

Jews and Leftist Politics

Judaism, Israel, Antisemitism,
and Gender

Edited by Jack Jacobs



Jews and Leftist Politics

The relationships, past and present, between Jews and the political left remain of abiding interest to both the academic community and the public. *Jews and Leftist Politics* contains new and insightful chapters from world-renowned scholars and considers such matters as the political implications of Judaism; the relationships of leftists and Jews; the histories of Jews on the left in Europe, the United States, and Israel; contemporary anti-Zionism; the associations between specific Jews and Communist Parties; and the importance of gendered perspectives. It also contains fresh studies of canonical figures, including Gershom Scholem, Gustav Landauer, and Martin Buber, and examines the affiliations of Jews to prominent institutions, calling into question previously widely held assumptions. The volume is characterized by judicious appraisals made by respected authorities and sheds considerable light on contentious themes.

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JACK JACOBS

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City University of New York*



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Introduction

Jack Jacobs

Jews played highly visible roles, over an extended period, in the leadership of leftist movements – including socialist, communist, and anarchist organizations – around the world. In the first half of the twentieth century, significant numbers of Jews were also evident in the rank and file of specific left-wing political parties. In addition to participating in general leftist movements, Jews in Eastern Europe created and fostered a number of distinctive Jewish socialist parties with tens of thousands of members. Why were so many Jews sympathetic to left-wing causes? Explanations revolving around the purported characteristics of Jews, the impact of Jewish religious ideas, and the marginality of the Jewish population have been expounded by prominent scholars. However, there is reason to question both of the first two of these explanations. At the present time, left-wing ideas no longer hold the same degree of attraction for Jews as they did one hundred years ago. The relationship of Jews to the left was historically contingent, specific to political, historic, and economic conditions that prevailed between the late-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries in Europe, and that impacted upon Jewish political opinion in the United States and other countries that received large numbers of Jewish immigrants from Europe.

*

In a book that first appeared in 1911, the German sociologist Robert Michels noted “the abundance of Jews among the leaders of the socialist and revolutionary parties” and attempted to illuminate this phenomenon by reference to “specific racial qualities” that “make the Jew a born leader

of the masses, a born organizer and propagandist.” Michels asserted that among these qualities were “sectarian fanaticism which, like an infection, can be communicated to the masses with astonishing frequency; next we have an invincible self-confidence (which in Jewish racial history is most characteristically displayed in the lives of the prophets) . . . remarkable ambition, an irresistible need to figure in the limelight, and last but not least an almost unlimited power of adaptation.”¹ He cites examples of “the quantitative and qualitative predominance of persons of Hebrew race” in leftist parties in Germany, Austria, the United States, Holland, Italy, Hungary, Poland, and other lands, and adds that Jewish involvement with socialist parties is also linked to the “spirit of rebellion against the wrongs from which” Jewry suffers, that is, the Jewish response to continuing antisemitism.²

Some scholars interested in the relationship between Jews and the left have emphasized not supposed Jewish qualities but rather purported similarities between Judaism or Jewish religious ideas, on the one hand, and ideas supported by leftist writers, on the other. Dennis Fischman, for one, has argued that Marx “approaches the standpoint of the Jewish tradition . . . In his stress on the indispensability of human action, Marx echoes the Jewish motifs of *partnership in Creation* and *dialogue*.”³ Michael Löwy, far more compellingly, has made creative use of Max Weber’s notion of *Wahlverwandtschaften*, has written of an elective affinity illuminating links between Jewish messianism and a revolutionary, libertarian, worldview, and suggests that the views of such thinkers as Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin, Erich Fromm, Gustav Landauer, Leo Lowenthal, and Georg Lukács can all be clarified, to varying degrees, through reference to the affinity he describes.⁴

Yet another, alternative, explanation for the attraction of some (very prominent) Jews to leftist ideas revolves around Jewish marginality. Isaac Deutscher – himself a leftist of Jewish origin – claimed that Marx, Luxemburg, and Trotsky (among others) “dwelt on the borderlines of various civilizations, religions, and national cultures” and “were born

¹ Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*, trans. Eden and Cedar Paul (New York: Free Press, 1962), p. 245.

² Michels, *Political Parties*, pp. 246–248.

³ Dennis Fischman, *Political Discourse in Exile: Karl Marx and the Jewish Question* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991), pp. 110–111.

⁴ Michael Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia: Jewish Libertarian Thought in Central Europe. A Study in Elective Affinity*, trans. Hope Heaney (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992).

and brought up on the borderlines of various epochs.”⁵ This, he proposed, “enabled them to rise in thought above their societies, above their nations, above their times and generations, and to strike out mentally into wide new horizons.”

The notion that Jews are a race has long since been discredited by reputable social scientists (if not necessarily by all geneticists). There were, and are, Jewish leftists who have found elements of the Jewish religion to be compatible with their political proclivities. The idea that Judaism per se is intrinsically progressive, however, is not tenable. Jewish religious beliefs can lead and have led many to deeply conservative political positions. But Deutscher’s explanation for the onetime link between Jews and the left, the fact that it is colored by his political sympathies notwithstanding, has a great deal of merit. Jews were regularly marginal to the societies in which they lived when the left came into being and in the era during which it developed. Antisemitism made it impossible for Jews in many European lands to break into any number of powerful institutions. Jewish marginality, and the political, economic, and sociological conditions that existed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and that fostered marginality, clarify the political inclinations of any number of prominent Jewish leftists of earlier generations. The rejection of Jews by mainstream society contributed to their sense that a dramatic change was both desirable and necessary.

*

THE LEFT AND THE JEWS

The left arose out of the French Revolution, and was, initially, committed to that revolution’s ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Indeed: the term “leftist” originally referred to those French political leaders who supported the Revolution. Specific French leftists in the National Assembly, none of whom were Jews, endorsed the emancipation of French Jewry. The positions taken by these founders of the French left led some Jews in France to ally with the left. There are known to have been Jewish Jacobins, for example, in Saint-Esprit, near Bayonne.⁶

⁵ Isaac Deutscher, “The Non-Jewish Jew,” in *The Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1968), p. 27.

⁶ Zosa Szajkowski, *Jews and the French Revolutions of 1789, 1830 and 1848* (New York: Ktav, 1970), p. 822.

Left-wing movements ultimately came into being not only in France but also in many other lands. In general, these movements tended to favor equal treatment of citizens and opposed the legal disabilities that had been imposed upon Jews, in specific countries, in earlier times.

To be sure, individual, highly visible, leaders of the left were not immune to anti-Jewish prejudices. The Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, who was of aristocratic, non-Jewish, origin and who was a foremost leader of the International Workingmen's Association (the First International), for example, penned an essay in 1869 in which he proclaimed that "modern Jews . . . considered as a nation . . . are *par excellence* exploiters of others' labor, and have a natural horror and fear of the popular masses, whom, moreover, they despise, either openly or secretly. The habit of exploitation . . . gives it an exclusive and baneful direction, entirely opposed to the interests as well as to the instincts of the proletariat."⁷ However, the views of figures such as Bakunin notwithstanding, the left was generally open to the participation of individual Jews within its ranks in ways that the European right was often not, and many late-nineteenth-century leftists (though not all) ultimately opposed the anti-semitic political movements that came into being in that era. It was by no means the case that outspoken opposition to political antisemitism and personal attitudes rooted in prejudice or stereotypes were mutually exclusive.⁸ Nevertheless, it is significant that German Social Democracy, the world's strongest Marxist-influenced movement in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, was less antisemitic than other major political parties in imperial Germany. It is worth noting that representatives of the Center Party advocated linking the number of Jewish judges in Bavaria to the proportion of Jews in the Bavarian population, that the National Liberals of Germany were not consistent defenders of equal rights for Jews, and that even the Progressives of Germany (to whom significant numbers of German Jews were attracted) were initially very cool to the notion of nominating Jewish candidates.⁹

Many Marxist-oriented parties operating at the end of the nineteenth century (or in the first decades of the twentieth) had positions on the

⁷ Edmund Silberner, "Two Studies on Modern Anti-Semitism," *Historia Judaica*, XIV, 2 (October, 1952), p. 96. Statements tinged with anti-Jewish sentiment can be found in the writings of any number of other socialists, anarchists, and communists.

⁸ For a recent discussion of this issue see Lars Fischer, *The Socialist Response to Antisemitism in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁹ Marjorie Lamberti, *Jewish Activism in Imperial Germany: The Struggle for Civil Equality* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1978), pp. 25, 33, 34, 42.

so-called Jewish question similar to that of German Social Democracy. The leading figures of the Marxist movement in France, Jules Guesde and Paul Lafargue, were opponents of political antisemitism, as were the leaders of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party. Edmund Silberner, among the first scholars to conduct sustained research on the attitudes of leftists toward Jews, once asserted that there is "an old anti-Semitic tradition within modern Socialism" and that this tradition sheds light on the views of quite a few socialist writers and parties.¹⁰ However, the attitudes of leftists toward Jews were far more differentiated than Silberner's conclusions might lead one to believe. There are important, deplorable examples of antisemitic leftists. Silberner to the contrary notwithstanding, on the other hand, there is not an undisputed "tradition" of antisemitism on the left per se.

*

JEWS ON THE LEFT

The relative openness of the left made it possible not only for individuals of Jewish origin to become involved in leftist movements, but also, in some cases, to become leaders of such movements. Karl Marx and Ferdinand Lassalle, who were of Jewish descent, are manifestly among the most important mid-nineteenth-century leftists and exemplify the highly visible roles played by individuals of Jewish origin in left-wing movements at a specific historic moment in time.

Marx knew little about Jews or Judaism. His father, Heinrich Marx, converted to the Lutheran faith in 1817, the year before Karl was born. Karl himself was converted to Lutheranism at the age of six. The school he attended as an adolescent, from 1830 to 1835, had been founded by Jesuits, and was attended primarily by Catholic students.

As a university student, however, Marx became friends with the Young Hegelian and Protestant theologian Bruno Bauer and took a course taught by Bauer on Isaiah. It is not surprising, therefore, that Marx paid close attention to Bauer's work on the Jewish question, and that he published responses to and critiques of Bauer's perspective.

Bauer had insisted that Jews, who did not have full civil rights in Prussia, would not be emancipated until such time as they had renounced

¹⁰ Edmund Silberner, "Anti-Semitism and Philo-Semitism in the Socialist International," *Judaism*, II (1953), p. 122.

Judaism. Marx replied to Bauer, most famously in “On the Jewish Question,” stressing that there was a distinction between political emancipation and human emancipation, and noting that Jews were entitled to the former even if they did not first abandon the Jewish religion. For Marx, the extent to which Jews had been granted equal political rights was a criterion by which to judge the modernity of a given state.

Marx never devoted sustained attention to the “Jewish question” after he wrote the discussions of Bauer’s work noted, though he referred to Jews in passing from time to time. In so doing, Marx sometimes made use of slurs and epithets (particularly in private letters to Friedrich Engels and other trusted confidants). These statements, and a review of Marx’s writings, led Edmund Silberner to proclaim, in an article first published in 1949, that “If the pronouncements of Marx are not chosen at random, but are examined as a whole, and if . . . by anti-Semitism aversion to the Jews is meant, Marx not only can but *must* be regarded as an outspoken anti-Semite.”¹¹

But, as was the case with Silberner’s general pronouncements, this assessment has been contested. Henry Pachter, for one, asserted in 1979 that “the term ‘anti-Semitic’ as we understand it today does not apply to the author of ‘On the Jewish Question’ and to his contemporary audience, which understood his meaning in the context of the Hegelian philosophy and its language . . . He is not preaching anti-Semitism but trying to defuse it.”¹² But it should be added: even if one rejects the label “anti-Semitic” as inappropriate when applied to Marx, and there is good reason to do so, it remains the case that Marx expressed personal antipathy toward individual Jews.¹³

Lassalle, the founder and the first president of the General German Workers’ Association, was, at the height of his career, one of the world’s most prominent socialists, and was widely popular among German workers. He was born and raised in a Jewish family. Lassalle’s mother was strictly orthodox in her observance of Jewish religious ritual during Lassalle’s youthful years. Lassalle never formally converted – though he became estranged from Judaism, particularly as he became acquainted with Hegelian and Young Hegelian thought.

¹¹ Edmund Silberner, “Was Marx an Anti-Semite?” *Historia Judaica*, XI, 1 (April, 1949), p. 50.

¹² Henry Pachter, “Marx and the Jews,” *Dissent* (Fall, 1979), pp. 452, 466.

¹³ The most thorough study of Marx’s attitude toward Jews is that of Julius Carlebach, *Karl Marx and the Radical Critique of Judaism* (London, Henley, and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), which contains an annotated guide to relevant works.

However little Marx published on Jewish matters, Lassalle published even less. Indeed, there are no works by Lassalle meant for public consumption that focus directly on Jews, Judaism, or Jewry. Lassalle's private correspondence, however, is revealing. In one letter he notes:

I do not like Jews at all. I even detest them in general. I see in them nothing but the degenerate sons of a great, but long past epoch. As a result of centuries of servitude, these people have taken on the characteristics of slaves, and for this reason I am hostile to them.¹⁴

At another point, he proclaimed: "There are above all two classes of people that I cannot stand, writers and Jews – and I, unfortunately, belong to both."¹⁵ Thus: like Marx's, Lassalle's attitude toward Jews was characterized by general lack of interest in Jewish affairs, and by personal antipathy (a matter quite distinct from advocacy of political antisemitism).

How might we explain this personal antipathy? Robert Wistrich relied on a psychological diagnosis – "self-hatred" – in explaining both Marx's attitude toward Jews and that of Lassalle.¹⁶ As used by Wistrich, Jewish self-hatred refers to negative attitudes of a person of Jewish origin toward Jews linked to "feelings of rejection" that "arise in the individual who cannot achieve full acceptance by virtue of his origin."¹⁷ Though not out of the question in Lassalle's case, the diagnosis of Jewish self-hatred seems far-fetched in the case of Marx, who was not inclined to think of himself as Jewish.

Wistrich insinuates that Jewish self-hatred was evident not only in Marx and Lassalle but also in a number of other figures of Jewish origin active on the left, and writes in general terms about "the role which Jewish self-hatred played in activating latent prejudices in the socialist movement."¹⁸ However, Wistrich does not provide compelling evidence in support of his contention, does not provide a list of those socialists who he believes were afflicted with Jewish self-hatred, and thus paints with an overly wide brush. To be sure: internalization of antisemitic hatred has

¹⁴ As translated in Robert Wistrich, *Revolutionary Jews from Marx to Trotsky* (London: Harrap, 1976), p. 56.

¹⁵ Quoted in Edmund Silberner, *Sozialisten zur Judenfrage* (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1962), p. 178.

¹⁶ Wistrich, *Revolutionary Jews*, pp. 36–37, 56. Cf. Sander L. Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred. Antisemitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 188–208.

¹⁷ Wistrich, *Revolutionary Jews*, p. 7. ¹⁸ Wistrich, *Revolutionary Jews*, p. 6.

affected any number of individuals of Jewish origin. On the other hand, as Wistrich was well aware, there is no reason at all to presume that self-hatred is (or was) more common among leftists than among conservatives (or others).

Exceptionally prominent leftists of Jewish origin in the generations immediately following those of Lassalle and Marx include Eduard Bernstein and Rosa Luxemburg, Victor Adler, Otto Bauer, and Max Adler, Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, Pavel Axelrod, Julius Martov, Trotsky, and Leon Blum.¹⁹ Some may well have exhibited traces of self-hatred. Others did not. They had rather different attitudes toward Jews and issues of interest to the Jewish community.²⁰ For example: Eduard Bernstein and Max Adler ultimately developed a sympathetic attitude toward Zionism. Rosa Luxemburg and Otto Bauer did not.

The preceding list of world-renowned figures should not be taken as suggesting that most leftist leaders have been Jewish. August Bebel, Auguste Blanqui, Eugene V. Debs, Friedrich Engels, Charles Fourier, Antonio Gramsci, Jean Jaurès, Karl Kautsky, Peter Kropotkin, Wilhelm Liebknecht, Robert Owen, Georgii Plekhanov, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Karl Renner, and Henri de Saint-Simon were not Jewish; nor were many,

¹⁹ For additional examples, and consideration of relevant matters, see Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton, NJ, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 84–86. Slezkine is off base on some subjects, including the Frankfurt School. His assertion that “members of the Frankfurt School did not wish to discuss their Jewish roots and did not consider their strikingly similar backgrounds relevant to the history of their doctrines” [Slezkine, *Jewish Century*, p. 87], for example (while true for Felix Weil), is undermined by Max Horkheimer’s explicit statements, late in his life, as to the relationship between Critical Theory and the Jewish prohibition against graven images.

²⁰ I have discussed the attitudes of Bernstein, Luxemburg, Victor Adler and Otto Bauer to Jewish matters in Jack Jacobs, *On Socialists and “the Jewish Question” after Marx* (New York, London: New York University Press, 1992). Cf. Enzo Traverso, *The Marxists and the Jewish Question: The History of a Debate (1843–1943)*, trans. Bernard Gibbons (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1994), pp. 58–91. On Emma Goldman see Richard Drinnon, *Rebel in Paradise: A Biography of Emma Goldman* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 23–26. On Trotsky see Joseph Nedava, *Trotsky and the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1972). Wistrich discusses all of these leftist figures (except Goldman) and considers relevant aspects of the life and ideas of Blum, in Wistrich, *Revolutionary Jews*. Cf. Robert S. Wistrich, *Socialism and the Jews: The Dilemmas of Assimilation in Germany and Austria-Hungary* (Rutherford, Madison, Teaneck NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1982), and Robert S. Wistrich, *From Ambivalence to Betrayal: The Left, the Jews, and Israel* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2012).

many, other key figures of European, American, or other socialist, communist, or anarchist movements. Nevertheless, the presence of Jews and individuals of Jewish descent in the leadership of leftist movements was, at one point in time, considerable, and was regularly disproportionate to the percentage of Jews in the general populations of the countries in which these Jews were active.

Particularly in the first decades of the twentieth century, there were not only a remarkable number of Jews in the most prominent leadership positions of leftist parties, but also a disproportionately high number of Jews in (somewhat) lower-ranking positions within some of these parties, and in particular roles in party-related institutions. An analysis of the family backgrounds of those who participated in the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party congress in 1907 reveals that 23 percent of the Menshevik delegates were Jewish, and that 11 percent of the Bolsheviks at this congress were Jews.²¹ Robert Michels noted in 1911 that "among the eighty-one socialist deputies sent to the [German] Reichstag in the penultimate general election, there were nine Jews, and this figure is an extremely high one when compared with the percentage of Jews among the population of Germany, and also with the total number of Jewish workers [in Germany] and with the number of Jewish members of the socialist party."²² Eighteen of the twenty-nine people's commissars in the government of the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919 were Jewish.²³ Eduard Bernstein suggested in 1921 that there were roughly five hundred journalists employed by social democratic newspapers in Germany, and that it would not be unreasonable to estimate that fifty of those journalists were of Jewish descent.²⁴ By the end of 1923, roughly 20 percent of the

²¹ Robert J. Brym, *The Jewish Intelligentsia and Russian Marxism: A Sociological Study of Intellectual Radicalism and Ideological Divergence* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978). There was less of a Jewish presence among the Bolsheviks than among the Mensheviks throughout the period preceding the Revolution of 1917. Moreover: the total number of Bolsheviks who were Jewish in the prerevolutionary period was rather small. A Communist Party census conducted in 1922 demonstrates that there were at that time merely 958 Jewish members in the party who had joined before 1917. The total membership of the Bolshevik group in January 1917 was 23,600 [Zvi Y. Gitelman, *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics: The Jewish Sections of the CPSU, 1917-1930* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 105-106].

²² Michels, *Political Parties*, p. 246.

²³ Traverso, *Marxists and the Jewish Question*, p. 33.

²⁴ Eduard Bernstein, "Di yidn un di dayshe sotsial-demokratie," *Tsukunft*, XXVI (March, 1921), p. 151.

membership of the Communist Party of Poland (KPP) was Jewish.²⁵ Official Communist sources (not inclined to exaggerate on this subject) estimated that 35 percent of the KPP membership was Jewish in 1930.²⁶ In 1949, it has been alleged, approximately half of those in the American Communist Party were Jews.²⁷

But the presence of Jews on the left extended, in the twentieth century, well beyond membership in political parties, or association with party-related institutions. Jews were also highly visible in major periodicals and intellectual groupings that had left-wing orientations but were not party affiliated. The Institute of Social Research, for example, which was founded in Germany in 1923, and which became the crucible within which the Frankfurt School came into being, ultimately proved to be particularly attractive to intellectuals of Jewish origin. Max Horkheimer, Leo Lowenthal, Erich Fromm, and Friedrich Pollock were all Jews, and so was Herbert Marcuse, who first became closely associated with the Frankfurt School in the 1930s.²⁸

Though Jews were manifestly present in leftist movements in a number of different countries during the twentieth century, this fact does not by any means imply that most Jews in these countries were members of leftist parties. The total number of members of the KPP in 1930 was roughly 6,600.²⁹ To say that 35 percent of the members of the party in that year were Jews is to suggest that 2,310 Jews were members of the KPP. A census conducted by the Polish government found that there were 3,113,933 individuals of the “Mosaic faith” in Poland in December

²⁵ M. Mishkinsky, “The Communist Party of Poland and the Jews,” in *The Jews of Poland between Two World Wars*, ed. Yisrael Gutman, Ezra Mendelsohn, Jehuda Reinharz, and Chone Shmeruk (Hanover, NH, and London: University Press of New England, 1989), p. 62.

²⁶ Celia S. Heller, *On the Edge of Destruction: Jews of Poland between the Two World Wars* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), p. 254. There are no reliable statistics on the proportion of Jews active in Trotskyist movements. However, it appears to be the case that Jews played a disproportionate role in many of these movements. I have discussed Jews active in the Trotskyist movement in Poland in Jack Jacobs, “Communist Questions, Jewish Answers: Polish Jewish Dissident Communists of the Inter-War Era,” *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, XVIII (2005), pp. 369–379.

²⁷ Gennady Estraikh, “Metamorphoses of Morgn-frayhayt,” in *Yiddish and the Left*, ed. Gennady Estraikh and Mikhail Krutikov, *Studies in Yiddish*, III (Oxford: Legenda, 2001), p. 145.

²⁸ Jack Jacobs, *The Frankfurt School, Jewish Lives, and Antisemitism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

²⁹ Gabriele Simoncini, “Ethnic and Social Diversity in the Membership of the Communist Party of Poland: 1918–1938,” *Nationalities Papers*, XXII, Supplement 1 (1994), p. 59.

1931.³⁰ Thus: considerably less than 1 percent of the Polish Jewish population was enrolled in the KPP in the early 1930s.

On the other hand: there are all but certainly cases in which a plurality or even a majority of Jewish voters in a specific country has voted for a socialist or social democratic party in a particular election. Most Jewish voters in Germany in the first years of the Weimar Republic are likely to have cast their ballots for the German Democratic Party (DDP), which was not a socialist movement, but rather proudly bourgeois in orientation. However, there was, in all likelihood, an increase in support among German Jews for the Social Democratic Party (SPD) (which evolved over time from a Marxist into a reformist organization) during the course of the 1920s. One contemporary source suggests that in 1924, 42 percent of Jewish voters in Germany voted for the SPD, 40 percent for the DDP, and 8 percent of the Jewish vote went to the Communist Party of Germany (KPD).³¹ As the strength of the Nazi party increased, and liberal parties such as the DDP collapsed, it is quite probable that the proportion of German Jews voting for the SPD grew yet again. Arnold Paucker presents data suggesting that 62 percent of Jewish voters voted for the SPD after 1930, and that 8 percent voted for the KPD. Even if, as Paucker himself admits, the evidence that he provides may overstate German Jewish support for parties of the left, it is very likely that a majority of German Jewish voters did in fact support such parties in the Weimar Republic's last years.³² But I hasten to add that many German Jews who voted in German elections in the early 1930s are likely to have supported the SPD not because they endorsed the general platform of that party but because they believed that there were no viable alternatives open to them. In this

³⁰ Chone Shmeruk, "Hebrew-Yiddish-Polish: A Trilingual Jewish Culture," in *Jews of Poland between Two World Wars*, p. 287.

³¹ Ernst Hamburger and Peter Pulzer, "Jews as Voters in the Weimar Republic," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, XXX (1985), p. 48, citing a work published in 1928. A second source indicates that the DDP received 64 percent of Jewish votes before 1930, the SPD 28 percent, the KPD 4 percent, and a fourth party, the German People's Party (DVP), which stood to the right of the DDP, received as many Jewish votes during that era as did the KPD [Arnold Paucker, "Jewish Defence against Nazism in the Weimar Republic," *Wiener Library Bulletin*, XXVI, 1-2, new series 26-7 (1972), p. 26].

³² Though the proportion of German Jewish voters casting ballots for the KPD may not have changed in the early 1930s, the proportion of Jews playing leading roles in that party dropped precipitously. There were no Jews in the Central Committee of the KPD at the end of the Weimar period, and no Jews among the eighty-nine KPD members elected to the Reichstag in November 1932 [Hamburger and Pulzer, "Jews as Voters in the Weimar Republic," p. 46].

and other cases: Jewish support for the left was linked to existing historical and political circumstances.

*

THE JEWISH LEFT

A. The Jewish Left in Europe

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, while some Jews created and became involved in non-Jewish leftist movements, explicitly Jewish leftist organizations were also established. Urbanization, modernization, pauperization, proletarianization, and the decline of rabbinic authority all contributed to the sparking of left-wing sentiment among East European Jews.³³ Unlike in Central and Western Europe, where many Jewish leftists were both acculturated and linguistically assimilated, and were therefore inclined to work within general leftist movements, East European Jewish leftists (and certain Jewish radicals who left Eastern Europe to settle in other parts of the world) regularly felt that the needs of the local Jewish populations – including the fact that many East European Jews were native-born Yiddish speakers and were not fluent in the languages of the non-Jews among whom they lived – made it necessary to create avowedly Jewish parties or organizations. Moreover: the socioeconomic structures of the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe were sharply different from those of Jewish communities in Central or Western Europe. The proportion of East European Jews who were middle class or wealthy was considerably lower than was, for example, the proportion of German Jewry that could be so characterized. This made East European Jewry a more fertile recruitment ground for leftists than its counterparts in the German-speaking lands.³⁴

The first Jewish socialist organization, the Hebrew Socialist Union, was established in London in 1876. However, it was not created by English Jews, but by Jews who had emigrated from the European mainland to England. The group's members were by no means self-haters.

³³ Gerald Sorin, *The Prophetic Minority: American Jewish Immigrant Radicals, 1880–1920*. The Modern Jewish Experience (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), pp. 18–27.

³⁴ Emanuel Scherer, “The Bund,” in *Struggle for Tomorrow: Modern Political Ideologies of the Jewish People*, ed. Basil J. Vlavianos and Feliks Gross (New York: Arts, Incorporated, 1954), p. 137.

They identified themselves as Jews (presumably in an ethnic or national sense), though they rejected religion. The Hebrew Socialist Union condemned private property, argued that a universal upheaval was necessary, and advocated workers' control. It held public meetings, helped to establish a trade union for tailors, and caused a stir within Anglo Jewry, but never had more than forty active members, and did not survive beyond the year in which it was created.³⁵ Though the Hebrew Socialist Union was inconsequential in size, it eventually provided inspiration to later Jewish socialists in Eastern Europe and elsewhere.

In the period beginning with the 1870s and continuing through the 1880s and 1890s, there were sporadic attempts made by Jews living in the Russian Empire (some of whom were populists, and others of whom were Marxists) to organize radical circles among Russian Jewish artisans.³⁶ By the end of this period, participants in those efforts began to extend their activities in a variety of ways, including via the establishment of trade unions made up of Jewish workers and artisans, the organization of strikes conducted by these unions, and the creation of propaganda materials in Yiddish. This activity contributed to the creation of the General Jewish Workers' Bund, which was founded in Vilna in 1897.

Over time, the Bund became a relatively large party, operating in a broad swath of territory, despite the fact that it was an underground

³⁵ William J. Fishman, *Jewish Radicals: From Czarist Stetl to London Ghetto* (London: Harrap, 1976), pp. 103–124. Russian Jewish radicals involved in political life in the 1880s did not emulate the example of the Hebrew Socialist Union. A relatively large number of radicals of Jewish origin became active in political affairs in the Russian Empire in the 1880s. There were only 67 Jews among those arrested in the Russian Empire for political offenses in the period 1873–1877. These Jews made up 6.5 percent of all those arrested on such charges. There were 579 Jews among the 4,307 individuals arrested on political charges in the years 1884–1890. Thus: close to 14 percent of those in this latter group were Jewish [E(lihu) Tcherikower (Tsherikover), “Revolutsionere un natsionale ideologies fun der rusish-yidisher inteligents,” in *Geshikhte fun der yidisher arbeter-bavegung in di fareynikte shtatn*, II, ed. E(lihu) Tcherikower (Tsherikover) (New York: Yidisher visnshaftlekher institut – vivo, 1945), p. 195]. Cf. Erich E. Haberer, *Jews and Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). However, these individuals were involved with the Russian populist movement and advocated that political activity be conducted primarily among Russian peasants. They made no attempt to found explicitly Jewish socialist groups. Indeed, most of the Russian radicals of Jewish origin of that era were ideological assimilationists and were estranged from Jewish life.

³⁶ Ezra Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale: The Formative Years of the Jewish Workers' Movement in Tsarist Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 30–31.

movement for almost all of the tsarist era.³⁷ It was not, initially, an advocate of national rights for the Jews of the Russian Empire. The Bund, however, ultimately came to be characterized not only by a continuing commitment to Marxism, and by its anti-Zionism, but also by its advocacy of national cultural autonomy for the Jews of the empire.³⁸ It played a key role in organizing the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party, established armed self-defense groups to aid Jews threatened by pogromists, and was particularly visible in the period of the Revolution of 1905, during which it claimed to have thirty-three thousand members.

A series of other Jewish socialist parties – the Zionist Socialist Workers' Party (often known as the SS, its Russian initials), which asserted that it had twenty-seven thousand members, and which advocated the territorial concentration of Jewry while not insisting that this concentration take place in Palestine; the Jewish Social Democratic Workers' Party Poalei Zion, which believed that Jewish territorial concentration could and ought to be realized only in Palestine, and which purportedly had sixteen thousand adherents, and the Jewish Socialist

³⁷ Henry J. Tobias, *The Jewish Bund in Russia: From Its Origins to 1905* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1972).

³⁸ Scholars have offered a number of different explanations for how and why the Bund came to adopt a national program. The Bund leaders, Jonathan Frankel has argued, were navigating between Zionist critics on one flank, and Russian and Polish socialist critics on another, and charted a course between the two. From Frankel's perspective, in other words, the Bund's ideological evolution in the years of the tsarist empire can best be explained not by the need to respond to pressure from the rank and file (as Bundist historiography has sometimes suggested), or by sociological factors, but by a need to respond to the party's political opponents. "Bundist ideology turns out to have developed not inexorably as a superstructure reflecting the realities of the mass base but rather as a result of specific political contingencies." [Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism and the Russian Jews, 1862–1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 182]. Yoav Peled has replied to Frankel by arguing, compellingly, that political factors alone cannot explain the ideological evolution of the party, and that Frankel devoted insufficient attention to underlying sociohistorical processes. He notes that the experience of Russian Jewish workers in the labor market caused them to develop "ethno-class consciousness" and that the ideology that was adopted by the Bund was the political expression of this consciousness. "The evolution of Bundist ideology was neither a smooth process of adjustment to primordial reality [as Bundist historians have tended to argue] nor a search by a group of intellectuals for an ideological niche of their own [as Frankel suggests]. It was, rather, the continuous effort of a political party to strike the correct ideological balance between the various conflicting concerns of the constituency it was seeking to mobilize" [Yoav Peled, *Class and Ethnicity in the Pale: The Political Economy of Jewish Workers' Nationalism in late Imperial Russia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), p. 131].

Workers' Party (a.k.a. SERP, its initials in Russian), which boasted a membership of thirteen thousand, many of whom were sympathetic to a social revolutionary rather than a Marxist understanding of socialism – came into being somewhat later than had the Bund, and competed with that party. These parties differed from one another, and from the Bund, in their conceptions of socialism, in their attitudes toward territorialism and Zionism, and, more generally, in their proposed solutions to the problems confronting the Jews of the Russian Empire.³⁹ They all thought of themselves, however, as leftist parties.

The Jewish socialist parties that had been active in the Russian Empire did not survive the Bolshevik consolidation of power (because the Bolsheviks were ultimately unwilling to tolerate such movements, and pressured them to dissolve).⁴⁰ But while the Bund was forced to stop operating in the USSR, it did quite well, in the 1930s, in Poland – the country in Europe with the largest Jewish population during that period and the cultural heart of the Jewish diaspora. An increase in the number of wage laborers in the Polish Jewish population (probably sparked by urbanization and economic modernization) led to the growth of trade unions linked to the Bund, which, in the 1930s, strengthened the Bund *per se*.⁴¹ In addition, the Bund in Poland benefited to some degree from the creation of a constellation of Bundist-oriented movements focused on children, youth, physical education, and women.⁴² Many of these Bundist-oriented movements acted as conveyor belts for the party, and thus help to explain how and why the Bund became the strongest Jewish

³⁹ Jews in Europe founded significant Jewish socialist parties not only in the Russian Empire but also in Austria-Hungary. The Jewish Social Democratic Party of Galicia, established in 1905, had a Bundist ideology and attracted forty-five hundred members in the period immediately preceding the beginning of the First World War [Rick Kuhn, "Organizing Yiddish-Speaking Workers in Pre-World War I Galicia: The Jewish Social Democratic Party," in *Yiddish Language and Culture: Then and Now*, ed. Leonard Jay Greenspoon, Studies in Jewish Civilization, IX (Omaha, NE: Creighton University Press, 1998), pp. 37–65]. Labor Zionists in Austria-Hungary also organized a party of their own, the Jewish Socialist Workers' Party Poalei Zion in Austria.

⁴⁰ Gitelman, *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics*, pp. 151–230. Relatively large numbers of Jews flocked to the Russian Communist Party – which was perceived as a bulwark against antisemitism, and a source of employment – in the era of the Russian Civil War and after the conclusion of that war.

⁴¹ Gertrud Pickhan, "*Gegen den Strom*": *Der Allgemeine Jüdische Arbeiterbund "Bund" in Polen, 1918–1939*, Schriften des Simon-Dubnow Instituts Leipzig, I (Stuttgart, Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2001), p. 206.

⁴² Jack Jacobs, *Bundist Counterculture in Interwar Poland* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, in cooperation with YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 2009).

political party in most major Polish cities with large Jewish populations in the period immediately preceding the beginning of the Second World War.

Labor Zionist parties never achieved political success in Poland comparable to that achieved by the Bund. The Left Poalei Zion, a Marxist-Zionist party, had strength in some provincial towns, including Brest and Chelm contributed to efforts to promote secular Yiddish culture in Poland in the interwar years, and had impressive intellectuals – such as Emanuel Ringelblum and Raphael Mahler – in its ranks.⁴³ But the Left Poalei Zion was squeezed, in interwar Poland, into a narrow political sliver between the general Zionist movement, on the one hand, and the Bund and Communist movements, on the other, and was unable to attract considerable numbers of Jewish workers or artisans in Poland's largest cities. The other left-Zionist parties in Poland – such as the Right Poalei Zion, Hitahdut, and the Zionist-Socialist Party Zeire Zion – were generally more Zionist and less leftist than was the Left Poalei Zion. As Ezra Mendelsohn has shown, they “had no parliamentary role and no real political responsibility.”⁴⁴

Most Jews active in or sympathetic to the Bund, the left-Zionists, or the non-Jewish leftist parties of Central Europe suffered the same fate as did the rest of the Jewish population during the Second World War. Almost all European Jewish leftists who remained in Nazi-occupied Europe during the war died or were murdered during the course of that conflict.⁴⁵ The base of support for the Jewish left in Europe was all but completely eliminated.

⁴³ Samuel Kassow, “The Left Poalei Zion in Inter-War Poland,” in *Yiddish and the Left*, ed. Gennady Estrakh and Mikhail Krutikov. European Humanities Research Centre Studies in Yiddish, III (Oxford: Legenda, 2001), pp. 109–128. Cf. Bine Garntsarska-Kadari, *Di linke poyle-tzien in poyln biz der tseyter velt-milkhome*, trans. Khonen Pozniak (Tel Aviv: Farlag i. l. peretz, 1995).

⁴⁴ Ezra Mendelsohn, *Zionism in Poland: The Formative Years, 1915–1926* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 172.

⁴⁵ A relatively small number of leaders of the Polish Bund escaped to the United States or to other lands with the aid of the New York-based Jewish Labor Committee, as did a small number of leaders of the German and of the Austrian social democratic movements. On the fate of Bundists during the Second World War, see Daniel Blatman, *For Our Freedom and Yours: The Jewish Labour Bund in Poland 1939–1949* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2003). On the aid and support provided by the Jewish Labor Committee to German and Austrian social democrats, some of whom were of Jewish origin, see Jack Jacobs, *Ein Freund in Not. Das Jüdische Arbeiterkomitee in New York und die Flüchtlinge aus den deutschsprachigen Ländern, 1933–1945* (Bonn: Forschungsinstitut der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 1993).

There were attempts made to reorganize the Bund in Poland when the Second World War was over.⁴⁶ However, the Bund was no more able to exist in Communist-dominated Poland than it had been in the Communist-controlled USSR. The Bund in Poland was dismantled in 1948–1949.⁴⁷

In sum: the explicitly Jewish left arose among East European Jews at a specific point in the nineteenth century, in the context of urbanization, shifts in the class structure of the Jewish population, and a decrease in the strength of traditional Jewish religious authorities. The Bund – the most significant of the Jewish left parties – achieved successes both in tsarist Russia and in interwar Poland. Along with all other Jewish left parties in Europe, however, it was ultimately destroyed by world-historic forces far beyond its control. The Yiddish-speaking Jewish working class – which had been the Bund’s core constituency – was virtually extirpated in Eastern Europe by the Nazis and by those who worked on behalf of the Nazis. Communist victories, first in Russia and, much later, in Poland and elsewhere, eliminated the political space within which the Bund (and the East European Jewish left in general) had operated. In the wake of the Second World War, the East European Jewish left per se could not and did not survive.

B. The Jewish Left in the United States

The founders of the Jewish left in the United States were generally similar to their counterparts in Eastern Europe, and the constituency within which American Jewish leftists conducted their work paralleled that in countries such as Russia or Poland. The very different political conditions in which American Jews lived eventually made it possible for the American Jewish left to grow to an impressive size. Ultimately, however, the Jewish left in the United States also went into a sharp decline – though not for the same reasons as had the Jewish left movements of Eastern Europe. In the United States, economic and social mobility over the course of the

⁴⁶ David Engel, “The Bund after the Holocaust: Between Renewal and Self-Liquidation,” *Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe: The Bund at 100*, ed. Jack Jacobs (New York: New York University Press, 2001), pp. 213–226; Natalia Aleksiu, “Where Was There a Future for Polish Jewry? Bundist and Zionist Polemics in Post-World War II Poland,” *Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe*, pp. 227–242.

⁴⁷ Blatman, *For Our Freedom and Yours*, pp. 210–218; David Slucki, *The International Jewish Labor Bund after 1945: Toward a Global History* (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 2012), pp. 56–74.

twentieth century diminished the proportional size of the Jewish working class. The relative openness of American society, which made assimilation possible, diminished the size of the Yiddish-speaking population. The American Jewish left, created in the nineteenth century, peaked in the twentieth century, and has dwindled in strength in the last few decades.

The pogroms of 1881, economic dislocation, and social changes within the world of East European Jewry, all contributed to sparking massive waves of immigration by Jews from the Russian Empire to the United States. Approximately 750,000 Jews born in the empire settled in the United States in the period from 1881 to 1905.⁴⁸ The Jews who left Europe were often younger, more impressionable, and somewhat less committed to the practice of Jewish religious traditions than were those who remained behind.

East European Jewish immigrants to the United States encountered extremely poor living and working conditions in neighborhoods such as New York's Lower East Side (to which a lion's share of the East European Jewish immigrants of that era moved upon arrival in America). This wave of immigrants, heavily concentrated in particular industries, began to develop class consciousness, was influenced by radical intellectuals, engaged in a variety of forms of collective action, and evinced sympathy for socialist and radical ideas.⁴⁹ Entities that later became pillars of the American Jewish left – including the Workmen's Circle and the Jewish Daily Forward (the *Forverts*) – were created by these immigrants during this period.

The Workmen's Circle (Arbeter Ring), first established on a local level in New York in 1892, snowballed in size after the beginning of the twentieth century. In an era when there was little in the way of government-provided social service in the United States, the Workmen's Circle offered concrete mutual aid benefits to its members. It also emphasized education and provided recreational opportunities. Considerable attention was given, as the organization matured, to sponsoring lectures, choruses, and orchestras; to publishing; and, ultimately, to establishing supplementary schools for children. The organization supported the work of trade unionists, including, in particular, trade union organizing efforts undertaken in the garment industry. It supported the American Socialist

⁴⁸ Hadassa Kosak, *Cultures of Opposition: Jewish Immigrant Workers, New York City, 1881–1905* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000).

⁴⁹ Tony Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 3–16.

Party, and sent material support to Jewish socialists abroad, for example, to Bundist institutions. Though the Workmen's Circle was broader in ideological range than was the Bund, and had a certain number of self-proclaimed anarchist members, and some members sympathetic to labor Zionism and other leftist currents, onetime Bundists tended to dominate the countrywide leadership of the Arbeter Ring for many decades after a wave of post-1905 immigration. The most prominent leaders of the Workmen's Circle, like those of the Bund, were sympathetic to socialism, and identified themselves as Jewish, but were not themselves religiously observant. Over time, the leaders also came to be strong advocates of secular, Yiddish language, culture. The organization was interested in defending the interests both of Jewish immigrants to America and of Jews who had remained in Eastern Europe. Though the order was open to them, it attracted few non-Jews into its ranks. It had eighty-seven thousand members at its peak in 1925 and had sizable material assets.

The *Forverts*, a Yiddish language newspaper founded in New York in 1897, was, at one time, another major bastion of Jewish leftists in the United States. The newspaper was not a party organ. However, it was closely associated with the American Socialist Party in the newspaper's early years. The *Forverts*, which was edited by Abraham Cahan during the period of its greatest strength, ultimately became not only the most powerful social democratic daily in the United States, but also the largest daily newspaper published in Yiddish anywhere in the world. Around 1917, the *Forverts* reportedly had a circulation exceeding 200,000.⁵⁰

The Workmen's Circle and the *Forverts* – which operated legally – were, in a number of respects, not directly comparable to European Jewish socialist parties such as the Bund, or to the earliest Yiddish radical

⁵⁰ Melech Epstein, *Jewish Labor in U.S.A.* (New York: KTAV, 1969), I, p. 323. The history and orientation of the *Forverts* are described by Epstein, *Jewish Labor in U.S.A.*, pp. 318–334; Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976); Arthur Liebman, *Jews and the Left*. Contemporary Religious Movements (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1979), pp. 326–346; and by Michels, *Fire in Their Hearts*, pp. 104ff.

Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe are known to have been involved with leftist causes not only in the United States, but also in Argentina, Canada, South Africa, and other countries [Philip Mendes, “The Rise and Fall of the Jewish/Left Alliance: An Historical and Political Analysis,” *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, XLV, 4 (December, 1999), pp. 492–493; Nancy L. Green, ed., *Jewish Workers in the Modern Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 119–185]. Regional variation notwithstanding, the trajectories of Jewish involvement with the left seem to have been rather similar in virtually all of the lands that attracted significant numbers of Jews from Eastern Europe.

periodicals issued in Eastern Europe (which were often produced and distributed surreptitiously). Nevertheless, it ought to be noted that the Workmen's Circle was, at its moment of greatest strength, much larger than any European Jewish socialist organization, and that the *Forverts*, similarly, had a far greater reach than did its counterparts in other lands.

Jewish immigrants to the United States from Eastern Europe played instrumental roles in the twentieth century not only in the Workmen's Circle and in the *Forverts* but also in America's trade union movement. The most important trade unions with Jewish leadership were the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), founded in 1900, which organized workers who made women's clothing, and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (the Amalgamated), which organized those who made men's clothing and came into being in 1914. The cap makers union and the fur and leather workers union were also significant. None of these unions was explicitly or exclusively Jewish. But the early leaders of all four – including, most famously, David Dubinsky of the ILGWU and Sidney Hillman of the Amalgamated – were Jews, and so were significant portions of the memberships of these unions. In 1918, the ILGWU had 129,311 members. The Amalgamated is known to have had 177,000 members in 1920.

As was the case among leftists around the world, the Bolshevik Revolution led to deep divisions within the American Jewish left. Individuals sympathetic to the Bolshevik cause and living in the United States ultimately helped to create (and/or controlled) a set of organizations and periodicals reflecting their perspective. The *Freiheit* (*Frayhayt*) (founded in 1922, and later renamed the *Morgn-frayhayt*), a Yiddish daily newspaper published in New York, attracted readers who were further to the left than were those who read the *Forverts*.⁵¹ Initially including among its leading figures individuals who were revolutionaries but not necessarily Communists, the newspaper was eventually dominated by Communists and drew many of its earliest readers away from the *Forverts*. In the 1920s, the paid circulation of the *Frayhayt* reached fourteen thousand.⁵²

⁵¹ The founding and earliest years of the *Frayhayt* are described in Melech Epstein, *The Jews and Communism 1919–1941: The Story of Early Communist Victories and Ultimate Defeats in the Jewish Community, U.S.A.* (New York: Trade Union Sponsoring Committee, 1959), pp. 102–104, and Michels, *Fire in Their Hearts*, pp. 238–250.

⁵² Epstein, *Jews and Communism*, p. 138. Estraikh reports that the *Morgn-frayhayt* had a circulation of twenty-one thousand in 1947 [Estraikh, “Metamorphoses of *Morgn-frayhayt*,” p. 145].

The International Workers Order, which was established in 1930, similarly, attracted Jews (and non-Jews) who were further to the left than were those in the Workmen's Circle. Jewish membership in the International Workers Order, which provided substantial material support to the *Morgn-frayhayt*, reached sixty thousand in 1947, at which time these Jews made up roughly one-third of the total number of members of the order.⁵³

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CONTEMPORARY JEWISH POLITICAL ATTITUDES

All of the components of the American Jewish left described previously have declined precipitously in size and strength in recent generations. Linguistic acculturation contributed substantially to a marked drop in the circulation of the *Forverts*. The Yiddish-language newspaper, which is now a biweekly, has a paid circulation for its print edition of considerably less than three thousand (though it also has a presence on-line).⁵⁴ The newspaper's editorial line is neither radical nor leftist.

The Workmen's Circle, which had done well when Jewish immigrants were densely concentrated in urban neighborhoods, was negatively affected by the geographic dispersion of the descendants of these immigrants (as well as by assimilation and other social changes).⁵⁵ Formal membership is now less than twelve thousand and continues to decline steadily.

Over the course of the twentieth century, the proportion of Jews in the garment industry unions decreased very sharply as a result of Jewish social mobility. By the 1930s, it was already true that 11 percent of employed Jewish males in the United States were in professional rather than working-class positions. This figure rose to 15 percent shortly after the Second World War, to 20 percent in 1957, and to 30 percent in the 1970s.⁵⁶ Local 22 of the ILGWU, which at one time "was perhaps the largest single Jewish labor organization" in the United States, had, at its height (in 1938), "nearly 28,000 members, of whom seventy-five percent

⁵³ Liebman, *Jews and the Left*, pp. 311-315.

⁵⁴ The Forward Association, owner of the *Forverts*, has also published an English-language weekly, *Forward*, in recent years. This weekly does not have a leftist editorial perspective.

⁵⁵ Liebman, *Jews and the Left*, p. 379. ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 359.

were Jewish” and of whom a high proportion were female.⁵⁷ By 1950, Local 22 had only 12,500 members, of whom 30 percent were Jews. Similar trends were also evident by the middle of the twentieth century in other trade unions in which Jews had earlier been present in significant numbers and have continued since. Only a negligible number of Jewish rank and file workers are currently employed in unionized positions in the American garment industry. More generally: a far smaller proportion of American Jews work in blue-collar positions today than was true a century ago.

Many of the organizations and periodicals created (and/or maintained) by those American Jews who were sympathetic to the Bolshevik Revolution – hurt not only by the factors mentioned, but also by measures taken by American government agencies against suspected Communists during the Cold War, and by a sharp drop in sympathy for Communism within the American Jewish population in the wake of revelations about actions taken by the Stalinist regime in the USSR – are no longer extant.⁵⁸ The International Workers Order, which lost a series of court battles and which ultimately had its charter revoked at the request of an agency of the state of New York, was formally dissolved in 1954.⁵⁹ The *Morgn-frayhayt* ceased publishing in 1988.⁶⁰

Arthur Liebman wrote, in a work published in 1979, that

the income, occupational, and geographical mobilities that Jews experienced in America in one or two generations were body blows to the maintenance of a sizeable, concentrated, and economically homogenous Jewish working class. Although limitations on where Jews might work or live continued (and continue), the opportunities were such that Jews as a people rather quickly moved from the working class to the middle class in America. This socioeconomic metamorphosis could not but be damaging to the Jews’ commitment to socialism.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Melech Epstein, *Jewish Labor in U.S.A.*, p. xii.

⁵⁸ Exceptions to this generalization include Camp Kinderland, a summer camp for children currently based in Massachusetts, which, in an earlier era, had been close in spirit to the International Workers Order, and *Jewish Currents*, a periodical issued in New York and originally known as *Jewish Life*. On Camp Kinderland see Paul C. Mishler, *Raising Reds. The Young Pioneers, Radical Summer Camps, and Communist Political Culture in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 89–94. Both Camp Kinderland and *Jewish Currents* have morphed into institutions committed to progressive political positions but far from following a party line, and rather different in tone than they were when they came into being.

⁵⁹ Epstein, *Jews and Communism*, p. 155; Liebman, *Jews and the Left*, p. 311.

⁶⁰ Estraiikh, “Metamorphoses of *Morgn-frayhayt*,” p. 144.

⁶¹ Liebman, *Jews and the Left*, p. 592. Liebman also describes ways in which the “inadvertent strengthening of a sense of Jewish solidarity” by Jewish leftists in America ultimately

The trends described by Liebman have continued over the course of the years since the publication of his work, and help to explain the continuing decline in ties between American Jews and the left. In the twenty-first century, leftist anti-Zionism and other factors have also contributed to further reductions of support for leftist causes within American Jewry. The number of contemporary American Jews who support explicitly socialist, communist, or anarchist movements is now rather small.

Though the United States is manifestly a vastly different country than was imperial Germany, contemporary American Jewry is more like early-twentieth-century German Jewry in its socioeconomic structure and in its political affiliations than like Russian Jewry of the tsarist era. Like the Jews of imperial Germany, a notable proportion of American Jewry is made up of individuals in high socioeconomic status groups. Like the Jews of early-twentieth-century Germany, contemporary American Jews are often sympathetic to liberal (as distinguished from radical) ideas. Indeed: American Jewry is more liberal than many other American ethnic groups on a broad range of issues. American Jewry is, however, not identified with the American political left, at this point in its history, but rather with powerful, mainstream American political institutions. As I write these lines, Bernie Sanders (who is Jewish and an avowed democratic socialist) and Hillary Clinton (who is neither Jewish nor a socialist) are both running presidential campaigns. Most American Jews, I suspect, support the latter of these two candidates.

Jews in other countries have likewise edged away from earlier sympathies for leftist ideas. The State of Israel had a string of Labor-dominated governments in its founding decades. It has, however, elected right-wing governments with nationalistic platforms in more recent elections. The decline of leftist ideas in Israel seems to be related to three different phenomena: (1) immigration patterns, (2) matters related to the conflict with the Palestinians and with other portions of the Arab world, and (3) changes in the class composition of Israeli society. Early waves of Jewish immigrants to Palestine (and, later, to the State of Israel) were made up, in part, of East European Jews who had themselves been influenced by leftist ideas, of varying kinds. Self-proclaimed socialist thinkers such as Nachman Syrkin and Berl Katznelson were widely admired by Israelis of an earlier generation. Many kibbutzim (collective settlements), the Histadrut (the General Federation of Labor), and other institutions in

undermined class consciousness and allegiance to the left [Liebman, *Jews and the Left*, p. 597].

Palestine were controlled, in an earlier era, by labor Zionists. The social democratic political parties within which these institutions were influential regularly won major electoral victories. However, neither the large wave of Jews from North Africa (the Mizrahim), which arrived in Israel beginning with the 1950s, nor the large wave of Jews from the USSR (and from the successor states of the USSR), which began to arrive roughly a generation later, were sympathetic either to socialism in general or to the Labor Party of Israel. Moreover: the descendants of East European Jews who have immigrated to Israel in recent years from English-speaking lands have often been from religiously orthodox backgrounds and have regularly advocated both conservative social values and conservative political views. Certain other segments of the Jewish population of Israel, including descendants of the East European Jewish immigrants who had arrived in Palestine as idealistic leftists in earlier eras, became less sympathetic to leftist ideas than their ancestors had been as their class position altered. The descendants of East European Jewish immigrants to Palestine currently living in Israel are regularly in very high socioeconomic status groups, and often sympathetic to business interests rather than to the interests of the working class. More generally: the Jewish population of Israel as presently constituted does not evince particular sympathy for the left.

Jews in France, home to the world's third largest Jewish community, were, even in the recent past, sympathetic to Socialist Party candidates. François Mitterand, the first Socialist elected to serve as President of the French Fifth Republic, apparently received a plurality of the votes of French Jews both in 1981 and in 1988. However, the Jewish population of France seems not to have given comparable support to Ségolène Royal, the Socialist candidate in France's presidential election in 2007. Fears within the French Jewish population of rising antisemitism seem to have increased support for the "law-and-order" policies advocated by Nicolas Sarkozy (who is partially of Jewish origin). A large proportion of the Jews of France, it would appear, voted for Sarkozy (candidate of the right-wing Union for a Popular Movement) in 2007 rather than for Royal. Sarkozy also apparently received a plurality of Jewish votes in the presidential election held in France in 2012.

Current Jewish political opinion in the three largest Jewish communities (United States, Israel, and France), which, collectively, constitute the overwhelming majority of world Jewry, corroborates the idea that the onetime ties between Jews and the left can best be explained by political, economic, and sociological conditions that came into existence in the

nineteenth century and went out of existence in the twentieth, rather than by reference to Jewish religious ideas or other factors. The marginality of Jews in Central and Eastern Europe, the lack of opportunity for Jews in major institutions in tsarist Russia, poor living and working conditions not only in Eastern Europe but also in the United States, the explicit antisemitism of right-wing movements, and the relative openness of left-wing movements, all led some Jews in areas such as the Russian Empire and the United States to affiliate with the political left at a particular juncture in history. However, the dramatically altered conditions in which most Jews live in the twenty-first century have resulted in a very different Jewish political profile. The relationship of Jews to the left was a historically important phenomenon. This relationship, however, was of limited duration.

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Many questions remain unanswered. How has the left evolved within Israel? What is the relationship of contemporary leftist anti-Zionism to antisemitism? How should Jews on the left assess Judaism? What is the significance for Jews alive today of the historic connections among certain individuals of Jewish origin and leftist parties? In what ways does a gendered perspective shed light on the relationship between the left and Jews? Do our historic understandings of canonical figures and institutions continue to ring true? These and other such questions will be addressed in the following pages. No attempt has been made to present a unified perspective. This book is intended, rather, to suggest the range of views and interests among the leading, contemporary academics concerned with relevant subjects – and the extent to which the subject of Jews and the left remains a contentious one even in the twenty-first century.

PART ONE

POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF JUDAISM

The Strangeness of Jewish Leftism

Michael Walzer

I have tried to think about what a keynote address should be like, and in line with my sense of what is appropriate here, I will talk about a subject that occurs first in the story of Jewish leftism, both logically and chronologically. My subject is the difficult, problematic relation of Jewish leftism to the religion of the Jews. We (leftists) started from the religious world – there was no other place – and it was not an easy start.

Many people have pretended that it was easy; they try to find reasons for the Jewish predilection for left politics in Judaism itself: Pesach as a celebration of national liberation, Hanukka as a celebration of religious freedom, the prophets as social critics and advocates of social justice, *tzedakah* as a commitment to the most vulnerable members of society. There is something to say in favor of this view of our religion, but not enough to explain Jewish leftism. Certainly the holidays, in their Orthodox versions, carry a message very different from the one we were taught in Reform and liberal-left households: Pesach celebrates a liberation at the hand of God and God alone; the people of Israel did nothing to free themselves; this was a liberation without human agency, which is the absolutely essential feature of any left politics (of any politics, actually). And the leaders of the Maccabean revolt were religious zealots; they were opposed indeed to the imposition of an imperial, Hellenistic religion; they fought for the freedom to impose their own orthodoxy on their own people; they were closer in spirit, I dare say, to the Taliban than to the Labor Zionists. The prophets, in the texts we love to quote, were magnificent social critics and advocates of social justice, but there are many texts that we do not love to quote. And the practice of *tzedakah* in the old *kehillot*, which certainly made for a kind of welfarism, did not interfere at

all with the oligarchies that ruled in each *kahal*. In fact, traditional Judaism offers precious little support to a left political orientation.

Hence the strangeness of Jewish leftism, for which centuries of religious life did not prepare us. There is no straight line from Judaism to left politics; those of you who grew up believing, as I did, that Judaism and socialism are pretty much the same thing may find this surprising, but you know, if not in your heart of hearts then in your mind of minds, that it is true. The negation of the exile, which is really a negation of traditional Judaism, the religion of the exile, is not only central to Zionism; it is central to leftism, too. Small numbers of Jews may have moved into a kind of left politics through the experience of religious heresy, as some recent scholarship on the Frankists suggests, but leftism on a larger scale is a product of the radical break that emancipation made possible, beginning in the French Revolution and continuing through the nineteenth century. Emancipation did not only take us into the modern state; it also took us out of the traditional *kahal*; it freed us from the rule of the rabbis; it opened the way to citizenship and political engagement.

We need to recognize this, so that we can recognize and resist the return of the negated – for Orthodox and ultraorthodox Judaism in Israel today, and in the United States too, is experiencing an extraordinary revival, and it is a powerfully conservative, right-wing, often far right, political force. I do not mean that all Orthodox or ultraorthodox Jews are right-wing – that is clearly not true – but the tendency of their collective commitments is steadily rightward. Many of us find the strength of the tendency surprising, but (again) it really is not – at least, it is no more surprising than the politics of Christian fundamentalism or Islamic zealotry or Hindu nationalism, though each of these cases has its own peculiar features. For decades, we were taught that secularization was an irresistible historical tendency. This was an academic theory that was picked up with enthusiasm by political activists. David Ben-Gurion certainly believed it; when he made his deal with the ultraorthodox sects, he imagined a future Jewish state in which they would be like the Amish or Mennonites in the United States. Today, this irresistible tendency is being resisted with considerable success. It turns out that a secular and liberal-left politics requires a commitment to the long term; there will be victories and defeats along the way. We are still engaged in the political and ideological struggles that began more than two hundred years ago.

What I would like to do today is to address six features of traditional Judaism that militate against a left politics. The six are not entirely

distinct; they overlap in various ways, and the list is not exhaustive – many of you may want to add to it. But it will at least suggest what we, on the Jewish left, are up against.

- 1) The idea of the chosen people: We all know the many ways liberal and leftist Jews have dealt with the embarrassment of chosenness. They say that we are not the chosen people; we are the choosing people – and in any case, all that we were chosen for was trouble. Or, alternatively, they say that chosenness is entirely about obligation and not about privilege, or they say that it is not a divinely appointed status at all but a human vocation – and every national and religious group has its own vocation. And then there is always the prophet Amos, wonderful Amos, who tells us in God’s name, “To me, O Israelites, you are / Just like the Ethiopians.”

Unfortunately, Amos’s line is not the dominant line in our religious tradition. And the insistence that we have a special relationship to God, that he loves us more than he does any other human group (however little he does to show his love), that insistence has sometimes taken very ugly, chauvinist forms. Though the Bible says explicitly that we were not chosen for any qualities of our own, many Jewish writers have looked for and laid claim to qualities that might justify God’s choice. And the claims extend from our spiritual insight and our elevated morality to some kind of ontological superiority – such that Jewish lives are reckoned, by some of our rabbis, to be more valuable than non-Jewish lives in wartime calculations and whenever triage is necessary.

The biblical covenant seems to imply that all Jews are each other’s equals, but in many traditional Jewish texts, it is obvious that equality does not extend to individuals and nations outside the covenant. That all men and women are created in God’s image is a biblical, therefore a Jewish, idea, and it serves as a wonderful metaphor for leftist egalitarianism (even for leftists who do not believe in God). In rabbinic times, this idea seems to have provided the grounds for a rejection of capital punishment and also of mutilation as a punishment, since both of these required an assault on, a violation of, God’s image. But, in truth, “creation in the image” played very little part in Jewish perceptions of non-Jews until the nineteenth century and the rise of the Reform movement. The formation of left egalitarianism required a re-formation of Orthodox Judaism.

- 2) The subordination of women: Though we are all chosen, some of us are more chosen than others. In traditional Judaism, only men are chosen for service to God and the community – which also means that only men are chosen for the study of Torah and for the rabbinate. No doubt, the distrust and fear of women play a large part in Christianity and Islam too, but comparison is not an excuse. In the modern world, the Orthodox exclusion of women from public activity, both religious and political, has a double effect: it marks Judaism as inherently undemocratic, given that half of the Jewish people are denied their rightful agency, and it makes Orthodox men self-interested supporters of this denial, since it guarantees their own privileged position.

Women were, perhaps, the greatest beneficiaries of emancipation: it freed them, or most of them, from the restraints imposed by halakhic Judaism. But this freedom was never fully realized, and it is today being contested with new energy, despite the appearance of Orthodox women who are fierce feminists. The opposition here is stark, for it is a fundamental leftist commitment, as the German social democrat August Bebel wrote in the 1890s, that “there can be no liberation of mankind without . . . equality of the sexes.”

- 3) Fear and hatred of the *goyim*: You know the litany: all the world is against us; in every age, they come to destroy us. This is the perspective of exile, a *galut* mentality marked above all by the fearful anticipation of hostility and then by the hatred that fear produces. There is certainly much in the history of our exile that explains the fear, but “all the world against us” fails to explain what has to be the decisive fact about our exile: that we have (so far) survived it, not only physically as individuals (many individuals obviously did not survive) but also collectively as a nation. In fact, we have always had friends or, at least, patrons and protectors, as well as enemies – in every age and in every country of our exile.

It is particularly irritating to hear right-wing Israelis recite the litany, as if Zionism has completely failed and Israeli Jews are still a persecuted minority, trapped in yet another hostile environment. In fact, again, Israel today has realized the plea of the elders to Samuel in the first book of Samuel – that they be given a king so that they could be “like all the nations.” The success of Zionism means that Israel is a state like all the states: it has friends, and strategic allies who are not quite friends, and fellow members of the society of states who are not particularly interested one way or another, and

enemies who are of little consequence, and enemies who are serious indeed. The refusal to recognize this complex reality makes it difficult to engage in a creative way with the non-Jewish world. It may well be true that creative engagement was not possible for much of our exile; after emancipation in the West and sovereignty in the Middle East, it is certainly possible. “All the world against us” makes negotiation seem fruitless; it invites us not only to expect hostility but also to join in it. It justifies strident defiance and sullen passivity – since nothing we do will make any difference; “they” will always hate us. And it may one day justify abject submission, when we cannot any longer oppose their hatred. It leaves no room for the politics and diplomacy of liberal nationalism and internationalism.

- 4) *Shtadlanut*: Until emancipation, the everyday politics of exile, what we might think of as the foreign policy of the exilic communities, was profoundly conservative – for very good reasons. The prophet Jeremiah provides the earliest prescription for our life in exile in his letter to the transported Judeans in Babylonia:

Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all that are carried away captives . . . Build ye homes, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them. Take ye wives, and begat sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace. (29:4–7)

The book of Esther illustrates this politics, though when Jeremiah wrote, “Give your daughters to husbands,” he probably did not have in mind the deliverance of a maidenly Esther to a heathen king. When Mordechai informed on the conspirators Bigthana and Teresh, he was seeking influence for himself in the palace – and at the same time he was following Jeremiah’s advice and seeking the peace of the city, which readily translates into the security of the ruling powers. He was the first *shtadlan* – and it is interesting to note that he made early Zionist writers profoundly uneasy: the Yiddish writer Y. L. Peretz, who was both a Zionist and a socialist, called Mordechai “the first informer and the first pimp.” One of the central goals of Zionism, and Jewish leftism too, was to make court Jews like him unnecessary.

Throughout our exile, we have been safest in stable states and empires ruled with a strong hand, and so the *shtadlanim*, the court Jews and the communal emissaries, worked not only to find favor with the king but also to strengthen his hand. We sensibly fear populist uprisings and their charismatic leaders, who fuel and feed off popular prejudice and resentment, and so we have looked for protection to the powers that be and we have defended the peace of the city against those who would disrupt it.

This was the politics of exile: look for a protector, make yourself useful to him, and cling to him. You can find the religious version of this politics in the prayer for the king, revised in some American Orthodox *siddurim* as a prayer for the President, which includes the line “May he deal kindly with us.” This hope does not reflect the mind-set of a democratic citizen, who might better pray in this way: “May we and our fellow citizens elect leaders who will act justly at home and in the world.” But for much of our history in exile, a ruler who dealt kindly with us was the most we could hope for. And we supported rulers of that sort (and loaned them money that we did not expect to see again) whether or not they were righteous rulers. Or better, we thought them righteous if they were kind to us. This is, again, entirely understandable. The old fearfulness and the hope for protection – together these constitute a powerful conservative force.

- 5) Clericalism: the rule of rabbis: Jewish life in exile was almost everywhere congregationalist in form; we did not have to learn that from the Protestants. Each *kahal* was a congregation, which governed itself and provided welfare services to its members. It was one of the effects of statelessness that there was no central authority – no king or high priest; no Jewish pope or archbishop. But the *kahal* was never a democracy. After the destruction of the second temple, when we no longer had a state of our own and when we could not crown a king, we canonized a set of texts, and we were ruled by the learned men (they were always and necessarily men) who studied and interpreted the texts. These were the sages, and they were not unlike the men who rule in Iran today, whose conservatism we have no trouble recognizing. They had, of course, lay allies who were also, sometimes, competitors, but they were a dominant force for much of our history. And they probably were, all things considered, better rulers than the feudal warriors and absolute monarchs of Christendom. Certainly the rabbis of pre-

emancipation Jewry were far more creative than Orthodox rabbis are today; they were capable of remarkable innovation, as when Rabbenu Gershom, “the light of the exile,” abolished polygamy in Ashkenaz with an edict that paid no attention to biblical or talmudic precedents.

Still, the rabbis were not democratic leaders. Their authority was derived from their learning, but they married their sons and daughters into families whose authority resulted from their wealth. And so there came into existence those oligarchies of merchants, bankers, and scholars that dominated Jewish communities before emancipation. Modern defenders of democracy thought that they could dismiss the scholars; they had to fight the merchants and bankers. That fight goes on, and we understand its dimensions. But the revival of rabbinic authority in Israel today reminds us of what traditional Judaism was really like. Orthodox rabbis claimed, and they still claim, to know the word of God, and that gave them, and gives them, a power whose dimensions secular leftists have great difficulty understanding.

- 6) Hostility to any kind of political engagement: Even in biblical times, and more and more strongly in the exilic years, the religion of the Israelites and then of the Jews had a strong anti-political tendency. The children of Israel were taught to trust in God; self-help was not a biblical doctrine, though the historical books make it clear that Israelite kings such as Hezekiah believed in it. Faith made politics unnecessary. So the Israelites at the Red Sea had nothing to do but stand still, as Moses told them, and watch the salvation of the Lord. In the wilderness, they did not have to find ways of feeding themselves; they did not need a Joseph (as the Egyptians did); God provided manna for hungry Israelites. Moses did not have to look for a politics that would vindicate his authority; God acted directly to destroy all those who rebelled against him. The same faith in divine deliverance is reflected in Jewish messianism: there is nothing for human beings to do but sit and wait for the coming of the messiah. To be sure, there were always Jews who “counted the days” and tried to “force the end.” But both these activities were condemned in the mainstream tradition. Orthodox Judaism made for political passivity – for what Gershom Scholem has called a “politics of deferment.” The *shtadlan*, of course, was supposed to be engaged, but only as an intercessor, never as an autonomous actor. The opposition of

many religious Jews to Zionism followed from this commitment to wait for God to act. Opposition to revolution followed with equal if not greater force – for revolution was a manifest, if secularized, example of “forcing the end,” which was beyond the mandate, so to speak, and the capacity of human beings. God might make a revolution, some day, but to try to anticipate God’s action was blasphemous.

Why then did so many Jews become revolutionaries? Why did so many Jews join (and lead) left-wing parties and movements? Why did so many Jews who were not revolutionaries gravitate toward the center left and become good liberals and social democrats? Why did so few Jews join parties of the right? There must be something in our history, if not in our religion, that pushed us leftward and that produced the negation of the exile, the radical rejection of the six features of traditional Judaism that I have just listed, and of much else besides. And, of course, there is this: the history of the Jews as a pariah people, the experience of discrimination and persecution, the extreme vulnerability of Jewish communities before and after emancipation, prepared us to embrace a leftist politics, which is aimed at drawing in all the pariah peoples, at ending discrimination and persecution everywhere, and at guaranteeing everyone’s security.

We were prepared in another way: because of our vulnerability, the *kahal*, though not a democracy, had to be a kind of welfare state, and it was obvious to everyone that in time of danger, individual wealth had to be available to the community – in this limited but important sense, we were socialists *avant la lettre*, long before there was socialism. Similarly, the humiliations of *shtadlanut* and the centuries of waiting for a deliverance that never occurred produced Jews who were more than ready for the excitement, the hope, and even the dangers of revolution. Given our history, and for the moment disregarding traditional Judaism, our leftism was not so strange; emancipated Jews were easily naturalized into left politics. And while there were antisemites on the left, too, the universalism of leftist parties and movements seemed, and often was, genuinely welcoming.

For us, left politics was both self-interested and idealistic. We were seeking benefits for ourselves – equality, integration, an end to every form of discrimination – and we were also joining a “cause” that had universal value. Indeed, this is what leftism conventionally is like: think of

American social movements like those that advocated votes for women, unions for workers, civil rights for blacks. All these invited people to fight on their own behalf and, at the same time, for justice and equality generally. For Jews emerging from the ghetto, this twofold project must have seemed especially attractive.

But our participation in left politics required the rejection of our exilic religion. Hence the negation of the exile – which was both necessary and, I now want to argue, profoundly wrong. I mean, it was necessary to reject features of exilic Judaism like the six I have listed, and others too, but it was profoundly wrong to reject, as so many leftists did, the whole thing. Negation tended to be, for most of the men and women committed to it, a totalizing project. And it left them with too little cultural material with which to shape an alternative Jewish life – and then (as we see in Israel today) with too little capacity to resist a religious revival. The kitchiness of misrepresented or redesigned holidays does not work; at least, it does not work for long. Nor will carefully selected biblical texts do the job. I called Jewish leftism “strange” in that our religion does not support it and cannot explain it. But left politics was strange in another sense – as in the biblical phrase “strange women,” describing Solomon’s foreign wives. Leftists were suddenly aliens among their own people. From a religious perspective, becoming a leftist was like moving to a foreign country.

Consider the following lines written by the Polish poet Czesław Miłosz in his autobiography, *Native Realm*, about “leftist intellectuals of Jewish origin” in Poland and Lithuania in the 1920s and 1930s:

From general ideas about the equality of men, they drew the conclusion that the past does not count . . . They were unwilling to take an interest in Yiddish literature or to translate it into Polish because they saw it as provincial and inferior, a leftover from the ghetto, the very mention of which was a tactless blunder . . . If anyone mentioned the Jews in their presence they took offense, at once reading racism into the remark. They tried at all costs to forget who they were.

This is a view from the outside, harsh and painfully accurate – it does not describe all Jewish leftists, obviously; still, it describes many of them (many of us). But the phrase “tried to forget” misses significant features of the actual work of negation; the idea that Judaism was provincial and inferior is only part of the perception that motivates the work. It is the picture of traditional Jews as passive, frightened, and deferential in the everyday world, and at the same time complacent in their faith, obedient

to their rabbis, confident in a redemption for which they had nothing to do – that is also what drove the negation.

But putting all that behind you, left too little in front of you. Forgetting who you were may have made you immediately a leftist militant, but it did not make for a sustainable Jewish militancy; it did not make for a leftist culture that could be reproduced over the generations, the way traditional Judaism had been and still is reproduced. In truth, we (on the left) have not done well at cultural reproduction. What is necessary if we are to sustain a political project that is both Jewish and leftist is something different from forgetting, different from negation. What is necessary is a critical engagement with the tradition. It has to be critical, for all the reasons I started with, but it also has to be an actual engagement.

What does that mean? I can only suggest a few possibilities, which will make for a kind of conclusion today, though this is an argument that I hope others will continue. The critical engagement has to begin with a denial that the tradition belongs only to the Orthodox; it belongs to us, too, and we have work to do interpreting and reinterpreting it. After that, the engagement must include a return to the calendar and its celebrations, with a more realistic acknowledgment of what the holidays were and a more imaginative effort to accept and adapt them – and it also has to include some creative adaptation of the ways in which religion marks the life cycle. It has to include a new commitment to the Jewish past and a readiness to move beyond “the people that dwells apart” and give us our rightful place in global history. It has to include a retelling of that history in a critical mode, which acknowledges and rejects the subordination of women – and which also recognizes the role of women in ensuring Jewish survival, despite their exclusion from public activity. It has to include a close analysis of the remarkable achievement of Jewish politics in exile – to sustain for almost two thousand years, as no other people has done, a national existence without sovereignty or territory – and to that end, to collect taxes, provide welfare services, underwrite schools, and organize a kind of self-government. It has to include a search for the experiential and textual sources of our solidarity. It has to include a recovery of the justice tradition in Jewish texts and in Jewish experience, in its full complexity, without shirking the question: Justice for whom? And finally, it has to move American Jewish leftists into a stronger connection with Israeli leftists, if not through aliyah then through what Shlomo Avineri has called *hatzi aliyah* (i.e., many visits; professional collaborations; investments of time, energy, and money; and political support), so that we are engaged together in an originally religious project, which we can

rightly appropriate: to make Israel a light unto the nations. Not *the* light, just one of the lights – there is nothing of chosenness or exclusivity here: let there be many lights. The aim of our work is only that Israel, one day, will be one among them.

All this together would give us the foundation for a Jewish leftism that might be strong enough and attractive enough to pass on to our grandchildren.

PART TWO

ANTISEMITISM AND THE LEFT

The Dualisms of Capitalist Modernity

Reflections on History, the Holocaust, and Antisemitism

Moishe Postone

This chapter seeks to relate historical changes in public responses to the Holocaust and understandings of antisemitism, especially on the left, to the historically changing configurations of capitalist modernity since 1945.¹ Thinking about the two together can be clarifying: public responses to the Holocaust have tended to be structured by an opposition between abstract modes of universalism and concrete particularism – an opposition that also is constitutive of modern antisemitism. These responses have shifted with and are related to the changing configurations of capitalist modernity from the statist Fordist–Keynesian configuration of the 1950s and 1960s to a subsequent neoliberal one. Consideration of these large-scale configurations can illuminate the historical character of those responses; at the same time examination of those responses can shed light on these larger historical configurations. This problem complex can be fruitfully approached on the basis of a critical theory of capital, on the one hand, and one of antisemitism, on the other.

Within the framework of a critical theory of capital the opposition between abstract modes of universalism and concrete particularism is neither ontologically given nor historically contingent but is intrinsic to the fundamental forms that structure capitalism, namely, the commodity and capital.² Such an analysis grasps *both* terms of the opposition –

¹ I would like to thank Mark Loeffler and Fabian Arzuaga for important critical feedback.

² Although I cannot elaborate here, they can be related to the “double character” of those structuring forms as being both abstract/general and concrete/particular. Cf. Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx’s Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

abstract universality and concrete particularity – as remaining bound within the framework of capitalist modernity, however much positions based on each of them have understood themselves to be fundamentally “critical” or “radical,” pointing beyond the existing order.

This essay seeks to problematize such “critical” positions by highlighting the one-sided character of each and by drawing attention to a historical shift from the predominance of critiques based on abstract universalism, characteristic of classical liberal thought and, with important differences, working-class movements, to the ascendancy of positions focused on concrete particularity, such as those expressed by liberation struggles that can be deemed anticolonial in the broadest sense. By suggesting that both sorts of responses remain immanent to capitalism, to its double character, the approach presented here problematizes the relation of each to the Holocaust and to antisemitism while contributing to a reflexive critique of emancipatory theory.

Far from delineating issues of peripheral importance for critical theories of capitalism then, the problem complex of responses to the Holocaust and the changing configurations of capitalist modernity touches upon issues of fundamental importance for such theories. Within the framework outlined in this chapter consideration of those changing responses not only reveals their generally problematic character, but also illuminates the limits of the left in terms of its most fundamental self-understanding as a practical and theoretical critique of the capitalist order. What mediates these various moments, as I shall elaborate, is the issue of antisemitism.

I shall only be able to present a preliminary sketch of this argument here. To do so I shall briefly describe the main features of the two general historical configurations of postwar capitalist modernity and also outline an analysis of antisemitism that distinguishes it from racism in general while showing it to be deeply intertwined with history as constituted by capital. Such an analysis could help conceptually distinguish political terror and mass murder (as expressed metaphorically by Buchenwald and Hiroshima) from extermination (as represented by Auschwitz). These distinctions are important not because the one crime is “worse” than the other but because the left, which has had few problems dealing conceptually with political terror and mass murder, has had difficulty grasping extermination. This difficulty reveals an inadequate understanding of antisemitism and relatedly an underlying weakness in apprehending the fundamental object of the left’s critique: capitalism.

Considering the contours of the twentieth century helps elaborate these contentions. The course of the past century can be described in terms of three overarching periods. The first, from the beginning of the century until after Second World War, was an “Age of Catastrophe” – to use Eric Hobsbawm’s term³ – marked by two world wars; the Great Depression; the rise of Fascism, Stalinism, and Nazism; and by the Holocaust. A Fordist “Golden Age” followed, lasting until the early 1970s, characterized by high rates of economic growth, the expansion of welfare states, relative political stability, and worldwide processes of decolonization. This period of high Fordism ended in the early 1970s, followed by a new crisis-ridden period marked by the increased mobility of capital and of labor, growing social differentiation and unemployment, the rise of new centers of capital accumulation, and catastrophic downturns in other parts of the world.⁴

The relation of state and economy has changed with each of these configurations. The first period witnessed a number of different, generally statist, attempts to react to the world crisis of nineteenth-century liberal capitalism. The second period was marked by an apparently successful state-centered synthesis in both East and West, which benefited the majority of metropolitan populations. In the final third of the century this configuration unraveled. Nation states were weakened as economically sovereign entities, welfare states in the West and bureaucratic party states in the East were undermined, and unchecked market capitalism reemerged, apparently triumphant.

Viewed retrospectively with reference to these changing configurations the rise and fall of the Soviet Union can be seen to have been closely related to those of state-centered capitalism. This suggests that the USSR should be understood with reference to a larger historical development of the capitalist social formation, however great the antagonism had been between the Soviet Union and Western capitalist countries.

³ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914–1991* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994).

⁴ For a cogent overview of these trends see David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp. 121–197. Also see Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origins of Our Times* (New York: Verso, 2009 [1994]), pp. 309–370; Tony Smith, *Globalization: A Systematic Marxian Account* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2009 [2005]). For an account with an emphasis on unemployment, see Stanley Aronowitz and William DiFazio, *The Jobless Future*, 2nd edn. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010 [1994]).

This pattern, I suggest, is not simply an imposition by historians on a reality that actually is formless, but delineates a historical actuality. David Harvey and others have noted that during the period of postwar prosperity Western states engineered stable economic growth and living standards through similar policies, although very different political parties were in power. Subsequently the welfare state synthesis unraveled and was rolled back in the course of the 1970s and 1980s in all Western states, regardless of which parties were in power. In both periods, the specific policies differed among states, but the tendency was general.⁵

The general character of this large-scale historical pattern suggests the existence of an overarching historical dynamic driven by a structure of imperatives and constraints that cannot be explained in local and contingent terms and that underlies the sorts of large-scale epochal changes outlined previously.

Recognizing the general historical patterns that characterize the twentieth century calls into question poststructuralist understandings of history as essentially contingent. It does not, however, necessarily involve ignoring the critical insight that informs such understandings – namely, that history, understood as the unfolding of an immanent necessity, constitutes a form of unfreedom.

This form of unfreedom, I suggest, is the object of a critical theory of capital. Rather than deny the existence of historical unfreedom by focusing on contingency, such a critical theory – which differs from more traditional socialist critiques inasmuch as it does not affirm history – takes the existence of a historical dynamic to be an expression of such unfreedom. It seeks to analyze the grounds of that unfreedom with reference to historically specific, abstract forms of domination expressed by categories such as “capital.”⁶

⁵ Despite their deep theoretical differences, the following accounts contain strikingly similar descriptions of this overwhelming confluence of state policies away from welfare models and toward a neoliberal regime: Marion Fourcade-Gourinchas and Sarah L. Babb, “The Rebirth of the Liberal Creed: Paths to Neoliberalism in Four Countries,” *American Journal of Sociology*, CVIII, 3 (November 1, 2002), pp. 533–579; David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 2–3, 5–38; and Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*. Leon de Mattis similarly refers to this general tendency, pointing out that in “some . . . countries like France, it was ‘socialists’ who had to obey the capitalist injunction” referring to François Mitterand’s dramatic reversal of his social campaign promises in 1983 (17). Leon De Mattis, “What Is Communisation?” *SIC: International Journal for Communisation* 1 (2011), pp. 11–30.

⁶ The theory of capital with which I hope to illuminate changing responses to the Holocaust is not, moreover, narrowly economic, delineating a presumed “material base” of social life

The changing configurations of twentieth-century capitalist modernity outlined here can be related to changing public responses to the Holocaust, including those on the left, on the basis of such a theory of capital as well as of a determinate understanding of modern antisemitism. Antisemitism is frequently apprehended simply as a variant of racism. They differ in important ways, however, although both have in common as forms of essentializing discourse an understanding of social and historical phenomena in innate – biological or cultural – terms. Whereas most forms of racism attribute concrete physical and sexual power to an Other that is considered inferior, modern antisemitism does not treat Jews as inferior but as dangerous purveyors of evil. It attributes great power to Jews, but that power is not concrete and physical. Rather, it is abstract, universal, intangible, and global. The Jews within this framework constitute an immensely powerful international conspiracy. Modern antisemitism is not simply a form of prejudice directed against a minority group but provides a framework for understanding an extremely complex and historically dynamic world. Modern antisemitism then, is a worldview that, building on earlier forms of antisemitism, purports to explain critically the modern capitalist world. It is distinguished by its populist anti-hegemonic, and antiglobal character. As I have argued elsewhere, this worldview misrecognizes the abstract temporally dynamic global domination of capital – which subjects people to the compulsion of abstract historical forces they cannot grasp directly – as the domination of international Jewry.⁷ Against the abstract domination of capital, reified in concretistic terms as the Jews, it posits concrete particularity as that which is authentically human.

Antisemitism then, does not treat the Jews as members of a racially inferior group who should be kept in their place (violently if necessary) but as constituting an evil destructive power – an antirace opposed to humanity. Within this Manichean worldview the struggle against the Jews

and focusing on forms of material interest. Rather, following (and modifying) Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), its categories seek to grasp historically specific forms of social being that are at once determinations of social objectivity and subjectivity, that is, forms that are both social and cultural.

⁷ Moishe Postone, “Anti-Semitism and National Socialism,” in *Germans and Jews since the Holocaust*, ed. Anson Rabinbach and Jack Zipes (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986). Also Moishe Postone, “The Holocaust and the Trajectory of the Twentieth Century,” in *Catastrophe and Meaning: The Holocaust and the Twentieth Century*, ed. Moishe Postone and Eric Santner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

is a struggle for human emancipation. Freeing the world involves freeing it from the Jews. Extermination (which should not be conflated with mass murder) is a logical consequence of this Weltanschauung.⁸

Because antisemitism can appear to be antihegemonic and hence emancipatory, it can blur the differences between reactionary and progressive critiques of capitalism and lead to conceptual and political confusion, especially on the left. For this reason, a century ago the German Social Democratic leader August Bebel characterized it admonishingly as the socialism of fools. In its more recent manifestations it could be characterized as the anti-imperialism of fools.⁹ Antisemitism fuses the deeply reactionary with the apparently emancipatory in an explosive amalgam.¹⁰

Since 1945 reactions by the left to the Holocaust, the most terrible and consistent expression of modern antisemitism, have tended to shift historically, from a position informed by abstract universalism to one

⁸ Saul Friedländer describes this phenomenon as “redemptive anti-Semitism,” which was understood as “a kind of crusade to redeem the world by eliminating the Jews,” who were considered an *active* and *lethal* threat to “*all nations, to the Aryan race and to the German Volk*” (as opposed to the passive threats represented by other enemies of the Nazi regime including “the mentally ill, ‘asocials,’ and homosexuals, ‘inferior’ racial groups including Gypsies and Slavs” (his emphasis, xvii–xix) Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, 2 vols. (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), Vol. 2: *The Years of Extermination, 1939–45*, pp. xviii–xxi. See also Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, 2 vols. (New York: HarperCollins, 1997) Vol. 1: *The Years of Persecution, 1933–39*, pp. 73–112.

⁹ Cf. M. Postone, “History and Helplessness: Mass Mobilization and Contemporary Forms of Anti-Capitalism,” *Public Culture*, XVIII, 1 (Winter 2006); Paul Berman, “The Anti-Imperialism of Fools,” *Dissent* (Winter 1987); Mick Hume, “The Anti-Imperialism of Fools,” *New Statesman* (June 17, 2002).

¹⁰ As an aside: it is a mistake to think that a reactionary critique of capitalism can be the first step in the constitution of a progressive critique. This has not happened historically – either in terms of mass movements or in terms of intellectuals. There have been very few if any reactionary critics of capitalism who have moved to the left; unfortunately history is replete with cases of people moving from the left to the radical right. For the example of Horst Mahler, the former Red Army Faction member who later joined the radical right National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) and founded a right-wing think tank (Deutsches Kolleg) associated with Holocaust denial, see George Michael “The Ideological Evolution of Horst Mahler: The Far Left–Extreme Right Synthesis,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, XXXII, 4 (2009), pp. 346–366.

As Slavoj Žižek noted in his critique of Ernesto Laclau: “In populism, the enemy is externalized or reified into a positive ontological entity (even if this entity is spectral) whose annihilation would restore balance and justice” (p. 555). “In populism proper, however, this ‘abstract’ character is always supplemented by the pseudoconcreteness of the figure that is selected as the enemy, the singular agent behind all threats to the people” (p. 556). Slavoj Žižek, “Against the Populist Temptation,” *Critical Inquiry*, XXXII, 3 (March 1, 2006), pp. 551–574.

marked by a focus on qualitative specificity, including anti-imperialist affirmations of national liberation. Those reactions, however, have rarely grasped the specificity of the Holocaust or dealt with antisemitism adequately. Indeed, in various ways they have tended to occlude an adequate understanding. Yet if, as I suggest, antisemitism is a fetishized form of anticapitalism, apprehending it is especially important for critical approaches to the contemporary world since it indirectly illuminates the adequacy of determinate critical understandings of capitalism.

This pattern of changing responses to the Holocaust was not unique to the left. Indeed, it indicates the degree to which left conceptions were very much part of their larger historical contexts. To elaborate, let me begin by noting a sea change in interpretations of Nazism after 1945. During the first postwar period – that of the “Golden Age” of Fordism – National Socialism frequently was interpreted as a revolt against modernity.¹¹ Subsequently, after the early 1970s, however, Nazism became seen as fundamentally modern.¹²

This reversal was related to the general issue of how history was understood. I have argued that antisemitism understands the complex, impersonal, historical dynamic of capital in agentive terms as a Jewish conspiracy. As such it can be understood as an attempt to overcome processes of ongoing historical change that seem to be beyond the control of people. Having grasped history as constituted by capital in agentive terms (the Jews), modern antisemitic movements seek to overcome that abstract history, misrecognized in terms of a global invisible conspiracy, by means of “another” concrete will – in order to assert political control over the forces of history. The struggle against (misrecognized) capital becomes cast as a world historical struggle of two different kinds of wills:

¹¹ On an intellectual historical level, see George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964). The postwar tradition of *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, embodied in the works of Wehler among others, expressed similar tendencies in its appropriation of modernization theory and its explanation of Nazism with reference to the persistence of “feudal” elites with “pre-” or “anti-modern” values. For a characterization and critique of the tradition, see David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of Germany History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

Hannah Arendt’s focus on bureaucratization and technologies of power in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (revised edition, Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1994) was an exception to this more general tendency, perhaps because it, arguably, overlapped with Heidegger’s critique of modernity in terms of technological domination.

