

## Ziva Postec and Jean-Pierre Lledo say what they think about the Ambash Affair



The Ambash Affair is both simple and complicated.

Daniel Ambash was sentenced more than three years ago by a court in Jerusalem to 26 years in prison and his family was broken up. It was made up of six women, four of whom were jailed for a year, and 17 children (13 of them Daniel's children). Most of these children are now in institutions.

The principal charges were: a dangerous cult; mental enslavement of the six women by Daniel Ambash; and abuse by the latter of the women and children.

We learned of the existence of this "affair" about a year ago through a friend, the filmmaker, Jessica Vaturi-Dembo, who, persuaded that this Family had been the victim of a grave injustice, conceived the project of a film in order to make these six women known.

And Friday, 11 March, at the Tel Aviv Cinémathèque, we saw an extract from this film in progress. And we listened to three of the women who had come to address the audience, Aderet, Shiran, and Azmara. On this occasion, we received the book which has just come out in three languages, and which presents this "affair" in addition to the testimonies of the women.

Jean-Pierre has known the author of this book, Georges-Elia Sarfati, for several years. He had supported the project of the Popular University of Jerusalem to teach Jewish history and philosophy. This project had been launched by Georges-Elia and Jessica, one of whose goals was to counter with knowledge the campaigns for delegitimizing

Israel throughout the world (and in Israel as well), reactivated by the books (best-sellers in France) of the Israeli historian, Shlomo Sand. Precisely Georges Sarfati was *one of the first* to respond to him with a powerful, well-argued and scathing text.

After meeting in a public place with the three women and after reading the book, *Ambash Affair* we said to ourselves that one could not know all that we know and not say that **we too believe in the innocence of Daniel Ambash**.

However, before doing so publicly, we wanted to meet the women again directly in private in order to be able to listen to their answers to certain objections that had been raised by some of our close friends.

This is what we did on Wednesday evening, 16 March, for four hours, from 8 pm to midnight, with two of the women, Shiran and Aderet. And this was after a long day of work on editing our film in progress.

But before presenting their account to you, it is necessary that you know who we are and the reasons for our commitment.

We are both filmmakers. Ziva was born in Israel and worked for 25 years in France as an editor, then chief editor, and after editing *Shoah*, the film of Claude Lanzmann, she came back to her country and directed several documentary films. Jean-Pierre, a director, had to flee Algeria in 1993 for France, following Islamist threats, and made *aliyah* in 2011. He is currently directing, with Ziva as producer and chief editor, a film that will test his former (negative) prejudices about Israel against reality.

As to the reasons for our commitment, despite the heavy load that directing this four-part film—a total length of 10 hours—entails, they are very simple. Beyond the fact that Ziva knew Daniel Ambash as well as his parents, it is above all the deep-seated conviction of his innocence that moves us to act. But it is also our even stronger conviction that Israel which gave The Law to humanity owes it to itself to give an example. Lastly, we think that our country is sufficiently burdened so that it should not supply a new pretext to the professionals of besmirching her.

### ***Our Deep-Seated Conviction***

The principal accusation against Daniel Ambash is that he was the leader of a cult: his own family. And some of our friends, while admitting to knowing nothing about this Affair, could not prevent themselves from telling us: "*This has all the signs of a deviant cult.*"

Now, having become familiar with the essential documents of this case which are accessible on the excellent website, [www.danielambash.info](http://www.danielambash.info), and after having spoken with the two women for four hours, **we can say that the functioning of this Family resembles precisely anything BUT that of a cult.**

Each one of us had had to reflect in fact on the social phenomenon of a *cult*. Jean-Pierre in Algeria wrote a great deal on the *cult* mode of functioning of totalitarian systems and traditional systems of a clan or tribal nature. And Ziva had been confronted among her close friends with the case of a young woman who had left her

family definitively for the Hare Krishna cult. This young woman accused her father of sexual abuse and that posed grave problems in the family, up till the day that several families that were victims of that cult got together and discovered that all the fathers had been accused by their children . . . of the same misdeed!

Both of us arrived at an understanding –through different experiences-- that what characterizes cults, whatever their kind, is their **closed nature**, a **hermetically** closed nature. Totalitarian societies and *pre-democratic* societies (*clans, tribes*) become autistic. As to families, they cannot have access to their children who have entered a cult. And if they succeed in having access, *thanks to the law* in democratic countries, the children remain totally impenetrable and insensitive to external stimuli.

