



The French People Know That They Are French From The Very Beginning. I Knew That I Was Jewish From Bukovina, Speaking German. But Who Am I?

Dušana Findeisen, Slovenian Third Age University

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Thoughts inspired by the screening of the documentary Das Kind (L'enfant) - A film directed by Jonathan Levy

When searching for films about refugees and their destiny (within the EU project [RefugeesIN](#), European Cinema for Refugees' Social Inclusion), we had an explicit goal in mind: to find and select documentary or feature films featuring refugees *as role models*, the kind of role models that could inspire both the today's newcomers and their hosts; films countering the degrading social stereotypes of refugees as being from rural background, low educated, poor, having lots of children, stealing jobs from local inhabitants, being "under-mench", being an overwhelming threat to the host community. Being primitive thinking patterns, such stereotypes are handy; they can make regrets and bad feelings disappear if not enough is done for refugees' wellbeing and protection.

Being specialised in older people's issues, we are used to coping with rather rigid stereotypes of old age, older people and ageing. Recently these stereotypes have got consolidated as a result of social, economic and political crises in our countries. *Crises do not stand diversity, any kind of diversity.*

Nevertheless, now after having screened some 15 European films on refugees, stereotypes of old people, old age and ageing seem to be less rigid than those of refugees. Why is it so? Could it be because we are even less familiar with the refugees' diverse and very personal stories that we are with those of old people? *It is important to be familiar with one's life story, since knowing one's story, one ceases being a stranger in our eyes.* (Slavoj Žižek).

Screening of the film "The Child" (Das Kind) has further made us understand *the state of refugees is evolving and therefore far from being stable*. Integration is not a state, it is not the ultimate goal of a process. *Integration is a lively way of life*. Therefore refugees should keep growing, vibrating with their personal, social, cultural, economic or political context actively adapting to it. To tell the truth, *a refugee never stops adapting as he or she never stops building up his or her identity*.

In this film the social, political, cultural background of Irma Miko's life keeps changing and Irma never stops being a refugee. "I was born in the Austrian-



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Hungarian Empire. When it fell apart we found ourselves deprived of our identity. Cernowitch became Romanian but was Austrian. A Treaty was signed, minorities were put together, and Romania was created. Having equal rights was just an illusion for these minorities.”

The 95-year old Irma Miko, a cultured and accomplished member of Europe’s intelligentsia, a pianist, is a woman with a past. Born in Czernowitz, she joined the communist youth and was arrested by the time she was 19. A Jew and a communist, Irma joined the French Resistance in Paris in 1941. Her unimaginably dangerous assignment was to approach occupying German soldiers and persuade them to join the Resistance. Hans whom Irma meets in Paris after 62 years was such a soldier, a soldier who had never asked himself why he had to come to Paris, what was the goal of the German Government. He ended up as somebody working for the French side.

In 2008, together with her son André, Irma set out on an emotional journey across Europe in search of her past and her old companions. The result is a poetic and deeply moving account of a vanishing world and a portrait of an extraordinary, brave woman who risked everything during one of the darkest chapters in history, a portrait of a permanent refugee. Irma finds refuge in France after leaving Czernowitz under the German occupation. She also leaves behind her communist and socialist society to enter the capitalist French society.

Being a Jew she was not Romanian, she was not Austrian, she was not French or she was a part of all that. Her music was not their music, her poetry was not their poetry. »My darling, even today I do not feel entirely French. But who am I? Romanian, Austrian? French? A part of each....“ Moreover she does not even have a language of her own: Yiddish, German, French, which language is her language? She says that she has never felt entirely French though her second husband was French, though her children were born and raised in Paris.

Where is Irma’s home? In Austria, Romania, France, Israel? *Why are refugees expected to get integrated, to nest their new home in the new country, to be like the others? A refugee remains a refugee, not knowing where his or her home is.*

The feeling of being homeless, of being “from elsewhere” is usually transmitted onto the refugees’ children. *The story of their parents, the anxieties of their parents become their anxieties* even before they are born. *Being a refugee is about the transmission of certain culture and feelings onto the next generations. It takes several generations for these feelings to become less obvious.*



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A refugee does not necessarily adapt to the host society, he or she should primarily adjust to himself or herself in new circumstances.

Irma is one of the few remaining witnesses of the life in the former city of Czernowitz, a vibrant community of 50,000 Jews (one-third of the town's population) that gave birth to countless Jewish writers, poets and scholars. She provides rare reportage of illegal Communist activities in 1930s Bucharest, and offers a direct connection to the Spanish Civil War, for which both her first and second husband fought. With the Stalinist purges, a disillusioned Irma cut all ties to the Communist Party.

All her life Irma has been a resister, ready to make sacrifice for her ideas. This readiness of her natures also her state of refugee.

At times refugees ask themselves what would they have become if they had taken another major decision? Certain cultures mean poverty, injustice, other wealth, art, beauty, peace, social justice. Belonging is a question of attitude. Choosing is a question of courage.

French-Israeli director Yonathan Levy's cinematically creative approach to storytelling, which includes photo projections and theatrical set pieces performed by Irma's granddaughter Sarah, bringing Irma's memories to life.

The film won Europe's Best Independent Film Award at the ECU Film Festival, Paris.

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Project coordinator: AidLearn, Portugal

Das Kind

L'Enfant, The Child

2010, France, 93 minutes, color

French, Romanian & German with English subtitles

Directed by Yonathan Levy; Produced by André Miko