

Varieties

In 1907 Israel Zangwill, a Jewish political leader as well as a celebrated writer (the author of the play *The Melting Pot*) published a remarkable story dealing with Jewish political life in Milovka, a Polish shtetl, shortly before World War I.¹ A young man, David Ben Amram (note his new-style, Hebrew-Zionist name), arrives in this town to organize a Jewish self-defense force as pogroms sweep over the land. His heroic efforts are ultimately frustrated by the incredible fragmentation of the small but highly politicized Jewish community. Not only have Jews adhered to various legal and illegal Polish and Russian organizations (this part of Poland was under Russian rule), but they are also divided among a large number of specifically Jewish organizations. David, a true believer in the holy principle of Jewish unity, a principle that for all-too-many Jews was honored more in the breach than the observance, encounters in this wretched backwater the following competing Jewish ideologies: integrationism or assimilationism (of which there were two or three distinct types), Orthodoxy (also divided into two types, Hasidic and anti-Hasidic), several varieties of socialist Zionism, Zionist Zionism, cultural Zionism, Mizrahi (Orthodox Zionism), Sejmism, territorialism, socialist territorialism, and Bundism. This awful divisiveness drives the young idealist to despair:

He had a nightmare vision of bristling sects and pullulating factions, each with its Councils, Federations, Funds, Conferences, Party-Days, Agenda, Referats, Press-Organs, each differentiating itself with meticulous subtlety from all the other Parties, each defining with casuistic minuteness its relation to every contemporary problem, each equipped with inexhaustible polyglot orators speechifying through tumultuous nights.²

In the end, unable to prevail against the political consequences of Halpern's "vile dispute," David commits suicide.

A similar note of despair is sounded in Aron Zeitlin's drama *Weizmann the Second*, which takes place somewhat later, during the Nazi persecutions. Here Jews, hounded out of Europe by ferocious antisemitism and placed in a ship sailing to Palestine, argue endlessly about the proper political solution to the Jewish Question. They elect Albert Einstein as their president, and the great scientist, like Zangwill's David, is obliged to confront a bitterly divided Jewish world: "What a tumult, what a tumult! Oh, the opposition movements with their resolutions, their revolutions, their complaints and their just demands. How difficult it was to be president of Israel."³

Historians do not have to worry about unifying the Jews, a job likened in Zeitlin's drama to "organizing chaos."⁴ However, acting according to the principle that order is a necessary prerequisite for understanding, I shall attempt an easier but still-complicated task, namely, I shall suggest a typology of Jewish organizations active in Jewish politics during the interwar period. A *Jewish* organization, obviously enough, is one that defines itself as such and that recruits its members from within the Jewish community. But matters are not quite so simple, and a few exceptional cases should be mentioned. There were, for example, the Jewish sections, also known as Yiddish-language sections. These organizations, very common within the socialist movement, were in fact subdivisions of non-Jewish political parties, as was the case with the celebrated Yevseksiia, the Jewish section within the Communist parties of the Soviet Union, and with the Jewish section of the American Socialist party. Despite their subservient status it would be unjustified to ignore them because they did cater to an exclusively Jewish clientele and definitely possessed their own Jewish political "line." Also impossible to ignore are the so-called Jewish labor unions in the United States, such as the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA). These large organizations did not define themselves as Jewish and did not cater to an exclusively Jewish membership. Nonetheless, it would be difficult to discuss the history of *Jewish* politics in America without taking them into consideration—just as no history of black politics in the United States would be complete without an analysis of the role of A. Philip Randolph's Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, which was not defined as an exclusively black union, nor would a history of Ukrainian politics ignore the role of the Uniate (Greek Catholic) church, which never restricted its membership to ethnic Ukrainians.

Questions

How can one arrive at an acceptable if not airtight typology of the various Jewish organizations active in Jewish politics? I suggest posing a number

of key questions, the answers to which will help one to divide the Jewish political world into a manageable number of schools or camps.

1. How are the Jews, taken collectively, to be defined? This question asks not *who* are Jews—an issue that keeps some rabbis and rabbinical seminaries busy and bedevils contemporary Israeli politics—but rather *what* are Jews? This is a somewhat different puzzle with a number of apparently mutually exclusive answers.
2. What should be the predominant cultural (meaning above all linguistic) orientation of the Jews? In simpler terms, what language (or perhaps languages) should the Jewish community of the future speak? Here, too, there exist a number of possible responses.
3. Assuming the existence of a Jewish Question, *where* does the solution lie—"here" in the Diaspora, where the Jews already live, or "there" in Palestine/Eretz Yisrael or in some other Jewish territory to which they will go and where the Jews will be allowed to establish a state of their own or at least enjoy some sort of territorial autonomy.
4. From a large number of potentially usable Jewish pasts, of Jewish historical pedigrees, which did the various Jewish organizations choose? In other words, from the vast expanse of Jewish history—over three thousand years—which Jewish personalities and which historical periods did they celebrate as inspirational and exemplary?
5. Which political forces in the non-Jewish world did these Jewish organizations identify with and seek out as allies? Whom did they perceive as their gentile friends and supporters?
6. What sort of political tactics did these various organizations favor? Did they think that the Jews, in the course of their campaign to further their interests and achieve their aims, should engage in high-profile or low-profile behavior, that is, in the politics of loud and open protest or in quiet, even secret diplomacy behind closed doors (among other reasons so as not to provoke the gentiles)?
7. The final question (the answer to which derives from the answer to question 3): To what degree were the various organizations under consideration optimistic or pessimistic with regard to the collective future of the Jews in the Diaspora?

In addition to seeking answers to these seven questions, some of which relate directly to the peculiar condition of Diaspora Jewry, it is necessary to consider the attitude of the various Jewish political organizations toward general social issues. Did they believe that the restructuring of society on socialist (or Communist) principles was essential to the solution of the Jewish Question? Or did they promote liberalism, conservatism, or even fascism? Are they to be located on the left, the center, or the right of the general political spectrum?

This Is Our Home, Our Palestine

In 1888 Simon Wolf, a leader of the veteran American Jewish fraternal organization B'nai B'rith, founded in 1843, announced with pride that the United States of America was "our Home, our Palestine; we have no other ambition than to prosper in this land of our adoption, to whose growth—material, social and intellectual—we have contributed our share. . . ."⁵ Such a statement serves as an excellent summary of the worldview of one well-defined school or camp of modern Jewish politics. How did its adherents respond to the questions mentioned earlier? For them, as for many others, the first question was the most difficult as no one really possessed a definitive answer to the "What are the Jews?" conundrum. Bernard Berenson's remark, made in 1937, that Jews "are neither a religion nor a nation nor a race any more, whatever they may have been at one time"⁶ exemplifies the widespread confusion and even bewilderment on this subject (this great art historian and connoisseur was by birth a Lithuanian Jew, a convert, and at the end of his life a bit of a pro-Zionist). Much better defined was the view of Eisenstein, a character in Henry Miller's *Sexus*, who insisted: "The religion is everything. . . . If you can't be a good Christian, you can't be a good Jew. We are not a people or a race—we're a religion."⁷

Eisenstein's interlocutor was skeptical: "That's what you say, but I don't believe it. It's more than that."⁸ But for the Simon Wolfs of the Jewish world, Eisenstein's answer was the politically correct one. They would have agreed wholeheartedly with the sentiments of the composer Darius Milhaud, who begins his memoirs with the simple but ideologically significant statement, "I am a Frenchman from Provence, and by religion a Jew."⁹ Religion was the thing that defined the Jew, and the Jews were, above all, a community held together by a common faith. Consider the words of Louis Marshall, the prominent American Jewish leader who founded, in 1906, the American Jewish Committee. Marshall is discussing another illustrious American Jewish leader, a banker and philanthropist:

[Jacob Schiff] regarded Judaism as a faith, and not as a race, and that the ties which bound one Jew to another were religious and not racial.

