Philippines with no solution in sight.

On the whole the book highlights the ethnicization of Islam and Christianity in the Philippines. It ends, however, with the note that hopefully the common Christian and Muslim belief in monotheism and shared cultural practices will serve as a principle for improving of the relations between the Christians and Muslims in the Philippines, in keeping with the spirit of the following verse of the Qur’an:

Say: O People of the Scripture. Come to an agreement between us and you: that we shall worship none but Allah, and that we shall ascribe no partners unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside Allah. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him). (Qur’an 3: 64).

What is needed in the present fragile state of relations between the Christians and the Muslims in the Philippines is that members of both the communities initiate a dialogue and strive to become partners in the effort to establish abiding peace and justice. The desire of the late Pope John Paul II on the event of the September 11, 2001 tragedy expressed in the following words is of great significance for the whole world. He said: “No peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness.”

The book is a welcome addition to the literature on Islam in the Philippines.

Imtiyaz Yusuf


In 1819, Ruždi Paša, the governor of Bosnia, used a trumped-up charge to levy a 50,000 groschen fine against the Jews of Sarajevo. He later increased the amount to 500,000 to be paid within three days and, to show that he really meant business, imprisoned ten of Sarajevo’s leading Jews, threatening to execute them if the fine were not paid. One of the most notable amongst the prisoners was the chief Bosnian Jewish spiritual leader, Rav Moshe Danon,
who later became known as the Rabbi of Stolac and whose tomb became a site of homage for both Jews and Muslims (p. 52). The night before the proposed execution, on the eve of the Sabbath, Rafael Levi, who as an observant Jew should have remained in his home, decided that the emergency allowed for departure from the law, and went to seek the aid of the Muslims. His story so impressed them that they took an oath that they would give up their lives if necessary to save the Jews.

The next morning, three thousand Muslims, under the leadership of Ahmed Barjaktar Bjelavski, local commander of the Bjelave neighborhood of Jews and Muslims, stormed the gates of the governor’s lodging and rescued Rav Danon and the rest of the prisoners. The Muslims then followed the liberated Jews to the synagogue, where Rav Danon told the story of Purim, one of the noted Jewish commemorations. For its parallel to this biblical narrative, the local incident later came to be known as the Sarajevo Purim. This is not the end of the story however; 249 Muslim notables attached their signatures to a document that they sent to the Turkish Sultan, denouncing the cruelty of Ruždi Paša.

The foregoing account is no myth designed to fabricate an era of past harmony between Muslims and Jews. Rather it is one of the many documented events related in *Sarajevo Rose: A Balkan Jewish Notebook*, authored by Stephen Schwartz (see pp. 46–49, 157). Like many of the other narratives in the book, it comes as a welcome counter to the plethora of pseudo-scholarship that seeks to imprint on the western mind that Islam and Muslims have always been at odds with Jews. Equally amazing is the information that the late Lubavitch Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson (d. 1994), hailed as the Messiah by his followers, often used to be overcome with emotion while humming a melody known as a *niggun* (a form of lament; akin to the Arab *ritā‘*). It turns out that the Rebbe was aware that the melody originated with Imam Shamyl (d. 1871), one of Islam’s greatest figures, a freedom-fighter and mystic from Daghestan, who had valiantly defended his land and people against the invading Russians. The Russians found that they could not defeat Imam Shamyl on the battlefield and offered him a truce. When he came to negotiate, he was captured and imprisoned, and while in prison, composed the haunting melody (p. 41). As Schwartz points out, it is not surprising that the Lubavitch Rebbe should honour the memory of a Muslim who had a common oppressor; what is intriguing is the emotion the *rebbe* attached to the song while fully aware of its origins (p. 42).

*Sarajevo Rose* simply dazzles the reader with its wealth of information, showing that, among other things, one of the largest European centres for Sephardic Jewry outside of Spain was Bosnia. The book chronicles the history
of the Jews in Bosnia, showing that the majority of them are descendants of Iberian Jews, who were welcomed by the Ottoman authorities in 1560 (p. 22). Only an author of unique qualifications could have put together such a wonderful book—and an examination of Stephen Schwartz’s credentials reveals astounding credentials. He moved to Bosnia in 1999, and was so impressed by the type of Islam there that he accepted the faith, developing fluency in Bosnian without any formal training. (It should be noted that Mr Schwartz is not a “convert” from any other religion; although coming from a mixed Christian and Jewish background, and well-schooled in the beliefs of these religions, he was never a “Jew” or “Christian” in the religious sense). Unlike many Muslims, Schwartz is no apologist for his religion: he is one of the most outspoken critics of militant Islam, and in this book (p. 149), as well as in his capacity as one of the founders and spokespersons of the Washington-based Centre for Islamic Pluralism, he does not spare the entities that he deems harmful.