¹² See, for example, Zygmunt Baumann, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989).

one operates abstractly, is intangible, and is fundamentally inhuman; the other is concrete, tangible, and authentically human.

This worldview waned during the postwar “Golden Age” of Fordism. Following a transition period marked by increased repression (the show trials in Eastern Europe, the McCarthy period in the United States) the rapid economic growth of the 1950s and 1960s in both the Fordist/Keynesian West and the post-Stalinist East appeared to indicate that the long crisis of liberal capitalism had finally been overcome by a successful state-centered synthesis. People, it seemed, had learned to control history (i.e., capitalism’s dynamic) without having recourse to terror in ways that benefited the majority of the population. An age of universal progress seemed to have dawned.

During this era history seemed to have been tamed; it no longer posed a threat but appeared positive, as modern progress. Consequently Nazism’s revolt against history could be regarded as antimodern, as a regression, a German aberration.¹³ The wartime Allied representation of Nazism as an expression of Germany’s historically unique essence then, was later buttressed and rendered credible by a postwar configuration in which historical development appeared benign and under control.

The apparently linear triumph of modernity in the 1950s and 1960s was undermined at the beginning of the 1970s. With the crises of that decade the historical dynamic of capitalism began to reemerge overtly beyond the control of what had been regarded as the primacy of the political, of national state structures. As the putatively universalist forms of the postwar decades reached their limits, an intellectual shift also occurred entailing a critique of the “master narratives” of modernity. History – whether understood in terms of progress, of processes of modernization, or as dialectical – became revalued as an expression of domination. This shift was accompanied by a critique of the universal and an affirmative turn to particularism. Within the framework of this shift Nazism once again became seen as the Other of critical discourse – this time as an extreme example of rationalized bureaucratized modernity.

What is striking about these two widespread understandings is that although opposed to one another, both grasp Nazism as the one-sided opposite of dominant discourse – as antimodern during the period when affirmations of modernity and modernization were hegemonic and as

¹³ For a strong example of treating German history as aberrant, see A. J. P. Taylor, *The Course of German History: A Survey of the Development of Germany since 1815* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1946).

modern during the subsequent “postmodern” period. This shift, it should be noted, reveals the inadequacy of the concept of modernity for grasping National Socialism (either as antimodern or as an expression of modernity). It indicates that the discourses of both modernity and postmodernity are as one-sided as are – relatedly – those of abstract universality and concrete particularity.¹⁴

Like interpretations of Nazism the nonlinear trajectory of Holocaust discourse can be related to the two overarching historical configurations of social life since Second World War. As is well known the Holocaust was discursively marginalized for several decades after 1945.¹⁵ This slowly changed in the course of the 1960s. Since the late 1960s and early 1970s the Holocaust in particular and issues of historical memory in general have become increasingly central to public discourse.

Let me begin problematizing the relation of this discursive shift to large-scale historical transformations since 1945 by briefly examining the marginalization of discourse on the Holocaust and on antisemitism in the first two postwar decades. I have argued elsewhere that processes of denial and repression played an important role in such marginalization, especially in Germany and Austria. Rather than dealing with the recent past and their responsibility most Germans and Austrians sought to begin anew by working hard and moving forward as if the past and the wildly popular Nazi regime had never really existed.¹⁶

The Cold War contributed to this marginalization. The recent past was quickly submerged by the new global struggle. Moreover former Nazis and collaborators had become partners of the West in its historical struggle against Communism and of the East in its historical struggle against imperialism. Under those circumstances focusing on the Holocaust would have weakened the legitimating ideologies of those struggles.

Yet however important such processes and developments were, they do not fully account for the general discursive situation in both East and West – namely, that after 1945 the attempted extermination of Jews *as Jews* was almost universally ignored.

¹⁴ Neither of these discourses, moreover, is reflexive, in the sense that they cannot explain the interpretive reversal outlined previously. This marks a fundamental difference between the one-sided and descriptive term “modernity” and the two-sided analytic concept “capitalism” – a difference that cannot be fully elaborated here.

¹⁵ See Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999); David B. MacDonald, *Identity Politics in the Age of Genocide: The Holocaust and Historical Representation* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

¹⁶ Moishe Postone, “The Holocaust and the Trajectory of the Twentieth Century.”

In Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union the centrality of antisemitism to Nazism was completely bracketed. Instead the official ideology regarded Nazism simply as Fascism, which, in turn, was understood merely as a tool of capitalism directed against the working classes and against Communism.¹⁷ Antisemitism was viewed as a secondary problem, a diversionary tactic. This understanding of Nazism afforded little conceptual space for dealing with the Holocaust. Hence not only was antisemitism downplayed in the postwar Communist world but, relatedly, the victimization of Jews as Jews. It is remarkable that although many monuments to the victims of Nazism were later erected in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, almost none of them mention the Jews. Hence, for example, the massacre of thirty-three thousand Jews in two days in September 1941 by the Nazis and Ukrainian irregulars at Babi Yar just outside Kiev, was not commemorated for years. When a monument was erected in 1976 it referred to the execution by “the German Fascist invaders” of “citizens of Kiev and Prisoners of War”¹⁸ but did not mention that the victims were Jews. In Soviet documents Jewish victims were frequently only referred to as “peaceful Soviet citizens.”¹⁹ Even the memorial at Auschwitz erected in 1967 was titled “International Monument to the Victims of Fascism,”²⁰ thereby eradicating the specificity of the Holocaust and of the Jews as victims of attempted extermination by dissolving that specificity in abstractly universal categories.²¹

¹⁷ Zvi Gitelman, “The Soviet Union,” in *The World Reacts to the Holocaust*, ed. David S. Wyman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

¹⁸ William Korey, “A Monument over Babi Yar?” in *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, ed. Lucjan Dobroszycki and Jeffrey S. Gurock (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1993).

¹⁹ The substitution of “peaceful Soviet citizens” for Jews in Soviet documents was common, beginning at the latest with a 1943–1944 Extraordinary State Commission to Examine and Investigate German–Fascist Crimes Committed by the Invaders and Their Accomplices on Soviet Territory. See John Gerrard, “The Nazi Holocaust in the Soviet Union: Interpreting Newly Opened Russian Archives,” *East European Jewish Affairs*, XXV, 2 (Winter 1995), pp. 3–40.

²⁰ Katie Young, “Auschwitz–Birkenau: The Challenges of Heritage Management Following the Cold War,” in *Places of Pain and Shame: Dealing with “Difficult Heritage,”* ed. William Logan and Keir Reeves (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 52.

²¹ It is telling that, when monuments were erected in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in the late 1960s and in the 1970s, they remained within the framework of abstract universalism. This could provide insight into the crisis of Soviet Communism. Having run up against its limits in the late 1960s and early 1970s – as did the Fordist/Keynesian configurations in the West – the Soviet Union proved incapable of transforming itself from within. The abstractly universal nature of the monuments can be taken as an indication of an attempted response to historical change within constraints that limited that response.

When specific categories of victims were named in such memorials it was either in political terms (“anti-Fascists”) or in national terms (Poles, Russians, Czechs, etc.). Both either excluded the category “Jews” or at best included it as one of many nationalities that had suffered under the Nazis.²² Focusing on antisemitism and the specificity of the Holocaust was avoided.

One could point to many factors that might help explain this situation in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, including the abstract universalism of Communist ideology, according to which a specific focus on the victimization of the Jews would be particularistic, and the strong hostility toward any expression of Jewish identity on the part of many Communists, as well as a willingness on the part of Communist ruling elites to curry favor with populations that they suspected remained antisemitic.

This bracketing of the specificity of the Holocaust, however, was not restricted to the Communist East. The fact that the Jews were particular targets of genocide was generally also not publicly recognized in the West in the immediate postwar decades. This suggests that various local and contingent factors do not sufficiently explain the marginalization of Holocaust discourse during those decades. Neither Churchill nor De Gaulle, for example, took cognizance of the centrality of antisemitism to Nazism; nor did they pay particular attention to the Jews as Nazism’s victims. Instead they treated the Third Reich as the ultimate expression of Prussian militarism.²³ In France in 1948 *Le Monde* wrote of the 280,000 deportees from France without mentioning the Jews. A law was passed that year according to which the term “deportee” was applicable only to those who were deported for political reasons. In fact the term was also applied to Jews – so that surreally Jewish children sent to Auschwitz were described as “political deportees.”²⁴ In Alain Resnais’s award-winning film *Night and Fog* (1955) political deportees, deportees sent to do forced labor, and Jewish deportees sent to their death are conflated. The film shows the piles of shoes and other articles taken from Jews at Auschwitz – but does so without mentioning the Jews or the Holocaust.²⁵

²² See, for example James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1993).

²³ Consequently, they insisted on dismantling Prussia. See, for example, Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600–1947* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2006).

²⁴ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2005), p. 805.

²⁵ Joan Wolf, *Harnessing the Holocaust: The Politics of Memory in France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 28.

It could be argued that this complete submergence of the specificity of the Holocaust, that the Jews were killed as Jews, was the expression of a certain form of universalism that understood itself as the opposite of Nazism and regarded any mention of the Jews as Jews to be unacceptably particularistic. Ironically it served to eradicate the Jews from history again.

In the immediate postwar period, however, the affirmation of universalism was not yet generally hegemonic. During the most virulent phase of the Cold War in the late 1940s and early 1950s each side viewed itself as threatened by a shadowy global conspiracy; each camp viewed its foe as pervasive and intangible, that is, as abstract. This reaction *against* the universal was expressed by the show trials in Eastern Europe, the so-called doctors' plot in the USSR, and McCarthyism in the United States.

In the most famous show trial in East/Central Europe – that held in Prague in 1952 – eleven of the fourteen accused Communist functionaries were Jews including Rudolf Slansky, the secretary general of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. The charges were classically antisemitic. The accused were characterized as rootless cosmopolitans, agents of nefarious international forces, namely, the CIA and Zionism.²⁶ Unable for ideological reasons to refer explicitly to “international Jewry,” the Communist regime used “Zionism” to fulfill the same function. Such antisemitic, antic cosmopolitan accusations became widespread in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union between 1948 and 1953,²⁷ culminating in the “uncovering” of the doctors' plot in Moscow – a purportedly international Zionist plot that aimed to poison the Soviet leadership. The Soviet regime began making plans for the mass roundup of Soviet Jews and for the construction of gigantic camps for them. These plans were then abruptly dropped with the death of Stalin in March 1953.²⁸

Having first bracketed the Holocaust in the name of universality Communist regimes now recapitulated the antiuniversalism of antisemitism,

²⁶ For overviews, see Me'ir Kotik, *The Prague Trial: The First Anti-Zionist Show Trial in the Communist Bloc* (New York: Herzl Press, Cornwall Books, 1987) and Judt, *Postwar*, pp. 185–189.

Igor Lukes points out that one dominant interpretation has been that Stalin “intended to present the defendants as rootless cosmopolitans who were uncharacteristic of communists in general” (162). “The Rudolf Slánský Affair: New Evidence,” *Slavic Review*, LVIII, 1 (April 1, 1999), pp. 160–187.

²⁷ Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, trans. P. S. Falla (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), p. 903.

²⁸ Jonathon Brent and Vladimir Naumov, *Stalin's Last Crime: The Plot against the Jewish Doctors, 1948–1953* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003).

attacking the Jews as constituting an international conspiracy that posed a danger to humanity. The accusations made were not contingently directed against Jews, but against Jews as agents of an abstract universal conspiracy that would undermine the people's community. The authorities now termed this conspiracy "Zionism." It should be clear that this form of "anti-Zionism" had very little in common with earlier socialist and communist critiques of Zionism.²⁹ At this point at the latest, at its end point, Stalin's "socialism in one country" revealed itself as essentially a form of National Socialism. (The revival of the late Stalinist usage of "Zionism" in recent decades and the resulting conflation of anti-Zionism as a critique of actually existing Israeli policies and institutions, and anti-Zionism as anti-semitism by another name, has deeply distorted discussions of the contemporary Middle East.)

Yet this turn against cosmopolitanism was not restricted to the Soviet bloc. On a much less terroristic level with less openly antisemitic language McCarthyism in the United States signaled a similar turn against cosmopolitanism, against "international Communism," which frequently was associated with Jews.³⁰

This antic cosmopolitanism abated or was pushed underground, however, after the mid-1950s. With the regularization of the Cold War after 1953 the universal threat perceived by each side diminished. What emerged was a global order structured by competing international "blocs" of nations states, each of which promoted a set of fetishized abstract universal values – liberty vs. equality. With all of their differences both camps based themselves on linear conceptions of progress associated with productivist visions of development in which large-scale bureaucratic organizations mediated production and distribution. That is, in

²⁹ Cf. Jack Jacobs, *On Socialists and "the Jewish Question" after Marx* (New York: New York University Press, 1992); Enzo Traverso, *The Marxists and the Jewish Question; The History of a Debate (1843–1943)*, trans. Bernard Gibbons (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1994); Iring Fetscher, *Marxisten gegen Antisemitismus* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1974).

³⁰ "McCarthyism" is being used here as a general term for the anti-Communism that swept the United States, beginning in the late 1940s. Although Joseph McCarthy's own anti-Communist campaign was not particularly antisemitic (being largely directed against the Eastern WASP establishment), the larger wave of anti-Communism – as represented for example by the House Un-American Activities Committee – had a strong antisemitic component. See Benjamin Ginsberg, *The Fatal Embrace: Jews and the State. The Politics of Anti-Semitism in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 119–120.

both cases social organization was seen to be rationally organized according to universal general principles.

The postwar synthesis then, became associated with purportedly universal values. This began to be called into question in the late 1960s and early 1970s as Fordist–Keynesianism and post-Stalinism, pushing up against their limits, began to unravel. One dimension of this historical shift was political and cultural – expressed by the rise of new political movements and new social movements of racial minorities, students, youth, women, and gays. At first such movements – such as the civil rights movements in the United States, student movements in West and East, reform Communism in Czechoslovakia, and the early phases of second wave feminism – operated very much within a universalist framework, criticizing the extant order as insufficiently universalist. However, by the end of the 1960s many such movements began increasingly to criticize in the name of qualitative specificity, characterizing abstract universality as a mode of domination. It was within this shifting historical context that public discourse began to address the specificity of the Holocaust. This shift began to occur in the early and mid-1960s, signaled by the appearance of such works as *The Deputy* by Rolf Hochhuth in 1963, *The Painted Bird* by Jerzy Kosinski in 1965, and *Treblinka* by Jean-François Steiner in 1966, and gained strength in subsequent years. This suggests that the growing concern with the Holocaust’s specificity cannot be grasped adequately with reference to the 1967 war, as an instrumental attempt to marshal support for Israel, as some have argued,³¹ but should be seen with reference to a more general historical shift entailing the rise of the politics of identity and recognition.³² This shift in turn can be understood as one facet of a general transformation that began to point beyond the extant order in multiple social, economic, and cultural ways and rendered imaginable the overcoming of the antinomy of abstract universalism and concrete particularism and its supersession by a form of universality that could encompass difference. Yet at the

³¹ Cf. Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999). Norman G. Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering*, 2nd edn. (London: Verso Books, 2003).

³² For an account of how the shift to the politics of identity was strongly expressed in the New Left (with a focus on the United Kingdom and United States), see Grant Farred “Endgame Identity? Mapping the New Left Roots of Identity Politics,” *New Literary History*, XXXI, 4 (October 1, 2000), pp. 627–648.

same time the structural logic of the existing order tended to perpetuate the antinomy of abstract universalism and particularism.³³

These various possibilities were expressed in newer discourses on the Holocaust, which have ranged from positions that suggest, at least implicitly, a different form of universality, beyond the antinomy of abstract universalism and particularistic specificity, to discourses that have been very particularistic in their focus on the Holocaust's specificity (and that have been used, for example, as an ideology of legitimation for Israeli policies).

A similar tension can also be found among a range of newer movements that emerged at the time. Some, such as socialist feminist movements, sought to pass beyond the dichotomy, however implicitly;³⁴ others – such as black nationalist and many radical feminist groups – tended to reproduce the dichotomy, coming down on the side of particularism.³⁵ This arguably became the case with many varieties of anti-imperialism, which, converging increasingly with what Gilbert Achcar has termed left-wing “orientalism in reverse,” tended to valorize the nationalism or religious “fundamentalism” of groups deemed Other as a revolt of authentic concrete particularity against the homogenizing dynamism of abstract domination.³⁶ At the same time such domination was frequently reified, understood in concretistic terms, as the domination of the United States, or of “The West” and, in many cases, of “Zionism.”

³³ For an account of that structural logic, see M. Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, pp. 289–293, 347–350, 366–373.

³⁴ Sophisticated accounts calling into question this dichotomy include Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988) and Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

³⁵ For an overview of feminist literature that attempts to privilege particularity to the extreme of “separatism” (e.g., critiquing liberalism from the standpoint of “traditional female virtues” such as “care, nurturance, empathy, and emotive reasoning”), see Clare Colebrook, “Feminist Political and Social Theory,” in *Routledge International Handbook of Contemporary Social and Political Theory*, ed. G. Delanty and S. Turner (Abingdon: Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 177–188. For an overview of the politics of race and ethnicity – including those embracing particularism – see Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994 [1986]), esp. pp. 95–112. For a serious attempt to wrestle with the problematic of abstract universalism, particularism, and attempts to pass beyond that opposition with reference to the politics of race and progressive change in the United States, see Michael C. Dawson, *Blacks in and out of the Left* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

³⁶ Gilbert Achcar, *Marxism, Orientalism, Cosmopolitanism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013), pp. 40–67.

The historical context of outgoing Fordism, then, was one within which the qualitative specificity of historical and social phenomena became emphasized. At first – in discourse on the Holocaust, for example – such an emphasis implied the possible overcoming of the dichotomy of the universal and the particular. However, the discourse of specificity quickly became particularistic – both with reference to the Holocaust and more generally as expressed by a wide range of identitarian movements. The irony is that consequently, just as the Holocaust was becoming a significant historical theme, movements arose that, veering back to a glorification of the concrete, began to reproduce antisemitic motifs. The relation of capitalism, “anticapitalism,” and the Holocaust was not adequately thematized, thereby contributing to a more general blurring of the differences between a populism that frequently can be reactionary and emancipatory anticapitalism.

Let me begin to elaborate this complex of issues. The emergence of a broad spectrum of oppositional movements and the sensibilities they expressed as well as the efflorescence of critical social theory in the late 1960s and early 1970s were related, I would argue, to a historical transformation of the overarching organization of social and economic life. The late 1960s was a crucial historical moment in this regard, one when the necessity of the current social order was fundamentally called into question. Viewed retrospectively it was a moment when the order that had superseded *laissez-faire* capitalism – state-centered Fordist capitalism and its statist “actually existing socialist” equivalent – ran up against its historical limits. Utopian hopes emerged, yet conceptual as well as political attempts to get beyond those historical limits remained singularly unsuccessful.

In this period students and youth were not so much reacting against exploitation as they were against bureaucratization and what they experienced as alienation. Classical workers’ movements seemed unable to address what for many young radicals were the burning issues. Moreover those movements – as well as the “actually existing socialist” regimes – seemed to be deeply implicated in precisely that against which the students and youth were rebelling. On a general level such shifts expressed a growing distance from and critique of the affirmation of labor at the heart of traditional working class movements. On a more directly political level such shifts were in part expressions of disillusionment with Soviet Communism (especially after the invasion of Prague in 1968) and dissatisfaction with Social Democracy, both of which were deeply intertwined with the productivist, statist, Fordist order.

The late 1960s and early 1970s then, saw a break with the affirmation of abstract universality, especially in its bureaucratic Fordist form. This new historical situation suggested the need for a critique of both market-mediated and state-mediated capitalism; it implied that a fundamental critique of the existing order, of capitalism, could no longer be based on a traditional Marxist affirmation of (alienated) labor and had to extend beyond the dichotomous opposition of abstract universality and concrete particularity. That is, it implied that the conditions for a postcapitalist society had to be fundamentally rethought.

Yet few oppositional movements tried to conceptualize explicitly what they arguably already implicitly expressed – the possibility of a social order beyond capitalism in both of its twentieth-century forms. In the absence of a critique of the two-sidedness of capitalist social mediation that could seek to advance beyond the opposition of abstract generality and concrete particularity, a strong tendency existed to grasp the world in concretistic terms; rather than trying to think beyond capitalism, many oppositional movements took a turn to the conceptually familiar and focused on concrete expressions of domination, such as military violence or bureaucratic police-state political domination. Examples of this turn are concretistic forms of anti-imperialism as well as the growing focus by some on concrete domination in the Communist East.³⁷ As different and even opposed as these political responses may have appeared at the time, both focused on domination in its most immediate, concrete forms and thereby helped occlude the nature of capital's domination just when its regime was becoming less statecentric and in a sense even more abstract, a regime that then emerged as neoliberal global capitalism.

By focusing on concrete expressions of domination such modes of oppositional politics remained fixated on the Fordist configuration of global capital even after it had begun to crumble³⁸ and did so in ways that reified that configuration. This reification of the abstract went hand in hand with a conception of oppositional politics that was itself concrete

³⁷ For example, see Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Social Regime in Russia," *Telos*, 38 (December 21, 1978), pp. 32–47 and Ferenc Feher, Agnes Heller, Gyorgy Markus, *Dictatorship over Needs* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983). For an informative debate over these types of analyses at the time, see Tim Luke, G. L. Ulmen, Ivan Szelenyi, Zygmunt Bauman, Gabor T. Rittersporn, and Graeme Gill, "Review-Symposium on Soviet-Type Societies," *Telos*, 60 (June 20, 1984), pp. 155–191.

³⁸ Focusing critically on the Fordist configuration of global capital was, arguably, on a very different level, also the case of the major theorists writing in the 1970s and 1980s (with all of their considerable differences): Habermas, Foucault, Derrida.

and frequently particularistic. Against the historical background of decolonization and anticolonial wars, especially in Vietnam, anticolonial struggles became the primary focus for much of the New Left. The concrete nature of such struggles was easy to grasp. Moreover, the struggle of colonized peoples for independence was felt to have an elective affinity with movements that demanded the recognition of particularity – such as those of minorities and women. In this situation, anticolonialism moved away from its universalist origins and increasingly also became a displaced way of expressing a radical critique of Western capitalist society, translated into nationalist and culturalist terms.³⁹

This was related to a significant change in the character of anti-imperialism. During the Vietnam War opposition to the American war was considered by many to be related to a larger struggle for progressive political and social change. American opposition to movements of national liberation was criticized particularly strongly precisely because such movements were regarded positively. The Vietnamese National Liberation Front was seen not only as an anticolonial movement, seeking to assert national independence, but also as socialist, struggling for a progressive future. Regardless of how one judges such positive evaluations today, what characterized the antiwar movements of a generation ago was that opposition to American policy was, for many, one expression of a more general struggle for progressive change.

The more recent antiwar mobilizations against the conflict in Iraq appear at first glance to be similar. But closer consideration reveals that, in this case, opposition to the United States has not been in the name of a more progressive alternative. On the contrary, the Ba'ath regime in Iraq could not be considered progressive or even potentially progressive. Yet that regime was not and had not been the object of sustained political analysis and critique by the Western Left. Rather than trying to come to terms with a problem – a conflict between a global imperial power and a brutal, oppressive regime – the antiwar mobilization tended to ignore the negative character of the latter. This suggests that mobilizations against the war in Iraq did not have the same sort of political meaning that the antiwar movement had earlier; they did not express a movement for progressive change.

³⁹ Partha Chatterjee discusses this phenomenon in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1986). For the culturalist dimension of this shift, see Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities* (London: Verso, 2009), especially “Culturalism, Grand Narrative of Capitalism Exultant” (pp. 17–39) and “Postmodern Obscurantism and the ‘Muslim Question’” (pp. 196–222).

If a generation ago, opposition to American policy entailed supporting struggles for liberation considered progressive, today opposition to American policy, in and of itself, is all too frequently deemed antihegemonic. Yet, in spite of the political differences between the antiwar movements of a generation ago and those of today, this shift, paradoxically, is, in part, an unfortunate legacy of the dualistic worldview associated with the Cold War. The Cold War category of “camp” substituted a spatial category for historical ones, which helped blur the idea of socialism as the historical beyond of capitalism.⁴⁰

This spatial, essentially dualistic framework helped eradicate from memory the experience of the first half of the twentieth century, which showed that opposition to an imperial power is not necessarily progressive; there were fascist “anti-imperialisms” as well.⁴¹ This distinction was blurred during the Cold War in part because the USSR aligned itself with authoritarian regimes, for example, in the Middle East, which had little in common with socialist and communist movements and, indeed, frequently sought to liquidate their own left.⁴² In this situation anti-Americanism per se became coded as progressive, although there had and have been deeply reactionary as well as progressive forms of anti-Americanism.

A central feature of this newer anti-imperialism has been a reified conflation of the abstract and dynamic domination of global capital with the United States – or at times the United States and Israel. This conflation should not be confused with a fundamental critique of American (or Israeli) policies and actions. It attributes to concrete actors the overarching developments effected by global capital and ironically recapitulates an ideology of a hundred years ago in which the subject positions occupied today by the United States and Israel in some forms of “antiglobalization” were occupied by Britain and the Jews. This latter ideology, however, was

⁴⁰ See Loren Goldner, “Loren Goldner, ‘Socialism in One Country’ before Stalin, and the Origins of Reactionary ‘Anti-Imperialism’: The Case of Turkey, 1917–1925,” *Socialism in One Country’ before Stalin, and the Origins of Reactionary ‘Anti-Imperialism’: The Case of Turkey, 1917–1925*, (2009), <http://home.earthlink.net/~lrgoldner/turkey.html> (accessed April 2, 2014).

⁴¹ One only need recall the Imperial Japanese slogan of “Asia for the Asiatics.” See, for example, John Toland, *The Rising Sun: The Decline and Fall of the Japanese Empire 1936–1945* (New York: Random House, 1970), p. 449. For a more general discussion see Loren Goldner, “Anti-Capitalism or Anti-Imperialism? Interwar Authoritarian and Fascist Sources of a Reactionary Ideology: The Case of the Bolivian MNR,” *Insurgent Notes*, 7 (October 2011).

⁴² See Danny Postel, “Who Is Responsible? An Interview with Fred Halliday,” *Salmagundi*, 150/151 (Spring–Summer, 2006).

a discourse of the European right. The similarity between what had been a rightist critique of hegemony and what regards itself as a critique from the left reveals similar fetishized understandings of the world.

I am suggesting then, that, with the fading of a conceptual horizon of possible fundamental transformation the concretistic anti-imperialism of the New Left (fused with a concretistic form of antiglobalization) began increasingly to recapitulate earlier antisemitic motifs. I cannot in this chapter adequately discuss this development but can only outline a number of considerations.

For parts of the New Left the Palestinian struggle, beginning after 1967, became regarded as *the* central anticolonial struggle.⁴³ What was and is noteworthy is not support for the Palestinian struggle for self-determination and criticisms of Israeli policies and institutions. Rather it is the degree to which much contemporary discourse on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict exceeds the bounds of political and critical analysis. One does not necessarily call into question Palestinian struggles when one notes the degree to which they have become emotionally invested for anti-imperialist groups (especially in Europe) and relatedly how invested the critique of Zionism has become.⁴⁴ “Zionism” is frequently treated as a malevolent global force so immensely powerful that it can even determine the policies of the American superpower.⁴⁵

⁴³ Peter Ullrich, *Die Linke, Israel und Palästina: Nahostdiskurse in Großbritannien und Deutschland* [The Left, Israel and Palestine: Discourses on the Middle East in the UK and Germany] (Berlin: Dietz, 2008). Hans Kundnani, *Utopia or Auschwitz? Germany's 1968 Generation and the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 49. By the late sixties, Kundnani writes, concerning the West German student movement, that the Palestinian struggle “would replace the war in Vietnam as its cause célèbre and become an obsession for some of its members” [Kundnani, *Utopia or Auschwitz?*, p. 49].

⁴⁴ Doron Rabinovici, Ulrich Speck, and Natan Sznajder, eds., *Neuer Antisemitismus? Eine globale Debatte* [New Antisemitism? A Global Debate] (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004). For a treatment of this trend in the German student movement, see Kundnani, *Utopia or Auschwitz?* He writes that by 1969, “some members of the student movement had come to regard Zionism as a conspiracy – one of the key features of modern anti-Semitism” (p. 93). Relatedly, he writes that very soon after “US imperialism . . . became synonymous with fascism,” then “Zionism had in turn become synonymous with both” (pp. 60–61).

⁴⁵ One of many examples: On October 16, 2003, the Malaysian prime minister, Mahathir Mohammed, drew a standing ovation at the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which has fifty-seven member states, for a speech in which he said: “Today the Jews rule this world by proxy. They get others to fight and die for them . . . They invented socialism, communism, human rights and democracy so that persecuting them would appear to be wrong, so that they can enjoy equal rights with others. With these they have gained control of the most powerful countries and they, this tiny community, have become a world power” [CNN.com, October 17, 2003].

Historically this form of “anti-Zionism” has several sources. In part it can be related to the situation after 1967, when the Soviet Union, reacting to the defeat of its client states (Egypt and Syria) in the June war, lashed out at Israel by drawing on the antisemitic motifs formulated earlier during the show trials. The USSR began promulgating a form of anti-Zionism that was essentially antisemitic: Zionism as singularly evil, as constituting a global conspiracy.⁴⁶ This became adopted by many Arab nationalists as well as Western anti-imperialists.⁴⁷

A further factor has been the spread and growing importance of the antisemitic worldview in the Middle East. Israeli policies and actions can certainly account for very strong anti-Israel sentiments but are not sufficient to explain the emergence of a classically antisemitic version of anti-Zionism, of Israel and the Jews as constituting a powerful global demonic power.⁴⁸ I would suggest that these more recent developments could be

See also the (more cautious) argument by John Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, “The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy,” *Middle East Policy*, XIII, 3 (September 1, 2006), pp. 29–87 and in *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Macmillan, 2007) essentially blaming Israel and the Israel lobby for unleashing the American invasion of Iraq.

⁴⁶ In his *A History of the Jews in the Modern World* (New York: Knopf, 2005) Howard Sachar wrote, “In late July 1967, Moscow launched an unprecedented propaganda campaign against Zionism as a ‘world threat.’ Defeat was attributed ... to an ‘all-powerful international force.’ ... In its flagrant vulgarity, the new propaganda assault soon achieved Nazi-era characteristics. The Soviet public was saturated with racist canards. Extracts from Trofim Kichko’s notorious 1963 volume, *Judaism without Embellishment*, were extensively republished in the Soviet media. Yuri Ivanov’s *Beware: Zionism*, which essentially replicated the infamous czarist forgery *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, was given nationwide coverage” (p. 722).

See, also, for example, Dariusz Stola, “Anti-Zionism as a Multipurpose Policy Instrument: The Anti-Zionist Campaign in Poland, 1967–1968,” *Journal of Israeli History*, XXV, 1 (March 2006), pp. 175–201.

⁴⁷ The same trend can be seen in certain strands of Islamist discourse. See Jeffrey T. Kenney, “Enemies Near and Far: The Image of the Jews in Islamist Discourse in Egypt,” *Religion*, XXIV, 3 (1994), pp. 253–270.

Referring to the West German context, Kundnani argues that the “attack on the Jewish community centre [in Berlin in 1969] was a logical development, albeit in extreme form, of ideas that had been at the centre of the student movement since its beginnings” (p. 92). Specifically, by conflating Nazism with Fascism and the United States with Fascism, he argues, “they universalized the specifically German phenomenon of National Socialism and ‘normalized’ Germany” (p. 92).

⁴⁸ For example, in 1986, Defense Minister of Syria Mustafa Tlass’s book, *The Matzah of Zion*, renews the medieval Christian anti-Jewish ritual murder accusations that reappeared in the 1840 Damascus affair and alleges that *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* is a factual document [Jonathan Frankel, *The Damascus Affair: “Ritual Murder,” Politics, and the Jews in 1840* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press,

related to the differential effect globally of the newest configuration of capitalism, of neoliberal globalization. Whereas some countries and areas – especially in East and South Asia – have prospered, others, such as in sub-Saharan Africa, have declined dramatically. Less well known is that the Arabic-speaking Middle East has also suffered precipitous economic decline.⁴⁹ This regional crisis, I suggest, constitutes the background for the growing spread of antisemitic ideas in that region. The notion that Israel and the United States are responsible for the *misère* of the Middle East helps make sense of the experience of helplessness in the face of protracted regional decline, reinforced by an awareness that some former “Third World” countries in other parts of the world have experienced rapid economic growth. This widespread ideology conflates the differential effects on the Middle East of global capital with the policies of the United States and Israel and with the Jews.

Another dimension of the shift toward de facto antisemitism among sections of the “anti-imperialist” left, especially in Europe, can be analyzed as the “return of the repressed.”⁵⁰ It could be argued that precisely because the Holocaust began to emerge on the surface of consciousness in the 1960s as a public memory and theme counterforces of denial became mobilized that sought to resubmerge the Holocaust, to push it back to the realm of hidden, frozen prememory. This attempted resubmergence is different from the marginalization of the Holocaust after the War since it involves denial of what has already emerged on the surface. The result was a form of acting out involving a number of reversals: much of the left that emerged out of the new social movements tended to identify with historical victims who were seen as Other. In the West German student movement, for example, positive attitudes toward Israel were very widespread in the early 1960s.⁵¹ A very rapid reversal occurred after the 1967

1997), pp. 418, 421]. In 2001 an Egyptian film company produced and aired a film called *Horseman without a Horse*, partly based on Tlass’s book.

⁴⁹ United Nations Arab Human Development Report 2002, *Creating Opportunities for Future Generations* (New York: United Nations Development Programme, Regional Bureau for Arab Studies, 2002).

Cf. Also Gilbert Achcar, *The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013), esp. pp. 7–37 (“Fettered Development”) and pp. 38–75 (“The Peculiar Modalities of Capitalism in the Arab Region”).

⁵⁰ Postone, “The Holocaust and the Trajectory of the Twentieth Century.”

⁵¹ Kundnani, *Utopia or Auschwitz?* p. 48; Martin W. Kloke, *Israel und die deutsche Linke: Zur Geschichte eines schwierigen Verhältnisses [Israel and the German Left: On the History of a Difficult Relationship]*. Schriftenreihe des Deutsch–Israelischen

war, however, whereby the Jews became cast in the role of perpetrators once again.⁵² The displacements and reversals involved whereby an identity was posited between Israeli Jews and the Nazis, and the Palestinians became the “true Jews,” victims of “genocide,” helps explain why the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians has been so cathected by the left. Within the framework of such acting out the Holocaust must be ignored or denied.⁵³

The Holocaust not only is a stain on European history that cannot simply be washed away and hence must be denied. It also disrupts some left understandings of history and politics. In this situation reductionist left understandings and the mechanisms of European historical denial reinforce each other. This is particularly the case with the self-styled “anti-imperialist” left, which seeks to locate the possibility of anticapitalism in non-Western nationalist movements. The anticapitalist character of such a conception was always questionable even during the era of Communist-led anticolonial struggle. The collapse of Communism has revealed the danger that was always latently present in such concretistic understandings of capitalism and of anticapitalist movements. Shorn of any pretence to progressive transformation the defense of such nationalism (in the broadest sense of the term) reveals itself as lacking an adequate conception of capitalism; it is an expression of conceptual helplessness and despair. Emancipation no longer is imagined as the constitution of a new form of social life but in terms of the eradication of the sources of global evil – “Zionism” and the United States. Movements that operate

Arbeitskreises für Frieden im Nahen Osten, XX (Frankfurt am Main: Haag + Herchen, 1990), pp. 41–64.

⁵² Kundnani, *Utopia or Auschwitz?* pp. 48–49. Kundnani argues that the student left’s relationship toward Israel “turned on its head . . . from being a ‘victim’ to a ‘perpetrator’ in the post-war generation’s black-and-white political worldview” (49); Kloke, *Israel und die deutsche Linke*, pp. 71ff. See also Reinhard Renger, ed., *Die deutsche “Linke” und der Staat Israel* (Leipzig: Forum Verlag, 1994), esp. Inge Deutschkron, “Angriff auf die Versöhnung: Die deutsche Nachkriegsgeneration und Israel” [Assault on Reconciliation: the German Postwar Generation and Israel] pp. 15–28 and Martin Kloke, “Resentment und Heldenmythos: Das ‘Palästinenserbild’ in der deutschen Linkspresse” [Resentment and Hero-Myth: The Image of the Palestinian in the German Left Press], pp. 47–75.

⁵³ This sort of inversion has been termed “secondary antisemitism” – one that exists not in spite of the Holocaust but as a reaction to it. See Lars Rensmann, “Zwischen Kosmopolitanismus und Ressentiment: Zum Problem des sekundären Antisemitismus in der deutschen Linken,” in *Exclusive Solidarität: Linker Antisemitismus in Deutschland*, ed. Matthias Brosch, Michael Elm, Norman Geißler, Brigitta Elisa Simbürger, and Oliver von Wrochem (Berlin: Metropol, 2007).

within the hollowed-out shells of Cold War thought have all too easily succumbed to forms of reification that have long characterized reactionary anticapitalism.

I am suggesting that this is one consequence of the absence of an adequate critical theory of capitalism today, one that could also point beyond the antinomy of abstract universalism and concrete particularism. The absence of such a critique is related to the absence of a future-oriented perspective, an absence that opens the door to fetishized concretistic forms of anticapitalism and populism, many of which are essentially antisemitic.

The problem complex of history, the Holocaust, and antisemitism then, is not simply particularistic. Rather it helps illuminate and in turn is illuminated by the structuring opposition in capitalism of abstract universalism and particularism in ways that also help to distinguish critiques of capitalism that could be emancipatory from those that are fundamentally reactionary, as broad as their populist appeal might be.

Marxism's Other Jewish Questions

Lars Fischer

That mainstream Marxism has a staggering track record of tolerating, excusing, and all too often itself propagating problematic attitudes toward Jews that gravitate toward, and in some cases themselves constitute, antisemitism is well known.¹ My intention in this chapter is not to reiterate this basic fact but to take stock of some of the implications of this insight and indicate some of the directions in which I would suggest scholars might look next in order to develop a deeper and more systematic understanding of why this might be the case.

I should begin with two clarifications. Firstly, there are, broadly speaking, two obvious motivations for focusing on the problematic attitudes specifically of Marxists or the left more generally. One might do so in order to discredit not only the historical track record of large parts of the left but the entire project of emancipatory politics as such, or one might do so precisely in order to recover and help reconstruct this project. If I spend a depressingly large part of my time engaged in the rather uncharitable and often unpalatable business of documenting and analyzing the shortcomings of those on the left, I do so as somebody who still thinks of himself as a Marxist (though, as with most Marxists today, my own particular brand of Marxism is unlikely to be acknowledged as such

¹ See Edmund Silberner, *Sozialisten zur Judenfrage* (Berlin: Colloquium, 1962); Robert S. Wistrich, *Socialism and the Jews* (London, Canada: Associated University Presses, 1982); Jack Jacobs, *On Socialists and "the Jewish Question" after Marx* (New York: New York University Press, 1992); Lars Fischer, *The Socialist Response to Antisemitism in Imperial Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Lars Fischer, "The Social Democratic Response to Antisemitism in Imperial Germany: The Case of the Handlungshilfen," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, LIV (2009), pp. 151–170.

by more than a handful of others). The need to know as precisely as possible what went wrong in the past is born not of a desire to disavow the left but to facilitate its meaningful reconstruction in a manner that might allow it not to repeat past mistakes and consequently to thrive on forms of (revolutionary) politics that truly are emancipatory.

Second, nothing in my research to date indicates that Marxists are prone to problematic attitudes toward Jews because they are Marxists. To be sure, Marxists have at various junctures developed variations of their own on well-established anti-Jewish tropes and their susceptibility to antisemitism can partly be explained in terms of ideological orientations and political conventions that are characteristic predominantly of a Marxist mind-set. Even so, there is no doubt in my mind that Marxists have subscribed to peculiar ideas about Jews not because they were Marxists, but because, to put it bluntly, they were bad Marxists, or not Marxist enough, not because of but despite their Marxism.

The question that underpins all my relevant research is fundamentally this: why did numerous Marxists with proven track records of recognizing other fetishes as fetishes fail to recognize that antisemitism is one, too, and a particularly pernicious one, at that? Why did their myth-busting abilities, frequently displayed to good effect elsewhere, falter in the face of antisemitism? Ultimately, I am more interested in the tragedy rather than the scandal that lies in the ineptitude that Marxists have more often than not displayed in their responses to antisemitism and to what they themselves have regularly acknowledged as a real existing Jewish Question.

To be very clear about this: by the standards widely accepted today, the number of Europeans prior to 1914 who were not antisemites is depressingly small indeed. Marxists were quite unexceptional in subscribing to peculiar ideas about Jews. They would have had good reasons not to do so, though, and yet did not see or take this opportunity. From a Marxist viewpoint the foibles of a bad Marxist are, of course, infinitely more irksome than the shortcomings of a non-Marxist.

One of the most startling findings of my research on German Socialists prior to 1914 was the extent to which they referred to, and indeed criticized, antisemites without actually being concerned with the antisemites' attitudes toward Jews. This may sound like a contradiction in terms. Surely it is their attitudes toward Jews that make them antisemites? How can one criticize them without taking issue with their attitudes toward Jews? Yet this seems odd only from our current perspective.

The period from the 1870s until 1945, roughly, was the age of self-avowed antisemitism. Self-avowed antisemites have become rather rare beasts; we generally suspect or accuse people of antisemitism, but they seldom identify themselves as such. Between 1870 and 1945, the label “antisemitic” was primarily used to denote a range of organizations (and the individuals within them) that readily and proudly professed their antisemitism. Yet these were not just one-issue enterprises. An antisemite, therefore, was not so much somebody who said nasty things about, or did nasty things to, Jews but somebody who belonged to the antisemitic camp; something was “antisemitic” not because it necessarily reflected or expressed a negative attitude toward Jews but because it was done or said by an antisemite. “Antisemitic lies,” to give an example, are not specifically lies about Jews but lies told by antisemites, no matter what they were lying about. The Social Democrats did indeed oppose organized political and especially party-political antisemitism, sometimes with considerable vigor; yet all too often this opposition took issue with a whole range of concerns, just not with the antisemites’ attitudes toward Jews.

A second startling insight concerned the widespread rejection of so-called philosemitism among Socialists. The pioneers of the antisemitic movement in the 1870s promptly denounced their opponents as “philosemites.” This was a smart and highly successful move as a result of which the entire subsequent discourse ultimately took place on the antisemites’ terms. This juxtaposition of antisemitism and philosemitism implied that one could only be either the Jews’ foe or their friend; only “friends” of the Jews could have a reason to oppose antisemitism. That one might not care much about the Jews one way or the other and still find antisemitism problematic was simply not considered a serious option. Philosemitism, then, was a dirty word, and it increasingly came to be seen as a counterproblem that needed to be opposed at least as vigorously as antisemitism itself.

As such, this is hardly news. Yet scholars have generally assumed that this rejection of “philosemitism” was principally a predilection of the more temperamental Francophone Socialists and that in the German party, which was, after all, the Second International’s model party, this sort of nonsense was believed only by one man, namely, the notorious Franz Mehring, who had duly been criticized for doing so. Yet this turns out to be wishful thinking. Indeed, my research began as a case study on Mehring, guided by Amos Funkenstein’s contention that “from the extreme case we may learn something about seemingly more reasonable

attempts in the same direction.”² Yet by the time I was finished, Mehring had gone from being an extreme case to being remarkably representative of his peers.

What much of the scholarship to date, including my own, has in common is that it focuses predominantly on those instances in which antisemitism, so-called philosemitism, or “the Jews” are explicitly the object of conversation. We have certainly moved beyond what I generally call “in/felicitious phrase hunting,” that is, the attempt to put various individuals neatly into the antisemitic or non-antisemitic pot on the basis of a handful of either critical or favorable remarks they made about Jews. Historians working in the field of Jewish/non-Jewish relations have become much more aware of the conflicted nature of many people’s attitudes toward Jews and the extent to which mutually contradictory ideas about Jews often existed within one and the same head. What we have not really begun to explore, though, is the question of how these attitudes tie in with deep-seated Marxist political and organizational assumptions and conventions, on the one hand, and a range of what I would call Other Jewish Questions, on the other.

To begin with the former, it is worth bearing in mind that Marxists rarely sat down and sought to formulate dispassionate analyses. Virtually all the statements on antisemitism at our disposal are direct interventions into political debates and controversies. As Donald Sassoon pointed out at my viva, logical consistency is rarely a prerequisite when it comes to political point scoring – quite the opposite. On the descriptive plane this is doubtless true. Yet German Socialists, in the very process of scoring points against the antisemites, ultimately did more to cement than question the fundamental assumptions underlying the antisemites’ case. This seems to me to be a potent warning against a particular style of politicking. This issue is obviously no preserve of the Marxists – but then what is the point of being a Marxist if one is going to be just as stupid or reckless as the non-Marxists? I defy anyone to name a single instance in which the attempt to oppose antisemites by claiming that they, the antisemites, themselves are in fact the “true Jews,” to take just one staple argument from the arsenal of this sort of crude anti-antisemitism, has done more good than harm.

Then there is that most wretched of notions that my enemy’s enemy is my friend (or, as a variation on this theme, that my enemy’s friend must

² Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), p. 307.

be my enemy). Lest I be misunderstood, I hasten to add that I obviously am not suggesting that one will ever be able to do without the question of *cui bono?* in developing serious forms of Marxist politics. Yet neither do we have cause to believe that answering the question of *cui bono?* in as simplistic and shortsighted a manner as possible makes for good Marxist politics. Those who benefit in the short and the long term are not always the same; Marxists too are liable to the law of unintended consequences, etc. Perhaps the most dramatic illustration of this problem is Rosa Luxemburg's stirring and heart-wrenching final editorial for the *Rote Fabne*, "Order Prevails in Berlin." In it she makes entirely the right argument and yet, as it turns out, was entirely wrong in her assessment of the consequences of the January uprising.

Put slightly more systematically, the more undialectical assumptions about one's friends and foes by association are surely not least a reflection of the perennial question of what Marxists should do when their political opponents and/or the powers that be, on specific issues, do the right thing for (inevitably) the wrong reasons. The Liberals base their defense of Jews against crude or violent antisemitism, to the extent that they mount such a defense, on assumptions about society that represent no less of a fetish than does antisemitism; the powers that be oppose antisemitism, if and when they do so, to enforce social cohesion and quell public disorder. In these instances, both the Liberals and the state are acting for the wrong reasons, yet, in pragmatic terms, they are doing the right thing. Are their actions nevertheless legitimate objects of critique? They most certainly are. Yet such criticism must surely remain proportionate to a concomitant critique of antisemitism, something that certainly cannot be said of the amount of emotive energy that so many, including the Socialists, invested in their critique of "philosemitism."

In the case of the Liberals, this problem was no doubt aggravated further by the fact that Marxists have to straddle the paradox that Liberalism was a subversive force in its origins but then went on to help secure a new form of class domination. Strictly speaking, it had gone on to play the only role that it objectively could play, given that, in the Marxist scheme of things, the working class was the first destined to replace the existing form of class domination not simply by another but by a form of sociation that would do equal justice to the interests of mankind as a whole and not just those of one class.

Historically, Liberalism's betrayal and/or limitations, depending on the perspective one took, played a crucial role in establishing the legitimacy of Socialist politics in the first place. Were it not for the failings of

Liberalism to keep its various initial promises, there would be no need for Socialism (placing Socialism and Liberalism in a relationship not dissimilar to the equally emotive one between Christianity and Judaism). Yet stressing that one's political opponents were ultimately not responsible for their actions because they were simply doing what they were objectively destined to do was only sometimes an effective means of attacking them politically; suggesting that they had betrayed their own legacy tended to work rather better. There is a certain parallel here, of course, to the decision of the Communist International around 1930 to declare Social Democracy a more serious threat than fascism, given that the legitimacy of Communism also depended heavily on the track record of Social Democracy's failings.

I would further contend that Marxism has tended toward an often deeply inhumane sense of triumphalism, for instance, in its dealings with its own political prisoners and victims of political repression. I do not doubt for a moment that many Marxists have felt, and probably were motivated by, a deep sense of what we might call the structural suffering of the oppressed classes by the capitalist order. But this was ultimately concern for the class in itself. In the realm of the class for itself, actual suffering, rather than heroic endurance, and the fact that repression can damage its victims, sometimes irrevocably, have generally tended to be taboos and in very many cases still are. Anyone familiar, for instance, with the tone of most of the activism in support of the prisoners from the Red Army Faction in Germany from the 1970s onward will surely be only too familiar with this problem.

This deep-seated pattern of perception and interpretation is hardly suited to sensitize Marxists to the very real effects of verbal rather than physical violence, especially when its victims do not have the right class profile; and it helps explain not least the triumphalist Marxist account of the National Socialist camp system, including the death camps, from which the Jews, at least qua Jews, have more or less disappeared simply because they will not conform conceptually to anything that is viable within the established Marxist mind-set.

Similarly, we might look at the way in which Marxists have dealt with the issue of exile. I have done a little bit of work on this in the imperial German context. Here the triumphalist and, we might say, ultracosmopolitanist account of exile was repeatedly undercut by a profound sense of alienation between those who were in Germany and those who were in exile. This sense of alienation, I would argue, has quite fundamental things to say about notions prevalent within the party as to what

constituted true belonging and what the consequences were of being torn from the one place where one genuinely belonged. These are issues that map in complex ways on to prevalent juxtapositions of Jew and non-Jew, and vice versa.

Insofar as the political–practical and the conceptual intersect when it comes to exile, this already places us squarely in Other Jewish Questions territory. This is a term coined by Jay Geller, who has been kind enough to suggest that I helped deliver this particular baby although we have since discovered that our understanding of this term partly differs. Geller's Other Jewish Question refers to the way in which those identified – whether by themselves or others – as Jewish negotiate what is generally called “The Jewish Question.”³ I take a slightly different approach here in that I refer to the so-called Jewish Question as the Non-Jewish Question. As the Weimar era publicist Moritz Heimann put it, “a ‘Jewish Question’ is only what a Jew stranded on the loneliest, most remote island still acknowledges as such.”⁴ My own emphasis in focusing on the Other Jewish Question is mainly on all those instances in which attitudes toward “the Jews” are implicitly expressed and woven into the deep structure of prevalent ideas and sets of ideas more generally.

A central question that merits close examination in this context is the extent to which Marxists may or may not have subscribed to the conceptual juxtaposition given its classic formulation by Ferdinand Tönnies as the contrast between community and society – community, to put it bluntly, being the sphere of authenticity and belonging where one's own sort feels warm and fuzzy, society being the sphere of artifice, abstraction, and alienation. I want to use the rest of this chapter to discuss this issue, since, to my mind, the significance of this juxtaposition can hardly be overrated.

I was initially alerted to the idea that there might be a worthwhile and significant line of inquiry here at an extremely important conference in Manchester in November 2008, organized by Marcel Stoetzler, Antisemitism and the Emergence of Sociological Theory.⁵ Modern antisemitism and the discipline of sociology were, of course, born roughly at the same time, and the discourses on which they drew and into which they sought

³ Jay Geller, *The Other Jewish Question* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011).

⁴ See Wolfgang Adam, “Bibliothek als Organismus,” *Magdeburger Wissenschaftsjournal*, 2 (2004), pp. 55–65, here p. 60.

⁵ See *Patterns of Prejudice*, XLIV, 2 (2010); Marcel Stoetzler, ed., *Antisemitism and the Constitution of Sociology* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014).

to intervene were partly coextensive. The conference was a crucial stepping stone in the already mentioned shift from in/felicitous phrase hunting toward a much more subtle analysis of the – often rather ambivalent – ways in which notions regarding “the Jew(s)” are woven into the deep structure of (in this case, sociological) thought.

Acting as respondent for a panel at this conference, which included a paper by Robert Fine on the early Marx, whose infamous double essay “Zur Judenfrage” (1844) I had discussed at some length in my book, I was struck while listening to Fine’s paper by what seemed to me to be similarities between Marx’s juxtaposition of civil society and human species being, on the one hand, and Ferdinand Tönnies’s juxtaposition of community and society, on the other.⁶ Needless to say, Tönnies did not invent this paradigm but rather lent it its classic formulation, so there is no reason why the early Marx could not have subscribed to a similar distinction some four decades earlier.

Now, I would argue that if for some bizarre reason a decree went out that henceforth later modern historians may use only one conceptual paradigm to try to explain what made people tick in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe, the community/society paradigm would be our best bet. Not, I hasten to add, because I subscribe to the paradigm myself but because it has been so widely accepted by others and reflects so many widely held assumptions absolutely fundamental to the mechanisms that have governed processes of inclusion and exclusion in later modern European history. Not least, many standard sociology textbooks to this day present the juxtaposition of community and society as a value-free fact ostensibly as unquestionable as the statement that the earth is round.

Let me summarize the gist of the argument by first quoting Tönnies himself and then indicating its implications with the help of a table compiled by Rick Tilman. Here, then, is Tönnies himself in *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*:

The theory of the society construes a group of people who, as in the community, live peacefully alongside one another yet are in essence not united but separated from one another. While they remain united in the latter despite everything that separates them, in the former they remain separated from one another despite everything that unites them. Consequently, no actions transpire in the society that can be derived from an a priori and necessarily existing unity, and that therefore express the will and spirit of this unity despite being performed by the individual,

⁶ Robert Fine, “Rereading Marx on the ‘Jewish Question’: Marx as a Critic of Antisemitism?” in Stoetzler, ed., *Antisemitism and the Constitution of Sociology*, pp. 137–159.

and that are performed in the interest of those connected to the individual as much as in his own interest. Instead, everyone is on his own here and in a condition of tension with everybody else. The various spheres of activity and power are sharply demarcated so that everybody denies contact and admittance to others as though any such aspiration constituted a hostile act.⁷

This is a starkly typological and undialectical characterization, of course, that ultimately offers no transparent criteria as to why community ultimately remains community, even when substantial elements identified with the essence of society transpire within it, and why, conversely, society can never become community, even when various features associated with community can be found within it.

Now, lest you be confused, Tönnies insisted that this juxtaposition was an absolutely value-free one. "It has . . . repeatedly been suggested," he wrote,

that, though no reflection of the author's intentions, the usage of this pair of concepts (community and society) by his students is characterized by a clear juxtaposition of good and bad (society = bad, community = good). Here is my response: an evaluation or assessment of this kind is no more the concern of objective scholarship than it is of concern to the biologist if one bases on his description of a youthful, growing and blossoming organism, on the one hand, and an ageing and decaying one, on the other, a strong preference for the youthful one.⁸

I find it a little difficult to believe that this statement was not made cheek-in-tongue. In any case, though, whether intended as such or not, the problematic implications of this juxtaposition are surely evident enough. Rick Tilman has summarized the qualities associated with this juxtaposition very effectively⁹: kinship, neighborhood, and friendship in the community are contrasted to anonymity of relationships in society. Community is characterized by barter, society by monetary exchange.

⁷ Quoted in Rick Tilman, "Ferdinand Tönnies, Thorstein Veblen and Karl Marx: From Community to Society and Back?" *European Journal of Economic Thought*, XI, 4 (2004), pp. 579–606, here p. 586; translation substantially amended. Hereafter Tilman, "Ferdinand Tönnies."

⁸ Quoted in Sibylle Tönnies, "Gemeinschaft oder Gesellschaft – ein Werturteil?" in *Ankunft bei Tönnies*, ed. Lars Clausen and Franz Urban Pappi (Kiel: Mührlau, 1981), pp. 172–181, here p. 172.

⁹ Tilman, "Ferdinand Tönnies," p. 585; table 3 key concepts in social relationships in Ferdinand Tönnies. I am quoting the contents of Tilman's table more or less word for word but have refrained from the use of inverted commas since the paragraph would otherwise become impenetrably busy.

Custom, tradition, inertia, and habit in the community are contrasted to contract, innovation, progress, and novelty in society. Customary law reigns supreme in the community, legislative law in society. Man is a social animal in the community, whereas society is characterized by atomistic individualism. Community is governed by value absolutism and the unity of ends and means, whereas value relativism and the separation of ends and means characterize society. Land and the means of production are owned communally in the community but privately in society, and power of labor in the community is replaced by the power of machines in society. Where idealism and transcendentalism hold sway in the community, materialism and nominalism are the features of society. Common altruism, mutual understanding, and solidarity are the principles underpinning the community, while the pursuit of individual self interest, the rational calculation of personal gain, egoism, narcissism, the will to power, and insensitivity to common needs and the public interest are the hallmarks of society. Sentiment, the unity of mind and heart, and conscience, finally, characterize the community, as opposed to interest, calculation, and consciousness in society.

I would have thought that it is pretty clear where, from the perspective of the non-Jewish majority, the Jews fit into this scheme of things. If Jews have a rightful claim to integration it exists in the sphere of society rather than community. Nor does it take a lot of guessing how secure the Jews' status is likely to be if community turns on society as its alienated alter ego. Indeed, as anyone who has read the likes of Sombart will realize, over time the very fact that their status in modern European society is predicated on the laws not of community but of society becomes an indictment in its own right: Jews' attempts to create new composite identities in order to integrate into the majority society are identified not only as a danger to the majority community but also as a betrayal of the Jews' own community. The Jewish community may be a rather wretched one, but sticking with it nevertheless beats betraying one's community, evidently the worst sin of all, and instead relying on the (false) promise(s) of society. The odds, then, are that where someone stands on the community/society paradigm will almost inevitably have an impact on his or her approach to matters (supposedly) Jewish (and/or vice versa).

Needless to say, I am by no means the first person to have picked up on similarities between the young Marx's ideas about civil society and human species being, on the one hand, and the community/society paradigm, on the other. Eugene Kamenka, for instance, stated in 1965 that

the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies, in part consciously influenced by Marx, strikingly developed Marx's contrast between the commercial, divisive society of capitalism and the unalienated society of communism into a sociological category, the contrast between the commercial, divisive *Gesellschaft* and the organic fellowship of the *Gemeinschaft*.¹⁰

Kamenka went on to comment that "even in the formulation of a critical program" this approach raised "problems that must be faced squarely. The work of Tönnies, in elaborating the concept of *Gemeinschaft*, runs together the brotherhood of a working team of equals and the paternalism of a feudal community in which everyone knows and accepts his place." Moreover, "a great part of the heritage of democratic socialism, and of the socialist concept of freedom, rests on the 'open' society created by capitalist development: the *Gesellschaft* that freed men from the bonds of religious and feudal authority."¹¹

In Tönnies's own mind there was certainly no doubt that this affinity existed. In his preface to the first edition of *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, he generously acknowledged his main sources of inspiration. "It is by no means my intention," he wrote, "to conceal the fact that my discussion has benefited profoundly from the various stimulating, instructive, and corroborating impulses it received from three distinguished authors, each of whose work differs considerably from that of the other two." Turning specifically to the economic underpinning of his argument, he expressed his appreciation for the man who was, to his mind, "the most remarkable and profound social philosopher" in this field: Karl Marx. "The insight," he then elaborated,

that I for my part formulate as follows: that the natural underlying constitution of civilization that is lost (to us) is communistic while its contemporary and evolving counterpart is socialistic, this notion, I would suggest, is not alien to genuine historians where they understand themselves most acutely, yet only the discoverer of the capitalist mode of production [i.e. Marx] could reveal it and formulate it with clarity.¹²

¹⁰ Eugene Kamenka, "Marxian Humanism and the Crisis in Socialist Ethics," in *Socialist Humanism*, ed. Erich Fromm (New York: Doubleday, 1965), pp. 107–117, here p. 113.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 116–117.

¹² Ferdinand Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (Leipzig: Fues's Verlag (R. Reisland), 1887), pp. xxviii–xxix. Niall Bond, one of the scholars currently on the most intimate footing with Tönnies, suggests that this made Tönnies one of "the earliest academics to make Marx unapologetically citeable as a source in established academia." Niall Bond, *Understanding Ferdinand Tönnies' "Community and Society"* (Münster: Lit, 2013), pp. 255–256.

This is neither the only occasion on which Tönnies acknowledged Marx's influence nor just any old bit of Marx that caught Tönnies's imagination. As Stanley Moore points out, in Tönnies's *Marx: Leben und Lehre* (1921) it was specifically "the comparison Marx draws between feudalism and capitalism in *On the Jewish Question*" that Tönnies "connects with his own comparison between community and society."¹³ Fritz Pappenheim, too, notes that in the Marx book Tönnies "does not hesitate to acknowledge the agreement between his theory of *Gesellschaft* and the description of the relationship between individual and society which Marx presents in his famous essays on the Jewish question."¹⁴

In Tönnies's defense it should be said that in these instances cited by Moore and Pappenheim, Tönnies's point of reference was the first part of "Zur Judenfrage." He expressly cited the "deep, thought-provoking statement" with which "the first essay 'On the Jewish Question' closes," characterizing the essay as "a thorough criticism of the egoism of civil society." As is well known, the first part of "Zur Judenfrage" is largely inoffensive as far as matters (supposedly) Jewish go, and it is indeed a key text that makes an indispensable contribution to the evolution of social theory – one I regularly give my students to read, not because of its relevance to Jewish/non-Jewish relations but because of its ingenuity in identifying core distinctions between modern and premodern society. That said, it is worth noting in passing that Tönnies also suggested in his discussion of the first part of "Zur Judenfrage" that it is characterized by "brilliant antitheses" that "still pleased the young writer," that is, the young Marx, and "mark the peculiar sharpness of his Jewish mentality."¹⁵

Yet while Tönnies's engagement of "Zur Judenfrage" may start with the first part, it does not end there. One of Tönnies's core disagreements with Marx concerned the relative significance of the spheres of production and circulation. For Marx the sphere of production was decisive, not least because the sphere of circulation only facilitated the distribution of surplus value already extracted from labor rather than that process of extraction itself that, for Marx, lay at the heart of capitalism. Tönnies placed much greater emphasis on the sphere of circulation, by which he

¹³ Stanley Moore, *Marx versus Markets* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), p. 11.

¹⁴ Fritz Pappenheim, *The Alienation of Modern Man* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1959), p. 78. Hereafter Pappenheim, *Alienation*.

¹⁵ Ferdinand Tönnies, *Karl Marx: His Life and Teachings* (n.p.: Michigan State University Press, 1974), p. 14.

meant primarily trade (rather than something as abstract and thus sinister as the stock exchange). For Tönnies, “the essence of capitalism – if we may correct Marx’s presentation – is the essence of trade.” As he saw it, “Marx must admit that capital profit does not alone and foremost originate in the sphere of production but also, and earlier, in the sphere of circulation. He reconciles himself with this fact, which does not fit into his system, by mentioning it only vaguely.”¹⁶

Now, just as Marx’s serious interest in the Jews effectively evaporated once he had identified the sphere of production as the heart piece of capitalism, Tönnies’s fixation on the sphere of circulation drew him to the obnoxious second part of “Zur Judenfrage.” Then again, insofar as he considered the primacy of the sphere of circulation not a transitory stage toward, but the very essence of, modern capitalism, he needed what he considered the crucial emphases in the second part of “Zur Judenfrage” to originate not with Marx with his Jewish–Hegelian predilections, but with Engels – the man who could play a crucial role in the procreation of Marxism because he carried with him news of the real world, where capitalism had already firmly taken hold.

Tönnies cited Engels’s contribution to the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, his “Outline of a Critique of National Economics,” quoting its first sentence: “National economics is a natural outgrowth of the expansion of trade, and it replaced the simple unscientific huckster [*Schacher*] with an elaborate system of permissible fraud and a complete science of self-enrichment or profit making.” Rather remarkably, for Tönnies the emphasis here lay precisely on that which, according to Engels, has been superseded. “The word huckster [*Schacher*],” Tönnies explained, “was a favourite expression of the young merchant [i.e. Engels]. As it often happens, his rebellion against society originated in a rebellion against his own family, against his strict father. He used every opportunity to manifest his dislike of the huckster [*Schacher*].” And here, for Tönnies, lay the connection to the second part of “Zur Judenfrage.” He continued: “And now it is remarkable that this Jewish–German word reappears in the second essay by Marx entitled ‘On the Jewish Question’ . . . I believe that this view developed under the immediate impression of Engels’ manuscripts, perhaps also from the letters accompanying and following the manuscripts.”¹⁷

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 150–151.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 18–19.

Now, the fact that Tönnies felt an affinity between him and Marx regarding the community/society paradigm does not necessarily mean he was right, of course. Perhaps the best-known Marxian proof text in this context is from the correspondence between Marx and his coeditor Arnold Ruge published in the first and only issue of the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, in which Marx's "Zur Judenfrage" also appeared. "One would first have to arouse again the human sense of self and freedom in the hearts of these people," Marx wrote here. "Only this feeling," he continued, "which vanished from the world with the Greeks, and under Christianity disappeared into the blue mist of the heavens, can again transform society into a community of human beings united for their highest aims, into a democratic state."¹⁸ This is obviously a striking passage. Yet it is no forgone conclusion that Marx intended the same conceptual implications as Tönnies when he juxtaposed community and society in this way. "Is Marx's contrast between community and society," Stanley Moore rightly asked in *Marx versus Markets* (1993), "connected by anything more than verbal coincidence with the contrast elaborated by Tönnies forty years later?"¹⁹

The modern scholar who perhaps made the most far-reaching claims about the affinity between Marx and Tönnies regarding the community/society paradigm was Fritz Pappenheim. Pappenheim (1902–1964) was a refugee from Nazi Germany who emigrated to the United States in 1941 and taught at the historically black Talladega College in Alabama from 1945 until 1952, when he was denied tenure for his "anticapitalist" views. He went on to write a classic work on alienation in which he states unambiguously that "there is indeed a considerable affinity between Marx's theory of capitalist economy and Tönnies' concept of *Gesellschaft*."²⁰

Yet Pappenheim's claim was far from uncontroversial, not least because Marx referred rather more frequently to *Gemeinwesen* than to *Gemeinschaft*. These are obviously not unrelated terms/concepts, but even so, does this not make it even more likely that we really are looking at a mere "verbal coincidence" here? Kenneth Megill, for one, certainly thought so.²¹ Mary Mahowald, responding to Megill, set out "to offer an interpretive clarification . . . differing from both Tönnies' and Megill's."

¹⁸ MEW 1: 338–339. ¹⁹ Moore, *Marx versus Markets*, p. 11.

²⁰ Pappenheim, *Alienation*, p. 77.

²¹ Kenneth A. Megill, "The Community in Marx's Philosophy," in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, XXX, 3 (1970), pp. 382–393.

She argued that Marx used the (frequently occurring) term *Gemeinwesen* when making descriptive statements about real existing communities and the (rather less frequently occurring) term *Gemeinschaft* when making normative statements about what communities should be.²² Alongside the already cited passage from the 1843 correspondence with Ruge, Mahowald's core proof text for this line of argument was an extremely well known passage from the *Deutsche Ideologie*:

Only in the community [with others has each] individual the means of comprehensively fulfilling his potential; only in the community, therefore, is personal freedom possible. In the previous substitutes for the community, in the state, etc. personal freedom existed only for the individuals who developed on the ruling class's terms, and only insofar as they were individuals of this class. The ostensible community in which individuals have hitherto united always took on a life of its own, independently of them. At the same time it represented the unification of one class against another. Hence, for the subordinated class this community was not only illusory but in fact a new fetter. In the real community the individuals in and through their association obtain their freedom.²³

So far, so good. Yet one only needs to continue reading the very same paragraph to see Mahowald's seemingly ingenious argument instantly fall apart. The text continues as follows:

It follows from the entire development so far that the communal [*gemeinschaftliche*] relationship that individuals of one class entered into and that was conditioned by their communal [*gemeinschaftlichen*] interests *vis-à-vis* a third party was only ever a community [*Gemeinschaft*] to which these individuals belonged as types of individuals, insofar as they lived according to the existential conditions of their class; a relationship of which they partook not as individuals but as members of a class.²⁴

The paragraph concludes by reiterating that individuals can attain their freedom only in a "genuine community," which clearly presupposes that community need not be "genuine."

I would like to return to Pappenheim for a moment. He does something I would suggest is rather typical. On his account, "Marx described these trends toward social atomization especially, though not exclusively, in his early writings – *On the Jewish Question* [etc.]."²⁵ He then goes on to ask, "What are the forces that shape this real existence of modern man?" and begins his answer by pointing out that "Marx

²² Mary B. Mahowald, "Marx's 'Gemeinschaft': Another Interpretation," in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, XXXIII, 4 (1973), pp. 472–488, here p. 472, 481.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 482; MEW 3: 74. ²⁴ MEW 3: 74. ²⁵ Pappenheim, *Alienation*, p. 81

describes the existence of contemporary man as largely shaped by the rise and dominant influence of commodity exchange.”²⁶ He then proceeds to explain that “both *Capital* and *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* open with chapters which are entitled ‘Commodities.’”²⁷ In other words, he cites “Zur Judenfrage” and other early writings when stressing the affinities between Marx and Tönnies (and Marx’s attendant sensitivity to issues of alienation, etc.), but when it comes to explaining the actual substance of what Marx supposedly meant by all this, Pappenheim automatically relies on the notion of commodification as developed much later.

Similarly, David Leopold suggests a strong continuity between notions of atomization and alienation in “Zur Judenfrage” and the concept of fetishism that begins to emerge in texts that were written admittedly not much later but that nevertheless arguably belong to a distinct new phase in Marx’s work. In the context of “Zur Judenfrage” Leopold suggests that “in an adumbration of his later concept of fetishism ... Marx describes the individual in civil society as becoming increasingly powerless, increasingly the ‘plaything of alien powers.’”²⁸ Focusing on the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of the summer of 1844, Leopold summarizes Marx’s stance as follows: “In the modern social world, Marx claims, the product of the worker’s labour confronts him ‘as an alien object that has power over him’. This represents an early invocation of the idea of fetishism,” he suggests, and then reiterates that this is a phenomenon “already treated in the early writings as a distinguishing feature of the modern social world.”²⁹

A rather more plausible reading, I would suggest, is that the Marx of the summer of 1844 was beginning to discern the outlines of the idea of fetishism while the Marx of “Zur Judenfrage” had done no such thing. What by the summer of 1844 was beginning to become a process in which labor and commodities were mediated in a complex way and matters were not what they seemed was in “Zur Judenfrage” still a straightforward process that was exactly what it seemed: “in civil society ... [man] acts as a private individual, regards other men as a means, degrades himself into a means, and becomes the plaything of alien powers.”

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 84. ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

²⁸ David Leopold, *The Young Karl Marx* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 137.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

I strongly suspect that the community/society paradigm resonated strongly with many Marxists who in this respect as in various others found the pre-Marxist Marx much more amenable than the Marxist one and/or misunderstood Marx's actual intentions. How dramatically this was the case in the later appropriation of "Zur Judenfrage," for example, I have demonstrated in detail in my book.

My interest in the community/society paradigm is also motivated by a second major concern, namely, the need for a fundamental reexamination of the nexus between modern antisemitism and racism. The intimate connection between modern antisemitism and racialized thinking has long been considered a truism. Yet along with other scholars working in this field, I have become increasingly perplexed by the considerable overlap between forms of anti-Jewish stereotyping that are intimately connected with racialized thought and those that clearly are not in any genuinely substantive manner predicated on such thought.

If prevalent antisemitic notions could but did not need to be based on racialized conceptions, then what exactly is the significance of racism for modern antisemitism? What this might suggest is that what we really need to identify is a more fundamental set of notions regarding belonging and exclusion that underlay both racialized thought and antisemitism. The community/society paradigm seems a rather obvious first place to look for such an overarching set of notions.

The short discussion here has, I hope, demonstrated the potential of a close reexamination of notions of belonging and the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion predicated on the community/society paradigm as a promising line of inquiry likely to render new insights into the functioning of antisemitism and racism as well as the nexus between them. I would suggest that it also offers an indication of the extent to which a thorough understanding of the ways in which assumptions about "the Jews" are woven into the deep structure of social and political thought can tell us a great deal not only about the dynamics governing relations between Jews and non-Jews but also about that social and political thought more generally.

PART THREE

ISRAEL, ZIONISM, AND THE LEFT

Socialist Zionism and Nation Building

Anita Shapira

Since the mid-1980s engagement with Jewish and Zionist socialism has become marginal. All at once the fascinating and very complex relationship between the Zionist left and the Bolshevik Revolution, and between the Russian culture and the one extant in Palestine of the time, stopped sparking the creative imagination and was no longer of interest. There were several reasons for this: the ideological and actual victory of the free market, which in Margaret Thatcher's and Ronald Reagan's day seemed to be the only credible possibility for economic and political success; the moral and political collapse of the Soviet Union, which was accepted as firm proof of the failure of socialism; and the triumph of the right in Israeli politics and the decline of the Israeli labor movement as an alternative to it. The New Left, which appeared in the 1960s, did not speak in the language of the socialist left, and more than it extolled the rule of social justice and equality – which had rallied the old left – it spoke in the language of anti-colonialism. But in recent years we have witnessed worldwide social unrest driven by the difficulties of globalization, the halt of middle-class growth, and the widening of the gap between the haves and have-nots. Only time will tell whether the first buds of the new social justice discourse will yield reforms in the present brutal capitalistic regime, just as social democracy did in the previous century.

The late Jonathan Frankel propounded a theory that, it seems to me, is universally accepted by scholars: Jewish socialism sprang from a common trunk in late-nineteenth-century tsarist Russia and sprouted three branches: the Eastern European branch, the American one, and the Palestinian one. It is important to remember these common origins, manifested as they are by the numerous shifts of personalities and leaders from

branch to branch and from stream to stream. The borderlines among the Bund, Zionism, territorialism, the workers' movement in the diaspora and Palestine, Yiddishists and Hebraists, were fluid, and both people and ideas moved from stream to stream and movement to movement; Chaim Zhitlovsky and Jacob Lestshinsky are good examples of such shifts. There were also numerous intermediate shades among the different movements: a man like Abraham Cahan, editor of the Yiddish *Forverts*, for example, was a leading figure in the American Jewish labor movement, and, at the same time, a harsh critic of the Polish Bund and an admirer of the workers' movement in Palestine, while a dyed in the wool Zionist socialist such as Berl Katznelson was able to keep a warm place in his heart for his former comrades in the a-Zionist camp. The Hebraist writer Yosef Haim Brenner maintained very cordial relations with Yiddish writers, especially Avrom Reyzen, and on Brenner's untimely death he was eulogized by non-Zionist Yiddishists. Quite a few writers wrote in both Yiddish and Hebrew, for example, Uri Zvi Greenberg. At the same time, we are talking about an ideological era in which people held extremely powerful beliefs, did not know the meaning of tolerance, and an ideological schism was also a personal rift. Yitzhak Ben-Aharon, a socialist and populist tribune, once told me that we become tolerant when things cease to matter to us. And there is some truth in that. The gathering under one roof in this collection of different streams of Jewish socialism is perhaps an expression of that tolerance, beyond love and beyond hate.

The year 1955 saw the publication of the works of Ber Borochov by the Hakibbutz Hameuchad-Sifriat Poalim publishing house. Luba, widow of the intellectual genius of Zionist-Marxism who died so young, wrote an embarrassed letter to Minister of Defense Ben-Gurion, Prime Minister Moshe Sharett, Golda Meir, and Zalman Shazar (the next president of the State of Israel) in which she gently rebuked them for not congratulating her on the book's publication. A loyal member of Mapai, Luba thought that perhaps her comrades were miffed because the book was not published by the Mapai publishing house, but by that of its Israeli labor movement rival, Achdut Ha'avoda. Ben-Gurion swiftly responded with a letter replete with expressions of friendship and admiration, stating among other things that prior to his immigration to Palestine in 1906 he had not read a single article by Borochov. This statement of Ben-Gurion's is thought-provoking since Borochov was considered the ideologue of the Poalei Zion Party. In 1905 Ben-Gurion attended the founding conference of this party, which was held at the home of Yitzhak Tabenkin in Warsaw; in 1906 he immigrated to Palestine and two months

later took part in composing the platform of Poalei Zion in Palestine – the Ramla Program – in which he employed the Marxist–Borochovist jargon accepted at the time regarding “stychic” immigration to Palestine, the workers’ role in building capitalism in the country, and in fostering democratic processes in Palestine only after the maturation of which would the time be ripe for socialist revolution there. Did Ben-Gurion take an accelerated course in Borochovist theory? Or did his use of Marxist jargon in the Ramla Program reflect the zeitgeist, in which Marxist formulae were considered “the last word” in the Jewish labor movement, and Ben-Gurion – who had heatedly clashed with the Bundists in his hometown, Plonsk – espoused this jargon as part of the arsenal accepted in the ideological debate of the time?

The young Zionist–socialist movement sought legitimacy and inspiration from the world socialist movement that was considered the bastion of universalism striving toward the kingdom of justice on earth. Finding commonalities between global processes as they were interpreted and predicted by historical materialism, and processes of the realization of socialist Zionism, was vital for it. However, the movement’s invented genealogy attributed its beginnings to Moses Hess, continued with Aaron Lieberman, and later with Nachman Syrkin, none of whom engaged with the Marxist method. Here Borochov played a key role: he provided the terminology that enabled anyone who so desired to believe that the Zionist case was an inseparable part of the global processes that lead – with the iron logic of historical inevitability – to the salvation of the world and the Jewish people. But the stitches laid by Borochov in his theory – as he himself was to admit later – were too rough, and their first contact with Palestinian reality revealed their slackness. The objective or “stychic” processes, as Borochov termed them, which according to him were to build the country’s Jewish capitalist society, did not materialize. During the Ottoman period, Jewish capital was not inclined to go to a backward country under a hostile regime, and Jewish workers preferred to immigrate to New York, not Jaffa. The understanding that only Zionist idealism would draw immigrants to the country led to acknowledgment of the need for Zionist education and propaganda, which classic Borochovism rejected out of hand. The workers’ need for the aid of national capital led them to cooperate with the Zionist Organization, which Borochovism rejected because of its bourgeois character. As early as the Second Aliya it was clear that the Jewish worker in Palestine could only survive with the aid of national capital. Arthur Ruppin, the Zionist Organization’s most important colonizer, understood the importance of

preserving the workers' idealistic pioneering element, while meeting their needs. This was the soil that yielded the first attempts at communal settlement. It was a trial and error process, which was retroactively accorded an ideological mantle. The workers who successfully managed to strike roots in the country were not proletarians but young idealists driven by a romantic-mystic connection to the land of their fathers, not by historical necessity. Instead of heavy industry, the basis of the true proletariat, they turned to agricultural labor. And while "The Internationale," which the pioneers sang enthusiastically in the youth movements, spoke of destroying the old world order, and the *Communist Manifesto* told them they had nothing to lose but their chains, the Palestinian workers devoted themselves to building an economy, cultural institutions, political power, and, in contrast with the grandiloquent claims of communist dogma, they had a great deal to lose.

Ben-Gurion's statement that he had not read Borochoy's articles was not accidental. The Palestinian workers' movement did not formulate a clearly laid out ideological manifesto. The movement's founding fathers used to claim that "in the beginning was the deed." And indeed, this was the process whereby the deed preceded ideology. The communes did not spring from either Fourier's ideology or that of Marx, but from the hardships encountered by a handful of intelligent young people in living alone, and of competing with Arab workers for places of work in the Jewish colonies (*moshavot*). For them, the communes seemed to be a practical expression of the socialist principles in which they believed. Their socialism derived from a sense of basic justice grounded in moral principles that needed almost no explanation: it was self-evident that equality was more just than inequality, that it was unjust that some went hungry and did not have a roof over their head, while others lived in magnificent palaces. For them, the imminence of the liberating revolution that was about to take place in their lifetime was the palpable reality that fired them and lent meaning to their lives. Berl Katznelson's future brother-in-law and Yitzhak Tabenkin's cousin was a twelve-year-old orphan for whom Tabenkin's mother provided lodgings in her house in Warsaw. He was a small and delicate boy who was sent to work with coarse, violent chimney sweeps. Every day he would return home filthy and dejected by the work, and lie down on his bed and cry. The young Tabenkin would sit beside him and console him: Don't cry, Slutzkin; the revolution will come soon. But they were less interested in the form of a future regime, or the way in which the revolution would occur, and were occupied more with how they could achieve a life of justice and equality in

a form that was close to Tolstoy's socialism. This is how the idea of the kibbutz developed, as well as the ideas of a workers' economy and an alternative workers' society that would replace Jewish bourgeois society. The seeds of these ideas and the processes that gave birth to them were already evident at the time of the Second Aliya and coalesced during the First World War, prior to the waves of immigration that began in the wake of the British Mandate.

Moral fervor and self-sacrifice prevailed instead of a formulated ideology or perhaps were a means of circumventing its contradictions. These inner contradictions were inherent in the notion of Jews settling in a country populated by another people. The country was indeed only sparsely settled, but the presence of the Arabs and the potential conflict between them and the Jewish settlers were clear from the outset. Moreover, it was the socialist workers who found themselves at the forefront of the national confrontation with the Arabs: the Jewish employers in the *moshavot* preferred cheap and experienced Arab labor to the inexperienced but arrogant Jewish workers, who harbored pretensions of being the bearers of lofty national and social messages of their own, and did not shy away from confrontations with them. Although the workers tended to present these confrontations as a class clash, the truth was that the folds of the class confrontation concealed a national conflict between Jews and Arabs. It was not by chance that the rationale of the workers regarding why the employers should forgo profit and employ Jewish workers was based on national-Zionist reasoning.

One of the most interesting attempts to ground the confrontation between workers and employers in Marxist terms was made by Ben-Gurion. For him the conflict between the interests of private profit-seeking capital and the Zionist interest, which mandated absorbing the Jewish workers into the limited labor market of the Jewish *yishuv*, was evidence of what he called "The National Mission of the Working Class." This well-known article, written in 1925, reflected Ben-Gurion's internalization of Borochovist concepts and his manipulation of them in order to adapt them to the needs of Zionism and *yishuv* reality. Ben-Gurion presented a worldview in which there was an unbridgeable contradiction between the interests of private capital, on the one hand, and Jewish workers, on the other. The owners of the former, be they Zionists or even idealists, would eventually be in conflict with national interests since their aspiration to profit would sooner or later lead to a clash with the employment of Jewish workers. Whereas by his very nature the worker, when fighting for his personal interest as a worker, was also fighting for the

realization of Zionism. As Ben-Gurion wrote: “The working class is unique in its objective adaptation to the historical needs of the nation, unique in its talent of constant loyalty to national interests,” and further, “The organic identity of the national and class mission is inherent in the social and economic nature of the working class.”¹ Ben-Gurion described an organic identity common to Zionist and working-class interests, and an irreconcilable difference between private and Zionist interests. Although the keyword here is “objective,” he contended that there were a few employers who gave preference to the national interest, but they were acting counter to their own interests and would ultimately be drawn down the same class path as the majority. He therefore concluded – employing dialectical thinking that would have pleased Borochof – that “the way to the realization of Zionism is through class war,” which would lead to the triumph of the worker.² In other words, the worker’s victory and that of Zionism are interlocked. In contrast with the view held by Shabtai Teveth, who held that Ben-Gurion’s Marxist–socialist patina was thin and quickly fell away, it seems that traces of this worldview still attended Ben-Gurion in the 1950s. In the article from 1925 mentioned previously he called businesspeople “the parasites of private enterprise,” and he still adhered to this view in the 1950s. It was only in the second half of that decade that he began to display acceptance of an economy with room for both private and national capital, albeit an acceptance tinged with deep suspicion. To the end of his life he viewed the profit motive of employers as avarice.

There was a basic flaw in Ben-Gurion’s concept: could there not be a contradiction between the worker’s aspiration to improve his lot and the Zionist interest? Indeed, the worker seeks to increase his wage regardless of the state of the economy. Furthermore, the absorption of new, inexperienced workers usually drives wages down. Would the Zionist worker prefer to absorb immigration or keep his relatively higher wages? The unlimited strike was a basic right of the workers, but did it always fall into line with the Zionist interest of building the country? The small Communist faction that was in the Histadrut Labor Federation until 1924, when it was expelled for anti-Zionist incitement, appositely defined and

¹ David Ben-Gurion, “Hayi’ud haleumi shel ma’amad hapoalim” [The National Mission of the Working Class] *Mima’amad le’am* [From Class to Nation] (Tel Aviv: Davar, 1933) (in Hebrew), p. 233.

² *Ibid.*, p. 234.

underscored the tension between the national interest and that of the workers. This held true in times of hardship and unemployment, but also in times of prosperity: then workers abandoned work in agriculture – much to the frustration of the Histadrut, which sought to safeguard Jewish employment in the citrus industry – and moved into construction, which was both easier and better paid. During the period of prosperity in the early 1930s there were fierce struggles for Jewish labor in the *moshavot*, accompanied by picketing that sometimes led to clashes with Arab workers and gained wide exposure in the press due to the participation of writers and poets in them. But the truth is that this was a propaganda war with no practical results, since there were no Jews who were prepared to work in agriculture.

Berl Katznelson asserted that Zionism should be socialistic or it would not be realized. But Katznelson did not pin this development on objective processes à la Ben-Gurion. Even though he had read *Capital* when he was sixteen, he had never been captivated by Marxist formulae. For him, what would determine the character of Zionism was the character of the people realizing it: those coming to Palestine to build the country would be penurious workers, and they would not immigrate to build what he termed “a house of slavery.” These young people would want to build a country in their own image. In other words, the orientation of Zionist socialism was not to a destitute proletariat that wandered to the most convenient immigrant country, as millions of Jews had at that time, but to a human type known as a *halutz*, a pioneer. Had Ben-Gurion replaced “worker” with *halutz* in his formula, then it would have been essentially correct.

Katznelson was always suspicious of real proletarians. He contended that the Jewish proletariat did not come to Zionism but went to the Bund, to the Yiddishists, to the movements whose national identity was mingled with internationalism. The proletarians were from poor families with no Jewish education and preferred socialist trends that did not talk about leaving the diaspora, but about improving their lot there. The socialist Zionists were from the Jewish lower middle class in Eastern Europe: the sons of rabbis and cantors, artisans who sent their sons to study in a *heder*, small merchants, and so forth. Not homeowners and certainly not wealthy men, but also not the Jewish poor who went to America: in other words, the class that faced pauperization and who saw in Zionism a movement connected with Jewish history that would provide it with a framework that preserved its identity and culture, even though it mandated proletarianization and adaptation to physical labor.

In Palestine the establishment of the workers' movement framework predated the establishment of the working class. The consciousness of a working class preceded its actual formation. When the workers' parties were formed at the time of the Second Aliya, their respective membership numbered only several hundred. When the Histadrut was founded in 1920 there were no more than a few thousand workers in the country. In the 1930s, in the wake of massive growth of the Jewish *yishuv*, Yehezkel Kaufmann wrote about the "imaginary revolution in the imaginary economy by the imaginary class."³ And he was not exaggerating. The need to educate former yeshiva students to undergo a process of modernization and secularization, to prepare them for a life of physical labor, derived from an existential need – the work available was in agriculture and construction, that is, physical labor in harsh conditions, in a primitive country without laws for protecting the worker against his employer, and no law that mandated upholding workers' rights. The organization of the Histadrut labor federation and establishment of its institutions created the social safety net in the young Jewish society. The Histadrut allotted work on a rota system, provided health insurance, protected the workers in the event of work accidents, and fought against their dismissal. It established kitchens that provided the workers, who in the main were single, with inexpensive hot meals. Immigrant houses supplied a roof for the new arrivals. In contrast with labor organizations in immigrant countries, which were generally opposed to new immigrants who lowered wages, the Histadrut provided employment for the new immigrants. Thus a patron–clientele relationship was formed – the Histadrut took care of the workers, while the workers aided it in its struggles, and voted for it in elections to the *yishuv* and Zionist movement institutions, thus endowing it with political power.