I entirely concur in this statement. . . . To my mind there is only one Judaism, and I consider all of its followers united by the bond of religion, and none other."¹⁰

This was the reason why Marshall preferred to be called a "Jew," meaning an adherent of Judaism, rather than a "Hebrew" or an "Israelite," terms that to his mind bore a certain "tribal significance."¹¹ By the same token it was highly significant that the leading German Jewish organization, founded in 1893, called itself the Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens (The Central Union of German Citizens of Jewish Faith), and that a conference of Polish Jews meeting in 1919 referred to its participants as "Polacy wyznania mojżeszowego" ("Poles of

the Jewish faith").¹² In the same spirit, in 1924 the former president of a B'nai B'rith lodge in Romania declared: "Religion is the only tie that still links us together."¹³

Assuming for the moment that what makes the Jews a coherent group is their adherence to the religion of Judaism, to which of the many varieties of Judaism should they adhere? Most of the organizations mentioned and most of their followers tended to favor some sort of reformed or "liberal" Judaism—in a word non-Orthodox or at least non-East European Orthodox. They were convinced that Judaism must adapt itself to the winds of change and not cling to outmoded and even grotesque "medieval" practices (including the special Jewish garb and such oddities as long beards and sidelocks). Although cleaving to its timeless, essential truths, its adherents must at the same time more closely conform to the norms of religious practice in the countries where the Jews resided. Some felt that Judaism must also be a religion with a message accessible to all, not the private property of a self-segregated separatist sect. Thus, the first seal of the Jewish Publication Society of America, founded in 1888, proclaimed to the world that "Israel's Mission Is Peace" (see fig. 1). Probably the most eloquent American spokesman for this standpoint was the founder of the reformed Jewish "church" in that country, Isaac Mayer Wise, who in 1895 declared: "Judaism is no tribal, nor racial religion, no conglomeration of antiquated customs and obsolete laws, it is the universal religion, progressive like reason, motherly humane, and like God's sun radiating light and life to all pilgrims of this sublunar sphere."¹⁴

If the Jews were neither a race nor a tribe and if theirs was a modern, universal religion with something to teach mankind, it followed that their standpoint must be militantly acculturationist. Which language should the Jewish community speak? Obviously not Hebrew—a language greatly esteemed by both Jew and gentile—the language of the book of books, of prayer and study, of the prophets and sages but for more than two thousand years not the spoken language of world Jewry. Even more emphatically not Yiddish, which was the spoken tongue of millions of East European Jews, both in Eastern Europe and in the lands of their dispersion. If Hebrew was honored by both gentiles and Jews as the language of the glorious Jewish past, Yiddish was often seen as an embarrassment, an object of scorn and ridicule. Many Jews regarded it as a misfit language (if a language at all). The pianist Artur Schnabel, by origin an acculturated Polish Jew, advertises his contempt for it when he writes in his memoirs that it was spoken with "the singsong of the jargon."¹⁵ Like many Jews he much preferred, though he was quite ignorant of, Hebrew. The Jewish "jargon" (or dialect) was regarded as a major cause of the infamous Chinese wall that, so regrettably, separated Jew from gentile. Thus, a character in the famous "Jewish novel" *Meir Ezofowicz*, by the Polish writer Eliza Orzeszkowa, expresses his amazement that the Polish Jews, resident in the land for a thousand years, are incapable of speaking Polish, "What! . . . they don't understand the language of the country in which



Fig. 1: Judaism Is for Everyone. Judaism is represented as the universal religion of mankind under whose warming sun perfect harmony prevails. ("Israel's Mission Is Peace," the first seal of the Jewish Publication Society of America. *American Jewish Year Book*, 15, 1913–14, p. 187. Reproduced with the permission of the Jewish Publication Society of America.)

they live?"¹⁶ This most serious impediment to gentile understanding and respect would have to be removed, and the sooner the better.

A program of acculturation meant that American Jews should speak English and look "American," Polish Jews should speak (and look) Polish, and so forth. Unfortunately, matters were not always clear-cut. There were many regions where it was by no means apparent which non-Jewish language should be adopted by the Jews. Should the Jews of pre-World War I Bohemia speak German or Czech? Should the Jews of pre-World War I Vilna (Wilno in Polish; Vilnius in Lithuanian)—the historic capital of the old Lithuanian state—a city inhabited mostly by Poles and Jews and ruled ever since the late eighteenth century by the Russian Empire, adopt as their spoken language Russian, Polish, or Lithuanian? These were not merely academic questions. If the Jews of Vilna opted for Polish, would they not infuriate the Lithuanians? And if they decided to speak Russian, would they not be accused by the Poles of siding with the power that had trampled on Polish freedom and subjected them to slavery? A wrong choice in the language game in the ethnically confused corners of Eastern and Central Europe could and often did lead to unfortunate, even tragic consequences. These complications notwithstanding, the principle was clear—

the language (or languages) of the land, however defined, must be learned, and learned quickly. Cyrus Adler, a leader of the American Jewish Committee, noted in 1922, "A statement was given out only a few days since, indicating that over 960,000 persons in New York City had Yiddish as their mother tongue."¹⁷ Here was one excellent reason, Adler thought, why Americans, fed up with newcomers who were refusing to "melt," were turning against the notion of free immigration. The old, European-born generation could go on reading Yiddish newspapers and speaking *mame loshn* (the mother tongue). The new generation must Americanize, as it is seen to be doing in Raphael Soyer's well-known 1926 painting *The Dancing Lesson* (see fig. 2). It must fit in in every way, as does Oscar Straus,



Fig. 2: The History of Acculturation. Raphael Soyer, a noted Russian-born American artist, portrays the inexorable process of Jewish acculturation in the New World. The grandparents, whose picture (I presume) hangs on the wall, are old-style Russian Jews. The parents, who came to America as adults, seem somewhat disoriented—even depressed—as they watch their children learn how to dance American-style. The mother holds a Yiddish newspaper in her lap, but English is the language of this family's future. (Raphael Soyer, *The Dancing Lesson*, 1926. Collection of Renee and Chaim Gross, New York City.)

indistinguishable from the other U.S. leaders in a group portrait of Theodore Roosevelt's cabinet (see fig. 3).