Now what is striking in the way of life of the Ambash Family is precisely openness. ***Totally porous openness!***

The proof supplied by the countless family videos that can be seen on the site. The proof demonstrated by the total freedom of movement of the women and children. The proof supplied by the perpetual movement of this street theater troupe in the *commedia dell'arte* tradition which performed throughout Israel. The proof provided today by these women who take all sorts of initiatives and display an extraordinary inventiveness to make the truth known.

The proof is even provided by the defamatory **television report** on **Arutz 2** which prepared public opinion to accept the arrest of Daniel Ambash and the dismantling of his family. The Family indeed did not see anything wrong in allowing moviemakers to enter into their private life and film them as they saw fit, *without the least supervision*. And *the moviemakers, not succeeding in filming one single image* which accredited their cult thesis, allowed themselves to produce a sordid manipulation, at the moment of editing, through the commentary and through frightening music, in order to lead the spectator to think "this cult is hiding its game very well. . . ."

Lastly, a proof *a contrario*: the judicial system could not derive any advantage from the photos taken without the knowledge of the Ambash Family for months, day and night, by a camera hidden in the family home. Furthermore, it was the chance discovery of this camera by one of the children that caused the arrest of the whole family in the hour that followed.

This Family, whether Daniel or the women, never wanted to hide anything for the simple reason that **they had nothing to hide**. They believed on the contrary that they were good Israeli citizens, participating in their own way in the extraordinary diversity that characterizes the Jewish people, in the past before the creation of the State, as well as after it.

### **Why So Relentless Against This Family?**

This is a question that we constantly ask ourselves. We find only one answer: The **Ambash Family was disturbing**. It was disturbing due to its way of life: six women living with only one man.

It disturbed people like us who remain attached to the way of life based on the union of one man and one woman, which is still dominant in our time.

It disturbed the ultra-orthodox milieu, called *haredi*, from which the first denunciations –libelous and anonymous-- emanated, for the Family lived in the Romema Quarter of Jerusalem. And it certainly awakened among them the profound hostility which Bratzlaver Hassidism –with which Daniel Ambash and his Family identify themselves-- has aroused since the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Europe.

It also disturbed a certain intelligentsia which insists on calling itself "on the Left" and which, like the historian Zeev Sternhell, harbors a visceral hatred towards all groups of the "religious" no matter how diverse.

Added to this detestation emerging from sources both diverse and opposed, was the **very healthy** detestation on the part of the broad public towards the cults that freely proliferate in Israel.<sup>1</sup>

Does the Ambash Family stand a chance of being rehabilitated facing such an objective coalition, which gathers together all categories of the population?

### **The Ambash Family Has Only One Chance, That of Justice**

The judicial system has the duty of telling the truth, even if this truth disturbs the majority, and therefore it is also duty bound to go against the current.

Despite our present skepticism, so badly did this "Affair" start off, we believe that justice will necessarily finish by being done. Our conscience as Jews and citizens gives us this hope. The more voices that call for justice, the sooner will it be done.

The judicial system in our country, *precisely in this Affair*, has already shown that it knew how to walk back its own judgement. In effect, the four women jailed for a year, were exonerated once the judicial system was convinced that the accusation rested only on interrogations that did not conform to the rules and on false testimonies extorted by different types of pressure.

Soon, on 28 March, following the appeal of Daniel Ambash, the punishment incurred by him (**26 years in prison**) will be either annulled by the Supreme Court judges, or confirmed or even aggravated at the request of the Prosecution (to 65 years in jail).

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<sup>1</sup> The Scientology cult which is forbidden in France, has a headquarters in Jaffa in a huge building that resembles a bunker. And every Friday and Saturday the Hari Krishna peacefully distribute their propaganda on the *tayelet* of Tel Aviv, despite their dangerous character which we spoke of above.

The first possibility would be miraculous in the present context. The second, the more probable, invites from now on a long-term commitment for which the only motivation is the Jewish ideal of justice.

### **Responses by the Women to Our Friends' Objections**

These last two weeks, we have addressed ourselves to our closest friends with the purpose of informing them and alerting them. Some subsequently asked what to do. Most preferred not to take a stand: the case is certainly very complicated. Some who at first were silent since they really believed that it was a cult that was involved, thanked us for having taken the time to listen to these women. Others finally raised objections. We thank all of them.