It was the urban proletariat, the masses who cast their ballots, that provided the Zionist–socialist movement with its power base. Nevertheless the movement was oriented not toward the proletariat but toward the agricultural worker. Agricultural labor settlement, as cooperative settlement was called, was considered the jewel in Zionist socialism's crown. The transition from city to village, from industry to agriculture, ran completely counter to the accepted social process in capitalistic countries, and also to the socialist vision loyal to historical materialism. But it was vital from an ideological standpoint – turning the Jews into a people

³ Yehezkel Kaufmann, "Milkhemet ma'amadot be-Yisrael" [Class War in Israel] *Be-havlei Ha-zeman* [In Troubled Times] (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1936) (in Hebrew), p. 121.

settled on and in its land, close to nature, engaged in primal labor – and from the Zionist–practical standpoint – control of the territory and establishing the borders of the Zionist foothold in the country. However, ideology and ideals are one thing, and reality is another: the vast majority of Jewish workers in Palestine lived in the cities and were employed in construction or various other occupations, and from the 1940s, in the developing industry. The Zionist movement was unable to finance large-scale agricultural settlement, so the spontaneous process led the workers to the city. Not only that, from the outset the majority of the workers had no intention of working in agriculture – monotonous, exhausting, and poorly paid work – but sought to continue their diaspora lifestyle in Palestine, but in a Jewish, Zionist framework. As the Zionist enterprise ceased to be the sole domain of small avant-garde groups and became the ideal of the masses of Jews who sought refuge in Palestine in the 1930s, the contrast was highlighted between the ideology that spoke of the village and the flow of workers to the city after they left the *moshavot* for work in construction, which was better-paid, and for city life with its attendant cultural temptations. But the orientation, the slogans, continued to view the village as the Zionist–socialist ideal. Even after the establishment of the State the ideology positing that the village and agriculture possessed a purifying and curative element for the maladies of the Jewish anomaly was still extant. The Defense Service Law stipulated that every soldier would work in agriculture for close to a year as part of his or her military service, but this clause was never fully implemented. In 1953, Ben-Gurion's leaving the government to live in Sdeh Boker was but another expression of this trend.

The Palestinian reality fitted neither class awareness nor a class struggle. National solidarity was stronger than all the talk of amity among nations, of joint organization with the Arab workers, and of workers' solidarity that was repeatedly pulled out each time there was an Arab–Jewish clash. Yet the self-image was that of a radical socialist movement. The role models employed were Soviet Russia, Austrian social democracy, and the British Labour Party. Soviet Russia was a very powerful magnet that both attracted and intimidated, for there was a constant covert competition between the attraction of Jewish youth to Palestine, and the attraction to Soviet Russia. Jews from all over the world, including from Palestine, flocked to the new society being built in the Soviet Union. There were some very fine *halutzim* such as the members of the Trumpeldor Labor Battalion, who as a result of a crisis in 1926, chose to go to Russia and establish a commune there. In

1921 Russia was a model for Ben-Gurion, who at the time spoke of establishing a general commune of workers in Palestine that would be more radical than Soviet military communism: all the workers would be given work by the Histadrut, their wages would be handed over to the Histadrut, and the Histadrut would allocate them money to live on – from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs. This proposal was removed from the agenda a year later, but it reflects the attraction to the radicalization that the Bolshevik Revolution produced. For the *halutzim*, the attraction of the Bolshevik Revolution was tremendous. In 1923, when Ben-Gurion visited the USSR, and was asked by young Jewish and Zionist socialists whether the movement in Palestine was communist, he cautiously replied: We think we are communists, that is, not according to the Soviet version. Indeed, the *halutzim* liked to compare themselves with the Soviet model, but with some qualifications: during the Third Aliya, when it seemed that only national capital and pioneering immigration were reaching the country, it was said that in Palestine, as in Russia, the capitalistic stage could be skipped and a socialist society established right away. They called this a “leap,” a term borrowed from the Kabbalah. The kibbutzim were compared with *kolkhozy*, a comparison that favored the kibbutzim from the standpoint of egalitarianism; Yitzhak Tabenkin, leader of Hakibbutz Hameuchad, spoke of the “commune” rather than the kibbutz. The Palmach was considered to have copied the model of a working army from the Russian Civil War period, which according to what was known in Palestine at the time combined fighting with farming; the notion of a “working nation” as a slogan also originated in Russia. The attempt to build an alternative workers’ culture (see later discussion) compared well with the Soviet attempts to support artists, the theater, literature, and so forth; to treat culture as a product of the state. Russian songs translated into Hebrew formed the permanent repertoire of the youth movements in Palestine, and Russian literature, particularly that of the Second World War, was the model for the country’s youth. Makarenko’s *Pedagogical Poem (Road to Life)* was a best seller in the early 1940s. Alexander Bek’s *Panfilov’s Men* was a vade mecum for the Palmach fighters, even though there was no connection between the values the book preached and those of the Palmach. However, as the dictatorial character of the Soviet regime emerged, a shift away from it began, albeit a slow one. By the 1930s Ben-Gurion had stopped admiring the Soviet Union, but the Zionist left deemed it fitting to explain and justify not only the purge trials, but also the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact and the Soviet invasion of Finland. The

1940s, beginning with Operation Barbarossa, were years of upsurge in admiration of Soviet Russia as a result of the heroic Russian stand against the Nazis, and later in view of the Eastern bloc's support of the establishment of the State of Israel, and its political alignment with Israel in the War of Independence. Ben-Gurion had a difficult task when he redirected Israeli foreign policy from neutrality between the blocs to a pro-Western policy. Even the Prague Trials and the Doctors' Trials at the end of the Stalin period did nothing to change the stance of the left. In fact, the withdrawal process from admiration of the Soviet Union was not completed until the Six-Day War, and was central to the shaping of Israeli society and the politics of the Israeli left.

In parallel there was the Austrian model – Red Vienna, controlled by the social democrats – that served as a model for building a socialist society under a democratic regime. The workers' quarters built in Vienna were a model copied by the Histadrut, which built workers' housing in Tel Aviv, the Borochoy neighborhood in Givatayim, and the Kiryat Chaim neighborhood near Haifa. The school network it established was part of its aspiration to promote the alternative workers' society and educate the future generation in the image of the founding fathers. In much the same way it founded the Hapoel sports association to counter that of Maccabi, and the Ohel Theater in reply to Habima. The linkage between the labor movement and Austrian social democracy was manifested at the time that the Schutzbund, the socialist militia, fought against suppression by the right-wing Dollfuss regime, when long lines of Zionist workers formed to donate money to help the workers of Vienna. Nathan Alterman wrote a poem on the martyrdom of the Viennese workers who were fighting for a better world. There is nothing like a magnificent defeat for turning an event of the past into a myth: Twenty years later, in 1954, after the Second World War and far greater tragedies than the destruction of Red Vienna, the Zionist left marked the date by publishing a special booklet commemorating the Schutzbund uprising.

The British Labour Party was close to the hearts of the leadership of the labor movement in Palestine: a party formed by trade unions, which as in Palestine preceded the organizational and party action toward ideological coalescence in the framework of a democratic regime. The fact of the matter is that in its structure and thinking the British Labour Party was the socialist movement closest to the workers' movement in Palestine, inter alia, because of the lesser role it accorded to ideology. Up to Labour's rise to power in 1945 and Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin's hostile policy, there were close ties between the two movements, despite

the fact that in 1929 the Labour government had an ambivalent stance on Zionism. While it was in the opposition Labour supported Zionism and was considered a friend of the movement. Whereas throughout the years the labor movement in Palestine had scrupulously avoided mentioning the word “transfer” with regard to the Arabs, the British Labour Party included this idea in its platform, which was re-endorsed in 1944. It is therefore hardly surprising that when the Labour government adopted a hostile policy toward Zionism, the socialist–Zionists felt betrayed.

The glamour of European social democracy disappeared in the 1930s because of the feebleness displayed by the German party – the strongest in Europe – in the face of the rise of Nazism. It was an earthquake that shook the very foundations of the movement in Palestine: The idea that masses of workers might turn traitor and cross the lines to the right-wing camp was a frightening one that explains, at least partially, the all-out war waged by them against the Revisionists, particularly against the workers among them. The Zionist–socialists in Palestine viewed the capitulation of the German social democrats and the weak opposition to the rise of Nazism they displayed as a weakness of the reformist movement. At the same time, in the 1930s Soviet Russia seemed determined to curb the European right, and was perceived as the world’s bastion of socialism (until the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact). Since then, the distinction between the workers’ movement in Palestine as revolutionary and European social democracy as reformist became one of the pillars of the movement on which the self-identity of its members was built.

How can a constructivist movement like the one in Palestine be depicted as a revolutionary movement? For the Zionists, Zionist–socialist revolutionism boiled down to changing the image of the individual Jew and the Jewish nation as a collective. Inverting the pyramid of the Jewish professions, which Borochof described as standing on its head, with a minority of agricultural and manual workers and a large majority of service workers, and placing it on a broad productive base, changing the value system and placing physical labor at the top of the scale – in contrast with the value of the scholar or the wealthy man, who were the respected members of the community in traditional Jewish society – were received as an expression of Zionist–socialist revolutionism. Productivization among the Jewish emigrants to America occurred spontaneously, but in Palestine it was a conscious, voluntary process designed to change the very nature of the Jewish people, to make it a nation-building people. The socialists in Palestine were contemptuous of what they called “salon communists,” people not committed to realizing the principles of justice

and equality in their daily lives. This type of person, who lives by his principles, was considered solid proof of the revolutionism of the movement in Palestine. The *halutz* who lived in a cooperative framework was living proof of the movement's radicalism, a movement that was not only talking but one that took what it preached to fruition. The fact that only a small minority of the Jewish workers in Palestine lived in accordance with these principles and that the urban majority was no different in character from any other Jewish immigrant society did not alter the self-image.

All this is related to the system that inculcated values and images. Relative to Eastern European Jewish society, the Palestinian society was well educated. The education system, the press, and first and foremost, literature, conveyed socialist messages and turned a population that was in the main of petit bourgeois origins, and a large part of which continued with that way of life in Palestine, into one that viewed itself as realizing not only the socialist mission, but also the national one. The combination of national and socialist goals accorded added value to the suffering, anguish, absorption difficulties, and yearning for home and parents: You are not suffering solely in order to improve your personal status; you are also achieving the redemption of the Jewish people. This contained a hugely potent message, particularly in a period as difficult as the 1930s. From the early 1930s the self-image that combined socialist world reform and building the Zionist nation was channelled into the struggle for hegemony in the Zionist movement. This struggle originated in the leadership's recognition that in order to compel national capital to bear the absorption costs of a destitute population, control of the Zionist Organization was mandatory. It reached this recognition during the great crisis of the second half of the 1920s, when the economic crisis became a crisis of faith in Zionism. This process was completed by 1935, when the workers took control of the Zionist Organization. The contest for hegemony between the Jewish middle class and the workers, one of whose bitterest manifestations was the struggle against the Revisionists, ended in victory for the workers. The interesting point is that the social roots of the Revisionists and the socialists were very similar, possibly even identical. The difference lay in the system of beliefs and opinions embraced by each movement, and the images with which they explained their existence and aims. Just as there was no working class in Palestine, it was also difficult to say that there was a middle class. The debate was between two settlement methods: by means of private or public capital. It was around this issue that the building of an ideology and an identity was accomplished.

But up until the establishment of the State, the bulk of the capital invested in the development of Palestine was private, and most of the land at the disposal of the Zionist enterprise was in private hands. This reality was fundamentally changed after 1948. Now the government with its Mapai majority had at its disposal means of production that were unlimited in terms of that time, and it could utilize them according to its socialist worldview. It was guided by the example of the British Labour Party, which nationalized infrastructures, instituted rationing, and introduced a taxation system that weakened the privileged classes. While there was no nationalization in Israel, the government assumed control of the financial system, investments, and the market. Twenty percent of the Israeli economy was in government hands and another 20 percent in the hands of the Histadrut, which was given preferred status both in government tenders and in obtaining credit, land, and so forth. In other words, 40 percent of the economy was in public hands, far more than in any other democratic country. The concept that a "big," centralistic government is capable of bringing a socialist program to fruition was not born in Israel, but was implemented there. As an immigrant country that absorbed large waves of penniless immigrants, in its first decades Israel suffered from a high level of inequality deriving from this situation. It was against this backdrop that the government instituted a taxation policy designed to lead to maximal equality among various types of workers. The Histadrut familial grading, which legend has it enabled the Histadrut tea lady to earn more than a department head because she had more children, was not actually maintained so meticulously, but it continued to be normative. Direct taxation was high, and the devaluation of money due to creeping inflation led to equalization of wages and reduction of profits in the private sector. In the second half of the 1950s, after going through the harsh crisis following the establishment of the State and in the wake of mass immigration, the salaried intelligentsia rebelled and expressed its unease with the absence of a wage gap between the simple worker and the educated man. One expression of this unease was the organization of engineers, teachers, and doctors into trade unions outside the Histadrut, and protracted and difficult strikes, designed to lead to differential wages, which eventually broke the Histadrut's monopoly over the labor market. These were the first signs of rebellion by the middle class against the labor movement's equality policy.

The establishment of the State and placing the means of production into government hands enabled the implementation of large-scale

development enterprises. Socialist ideology justified reduced investment in consumption for the benefit of development. Deferred gratification was the name of the game. Consideration of individual suffering was not the main issue on the agenda. The socialist state is entitled to impose shortages and suffering on its citizens for the sake of a better future. Once again, the example was set by Soviet Russia. The problem was that there were those who suffered more, and others less. Development yielded its fruit, and the Israeli economy grew at a rate that set an example to the countries of the world. But as the sense of emergency of the country's first years dissipated and an educated middle class emerged, willingness to accommodate the government's weaknesses diminished. Israel was not immune to the phenomenon of an overbearing bureaucracy that the citizen encountered in his contacts with government bodies, a phenomenon typical of countries wherein governmental bureaucracy dominates every facet of life. This spawned hostility and resentment in wide sectors toward the regime, which ultimately led to the turnabout of 1977. It may be said that the success of Israeli socialism led to its downfall.

From a bird's-eye view it seems that the productivization processes, the heart's desire of Jewish reformers from the beginning of the Enlightenment period in the early nineteenth century, yielded fruit in the United States and Israel. In both of these immigrant societies the Jews were compelled to undergo proletarianization and engage in physical labor. The Jews of the United States integrated into the New Deal society with its Keynesian-statist foundations, whereas in Palestine the Histadrut society, and later Israeli statism, were built on the basis of similar ideas. In both countries the change lasted no longer than a generation or two. In the USSR, too, the Jews found their way to the big cities and higher education and evaded attempts to settle them in agriculture in the Crimea or Birobidzhan. The Jewish family's investment in educating their children led to a very rapid rate of social and economic mobility. With mobility and change of status occurred a change in worldview. The shift from socialist to liberal-individualistic outlooks, from emphasis on society to emphasis on the individual, took place on both sides of the Atlantic. Is the Jew by his very nature a member of the educated middle class, an urbanite in need of constant contact with cultural endeavor, and incapable of being a proletarian unless he is under the pressure of extenuating circumstances? Is socialism a regime that succeeds only in societies with a relatively low standard of living, which loses its appeal with improved social conditions? And perhaps socialism is a regime that eventually fails, aside from Europe, where it has flourished as an integral part of a long

tradition? And in general, did Marx's mythological proletariat, which had nothing to lose but its chains, ever really exist?

In recent years the call for social justice has been heard again. Capitalism and the free market have proved the ability to generate wealth, but have displayed no talent regarding its distribution. Can there be a free society, a free market, and a more equal distribution of wealth? This question is socialism's – and capitalism's – new test throughout the world. In Israel, socialism in its Zionist–constructivist form made some great achievements, but its collapse since the late 1970s has been more rapid than in other Western countries, and it seems that the contradictions inherent in the Zionist–socialist model can provide several valuable insights as we approach this new test.

Delegitimation of Israel or Social-Historical Analysis?

The Debate over Zionism as a Colonial Settler Movement

Yoav Peled

INTRODUCTION

Alan Dershowitz's book *The Case for Israel* is a catalog of sins Israel is accused of by its enemies, systematically refuted by the author.¹ The very first chapter deals with the accusation that Israel is a colonialist, imperialist state. Dershowitz concludes his refutation of this claim by stating that "the claim that Israel is a colonial or imperialist state is so farfetched that it simply serves to illustrate how language is willfully distorted in the service of a partisan agenda."²

According to Uri Ram:

In Israel ... the identification of Zionism as a colonial movement is usually regarded as slanderous. The consideration of Israel as a colonialist society, implying that the Jews conquered and expropriated a settled land and exploited or expelled the native dwellers, goes against the grain of the Zionist self-portrayal as a movement of a people without land returning to a land without people. It is considered repugnant by Israel's Zionist left wing, which traditionally has professed self-liberation and redemption of a wasteland through toil, and by Israel's right wing, which traditionally has advocated that the "Whole Land of Israel" is an incontestable asset of the Jewish people by "historical rights" and providential covenant.³

Chaim Gans, a prominent liberal Zionist legal scholar, admitted that

¹ Allan Dershowitz, *The Case for Israel* (New York: Wiley, 2003).

² Dershowitz, *Case for Israel*, p. 21.

³ Uri Ram, "The Colonization Perspective in Israeli Sociology: Internal and External Comparisons," *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 6 (1993), pp. 327–350.

Zionist practice necessarily involved a certain degree of colonial practice (in the sociological–descriptive sense of the term), because the Zionist enterprise involved the settlement of one ethno-cultural group in a land already occupied by another group for generations, and the new settlers did not intend to integrate with the local group and adopt its culture but rather to establish a society separate and distinct from the local group, culturally and nationally.⁴

However, he contended that while post-Zionist scholars (Gershon Shafir and the present author are specifically referred to) “believe that the very classification of the original Zionist practice as colonial indicates that it was unjust,” the justness or otherwise of Zionism should be determined by considering its nationalist *ends*, rather than its colonialist *means*.⁵ In this chapter I would like to consider the question of Zionism as a colonial settlement movement in its “sociological–descriptive sense” only (henceforward “the colonial thesis”), leaving its normative implications to the judgment of the reader.

In the sociological–descriptive sense, a colonial settler society is a new society established in an inhabited territory through the combination, in different degrees, of military control, settlement of nonindigenous populations, and the exploitation, expulsion, or annihilation of the indigenous population, justified by recourse to historical rights, divine mission, or cultural superiority.⁶ A colonial settlement movement is a social–political movement that works to colonize a particular territory in this way. This definition, it should be noted, does not refer to the *intentions* of the settlers or of the power holding military–political control over the territory being colonized; nor does it refer to any kind of affinity between that power and the settling population, other than the fact that settlement takes place under the auspices of that power.

A colonial settlement project establishes a triangular relationship among the power holding military–political control over the territory, the settler population, and the indigenous population. This is a dynamic

⁴ Chaim Gans, *A Political Theory for the Jewish People: Three Zionist Narratives* (Haifa: University of Haifa Press, 2013) (in Hebrew), p. 115.

⁵ Gans, *Political Theory*, p. 115; cf. Yoav Peled and Gershon Shafir, *Being Israeli: The Dynamics of Multiple Citizenship* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2005) (in Hebrew), pp. 27–37.

⁶ Gershon Shafir, “Israeli Society: A Counterview,” *Israel Studies*, I, 2 (1996), pp. 192–193; Oren Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy: Land and Identity Politics in Israel/Palestine* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), p. 12; Wolfgang Reinhard, *A Short History of Colonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 1–4; Andrea L. Smith, *Colonial Memory and Postcolonial Europe: Maltese Settlers in Algeria and France* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), p. 65.

relationship that, if the settlement project is successful, evolves toward subjugation, expulsion, or extermination of the indigenous population, disengagement from the controlling power, and the establishment of settler sovereignty. In Lorenzo Veracini's words:

To succeed, a settler project must emancipate itself from external supervision and control, establish local sovereign political and cultural forms, terminate substantive indigenous autonomies, and tame a landscape once perceived as intractably alien. In other words, a settler colonial project that has successfully run its course is no longer settler colonial.⁷

The classic examples of successful colonial settler societies are the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. (The settlement project can also fail, as happened in Algeria and in British East Africa.) A similar trajectory, I will argue, has characterized the project of Zionist settlement in Palestine.

At the turn of the twentieth century Palestine, economically underdeveloped and lacking natural resources, was not an especially attractive destination for immigration or colonial settlement. Thus only 3 percent of the 2 million Jews who had left Eastern Europe between 1882 and 1914 went to Palestine, and many of those subsequently emigrated to other countries. Those Jews who did settle in Palestine in that period did so primarily for ideological, religious, or nationalist reasons rather than material ones. Jewish settlers in Palestine, whether Zionist or pre-Zionist, faced further complications that made their experience different from that of most other colonial settlers: The indigenous Palestinian population was made up of peasants and urban dwellers, not hunter-gatherers as in most other settler colonies.⁸ This population could not be easily eliminated and did put up resistance to Jewish settlement from the very beginning.⁹ The Palestinian population could also not be induced to perform forced labor on the settlers' farms and had to be paid for their labor. Furthermore, until 1917 the Ottoman rulers of Palestine did not look favorably on Jewish settlement, and the British, committed as they were to the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine (see later discussion), did not go so far as to expropriate Palestinian land and turn it over to the

⁷ Lorenzo Veracini, "The Other Shift: Settler Colonialism, Israel, and the Occupation," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 42 (2013), p. 28.

⁸ Reinhard, *History*, p. 4.

⁹ Avi Shlaim, "The Balfour Declaration and Its Consequences," in *Yet More Adventures with Britannia: Personalities, Politics and Culture in Britain*, ed. William Roger Louis (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), pp. 261, 268.

Jews. As a result, until they achieved sovereignty in 1948, the Jewish settlers had to buy land from the indigenous Palestinians or from absentee landlords in the surrounding Arab countries. As a result of the scarcity of available arable land, its steeply rising price, and the limited financial resources of the Zionist movement, only 6.59 percent of the land area of Palestine had been purchased by 1947.¹⁰

These peculiar characteristics of the Zionist settlement project are used by opponents of the colonial thesis to argue for the noncolonialist nature of Zionism. Their arguments fall into two broad categories: those relating to the *intentions* of the Zionist settlers and those relating to their *practices*.¹¹ In the following sections I will present the arguments of the opponents of the colonial thesis and then try to assess their validity on the basis of the historical evidence.

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ZIONIST INTENTIONS

The most detailed and comprehensive critique of the colonial thesis was offered early on in the debate by Moshe Lissak, in the inaugural issue of the journal *Israel Studies*.¹² The “main weak point” of the colonial thesis, according to Lissak, was the failure of its adherents to recognize that Zionism was a national movement, “the most comprehensive expression of the modern national movement of the Jewish people . . . [aiming] to create a political entity in what was defined by all parts of the Jewish people [*sic*] as their historical territory.”¹³ Lissak admitted that, unlike all other national movements, in the Zionist case, “the creation of the national state involved the migration of the population from one territory to another.”¹⁴ However, “*aliyah*/immigration to the country . . . had particular [i.e. nationalist] motivations, in comparison

¹⁰ Between 1922 and 1944 the price of rural land in Palestine rose from 34 to 1050 US dollars per acre. In 1944 the price of rural land in the United States was 45 US dollars per acre; Warwick P. Tyler, *State Lands and Rural Development in Mandatory Palestine, 1920–1948* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2001), p. 10.

¹¹ These arguments are summarized succinctly in Aviva Halamish, “Mandatory Palestine: A Dual Society or a Colonial Reality?” *Zemanim*, 92 (2005), pp. 16–25 (in Hebrew).

¹² Moshe Lissak, “‘Critical’ Sociology and ‘Establishment’ Sociology in the Israeli Academic Community: Ideological Struggles or Academic Discourse?” *Israel Studies*, I, 1 (1996), pp. 247–294. For a rejoinder see Shafir, “Israeli Society.”

¹³ Lissak, “Sociology,” p. 274. ¹⁴ *Ibid.*

with any other settlement movement,” which, presumably, did not have such motivations.¹⁵ Thus, according to Lissak, the Zionist movement, being a national movement and a settlement movement at the same time, could not, by definition, be a *colonial* settlement movement. To buttress his argument, Lissak relied also on the “socioeconomic and ideological policy” of the Labor Zionist movement, which led the settlement project. Socialist–Zionist ideology, he claimed, prevented the development of colonialist symptoms in Eretz Yisrael, a potential for which did exist in the *moshavot* (plantation colonies) of the First Aliyah (1881–1904).¹⁶

Lissak, then, relied on the subjective intentions of the Zionist settlers and of their primary settlement movement in order to deny the colonial nature of Zionism. An even stronger version of this subjectivist argument is offered by Boaz Neumann, based on a Deleuzian theoretical framework.¹⁷ Neumann aims to refute the colonial thesis by portraying the Labor Zionist “pioneers” as rugged individualists motivated by an almost primal desire for the land, innocent of all ideology or colonialist design: “The pioneer wets the land with his sweat and thus transforms it from [mere] soil to land, from no-man’s land to Jewish land, marking the border between Jewish land and Arab soil.”¹⁸ Therefore,

it would be a mistake to impose on that love [of the Zionist pioneers for Eretz Yisrael], desire as I called it, concepts that are foreign to it. For example, to read into it romantic–Orientalist, colonialist, or, certainly, proto-fascist meanings. Such a reading would sin to the “Nietzschean spirit” of Zionist pioneering.¹⁹

An argument from intentions is a risky enterprise, since intentions cannot really be known, unless one takes the self-portrayal of the people involved at face value. Moreover, while the consideration of intentions is important for moral philosophy and legal practice, social–historical analysis must deal with actual consequences, which, as is very well known, can diverge significantly from the historical agents’ intentions. Be that as it may, there is no inherent logical or empirical contradiction between a settlement movement’s being national and its being colonial at the same time. Different national movements employed various ideological platforms for achieving their nationalist aims, such as liberalism,

¹⁵ Lissak, “Sociology,” p. 272. ¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Boaz Neumann, *Land and Desire in Early Zionism* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2009) (in Hebrew); Horit Herman Peled and Yoav Peled, “Post-Post-Zionism? Confronting the Death of the Two-State Solution,” *New Left Review*, 67 (2011), pp. 106–111.

¹⁸ Neumann, *Land and Desire*, p. 94. ¹⁹ *Ibid.*

socialism, even fascism, and there is no a priori reason to preclude the possibility that the Zionist movement used a colonial strategy to achieve its national purpose. Moreover, an examination of the Zionist discourse at the early stages of settlement reveals that a colonial terminology and colonial analogies were used openly by the Zionist settlers and by their sponsoring organizations.

According to Ran Aaronsohn, a fierce opponent of the colonial thesis, “the first Jewish settlers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries referred to themselves as ‘colonists’ and their settlements as ‘colonies’ [*moshavot*].”²⁰ The main financial body set up in 1899 to facilitate the settlement project was named *Jewish Colonial Trust* (currently Bank Leumi). The company, set up in 1924 by Baron Edmond de Rothschild to manage the colonies he sponsored in Palestine, was named *Palestine Jewish Colonization Association* (PICA); it took over the management of the Rothschild colonies from the Palestine Committee of the worldwide *Jewish Colonization Association* (ICA).²¹ In 1927 Chaim Arlosoroff, leader of Hapoel Hatzair (Young Worker) Party, wrote, “It seems to me that the territory of the South African state, with its labor question, is almost the only case in which the similarity of the objective conditions and the problems allows us to make a comparison” with Jewish settlement in Palestine.²² And as late as 1947 one could read, in the preface to a picture book of Palestine, that “despite natural and political handicaps, Jewish colonization, once begun continued – stubbornly. It changed the physiognomy of the land. It produced a new kind of Jew. It re-created Jewish Palestine.”²³ Aaronsohn explains this usage by the fact that until the era of decolonization words derived from the root *colone* did not

²⁰ Ran Aaronsohn, “Settlement in Eretz Israel – a Colonialist Enterprise? ‘Critical’ Scholarship and Historical Geography,” *Israel Studies*, I, 2 (1996), p. 217.

²¹ Jacob Goldstein and Bat-Sheva Stern, “PICA – Its Organization and Goals,” *Katedra*, 59 (1991), pp. 103–125 (in Hebrew); Anne Ussishkin, “The Jewish Colonisation Association and a Rothschild in Palestine,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, 9 (1973), pp. 347–357.

²² Chaim Arlosoroff, “On the Question of Organization,” in *The Writings of Chaim Arlosoroff*, III, 2nd edn. (Tel Aviv: Stybel, 1934), p. 158 (Hebrew); cf. Zachary Lockman, “Land, Labor and the Logic of Zionism: A Critical Engagement with Gershon Shafir,” *Settler Colonial Studies*, II, 1 (2012), pp. 9–38. In 1930 Hapoel Hatzair united with the larger Achdut Haavoda to form Mapai, which was the dominant political party in the *yishuv* and in Israel from 1933 to 1977. Arlosoroff was murdered in 1933. The circumstances surrounding his murder are still unclear.

²³ Jacob Rosner, “Preface,” in *A Palestine Picture Book*, ed. Jacob Rosner (New York: Schocken Books, 1947), [no p. no.]. I am grateful to Corey Robin for calling this book to my attention.

carry negative normative connotations, so the Zionist settlers felt free to use them to describe their own enterprise.²⁴

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ZIONIST PRACTICES SETTLEMENT STRATEGIES

A well-known theme running through the historical literature on the Labor Zionist settlement project is that the settlers had to adjust their ideology to the realities on the ground, first and foremost to the increasingly violent resistance of the indigenous Palestinian population.²⁵ Thus, in practice the Zionist settlers had to adopt strategies that seemed, at least, to contradict their universalist, even socialist values. “Constructive socialism” was the overall label used to describe these adjustments of the ideology to the conditions of Ottoman and Mandatory Palestine.²⁶

Lissak admitted that

the need to confront the “Arab Problem” created a long series of suggestions and solutions. In some of them one may indeed detect signs of a colonial character: I refer here to the [First Aliyah] moshavot, or at least some of them. These signs could have developed into the dominant structure throughout the course of Jewish settlement, but it did not happen that way.²⁷

The reason the plantation colony model of the First Aliyah did not become dominant, according to Lissak, was that the Labor Zionist movement, which was ideologically opposed to it, became the predominant political force in the *yishuv* (Jewish community in prestatehood Palestine) and in the World Zionist Organization. Instead of the plantation colonies,

²⁴ Aaronsohn, “Settlement in Eretz Israel,” p. 217; see also Anita Shapira, “Politics and Collective Memory – the Debate over the ‘New Historians,’” in *From Vision to Revision: A Hundred Years of Historiography of Zionism*, ed. Yechiam Weitz (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1997), pp. 367–391.

²⁵ Joseph Gorni, “The Idea of Constructive Socialism in the Poale Zion Party (Eretz Israel) During the Years 1906–1914,” *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies*, II, 2: *Jewish History in the Mishnah and Talmud Period, in the Middle Ages and Modern Times; The Jewish Labour Movement; Contemporary Jewish History; The Holocaust* (in Hebrew), p. 115.

²⁶ Gorni, “Constructive Socialism.” Yonathan Shapiro and Zeev Sternhell have shown that in Labor Zionist ideology the socialist, universalist element was completely subordinate to the nationalist one. See Yonathan Shapiro, *The Formative Years of The Israeli Labour Party: The Organization of Power, 1919–1930* (London: Sage, 1976); Zeev Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

²⁷ Lissak, “Sociology,” p. 274.

which employed Palestinian labor on Jewish-owned farms, the Labor movement “preferred to cut itself off almost completely from the Arab sector and to build an entirely autonomous system; that is, an economic, political and cultural structure that would not be dependent upon the Arab population.”²⁸

According to Lissak, when the Labor Zionist movement assumed the leadership of the settlement project, it could choose among four possible settlement strategies: “this upon that” (a better translation would have been “one upon the other”), “this instead of that,” “this together with that,” and “this alongside that.” “This upon that” was the plantation colony strategy of Rothschild and the First Aliyah, and it indeed had a potential to develop into settler colonialism, but it was abandoned by the Labor movement. “This instead of that” meant the expulsion of the indigenous Palestinian population, as indeed happened during the 1948 war, but this was “in limited scope” [*sic*] and “there are in fact numerous versions regarding the number of people expelled, just as there are regarding the existence or non-existence of an ‘emergency plan’ for the execution of such an expulsion.”²⁹ “This together with that” was the binational option that had only few supporters in the *yishuv* and even fewer ones among the Palestinians.

“This alongside that,” the option chosen by the Zionist Labor movement, “was of an *explicitly anti-colonialist tendency*” (emphasis added) and

drew upon an ideology which sought to create, not only a democratic and egalitarian [Jewish] society, but also a structure that would realize the Borochovia idea of “reversing the occupational pyramid” of the Jewish people. The new “pyramid” needed to assure that the Jews would fill all levels of the employment structure, and first and foremost those occupations involving physical labor. Only thus, according to the Labor movement, would it be possible to bring about the productivization of the Jewish people. The attainment of this goal would also mean the shaping of an autonomous socio-economic structure alongside that of the Arab population. Such a situation would allow for the exchange of goods, wealth and manpower, albeit in a very limited way, between the two distinct economic-political systems, without brutal exploitation of either side by the other.³⁰

²⁸ Lissak, “Sociology,” pp. 274–275.

²⁹ Lissak, “Sociology,” p. 275. According to the UN the number of Palestinian refugees who left their homes during the 1947–1949 war was around 700,000, or 85 percent of the total Palestinian population in the area that became the State of Israel; www.unrwa.org/palestine-refugees (accessed August 20, 2014).

³⁰ Lissak, “Sociology,” p. 276.

Lissak's classification of the possible settlement strategies is useful, but in a way that defeats his overall purpose. With the exception of the binational option, all the other three strategies were employed by the Zionist settlers at one time or another, and the move from one strategy to the next was not motivated by ideology but by the actual material conditions prevailing on the ground. As demonstrated by Gershon Shafir in his pathbreaking book, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict 1882-1914*, the market-based plantation colony strategy of the First Aliyah was abandoned not for ideological reasons, but because it could not provide employment for the newly arriving settlers of the Second Aliyah (1904-1914). The privately owned farms of the *moshavot* were meant to be economically self-sustaining, so their owners preferred the experienced and less costly Palestinian workers to their ideologically motivated but inexperienced and more expensive cor-religionists. By the same token, the financial resources available to the Zionist movement at the time did not afford the possibility of purchasing sufficient amounts of land in order to establish plantation colonies for the newly arriving settlers. Thus, a market-circumventing strategy was required if the settlement project was to succeed.³¹

The newly adopted "labor settlement" strategy – self-employing cooperative settlements on nonalienable, nationally owned land – was not devised by the Zionist Labor movement in Palestine but by Franz Oppenheimer, a German Jewish physician-turned-sociologist who had been involved, as a physician, in the German settlement project in East Prussia. Oppenheimer's ideas were adopted by Otto Warburg and Arthur Ruppin, chairman of the World Zionist Organization's Palestinian Affairs Department and head of its Palestine Office, respectively, as a solution to the crisis of the Second Aliyah. The new strategy had to be sold to the leaders of the emergent Labor movement in Palestine, who saw themselves, ideologically, as revolutionary workers, not settlers. The Labor movement agreed to adopt the new strategy, now christened as "constructive socialism," only when they realized that the "conquest of labor" from the Palestinians could not be achieved without the "conquest of Land."³²

³¹ Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914*, updated edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

³² Joseph Vitkin, "Conquest of Land and Conquest of Labor" [a lecture delivered in 1908], *Hapoel Hatzair Chapters*, ed. Eliezer Schochat and Chaim Shorer, VIII, Book 2 (Tel Aviv: N. Twersky, 1936), pp. 9-14 (in Hebrew), cited in Shafir, *Land, Labor*, pp. 161-162, see also pp. 151-165; Gorni, "Constructive Socialism," pp. 116-117.

As we saw, according to Lissak, the dual economy strategy, based on ethnically segregated land and labor markets, was an “explicitly anti-colonialist tendency.” The assumption underlying this assertion is that economic and social separation meant that the settlers had minimal impact on the indigenous population, although both coexisted within one political formation. However, as pointed out by Arlosoroff already in 1927, the implantation of a modern economic sector into a traditional society, with no political boundaries to protect the latter, cannot but have a negative effect on the traditional, indigenous population: “The entire structure of conventional concepts, tradition and inherited social rules – collapses in the face of the new forms that the new settlement brings with it. The social structure is undermined under the impact of the new society being formed in the country.”³³ In Neumann’s picturesque language (drawn from the writings of the “pioneers” themselves), unlike the “pioneers,” “the Palestinians . . . ‘never cleared their fields of stones and never improved them, they never plowed with heavy, expensive European plows . . . Really, . . . [the Palestinian peasant] does not plow, he just scratches or slightly bruises the surface of his land with his shovel.’”³⁴ How could the competition between these two agricultural sectors not impact negatively the one that “just scratches the surface of [its] land,” instead of plowing it?

As for the land market:

Jewish land purchased from *fellahin* [Palestinian peasants] . . . led to displacement and eviction of tenants and to attempted, if unsuccessful, countermeasures by the Mandatory authorities. Consequently, in 1930, the Arab Executive demanded for the first time that the Mandate legally prohibit the sale of land to Jews. Subsequently, this demand “became a tenet of the Palestinian Arab national movement,” and the land question from then on was regarded as “a matter of life and death” no less than the immigration problem.³⁵

Still, the rapidly rising price of land induced Palestinian landowners to continue to sell land to the Zionists, in disregard of the ideological injunction and, after 1939, legal prohibition against it. The Palestinian peasants, displaced from the land and unable to find alternative employment,

³³ Arlosoroff, “Question of Organization,” p. 139.

³⁴ Neumann, *Land and Desire*, p. 104.

³⁵ Shafir, “Israeli Society,” p. 196, citing Yehoshua Porath, “The Land Problem as a Factor in Relations among Arabs, Jews, and the Mandatory Government,” in *The Palestinians and the Middle East Conflict* (Ramat-Gan: Turtle dove, 1978), pp. 507–543.

were concentrated in urban shanty towns and provided the spark that ignited the Arab Revolt of 1936–1939.³⁶

MOTHER COUNTRY

Another major argument employed by opponents of the colonial thesis is that, unlike all other colonial projects, the Zionist movement did not have a “mother country” that provided it with political and military protection and on whose behalf resources were extracted from the colony. However, this argument holds true for the Ottoman period only, during which Theodor Herzl made frantic but unsuccessful efforts to secure for Zionism a colonial “charter” from various European powers and even from the Ottoman sultan himself. But even during that period, those Jewish settlers who were citizens of European countries, as most of them were, received legal and other protections from their respective countries’ consuls-generals, under the “capitulations” regime then prevailing between the Ottoman Empire and the European powers.³⁷

The Zionist leader who did succeed in securing a “charter” from a major European power was, formally at least, Chaim Weizmann, who was the key Zionist leader in Britain at the time of the Balfour Declaration in 1917.³⁸ The declaration committed Great Britain to support the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine, “it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of *existing non-Jewish communities* in Palestine,” that is, the civil and religious (but not political) rights of the indigenous Palestinian population, which constituted 90 percent of the population of

³⁶ Baruch Kimmerling and Joel S. Migdal, *The Palestinian People: A History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 109–111; Raya Adler (Cohen), “The Tenants of Wadi Hawarith: Another View of the Land Question in Palestine,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 20 (1988), pp. 197–220.

³⁷ Arnon Golan, “European Imperialism and the Development of Modern Palestine: Was Zionism a Form of Colonialism?” *Space and Polity*, 5 (2001), pp. 140–141; see also The Palestine Mandate, Article 8, in Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), p. 284.

³⁸ Mayir Vereté, “The Balfour Declaration and Its Makers,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, 6 (1970), pp. 48–76; James Renton, “Flawed Foundations: The Balfour Declaration and the Palestine Mandate,” in *Britain, Palestine and Empire: The Mandate Years*, ed. Rory Miller (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 15–37; Jonathan Schneer, *The Balfour Declaration: the Origins of the Arab–Israeli Conflict* (New York: Random House, 2010); Shlaim, “Balfour Declaration.”

Palestine at the time.³⁹ Under strong British pressure, the League of Nations Mandate over Palestine, granted to Great Britain in 1922, incorporated the Balfour Declaration almost verbatim and added a crucially important provision:

The Administration of Palestine, while ensuring that the rights and position of other sections of the population are not prejudiced, shall facilitate Jewish immigration under suitable conditions and shall encourage, in co-operation with the Jewish agency . . . close settlement by Jews on the land, including State lands and waste lands not required for public purposes.⁴⁰

The mandatory government's attempts to comply with the land transfer provision of this article encountered fierce legal opposition from the Palestinians and were eventually abandoned, generating a major source of friction between Britain and the Zionist settlers.⁴¹

Article 4 of the Palestine Mandate provided that

an appropriate Jewish agency shall be recognised as a public body for the purpose of advising and co-operating with the Administration of Palestine in such economic, social and other matters as may affect the establishment of the Jewish national home and the interests of the Jewish population in Palestine, and, subject always to the control of the Administration, to assist and take part in the development of the country.

The Zionist organisation, so long as its organisation and constitution are in the opinion of the Mandatory appropriate, shall be recognised as such agency. It shall take steps in consultation with His Britannic Majesty's Government to secure the co-operation of all Jews who are willing to assist in the establishment of the Jewish national home.⁴²

Needless to say, no parallel "Arab agency" was provided for to deal with the interests and concerns of the indigenous Palestinian population. The Palestinians repeatedly asked for the establishment of representative institutions of the entire population of Palestine to "advise and assist" the mandatory government, but these demands were frustrated in the face of fierce Zionist opposition.⁴³

Lissak concluded, somewhat incongruously, that

³⁹ <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/o/E210CA73E38D9E1D052565FA00705C61> (accessed August 14, 2014), emphasis added; Shlaim, "Balfour Declaration," p. 258.

⁴⁰ The Palestine Mandate, Article 6, in Khalidi, *Iron Cage*, p. 283.

⁴¹ Jeremy Forman and Alexandre Kedar, "Colonialism, Colonization and Land Law in Mandate Palestine: The *Zor al-Zarqa* and *Barrat Qisarya* Land Disputes in Historical Perspective," *Theoretical Inquiries in Law*, IV, 2, (July 2003), pp. 491–540.

⁴² The Palestine Mandate, Article 4, in Khalidi, *Iron Cage*, p. 283.

⁴³ Khalidi, *Iron Cage*, pp. 31–64.

it is . . . true that the Yishuv was helped at a certain rather critical stage by the British government, which provided it with legal sanction for the building of its institutions and also helped, at least during the period of the Third Aliyah [1919–1924], in providing it with employment. Without this help, the attrition of this Aliyah would have been even greater than that during the Fourth Aliyah [1924–1931] – assuming the latter would have taken place at all after the failure of the preceding one. This help also assisted the construction of the central political, socio-economic, and cultural framework which facilitated the creation of Jewish autonomy in the Land of Israel. Thus, various signs of colonial structure were neutralized in a way that was not insignificant.⁴⁴

Derek Penslar, another opponent of the colonial thesis, concluded that the British Mandatory regime developed Palestine’s physical infrastructure, sanctioned mass Jewish immigration, and encouraged the development of Jewish political and even military institutions. Clearly, without British support the Zionist project would have died in the cradle. Yet Britain’s role was inconsistent, vacillating between promoting and throttling the Zionist project. Britain was more a stepfather than a biological parent of the Jewish state.⁴⁵

Britain’s only serious effort to “throttle” the Zionist project was the White Paper of 1939, promulgated in the wake of the Arab Revolt of 1936–1939.⁴⁶ Issued on May 17, 1939, the White Paper abandoned the Peel Commission’s partition plan of 1937 and called for the establishment of a unitary, democratic independent state of Palestine within ten years. Jewish immigration to Palestine was to be limited to seventy-five thousand for the next five years, subject to the country’s “economic absorptive capacity,” and would later be contingent on Arab consent. In addition, stringent restrictions were imposed on land acquisition by Jews. The White Paper was viewed by the Zionists as a betrayal of Britain’s commitment to the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine, and David Ben-Gurion famously vowed to “fight Hitler as if there were no White Paper and fight the White Paper as if there were no Hitler.”

⁴⁴ Lissak, “Sociology,” p. 275; cf. Ilan Pappé, “Zionism as Colonialism – a Comparative Look at Diluted Colonialism in Asia and Africa,” in Weitz, ed., *Vision and Revision*, pp. 363–365 (in Hebrew).

⁴⁵ Derek Penslar, *Israel in History: The Jewish State in Comparative Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 93–94. A minor indication that this stepfather was a rather benevolent one is the fact that three major streets in Tel Aviv are still named after key British personalities involved in occupying Palestine in 1917 – King George V, Field Marshal Allenby, and Arthur James Balfour.

⁴⁶ Kimmerling and Migdal, *Palestinian People*, pp. 102–131; Khalidi, *Iron Cage*, pp. 105–125.

The actual consequences of the White Paper were rather paltry, however. During the Second World War Jewish immigration to Palestine was practically halted, and fell far short of the seventy-five thousand immigrants allowed by the White Paper. Immigration restrictions became effective only after the war, when a campaign of illegal immigration (known as Aliyah B) was set up by the Jewish Agency that sent eighty-four thousand Jewish immigrants to Palestine between 1945 and 1948.

As far as land acquisition was concerned, the 1940 Lands Law implementing the directives of the White Paper divided the country into three zones: Zone A, where transfer of land from anyone to non-Palestinian Arabs was prohibited, with some exceptions; Zone B, where transfer of land by Palestinian Arabs to non-Palestinian Arabs was prohibited, also with some exceptions; and the Free Zone, on the coastal plain already heavily populated by Jews, where no restrictions applied. Zones A and B comprised 95 percent of the land area of Palestine.

In actual fact, in the years the White Paper was in effect, between 1939 and 1947, the Jewish National Fund (JNF), the primary Zionist land purchasing body, succeeded in purchasing 454,471 dunams (about 110,000 acres), 75 percent of them in Zones A and B. True, 182,188 dunams purchased in the restricted zones were purchased from other Jews, a practice adopted as a result of the restrictions imposed by the Lands Law. But the remaining 158,665 dunams purchased from Palestinians or from third parties (such as Christian churches) were more or less equal to the amount of land purchased between 1930 and 1939.⁴⁷ Assuming that the British officials of the Mandatory Government were not totally inept or corrupt, it is quite clear that they turned a blind eye to the different ruses used by the JNF in order to circumvent the restrictions on land acquisition.

The final point that needs to be considered in relation to Great Britain's role as the Zionist settlers' "mother country" is Britain's motivation in sponsoring Zionist settlement in Palestine. Opponents of the colonial thesis argue that colonialism necessarily involves the transfer of resources from the colony to the metropole, and since no such transfer of resources took place in Palestine, Zionism was not a colonial movement. This argument confuses two types of colonial projects, extractive colonies

⁴⁷ A[braham] Granovsky, *The Land Regime in Eretz-Yisrael* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1949) (in Hebrew), p. 274; Yossi Katz, *The Battle for the Land: The History of the Jewish National Fund (KKL) before the Establishment of the State of Israel* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2005), pp. 167–230.

and settlement colonies.⁴⁸ But, clearly, if Britain did function as the Zionists' "mother country," it had to have an interest in doing so.

Discounting personality-based explanations, such as Prime Minister Lloyd George's and Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour's Zionism and/or antisemitism, or Weizmann's social skills or contribution to Britain's war effort, Mayir Vereté analyzed in great detail the evolution of Britain's policy toward Palestine during the First World War and the interests that lay behind it. Those interests, Vereté argued, were of two kinds: short-term and long-term. The long-term interest was to have a British controlled buffer zone between Egypt, and especially the Suez Canal – lifeline of the empire – and potential threats originating in Russia, in Germany, in the future French possessions in the Middle East, or from Britain's Arab allies themselves. The Sykes–Picot agreement, signed in 1916, envisioned a British–French–Russian (and possibly additional powers') condominium over Palestine and Britain was eager to extricate itself from this agreement and gain exclusive control over the country. The logic behind this policy and its connection to Zionism was made clear after the conquest of Palestine by Sir Ronald Storrs, Britain's military governor of Jerusalem and later of Palestine, who said that "Zionism . . . [was] forming for England 'a little loyal Jewish Ulster' in a sea of potentially hostile Arabism."⁴⁹

Unlike the long-term interest, the short-term interest was common to Britain and its wartime allies and was used to persuade the latter to endorse, or at least acquiesce in, the Balfour Declaration. Jewish public opinion favored Germany during the war, because of tsarist Russia's treatment of the Jews. This was an important political fact because American Jews (like the Irish Americans and German Americans) opposed the entry of the United States into the war, and American Jewish bankers refused to float British war bonds in the United States. The idea of issuing the Zionists a colonial "charter" over Palestine had been crystallized already in 1916, in the Liberal British government headed by Asquith, as a measure that would sway American Jewish opinion behind the Allies' war effort and legitimize Britain's claim of exclusive rule over Palestine.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ David Lloyd, "Past Is Present: Settler Colonialism in Palestine," *Settler Colonial Studies*, 2 (2012), p. 66; Shafir, "Israeli Society," p. 193.

⁴⁹ John Quigley, *The Case for Palestine: An International Law Perspective* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 8.

⁵⁰ Renton, "Flawed Foundations," pp. 16–20; Schneer, *Balfour Declaration*.

In sum, then, Great Britain's intentions, as expressed in official documents, its actions on the ground, and its interests in the Middle East, all point to its playing the role of a "mother country" to the Zionist settlers in Palestine. Relations between the two sides were strained as a result of the Arab revolt and the White Paper of 1939, and the disintegration of the British Empire following the Second World War transformed the geopolitical constellation of interests. Having lost India, Britain no longer needed control over the Suez Canal and had neither the resources nor the desire to be entangled between the Jews and the Arabs in Palestine.

Looking back at the period of the consolidation of Zionist settlement, 1882–1948, Arnon Golan has observed that

the Zionist movement would not have attained the establishment of an independent Jewish state without the prevalence of non-formal and especially formal European imperialism in Palestine. Before 1914, European emissaries in Palestine were inclined to support Jewish merchants and the urban elite, which they considered as part of the local collaborators group. Moreover, prominent Zionist leaders such as Herzl and Weizmann assumed that Zionism would gain from becoming a fully-fledged collaborator with the imperial powers in Palestine. They strove to convince European leaders that Jews would form the white settler group in the country, considered as the ideal collaborator group serving the interests of imperialist-colonialist powers, such as in Australia, New Zealand, Rhodesia and Algeria.⁵¹

And in Avi Shlaim's words:

The Zionists were not slow to grasp the importance for a weak national liberation movement of securing the sponsorship and support of a great power. Indeed, ensuring the support of the paramount Western power of the day remains to this day a basic tenet of Zionist foreign policy.⁵²

CONCLUSION

Opponents of the colonial thesis have used three types of arguments in defense of their claim that Zionism is not, and was not, a colonial settler movement: Zionist intentions were national, not colonial; Zionist practices diverged significantly from colonial practices; Zionism did not have a "mother country" supporting it. In this chapter I have shown that as long as it was politically correct to do so, the Zionist settlers referred openly to their aims and institutions in colonial terms; that Zionist

⁵¹ Golan, "European Imperialism," pp. 140–141.

⁵² Shlaim, "Balfour Declaration," p. 260.

practices were very much in line with colonial practices of exploiting and/or excluding the indigenous population; and that Great Britain did function as the Zionists' "mother country," albeit with the adjustments required by the specific conditions of Palestine at the time.

Moreover, viewing Zionism as a colonial settlement movement, I would argue, not only accounts more successfully for the historical evidence, it help us better understand contemporary Israel as well. Opponents of the colonial thesis are hard pressed to explain, for example, Israel's policy of settlement in, and permanent occupation of, the Palestinian territories captured in 1967, which many of them consider to be a colonial policy. Thus Lissak hints at "great changes" that took place in the character of the Zionist movement after 1967, but avoids trying to explain them:

Notwithstanding the existence of similarities in certain respects between the Jewish settlement and one or another form of colonialism, this similarity was purely structural, and did not affect one way or another the unique character of the Zionist movement. *This situation remained more or less true until 1967*, but a discussion of the great changes which took place in this outlook at that time goes beyond the parameters of the present paper.⁵³

One easy explanation that comes to mind would point to the fact that the Labor Zionist movement lost control over the Israeli state in 1977 and Revisionist Zionism that took over has indeed pursued a policy of colonial settlement. However, settling the occupied Palestinian territories began already in 1967, and the Labor movement had ten years in which it could reach a political settlement with the Palestinians and/or the surrounding Arab countries but failed to do so because it was internally split over the future of those territories.⁵⁴ As a matter of fact, the revisionist Likud Party relinquished control over the Sinai Peninsula almost as soon as it took power in 1977, whereas the previous Labor government under Golda Meir refused to do so.

Jewish settlers in the territories occupied since 1967, whether Labor Zionists or religious Zionists, have always maintained that the project

⁵³ Lissak, "Sociology," p. 276, emphasis added. How "structural" features can not affect the "character" of a phenomenon remains a mystery. See also Zeev Sternhell, "It's the Colonialism They Hate, Not Jews," *Haaretz*, September 19, 2014. www.haaretz.com/opinion/premium-1.616546 (accessed September 19, 2014); Ari Shavit, *My Promised Land: The Triumph and Tragedy of Israel* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2013), pp. 220–222.

⁵⁴ Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled, *Being Israeli: The Dynamics of Multiple Citizenship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 160–165.

they were engaged in was no different from the pre-1948 project of pioneering settlement. Indeed, it was a serious examination of this claim that led the pioneers of the colonial thesis, Baruch Kimmerling and Gershon Shafir, to conclude that the settlers were right in arguing that their practices were the natural continuation of the Zionist settlement drive that began in 1882. So if the post-1967 drive was colonial in nature, a characterization not really in dispute in mainstream Israeli social science, then the same was true for the pre-1948 drive as well.⁵⁵

Another feature of Israeli social relations for which the colonial thesis has a better explanation than mainstream Israeli social science is the inter-Jewish cleavage between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim (Jews hailing from Europe and from the Moslem world, respectively). The semiperipheral place of Mizrahim in Israeli society, where they are socioeconomically, culturally, and politically sandwiched between the Ashkenazim on top and the Palestinians at the bottom, has been widely discussed since the emergence of critical sociology in Israel in the late 1970s.⁵⁶ If Zionism is indeed a national liberation movement, as claimed even by the most liberal Zionists, how can one account for the existence of ethnoclasses within Jewish society in Israel? Mainstream, functionalist social science, of which Lissak is a prime representative, has sought to explain this reality through the use of modernization theory, arguing that the Mizrahim originated in traditional societies and had understandable difficulties adjusting to modern, industrial, socialist Israel. Granting them this point for the sake of argument, how can that explain the persistence of the inter-Jewish ethnic cleavage in the second and third generations, after the offspring of the original Mizrahi immigrant/settlers had gone through the Israeli educational system?

Drawing on theories of settler colonialism, Oren Yiftachel has noted that settler societies “are generally marked by a broad stratification into three main ethnoclasses: (a) a founding charter group . . . (b) a group of later immigrants from different cultural backgrounds . . . (c) dispossessed indigenous groups.”⁵⁷ Examples of these triadic relations are (a) the French settlers; (b) the Italian, Maltese, and Spanish immigrants; and (c) the Arab and Berber indigenous groups in Algeria, or (a) the WASPs, (b) later groups of European immigrants, and (c) Native Americans in the United States. According to Yiftachel,

⁵⁵ Shafir, “Israeli Society,” pp. 208–209.

⁵⁶ For a review see Shafir and Peled, *Being Israeli*, pp. 74–95.

⁵⁷ Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy*, p. 13.

The charter group establishes the state in its own vision, institutionalizes its dominance and creates a system that both assimilates later immigrants into the dominant culture and incorporates them unevenly into politics and the economy. At the same time, residential and economic segregation is maintained vis-à-vis marginalized immigrant and local groups. Such a system generally reproduces the dominance of the charter group for several generations.⁵⁸

In Israel the structuring of the society in this way began at the time of the Second Aliyah, when Yemenite Jewish immigrants, some of them induced for that purpose especially from Yemen, were used as foot soldiers in the unsuccessful campaign for the “conquest of labor” from the Palestinians. Unlike the Ashkenazi settlers of the Second Aliyah, however, who also failed to capture the plantation jobs from the Palestinians (see previous discussion), the Yemenite immigrants were not included in the transition to “labor settlements” (*kibbutzim* and *moshavim*) but were left to languish on the outskirts of the First Aliyah’s plantation colonies. The same fate awaited Mizrahi immigrants who arrived in the 1950s and 1960s: As Jews immigrating under the Law of Return, they were granted all civil and political rights, but they were socially and economically marginalized: settled in border areas and in towns deserted by Palestinians in 1948, they were used to beef up the military and to provide unskilled labor for the country’s agriculture and, later on, for its industrialization drive.⁵⁹

According to Andrea Smith,

status differences understood as ethnic in origin developed early on [in Algeria], and were grounded in access to land. This land, taken from the indigenous populations, was granted to the settlers, although unequally, and largely according to nationality. As the indigenous population experienced rapid pauperization, a status hierarchy based on ethnicity and class developed among Europeans.⁶⁰

In Israel, one of the most dramatic High Court of Justice decisions in the area of social rights pertained to the allocation of state land (i.e., formerly Palestinian land) as between *kibbutzim* and Mizrahi dwellers of public housing projects, on a petition brought in 2000 by the activist Mizrahi organization, the Democratic Mizrahi Rainbow.⁶¹

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* ⁵⁹ Shafir and Peled, *Being Israeli*, pp. 74–95.

⁶⁰ Smith, *Colonial Memory*, p. 64.

⁶¹ HCJ 244/00, *New Discourse Association for the Democratic Discourse et al. v. Minister of National Infrastructure et al.*; decision granted August 29, 2002. <http://elyon1.court.gov.il/files/00/440/002/E58/00002440.e58.htm> (accessed August 20, 2014); Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy*, pp. 131–133.

Gabriel Piterberg has shown that the claim of historical uniqueness is characteristic of colonial settler projects, and Zionism is no exception.⁶² But the fact that each project takes its own historically specific form does not detract from its colonial character. As I have shown in this chapter, the attempts to use the historical specificity of Zionism in order to argue that it does not fit the colonial–settler model do not stand up to historical scrutiny. Not only that, the insistence on denying the colonial–settler nature of Zionism obscures for the opponents of the colonial thesis major areas of the reality in contemporary Israel as well.

⁶² Gabriel Piterberg, *The Returns of Zionism: Myths, Politics and Scholarship in Israel* (London: Verso, 2008), p. 57; cf. Smith, *Colonial Memory*, p. 65.

Does the Left Have a Zionist Problem?

From the General to a Particular

Mitchell Cohen

When Heinrich Heine addressed what conversion from Judaism to Christianity meant, he declared baptism to be “the entrance ticket to European culture.” The poet was never at ease about his own baptism in 1825 and, oddly, suggested that there was something political, actually conservative, about what he did. As if chastising himself, he wrote a poem, “To an Apostate,” which brands Eduard Gans as a “scoundrel.” This Hegelian legal philosopher, who had played an important role in the development of Jewish historical studies, had also become a Christian. Heine misrhymed scoundrel – *Schurke* in the German – with “Burke,” as in Edmund, the author of *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), a bible of modern conservatism.

Heine was no conservative but he was deft at wordplay; it often allowed him to evoke with subtle jibe and even to mock himself while he mocked others. Had he been reading Burke with Jews in mind, though, he would have found in the *Reflections* of 1790 comments that resemble those made half a century later by a friend of his. Karl Marx, in his essay “On the Jewish Question“ (1843), identified Judaism with huckstering and capitalism and called for its transcendence. Jews, power, money – these words, or equivalents, repeated together like notes in a musical motif that aim to provoke this or that allusion in a listener’s mind, constitute a constant feature in anti-Jewish discourse. Burke was as frank as Marx. He worried that a future generation of aristocrats might “resemble . . . money-jobbers, usurers and Jews.” He worried about revolutions captured by “Jew-brokers contending with each other [as to] who could best remedy with fraudulent circulation

paper the wretchedness and ruin brought on their country by their degenerate councils.”¹

I start with this intellectual history in order to make an assertion and ask some questions.

The assertion: anti-Jewish notions and language are promiscuous. They mate with different viewpoints, both within and outside the left. The questions: Is anti-Zionism becoming the entrance ticket to the left? Is there a Zionist problem within the left? Or rather within parts of it, that reiterate, perhaps consciously but perhaps not, older tropes of anti-Judaism and antisemitism in contemporary discourse and then rush to immunize themselves from criticism by saying, “I am not antisemitic, I am anti-Zionist”? My answers to the preceding questions are “Increasingly, yes.” However, these answers require considerable qualifications, including a sharp distinction between the contention that anti-Zionism is inevitably antisemitic (it is not) and the assertion that it can promote antisemitism (it can). The themes and distinctions explored in what follows tell only part of a story; they can be found in older debates that have resumed noisily. My aim is, first, to advance some general propositions about cosmopolitanism and Zionism, and then to examine a particular case, that of a vocal anti-Zionist philosopher, Judith Butler. She exemplifies in many ways problems found in left anti-Zionism; these pose important intellectual problems to the left.

Some preliminaries will be useful.

Since its birth, Zionism has had varied foes. Prejudice can be ascribed to some of them but not – at least not fairly or without slander – to others. Think of some Jewish examples, not all from the “left.” In the early twentieth century the historian Simon Dubnow, a liberal, and the Jewish Workers’ Bund, composed of socialists, advocated Jewish national cultural autonomy in the diaspora. The Neturei Karta, a Hasidic sect, believed (and believes) on religious grounds that state building is a sin before the Messiah’s arrival. All three, for all their differences, proposed alternative visions for Jews and were committed to specifically Jewish kinds of life. Dubnow and the Bund saw no contradiction between full participation of Jews in their surrounding societies and Jewish culture and identity; they tried to be both universalistic and particularistic at once.

¹ Heine quoted in Jeffrey L. Sammons, *Heinrich Heine* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 109. Sammons points to the misrhyne with “Burke” on p. 108. For the Burke quotes, see Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in *The Works of Edmund Burke, III* (Boston: Little & Brown, 1839), pp. 69, 68.

Members of Neturei Karta are, by contrast, devoted to radical particularism in a community that is as closed as possible.

When I speak of “anti-Zionism” in these pages, my concern is not with these just mentioned programs or movements but with proponents of abstract universalism, including many who may speak of “difference” as an almost canonical category of life while finally suggesting freedom is possible only when all “particularisms” are shed. This kind of universalism either disregards the specifics of past persecutions and/or believes in universalizing solvents: Humanity or the Individual or the Classless Society for examples. It assumes that all oppressions are Oppression and sees Liberation likewise. It wants to dissolve all particularism rather than accept the idea of lives lived within the very tensions created inevitably between tugging universalism and tugging particularism. It is what I will call *integral cosmopolitanism*, an inverted counterpart of integral nationalism. What integral cosmopolitanism and integral nationalism share is monism: the first looks forward to an Esperanto humanity and assumes cultural differences are not only “constructed” – which of course they are – but are keys to all past discord. People who identify as part of a historical community or who are attached to a language are deemed myopic. “Everyone” and a Community become opposites.

The “Nation” plays for an integral nationalist the same role as “Everyone” does for the integral cosmopolitan. The integral nationalist assumes that the culture and life of a people or nation must always be interpreted from within. The space of integral cosmopolitanism is usually proclaimed to be everywhere – a place that has been visited by none and that constitutes an impossible domain for any real self-government, that is, meaningful democracy. The mental and material space of integral nationalism is usually defined by a piece of land that becomes reified as an end in itself rather than a means to life. All the while, integral nationalists wish for expansive borders (for their own kin) – the creation of a spreading Claustrophobia rather than an impossible Utopia. Examples of integral cosmopolitanism are found in those parts of the left that would deny to Jews self-definition as a people and any self-determined agency in response to oppression or within Jewish cultures. This can slip a little too easily into anti-Zionism. Advocacy of universalizing solvents does not necessarily imply prejudice; it suggests conversion to sameness, available to all. But when it denies any specificity to what was long called “the Jewish problem” – when it speaks of Jewish suffering but does not really need or want the Jewish part of it, however defined substantively – it can lend itself to prejudicial reasoning: Jews, especially self-identified Jews,

are always, somehow, the problem for not being universalist enough, even when faced with attackers who hate them quite specifically. We will often find something like this in anti-Zionism.

Integral cosmopolitanism was captured in Rosa Luxemburg's declaration "I cannot find a special corner in my heart for the ghetto. I feel at home in the entire world wherever there are clouds and birds and human tears."² Vladimir Jabotinsky, whose right-wing heirs have dominated Israel since 1977, exemplified integral nationalism. He insisted that his worldview was "monistic," both in his demand for a Jewish state that would recover an (imaginary) territorial integrity of ancient Israel and in his demand that all economic programs in a Jewish state be justified by a Jewish source, the Bible. He excoriated the Zionist left for diluting Jewish priorities with internationalist, socialist ideas and believed that "in things eternal the highest expression of Monism is Monotheism. In things secular, the highest expression of the Jew's monism is 'Palestine a Jewish state on both sides of the Jordan.' Individuals and classes are nothing but instruments of the state-idea."³

If there are different kinds of anti-Zionism and different kinds of Zionism, there are also different kinds of "left." For one obvious twentieth-century example, there was a left that was anti-Stalinist and a left that was blindly pro-Soviet. And as there were pro-Stalin Zionists as well as pro-Stalin anti-Zionists so there were pro-Zionist leftists and anti-Zionist leftists. After all, equality and democracy can be conceived in different ways. This is also to say that the charge, often emanating from the right, that "the left" was and is "antisemitic" and/or "anti-Zionist" is akin to saying that "Zionism is racist." Neither assertion can withstand serious historical or intellectual scrutiny. Just as there have been leftists who were (or are) antisemitic or anti-Zionist, so there are Zionists who are antiracist and there are Zionists who are racists.

Similar points may be made about Palestinian Arab nationalism. Its principal leader before 1948, Haj Amin el-Husseini, the mufti of Jerusalem, spent Second World War in Berlin championing the Third Reich. Palestinian nationalists received considerable support in the 1930s from fascist

² Rosa Luxemburg, Letter to Mathilde Wurm, February 16, 1917, as quoted in J. P. Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg* (London, Oxford, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 517.

³ Jabotinsky in a letter of February 20, 1932, see Mitchell Cohen, *Zion and State* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992 [originally 1987]), p. 139. For an alternative to both integral cosmopolitanism and integral nationalism, see, Mitchell Cohen, "Rooted Cosmopolitanism," *Dissent*, Fall 1990.

Italy. Nonetheless, blind supporters of the “Palestinian cause” – by “blind” I mean by contrast to reflective people, Palestinian and not Palestinian, who may see right and wrong on both sides of the morally complex Palestinian–Israeli conflict – try to equate the *Naqba* (the Palestinian disaster of 1948–1949) with the *Shoah* (the Holocaust). In 1948 the Zionist leadership, led by its social democrats, accepted compromise in the form of the partition of Palestine into two states. The League of Arab States along with Palestinian nationalists went to war to prevent it. Abdul Rahman Azzam Pasha, head of the Arab League, warned in fall 1947 of bloody war between his troops and the Zionists should the UN vote for partition. It would be

a war of extermination and momentous massacre which will be spoken of like the Tartar massacre or the Crusader Wars. I believe the number of volunteers from outside Palestine will be larger than Palestine’s Arab population . . . This war will be distinguished by three serious matters. First – faith: as each fighter deems his death on behalf of Palestine as the shortest road to Paradise; second [the war] will be an opportunity for vast plunder. Third, it will be impossible to contain the zealous volunteers arriving from all corners of the earth.⁴

As it happened, Azzam’s side lost decisively and Palestinian Arabs suffered dismal consequences; but nothing beyond political rhetoric allows these consequences to be compared to the Nazi genocide (as some left anti-Zionists do). And if you think of Nazi and fascist support for Palestinian nationalists in the 1930s, the mufti’s embrace of Hitler, the Arab League invasion and its chief’s earlier declaration, then you may sense why the Zionist leadership preferred not to second guess what its regional foes were doing in 1948–1949.

Yet this history also included cases of unjustifiable behavior on the Zionist side, such as the massacre at Deir Yassin by right-wing Jewish militias (which was denounced by Zionism’s social democratic leaders). It is important to be wary of “explanations” made a little too often for such acts. Likewise, it is necessary to address frankly the impact on Israel of what have now been several decades of growing right-wing dominance. The Jewish state has been transformed from a society rooted in a social democratic ethos into a polity whose priorities are set by integral nationalists, secular and religious, who have confused legitimate national

⁴ The interview appeared in a leading Egyptian daily. David Barnett and Efraim Karsch, “Azzam’s Genocidal Threat,” *Middle East Quarterly*, XVIII, 4, Fall 2011, www.meforum.org/3082/azzam-genocide-threat. Also see I. F. Stone, *This Is Israel* (New York: Boni and Gaer, 1948), p. 21.

security interests with their ideology. The elections that put Menachem Begin, Jabotinsky's heir, in power were effectively the political turning point. This rightward veer was interrupted by Yitzhak Rabin's brief tenure as a Labour prime minister and the negotiations of the Oslo Accords. After his assassination, and especially under the leadership of Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli governments have regularly taken positions and engaged frequently in activities that appear to disregard cavalierly the past support Israel received from the left abroad. Netanyahu's settlement policies, his fierce animosity toward "leftists," his nursing into politics of a younger generation of integral nationalists, and his avid cultivation of the American right seem almost designed to alienate Israel's friends on the left, including liberals in the Democratic Party.

Historians may one day discern that the combination of ideological commitment and cockiness of the "Jabotinsky movement" caused extensive damage to Israel's political culture, and to its relations with the world, including world Jewry, and helped to fertilize terrain for left-wing anti-Zionism and the "Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions" movement.

Bad Likud policies do not, however, make bad thinking on the left right.

II

Evidence of the promiscuity of antisemitism and anti-Zionism is easy to find. Jews were charged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with being the power behind world capitalism while they were indicted for playing the same role for communism. Charges often had a coda: accusers said they were not really prejudiced, but just reporting "facts" such as the number of Jewish names found in financial institutions or in left-wing parties. Innuendos suggest more: secretive networks that swayed and controlled established powers behind the scenes. Jewish communists were purged in Czechoslovakia in 1952 and in Poland in 1968 with accusations of covert ties to "Zionism." The district attorney Leander H. Perez, a leading figure in the New Orleans White Citizens' Council – ferocious foes of civil rights in the 1950s and 1960s – declared in 1960 that a "Communist Zionist web" had "unnatural influence" over Washington and used it to promote racial equality. For him "the most dangerous people in this country are Zionist Jews."⁵ Anyone familiar with the

⁵ Quoted in Neil R. McMillan, *The Citizen's Councils* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), pp. 70, 289.

books, articles, speeches, and pamphlets that promoted such themes in the past will find eerie echoes in some anti-Zionist pronouncements nowadays including uncritical talk about “the Israel lobby” or “Zionist” conspiracies. “Zionists” have been chastised from the left for being tools of Western imperialism and accused simultaneously of controlling the imperialists through a financially powerful “lobby.”⁶

Comparable allusions have originated in parts of the mainstream American right that are unsympathetic to strong ties between the United States and Israel. For example, Patrick J. Buchanan, the conservative journalist and sometime politician, blamed impending war in Iraq in 2003 on the takeover of the Republican Party by a cabal that did not have American interests at heart. These cabalists were “neoconservatives,” who are usually identified as particularly Israel-friendly (more precisely, friendly to its right wing) and have many Jewish names in their ranks. Buchanan knew that President George W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld were not neoconservatives (others in government were). That the Israeli government was skeptical of an American war (Jerusalem feared it would leave Iran dominant in the Persian Gulf) did not seem to interfere with Buchanan’s major point. Yet Buchanan protested in the same article that allegations of antisemitism against critics of Israel like him constituted a “veritable slander” that was “designed to nullify public discourse by smearing and intimidating foes and censoring and blacklisting them.”⁷

Judith Butler, who holds a chair in rhetoric at the University of California at Berkeley, made claims in a similar anti-Zionist spirit though in a different context that same year. Butler and Buchanan are from far distant poles of the political spectrum; she became known for challenging conventional notions of gender; he was famous as a right-wing populist who supported fiercely “family values,” insisting on unalterable foundations in social life. Butler made a profession out of insisting on philosophical grounds that there are no such permanent foundations in life or society but only social constructions fashioned and furthered by hierarchies on their own behalf. Yet Buchanan and Butler circled in the same orbit when it came to Israel.

Butler targeted Lawrence Summers, then president of Harvard University, in a tangled article denouncing a speech this ex-Treasury Secretary

⁶ This point is especially well made in Russell A. Berman, “From ‘Left-Fascism’ to Campus Anti-Semitism: Radicalism and Reaction,” *Democratiya*, 13, Summer 2008, p. 27.

⁷ Patrick J. Buchanan, *The American Conservative on Line*, March 23, 2003.

made a year earlier. Summers proposed that many recent attacks on Zionism and Israel, especially on campuses, were antisemitic in their impact, particularly when partisans applied standards to Israeli actions that they did not insist on elsewhere and even if their own purposes were not necessarily antisemitic. Butler contended that academic freedom was threatened when a man in a position of great academic power said such things. She tried to turn what she claimed was his argument upside down but ended up making a perplexing assertion: free inquiry required that Summers not speak out. Why? Even though he declared that his purpose was not to censor but to make a worried statement about a phenomenon in intellectual life, his comments had a “chilling effect” on political discourse. They threatened academic freedom “in effect, if not intent,” said Butler, because Summers really meant that “any criticisms of Israel” are effectively antisemitic. While proposing that she knew what Summers intended, she somehow protested that he had no business attributing a “hidden meaning” of prejudice to critics of Israel.⁸ True, Summers said explicitly that bad ideas should be countered only by good ones, but Butler, identifying herself as a “progressive” Jew making an “ethical” argument, imagined that she undid him by asking, “How does one vigorously advocate the idea that the Israeli occupation is brutal and wrong, and Palestinian self-determination a necessary goal, if the voicing of these views calls down the charge of antisemitism?” This question simply bracketed what Summers said – that there should not be censorship – and presented a blanket assertion of her own views.

Does this kind of thinking represent a “Zionist problem”? Whenever she addresses matters touching on Israel, no matter the circumstances, her conclusions are predicable: the unchangeable Zionist state is at fault. Antifoundationalism fades; anti-Zionist teleology emerges. Choosing an attack on Summers as an opportunity to put forth her views suggests a rhetorical move: find an easy target when you want to appeal to a liberal or left audience (such as the readership of the *London Review of Books*, where her article appeared). Summers is a pugnacious champion of an economic worldview (“neoliberalism”) reviled on the left; he was a controversial figure at Harvard.⁹ Still, he neither embraced all Israeli policies

⁸ Judith Butler, “No, It’s Not Anti-Semitic: Judith Butler Defends the Right to Criticize Israel,” *London Review of Books*, August 21, 2003, p. 19. Summers gave his speech on September 17, 2002.

⁹ I would also dissent strongly from his economic views and some of his statements, although without abusive characterization of him.

nor equated all criticism of them with “effective antisemitism.” Butler’s rhetoric “effectively” makes all anti-Zionists like her appear as victims of a witch hunt. Yet she provided no evidence that Summers tried to evict any professors because of their views. Her complaint, finally, was against his speaking political words.

It is surely true that the president of Harvard has great public authority. Yet it is unclear why a professor in her circumstances – tenured, highly paid, sought worldwide, and a participant, presumably, in the hiring, firing, and tenuring of faculty – has a right to deploy her authority if the president of a university ought not to raise difficult issues in public. Should not university presidents in an earlier era have come out against loyalty oaths demanded of professors by conservatives? Would Butler have chastised university presidents for raising doubts in public about the Vietnam War? Did their words freeze or promote academic debate?

Behind Butler’s case against Summers are a war of intellectual position and a lumpy mix of postmodernism, Foucault, and some Hegel. She also draws partly upon (and tries to remake) a notion made famous by J. L. Austin’s *Doing Things with Words*. In brief, this influential work of philosophical linguistics proposed that truth value is not the sole issue of speech. When you say something, you do something and consequently an utterance is “performative” – a “speech act.” Butler has tried to politicize sharply this notion by contending that hierarchical powers impose boundaries around the possibilities of speech. Counter “performing,” especially parody, is a way of fighting limitations through other speech acts. When a university president makes a speech, then, its specifics do not really matter. It is a political act reproducing hierarchy and needs to be resisted. An opposed performer strikes blows for liberation. Butler assumes that we are inhabited by cultural, political, and more general mental codes that constrict us; most of us are unaware of them, at least significantly so, and they urge roles on us. This is surely often so and it is a useful notion, if not especially original. Yet is there not a basic problem if you claim to believe in the value of free speech while you reduce speaking opponents to constrictors, to be dismissed by definition – of their job, for instance – and imagine you must only make a counterspeech with no need to defend its content?

Whether it is a matter of intent or effect, Butler seems to claim that anti-Zionists ought to have immunity from criticism whenever one of their critics says there can be a relation between anti-Zionism and anti-semitism. She says of Jews – but to draw an anti-Zionist conclusion – that

“victim” has become a “quickly transposable term.”¹⁰ That is undoubtedly true. But then she sounds as if she thinks her anti-Zionism always makes her and similarly minded people victims. Given the preeminence of postmodern faculty in elite universities for decades, Butler’s stance is oddly reminiscent of Buchanan’s avowed enemy, the neoconservatives, during the Reagan era. While they were generously funded, well awarded, and invited regularly to White House dinners, they presented themselves as if they were persecuted by a communist conspiracy that pervaded the academic, journalistic, and, more broadly, intellectual worlds. It was, rhetorically speaking, a useful way to deflect critics.

Butler dwells on the meaning of “victim” and charges that it slides “from minute to minute from the Jews killed by suicide bombers on a bus to the Palestinian child killed by Israeli gunfire.” Both “kinds of violence” ought to be confronted “in the name of justice.” Her own challenge, she adds, is due to ethical conclusions she draws from “Jewish suffering.”¹¹ These assertions might be defensible if Jewish ethics led her to unqualified pacifism. Yet matters seem to blur when violence is also called “resistance.” By contrast, if violence is ascribed to “the state,” her condemnation is without qualification and perhaps anarchist. Butler’s philosophy asserts that there can be many genders, not necessarily two, but she will not allow the same pluralism for types of states or nation-states or the possibility that states may change and change again.

On one obvious level, her point about Israeli and Palestinian victims is true: killing an innocent is killing an innocent, regardless of nationality or religion. Yet intent has a great deal to do with whether or not such a death is legitimately characterized as murder or a war crime. A suicide bomber’s culpability – and classification as a “terrorist” – lies in his or her intention to kill innocent noncombatants (or carry out orders to do so) for political (or religiopolitical) purposes. This is so whether the killer serves a state or a nonstate organization. It matters whether or not a Palestinian is a targeted noncombatant or whether he or she is an unintended victim of cross fire amid, say, an attempt by Israeli soldiers to thwart Hamas gunmen attacking other innocents. If the latter is the case, Butler’s assertion collapses for she is comparing an ethical orange to a moral apple on the basis of the fact that they are both fruit. Innocents die in all wars and the crucial question – you can ask it only if you are not a pacifist – is whether or not shooters (or pilots engaged in aerial attacks or missile or

¹⁰ Butler, “No, It’s Not Anti-Semitic,” p. 19.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

artillery launchers) act in reckless disregard of the possibility of innocent deaths or without concern for what is usually called proportionality – the extent of unintentional death during a justifiable act in given circumstances. Only if soldiers (or pilots) target innocent civilians can their actions be compared to that of a suicide bomber who assumes innocent civilians on a bus are legitimate targets. To say that innocent Palestinians have been killed is a truism. Even Paul Wolfowitz, the neoconservative hawk, said so to a pro-Israel rally in 2002 when he was George W. Bush's assistant secretary of defense. He openly spoke to the fact that not only Israelis but also "innocent Palestinians" were "suffering and dying." (He was booed.)¹²

Such distinctions about violence and culpability derive especially from the revival of just war theories in recent decades. These theories argue that justice requires us to ask whether a particular war is justifiable and if yes, then to ask whether a proposed act of war taken in it is appropriate to specific and legitimate goals; if innocent deaths cannot be prevented – they feature in all war – we must be asked whether their numbers are proportionate relative to a goal. Obviously this is not an exact "science"; it is a matter of moral judgment not a pocket calculator. In a famous interview in the early 1970s, Yasser Arafat provided a classic example of what this theory opposes. He declared that "the end of Israel is the goal of our struggle, and it allows for neither compromise not mediation. . . . revolutionary violence is the sole system . . . to liquidate Zionism . . . and to drive it out of Palestine forever." Even if, for argument's sake, you accepted this goal, you would have to scrutinize the proposed means. In explaining "revolutionary" violence, he dismissed objections to killing innocents because "civilians are the first accomplices of the gang that rules Israel."¹³

Butler is contemptuous of questions posed by just war theory. Michael Walzer's *Just and Unjust Wars* seems to be the target – sometimes he is named, sometimes not – of many of her comments. Sometimes, she seems to misread him in ways that resemble curiously her misrepresentation of Summers as censor.¹⁴ For instance, she charges that there has been "semantic sliding" in the use of the word "terrorism"; it is used to

¹² Wolfowitz quoted by Frank Rich in the *New York Times*, May 12, 2002, www.nytimes.com/2002/05/11/opinion/the-booing-of-wolfowitz.html.

¹³ "Yasir Arafat," in Oriana Fallaci, *Interview with History* (New York: Liveright, 1976), pp. 130–131, 134.

¹⁴ For Walzer's arguments see *Just and Unjust Wars* (New York: Basic Books, 1992) and *Arguing about War* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2004).

describe both insurgency and counterinsurgency. Walzer, she charges, refuses “to consider the reasons for certain kinds of violence” and therefore uses “a restrictive normative” vocabulary that excludes discussion of some forms of violence. When he opposes those who “explain” terrorism instead of branding it, she finds that this prevents us from knowing “precisely what we are talking about” as we have no way to understand “strong normative judgments.”¹⁵ It would seem that she is particularly agitated by denunciations of terrorism committed by Palestinians. But just war argument should have the same meaning for Palestinians and Israelis, for nonstate actors and states; that a cause is deemed just does not justify automatically all means. Butler like Arafat demurs from such an approach to means and ends.

But consider another Butler complaint. Its context was a discussion of Hannah Arendt’s views, or Butler’s understanding of them, about the birth of Israel and the later controversy about Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Butler declares that in 1948 this political philosopher rejected “the Zionist alternative that would consecrate the idea of the Jews as a ‘chosen people.’” Following on this, Butler sees in Arendt’s arguments against genocide an embrace of “universal ‘unchosenness’” – by contrast to Eichmann’s belief that he could choose with whom he shared the earth. In other words, Butler thinks that Arendt believed rightly that Zionists thought the way Eichmann did. This claim – frankly, it borders on intellectual demagoguery – ignores among things what any student of Zionism’s history knows: the Zionist mainstream, which was largely secular, argued for Jewish statehood on the grounds that it would make Jews “normal.” Israel’s Declaration of Independence justifies Jewish national self-determination by the right to be “like all other nations.” The new state, it said, would “foster the development of the country for the benefit of all of its inhabitants” and “ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants regardless of religion, race or sex.” Eichmann might have been surprised to learn that he shared these ideals. Butler may not like the idea of a nation-state or Israel, and she may think that Israel does not and cannot come close to approximating those ideals, but it is something else to present a fiction to suit her anti-Zionism when history does not do so. (There are scores of Zionist speeches and writings about “normalcy.”)

¹⁵ Judith Butler, “Non-Thinking in the Name of the Normative,” in *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso Books, 2010), p. 154.

Her discussions of “difference,” her criticisms of just war theory, and her characterizations of Israel share a refusal to make real, fair, and careful distinctions. During a question and answer period at a public event – a Berkeley teach-in in 2006 – Butler was asked whether the left could support Hamas and Hezbollah. She responded that “understanding Hamas, Hezbollah as social movements that are progressive, that are on the left, that are part of the global left, is extremely important.” It was possible, she added, to see them this way while being critical of “certain dimensions” of them. She has since insisted that fury at her remarks decontextualizes them. Yet anyone who saw this event on YouTube, as I did in 2010 (taking notes), can have little doubt about what she was saying and doing. Apparently, it has become unavailable on the Web; my efforts to see it in early 2014 were met with a screen saying the video is “private.”

At first glance this seems unobjectionable. Butler or the event’s organizers or the video’s maker ought to have the right to remove it if it landed on a disagreeable Web site or was posted without permission. But then: it was a public event at a public university and the speaker has been a vigorous critic of a university president for raising political questions in public. Should not Butler want it to be available so as to confirm that it has been represented unfairly? Butler has said that her comments were simply a response to a question “by a member of an academic audience” and denies she supported Hamas or Hezbollah. She defended herself on an anti-Zionist Web site after criticisms of her statement appeared in the *Jerusalem Post* in 2012 and reports that she chose that venue because she was “unhopeful” that the *Post* would let her reply.¹⁶

She does not explain, however, why someone who advocates, with some hedging and qualifications, a boycott of Israeli institutions and who refuses to speak at Israeli universities “unless they take a strong stand against the occupation” should think that she ought not to be boycotted by people who oppose her views. By her argument against Summers, presidents of Israeli universities ought not to take political stands. It was reasonable to expect the *Jerusalem Post*, a right-wing daily unsympathetic to Israeli doves and the left, Zionist or not, to refuse her a forum. But she

¹⁶ See “Judith Butler Responds to Attack: ‘I affirm a Judaism that is not associated with state violence,’” *Mondoweiss*, August 27, 2012, <http://mondoweiss.net/i-affirm-a-judaism-that-is-not-associated-with-state-violence.html>. On December 14, 2011, I accessed a transcript of her Berkeley comments, <http://radicalarchives.org/2010/03/28/jbutler-on-hamas-hezbollah-israel-lobby/>.

has been attacked in many venues and has many open to her, so it is unclear why an advocate of boycotts would want – or allow herself – to appear in its pages.

To critics of her claim that Hamas and Hezbollah were part of a “global left,” she replies, “My first point was merely descriptive: those political organizations define themselves as anti-imperialist, and anti-imperialism is one characteristic of the global left.” Declaring herself this time against both violent resistance and the state, a seemingly pacifist stance, she insisted that she never actually took a position. “*To say that those organizations belong to the left is not to say that they should belong or that I endorse or support them in any way*” [emphasis in the original].¹⁷ Yet her statement was not simply that Hamas and Hezbollah can be described as “left” but that they are “progressive” – a term she has used to describe her own politics – movements and that it was “*extremely important*” to classify them as “left.” She presented a standard in her “description”: “anti-imperialism.” Battle between imperialism and anti-imperialism features persistently in her writing and valuation is always implied.

The basis for Butler’s “description” of Hamas as anti-imperialist is actually a fiction accepted by many on the left. Hamas derives its “anti-imperialism” from a medieval Islamic separation of the world into the “House of Islam” and everyone else – “the House of War.” This division can be overcome only when the entire world is Muslim. Butler has spent much energy in arguments about foundations yet does not seem to recognize the centrality of foundationalist motivations among religious zealots. If their political theology is described as left and progressive, then why not their demand that women cover themselves in public? Slavoj Žižek, himself anti-Zionist, has written against leftists prone to “an all-too-easy and uncritical acceptance of anti-American and anti-Western groups as representing ‘progressive’ forms of struggle, as automatic allies: groups like Hamas and Hezbollah all of a sudden appear as revolutionary agents, even though their ideology is explicitly anti-modern, rejecting the entire egalitarian legacy of the French revolution.”¹⁸ He does not name Butler, but this remark seems an obvious rebuttal of her.

¹⁷ See “Judith Butler Responds to Attack.” For a critique of Butler’s rhetorical strategies see Berman, “From ‘Left-Fascism’ to Campus Anti-Semitism,” pp. 23–27.

¹⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (London and New York: Verso Press, 2011), p. 137.

III

Again: are Butler's political interventions a function of her more general philosophical contentions? She argued against traditional distinctions between genders on the grounds that these presume a "subject," that is, a predetermined agent or reality: "Woman" or "Man" or even "Humanity." She proposed that "freedom does not emanate from a part of the soul or a dimension of one's nature, but is articulated in its exercise."¹⁹ She makes an absolute out of denial of "the subject"; it allows her to suppose that there are not only two genders, and that there could be three or four or ten since they are all constructs and roles.

These claims seem to underlie her views of nations and nationalism. Consider her discussion of singing of national anthems. In its description blurs into valuation. She reports on watching a demonstration about immigration and residence rights in Los Angeles in 2006. "The Star-Spangled Banner" was sung at one point in Spanish, as was Mexico's anthem. Butler asks: to whom do these anthems belong? Who is the rightful "we" involved in singing them? Instead of answering, she poses more and more questions in which she seems really to be making political claims: does singing the American national anthem in Spanish constitute a "nonnationalistic or counternationalistic mode of belonging," one requiring consideration of globalization? Must not this singing 'we' raise questions about equality? "It's not just that people sang together but also that singing is a plural act" and it was in public space.²⁰ If someone – she cites the cultural authority George W. Bush – declares that the national anthem ought only to be sung in English, is this not a restriction imposed by the "linguistic majority," making language a "criterial control" of belonging, an inevitable matter of policing and exclusion? Does not this speech act – perhaps it is better called song act – in Spanish install "the task of the translator at the heart of the nation?" This kind of singing, she insists, has been inadequately "theorized"; indeed terms for its "theorizing" have not yet been found for "the point is not simply . . . to expose the street as a site for free assembly. At this point the song can be understood not only as the expression of freedom or longing for enfranchisement – though it is clearly both of these – but as a restaging the street, enacting freedom of

¹⁹ Butler in Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: Polity, 2013), p. 182.