Where is the Jewish Question to be solved? The obvious answer was "here" (in the lands of the Jewish dispersion), and not "there" (in Palestine or in some other territory set aside for the Jews). This principle was known in the Jewish political lexicon as *doikeyt*, a Yiddish word meaning (literally) "hereness," as opposed to the "thereness" of Zionism and other forms of Jewish territorial nationalism. It did not necessarily imply hostility to emigration, which was sometimes necessary, but it did imply a strong attachment to the land in which the Jews resided along with an even stronger objection to the idea that the Jews should establish an autonomous or sovereign territorial unit somewhere else in the world. The Jewish organizations I have mentioned loved to emphasize the Jews' deep roots in their "native land" and their outstanding contributions to its cultural and economic development (see fig. 4). On the eve of the Nazi revolution, German Jews were instructed by the Central-Verein to inform their gentile neighbors, "The graves of my forefathers are in German soil. I know that for more than a thousand years Jews have lived and worked in Germany. My mother tongue is German. I can speak no other language; Hebrew for me is a language of prayer, like Latin for the Catholics."¹⁸ A Jewish member of the Hungarian parliament, presumably a serious man, boasted in 1920 that the Jews were present at the very creation of the first Hungarian state in the



Fig. 3: Blending In. Oscar Straus, appointed U.S. Secretary of Commerce and Labor in 1906—the first Jewish member of an American cabinet—embodies acculturation by perfectly blending into this group portrait of its members. (Source: Oscar S. Straus, *Under Four Administrations. From Cleveland to Taft. Recollections of Oscar S. Straus* [Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1922]. Photograph by Clinedinst.)



Fig. 4: A Jewish Explorer. This illustration sheds light on a little-known chapter in the glorious history of the Jewish contribution to German culture as an intrepid German explorer of the Mosaic persuasion presses forward in the African bush. (Source: *Wir deutschen Juden, 321–1932* [Berlin, 1932?].)

tenth century: "Among the 108 smaller Magyar tribes which were formed by the conquering Magyars, there were Jewish nations."¹⁹

"Hereness," in this case, at least, meant fervent patriotism. A much favored activity was the compilation of lists of Jews who had fought (and better still, fallen) in defense of their country. Simon Wolf discovered that no less than 7,243 Jewish soldiers had fought in the American Civil War (336 were killed); Wilhelm Filderman, a leader of Romanian Jewry, unearthed the names of 882 Jewish martyrs killed while serving in the Romanian army in World War I.²⁰ Some Polish Jews made a holy icon of the Jewish officer Bronisław Mansperl, a legionnaire who fought for Polish independence during World War I and fell in 1915, "mort pour la Pologne"²¹ (see fig. 5).

The tragicomic hunt for Jewish patriots and martyrs was combined with a rather pathetic effort to claim a kind of spiritual or historical affinity between the Jews and their "hosts." Some Polish Jews liked to speak of the shared history of suffering and martyrdom that linked together the Polish and the Jewish experience.²² In 1901 the president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, a reform organization, proclaimed:

[In America] the principles, that were first enunciated by Moses and endorsed by Israel at Sinai three thousand years ago, were again proclaimed to the world and ineradicably engrafted upon the then young and already vigorous nation.

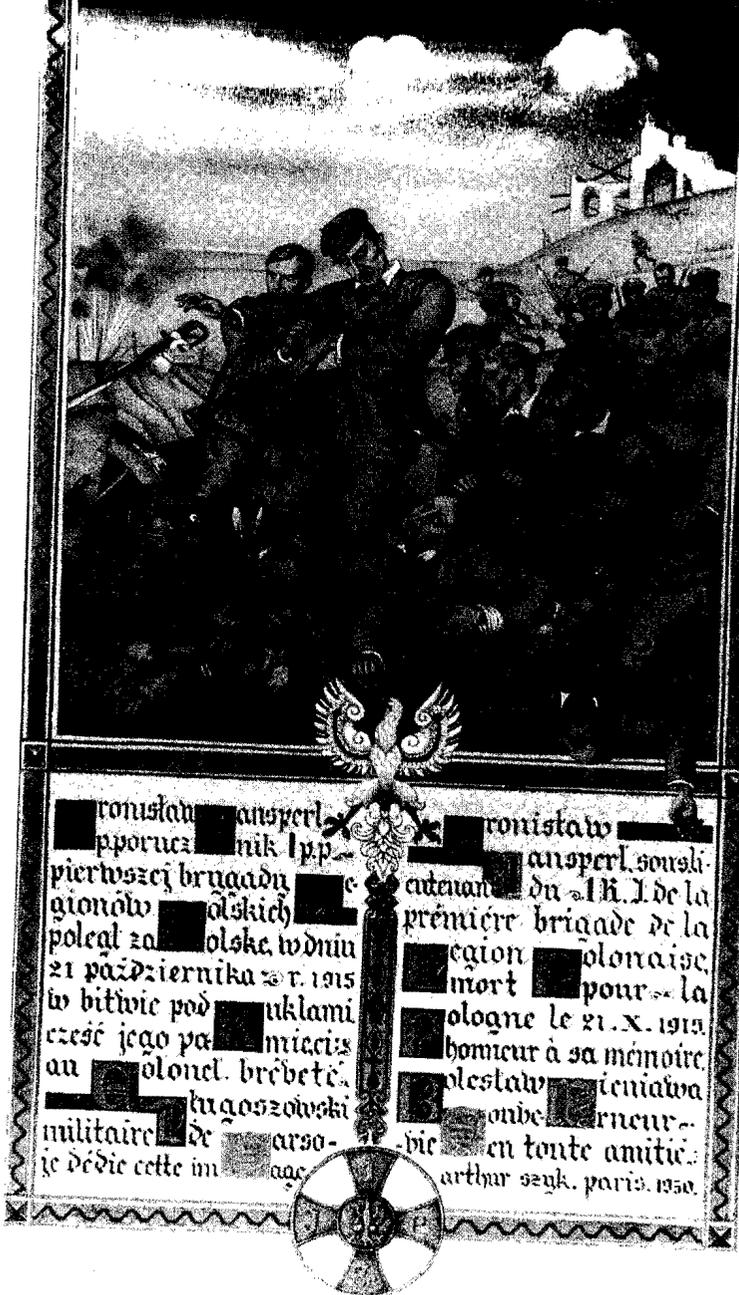


Fig. 5: *Mort pour la Pologne*. The artist Artur Szyk depicts the heroic death of a Jewish officer of the Polish legion, Bronisław Mansperl, who was killed in the struggle for Polish independence during World War I. The Polish eagle spreads its wings in this icon of Jewish martyrdom for the Polish cause. (Artur Szyk, *Statut kaliski*, presented by the Polish government to Nahum Sokilow and to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1933. The National Library, Jerusalem, Israel.)

Here was first sounded the historic bell that announced liberty to all in obedience to the words of scripture, "Proclaim liberty throughout the land, to all the inhabitants thereof" . . . this has ever been the tocsin of Israel and America.²³

In the concert hall of the Young Men's Hebrew Association in New York City the names of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson are displayed alongside the names of Isaiah and Moses. And in 1954, when American Jewry celebrated three hundred years of prosperous and relatively peaceful residence in the country, a logo was devised that combined Jewish and American symbols into one splendid harmonious whole (see fig. 6).

Those who agreed with the views of the rabbi just cited as well as with the designers of the 1953 symbol of the affinity between Israel and America had little difficulty in selecting their favorite historical figures and their favorite historical epochs. They naturally preferred people who had succeeded in combining loyalty to Judaism with close cultural links to the great outside world. Such a man, so they thought, was the first-century philosopher Philo of Alexandria, after whom the Central-Verein named its publishing house, the Philo-Verlag.²⁴ Even better was the world-renowned Maimonides, a master of both Jewish and non-Jewish culture, a universal genius who wrote his philosophical works in Arabic, a man of intellect hailed as "the great reformer of those days" by Simon Wolf,²⁵ and the ideal Jew as portrayed by the American Jewish artist Jack Levine (see fig. 7). But the historical figure who most perfectly fit their needs was Moses Mendelssohn, the German-born eighteenth-century father of the Jewish enlightenment (Haskalah) movement. He was a hero to the small band of Jews preaching Russification and modernization in the czarist empire.²⁶ In America members of the Mendelssohn Society were among the founders of the Jewish fraternal association B'nai B'rith;²⁷ and for children the American Jewish Publication Society issued a moving biography of the young Moses Mendelssohn, portraying his heroic struggle to break out of the old, closed Jewish ghetto and to gain secular knowledge



Fig. 6: *Jewishness Is Americanness*. In this logo selected by the American Jewish Tercentenary Committee in 1953, a menorah, the most famous of all Jewish symbols, is topped by eight American (not Jewish) stars. No Hebrew letters were included, much to the disgust of the Jewish nationalists. (Source: *New York Herald Tribune*, March 18, 1953.)