In our desire to know the responses of Shiran and Aderet to these objections, we have communicated the objections to them. Here are their responses:

-- "*It has 'the appearance of a sect'*"

*"'Certainly!' Shiran and Aderet exclaimed in unison"*

*"But everything was done to that end. Do you want examples?"*

*A manipulative report broadcast on Channel 2 TV (program "360") was edited precisely in order to give credibility to the idea that the Ambash Family was a cult.<sup>2</sup> And since there was no image that could prove that, the report was followed by a discussion to which two protagonists of another cult affair, of **the Ratson cult**, were invited.<sup>3</sup> The report and the discussion were broadcast four months before Daniel's arrest, and aimed to identify Ambash with **Ratson**, who was indeed a true guru and his twenty or so women were truly ill . . . .*

***Exactly 25 days after Daniel's arrest and 2 years before the judgment**, the chiefs of the police and the social services in Jerusalem, in a press conference, assured the 50-odd journalists that the Ambash Family was indeed a "**sadistic cult in Jerusalem.**"*

*"Everybody was allowed to speak, but we, we were forbidden to speak, and we may again be condemned for not having respected this prohibition."*

#### ■ **"Polygamy is forbidden in Israel"**

With the nuance that it is not forbidden to Muslims, the women drew our attention to the fact that "*Daniel Ambash was accused of several things (notably, mental slavery and abuse of the women and children), **but not of polygamy!***"

They then add:

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<sup>2</sup> In normal circumstances, the authors of this impropriety would have been judged for an intention to harm and for manipulation of images, condemned for defamation, and, in any case, driven out of our profession.

<sup>3</sup> One of the women of the guru and the woman lawyer for an anti-cult association, haMerkaz haYisraeli l'Nifga'ey Katot (the Israeli Center for Victims of Cults).

*"The law could not indeed be opposed to the fact that we had decided to live with the same man. Therefore they invented the story of a cult."*

■ ***"The Consent of the Women is sadly banal"***

This is the objection of a friend who has worked for long years on violence committed against women. When we reported this to the two women, this was their immediate response, without having to deliberate:

*"This person is quite right! The 'consenting women' are victims!" But we are not 'consenting women.' We refuse to be classified as 'consenting women.' This family, this construction, it is we who wanted it. It is we the women who made it! If there is someone who was 'consenting' in this affair it was rather Daniel. He should be seen as the victim!"*

■ ***"Children deprived of school and pushed into begging": A doubly false statement.***

**Schooling.** One of the women, Aderet, was a primary school teacher by profession. She explained what happened to us: Following the example of the adults of the ultra-orthodox neighborhood of Jerusalem where Daniel's family lived, notably in the neighborhood school, the children began to harass the Ambash children. Thus, the family made the decision to remove the children from the school and, together with other families, they founded a private school with their own funds.

Private education indeed exists in Israel. We know of other examples where families took direct charge of schooling their children. We don't know if this practice is illegal but it cannot be said that the Ambash children were left without education.

*"The social services who interrogated the children well know that, since they were amazed at the intelligence and knowledge of the children," Shiran asserted.*

**Begging:** Aderet and Shiran told us that the Ambash children had been especially filmed without their knowledge for a very long time, precisely to obtain a proof of begging. But not even the least image illustrating this practice could be brandished against Daniel during the trial.

■ ***Testimony of one of the children***

These two last grievances were evoked by a friend who based himself on the testimony of one of the children who, he said, had been at his home a few days earlier.

This is what the two women told us:

*"What this child can no longer say is his own true story. After the father's arrest and the 'sheltering' of the four women in institutions, the women were isolated one from the other, without a telephone and thus incapable of making contact with the outside world. Daniel's three older children who had been left at liberty (since the minor children were also put into institutions and were subjected to*

various pressures) did everything they could to defend their father: going to lawyers, looking for support among friends in order to pay them, etc . . . That was displeasing and they were arrested. Today this young man, 'supported' by the anti-cult association is now persuaded that he was the victim of a guru."

The women take out their iPhones and show us photos of this child several years earlier (that can be seen on the site [www.danielambash.info](http://www.danielambash.info)): "Does he really look like a child who was the 'victim of dangerous guru' as your friend says?" they ask us.



They then show us dozens of video clips where all the children are actors, clowns, and musicians.

"The Ambash home was transformed into a theater, a recording studio, and a concert hall!"

And we can easily imagine that for the children, it must have been paradise.