²⁰ Butler in dialogue with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in *Who Sings the Nation?* (London, New York, and Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2007), pp. 58–59.

assembly precisely when and where it is explicitly prohibited by law. This is a certain performative politics.” When they join together in California streets to sing “The Star Spangled Banner” in Spanish, protesters “alter not just the language of the nation but its public sphere as well.”²¹ Perhaps Butler imagines it a harbinger of mass conversion from one kind of (English oriented) nation into its Other or multiple Others.

The problem, however, is that her argument works by imputation, disengaged from the history of nation-states, nationalism, and their relation to language. It is even detached from the history of song. And it seems detached from anything most people, including scholars, might call evidence. Perhaps her description is right. That is possible. But consider some questions: Could it have been that those – or many of those – singing in Spanish did not yet but wanted to know English and that by singing the national anthem in Spanish in public were expressing that desire along with the hope that they (or their children) might become part of a larger American culture that speaks English – and no more? Might they simply have wanted to press the admirable demand that the United States live up to its own announced principles of democracy and pluralism and not allow prejudice against vulnerable people? Could singing in Spanish or singing the Mexican anthem express something very simple and nothing more: a desire for good-neighborliness? I do not know the answer to these questions; I neither was there nor have found, say, a poll asking them of its participants. Butler was there, but she cites no evidence and simply weaves a narrative that allows her to assert what the demonstrators meant and mean.

National anthems are by definition symbols of belonging, but that does not necessarily imply a monistic framework. Nations and nation-states are not necessarily the absolute opposites of nonnational forms of belonging or of pluralistic societies. Singing together is not the only kind of plural voice act. A madrigal is pluralism in song; several voices join with different vocal lines and words, creating beauty in sound by their overlap. But in doing so, words, ideas, or sentiments usually become incomprehensible. Oppression cannot be protested nor rights defended this way, at least not intelligibly. We might add in some political history here. Attempts by early protagonists of nationalism or republicanism to impose a single language of public discourse in a state were due not to a majority’s will to cultural dominance but to democratic purposes.

²¹ Butler in *Who Sings the Nation?*, pp. 59–61, 63–64, 67.

“Nationalism” in modern politics was a word first identified with the left and France provides the classical example. The French Revolution (in its most sensible aspect) aimed to make individual and equal members of a nation out of subjects of a king; the monarch’s realm had divided rights and status according to inherited and hierarchical social estates. (Equal rights for women had to wait.) It was conservative forces that opposed nationalism because for them it combined “the nation” with popular sovereignty, leading inevitably toward a demand for equality in political participation. They opposed uniformity in public language in order to deprive lower classes and the weak of a democratic means for politics.

In 1794 revolutionaries solicited an account by Abbé (Henri) Grégoire – a supporter of universal suffrage and a foe of slavery and persecution of Jews – of languages within the state’s borders. He reported that “French,” the language of the Île de France, was spoken only by a minority. The majority, composed of many minorities throughout the country, spoke local languages (and could not read). True, those local languages were considered by many in Paris to be inelegant, even degenerate. But such cultural attitudes should not be confused with the political question: how can democracy, a “we,” form or function if citizens cannot speak to and debate each other or understand laws – without an inclusive means of democratic communication? (There is no intrinsic reason why this should prevent minority cultures and languages from thriving, even if that has often not happened during a “nationalization” of language.)

This leads us finally to Butler’s treatment of Jewish culture. She has in recent years asserted repeatedly that her entry into philosophy was through studying Jewish ethics. She proposes that “the ethical relation with the non-Jew and cohabitation” are the keys to it. (She again cites Arendt’s authority although her argument recalls the Hegelian claim that freedom entails transcending otherness to be “at home” in the world.)²² But there is nothing particularly Jewish about this (nor should there be). Ethics always concerns “Others.” Yet something else seems to be going on in Butler’s claims, and she makes it explicit when she writes that she wishes to bring forth “Jewish resources” to oppose “state violence, the colonial subjugation of populations and dispossession.” It becomes evident that there is a principal aim: discrediting Zionism. All roads lead to that purpose. After all, why does opposition to violence, colonialism, and subjugation need a specifically “Jewish” justification? She insists that

²² G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 35–36.

“social equality and social justice have been an integral part of Jewish secular, socialist and religious traditions.” This is not new, as she admits.²³ Religion aside, the Bund, Marxist and secular, advocated social equality and justice. Socialist founders of Israel would also have agreed, but they would have added that modern history also gives Jews the right to demand self-determination in the form of statehood to protect themselves and to sustain and to develop Jewish culture. The Jewish “resources” from which Butler draws are selective: twentieth-century European Jewish philosophers such as Arendt or Walter Benjamin. They are indeed worth reading, but her “Jewish” interest in them seems to have no substance except anti-Zionism. Broader Jewish cultural and political realities before (or in) the 1920s – actual Jewish politics – do not seem to exist for her. In a way, she really does embrace Jewish ethics with no foundation. But where would these ethics take Jews in the future? It turns out to something like her description of the singing demonstrators. Butler tells us that whatever their source, an ethics must be universalizable. Jewish values of justice “can only remain Jewish values if they are *not* exclusively Jewish.”²⁴ Butler wants “alterity” to be a decentering center of these values and this would be so if the “meaning of Jewishness” were wrested from Zionist control; more than that, thinking about Zionism must be divorced from “a Jewish-centered framework.” But in that case, a critique of Zionism has nothing to do with an argument about Jewish life. Jewishness, for Butler, must be located “in the moment of its encounter with the non-Jewish, in the dispersing of the self that follows that encounter.”²⁵

What Butler claims to be Jewish ethics stands in dramatic opposition to one of its most famous statements, ascribed to Hillel the Elder (who was born in Babylon but died in Jerusalem in the age of Herod): “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, who am I?”²⁶ Butler would, undoubtedly, object to his assumptions about a “self.” Yet it is possible to sidestep this issue and to speak as if there were one. Hillel’s statement links two ethical dimensions by saying that it is unethical to ignore yourself but you must equally be there for others. The two are distinct but all the while inseparable; and they do not dissolve one into the other or into the relations between the one and the other. A similar point

²³ Judith Butler, *Parting the Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), pp. 153, 1–2.

²⁴ Butler, *Parting the Ways*, p. 5. ²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 26.

²⁶ Hillel the Elder, *Pirkei avot*, 1:14.

encapsulated left-wing Zionist attitudes – but one could say the same of many diaspora nationalists, especially on the left – in the early twentieth century: Jews had a right to defend themselves, and to have a sense of peoplehood all while they embraced programs seeking a better world for everyone. They were neither integral cosmopolitans nor integral nationalists.

Butler's repudiation of Zionism and, effectively, Hillel's principle can be found in her reading of Edward Said's *Freud and the Non-European*, perhaps the culmination of her claims about Judaism, ethics, and Zionism. Freud's controversial *Moses and Monotheism* proposed that there were two different men named Moses. The first, the inventor of monotheism, was actually an Egyptian prince who was murdered by followers in the desert; the second led Hebrews to the "Promised Land." This narrative allowed Freud to explore psychological dimensions of political and religious leadership. Said expropriates it for anti-Zionist purposes by stressing that it makes a non-Hebrew into the founder of the people of Israel. Butler follows his lead and concludes that "Judaism is not possible" without asking equally, "What is Arab"? This serves, in turn, to challenge what she calls the "hegemonic Ashkenazi definition of Jewishness" and "implies a more diasporic origin of Judaism." She goes on, "The figure of Moses . . . makes an even more emphatic point, namely, that for some, Jew and Arab are not finally separable categories, since they are loved and embodied in the life of an Arab Jew. Of course there are reasons to be suspicious of recourse to origins, biblical and metaphorical, but Said is . . . conducting a thought experiment to incite us to think differently."²⁷

Said, she imagines, has shown that a "foundational moment for Judaism" centers on a man for whom "there is no distinction between Arab and Jew." Zionist colonialism would, then, have to be out of the picture, and since Moses was not a European, it was "the non-European, the Arab Jew" who is "at the origin of our understanding of Judaism – a figure within which 'Arab' and 'Jew' cannot be dissociated." Consequently, Mizrahi (Middle Eastern and North African) and Sephardic Jews are "central" to Jewish history. Butler is "grateful" to Said for this "understanding of Jewishness" for he "acts as the 'non-European'" who might "found" the Jewish people again" in "a moving invocation to recall an originary and insuperable alliance."²⁸ If only there were a mass

²⁷ Butler, *Parting the Ways*, pp. 28–29.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 30–31.

conversion of Zionists into followers of Edward Said, it seems, then a crucial lesson would be learned due to Said's Freud's Moses: "If Moses stands for a contemporary aspiration, it is one that refuses to be organized exclusively on principles of national, religious or ethnic identity, one that accepts a certain impurity and mixedness as the irreversible conditions of social life." Identity, says Butler, following Said (and Hegel, although he is not mentioned), "cannot be thought or worked through alone." Consequently, "at the site of . . . origin, an impurity, a mixing with otherness . . . turns out to be constitutive of what it is to be a Jew." Moreover – yes, it always comes to this – "Jewish resistance to Zionism" was "not only 'archaic' in the sense that Moses exemplifies" but an "unacknowledged" component of European Jewish history throughout the twentieth century.²⁹

By the end of the story, a thought experiment slides into political claims about the nature of Judaism and Jewish peoplehood, like a surreptitious but tendentious exercise in political counterpoint. Of course, Butler's rhetorical strategy provides an intellectual escape hatch should someone marshal evidence against her narrative; it is only a provocation. But provocations may also be scrutinized. Butler has taken Said's tendentious reading of what Freud in his first version called a "novel" – a novel based on Freud's reading of the Bible, which he then reformulated with dubious history – in order to make her own anti-Zionist claims, which, in turn, lead her to conclude that as Moses was an Arab who created the Jews, the Jews should be refounded through the thinking she attributes to Said. It is a remarkable circle, not least because she says that Said's Freud's Moses has the salutary effect of saving Judaism from Ashkenazi – that is, European Jewish and Zionist – discourse; the latter, she thinks, silenced Sephardic and Middle Eastern contributions to Judaism.

What is the relation of this "thought experiment" to the words it uses? Since we do things with words (and narratives), consider:

- * The Egyptians of Moses' day were not Arabs because "Arab" then had no meaning;
- * Subsequent scholarship, including in his day, dismissed Freud's sources for his fiction-cum-history;
- * Terms like "Ashkenazi," "Sephardic," and "Mizrahi" had no meaning at the time of Moses (if there was a Moses; scholars are not at all

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

sure). Nor did the notions of European and non-European have meaning. The idea of an “Ashkenazi point of view” is fiction; European Jewish culture was pluralistic, and differences, say, between medieval thinkers such as Rashi (Ashkenazi) and Maimonides (Sephardi) were not about imperialism and antiimperialism. Butler imposes a twentieth-century notion of Eurocentrism on circumstances in which it has no intelligible application. Moreover, she does not seem to notice that when Zionism was born, approximately 85 percent of world Jewry lived in Europe, east and west. They had to face pogroms in the Russian Empire, a burgeoning antisemitic movement in Germany, and the Dreyfus affair in France. What might “Eurocentrism” mean in these circumstances? That Jews should not have been concerned about European rejection of – and violence against – them?

- * To state that the myth of Moses shows Judaism’s “diasporic” origins is a nonsense that also had no meaning at the supposed time of Moses. *Diaspora* is a Greek term for dispersion that was used later to describe Jewish life outside an already established center in what ancient Hebrews called the Land of Israel. The myth Said and Butler would subvert is about how a people formed by Moses’ leadership left slavery in ancient Egypt for an alternative existence in what Edward Said called Palestine.

“The Professor of Parody” – that is how the philosopher Martha Nussbaum once described Butler.³⁰ Is Butler’s treatment of Moses and Jewish ethics a parody or a political ploy? Is it the foundationless meeting point of anti-Zionism with “theoretical antihumanism”? Does it propose a conversion? As Jews needed baptism as the entrance ticket to European culture, do they now need an odd species of integral cosmopolitanism to usher them into self-dissolution today? A parallel to the old conservative, religious demand that Jews not determine themselves as Jews? Is this not what is suggested by Butler and Said, although without the wit of a Heine – who knew something as well about writing parody – and his tortured self-mockery and insight?

³⁰ Martha Nussbaum, “The Professor of Parody,” *The New Republic*, February 22, 1999.

PART FOUR

JEWES AND COMMUNISM

Jews and Communism in the Soviet Union and Poland

Antony Polonsky

What I want to do in this chapter is to examine how prominent was the presence of Jews in the government and security apparatus of the Soviet Union and the Peoples Republic of Poland and how this participation should be evaluated. The position of the Bolsheviks on the “Jewish question” is well known. National issues were seen by them as instrumental. They were to be judged on how they advanced the interest of the world revolution and the Soviet state. Where national groups were supported, this was a tactical alliance, like the alliance with the peasantry. The ultimate goal was the creation of a new socialist man, who would be above petty nationalist divisions, and a single world socialist state. All those responsible for Jewish policy within the Bolshevik Party sought this final goal; the only difference between them was their view on how long Jewish separateness could be tolerated. The aim was assimilation – a new version of Clermont-Tonnerre’s view that the Jews were to be given everything as individuals and nothing as a community.

The Jews, according to Bolshevik theory, were not a nation. In the course of the Bolsheviks’ conflict with the Bund, Lenin had asserted that “the idea of a Jewish nation was essentially totally false and reactionary.”¹ This view was confirmed by Stalin’s study of the problem, carried out at Lenin’s request in 1913. According to this, a nation should have four characteristics: a common territory, a common language, a common economic system, and a common culture. As Stalin himself put it, “The demand of national autonomy for Russian Jews is something of a

¹ V. I. Lenin, “The Position of the Bund in the Party, 22 October 1903,” p. 93; in V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, 45 vols. (Moscow: Progressive, 1963), p. vii.

curiosity – proposing autonomy for a people without a future and whose very existence has still to be proved.”²

The long-term fate of the Jews, whom he described as “a fiction bereft of territory,”³ was clearly to be integrated into the nations among whom they lived, and ultimately, especially during the Stalinist period, into the emerging Soviet nation. The Bolsheviks recognized that the Jews possessed some protonational characteristics and that they were found in considerable numbers in the Soviet Union. In order to facilitate their integration into the new socialist world, for a period a specific socialist Jewish identity, expressed through a secularized version of Yiddish, could be tolerated. Some Jews, and even some Bolshevik leaders such as the president of the USSR, Mikhail Kalinin, thought this could become permanent. A key role was to be played in the creation of this identity by the Jewish sections of the Communist Party, the *Evseksii*.

The way these policies were implemented in the twenty years between the end of the Civil War and the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union underwent a drastic change with Stalin’s rise to power. The early 1920s were a period of relative liberalization in Soviet policy. After the collapse of the revolutions in Germany and Hungary and the Soviet defeat in the battle of Warsaw in August 1920, which ended any hope of extending the revolution using the Red Army, Lenin had decided to abandon collectivization and to allow the development of private industry and trade. This period came to an end with the victory of Stalin in the struggle for power after Lenin’s death and his adoption of a radical policy of collectivization and rapid industrialization.

This “Great Turn” of 1929–1932 was of crucial importance in the evolution of Soviet policy toward the Jews. It was marked by an intensification of the terror, which often targeted Jews. Trotsky, whose Jewish origins were now strongly emphasized, became the focus of Stalin’s obsessive hatred, and Stalin also manifested a growing obsession with Jews, starting with his opposition to the involvement of his daughter, Svetlana, with a Jew. At the same time, it should be stressed that Jews were not disproportionately represented among the victims.

Nationalism of all sorts was now suspect. Ukrainian and Belarusian national communists were purged, and Polish autonomy in Ukraine and Belarus was suppressed. Cultural life was also much more tightly

² J. V. Stalin, *Sochineniya*, ii, pp. 298, 334 in *Sochineniya*, 13 vols. (Moscow: Gos. Izdatelstvo polit. lit-ry, 1946–1955).

³ *Ibid.*

controlled. The Soviet Union was now marked by greater isolationism and suspicion of the outside world. The Joint Distribution Committee and its subsidiary, the Agro-Joint, which had played a crucial role in the life of Soviet Jews in the 1920s, were now much less free to operate. In addition, Stalin began to reduce the percentage of Jews in the highest ranks of the NKVD and among judges and prosecutors.

The Soviets sought to foster the integration of Jews in the new society by abolishing all restrictions on where they could live or what occupations they could pursue. As a result, in the twenty years between the end of the Civil War in 1921 and the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union a major transformation took place within the Jewish population of the country. There had already been considerable Jewish urbanization in the tsarist empire before 1914 and this process was rapidly accelerating.

Urbanization had frequently been accompanied by the adoption of the Russian language. Russification was frequently associated with the adoption of the values of the Russian intelligentsia, a group deeply at odds with the surrounding society. The way of life of the Russian intelligentsia was extremely attractive to young Jewish gymnasium and university students. Their adoption of its values inevitably led to their rejection of the Jewish “petit bourgeois principles,” “backwardness,” and “provinciality” that seemed to be embodied in their families. In his autobiography Leon Trotsky described his breach with his parents as follows: “The instinct for acquisitiveness, the petit bourgeois outlook and way of life – from these I sailed away with a mighty push, never to return.”⁴

As a group, certainly until the revolution of 1905, a large number of the Russian intelligentsia were committed to the revolutionary transformation of the tsarist empire. Not surprisingly, therefore, those Jews who aspired to be *intelligent* also frequently became revolutionaries, whether of the populist or the Marxist variety. The processes of acculturation and integration were enormously accelerated by the policies of the Bolsheviks. The emigration of more than 2 million people from Russia in the aftermath of the revolution (some fifty thousand of them Jews), most of them from the educated classes, created a huge gap in skilled personnel and created new opportunities for upwardly mobile Jews.

Jews moved in large numbers to the towns, particularly to those in which they had previously been forbidden to live, or were allowed to live

⁴ L. Trotsky, *Moya zhizn': Opyt autobiografii*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Izdatestvo “Granit,” 1930), I, p. 106.

only in restricted numbers, before February 1917, such as Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Odessa, and Kharkiv. By 1939 more than 1.3 million were living in such areas. By that time 86.9 percent of all Soviet Jews lived in urban areas, about half of them in the eleven largest cities of the USSR. As a result of this movement the proportion of the Jewish population living in the Russian Federation grew from 23 percent in 1926 to more than one-third in 1939.⁵ This migration into the towns was the result of a mass exodus from the shtetls of Ukraine and Belarus, which had been devastated by continuous warfare between 1914 and 1921. Most of those who participated in the wide-scale urbanization were attracted by the broader cultural and social horizons of the city.

In the 1920s the economic restructuring of the Jewish population proceeded relatively slowly. Many Jews profited from the economic liberalization of the New Economic Policy (NEP) and constituted a significant proportion of the “NEPmen,” the traders and speculators who were a feature of this period. Perhaps out of fear of arousing antisemitism, the Bolshevik campaign against the NEPmen did not stress their Jewish character. They were, however, the targets of bitter attacks from a number of young leftist Jewish writers, another example of the deep generational conflict in the Soviet Jewish world.

Stalin’s “Great Turn” was marked by a further attack on the dominant Jewish occupations of trading and artisanry. Given the generational conflict within the Soviet Jewish world, it is not surprising that many of the OGPU (secret service) officials who were responsible after 1928 for the suppression of private industry were Jews, including the head of the “hard currency” department, Mark Isaevich Gai (Shtokliand).⁶

With industrialization the movement of Jews into industry was encouraged and accelerated. The transformation of Jews into industrial workers was often celebrated in Yiddish literature. There was some authenticity in these propagandistic accounts. In 1931, 11.3 percent of economically active Jews were metalworkers, while 1.4 percent were

⁵ Y. Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 217; G. Freitag, “*Nächstes Jahr in Moskau! Die Zuwanderung von Juden in die sowjetische Metropole 1917 bis 1932*,” Ph.D. diss. (Johann-Wolfgang-Goethe University, 2000), pp. 44, 69–70, 83; M. Beizer, *Evrei Leningrada 1917–1939: Natsional'naya zhizn' i sotsializatsiya* (Jerusalem: Gesharim, 1999), pp. 81, 116, 360; M. Altshuler, *Soviet Jewry on the Eve of the Holocaust: A Social and Demographic Profile* (Jerusalem: Centre for Research of East European Jewry, 1998), pp. 34–35, 220, 225, 253.

⁶ Slezkine, *Jewish Century*, p. 221.

miners. By 1939 nearly 30 percent of economically active Jews were classed as industrial workers.⁷

The majority were, however, clerical workers or officials. Thus in 1939 40 percent of Jewish breadwinners were employed as functionaries, while 364,000 were classed as members of the intelligentsia. Jews were particularly strongly represented among the ranks of managers and accountants, technicians, teachers, doctors, cultural workers, professors, agronomists, engineers, and architects. They played a role in the early decades of the Soviet Union similar to that played by Germans in the tsarist empire between the reforms of Peter the Great and the revolutions of 1917. In Lenin's words:

The fact that there were many Jewish members of the intelligentsia in the Russian cities was of great importance to the revolution. They put an end to the general sabotage that we were confronted with after the October Revolution . . . It was only thanks to this pool of a rational and literate labour force that we succeeded in taking over the state apparatus.⁸

These people were concentrated in the larger towns, particularly Moscow and Leningrad, which were also the centers of Soviet cultural life and the home of the key figures in the Soviet cultural elite. In this milieu Jews were also well represented. In addition, Jews had a significant presence on the editorial boards of leading newspapers and magazines, universities, and hospital staffs, and among the Soviet officer corps.

The educational opportunities open to Jews also increased enormously as the regime did away with previous restrictions and saw the expansion of education as the key to the modernization and industrialization of the country. By 1939, 26.5 percent of all Jews had a high school education (as compared to 7.8 percent of the population of the Soviet Union as a whole and 8.1 percent of Russians in the Russian Federation). In 1939 Jews made up 15.5 percent of all Soviet citizens with higher education, and one-third of all Soviet Jews of college age (nineteen to twenty-four years old) were college students, as compared to 4–5 percent in the Soviet Union as a whole.⁹

Intermarriage, which had been rare before 1917 and usually required conversion to Christianity, now became much more frequent, and was

⁷ L. Zinger, *Dos banayte folk: tsifern un faktn vegn di yidn in FSSR* (Moscow, 1941), p. 49; Y. Kantor, *Natsional'noe stroitel'stvo sredi evreev v SSSR* (Moscow, 1934), p. 145.

⁸ Quoted in G. Kostyrchenko, *Tainaya politika Stalina: Vlast' i antisemitizm* (Moscow: "Mezhdunarodnaya Otnosheniia," 2001), p. 58.

⁹ Altshuler, *Soviet Jewry on the Eve of the Holocaust*, pp. 118–127, 308.

discussed in literature, as in Moshe Kulbak's *Zelmenyanar*. By 1926, 21 percent of Jewish marriages in the Russian Federation were exogenous, and the following year the figure in Ukraine was 11.1 percent. By 1936 the percentage had increased to 42.3 percent in the Russian Federation, to 15.3 percent in Ukraine, and to 12.6 percent in Belarus.¹⁰ Many senior Jewish figures in the Bolshevik leadership, including Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Sverdlov, were married to Russian women, while non-Jews married to Jews in this group included Bukharin, Dzierżyński, Kirov, Lunacharsky, Molotov, Rykov, and Voroshilov.

Linguistic assimilation proceeded rapidly. In 1926, 25 percent of those of "Jewish nationality" gave Russian as their mother tongue, a figure that by 1939 had risen to 54 percent. New migrants to the cities made little effort to pass on their Yiddish language or their religious practices to their children, believing that this would only impede their advancement. Although attracted by Russian culture, many of these children identified themselves as Soviet.

Those Jews who emerged from the Soviet universities in the late 1920s and 1930s constituted a generation devoted both to the ideals of the revolution and to Russian culture as embodied in the traditions of the prerevolutionary intelligentsia. In the words of one of them, Mikhail Baitalsky, while "we all prepared ourselves to be agitation and propaganda officials," at the same time "we inherited the moral ideals of all the generations of the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia: its nonconformity, its love of truth, its moral sense."¹¹

Jews played a large role in developing Soviet popular culture. They wrote many of the popular songs that were part of the social mobilization that accompanied the Five Year Plans. When classical music again became part of the Soviet canon in the 1930s, the majority of its performers were Jews, such as David Oistrakh and Emil Gilels.¹²

As elsewhere in Europe, Jews identified with a new social order that had abolished the discrimination under which they had previously suffered and made possible their integration into the new society. This is strikingly reflected in the names some Soviet Jews gave their children, among them Feliks (after the founder of the Soviet secret police), Melib

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Mikhail Baitalsky, "Tetradi dlya vnukov," Memorial Archive, Moscow, f. 2, op. 1, d. 8, ll. 19, 50; quoted in Slezkine, *Jewish Century*, p. 232.

¹² J. Braun, "Jews in Soviet Music," in *Jews in Soviet Culture*, ed. Jack Miller (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1984), pp. 75–86.

(Marx–Engels–Liebknecht), Vil (Vladimir Ilich Lenin), Marlen (Marx–Lenin), Lenina, and Ninel (‘Lenin’ backward).

One of the more vexed questions in Soviet Jewish history is the question of how many Jews were members of the Communist Party and the ruling bureaucracy. As we have seen, the worsening situation of the Jews from 1881 had led to their significant involvement in all parts of the revolutionary movement although they were more prominent within the Mensheviks than in the Bolsheviks. At the same time a number of the most prominent Bolsheviks were of Jewish origin, although they would have denied any connection with the Jewish world. Among them were Trotsky himself, while during the civil war the Bolshevik leaders closest to Lenin were Grigori Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev (Rosenfeld), and Yakov Sverdlov.

In the first years after 1917, the role of Jews in the party was still quite small. In 1922 the great majority of members of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union were ethnic Russians (72 percent) compared to the Jewish percentage of 5.21, which fell to 4.34 in 1927, or around fifty thousand. Throughout the 1920s Jews made up 6 percent of the Executive Committee, the Central Committee, and the Presidium of the Executive Committee¹³

However, although the percentage of Jews in the party was relatively small, and not much higher than the Jewish proportion of the population, Bolshevik Jews were highly visible, partly because Jews in positions of authority had been so unusual in Russia, and partly because of their prominence in certain areas. In April 1917 ten of the twenty-four members of the governing bureau of the Petrograd soviet were Jews, while at the Bolshevik Central Committee meeting of October 23, 1917, which took the decision to launch an armed insurrection, five of the twelve members present were Jews (not all of whom were in favor). Between 1919 and 1921 Jews constituted about a quarter of the members of the party’s Central Committee and held an important share of the leading positions in the cities of Moscow and Petrograd.

Jews also played a significant role in the Cheka, the secret police that maintained the new regime. The overall percentage of Jews in the organization was quite low: 3.7 percent of the Moscow apparatus, 4.3 percent of Cheka commissars, 8.6 percent of senior (“responsible”) officials in 1918, and 9.1 percent of all members of provincial Cheka

¹³ B. Pinkus, *The Jews of the Soviet Union: The History of a National Minority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 78–79.

offices in 1920. Most members of the Cheka were Russians, and, as in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, a key role at this stage was played by Latvians, who constituted 35.6 percent of the Moscow Cheka apparatus, 52.7 percent of all Cheka senior officials, and 54.3 percent of all Cheka commissars. But even in the Cheka, Bolsheviks of Jewish origin combined ideological commitment with literacy in ways that set them apart and propelled them upward. In 1918, 65.5 percent of all Jewish Cheka employees were “responsible officials,” and some held more senior positions. In 1918 they made up 19.1 percent of all investigators in the central office and half (six of twelve) of those in the department for “combating counterrevolution.” In 1923, when the OGPU replaced the Cheka, Jews constituted half (four of eight) of the members of its collegium and 15.5 percent of its “leading” officials.¹⁴

Jews became more important in the security apparatus in the period of collectivization and the first Five Year Plan. In July 1934 Genrikh Yagoda was appointed people’s commissar for internal affairs, with control over the regular as well as secret police, and when later that year the OGPU was transformed into the NKVD, people classed as Jews under paragraph 5 of the internal passport law made up thirty-seven of the ninety-six “leading cadres” of the organization, as against thirty Russians, seven Latvians, five Ukrainians, four Poles, three Georgians, three Belarusians, two Germans, and five others. They headed a number of key NKVD departments among them that were responsible for the worker–peasant militia (the police), labor camps, counterintelligence, surveillance, and economic sabotage.¹⁵ When Stalin replaced Yagoda in September 1936, he appointed another Jew, the more zealous Nikolai Yezhov. In January 1937 the 111 top NKVD officials included 42 Jews, 35 Russians, 8 Latvians, and 26 others. Of the twenty NKVD directorates, twelve (including state security, police, labor camps, and resettlement) were headed by officers identified as ethnic Jews. Of the ten departments of the Main Directorate for State Security, the most sensitive of all NKVD agencies, seven (protection of government officials, counterintelligence,

¹⁴ L. Krichevskii, “Evrei v apparate VChK-OGPU v 20-e gody,” in *Evrei i russkaia revoliutsiia: Materialy i issledovaniia*, ed. O. Budnitskii (Moscow and Jerusalem: Gesharim, 1999), pp. 320–350; L. Schapiro, “The Role of the Jews in the Russian Revolutionary Movement,” *Slavonic and East European Review*, XL, 94, (1961), p. 165.

¹⁵ A. Kokurin and N. Petrov, eds., *Lubyanka: VChK – OGPU – NKVD – NKGB – MGB – MVD – KGB, 1917–1960: Spravochnik* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratia,” 1997), pp. 12, 104; N. Petrov and K. Skorkin, eds., *Kto rukovodil NKVD 1934–1941: Spravochnik* (Moscow: Zvenia, 1999), pp. 139–140, 459–460, 495.

secret political, special (surveillance in the army), foreign intelligence, records, and prisons) were headed by Jews. The prominence of Jews in the security apparatus may well have reflected a deliberate decision by Stalin to use them in these unpopular roles in order to deflect hostility from him and the Soviet state.

However, by that time the role of the Jews in the NKVD was coming to an end and Yezhov's replacement by Beria, a Georgian like Stalin himself, was followed by a diminution in Jews in leadership positions.¹⁶ In the years 1934–1941 the number of cadre leaders grew gradually from 96 to 182. According to the calculations of Petrov and Skorkin, on July 10, 1934, when the OGPU was incorporated into the Main Administration of State Security (Glavnoe Upravlenie Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti) and into a unified NKVD, Jews held 38.5 percent of these posts, Russians 31.2 percent, and Latvians 7.3 percent. On February 26, 1941, when the security section of the NKVD was split off into a separate body, the NKGB, Jews made up only 5.5 percent and Russians 64.8 percent of its personnel; Ukrainians (15.4 percent) and Georgians (6.6 percent) overtook the Jews. In the organization as a whole this change can be documented to the end of 1938 and the beginning of 1939: on September 1, 1938, Jews still constituted 21.3 percent of the management cadre, but as of July 1, 1939, they were only 3.9 percent.¹⁷ This development may reflect Stalin's increasing interest in making an arrangement with Hitler.

The rapid social advancement of Jews and the role they played in the new regime aroused considerable resentment, which alarmed the party. It monitored the strength of antisemitism and took action against those advocating it. This sometimes took violent form, as in March 1925, when seven Russian nationalists were shot for advocating the toppling of the "Communist Jewish" regime and the deportation of all Soviet Jews to Palestine, among other charges.¹⁸

The party also undertook a campaign against antisemitism. In August 1926 the Central Committee's Agitprop organized a special meeting on the subject, and in December 1927 Stalin told delegates at the Fifteenth Party Congress, "This evil has to be combated with utmost ruthlessness,

¹⁶ Kokurin and Petrov, eds., *Lubyanka*, pp. 17–18, 105–106; Petrov and Skorkin, eds., *Kto rukovodil NKVD 1934–1941*, p. 105; P. Sudoplatov, *Razvedka i Kreml': Zapiski nezhe-latel'nogo svidetelya* (Moscow: TOO "Geia," 1997).

¹⁷ Petrov and Skorkin, eds., *Kto rukovodil NKVD 1934–1941*, p. 495, table 4.

¹⁸ V. Izmozik, " 'Evreiskii vopros' v chastnoi perepiske sovetskikh grazhdan serediny 1920-kh gg.," *Vestnik Evreiskogo universiteta v Moskve*, no. 3/7 (1994), pp. 164–188, 165–167; Kostyrchenko, *Tainaya politika Stalina*, pp. 107–108.

comrades.” In January 1931 he proclaimed that “antisemitism is an extreme form of racial chauvinism, the most dangerous vestige of cannibalism.” In the years to 1932 fifty-six books were produced attacking antisemitism, while articles on the topic appeared frequently in the newspapers.¹⁹ The campaign then ceased, and it may be that hostility to Jews decreased in intensity. On the other hand, it may be that it festered but we do not know about it because the security forces were monitoring other “enemy” manifestations. It is also possible that Stalin no longer wished to pursue this policy.

Some Bolsheviks called for Jews to be placed in less prominent positions to rectify the popular belief that the revolution was controlled by Jews, although the removal of Jews only assumed a significant scale in the late 1930s. Others attempted to explain why Jews seemed so prominent. Lunacharsky pointed to the major role people of Jewish origin had played in the revolution and the fact that Jews were largely urban:

The Jews played such an outstanding role in our revolutionary movement that, when the revolution triumphed and established a state, a significant number of Jews entered the institutions of the state. They earned this right with their loyal and selfless service to the revolution.²⁰

Increasingly, as Stalin established his dominance, the “Jewish question” became a taboo topic. This can be seen in the treatment of Lenin’s Jewish grandfather, Aleksandr Dmitrievich Blank, born Srul (Israel), the son of Moshko Itskovich Blank, in the shtetl of Starokonstantinov in Volhynia. In 1924, when his background first came to light, it was decided to keep it secret, a decision that was maintained in spite of Lenin’s sister’s twice asking Stalin, in 1932 and again in 1934, to reconsider on the grounds of the importance, in combating antisemitism, of this confirmation of the “exceptional ability of the Semitic tribe” and of “the extraordinarily beneficial influence of its blood on the offspring of mixed marriages.”²¹

The purge that Stalin initiated in early 1936 had many aspects, one important element of which was an attack on the party leadership. Since Jews were clearly a significant element in this elite, they suffered greatly in this part of the purge. They certainly produced many of the memoirs that

¹⁹ Stalin, *Sochineniya*, xiii. 28; Kostyrchenko, *Tainaya politika Stalina*, pp. 100–111.

²⁰ A. Lunacharsky, *Ob antisemitizme*, 5–6 (Moskva: Gos. izd-vo, 1929).

²¹ N. Kirillova and V. Shepelev, eds., “Vy ... rasporyadilis’ molchat’ ... absolyutno,” *Otechestvennye arkhivy*, 3 (1992), pp. 76–83; see also Y. Petrovsky-Shtern, *Lenin’s Jewish Question* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

have given us such a moving and vivid picture of what it was like for those who believed deeply in the system for it to turn on them and treat them in the most brutal manner.²² At the same time, most of the victims of this purge, as of earlier purges, were peasants, and members of nonterritorial nationalities, such as Poles, Germans, and Koreans, also suffered disproportionately. Some of those involved in the attempt to create a Jewish nonterritorial socialist nation were purged and, on occasion, executed. However the actions against Yiddish cultural activities, though brutal, were less far-reaching than those against other nonterritorial minorities.

The rapid social advancement that a significant part of Soviet Jewry experienced between 1921 and the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union was the consequence of two separate phenomena. On the one hand, the mass emigration that followed the revolution and civil war as well as the ambitious plans of the Bolsheviks for the modernization and industrialization of the country created a huge gap in skilled personnel, which Jews, among others, were well placed to fill. At the same time, as in western Europe in the nineteenth century, above all in France, Jews identified strongly with the state, which had abolished the disabilities under which they had suffered and which offered them the opportunity to rise as high as their talents allowed.

By the eve of the Second World War the economic situation of the Jews of the Soviet Union had been largely transformed. The improvement is noted by Benjamin Pinkus:

To sum up, the economic situation of the Jews at the end of the 1930s was considerably better than in the 1920s. They occupied influential positions both in the economy and in institutions of higher learning, research, art and culture, that is to say, in the socio-economic elite of the Soviet Union. The level of education among the Jews, with 72 per cent literacy, already the highest among the Soviet nationalities in 1929 (apart from the Latvians who constituted a small minority in the Soviet Union), had risen still further by 1939. The proportion of the working population, which included women – a sign of modernization – rose

²² Among them are N. Ulanovskaya and M. Ulanovskaya, *Istoriya odnoi sem'i* (New York: Chalidze, 1982); I. Shikheeva-Gaister, "A Family Chronicle," in Sheila Fitzpatrick and Yuri Slezkine, eds., *In the Shadow of Revolution: Life Stories of Russian Women from 1917 to the Second World War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 367–390; F. Roziner, *Serebryanaya tseepochka* (Tel Aviv: Biblioteka Aliia, 1983); E. Ginzburg, *Journey into the Whirlwind* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975); F. Roziner, *Within the Whirlwind* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981); L. Kopelev, *To Be Preserved Forever* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1977); T. Meromskaya-Kolkova, *Nostal'giya? Net!* (Tel Aviv: Lim, 1988); and M. Baitalsky, *Notebooks for the Grandchildren* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1995).

among the Jews from about 40 per cent in 1926 to 47 per cent in 1939. The social structure we have outlined, with a stratum of 40 per cent of functionaries and intelligentsia and a high percentage of Jewish students, is proof that by the end of the 1930s the Jewish population had become an advanced modern society.²³

The new economic security, which contrasts strikingly with the situation of Jews in Poland and Lithuania, was bought at a heavy price. By 1939 very little was left of the attempt to create a Jewish national identity on the Soviet model based on the Yiddish language. Indeed, the ambitious attempt of the Jewish sections of the Communist Party to create a secular Soviet Yiddish nation was probably always chimerical and fell victim both to its internal contradictions and to the greatly increased political control of the 1930s. It could not win over traditional Jews and failed to take into account the desire for social advancement of many Jews, which led to their movement to large towns and the adoption of the Russian language. The hope that this could be achieved on a territorial base in northern Crimea had clearly failed, while Birobidzhan was not proving attractive to Jewish settlement. In addition, by the late 1930s the institutions of Yiddish higher learning established in the 1920s had almost all been dissolved or ceased to function. Yiddish schools largely ceased to operate from 1938. All forms of independent Jewish activity, whether religious or cultural, had been suppressed, and contact with the outside Jewish world had largely been ended. A number of Yiddish writers had been executed, while others had been sent to labor camps.

Moreover the Soviet regime from its inception, and particularly after Stalin established his dominance, employed terror on an enormous scale as part of its revolutionary goals of totally transforming society. Periodically it also turned on its own adherents. Jewish communists thus suffered disproportionately in the purges of 1936–1938 and remained highly vulnerable even when these were brought to an end. In addition, as the regime became more national and stressed its Russian character and the primary role of Russians as “first among equals” of the Soviet nations, resentment of the prominent position that Jewish cadres had achieved in the party and that Jews as a whole had obtained in Soviet society was bound to grow. This was illustrated by the fall of the brutal murderer Nikolai Yezhov, head of the NKVD, and his associates, on the one hand, and, on the other, by the replacement of the foreign minister,

²³ B. Pinkus, *The Jews of the Soviet Union* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 98.

Maxim Litvinov, and other Jewish diplomats on the eve of the conclusion of the German–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact. Litvinov’s successor, Vyacheslav Molotov, was specifically instructed by Stalin to “get rid of the Jews” in the Commissariat of External Affairs. Hitler at this time told his associates that, in a conversation with Ribbentrop, Stalin had claimed that he was only waiting for the emergence of a sufficiently large stratum of local intelligentsia before removing Jews from the Soviet elite.²⁴ The situation was not altered by the incorporation of the former eastern Poland (western Belarus and western Ukraine), the Baltic states, northern Bukovina, and Bessarabia into the Soviet Union in 1939 and 1940. This was the situation in which the Jews of the Soviet Union found themselves on the eve of the ordeal of the Nazi occupation and its attendant horrors.

These developments were exacerbated by Stalin’s growing suspicion of Jews. In particular, he became obsessed, as relations with the West deteriorated, by the close links that the leadership of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee had established with the Jews outside the Soviet Union, especially in the United States, and the enthusiastic support of Soviet Jews for the emergence of the State of Israel. As in other purges, Stalin acted on several levels, taking action both against those who were prominent in Soviet Yiddish culture and against the larger group of acculturated and Sovietized Jews who still held prominent positions in the Soviet bureaucracy and in cultural life. The tragic denouement is well known, culminating in the notorious “doctors’ plot,”“ so there is no need to rehearse them here.

In Poland after 1944, it was even more difficult for the regime to find reliable cadres and they sought them among the small surviving Jewish community. Most of the more than 300,000 Polish Jews who survived the war (primarily in the Soviet Union) soon left Poland. Among the remainder (between 70,000 and 80,000 in 1951), Polonization proceeded rapidly and the communist regime for all its faults was widely seen as offering a better future and as being the only genuine protector of the Jews.

One of the most disputed issues in the historiography of this period is the role played by communists of Jewish origin in the new regime. The war had certainly strengthened the perceived identification of Jews with

²⁴ *Hitlers Tischgespräche im Führerhauptquartier, 1941–2*, ed. Henry Picker (Bonn: Seewald, 1951), p. 119.

communism. In their hope that the new regime would remedy the defects of the Second Republic, Jewish supporters of the new order were at one with a significant part of the Polish intelligentsia. In addition, in the civil war conditions of postwar Poland, the Jewish community could expect protection only from the new communist-dominated authorities.

Communists of Jewish origin played a significant, though not dominant, role in the new regime. In the political apparatus they included Jakub Berman; Roman Zambrowski, who had been one of the principal creators of the communist-dominated Polish army in the USSR; and Hilary Minc, a key economic planner. Jews also played a key role in the cultural policy of the new regime, among them Jerzy Borejsza, the founder of the journal *Odrodzenie* and chief executive of the Czytelnik publishing house, until he was dismissed from all his positions in 1949.

However, antisemitism was also not absent from the Polish People's Republic itself. Official government policy was to defend the Jews and to foster their economic rehabilitation, but within the party some factions were much less sympathetic to the difficult plight of the Jews, particularly those who had been in occupied Poland during the war. During the war Polish communist politics had been highly factionalized. By 1947 the communists were establishing a Soviet-style regime and banning all independent political forces, and in 1948 the leading national communist, Władysław Gomułka, was forced out of office. Jewish communists were mostly to be found among the group that had been in Moscow during the war and in the groups that were suspicious of the "Polish road to socialism." Many of them soon repented of their flirtation with Stalinism and became among the most ardent supporters of democratization in the period of the thaw that put Gomułka back in power in October 1956. However, at this time their position in the party aroused considerable resentment, which was to surface in 1956 and still more in 1968.

Jews were also viewed as playing a key role in the security apparatus of the new regime. Certainly, there were a number of Jews in leading positions in it, including Anatol Fejgin, the head of the notorious Tenth Department of the Ministry of Public Security (Ministerstwo Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego, MBP), which was responsible for the surveillance of all members of the Polish United Workers' Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, PZPR), and his deputy, Józef Światło. Our understanding of the situation in Poland (as of that in the Soviet Union) has been transformed by the opening of the archives, which give a much fuller picture both of the role of Jews in the Polish security apparatus in the

immediate postwar years and of the process by which they were purged from it after the death of Stalin.²⁵ On October 20, 1945, Nikolay Selivanovsky, the chief Soviet adviser at the MBP, sent a report to Lavrenty Beria, head of the Soviet security and secret police apparatus. In it he claimed that Jews made up 18.7 percent of the ministry's workforce and held half of the managerial positions. In certain sections, he asserted, the presence of Jews was even greater: in Department 1 (counterintelligence) they constituted 27 percent of the staff and occupied all managerial positions, and in the Press Control Department they constituted "up to 50 per cent."²⁶

Lower figures for the number of Jews are given in a note written by Bierut on November 25, 1945, based on information provided by Radkiewicz, which is more reliable. According to Bierut, Jews made up 1.7 percent of the total workforce of the MBP (438 of 25,600) and held about 13 percent of the "managerial positions" (67 of 500).²⁷ The difference between the two sets of figures may also be due to the fact that the Selivanovsky report relates to the ministry alone, whereas Bierut's note relates to the entire apparatus, including regional offices, in which there was a very high turnover at the lower levels.²⁸

On the basis of an investigation of the official account of the central office of the Security Services produced by Department C of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1978, the historian Andrzej Paczkowski carried out an analysis of the ethnic background of those officials who in the period 1944–1956 occupied the position of section head or higher in the headquarters of the security establishment (originally the Department, then the Ministry of Public Security, and subsequently the Committee for Public Security). It does not include those who occupied managerial positions, even at the highest level, in regional offices but who never reached high office at the center. Of the 447 individuals in the survey, the nationality of

²⁵ There is a growing Polish literature on this topic, but with the exception of L. Piłat, "Struktura organizacyjna i działalność Wojewódzkiego Urzędu Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego w Lublinie 1944–1945," *Studia Rzeszowskie*, 6 (1999), pp. 77–92 and Szwagrzyk "Żydzi w kierownictwie UB Stereotyp czy rzeczywistość?" *Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej*, 11 (2005), pp. 37–42, the issue of Jews in the security apparatus is only tangentially discussed.

²⁶ T. Cariwskaja et al., eds., *Teczka specjalna J. W. Stalina: Raporty NKWD z Polski 1944–1946* (Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza Rytm, 1998), p. 421.

²⁷ Cited in A. Paczkowski, "Jews in the Polish Security Apparatus: An Attempt to Test the Stereotype," *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, XVI (2003), pp. 456–457.

²⁸ See L. Gluchowski and A. Paczkowski, letter to the *Times Literary Supplement*, March 28, 1997.

131 (29.6 percent) was listed as Jewish. In 1944 and 1945 Jews represented 24.7 percent of the total, half the number given in Selivanovsky's report. The percentage of Jews in the head office remained more or less constant at around 30 percent, with the exception of the years 1944 and 1945, when it was somewhat lower. In the local branches of the Secret Police (Urząd Bezpieczeństwa, UB) Jewish participation was much lower.

What is clear is that, in the period 1944–1956, in Paczkowski's words, "Jews were over-represented, occupied higher rather than lower positions, and that the higher the level, the greater their proportion."²⁹ Of course these were communists and internationalists far from any involvement in Jewish life. They entered the security service at a time in which the struggle to impose communism was particularly intense and when loyalty to the system was the overriding criterion both of the Polish communist leadership and of their Soviet overlords. Thus of the 447 higher officials at the head office, 21 percent had been members of the prewar Communist Party of Poland (Komunistyczna Partia Polski, KPP); 35.1 percent of those who gave their nationality as Jewish had been members of the KPP, clearly a major factor in their recruitment.

After 1956 Jews were to be largely purged from the security apparatus. Even in the period between 1944 and 1955 their role had aroused opposition among "native" communists, who felt that it increased their own unpopularity in Polish society and barred their path to high office. Gomułka cited the "attitude towards Jewish comrades," the preferential treatment they were receiving, as one of the reasons why he had rejected Stalin's proposal that he become a member of the Politburo that was being formed in the PZPR.³⁰ During the anti-Zionist campaign of 1968 Gomułka was to claim that opposition to him began when he tried to change the leadership of the MBP.

Why was it that Jews were allowed to hold a considerable number of important posts in the security apparatus in Poland when they had

²⁹ For this analysis, see Paczkowski, "Jews in the Polish Security Apparatus," p. 457. The two-volume account "Służba Bezpieczeństwa Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej 1944–1978: Centrala" was published with an introduction by Mirosław Piotrowski as *Ludzie bezpieki w walce z narodem i Kościołem: Służba Bezpieczeństwa w Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej w latach 1944–1978: Centrala* (Lublin: Klub Inteligencji Katolickiej, 1999), pp. 39–48. The calculations under discussion were conducted by Jarosław Pawlak within the framework of a research project under Paczkowski's direction entitled "Institutions of a Totalitarian State: Poland 1944–1956."

³⁰ *Vostochnaya Evropa v dokumentakh rossiiskikh arkhivov 1944–1953* (Moscow: Memorial, 1997) I, pp. 940–941.

already been removed from such positions in the Soviet Union and at a time when Stalin was engaged in the destruction of the Soviet Yiddish cultural establishment and in a full-scale purge of “Jewish cosmopolitans”? The Soviets were certainly aware of the significance of Jews in the Polish communist elite. On July 10, 1949, Viktor Lebedev, the Soviet ambassador in Warsaw, sent a letter to Moscow addressed to, among others, Stalin, Molotov, and Beria. He warned them of the presence of “agents of the pre-war intelligence and counter-intelligence services” at the highest levels of the Polish party and hinted that the minister of public security, Radkiewicz, was “a nationalist” and that his wife was “a passionately anti-Soviet person.” At the same time, he claimed that Minc, Berman, and Zambrowski, who a year earlier, with the assistance of the Kremlin, had unseated Gomulka for “Polish nationalism,” were themselves guilty of “Jewish nationalism.” Moreover, he continued, in the MBP, “beginning with the vice-ministers through the department directors, there is not a single Pole. They are all Jews.”³¹ Perhaps considering “Polish nationalism” in the party as a more serious problem for the Kremlin, he counseled that “the time has not yet come for a decisive resolution to the question of the battle with Jewish nationalism in the Polish party. We can only think about a gradual preparation for such a resolution.” That the general situation in Poland was worsening, he added, “affects in particular the apparatus of the Ministry of Public Security . . . restoring the leadership of the MBP to health would be an important step on the road to restoring the situation in the leadership of the Polish party.”³²

Some changes were now introduced. A new, impeccably “Aryan” deputy minister, Waclaw Lewikowski, a longtime Comintern official, was appointed to the MBP, and a senior Jewish functionary, Józef Różański, was removed from the group investigating Gomulka. In February–March 1950 the Secretariat of the Organizational Bureau of the Central Committee, which was to become the highest and most important decision-making body in Poland in the last years of Stalin’s life, was established. Of the top communist officials who were of Jewish origin only Zambrowski was a member; both Berman and Minc were excluded. The key figures under Bierut were now Edward Ochab, Zenon Nowak, and Franciszek Mazur – all of whom were non-Jews. Reporting

³¹ Quoted in A. Kochański, *Polska w dokumentach z archiwów rosyjskich 1949–1953* (Warsaw: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 2000), p. 46.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 47.

to Stalin on the discussion about the establishment of this body, Lebedev argued that Bierut “should free himself from the ‘confusion’ in which he finds himself, draw two or three Polish comrades close, and rely on them more boldly.”³³ There were those in the party who wished to take advantage of the new situation. On April 12, 1950, the head of the secret espionage section in Warsaw of the Soviet news agency TASS reported to Stalin (with copies to Molotov and Malenkov) on the composition of the personnel of the new Secretariat. Relying on the opinions of Stefan Matuszewski, a leading member of the PZPR Central Committee, and Władysław Wolski, another hard-line communist, who were frequent guests at the Soviet embassy in Warsaw, he observed that “many Jewish workers in the Central Committee consider it [the composition of the new body] an attack directed against Jewish party workers,” but according to Matuszewski, “it was enthusiastically supported by the entire party.” Wolski was more skeptical, believing that there was still a “Jewish clique” in the party, which “hindered the advancement of Poles.”³⁴

Bierut seems to have decided, perhaps with Soviet encouragement, that to remove large numbers of Jews from the party apparatus at this stage would be too destabilizing. As a consequence, the antisemitic purge within the UB focused almost exclusively on functionaries of the intelligence service headed by its longtime chief, Waclaw Komar. The core of the leadership of the MBP thus remained unchanged. At the same time, there are clear indications that Stalin was considering a purge of Jews in top-ranking positions in the PZPR. After the Slánský trial, Wanda Wasilewska, who had played a key role in the wartime leadership of the Polish Workers’ Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza, PPR), traveled from Kiev to Warsaw to warn Berman of Stalin’s plans to eliminate him.³⁵

In fact, until 1956 none of the major changes in the MBP involved the large-scale removal of Jews. In 1948–1949 purges had removed the supporters of the rightist–nationalist deviation, including Mieczysław Moczar and Grzegorz Korzyński. Two Jews lost their positions after the death of Stalin, Anatol Fejgin (for not preventing Światło’s defection in December 1953) and Różański (for “violating people’s law and order”).

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 74. ³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

³⁵ Jakub Berman, “Wspomnienia, 1979–1982,” *Archiwum Akt Nowych* (Archives of Contemporary Records, Warsaw), 325/33; cited in M. Shore, *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation’s Life and Death in Marxism, 1918–1968* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 268.

However, it was only after 1956, with the restoration of Gomulka, that a wide-ranging purge occurred. Until this date the party leadership seems to have felt that the Jews had to be tolerated because “Polish nationalism” was a greater danger.

At root, the presence of communists of Jewish origin in significant positions in the security apparatus has to be seen as a consequence of Stalin’s deep distrust of the Poles. It took place at the same time as the purge of Yiddish cultural activists in the Soviet Union and the wider campaign against “cosmopolitanism,” which was essentially an attack on Russified Jews within the new Soviet intelligentsia. The retention of Jews in these positions in Poland was clearly intended by Stalin to be a temporary expedient until a larger group of reliable local communists could be trained. Resentment in the party against the position of Jewish communists and Jews in general surfaced in the crisis that raised Gomulka to power, and, still more, in that of 1968.

CONCLUSION

Clearly most problems are aroused by those who took an active part in the communist regimes in the Soviet Union and Poland (and also elsewhere, although that is not the topic of this chapter). Some have claimed that those who became communists had totally severed their links with the Jewish world. In a speech in 1917, Simon Dubnov observed:

Many demagogues came from among us, who joined the heroes of the street and the prophets of power grabbing. They use Russian pseudonyms because they are ashamed of their Jewish origin (Trotsky, Zinoviev etc.), but maybe it is their Jewish name which is not genuine, because they have no roots to bind themselves to our people.³⁶

There is some truth in these observations. However, such people are perhaps representative of the category identified by Isaac Deutscher as “non-Jewish Jews,” and their role in the early history of the Soviet Russia and of communist Poland is undeniable. Certainly the messianism of the Bolsheviks struck a chord with many Jews, as did the slogans of the communist political religion, such as “God is us,” “The proletariat is

³⁶ Simon Dubnov, *Kniga zbizni*, II (Riga: Jaunātnes Grāmata, 1935), p. 227, quoted in O. Budnitsky, “V chuzhom piru pokhmel’e: Evrei i russkaya revolyutsiya,” *Vestnik Evreiskogo universiteta v Moskve*, 3, 13 (1996), p. 25

the chosen people which will fulfill its mission and complete history,” and “The destitute proletariat was nothing – it will be everything.”³⁷ In addition, Jews were attracted to revolutionary socialism because of their belief that this would make possible integration, because of Jewish poverty.

For antisemites, the equation of Jew and Bolshevik merely added to the armory of their arguments. There were, however, those who raised seriously the question of why the Jews had played so large a role in the revolution and whether Jews as a whole had some responsibility for those of their number who were implicated in its many excesses and crimes. One of them was the monarchist and Russian nationalist editor of *Kievlyanin*, Vassili Shulgin. In his book *Why We Do Not Like You* published in Paris in 1927, he stated it bluntly, not eschewing antisemitic commonplaces:

We do not like the fact that you took too prominent a part in the revolution, which turned out to be the greatest *lie and fraud*. We do not like the fact that you became *the backbone and core of the Communist Party*. We do not like the fact that, with your discipline and solidarity, your persistence and will, you have consolidated and strengthened for years to come the maddest and bloodiest enterprise that humanity has known since the day of creation. We do not like the fact that this experiment was carried out *in order to implement the teachings of a Jew, Karl Marx*. We do not like the fact that this whole terrible thing was done *on the Russian back* and that it has cost us Russians, all of us together and each one of us separately, unutterable losses. We do not like the fact that you, Jews, a relatively small group within the Russian population, participated in this vile deed *out of proportion to your numbers*.³⁸

What the Jews as a collective needed to do was to repudiate the revolutionaries acting in their name. If they did not, they could not hold Russians responsible for the pogroms they suffered. Russians would be bound to respond:

Fine, *in that case* we did not stage the pogroms, either, and don't have anything to do with those few who did: Petlyura's men, the Ossetians, and assorted riffraff along with them. We don't have any influence over them. Personally, we did not engage in any pogroms, we tried to prevent pogroms . . . So if the Jews, all of them,

³⁷ This issue is well discussed in Zsuzsa Hetényi, *In a Maelstrom: The History of Russian-Jewish Prose (1860-1940)* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2008), pp. 171-173 and M. Löwy, “Messianisme juif et utopies libertaires en Europe Centrale (1905-1923),” *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* LI, 1 (1981), pp. 5-47.

³⁸ Vassili V. Shul'gin, “*Chto nam v nikh ne nraivtsia . . .*” *Ob Antisemitizme v Rossii* (Reprint Moscow: Nestor-Istoriia, 1992), pp. 34-35 (italics in the original).

do not plead guilty to the social revolution, then the Russians, all of them, will plead not guilty to the Jewish pogroms.³⁹

His views were echoed by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in the second volume of his *Dvesti let vmeste* (1795–1995) (Two Hundred Years Together). In it he calls on Jews, on the analogy of what has taken place in Germany since the end of Nazism, to accept “moral responsibility” for those among their coreligionists who “took part in the iron Bolshevik leadership and, even more so, in the ideological guidance of a huge country down a false path.” They should “repent” for their role in the “Cheka executions, the drowning of the barges with the condemned in the White and Caspian Seas, collectivization, Ukrainian famine – in all the vile acts of the Soviet regime.”⁴⁰

What is clear is that the crude application of the concept of collective responsibility to so diverse and politically unorganized a group as, for example, the Jews of the tsarist empire does not facilitate the understanding of complex historical events. Rather one should seek to understand the reasons why a section of the Jewish community was attracted to Bolshevism and manifested this allegiance sometimes in violent forms and, in the larger context, the complex nature of Jewish acculturation and integration within the Soviet revolutionary state and in post-1944 Poland.

How, therefore, is one to evaluate the role of Jews in revolutionary socialist regimes? Vassili Grossman in *Forever Flowing* saw this as the result of the *longue durée* of Jewish history:

Whence had that powerful flame of fanaticism flared within him, this son of a sad, sly shopkeeper from the *shtetl* of Fastov, this student in the commercial school who had read the books of the “Golden Library” and of Louis-Henri Boussenard? Neither he nor his father had any reason to store up within their hearts that hatred of capitalism which was fed in dark coal mines, in smoky factories.

Who had given him a fighter’s soul? Was it the example of Zhelyabov and Kalyayev, or the wisdom of the Communist Manifesto, or the suffering of the impoverished people right beside him?

Or was it that the smouldering coals were buried deep within his thousand-year inheritance, ready to burst into flame – to do battle with Caesar’s Roman soldiers, to confront the bonfires of the Spanish inquisition, to join in the starving frenzy of the Talmudists, to emerge in the *shtetl* organization for self-defense during the pogroms?

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 141–142.

⁴⁰ Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *Dvesti let vmeste*, II (Moscow: Russkii put’, 2002), pp. 445, 468.

Was it the age-old chain of abuses, the anguish of the Babylonian captivity, the humiliations of the ghetto, or the misery of the Pale of Settlement that had produced and forged that unquenchable thirst that was scorching the soul of the Bolshevik Lev Mekler?

Others were less apologetic. Unlike some other former Jewish communists, the Polish–Jewish poet Stanisław Wygodzki, who immigrated to Israel in 1968, remained true to the ideal of communism while rejecting the practice. In an interview with *Polityka* in 1990 characteristically entitled “I Served an Evil Cause,” he stated:

You want to know whether I still believe in something that was once called Communism. I believe that one should not live from exploitation, that one should not oppress anyone, that one should not subjugate a foreign land and that one should not do anything that takes away from people their humanity. This is what communism means to me and in such a communism I still believe today.⁴¹

⁴¹ Interview with Piotr Sarzyński, “Służyłem złej sprawie,” *Polityka*, 33, 1990.

Jews and American Communism

Harvey Klehr

Few topics have been as sensitive in the American Jewish community as the seemingly large number of Jews in such radical or revolutionary groups as the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA). The reason is not hard to fathom. For many years antisemites of all varieties have linked Jews with Bolshevism or communism. Shortly after the Russian Revolution, a Brooklyn magazine entitled the *Anti-Bolshevist* charged that the Bolshevik was “a Jew who uses socialism, anarchy and internationalism for the sole purpose of getting possession of the Christians’ wealth and to exploit the Christian toiler. The Russian government is a government of the Jews, by Jews and for the Jews.” In the same period American diplomats routinely described the Russian Revolution as a Jewish plot, noting that Karl Marx was Jewish – albeit baptized – and that such prominent leaders of the revolution as Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Kamenev were Jews. Invariably and incorrectly Lenin was tossed in as well.¹

Bad enough that so many Russian Jews were Communists, but far worse for American Jews that so many revolutionaries seeking to overthrow the democratic government of the United States had Jewish origins. To many Americans radicalism was a foreign import – Andrew Carnegie once labeled radicals as “a parcel of foreign cranks whose communistic ideas were the natural outgrowth of unjust laws of their native land.” That so many American Jews had family origins in the old Russian

¹ Zosa Szajkowski, *Jews, War and Communism*. Vol. II. *The Impact of the 1919 Red Scare on American Jewish Life* (New York: Ktav, 1974), p. 159.

Empire meant that the identification of Jews with Russian Communism called into question their own patriotism.²

Even the Communist Party was sensitive about its image as a Jewish-dominated organization. A study I conducted many years ago showed that Jews took considerably longer to work their way up the Party ladder to the Central Committee than non-Jews because the Party was anxious to present a less “Jewish” face to the country.³ In 1929 the New York Young Communist League boasted of the advances it had made, noting that “the results are also good in national composition, the majority of the new recruits being young Americans and not Jewish.”⁴

At times, other groups in the CPUSA complained about an outsized Jewish presence. During the 1930s, when the various ethnic fraternal orders controlled by the CPUSA were consolidated into the International Workers Order, several of the Eastern European groups grumbled about losing their autonomy and being controlled by Jews, the largest of the groups. Harold Cruse, a black former Communist, wrote a book praised by many on the left in the 1960s, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, in which he railed against Jewish “dominance” of the Party and complained that Jewish Communist intellectuals had “brainwashed” their black counterparts. While pretending to be universalists, they were actually Jewish chauvinists, who had persuaded the Communist Party to take “up the anti-Hitler crusade in the late 1930s,” but vehemently opposed black nationalism.⁵

Many of the leading Jewish cadres of the CPUSA changed their names to present a more American image. Israel Regenstrief became John Gates, Gil Greenberg became Gil Green, Jacob Liebstein became Jay Lovestone, Sol Auerbach became James Allen. Non-Jewish ethnic Communists also changed their names – Arvo Holberg became Gus Hall, Stefan Mesarosh became Steve Nelson – but my impression is that the practice was far more common among Jews.

² Andrew Carnegie, *Triumphant Democracy, or, Fifty Years March of the Republic* (New York: Kennikat Press, 1886), p. 348.

³ Harvey Klehr, *Communist Cadre: The Social Background of the American Communist Party Elite* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1978), pp. 37–57.

⁴ Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), p. 163.

⁵ Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: From Its Origins to the Present* (New York: William Morrow, 1967), pp. 147–170.

One important clue to the attraction of the CPUSA to some American Jews does emerge from this phenomenon of changing names. Oddly enough, the CPUSA was a route to Americanization. In the Party young immigrants and the children of immigrants found a way out of their ethnic ghettos. The Party was a bridge to the larger American culture, a place where they met and mingled with other Americans. While the Jewish Federation of the Party, like the other ethnic-language groups, conducted its business in Yiddish and was quite insular, younger, more Americanized Jews functioned in the more Americanized sector of the CPUSA. If a young Communist wanted a future in the CPUSA, he or she got out of “language work” as quickly as possible, as J. Peters, born Sandor Goldberger, did when he moved in 1929 from the Hungarian Federation to the broader CP. Peters, like many of his comrades, avoided any identification as Jewish.⁶

The Jewish role in the CPUSA, both in its leadership and its rank and file, varied considerably over time. When the Communist movement was founded in 1919, Jews did not play a major role among its top cadres. Only two of the most prominent left-wing leaders – Gregory Weinstein and Nicholas Hourwich – were Jewish, and neither had a significant role in the CPUSA after its formation. The most prominent figures in the early Party – Louis Fraina and John Reed, Charles Ruthenberg, James Cannon, Alfred Wagenknecht, and James Larkin – were not Jewish. Most of the Jews who emerged into the Party leadership in the 1920s – Ben Gitlow, Bertram Wolfe, Jay Lovestone, William Weinstone, Alexander Bittelman – were younger and far less well known, or not known at all in the Jewish socialist community, and few identified themselves as Jewish in any way. The Party’s most significant recruit of the early 1920s, William Z. Foster, was not Jewish and neither were the members of the group of Chicago-based trade unionists who became the mainstays of his faction.

A split in the Jewish Federation of the Socialist Party in 1921 led more Jews into the Communist movement, including such prominent figures as J. B. Salutsky, Mossaiye Olgin, and Jacob Mindel. Salutsky did not last long and many of these recruits remained within the orbit of the Jewish Federation. While many of the young Jews who had joined in 1919 moved into second-tier Party leadership positions in the mid-

⁶ Thomas Sakmyster, *Red Conspirator: J. Peters and the American Communist Underground* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011).

1920s, only one – Jay Lovestone – ever became the leader of the CPUSA. Ousted by Stalin himself in 1929, Lovestone was the first and last Jew to head the Party.

Between 1921 and 1961 Jews made up approximately one-third of the membership of the Party's Central Committees. During that period about one-half of the foreign-born members of the CC were Jewish. While many of the foreign-born non-Jews never abandoned the language federations where they had their roots and that were the backwaters of the Communist movement, most Jewish Communists were far less insular.⁷

But for much of the 1920s, Jews, while making up a substantial portion of the midlevel leadership of the CPUSA, were not the largest ethnic bloc in the CPUSA. As late as 1925, about 50 percent of the Party were from the Finnish-language Federation, and Yugoslavs and Bulgarians made up another quarter. About 15 percent of the Party was Jewish. Their influence and visibility, however, were far higher than their numbers. Only about 10 percent of the Party in the mid-1920s was English-speaking, and a significant percentage of those were Jewish. For all their numbers, the Finns, concentrated in the upper Midwest, played a minimal role in Party life. Jews, on the other hand, were concentrated in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and other cities. They had a significant base in the garment unions, one of the very few industries where Communists had established a foothold, and their newspaper, the *Frayhayt*, had a larger circulation than the *Daily Worker* – twenty-two thousand to seventeen thousand.⁸

To be sure, there were substantial defections by Jews from the Communist movement. Both the Trotskyists and the Lovestoneites, expelled in the late 1920s, were disproportionately Jewish. Virtually all of Lovestone's followers – Bertram Wolfe, Ben Gitlow, Will Herberg, Charles Zimmerman – were Jewish. Martin Abern, Max Shachtman, Al Glotzer, and numerous other Trotskyists were also of Jewish origin. And many rank-and-file Jewish Communists found it hard to swallow Party support for anti-Jewish riots in Palestine in 1929.

The Jewish percentage of the Party surged in the 1930s. The language federations became far less significant. A dispute within the Finnish Federation over whether the Party would control the cooperative movement the Red Finns had built led to a mass exodus. But under the impact

⁷ Klehr, *Communist Cadre*, pp. 24–31.

⁸ Theodore Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia* (New York: Viking Press, 1960), pp. 190–192.

of the Depression and the rise of Hitler, a large number of native-born Jews, many of them graduating from college with little prospect of employment or facing discrimination in hiring, joined the Party.⁹

For many years, Communist policies hampered efforts to appeal to Jews concerned about Jewish issues. While American Communists trumpeted the alleged abolition of antisemitism in the USSR, their hard-edged rejection of some of the most powerful currents in Jewish life – Judaism and Zionism – ensured that substantial segments of the Jewish community regarded them with implacable hostility. During the 1920s, Jewish Communists frequently emphasized their disdain for “superstition” and backward religious practices. The *Frayhayt* was published on the High Holidays with antireligious content and young Communists picketed in front of synagogues, often eating nonkosher food on Yom Kippur.¹⁰

While many Jewish leftists shared an antipathy to religion, few were as brazen as the Communists in expressing it. Similarly, the Communists were not alone in rejecting Zionism. The Jewish Bund had vociferously opposed settlement in Palestine as a solution to the Jewish problem in Europe, and large segments of the Jewish left and Jewish labor movement were likewise political opponents of Zionism. But few outside the Communist orbit were enthusiastic about Soviet efforts to create a Jewish homeland in Birobidzhan, a remote area in Siberia, beginning in 1928. Although several thousand Jews moved there and American Communists created a fund-raising apparatus to provide support, the project did not generate widespread support in the Jewish community.¹¹

Following Arab riots in Palestine in 1929 that resulted in the massacre of religious Jews in Hebron, the *Frayhayt* at first blamed British imperialism along with Zionist provocation and labeled the attacks a pogrom. When the CPUSA leadership criticized the statement and demanded that the paper lay the blame on Zionists, the editors meekly agreed and absolved the Arabs from responsibility. The *Frayhayt* proceeded to print false and inflammatory stories of Zionist massacres of Arabs and endorsed the Arab revolt. Outraged by the newspaper’s approval of the murder of Jews, advertisers, news dealers, and many non-Zionists excoriated the Communists.¹²

⁹ Klehr, *Heyday*, pp. 378–385.

¹⁰ Melech Epstein, *The Jew and Communism 1919–1941* (New York: Trade Union Sponsoring Committee, 1959), pp. 254–255.

¹¹ Henry Srebrnik, *Dreams of Nationhood: American Jewish Communists and the Soviet Birobidzhan Project, 1924–1951* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2010).

¹² See Epstein, *Jew and Communism*, pp. 223–233.

The CPUSA's willingness to alienate Jews began to fade after 1935, when the Party abandoned its ultrarevolutionary Third Period line, which had foreclosed cooperation with other left-wing groups and declared such "social fascists" as Norman Thomas more dangerous to workers than Nazis. As the USSR recalibrated its foreign policy to combat the growing menace of fascism, Communist parties around the world toned down their revolutionary pronouncements and sought allies wherever they could be found. Party membership soared, reaching ninety thousand by 1939.

In this new atmosphere Jews became a target of opportunity. Communists derived enormous prestige in the Jewish community as the most vigorous and militant enemies of fascism, symbolized by their sponsorship of the Abraham Lincoln Brigades fighting on the side of the Loyalists in the Spanish Civil War. Of some three thousand Americans who went to Spain, at least a third were Jewish.¹³

During the Popular Front the Party toned down the assimilationism and atheism that had marked the Third Period. Just as it made appeals to Catholics, it courted Jews. After 1935, specific Jewish holidays, given a secular content, were incorporated into the curriculum of the International Workers Order's (IWO's) schools. When Communists such as Israel Amter ran for public office, the Party emphasized his Jewish ties. Jack Stachel, a Party functionary, announced that "a good Communist can also be a good Jew loyal to his people." Mossaiye Olgin, a onetime Jewish Bund leader who had joined the Communists in 1921, explained in 1938 that the Party's opposition to Zionism had led it to forget "that the craving, the desire for nationhood is not in itself reactionary."¹⁴

Although there are no exact figures, Jews might have constituted 40 percent of the Party's membership just before the Nazi-Soviet Pact. The Jewish People's Fraternal Order, created to compete with the Workmen's Circle, was the largest ethnic group in the International Workers Order. The only union led by an avowed Communist was the largely Jewish Furriers' Union, whose fiery president was Ben Gold. Other unions in which Communist influence was considerable, including the Distributive Workers, American Federation of Teachers, United Public Workers, and Federation of Architects, Engineers and Technicians, were

¹³ Albert Prago, "Jews in the International Brigade," *Jewish Currents*, February 1979, pp. 15-27.

¹⁴ Klehr, *Heyday*, pp. 383-384.

largely Jewish and concentrated in New York. The radical student movement of the 1930s was strongest on campuses with large numbers of Jewish students – CCNY, Columbia, NYU – and a large percentage of its leaders were Jewish. In a mock presidential election in 1936, for example, the Communist Earl Browder received 25 percent of the vote at City College.¹⁵

The Popular Front, however, was a short-lived policy. Proclaimed in 1935, it was interred in 1939. Since American Communists were hostages to Soviet foreign policy, they had no choice but to acquiesce in September 1939 when Joseph Stalin concluded his pact with Adolf Hitler, dividing up Poland, allowing Soviet incorporation of the Baltic states, and precipitating the Second World War. Despite CPUSA efforts to justify the pact as saving that portion of the Polish Jewish community now annexed to the USSR, the spectacle of the supposed bulwark of antifascism agreeing to a treaty of friendship with the Nazis proved devastating to the CPUSA and its Jewish members. The Nazi–Soviet Pact was a disaster for the American Communist Party, particularly among Jews. The Party itself admitted that membership had dropped by 15 percent, but the real losses may well have reached 40 percent, since Party membership in April 1942 was only fifty thousand. No definitive figures are available, but it is reasonable to conclude that a significant percentage of the dropouts were Jews appalled by the Soviets' actions and the CPUSA's support for them.¹⁶

Although the alliance between the USA and the USSR during the Second World War briefly refurbished the Party's image, after the war the Party began a long, steady decline into irrelevance. While many Jews applauded the fierce Soviet resistance to Nazism, the USSR's apparent murder of the Bund leaders Victor Alter and Henryk Erlich (Erlich had actually committed suicide while in Soviet hands) on the grounds that they had aided the Nazis solidified the hatred felt by many left-wing Jews toward Communism. The *Daily Worker* defended their supposed executions and attacked such Jewish socialists and onetime Bundists as David Dubinsky as dupes or agents of the Nazis for condemning what they believed to have been the murders of both men.¹⁷

¹⁵ Arthur Liebman, *Jews and the Left* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1979), pp. 57–66.

¹⁶ Epstein, *Jew and Communism*, pp. 361–370.

¹⁷ Stephen Norwood, *Antisemitism and the American Far Left* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 76–78.

After the war, the Soviets' surprising decision to support the creation of the State of Israel again won it some credit in the Jewish community. It was not that its long-standing hostility to Zionism had evaporated; the USSR saw the creation of a Jewish state as a blow to British imperialism and had some hopes, quickly dashed, that a socialist-dominated Israel, with many of its founders born in Russia, might be an ally. American Communists benefited within the Jewish community. In a special election to the U.S. House of Representatives, Leo Isaacson, running on the American Labor Party line with strong Communist support in a heavily Jewish district, defeated a Democratic opponent, emphasizing his support for Zionism. Isaacson's victory was one of the encouraging omens that persuaded the CPUSA to support a third-party presidential election bid in 1948.

A good picture of the Party's support among Jews occurred during the Henry Wallace campaign of 1948. The CPUSA had pushed him to run on a third-party ticket, exerted significant control of the Progressive Party, and urged its union assets to support Wallace, even at the cost of alienating its allies in the labor movement. One-third of Wallace's vote was from Jews; only 2 percent of non-Jews supported him compared to about 10 percent of Jews.¹⁸

It was after the Second World War, when the Party was in steep decline, that it appeared even more Jewish. Party membership outside major metropolitan areas virtually vanished, leaving Communists concentrated in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Philadelphia, where Jews were an inordinately high percentage of members. Eleven of the top leaders of the Party were tried under the Smith Act in 1948; five were Jewish. Ten of the fifteen defendants in the "second-string" New York Smith Act trial were Jews, as were seven of the fourteen California defendants. The House Committee on Un-American Activities hearings on Communism in Hollywood featured a large number of Jews. Seven of the Hollywood Ten were Jewish, as were many of the witnesses who followed them. It was front-page news when such actors as Edward G. Robinson, Lee J. Cobb, John Garfield, and Zero Mostel either took the Fifth Amendment or testified about their Communist pasts. Antisemites such as Congressman John Rankin of Mississippi thoughtfully supplied the press with the "real names" of such miscreants: Edward

¹⁸ Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes, *The American Communist Movement: Storming Heaven Itself* (New York: Twayne, 1992), pp. 92–95; Liebman, pp. 65–66.

Iskowitz (Eddie Cantor), Emmanuel Goldenberg (Robinson), David Kaminsky (Danny Kaye), Melvyn Hesselberg (Melvyn Douglas), etc. Rankin was a vile antisemite but his effusions – he explained on the floor of the House of Representatives that communism was older than Christianity; it had persecuted the Savior and gambled for his garments at the foot of the cross – remained on the fringe.¹⁹

Many of the people named by Elizabeth Bentley as Soviet spies were Jewish, including Harry Dexter White, Nathan Silvermaster, George Silverman, Bela and Sonia Steinman Gold, Harry Magdoff, Victor Perlo, John Abt, Harold Glasser, Charles Kramer, Maurice Halperin, Sol Adler, Michael Greenberg, and Allen Rosenberg. Two of the highest-profile espionage prosecutions featured Jewish defendants – Judith Coplon and Morton Sobell, Ethel and Julius Rosenberg.

While the Rosenbergs were on death row, the CPUSA tried to argue that their convictions were a product of antisemitism. Even as they denounced the anti-Communist legal offensive of the late 1940s as a manifestation of ethnic hatred, American Communists fervently defended the purge trials in Eastern Europe as having no relation to the Jewishness of many of those in the dock. Especially egregious were the court proceedings in Czechoslovakia, where eleven of the fourteen defendants were Jewish; they were accused of spying on behalf of Zionism. In the same period, Yiddish writers were murdered in the USSR, and a fierce campaign targeting “rootless cosmopolitans” and denunciations of Jewish doctors for murdering Kremlin leaders marked an upsurge in naked antisemitism. If the CPUSA’s charges of antisemitism in America developed little resonance, part of the reason may lie in the refusal of Jewish Communists to acknowledge virulent antisemitism in the Communist world.

Yet, what is most remarkable is that the antisemitism that might have been expected from revelations at the height of the Cold War that some 40 percent of those Americans who had spied for the USSR were Jewish never developed, even though the Rosenberg defenders tried to argue that they were targets of antisemitism. Joseph McCarthy, who was not averse to demagoguery, refrained from playing the antisemitic card even though, unlike in Czechoslovakia, there were real spies in America who happened to be disproportionately Jewish. It was the

¹⁹ See Walter Goodman, *The Committee* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968), pp. 173–174, 222.

Communist left, not the American right, that cynically manipulated antisemitic themes in the 1950s.²⁰

If legal attacks on the Party and the emerging Cold War were not enough to drive most Party members, including Jews, to desert it, the revelations of Soviet antisemitism, including the murder of Yiddish writers, the brutal crushing of the Hungarian Revolution, and Khrushchev's secret speech revealing Stalin's crimes completed the job. Such Jewish Communists as John Gates, George Charney, Sid Stein, and Max Weiss led a futile effort to reform the Party and then resigned when it failed. By 1960 Party membership had fallen to three thousand. A core of old Jewish members, from the garment unions or centered on the *Frayhayt*, remained loyal.

Even fifty years of steadfast allegiance to Soviet policies that demonized Jews did not protect Paul Novick, a mainstay of the Jewish section of the CPUSA since the early 1920s and a longtime editor of the *Frayhayt*. Novick had stuck to the Party despite knowing about the repression of Yiddish culture in the USSR through the 1950s but by 1964 had begun to express misgivings. After the Six Day War in 1967, he was critical of the USSR's full-throated support of the Arab states, denounced Arab terrorism directed at Israel, and worried that the New York teachers' strike of 1968 had unleashed antisemitism. After several years of criticism of Novick and the *Frayhayt*, the Party's Political Committee expelled him in 1973 for capitulating "to the pressures of Jewish nationalism and Zionism." Four years later it mounted a futile effort to encourage the paper's remaining few readers to remove Novick and his allies from their positions.²¹

Over the years, Jews played a disproportionate role in the CPUSA and a disproportionate role in defecting from the CPUSA. It is also worth recalling that only a small fraction of American Jews were ever members or sympathizers of the Communist Party. Despite its occasional claims to defend Jewish interests, the CPUSA at all times in its history placed the interests of the Soviet state above all other considerations. To be a Jewish Communist meant approving the Arab slaughter of Jews in Palestine in 1929; defending an alliance with Adolf Hitler in 1939–1941; cheering antisemitic purges in Eastern Europe in the 1940s; and ignoring the

²⁰ For a discussion of the antisemitic aspects of the Czechoslovakian purge trials, see Helaine Blumenthal, "Communism on Trial: The Slansky Affair and Anti-Semitism in Post-WWII Europe," www.escholarship.org/uc/item/4wr2g4kf.pdf;origin=repeccitec.

²¹ Norwood, *Antisemitism and the American Far Left*, pp. 210–214.

murder of luminaries of Yiddish culture, the “doctors’ plot,” and the attacks on “rootless cosmopolitans,” as well as the repression of Jewish refuseniks in the USSR over a period of decades. Whatever the motives that had first led them to Communism, few Jews found it possible to remain loyal to an organization that excused and apologized for antisemitism and supported policies designed to weaken or destroy Israel.

PART FIVE

GENDERED PERSPECTIVES

Gesia Gelfman: A Jewish Woman on the Left in Imperial Russia

Barbara Alpern Engel

“We regarded her as the embodiment of everything lofty, excellent, altruistic and ideal. She was self-sacrificing in matters large and small,” a contemporary recalled of a radical comrade. Decades ago, I used this quote from her memoirs in a book I wrote about Russian radical women of the 1870s.¹ In the course of that decade, several thousand women and men, most of them no older than twenty, fought to overthrow Russia’s social and political order. Their goal: to end the autocracy and the economic exploitation of the peasantry, and to create a more egalitarian world, in which those who toiled would reap the full benefits of their labor. Russia’s peasants, the overwhelming majority of the population, would provide the means. Rising in revolt, they would bring about a socialist order. The revolutionaries became known as *narodniki* from the Russian word *narod*, or people – populists in the usual English translation. Idealizing Russia’s peasantry, whom they regarded as inherently socialist, the revolutionaries pursued the goal of an agrarian socialism that would enable Russia to avoid capitalism, then only slowly gaining momentum, and all the human suffering they associated with it. Roughly 17 percent of participants in the populist movement were female.

In the book, I used the preceding quote to illustrate the extent to which populist revolutionaries and their sympathizers idealized women on the left. It represented merely one quotation among many I might have chosen. I encountered some or all of its terms – lofty, altruistic, ideal, self-sacrificing – innumerable times as I studied the history of Russia’s

¹ Barbara Alpern Engel, *Mothers and Daughters: Women of the Intelligentsia in Nineteenth Century Russia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 180.

radical women. Those words influenced the thesis of my book. Drawing on the narratives of other revolutionaries as well as on radical women's accounts of their own political trajectories, I argued that those terms demonstrated the powerful cultural imperatives that first enabled radical women to rebel against customary female roles and then inspired their conduct as revolutionaries – and to a far greater extent than they inspired men. I traced the source of these ideals to religious values that glorified suffering, self-abnegation, and self-sacrifice – values that were inspired by the Russian Orthodox faith. I was astonished, therefore, to discover when I reread the source of the quote that the woman to whom it referred was Jewish, not Russian Orthodox.²

Her name was Gesia Gelfman (sometimes rendered as Hesia Helfman, or Jessie Helfman). Undoubtedly, Gelfman was the most well known Jewish radical woman of her time, the sole Jew, and one of two women, to receive the death penalty for involvement in the assassination of Tsar Alexander II by revolutionary terrorists on March 1, 1881. However, my study of radical women paid little attention to the specifics of her story or, for that matter, to the stories of other Jewish women who also engaged in radical activism. Of the Jews active in the revolutionary movement of the 1870s, 23.5 percent were female, a considerably higher proportion of women than that to be found in the movement as a whole.³ Nevertheless, while occasionally discussing activist Jewish women – in particular, Beta Kaminskaia and Anna Epshtein, in addition to Gelfman – my book paid no attention to their Judaism.

This was partly because so very little is known about the lives of Jewish women in Russia and Eastern Europe, as ChaeRan Freeze and Paula Hyman have recently observed. To generalize on the basis of such scanty evidence, they argue, is to do injustice to complexity – to “distort the self definitions and experiences” of countless Jewish women.⁴ In addition, Jewish women did not lend themselves to the methods that I used. My methodology relied heavily on personal documents testifying to my subjects' early experience and motivations and the impact upon them of the tumultuous 1860s, as well as of more enduring cultural ideals. Gentile women left copious documentation of this sort. Jewish women radicals of

² M. El'tsina-Zak, “Iz vtrech s pervomartovtsami,” *Katorga i Ssylka*, 12 (1924), pp. 126–127.

³ Boris Orlov, “A Statistical Analysis of Jewish Participation in the Russian Revolutionary Movement of the 1870s,” *Slavic and Soviet Series*, IV, 1–2 (1979), pp. 6–7.

⁴ ChaeRan Freeze and Paula Hyman, “Introduction: A Historiographical Survey,” *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, XVIII (2005), p. 6.

the 1870s left very little. They were a “doomed generation,” in the historian Naomi Shepherd’s words.⁵ Only the rare Jewish woman radical of this era survived to tell her own story. Moreover, with only a few exceptions, most of those who did survive and write autobiographies focused on events that occurred during their movement’s activist stages rather than on their own early years, family and educational background, or motivations in choosing a radical path. It is therefore difficult if not impossible to compose a collective biography of “Jewish women radicals” of this generation, of the sort I set out to create for their Russian Orthodox sisters or that Eric Haberer has created for Jewish radicals of this period more generally.⁶ I begin, instead, with an individual.

That individual is Gesia Gelfman, the most well known Jewish radical woman of her generation. Situating her life in the context of existing scholarship that traces the trajectory of Jewish and female radical activism in Russia during this era this chapter will ask what, if anything, distinguishes a radical who was both Jewish *and* female from others. Erich Haberer, whose pioneering study of Jewish radicalism in Russia is by far the most thoroughgoing, argues for a distinctive Jewish experience of, and influence upon, the radical movement. He emphasizes the importance of education and ideas in the making of Jewish rebels – in particular, the melding of the Haskalah, the Jewish enlightenment, with its glorification of progress through learning and secular knowledge and Russian “nihilism” of the 1860s, which stressed rejection of the past in favor of personal emancipation and social progress. Inspired by these ideas, young Jews became completely alienated from a traditional Jewish community already in the process of upheaval. Thus “cast adrift in a turbulent sea,” as Haberer puts it, they climbed aboard the boat of revolution – the only boat in sight and one that, uniquely in Russian society, welcomed Jews as equals.⁷ The radical movement, he observes, offered Jews an emotional as well as ideological/political refuge. It provided the sole place where revolutionary Jews might feel “at home,” where “love and marriage between Jew and Gentile was the norm,” foreshadowing the new world to come.⁸ Most joined the movement despite, not because of, its peasant-idealizing

⁵ Naomi Shepherd, *A Price below Rubies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 73.

⁶ Erich Haberer, *Jews and Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism and Russian Jews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), a fine study, provides only a relatively superficial overview of this early period.

⁷ Haberer, *Jews and Revolution*, p. 261. ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

ethos, however. Drawn instead to its cosmopolitanism and elements of Western European socialism, Jews fostered those elements as best they could. Including female as well as male activists, Haberer's account draws no distinctions by gender.

By contrast, for Naomi Shepherd, gender provides the key to the genesis of Jewish female radicalism. Close to but excluded from the powerful traditions of learning that provided the mainstay of Jewish life, she argues, women were especially sensitive to new ideologies and had less intellectual baggage to discard when they embraced radical ideas. As did Russian Orthodoxy, Jewish culture provided women with models for self-sacrifice, but without the element of moral superiority so important to Orthodox female rebels. "Female martyrdom and suicide" was "revered" in Jewish history, Shepherd writes, inspiring a long history of female self-abnegation. In combination with the practicality and assertiveness engendered by women's responsibility for the survival of family and community, this self-abnegation made women apt recruits to a radical cause that required them to sever all ties with both.⁹

Helpful as they may be in identifying broader patterns, it is difficult for such overviews to do justice to the particulars of an individual's life trajectory, especially when, as in the case of women, so little is known about the social and cultural context. Nor do such overviews fully explain why their rebellious subjects, be they Jews in general or Jewish women in particular, became revolutionaries. Jewish radicals constituted a mere fraction of the Jewish women and men who struggled to break free from their families and, taking advantage of opportunities to expand their education, left the Pale behind them.¹⁰ Haberer's contention notwithstanding, there were, in fact, other boats prepared to take Jews on board, as Ben Nathans has compellingly demonstrated. Why, then, did some Jews nevertheless choose a radical path? Gelfman's story may suggest possible answers.