Fig. 7: The Ideal Jew. In this American Jewish artist's depiction of Maimonides, the great medieval Spanish Jewish philosopher and physician, American Jewry's ideal type is represented. (Jack Levine, *Maimonides*, 1952. Courtesy of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.)

while remaining loyal to Judaism.²⁸ It appears that there are no streets named after him in the Zionist and ultra-Orthodox Jewish city of Jerusalem (which does, by the way, contain a street named after the antisemitic Chopin), but he was the patron saint of a large number of modern Jewish organizations that preached acculturation, patriotism, and modernized Judaism.

For such organizations, obviously, the best of all periods of Jewish history was the modern one (post-1789 and pre-1933), which had witnessed, so they believed, the triumph of both enlightenment and emancipation. With regard to ancient Jewish history, when the Jews were an independent nation, the chosen heroes were neither kings nor warriors but rather the prophets, who combined, so it was thought, deep religiosity, a

rejection of narrow parochialism, and a universalist outlook. According to an official publication of the leading French Jewish organization, the Alliance israélite universelle, "the grand idea of universal fraternity is the idea of the Jewish prophets."²⁹ In the 1899 American Reform Rabbi Henry Berkowitz put it this way: "It was the great discovery of the prophets of the eighth century that the God of Israel is the God of mankind, the God of Judea is the God of the universe. This great thought then for the first time broke through the bonds of nationality and announced the Universal religion."³⁰

What of non-Jewish allies? The most likely candidates were individuals and organizations that saw in religious pluralism and toleration a highly desirable feature of modern society. This often (but not invariably) ruled out alliances with the political right and pointed to the desirability of linking up with the liberals and the left. Thus in Imperial Germany the Central-Verein looked to the small progressive parties for support.³¹ In Romania, where pluralists were in short supply, the Union of Romanian Jews (Uniunea Evreilor Români, or UER), was linked with the Liberal party ("liberal," it might be said, only by Romanian standards). In America, where both political parties believed in pluralism, it was possible to be either pro-Democrat or pro-Republican. Another available option was to join forces with other like-minded minority groups. A fascinating example is the famous alliance between Jews and blacks (then called Negroes) in the United States, an alliance initiated and fostered by the Jews. Louis Marshall of the American Jewish Committee was a supporter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and Jacob Schiff took a serious interest in black education in the South.³² Jewish support for the black cause (by which was meant most emphatically the cause of integration, not the cause of black nationalism) may have derived in part from disinterested idealism, but it was also based on the perception that American Jews had a real interest in the successful integration of all minority groups into American society. If the blacks, low men on the American totem pole, could make it, so, surely, could the Jews.³³

In their efforts to achieve their goals, Jewish organizations of the type I have discussed usually preferred low-profile tactics. Not for them the mass rallies and open confrontations favored by others. Rather, they preferred quiet intercession with the authorities. An excellent summary of this position is the statement by Cyrus Adler in a letter to Jacob Schiff:

The Jewish people, my dear Mr. Schiff, are somewhat to blame, in my opinion, for the attacks [against them]. We have made a noise in the world of recent years in America and England and probably elsewhere, far out of proportion to our numbers. We have demonstrated and shouted and paraded and congressed and waved flags to an extent which was bound to focus upon the Jew the attention of the world and having got this attention, we could hardly expect that it would all be favorable. Now it may be that many persons think this was a wise policy. I do not.³⁴

And neither did his colleague Louis Marshall, who back in 1908 had deplored "indiscreet, hot-headed and ill-considered oratory" that would inflict "untold injury upon the Jewish cause."³⁵

Finally, the people and organizations belonging to this school of Jewish politics evinced great optimism regarding the future of the Jewish Diaspora. History, they believed, was on their side. Reason would triumph over medieval superstition. The artificial walls separating the Jews from the rest of mankind would, like the walls of ancient Jericho, come tumbling down. When they did, the aims of the Central-Verein, the Alliance, the American Jewish Committee, and their sister organizations would be fulfilled at last. The barriers to advancement would collapse, allowing fully acculturated, patriotic Jews to bring their great talents to bear in the advancement of society for the general good.

It is not easy to find a suitable name for this particular variety of modern Jewish politics. In the eyes of its many enemies, its adherents were "assimilationists," a pejorative word in the vocabulary of modern Jewish politics if there ever was one. But if assimilation means to disappear altogether and to achieve a new identity in place of the old one, it is a completely inappropriate term to describe this group. The Marshalls and Schiffs, the members of the Central-Verein and the Alliance as well as the supporters of Jewish Polonization and Russification did not wish the Jews to disappear. They were survivalists who would never have agreed with Herr Julius Klesmer, the presumably Jewish musician in George Eliot's "Jewish" novel, a man with "cosmopolitan ideas. He looks forward to a fusion of races."³⁶ Herr Klesmer was a true assimilationist. But the Marshalls and Schiffs rejected "fusion"—they devoutly wished for the preservation and revitalization of the Jews who, as heirs to a great culture, a great history, and above all a great religious tradition had much to offer mankind. The Jewish collective, in their eyes, was something like an important and endangered species in the eyes of a conservationist, a species whose preservation was essential not only to its own members but to the happiness and well-being of the planet.

This school was therefore acculturationist without being assimilationist. It is sometimes called liberal because it usually adhered to liberal Judaism, sought liberal allies, and was usually liberal in its social orientation, but I prefer the term *integrationist*.³⁷ What its adherents really wanted the Jews to do was to integrate into the majority society without being entirely swallowed up by it. *Integration* in the American context usually refers to the struggle for black civil rights and is not associated with any particular Jewish cause. But the Jews of this political camp and the blacks associated with the NAACP and other integrationist organizations wanted essentially the same thing—to be recognized as being of their countries of residence, not merely in them, and at the same time to retain a strong group identity and cohesiveness—in the black instance based chiefly on the unique historical and cultural traditions associated with their race, in the Jewish instance based chiefly on a unique religious tradition. It will not be the last time that

this discussion mentions the interesting parallels between Jewish and black politics.

The Jews Are a Nation

Cyrus Adler, the quintessential integrationist, traveled to Paris in 1919 to attend the international peace conference. There he was not pleased to hear Ozjasz (Yehoshua) Thon, a Polish Zionist leader from Cracow, proclaim: "The Jews are a nation, not a religious sect, and we wish the world to know it."³⁸ All those who agree with Thon's definition of the Jews belong to the national school of modern Jewish politics. Of course, the definition of the Jews as a nation meant different things to different people. It certainly did not exclude the proposition that the Jews were also a religious group (this was, in fact, the view of Thon himself, who was both a Zionist and a leading rabbi). The point is that for most Jewish nationalists "nation" came first. And this above all—if the Jews were a modern nation, they obviously deserved to possess national rights, which could mean anything from full-fledged statehood to some sort of national autonomy in the lands of their dispersion.