As with any non-fiction work, Sarajevo Rose is not just a chronicle of harmonious interaction between followers of different religions. Schwartz documents some of the more hurtful aspects of modern politics: given the perception of the Arab-Israeli conflict as a Muslim-Jewish confrontation, some Jews in Israel spread propaganda supporting the Serbs at the time of the Kosova war against Albanians (p. 108). Mordechai Atijas, President of the Jewish community of Doboj, proclaimed himself a Jewish chetnik and participated in the expulsion of Muslims from the town (p. 109). Israelis fought on the side of the Serbians, and organizations from Yugoslavia and Macedonia also provided support (p. 109). Yet however, Schwartz lets us know that this was not a monolithic position amongst the Jews. At the beginning of the atrocities in Bosnia, Sarajevo Jews established a dining hall and pharmacies for aid to all, irrespective of religious or ethnic origin. It was the service of these pharmacies that prevented epidemics from further ravaging the city (p. 80).

In the recounting of events involving the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, most writers completely demonize the Serbs, overlooking deeds of their gallantry. Schwartz provides us with the information about the Serbian general Jovan Divjak who fought on the side of the Bosnians. The sad details of this truly brave man’s forced retirement from the Bosnian Army are recounted — rejected by the Serbs who saw him as a traitor, this hero who had dug slit trenches with his bare hands — was pensioned off because some Bosnian officers could not stomach a Serb in their ranks (p. 111).

The subtitle of the book: A Balkan Jewish Notebook, is extremely appropriate: for the book does not deal with Bosnia-Hercegovina only; it
covers the entire Balkan region, covering journeys to Romania and Albania among others. The book also reflects a personal journey by Schwartz as he searches for Jewish graveyards and shrines. A particularly interesting quest is the search for the grave of Sabbatai Zvi (d. 1676) is a particularly interesting narrative. He was hailed as the Messiah by many Jews, but later apparently converted to Islam. The most likely site for his burial place seems to be Ulcinj (in Montenegro), and the evidence seems to point to a turbe (mausoleum) in the city. The keeper of the turbe however denies that it could be the burial of a Jewish person, insisting that it is rather the shrine of an Albanian, Murat Dede (p. 223). Despite this denial, the presence of Hebrew altars in the area warrants further investigation, and it is hoped that Schwartz’ foray will encourage some adequately funded venture(s).

In his coverage of the interaction between Christians and Muslims, Schwartz is careful to point out that the conflict in the region was not one of religion (p. 46). On the other hand, Schwartz details the activities of the Franciscan father, Marko Oršolic, Director of the Bosnian Interfaith Council, an association that consists of several high level clerics: among them Mustafa Čeric, head of the Muslim clerics of Bosnia-Hercegovina, Cardinal Vinko Puljic of the Catholic Church, and Jakob Finci, President of the Jewish Community of Bosnia-Hercegovina (pp. 52–3). One of the most astute observations that Schwartz makes is that Bosnian Islam knows nothing of fundamentalist extremism, and is a fully European Islam. He propounds that this type of Islam may dramatically change the course of world history, and warns that if this type of Islam is not followed, there is a strong possibility of a global and long-lasting confrontation between Islam and the West (pp. 155–156).

Schwartz’s integrity and objectivity are evident throughout the book: he lauds that which needs to be praised, and does not spare that which is blameworthy. He draws attention to the fact that western universities have programmes for Hebrew and Yiddish, but none dedicated to Sephardic studies (p. 24). One of the most astounding pieces of information is that that the two main authorities on the Bosnian Sephardica are Professors Muhamed Nezirovic and Kemal Bakarsic, two Bosnian Muslims. Schwartz strongly criticizes foreigners who visit the region, seemingly to report on events, but are in fact not there to learn anything — preconceived notions have already warped their objectivity (p. 146).

Schwartz writes with passion and conviction, producing a peerless work, or as Michael Sells states on the book’s dust cover, “a story so compelling that it turns the pages on its own.” The scope of this book seems limitless: it should not only be a must-read for anyone interested in Balkan, Jewish, and Islamic
Studies, but also in Religion and interfaith dialogue. Muslims who love to talk of emulating and doing good deeds, and dichotomously engage at times in anti-Semitic rhetoric should be particularly struck by the story of an Albanian National hero, Ismail Qemali Vlora, Ottoman governor of Tulcea, Romania at the end of the nineteenth century. When Romanian Jews were being horribly persecuted by Romanian Christian rulers, he did all that was in his power to assist the Jews, deeming them as “the race from which sprang the truth of all religions and all the intelligence possessed by humanity through revelation...” (p. 268).

One of the common drawbacks that I should mention against books of such depth is their prohibitive price, largely due to the fact that they are considered as “academic” publications. Fortunately for the reader, this book is classified as a “trade” publication, and costs an economical $30.00, while listing among its several attractive features, photographs and references. This book should be a part of every library, private or otherwise. Rabbis, priests, imams, professors and students of religion, conflict resolution, and Balkan studies should consider this book as essential reading.

Khaleel Mohammed


History as a subject is fraught with deficiencies, mainly because it has been written by people who were paid for by the rulers to write about their glories. Consequently, history has mainly remained concerned with men (that is why history is called his-story rather than her-story), and those too who became kings and about their conquests and wars. Recorded history has thus gone to ignore 99.9% of the humanity, who were ordinary mortals and had scant concern with their occupations that were “less than glorious.”

It is during the last few decades that historians have started looking at the life of all humankind, belonging to “us” and “them,” to men and women, to princes and serfs, and so on. The book under review is one such commendable attempt to discover the lives of the ordinary mortals of the Middle East: how