Most of the story of her early years must be pieced together from the retrospective accounts of others. Such accounts pose more than the usual methodological problems. Written to memorialize people who gave their lives to the revolutionary cause, they were composed by movement

⁹ Shepherd, *A Price below Rubies*, pp. 2, 22, 44, 66, 73, 76, 83.

¹⁰ Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 248. See also Carole Balin, "The Call to Serve: Jewish Women Medical Students in Russia, 1872-1887," in *Polin*, XVIII (2005), pp. 133-152 and the brief biography of Teofilia Poliak, medical student, who never became involved in revolution, in Engel, *Mothers and Daughters*, p. 159.

survivors with the aim not only of honoring the dead, but also of justifying activists' choices and deeds, and sanctifying their own movement.¹¹ They thus represent a kind of hagiography, one that has cast a shadow over just about every retrospective account of the radical movement of the 1870s, including Haberer's and my own.¹² For much of Gelfman's story, I rely on the account of her sole Jewish biographer, Vladimir Iokhelson, who shared a conspiratorial apartment with her for four months and with whom Gelfman talked about her past, albeit reluctantly, because she found it difficult to speak negatively "about the people who were responsible for her miserable childhood and difficult youth, but to whom she remained attached to the end."¹³ Iokhelson's account hews most closely to facts that can be independently verified. And if indeed hagiography is involved – and there can be little doubt that it is – his, at least, is hagiography with a Jewish inflection.¹⁴

Born to a "perfectly ordinary family," probably in 1855, Gelfman was raised in the small district town of Mozyr, Minsk, its population still below six thousand toward the close of the century, roughly 70 percent of them Jews.¹⁵ The family was deeply traditional. Her father, a fairly well-to-do tradesman in the forest products that sustained the town, was "sternly attached to the rituals of Jewish life" and required his family to

¹¹ Hilde Hoogenboom, "Vera Figner and Revolutionary Autobiographies: The Influence of Gender on Genre," in *Women in Russia and Ukraine*, ed. Rosalind Marsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 78–93; Lynn Ellen Patyk, "Remembering 'The Terrorism': Sergei Stepniak-Kravchinskii's *Underground Russia*," *Slavic Review*, LXVIII, 4 (2009), pp. 758–781; James Frank Goodwin, "The Afterlife of Terrorists: Commemorating the People's Will in Early Soviet Russia," in *Just Assassins: The Culture of Terrorism in Russia*, ed. Anthony Anemone (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2010), pp. 229–246.

¹² For an early example, see the obituary of Beta Kaminskaia (who was Jewish) and Maria Subbotina, first published in 1878. Kaminskaia and Subbotina were "typical of an entire category of Russian girls, women who will be the pride of the Russian nation for all eternity, to whom our socialist movement is indebted . . . No one could surpass their profound, selfless devotion to the cause." *Obshchina: Sotsial'no-revolutsionnoe obozrenie*, 6–7 (1878), p. 51.

¹³ V. O. Iokhelson, ed. *Gesia Gelfman: Materialy dlia biografii i kharakteristiki* (Petrograd-Moscow: Byloe, 1922), p. 3.

¹⁴ To my knowledge, no one has studied the impact of Judaism on the representation of the revolutionary self. But there is considerable work on Jewish self-representation. See, for example, Michael Stanislawski, *Autobiographical Jews: Essays in Jewish Self-Fashioning* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004).

¹⁵ Iokhelson, *Gesia Gelfman*, p. 3. Other accounts give the date of birth as either 1852 or 1854. For Mozyr, see *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 16 vols. (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972), XI, p. 446.

conform as well. The child lost her mother early, or so Iokhelson tells us, and suffered at the hands of a cruel stepmother.¹⁶ Such education as she received, she obtained at home. “The child learned to read and write somehow,” a pattern not untypical for girls of her age and social position.¹⁷ At some point, how exactly remains unclear, Gelfman learned to read and write in Russian as well as Yiddish – a far more unusual accomplishment.¹⁸

As was often true of the women of her generation (and to a lesser extent, of Jewish men), Gelfman’s first rebellion was personal, not political, against an arranged marriage with a talmudic scholar whom she barely knew. Her resistance to the match flew in the face of traditions that granted parents absolute authority over the marriage of daughters. “Submission to parental will was generally the norm in Jewish society,” writes ChaeRan Freeze. Freeze quotes Puah Rakovsky, of Bialystok, born ten years after Gelfman and also pressured into an unwanted marriage: “Jewish girls weren’t bold enough to break out of the fence of unbending customs that actually kept them enslaved,” Rakovsky remembered. “A girl didn’t even have the nerve to oppose the match her father made for her.”¹⁹ Apart from antipathy for her fiancé, what prompted Gelfman to defy these norms remains unclear. She may well have been inspired by the cultural flux of this period – that is, by the ideas that figure so prominently in Haberer’s account, ideas that bore a gendered dimension. During the 1860s, Russian nihilists presented searing critiques of patriarchal authority and of the arranged marriages that prevented individuals from acting autonomously and on the basis of their own feelings – themes that resonated in Jewish communities, too. But whereas the Russian critique decried the victimization of women in such unions, the maskilic version

¹⁶ The second biography, first published in *Novyi Mir* in 1919 and written by a family member, contends that the mother remained alive at least until Gelfman left home. See Iokhelson, *Gesia Gelfman*, p. 14.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3. Nathans, *Beyond the Pale*, p. 222 on typicality. Still, close to 60 percent of Jewish women her age were illiterate, including in Yiddish, according to the census of 1897. Paula Hyman, “Introduction,” in *Puah Rakovsky: My Life as a Radical Jewish Woman: Memoirs of a Zionist Feminist in Poland*, trans. Barbara Harshav and ed. Paula Hyman (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002), p. 5.

¹⁸ Perhaps her relative’s version of her early history is relevant here. It tells us that she learned Russian, gained contact with the Haskalah, and met socially engaged young people at the home of an uncle in Berdichev. This account is unreliable in other respects, and may not be trustworthy. See Iokhelson, *Gesia Gelfman*, p. 15.

¹⁹ ChaeRan Y. Freeze, *Jewish Marriage and Divorce in Imperial Russia* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2002), p. 14; Rakovsky, *My Life*, p. 27.

focused on the sufferings of men.²⁰ Whatever the impetus, in 1871, at the tender age of sixteen, and on the eve of her wedding, Gelfman fled her father's roof.²¹

Such flights were invariably difficult and wrenching. Severing completely a woman's ties with her family of origin, her community, and everyone she had ever known, they produced an irrevocable break with the past. To escape their families, gentile women often resorted to a "fictitious marriage," marriage with an idealistic young man prepared to offer them freedom. Such marriages offered the benefit of identity papers as well as encouragement from and connection to a community of like-minded individuals, often of a radical persuasion.²² By contrast, Gelfman managed her escape without much help from anyone, and no community welcomed her. It is unlikely that the Russian friend who "promised to help her" and sheltered her when she fled provided support once Gelfman had left town.²³ Gelfman thus tossed herself into Haberer's "turbulent sea."

Thereafter, and again unlike most sixteen- or seventeen-year-old rebels, male as well as female, gentile as well as Jewish, Gelfman found herself alone in the world. Unassisted by family or friends, she overcame numerous obstacles. Hoping to pursue an education, a goal she shared with many members of her generation, she somehow made her way to the city of Kiev, roughly 160 miles from Mozyr, where she aimed to enroll in the only available specialized education for women, midwifery courses. Although Kiev was off limits to Jews without a residency permit, despite its location in the Pale of Settlement to which Jews were restricted, Gelfman settled there somehow. She began sewing for a tailor who paid her "a pittance," and prepared for the entry exams, which must surely have required knowledge of Russian in addition to her native Yiddish. Passing the exams and enrolling as a student, she obtained the legal right to residence. At some point, Gelfman reconciled with her

²⁰ Barbara Alpern Engel, *Breaking the Ties That Bound: The Politics of Marital Strife in Late Imperial Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), chap. 2; Freeze, *Jewish Marriage*, pp. 16, 18. Stanislawski, *Autobiographical Jews*.

²¹ Gelfman was hardly unique. "The daughter of so-and-so fled her parents' home on the eve of her marriage, taking all her trousseau and jewels with her and vanished without a trace" was commonly heard in Minsk at the time. Quoted in Freeze, *Jewish Marriage*, p. 17.

²² Engel, *Mothers and Daughters*, pp. 71, 83, 92, 120–121.

²³ Iokhelson, *Gesia Gelfman*, p. 17; Olga Liubatovich, "Autobiography," in *Five Sisters: Women Against the Tsar*, ed. Barbara Alpern Engel and Clifford Rosenthal (New York: Knopf, 1975), p. 185.

father. This may explain why she was allowed, at age sixteen, to enroll in school, when women below twenty-one required parental permission. But Gelfman remained penniless. If indeed she had “grabbed her jewelry” on the night she fled home, as Olga Liubatovich reported, she had long since used up the proceeds of their sale.²⁴ Having refused financial assistance from her father and with no resources other than her own two hands, she earned money by working as a seamstress even as she attended the midwife courses.

Gelfman was soon drawn into the broader student milieu, a milieu characterized by a “powerful collective ethos” and a “unified, usually radical, worldview,” in which differences of religion or ethnicity were irrelevant.²⁵ Sharing her generation’s desire for self-development, she took advantage of every opportunity to “extend her intellectual horizons and acquire the knowledge she lacked.” She read when she could find the time, listened to the discussions of others, and attended public lectures, and the like.²⁶ At the midwife courses, Gelfman made friends with other students, who in turn introduced her to university students, who had “a beneficial impact on her development,” in the words of her biographer.²⁷ In other words, she came to embrace elements of the radical worldview.

Gelfman appears to have remained unaffected, however, by the altruistic urge “to serve society” or “be useful” that often motivated women of her generation to assume a public role.²⁸ And while the search for a worldview to replace the Judaism she had abandoned may have impelled her, as Haberer asserts to be characteristic of other Jewish rebels, Gelfman’s choices were also shaped by impulses less abstract, more immediate and down to earth, more visceral, at least as Iokhelson depicts her. A responsive and empathic soul, she identified with the joys and, even more, the suffering of other people. She responded to that suffering neither by expressing pity nor by wringing her hands, but by actively and “passionately” trying to assist however she could. Thus, for example, while working as a seamstress, Gelfman might give her last kopek to a needy seamstress friend, forgetting that she herself had gone hungry the day before. The capacity for empathy never left her. Later, it would deprive her of some of the discipline and focus requisite for revolutionary

²⁴ Liubatovich, “Autobiography,” p. 185. ²⁵ Nathans, *Beyond the Pale*, p. 239.

²⁶ Iokhelson, *Gesia Gelfman*, pp. 5–6. ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁸ See Engel, *Mothers and Daughters*. Haberer and Shepherd notwithstanding, Jews, too, might share this impulse. See Balin, “Jewish Medical Students.”

struggle. Even in the thick of the terrorist campaign, she could not refrain from “taking to heart” other people’s personal problems, such as marital discord or financial need.²⁹

Empathy as well as ideas likely inspired Gelfman’s initial step in the direction of social activism. She joined and may have initiated a sewing cooperative modeled on that of Vera Pavlovna, the heroine of Nikolai Chernyshevskii’s enormously influential novel, *What Is to Be Done?* (1863), which was virtually the bible of her generation. Such cooperatives, in which workers shared the profits and sometimes lived together, proliferated in the 1860s. An existing cooperative provided the original model for Chernyshevskii’s fictional prototype; his idealized, fictional cooperative in turn inspired many others. By the 1870s, cooperatives were far less common. But Gelfman welcomed the idea when it was proposed. She knew from her own experiences about the poverty that seamstresses suffered, and she believed that collectives offered a solution. When what appeared so straightforward in Chernyshevskii’s depiction proved far more complicated in reality, as it often did, Gelfman stuck with the endeavor (unlike many who abandoned collectives when they encountered difficulties), worked hard, and relished every modest success. In this as in much else, Gelfman displayed practical abilities absent in much of the student and radical milieu, a characteristic of Jewish revolutionaries in general according to Haberer and of Jewish women in particular by Shepherd’s account. Her practicality sometimes bore a distinctly feminine flavor. Gelfman, “as if it were her right,” assumed the role of hostess and organizer whenever any collective project was in the offing. She also “loved to cook” for people and to “stuff her guests” with the food she prepared with her own hands, an unusual quality in a (soon-to-be) radical woman, most of whom firmly rejected such feminine roles, and likely reflecting her Jewish heritage.³⁰

Gelfman entered the orbit of the left in the spring of 1875, after meeting Alexandra Khorzhevskaiia, and through her, other members of the All Russian Socialist Revolutionary Organization (hereafter ARSRO). The organization was composed of former members of the Fritsche group, young women who had studied together in Zurich earlier in the decade, then united with a circle of like-minded men who shared their goal of socialist revolution. They were among the first populists to try to spread socialist ideas and revolutionary publications among factory

²⁹ Iokhelson, *Gesia Gelfman*, pp. 5–6. ³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

workers rather than peasants.³¹ The women had gone to Kiev with that goal in view. The possibility of “different, and broader” activism, in her biographer’s words, is what attracted Gelfman. The fact that the recruiters were female may have mattered, too. As were other populists, Gelfman was drawn to the *narod*, the “mass of the insulted and injured,” Iokhelson tells us. But unlike most, who felt remote from the *narod* and guilty toward them, she was drawn primarily because she felt she belonged to the *narod*, at least in spirit.³²

Indeed, in some respects very little separated Gelfman from ordinary laboring women and men. This was not only because she sometimes went hungry and engaged in manual labor by necessity, unlike most populists, who, if they worked with their hands, did so by their own choice – that is, to be closer to “the people.” It was also because, although her family was, according to most sources, fairly prosperous, Gelfman’s social origins in the lower middle class placed her among the legally “unprivileged,” a status that distinguished her from the overwhelming majority of women who became revolutionaries, gentile women in particular.

Khorzhevskaiia and her comrades drew Gelfman into their movement. Without ending her relationship with the sewing collective, together with her new friends Gelfman began to develop ties with factory workers and to visit the *artels* in which workers lived collectively. In concert with Ekaterina Tumanova, another member of the group, she prepared to “go to the people,” that is, the peasantry, as thousands of young people had already done. Then, in September 1875, Gelfman was arrested together with other members of the organization. After eighteen months of pretrial detention, she stood in the dock with members of ARSRO in the Trial of the Fifty. In this, one of the great political trials of the decade, Gelfman figured only modestly.

The trial record, which only rarely mentions Gelfman by name, makes it clear that she was a newcomer, far less deeply involved than most of the other conspirators. On the other hand, the record also leaves no doubt that she was aware of and sympathized with their goal of spreading socialist ideas among workers: Gelfman maintained an apartment where members of the organization gathered, allowed her address to be used for

³¹ Engel, *Mothers and Daughters*, chap. 7. Gelfman appears to have had no contact with the Kievan branch of the Chaikovskii circle, in which Jews predominated, perhaps because when the circle was at its height in 1873–1874 she was still a student, perhaps because their “cause of the book” was not to her taste. On the Kievan Chaikovtsi, see Haberer, *Jews and Revolution*, pp. 70–72.

³² Iokhelson, *Gesia Gelfman*, p. 7.

underground correspondence, and, most significantly, in at least one instance distributed illegal literature to the factory workers with whom she had helped to establish ties.³³ The court found Gelfman guilty of membership in an illegal organization that aimed to overthrow the existing order and sentenced her to two years of confinement in the Litovskii Castle, to be followed by exile. This was a relatively mild sentence by comparison with those meted out to more prominent members of the organization, but it was nevertheless quite onerous, not only because of the relative modesty of Gelfman's involvement, but also because of her social background. Gelfman was confined to the workhouse, the section of the castle reserved for the unprivileged, where Anna Toporkova, the gentile daughter of a craftsman, soon joined her. The other female members of the group, who derived from privileged backgrounds, were incarcerated in a different section and were not made to labor.

In the workhouse, and evidently for the first time, Gelfman was forced to confront the characteristic that most distinguished her from the *narod* – her Jewish origins. The humbly born female inmates of the workhouse, primarily beggars, vagrants, and procuresses or thieves and prostitutes “of the lowest order,” turned out to be rabid antisemites. From the moment she arrived, they sought to poison Gelfman's existence because of her Jewish origins, as well as humble social and economic status and involvement in a radical cause. She, who had “blindly” believed in the masses, “who loved them and believed they had only honorable and righteous instincts,” was treated maliciously by them from the first and forced to undertake the most onerous tasks – to clean the unbelievably filthy floors, to empty the repulsive slop bucket, and the like. Iokhelson makes this an important moment in Gelfman's story, a test of her devotion to her ideals and revelatory of her character. Although this treatment caused her far greater suffering than the physical deprivation and inedible food, Gelfman responded with empathy and displayed considerable moral strength. Witnessing the other prisoners' envy and greed when she received packages containing tea and sugar from her friends at liberty, Gelfman generously shared virtually all of it with other prisoners. The result, if we can believe her biographer, was almost “a total turnaround” in the prisoners' attitudes toward her.³⁴

³³ *Protsess piatidesiati suzhdennykh v Moskve* (Leipzig: E. L. Kaprowicz, 1888), pp. 39, 50. See also Iokhelson, *Gesia Gelfman*, p. 8.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Gelfman's years of incarceration represented a turning point. They took a terrible physical toll: she lost weight, suffered from stomach problems, and lost her earlier lightheartedness. Incarceration did not break her, however, as it did others. Beta Kaminskaia, also Jewish and a member of the ARSRO, lost her mind in prison and took her own life. So did a number of defendants in the subsequent Trial of the 193. Nor did prison sway Gelfman from the path of revolution, as incarceration did in the case of Anna Toporkova, the other female defendant sentenced to the workhouse, who was released thanks to a petition by her sister and had no further contact with the left.³⁵ On Gelfman, prison had the opposite effect, strengthening her resolve to devote herself completely to social revolutionary activity among the people, or so her biographer tells us.

After her incarceration ended, Gelfman rejoined the radical movement, and at a far higher level of commitment than before. She completed her sentence in March 1879 and then was sent in a convict convoy to Staraiia Russa, a small town in Novgorod province, where she was required to live under police surveillance. After several months, having borrowed money and a passport from a generous acquaintance, she fled to St. Petersburg and in November 1879, resumed her affiliation with the left. The organization she joined, the People's Will, differed considerably from the one to which she had given her support four years earlier. A self-declared terrorist party that embraced the goal of political assassination, on March 1, 1881, its members would succeed in taking the life of Tsar Alexander II. Of course, when she joined her fate with the People's Will, Gelfman had few other choices. Her family had renounced her after her arrest in 1875. Having fled exile and police surveillance, she led an illegal existence. Where else could she find refuge but with fellow radicals? Moreover, most of the people she knew belonged to the People's Will, including Nikolai Kolodkevich, one of its founders, whom she had first met in Kiev and with whom she soon entered a "civil marriage" in St. Petersburg.

Gelfman, however, insisted that her choice was deliberate and not dictated by circumstances. In an effort to mitigate her fate at the trial of the regicides in 1881, her lawyer attempted to underscore her lack of alternatives. He described in detail the hardships that prompted Gelfman's flight from Staraiia Russa to St. Petersburg, presumably drawing

³⁵ *Deiateli revoliutsionnogo dvizheniia v Rossii. Bio-bibliograficheskii slovar'*, II, 1870-e gody (Moscow, 1929-1932).

upon Gelfman's own words. Gelfman could make no friends in the town to which she was exiled, the lawyer asserted; she could not live as freely as she wished. She tried to find work as a seamstress to supplement the pittance allocated by the state, but no one wanted to hire her. Acquaintances avoided her. That was why, he implied, she hid from the police, fled her place of exile, and returned to St. Petersburg. Without denying these details, however, Gelfman flatly rejected his portrait of her as a person at the mercy of circumstances, someone who had not consciously chosen her path: "I went to St. Petersburg," she declared before the court, "only because, when I was released from prison, I had set myself the goal of serving the cause that I served."³⁶

Certainly, there was nothing halfhearted about Gelfman's efforts in support of the People's Will. It is true that she took no direct part in terrorist activities – she shot no pistols and planted no bombs. But her energies in the sixteen feverish months that passed between her escape from exile and the assassination on March 1 were devoted entirely to the goals of the movement. She was in frequent contact with radical students and distributed underground literature to and maintained contacts with those sympathetic to the cause.³⁷ One of those sympathizers, a female medical student, has left a vivid account of Gelfman's activities: "Always busy, always occupied with one thing or another, Gelfman never visited without a reason. Sometimes, she needed to borrow money; sometimes to obtain clothing for someone; to leave a package that had to be hidden; to organize an evening party to raise money on behalf of the revolutionary Red Cross."³⁸

Much of Gelfman's energy, however, was devoted to assisting the Executive Committee of the People's Will in its terrorist struggle with the government. She organized several key conspiratorial apartments. These included an apartment on Gorokhovaia Street over which she presided with Iokhelson, where the organization met, administrative matters were discussed, and the issues of the party's publication, *Narodnaia Volia* (The People's Will) were prepared for distribution, and

³⁶ *Protsess 1-go marta 1881-go goda* (St. Petersburg: Tip. Montvid, 1906), pp. 202–204; 226 (accessed through Google Books).

³⁷ Haberer, *Jews and Revolution*, pp. 194–195. He quotes a laudatory account of her actions and influence from Sergei Kravchinskii, *Underground Russia*. Kravchinskii cites as his source a letter from Anna Epshtein. However, *Underground Russia*, among the first of a long series of "revolutionary martyrologies" that sacralized violence, is far from a trustworthy source. See Patyk, "Remembering 'The Terrorism'," pp. 763, 770.

³⁸ El'tsina-Zak, "Iz vstrech," p. 126.

another where the incendiary bombs used to assassinate the tsar on March 1 were prepared.³⁹ Gelfman fulfilled the role of *khoziaika*, or mistress of the house, with unusual adroitness. Portraying herself as a perfectly ordinary, rather chatty and frivolous woman, she could deflect the attention of unwanted visitors from compromising circumstances difficult to conceal. Gelfman's dedication to the organization was total. Even her union with the gentile Nikolai Kolodkevich was not allowed to interfere with her revolutionary activity – a typical pattern for intimate relationships on the radical left. Many of her comrades remained unaware of their civil marriage.

Yet however total Gelfman's dedication to the party and its goal of social revolution, her testimony at the trial, the only time when we hear her voice at any length, raises the possibility that she may have felt reservations about the methods – that is, the use of terror and assassination. At the trial, she resolutely refused to name any names: "I don't want to say," she repeatedly responded when asked whether she knew other participants. And when the prosecutor asked whether she "admitted guilt," Gelfman frankly acknowledged the role she played in the movement: "I consider myself guilty of belonging to a social revolutionary party because of my convictions," Gelfman declared. "I participated in the activities of that party and I embrace the program of the 'People's Will.' I was mistress of the conspiratorial apartment in which meetings took place." But then she drew a line, indicating not only her secondary role, but also, perhaps, reservations about the final outcome. "However" – she added truthfully – "I did not participate in those meetings, and did not play a direct role in carrying out the crime [*prestuplenie*] of March 1."⁴⁰

The word "crime" is an interesting choice. No secondary account of Gelfman's life and court testimony mentions it. Was her use of the word "crime," together with her quite legitimate denial of a direct role in the party's decision making or in the assassination, an attempt to protect her own life, perhaps for the sake of the child she already knew she was carrying? If so, this behavior distinguishes Gelfman from many gentile female revolutionaries, who tended to exaggerate rather than minimize their roles in order to suffer the same punishment as their male comrades.⁴¹ Or did Gelfman consider the taking of a life, even or especially the life of a tsar, a "crime," to repeat her language and, as Haberer

³⁹ Haberer, *Jews and Revolution*, p. 193. ⁴⁰ *Protsess 1-go marta*, p. 61.

⁴¹ Engel, *Mothers and Daughters*, p. 189.

suggests, disapprove of terrorism as a method, despite all the support she rendered to the movement that employed it?⁴²

Whatever the answer, Gelfman did in the end try to save her own life, although emphatically not at the price of renouncing her convictions. Sentenced to death by hanging, along with the five other main defendants in the trial of the regicides, she asked to see Kolodkevich, her common-law husband, shortly after the trial's end. The authorities denied her request. Gelfman then declared in writing that she was four months pregnant. After a medical examination confirmed her statement, the death sentence was postponed until forty days after the baby's birth, as the law forbade taking an innocent life. When her lawyer, A. A. Gerke, visited her in prison on June 28, 1881, he found Gelfman looking exhausted, "like someone utterly worn out or recovering from an illness." Terrified of miscarrying or giving birth alone in her solitary cell, denied both the nourishment and medical care her pregnancy required, she finally acceded to his urging that she petition the tsar. Requesting that her sentence be commuted and her conditions improved, Gelfman refused to write a word about feeling remorse.⁴³

When it occurred, however, the commutation of her sentence was likely the outcome of pressure from abroad rather than Gelfman's petition. Europeans closely followed the dramatic events unfolding in Russia, aided by the public relations efforts of the People's Will and by newspapers eager to supply accounts of revolutionary exploits to a public hungry for sensational stories. The campaign conducted by Western European socialists and the foreign press on Gelfman's behalf found a sympathetic audience. Sympathy was especially widespread in France, on the verge of an alliance with Russia. The author Victor Hugo penned an open letter to the Russian government, assailing Gelfman's treatment. French socialists, emphasizing the gendered dimension of her plight, summoned to her defense "all mothers who love their children."⁴⁴ On July 2, Gelfman's death sentence was commuted to a lifetime of penal servitude.

⁴² Haberer writes that "in the course of the trial she made it clear that while she did not condone terrorism per se, she had deliberately joined Narodnaia Volia," *Jews and Revolution*, p. 198. Those who sought to stoke the pogroms that followed the assassination of Tsar Alexander II likely made use of Gelfman's close association with the regicides.

⁴³ 1 marta 1881 goda. *Kazn' imperator Aleksandra II: dokumenty i vospominaniia* (Lenin-grad: Lenizdat, 1991), pp. 355–57. See also *The London Times*, July 7, 1881.

⁴⁴ www.lechaim.ru/ARHIV/86/kravets.htm (accessed February 11, 2014). Iokhelson, *Gesia Gelfman*, p. 43. Articles devoted to her in the *London Times* made no reference to her Judaism. I have not read the articles that appeared in France, but secondary materials suggest that it was unmentioned there, too.

Gelfman was not permitted to survive long, however. The physician appointed to preside over the birth of her child was a gynecologist who normally served the imperial family. Likely on the orders of the new tsar, Alexander III, or his minions, after he delivered a healthy girl on October 12, the physician, having ordered the midwife from the room, neglected to mend Gelfman's severe perineal tear. Never healing, the tear became infected, and over time the infection grew severe and life-threatening. Gelfman nevertheless insisted on her right to nurse her infant herself. Calling them "fanatics," she refused to surrender her baby to her family.⁴⁵ On January 25, 1882, the baby was nevertheless removed from her custody and transferred to a foundling home without identifying information.⁴⁶ The infant's fate is unknown but, like most foundlings, it very likely perished. A week later, on February 1, 1882, the infection took Gelfman's life.

Gelfman's story alerts us to the ways that gender and Judaism might interact in the making of a revolutionary. Like that of many other radical women, Gelfman's first rebellion was personal, not political, against an arranged marriage as well as, more positively, in pursuit of the knowledge so prized by her generation – knowledge, so it seems, valued for its own sake, and not as preparation for a profession – midwifery – that Gelfman never practiced. Like other Jews, she found in the student milieu an alternative community and an alternative worldview, and lacking other avenues for acting on her new ideals, she gravitated leftward.⁴⁷ In addition to these intellectual factors, feelings of empathy also disposed Gelfman to sympathy with the Russian radical cause. Her capacity to understand and share the feelings of others, their suffering in particular, moved her to action. She was, after all, a woman who shared her last kopek with other seamstresses, organized and participated in a sewing cooperative to benefit them, shared her tea and sugar with her antisemitic sister prisoners, and violated revolutionary discipline to expend energy on the personal problems of others. "She was a very sensitive person and her life was one of continuous sacrifice; she had the ability to love," as Olga Liubatovich described her.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ *London Times*, July 7, 1881

⁴⁶ Liubatovich, "Autobiography," pp. 186–87; see especially documents reproduced in: www.lechaim.ru/ARHIV/86/kravets.htm. Officials also spurned the appeals of Liubatovich's and Kolotkevich's parents, both of whom requested custody of the child.

⁴⁷ See Engel, *Mothers and Daughters*, chap. 8.

⁴⁸ Liubatovich, "Autobiography," p. 186.

In the character of her self-sacrifice, Gelfman was not unique. Similar qualities are attributed to other Jewish women, albeit only a minority of them. These others tended to be better educated than she: Beta Kaminskaia, a member of the Fritsche group and then of the ARSRO, “looked with anguish on those who were poor and suffering,” to quote her biographers. Anna Epshtein’s active love for those who needed her was an essential aspect of her nature. She would “use her own skin to make someone else a jacket,” her husband, Dmitrii Klements, once said about her.⁴⁹ Although all women revolutionaries of this era demonstrated a capacity for self-sacrifice, that of Jewish women was rarely abstract or lofty or modeled on the behavior of Christian saints. And as Naomi Shepherd has also noted, it bestowed no sense of moral superiority.⁵⁰ Empathic self-sacrifice might inflect the “practical” role that women, like men, played in the movement, giving it a distinctively feminine flavor.⁵¹ However, just as there were many varieties of Jewish female experience in the Russia of Gelfman’s time, there surely existed more than one path leading Jewish women to radicalism and influencing their role in the movement. As political opportunities widened, Jewish women lent their energies to a diversity of Russian radical causes – populism, including terrorist populism; feminism; Marxism in its various varieties; Bundism; Zionism; and more. Many questions concerning the origins, development, and manifestations of Jewish female radicalism in Russia still remain open.

⁴⁹ A. A. Ul’ianovskii, *Zhenshchiny v protsesse 50-ti: sbornik* (St. Petersburg: O. N. Popova, 1906), p. 60; Engel and Rosenthal, eds., *Five Sisters*, p. 90. These qualities can be detected in the letters Epshtein addressed to Felix Volkhovskii in 1880, while working for the Red Cross and attempting to assist political prisoners. Hoover Institute, Nikolaevskii Archive, Volkovskii Collection, series 115, folder 183, item 41.

⁵⁰ Shepherd, *Price below Rubies*, p. 73.

⁵¹ Haberer emphasizes the practical dimension of Jewish participation, in the People’s Will especially.

Manya Shochat and Her Traveling Guns

Jewish Radical Women from Pogrom Self-Defense to the First Kibbutzim

Deborah Hertz

THE VOLATILE JEWISH LEFT IN 1903

In the fall of 1903, Manya Wilbushevitz was twenty-five, active in a plan to assassinate the Russian minister of the interior, Vyachaslav von Plehve.¹ She traveled to Berlin to raise funds for the project, living with her brother Gedaliah. While there, she learned that their plot had been uncovered and that certain arrest, perhaps a death sentence, awaited her comrades back in Russia. Gedaliah worried about her mental state and contacted their brother Nahum, who had moved to Palestine, imploring him to invite Manya to visit him there. Because she decided to remain in Palestine, she escaped the punishments meted out to her fellow conspirators. Manya was soon acquainted with the leading pioneers of the First Aliyah, who had departed Russia in the eighties and nineties. Four years later, she married another Russian radical, Israel Shochat. They raised two children in a stormy, complicated marriage. Manya kept up a hectic pace of activism over the years, purchasing and smuggling guns, transporting illegal immigrants, and advocating Arab equality. She imagined and founded an agricultural commune in 1907, which inspired the first kibbutzim. In this chapter we explore two junctures in Shochat's life. First we go back to the years between 1897 and 1903, when she was a firebrand activist with ties to

¹ Although most of the events described in this chapter took place before Manya married Israel Shochat, I refer to her as either "Manya" or "Shochat" in this essay. On the assassination planning, see Rachel Yanait Ben-Zvi, *Before Golda: Manya Shochat* (New York: Biblio Press, 1989), p. 33.

several left parties. Then we jump forward to the fall of 1907, when her soon-to-be husband, Israel, helped to found Bar Giora, a secret military unit defending Jewish villages and farms.

Manya was certainly unusual in her edgy character, but she was simultaneously a recognizable type at the time. Her life illuminates how young women channeled the values of Russian radicalism into Zionism. That even a handful of female activists would use guns shows one of several ways that left movements helped women challenge traditional roles. Moreover, the politics of Manya Shochat and her friends, comrades, and enemies reverberated across the decades of twentieth-century history. The Russian Revolution of 1917, the so-called Judeo-Bolshevist synergy so hated by the Nazis, and the State of Israel founded in 1948 all have their roots in the complex tapestry of their passions and causes.

Manya was born to a large, wealthy, fascinating family and was endowed with a strong personality and remarkable stamina. In her late teens she organized Jewish workers in Minsk, a town in the north of the Russian Pale of Settlement, but soon became critical of the Jewish socialist party, the Bund. In 1901 she helped found the Jewish Independent Labor Party, a highly controversial protounion movement sponsored by the secret police. Through her brothers and various friends, she was familiar with the left Zionist Poalei Zion (Workers of Zion) Party, whose activists fought for Jewish workers wherever they toiled, from Minsk to New York City to rural Palestine. Manya was also on the fringe of the Social Revolutionaries, who favored organizing peasants and the selected assassination of state officials. She and her peers debated furiously, in leaflets, journals, and newspapers and in myriad congresses both secret and public. They pondered whether and when to use violence, which Russians to organize, and about nationalism. They struggled to describe the class position of Jews, an analysis necessary so as to plan effective strategies. They debated what it meant to be a *people*, and whether all *peoples* should become nations. Jews experienced an acute version of this dilemma, with no autonomous territory, no single language, and ongoing conflicts about belief and rituals.

Manya's participation in the plan to assassinate Plehve illustrates a remarkable synthesis of Russian and Jewish identities. This fusion was several decades in the making, since Jewish youth in the tsarist empire had begun joining left parties back in the 1870s. In the previous era, Jewish radicals usually saw themselves as rootless cosmopolitans, integrated into

the fellowship of an ersatz political family of activists from disparate backgrounds. Manya's generation was different. She and her peers, who came of age in the era of the Russian Revolution of 1905, more often experienced their socialist and their Jewish loyalties as equally authentic. As a radical, Manya despised Plehve for his harsh repression of the left parties. Simultaneously, as did most Jews, she blamed him for supporting pogroms. The rioting hooligans who enacted the pogroms had fused the opposite passions, loyalty to the tsar and hatred of the Jews.

But still, debates raged. Was the dream of Jewish socialism best realized in Europe, in America, or in Palestine? Many activists posed this question as they roamed, since more than 2 million Russian Jews were on the move in these years. They took their debates with them wherever they migrated. Viewed from afar, Manya's move to Palestine in 1904 was a choice for nationalism over socialism, as her Zionist admirers then and now have claimed. But here we deepen this polarity and show that the competing parties then actually shared many values and practices. Cynical contemporaries sometimes mocked how individuals chose one party over another. Georg Plekhanov, a Russian socialist, nastily joked that the difference between a Bundist and a Zionist was that "a *Bundist* is a Zionist with fear of seasickness."²

Plekhanov was altogether hostile to both movements, but his remark does call into question just how different the parties were. To make sense of Manya's odyssey, here we examine four parallels among Manya's various affiliations in this era. First, certain of their self-proclaimed goals were similar. Activists in the Bund, in the Independents, and in Poalei Zion aimed to improve the lives of impoverished Jews across the Pale of Settlement. Second, the language of the rank and file of these three parties, and of much of their work, was Yiddish. Promotion of Hebrew was a central plank of many Zionists at the time. But a key theoretician of the Poalei Zion, Ber Borochov, was a Yiddishist. In order to reach their flocks, especially while still in Russia, activists of the Poalei Zion often gave their speeches and published their manifestos in Yiddish. A third, less appreciated similarity between the Bund and Poalei Zion was that, from time to time, activists in both parties were willing to make use of violent means. On at least one occasion, a rank and file Bundist plotted an assassination. Members of the Poalei Zion organized "appropriations" in

² See Chaim Weizmann, *Trial and Error: The Autobiography of Chaim Weizmann* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1921), p. 50 re Plekhanov's snide joke.

the course of which they visited wealthy Jews, sometimes placing a gun on a table, in order to requisition financial donations for movement projects.³

Finally, all three Jewish parties often welcomed strong, passionate women. These were years when traditional family norms were under scrutiny in novels, plays, newspapers, legislation, and trials. Their activism helped women escape harsh gender norms, which so limited the chance both for private fulfillment and for a public role. The movements offered a mixed social and romantic space, free from parental supervision. Many were in their late teens when they joined up, often living in communes far from home and family. Trust was necessary, because in these years the Bund and the Poalei Zion were illegal. Those affiliated with either of these movements often lived under false names, moved from town to town, and were ingenious in finding ways to escape from prison and exile in Siberia. Jewish radicals were often assigned to transport contraband books and other radicals across the border. Some of them were born into smuggling families, and indeed smuggling across the Russian–German border had long been a Jewish specialty.

The conspiratorial ambience of Russian left politics in these decades was ideal for women, and performing extraordinary acts of self-sacrifice was a path to leadership. When political opposition was legal, influence resulted from publishing and public speaking, rather than hiding guns, organizing safe houses, or making bombs. In Manya's era, intellectual leadership was still elusive for most Jewish women, although a select few managed this considerable feat. Manya was an excellent example of a woman who flourished in underground movements. In her Zionist projects, too, Manya was a visionary dynamo, rather than an erudite shaper of ideologies.

To understand the intricate spectrum of politics created by Manya's generation, we certainly do need to understand their debates. However, here we turn away from the intellectual history of the left and instead explore the function of their ideologies. As we see in Manya's own life, quite a few radicals changed party affiliations frequently, seemingly without much fuss. In this chapter, we uncover the values, friendships, and love affairs that help explain the shifting allegiances of Manya Shochat and her friends. Moreover, Manya's biography helps us evaluate whether

³ For examples of David Ben-Gurion's participation in expropriations in Plonsk in 1905, see Shabtai Teveth, *Ben-Gurion: The Burning Ground 1886–1948* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 30–31.

it is right to claim that the use of violence by Zionists began and ended during the pogroms of the era. Guns used for self-defense against *pogromchiks* could be fired by the same activists just a few years later, to defend rural settlements in Palestine. Moreover the romance of violence seems to have been reflected in actual romances. Manya and her women friends were attracted to the “Hebrew Bedouin” firebrand men working on Jewish farms in the Galilee, who rode horses and carried daggers and whips. A fuller picture of what politics meant for these activists will help us decide whether or not women in any way shaped the Zionist project.

MANYA AND THE RIVAL JEWISH LEFT PARTIES

Political and religious discord among Jewish families in Manya’s generation was rife, and her family too was divided about Judaism, emigration, and politics.⁴ Her father, Wolf, was born into a wealthy assimilated family, which had earned its fortune by supplying the Russian army. In his teen years, Wolf reverted to the Judaism his parents had rejected, causing an enormous uproar. After his mother beat him out of fury about his return to Judaism, he tried to commit suicide by refusing food.⁵ Wolf’s first wife died after a year of marriage, and his second wife, Sara Rozensweig, chose a path between tradition and assimilation, the path of the *Haskalah*, the Jewish enlightenment. The *maskilim* advocated mastery of secular languages and learning, combined with critiques of traditional practices. Sara was an industrious business wife, who administered the family’s grain mill at their rural home in Lososno, not far from the town of Grodno. Her public industry was not at all unusual then and there, as Jewish wives often worked at taverns, inns, boarding houses, and small shops, justified by the need for men to study full-time.⁶

Sara and Wolf provided rigorous Jewish training to all ten of their children, including education in biblical Hebrew, rare for Jewish girls at the time.⁷ As a young child, Manya followed her father and disdained her assimilated grandparents. As the eighth child, Manya had ample

⁴ Many of the biographical details in these paragraphs are taken from Shulamith Reinharz, Yehuda Reinharz, and Motti Golani, eds., *Im Ha-zerem ve-Negdo: Manya Shochat, Egrot ve-Te-udot 1906–1960* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 2005). I am grateful to Dana Linskill for translations from the Hebrew and research assistance.

⁵ Ben-Zvi, *Before Golda*, p. 2. ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁷ See Iris Parush, *Reading Jewish Women: Marginality and Modernization in Nineteenth-Century Eastern European Society* (Waltham, MA: University Press of New England, 2004).

opportunity to ponder the life choices of her older siblings. Several of them found life difficult. Eventually three of the ten would take their own lives. Later, when she was in her middle years and unhappy in her marriage, Manya tried and failed to kill herself.⁸ Zionism was often a subject of family conversation, as four of her brothers lived on and off in Palestine.

By the time she was sixteen, in 1894, all roads to study that Manya sought to enter were blocked. Her mother encouraged her to study medicine, a common ambition for serious young women in Russia. But her father objected and the plan fell apart.⁹ Nor would he permit Manya to study at a gymnasium, an elite academic secondary school. Indignant, Manya ran away to Lodz to work as a porter and build up her physical strength. She was forcibly returned home by her parents, and remained on the family estate for several years. By 1897, when she was nineteen, she moved to the nearby city of Minsk, working for her brother Gedaliah in his carpentry workshop. Soon her apartment became a meeting place for her radical friends and for study groups she led for local workers.

According to some accounts, it was only in her Minsk period that Manya actually *learned* Yiddish, necessary to organize Jewish workers.¹⁰ Other sources note that her father spoke Yiddish at home.¹¹ If indeed Manya chose to exaggerate her ignorance of Yiddish when she dictated her memoirs, that myth itself is telling. Any Jewish radical who *chose* to learn Yiddish was engaged in a remarkable linguistic return. Mastering Yiddish meant working for the betterment of their own people, rather than for Christian workers and peasants. Jewish radicals often hailed from assimilated families who spoke Russian at home. Indeed, up until World War One, Russian and not Yiddish was the primary language used at the Bund conferences, because so many activists spoke Russian better than they did Yiddish.¹² And in Manya's time, acquiring Yiddish definitely did not imply a commitment to Jewish cultural or political independence.

When Manya arrived in Minsk in 1897, its population was a little more than 100,000, more than half of whom were Jews.¹³ The wealthy

⁸ Manya's sister Finia committed suicide at nineteen, her brother Isaac when he was twenty-three, and her sister Anna at forty-eight. A fourth sister, Penina, died at age six.

⁹ Regarding the disagreement between the two parents, see Ben-Zvi, *Before Golda*, p. 8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* ¹¹ Reinharz, Reinharz, and Golani, *Im ha-Zerem*, p. 19.

¹² See Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews 1862-1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 202.

¹³ For a brief survey of Jews in Minsk in this era, see Elissa Bemporad, *Becoming Soviet Jews: The Bolshevik Experiment in Minsk* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013), p. 15.

Jews were very robustly represented in commerce; they also owned most of the workshops, sweatshops, and small factories, which mainly employed other Jews. Minsk's Jewish elite funded vocational and academic schools, an agricultural farm, a hospital, and societies for emancipation and self-help.¹⁴ A vibrant voice from Jewish Minsk comes to us from the memoir by Pauline Wengeroff, written when she was in her seventies and published in 1908. Pauline belonged to the generation of Manya's paternal grandparents and was in her sixties when Manya arrived in town as a firebrand organizer. Pauline believed in tradition and fumed that too much assimilation had deprived Jewish wives of their historic domestic influence.¹⁵ We can imagine how Manya might have disdained Pauline's laments about the waning power of Jewish mothers. We learn from other memoirs that Jewish mothers often enforced tradition, especially by insisting on arranging the marriages of their children.¹⁶ Indeed, resistance to marrying a mate chosen by their parents was often the catalyst for Jewish teen girls joining up with radical movements, a trend that had begun back in the seventies.¹⁷

At the lower end of the Minsk Jewish hierarchy were the poor and traditional Jews whom Manya sought to organize. Indeed, the swelling population of Jewish workers in the larger towns of the Pale of Settlement helps explain the dynamic success of the various Jewish left parties in these years. The very year when Manya moved to Minsk, during the Jewish New Year holiday in 1897, thirteen delegates from dispersed Jewish socialist groups met secretly in Vilna, in the attic room in a worker's home.¹⁸ The official title of their new party was the General Jewish Workers' Bund in Russia and Poland, usually referred to as the Bund.

¹⁴ As noted in Bemporad, *Soviet Jews*, p. 14.

¹⁵ See Bernard Dov Cooperman, ed., *Rememberings: The World of a Russian-Jewish Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Bethesda, MD: University Press of Maryland, 2000), and the longer version in Shulamith Magnus, ed., *Memoirs of a Grandmother: Scenes from the Cultural History of Jews in Russia in the Nineteenth Century* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010). Vladimir Medem discusses the Wengeroff family in his memoir; see Samuel Portnoy, ed., *Vladimir Medem: The Life and Soul of a Legendary Jewish Socialist* (New York: Ktav, 1979), p. 21.

¹⁶ A spectacular example of this situation is told by Puah Rakovsky, *My Life as a Radical Jewish Woman: Memoirs of a Zionist Feminist*, ed. with an introduction by Paula Hyman (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002).

¹⁷ See Moshe Kamionski's memoir, "Hebrew Nihilists of the Seventies" (Hebrew), in *Ha-Shiloach* 17 (1907-08), p. 259.

¹⁸ For background, see Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, p. 208.

Vilna had been the center of Jewish socialism for decades before the official founding of the party.¹⁹ Vilna was home to many Jewish intellectuals and “half-intellectuals,” as those who failed to obtain the higher education necessary for prestigious employment were called then. Vilna was also home to a large population of Jewish workers. Throughout the eighties and nineties effective trade unions emerged in Vilna and elsewhere across the Pale of Settlement.²⁰ Indeed, only eight years later, at the time of the Russian Revolution of 1905, the Bund was the best organized, largest, and most visible workers’ movement in Russia.²¹ As the Bund grew in size, influence, and political ambitions, its leaders organized large-scale demonstrations against the regime. The predictable consequences were mass arrests, all too often followed by prison and Siberian exile.²²

As their frequent use of Russian among themselves suggests, many of the men and women who founded the Bund grew up in *maskilic* families, and the men had often attended prestigious Russian schools.²³ From the beginning, the proportion of women activists in the Bund was very robust. One claim is that this was the first time that Jewish women had contributed so much to a political movement.²⁴ By 1905, a third of Bund activists were women. Not just the Bund, but also Poalei Zion “attracted a sizeable female constituency, numerically more than any other Jewish or Russian socialist party.”²⁵ To be sure, none of the left parties articulated an explicitly feminist agenda. The ultimate triumph of socialism was viewed as the precondition for any improvement

¹⁹ An excellent survey can be found in Erich Haberer, *Jews and Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), chapter 4.

²⁰ See Bernard Johnpoll, *The Politics of Futility: The General Jewish Workers Bund of Poland, 1917–1943* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 22–25, and Nora Levin, *While Messiah Tarried: Jewish Socialist Movements 1871–1917* (New York: Schocken, 1977), part three.

²¹ As discussed in some detail in Henry Tobias, *The Jewish Bund in Russia: From Its Origins to 1905* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1972), chapters 3 and 4.

²² See Tobias, *Jewish Bund*, p. 125.

²³ On this point see Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, p. 202, and Tobias, *Jewish Bund*, p. 62.

²⁴ See Rebekka Denz, *Bundistinnen: Frauen im Allgemeinen Jüdischen Arbeiterbund* (Potsdam: Universitaetsverlag, 2009), p. 51. See also Tobias, *Jewish Bund*, p. 44, noting that six of the forty-eight early Bundist leaders were women. Also useful is Naomi Shepherd, *A Price below Rubies: Jewish Women as Rebels and Radicals* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), chapter 4, and Harriet Davis-Kram, “The Story of the Sisters of the Bund,” *Contemporary Jewry* V (1980).

²⁵ See Elissa Bemporad, “Issues of Gender, Sovietization and Modernization in the Jewish Metropolis of Minsk,” *Quest* 2 (October 2011), text adjacent to footnote 21.

in women's status. But in their activism, the women enjoyed rare freedoms, and perhaps those freedoms compensated them for the privations of the radical life.

Like many of their male comrades, several leading women Bundists were born to wealth and acquired an education that qualified them as intellectuals, quite rare for the times.²⁶ Young female workers also flocked to the movement and early on managed to achieve leadership roles. After the first wave of arrests in 1898, the Bund's second Executive Committee included Rosa Greenblat, a weaver; Marya Zhaludsky, a seamstress; and Tsvia Hurvitch, a glove maker.²⁷ Because many teen girl workers were not living with their parents, they could appear at secret forest meetings, remain out late in study groups, and hide fugitives, leaflets, and guns. To understand this trend, we must attend to the structural shifts in female employment. Jewish wives usually worked in public settings, though in earlier eras, these locations had typically been a village or a rural estate. Now, single daughters were sent by their families to work in the cities, producing matches, cigarettes, stockings, and gloves.²⁸

Earlier generations of women radicals often paid a huge personal price for a life in politics, and we come upon many who suffered childlessness, thwarted romances, suicide, and death in prison. The Bund women often led more integrated lives, and many whose lives are well documented created stable relationships with another Jewish radical.²⁹ Anna Heller and Matla Srednicki were both born to wealth, both became dentists, and both chose partners who were among the leaders of the party.³⁰ Liuba Levinson, a third activist woman in Vilna, studied at the University of Geneva, and hosted a political salon in Vilna during the late eighties. She

²⁶ Denz, *Bundistinnen*, p. 46, calculates that thirty of the forty-five Bund women she studied were intellectuals. See also Beate Fieseler, *Frauen auf dem Weg in die Russische Sozialdemokratie 1890–1917* (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 1995).

²⁷ For references on these three activists, see table 8.1 in Denz, *Bundistinnen*, pp. 137–139.

²⁸ See Denz, *Bundistinnen*, p. 44.

²⁹ This is the claim by Shepherd, *Price*, p. 151. See also Zvi Gitelman, "A Century of Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe: The Legacy of the Bund and the Zionist Movement," in *The Emergence of Modern Jewish Politics: Bundism and Zionism in Eastern Europe*, ed. Gitelman (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003), pp. 16–17.

³⁰ Heller-Rozental is noted briefly in Tobias, *Jewish Bund*, p. 11, and in Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, p. 155. See also Jack Jacobs, "Bund" in the online Jewish Women's Archive, and also in Jacobs's *Bundist Counterculture in Interwar Poland* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2009), pp. 85–86.

died while in New York City, having traveled there to leave her child with her sister.³¹ The Minsk Bund chapter could also boast of several talented women. Zhenya Hurvitch was the translator of the second volume of Karl Marx's *Capital* into Russian.³² The best-known Minsk Bundist was Esther Frumkin, whose real name was Malka Lipshits. Esther was born to a wealthy family in Minsk in 1880 and sent by her family to St. Petersburg to obtain an advanced degree in philology. She returned to Minsk, where she married Boris Frumkin, a fellow Bundist, and gave birth to a daughter. Boris soon died from a prison illness, and Esther raised their child, as well as a child of her wet nurse, and two of her orphan nieces, all the while supported by her work as a teacher and by her supportive parents.³³

These were years when terrorist methods were hotly contested among Bund members.³⁴ The party's ambivalence about assassination was severely tested in May of 1902, when Hirsh Lekert, a Bundist shoemaker, tried to kill General Viktor von Wahl, the new governor of the province of Vilna. Lekert was incensed that so many Jewish participants at the recent May Day demonstration had been arrested and then whipped. Governor Wahl survived the attack, but Lekert was captured and then tortured, finally hung in public.³⁵ Lekert's sad end made him into "a folk hero, a martyr, and spirit incarnate of the militant Jewish worker, in poem, song, and drama."³⁶

After Manya had been organizing local workers in Minsk for a year, in 1898 she was arrested and interned in Grodno, then transferred to a Moscow prison. There her guards tortured her with false rumors about family, comrades, and the Jewish activist Gregory Gershuni, with whom she had fallen in love. The police official responsible for her arrest was Sergei Zubatov, head of the Moscow Secret Police, who, in younger days,

³¹ Levinson noted by Levin, *Messiah*, p. 229, and in Shepherd, *Price*, p. 151.

³² See Portnoy, ed., *Medem*, p. 158. See Tobias, *Jewish Bund*, p. 15, note 11. Zhenya Hurvitch was also known as Evgeniia Gurvich, noted by Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, pp. 240 and 666.

³³ See the summary of her life in Shepherd, *Price*, chapter 4. See also Rochelle Goldberg Ruthchild, "Esther Frumkin: Bringing the Revolution to the Jewish Street," in *Jewish Intellectual Women in Central Europe 1860-2000: Twelve Biographical Essays*, ed. Judith Szapor, et al. (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Press, 2012). See also Aryeh Gelbard, "Ester Frumkin," (Hebrew), in *M'Asef* (1985), pp. 61-76.

³⁴ According to Tobias, *Jewish Bund*, p. 148.

³⁵ This account is from Tobias, *Jewish Bund*, pp. 150-151.

³⁶ These are the words of Tobias, *Jewish Bund*, p. 151.

had been attracted to the left.³⁷ After days of dialogue, Sergei recruited Manya to help him build a union concentrating only on economic gains for Jewish workers. Relations with the Bund were predictably stormy, leading to broken friendships, distrust, and bad blood all around. Rumors floated for years that Manya and Sergei were lovers, but the truth here is elusive.³⁸

Because she agreed to organize the new party, Sergei arranged for her release from prison, and late in 1901, Manya was on hand for the founding of the Jewish Independent Labor Party. The new party grew rapidly in size and influence.³⁹ But her relationship with Zubatov remained stormy. Sometime in 1902, Manya became convinced that Sergei was responsible for the arrest of her close friend Grisha Shechovitz, a Bund activist.⁴⁰ In a fury, she took a gun to a meeting with Zubatov, preparing to assassinate him. He “poured out his heart” to her, explaining his innocence in her friend’s arrest, and Manya dropped the gun.⁴¹ Zubatov himself was soon arrested by his superior, the notorious Vyachaslav von Plehve, and the party dissolved.⁴²

During these years, several of Manya’s family and friends were choosing a more nationalist politics. In addition to Poalei Zion, several splinter territorialist parties argued for a new Jewish society in spaces other than Palestine. Some proposed Uganda, some thought Argentina, and some argued for rural America as the right place. But for the Poalei Zion activists, Palestine was the desired location, even if their rhetoric was anything but sentimental and religious. Two of her closest friends in Minsk were Chayka and her brother, Meir Kagan, who helped found the Minsk chapter of Poalei Zion.⁴³ The left Zionists too attracted hot-heads prepared to assassinate those they deemed to be enemies of the Jewish people. In the spring of 1903, the town of Kishinev was the scene of a vicious pogrom, more destructive than the riots against Jews that followed the assassination of the tsar back in 1881. Many contemporaries

³⁷ See Dimitry Pospelovsky, *Russian Police Trade Unionism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), and Jeremiah Schneiderman, *Sergei Zubatov and Revolutionary Marxism* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1976), p. 268.

³⁸ Discussed and denied by Pospelovsky, *Police Trade Unionism*.

³⁹ Details in these paragraphs are drawn from Tobias, *Jewish Bund*, pp. 122–125.

⁴⁰ See Ben-Zvi, *Before Golda*, p. 29. ⁴¹ Ben-Zvi, *Before Golda*, p. 30. ⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ On the Kagan siblings, see Ben-Zvi, *Before Golda*, pp. 25 and 29. On the founding of the Poalei Zion in Minsk, see Tobias, *Jewish Bund*, p. 322, and Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, chapter 7.

blamed the journalist Pavel Krushevan for agitating pogrom violence, and Pinchas Dashevsky, a member of a small territorialist party called the Zionist Socialists, tried to kill Krushevan. Dashevsky's deed was later celebrated as "the first revolutionary manifestation of Jewish national consciousness," and he became a hero for the Jewish left, alongside the Bund's Hirsh Lekert.⁴⁴

The intensity of destruction during the Kishinev pogrom in 1903 shocked radical Jewish youth across the Pale and beyond. Hayyim Nahman Bialik's much-discussed poem "City of Slaughter" accused husbands and fathers of passivity while their mothers, wives, and daughters were raped.⁴⁵ The self-defense units that were organized by activists in the left parties while the pogroms still raged were an innovative response. It was only months after the 1903 pogroms that Manya joined with the Social Revolutionary party in the plan to assassinate von Plehve. One of her Minsk friends who was a notable leader in the Social Revolutionary party was Catherine Breshkovsky. At the time Catherine was fifty-six, recently released from eighteen years in prison exile in Siberia, living temporarily with family friends on a landed estate near Minsk. Catherine had led an extraordinary life so far, as a woman of the gentry who had abandoned husband, child, and wealth to give over her life to social change.

We have seen that Manya Shochat moved fluidly among the parties and the ideologies on the left before she boarded the boat for Jaffa in December of 1903. At one level the timing and circumstances of her journey to Jaffa were entirely personal. But viewed from afar, her journey was also historical. Once she became settled in Palestine in 1907, she abandoned the socialist struggle in Russia for the national struggle in Palestine. Let us now follow her there as she integrated her revolutionary values and practices into a vision of communal agricultural labor in Palestine.

MANYA AND THE ROVING GUARD UNITS

Pioneer Jews stepping off the boat in the tumultuous port of Jaffa often encountered new immigrants eager to travel in the opposite direction, who would call out, "You are the next victims." Later David Ben-Gurion

⁴⁴ On Dashevsky's attempted assassination, see Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, p. 323; and Anita Shapira, *Berl: The Biography of a Socialist Zionist, Berl Katznelson 1887-1944* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 14.

⁴⁵ The poem is included in Israel Efros, ed., *The Complete Poetic Works of Hayyim Nahman Bialik*, I (New York: Bloch, 1948), pp. 129-143.

would estimate that a full 90 percent of those who arrived during the Second Aliyah, from 1904 to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, would ultimately leave Palestine.⁴⁶ The 35,000 Jews who arrived in Palestine in that decade made their mark on Zionist history not just through their numbers but through the socialist institutions they created. In the year when Manya stepped off the boat, Ottoman Palestine was home to roughly 700,000 inhabitants, less than 10 percent of whom were Jewish. The vast majority of Jews there at this juncture were altogether traditional in religion and lifestyle. They had no desire to work the land so as to redeem their muscles, their Judaism, and all of the deficiencies inherent in the diaspora. Still, we should not discount the work of scores of European Jews who settled in Jerusalem and labored to lay the foundations for a new kind of Jewish life, including many notable women. These were the years when Eliezer Ben-Yehuda and his wife, Hemda, added to the Hebrew vocabulary and the extent of spoken Hebrew; Boris Schatz built the Bezalel art school, and Annie Landau directed a remarkable school for young girls.

When Manya arrived, several hundred immigrants who believed in the crucial importance of agricultural labor had settled in the thirteen settlements funded by Baron Edmond Rothschild of Paris. In these colonies, as they were called, Arab peasants were paid low wages to labor in the vineyards and the fields. The wives of the Rothschild colonies were responsible for traditional women's domestic labor and practiced traditional Jewish family values. These middle-aged First Aliyah wives were shocked when Manya and her women friends entertained on straw mats, ate raw vegetables, spoke a rough jargon of Yiddish mixed with Arabic, and wore trousers so as to work more easily in the fields.⁴⁷

Soon after she arrived, Manya traveled from Jaffa to Rishon LeZion, a village where her brother Nahum lived with his wife, Shoshana Feinberg.⁴⁸ Nahum and his new extended family agreed with the central plank of the Poalei Zion program, that Jews should create an all-Jewish economy in Palestine. The arrival of the "itinerant ragamuffins" of Manya's cohort of pioneers was unsettling to those who had settled in

⁴⁶ This estimate is noted in Teveth, *Ben-Gurion*, p. 42.

⁴⁷ For background in English, see Mark Raider and Miriam Raider-Roth, eds., *The Plough Woman: Records of the Pioneer Women of Palestine* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2002).

⁴⁸ See Simon Schama, *Two Rothschilds and the Land of Israel* (London: Collins, 1978), chapter 5.

Palestine in the eighties and whose children were now young adults.⁴⁹ On an excursion to Petach Tikvah, the oldest and largest of the Jewish villages, Manya first met the Shochat brothers, Israel and Eliezer, who had arrived in Palestine together early in 1904. The Shochat brothers were the sorts she would have met back in Minsk at secret meetings, demonstrations, and hideaway radical apartments. Both had been active in self-defense efforts during the 1903 pogrom, and Israel was active in Poalei Zion. Soon after settling into the rural scene in Palestine, each brother ran his own political miniempire. Israel was a leader of the local Poalei Zion party, and Eliezer led a rival left Zionist party called Hapoel Hatzair (The Young Worker). The two groups quarreled about Yiddish versus Hebrew, the application of Marxist categories to Jewish society, the role of philanthropy from abroad, and how aggressively to exclude Arabs from the Jewish economy.⁵⁰

A year after her arrival, Manya left Palestine, on an extended trip to convince influential Zionist donors abroad to support her dream of self-sufficient Jewish agricultural communities. In Paris Theodor Herzl's colleague, the writer and social critic Max Nordau, was flummoxed, even repelled by Manya's ideals, and suggested she visit a psychiatrist to reveal to her that her ideas were delusions.⁵¹ In July of 1905, our peripatetic heroine made her way to Basel, to attend the Seventh Zionist Congress, where she met Rahel Yanait, at the time called Golda Lishansky.⁵² By the time Manya returned to Paris after the Basel congress, pogroms broke out again in the Pale of Settlement. The Revolution of 1905 had begun in January, and as in earlier settings, political revolt stimulated hatred of the Jews. In Paris several Minsk friends convinced her to raise funds to buy arms for pogrom self-defense and then smuggle them into Russia.⁵³ She raised fifty thousand francs from Baron Rothschild, and, promising to keep this donation a secret, she then joined a splinter sect whose aim was "to exact vengeance on the leaders of Russian antisemitism."⁵⁴ Years

⁴⁹ This phrase is from Shapira, *Land and Labor*, p. 72.

⁵⁰ For a brief description of the competition between the two parties in 1906, when David Gruen arrived in Palestine, see Teveth, *Ben-Gurion*, chapter 3.

⁵¹ See Ben-Zvi, *Before Golda*, p. 50. ⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁵³ Nadejda Grinfeld joined the Bund in 1903 and was the leader of the Bund self-defense unit in Odessa. See Leopold Haimson et al., *The Making of Three Russian Revolutionaries: Voices from the Menshevik Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

⁵⁴ See Shulamit Reinharz, "Manya Wilbushewitz-Shohat and the Winding Road to Sejera," in Deborah Bernstein, ed., *Pioneers and Homemakers: Jewish Women in Pre-State Israel* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 95-118, at 103.

later, in her unpublished Hebrew memoir, she wrote that while organizing her arms stash in Odessa, she became fearful that a visitor was a police spy. In her own account she claimed to have killed him with a gun in her pocket, equipped with a silencer; sliced up his body; and mailed the parts in separate packages to various addresses.⁵⁵

After almost two years away, in the spring of 1907 Manya returned to Palestine. In September of 1907, her love interest, Israel, and several of their closest friends founded the secret new unit called Bar Giora, meeting in the tiny Jaffa apartment of Rahel Yanait and Yitzhak Ben-Zvi. Almost all of the ten radicals present at the first meeting were in their twenties and had been involved in pogrom self-defense. Three women were invited to join, either on the day the unit was founded or later that year.⁵⁶ That day in the Jaffa meeting, they promised to keep their group a secret, to engage in agricultural labor, and to defend rural settlements in the Galilee. The conspiratorial ambience of secrecy and code names and clandestine meetings was adapted directly from recent Russian politics.

A few months after Bar Giora was founded, Manya, Israel, and sixteen other Jewish immigrants moved to the training farm of Sejera, between Haifa and Tiberias. The manager of the farm, Eliyahu Krause, worked for the ICA, the Jewish Colonization Association, a French philanthropic foundation that distributed Baron Rothschild's funds. Krause was sympathetic to Manya's vision, because he also opposed the use of Arab labor, and he wanted to help women participate equally in agriculture. He helped the seven Sejera women plow the fields with oxen, unusual work for women in those settings.⁵⁷ When the year was over, the experiment was a decided success, setting the crucial precedent for the first kibbutzim founded five years later.

⁵⁵ Ben-Zvi, *Before Golda*, p. 53. This incident is not mentioned in Reinharz, Reinharz and Golani, *Im Ha-Zerem*. See Yaakov Goldstein, *Manya Wilbeshewitz-Shochat: Perek Ha-Manhigut ha-mahpekhaniit* (Haifa: University of Haifa Press, 1991), p. 145. Manya herself told the story in her memoir, which was lost when the Ha-Shomer Archive disappeared during the First World War. See Gur Alroey, "The Russian Terror in Palestine: The Bar Giora and Ha-Shomer Associations, 1907–1920," in *Bounded Mind and Soul: Russia and Israel 1880–2010*, ed. Brian Horowitz and Shai Ginzburg (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013), pp. 67–97.

⁵⁶ In Teveth, *Ben-Gurion*, p. 59: "Three of the women [in the Sejera commune] joined and found husbands in Bar Giora." See also, for useful background, Smadar Sinai, *Ha-Shomrot she-lo Shamru: Nashim u-migdar be "ha-Shomer" uve-kibutso Kefar Giladi* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Sifrat Poalim, 2013).

⁵⁷ Ben-Zvi, *Before Golda*, p. 58.

During their communal year in Sejera, Israel and his friends convinced Krause to let them stand watch in the nights. An episode that spring in Sejera, at the commune's Passover seder, suggests that the women there, as residents and as visitors, were welcome by the men to participate in self-defense. Rachel Yanait was visiting the commune for the seder, when an Arab attacker besieged the Sejera settlement. She and her friend Ruth Becker were given guns so as to aid in the defense.⁵⁸ David Ben-Gurion, at the time a young Polish immigrant, was living at the Sejera school, but to his chagrin, he had not been invited to join Bar Giora. Although he himself proudly owned a gun, he felt rejected by the Bar Giora circle and the cult he felt had gathered around Manya and Israel. As he watched the social scene at Sejera that year, he was painfully aware that his female peers were definitely attracted to the Bar Giora men.⁵⁹ Men in this circle adopted the "symbols of power" in Bedouin culture, including riding horses, carrying weapons, and wearing a *kaffia* headdress.⁶⁰

Space will not allow us the chance to move further into the fate of women in this early stage of Israeli military history. But just this short foray into Manya's life shows that a handful of women were eager to bear arms on behalf of their people. Their steps toward emancipation may not have been optimal; nor was that emancipation negligible. We have seen that long before Manya moved to Sejera and formed a love and political alliance with Israel Shochat, guns and violent solutions were intrinsic to her left politics, now relocated in the embryonic institutions of the Jewish homeland.

CONCLUSION

Our look back at these turning points in Manya's life can help us evaluate recent critiques of Zionism by contemporary feminists. Judith Butler and Jacqueline Rose both have offered expansive critiques of Zionism, rooted in their profound cynicism about all forms of nationalism.⁶¹ Rose points to the use of guns in self-defense during the pogroms of 1905, arguing

⁵⁸ This episode is summarized by Yanait Ben-Zvi in her own memoir, *Anu Olim*, which appeared in English as *Coming Home* (Tel Aviv: Massadah, 1963), p. 120.

⁵⁹ For Ben-Gurion's reaction to Manya and Israel's role at Sejera, see Teveth, *Ben-Gurion*, at p. 58.

⁶⁰ On this fascinating issue, see Shapira, *Land and Power*, p. 61.

⁶¹ See Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), and Jacqueline Rose, *The Question of Zion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

that it was then that the “slow apprenticeship in violence” began among Jewish youth who then moved to Palestine.⁶² She argues that “Jewish nationalism contained a violence that would have to find somewhere to go.” On Rose’s account, that violence was rooted in suffering, which then “became an identity,” and eventually “had to turn cruel.”⁶³ Even if Jacqueline Rose is correct in her psychological determinism about Zionist violence, we still need an accounting of the actual status of actual women involved in Zionist projects. Of late historians have considered whether the attempt to create a “muscle Judaism” in Zionism was ultimately negative for the women who became involved.⁶⁴ But as we have learned in this chapter, Manya and a handful of her peers in Second Aliyah Palestine created their own pathways for emancipation and certainly shaped the first kibbutzim.

On the broader canvas of history, our visit back to the early years of labor Zionism provokes us to ask whether or not Manya and her friends were participating in what we might call an innocent juncture in the history of Zionism. Such a quest appears to be quixotic. Viewed from afar, the use of guns to defend against *pogromchiks* might be applauded by some, who would nevertheless be dubious about self-defense in Palestine in the same years and involving the same activists. Already at this early stage we see that the transplanted Russian radicals, who themselves had left Russia because of massive ethnic prejudice, were ready to direct their guns against local Arabs unhappy with Jewish settlements. That the radical leftists from Poalei Zion would insist that Jewish and Arab societies remain separate is an uncomfortable truth of this era. But still, our study of Manya and her projects provides a more complex understanding of Second Aliyah violence than the flippant psychological determinism offered by some contemporary critics of Zionism.

⁶² Rose, *Zion*, p. 122.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁶⁴ Shepherd, *Price*, p. 177.

The Gender of Jews and the Politics of Women

A Reflection

Alice Kessler-Harris

My first encounter with Emma Goldman occurred in the late 1960s while I was researching a doctoral dissertation. I found her in the pages of the *Arbeiter Zeitung* [*Arbayter Tsaytung*], standing on a platform in Union Square and shouting in Yiddish to a crowd of onlookers, “If you need bread, take it.” It was early in the depression of 1893 – and Goldman, an anarchist, was one of many speakers trying to stir up garment industry workers to take action against the bosses. At the time, I passed over her. I was working on the Jewish labor movement in the nineties. She was a woman, an anarchist; I was not yet tuned to questions of gender.

It did not take long for me to regret that oversight, and to regret as well all the other women I had missed while I was searching for pattern and shape in an incipient labor movement. I had wrongly assumed that paying attention to the largely male leadership would open the doors to Jewish trade unionism. But when, encouraged by an emerging women’s movement, I turned to find out more about the participation of women, I was horrified to discover that I had simply overlooked major female figures. Some of the American Jewish women whom I and others then identified have since become folk heroes whose inclusion in histories of the American Jewish left has altered our understanding of early organizing campaigns.¹ The turn-of-the-century socialists and left-wing anarchists

¹ Alice Kessler-Harris, “Organizing the Unorganizable: Three Jewish Women and Their Union,” in Alice Kessler-Harris, *Gendering Labor History* (Champaign-Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007), pp. 38–51; Annelise Orleck, *Common Sense and a Little Fire: Women and Working Class Politics in the United States, 1900–1965* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

(Jewish and not) whose reclamation we effected are now familiar among historians of women, but in the literature of American socialism and the left most remain marginal. Similarly, Jewish historians, who pay lip service to the courageous stands of such figures as Clara Lemlich and Rose Schneiderman, still have a hard time acknowledging their larger roles. Important figures including Theresa Malkiel, Fannia Cohn, Pauline Newman, Theresa Wolfson, Rose Pesotta, and Becky Edelsohn, remain peripheral in the literatures of labor and the left.

I have puzzled over the question of whether there is anything in their culture that particularly attracts Jewish women to left-wing, radical, or rebellious activity. As the chapters in this volume suggest, Jews in general have a special relationship to the left. But American Jewish women appear as agents of acculturation to American values as often as they do as rebels against it.² Emigrating as most did from Eastern European shtetls, they more eagerly sought the practical advantages of American consumption than the visionary idealisms drifting over the Europe they had left behind. Still, the more I uncovered women who might be called radical – women who led labor protests or challenged traditional views of the family by advocating on behalf of contraception and suffrage – the more I wondered about the tendency of Jewish women to rebel. Was there something in Judaism that pulled women to rebel? If so, what might we learn from Jewish women that would teach us something about left-wing politics and relationships in general?

Haunting as this question has been, I did not grapple with it until 2011, when the Brandeis historian Joyce Antler hosted a conference directed at exploring why participants in the women's liberation movement of the 1960s were disproportionately Jewish. What could the historical experience reveal to help us respond? In and around that conference I have been prompted to rethink the question of whether and how it matters that we pay attention to *Jewish women* on the left. Does the Jewishness of women matter? Does the gender of Jews make a difference to the larger historical process?

The women activists and leaders who fostered the influx of women into the garment trades unions in the first part of the twentieth century rarely thought about the issue of what made them Jews. As did many new

² Paula E. Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History: The Roles and Representation of Women* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1995), chapter 3; Andrew Heinze, *Adapting to Abundance: Jewish Immigrants, Mass Consumption and the Search for American Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

immigrants who embraced the possibilities of new lives in America, these women readily shed the traditions that had restricted their expectations. In the years before the Second World War, Jews on the political left associated attendance at synagogue services, identification with Zionism, and use of the Hebrew language with parochialism and nationalism. From a religious perspective they were, in Lionel Trilling's apt phrase, "minimalist" Jews. Culture, not religious belief, bound them together. Never denying their affiliation – according to Trilling simply acknowledging that others would always think of them as Jews – constituted the bottom line.³ Minimalism – attachment to Jewish identity without the trappings of religious ritual – may well have been a key step taken by men and women who sought to let go of the past and change the world. A less rigid stance toward religion enabled many Jews (men and women) to translate religious injunction into secular activity. For them religious mandates such as for caring for community, charitable giving, welcoming the stranger, and living justly in this world facilitated an easy transition into utopian visions of what a good world might look like.

Both men and women, as the historian Michael Berkowitz notes, emerged from traditions that sometimes inspired continuing radical activity. Kovno, the birthplace of Emma Goldman, was such a place, its Jews "noted for their revolutionary politics and ardent rationalism."⁴ Similarly, sex did not differentiate among immigrants to Rochester, whose particularly exploitative garment industry drove Goldman into the arms of American anarchism. It was the gap between the dream and the reality, as Berkowitz tells us, that inspired a mistrust of the American dream and a burning desire to change it.⁵

Yet for Jewish women facing the challenges of immigration and the particular historical circumstances of twentieth-century America, three Jewish traditions had special resonance. There was first the notion of *tikkun olam* – healing the world, or perfecting the world in God's name, which provoked mothers to become living examples for their children. Second, Jews committed themselves to *tzedakah*, the charitable work that ameliorated the lives of those who fell afoul of fortune and that measured commitment to do good on earth. *Tzedakah* began in the home, with sharing and sacrifice in family life. Finally, the notion that a pious male

³ Mark Shechner, "The Elusive Trilling," *The Nation* (September 1977), p. 353.

⁴ Michael Berkowitz, "Emma Goldman's Radical Trajectory: A Resilient 'Litvak' Legacy?" *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, XI (July 2012), p. 243.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

might devote his life to talmudic study encouraged married women to assume special economic responsibility within the family, accelerating their need to associate with non-Jews, and to adapt to New World opportunities. In the context of immigration and New World urban and industrial challenges, these injunctions opened the imaginations of Jewish women to possibilities that remained clouded for others of their generation.

If the transformation provided a measure of assimilation and of liberation for both men and women, I suspect that for women, doubly constrained by ritual and tradition, it may well have supplied an irresistible invitation to enter the world fully and equally. In America cherished community mandates could evolve into self-perceptions, life purposes, and activities conducive to rebellion and protest. Arguably at least community pride in talmudic study for men validated greater economic decision making among women who found themselves responsible for family support. In turn this translated into greater respect and responsibility for women.⁶ Young women who earned wages sufficient to help support families and pay for their brothers' educations might develop a greater sense of themselves as family providers, or they might decide to seek satisfaction in their own independence.

At the same time the wives of men who took advantage of new commercial, entrepreneurial, and professional opportunities understood that their tasks extended beyond the borders of their households. Their greater share of responsibility for *tzedakah* translated easily into participation in activities to promote community welfare through clubs and alliances in and outside the synagogue. Fortified by a mandate to "heal the world," women had no difficulty creating alliances with non-Jewish men and women in order to fulfill their larger moral obligations successfully.⁷ Arguably, too, women's greater access to the world of wage work, their enormous responsibility for family economic well-being, fostered more aggressive efforts to change the world and induced healthier conceptions of cooperation and coalition across class lines than would have been available to many other turn-of-the-century females. In this respect Jewish immigrant women more closely enacted the patterns of African American women than those of most immigrant groups.

⁶ Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation*, chapter 3.

⁷ Marion A. Kaplan and Deborah Dash Moore, eds., *Gender and Jewish History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press), p. 2.

These new self-perceptions were not easy for men to bear. And yet the range of left-wing activities in which women engaged reveals the workings of what can only be described as changing Jewish thought in the daily behavior of women. Women's trade union leadership; their participation in the socialist, anarchist, and, later, communist parties, and in progressive, or left-wing politics, all suggest community support for the activities of women. And Jewish men, while they were often contemptuous of the effectiveness of "girls," appear to offer somewhat less resistance than Italian men, for example, to women's participation in public life.

I do not argue that Jewish women are drawn to the left in unique ways – only that being female and Jewish at a particular historical moment seemed to create a synergy that propelled women toward the left. Nor do I suggest that Jewishness is the only, or even an essential, component of radicalism for women. The different pulls of Irish or African American women to radicalism would put the lie to that. But I do believe that thinking about the complex and interleaved places of Jewish women in the American century might reveal something about how rebellion is fostered by a twin appeal to both culture and possibility. In this respect both the gender of Jews and the Jewishness of women matter. Jewish lore assigns women a supportive role in the family and primary responsibility for mothering children. In the American context neither role could be effectively accomplished without attention to the working conditions of women and the politics of capitalism.

The well-known activism of Jewish women in the early twentieth century labor movement illustrates both the drive of women to change the world and the resulting tensions. In cities such as New York, Baltimore, and Chicago, young Jewish immigrant women routinely took jobs in the burgeoning garment industry. Their income helped to support families and to pay for steamship tickets to transport additional family members across the Atlantic. When incomes were squeezed, whole families suffered. Not accidentally then, the early years in the twentieth-century garment trades were rocked by labor strife, much of it provoked and led by women. Men in the industry persisted in describing "girls" as not susceptible to unionization. Only after the same girls, allied with middle-class female supporters, produced some of the most successful labor organizing of the new century, did men begin to support union organization for women. The International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), and to only a slightly lesser extent the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union (the Amalgamated), relied on the active leadership of mostly Jewish women. By 1914 the relatively unskilled as well as

skilled workers in the garment industry had organized more successfully than any other comparable group in the country. If we ask how those women had the moral courage to engage in labor protest, we turn first to explanations that lie in their sense of identification as workers, necessary to the support of family and community, and then to their location in an ongoing tradition of justice.

As women, garment workers envisaged themselves as central to the family economy of their day. As workers they felt entitled to be treated justly. They were members of immigrant families, spoke Yiddish to each other, read Yiddish newspapers, worked in sweatshops managed by Jewish foremen, and more often than not appealed to their fellow workers in Yiddish at the cost of alienating those who were not Jews. If Jewish labor organizers cared little for spiritual and institutional commitments to religion, they made good use of Jewish tradition to build solidarity.⁸ In letters to each other and in organizing tactics Jewish women distinguished themselves from the Italian women with whom they often worked. Italians, one organizer noted, “are still suffering from an age-old seclusion of women in the home.”⁹ Appealing for solidarity, Jewish women relied on Eastern European, largely Yiddish, Jewish tradition, expressing confidence in their shared class consciousness. When they crossed class lines to create alliances with sympathetic women (even those who, like them, were from Jewish families), they understood that they would need to speak to their allies in a different idiom. Among themselves, however, they could not refrain from expressing contempt for the “fine ladies” who came to their aid.¹⁰

The demands of women garment workers transcended the narrow insistence of the male labor union movement at the time for higher wages and shorter hours. Jewish women workers wanted not only to earn more, but to make their lives better. As the ILGWU organizer Rose Schneiderman told a hushed crowd of mourners in the aftermath of the devastating 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist fire that killed 146 mostly young female workers:

What the woman who labors wants is the right to live, not simply exist – the right to life as the rich woman has the right to life, and the sun and music and art. You

⁸ As, for example, in the famous oath that the male ILGWU leadership led, after Clara Lemlich shamed them into supporting striking women.

⁹ Quoted in Kessler-Harris, “Organizing the Unorganizable,” p. 43.

¹⁰ On this subject, see Alice Kessler-Harris, “Where Are the Organized Women Workers?” *Gendering Labor History*, pp. 21–37.

have nothing that the humblest worker has not a right to have also. The worker must have bread, but she must have roses, too. Help, you women of privilege, give her the ballot to fight with.¹¹

When it came to militance and organized activity, abundant evidence exists that Jewish women saw themselves differently from their non-Jewish sisters. Pauline Newman glowed with pride over her ability to organize English-speaking “Americans.” Juliet Poyntz insisted that Italian women would “need a long and serious education to enable them to function intelligently as members of the working class in the shop and in the political field.”¹² As late as 1935, Rose Pesotta complained that the Seattle women she was then organizing had no conception of class consciousness: it is, she wrote, “as remote from their thoughts as any idea that smacks with radicalism.”¹³

As they had understood that Jewish tradition fostered union solidarity in the early years, so women’s locals quickly turned to developing solidarity among women. They promoted activities intended to enlighten and educate their sisters. In the teens they sponsored night school classes and created vacation camps in the Pocono mountains. Musical orchestras, choruses, gym classes, and dances quickly followed. These activities were racially and ethnically integrated, intended to give joy to the lives of women workers and to cement loyalty to their union among all women, including those who did not share the Jewish tradition.

Male ILGWU leaders, concerned that solidarity among women might subvert loyalty to the larger union, at first resisted the social activities and summer vacation houses organized by women. Faced with the women’s immense success at retaining membership loyalty, the male leadership grudgingly acknowledged the evanescent “spirit” of female union members. Instead of dissolving the vacation houses, they took control of them, as well as many of the educational and social activities. In the process they learned an important lesson. As the historian Dan Katz has powerfully demonstrated, cultural activities eventually became the center of the ILGWU’s efforts to meld an increasingly racially and ethnically diverse membership. In the mid-1930s, the union, eager to take full advantage of the political potential of educational programs, removed

¹¹ Rose Schneiderman, “We Have Found You Wanting,” speech in commemoration of the victims of the Triangle Fire, http://trianglefire.ilr.cornell.edu/primary/testimonials/ootss_RoseSchneiderman.html

¹² Julia Stuart Poyntz, “What Do You Do with Leisure?” *Justice* (February 22, 1919), p. 13.

¹³ Quoted in Kessler-Harris, “Organizing the Unorganizable,” p. 43.

women, represented by Fannia Cohn, from leadership and turned over educational activities to trustworthy males.¹⁴ Fannia Cohn, who had been educational director of the ILGWU in the twenties, resisted the move, defending her efforts to build solidarity and understanding among women as in the interest of all union members.¹⁵ The leadership simply dismissed her as “mannish.”

A somewhat different process occurred in the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union. There idealistic women initially hoped to build trust in the male leadership by building a women’s bureau that would focus on women’s family issues and organize dances and entertainments to add roses to their lives. Male leaders soon began to think of these activities as subversive, believing them to promote loyalty, not to bread-and-butter issues, but to the larger purposes that women had in mind. Women, who did not separate the two, soon lost control of the women’s bureau. This was particularly galling as the Amalgamated arguably emerged from the 1910 protests of young women led by Bessie Abramowitz, who would soon marry Sidney Hillman, the Amalgamated’s longtime leader. Abramowitz always insisted that the incident that led to the 1910 Chicago Men’s Garment Workers strike was more about fairness and social justice than about wages. Still after she married Sidney Hillman and settled into a comfortable home and motherhood, she kept her peace. When she returned to the battlefield in the 1930s, it was to lead a successful effort to organize mostly African American laundry workers.¹⁶

The injunction to heal the world carried different resonances for different kinds of women. The immigrant socialist Rose Halpern became involved with birth control out of the conviction that having fewer children would enable women to become better mothers. The Jewish emphasis on protecting the family guided her position. Anarchists such as Emma Goldman and Rose Pesotta framed their involvement with birth control as part of a larger campaign for personal freedom for women. Poor women, burdened by large numbers of children, would find autonomy a nearly impossible attainment. For Rose Pastor Stokes (an immigrant who married into the Protestant elite) the campaign for birth

¹⁴ Daniel Katz, *All Together Different: Yiddish Socialists and the Labor Roots of Multiculturalism* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

¹⁵ Kessler-Harris, “Where Are the Organized Women Workers?” p. 37; and see Kessler-Harris, “Organizing the Unorganizable,” pp. 42–43.

¹⁶ Karen Pastorello, *A Power among Them: Bessie Abramowitz Hillman and the Making of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008), pp. 21–24.

control was both a campaign against poverty and an effort to reify motherhood. Many active synagogue women sought rabbinical blessing – readily achieved on the grounds that birth control would sustain good mothering.¹⁷

In disproportionate numbers the wives and daughters of middle- and upper-middle-income Jews found themselves engaged in organizational work that expanded women's capacities to achieve justice in the New World. Their motives varied. For well-off women, commands to heal the world and to act charitably could create a sphere of relative autonomy, encouraging them, for example, to support the strikes initiated by wage-earning women or to create organizations that would sustain them. Some of their organizations, such as the National Council of Jewish Women, initially engaged in relatively traditional philanthropic roles sanctioned by synagogue activity. But such activities often led, as in the work of Maud Nathan, beyond the walls of the synagogue into the larger political sphere. In the early years of the twentieth century Nathan, daughter of a wealthy Jewish family whose American roots dated to before the American Revolution, worked first in the National Consumers' League and then in the peace movement. Recognizing the importance of political influence to achieve worthwhile social ends, she expanded her activities into the suffrage movement. Engaging in politics, she believed, would draw attention to women's voices, enhancing their calls for justice and making women better wives and mothers. As the historian Melissa Klapper notes, "Jewish suffrage activism . . . provided critical connections among social integration, American Jewish citizenship, and modern womanhood."¹⁸

Frequently better off Jewish women found themselves cooperating with non-Jews in order to achieve common ends. Rooted in family life, they nevertheless reached into the larger culture in ways never approached by men. Lillian Wald, founder of a Nurses' Settlement House and later of the Visiting Nurses Association, became a key leader of the movement against war, where her close alliance with Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr produced a vibrant opposition to Woodrow Wilson. Maud Nathan moved from the National Council of Jewish Women to the National Consumers' League, where she partnered with Florence Kelley,

¹⁷ This material is drawn from Melissa R. Klapper, *Ballots, Babies and Banners of Peace: American Jewish Women's Activism, 1890–1940* (New York: New York University Press: 2013), pp. 69–70 and ff.

¹⁸ Klapper, *Ballots, Babies and Banners of Peace*, p. 22.

and, through the good work of Josephine and Pauline Goldmark, helped to draw the future Justice Louis Brandeis into the league's efforts to shape legislation on behalf of wage-earning women. Nathan's sister, Annie Nathan Meyer, assembled a coalition of well-off women who together founded Barnard College.

The Women's Trade Union League (WTUL) linked young workers (many of them Jews) with wealthy allies of both Protestant and Jewish origin. At first focused on organizing young immigrant women, the WTUL eventually became a vehicle through which many immigrants learned to adapt to the manners and behavior of native-born women in the larger culture. Drawn together by their concern for the costs of industry on family life and especially by their desire to protect potential mothers, allies and workers developed new strategies for exercising women's influence. Rose Schneiderman provides an example of the process. An immigrant from Poland, she started out as a teenage cap maker, became a union organizer, and then led the New York branch of the WTUL into supporting legislative strategies to protect existing and potential mothers. Never a mother herself, she nevertheless used arguments in defense of motherhood to become a WTUL leader and eventually a close friend of Eleanor Roosevelt's.¹⁹

Arguments in defense of motherhood provided women of all kinds with a standpoint from which to participate in a range of political movements. These arguments fit particularly smoothly into the Jewish value tradition. They may well account for why such influential Jewish figures as Fanny Brin chose to use her pulpit as president of the National Council of Jewish Women to speak on behalf of the peace movement in the twenties and thirties. Brin, who joined the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), cited religious conviction as her inspiration for antiwar activity. Melissa Klapper tells us that "Jewish women's groups consistently positioned peace as a religious issue, using Jewish texts to support their statements."²⁰

Less observant Jews rationalized their arguments for peace through the broader impetus to heal the world. Before and after the Second World War they insisted that only commitments to peace would enable ethnic and racial reconciliation, fostering cooperation across lines of faith and class. These lines of argument melded in the late 1940s and 1950s with

¹⁹ Alice Kessler-Harris, "Rose Schneiderman and the Limits of Women's Trade Unionism," *Gendering Labor History*, pp. 71-92.