A modern nation requires its own unique national language. This was an article of faith for virtually all nationalists, at least in Eastern Europe, from Albanians to Ukrainians. Therefore, members of the Jewish national political camp, although certainly not opposed to learning and speaking the "language (or languages) of the land"—Thon and his colleagues were fluent in Polish—insisted that the Jews cultivate a Jewish language, teach it to their children, and make it the chief cultural ornament of the organized Jewish community, the jewel in its national crown. To repeat, European Jewry was blessed with at least two languages of its very own, Yiddish and Hebrew (Ladino, or Judeo-Spanish, the language of the Sephardic Jews of the Balkans, was also very much alive in the interwar period, but it was spoken by a relatively small number of people). Jewish nationalists, united in opposing the integrationists' ideological commitment to acculturation, split into Hebraists and Yiddishists. Although it was possible to adopt a two-language policy and favor the cultivation of both Hebrew and Yiddish, fierce enmity between advocates of these two very distinct tongues was common. Extreme Yiddishists, as the passionate advocates of the cause of that often-despised "jargon" were called, sometimes declared Hebrew to be a dead language, the Jewish equivalent of Latin or Sanskrit. If, as was often the case, they were leftists, they were likely to attack the "holy language" (*loshn koydesh*) as a tool of reactionary, obscurantist clerics. The attitude of other Jewish nationalists to Yiddish was reminiscent of the attitude of the integrationists, of which we have already furnished an example. Arthur Koestler, at one time in the course of his ideological odyssey an enthusiastic Jewish nationalist of the Zionist type, had this to say about the language spoken by millions of Jews:

It had no fixed grammar and syntax, no fixed vocabulary, no logical precision. It was not spoken but sung, to the accompaniment of gestures. Nothing said in Yiddish seemed to be a flat statement. . . . I disliked this language, and the mentality which it reflected, from the first time I heard it, and I have never lost my aversion for it.³⁹

At least Koestler admits that Yiddish is a language, a concession some of its enemies were unwilling to make. But he and many of his fellow Zionists were surely not pleased by the results of a Jewish cultural conference held in Czernowitz, the capital of Bukovina, in 1908, at which a group of Yiddishists including some celebrated Yiddish writers declared Yiddish to be a *national language* of the Jewish people.⁴⁰

Where should the new, modern national culture be created? The “here versus there” question, like the language question, split the nationalists into two factions. Some believed that the Jewish Question could only be resolved by establishing an autonomous Jewish territory, perhaps even a fully independent state, “there,” either in Palestine (the Zionists) or somewhere else (the territorialists). Zionists, the most prominent representatives of this school, were usually Hebraists. Others, known as autonomists, or Diaspora nationalists, believed that the Jewish nation would be able to thrive “here,” in the lands of the Diaspora (more specifically the East European Diaspora) and that there was no need for it to be transferred to the Middle East, Alaska, Madagascar, or anywhere else. The social democratic party known as the Bund was probably the most important Jewish organization to take this position, which was shared by the smaller *Folkspartey*, whose adherents were known as *Folkists*. These and like-minded organizations were Yiddishist in their cultural orientation. The national advocates of “hereness” believed that their governments, of their own free will or under irresistible political pressure, would grant to the Jews not only equal rights as individuals but also recognition as a national minority with legally defined national minority rights, above all in the realm of culture—for example the right to establish Yiddish-language state-financed schools and other cultural institutions wherever large numbers of Yiddish-speaking, national-minded Jews resided. The teacher Hurvitz in *Three Cities*, Sholem Asch’s novel of Jewish life in Eastern Europe, expresses their viewpoint in an argument with the Zionist Zachary Gavrilovich Mirkin: “There’s no Jewish nation but this one,” says Hurvitz, “and there’s no asylum to which it can flee. Our forefathers had enough wandering through the world; we have to stay where we are and do battle for ourselves here!”⁴¹

In this case, too, as in the case of language, there was room for compromise. There were Jewish nationalists who believed that some Jews should devote themselves to the establishment of the Jewish national home in Palestine, whereas others would be able to maintain a modern Jewish national life in the Diaspora. A dual Hebrew–Yiddish polity could therefore be paralleled by a toleration for both “here” and for “there,” a recognition of the legitimacy of the struggle for Jewish national rights in the

Diaspora and for a Jewish state. In many cases, however, hostility between Zionists and Diaspora nationalists ran very deep: The former were accused, among other crimes, of running away from the battle, of promoting a utopian scheme, and of abandoning the Jewish masses fated to remain in Europe; the latter were denounced as blind believers in the continued existence of the doomed Diaspora and as deniers of the deeply rooted historical links of the Jewish people with the Land of Israel.

Jewish integrationists, as we know, were fond of emphasizing their patriotism, their Americanism, Germanism, and so on. For the nationalists things were different. They certainly regarded themselves as loyal citizens of the countries they inhabited, although this was sometimes contested by antisemites, like those Poles who urged them to act on their beliefs with cries of “Żydzi do Palestyny” (“Jews to Palestine”). But they had no compelling reason either to boast of their patriotism or to claim a real or invented affinity to the host nation. The Jewish nation, like all nations, was by definition unique. On the other hand, other nations might well be admired, even emulated. Jewish nationalists, although agreeing with most Polish nationalists that the Jews were not, and could never become Poles, were happy enough to use Polish nationalism as a model and as an inspiration for their own activities. This sort of relationship between Jew and gentile was regarded as more “honorable” than the approach of the integrationists, interpreted in the nationalist camp as smacking of the dread disease of self-hatred, as being both fawning and self-denigrating.

Who were the Jewish heroes of the nationalists, and which eras in Jewish history did they most admire? For the secular Zionists the answers were fairly obvious. They naturally looked with favor on the very distant but not forgotten centuries of Jewish independence in Palestine, and among their heroes were those ancient Jewish warriors who had fought the good fight to conquer their country or to liberate it from foreign oppression—like Bar Kokhba, who led a valiant (but unsuccessful, even disastrous) revolt against Rome, and the more successful Judah Maccabee, who defeated the Hellenized Syrians. Some early Zionist organizations were named after these heroes, for example, the celebrated Bar Kokhba Society in Prague. Other exemplary figures were taken from the modern period of the Jewish national renaissance, and in particular from among the stalwarts of the Jewish rebirth in Palestine—like the members of the pre–World War I defense organization *Ha-shomer* (The Guard), after which the famous interwar Zionist youth movement *Ha-shomer ha-tsair* (The Young Guard) was named. The celebrated youth movement *Betar* (short for *Brit Trumpeldor* [the *Trumpeldor* Union]) derived its name both from the Zionist martyr Yosef Trumpeldor, killed in 1920 in defense of a Jewish settlement in northern Palestine, and from the ancient Palestinian Jewish town of *Betar*, which played a role in the heroic second-century revolt against Rome.⁴²

Such heroes were not always suitable for the religious nationalists.