On the other hand, Ziva and I who have worked for a total of 90 years on images, formally affirm that there was no sign of fear or "mental slavery."

#### ■ "A non-standard personality"

This is how our abovementioned friend characterized Daniel, as if that could be a reason for an accusation.

Daniel was indeed "non-standard". He was a highly talented dancer who had worked with the greats of his art (notably Maurice Béjart). He abandoned that career in order to come to Israel, do *teshuvah* there, and become involved with the spirituality of the Bratzlaver hassidim.

His parents were artists, his mother a painter and his father a moviemaker (Ziva already knew Daniel and his parents in Paris).

Daniel was later on seduced by the music of another *non-standard* personality, the rabbi-hippie-Bratzlaver hassidic singer, **Shlomo Carlebach**, whose melodies overwhelm us.

The first of the women incriminated, **Ilana**, is also *non-standard*. She is a violinist, a women's champion of kung fu in France, a practitioner of *teshuvah* too, and she married Daniel against the will of her parents who lived in France.

A whole family transformed into artists and made up of six women, one man, and 17 children, lived in harmony and indeed everything about the Ambash family was *non-standard*. **But what is criminal about that?**

**Is it Israel's mission to only produce the standard?**

### **In Conclusion**

Wednesday evening, Ziva and I listened to two magnificent women: Aderet and Shiran. Like the two others, Ilana and Azamra, they never gave in, despite the trying interrogations,<sup>4</sup> during the year in prison which was inflicted on them, as well as the separation from their children.

Two lively women who made us laugh a great deal, by the way. They reacted automatically to all our questions, without hesitation, without choosing their words, in a word, without trickery. They were not at all aggressive. On the contrary, without a great deal of distance and with a sense of humor, despite the immense tragedy that had crushed more than one of them. With their gift of comedy, they preferred to mock everything that they had undergone.

They argued and took our reasoning and our logic as witnesses. For example, "*If we were 'mental slaves' as was said, would it not have been necessary to have us benefit from psychological treatment and help rather than being put in jail?*"

Or again: "*Why did the judicial system acquit us once it was convinced of the false testimonies of certain witnesses, while keeping Daniel sentenced to jail on the basis of the same false testimonies?*" (see the rubric "**Perjury**" on the site).

It is not within our competence or our desire to go on at length about the propriety of the judgment. On the other hand, what we can surely attest to, unless we are subject to "*Daniel Ambash's telepathic powers*," is that these women are not "mental slaves" of their supposed guru (whom they have been separated from for more than four years). These women are not at all zombies. Believe us!

Despite the disaster that crashed down on this family, instead of keeping quiet, they speak. Instead of closing themselves up, they go towards the world. Instead of being aggressive and making recriminations, they explain. Instead of attacking their people or the authorities, they content themselves with testifying and answering, without annoyance, all the questions that one might ask them. Instead of weeping, they laugh and sing.

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<sup>4</sup> The content of the interrogations is accessible to everyone.



Such is not the attitude of people who consider themselves guilty. On the contrary. For us, they are an example of the Jewish response in trying circumstances. Really, we are proud of them, and we told them that we will support them.

We are convinced that we will not be the only ones, even if it takes time for everyone to be able to form his own opinion.

We must also add that if we left these persons in danger without assistance, we would be giving grist to the mill of all those who have made a specialty of detesting their own country, in the name of Morality and the principles of human rights, shamelessly allying with those who purely and simply desire our disappearance as a country and as a State.

We believe in morality and in the principles of human rights, but in order to strengthen our country, not to destroy it.

We are very saddened that so much energy has been and continues to be wasted for such a tragic result as the imprisonment, almost for life of a man, *non-standard* to be sure, and the breaking apart of a family that was happy. Therefore we call upon all women and men of good will to become informed and to act in their soul and their conscience.

In four hours, Aderet and Shiran told us so much and we have transmitted so little to you, but we won't say anymore about it.

The site in three languages is excellent: [www.danielambash.info](http://www.danielambash.info) .

You can also write to: **justice for ambash** [justiceforambash@gmail.com](mailto:justiceforambash@gmail.com)

There are now books of testimonies in three languages (Hebrew, English, and French). The women told us that they can send them to whoever wishes them. They are also ready to speak to all those who want that. We can help in that. For direct meetings, our home will always be open.

Jewess

Best wishes to everyone and very sorry for all of your time that we have taken.

Ziva Postec and Jean-Pierre Lledo  
Tel Aviv, Thursday 17 March