²⁰ Klapper, *Ballots, Babies and Banners of Peace*, p. 120.

arguments for “peaceful coexistence” fostered by opponents of the Cold War. But commitment to peace in those days seemed to ally one with the totalitarian Communism practiced in the Soviet Union. Only at the end of the decade did a coalition of Quakers, Catholics, and Jews call on motherhood to provoke a national outcry against the danger of nuclear fallout and a demand to ban the bomb. Women Strike for Peace (WSP), whose founding members included such notable secular Jews as Bella Abzug, Cora Weiss, and Amy Swerdlow, arguably gets much of the credit for the 1960s efforts to “ban the bomb” and for effective publicizing of the movement to stop the war in Vietnam. Their slogans “War is not healthy for children or other living things” and “Not our boys, not your boys” fit neatly into Jewish tradition and values.

The living possibility of healing the world helps to explain why Jews in general, and Jewish women in particular, could be found in disproportionate numbers in the left-wing movements of the thirties, and especially in the popular front organizations of the Communist Party. The utopian visions of these groups provided practical ways to move toward the better world that Jews envisioned. The antiracist stance of the Jewish People’s Fraternal Order (JPFO) especially appealed to women who sent their children in droves to the summer camps that rooted them both in secular Yiddish traditions and in socialist values. Additionally women formed their own community groups and provided leadership to unemployment councils and antipoverty protests.

Finally the engagement of Jewish women in left causes tells us something about the formation of political identity among men as well as women and evokes its complexity. In twentieth-century America, to be sure, one could readily escape one’s Jewishness. But claiming one’s identity as a Jew could also align one with a larger community of shared values on the side of virtue, provide instant rationalizations for one’s behavior, and stake claims to alliances. Consciously and not so consciously Jewish women positioned themselves politically simply by claiming their heritage.

The controversial playwright Lillian Hellman illustrates the point. Hellman grew up in New Orleans and New York City, the child of two nonobservant Jewish parents and without any particular attachment to religion. Instead her parents introduced her to the secular Jewish commitment to social justice and fairness. In adulthood Hellman translated these into an abiding commitment to trade unionism, antifascism, and, finally, a short-lived membership in the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA). These were common enough paths in the 1930s, and especially

for Jews who inhabited, as she did, the entertainment world. For Hellman, as for many Jews, membership in the CPUSA constituted the best way to enact her faith in a better world, and to express an antiracist stance, and one opposed to the accumulation of great wealth.

As long as Jewish identity cohered around an egalitarian spirit, Hellman could and did claim her own Jewishness and enact it politically. She joined antifascist refugee committees to rescue Spaniards from their civil war and Jews from the perils of the Nazis; she traveled the country with Russian-Jewish emissaries to raise money for the Soviet war efforts; and she fought together with Paul Robeson to end Jim Crow in the US Army. But in the late forties and fifties, Jewish identity splintered. In the face of the Cold War Hellman and her left-wing compatriots began to question what it meant to be a Jew in a world in which antiracism and an egalitarian ethos were identified with a dangerous Communist enemy. Perhaps perversely Hellman clung to the universal values with which she had begun her journey. She would not deny that she had once and still wanted to make a better world. Though she dismissed her brief membership in the CPUSA, she would not betray those whose values she still shared. After all, as she put it, "I do not believe we did our country any harm."²¹ For her insistence on the right of individuals to believe as they wished, Hellman briefly became a heroine, lauded by many.

Within the Jewish community another dispute stirred. Asked in 1952 to evaluate a play script based on the *Diary of Anne Frank*, then unknown in the United States, Hellman dismissed the play.²² The author in her view had situated Frank too narrowly. He had represented human suffering at the hands of the Nazis as the fate of Jews alone. Hellman and many other people preferred to situate Frank's work as emblematic of universal suffering brought on by the Holocaust. Rejected by one producer after another and unwilling to acknowledge the limits of his play, the author (Meyer Levin) sued Hellman for denying him the right to mount the play. In his mind the only explanation for his failure to find a producer had to be Hellman's opposition. Calling her a non-Jewish Jew and a self-hating Jew who was following the Communist Party line, he accused her of organizing a conspiracy to deny the play a venue. Value systems now

²¹ Lillian Hellman, *Scoundrel Time* (Boston: Little Brown, 1976), p. 150; and see Kessler-Harris, *A Difficult Woman: The Challenging Life and Times of Lillian Hellman* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2012), chapter 5.

²² The play was written by Meyer Levin, who wrote about the incident in *The Obsession* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973).

collided. Hellman had never been a particularly good Jew in any spiritual sense, but she had lived by a moral code that was consistent with the larger set of Jewish values. Though she could not now agree that the special suffering imposed by the Holocaust was limited to Jews, and she could not condone the new State of Israel's removal of Palestinians, Hellman still imagined herself as a Jew. But many of her former friends now did not.²³

The incident moves full circle the deeper meaning of Jewishness for some women. In the spirit of Lionel Trilling's minimalist Jew, Hellman did not and could not deny that she was a Jew. For her the meaning of Jewishness was embedded in the larger moral injunctions that Judaism promoted. This sense of herself as an individual with a set of values nurtured in Jewish identity remained the core of a moral value system from which she never wavered. She adopted a parallel stance with respect to attacks on her politics. As she remained loyal to her own sense of herself as a Jew, so she would not turn her back on what she had once believed. Unpopular as her position was and despite allegations of Stalinism, she refused throughout her days to deny that she had been among those who sought a better world. The parallel was no accident: Hellman may have been a non-Jewish Jew in the eyes of some, and a Stalinist in the eyes of others. But in her own mind her loyalty was to principles that she would not abandon. She was, as she often said, a rebel, not a radical. She was less interested in root change than she was in fostering the moral world in which she believed.

Lillian Hellman, Fanny Brin, and Rose Schneiderman, all of them engaged in activity radical for their times, did not have much in common apart from their gender. Yet a strong thread of tradition framed their very different commitments to what one might roughly call a left-wing agenda. In these women and others tradition fostered an ethos of justice and fairness in the world. Visions of what that better world might look like differed among them, as they differ for us. But for Jewish women whose ritual and familial responsibilities once confined them to the household working toward a better world unaccountably expanded possibilities and opened doors. In unforeseen ways visions of making the world better provided women with permission to speak and with community approval for doing so. In the 1960s a generation of young Jewish women,

²³ On this issue, see Norman Podhoretz, *Ex-Friends: Falling Out with Allen Ginsberg, Lionel and Diana Trilling, Lillian Hellman, Hannah Arendt, and Norman Mailer* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2000), pp. 116–134.

perhaps inspired by the ongoing tradition, joined with many others to produce what we now call the women's liberation movement. Surely Jews were not alone in fostering new claims to freedom and in voicing opposition to what they perceived as immoral acts. But among others Jewish participation illustrates a concurrence of consciousness with opportunity that has proved particularly salient in the American context. Joining in the creation of a new social movement, they followed the lead of generations of Jewish women in the service of social justice. Those who took to the streets acted in the tradition of their mothers when they joined a feminist movement that would reshape the expectations of women and the family lives of all Americans.

PART SIX

CANONICAL FIGURES

Gershom Scholem and the Left

Steven E. Aschheim

What is the philosophy of history? It is the attempt to capture the flow of life in an iron box . . . we have been dragging too much history around with us . . . Here's to life! . . . One doesn't need historical materialism to justify socialism: personal experience suffices. That one cannot prove Zionism is clear to anyone who has ever felt it.¹

Gershom Scholem, diary entry, November 1914

One could almost say that however shifting and idiosyncratic were the political postures of the formidable Judaic scholar Gershom Scholem, he was never a Marxist or conventional leftist. Yet, as his turbulent, precocious youthful diaries indicate, even that assertion does not ring entirely true. In 1914 (at the age of sixteen), already opposed to the impending war and rebelling against his bourgeois Jewish father, he announced that he had left Jewish orthodoxy, that he was finding his way to Martin Buber (from whom shortly thereafter he turned away), and that "I've also become a socialist."² Moreover, as the war unfolded, there were (fleeting) moments when, in his dramatically portentous mode he declared: "To the devil! I have developed myself into a Marxist! The other side has nothing and only Marxism guarantees enduring renewal . . . Two types: Revisionism and Marxism! He is a villain who does not totally, un-divided, insensibly place himself on the side of Marxism."³ To be sure, this

¹ Diary entry for November 15, 1914, in *Lamentations of Youth: The Diaries of Gershom Scholem, 1913-1919*, ed. Anthony David Skinner (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 32.

² *Ibid.* See the undated 1914 entry on p. 26.

³ Entry for June 28, 1916, in Gershom Scholem, *Tagebücher I 1913-1917*, ed. Herbert Kopp-Oberstebrink, Karlfried Gründer, Friedrich Niewöhner (Frankfurt am Main:

occurred in a very specific context, a function of his delight, when in June 1915 the revisionist Social Democrat Eduard Bernstein – “the most honorable man in Juda” – turned against his own original August 1914 support for war credits.

Indeed, to the qualified degree that they existed, Scholem’s Marxist sympathies were almost entirely a function of his opposition to the Great War. Thus, when on November 28, 1917, the new Soviet government issued its peace offer, Scholem wrote to his friend Werner Kraft:

Something entirely new and unimaginable has appeared on the scene. You can only imagine how much I set my heart on the offer made by the Russian revolutionaries. If their efforts meet with success, the kind of blessings that will be heaped upon these men (whose best comrades in Germany sit in prison) will be simply unfathomable. I’ve never read such a humanly moving and authentic political tract as the document on the Bolshevik Revolution. And I don’t believe that such a document has ever before appeared in history. The most amazing thing of all is that *each and every* one of us can place his signature upon these things.⁴

For all that, as an ideal, a movement, and a materialist, antimetaphysical methodology,⁵ both Bolshevism and Marxism (as opposed to a specific understanding of socialism) were anathema to both the youthful and the mature Scholem.⁶ Indeed, shortly after his ecstatic reception of the Russian peace offer, in an undated 1918 manuscript entitled “Bolshevism,” Scholem, declared:

Bolshevism has a central idea that endows its movement with its magic. It is: that the messianic kingdom can only arise through the dictatorship of the poor . . . The poor are perhaps not just, but they can never be unjust. Poverty, even when it is dictatorial, is not violence. Moscow’s theory of shooting appears as an ethical

Jüdischer Verlag, 1995), p. 327. Typically Scholem applied this lesson to the Zionists and their leaders in the hope that they would do the same.

⁴ Letter to Werner Kraft, November 30, 1917, Gershom Scholem, *A Life in Letters, 1914–1982*, ed. Anthony David Skinner (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 63.

⁵ For Scholem social science and Marxism were perhaps not identical but they did share an affinity. On the study of antisemitism he commented to Adorno, “I can only offer you my condolences. I regret to say that as a long-time historian I no longer think that social scientists can add anything relevant to the topic. I’ve become more and more convinced that only a metaphysician can contribute anything useful in this regard.” Letter of January 28, 1943, to Theodor Adorno, in Scholem, *A Life in Letters*, p. 317.

⁶ There were, of course, other later humorous moments when he ironically commented: “We have become true ‘Marxists,’” as he wrote to Shmuel Agnon, referring to his affection for Alexander Marx and his wife. Letter No. 6, May 6, 1949, to Samuel J. Agnon in Gershom Scholem, *Briefe II, 1948–1970*, ed. Thomas Sparr (München: C. H. Beck, 1995), p. 12.

consequence: the rich, who are unjust, stand before judgment. Bolshevism is the attempt to stand God's judgment on its head. It kills in the name of a task, a challenge.⁷

Scholem's explosively charged spiritual language, existential sensibility, and political judgments always circled around his self-described "fanatical" immersion in his (uniquely distinctive understanding of) Jewish and Zionist commitments. Already then he was transfixed by postliberal questions of the radically transgressive and the messianic. Bolshevism was thus now negatively juxtaposed to his peculiar figuration of Jewish messianism: "There is revolution where there is an attempt to create a messianic kingdom without Torah. In the last analysis, there *can* be *no* revolution for the Jews. The Jewish Revolution is exclusively the reattachment to Torah."⁸ As for Marx himself – of those who had smashed the old idea of heaven, "the mightiest, most calamitous, and most important man of all"⁹ – from Scholem's determinedly Jewish point of view, as a consequence of his discussion of *Geldjudentum* in his early book on the Jewish question, Marx was "sadly, sadly responsible for the complete lack of standard in socialist discussions of the *Judenfrage*" and indeed its overall anti-Jewish tone.¹⁰

For all that, Scholem's engagement with the ideas of the left (however defined) was a resonant force that at different times and levels of intensity engaged him both intellectually, as a kind of foil to his own thought, and also at the deepest personal levels. Many of his closest interlocutors, from his brother Werner to his most valued friend, Walter Benjamin; to the Frankfurt School's Theodor Adorno were certainly very much on the left and considered themselves Marxists or at least were sympathizers. So too were other less close figures such as Max Horkheimer and Ernst Bloch. But Scholem had a particular affection for the quasi-Marxist George Lichtheim (his concerned, fatherly letters to the latter upon his depression, though they could not prevent his suicide, are particularly moving) as he did for Jürgen Habermas. "I never quite understood," Habermas writes in full awareness of Scholem's prickliness, "why he was so without any

⁷ [Der Bolschewismus], undated, circa December 1918, Scholem, *Tagebücher II 1917–1923*, pp. 556–558. The quote appears on p. 556.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 556.

⁹ Skinner, ed., *Lamentations of Youth*, entry for January 20, 1915, p. 47.

¹⁰ Letters to George Lichtheim. See Scholem, *Briefe II*, Letters 108 (December 4, 1966), pp. 162–163 and 109 (December 16, 1966), pp. 163–166.

reservation towards me – who had, as he was aware of, still too much of the great ‘villains’ Marx and Freud on his mind.”¹¹

This is perhaps best illustrated in terms of his dialogical relationship with his brother Werner, who, like Gershom, rebelled against his conventional bourgeois Jewish home, ferociously opposed supporting the Great War, and turned to radical leftist activism. (In a sense for sensitive German Jewish youth in search of alternatives to their bourgeois liberal upbringing, at the time Zionism or Marxism appeared to be the truly revolutionary option. The two other Scholem brothers, Erich and Reinhold, chose more conformist or even right-wing paths, more or less exhausting the template of possible ideological avenues.)¹² Werner joined the ranks of the USPD, the Independent German Social Democratic Party, and after it split became a member of the Reichstag for the KPD, the German Communist Party, edited its journal, *Die Rote Fahne*, for some time defended its rigid orthodox policies but later, when he criticized them, was expelled in November 1926. He never, however, gave up his communist beliefs and was tragically murdered – as both a Jew and a Communist – by the Nazis in Buchenwald in July 1940.¹³

Gershom’s relationship to his brother was a complex mix of shared rebellious instincts, affection and concern,¹⁴ bewilderment (Scholem found Werner’s acceptance of so-called revolutionary necessities “completely indigestible”),¹⁵ alienation (on Werner’s December 29, 1918, birthday he wrote: “A mountain of estrangement separates us . . . Recently, terrible demonic forces have ruled over him from deep inside. We will both die without having spoken to each other”), and deep philosophical and existential disagreement. When asked why the brothers went off in such dissimilar communist and Jewish directions, Gershom uncharacteristically declared, “I have no answer to that. These are

¹¹ Personal correspondence. Email of September 4, 2014. See too Jürgen Habermas, “Begegnungen mit Gershom Scholem” in *Zur Historischen Gestalt Gershom Scholems, Münchner Beiträge zur Jüdischen Geschichte*, 2 (2007), pp. 9–18.

¹² Scholem’s by-now-familiar version of the family history is told in his *From Berlin to Jerusalem: Memories of My Youth* (New York: Schocken Books, 1980).

¹³ Miriam Zadoff has now written a first-rate, much needed biography, *Der rote Hiob. Das Leben des Werner Scholem* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2014).

¹⁴ See the moving letters concerning Werner’s tragic fate in Betty Scholem, Gershom Scholem, *Mutter und Sohn im Briefwechsel 1917–1946*, ed. Itta Shedletzky (München: C. H. Beck, 1989). This is also apparent in Scholem’s correspondence with Walter Benjamin and his letters generally.

¹⁵ Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, p. 145.

personal decisions whose secret cannot be fathomed.”¹⁶ The disappointment was mutual. Of Gershom’s Zionist immersion, Werner commented, “Sad that a young person like you should devote all your strength to this cause, instead of placing yourself at the service of World Revolution.”¹⁷

Still, at one point in 1915, explicitly under Werner’s influence, Gershom (or Gerhard, as he was known then) did consider joining the Social Democrats but only halfheartedly and only immediately after noting that he was “reading Zarathustra, a book that simply cannot be exhausted” (Scholem later very disingenuously disclaimed his enthusiastic reception of the book, telling a friend that *Zarathustra* was the worst of Nietzsche’s works!)¹⁸ At that time he confided to his diary:

I nearly became a member of the Social Democratic Party. Suddenly, something came over me, and I headed to the building where Werner had once enlisted. If I had found the fourth electoral district’s cashier, I would now be a party comrade. Later came the skeptical rumination that I would never join a party during peacetime, and that my interest in oppositional novelties is really driven by mere curiosity. Is this so? What business do I have in the party? Almost none.¹⁹

A few days later, he made his personal and (Jewish) nationalist motives for not joining clearer: “I would only end up walking around in confusion in a place I don’t belong: namely, by representing the interests of a nation I don’t feel I have the right to represent, and a nation which one of my essential tasks is to separate from. I am not a Marxist; in fact, the ‘scientific’ socialists would no doubt number me among the ‘utopian socialists of sentiment’.”²⁰

The saga between the two rebellious brothers has been well related elsewhere. Of particular relevance in our context is the precocious dialogue Gershom (at the tender age of sixteen) conducted with his slightly older Marxist sibling. In a sense it was an exchange that served as a crucial means for fashioning his own distinctive views. While early on both brothers regarded themselves as radical and “left” and in search of bringing about socialism, Scholem argued for an alternative way by positing a revolutionary anarchism animated by myth and totality, rejecting his brother’s (at that time) evolutionary Social Democratic views:

¹⁶ Quoted in Zadoff, *Der rote Hiob*, p. 17. ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹⁸ Letter to Aharon Heller, June 23, 1918, Gershom Scholem, *Briefe I, 1914–1947*, ed. Itta Shedletzky (München: C. H. Beck, 1994), p. 163.

¹⁹ Diary entry for December 18, 1915, Skinner, ed., *Lamentations of Youth*, p. 86.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Diary entry for January 5, 1916, p. 95.

Despite the fact that I can go along with the Erfurt Program, I still don't call myself a Social Democrat – for the simple reason that you are “organized” . . . An organization is like a murky sea that collects the lovely flowing streams of thoughts, which are never allowed to escape again. “Organization” is a synonym for death . . . The Social Democrats desire such beautiful things and their aim is to liberate men, yet they go about it by squeezing people into organizations! What irony! After thirty years of party politics, of legislative squabbling and strife, the socialist idea now survives only among outsiders, heretics, “imperfect socialists” . . . The Hasidim of Galicia . . . preach (or preached) socialism *sans phrase*. They stood for unity and myth, and myth is life. Since no one believes in the soul any longer, socialism naturally does not have one. But I am eager to know whether it has a myth.²¹

Interestingly, Werner replied that “every thinking Jew somewhere along the line becomes a socialist – which you now are, since you stand on the foundation of the Erfurt Program.”²² While he agreed that “organization” was a problem, it was sadly unavoidable. Still, he had little patience for Gershom's ventures into irrationalism. “I can't stand the sort of mystical parables you gave me,” he admonished his younger brother.²³

But these were crucial categories for Gershom. The fructifying powers of myth and the irrational – even if they contained destructive, nihilistic powers – remained a constant in Scholem's worldview. Already writing in the third person (Harold Bloom once commented that Scholem was the only person he knew who talked about himself in the third person) Scholem declared in his diary: “Within Judaism, a religion that has hitherto been the quintessential religion of rationalism and of the spirit of calculation, he has discovered the irrational emotions and desires that are the mother of renewal.”²⁴ Accordingly he told his brother about “thoughts you've never heard of because I have gone off in a direction you can't even imagine. The doctrine of myth has become the main pillar in the intellectual structure I'm busy conceptualizing.”

²¹ Scholem, *A Life in Letters*, Letter of September 7, 1914, pp. 22–23.

²² Adopted in 1891, this document formulated by Bernstein, August Bebel, and Karl Kautsky declared the inevitable collapse of capitalism and the need for socialist ownership of the means of production. But, given the imminent demise of capitalism, revolution should be abandoned for parliamentary participation where the improvements of workers' conditions were to stand at the center.

²³ Scholem, *A Life in Letters*, Letter of September 8, 1914, pp. 23–25.

²⁴ Entry for January 27, 1915, Skinner, ed., *Lamentations of Youth*, p. 49. A short time later (January 29, 1914) he wrote: “Rationality is a longing desire without any reality whatsoever. Reason is a stupid man's longing. These people think that in the messianic age everything will be rational. God forbid!” (p. 50).

This went together with a certain vision of the historical process that, I believe, lasted throughout Scholem's life. "I do not believe in the philosophy of history," the sixteen-year-old proclaimed, "whether it be Hegel's (i.e., Marx's), Ranke's, or Treitschke's, or (for all I care) even the negative form of it preached by Nietzsche. In other words, I believe that if history produces laws at all, either history or the laws are worthless. At the very most, I think that only anarchism can be of some use if you really want to prove something through history."²⁵ It is true that Scholem was never a determinist historian. His historical narratives were marked by dialectical paradoxes and processes, but these were non-Hegelian, a "mode of transformation [that] does not become a mode of reaching a synthesis."²⁶ Yet while his scholarship on Judaism contained a principled, historical openness, one should also remember that this operated within a clearly defined structure.²⁷ Even when the tensions were highlighted, his dialectics proceeded from what early on he called the "essential conditioning force of the inner form of Judaism. An *absolute*."²⁸

Moreover, Scholem's anarchism was hardly of the left (or right) conventional kind. Part of the genesis of his anarchic radicalism, it is true, is familiar and was born out of the slaughter of the Great War. "The state is violence," Scholem confided to his July 1915 diary, "from which follows that we have to extricate ourselves from it" and create communities built upon new foundations that excluded the use of force.²⁹ Yet, more idiosyncratically, the young Scholem developed a kind of esoteric political theology of Zionist anarchism far removed from any of the usual understandings of the term.³⁰ Anarchism, he declared in 1918, was "the

²⁵ *Ibid.* Letter of September 23, 1914, pp. 25–27.

²⁶ See Nathan Rotenstreich, "Symbolism and Transcendence: On Some Philosophical Aspects of Gershom Scholem's Opus" in his *Essays in Jewish Philosophy in the Modern Era* (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1996), p. 299.

²⁷ I have explored these matters in more detail in *Scholem, Arendt, Klemperer: Intimate Chronicles in Turbulent Times* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 2001), and "The Metaphysical Psychologist: On the Life and Letters of Gershom Scholem" in Steven E. Aschheim, *At the Edges of Liberalism: Junctions of European, German, and Jewish History* (New York: Macmillan Palgrave, 2012).

²⁸ Scholem, *Tagebücher I*, p. 402, entry for October 11, 1916.

²⁹ Diary entry for July 29, 1915, Skinner, ed., *Lamentations of Youth*, p. 63.

³⁰ Upon reflection, I do believe that Scholem constructed a kind of political theology of Zionism yet am not certain, as Gabriel Pieterberg has argued (*The Returns of Zionism: Myth, Politics and Scholarship in Israel* (London: Verso, 2008), pp. 159–160, about the nature and extent of Carl Schmitt's influence. Schmitt published his *Political Theology* in 1922; in that sense one could argue that Scholem preceded rather than followed him.

only conceivable ideal steppingstone to the Divine State . . . Anarchism is the theocratic state of mind opposing every contemporary period of time that's not an eternal present. I am, so to speak, too far to the left for today's revolution, which has only a faint and indecisive understanding of its mission. I am *entirely* beyond this revolution."³¹ The anarchic and the theocratic were the only two possible kinds of politics – all others limited freedom.³² Looking back over the years, Scholem confirmed this belief: "My sympathy for anarchism was a moral one . . . I believed in anarchism as Utopia. I wasn't an atheistic anarchist. I thought that the organization of society under absolute liberty is a divine mandate."³³ Of course, the later Scholem affirmed the secular realm – what he called the Zionist return to concrete history (despite his disappointments and warnings of its direction) – yet maintained his belief in a possible if not immediately accessible transcendental theological future. "A remnant of theocratic hope," he opined in 1974, "also accompanies that reentry into world history of the Jewish people that at the same time signifies the truly Utopian return to its own history."³⁴

In intoxicated language, early Scholemian anarchism referred to ecstatic notions of nationalist purity and community, to "marriage with the Volk" and becoming a "bridegroom of blood" for Judah. It invoked

There are virtually no mentions of Schmitt in the Scholemian oeuvre. Nevertheless Christoph Schmidt has intriguingly noted that the decisionist epistemology of post-world war culture encouraged a kind of antiliberal transgressiveness, resulting in a parallel between Schmitt's desire to suspend the Weimar constitution to protect the state against its enemies and Scholem's interest in Jacob Frank, who sought to suspend Jewish law in order to protect the Jewish people from their enemies. See Schmidt's "The Political Theology of Gershom Scholem" [Hebrew], *Theory and Criticism* 6 (Spring 1995), pp. 149–161. See too the English abstract, p. 187. Also relevant is "German Jews beyond Bildung and Liberalism: The Radical Jewish Revival in Weimar Germany," in Steven E. Aschheim, *Culture and Catastrophe: German and Jewish Confrontations with National Socialism and Other Crises* (New York: Macmillan, 1996).

³¹ Entry for December 25, 1918, Skinner, ed., *Lamentations of Youth*, p. 288. See too entry for November 13, 1918, p. 274.

³² Scholem, *Tagebücher II 1917–1923*, entry for July 19, 1918, p. 270.

³³ "With Gershom Scholem: An Interview" (with Muki Tsur) in Gershom Scholem, *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis: Selected Essays*, ed. Werner J. Dannhauser (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), pp. 35–36.

³⁴ *Ibid.* See "Reflections on Jewish Theology" in *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis*, p. 295. See too Zohar Maor, "Death or Birth: Scholem and Secularization" in *Against the Grain: Jewish Intellectuals in Hard Times*, ed. Ezra Mendelsohn, Stefani Hoffman and Richard I. Cohen (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014), pp. 64–85 and R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, "Tradition in 'säkularer' Kultur" in *Gershom Scholem: Zwischen den Disziplinen*, ed. P. Schaefer and Gary Smith (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1991), pp. 70–70.

“the will to *totally* bind ourselves religiously - to be active in Palestine as simple people dressed in white robes.”³⁵ Such a community moreover was of a metaphysical sort: it could not be willed into existence, but was beyond the will.³⁶ He even equated this idealized Zionist community with communism. In contrast to socialism, communist life possessed a *religious* horizon, did not depend at all upon economics, and determined itself out of its relationship to the messianic kingdom. This, he insisted, was not a juristic concept but a form of life shorn of possessions, money, and all mechanical goods.³⁷

If this community was beyond volition, it also transcended what contemporaries understood by revolution. Thus in a letter to Robert Weltsch and Hans Kohn, the romantic *Erlebnis* Prague Buberians (of whom by then he was deeply skeptical), he went so far as to

pledge my allegiance to an utterly non-revolutionary notion of Zionism – or one that can be labeled revolutionary only with deep and nearly indecent irony, since it refers to a stratum where there are no revolutions. I do not think that the task of Zionism has any relation to social problems. In other words, I am convinced that *if* the rebirth of the Jewish people succeeds, it can do so even in the worst capitalist state, just as it could flounder in a socialist one. Nor do I know a thing about the revolutions of the spirit that you demand. . . I know only the deep continuity of the Teaching – which has obviously faded from Zion, though Zionists haven’t noticed this.³⁸

(Of course, earlier on he argued rather differently, a function perhaps, both of youth and whom he was addressing. Declaring the nature of his Zionism in 1914 he wrote: “Our guiding principle is revolution! Revolution everywhere! We don’t want reform or reeducation but revolution or renewal. We desire to absorb revolution into our innermost souls. . . For the sake of Judah, we want to fight it out with foes. Above all, we want to revolutionize Judaism. We want to revolutionize Zionism and to preach anarchism and freedom from all authority.”)³⁹

One way or another, the esoteric metatheological dimension of Zionism was always present in Scholem (conveniently – if rather vaguely – allowing him to distinguish between the negative uses of political messianism while retaining a sense of utopian religious redemptive possibility). But so too were his postliberal, antibourgeois attitudes (though

³⁵ Entry for December 18, 1916, Skinner, ed., *Lamentations of Youth*, p. 158.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Entry for June 29, 1919, p. 306.

³⁷ Scholem, *Tagebücher II, 1917–1923*, undated entry, p. 374.

³⁸ Scholem, *A Life in Letters*, Letter of July 30, 1921, pp. 119–121.

³⁹ Entry of January 4, 1914, Skinner, ed., *Lamentations of Youth*, p. 48.

admittedly his everyday way of life, with its birthday celebrations, poetry readings, and discussion of the classics was reminiscent of the German *Bildungsbürgertum*).⁴⁰ Still, it was this purported radicalism – greatness, he declared, was antibourgeois⁴¹ – coupled with his self-proclaimed fanatical Zionism that prompted his diverse lifelong dialogue and sometimes vehement differences with leftists across the spectrum.

In some cases, the dialogue took on – an inevitably disappointed – *conversionary* aspect. Thus in 1916 Gershom was sure that he could win his brother Werner over to his Zionist cause: “You should not forget *one thing*: that he is *on the right path*,” Scholem wrote to his friend Erich Brauer.

His Judaism is “remediable” because he is not smugly content with himself, which is something I can’t say for many “Zionists”. The more you work on him – and in the course of time I intend to win him *fully* over to our side – the more he will consciously turn to the *one way*. . . *My brother and I basically see eye to eye on things*. We both have a truly honest ideal of a “movement” and of “radicalism”. You are *without question* mistaken about his socialism. I know this for certain; and precisely *because* I know this, I know it will lead him to Zion.⁴²

There were, of course, some moments when his readings of left thinkers were not assessed according to Zionist or Judaic criteria. In December 1917 Ernst Toller tried to convert Scholem to his pacifist views. In retrospect Scholem wrote, “I have respect for the man, but not for his ideas and even less for his literature.”⁴³ On the one hand, Heinrich Blücher, at that time Hannah Arendt’s companion (later her husband) and a committed communist, “made an exceptionally fine impression” on him,⁴⁴ while he likened Georg Lukács’s writing (whose *Destruction of Reason* Scholem abhorred) to “a metaphysical slide of the highest spheres that ended unceremoniously in the abyss of twaddle.”⁴⁵ If there was a

⁴⁰ See George L. Mosse, *Confronting History: A Memoir* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), p. 194.

⁴¹ Entry of July 23, 1916, Skinner, ed., *Lamentations of Youth*, p. 120.

⁴² Letter of July 17, 1916, to Erich Brauer, Scholem, *Briefe I*, p. 42.

⁴³ Letter 211 to Daniel Bell, ca. December 1980, Gershom Scholem, *Briefe III, 1971–1982*, ed. Itta Shedletzky (München: C. H. Beck, 1999), p. 228.

⁴⁴ Letter 115, November 6–8, 1938, in Gershom Scholem, ed., *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem 1932–1940* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 233.

⁴⁵ Letter 45 to Theodor Adorno, November 28, 1960, Scholem, *Briefe II*, pp. 74–75. Elsewhere he commented that Lukács was a “moral nihilist who accomplished the considerable feat to combine doctrinary communism with nihilism as the secret doctrine.” Letter 211 to Daniel Bell, Scholem, *Briefe III*, ca. December 1980, p. 228.

grudging intellectual acknowledgment, it was accompanied by clear ethical disapproval. When, around 1976, he spoke to a student, Paul Breines, whose master's thesis was on the anarchist Gustav Landauer and whose doctoral dissertation was on the young Georg Lukács, Scholem wryly commented: "You went up intellectually, but down morally."⁴⁶ He declared Franz Borkenau's *Der Übergang vom feudalen zum bürgerlichen Weltbild* a "warning to Marxists and those who wish to become such. The Institute of Social Research, which publishes this kind of thing, must really have leanings toward orthodoxly dressed intelligent prattle."⁴⁷

For all that, most often Scholem's encounters with the left were defined by a Jewish and/or Zionist agenda. At the age of twenty-one he visited Ernst Bloch in Interlaken. They talked from six in the evening until close to four in the morning on Jewish matters. "It was relatively good to speak with him," Scholem opined, "but in the last analysis I have very little in common with his views."⁴⁸ He had little sympathy for Bloch's *Spirit of Utopia*, with what he took to be its uncritical borrowings from Buber's Prague lectures and its historical-philosophical observations bearing no connection whatsoever to the philological categories upon which they were supposed to be based.⁴⁹ Over time, Scholem softened his critique, but, like his reading of Walter Benjamin, believed that Bloch's Marxism sat uncomfortably with what he called his "mystical anarchism."⁵⁰

Scholem's relationship with Max Horkheimer was always a difficult one. Given Scholem's famously formidable, almost overwhelming presence⁵¹ the fact that he bored Horkheimer is a major surprise (and puts Scholem into a more human perspective): Horkheimer "seemed to be bored stiff by me (but he put on a good show)," he wrote to Benjamin on May 6, 1938, and added that while there was polite contact it was caused by "mutual antipathy. It proved impossible to conduct even a single sensible conversation in his presence without having his infinitely and vividly bored expression make the words die in your (or rather my) mouth. . . I have read some of his essays, which are not uninteresting but

⁴⁶ As reported by Anson Rabinbach, who was present at this meeting, in an e-mail correspondence of September 2, 2014.

⁴⁷ Letter 64 to Walter Benjamin, August 14, 1934 in Scholem, ed., *Correspondence*, p. 138.

⁴⁸ Scholem, *Tagebücher* II, entry May 19, 1919, p. 444.

⁴⁹ Scholem, *A Life in Letters*, Letter of February 5, 1920, to Benjamin, pp. 110–111.

⁵⁰ See Letter 35, April 6, 1960, Scholem, *Briefe* II, pp. 54–56.

⁵¹ As George Mosse (himself no shrinking violet) reported, "I was always overawed by Scholem's strong personality and an erudition which frightened me." See Mosse, *Confronting History*, p. 195.

which didn't shake me in my conviction that he is not a pleasant fellow."⁵² But a little later, when, in 1939, Horkheimer's essay "The Jews and Europe" appeared, Scholem voiced sheer contempt. It was "laughable and scandalous . . . the latest metamorphosis" of the Marxian take on Jewish questions,⁵³ "an entirely useless product. . . The author has neither any conception of the Jewish problem nor any interest in it . . . on the subject itself, the author has nothing whatsoever to say." Horkheimer, he angrily declared, had no idea of the meaning and significance of the expulsion of the Jews from Europe. "Nor does he ask *on behalf of the Jews* for the Jews interest him not *as Jews*, but only from the standpoint of the fate of the economic category they represent for him as 'agents of circulation'."⁵⁴

Scholem's relationship with Theodor Adorno, even if there were some bumps on the road, was a far more positive, even affectionate, one. Neither man was marked by modesty as Adorno's – perhaps ironic? – description of his meeting with Scholem, the "antinomian Maggid," indicates. It produced, he wrote, "a certain trust – rather like that which might develop between an Ichtyosaurus and a Brontosaurus meeting for coffee, or even better, as if Leviathan should decide to drop in on Behemoth."⁵⁵ Their relationship to and collaboration on the works of Walter Benjamin were of course the binding force. Still, while mutually admiring, both maintained a critical eye on each other's projects. It was ironic that Scholem's conception of mysticism, Adorno wrote to Benjamin, "presents itself from the perspective of the philosophy of history precisely as that same incursion into the profane with which he reproaches both of us. . . The spiritual energy and power of the man is enormous . . . but it is strange how this power sometimes abandons him at a stretch and allows prejudice and the most banal observations to prevail uncontested instead."⁵⁶ For his part, Scholem, while appreciating Adorno's "negative dialectics" (not far removed from Scholem's "negative theology"), wondered whether the latter's attempted salvation of metaphysics needed – or indeed could be supported by – a Marxist materialist

⁵² Letter 108, Scholem, ed., *Correspondence*, p. 218 and later (Letter 115, November 6–8, 1938, p. 235).

⁵³ Letter 108 to George Lichtheim, December 4, 1966, Scholem, *Briefe* II, p. 162.

⁵⁴ Letter 128 to Benjamin, February 1940 in Scholem, ed., *Correspondence*, pp. 264–265.

⁵⁵ Adorno to Benjamin, March 4, 1938, in Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence, 1928–1940* ed. Henri Lonitz (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), pp. 248–252. The quote appears on p. 250.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* The letter contains some brilliant critical insights into Scholem's project.

foundation (this was a critique Scholem was likely to make of almost all his Marxist acquaintances).⁵⁷ Given his own clear nonmaterialist approach, Scholem rejected the equation of truth content with the “Social.” The social, he believed, was conceived as a kind of magical fetish. “Always in vain,” Scholem asked, “how enigmatic Marxists like Adorno and Benjamin could get caught in this misguided contradiction and allow themselves to be intoxicated or enchanted and praise this labyrinth as a way out, instead of precisely devaluing or transcending this moment.”⁵⁸

Much has been written of the Benjamin–Scholem connection and there is no need to rehearse that here. Of relevance in our context is only the degree to which Scholem resisted Benjamin’s Marxism in their own relationship and later in the contestation over Benjamin’s legacy. Scholem’s Benjamin was a thoroughly Judaized one. Time and time again he declared that Benjamin’s insights were incompatible, or sat uncomfortably, with his purported Marxist method. Benjamin gave the impression that his insights were the product of a Marxist methodology, but this was an illusion easily exposed by the nature of the theological and metaphysical questions he asked and answered. “The seductive powers of Marxism never found a home in his extremely fertile and original thinking . . . he believed he would find the true object of his thought in the realm of Judaism, even if he was ignorant of its sources.”⁵⁹ (The furthest Scholem was prepared to go was to interpret Marxism in Benjamin’s sense “as an esoteric method of true theology.”)⁶⁰

Scholem’s attitude to the European left in general, as it was to its theoreticians, was inevitably a function of his profoundly held Zionist and Jewish commitments, and a measure of his sensitivity to antisemitism. Already in his December 1914 diary he noted its anti-Jewish tendencies,⁶¹ which he found confirmed in a much later (1972) observation: “That antisemitism, according to circumstances, can also operate behind a new

⁵⁷ See the detailed letter of Scholem, 116, to Adorno dated March 1, 1967, in Scholem, *Briefe* II, pp. 177–180. Scholem, moreover, was no admirer of Adorno’s prose; he found that it was “unnecessarily complicated and often approached the borders of the incomprehensible.” He also noted that perhaps he had overpraised Adorno’s work in his letter to him. Letter to George Lichtheim, November 3, 1967, Scholem, *Briefe* II, p. 189.

⁵⁸ Letter 59 to Helmuth Plessner, March 25, 1973, Scholem, *Briefe* III, p. 61.

⁵⁹ Letter to Albert Salomon, December 20, 1960, Scholem, *Briefe* II, p. 77. Scholem, of course, placed his stakes on the Jewish element in Benjamin in the still-ongoing contestation over Benjamin’s legacy.

⁶⁰ Letter to Adorno, July 4, 1945, in Scholem, *A Life in Letters*, pp. 325–326.

⁶¹ December 9, 1914, Scholem, *Tagebücher* I, pp. 75–77.

political façade and drape itself in progressive garb. . . will not surprise any old experienced European observers.”⁶²

More playfully, he even relished debating and teasing Marxists closer to home. In March 1937 he announced: “I myself am going three days from now to a village in the Valley of Jezreel, where they are very rigorous Marxists and don’t want to hear about anything else. I plan to poke fun at them dialectically and deliver a series of three lectures on the theme: The Kabbalah as a Revolutionary Factor in Jewish History. In the end we’ll surely be at each other’s throats.”⁶³

But intellectual parrying with the left and its thinkers apart, what was Scholem’s role in practical Zionist and Israeli politics, and how, after his death, has his legacy been interpreted? Given his highly Judeocentric, some would indeed say *Völkisch*, worldview, it may come as a surprise that during the 1920s and early 1930s he was a leading radical member in Brit Shalom, a group heavily populated by Central European intellectuals, devoted to the cause of Arab–Jewish understanding and that advocated a binational, common state or federative solution to the emerging conflict. Their questioning of an ethnic majoritarian state (a minority position very annoying to the *yishuv* of its day) was both unique and surprising given that this position flowed from *within* a deeply felt nationalist commitment. How can we best understand Scholem’s position in the light of this paradox?⁶⁴

On one level, this can be traced to Scholem’s lifelong adherence to his self-defined antistate anarchism, one that from very early on informed his Zionism. In 1915 he already opposed Herzl’s power-political brand of Zionism, declaring: “We reject Herzl. He is *responsible* for today’s Zionism that goes backwards instead of forwards . . . that bows at the feet of the powerful. . . He grasped Zionism only formally instead of from within outwards. His only thought was the Jewish-State. And that we reject. We preach anarchism, we want no State.”⁶⁵ Here then was a deeply felt *Völkisch*-religious commitment but one that dismissed the power-

⁶² Letter 41 to Carl J. Burckhardt, December 18, 1972, in Scholem, *Briefe* III, p. 43.

⁶³ Scholem, ed., *Correspondence*, Letter 90, March 1, 1937, pp. 191–193. The quote appears on p. 192.

⁶⁴ I have tried to explain this paradox further in *Beyond the Border: The German–Jewish Legacy Abroad* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007) and “The Metaphysical Psychologist: On the Life and Letters of Gershom Scholem,” in Steven E. Aschheim, *At the Edges of Liberalism: Junctions of European, German, and Jewish History* (New York: Macmillan Palgrave, 2012).

⁶⁵ Entry for January 20, 1915, Scholem, *Tagebücher* I, p. 81.

political and hierarchical aspects of that ideology and deployed it within the cultural and spiritual realm.

Even though Scholem insisted that Zionism was about the Jewish return to concrete history,⁶⁶ his highly charged theological and metaphysical version of it enabled him to envisage a kind of future Utopia that, as he told Walter Benjamin, “God knows, originally had nothing to do with Englishmen or Arabs.”⁶⁷ In retrospect he candidly admitted that his membership in Brit Shalom “was for ‘external’ purposes. ‘Domestically’ I was something else . . . The Arab question was a controversial one . . . But this matter has never been crucial to me.”⁶⁸

It does not appear then that Scholem – unlike say Shmuel Hugo Bergman, another member of the group – experienced a kind of existential crisis of conscience or particular empathy regarding the resident Arab population. If Brit Shalom was a humanist “left” organization, Scholem’s retrospective comment on the conflict appears shockingly self-centered: “The Arab question could arise on a serious historic plane after the removal of Turkish rule. Had the Turkish authorities deported hundreds of thousands of Arabs as was done with the Armenians, the situation would have been different. I am not saying this nostalgically, but in order to explain . . . how fine the thread was on which the Arab question has depended.”⁶⁹

Indeed throughout he was conscious of the strains and contradictions entailed in the group’s stance. After the 1929 Arab riots he wrote about “what a very difficult undertaking it is, under the prevailing political and psychological conditions, to simultaneously pursue a reconciliatory politics with the Arabs and to ensure our defense against attacks of the kind that we have just experienced. It seems to us, however, that there is no other way.”⁷⁰ In 1937 he remained “personally against partition as such,

⁶⁶ On these general views, see Scholem’s interview with Ehud Ben Ezer, “Zionism – Dialectic of Continuity and Rebellion” in Ben Ezer, ed., *Unease in Zion* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1974), pp. 263–296 and David Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

⁶⁷ See the complex letter of August 1, 1931 in Gershom Scholem, *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1981), pp. 169–174. The quote appears on p. 171.

⁶⁸ “With Gershom Scholem: An Interview,” in Gershom Scholem, *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis: Selected Essays*, ed. Werner J. Dannhauser (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), p. 43.

⁶⁹ “Zionism – Dialectic of Continuity,” p. 270.

⁷⁰ Letter 96 to Robert Weltsch, September 22, 1929, in Scholem, *Briefe I*, pp. 240–242. The quote appears on p. 242.

since I believe joint Arab–Jewish sovereignty in the whole of Palestine to be the more ideal solution,” yet, given the depressing weight of events and policies, “this opportunity is one we will probably never be granted.”⁷¹

Scholem’s views hardened as circumstances became worse and as he faced criticism – especially from the left – from outsiders. He expressed this in a 1946 letter to Hannah Arendt:

My political faith, if it exists at all is – anarchistic. But I cannot take offence with Jews when they do not take into consideration progressive theories that no one else practices. I would vote with an equally heavy heart for the binational State as for partition. . . The Arabs have not agreed to any single solution, whether federative, State or bi-national, insofar as it is connected with Jewish immigration. And I am convinced that the confrontation with the Arabs on the basis of a fait accompli like partition will make things easier than without it. In any event, I have no idea how the Zionists could go about obtaining an agreement with the Arabs. . . I am not sufficiently presumptuous to maintain that our politics would likewise not have found precisely the same opponents, for they are not interested in our moral or political sentiments but rather in the question whether or not we are present here at all.”⁷²

Despite his youthful vitriolic comments on the viciousness and violence of the power-hungry state, given both the trauma of the Holocaust and Arab resistance, Scholem clearly made his peace with the State of Israel and many of its empirical realities. Over the years at the level of *Realpolitik* – especially with his left-leaning and progressive friends and interlocutors – his posture became decidedly more defensive, even patriotic. Increasingly he defined himself as an unabashed nationalist sectarian who saw no reason to submit to universal standards that no one except the Jews were expected to follow.⁷³ He contemptuously dismissed Erich von Kahler’s dismay that the destiny of the Jews was to end up “in a tiny nationalistic framework”⁷⁴ (conveniently forgetting his persistent utopian insistence on Judaism’s special historical resonance and his own resistance to any kind of Zionist “normalization”).

Scholem’s political thought remains ambiguous; his political legacy likewise continues to be intensely contested. Though he always regarded himself in one way or another as radical, his idiosyncratic vision

⁷¹ Letter 94, July 10, 1937 in Scholem, ed., *Correspondence*, pp. 199–201. The quote appears on p. 200.

⁷² Letter 131, January 28, 1946, Scholem, *Briefe I*, pp. 309–314. The quotes appear on pp. 310–311. A shorter translation appears in Scholem, *A Life in Letters*, pp. 330–333.

⁷³ See his letter, No. 50 to Victor Gollancz, June 13, 1961, Scholem, *Briefe II*, p. 80.

⁷⁴ See the letter to von Kahler, No. 122, August 17, 1967, Scholem, *Briefe II*, pp. 186–187.

precluded him from belonging to any conventional understanding of the “left.” Early on his brother Werner playfully (but half-seriously) sent “warm regards to the servant of English imperialism,”⁷⁵ and in 1933 Scholem wrote to Benjamin that he had acquired a reputation for extreme chauvinism⁷⁶; yet both the mix of political identities and the irony are evident in a signing off of a 1976 letter Scholem sent to his brother Reinhold: “Your left-Israeli brother, widely known amongst the so-called New Left as a reactionary imperialist and Zionist aggressor.”⁷⁷ Nevertheless the thoughtlessness of the label “reactionary” seriously annoyed him. In his reply to Arendt’s critical “Zionism Reconsidered” piece he wrote:

Allow me to conclude with a comment on the phraseology of “reaction” which plays a role in your thinking. The moral debacle of socialism, which is unparalleled in the history of the past generation (since fascism, as is implied in the fact that it wanted to eliminate morality altogether, had no moral idea to defend), has created such confusion over what is reactionary and what is progressive that I can no longer make any sense out of these notions. Everyone today is a reactionary. . . . Moreover, the willingness to go to any length to avoid falling into this category . . . is one of the most depressing phenomena to be seen among clever Jews. . . . I feel free enough in my thinking not to be disturbed when I’m accused of holding reactionary opinions.⁷⁸

It is precisely this ambiguity that accounts for the continuing contestation over Scholem’s political legacy. Some have seen him as a nationalist who had a humanizing, ethical *Bildungs* consciousness, and through his cultural and spiritual emphasis neutralized the otherwise power-hungry ingredients of more lethal kinds of ethnic nationalist ideology.⁷⁹ And given his juxtaposition between the dangers of political messianism and the utopian (if thus far inaccessible) religious realms,⁸⁰ he voiced opposition to the post-1967 settlement movement, going so far as to label its

⁷⁵ See the letter of January 21, 1925, in Scholem, *A Life in Letters*, note 125, p. 513.

⁷⁶ Letter 25, June 15, 1933, in Scholem, ed., *Correspondence*, p. 56.

⁷⁷ Letter 132, September 8, 1976 in Scholem, *Briefe* III, p. 147.

⁷⁸ Letter of January 28, 1946, in Scholem, *A Life in Letters*, pp. 330–333. The quote appears on p. 332.

⁷⁹ See George Mosse’s essay “Gershom Scholem as a German Jew” in his *Confronting the Nation: Jewish and Western Nationalism* (Hanover & London: Brandeis University Press, 1993) and chapter 1 of *Beyond the Border*. This chapter represents a qualification of my previous view.

⁸⁰ For an interesting and provocative elaboration of the theme see Zohar Maor, “Moderation from Right to Left: The Hidden Roots of Brit Shalom,” *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society* 2 (Winter 2013), pp. 79–108.

members as “Sabbatians”⁸¹ (there is even at least one uncorroborated report that at one election Scholem voted for a dissident and pro-Israel Communist faction.)⁸² That is perhaps why, as with critics in pre-State Palestine, a certain right-wing antagonism toward Scholem persists. Thus only a few years ago Yoram Hazony – employing the pursuit of Jewish state sovereignty as the absolute measure – mounted a highly injudicious attack on Scholem (and associated Brit Shalom Central European intellectuals) as essentially betrayers of the Zionist cause.⁸³ Given Scholem’s formidable, if esoteric, form of Zionism this was not the only irony, for many of Scholem’s students have indeed ended up in or as supporters of the settlement movement.

Critics on the left claim that this was no accident. After all, Scholem’s historical world was filled with animating *Lebensphilosophie* and “irrationalist” categories: myth, mysticism, nihilism, the demonic and antinomianism populated his rereading of the dynamics and rejuvenation of Judaism (“Redemption through Sin,” investigating the heretic dialectics of redemptive antinomianism, is perhaps his greatest essay). Moreover, as Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin argues, “while repeatedly warning against Messianism, he himself was among those who had a pivotal role in articulating the nationalist consciousness that made such Messianic claims possible.” While ambiguously denying messianism’s validity as a national or animating political myth he “delineated Zionism in terms of a utopian return to Zion (namely in Messianic language).” Given this wholly inward emphasis on redemption and return, he argues, this stifled a shared narrative and prevented a later critical discussion on the history and tragedy of the Palestinians.⁸⁴

Regardless of the position one takes regarding his politics, Scholem among his peers was – as Hans Jonas characterized it – “the focal point. Wherever *he* was, you found the center, the active force, a generator which constantly charged itself: he was what Goethe called an

⁸¹ See David Biale, “Gershom Scholem Einst und Jetzt: Zionist Politics and Kabbalistic Historiography” in *Against the Grain*, p. 61.

⁸² See Mosse, *Confronting History*, p. 194.

⁸³ Yoram Hazony, *The Jewish State: The Struggle for Israel’s Soul* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

⁸⁴ Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, “Between ‘Brit shalom’ and the Temple: Redemption and Messianism in the Zionist Discourse: A Reading of the Writings of Gershom Scholem,” *Teoria ve’bikoret* (Hebrew), XX, Spring 2002. See too his “On the Right Side of the Barricades”: Walter Benjamin, Gershom Scholem, and Zionism,” *Comparative Literature*, LXV, 3, 2013.

Urphänomen.”⁸⁵ In the end there was something thoroughly *sui generis* about the man and his explosive thought. Yet there is no doubt that his somewhat unclassifiable politics were formed in the crucible of his complex dialogue, appropriations, rejections, radicalizations, and differences with his leftist interlocutors, friends and opponents alike, and their varying (more or less subversive, utopian or otherwise) ways of viewing the world and attempting to radically refashion it.

⁸⁵ Scholem, *A Life in Letters*, letter to Fania Scholem upon Scholem’s death, February 24, 1982, pp. 494–495.

The Romantic Socialism of Gustav Landauer

Michael Löwy

Gustav Landauer was above all a revolutionary romantic. This is the common root of both his messianism and his anarchist utopia. Revolutionary romanticism shaped his worldview in an almost “ideal-typical” way. One can hardly find another author in whose work past and future, conservatism and revolution, were so directly connected, so intimately articulated, in a radical restorative/utopian dialectic. His singular thought has been defined by modern historians as “an anarchist Jewish messianism.”¹

¹ Ulrich Linse, *Gustav Landauer und die Revolutionszeit (1918–1919)* (Berlin: Karin Kramer Verlag, 1974), p. 28. Born on April 7, 1870, in a bourgeois and assimilated Jewish family in southwest Germany, Gustav Landauer was a writer, philosopher, literary critic, and militant anarchist. A friend of Martin Buber and of Peter Kropotkin, he was the editor of the anarchist journal *Der Sozialist* (1909–1915).

His oeuvre is astonishing both for its wealth and for its spiritual unity. Among his major works are the influential anarchist book *Die Revolution* (1907) and *Appeal for Socialism* [*Aufruf zum Sozialismus*] (1911); a study on Shakespeare in two volumes (*Shakespeare dargestellt in Vorträgen*, 1920), which became a classic of German literary criticism; a collection of essays opposing the First World War, *Report* [*Rechenschaft*] (1919); and two collections of literary and political articles published by Martin Buber soon after Landauer’s death, *Becoming Human* [*Der werdende Mensch*] (1921) and *Beginning* [*Beginnen*] (1924). He also wrote a novel, *The Death Preacher* [*Der Todesprediger*] (1893); a collection of novels, *Power and Powers* [*Macht und Mächte*] (1903); a philosophical essay, *Scepticism and Mysticism* [*Skepsis und Mystik*] (1903); a collection of letters on the French Revolution (*Briefe aus der französischen Revolution*, 1919); several translations – of Master Eckhardt, Etienne de la Boétie, Proudhon, Kropotkin; and two posthumous volumes of correspondence (published by Buber in 1929), *Gustav Landauer, sein Lebensgang in Briefen*. Other collections of Landauer’s writings were published in Germany after 1960, when his thought was rediscovered.

Gustav Landauer's romantic utopian vision made him into a twentieth-century "prophet of community."² By "prophet" I do not mean an oracle who pretends to foresee the future, but, in the truly biblical meaning he who warns the people of the impending catastrophe and calls for action before it is too late. "Utopian" should not be understood as "an ardent but impractical reformer"³ but as the partisan of a just and humane social order that does not – yet – exist anywhere (the original meaning of the Greek word *u-topos*).

And by "romanticism" I mean not just a German literary school from the beginning of the nineteenth century, but a powerful movement of protest against modern bourgeois/industrial civilization in the name of past social, cultural, or religious values, a movement that runs through modern culture from Jean-Jacques Rousseau until our day. The romantic protest is aimed against the cold, utilitarian, calculating spirit of the modern (capitalist) age – what Max Weber called *Rechenhaftigkeit* – against the mechanization and reification of the soul, and above all against what Weber called *die Entzauberung der Welt* [disenchantment of the world]. To a large extent, romanticism is a nostalgic and often desperate attempt to reenchanted the world, through poetry, myth, religion, mysticism, utopia. A powerful current in Central European culture at the beginning of the twentieth century, it usually took a conservative and restorative character – the main exception being Jewish intellectuals, among whom we often find romantic socialist, utopian, or revolutionary tendencies. The anarchist Gustav Landauer, of course, belonged to this last tendency.

What did romanticism mean to him? First of all, the rejection of bourgeois vulgar mediocrity, of what was called, among German poets and artists, *Philistertum*. In an autobiographical article written in 1913 Landauer described the atmosphere of his youth as a rebellion against the family milieu, as "the unceasing clash of a romantic nostalgia against narrow Philistine barriers [*enge Philisterschranken*]."⁴ In a similar vein he wrote in an unpublished note on romanticism that can be found among his papers at the Landauer Archive in Jerusalem that romanticism should be understood as rebellion, not as "political reaction

² See Eugen Lunn's remarkable book, *Prophet of Community; The Romantic Socialism of Gustav Landauer* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973).

³ *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*.

⁴ G. Landauer, "Vor funfundzwanzig Jahren," in *Rechenschaft* (Cologne: 1924), 2 edn., p. 135.

(Chateaubriand),” or “German patriotic-medievalism,” or just as a “literary school.” What the romantics, Goethe, Schiller, Kant, Fichte, and the French Revolution had in common was that they were all *anti-Philister*.

Next to the romantic poets – especially Hölderlin, whom he compared in 1916 to the biblical prophets! – Rousseau, Tolstoy, and Strindberg were among his favorite authors, because they were able to combine “revolution and romanticism, purity and fermentation, holiness and madness.”⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche is another of his main cultural references. However, unlike the author of *Also sprach Zarathustra* and most of the other German romantic critics of modern civilization, Landauer advocated politics that were, from the beginning of his career, socialist and revolutionary.

GEMEINSCHAFT, REVOLUTION, AND SOCIALISM

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Gustav Landauer joined the Neue Gemeinschaft [New Community], a sort of “neoromantic” literary circle created by the brothers Heinrich and Julius Hart, two well-known literary critics, which attracted writers and artists such as Erich Mühsam, Else Lasker-Schüler, Martin Buber, and Fritz Mauthner. Most of them shared an important common passion: *Gemeinschaft*.

Landauer’s communitarian views were clearly romantic not only in their critical edge against modern bourgeois, individualistic, and egoistic society, but also in their nostalgic celebration of the lost *Urgemeinschaft* [primitive community]. However, unlike reactionary and conservative German romantics, he did not dream of restoration, but of a new form of communitarian life: nostalgia for the past is invested in hope for the utopian future.

Martin Buber, who shared to a certain extent these aspirations, asked Landauer to contribute a volume to Buber’s series of sociological and socio-philosophical books *Die Gesellschaft*. Landauer’s contribution became the book *Die Revolution*, published in 1907. This essay is a – largely unacknowledged – landmark in modern political thought. It was the first attempt to reinstate the concept of utopia at the center of social philosophy after Friedrich Engels’s sympathetic but firm dismissal of this notion, in *Anti-Dühring* (1878), as a prescientific stage in the history of socialism. In 1907,

⁵ G. Landauer, “Dem größten Schweizer,” in *Der werdende Mensch. Aufsätze über Leben und Schrifttum*, ed. Martin Buber (Postdam: Gustav Kiepenhauer Verlag, 1921), pp. 136–137.

well before Ernst Bloch's *Spirit of Utopia* (1918) and Karl Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia* (1929), Gustav Landauer raised utopia to a universal human principle, the active expression of which was revolution.⁶

Unlike Second International socialists Landauer did not believe in "progress." For him, "all the economic and technical progresses" in the capitalist system "aggravate the condition of those that work." The most negative aspect of modern industrial civilization and its "progress" was in his opinion the absolute domination by the modern state, the "true Anti-Christ," and the "mortal enemy of what used to be Christianity or the spirit of life."⁷

Landauer belongs – like William Morris, Ernst Bloch, and others – to a current inside romanticism that we could name Gothic revolutionary, insofar as it is fascinated by the (Catholic) medieval culture and society, which becomes one of the main sources for the socialist utopias of the members of this current. In total contradiction to the doctrines of progress dominant in the labor and socialist movement of his time, for which the Middle Ages were an era of superstition and obscurantism, Landauer considered the Gothic Christian world as a "cultural summit," a period of spiritual flowering and plenitude, thanks to the existence of an organic society: a social body composed of multiple independent social structures – guilds, corporations, churches, parishes – that associate freely. In this – rather idealized – image of the medieval society, one of the most important characteristics is the absence of an omnipotent state, whose place is occupied by society, by a "society of societies." Of course, Landauer did not deny the obscurantist aspects of the Middle Ages, but he considered them as less important than other characteristics of that era: "If one objects to me that there was this or that form of feudalism, of clericalism, of inquisition, of this and that, I can only answer: 'I know it well – but nevertheless [*trotzdem*]'." The essential issue was, in his eyes, the high degree of culture of the Gothic world, thanks to the diversity of its social structures and its unity. The same spirit inhabited the individuals living in that world and gave them their supreme aims.⁸

In contrast, all of the modern era that begins in the sixteenth century was for him "a time of decadence and therefore of transition," a time of

⁶ G. Landauer, *Die Revolution* (Frankfurt: Literarische Anstalt Rütten und Loening) in *Die Gesellschaft*, ed. by Martin Buber, 1907, facsimile ed. (Berlin: Karin Kramer Verlag, 1974), pp. 17–18: "Utopia survives underground, also during the times of relative stable topias, and undertakes to make out of this complex of memories, desires and feelings a unity, which it tends to designate with the name: the Revolution."

⁷ Landauer, *Die Revolution*, pp. 62, 116. ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 51ff.

“breaking down the unifying enchantment that gave sense to social life.” In other words, he saw it as a time of decline of the spirit on behalf of authority and the state. He assigns a key role in this fatal turn to Martin Luther, whom he considered as one of the main people responsible for the “separation between life and faith and the replacement of the spirit by organized violence.” Landauer did not forgive Luther for having sided with the lords against the insurgent peasants and for having consecrated the “principle of Caesarism.”⁹ Curiously enough, this strong antipathy for the initiator of the Protestant Reformation was shared by several other German socialists, from Karl Kautsky to Ernst Bloch.

In this long road, from the decline of the common Christian (medieval) spirit to the rise of the new common spirit of the socialist future, the revolutions are the only moment of authenticity, the only true “spiritual bath”: “Without this transient regeneration, we couldn’t continue to live, we would be doomed to sink.” The forerunner of the antiauthoritarian revolutions was, according to Landauer, the Hussite prophet of the fourteenth century Peter Chelcicky, “a Christian anarchist much in advance on his time,” who recognized that the Church and the state were “the mortal enemies of all Christian life.” The first and most important modern revolution is the Peasant War in the sixteenth century led by Thomas Müntzer and the Anabaptists, who “made a last attempt, the last time for a long time, to change life, all life” and to “re-establish what existed at the times of the spirit.” Their struggle was pursued by the Christian Monarchomachs of the seventeenth century and all anticentralist movements who bear witness to the “efforts of tradition to restore and broaden the old institutions, the federations of orders and parliaments.”¹⁰

At the same time Landauer was diffident toward what he calls “the state revolutions,” which include the English Revolution – for which he had only contempt – the American and the French. The last one drew his sympathy only insofar as it raised the principle of fraternity: “It is from the French Revolution that we got the word ‘fraternity’ and from here came the joy of participating in this revolution, human beings feeling then that they had brothers, and, let us not forget, sisters.” If all these revolutions finished by becoming bogged down, this was not only because of the

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 62–68. By contrast, for the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, living in a Catholic country, the Protestant Reformation was a model for the moral and social reform that the socialist movement intended to accomplish.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 51–55, 67–69.

ambition and partisan spirit of their leaders, or because of the siege of the republic by its enemies, but because it was not possible “to solve social problems by means of a political revolution.”¹¹

What is the place of utopia in this view of history? *Die Revolution* was, at the beginning of the twentieth century, one of the first books in the German language to bestow a positive meaning on the concept of utopia, making it the main impulse for revolutionary thinking. Landauer does not define clearly what he understands by utopia, but he describes it as “a principle coming from far away epochs, which jumps over centuries with giant steps in order to plunge into the future.” While the usual approach perceives utopias only as images of a desirable future, the author of *Die Revolution* illuminates, with truly romantic sensibility, the dialectics between past and future: each utopia contains in itself “the enthusiastic remembrance of all known precedent utopias.”

Landauer’s defense of utopia was to influence not only Buber, Bloch, and Mannheim, but also – among others – Gershom Scholem, Manès Sperber, Walter Benjamin, and the youth movement Hashomer Hatzair. They were attracted by Landauer’s idea of revolution as regeneration and his belief that utopian change would come from “the unknown, the deeply buried and the sudden.”¹²

Landauer attempted to reformulate socialist theory in the same period in his document “People and Land: Thirty Socialist Theses” (1907), in which he argued that if socialism is ever to emerge, it must be built outside the state, through decentralized communities, making up the “new organism of the people.” In 1908 Landauer founded a libertarian/socialist association, the Sozialistischer Bund, on the basis of his “Theses.” In its first pamphlet “What Does the Socialist Bund Want?” the new organization, which attracted a significant following (some thousand members), called for an “active general strike,” through which the working people no longer would work for the capitalists but for their own needs.¹³

His other important political piece is the *Appeal for Socialism* (1911), one of the great works of romantic socialism in the twentieth century, the negative credo of which is summarized as “No progress, no technology, no virtuosity can bring us salvation and happiness.” Rejecting the

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 111–113.

¹² “Unbekanntes, Tiefbegrabenes und Plötzliches” are the last words of Landauer’s *Die Revolution*, p. 119.

¹³ G. Landauer, “Volk und Land. Dreissig sozialistischen Thesen” and “Was will der Sozialistische Bund,” in *Beginnen. Aufsätze über Sozialismus* (Cologne: Marcan-Block-Verlag, 1924), pp. 3–20, 91–95.

German Social Democrats' "belief in progressive development [*Fortschrittseentwicklung*]," Landauer presented his own vision of historical change:

To my mind, human history is not made up of anonymous processes, nor is it merely an accumulation of countless small events . . . When something noble and grandiose, deeply moving and innovative, has happened to humankind, it has turned out that it was the impossible [*das Unmögliche*] and the unbelievable . . . that brought about the turning point.¹⁴

Against the positivist/evolutionist perception of progress as quantitative and gradual accumulation, Landauer proposed a qualitative conception of historical time, in which radical change, the great metamorphosis, results from a sudden irruption of what until then was considered as impossible. The privileged moment of such an irruption is revolution – described with strong religious undertones. In revolutionary events "the unbelievable, the miraculous move towards the realm of the possible."¹⁵

Karl Mannheim has quite insightfully perceived Landauer as the heir of Anabaptist millenarianism and even as the representative of "the Chiliasitic mentality . . . preserved in its purest and most genuine form." This style of thinking precludes any concept of evolution and any representation of progress. Within a "qualitative differentiation of time" revolution is perceived as a breakthrough [*Durchbruch*], an abrupt moment, an experience lived in the now time [*Jetzt-Erleben*].¹⁶ Mannheim's analysis is all the more impressive in that it can be applied not only to Landauer, but also, with a few subtle differences, to Martin Buber, to Walter Benjamin (that is, to his messianic concept of *Jetztzeit*), and to several other Jewish-German thinkers.

In *Aufruf zum Sozialismus*, as in several other writings by Landauer, the medieval Christian culture appears as an inspiration for the emancipated future. Thanks to its "Catholic," i.e. universal – and non-"German-patriotic" – dimension, it achieved "shining heights," because "the spirit gave a meaning to life." Landauer perceived the medieval communes and associations as the expression of an authentic social life, rich in spirituality, in opposition to the modern state, "this supreme form of the non-spirit [*Ungeist*]." One of his main criticisms of Marxism is that it denied

¹⁴ G. Landauer, *Aufruf zum Sozialismus*, 2nd edn. (Revolutionsausgabe) (Berlin: Paul Cassirer, 1919), pp. 11, 44, 108.

¹⁵ Landauer, Preface to *Aufruf zum Sozialismus*, 2nd ed., p. x.

¹⁶ K. Mannheim, *Ideologie und Utopie* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Schulte-Bulmke, 1969), p. 196.

the affinity between the socialism of the future and certain past social forms, such as the urban republics of the Middle Ages, the German rural *Marke*, and the Russian *Mir*.¹⁷

However, Landauer was not a past-oriented thinker. He did not dream, as did Novalis and other conservative romantics, of restoring medieval Christianity. As a convinced anarchist, he saw himself as the inheritor of La Boétie, Proudhon, Kropotkin, Bakunin, and Tolstoy, opposing to the centralized state the regeneration of society through the formation of a network of autonomous structures. Landauer did not advocate a reversion to the medieval past, but he wanted to give the past a new form and to create a *Kultur* with the means available to modern *Zivilisation*.¹⁸

Concretely Landauer believed that the medieval forms of community, which had been safeguarded over centuries from social decay, could become “the seeds and life crystals [*Lebenskristalle*] of a future socialist culture.” The rural villages, with their vestiges of communal property and autonomy vis-à-vis the state, could serve as the fulcrum for the reconstruction of society. Socialist militants would settle in the villages and help to revive the spirit of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries – the spirit of the heretical and rebellious peasants of the past.¹⁹

In an essay on Walt Whitman Landauer compared the American poet to Proudhon and emphasized that the two were able to unite “the conservative and the revolutionary spirit, individualism and socialism.”²⁰ This characterization fully applies to his own social vision of the world, in which a utopian dialectic joined ancestral tradition and hope in the future, romantic conservatism and anarchist revolution.

ROMANTIC JUDAISM

There are very few references to Judaism in Landauer’s writings or even in his letters before 1908. In the document “People and Land: Thirty

¹⁷ Landauer, *Aufruf zum Sozialismus*, pp. 9, 20, 43. Landauer seems to ignore that Marx and Engels saw precisely in the German *Marke* and the Russian *Mir* possible roots for a socialist development. See on this Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, *Romanticism against the Tide of Modernity*, trans. Catherine Porter (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

¹⁸ Landauer, *Aufruf zum Sozialismus*, pp. 6, 100, 102. The word *Kultur* described, in German romantic social thought at the turn of the century, a body of cultural, artistic, religious, and social traditional values, while *Zivilisation* referred to the modern world of science, technology, and industrial production.

¹⁹ Landauer, *Aufruf zum Sozialismus*, pp. 46–47, 87, 145–146, 149.

²⁰ Landauer, *Der werdende Mensch*, p. 190.

Socialist Theses" (1907) alluded to earlier, after mentioning spiritual figures from every nation (Goethe for Germany, etc.) he writes: "The Jews too, have their unity and their Isaiah, Jesus and Spinoza" – a very characteristic choice, in which two of the highest representatives of Judaism have little in common with traditional Jewish religion or culture.²¹

What caused Landauer to turn toward Judaism was not – as in the case of Theodor Herzl or Bernard Lazare – antisemitism or the Dreyfus affair. It was his discovery, through the writings of Martin Buber, of a new conception of Jewish spirituality, a romantic Jewish religiosity.

Buber's *The Legend of the Baal-Shem* (1908) worked on him as a sort of "profane illumination" (to use W. Benjamin's image). He was not the only one impressed by it. The book had a tremendous impact on many Jewish – and non-Jewish – intellectuals in Central Europe because it presented for the first time a new image of Judaism, radically different from both assimilated liberalism and rabbinic orthodoxy.²² For Landauer as for several other German Jewish intellectuals only a romantic, mystical, and poetical Judaism such as the one created by Buber from old Hasidic legends could be attractive. It appeared as a direct challenge to the view of Judaism as a rationalist, nonmystical, antimagical, and legalistic religion, presented – in different ways – by German sociology (i.e. Weber, Sombart).

Landauer wrote a review of Buber's book – which was published only in 1910 – moving to the fore the book's romantic/messianic aspects: "The extraordinary thing about these Jewish legends is . . . that not only must the God who is sought after free people from the limitations and illusions of the life of the senses, but he must first and foremost be the Messiah who will lift the poor, tormented Jews from their suffering and oppression." This review also contains a sort of confession. Landauer tells us about the change in his own attitude toward Judaism as a result of reading Buber's opus:

Nowhere can a Jew learn, as he can in Buber's thoughts and writings, what many today do not know spontaneously and discover only when there is an outside impulse, namely that Judaism is not an external accident [*äussere Zufälligkeit*] but

²¹ Landauer, *Beginnen*, p. 7.

²² Among those who were fascinated by it one can find figures as different as Rainer Maria Rilke, Walther Rathenau, Georg Lukács, Ernst Bloch, and Franz Kafka. See Paul Mendes-Flohr's remarkable essay, "Fin de siècle Orientalism, the *Ostjuden* and the Aesthetics of Jewish Self-Affirmation," in *Divided Passions; Jewish Intellectuals and the Experience of Modernity* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1991), p. 100.

a lasting internal quality [*unverlierbare innere Eigenschaft*], and identification with it unites a number of individuals within a *Gemeinschaft*. In this way, a common ground and a common situation of the soul [*Seelensituation*] is established between the person writing this article and the author of the book.²³

In fact, Landauer himself was one of those Jews for whom Judaism had been an “external accident.” In a letter to the editor of the magazine *Zeit* in response to an antisemitic article by Hellmut von Gerlach, Landauer qualified his Jewishness as “fortuitous” [*Zufall*].²⁴

A few years later Landauer wrote another sympathetic article on Buber. Presenting his friend Buber as “the apostle of Judaism before humanity,” Landauer praised Buber’s Hasidic books, “filled with melancholia, tender beauty, and . . . the desire to be delivered from earthly oppression.” As a result of Buber’s writings – which had saved a buried and underground tradition from oblivion – “the image of the Jewish essence [*des jüdischen Wesens*] became different for Jews and non-Jews.”²⁵

In other terms: Buber’s Jewish writings were the “outside impulse” that allowed Landauer to discover his own Jewish identity. In fact, after 1908 Landauer not only interpreted Judaism in the light of romantic hermeneutics, but also German romanticism in terms of Jewish propheticism. The most astonishing example of this second movement is his piece on Hölderlin from March 1916, in which he compares the hard words of the German poet – “as hard as the merciless verdict of a God” – with those of the Jewish prophets and his ultimate spiritual power as a modern prophet with those of his “brothers of the ancient Hebrew times.”²⁶

Unlike Buber’s thought Landauer’s philosophy belongs to the paradoxical domain of religious atheism. The prophetic, mystical, or Jewish messianic *topoi* were secularized in Landauer’s socialist utopia. It is true that this was not secularization in the usual sense of the word. The religious dimension remained at the very heart of Landauer’s political

²³ G. Landauer, “Die Legende des Baalschem,” *Das literarische Echo*, XIII, 2 (October 1910), p. 149.

²⁴ Gustav Landauer Archives (Hebrew University of Jerusalem), MS Var 432, File 162. Although the document is not dated, it can certainly be established as having been written before 1908.

²⁵ G. Landauer, “Martin Buber,” *Der werdende Mensch*, pp. 244–246.

²⁶ G. Landauer, “Friedrich Hölderlin in seinem Gedichten,” *Der werdende Mensch*, pp. 165n, 168. See Bernd Witte, “Zwischen Haskala und Chassidut,” in *Gustav Landauer im Gespräch. Symposium zum 125. Geburtstag*, ed. Hanna Delf and Gert Mattenklott (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1997), pp. 39–41.

imaginary. It was not simply nullified but rather preserved/transcended – in the dialectical sense of *Aufhebung* – in the utopian revolutionary prophecy. In Landauer’s mystical secularization – some authors speak of his “mystical atheism”²⁷ – a religious symbolic universe explicitly entered his revolutionary discourse and imbued it with a sui generis spirituality that seemed to escape the usual distinctions between faith and atheism. Landauer refused to believe in a God “beyond the earth and beyond the world” [*überirdischen und überweltlichen Gott*]; following Feuerbach, he affirmed that it was man who created God, and not the other way round. But this strong humanistic belief did not keep him from defining socialism as a “religion.”²⁸

Landauer’s attitude toward the Jewish religion was inspired by the romantic dialectic of utopia, linking up the millennial past and the liberated future, tradition preserved in collective memory, and revolutionary emancipation. In an important article on the Jewish question from 1913 “Are These Heretical Thoughts?” he wrote “The arch-ancient, which we keep in our soul, is the path taken by mankind towards the future, and the tradition of our martyred and nostalgic heart is nothing other than the revolution and regeneration of mankind.”²⁹

As a committed socialist he emphasized the revolutionary social and political dimension of Judaism. For instance in the *Appeal for Socialism* (1911) he interpreted Moses’s institution of *Jubilaem* in terms of permanent revolution:

The uprising [*Aufruhr*] as a constitution, transformation and upheaval as a rule expected to last forever . . . were the grandiosity and the sacredness of the Mosaic social order. We need that once again: new regulations and a spiritual upheaval which will not make things and commandments permanently rigid, but which will proclaim its own permanence. The revolution must become an element of our social order, it must become the basic rule of our constitution.³⁰

A note that I found in the Landauer Archives takes up this theme from another angle: in other religions the gods help the nation and protect its heroes, while in Judaism “God is eternally opposed to servility; he is therefore the subversive [*Auführer*], the arouser [*Aufrüttler*], the one-

²⁷ Heinz Joachim Heydorn, “Preface” to Gustav Landauer, *Zwang und Befreiung* (Cologne: Hegner Bücherei, 1968), p. 15.

²⁸ Landauer, *Der werdende Mensch*, pp. 30, 35.

²⁹ G. Landauer, “Sind das Ketzergedanken?” in *Der werdende Mensch*, p. 135.

³⁰ Landauer, *Aufruf zum Sozialismus*, pp. 136–137.

who-warns [*Mahner*].” The Jewish religion is evidence of “the people’s holy dissatisfaction with itself.”³¹

As far as the issue of Zionism is concerned, Landauer had rather ambivalent feelings. On the one hand, he rejected what he considered to be the “cold” and “doctrinaire” concept of a “Hebraic Judaism” aiming to suppress the German–Jewish, the Russian–Jewish, and the Yiddish culture. But in another article of the same year (1913) he praises “the movement that, generally under the name of Zionism, goes through Judaism,” because it has the aim to give “a pure and creative form” to the specific essence of the Jewish nation. What he particularly resented was what he called, in an angry letter to the Zionist educator Siegfried Lehmann, “the falsifying ‘either/or’ choice which a Zionist calls upon me to make between being a German and a Jew, an European and an Oriental.”³²

In any case his commitment was not to Zionism, but to a sort of messianic diaspora socialism. He believed that the Jewish people had a specific messianic/revolutionary role in modern history. Their mission [*Amt*], vocation [*Beruf*], or task [*Dienst*] was to help transform society and create a new humanity.

Why the Jew? He answers in an astonishing passage from his “Ketzer-gedanken” [“Heretical Thoughts”] of 1913:

A voice, like a wild cry resonating throughout the world and like a sigh in our heart of hearts, tells us irrefutably that the redemption of the Jew can take place only at the same time as that of humanity; and that it is one and the same to await the Messiah while in exile and dispersed, and to be the Messiah of the nations.³³

This was, of course, a typical form of pariah messianism, which reversed in the spiritual domain the “negative privileges” (to quote Max Weber) of the pariah people. In Landauer’s mind the Jewish vocation dated back to the Bible itself. In a commentary on Strindberg written in 1917, he claims that there have been only two great prophecies in human history: “Rome, world domination; Israel, world redemption.” The

³¹ Landauer Archives, Ms Var 432, file 23. Paul Mendes-Flohr is correct in emphasizing the role of aesthetics in Landauer’s conception of Judaism (*Divided Passions*, p. 108), but the social and political dimensions are no less important.

³² The first quote is from “Sind das Ketzer-gedanken?” p. 127, and the second one from “Zum Beilis-Prozess,” *Der werdende Mensch*, p. 133. The letter to Lehmann, dated November 30, 1915, was published in November 1929 by the journal *Der junge Jude* (see Mendes-Flohr, *Divided Passions*, p. 131).

³³ Landauer, *Der werdende Mensch*, p. 125.

Jewish tradition, which never forgot God's promise to Abraham – the redemption of the Jew along with all nations – was evidence of “a messianic conception, a messianic faith, a messianic will.”³⁴

The Jewish redemptive mission has taken in modern times the secular form of socialism. Landauer regarded the present condition of Jews as the objective foundation for their internationalist socialist role. Unlike other nations Jews had the unique particularity of being a people, a community, a nation, but not a state, which gave them the historical chance to escape the statist delirium.³⁵ This explains the conclusion of his “Ketzergedanken”: while other nations closed themselves in state borders [*sich zu Staaten abgegrenzt haben*] “the Jewish nation carries its neighbors in its bosom.” He regarded this singularity as the surest sign of the Jews’ “mission towards humanity.”³⁶

When Landauer was invited in 1912 by a West Berlin branch of the German Zionist movement to give a speech on “Judaism and Socialism,” he put forward the provocative idea that the *galut* [the Exile] was exactly what linked Judaism to socialism – a theme that logically ensued from his entire analysis of the Jewish condition. The Jewish people, he believed, was particularly qualified for the task of helping to build socialist communities, because it was less addicted to the cult of the state.³⁷

WAR AND REVOLUTION

Landauer's attitude toward the First World War was summarized in a letter from November 1914 to his friend Fritz Mauthner, who had taken a German nationalist position: “I do not have the slightest feeling of

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 273, 284.

³⁵ According to Norbert Altenhofer, Landauer rejected the two dominant currents within the German–Jewish community: assimilation – which implied accepting the German imperial state – and Zionism, which sought to establish a Jewish state. Cf. Norbert Altenhofer, “Tradition als Revolution: Gustav Landauers ‘gewordenes-werdendes’ Judentum,” in *Jews and Germans from 1860 to 1933: The Problematic Symbiosis*, ed. David Bronsen. Reihe Siegen, IX (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1979), pp. 194–195.

³⁶ Landauer, *Der werdende Mensch*, p. 128.

³⁷ G. Landauer, “Judentum und Sozialismus,” *Die Arbeit. Organ der Zionistischen Volksozialistischen Partei*, II, (June 1920), p. 51. As Paul Breines emphasizes, in Landauer's opinion “the Diaspora became the social base so to speak of the idea of the Jews as redeemers of humanity. . . The dispersion, in fact, freed the Jews; it allowed them to remain a nation, and at the same time, to transcend that nation and all nations, and to perceive the future unity of mankind as being made up of a variety of true nations.” See P. Breines, “The Jew as Revolutionary: The Case of Gustav Landauer,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, XII (1967), p. 82.

association with the policies and actions of the German Reich.”³⁸ In his journal *Der Sozialist*, closely watched by the authorities, he tried to fight German chauvinism by publishing cosmopolitan and antiwar texts by Herder, Fichte, and Romain Rolland. He also supported the initiatives of the democratic pacifist organization Bund Neues Vaterland created in 1915 by intellectuals (including Friedrich Wilhelm Foerster and Albert Einstein) who favored an immediate compromise peace. At the same time he was deeply wounded by the prowar position taken by friends he had trusted, such as Martin Buber, Fritz Mauthner, or Richard Dehmel.³⁹ This opposition to war is one of the reasons why Landauer received the Russian Revolution of October 1917 with enthusiasm, in spite of his strong hostility to Marxism. A letter to Buber from February 5, 1918 documents in a sharp and concrete way his disagreement with his friend, whose main interest was at that precise moment the future of the Jewish home in Palestine. Explaining his refusal to participate in a collective book planned by Buber “against the penetration of imperialism and mercantilism in Palestine” Landauer writes:

My heart has never lured me to Palestine, nor do I believe that it necessarily provides the geographical requirement for a Jewish *Gemeinschaft*. The real event of importance, one that may even be decisive for us Jews, is the liberation of Russia. . . It seems preferable to me – despite everything – that Bronstein is not teaching at the University of Jaffa, but is Trotsky in Russia.”⁴⁰

Landauer’s attitude toward the Bolsheviks was ambivalent, but in the preface to the new edition of the *Aufruf zum Sozialismus* (January 1919) he rejoiced at the news that they – in a similar way to Friedrich Adler or Kurt Eisner – seemed to overcome their doctrinarism, by giving priority to

³⁸ G. Landauer, *Sein Lebensgang in Briefen*, ed. by Martin Buber (Frankfurt am Main: Rütten & Loening, 1929), II, p. 10.

³⁹ Lunn, *Gustav Landauer*, pp. 243–246.

⁴⁰ This letter was not included in the collection of Landauer’s letters published by Martin Buber in 1929. It can be found in the posthumous edition of Buber’s correspondence: *Martin Buber Briefwechsel aus sieben Jahrzehnten*, I (Heidelberg: Verlag Lambert Schneider, 1972), p. 258. In spite of this harsh rebuttal, Landauer still showed interest in the Jewish kibbutzim in Palestine and agreed to participate in a meeting with Zionist socialists (organized by Buber) in order to discuss the topic. The meeting was to have taken place in April 1919, but by that time Landauer was engaged in Munich with the revolutionary councils. There is correspondence between Landauer and Nahum Goldmann on the subject, dated March 1919 (Landauer Archive, MS Var 432, files 167–168). This correspondence has been published in Hebrew with an interesting introduction by Avraham Yassour, “Al Hitiashvut shituft va Tiuss” [On Communal Settlements and Industrialization], *Kibbutz*, 2 (1975), pp. 165–175.

federation and freedom over centralism and military–proletarian discipline.⁴¹ But his main interest, during his last year of life (1918–1919) was the future of the revolution in Germany.

His friendship with Eisner led him to a decisive commitment to the movement in Bavaria. As soon as he arrived in Munich (November 1918), Landauer became, together with Erich Mühsam, a leader of the most radical body, the Revolutionary Workers' Council, which included both partisans of Eisner's USPD (Independent Social Democrats) and anarchists. During the months of January and February 1919 he was willing to cooperate even with the Munich Spartacists – whom he used to loathe – in the common struggle against the counterrevolutionary forces, particularly after the assassination of Eisner by a fanatical aristocrat (Count Arco-Valley).

When the Council Republic was proclaimed on April 7, 1919, Landauer agreed to become People's Commissar for "Enlightenment and Public Instruction." He did not have many illusions as to the chances that the revolutionary experiment would be long-lasting. In a letter to Fritz Mauthner from this same date he wrote: "If we are allowed a few weeks' time, then I hope to be able to accomplish something; it is very possible, however, that it will last only a few days and then seem as if it had been a dream." The dream soon ended in a nightmare. Landauer was assassinated by counterrevolutionary troops on May 2, 1919, after the defeat of the revolution.⁴²

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Gustav Landauer was an unarmed prophet, to use Machiavelli's well-known phrase. He was also a romantic socialist and a communitarian utopian. Was his utopian socialist dream a reasonable one? Let me answer with a remark by Bernard Shaw: "The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man."

⁴¹ Landauer, "Vorwort zur neuen Aufgabe," in *Aufruf zum Sozialismus*, pp. vii–viii.

⁴² Landauer, *Sein Lebensgang in Briefen*, II, p. 414. In fact, Landauer had ceased to exercise his functions as people's commissar after April 14, when a Communist leadership (Eugen Leviné) replaced the socialist/anarchist coalition at the head of the ephemeral Councils' Republic. His project of educational reform, based on the "Revolutionary University Council," was to transform the universities into a libertarian cooperative society of lecturers and students. Of course, he did not have time to implement it. See Lunn, *Prophet of Community*, p. 330. For a dramatic description of his murder by a witness, see *ibid.* pp. 338–339.

Martin Buber between Left and Right

Uri Ram

The world renowned philosopher Mordechai Martin Buber (1878–1965) is a model figure among Israel’s left-wing thinkers; to the same extent, he is a scorned figure among Israel’s right-wing thinkers. In the era before the establishment of the State of Israel, Buber was, in the 1920s and 1930s, one of the leaders of Brit Shalom [Peace Covenant] and, in the 1940s and 1950s, of Ichud [Union] – radical peace groups that recognized the Arab right to the land of Palestine – Eretz Israel – alongside the right of the incoming Jewish settlers. While Buber’s leftist engagement is very well known, what is less well known is that his political thought is saturated with right-wing features.

This chapter highlights this duality in Buber’s thought and the dynamic of his relationships with the left in Israel from his time to ours. The first part of the chapter discusses the Zionist political theology of Buber; the second discusses his views about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict; the third discusses the left–right ambiguity in his thought; the fourth and final part discusses the relationship between Buber and various streams of the left in Israel, past and present.

I BUBER’S ZIONIST POLITICAL THEOLOGY

Buber started his activity in the Zionist movement in 1898, as a follower and a close associate of Theodor Herzl. But he parted ways with Herzl only a few years thereafter and affiliated with the oppositional “cultural fraction,” which was led by Ahad HaAm (Asher Ginsberg), a prominent Russian Jewish intellectual. Yet Buber differed from Ahad HaAm in that Buber’s cultural position was deeply religious. Buber came to be one of

the foremost spokesmen of a Zionist political theology, which was in opposition to mainstream pragmatic political Zionism.¹

For the rest of his life, from the days of Herzl to those of Ben-Gurion, Buber remained a “spiritual” Zionist and disapproved of political Zionism. He considered the latter stream superficial and “assimilationist” – turning the Jewish people into a merely standard nation, “a nation like any other nation.” For Buber the prime goal of Zionism was the rescue of Judaism and its revival, rather than the rescue of Jews. From his perspective Zionism was not just one more ordinary national movement; Zionism was, rather, the present manifestation of the old sacred covenant between the Land of Israel, the people, and God.