Trumpeldor, for example, was a left-winger, and so were the members of Ha-shomer. These people, presumably, did not worry about eating non-kosher food and traveling on the Sabbath. Much to be preferred were such sages as Rabbi Akiva, also a "Palestinian" and a martyr, killed by the Romans in the second century; several religious Zionist youth movements were named after him. As for the anti-Zionist, antiterritorialist and Yiddishist Diaspora nationalists, they were not particularly enamored of the Bar Kokhbas of Jewish history, nor did they cherish the periods of Jewish territorial independence. The famous Jewish historian Simon Dubnow, a father of the ideology of Diaspora nationalism, emphasized in his writings the importance of postbiblical Diaspora Jewish autonomous life, when the Jews were organized in legally recognized communities and enjoyed a considerable degree of autonomy—for example, in premodern Poland, which featured Jewish "parliaments" known as the Council of the Four Lands (Va'ad arba aratsot in Hebrew) and the Council of the Land of Lithuania (Va'ad medinat lita).⁴³ If sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Polish Jewry, led by its most distinguished rabbis and laymen, had its own self-government, so twentieth-century Jewry, at least in Eastern Europe, might develop its own unique national culture within the framework and under the guidance of its still-existing but now secularized and democratized *kehiles* (*kehilot* in Hebrew, the government-sanctioned communal organizations).

Now to the question of alliances: Who were perceived to be the nationalists' potential supporters among the gentiles? Two interesting alliance strategies were particularly attractive to the nationalist school. One was to forge political ties with other oppressed or unhappy national minorities with the aim of coercing the host country into making the necessary concessions and granting them national rights. The Zionists of central and eastern Poland, advocates of both the Palestinian solution and national minority rights in the Diaspora, made this the centerpiece of their political strategy in the 1920s when they played a key role in establishing so-called minority blocs. Polish elections in 1922 and again in 1928 featured the participation of a special electoral list comprised of representatives of the Jewish, German, Ukrainian, and Belorussian nationalities, all of whom hoped to compel the stubborn Polish majority to alter what was seen to be an unyielding, chauvinistic policy on the national minorities question. In interwar Czechoslovakia the Jewish national party linked up with representatives of the small Polish minority there. A variation on this theme was represented by the policy of some Russian Jewish nationalists in the immediate post-World War I period, who sought a political alliance with the Lithuanians, members of a "weak" nationality in the process of asserting its claims to independence; the latter promised, in return for Jewish support, to recognize Jewish national rights in a free and multinational Lithuanian state. One of Zionism's most celebrated interwar leaders, Vladimir (Zev) Jabotinsky, advocated an alliance between the Jews and the Ukrainians, whose national movement he admired and supported.⁴⁴ In contrast to the

American integrationists, whose alliance with blacks (and other local ethnic groups) was designed to promote Americanization and to prove that integration could work in their country, Jewish nationalists sought to work with other powerless or relatively weak nationalities in order to facilitate the establishment in Eastern Europe of a multinational environment in which all nationalities, including the Jews, would be free to develop their national culture. Of course, the Zionists did not believe that the Jewish Question could be solved merely by achieving national rights in the Diaspora—gaining such rights in countries like Poland and Lithuania was obviously very important, but it was perceived by many as a means to an end, namely, the establishment of some kind of "national home" in Palestine. The attainment of extraterritorial national rights in the Diaspora was desirable in that it would enable the Jews to sustain their process of nation building, the logical fulfillment of which was the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. The attainment of this classic aim of Herzlean, mainstream Zionism suggested another potentially valuable ally, namely, right-wing or even overtly antisemitic forces. After all, antisemites were interested in getting rid of the Jews, and the Zionists were interested in the transfer of Jews to Palestine. There existed, at least in theory, a perfectly natural "community of interest" between them. It would be absurd to argue (as some have) that the Zionists wished to incite pogroms; but given the fact that there were pogroms, that antisemitism was such a powerful force, and that the Zionists believed that only a Jewish state could adequately protect the Jewish people from the dangers of antisemitism, why not come to terms with the antisemites so as to benefit Zionism? It made perfect sense, therefore, for Zionist leaders to negotiate with representatives of antisemitic regimes in Eastern Europe in the 1930s, hoping for support for Zionism's demand to facilitate mass Jewish *aliyah* (the Hebrew term for immigration to Palestine). If Theodor Herzl, the founder of political Zionism, met with the Russian minister of the interior in 1903, directly after the infamous Kishinev pogrom, so Jabotinsky negotiated with Polish politicians in the late 1930s, calling on their government to facilitate large-scale Jewish "evacuation" from Eastern Europe to the Holy Land. This was a very controversial policy and was furiously denounced by Jewish enemies of Zionism—even by many Zionists—as an attempt to make a pact with the devil. Jabotinsky was not very successful—the Poles liked and supported him, but could not open the gates of British Palestine. Nonetheless, one of Zionism's strengths was its ability to find allies among those East European politicians, antisemitic or not, who felt that there were simply too many Jews in their countries and did not know what to do with them as well as those West European and American politicians who feared an influx of East European Jews and much preferred them to travel east rather than west.

If the leaders of the American Jewish Committee and other like-minded organizations advocated low-profile political tactics, the nationalists, divided on so many issues, were united in their support, at least in

principle, of open, strident, "proud," and fearless political behavior. They dismayed more cautious Jewish politicians with their demands for the convening of Jewish congresses and national councils. They rejected what they called the politics of *shtadlanut* (*shtadlonen* in Yiddish), by which they meant the practice of dispatching Jewish "notables," hat in hand, to negotiate with gentile leaders behind closed doors, in smoke-filled rooms. They paraded, demonstrated, shouted, and boycotted—embracing what their enemies called the politics of noise (*tareram*)—and professed, despite their minority status, not to be concerned with what the gentiles might think or say or even do. True, they did not always practice what they preached. But they were the organizers of mass Jewish demonstrations and strikes held in Poland in the late 1930s to protest as loudly as possible against antisemitic violence. They were not afraid to ally themselves with other non-Polish minorities during election campaigns, despite the not unfounded fears of some Jews that such tactics constituted a dangerous anti-Polish provocation, and they did establish self-defense groups of the type that Zangwill's unhappy hero, David Ben Amram, wanted to organize in his Polish shtetl in order to teach the pogromists (*pogromsbchiki*) a lesson once and for all.

We already know that Jewish nationalists were split on the question of the ultimate viability of Jewish Diaspora life. Zionists, by definition, were deeply pessimistic—they believed, after all, that antisemitism was endemic to the Diaspora—although even the most fanatic members of this Jewish political persuasion did not really believe that all or even most Jews would, or could, go to Palestine. A Diaspora would therefore continue to exist, but it would be sustained by the existence of a Jewish homeland serving as a cultural and political model and as a magnet for its best and brightest sons and daughters. Without such a territorial center Jewish Diaspora life would inevitably succumb to antisemitism or to the blandishments of assimilation. The Diaspora nationalists would have none of this. They were not all principled enemies of Jewish emigration to Palestine (or to any other place), but they were great believers in the rosy future of Jewish-gentile peaceful coexistence within the framework of the multinational, democratic state. Many clung to this optimism, to this version of *doikayt*, even in the dark days of the late 1930s. The Yiddish poet Yitshak Katzenelson, in a famous poem written during the years of mass destruction, depicts the advocates of Diaspora nationalism, the Bundists, and the followers of the Agudah, as finally waking up to the futility of their position and crying, "To Palestine, let us save ourselves. . . ."45 But even in those times optimism was not entirely extinguished. Consider the final statement of Shmuel Zygelbojm, the leader of the Jewish Bund, written shortly before his suicide in 1943: "My wish is that those few survivors of the millions of Polish Jews will live to see, along with the Polish population, the realization of the redemption in Poland, in a world of freedom and socialist justice. I believe that such a Poland will arise, and such a world will come."⁴⁶ There could be no greater faith than this in the viability of the Jewish Diaspora, a faith based on the belief that the Jewish and Polish

nations, inhabiting the same country, could work and even fight together for a better future.

Jewish Jews

Jews who remained faithful to what became known during the nineteenth century as Orthodox Judaism (so long as all Jews were "Orthodox" there was no need for such a term), who spurned the "improvements" introduced by the reformers, and who did their utmost to keep the 613 commandments of Jewish law (while usually rejecting the almost identical number of compositions listed by Ludwig Köchel in his Mozart catalog) could be found in small numbers among the integrationists and in rather greater numbers among the nationalists (they created the special religious Zionist party called the Mizrahi). But a large and politically very potent section within the Orthodox community established its own unique political camp, a "third force" within Jewish politics, which merits a distinct place in our typology. The representative organization here was Agudat Israel (League of Israel), founded in 1912; it is usually referred to simply as the Agudah.

The reply of this Jewish political camp to the first question I asked (see p. 5) lay somewhere in between the responses of the integrationists and the nationalists. The idea that the Jews constituted a "nation" did not frighten the Orthodox, although the preferred term was the more vague Yiddish word *folk* (people: *am* in Hebrew). But they were a religious nation, or no nation at all, a religions-folk in the rather awkward formulation of an early Agudah proclamation dating from 1916.⁴⁷ "The Jewish nation," wrote an Agudah leader in 1921, "is the nation of God. . . ."48 Another favorite formulation had it that the Jews were a *Toyre traye* people (a people loyal to the Torah).

It would be utterly wrong then, indeed sacrilege, to claim that the Jews were a modern nation similar to the Lithuanians or the Albanians or even the Poles. And it followed that to demand modern national rights (as opposed to traditional religious rights) for the Jews was also absurd, as we are told in the following verses from an Agudah youth organization publication in Poland:

All the peoples of the world, using the sword
base their existence on land and language.
But our people dwells alone
Only God's Torah gives it life.⁴⁹

The notion of "dwelling alone" bore obvious implications for the cultural orientation of the "Torah true" or, as they also referred to themselves, Jewish Jews (*Yidishe yidn*) (see fig. 8). The famous Chinese wall separating Jew from gentile, which the integrationist beavers were so busy chewing away at, was regarded as a blessing. This being the case, one



Fig. 8: *Jewish Jews*. An artistic portrayal of potential supporters of Agudat Israel at work. (Max Weber, *The Talmudists*, 1934. Jewish Museum/Art Resource, New York City.)

would expect, at least in Eastern Europe, a devotion to Yiddish, not because this language was regarded as a basis of modern secular Jewish nationalism but because its preservation reduced the likelihood of close contacts with the non-Jewish world. In fact the Agudah of Eastern Europe “spoke Yiddish,” although it never developed an ideology of Yiddishism. Hebrew, the “holy language,” continued to be revered as the language of prayer and of religious learning, but the campaign to make Hebrew a spoken language in the European Diaspora, led as it was by secular nationalists who spread this doctrine in their secular Hebrew schools, was regarded with great suspicion.

There was nothing in the ideology of the Orthodox camp to prevent its adherents from learning and speaking non-Jewish languages. Such things were, after all, necessary. And in Central Europe, particularly in

Germany and Hungary, some Orthodox Jews affiliated with Agudah took a strong stand in favor of the adoption of the language and customs (up to a point) of the land, thereby combining antinational Orthodoxy with acculturation.⁵⁰ But the vast majority of Orthodox Jewry, and above all the vast majority of the most conservative section of Orthodox Jewry, the adherents of Hasidism, resided in Eastern Europe. There the Yiddish orientation remained dominant until the end of the interwar period, as did the distinct Jewish dress so despised by the integrationists.

The Land of Israel is, of course, of central importance to every religious Jew. Orthodox Jews of the Agudah variety believed that the Jews would eventually be gathered together in their promised land as the result of the direct intervention of divine forces in human history. It was commonly believed that the Jews would return to the Land of Israel in the Messianic age, whenever that might be. Meanwhile an Orthodox Jewish community was maintained in Palestine, consisting mostly of pious East European Jews who settled generally in the holy cities of Jerusalem, Hebron, Tiberias, and Safed. It is, therefore, not quite right to use the word *doikheyt* to define the attitude of Orthodox Jews to the question of “here versus there.” Residence in the land of the gentiles was regarded as “exile” (in Hebrew *galut*; *goles* in Yiddish) no matter how long it might go on, and it was not the last stop on the Jewish journey, as the integrationists and Diaspora nationalists believed. Nonetheless, the partisans of Agudah were ideologically opposed to Zionist and territorialist schemes. A Jewish national home or state in Palestine/Eretz Yisrael—the work not of God and not of pious Jews but of heretical secularists, of Jewish nationalists who were enemies of Judaism—was regarded as a certain recipe for catastrophe, a revolt against God Himself, and a provocation in the eyes of the gentiles. Cooperation with secularists in the Zionist venture was rejected because nothing good could come of any project dominated by men and women who had jettisoned their glorious Jewish heritage and whose greatest dream was that the Jews establish merely another secular nation-state. True, some Orthodox Jews, organized in the Mizrachi party, favored such cooperation, arguing that in the long run they would succeed in taking over the Zionist movement from within, causing its secular leaders to “return” to Judaism and establishing a Jewish state based on Jewish Orthodox religious law. In the eyes of the Agudah such people were traitors to the Orthodox cause because they were legitimatizing secular Jewish nationalism in the eyes of the pious Jewish masses. In the 1930s, Agudah’s principled opposition to the Zionist movement was somewhat muted by the rise of nazism and Polish antisemitism, which made the need for a Jewish refuge in a hostile world so pressing. However, the party never abandoned its ideological enmity to the idea of creating a basically secular Jewish national entity “there,” especially “there” in the Holy Land. Most pious Jews would, God willing, remain where they were.

Orthodox Jewry had no difficulty in identifying its Jewish heroes—the great rabbinical authorities of all ages—and its villains—the heretics and, in

the modern period, the Jewish "enlighteners" (*maskilim*), Moses Mendelssohn and his spiritual heirs, whose desire to make Judaism conform to "the spirit of the times" had opened a Pandora's box of troubles, including the worst blow of all—conversion to Christianity. For the large Hasidic community, the pillar of anti-Zionist Orthodox Jewry, whose origins were in eighteenth-century Poland and Russia, the most important Jewish historical figures were obviously the Rebbes, the charismatic leaders of the various Hasidic courts to be found all over Eastern Europe (but not in Central or Western Europe, and not, in the interwar period at least, in the United States). As for historic periods, what stands out is not so much the choice of exemplary eras from the past but rather the unanimous feeling that the modern age was one of extreme danger for the Jewish people. It was only natural for the Orthodox Jews to look back with longing to the "golden age" of European Jewry, before the emergence of Mendelssohn and his ilk, when all were God-fearing and all were under the strict but benevolent control of the natural leaders of the Jewish people, the rabbis. Thus, in 1930 when the Polish organization of "Agudah girls" (Bnos agudah) announced that it intended to fight against the "free spirit" of modern times, it was also announcing its appreciation of previous, happier periods in Jewish history.⁵¹

Unbending, rigid in its devotion to traditional Judaism, this school of Jewish politics was pragmatic in its alliance systems. Potential gentile allies included all those political forces that subscribed to religious pluralism and were willing to allow traditional Jews to practice their religion in peace and earn a living. As in the case of Zionism, but for different reasons, deals with right-wingers were possible. In Poland the Agudah made a famous political alliance with the regime of Marshal Józef Piłsudski—an authoritarian, but no great antisemite, and certainly tolerant of religious (if not always national) diversity in his country—a leader who preferred the Orthodox Jews to the socialists, who preached violent revolution, or the militant national Jews, who wanted to transform Poland from a nation-state into a "state of nationalities" with national autonomy for all. In Latvia the Agudah established a good working relationship with the right-wing regime that took power following the coup of 1934. The socialist left, regarded correctly enough as antireligious, was usually ruled out as a possible political partner. Agudah certainly much preferred the politically and culturally conservative environment of interwar Eastern Europe (at least up until the mid-1930s) to the militantly atheistic and horribly intolerant Communist regime set up in the Soviet Union, where it could find no gentile allies at all and where its adherents were fiercely persecuted.