The conventional image of Buber is that he was a left-wing thinker. He was in fact fundamentally a religious nationalist thinker.

Some interpreters draw distance between Buber’s nationalism and other nationalisms. A representative of this view is the historian Shalom Ratzabi, who writes: “Buber’s Zionist approach should not be considered as a national approach in the conventional sense; all the more, it cannot be understood on the backdrop of the ideas and concepts of organicist-evolutionist theories that were common in the German speaking sphere ... Buber’s Zionist approach is not cut out from modern nationalist theories ... ”² This is utterly wrong. Buber’s nationalist thought does take after the organicist romantic *völkisch* nationalist sentiment, common in Germany in his time. Ratzabi correctly highlights Buber’s nationalism as “theo-political,” but there is nothing in it to distance him from common nationalism. If anything, it rather draws him close to it.

Ratzabi is also correct when he claims that “[Buber] bases the right [over the Land of Israel] on a total religious concept, at the center of which is the idea of the Lord’s Kingdom: the total ownership of the Land by God.”³ The covenant is the event by which the Land of Israel was bequeathed by God to the people of Israel, and this is the foundational source of the legitimization of Zionism. The combination of religious ethos and nationalist ethnos is far from being rare in the annals of nationalism, and it usually makes nationalism even stiffer and more

¹ On ideological streams in Zionism see Gideon Shimoni, *The Zionist Ideology* (Boston, MA: Brandeis University Press, 1995).

² Shalom Ratzabi, *Anarchy in “Zion”: Between Martin Buber and A. D. Gordon* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2011) (in Hebrew), p. 45.

³ Ratzabi, *Anarchy in “Zion.”*

entrenched than it tends to be in any event.⁴ The nationalist-religious credo usually harbors an organicist notion of the collectivity, by which the collective “body” is prior to its individuals, and the “eternal” continuation of the nation is preferable to the “transient” happiness of the individuals. It is in strict antagonism to basic liberal political principles.⁵

This line of thought pushed Buber further along its logic, ultimately leading him to the point of praising the (ostensible) “blood” aspect of collective belonging. Objectionable as it sounds today, Buber in fact hailed the “blood principle” of Jewishness. This theme was expressed notoriously in Buber’s series of lectures before Jewish youth movement audiences in Prague, in 1909–1911. These lectures gained Buber a wide reputation and increased the influence of “cultural Zionism” among young Jews in the German-speaking area of that time.⁶

Speaking about how an individual senses his Jewish identity (or should sense it) Buber said, among other matters, that

he perceives then what commingling of individuals, what confluence of blood has produced him, what round of begetting and births had called him forth. He senses in this immortality of the generations a community of blood, which he feels to be antecedents of his I, its perseverance in the infinite past. To that is added the discovery, promoted by his awareness, that blood is a deep rooted nurturing force within individual man; that the deepest layers of our being are determined by blood; that our innermost thinking and our will are colored by it. Now he finds that the world around him is the world of imprints and of influences, whereas blood is the realm of a substance capable of being imprinted and influenced, a substance absorbing and assimilating all into its own form. And he therefore senses that he belongs no longer to the community of those whose constant elements of experience he shares, but to the deeper-reaching community of those whose substance he shares.⁷

The historian Dmitri Chumsky refers to these lectures sharply as racial-biological, narcissistic, and ethnocentrist, and he explains: “Buber elaborated an essentialist formula of Jewish identity, by using conspicuous ethno-national language. The major component in this formula ... reflects clearly one of the basic images of racial discourse, which is the

⁴ See Anthony Smith, *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁵ For comparison between ethnic and liberal nationalism see Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

⁶ The lectures are published in Martin Buber, *On Judaism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), pp. 3–33.

⁷ Buber, *On Judaism*, p. 16.

image of supposed organic tribal collectivity, the belonging to which depends on blood ties.”⁸ This was not just a cursory expression. On other occasions as well Buber expressed yearning for “the blood tribe,” its “ancient life,” and its “motherland.”

Such an approach should not be regarded as exceptional among Jewish intellectuals at the time,⁹ but late in life Buber was embarrassed by these passages. In the 1960s he added the following comment to a republication of these texts: “Several years after the authorship of these things, evil people distorted the term ‘blood’ that I used. This is why I find it appropriate to announce that wherever I used the language of blood I referred in no way to the racial matter, which in my view is baseless, but to the succession of birth giving within a nation, which is the skeleton of its essence.”¹⁰

This comment just adds embarrassment. On the one hand, it refers to the “racial matter” as baseless, but, on the other hand, it rebases the same “matter,” only not on the basis of blood but rather on the basis of the national sperm and egg. In any case whether or not Buber was a “biological racist” he certainly was applying to Judaism the spirit of German romantic cultural nationalism that eventually led to organicist nationalism. This political culture, which may well have started with Johann Georg Hamann (1730–1788), continued with Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), moved through the Sturm und Drang aesthetic movement of the eighteenth century, and in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in thinkers such as Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) and Ferdinand Tönnies (1855–1936), and finally reached its peak with the ideologues of German Volkism in the first half of the twentieth century.¹¹

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Buber belonged mentally to the circle of conservative German professors, especially in the humanities and in the social sciences, whom Fritz Ringer

⁸ Dimitri Chumsky, *Between Prague and Jerusalem: Prague Zionism and the Bi-National Idea in Eretz Israel* (Jerusalem: Leo Baeck Institute and the Shazar Center, 2010) (in Hebrew), p. 149.

⁹ See Raphael Falk, *Zionism and the Biology of the Jews* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2006) (in Hebrew), pp. 71–115.

¹⁰ Martin Buber, “Jews and Judaism,” in *Teuda VeYeud*, I (Jerusalem: Hasifiya HaZionit, 1963) (in Hebrew), p. 29.

¹¹ See David Blackbourn, *History of Germany 1780–1918: The Long Nineteenth Century* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002); William W. Hagen, *German History in Modern Times: Four Lives of the Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

labeled the “Mandarins.”¹² The common denominator of the Mandarins was their disdain for liberal modernity. Their status was founded upon their being the guardians of German *Kultur*, which they counterposed against French and British (and later also American) *Zivilisation*. While *Kultur* was depicted as authentic and meaningful, *Zivilisation* was depicted as alienating and instrumental. The Mandarins were intensely anxious and suspicious about modernity. Though a conservative reaction to modernity was not exclusive to Germany, Germany was a special case in this regard, as Ringer puts it.¹³ This interpretation of the mentality of the German intellectual elite resonates with the *Sonderweg* [Special Path] historiography of Germany, according to which the process of modernization there was unbalanced. Around the turn from the nineteenth century to the twentieth century Germany experienced rapid industrialization and urbanization, but without a bourgeois liberal revolution. One does not have to accept wholesale the Luther-to-Hitler *Sonderweg* paradigm in order to identify the acute conservatism of German intellectual culture in the Bismarckian and Wilhelmian periods.¹⁴

Buber’s thought was deeply immersed in his place and time. His social philosophy was directly inspired by the seminal distinction drawn by Tönnies, the forefather of German sociology, between the *Gemeinschaft*, premodern intimate community, and the *Gesellschaft*, modern formal society.¹⁵ To a large extent this distinction underlies the central staple of Buber’s own thought, namely, the I–Thou relationship, and its adverse – the I–It relationship.¹⁶

Buber’s Zionist political theology is fully elaborated in his work *Between a People and Its Land*.¹⁷ The epistemological assumption underlying his argument is the exceptional uniqueness of Jewish nationalism. He regards Jewish nationalism as one of a kind, and as existing beyond

¹² Fritz Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890–1933* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1990).

¹³ Ringer, *Decline*, p. 3.

¹⁴ For a *Sonderweg* analysis of German cultural history see Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1974). For a discussion (and critique) of the *Sonderweg* thesis see David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

¹⁵ Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

¹⁶ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Touchstone, 1971).

¹⁷ Martin Buber, *Between the People and the Land* (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1984) (in Hebrew).

the realm of usual historical causality. This nationalism is depicted as prior to history and as transcending it. This epistemology facilitates the next step in the argument: the link between the people and its land is not, as is usually the case, a matter of national claim over a territory, but rather has cosmic and ontological dimensions. This enables him to regard Zionism – the return of the Jewish people to the land of Zion – not in terms of mere drives and interests, but rather as a materialization of the sacred covenant. Buber does not stop there. With a reference to the old sages he reflects positively upon Zionism as redeeming three losses: of the land, of the temple, and of David's kingdom. Zionism is thus conceived not as one usual (or unusual) historical event, but as a messianic event of cosmic magnitude. The salvation of humanity at large is conditioned upon Jewish territorial-cum-spiritual redemption.

The goal of Zionism is, as mentioned, not the redemption of Jews, but rather the redemption of Judaism. No wonder that this goal can be finally materialized only in the form of a future community/*Gemeinschaft*, not in the form of a liberal republic of citizens – the detested *Gesellschaft*. Buber offers therefore an alternative narrative of Zionism. Rather than a modern secular national movement (with a colonial dimension), Zionism becomes in Buber's depiction a direct descendant of covenant Judaism. Two *Gemeinschaft*-type communities revive modern Judaism and lead it to the fold: the Hasidic movement, which began in Eastern Europe in the eighteenth century, and the kibbutz socialist movement of twentieth-century Palestine. The former is socialist without recognizing it; the latter religious without recognizing it. Both movements epitomize communal Judaism – the nucleus of the future Jewish *Gemeinschaft* in Zion.

To the contemporary ear this rhetoric sounds close, all too close, to the national-religious ideology that prevails today in Israel (of Gush Emunim, Bloc of the Faithful). Can it be that a major thinker of the left is so close to the political thought of the right?

One figure whom Buber cites as his inspiration is no other than Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook – the pre-State forefather of the contemporary national-religious ideology of the Jewish settlers in the occupied territories.¹⁸ These two thinkers regard pragmatic Zionist secular politics as only a gateway to the true redemptive essence of Zionism. Buber was a right-wing, organicist messianic Zionist. But he was not only that.

¹⁸ Ian Lustick, *For the Land and the Lord: Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel* (Washington, DC: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1988).

2 BUBER AND THE PALESTINIAN ARABS

Despite the organicist and messianic disposition of his national theology, Buber developed a compassionate attitude toward the national demands and claims for the country made by the Palestinian Arabs. He developed this attitude on both moral and practical grounds.

From a moral point of view Buber warned as early as 1929 that the Zionist Jews must not see those unfamiliar to them as inferior and that they must not relate to them in the same manner as have those at whose hands Jews suffered through the ages. He proclaimed further, "We do not wish to submit to the majority as a minority, and nor do we wish to become a majority and make a minority submit to us."¹⁹ From a practical point of view Buber anticipated that without Arab consent the rooting of the Jewish settlement would be obstructed. He believed that a mutual understanding between the Jewish community and the Arab community must be reached, even at the price of giving up the Jewish intention to become a majority or the intention to gain sovereignty. Such views were considered in Buber's time as radical leftist, and they are still regarded as such in our own days.

Nevertheless, Buber did not have a clear concept of the framework in which such a compromise could be worked out institutionally and territorially. Moreover, Buber's position moved to the center of the Zionist political spectrum. In a very sincere proclamation he reasoned, "We cannot refrain from doing injustice altogether, but we are given the grace of not having to do more injustice than absolutely necessary."²⁰ Buber was perceptive enough to regard the Jewish settlement in Palestine as a "conquest by peaceful means"²¹ and was Zionist enough to support it wholeheartedly:

The finest people among us did not pretend to remain guiltless and unsullied in our national struggle for survival. Inasmuch as we came here to ensure a place for our future generations, we were perforce reducing the space for future generations of the Arab nation. Yet our intention was to sin no more than was absolutely necessary in the endeavor to obtain our objective.²²

This is certainly not a radical-leftist stance, but rather a moderate Zionist stance, common on the soft left, in the center, and sometimes

¹⁹ Martin Buber, "No More Declarations," in *A Land of Two Peoples: Martin Buber on Jews and Arabs*, ed. Paul R. Mendes-Flohr (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 80.

²⁰ Martin Buber, "Politics and Morality," in *Land of Two Peoples*, p. 170.

²¹ Martin Buber, "Instead of Polemics," in *Land of Two Peoples*, p. 271. ²² *Ibid.*

even on the right. In fact Buber also shared the common European Orientalist perspective, by which the local Arabs did not really have a national concern and may be appeased by the cultural and economic benefits that will accrue from Jewish immigration to Palestine. The socialist vision in particular seemed promising to bridge over the national rift.²³ Despite his antimodern stance, when it came to justifying the right of the Jewish people over Eretz Israel, Buber subscribed fully to the “productivist” and “prograssivist” and, frankly, colonialist, view of socialist Zionists, who held that the land is rightly “won by toil,” and to their presumption that European settlers would “make the desert bloom,” unlike the Arabs, who kept the land barren and neglected: “Ask the soil what the Arabs have done for her in 1300 years and what we have done for her in 50! Would her answer not be weighty testimony in a just discussion as to whom this land ‘belongs’?”²⁴

Buber’s Orientalism was akin to German Orientalism at the time and to the German–Jewish Orientalist attitude toward East European Jews.²⁵ This attitude involved, as is very well known, repulsion from the Orient’s presumed backwardness and desolation, and attraction to its presumed authenticity and exotics. Such duality characterized the attitude of the Zionist settlers to the Arabs at least until the 1930s.²⁶

Buber ascribed the role of mediation between European and Asiatic cultures to the Jewish settlers in Palestine: “We were chosen to be the harbingers of the renewing West, and we ought to help our brethren in the Orient, so that they can establish real life of sharing in tandem with the West and in their own capacity.” Furthermore “by bringing the call for liberation to the suppressed classes of the people of Asia, we shall redeem them from the false rule of nationalism, aggression and the thirst for power.”²⁷

²³ Cf. Martin Buber, “Facts and Demands: A Reply to Gideon Freudenberg,” and “Preface’ to a Projected Volume on Arab–Jewish Rapprochement,” in *Land of Two Peoples*, pp. 236–239 and 258–261.

²⁴ Martin Buber, “A Letter to Gandhi,” in *Land of Two Peoples*, p. 122.

²⁵ Martin Buber, “The Spirit of the Orient and the Jews,” in *Teuda VeYeud*, pp. 54–69.

²⁶ On the Orientalism of German Jews see Paul Mendes-Flohr, “Fin-de-Siècle Orientalism, the Ostjuden and the Aesthetics of Jewish Self-Affirmation,” *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, I (1984), pp. 96–139; Yifat Weiss, *Ethnicity and Citizenship: German Jews and Polish Jews 1933–1940* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2000) (in Hebrew); Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800–1923* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982).

²⁷ Martin Buber, “At This Late Hour,” in *Land of Two Peoples*, p. 46.

While Buber's moral position is – justifiably – praised by the Israeli left, which supports a mutual recognition and compromise between Jews and Palestinians, it must be remembered that volumes may be filled by the friendly pronouncements, characterized by goodwill, of Israeli leaders from all sides of the political spectrum toward the Palestinians. Yet when power was an option – power was exercised.

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And yet Buber was indeed radical in his unreserved support of the minor (though palpable) peace groups Brit Shalom and Ichud. Brit Shalom was formed in Palestine in 1925 and Buber was among its supporters in Germany. The group dispersed after the outbreak of violent clashes between Arabs and Jews in Palestine in 1929. Ichud was formed in 1942 to continue the path of Brit Shalom, in reaction both to the White Book that expressed British withdrawal from the commitment to the “Jewish Homeland” and to the Biltmore Conference of 1942, which proclaimed the Zionist resolve to establish a Jewish state. Buber, who had been in Eretz Israel since 1938, was one of Ichud's senior members.²⁸ These organizations are the ancestors of the later peace organizations in Israel, from the radical Matzpen [Compass] to the moderate Shalom Achshav [Peace Now]. Brit Shalom and Ichud were expressions of a tendency among German Zionists, including such central figures as Arthur Ruppin and Pinchas Rosen (Felix Rosenblüth).²⁹ This position emerged as a critique of Herzlian political Zionism, and, during the 1920s, in reaction to the rise of the militant Revisionist camp in the Zionist movement, headed by Zeev (Vladimir) Jabotinsky.

Ideas close to a binational state, Jewish and Arab, were aired from the podium at the Fourteenth Zionist Congress, which was held in Vienna in 1925. No less a figure than Chaim Weizmann declared there that “*Eretz Israel* is not Rhodesia. There are 600,000 Arabs living there, who, by the world's sense of justice, have the same right to live in Palestine as we have . . . for our national home [there] . . . Palestine has to be built in such a way that not a hair will fall from the legitimate Arab interests.”³⁰

²⁸ Yosef Heller, *From “Brith Shalom” to “Ichud”*: Judah Leib Magnes and the Struggle for a Bi-National State (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2003) (in Hebrew); Adi Gordon, *Brith Shalom and Bi-National Zionism: The “Arab Question” as a Jewish Question* (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2003) (in Hebrew).

²⁹ Hagit Lavsky, “The Early Days of *Brith Shalom* and the German Zionists,” *Yahadut Zemanenu*, IV (1987) (in Hebrew), pp. 99–121.

³⁰ Cited in Lavsky, “Early Days of *Brith Shalom*,” pp. 116–117.

Arthur Ruppin called for the creation in Palestine of “a community in which the two nations, without a governmental advantage to one or a repression of the other, will work shoulder to shoulder, in full equality, for the economic and cultural progress of the country.”³¹

It is to Buber’s credit that he persisted in his humanist approach toward the Palestinian Arabs in later times and after the establishment of the State. During the 1950s Buber demanded that Israel take the initiative with regard to the Palestinian refugees.³² He protested the annexation of Arab lands by the State; he demanded a solemn judgment of the massacre of Arab citizens in Kafr Qasim; he demanded the removal (or limitation) of the military government that was imposed on the Arabs, and he condemned the “Judaization” of the Galilee and its development exclusively for Jews. Violence and injustice toward Arabs were regarded by him as contradicting the essence of Zionism, and as betraying its spirit as well as jeopardizing its viability. Buber also denounced the mixture of the Zionist interest with the interest of imperial powers such as Britain, on account of the local population. In general he drew a distinction between “small Zionism” and “large Zionism,” the former of which is contentious toward the Arabs, and the latter cooperative with them.³³

This courageous critical stance won Buber the appreciation of the left. Yet it should also be noticed that the moderate (or radical, depending on who is doing the labeling) position of organizations such as Brit Shalom and Ichud was not only righteous, but also realistic. They appreciated (correctly in their day) that the Jewish project in Palestine could have been endangered by the superior power of the Arabs, and that an effort to reduce Arab hostility ought to have been undertaken. This policy suggestion was one shared with mainstream Zionists, who until 1942 refrained from openly demanding a state. But a sober examination of the binational state program exposes its deficiency. It is not clear on what moral grounds a demand for parity of government and resources could have been made by a group of newcomers to the country, who were one-tenth the size of the indigenous population. Seven hundred and fifty thousand Arabs and seventy-five thousand Jews lived in Palestine–Eretz Israel in 1925.

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³¹ Cited in Lavsky, “Early Days of Brith Shalom,” p. 117.

³² Martin Buber, “On the Moral Character of the State of Israel: A Debate with Ben-Gurion”; “Memorandum on the Military Government,” in *Land of Two Peoples*, pp. 239–244 and 283–288.

³³ Martin Buber, “Concerning Our Politics,” in *Land of Two Peoples*, pp. 137–142.

In Hebrew culture it is common to regard David Ben-Gurion and Martin Buber as two opposing poles in the Zionist political spectrum. Ben-Gurion was a secular political realist, a head of Israel's state and military institutions, the leader of the War of Independence, and as such also responsible for the plight of the Palestinians. Buber is depicted as a spiritual leader, a person of universal morality and values, a representative of the human face of Zionism and an irrevocable defender of Arab rights. The collision between the two has drawn a lot of attention.

Yet a more careful examination of the issue reveals that the distance between the two was not so large after all. To begin with both shared a messianic view of Zionism and considered it as a movement of universal redemptive significance. Michael Keren argues, correctly, that despite Buber's critique of political messianism, "political messianism in Israel could not have thrived if not for the profundity which was bestowed on messianism by Buber."³⁴ Likewise the loud controversy between Ben-Gurion and Buber on whether Zionism aspires to create a "Jewish majority" (the former) or just to bring "as many Jews as possible" to Palestine (the latter) was actually over a small difference. Principles that Buber presented to the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on behalf of the Ichud – a demand not to limit Jewish acquisition of land, a demand to permit immigration and settlement, and a demand for political autonomy – were not far from mainstream Zionism.³⁵ The committee ultimately recommended the establishment of a binational state (in the spirit of Ichud), but its recommendation never materialized.

The difference between Ben-Gurion's demand for a state and Buber's demand of autonomy may appear enormous. Yet when the demand for autonomy is interlocked with ultimate demands for free land purchase, immigration, and settlement, the distance shrinks. As part of his antimodern perspective Buber detested the idea of a "state" (the utmost manifestation of modern *Gesellschaft*). He was convinced that a common Jewish-Arab denominator could have been created on the basis of everyday cooperation, if only "superfluous politics" could have been diminished.³⁶ He thus rejected the Biltmore plan. Buber wanted to have it both

³⁴ Michael Keren, *Ben-Gurion and the Intellectuals: Power, Knowledge and Charisma* (Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 1988) (in Hebrew), p. 75. See as well pp. 65–95.

³⁵ Martin Buber, "The Meaning of Zionism," and "The Bi-National Approach to Zionism," in *Land of Two Peoples*, pp. 179–184 and 207–214.

³⁶ Martin Buber, "Two Peoples in Palestine," and "The Bi-National Approach to Zionism," in *Land of Two Peoples*, pp. 194–202 and 207–214.

ways – a national–colonial enterprise without an international conflict. Ben-Gurion and Jabotinsky were more prescient. For better or worse there was no Zionism without power.

Still one must not do away altogether with the distinction between the two shades of Zionism represented by Ben-Gurion and Buber. Ben-Gurion put the state in the center of his vision. The state is the utmost manifestation of the revival of Jewish nationhood. Ben-Gurion was a faithful heir of Herzl in the search for the “normalization” of the Jewish people. Buber objected to Ben-Gurion’s ideas in the middle of the twentieth century for the same reasons he had objected to those of Herzl at the beginning of that century. Buber’s major concern was the revival of Jewish culture. This culture, he believed, could only flourish at its birthplace – in Zion – but it did not necessarily require political sovereignty. For Buber normalization was tantamount to assimilation, i.e., becoming just one more historical case of a nation.

Despite these reservations Buber received the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 with great enthusiasm, nevertheless warning that the victory of the Jews might turn out to be the loss of Judaism.³⁷ Paul-Mendes Flohr suggests that Buber attempted to pave a third way with regard to the Arab question, a way beyond absolute morality, on the one hand, and aggressive “realism,” on the other hand. This “third way” “descend[s] with our moral principles into the ‘unclean’ reality.”³⁸ This is praiseworthy. But Buber did not really deviate from basic Zionist policies. The denominator between him and Ben-Gurion was more solid than were their disparities. Buber was not as radical as both left and right portray him, but rather close to the mainstream. After 1948 Buber lived in a Palestinian house in the Talbia neighborhood in Jerusalem, a house that formerly belonged to the family of Edward Said, the prominent Palestinian intellectual.³⁹ The point is that it was not possible to prepare the omelet without breaking eggs. Given his lofty morality Buber found it difficult to accept reality.

3 BUBER BETWEEN HUMANISM AND NATIONALISM

Unlike the common image of Buber as a radical leftist, we have portrayed a more ambiguous image of him, in which left and right commitments

³⁷ Martin Buber, “Zionism and ‘Zionism,’” in *Land of Two Peoples*, pp. 220–223.

³⁸ Paul R. Mendes-Flohr, “Introduction,” in *Land of Two Peoples*, pp. 3–33.

³⁹ David Kroyanker, *Jerusalem Neighborhoods: Talbia, Katamon and the Greek Quarter* (Jerusalem: Keter, 2002) (in Hebrew), pp. 80 and 168.

were intertwined. The conflation of religious-national messianic components with compassionate humanistic components is quite unusual, certainly in the context of later Israeli politics, wherein religious nationalism is a marker of the most annexationist and xenophobic right-wing thinkers.

When one comes to assess the thought of Buber as a whole, one faces its perplexing duality. On the one side there is the nationalist and messianic Buber, who sanctified the ancient community and even the ostensible blood tie, the holiness of Eretz Israel and its sacrosanct tie to the people of Israel. These are the building blocks of an organicist and *völkisch* type of nationalism. Yet on the other side is the humanistic Buber, who demands unequivocal morality and proclaims that Zionism will reach its goal only when it creates an exemplary society. The historian Uriel Tal raised this question of duality in the following way:

How can one reconcile the two interpretations of the Zionism of Buber? – the revival of the Jewish people, which revitalizes “ancient”, “mystical” and even “mythical” powers, in the form of re-unity with the land; a communal people which existed by common past and blood ties on the one hand, and an ideal of humanistic and social solidarity with the neighbors, and integration in the Middle East, in the form of a bi-national state and a regional federation on the other hand.⁴⁰

Some of those who have written about Buber have tackled this question, though a unified answer has not been offered. One common reply, opted for by Paul Mendes-Flohr and Shalom Ratzabi, is the distinction between two stages in Buber’s intellectual development: that of the young “mystical” Buber and that of the older Buber (after the “dialogical turn” of 1919). But this answer is not satisfying, since the political theology of Buber, his religious nationalism, continued to be present in the “later Buber” as well. Another answer, proposed by Steven Aschheim among others, revolves around the distinction between two parallel layers that run through Buber’s thought: a cultural layer and a political layer. According to this approach Buber was *völkisch* and nationalistic in the cultural sphere, but he was universalistic and humanistic when it came to the political sphere. This distinction, though it does not explain the duality, gives it a reasonable shape.

⁴⁰ Uriel Tal, “Myth, Solidarity and the Return to Zion in the Thought of Martin Buber,” in *Myth and Reality in Contemporary Jewry* (Tel Aviv: HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 2011) (in Hebrew), p. 29.

Uriel Tal responded to this issue by noting that Buber's duality exhibits two complementary sides of his work. Buber was in search of a particularistic completion to universalism and of a mythical completion to humanism. Still, it is not clear how these two sides are supposed to complete each other. Tal writes:

In Buber's thought, on the one hand, there is a common denominator between the mythical and romantic foundations of nationalism and the religious and romantic motifs that were common in the national movement in Germany, from the liberation wars of the beginning of the 19th-century ... until the Volkisch movements in the German-speaking countries between the two world wars. Yet on the other hand, Buber elaborated his national thought and his public Zionist activity in opposition to the European national movements, which were based on racism, violence, and political myth like those of Georg Sorel and Oswald Spengler ".⁴¹

A somewhat similar response to the "duality query" is proposed by Bernard Susser. Susser proposed to locate the duality of Buber within a historical context. In this light it turns out that the culture of *Gemeinschaft* communalism, romantic spiritualism, and *völkisch* nationalism was "multivalent." At one stage during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, this culture was shared by critics of modern society (conceived as utilitarian, rational, atomistic, mechanical, and so forth) from both right and left. At a later stage this culture was seized by the nationalist and racist right and came to form its philosophical foundation.⁴² In other words up to World War I a certain type of antimodern atmosphere was the norm among members of the nonliberal European intelligentsia, not always with strict demarcation between left and right. Themes such as a critique of "alienation" or a plea for "authenticity" were not limited to left- or right-wing thinkers. Thus, according to Susser the resonance between the language of Buber and that of later extreme right-wing movements and even Nazism does not indicate his position on the right, but only that his intellectual socialization took place in Germany before World War One.

Buber, the argument goes, used this language in an opposite direction from that of the right, criticizing in the most universal and humanistic manner any coercion and repression of human beings. As Susser

⁴¹ Tal, "Myth, Solidarity and the Return to Zion," p. 39.

⁴² See also Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, *Romanticism against the Tide of Modernity*, trans. Catherine Porter (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

characterizes it: “While the right-wing volkish thinkers drew upon the ‘conservative revolution’ to justify leadership, hierarchy, corporatism and antisemitism, Buber and like-minded left-wing intellectuals, saw in these primordial ties a school for socialism – for equality, decentralization and free cooperation.”⁴³ This is a prescient insight into the intellectual history of Europe, and it sheds light on the conundrum we have raised here about the place of Buber between left and right. Yet Buber departed Europe in 1938 and lived in Jerusalem from that point until his death in 1965.

4 BUBER AND THE LEFT – HIS RISE, FALL, AND RETURN

While examining the relations between Buber and the left in Israel one must consider three eras, and different components of the left: first, the era of the Labor movement in the years of the *yishuv* (the pre-State Jewish community in Palestine); second, the dominant and hegemonic left in the decades following the proclamation of the State; and, third, the radical left in contemporary Israel. The prestige and the influence of Buber on the left differed from one era to the next and may be narrated in terms of rise, fall, and return.

The “rise” took place in the pre-State *yishuv*. Despite the frequent quarrels between him and Ben-Gurion, the foremost leader of the Labor movement and later the State’s prime minister, there was deep mutual appreciation between the two. One reason for that was the common Zionist denominator that they shared. But more specifically it was Buber’s much-publicized esteem of the kibbutz movement that endeared him to the members and activists of the left in the years before the establishment of the State. As he had done with Zionism in general, Buber elevated the image of the kibbutz beyond its prosaic presence, to the realm of moral goals. For him the kibbutz was the most conspicuous concrete materialization of the model society to which he aspired in his seminal work *I and Thou*.⁴⁴

⁴³ Bernard Susser, “Ideological Multivalence: Martin Buber and the German Volkish Tradition,” *Political Theory*, V, 1 (1977), p. 87. For an analysis of the volkish influence upon German Jewry and the left–right tensions involved see George L. Mosse, “The Influence of the Volkish Idea on German Jewry,” in *Germans and Jews: The Right, The Left and the Search for a “Third Force” in Pre-Nazi-Germany* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1987), pp. 77–115.

⁴⁴ Buber, *I and Thou*.

In his view there were two basic human attitudes in the world: the I–It attitude (*Ich–Es*) and the I–Thou attitude (*Ich–Du*). The I–It attitude is one of cognition, and thus also one of distance and of objectivity. One usually relates this way to “things,” but commonly also to persons. The I–Thou attitude is one of recognition, of being one with another. This is a rare moment of mental and sensual intimacy and mutuality. As mentioned, in some sense this conceptualization takes after Tönnies’s distinction between *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft*, the former with its rational formal will [*Kürwille*], the latter with its authentic natural will [*Wesewille*]. The same distinction is also echoed in Max Weber’s differentiation between substantial rationality [*Wertrationalität*] and instrumental rationality [*Zweckrationalität*].⁴⁵

Not unlike Weber, Buber saw modernity as magnifying the I–It module and spreading it throughout the social terrain. This was in line with the typical misgivings of German intellectuals about modernity. It was at the root of his critique of both capitalism and Communism. In both cases a “thingness” of a huge magnitude overcomes and suppresses interhuman relations. Buber did not think that a return to the past is a possibility, but he believed that there are rudiments of interhuman relationship, of the I–Thou relationship, that may be recovered. The kibbutz was a case in point, and it thus paved a path not simply and merely towards the Zionist conquest of Palestine, but toward utopia as such. The kibbutz was a utopian nucleolus, and, in his much-quoted evaluation of it, was designated as a “glorious non-failure.”⁴⁶ His model of socialism was not one of a class struggle and of a state takeover, but rather one of interpersonal relationship. In this sense his thought resonated well with mainstream socialist Zionism of the time, which rejected Marxism and Communism and adopted popular interclass socialism.⁴⁷

There is no wonder therefore that decades after his glorification of the kibbutz Buber remained revered by its intellectuals. When they sensed the coming crisis of the kibbutz credo and its shrinking prestige in the 1960s, it was to Buber that they turned for a new spiritual inspiration, as well as for a more Jewish concept of the kibbutz. Such a perspective was articulated by the circle of the journal *Shdemot* [Fields] and was later passed on

⁴⁵ Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, ed. Guenther Roth and Calus Wittich, 2 vols. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978).

⁴⁶ Martin Buber, *Paths in Utopia* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996).

⁴⁷ Zeev Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

to the spiritual and Jewish movement that became anchored in kibbutz cultural and educational institutions, as a substitute for debunked socialism.⁴⁸

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This reverential attitude toward Buber within the kibbutz movement notwithstanding, the “fall” of Buber took place in the early State era, when the left – now in the form of the State’s ruling party, Mapai – came to be identified with the newly established State. The I–Thou model, with its communal and voluntary essentials, had resonated well with the pre-State pioneering society, in which the kibbutz played a significant symbolic role (even though it was always small in terms of population; no more than 7 percent at its peak). But it became defunct when the state became the center of national life. The decline of the status of Buber was disclosed clearly in his changing fate in the sociological discipline.

In 1939 Buber was named as a professor for the sociology of culture at the Hebrew University. There was no department of sociology at Hebrew University at that time, but there was one other prominent sociologist on the faculty, Arthur Ruppin (1876–1943), who was defined as a sociologist of the Jewish people. Buber and Ruppin were Israel’s protosociologists, and the sociology professed by both of them was of the German style, albeit of different veins. When a department of sociology was established at Hebrew University in 1947, Buber was selected to be its chairperson. He thus became the first chair of the first department of sociology in Israel’s first university.

The State of Israel was declared in 1948. One result was a radical transformation of the academic culture. Up until that time Hebrew University and its professoriate were highly independent of any political authority. Though Buber was a very distinguished example of this phenomenon, he was only one of a number of professors who had challenged the version of Zionism dominant in the *yishuv* before 1948. These professors professed a type of universal Zionism, with an emphasis on culture, while the *yishuv*’s leaders were busy with a build-up of Jewish power. The professors saw the leaders of the *yishuv* as narrow-minded, and the leaders saw the professors as aloof and arrogant. A gulf opened between the “Valley” (Jezreel Valley, which was the jewel in the crown of the

⁴⁸ See Zeev Sokor, “Civil Religion in Socialist Zionism and the Kibbutz,” in *Secularization in Jewish Culture*, ed. Avriel Bar-Levav, Ron Margolin, and Shmuel Finer (Raanana: Open University, 2013) (in Hebrew), pp. 715–782.

Jewish settlements) and the “Mountain” (Mount Scopus, the location of Hebrew University). As Berl Katznelson put it, however, the distance between the two was mental, not geographical.⁴⁹

This type of academic autonomy, and the antagonism it generated, changed radically during the 1950s. For one thing the university came to depend economically on the state; for another it was put under the jurisdiction of an Authority for Higher Education, headed by the minister of education; finally the background of the professoriate changed. In the pre-State era the senior staff of the university was composed of mature and reputed academicians who immigrated to Palestine, mostly from Central Europe. In the 1950s their *yishuv*-born students came of age and became the leaders of the university. There was, in conjunction with this shift, a 180-degree ideological turn. From being a hotbed of critique, the university became a source of legitimization. Scholarship was now mobilized to the shaping of Israeliness: Bible scholarship proved that Jews owned the land; archaeology discovered a chain of Hebrew ancestors who lived there; geography portrayed the nature of the motherland; literature depicted the mind and body of the sabra; and history explained the unbroken ties between the people and the land.⁵⁰ Hebrew University was transformed from a university of the Jewish people into an Israeli university.⁵¹

The changes in the Sociology Department provide a case in point. In 1950 Buber retired and the chairmanship of the department passed to his former doctoral student Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt (1923–2010), who arrived in Israel as a child and grew up in Tel Aviv. Eisenstadt dominated the sociological scene single-handedly for the next three decades and redesigned the discipline afresh. Whereas the spirit of the *yishuv* resonated with the principles of *Gemeinschaft* (at least symbolically), the spirit of the new State and its etatist ideology (*mamlachtiyut*) resonated with the principles of *Gesellschaft*. The State was a new overarching structure of authority with a military, industry, and bureaucracy, and the imagery fitting it now was that of a “social system.”

Eisenstadt followed in the footsteps of the American sociologist Talcott Parsons and his structuralist-functional modernization school and

⁴⁹ Uri Cohen, *The Mountain and the Hill: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem during Pre-Independence Period and Early Years of the State of Israel* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2006) (in Hebrew).

⁵⁰ See Uri Ram, *Israeli Nationalism: Social Conflicts and the Politics of Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

⁵¹ Cohen, *Mountain and the Hill*.

became an internationally renowned associate of that school.⁵² The transition of Israeli sociology from Buber to Eisenstadt was tantamount to a transition from the German to the American paradigm.⁵³ Of course Israel was not unique in this transition. The center of gravity of the field of sociology moved after the Second World War from Europe to America. It was the turn of American “Mandarins” to design world civilization.⁵⁴ The Israeli left put the socialist utopia behind it and moved the program of state building to the front burner. Buber and his heritage were also left behind. He was ousted from the sociological canon. Sociologists did not read him or write about him, and he was not included in the sociological curriculum.⁵⁵ Eisenstadt himself hardly referred to Buber. It was not until 1992 that Eisenstadt made a gesture toward his onetime teacher by editing a book of Buber’s writings (in English).⁵⁶ In 2007 Eisenstadt proclaimed for the first time that Buber was the “grandfather” of Israeli sociology.⁵⁷

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Yet the end of Buber’s resonance was declared too early. There has lately been a noticeable turn toward his work by Israeli sociologists and other intellectuals. Buber is being rediscovered now by a new generation – this time by those affiliated with the postmodern and postcolonial radical left. In 1999 the sociologist Ronen Shamir and the political theorist Dan Avnon published a breakthrough article, in which they called for the return of Israeli sociology from Eisenstadt to Buber. They reinstated Buber’s I–Thou sociology as an alternative to the I–It social system of

⁵² Gary G. Hamilton, “Configurations in History: The Historical Sociology of S. N. Eisenstadt,” in *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology*, ed. Theda Skocpol (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 85–128.

⁵³ Uri Ram, *The Changing Agenda of Israeli Sociology: Theory, Ideology and Identity* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995).

⁵⁴ Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

⁵⁵ Uri Ram, *The Return of Martin Buber: National and Social Thought in Israel from Buber to the Neo-Buberians* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2015) (in Hebrew).

⁵⁶ Martin Buber, *On Intersubjectivity and Cultural Creativity*, ed. S. N. Eisenstadt (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁵⁷ Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt interviewed by Dani Rabinowitz: “Dani Rabinowitz and Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt on Israel Studies, Jewish Studies, Modernization and Globalization: A Series of Talks,” in *Generations, Locations, Identities: Contemporary Perspectives on Society and Culture in Israel: Essays in Honor of Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt*, ed. H. Herzog, T. Kohavi, S. Zelniker (Jerusalem: Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and HaKibutz HaMeuchad, 2007) (in Hebrew), pp. 481–529.

Eisenstadt and considered the former as a major inspiration toward a new alternative postmodern sociology in Israel.⁵⁸ By 2015 – the fiftieth anniversary of Buber’s death – signs of a revival were ever growing. This neo-Buberian wave is generated in response to four crises of the left in contemporary Israel: a political crisis, a cultural crisis, a social crisis, and an intellectual crisis.

The political crisis of the left is anchored in the lasting failure of the Israeli–Palestinian “peace process.” The process of Israeli–Palestinian negotiation that started in 1993 in Oslo raised much hope, especially on the left, for the end of hostilities, mutual recognition, and peace based on the partition of the land governed by Israel into “two states.” Such hopes were dashed on November 4, 1995, when Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who led the process, was assassinated by a Jewish right-wing zealot. In the following elections Benyamin Netanyahu of the Likud Party was elected prime minister, and the peace process, which had tattered in any event as a result of continued Palestinian terrorist attacks on Israel and of entrenched opposition by the right wing in Israel, came to a halt. All subsequent attempts to revive negotiations over a “two-state solution,” undertaken reluctantly by both sides, did not succeed. The left in Israel was almost extinguished and has been engulfed by a sense of despair. These developments led some left-wing radicals to regard the two-state solution as no longer viable, and to opt for the concept of a binational one-state solution. Some find solace in a “poststate” Jewish–Palestinian confederation. In this situation the return of some intellectuals to Buber and his political partners is only natural (though it is far from certain that either “solution,” one-state or two-states, is still feasible).⁵⁹

The cultural crisis of the left is associated with the political crisis. Up to the 1970s the secular nationalism of the left was hegemonic in Israeli cultural discourse. The occupation of the territories in 1967 opened a new phase in Israeli history, a phase that solidified via the 1973 October War and the 1977 elections, in which a new Likud and National-Religious coalition came to be the “natural” party of government. Together with the rise of the *mizrahi* party Shas (beginning in 1984), with a measure of “new age” religionization among the secular public, and with the background of neoliberal hollowing of social solidarity, the new hegemony in

⁵⁸ Ronen Shamir and Dan Avnon, “Martin Buber and Israeli Sociology,” *Theory and Criticism*, 12–13 (1999) (in Hebrew), pp. 47–55.

⁵⁹ A concise advocacy for the “one-state solution” was made by Ian Lustick. See Ian Lustick, “Two States Illusion,” *The New York Times*, September 14, 2013.

Israel came to be one with a national-religious orientation.⁶⁰ Buber's legacy plays a peculiar role in this regard. For secular Israelis and for radical intellectuals he offers a smooth passage toward a nonprescriptive Judaism, based on his spiritual non-Halachic Jewish religiosity.

A third crisis that animates a return to Buber is a crisis of social solidarity. Since the 1980s Israel has undergone an intensive neoliberal turn. Its economy has been privatized, its society has become extremely unequal, welfare benefits have contracted, and impoverishment has spread. A huge wave of social protest erupted in the summer of 2011 against the collapse of social solidarity, the emerging cost of living, and the financial elites (the "tycoons"). New forms of public sociability and dialogue were exercised in the streets, but the protest did not succeed in producing a movement of social struggle. On this background there spreads in the left a search for ideological resources that lead some activists to opt for the Buberian theme of communalism.

Finally the intellectual crisis of the left-wing scholars in Israel is associated with the long-term reliance of Israeli social sciences on the American model. Scholars in the social sciences realize today that Israeli academia has become over the years a kind of branch of American academia.⁶¹ This, as we saw previously, is connected with a certain understanding of modernization and with a strong commitment to quantitative methodology. The postmodern and postcolonial critics of Western notions of objectivity and universality, however, have generated a search for the "voices" of the "others" of society, and for a social science more sensitive to its social position and reflexive about its social effects. In this regard the rebellion against Eisenstadtian sociology (as well as against the Zionist historiography of the "Jerusalem School")⁶² can and does draw

⁶⁰ Uri Ram, "Why Secularism Fails: Secular Nationalism and Religious Revivalism in Israel," *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, XXI (2008), pp. 57–73.

⁶¹ On the Americanization of Israeli sociology see Nachman Ben Yehuda, "The Dominance of the External: Israeli Sociology," *Contemporary Sociology*, XXVI, 3 (1997), pp. 271–275; Sammy Smooha, "Israeli Sociology's Position in International Sociology and the Challenges it Faces," (2010), pp. 1–19. http://Soc.haifa.ac.il/~s.smooha/uploads/editor_uploads/files/IsraelSociologyinWorldSociology.pdf. For a critique see Yehouda Shenhav, "Is There an Israeli Sociology," *Israeli Sociology*, II, 2 (2000) (in Hebrew), pp. 675–681.

⁶² See Anita Shapira and Derek A. Penslar, eds., *Israeli Historical Revisionism: From Left to Right* (London: Frank Cass, 2002); Lawrence Silberstein, ed., *Postzionism: A Reader* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004); Uri Ram, *Israeli Nationalism: Social Conflicts and the Politics of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2011); Ilan Pappé, *The Idea of Israel: A History of Power and Knowledge* (London: Verso, 2014).

inspiration from a “return to Buber” and to the European roots of scholarship that he symbolizes, which are perceived now as “continental,” rather than as “German.” Buber paves a way to retreat from the state-centered academic culture engineered by Eisenstadt and his colleagues and points to a possible renewal of the sociology of identity and of communities.⁶³

And so it happens that Buber, whose pre-State radical leftist-cum-religious-nationalist orientation was ousted by the state-centered modernist left after 1948, has returned today with a vengeance, as a symbol and a model for a poststate orientation, by the new radical left. The only problem with this move is that Israel sorely needs a switch to a more universal citizenship, while neo-Buberians may join the present drift in Israel toward the opposite direction of Jewish communalism. In any event Buber’s legacy, despite its inherent ambiguity between left and right, or just because of it, continues – for better or worse – to be pivotal.

⁶³ For a variety of neo-Buberian manifestations see Yehouda Shenhav, *Beyond the Two State Solution: A Jewish Political Essay* (New York: Polity, 2012); Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, “Exile, History, and the Nationalization of Jewish Memory: Some Reflections on the Zionist Notion of History and Return,” *Journal of Levantine Studies*, III, 3 (2013), pp. 37–70; Zali Gurevitch, “The Possibility of Conversation,” *The Sociological Quarterly*, XXXVI, 1 (1995), pp. 97–109; Phillip Wexler, *Mystical Sociology: Towards Cosmic Social Theory* (New York: Peter Lang, 2013).

PART SEVEN

CASE STUDIES

The Soviet Union, Jewish Concerns, and the New York Electoral Left, 1939–1944

Daniel Soyler

From its founding in 1936 to the middle of the 1940s, the American Labor Party (ALP) was the main electoral vehicle of the New York left.¹ It provided significant support for New Deal candidates from Franklin Roosevelt himself to Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, and occasionally elected its own members to office. The ALP pushed for the extension of the New Deal welfare state and for prolabor and pro-civil rights legislation. Rooted especially in the garment unions, it had a sizable presence in the city's working-class and lower-middle-class Jewish neighborhoods, where it was often the second party behind the Democrats. Its leadership was also largely, though not exclusively, Jewish. The party included both Communist/Popular Frontist elements and anti-Communist social democrats, and for several years the two factions engaged in bitter battles for control. Given the ethnic makeup of the party's membership, and the increasing importance of international questions in the era of the Second World War, the issues at stake in ALP primaries were often of particular interest to Jews. The Hitler–Stalin Pact thus played a central role in intraparty struggles in 1939–1940 and the Erlich–Alter affair in 1943–1944.

The struggles within the American Labor Party are instructive concerning the nature of liberal and left anti-Communism, a topic of some debate among American historians of the mid-twentieth century. For the most

¹ On the ALP see Kenneth Waltzer, "The American Labor Party: Third Party Politics in New Deal-Cold War New York, 1936–1954," Ph.D. diss. (Harvard University, 1977); Robert Frederick Carter, "Pressure from the Left: The American Labor Party, 1936–1954," Ph.D. diss. (Syracuse University, 1965).

part, anti-Communism gets a bad rap in the American historical mainstream. It is associated with antilabor and anti-New Deal attitudes, with nativism, white supremacy, militarism, and reaction. Some scholars all but ignore the existence of liberal, social democratic, socialist, and anarchist anti-Communism. Others acknowledge its presence but view it as a cowardly and ultimately futile defensive posture, or as a capitulation to conservatism. Liberal and socialist unwillingness to ally with Communists, to remain silent in the face of Stalinist crimes, or to defend Communists from attack receives the lion's share of the historiographical blame for stalling progressive reform in the postwar period. The anti-anti-Communist school of historiography is, if not dominant in numbers, then certainly in influence.² Only a few historians put liberals and leftists at the center of American anti-Communism, thus calling into question the necessity of the link between anti-Communism and reaction. Above all, these historians have begun to shed light on the reasons *why* radicals and liberals might reasonably oppose not only Soviet tyranny but also the influence of the Communist Party in American progressive movements.³

² See M. J. Heale, *American Anticommunism: Combating the Enemy Within, 1830–1970* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Doug Rossinow, *Visions of Progress: The Left Liberal Tradition in America* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Jonathan Bell, *The Liberal State on Trial: The Cold War and American Politics in the Truman Years* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2003); Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1998); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Daniel J. Link, "'Every Day Was a Battle': Liberal Anti-Communism in Cold War New York, 1944–1956," Ph.D. Diss. (New York University, 2006); Daniel Prosterman, *Defining Democracy: Electoral Reform and the Struggle for Power in New York City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 129–141. This school includes at least two recent presidents of the Organization of American Historians: Jacqueline Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History*, XCI, 4 (March 2005), pp. 1233–1263; Elaine Tyler May, "Security against Democracy: The Legacy of the Cold War at Home," *Journal of American History*, XCVII, 4 (March 2011), pp. 939–957. For a brief overview of the literature of anti-Communism see, Marc J. Selverstone, "A Literature So Immense: The Historiography of Anticommunism," *OAHS Magazine of History*, XXIV, 4 (October 2010), pp. 7–11. On whether this school of thought constitutes a "consensus," see Alex Lichtenstein, "Consensus? What Consensus?" pp. 49–53, and Eric Arnesen, "The Final Conflict? On the Scholarship of Civil Rights, the Left and the Cold War," pp. 63–80, both in *American Communist History*, XI, 1 (2012).

³ Richard Gid Powers, *Not without Honor: The History of American Anticommunism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995); Jennifer Delton, "Rethinking Post-World War II Anticommunism," *Journal of the Historical Society*, X, 1 (March 2010), pp. 1–41; Eric Arnesen, "Civil Rights and the Cold War at Home: Postwar Activism, Anticommunism,

Accepting anti-Communism as an understandable response to Communist provocations, this chapter argues that much of the responsibility for the postwar disruption of progressive politics lay with the Communist Party and its close allies who broke ranks repeatedly with the rest of the left during the war and made it all but impossible to re-form those ranks. Indeed, a close look at what the Communists actually said, and how they really acted on the local level at crucial moments, makes it easy to understand why other progressives would distrust them, avoid alliances with them, and refuse to defend them when they were under attack. As Ellen Schrecker put it, the Communists as potential allies were “secretive, authoritarian, opportunistic, and insulting.”⁴ But their political disagreeableness was not simply a matter of style. It was woven into their most distinctive characteristic – their subservience to the Soviet Union and to Joseph Stalin. As the American Communist response to the Erlich–Alter affair shows, this essential Stalinism did not disappear during the Second World War. While the Popular Front may have reconstituted itself broadly, in the intimate sphere of the New York Jewish left, Communists continued vituperatively to brown-bait their social democratic opponents for questioning seemingly indefensible Soviet actions.

New York City, with its largely immigrant and ethnic population, was a place where international issues mattered even in local politics. In the 1930s and 1940s attitudes toward Communism and fascism, the Spanish Civil War, and the fate of Czechoslovakia and Ethiopia helped define political alignments. Often these alignments coincided with ethnoreligious divisions – with mostly secular Jews lining up on the left and mostly Irish, German, and Italian Catholics on the right.⁵ Jews, the largest ethnic group in the city, played a disproportionate role in the left of all stripes and helped give New York its progressive ethos. Since most Jews were either immigrants from Eastern Europe or their children, Russia was not an abstraction, but a living and breathing place, and its transformation after

and the Decline of the Left,” *American Communist History*, XI, 1 (2012), pp. 5–44; Eric Arnesen, “No ‘Grave Danger’: Black Anticommunism, the Communist Party, and the Race Question,” *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas*, III, 4 (2006), pp. 13–52.

⁴ Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes*, p. 77.

⁵ See Ronald Bayor, *Neighbors in Conflict: The Irish, Germans, Jews and Italians of New York City, 1929–1941* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); Joshua Zeitz, *White Ethnic New York: Jews, Catholics, and the Shaping of Postwar Politics* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Mason Williams, *City of Ambition: FDR, La Guardia, and the Making of Modern New York* (New York: Norton, 2013), pp. 289–324.

the revolution proved very attractive to many. Of course, the rise of Nazism was also an important political issue for Jews. But the fights within the ALP over precisely these questions show that deep political divisions existed within, not just between, ethnic groups, and within the left, and not just between left and right.

These internecine struggles, which might have been of purely sectarian interest elsewhere, had a real effect on general politics in New York City, where the left was strong enough to wield some electoral clout. Even after the Socialist Party's brief electoral heyday between 1914 and 1922 came to an end, Socialists retained control of such influential institutions within the Jewish community as the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), the Workmen's Circle, and the *Jewish Daily Forward* [*Forverts*]. Beginning in 1936, these organizations entered the political mainstream by throwing their weight behind the ALP. For its part, the Communist Party had as many as thirty thousand members in the city, making it the largest single disciplined political organization.⁶ Not only did it elect two city councilmen of its own, but when it chose to, it could flood a district with literally thousands of enthusiastic volunteers to campaign for an allied politician.

The American Labor Party was founded in 1936 primarily as an outgrowth of the New York branch of the CIO's Labor's Non-Partisan League, headed by Sidney Hillman of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (Amalgamated). But the party also incorporated the right-wing faction that had split that year from the Socialist Party (SP) and formed the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), as well as the ILGWU, whose chief, David Dubinsky, had also just resigned from the SP, and independent liberals who supported the president but shied away from the Democratic Party with its machine and white supremacist wings. While Hillman saw the party mainly as a vehicle for aiding the president's reelection effort, Dubinsky and the social democrats hoped it would be a permanent political force, and perhaps even the nucleus of a national independent labor party. Dubinsky and the SDF were vehemently anti-Communist. Hillman, on the other hand, lacked their fear of the Communists and occasionally made alliances with them when he thought they would be useful.⁷

⁶ Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism* (New York: Basic, 1984), p. 268.

⁷ Waltzer, "The American Labor Party," pp. 78–83; Steven Fraser, *Labor Will Rule: Sidney Hillman and the Rise of American Labor* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 363–364; David Dubinsky and A. H. Raskin, *David Dubinsky: A Life with Labor*

Ironically, the anti-Communist social democrats who helped found the ALP soon found themselves in the same party as their left-wing opponents. In accordance with the new Popular Front line, American Communists adopted a program of progressive reform, becoming strong supporters of the New Deal and President Roosevelt. The ALP seemed a perfect vehicle for Popular Front politics. When the Communist Party (CPUSA) lost its own state ballot line after the 1936 elections, Communists registered as ALP voters and joined party clubs, despite a formal ALP ban on Communist membership.⁸ But as long as the Communists behaved themselves and backed essentially the same positions as the party leadership, the dominant trade union leaders tolerated them – despite increasingly shrill warnings from the ideologically more doctrinaire SDF and *Forverts*. With the “right” in control of the state committee it could control the party’s program, administration, and major candidates.⁹

This era of relative calm was shattered by the news of the Hitler–Stalin Pact on August 23, 1939. The signing of the nonaggression pact threw the Communist Party briefly into disarray, as the treaty seemed to bear out accusations that Nazism and Communism held a certain affinity. The confusion was perhaps greatest on the “Jewish street,” where “Jewish communists were met by their shopmates with the Nazi salute and a ‘Heil Hitler!’” Fistfights broke out in the Garment District, while the epithet “Communazis” was hurled at Communists. The Communist Yiddish daily *Frayhayt* lost advertisers. Yiddish-language pro-Soviet lecturers had a hard time renting a hall or getting tickets printed. A handful of prominent writers and intellectuals quit CPUSA-allied Yiddish cultural organizations. But the CPUSA soon regrouped. Asking “Is the Pact good for Jews?” the New York Committee of the National Council of Jewish Communists answered an emphatic yes, for by weakening Hitler and

(New York: Simon & Schuster, 1977), pp. 267–268; Robert Parmet, *The Master of Seventh Avenue: David Dubinsky and the American Labor Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), pp. 131–132; Williams, *City of Ambition*, pp. 219–220.

⁸ Waltzer, “American Labor Party,” pp. 63–66, 91, 123–124, 128; Carter, “Pressure from the Left,” p. 80; Klehr, *Heyday of American Communism*, p. 266.

⁹ Melech Epstein, *The Jew and Communism, 1919–1941* (New York: Trade Union Sponsoring Committee, n.d.), p. 271; “Labor Party Rule by Reds Is Feared,” *Times*, May 7, 1939; “A.L.P. in Turmoil over Charges of Communist Grip,” *Post*, May 15, 1939; “Red Play Denied by Labor Party,” *Times*, May 16, 1939; Paul Sann, “Waldman Seeks A.L.P. Purge but Gets It Himself,” *Post*, May 16, 1939, all clippings, b. 145, f.6, Dubinsky Correspondence, ILGWU Records, 5780/002, Kheel Center, Cornell (hereafter, Dubinsky Correspondence). Carter, “Pressure from the Left,” pp. 89–92, 102–103, 110; Waltzer, “American Labor Party,” pp. 127–128, 223–226.

forestalling a new deal between him and Chamberlain, the pact had made the Jews of Ukraine and Poland “more secure.” A full elaboration of the new line would take a couple of months, and would entail a secret short-wave broadcast from Moscow to set the American party straight: No longer was fascism the chief enemy; rather, Communists would lead the fight against “imperialist war.” Both sides – Britain and France, on the one hand, Germany, on the other – were equally culpable and neither side should be defended. The Russian occupation of eastern Poland was an act of “liberation.” The party rallied the faithful at Madison Square Garden, and repudiated the Popular Front. Losses to the core were relatively small. As *Izvestia* put it, “respect or hate” for Hitlerism had become “a matter of taste.”¹⁰

The new Communist line swept away the Popular Front. Michael Gold excoriated liberals who questioned the Soviet–Nazi alliance as “thieves, . . . fascists, . . . prostitutes, . . . mental cripples, . . . social traitors and renegades.” Quoting liberally from Lenin, the party theorist Harry Gannes averred, “Social democracy is now the greatest foe of peace and the most bloodthirsty advocate of war – in the interest of Anglo-French imperialism.” As if to emphasize the Communists’ self-imposed isolation from the rest of the left, Gannes placed not only Leon Blum and the British Labour Party, but also Trotsky and the followers of the dissident communist Jay Lovestone within the social democratic camp along with the *Forverts* editor Abraham Cahan, Dubinsky, and the chief ALP strategist Alex Rose of the hatters’ union. Not surprisingly, the party announced that “United Fronts are impossible with those tendencies and groups in the labor movement which follow the treacherous policy of Social Democracy, support the imperialist war, seek to drag America into it, incite against the Soviet Union and hamper the struggle of the working class against imperialism, capitalism and intensified capitalist reaction and exploitation.” Communists also vilified efforts by the social democratic Jewish Labor Committee to rescue socialists and labor activists from Nazi hands, accusing it of having “brought-over counterrevolutionary . . . remnants of the anti-Soviet conspiracy and

¹⁰ Epstein, *Jew and Communism*, pp. 350–355, 361–369, 371–375; Maurice Isserman, *Which Side Were You On? The American Communist Party during the Second World War* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1982), pp. 32–36; Klehr, *Heyday of American Communism*, pp. 388–397; Henry Srebrnik, “The Jews Do Not Want War! American Jewish Communists Defend the Hitler–Stalin Pact, 1939–1941,” *American Communist History*, VIII, 1 (2009), pp. 49–71; “Iz der opmakh gut far yidn?” flyer, US Territorial Collection, YIVO.

espionage.” In truth, premature anti-Stalinists such as Dubinsky, Cahan, the *Forverts*, and the SDF did not need the Hitler–Stalin Pact to turn them against the Soviet Union. But the pact deepened the factional chasm and helped crystalize anti-Communism as a political stance. One group that had straddled the fence, the Lovestoneites, now found themselves firmly ensconced on the anti-Communist side. Several Lovestoneites would play important roles in the factional battles within the ALP.¹¹

Most significantly for the American Labor Party the Communist attitude toward FDR reversed itself, though its interest in the ALP remained strong. The CPUSA now labeled Roosevelt an imperialist warmonger, a member of the “reactionary camp,” “dismantling the New Deal” on behalf of the “economic royalists.” Comparisons between Roosevelt and Hitler were common: “Mr. Roosevelt,” Earl Browder said, “has studied well the Hitlerian art, and bids fair to outdo the record of his teacher.” William Z. Foster wrote that the “war policy of the Roosevelt administration” is “perhaps the greatest crime ever committed against the American people by its government and the ruling class.” Plans for conscription were “Hitleresque.” Thus, as the 1940 election approached, the Communist Party opposed the president’s reelection. Calling for an independent labor party that would rally antiinterventionist forces, the CPUSA therefore did not abandon the ALP, but instead sought to turn it from its original purpose of support for the New Deal.¹²

As the Lovestoneite teachers’ union activist Ben Davidson later recalled, “when the Stalin–Hitler Pact was signed . . . like lightning, it lit up the air.” The ALP state leadership finally undertook to oust the Communists. What followed was a four-year struggle for control over the party, in which every primary – not only for major offices, but even for county and state committees – was bitterly contested, and in which the party’s stance toward the Soviet Union and the Communist Party became

¹¹ Isserman, *Which Side Were You On?* p. 38; Harry Gannes, “Social Democracy, 1914–1939: Record of Betrayals,” *Daily Worker*, October 8, 1939; Epstein, *Jew and Communism*, pp. 356, 368, 379; Robert J. Alexander, *The Right Opposition: The Lovestoneites and the International Communist Opposition of the 1930s* (Wesport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), pp. 113–134; “To the Dressmakers of Local 22,” *Justice*, November 1, 1939, clipping, b.146, f.4a, Dubinsky Correspondence; Parmet, *King of Seventh Avenue*, 182; “CP Section Hits War-Mongers in ILGWU Local,” *Daily Worker*, clipping, n.d., b.146, f.4a, Dubinsky Correspondence.

¹² Epstein, *Jew and Communism*, pp. 357–358; Isserman, *Which Side Were You On?* pp. 63–64; Klehr, *Heyday of American Communism*, pp. 397–398, 405; “Labor Must Find Its Political Independence,” *Sunday Worker*, October 27, 1940.

the overriding issue.¹³ The Communists and their allies tended to be younger, American-born, and well educated. They included in their number the New York City CIO Council and individuals such as Congressman Vito Marcantonio, Transit Workers' Union (TWU) chief Michael Quill, and TWU taxi division leader Eugene Connolly. The established leadership had more support among older immigrant workers and its institutional base in the ILGWU, the millinery workers union, the SDF and its organ the *New Leader*, the *Forverts*, the Workmen's Circle, and the *New York Post*.¹⁴ The CPUSA and its fellow travelers were generally termed the "left" and the anti-Communist social democrats and liberals the "right." But in truth, these demarcations were not so clear-cut. During the pact period the "left" did indeed use leftist language to condemn American support for Britain and France against Germany and call for an independent labor party. But once Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, the left condemned the right's continued interest in a national labor party and called for stricter adherence to labor's no-strike pledge. What is clear is that the left's abrupt desertion of the antifascist front thus undermined the radical mainstream political alternative in New York.

The right struck first, calling a meeting for October 4 to adopt a resolution condemning the German-Soviet alliance and calling for aid to the Western allies short of direct American involvement in the war. Some eight hundred delegates attended the stormy meeting. As the *Daily Worker* put it, "Every running dog for Martin Dies that could be legally or illegally rallied for the meeting was on hand to stir up the war spirit." The party secretary, Alex Rose, set the tone for the decidedly anti-Stalinist crowd, explaining that part of the meeting's point was precisely to smoke out the Communists within the ALP: "Tonight the mask is off. The American Communist Party has a function similar to that of the Russian Pavilion at the World's Fair. It is a Russian exhibit. It has no relation to American life." Those who voted against the resolution, Rose announced, would "no longer be considered members of the party." (In reality, since the party was organized under New York state election law, there was virtually no way to regulate who joined.) The ILGWU's Julius Hochman charged that the Communists had "betrayed international solidarity" and cited the need to oppose both Communism and fascism. Jack Altman, a

¹³ Ben Davidson Oral History, Columbia University, p. 76; "The ALP and the Elections," *New Leader*, August 31, 1940, scrapbook 9, Records of the Liberal Party, NYPL.

¹⁴ Waltzer, "American Labor Party," pp. 235-236, 561n39.

Socialist and leader in the retail workers' union, seconded Rose's call for expulsion of anyone supporting the "bloody, brutal assault on Poland by the Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany." On the defensive, opponents of the resolution attempted to deflect the issue, arguing that the ALP should continue its previous practice of downplaying international issues. The Communist Irving Potash of the furriers' union asked, "If no resolution was introduced when Fascism destroyed Austria and Ethiopia and strangled Spain, what interest is to be served by introducing now a hysterical resolution on the world situation?" But when he went on to defend the Soviet invasion of Poland, he was greeted with boos and shouts of "Heil Hitler." Interestingly, some non-Communist speakers, including the Lovestoneite ILGWU leader Louis Nelson, opposed the resolution because it called for lifting the arms embargo but remained within the pale of acceptable dissident opinion within the ALP and its affiliated unions.¹⁵

The resolution that passed 605 to 94 put the ALP on record for the repeal of the Neutrality Act, for the outright sale of war materials to Britain and France, for the prohibition of American travel and shipping in war areas, and for an excess-profit tax so that there would be no capitalist incentive for direct American intervention. The official ALP statement accused the Soviets of leveling a "treacherous blow to world civilization" and, elaborating a theme taken up spontaneously in the shops and at the party meeting, saw a "fusion" of "red and brown dictatorships." The leadership now admitted that it had long "suspected" that there were Communists in the ALP, but argued that now it was imperative to draw a clear line between the two parties. The ALP advocated solidarity with the democracies of Western Europe against fascist aggression. It also pledged to oppose any attempts to use the war crisis to curtail social legislation.¹⁶

The Communist Party, of course, saw the situation differently. The State Committee of the CPUSA responded that the meeting had been the scene of a "hysteria of war-mongering and red-baiting" and likened the "Waldman-Social Democratic-Thomasite-Lovestoneite clique" to the European social democrats who had supported their countries' war efforts in the last disastrous imperialist war. The leadership had exhibited

¹⁵ "Laborites of City Brand Communists Foes of Workers," *Times*, October 5, 1939, b.145, f.6, Dubinsky Correspondence; Harry Raymond, "Clique of A.L.P. Chiefs Whip Up War Incitement against C.P.," *Daily Worker*, October 6, 1939.

¹⁶ "Statement by the American Labor Party on Its Anti-Communist Resolution," b.145, f.6, Dubinsky Correspondence.

the “worst features of Tammanyism,” and had allied with Coughlin, Dies, and Hearst against “the peace policy of the soviet government.” The *Daily Worker* scoffed at the idea that the CPUSA took orders from Moscow, attributing it to the need of the right to deflect attention from the fact that “it is they who are so slavishly taking orders from Reaction, from the Hearst forces, from the Chamberlain imperialists and their Leon Blum bootlickers.” Though denying that the CPUSA had any role in the ALP, the Communist press charged that the ALP leadership had lost the support of the party rank and file.¹⁷

Subsequent events bore out the analysis of both sides to some degree: As a litmus test the antipact resolution served to identify pro-Communist elements as they stepped forward in the clubs and county organizations to defend the Soviet alliance with Germany. On the other hand, it did indeed turn out, as the *Worker* said, that the left had substantial rank-and-file support. ALP clubs across the boroughs adopted resolutions repudiating the position of the state leadership. After months of struggle the left gained control of the Manhattan organization.¹⁸

Both sides now geared up for primary fights in the spring of 1940, as well as for the statewide convention that would nominate a presidential candidate in the fall. For the first time formal factions took shape. The left formed the Progressive Committee to Rebuild the American Labor Party, which accused the state leadership, justly, of “dictatorial methods” and patronage politics and rather disingenuously of “becoming involved in debate over events and theoretical shadings of philosophies which are foreign to the American scene.” Members included Morris Watson of the Newspaper Guild as chair, along with Quill, Connolly, Joe Curran of the maritime union, Bella Dodd of the Teachers’ Union, Louis Boudin, Dashiell Hammett, Lillian Hellman, and Rockwell Kent. The right countered with the Liberal and Labor Committee to Safeguard the American Labor Party. Its chair was the anticlerical Socialist Paul Blanshard, and it

¹⁷ “N.Y. Communist State Committee Replies to War Incitement of A.L.P. Executive,” *Daily Worker*, October 6, 1939; “Indignation Mounts against ALP War-Mongering Clique,” *Daily Worker*, October 12, 1939.

¹⁸ “ALP Clubs in Three Boroughs Rebuke Warmongers’ Clique,” *Worker*, October 18, 1939; “More ALP Clubs Play War-Mongers, Back Mike Quill,” *Worker*, October 21, 1939; “Labor Row Here Ends in Blackout,” *Times*, October 7, 1939, clipping, b.145, f.6, Dubinsky Correspondence; “Group Fights ALP Drive on Communists,” *Post*, October 7, 1939, clipping, b.145, f.6, Dubinsky Correspondence; “28 of Labor Party Groups Backing Up Right Wing Fight,” *Sun*, March 22, 1940, b.141, Dubinsky Correspondence; “Rose Fights ALP Leftist Victors,” *Post*, March 1940, clipping, b.141, Dubinsky Correspondence; Carter, “Pressure from the Left,” p. 117.

included such liberal, left, and labor luminaries as the Socialist leader Norman Thomas, the African American trade unionist and Socialist A. Philip Randolph, the pragmatist philosopher Sidney Hook, the *Nation* publisher Freda Kirchway, the Reverend John Haynes Holmes, the anti-Communist civil liberties attorney Morris Ernst, the teachers' union leaders George Counts and John Childs, the *Forverts* Adolph Held and Alexander Kahn, the League for Industrial Democracy director Harry Laidler, the Amalgamated's Louis Hollander, the party chair Luigi Antonini of the ILGWU, and Rose. What was left of the Socialist Party, which opposed intervention but also the Hitler–Stalin Pact, lent its support to the right. Denying conservative intent, the right charged that contrary to the Progressive Committee's accusation it was the left that was subservient to foreign ideas and powers:

We who have always condemned red-baiting can take the lead in ridding the Labor party of undemocratic elements without being accused of intolerance. We do not oppose the Communists in the party because they are radicals, but because they are machine politicians obeying a Moscow boss. They say one thing and mean another. They reverse their most fundamental ideas upon the orders of an outside dictator.¹⁹

The April elections for state committee saw the left consolidate its hold on Manhattan and take Queens and Staten Island, while the right won in Brooklyn (barely), the Bronx, and upstate. During the campaign the Liberal and Labor Committee continued to emphasize the legitimacy of defending the Labor Party from Communist control. A letter from Blanshard to voters argued, "The talk of the opposition about red-baiting and war-mongering is simply a smokescreen. Is it red-baiting to defend our party from Communist control?" The right also pointed out the inconsistency of the left position, a theme that would gain even more salience once the left rejoined the antifascist struggle. For now Rose simply pointed out that the Communists and ALP left had loved FDR, Governor Herbert Lehman, and *La Guardia* between 1936 and 1938, but now had nothing

¹⁹ "Report of Alex Rose . . . to state Committee of American Labor Party," January 6, 1940, b. 144, f. 2b, Dubinsky Correspondence; "Form Committee to Rebuild Labor Party," *Daily Worker*, December 31, 1939, clipping, Box 177, Folder: US elections: Gerson, Simon, American Labor Party, Records of Communist Party, TAM 132, Tamiment Library, NYU; "Fight on A.L.P. reds at Polls Planned," *Times*, February 19, 1940, clipping, b.141, Dubinsky Correspondence; "Paul Blanshard Leads Fight on 'Reds' in ALP," *Times*, February 20, 1940; "Socialists Back Labor Right Wing," *Times*, April 1, 1940, b. 144, Dubinsky Correspondence; Waltzer, "The American Labor Party," pp. 236–237.

but curses for them. Most enrolled ALP voters disagreed with Rose. But although the left won more votes, the right retained control of the state committee, partly because it had rigged the system so that Manhattan was underrepresented and the areas outside the city overrepresented on the state committee.²⁰

The ALP state committee convened in Utica on September 14 to name a presidential candidate, precipitating another brawl between right and left. After failing through court order to block the meeting from taking place at all, Connolly and Watson introduced a resolution condemning Roosevelt as the chief enemy of the labor movement:

Franklin D. Roosevelt, false to those things which gave rise to genuine hope in the hearts of millions of Americans, is on the same path as his rival [Republican Wendell Willkie]. Abandoning the New Deal, likewise capitulating to Big Business and international finance capital, he is betraying the American people. . . He seeks to get us into war. Continuation of his policies will get us into war, will destroy our labor movement, will deprive us of a democracy worth fighting and dying for.

The ensuing tumultuous meeting, at which, according to the *Daily Worker*, “chairs were hurled, fists flew, blackjacks came into play,” had to move twice, once under police order after complaints from neighbors. The decisive vote finally occurred at 2:00 a.m. – 442 for Roosevelt, 234 for no nomination, 11 for Socialist Norman Thomas – a “dubious” and “smelly” victory for Roosevelt, said the *Daily Worker*.²¹

The ALP right was as enthusiastic for Roosevelt as ever, supporting his foreign and defense policies and still hoping for further social reform. Dubinsky articulated the case for FDR in an article in the *Forverts*. It was not just a question of individual programs and reforms, the ILGWU

²⁰ “A Last Minute Message to Enrolled Voters of the American Labor Party,” b. 144, f. 2b, Dubinsky Correspondence; “Socialists Back Labor Right Wing,” *Times*, April 1, 1940, b. 144, Dubinsky Correspondence; Parmet, *King of Seventh Avenue*, p. 182; Carter, “Pressure from the Left,” p. 130; Waltzer, “American Labor Party,” pp. 237–239.

²¹ “Labor Left Wing Gets Court Order,” *Times*, September 1, 1940, scrapbook 9, Records of the Liberal Party, NYPL; “Labor Left Wing Gets Court Order,” *Times*, September 1, 1940, clipping, b.141, Dubinsky Correspondence; “Labor Right Wing Wins Court Edict,” *Times*, September 12, 1940, clipping, b. 141, Dubinsky Correspondence; Resolution, Box 2, Folder: memoranda, Records of Liberal Party, NYPL; Dubinsky and Raskin, *David Dubinsky: A Life with Labor*, 272; “Labor Party Girds for Primary Fight,” *Times*, September 16, 1940, b.141, Dubinsky Correspondence; “Reds, Nazis Scored in Labor Platform,” *Sun*, September 29, 1940, b.142, f.1c, Dubinsky Correspondence; Harry Raymond, “Progressives in ALP Flay Willkie, FDR,” *Sunday Worker*, September 15, 1940; “FDR Gets Dubious OK and ALP Old Guard Riots,” *Daily Worker*, September 16, 1940; “ALP Old Guard Steamroller OK’s Roosevelt,” *Daily Worker*, September 29, 1940.

leader averred, but a change in the whole tenor of government, from one that defended the interests of the bosses, to one that looked out for the working people. Roosevelt had introduced into government the principle of social justice, for which only Socialists and the most progressive liberals had previously fought. The government was to “defend its citizens, not only against thieves and criminals who break into the houses or empty the pockets of their victims, but also against exploitative bosses, against financial swindlers and rapacious banks, against the rich trusts and heartless landlords and mortgagers.” The campaign culminated in a three-hour rally at Madison Square Garden. When the ALP provided FDR’s margin of victory in New York, the right was happy, but the *Daily Worker* shouted, “Wall Street Wins,” while the *New Masses* lamented that the ALP had put itself in “service for reaction.”²²

The main outcome for the American Labor Party of the Hitler–Stalin Pact era from August 1939 to June 1941 was that the party was in a permanent state of civil war. As the anti-Communist social democratic *New Leader* stated happily, “Those in the party who in the past had been inclined to make united fronts with the Communists are now thoroughly disillusioned and are honestly seeking to rid the party of Communist infiltration.”²³ But the Communists and their allies were just as determined to expand their foothold in the party. The enmity survived the period of the pact and existed independently of positions on specific issues – even when the left reversed course and outflanked the right from the right by opposing a national labor party and wartime strikes.

Over the next two election cycles tensions abated between left and right concerning the top of the ticket. But the battle between left and right over control of the party continued. County Committee meetings were tumultuous scenes of shouting and walk-outs. The left now called for unity and winning the war as nearly all that mattered. But the right remained convinced that the ALP left was a front for the Communist Party, and they sought to remind voters of the left’s opposition to Roosevelt and preparedness up until June 1941. They got help from

²² David Dubinsky, “Ruzvelt firt durkh di printsipen, far velkhe nor di sotsialisten un arbayter hoben friher gekemft, - shraybt Deyvid Dubinski,” *Forverts*, November 3, 1940, clipping, b.141, Dubinsky Correspondence; “Time Schedule-ALP Meeting,” October 31, 1940, b.141, f.1b, Dubinsky Correspondence; “20,000 at Rally of Labor Party Cheer Wallace,” *Herald-Tribune*, November 1, 1940, b.141, Dubinsky Correspondence; Waltzer, *The American Labor Party*, p. 244.

²³ “ALP and the Elections,” *New Leader*, August 31, 1940, scrapbook 9, Records of the Liberal Party, NYPL.

Eleanor Roosevelt, who noted that the right's "stand on foreign affairs has always been my own." She admired the Russian people, she said, but did "not wish to be controlled in this country by an American group that, in turn, is controlled by Russia and Russia's interests." For the time being, though, the war effort, the CPUSA's relative docility in favor of unity, and the right's continued control over nominations forestalled a split.²⁴

But one incident in particular drove home to the right just how little the Communists had changed their underlying stripes. In February 1943 they received the startling news that Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter, two top leaders of the Jewish Labor Bund in Poland, had died while captives of Stalin. The anti-Communist wing of the Jewish labor movement in New York reacted furiously to the Soviet betrayal. Many members of the Jewish immigrant left, including both Dubinsky and Hillman, had been Bundists in their old-country youths. Dubinsky and many others – though not Hillman – retained warm feelings toward the party, even direct ties. Erlich had visited the United States seven years earlier and had published in the American Yiddish and English Socialist press. Both men were well known in Socialist circles because they had often represented the Bund at congresses and meetings of the Socialist International. As Dubinsky said, "Erlich and Alter were no strangers to us in America. They were close to our labor movement, we worked with them, we cooperated with them, and we loved them for their idealism and for their high integrity." The Soviet regime knew them as well. Erlich had played a role in the Petrograd Soviet during the 1917 revolution, and Alter had once been arrested while in Russia for an early meeting of the Comintern when he tried to smuggle out a letter from a jailed socialist to the head of the British Communist Party. The Soviets refused to recognize their Polish citizenship, regarding both Erlich and Alter as Soviet nationals.²⁵

²⁴ William Vogel Jr., "ALP Cracks Wide Open . . . Left and Right Go to Mat This Week," *PM*, September 29, 1941; William Vogel Jr., "Leftists Take Over in ALP and Rightists Take a Walk," *PM*, October 3, 1941; Parmet, *King of Seventh Avenue*, p. 190; "Mrs. Roosevelt Hits Left ALP," *PM*, August 6, 1942; William Vogel Jr., "ALP Right and Left Wings Fight for Control Tomorrow," *PM*, August 10, 1942. Flyer, *Post* reprint, "Mrs. Roosevelt Rejects ALP Left Wing; Supports Rightists," August 6, 1942, b.140, f2c, Dubinsky Correspondence; 5780/002, Kheel Center, Cornell; Carter, "Pressure from the Left," pp. 165–169, 173; Waltzer, *The American Labor Party*, pp. 260–265.

²⁵ *Henrik Erlich un Viktor Alter* (New York: Unser Tsait, 1951), pp. 45–48, 56; Samuel Portnoy, *Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter: Two Heroes and Martyrs for Jewish Socialism* (Hoboken, NJ, and New York: Ktav/Jewish Labor Bund, 1990), p. 328; Daniel Blatman, *For Our Freedom and Yours: The Jewish Labour Bund in Poland, 1939–1949* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2003), pp. 82–83.

When Germany and Russia repartitioned Poland in September 1939, Erlich and Alter fled into the Soviet zone.²⁶ Soon arrested, the two men sat in prison for two years. Convicted of “reactionary activity, conspiracy with the international bourgeoisie, collaboration with opponents of the Soviet regime and contact with Westerners,” Erlich and Alter were sentenced to death in the summer of 1941. But their sentences were soon commuted after an agreement between the Soviets and the Polish government-in-exile. Approached by the NKVD, Erlich and Alter agreed to head up a Jewish Antifascist Committee that would rally Jewish support around the world for the Soviet struggle against the Germans. They hoped that the committee would also aid Polish Jewish refugees and assist the Jewish underground in Poland. Alter was nominated to the Polish National Council. But the two Bundists proved much too independent for the Soviets. After three months they were rearrested and disappeared from view. Representatives of the Bund in New York worked tirelessly for their comrades’ release, gaining support from Polish, British, and American labor and Socialist circles. But unbeknown to his supporters, Erlich had committed suicide in May 1942. Alter was shot on February 17, 1943. Finally, on February 23, 1943, William Green, President of the American Federation of Labor, received a message from the Soviet ambassador informing him (falsely) that Erlich and Alter had been executed for attempting to sabotage the Soviet war effort by urging Red Army soldiers to lay down their weapons and conclude an immediate peace with Hitler.

The reaction was visceral and immediate. Of course, no one outside Communist circles believed the outlandish charges against these two veteran socialists, Polish patriots, and Jews who had long participated in the antifascist struggle.²⁷ Hillel Rogoff, writing in the *Forverts*, compared the charges against Erlich and Alter to a blood libel and expressed the hope that their absurdity would “at least work to open the eyes of those people who have lately been dazzled and misled by the Communist propaganda.” “Of course we will protest, of course we will condemn before the entire world the crime that has been committed,” Rogoff wrote, even though under the wartime circumstances there was no chance

²⁶ The following account depends on Blatman, *For Our Freedom and Yours*, pp. 69–86, and *Henrik Erlich un Viktor Alter*, pp. 80–115, 170–172.

²⁷ For a Shachtmanite statement on Erlich–Alter, for example, see “The Murder of Ehrlich and Alter,” in Tony Michels, *Jewish Radicals: A Documentary History* (New York: NYU Press, 2012), pp. 264–267.

that the governments of the democratic states would pay much attention. Letter writers to the *Forverts* also used the term “blood libel” and compared the executions of Erlich and Alter to those of Sacco and Vanzetti. The *Forverts* was at least gratified that some American liberal publications, such as the *New Republic* and the daily *PM*, recognized the injustice of the decree. Even as they protested against the verdict against the Polish Bundists, however, *Forverts* writers and readers also expressed their “wonder, respect, and love for the heroic Russian Army,” as Cahan put it.²⁸

But not everyone on the New York Jewish street felt the same way. The *Frayhayt* defended the executions as a “necessary war measure” against “two enemies of the Soviet state” at a time when the Soviets were defending themselves, the Jews, and the world against the Nazis. Speaking certainly for itself, the *Frayhayt* wrote that “the people of the world, the Jewish people, have trust in the Soviet government.” Such trust was necessary, because the exact charges against the “treacherous” Erlich and Alter were not at all clear. The *Frayhayt* was forced to demonstrate their guilt by analogy and association. In a 1942 article in an American publication published while Erlich and Alter were in prison, Nathan (Nokhum) Chanin, head of the Workmen’s Circle, had expressed the hope that the Stalin regime would topple as a result of the war. Erlich and Alter could not have even seen the article, but they belonged to the same political tendency, though in a different country, and had presumably acted on the thoughts expressed by Chanin. For this they deserved death. For the Jewish Communists the anti-Soviet articles of their friends in the United States were “direct evidence” of Erlich’s and Alter’s guilt. The chilling logic implied, of course, that Chanin and others like him deserved the death penalty all the more for having actually said what Erlich and Alter only probably thought. As the Bund and its allies expanded their protests, the *Frayhayt* accused them of doing “work for Hitler! This is exactly the work that Goebbels does.”²⁹

²⁸ Hillel Rogoff, “In dem itstikn moment,” *Forverts*, March 4, 1943; Ab. Cahan, “Notitsen vegen dem Erlich-Alter Miting,” *Forverts*, April 3, 1943; L. Fogelman, “Di liberale tsaytungen vegen di hinrikhtungen fun Ehrlikh-Alter,” *Forverts*, March 23, 1943; “Fun folk tsum folk,” *Forverts*, March 11, 1943.

²⁹ “Der inyen Erlikh un Alter,” *Frayhayt*, February 27, 1943; “Erlikh-Alter hobn zikh farnumen mit arbet far soyne in moment fun biterstn ongrif fun natsishe armeyen,” *Frayhayt*, February 27, 1943; “Litvinov zogt Erlikh un Alter hobn gezukht untertsugrobn kamf fun der royer armye gegn di natsis,” *Frayhayt*, March 4, 1943; “S’iz a hetse gegn

Dubinsky and J. B. Salutsky-Hardman, a veteran Jewish socialist who worked for the Amalgamated, organized a mass protest meeting at Manhattan's Mecca Temple. The meeting faced obstacles. Even some insiders doubted that such a meeting would have the desired effect, given the American press's current high regard for Russia; perhaps the meeting should be held entirely in Yiddish or Russian so that it would attract minimal notice outside narrow circles. Senator Mead agreed to speak, then tried to back out, perhaps at the behest of the State Department. Dubinsky convinced him to speak after all via phone from Washington. The Communist maritime union head Joe Curran threatened the CIO's Carey with bodily harm if he attended the meeting, but Carey went anyway. The thirty-five hundred who attended passed a resolution expressing their "indignation" at the murders. "Thousands of us knew these two leaders of labor in Poland personally and well," the resolution continued, "and all of us have watched their record, over many years, as determined fighters against Hitlerism, fascism and every form of tyranny, oppression and brutalitarianism." More than one speaker compared Erlich and Alter to the radical martyrs Sacco and Vanzetti. Hillman did not attend. Neither did anyone from the Roosevelt administration.³⁰

In a way, the Erlich–Alter affair marked the beginning of the final struggle for control of the ALP. The New York CIO Council, led by the covert Communist Saul Mills, and the New York County ALP condemned Dubinsky for "stirring up anti-Soviet feeling." Although the Mecca Temple resolution had made clear the right's admiration for the Russian people's spirit and its continued support for alliance with Russia against the Axis, the ALP left responded with disdain: "We condemn as enemies of government policy those who seek to disrupt the United Nations through slander of our great fighting ally, Soviet Russia. Those who have utilized the execution of enemies of the Soviet Union, like Alter and Ehrlich . . . are only seeking to weaken the bonds that tie us to our fighting ally. By pursuing a policy of Soviet-baiting and red-baiting they carry out the orders of Hitlerism." The clash over the murder of Erlich

Amerike, gegn Poyln, un gegn idishn folk," *Frayhayt*, March 4, 1943; "Erlikh's un Alters farbindungen," *Frayhayt*, February 28, 1943.

³⁰ Cahan, "Notitsen vegen dem Erlich-Alter Miting"; Dubinsky and Raskin, *David Dubinsky: A Life with Labor*, pp. 249–251; Melech Epstein, *Jewish Labor in U.S.A.: An Industrial, Political and Cultural History of the Jewish Labor Movement*, II, 1914–1952 (1953; reprint, n.p.: Ktav, 1969), p. 298; Portnoy, *Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter*, pp. 201–203, 327–337.

and Alter thus became an issue (though certainly not the only one) in the ALP primaries in 1943 and 1944, as the left now entered an alliance with Hillman.³¹

Significantly in the wartime context it was the *left*, not the right that sought to play up the Erlich–Alter affair. An ALP left campaign manual recommended that activists emphasize the fight against a “clique” of “embittered Social Democrats” who followed a “red-baiting line harmful to national unity and an anti-Soviet line harmful to unity of the United Nations.” Dubinsky’s work on the Erlich–Alter case was suggested as one piece of evidence. A “Message to Enrolled Voters of the American Labor Party” argued that the right’s “sole stock-in-trade is red-baiting and hatred of the Soviet Union. The fear of Communism and Communists is Hitler’s ‘secret weapon’ and these gentlemen have not hesitated to borrow from Hitler and Goebbel’s [*sic*] arsenal of weapons. They have contributed to international disunity by organizing meetings to attack our heroic ally, the Soviet Union, by attempting to whitewash Alter and Ehrlich, two traitors who were executed by the Soviet Union.” The *Daily Worker* complained of the “scandalous Alter–Ehrlich campaign.” The campaign to free the two socialists and then to memorialize them was thus put in the frequently used category of “red-baiting,” with which the left attempted to deflect all criticism.³²

For its part the right expressed exasperation that the left could even have the temerity to cloak itself in Roosevelt’s mantle, as it sought to do, or to claim to be the most consistent anti-fascists, as it claimed to be. It had only been three years since the Communists and their allies in the ALP had excoriated Roosevelt as a warmonger and imperialist and branded the struggle against Germany an imperialist war in which both sides were to blame. Had the period of the Hitler–Stalin Pact been forgotten already? Rose complained about the shifting nature of the challenge: “The issues they raise always vary. For the first two years they

³¹ Waltzer, “American Labor Party,” p. 268; “Left Wing Seeks Control of A.L.P.,” *Times*, May 15, 1943, scrapbook 12, Records of the Liberal Party, NYPL.

³² “Campaign Notes for ALP Primaries,” Dubinsky Correspondence; “A Message to the Enrolled Voters of the American Labor Party, An Opportunity and a Duty,” b.140, f.1c, Dubinsky Correspondence; “300 Trade Union Officers Back ALP Progressive Group,” b.140, f.1d; Dear ALP Voter, b.140, f.1b, Dubinsky Correspondence; “200 Union Heads Hit Dubinsky–ALP Disruption” and “200 Unionists Blast Dubinsky–ALP Policy,” *Daily Worker*, July 23, 1943, clipping, b.140, f.1d, Dubinsky Correspondence; “The Real Issues in the ALP Primary,” *Daily Worker*, July 15, 1943; *United Labor News*, b. 145, f.4b, Dubinsky Correspondence.

made a primary fight of our support of world democracy, which was then the United Nations' first front. At that time they called President Roosevelt and our party leaders Wall Street imperialists and war mongers." Rose pointed out the inconsistency of the left's antifascism: "Mr. Vito Marcantonio was the only Congressman who voted against every national defense measure, against lend-lease, against selective service and against national defense appropriations bills," Rose reminded voters. "The Russian people may well be thankful that there was only one Marcantonio in our Congress." Similarly the ILGWU's *Justice* averred:

The same Merrills, Quills, Currans, Connollys, Flaxers and others of their ilk – all pillars of the Communist-led ALP splinter in New York – who in October, 1940, were declaring that "Roosevelt has no right to expect the support of the laboring millions whom he has consistently betrayed:" who were lauding John L. Lewis to the skies for his "courage of a lion" because he had savagely attacked the President and endorsed Wendell Willkie . . . these selfsame Communist bedfellows are today parading up and down the sidewalks of New York shouting "war unity" and spewing venom at their erstwhile comrades-in-hate against the President, the Administration and the New Deal.³³

In the end, however, the left in alliance with Hillman emerged victorious from the August 1943 elections for county committees and the March 1944 election for the state committee. In August 1943 they managed to seize control of the Brooklyn organization, though consolidation of that control took several more tumultuous meetings and court intervention.³⁴ But if the August primaries were a setback for the right, the March 1944 elections were an unmitigated disaster. The coalition of the Communist Party and Hillman's Amalgamated Clothing Workers was a powerful one – Rose estimated that some twenty thousand Communists were enrolled ALP voters, and the Amalgamated was stronger upstate

³³ "A.L.P. 'Left Wing' Assailed by Rose," *Times*, May 16, 1943, b.145, f.4b, Dubinsky Correspondence; "Editorial Notes: A Challenge to Working America," *Justice*, July 1, 1943, b.140, f.1d, Dubinsky Correspondence.

³⁴ Waltzer, "American Labor Party," pp. 286–287; "Labor Party Race for Control Close in Primary Here," *Times*, August 11, 1943, b.140, f.1d, Dubinsky Correspondence; "ALP Control in City Rests on Brooklyn," *Times*, August 12, 1943, b.150, f.1d, Dubinsky Correspondence; Robert Spivack, "Right Wing Leaders Win ALP Control in Brooklyn," *Post*, August 31, 1943, b.140, f.1d, Dubinsky Correspondence; "ALP 'Right' Is Victor by Its Own Count," *Times*, August 31, 1943, b.140, f.1d, Dubinsky Correspondence; Arnold Blechman, "ALP Right-Wingers Steam-Roll 'Victory,'" *PM*, August 31, 1943; "ALP's New Convention in Brooklyn Stalled for Hours in Admittance Snarl," *PM*, October 12, 1943; "ALP Wings Fly In and Out, with Left Landing Safely," *PM*, October 21, 1943.

than the ILGWU. The left–Hillman coalition won fifty-one thousand votes to thirty-seven thousand and captured 620 of the 750 seats on the state committee. The left even took the Bronx, the right’s last bastion in the city. The right immediately announced a split. The *Daily Worker* exulted that “Dubinsky’s blood pressure rose as the counts came in,” and predicted that rank-and-file voters would not follow the Social Democrats out of the ALP. Hillman regretted the split. But Dubinsky angrily retorted, “Mr. Hillman can act as a front for the Communists; I never did and never will.”³⁵ Tellingly the right’s prediction that Hillman would lose interest in the ALP, leaving it in the hands of the CPUSA and its close allies, proved essentially accurate, though it was only borne out after Hillman’s untimely death when his Amalgamated Clothing Workers quit the party in 1946. When the Amalgamated left the ALP, the party was left under the undisputed control of the Communist Party and such close fellow travelers as Vito Marcantonio.

Hillman’s alliance with the Communists in the ALP left, and their victory in the 1943 and 1944 primaries show that during the Second World War the Communists retained considerable prestige and a sizable following in New York. But the vituperative polemics that issued from both sides demonstrated that there was a considerable chasm opening up between the pro-Soviet and democratic lefts. True, the invectives flew both ways. The difference was that the right’s charges that the Communists were subservient to Stalin and the Soviet Union were essentially true. What the left regarded as “red baiting” was amply borne out as fact by the twists and turns in the party line around the Hitler–Stalin Pact. Moreover for those paying attention, especially those reading the Yiddish press, the thinness of the CPUSA’s Popular Front liberalism was revealed by its fervent defense of the murder of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter. On the other hand, the left’s brown-baiting of the right – accusations that the likes of Dubinsky were in league with Hitler, Goebbels, Coughlin, and Wall Street; that they were for imperialist war between August 1939 and

³⁵ “ALP Rightists Set to Back 4th Term,” *Times*, July 23, 1943, clipping, b.140.f.1d, Dubinsky Correspondence; Morris Makin to David Gingold, February 14, 1944, b.143, f.3c, Dubinsky Correspondence; “Voters Shun ALP Old Guard,” *Daily Worker*, April 4, 1944; untitled, *Daily Worker*, April 9, 1944, clipping, scrapbook 15, Records of Liberal Party, NYPL; Freda Kirchway, “American Labor Pains,” *Nation*, April 8, 1944; “A Word to both Wings,” *New Republic*, April 17, 1944; untitled, *Nation*, April 15, 1944; Victor Riesel, “Labor News and Comment,” *Post*, April 11, 1944, clipping, scrapbook 15, Records of Liberal Party, NYPL; Robert Parmet, *The King of Seventh Avenue*, p. 198; “ALP Leaders Meet Saturday,” *PM*, April 5, 1944.

June 1941, and for undermining the people's war thereafter; that Erlich and Alter were Nazi spies; and (after June 1941) that the rightists were inconsistent friends of FDR – all that was simply not true. To the premature anti-Stalinists of the SDF, the ILGWU, and the *Forverts*, none of this was a surprise. But the events of the war years reinforced their anti-Communism and helped put it at the center of their political identity. As the Cold War heated up, they found more allies among mainstream liberals, while the Communists and their close fellow travelers found themselves more and more isolated, unable to rebuild the bridges they had worked so hard to pull down.

Jews and the Left at the New School

Judith Friedlander

In his article for this volume Michael Walzer challenges the widely held assumption that Jews inherited a cultural affinity for leftist politics through the teachings of traditional Judaism.* He persuasively demonstrates the weakness of the assertion while acknowledging its enduring popularity among Jews who identify with progressive causes – he embraced the idea himself until very recently; so did I. We have all heard variations on the theme, usually from people who describe themselves as “cultural” Jews, as opposed to religious Jews, but also from those who have tried to change traditional Judaism in ways that would accommodate their political views on, for example, the rights of women.

We also hear people making similar remarks about the presence of a relatively large number of Jews in progressive academic institutions, such as the New School for Social Research. Founded in the name of academic freedom, only two years after the Russian Revolution, the New School has had a reputation since 1919 of being a haven for leftist intellectuals and artists. After it created the University in Exile in 1933, it earned a reputation as a haven for Jewish leftists in particular.

As we shall see, the story is a good deal more complicated. Although the New School has heroically championed progressive causes since 1919, it has never embraced a leftist agenda. On the contrary, it openly opposed

* This article is based on research conducted for my forthcoming book on the history of the New School for Social Research (Columbia University Press). I have already published some of the material found here in “The Place of Philosophy at the New School for Social Research,” *The Reception of Husserlian Phenomenology in North America*, ed. Michela Beatrice Ferri, Carlo Ierna (Springer, 2017).

the Communist Party at a time when taking a stand against the Soviet Union branded you a reactionary among many in leftist circles. What is more, despite having founded the University in Exile that welcomed Jewish refugees from Nazi-occupied Europe, it has never seen itself as a Jewish institution. Jews may have taught at the New School in significant numbers when other universities in the country were excluding them, but the Jews at the New School did not identify themselves as Jewish intellectuals. With very few exceptions they saw little connection between their academic and political interests and whatever ancestral ties they might still have had to traditional Judaism.¹

Before turning to the history of the New School, let me give a specific example of how people have seen – and continue to see – a logical connection between the teachings of traditional Judaism and the choices Jews have made to act politically in the name of progressive causes. The anecdote is admittedly extreme, even a bit clumsy, but it underlines the problem with this kind of thinking in ways a more subtle illustration might obscure:

In the fall of 2011, Letty Cottin Pogrebin, a founder of *Ms.* magazine and a feminist reformer of Jewish traditions, gave an interview on a blog of the *Jewish Daily Forward*, owned by the organization that also owns the *Forverts*, a venerable Yiddish newspaper. The *Forverts* was long edited by Abraham Cahan, a socialist and a Jew who immigrated to New York from tsarist Russia in the late 1800s. Pogrebin was publicizing an upcoming conference that she was organizing with another feminist of Jewish origin, to pay tribute to Anita Hill, a heroine of the women's movement. Twenty years earlier Anita Hill had accused Clarence Thomas on television before millions of Americans of having sexually harassed her. She testified during his Senate confirmation hearings as he was about to be appointed the next justice of the United States Supreme Court. "Speaking truth to power," Hill described in graphic detail the ways Thomas had humiliated her when she worked for him at the Department of Education and the Equal Opportunity Commission. Both Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas are black.

Given the focus of the upcoming event, the *Forward's* journalist asked Pogrebin to comment on whether it was "relevant" that she and the other organizer were Jewish. "Very relevant," she replied. "Anybody who goes

¹ There are, of course significant exceptions to this rule, among them Horace Kallen, Hannah Arendt, Hans Jonas, and, more recently, Ira Katznelson and Agnes Heller.

to a [Passover] seder is reminded of our purpose as a people. That purpose is to imitate God and intervene in history to alleviate injustice.”²

As Michael Walzer argues in *In God's Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible*, “there is no political theory in the Bible. Political theory is a Greek invention.” In fact, he goes on:

There is a strong anti-political tendency in the biblical texts, which follows from the idea that God is a “man of war” (Exodus 15:3) and a supreme king – so what is there for humans to do? Antipolitics makes its first appearance in the exodus story, which describes a liberation with no acknowledged and autonomous human agents, and it is reiterated, centuries later, in the prophetic writings.³

So if Jews do not learn to lean left from the teachings of the Torah, what motivates them? Political pragmatism, Walzer suggests, when, during specific historic periods, the left has taken a more vigorous stand against antisemitism than the right. There is of course a long tradition of antisemitism on the left as well, a resounding theme in several articles in this book, but many Jews in Europe embraced the left at the turn of the nineteenth century, during the final years of the tsarist empire, for understandable political reasons that had little to do with biblical teachings and go well beyond what I wish to discuss here. Suffice it to say that we are living today in a very different historical period, one in which we are more likely to hear people on the right quoting passages from the Torah than people on the left – and just as problematically – to justify the occupation by Israeli settlers of territories belonging to the Palestinian Authority.

The protracted crisis in the Middle East raises very serious questions about the categories themselves. It is not at all clear what we mean when we talk about the right and the left; or, for that matter, when we talk about the Jews. And this has been true for decades.

In my brief historical sketch of the New School I trace much of the confusion about the university's political reputation to accusations made early on, during its first forty years, by government agents and right-wing organizations. Then in the late 1960s and 1970s the left took over. During those years a small group of faculty, who identified with the New Left, tried to turn the New School into the leftist institution that the right had long claimed that it was. Today we still hear people describe

² Debra Nussbaum Cohen, “Jewish Women Organize Conference on Anita Hill,” *Jewish Daily Forward*, blog, September 2, 2011: <http://blogs.forward.com/sisterhood-blog/142259/jewish-women-organizeconference>.

³ Michael Walzer, *In God's Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 2013), pp. xii–xiii.

the university as a center of radical political thought. And we still find activists on the faculty working to see that the dream comes true.

The main leader of the radical faction during the late 1960s and 1970s was Stanley Diamond, a man of Jewish origin, a fact that gave him the authority – or so he seemed to believe – to criticize the politics of his Jewish émigré colleagues without having to worry about being accused of antisemitism. In the process he also laid claim to the New School's legacy and tried to take it in a new direction. Ethnic ties, however, had little relation to the issues at hand. This was not a fight among Jews, but between American-born leftists with no experience living in a totalitarian state and German-born social democrats, whose experiences forced them to flee Nazi-occupied Europe.

The New School offers an interesting case history in ideological confusion. I will begin with the oft-told story of the early years at the New School, complicating the most popular version with competing narratives, composed over the years, by critics and enthusiasts alike.

THE EARLY YEARS

The New School for Social Research was founded by a group of well-known journalists and scholars in 1919 in the name of academic freedom and as an act of protest against Nicholas Murray Butler, the president of Columbia University, who had recently fired two members of his faculty for expressing pacifist views during the First World War, while American soldiers were fighting overseas. The original faculty of the New School included the historians Charles Beard and James Harvey Robinson, the philosophers John Dewey and Horace Kallen, and the economists Alvin Johnson, Wesley Clark Mitchell, and Thorstein Veblen. Among the founders as well was Herbert Croly, the editor in chief of the *New Republic*, where Alvin Johnson was also an editor. Within a few years most of the original founders had abandoned the New School, leaving Alvin Johnson essentially alone to build an institution that still owes its reputation today to his extraordinary, if financially precarious, achievement. Johnson succeeded in honoring the New School's commitment to academic freedom and open intellectual inquiry while creating a new and ambitious experiment in adult education, what he liked to call "the continuing education of the educated."

Although Johnson spoke eloquently during the early years about the importance of defending academic freedom, he also made it abundantly clear that neither he nor the institution he directed had any sympathy for

Marxism or the Soviet Union. Still the New School faithfully offered courses on Marxist philosophy and economics when few other institutions were doing so.⁴ Some of those courses were taught by Jews and occasionally by Communists of Jewish origin, at a time when Jewish professors were rarely found on American campuses, no matter what their political persuasion. Moissaye Olgin, for example, taught at the New School from 1919 until he died in 1939. Olgin was a member of the National Committee of the American Communist Party and a translator of works by Lenin. He was also the editor of the Communist Yiddish daily *Frayhayt* and of a party monthly, *Der hamer*.

By the early 1920s the New School was attracting enthusiastic crowds of educated professionals who were eager to learn about exciting new fields such as modern art, psychoanalysis, and anthropology. These innovative programs also attracted the attention of government agents who were scouring universities in search of subversives. After visiting a few classes, the agents added the New School to their list of dangerous radical institutions. The philosopher Horace Kallen, who had little sympathy for Communism, enjoyed describing the time when undercover agents attended the course he was teaching in 1920 on “the evolution of the international mind.”

The New School’s bulletin described the class as “A Survey of the psychological and social factors in the rise, development and subsidence of international ways of thinking and behaving: The relation of the state to society.”⁵ The FBI flagged the New School again in the 1930s when the university opened its doors to refugee scholars.

The dramatic story of the New School’s University in Exile began three months after Hitler became chancellor of Germany. On April 24, 1933, Alvin Johnson wrote to Edwin R. A. Seligman, professor of political economy at Columbia University, to ask him to reach out to people he knew who might be willing to give money to support an urgent if seemingly impossible mission to rescue European scholars from “the claws of fascism.” At the time Seligman and Johnson were editing the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, a project they started in 1927 and would complete in 1937. This major undertaking led them to collaborate

⁴ *The New School for Social Research, Announcement of Courses of Study October 1919–May 1920.*

⁵ *Constitution of the Graduate Faculty of Political and Social Science, 1935*, New School Archives (NSA).

closely with leading scholars in Europe, a significant number of whom lived in Germany and were directly threatened by Hitler's rise to power, for political and "racial" reasons. Johnson proposed creating a University in Exile at the New School and inviting fifteen endangered scholars to launch the effort with the full expectation of growing the faculty later on. With the help of the staff of the *Encyclopedia*, Johnson knew the New School could "select as brilliant a group as were ever brought together in any institution," but he had no time to lose: "The world is quick to forgive invasions of academic liberty by a forceful government. It long ago forgave Mussolini. It will never forgive Hitler so long as we have a working University in Exile."⁶

Thanks to Seligman's connections to Jewish philanthropists, in particular to the generosity of a businessman by the name of Hiram Halle, Johnson raised enough money within a few weeks to offer modest salaries to fifteen scholars at the New School for two years. On October 3, 1933 the *New York Times* published an article about the opening of the University in Exile and, on the next day, printed a photograph of Johnson, together with nine refugee scholars, eight men and one woman, seven of whom were Jews, at least by the standards of the Nuremberg Laws that rejected the baptismal certificates of Christians whose grandparents had been born Jewish. Two of the refugees in the photo were members of families that had abandoned Judaism; a third, whose mother had married a non-Jew, was raised a Christian; and a fourth converted to Christianity after settling in the United States. As for the three other "Jews" they had had little if any connection to the German Jewish community, religious or secular. Finally, yet another member of this first group of refugees was married to a woman identified as a Jew by the Nuremberg Laws. Most of the refugees who followed had similar histories.

Johnson's refugee scholars were all social scientists, economists like him for the most part, some of whom went on to work in the Roosevelt administration on economic and political matters. Several had previously held positions in the Weimar government. Most of them belonged to Germany's Social Democratic Party and were vehemently opposed both to fascism and to communism. But in the eyes of the right the University in Exile confirmed their worst fears about the political leanings of the New School.

⁶ Alvin Johnson to Edwin R. A. Seligman, April 24, 1933, NSA.

The FBI had been keeping a file on Alvin Johnson and the New School since the early 1920s. Now, with the founding of the University in Exile, the Bureau was growing more suspicious, as were others. Rumor had it that the New School was serving as a front organization, and many complained, including members of the Board of Trustees, that it was too Jewish. Even though the New School mounted courses occasionally on Marxism, Alvin Johnson, I repeat, was fiercely anti-Communist, and so was the university he ran, some might even say shockingly so for a progressive institution that prided itself on defending academic freedom. What is more, the New School was not then, nor has it ever been, particularly interested in Jewish affairs, a fact Johnson took great pains to explain to the New School's Board of Trustees. Although Johnson vigorously opposed antisemitism and succeeded heroically in saving the lives of hundreds of Jews almost single-handedly, he still bent to pressure and wrote the following in his Report to the Board of Trustees in February 1935, by which time the University in Exile, now called the Graduate Faculty of Political and Social Science, had eighteen full-time professors. Johnson called this section of his report "Racial and Political Constitution of the Faculty":

There is a prevalent conception that the German professors expelled from their chairs were all either "Marxians" or Jews. This conception is not valid so far as the Graduate Faculty is concerned. In selecting scholars for the faculty no attention was given to such irrelevant matters as race and religion, but in the outcome it was found that rather more than one-third had no Jewish blood at all and of the others several could be classed as non-Aryan only by virtue of the "grandparent clause."

The actual grounds for dismissal were in only a small minority of cases the Aryan clause in the law. The principal ground was "political unreliability," that is failure to accept the Nazi political discipline and philosophy. All the members of the faculty had supported the democratic government under the Weimar constitution; some of them had participated in it, and were therefore unacceptable to the present government.

No member of the Graduate Faculty is a Marxist as the term is understood in America. A number of them were supporters of the Social-Democratic party, whose position was virtually that of the present day American progressive, whether Democratic or Republican.⁷

Alvin Johnson was undeniably a great friend of the Jewish people, frequently honored, as he should have been, during and after the Second

⁷ Alvin Johnson, "Report to the Trustees of The Graduate Faculty of Political and Social Sciences in the New School for Social Research," February 1935, NSA, pp. 8-9.

World War by many Jewish organizations. Within only a few months after Hitler rose to power, he had created the University in Exile, responding immediately to the dangers that lay ahead, long before others had grasped the gravity of the situation. By 1945 he had succeeded in saving the lives of nearly two hundred European intellectuals and artists together with their families. And most of these refugees were of Jewish origin or married to Jews. But he still felt obligated to write what he did in 1935 and to stress what in fact was the case: the Jews he had rescued had tenuous ties to Judaism and the European Jewish communities that were being destroyed. The racial laws of Nazi Germany, not their family practices or religious affiliations, identified them as Jews. Once classified as Jews, however, these refugees did not try to hide their identity. They assumed it courageously, becoming what Sartre famously called “authentic Jews” and Hannah Arendt, quoting Bernard Lazare, “pariahs” – with all the problematic connotations associated with these terms.⁸

Fiercely anti-Communist, the émigré faculty added a clause to the Charter of the Graduate Faculty in 1935 that prohibited hiring members of the Communist Party.⁹ As Alvin Johnson noted nearly twenty years later, the New School had “no use for the Communists and never has had,” adding proudly – and this was during the McCarthy period – that the New School was “the first educational institution in America to declare that no person following a party line can hold a place on its Faculty.”¹⁰ Still in the eyes of the right the New School had too many leftists and foreigners on its faculty – another way of saying, in the language of the times, that it had too many Jews. The FBI reported in 1943 that it had a “voluminous” file on the New School and Alvin Johnson:

Numerous reports have been received by the Bureau from reliable informants indicating a close collaboration between the New School for Social Research and

⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, trans. George J. Becker, preface Michael Walzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1995); Hannah Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*, ed. Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), part II, “The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition.”

⁹ *Charter of the Graduate Faculty of Political and Social Science*, section 1 (2): “No member of the Faculty can be a member of any political party or group which asserts the right to dictate in matters of science or scientific opinion.”

¹⁰ Alvin Johnson in letter to August Hecksher, December 29, 1954, NSA, defending his decision in the 1930s – and this is critical – to hire Hanns Eisler. Eisler left the United States during the McCarthy period and settled in East Germany, after having been summoned before the Committee on Un-American Activities.

various prominent Communists and individuals known to be sympathetic with and advocates of Marxian Ideology.¹¹

And the FBI had good reason to be suspicious. Despite declarations to the contrary Johnson offered refuge now and again to individuals who were, or had been, members of the Communist Party, some of whom were Jews. They may never have received an invitation to join the University in Exile, but they were welcomed at the New School in the Division of Continuing Education. For example, Erwin Piscator, who created the Actor's Studio and Dramatic Workshop at the New School, and the composer Hanns Eisler. Johnson did this in good faith, fully believing that he knew how to distinguish between trustworthy people who may have had an affiliation with the Communist Party and those who were dangerous to the security of the United States. He had, after all, served on the Enemy Alien Hearing Board, as he noted ostentatiously in 1946 in a letter he wrote to the State Department on behalf of Piscator, supporting his colleague's application for citizenship.¹² The State Department rejected the dramaturge all the same, and Piscator, feeling vulnerable, left the United States in the early 1950s to avoid appearing before the House Un-American Activities Committee.

Johnson made up his own rules about who was or was not a Communist. His refugee colleagues were less flexible. In 1953, for example, after Johnson had retired and his good friend Hans Simons was president, this émigré scholar, who had joined the University in Exile in 1935, bowed to political pressure from the Board of Trustees. At the height of the McCarthy period Simons agreed to place a curtain before a panel of Orozco's mural, which appeared on the walls of the New School's cafeteria, because it included portraits of Lenin and Stalin. Called "Imperialism and Slavery," the mural had been painted in 1931 by the Mexican artist with the enthusiastic endorsement of Alvin Johnson. The decision twenty-two years later to hide the panel had the full support of the Graduate Faculty, but not of Alvin Johnson. The old man was livid, not because he had softened on Soviet Communism, but because he believed in academic and artistic freedom – particularly for non-Communists, and Orozco, he fumed, had never joined the Party.¹³

¹¹ Federal Bureau of Investigation, February 11, 1943: http://homepages.stmartin.edu/fac_dprice/foia.docs/soc1.gif.

¹² Alvin Johnson to U.S. State Department, on behalf of the application for citizenship of Erwin Piscator, August 19, 1946, Alvin Johnson papers, Yale University Library (YA), Box 5.

¹³ Alvin Johnson to Edith Brie, nd, YA box 1, draft of letter to New School trustee Edith Brie, written, probably, in 1952.

Johnson's position on Communism was not very different from that of other anti-Stalinist socialists of the time, for example, Irving Howe and the other members of the editorial board of *Dissent*. When they published the first issue of their new magazine in 1954, the editors invited readers of varying political stripes to submit manuscripts, promising to print articles that dissented from *Dissent*. Describing themselves as "radicals," they summarized the magazine's editorial policy as follows, without the slightest hint of irony: "Our magazine will be open to a wide arc of opinion, excluding only Stalinists and totalitarian fellow-travelers on the one hand, and those former radicals who have signed their peace with society on the other."¹⁴ In that same first issue Irving Howe attacked the New School for covering the Orozco mural.

With the embarrassing exception of the Orozco mural scandal, the New School protected the rights of free expression during the McCarthy period more boldly than the vast majority of academic institutions in the United States, a fact Ellen Strecker confirms in *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities*. In her comprehensive study of those years Strecker mentions the New School twice, both times to praise it for having offered teaching opportunities to blacklisted professors.¹⁵ These lecturers, however, were not invited to give courses at the Graduate Faculty (GF), but in Continuing Education.

THE RADICAL 1960S AND 1970S

As the New School emerged from the McCarthy period, the leadership of the university increased its efforts to turn the New School into a more conventional academic institution, in part by hiring a new generation of American-trained social scientists to teach at the GF. Rising stars among the recently appointed Americans were Edward Nell, professor of economics, and Stanley Diamond, professor of anthropology and poet. Both Diamond and Nell wanted to take the GF in exciting new directions, in keeping with the intellectual and political aspirations of the New Left. The student movement was gaining momentum at the time, providing them with the backing they needed to force the university to change. As they tried to build a more radical future for the GF, they also

¹⁴ The Editors, "A Word to Our Readers," *Dissent* (Winter 1954), pp. 3-4.

¹⁵ Ellen Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 288, 289.

reinterpreted the place the New School had occupied in the history of higher education in this country.

Stanley Diamond was the ringleader. He was born in 1922 into an intellectual middle-class Jewish family with strong ties to New York City's Yiddish culture. One of his grandfathers had been in the Yiddish theater on the Lower East Side. Diamond, however, had little sympathy for Jewish traditions, either secular or religious. When he wrote occasionally on Jewish subjects, his tone was dismissive, even bitter. In his introduction to a special issue on Jews in his journal *Dialectical Anthropology* he observed the following:

Hence the incessant and curious question – what is a Jew? Who am I? The answer: A people without a culture (a text is not a culture), without a society, haunted by archaic references, trying to live in abstraction, and having been close to extinction on several occasions, nevertheless maintaining an indomitable passion for survival.¹⁶

By the late 1960s the New School enjoyed a reputation as a hotbed of radical activity, in the eyes not only of the FBI but of left-leaning academics as well. The GF in particular had become a magnet for veterans of 1968, politically engaged students and faculty who opposed the Vietnam War and were seeking new ways to understand politics and society. When, on April 30, 1970, American troops invaded Cambodia, several hundred students occupied the lobby of the GF building, and a smaller group remained there for three weeks. In the early days of the strike the faculty supported the students. When the Ohio National Guard opened fire on students at Kent State University, faculty at the New School in significant numbers joined the mass demonstrations. But by the end of the second week only a handful of faculty members still sympathized with the occupation. Diamond and Nell were among them. At the end of the third week the president of the New School called in the police and forced the students to leave over the vigorous opposition of many members of the faculty, including those who no longer supported the occupation. Diamond and Nell expressed their outrage by publishing a lengthy article about the strike in the *New York Review of Books*.¹⁷

¹⁶ Stanley Diamond, "The State of Being Jewish," *Dialectical Anthropology*, VIII, 1 and 2 (October, 1983). Quoted in Jonathan Boyarin, "Trickster's Children: Paul Radin, Stanley Diamond and Filiation in Anthropology: A Lecture at the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill, Anthropology Colloquium, May 15, 2009," <http://iijis.columbia.edu/~columbia/files/Boyarin%20Paper.pdf>

¹⁷ Stanley Diamond and Ed Nell, "A Special Supplement: The Old School at The New School," *New York Review of Books* (June 18, 1970), pp. 38–43.

Diamond predictably was the lead author. He used the article as a manifesto in which he outlined the reasons why it was time to end the intellectual hegemony of the émigré scholars at the Graduate Faculty and turn the university into a center of New Left scholarship and political activism. At the time of the student occupation in 1970 there were only three émigré scholars left on the full-time faculty, all of them in philosophy, and all of them hired after the Second World War. They were Hannah Arendt, Hans Jonas, and Aron Gurwitsch.

Diamond and Nell described the student protest in their article as the latest example of why it was time to rethink the Graduate Faculty's academic mission. Although they hoped to preserve the GF's commitment to European intellectual traditions, they wanted to focus on a different set of thinkers whose ideas, they believed, spoke more directly to the students and to the issues of the time: Down with Weber, up with Marx. "Conceived in one crisis" the New School's legendary University in Exile would now be "reconceived in another."

Over the next few years Diamond and Nell succeeded in advancing their agenda. They built dynamic new programs in anthropology and economics that gave the GF the reputation for being a center of Marxist analysis. In the process Diamond and Nell not only reinvented the New School in the present, they also contributed to rewriting the past, something they accomplished ironically with the help of some of their political enemies on the faculty.

In 1965, thanks to a generous gift from the Volkswagen Foundation, the West German government created a chair at the New School for visiting distinguished German professors. The chair was named after Theodor Heuss, the first president of postwar West Germany. With the help of the remaining émigré professors the New School recruited Jürgen Habermas as one of the first Heuss philosophers. By 1965 Habermas was already a big name among postwar German philosophers, recognized internationally for having renewed the legacy of the Frankfurt School and reintroduced the work of its leading figures, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, to the United States. Another rising star of this new generation in Germany was Albrecht Wellmer, who also went to the New School and eventually accepted a full-time position in the Department of Philosophy.

Soon the New School became known as the place to go to study Marxist Critical Theory in the tradition of the old Frankfurt School and its Institute of Social Research, leading many to assume that Horkheimer and Adorno had joined the New School in the 1930s together with other

members of their group. In fact they went to Columbia instead, as the (paying) guests of the university's president Nicholas Murray Butler, the same man whose decision to fire pacifists on his faculty during the First World War led to the creation of the New School in the first place.

The exiled community in New York was small. Many of them had already known one another in Europe. And a number of those who joined the University in Exile had little sympathy for those affiliated with the Institute of Social Research. The feeling was mutual. Bitter rivalries erupted, despite efforts on the part of Max Horkheimer and the New School economist Adolph Lowe to maintain cordial relations between the two groups.¹⁸

Returning to the controversy in 1970, Diamond and Nell argued in the *New York Review of Books* that the émigré faculty at the Graduate Faculty could not relate to American students, because they had been "traumatized" by the Second World War and, by implication, antisemitism. But the authors did not dwell on antisemitism per se. They raised the matter of trauma for other reasons. The war, they explained, had distorted the way these émigrés presented the Western intellectual tradition to American students. It had turned them away from politics and led them to teach the European philosophical tradition as if it had always been detached from worldly concerns. According to Diamond and Nell:

[The émigrés] . . . share a Platonic mystique of academic scholarship, as opposed to Socratic engagement. The political views are formally liberal and somewhat abstractly humane. They could be defined as Social Democrats, in the European sense. They value the symbols of status highly, are formal in their public attitudes toward each other and toward students, whom they regard as epigones or apprentices: indeed, one has the impression that the ideal student would be a kind of soldier of learning, ascetic, disciplined and unresponsive to irrelevant desires.

In contrast, they claimed, the younger generation of faculty at the New School, who had been hired in the 1960s, had a very different approach:

¹⁸ Cf. Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories and Political Significance*, trans. Michael Robertson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), p. 254; Thomas Wheatland, *The Frankfurt School in Exile* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. 47; and Claus-Dieter Krohn, *Intellectuals in Exile: Refugee Scholars and the New School for Social Research*, trans. Rita Kimber and Robert Kimber, foreword Arthur J. Vidich (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), pp. 189–197. Krohn complicates the picture by adding that Max Horkheimer and Adolph Lowe were friends, but relations between the émigrés at the New School and at the exiled Institute of Social Research were strained.

In the spirit of the times, a number of technically specialized scholars have been recruited, and perhaps more significantly, “internal *émigrés*” have been attracted to the faculty. This latter group tends to be politically radical, egalitarian, disenchanting with the aridity of academic practice, and involved in efforts to revitalize their disciplines and redefine their intellectual roles amid the inescapable crises of the times. If the older generation represents exile, these younger exiles represent engagement. Each in the name of freedom opposes the other. The old guard looks back to its political event; the younger is trying to establish one. Each lays claim to the birthright of the institution.

Diamond and Nell did their best to discredit the old guard, but students kept going to the New School to study with Hannah Arendt, Hans Jonas, and Aron Gurwitsch, together with the German Critical Theorists whom the “old guard” had invited to the New School. Students of the 1968 generation also attended to study critical anthropology with Stanley Diamond and Marxist political economy with David Gordon and Anwar Shaikh, brilliant young Marxist economists whom Nell had hired. Students attended to study as well with older luminaries in the Department of Economics such as Robert Heilbroner and the *émigré* economist Adolph Lowe, who had retired but who still taught an occasional course. Heilbroner and Lowe made sure that the social democratic wing of the department remained strong.

By the late 1970s, Anthropology and Economics were booming, attracting students in search of radical alternatives to the social sciences, but Philosophy, Political Science, and Sociology were in serious trouble. The three departments had all received negative reviews from New York State’s Department of Education and temporarily lost the authority to award Ph.D.s. Hans Jonas had retired by then and refused to have anything more to do with the New School, and Hannah Arendt and Aron Gurwitsch were dead. Enrollments had predictably plummeted and many worried that the old University in Exile would be forced to close. Despite dire predictions, widely circulated in the media, including in the *New York Times*,¹⁹ the Board of Trustees rallied to save the GF. In the early 1980s they appointed a new president, Jonathan Fanton, who in turn appointed a new dean, the political scientist Ira Katznelson. Together they rebuilt the Graduate Faculty in the spirit of the founders of the old University in Exile and the social democratic traditions they represented.

¹⁹ “New School for Social Research May Lose Three Doctoral Programs” (no byline), *New York Times*, May 7, 1978.

THE REBUILDING

In the early years of the Fanton administration the Soviet Union was visibly crumbling and dissident movements were gaining momentum across East and Central Europe. The intellectuals working with these “velvet revolutions” had played leading roles as well in the student movements of 1968, which Tony Judt described as “cataclysmic events unraveling in [countries like] Poland and Czechoslovakia.” As American intellectuals looked back on 1968 during the early 1980s, they remembered those years as the time when students and radical faculty declared their intellectual and political independence from mainstream academic thought and turned to Marxism and other modes of inquiry previously rejected on American campuses. When their counterparts in East and Central Europe looked back, they remembered a time when student radicals declared their independence as well, but in their case from “the very Communist idea itself.” And they were still defiantly declaring their independence against government authorities in the early 1980s. With the benefit of hindsight Tony Judt blamed himself and his friends in London, Paris, and New York for not having paid more attention in 1968 to what was happening in Warsaw and Prague:

For all our grandstanding theories of history, then, we failed to notice one of its seminal turning points. It was in Prague and Warsaw, in those summer months of 1968, that Marxism ran itself into the ground. It was the student rebels of Central Europe who went on to undermine, discredit and overthrow not just a couple of dilapidated Communist regimes but the very Communist idea itself. Had we cared a little more about the fate of ideas we tossed around so glibly, we might have paid greater attention to the actions and opinions of those who had been brought up in their shadow.²⁰

Colleagues at the New School were paying attention. Soon after Jonathan Fanton arrived, two sociologists, Andrew Arato and Jeffrey Goldfarb, approached the new president with a bold proposal: The Graduate Faculty should reaffirm its commitment to the University in Exile by defending the rights of intellectuals in East and Central Europe. As specialists of present-day Hungary and Poland, Arato and Goldfarb had been following the political situation in the region very closely and personally knew key players in the opposition. Fanton and Katznelson responded quickly and the New School became a leader once again

²⁰ Tony Judt, “Three More Memoirs,” *New York Review of Books* (February 25, 2010), p. 19. Reprinted in Tony Judt, *Memory Chalet* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010).

among American universities in an international campaign to defend the rights of persecuted European intellectuals. Given the ongoing political turmoil at the Graduate Faculty not everyone endorsed this new political campaign, but it happened all the same.

On April 25, 1984, President Fanton awarded an honorary doctorate in absentia to the Polish dissident Adam Michnik, who was a prisoner in Poland at the time. The Nobel Laureate poet Czesław Miłosz represented Michnik at the ceremony. The following day the *New York Times* published the story on the first page of the newspaper.²¹

Political engagement led to intellectual engagement. After receiving his honorary degree, Michnik asked the New School to help dissidents in Poland and Hungary acquire books long banned by their governments. First on the list were works by Hannah Arendt on totalitarianism, democracy, and revolution. New School colleagues smuggled the books into the two countries. Groups then met to discuss them in clandestine “Democracy Seminars.”

After 1989 the Democracy Seminars emerged from hiding and the real work began to rebuild academic institutions throughout the region. Jonathan Fanton appointed the Polish sociologist Elzbieta Matynia to work with him, Ira Katznelson, and other members of the faculty to create ongoing projects in the region. Matynia herself had participated in the Solidarity movement, before taking refuge at the Graduate Faculty in the early 1980s, after martial law was declared in her country. Within a couple of years the New School had built a strong network of academics, jurists, and grassroots activists across Eastern Europe, who were deeply engaged in creating new democratic institutions in eleven countries that had previously been tied politically to the Soviet Union. Then after 1994 the seminars expanded further, to include faculty and students from South Africa and other parts of the world where people were taking part in “transitions to democracy.”

In addition to the Democracy Seminars, Arien Mack, editor of the Graduate Faculty’s journal *Social Research*, created the Journal Donation Project. With the support of major foundations and the cooperation of editors of English-language academic journals the project provided subscriptions free of charge for a number of years to university libraries to help them rebuild their collections, first in East and Central Europe, then in South Africa and Nigeria, now in many

²¹ *New York Times*, April 26, 1984.

other parts of the world. Alvin Johnson created *Social Research* in 1934 to give the New School's refugees a scholarly journal in which to publish their work.

More often than not the dissident intellectuals from Poland and Hungary with whom the New School collaborated were the children of Communists whose families were of Jewish origin. Their parents were the kind of "assimilated Jews" Milosz knew in Wilno (now Vilnius) before the Second World War, who "didn't consider themselves Jewish, either religiously or culturally."²² Coming of age in the 1960s, this new generation of dissidents began organizing on university campuses the way their counterparts were doing in the West, but the issues were strikingly different. In March 1968 the Polish government crushed the student movement. Of the hundreds of students swept up by the police, only fifty were detained, all of them the children of assimilated Jews. At their trials the students were given the choice of either emigrating or going to jail. Adam Michnik chose prison. This was not the first time he was incarcerated; nor would it be the last.²³

When dissidents such as Michnik imagined their new life in a democratic Poland, they gave little thought to rebuilding Jewish communities in what was rapidly becoming a devoutly Catholic country.²⁴ In 1996 Ira Katznelson challenged Michnik on his lack of concern for Judaism and Jewish culture in *Liberalism's Crooked Circle*, an eloquent exploration of the weaknesses of the universalistic ideals of liberal democratic thought that Michnik had embraced with enthusiasm. Michnik, however, has remained uninterested in internal Jewish affairs.²⁵ Antisemitism is another matter. In recent years Michnik has begun to speak out more forcefully about the dangers of antisemitism than he did in the past,

²² Czeslaw Milosz, "Poland and the Jews: An Interview with Czeslaw Milosz," *Tikkun*, II, 2 (March–April, 2002), p. 36.

²³ By 1989 Michnik had served six years behind bars. He emerged a hero of the Solidarity movement and earned a place at the famous Round Table negotiations that brought Communist rule to a peaceful end in Poland and initiated the transition to democracy. Since then he has been editor in chief of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, the leading newspaper in Poland, which is also widely read in other countries in East and Central Europe.

²⁴ Konstanty Gebert is an important exception. His father was an American Communist (not Jewish) who moved to Poland soon after the Second World War and married an assimilated Polish Jew. Since 1989 Gebert has been actively trying to build a religious Jewish community in Poland.

²⁵ Ira Katznelson, *Liberalism's Crooked Circle: Letters to Adam Michnik* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

largely in response to the conservative turn within the Polish Catholic Church, an alarming development in an institution that had played such an inspirational and inclusive role during the days of Solidarity. In combating antisemitism, however, Adam Michnik responds as a citizen of Poland, not as a Polish Jew.

CONCLUSION

When Alvin Johnson invited scholars and artists of Jewish origin to give courses at the New School, he did so not because they were Jewish but because he had

established the principle that no consideration of race should stand in the way of selecting the best man available. If this happened to involve a large proportion of Jews, this was no concern of ours. On assuming the Directorship I stipulated that no Trustee would presume to suggest that we had too many Jews on the Faculty.²⁶

In a letter to a wealthy Jewish donor, Leo Heimerdinger, he recalled seeing “colleagues at other colleges and universities selecting, not the best man but the best Gentile. Honest education has the right to the best man, and by the frequent exclusion of the better man weakens its effect and corrupts its ideals.” But by standing up for his principles and rejecting the pressure of antisemites, Johnson lost a lot of money for the New School:

I will tell you my beloved friend Leo, when Jewish friends demand of me: “How much money are you getting out of Gentiles?” If I had played the antisemitic game I would not in my old age be appealing to Jews.²⁷

Alvin Johnson was born and raised in the late 1800s on a farm in the Nebraskan prairie. He prided himself on his midwestern roots and his education in classics at the University of Nebraska. The son of Danish immigrants, he felt a strong attachment to European culture, in particular to the political and philosophical traditions of ancient Greece and Rome, and to the French Enlightenment that led to the creation of modern democratic states. The university he built embraced these universalistic values while it rejected political extremism, racial discrimination, and cultural particularism. The New School has changed a great deal since

²⁶ Alvin Johnson to Leo Heimerdinger, January 1944, NSA.

²⁷ Alvin Johnson to Leo Heimerdinger, December 1952, NSA.

Johnson was president, particularly in recent years, but it still harkens back to the story of its extraordinary founder and the University in Exile. The Old School at the New School is still the best story the New School has to tell. Myths to the contrary notwithstanding, it is not, at least not strictly speaking, a story about Jews and the left.

Deutscher and the Jews

On the Non-Jewish Jew – An Analysis and Personal Reflection

Samuel Farber

Isaac Deutscher's concept of the "non-Jewish Jew" has been adopted by many secular leftist Jewish intellectuals as a badge of identity.¹ Defined by a universal and humanist outlook that is rooted in Jewish thought, his is a construct that draws inspiration from Jewish thinkers such as Baruch Spinoza, Heinrich Heine, Karl Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, Sigmund Freud, and Leon Trotsky, whom he sees as revolutionaries of modern thought who transcended their Jewish background. In what perhaps is the most lucid passage of his provocative essay² Deutscher attributes their exceptional breadth to the fact that as Jews they lived in the boundaries of various civilizations, religions, and national cultures and were born and grew up on the boundaries of various epochs. Their minds matured where the most diverse cultural influences crossed and fertilized each other, and they inhabited the nooks and crannies of their respective nations, living in society but not being part of it. This was, Deutscher avers, what enabled them to lift their gaze above their own community and nation, beyond their times and generations, and to strike mentally into wide new horizons and far into the future (27).

¹ An earlier version of this chapter was published in *New Politics*, XIV, 4 (Winter, 2014), pp. 83–96.

² Isaac Deutscher, "The Non-Jewish Jew," in *The Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays*, Tamara Deutscher, ed. (New York: Hill & Wang and Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 25–41. Subsequent parenthetical page numbers in the text are from this volume. My thanks to Carel Bertram, Jonah Birch, David Finkel, Joel Geier, Charles Post, and especially my wife, Selma Marks, for their critical comments and suggestions. Special thanks to Jack Jacobs for his indispensable editorial advice.

Although an apt description of the real, historical phenomenon of Jews that revolutionized thought and society, Deutscher includes himself in his depiction of the “non-Jewish Jew” and thus reveals his subtle but clear sense of dissociation, his attempt to put a distance between him and the Jewish world he left behind. For the secular, universalistic Jew that may be understandable in the context of the world in which Spinoza, Heine, Marx, and Luxemburg lived, but it was much less so in 1958, the year when Deutscher wrote this essay, only thirteen years after the end of the Holocaust and the Second World War. This dissociation became all the more conspicuous against the background of a Freud³ and a Trotsky, who having witnessed the rise and consolidation of the German antisemitic regime (they died in 1939 and 1940, respectively) expressed their unequivocal solidarity with the persecuted Jews.

In a 1966 essay/interview entitled “Who Is a Jew?” included in the same volume in which he published “The Non-Jewish Jew” Deutscher abandoned that sense of setting himself apart by stating unambiguously that he considered himself a Jew and that he did so out of his unconditional sense of solidarity with the persecuted and exterminated, because he felt the pulse of Jewish history and the Jewish tragedy as his own, and because “I should like to do all I can to assure the real, not spurious, security and self-respect of the Jews” (51).

However, it is that sense of dissociation that pervades his broader interpretation of Jewish history and of the Jewish condition of his times throughout the corpus of his work on Jewish issues assembled by his widow, Tamara Deutscher. This comes through, for example, in his views in favor of the assimilation of the Jews. Although clearly opposed to the use of force, he supports the active dissolution of the Jews into the larger society. In “Remnants of a Race” (84–90) published in the *Economist* on January 12, 1946, not only does he celebrate the first declaration of equal rights for Jews by Jacobin France in 1791, but he also includes Napoleon’s “enlightened maxim” “Let the Jews look for their Jerusalem in France” and argues that Napoleon’s purpose of disaccustoming the Jews from usury and illicit trade, of breaking down their separation, and making them submerge themselves in the gentile population was certainly

³ Freud had a more active association with organized Jewry than was the case for several of the other major “non-Jewish Jews” identified by Deutscher, although he was nevertheless ambivalent toward his own Jewish background. See Peter Loewenberg, “Sigmund Freud as a Jew: A Study in Ambivalence and Courage,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 7 (1971), pp. 363–369.

sound; and – who knows? – if it had been consistently carried into effect all over Europe, the Jewish problem might have been forgotten long ago; and our generation would perhaps have been spared the indelible shame of witnessing the deliberate murder of 6 million human beings in concentration camps and gas chambers (86–87).

Although he acknowledges Napoleon’s “tyrant’s touch” toward the Jews, as in the emperor’s proposal to compel every third Jewish man and woman to marry a Christian, his overall treatment of Napoleon’s policies toward the Jews is indicative of an extreme assimilationism that borders on the perverse: had the Jews disappeared, as a result of their own actions and inactions, there would have been no Jews left for Hitler to kill.

Deutscher’s admiration of Napoleon’s strongly assimilationist attitude to French Jews bears a strong parallel with his apologetic view of Stalin, whom he saw as a Thermidorean figure similar to Napoleon. Deutscher viewed both Napoleon and Stalin as pursuing worthy goals even though he might, in a subordinate note, regret their methods. It was this apologetic approach that led the Russian socialist historian Roy Medvedev to object to the way in which Deutscher, in telling the story of industrialization and collectivization, argued that Stalin could be considered one of the greatest reformers of all times because he had put the ideas of the October Revolution and socialism into practice. That the price was very high – the gulag, the purges, and the deliberate creation of famines resulting in the death of millions of people – only proved to Deutscher the difficulty of the task.⁴ Stalin to him was primarily a reformer, not a mass murderer. As in the case of Stalin and his legacy Deutscher adopts an “objectivist” analysis of Napoleon’s wishes for the French Jews, pretending to stand outside history and lacking in empathy for the choices actually faced by its living actors, except perhaps for the “problems” faced by leaders promoting change from above.⁵

For the Jews, assimilation, in the sense of disappearing rather than just acculturating to various host societies, has historically been and continues to be an extremely important and complex issue.⁶ Deutscher is so

⁴ Roy Medvedev, *Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism*, ed. and trans. George Shriver, rev. and expanded edn. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 869.

⁵ Of course, my purpose here is not to evaluate Napoleon’s policies and actions toward the Jews (he emancipated them everywhere he ruled) but rather Deutscher’s vision of the French emperor.

⁶ Ezra Mendelsohn makes an important distinction between assimilation and acculturation. Thus, during the interwar period there was significant acculturation of Polish Jews to the

dissociated from those concerns that he does not even mention them. For Jewish communities throughout the centuries assimilation has, on the one hand, been associated with forced conversion, a historic source of tremendous suffering and even martyrdom. But on the other hand, it has also been a veritable bugaboo, because of the deeply ingrown failure to distinguish clearly forced conversion from the social traffic that is bound to occur among human groups and that leads to an entirely voluntary “assimilation.” The obsessive if not pathological fear of voluntary assimilation can lead to a very distorted understanding and perception of the world. Thus, growing up under the very dark shadows cast by the Holocaust, I repeatedly heard from many members of the small Ashkenazi community of Polish and other Eastern European Jews in Cuba⁷ (made up of approximately ten thousand people) that antisemitic genocidal Hitlerism had developed in Germany *because* of the high degree of assimilation among German Jews. It is very hard to see how this kind of logic, or rather illogic, could explain how a high degree of assimilation would lead to the Nazi Holocaust, but the low degree of assimilation of Polish and other East European Jews would “only” lead to blood libels, pogroms, and widespread and deeply entrenched antisemitic discrimination and prejudice.

A closer look at the traditional Jewish obsession with peaceful voluntary assimilation will show its close kinship with the attitudes common among practically all nationalisms not only to protect themselves against outside coercion but, going well beyond that legitimate goal, to seek if not demand a *guarantee* not only for the perpetual existence of their particular nation, but even for its current cultural configuration against any conceivable change. Such a guarantee could of course only be obtained

Polish language and culture but very little assimilation. Ezra Mendelsohn, “A Note on Jewish Assimilation in the Polish Lands,” in *Jewish Assimilation in Modern Times*, ed. Bela Vago (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1981), pp. 145–146. In this context it is revealing and significant that historians of the Jews such as Simon Dubnow and Raphael Mahler thought that the replacement of Hebrew and Yiddish by modern European languages would carry the Jewish people toward its complete assimilation and self-destruction. Jonathan Frankel, “Assimilation and the Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Towards a New Historiography?” in *Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth Century Europe*, ed. Jonathan Frankel and Steven J. Zipperstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 21.

⁷ There were also some four thousand Sephardic Jews of Turkish origin and several hundred North American Jews on the island. However, my family and most Ashkenazi Jews had little contact with the members of these two other communities. Intercommunal contacts began to increase gradually after the Holocaust and the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948.

through the erection of strongly xenophobic barriers against any kind of foreign cultural influences, including the immigration of or even close contact with people of different races, religions, and cultures.

Deutscher's treatment of assimilation was clearly informed by classical Marxism. As extensively documented by the Marxist scholar Enzo Traverso in his excellent study *The Marxists and the Jewish Question*,⁸ classical Marxism as a whole had a highly schematic – as opposed to historically specific – view of Jews and the Jewish question. Put in its simplest terms, it held that Jews had played a certain role in precapitalist trade as moneylenders and usurers, particularly in the European Middle Ages. When trade would disappear, the Jews would have no other special role to play in society and therefore they would ultimately assimilate. As Traverso explains,

the fundamental limitation of this approach lies in its incapacity to consider the Jews as a community with a specific cultural and ethnic physiognomy, capable of transforming itself, but also of conserving itself, beyond and through changes of social and economic structure (one could say by, with, and in history).⁹

Deutscher adopts this kind of schematic Marxism when he, in “The Non-Jewish Jew”, reduces the reasons for the survival of the Jews as such to their having “represented the market economy amidst people living in a natural economy” (39). While it is true that after the eleventh century most European Jews began to assume a particular economic role accompanied by exclusion and discrimination, the schematic Marxist interpretation could not explain the existence and survival of Jews in the pagan Hellenic world, in the Roman Empire before and after Christianity, or in the Islamic world, where the Jews were a minority distinguished, on the whole, neither by language nor by economic role, but solely by religion.¹⁰

Deutscher's historical schematism also expressed itself in his peculiar claim that it was a Jewish tragedy that the world had driven the Jew to seek safety in the nation-state – Israel – in the middle of the twentieth century when “the nation state is falling into decay” (113). There are of course lots of powerful and convincing arguments against Zionism, but this one, rooted perhaps in a schematic philosophy of history that does not meet the test of empirical reality, is a remarkably weak one. At the very moment that Deutscher was writing those lines a colonial revolution

⁸ Enzo Traverso, *The Marxists and the Jewish Question: The History of a Debate 1843–1943*, trans. Bernard Gibbons (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1994).

⁹ Traverso, *Marxists and the Jewish Question*, p. 21. ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

was in full swing and in the process of creating dozens of new states in Africa and Asia. At the same time the United States and other Western imperialist powers were in the middle of the greatest economic boom they had ever experienced while arming themselves to the teeth with nuclear weapons to confront the USSR, the rival nuclear imperialist power, which was also reaching the peak of its own state power, which would very soon allow it to launch the first satellite – Sputnik – into orbit in 1957.

It is true that Deutscher expressed a certain skepticism toward schematic Marxism, although without attempting to provide an alternative. Thus, for example, in “Who Is a Jew?” (42–59), while describing with great pride the role he played in the Jewish labor movement in Poland (by which Deutscher meant his role in that component of the Communist movement of Poland that focused its attention on Polish Jews), he notes that “as Marxists we tried theoretically to deny that the Jewish labor movement had an identity of its own, but it had it all the same” (45). In this instance he also oversimplifies the position of East European Marxism toward the Jewish labor movement. The issue was not whether that movement had its own identity, which was never in question, but whether and the degree to which it should be autonomous and independent of the larger socialist movement before and after the fall of the tsarist empire.

It is important to clarify that the long-term Marxist assimilationist view of Judaism could coexist with the most vigorous and militant stance against antisemitism, as was the case with V. I. Lenin’s views and practical political record, and an enlightened cultural policy toward the Jews, as was the case in the Soviet Union of the twenties. It is also usually ignored, sometimes maliciously, that Marx’s original essay on the Jewish question, commonly attacked as antisemitic, was an argument *for* Jewish political emancipation.¹¹ However, it is true that the classical Marxist tradition has shown a certain degree of historical insensitivity toward Jews. This can be seen, for example, in the Russian social democratic polemics – Bolshevik or Menshevik – against the Jewish Bund on occasions such as the 1903 Congress of Russian Social Democracy. The Bund may have made unjustifiable demands, such as insisting on being declared the exclusive representation of all Jewish workers no matter where they lived inside or outside the Pale of Settlement. But Social Democracy was insensitive and historically obtuse when, influenced by its expectations

¹¹ Hal Draper, “Marx and the Economic-Jew Stereotype,” Special Note A, in *Karl Marx’s Theory of Revolution, I. State and Bureaucracy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977), pp. 591–608.

of Jewish assimilation, it refused to treat the Jews as it did any other *national* group within the tsarist empire, as the Jews were, at least within the Yiddish-speaking Pale of Settlement.

If nothing else, history demonstrated with extreme and horrific cruelty the lack of validity of the assimilationist perspective of Russian Social Democracy and, by extension, of Deutscher. Signs of linguistic acculturation were evident among, for example, Polish Jews of the late 1930s. But East European Jews were exterminated by the Nazis before any major assimilationist trends similar to those in Western Europe and the United States became evident in Poland, Lithuania, and other parts of Eastern Europe where the majority of the Jews lived. It is interesting to note that the rise to power of the Nazis in Germany led Leon Trotsky to abandon his earlier assimilationist assumptions. In 1937 while ruling out the possibility of a “forced assimilation” inside a socialist democracy, he left open the question of whether the Jews would assimilate naturally or whether, on the contrary, they would opt for the creation of what he called an “independent republic.” But he clearly affirmed the existence of a modern Jewish nation maintained through the development of the Yiddish language as an instrument adapted to modern culture, and although he unambiguously rejected Zionism, he affirmed the necessity of a territorial option that socialism should offer to the Jewish people.¹²

In 1908 the Bundist leader Vladimir Medem refused to make a forecast about the future of the Jews and argued that “we are neutral . . . we are not against assimilation, we are against assimilationism, against assimilation as a goal.”¹³ Many years later the Belgian Trotskyist Abram Léon, who later became a victim of Nazism, echoed Medem and argued that “socialism must give the Jews, as it will to all peoples, the possibility of assimilation as well as the possibility of having a special national life” and added that socialism would confine itself, in this area, to “letting nature take its course.”¹⁴ That may well be the most pertinent democratic and socialist position on the issue of Jewish assimilation: while it does not “guarantee” the existence of Jews for eternity, it does provide them with the favorable conditions to remain Jews as long as they so wish.

¹² Traverso, *Marxists and the Jewish Question*, pp. 227–228. For a more extended discussion, although from a Zionist point of view, of the evolution of Trotsky’s thinking about the fate of the Jews in the 1930s see Joseph Nedava, *Trotsky and the Jews* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1972), pp. 202–210.

¹³ Traverso, *Marxists and the Jewish Question*, p. 104. Medem’s view remained his own since it was not officially adopted by the Bund.

¹⁴ Cited by Traverso, *Marxists and the Jewish Question*, p. 228.

While Deutscher's "Non-Jewish Jew" focuses on the Jewish intellectual, it also assumes the existence of a Jewish world from which this intellectual has originated and that has given her a distinctive gaze. It is when entering into that Jewish world, what and who Jews are, that Deutscher is at his weakest. In contrast with the painstaking historical scholarship he is known for in his work on Trotsky, his treatment of the Jewish component of his intellectual Jew is unsupported by history. Yet, if nothing else, Deutscher's prominence as a Marxist historian and as the proponent of the notion of the "non-Jewish Jew" makes his ideas influential, including those about Jewish existence.

It is not clear whether Deutscher thought of the Jews as a people, or as a religious, cultural, or ethnic group. His discussion of Spinoza and Heine (27–30) suggests a possible emphasis on Judaism as a religion. This emphasis might be due to the weight that religion had in defining Judaism in Spinoza's times. But it also may stem from Deutscher's own upbringing as an Orthodox Jew. It is clear, however, that he rejected the notion of a Jewish community, of Jews being linked with each other by ties beyond religious ritual and practice. He argued that to speak of the "Jewish community" as if it were an all-embracing entity was meaningless, especially for a Marxist, who saw all societies primarily from the point of view of their class divisions and for whom it was clear that the Jewish "community" contained antagonistic social classes (52). Taking this argument seriously would lead Marxists to deny the very notion of society and community, since what Deutscher saw as an exclusive characteristic of Jewish life is true of all societies and communities: all are divided into classes. By way of contrast, American Marxists have for a very long time spoken about black and other minority communities in the United States without implying or assuming that they have no internal class divisions.

In his "Who Is a Jew?" Deutscher states that Jews would not have survived as a "distinctive community" if it had not been for antisemitism. It is important to underline that he does not simply say that it is only Zionism, or more broadly, Jewish nationalism, that is a product of antisemitism, but that it is the existence of the Jews itself that is entirely a function of antisemitism (47).¹⁵ Thus to him there is nothing intrinsic to

¹⁵ Many prominent, educated elite Jews such as Theodor Herzl and Max Nordau also felt that "only anti-Semitism had made Jews of us." Cited by Steven Zipperstein, who describes the comment as "half-frivolous, but also deadly earnest" in "Ahad Ha'am and the Politics of Assimilation," in Frankel and Zipperstein, eds., *Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth Century Europe*, p. 344.

the Jews that binds them together (except for the religious bond); they are some sort of artificial group. Curiously the fact that, in the years he wrote that essay, there were Jewish communities flourishing as such in many Western countries with a relatively low degree of antisemitism did not change in any way his position.

For Deutscher the idea of a Jewish community was also belied by the geographical differences among Jews. He claimed that the different native cultural traditions of which “the Jews were a minority, affected them differently and left a different imprint on their mental outlook” (52). This is not only true of the differences between German and East European Jews, which were the examples he cited, but even more so of the differences between both of those groups and Sephardic and Oriental Jews. And it is worth noting that while Jews of these diverse geographical areas shared a religious persuasion, they were not part of the same nation. But there are two major exceptions to this claim: the Jews who lived within the Pale of Settlement and shared the Yiddish language and were in most respects culturally homogeneous and the Jews who emigrated to Israel and became forged into a Jewish Israeli nation by a cohesion and national consciousness achieved through common education and the universal use of a modernized Hebrew language, service in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), and a nationalist ideology, all of which have become consolidated by their contempt for the oppressed Palestinian people.¹⁶

One could argue that because he was focused on the “non-Jewish Jews,” the philosophers and revolutionaries of Jewish origin, and not on rank-and-file Jews, Deutscher had no interest in analyzing the complexities of Jewish social life, even though his views on the “non-Jewish Jews” at least implicitly required some understanding of the nature of it. That might be why much of the Jewish social world that comes through in his work is presented, at least implicitly, in terms of a polarity between, on the one hand, a traditional Jewish religious group and, on the other hand, a group of left-wing emancipated intellectuals who have left behind the particularism of that religious community but who maintain what could be called a Jewish style of thought created and reinforced by their continual social marginality. Regardless of the reasons that might have led Deutscher to adopt this perspective, it was not an accurate characterization of the trends that existed in the Jewish communities in the West at the time he wrote his essay in the middle of the twentieth century. By the

¹⁶ For another, similar, approach, see Moshe Machover, “Zionist Myths: Hebrew versus Jewish identity,” *Weekly Worker*, 962 (May 16, 2013).

fifties and sixties Jewish society in the West and even more so in the USSR,¹⁷ had developed large secularized majorities who retained a Jewish identity. In the United States of that period the overwhelming majority of Jews either were secular or belonged to Reform or Conservative synagogues. Most members of these synagogues related to them not as their grandparents related to the *shul* in the old country, but as the occasional place to go for the High Holidays and major life-cycle-related occasions. So why did Deutscher, a profoundly political writer, gloss over this new Jewish majority of the mid-twentieth century?¹⁸

Part of the reason was Deutscher's political distaste for much of Western Jewry based on his perception, clearly shown in this volume, of their style of life and their politics. While Deutscher in "Who Is a Jew?" (42–59) strongly praises the political and intellectual achievements of the Jewish labor movement, of which he was part in Poland, it is revealing that all he has to say about Western Jewry is "how repellent" some of their milieus are where "there is nothing but a few taboos and a lot of money . . . We [the Jewish labor movement in Poland] had a thorough contempt for the *Yahudim* of the West. Our comrades were made of different stuff" (45). Later on in the same essay he blasts the record of Western Jewish intellectuals for "their extraordinary conformism, political, ideological, and social. In the Cold War which has dominated our lives for more than thirteen years, the Jews have been most prominent" (59). He did not consider, however, that, compared to other ethnic and religious communities, Jews were more likely to question, at least in the United States, the premises of the Cold War even though, like all the other ethnic and religious groups in North America, they overwhelmingly supported the U.S. side in that conflict.

With a touch of ethnic and intellectual elitism in his 1954 essay "Israel's Spiritual Climate" (91–117) Deutscher seems to accept uncritically the idealized stereotype of Ashkenazi Jews as a "higher civilization" than Oriental Jews (107–108), and as *Am Hassefer* [*sic*] – the "People of the Book" for whom "the book is a first necessity." That is why, according to Deutscher, Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Jerusalem seemed to have "as many bookshops and lending libraries as there are grocery and

¹⁷ For a brief discussion of Soviet Jewry, which underlines how antisemitic discrimination helped to prevent assimilation, see Yaacov Ro'i, "The Dilemma of Soviet Jewry's Assimilation after 1948," in Vago, ed., *Jewish Assimilation in Modern Times*, pp. 165–170.

¹⁸ It is perhaps ironic that Deutscher's essay "The Non-Jewish Jew" was based on a lecture delivered during Jewish Book Week to the World Jewish Congress, in February 1958.

greengrocery stores,” and that farming settlements possessed rich libraries you would hardly find in any other countryside. That Deutscher accepts the conception of the “People of the Book“ is ironic: on the one hand, he points to the existence of class divisions among Jews; on the other hand, class divisions disappear when talking about the intellectuality of the Jews.

The supposed love of learning that is commonly attributed to the East European Jews of the shtetl has been seriously questioned by the anthropologist Mariam K. Slater, who branded it as the myth of intellectuality.¹⁹ The average Jewish man in the shtetl, Slater shows, attended only the *kheyder* or Talmud Torah until adolescence. His education there consisted in memorizing the commandments for twelve hours a day.²⁰ That kind of learning, Slater observed, rather than being rational and scientific, was actually an obstacle to the development of the modern intellectual spirit since it was based on factual ignorance of the developments in the outside world, the cultivation of memory instead of critical thinking, and an arid disputatious scholasticism ritualistically preoccupied with talmudic legalisms.²¹ Citing another scholar’s work,²² she notes that very few of the Jewish males in the shtetl were directly exposed to talmudic scholarship. Moreover, the religious authorities had a very hostile attitude to nonreligious learning. Antony Polonsky cites the case of a rabbi in the town of Liozno in the Lithuania of the 1880s who ordered a search of all homes. All books, except religious ones, were to be taken to the synagogue courtyard for burning so evil could be purged from the town.²³

¹⁹ Mariam K. Slater, “My Son the Doctor: Aspects of Mobility among American Jews,” *American Sociological Review*, XXXIV, 3 (June 1969), pp. 359–373. Stephen Steinberg has pointed out that sociologists have argued not that Jewish intellectual traditions were in themselves important but rather that they fostered a positive orientation toward learning that was easily adapted to secular education. However, that was not Deutscher’s view about Jewish intellectuality. Stephen Steinberg, *The Ethnic Myth: Race, Ethnicity and Class in America* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1989), pp. 132–133.

²⁰ Slater, “My Son the Doctor,” p. 365.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 365–366. Interestingly, in her introduction to *The Non-Jewish Jew*, Tamara Deutscher cites her late husband to the effect that his religious training provided a “pseudo-knowledge” that “cluttered and strained my memory, took me away from real life, from real learning, from real knowledge of the world around me. It stunted my physical and mental development” (7).

²² Slater, “My Son the Doctor,” p. 366. Slater is quoting here Louis Wirth, “Education for Survival: The Jews,” in *Education and the Cultural Process*, ed. Charles S. Johnson, reprinted from the *American Journal of Sociology*, XLVIII, 6 (May 1943).

²³ Antony Polonsky, “Introduction: The Shtetl: Myth and Reality,” *Polin. Studies in Polish Jewry*, XVII (2004), p. 18.

The Ashkenazi Jews of the shtetl and cities were certainly more literate than the surrounding non-Jewish population. According to the 1897 Russian census, the rate of literacy in Russia for those older than ten years of age was 50 percent for Jews and 28 percent for non-Jews. Among men the literacy rate was 65 percent for Jews and 39 percent for non-Jews. The sociologist Stephen Steinberg questions the explanation of this difference based on a distinctive religious factor and suggests that had the Russian census compared Jews with non-Jews who were engaged in urban occupations the difference would have been less striking.²⁴ But even accepting the higher rate of Jewish literacy, Tony Michels points out that most of the Eastern European Jewish immigrants arriving in New York in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries experienced considerable difficulty in becoming readers of the Yiddish newspapers published in the city. Most individuals had to learn how to read before they could just simply pick up a Yiddish newspaper. Even if literate, most of them possessed only rudimentary reading and writing skills since the *kheyder* in the old country taught little more than the Hebrew alphabet, prayers, and the Bible to boys. Jewish girls received an even more inadequate education.²⁵

Not only were Ashkenazi East European Jews overwhelmingly urban in background – whether from villages or from cities located within the Pale of Settlement – they were also more likely to be skilled in artisanal occupations such as tailoring and shoemaking. Thus, while 67 percent of Jews entering the United States between 1899 and 1910 were skilled workers, that was only true for 20 percent of all immigrants.²⁶ In light of this background it is not surprising that once they became involved in the rising trade union and socialist movement centered in the Lower East Side of New York of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they were much more likely than workers with peasant backgrounds in Europe or rural backgrounds in the United States to participate in a more intellectual fashion. According to a 1913 Columbia University study cited by Michels, almost 32 percent of Russian Jewish men between the ages of seventeen and twenty-five attended at least one public lecture per week in New York City; Russian Jewish men between twenty-five and thirty-five followed close behind; and single Russian Jewish men frequented lectures twice as often as their married counterparts, suggesting that these lectures

²⁴ Steinberg, *Ethnic Myth*, pp. 101–102.

²⁵ Tony Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 109–110.

²⁶ Steinberg, *Ethnic Myth*, p. 98.

were social as well as political-intellectual events. Among the topics covered were “Socialism and Religion,” “The Development of Private Property,” “The Necessity of Education,” “Socialism from A to Z,” “The Origins of Rights,” “History as Science,” and “What Is Trade Unionism?”²⁷

My own personal experience is closer to Slater’s analysis than to Deutscher’s notion about Jewish intellectuality. A very small proportion of the Jewish immigrants from Poland and Eastern Europe in Cuba were intellectuals or intellectually inclined; the great majority were shopkeepers and small wholesalers and manufacturers in the garment and related trades, who, although literate, did not take intellectual endeavors seriously and were sometimes contemptuous of them. University titles and professional certifications and accomplishments were held in higher regard, although not as much as material success, a phenomenon that Slater also found in her review of the literature about Jews in the United States.²⁸ But exclusive intellectual endeavors with no prospect for material gain, whether artistic or political, were regarded with condescension as belonging to the impractical realm of dreamers. Thus, for example, Albert Einstein was regarded by most Cuban Ashkenazi Jews as a successful, universally famous figure who was a huge credit to Jews everywhere. Cuban Jews also appreciated that he had taken the trouble to visit Cuba and its Jewish community in the twenties. However, his slovenliness and his socialist leanings were proof positive that people like him – intellectuals and pure scientists – did not have their feet on the ground and were thus not reliable people. It is true that Jewish Bundists, Communists, and left-wing Zionists in Cuba did not share this outlook, but, having been an important minority of the community in the twenties and thirties, they had, with the possible exception of the left-wing Zionists, significantly declined by the late forties.

ASSIMILATION AND THE FUTURE OF JEWRY

In light of Deutscher’s strongly assimilationist perspective it is worth considering the current trends relevant to that issue. It is unclear whether the number of Jews in the United States – the other major center of Jewish population besides Israel – is currently increasing or decreasing. This has been an elusive figure for at least two decades. The U.S. Census cannot

²⁷ Michels, *Fire in Their Hearts*, p. 77.

²⁸ Slater, “My Son the Doctor,” p. 371.

obtain and provide data based on religious affiliation. The estimate of approximately 6.5 million Jews in 2011 made by the Berman Institute of the University of Connecticut is about 20 percent higher than the previous estimate of 5.2 million provided by the 2000 National Jewish Population Survey, but the lower figure was based on a study that was criticized as flawed, a view that was eventually accepted by the survey's sponsor.²⁹ What is clear, however, is that the number of Orthodox Jews is increasing substantially while the adherents of milder forms of Judaism such as the Conservative and Reform movements is declining. The study of the Jewish community in New York City published in 2012 by Steven M. Cohen and Jacob B. Ukeles shows that the Jewish population in that city – the largest in the United States – grew to nearly 1.1 million people between 2002 and 2011 after decades of decline, as a result of the “explosive” growth of the Hasidic and other Orthodox groups. These groups now amount to 40 percent of Jews in the city compared to 33 percent in 2002. During the same period the Reform and Conservative movements each lost about forty thousand members in New York City. Even more revealing of current and future trends is that 74 percent of all Jewish children in the city are Orthodox. The same study also found that while the rate of intermarriage remains at roughly 22 percent for all Jewish couples in New York City, it is growing among the non-Orthodox. Between 2006 and 2011, one of two marriages in which one partner was a non-Orthodox Jew was to a person who was not Jewish and did not convert to Judaism.

At the other end of the spectrum from the Orthodox Jews, nearly a third of the respondents who identified themselves as Jews did not belong to a particular denomination or claimed not to observe or follow any religion. Jacob B. Ukeles, one of the authors of the study, stated that “there are more deeply engaged Jews and there are more unengaged Jews . . . These two wings are growing at the expense of the middle. That’s the reality of our community.”³⁰

A national survey of Jews conducted by the Pew Research Center’s Religion and Public Life Project in 2013 found that the intermarriage rate

²⁹ Ira Sheskin and Arnold Dashevsky, *Jewish Population in the United States, 2011*, 4, 2011, Berman Institute – North American Jewish Data Bank, University of Connecticut; and Naomi Zeveloff, “U.S. Population Pegged at 6 Million,” *Forward.com*, published January 17, 2012, issue of January 20, 2012: <http://forward.com/articles/149492/us-jewish-population-pegged-at-million/>.

³⁰ Joseph Berger, “With Orthodox Growth, City’s Jewish Population Is Climbing Again,” *New York Times*, June 12, 2012, A18.

was very similar to that of New York and had reached a high of 58 percent for all Jews, and 71 percent for non-Orthodox Jews. Surprisingly, the study also found that the percentage of Orthodox in the country as a whole was only 10 percent, while Reform Judaism remained the largest religious tendency at 35 percent and Conservative Jews at 18 percent.³¹ But, as in New York, 30 percent of Jews did not identify with any denomination. In spite of the decline in religious identity and participation, the national survey also showed that American Jews had a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people and felt proud to be Jewish.³²

The prevailing situation in New York would confirm one of Deutscher's implicit assumptions about the significance of religious orthodoxy in defining Judaism. While that assumption was incorrect when Deutscher was writing about Jews from the forties to the sixties, it has acquired greater validity in the early twenty-first century, although in part for reasons that Deutscher did not anticipate, since it would be mistaken to attribute changes such as these only to the internal dynamics of the Jewish community and its relationship to the outside world. Major changes in American society have created parallel developments in Protestantism, with the mainstream denominations such as Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Methodists, who are roughly comparable to Reform and Conservative Judaism,³³ having substantially declined while the size of fundamentalist Christianity, which is comparable to Orthodox Judaism, has substantially increased. At the same time, and paralleling what Jacob B. Ukeles pointed out about engaged and unengaged American Jews, the number of Americans who do not identify with any religion continues to grow at a rapid pace. A survey conducted in 2012 by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life found that one-fifth of the U.S. public – and a third of adults below age thirty – are religiously unaffiliated, the highest percentage ever in Pew Research Center polling. The poll found that between 2007 and 2012 the unaffiliated increased from just above

³¹ I would have expected a lower proportion of Orthodox Jews outside New York but not such a large difference (40 percent of Jews in New York compared to 10 percent in the United States as a whole).

³² Laurie Goodstein, "Poll Shows Major Shift in Identity of U.S. Jews," *New York Times*, October 1, 2013; and Pew Research Religion & Public Life Project, "A Portrait of Jewish Americans," October 1, 2013: www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/.

³³ It is worth noting, however, that perhaps in response to their relative decline and the gradual move to the right of the Jewish community, the Conservative and even the Reform wings of American Judaism are moving closer to Orthodox religious practices.

15 percent to just below 20 percent of all U.S. adults.³⁴ Similar “secularizing” trends have been noticed in Western Europe for quite some time; even countries with a profound Catholic history, such as Spain, have legalized gay marriage and effectively limited the influence of the Catholic Church.

Support for Israel has also played an important role in maintaining the cohesion and limiting the assimilation of American Jews. However, a 2007 study by Steven M. Cohen and Ari Y. Kelman showed that younger American Jews are less connected to Israel than older American Jews. The report noted that while the majority of younger Jews remain attached to Israel, that country is less salient to the less connected, non-Orthodox, and increasingly intermarried Jews, with instances of genuine alienation as many more Jews, especially young people, profess a near-total absence of any positive feelings toward Israel.³⁵ An influential and controversial article by Peter Beinart called this development to the attention of a broader public and claimed that the erosion of American Jewish support for Israeli policies was related to what he saw as the contradiction between American Jewish liberalism and the illiberalism of Israeli policies. Whatever degree of truth there might be to that claim, it is evident that the American Orthodox Jews, the least liberal sector of American Judaism, are much more likely to support Israel and its policies uncritically. As Beinart points out, “In their yeshivas they learn devotion to Israel from an early age; they generally spend a year of religious study there after high school, and often know friends or relatives who have immigrated to Israel.” The same American Jewish Committee 2006 survey found that while only 16 percent of non-Orthodox adult Jews below the age of forty feel “very close to Israel,” among the Orthodox the figure is 79 percent.³⁶

One can draw the conclusion that, contrary to Deutscher’s expectations, a relatively low degree of antisemitism has not led to the disappearance of the principal Jewish community in its principal place of residence outside Israel. But these trends also pose the question of whether the demographic and social base from which the secular Jewish left-wing intellectuals and activists, Deutscher’s “non-Jewish Jews,” emerged in the past is declining. It is doubtful, for a variety of reasons, that the growing proportion of

³⁴ “‘Nones’ on the Rise.” Poll conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, October 9, 2012: www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/.

³⁵ “2007 Survey of American Jews.” North American Jewish Data Bank: www.jewishdatabank.org/Studies/details.cfm?StudyID=574.

³⁶ Peter Beinart, “The Failure of the American Jewish Establishment,” *New York Review of Books*, June 10, 2010.

“unengaged Jews” can play a similar role in the development of leftist Jewish activists and intellectuals as was once the case with the Jewish labor and socialist movements. “Unengaged” Jews in the United States today are not peripheral to American society, as were Deutscher’s non-Jewish Jews. American Jews simply do not live on the boundaries of civilization. Indeed they often occupy positions at the very center of a very powerful society. As far as Jewish liberalism is concerned, if one measures it by the metric of voting for Democratic Party candidates, it remains alive. This measurement, however, is very flawed and does not take into account considerations such as the likely rightward drift of Jewish liberalism, let alone the extent to which Democratic candidates may not themselves be liberals. Aside from Jewish liberalism, it is likely that the proportion of people of Jewish background in the U.S. radical left has declined, an issue that remains to be investigated.

A PERSONAL REFLECTION

Having been reproached by my late older sister, a strong but somewhat disillusioned Zionist, for being concerned about the fate of every group and nationality “except the Jews,” I have often thought about the response that Rosa Luxemburg gave to a friend while sitting in prison in February 1917: “Why do you want to come to me with the special sufferings of the Jews? For me, the unhappy victims of the hevea plantations of the Putamayo region, the Negroes of Africa whose bodies the Europeans kick about as if playing with a ball, affect me as much.” And she added, “I sense myself at home in the wide world everywhere there are clouds, birds and tears.”³⁷ Luxemburg was a forthright and vigorous opponent of antisemitism, but her statement here is problematic to me. Regardless of how she defined herself, she was treated by the world at large, and particularly by antisemites, as a Jew. Her dissociating herself from her Jewish background in those circumstances was tantamount to a withdrawal of solidarity from the other Jews who were also the victims of antisemitism. She seems to have assumed that an internationalist *politics* required an internationalist *identity*, that the revolutionaries who felt themselves part of an “imagined community” of internationalists, could not, unlike the nationalists discussed by Benedict Anderson, identify with any particular country or nationality.

³⁷ Cited by Traverso, *Marxists and the Jewish Question*, p. 49.

In fairness to Luxemburg, taking distance from one's Jewish origins was very widespread among Jews in the socialist movement. Thus, in the 1890s even socialists who were building an all-Jewish Yiddish-speaking movement in New York City favored the eventual dissolution of the Jewish labor movement and even of the entire Jewish culture, community, and identity and saw assimilation as inevitable, especially in democratic and industrial countries such as the United States. For them assimilation would accelerate with the revolution they saw approaching.³⁸ The problem with this perspective is that it weakened politically these Yiddish socialists when they were confronted with major Jewish disasters such as the Kishinev pogrom of April 1903. As Tony Michels has pointed out, their socialist belief in Jewish assimilation – which they saw as part of their internationalism – now struck many individuals as naïve, even indecent. He describes previously staunch internationalists questioning, after Kishinev, whether their commitment to the workers of the world conflicted with their loyalty to the Jewish people.³⁹ Not surprisingly, Jewish nationalism emerged strengthened from these events. While the growth of Jewish nationalism might have been inevitable as a result of those antisemitic attacks, it was clearly reinforced by the socialist ambivalence about defending Jews as Jews rather than as just workers,⁴⁰ as well as by its active proassimilationist perspective.

As a Cuban–Jewish Marxist, I find Deutscher's "Non-Jewish Jew" a questionable notion because of its dissociation from the Jewish condition and because of the lack of solidarity it evinces toward what has historically been an oppressed, persecuted group even though antisemitism may have declined in countries such as the United States. As an alternative I propose the notion of the internationalist Jew. Most Marxists nowadays do not make an internationalist identity into a condition of internationalist politics. The fact that as a Cuban Jew I am not "affected as much," to use Luxemburg's terminology, by what happens to people who are neither Jewish nor Cuban does not mean that I am indifferent to their oppression by others. The essence of internationalist politics seems to me then to refuse to place the interests of Cubans or Jews above the interests of other people and to support those people when they are

³⁸ Michels, *Fire in Their Hearts*, p. 123. ³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁴⁰ It is worth noting the similarity between this Jewish socialist stance and the reluctance of the American socialist leader Eugene Debs to go beyond the defense of black workers as workers and develop a political program specifically addressed to the problems and oppression that black people faced as blacks.

oppressed by fellow Jews or Cubans. In the early fifties, long before I had become a Marxist, a Cuban friend tested my Cuban nationalist credentials by asking me which side I would take if there were a war between Cuba and the recently established State of Israel – a question faced, by the way, by many other Jews of my generation.⁴¹ After briefly hesitating I answered that would depend on who the aggressor was. Many years later I concluded that even though I was at the time affected by sentiments of “dual loyalty,” it was nevertheless an apt answer because it centered on the substantive issues at stake rather than on an unconditional loyalty to one country or another (my country right or wrong). In retrospect I realize that it was the Jewish marginality that Deutscher so acutely analyzed that allowed me to think like that. Nowadays for me being an internationalist Jew means recognizing that it is the Palestinians, and not the oppressive actions of the State of Israel, that deserve solidarity rather than the critical ambivalence of Deutscher. It means refusing to remain silent when confronted by antisemitic statements and actions. It also means acknowledging my profound sense of solidarity with the victims of the Holocaust and of antisemitism. I identify with the solidarity expressed by a number of Jews, including Marc Bloch, the great French historian and anti-Nazi resistance fighter, who were in favor of “flaunting” their Judaism in only one instance: when encountering an antisemite.

Although this stance might reflect a negative kind of Judaism – proclaiming one’s Jewishness only when confronting antisemitism – it is an in-your-face attitude of resistance (and it is not premised on the Zionist notion, deeply rooted in East European Jewish culture, that antisemitism is both inevitable and incurable). It also shuns a sentimental view of Jews when they are victimized and an uncritical view of Jews when they are the victimizers. Primo Levi’s searing objectivity analyzing and resisting the temptation to prettify the brutalizing effects that extreme oppression such as that of the concentration camps can have on people, and his refusal to be an apologist for Jews or for Israel, shine very bright in my mind.

⁴¹ A military clash between Cuba and Israel could have potentially taken place when the Cuban Army sent a tank brigade to reinforce Syria’s border with Israel near the Golan Heights after the “Yom Kippur” war of 1973. Ignacio Ramonet, *Fidel Castro: Biografía a Dos Voces* (Barcelona: Random House Mondadori, S.A., 2006), p. 529.

Glossary

- Achdut Ha'avoda [Labor Unity]:** a Zionist party founded in Palestine in 1919 that, in 1930, joined with Hapoel Hatzair to form Mapai
- aliyah:** immigration by Jews to pre-1948 Palestine and to the State of Israel
- Ashkenazim:** Jews of European origin
- Bar Giora:** an underground Jewish paramilitary organization founded in Palestine in 1907
- Brit Shalom [Covenant of Peace]:** a group founded in 1925 that sought peaceful coexistence between Jews and Arabs
- Cheka:** a Soviet state security organization established in 1917
- Evseksii:** Jewish sections of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union
- galut:** the Jewish exile from the Land of Israel
- goyim:** non-Jewish nations
- Gush Emunim [Bloc of the Faithful]:** a right-wing Israeli movement formed in 1974 that advocated Jewish settlement of the Occupied Territories
- Habima:** a Hebrew-language theater company established in the Russian Empire in 1912 that ultimately became the national theater of Israel
- Hakibbutz Hameuchad Sifriat Poalim:** the publishing firm of the United Kibbutz movement
- halutzim [pioneers]:** early Jewish settlers in Palestine
- Hapoel [The Worker]:** sports movement founded under labor Zionist auspices in 1926
- Hapoel Hatzair [The Young Worker]:** a Zionist movement active in Palestine beginning with 1905 and committed to the importance of Jewish physical labor that became a founding component of Mapai in 1930

- Hamas:** a Palestinian fundamentalist organization founded in 1987 that has played a governing role in the Gaza Strip
- Hashomer Hatzair [The Young Guard]:** a socialist Zionist youth movement founded in the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1913
- Hasidim:** adherents of a Jewish, spiritually oriented, ultraorthodox religious movement that came into being in Eastern Europe in the eighteenth century
- Haskalah:** the Jewish enlightenment movement
- Hezbollah [Party of Allah]:** a Shi'a militant group based in Lebanon
- Histadrut [General Federation of Workers in the Land of Israel]:** a group established in Palestine in 1920 to defend the interests of organized Jewish workers in Palestine
- Hitahdut [Union]:** a soft-Left, Hebraist political party focused on building the Jewish community in Palestine that was active in interwar Poland in the 1920s
- Ichud:** a political movement created in 1942 that advocated binationalism and incorporated many of the onetime members of Brit Shalom
- kahal (plural: kehillot):** organized Jewish community
- khoziaika:** mistress of the house
- kibbutz (plural: kibbutzim):** a communal settlement, initially oriented toward agricultural enterprise, in which the land and other property were owned by the community. The first such settlement, Degania, was founded in Palestine in 1909
- Likud:** a major right-wing political party in Israel established in 1973, initially headed by Menachem Begin and later by Benjamin Netanyahu
- Mapai [Land of Israel Workers' Party]:** a major labor Zionist political party created in Palestine in 1930 by a merger of Hapoel Hatzair and Achdut Ha'avoda, which was a dominant force in Israel from the late 1940s until the late 1960s
- maskil (plural: maskilim):** an adherent of the Haskalah
- Matzpen:** a radical Left organization opposed to the occupation of territories occupied by Israel in June of 1967, and highly critical of Zionism
- Mizrahim:** Jews from Middle Eastern or Muslim-majority lands, and their descendants
- moshav (plural: moshavim):** a cooperative agricultural community, the first of which was established in Palestine in 1921, in which profits devolved to the families who produced them

- moshava*** (plural: ***moshavot***): an agricultural community, generally founded during the first two waves of Zionist immigration to Palestine, in which the farming land was owned privately, not by the community
- Naqba**: Arabic term for events in 1948, during which many Palestinians fled or were expelled from their homes
- Narodnaia Volia [The People's Will]**: a political movement active in the Russian Empire that advocated the use of terrorism in order to overthrow the tsarist regime
- narodniki*** [**populists**]: left-wing political activists who agitated on behalf of radical ideas among the peasants of the Russian Empire beginning with the second half of the nineteenth century
- Neturei Karta [Guardians of the City]**: an ultraorthodox Jewish group formed in 1938 that is opposed to Zionism and favors the dismantling of the State of Israel
- Ohel**: a theater founded in Palestine that initially had a socialist ideology
- Palmach**: an elite fighting force that operated within the Haganah, the major Zionist paramilitary organization in the *yishuv*
- Poalei Zion [The Workers of Zion]**: name used by a number of different labor Zionist organizations in Eastern Europe, Palestine, the United States, and elsewhere; the movement ultimately split in two (the Right Poalei Zion and the Left Poalei Zion)
- Sephardim**: descendants of Jews who lived in the Iberian Peninsula, and Jews who have adopted the liturgy of such descendants
- Shalom Achshav [Peace Now]**: a movement in Israel established in 1978 that has promoted a negotiated settlement between Israel and its Arab neighbors and favors a two-state solution to the current conflict between Israelis and Palestinians
- Shas [Sephardi Torah Guardians]**: an ultraorthodox political party in Israel, founded in 1984, with a Sephardic and Mizrahi constituency
- Shoah**: the Holocaust
- shtadlanut***: the policy of having influential Jews intercede with authorities on behalf of other Jews or the Jewish community
- tzedakah***: charity
- yishuv***: the Jewish community in the Land of Israel prior to the establishment of the State of Israel
- Zeire Zion [Youth of Zion]**: a non-Marxist group in interwar Poland that was in favor both of work in the diaspora and of fostering the efforts of pioneering-oriented Zionists in Palestine

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