As might be expected the Orthodox camp in general was no champion of high-profile political tactics. Its philosophy of life counseled against needlessly provoking the gentiles. The Agudah was an unabashed advocate of the policy of *shtadlanut*, the very policy so maligned in "proud" nationalist circles. One of its newspapers wrote in 1920 that "the entire Zionist

tareram [noise] over 'struggle,' over the obligation and necessity to struggle, consists only of words and not deeds."⁵²

On this issue the Agudah was in basic agreement with the leaders of the American Jewish Committee. In 1936 when the Polish Sejm (parliament) debated legislation to prohibit ritual slaughter of animals (*shkhhite*), a matter of life and death for the Orthodox community, a leading rabbinic authority wrote that "it would be fitting to move heaven and earth on this question, but the protest must come from them [presumably Jews abroad] and not from us, for various reasons. . . ." ⁵³ When things became truly intolerable the preferred rabbinic tactic was to call for a public day of fasting—an extreme measure, to be sure, but nonetheless a quiet, passive one.

The Agudah-type Orthodox were natural optimists, at least in the long run. The Messiah would come, and in the meantime the Jews, despite their suffering, would persevere and prevail. In Poland it was noted that the very name Poland (*Polin* in Hebrew) demonstrated that the Jewish connection with this land was divinely inspired and likely to endure (*po* in Hebrew means here; *lin* derives from the verb to dwell).⁵⁴ Orthodox optimism, deriving from religious faith, not from the integrationists' faith in enlightenment and liberalism, thus stood in opposition to the fundamental Zionist pessimism with regard to the future of the Jewish Diaspora.

Halfway Houses

The answers to my seven questions were sometimes far from unambiguous. In one particular case, which demands our special attention, they were actually contradictory. When confronted with the "What are the Jews?" issue, it was possible to answer: In the future the Jews shall not be a nation, but at present they are. The Jews of the present might be mostly Yiddish-speaking and the possessors of a distinctive national consciousness; the Jews of the future would most likely acculturate and perhaps even assimilate. It followed that the kinds of organizations they might need *now* would become, in the fullness of time, superfluous: "A better world [was coming] . . . where there will be neither nations, classes, nor religions, but only one united, advancing humanity."⁵⁵

This was a position that even some full-fledged Jewish nationalists might take—Bundists, even Zionist socialists, might believe and hope that in the (probably distant) future nations would merge into one glorious united humanity. But the most notable adherents of this position were the leaders of the "Jewish sections" of various socialist and Communist parties and fronts, semiautonomous organizations that catered to unacculturated, working-class people but at the same time tended to preach the virtues of, or at least accepted the inevitability of, eventual acculturation. It was well expressed by Semen Dimanshtain, one of the leaders of the Jewish section (*Yevseksiia*) of the Communist party of Soviet Russia, in 1918:

As internationalists, we do not set any special national tasks for ourselves . . . insofar as we speak a different language, we are obligated to make an effort to have the Jewish masses know their own language, satisfy their needs in their language. . . . We are not, however, fanatics of the Yiddish language. There is no "holy Yiddish" for us. . . . It is entirely possible that in the near future the richer languages of the stronger and more highly developed peoples will push aside the Yiddish language in every country. We Communists will shed no tears over this, nor will we do anything to obstruct this development.⁵⁶

Dimanshtain was obviously no Jewish nationalist. Moreover, since he and his fellow left-wing Jewish section activists, whether socialists or Communists, were total secularists, they could not, in contrast to the integrationists, combine a belief in the necessity for acculturation with a conception of a Jewish future as a religious sect with a unique, even holy mission. Their long-term attitude may therefore be considered not merely acculturationist but actually assimilationist. With the disappearance of Yiddish and other Jewish cultural and religious trappings such as their belief in their "chosenness" and in the Torah as well as their love, for example, of gefilte fish, the Jews as a coherent group would disappear, and so would their special language sections in the various cosmopolitan Socialist and Communist parties. These organizations may therefore be regarded as halfway houses, positioned between the ultimately doomed ghetto and a future of universal brotherhood. But temporary though they might have been, they did regard themselves as the authentic representatives and defenders of the proletariat, Yiddish-speaking Jewish nation of the present, obliged to be responsive to its special political and cultural needs. Thus, leaders of the Yevseksiia established Yiddish socialist schools for Jewish children, schools that would presumably be closed down when Yiddish would give way to Russian, or possibly to Esperanto.

Left, Right, and Center

The answers to our seven questions have yielded three distinct Jewish political camps—the integrationists, the nationalists, and the Orthodox—to which must be added the Jewish sections, positioned somewhere between the first two of these factions. Let me now complement this typology by placing the various Jewish political organizations on the left-right ideological spectrum, just as one might do in the case of French or Lithuanian politics.

The Jewish left consisted of all specifically Jewish organizations that believed the solution to the Jewish Question must include a thoroughgoing restructuring of Jewish (and perhaps also general) society and the establishment of a new social order based on justice and the absence of exploitation. It embraced an almost infinite variety of views, ranging from hard core bolshevism (the Yevseksiia, the Jewish bureau of the American

Communist party) through more moderate Marxist social democracy (the Bund and some varieties of the socialist Zionist Poale Zion) to anti-Marxist "reformism" of one kind or another (for example, the labor Zionist Hitahadut party). All claimed to represent a social element variously called the Jewish "proletariat" (whose very existence was denied by some people—most Jewish workers were tailors and shoemakers, not miners or automobile makers) or the Jewish "laboring masses" (whoever they might be) (see fig. 9). All believed that contemporary Jewish society was dominated by the Jewish "bourgeoisie," an element also difficult to define but one that had to be gotten rid of via class warfare or at least weakened in some way. This is the way the leader of the Jewish needle workers' union in a Polish town put it in a novel by Michal Bursztyn: "Our enemies are the master artisans. For us they are the representatives of capitalism in Ploynce. They and, of course, . . . the bourgeoisie, whose little sons and daughters fool around, for lack of anything better to do, in the Ha-tikva society."⁵⁷

The Jewish left was divided not only by different interpretations of the essence of socialism but by most of the "Jewish" issues that we have already discussed. Thus it included within its ranks numerous socialist Zionist organizations—all of which wished to create a Jewish socialist or "labor"



Fig. 9: The Jewish Working Class in America. A portrayal by an American pro-Communist artist of the Jewish laboring masses—potential socialists or Communists. (William Gropper, *Biographical Cartoon*, 1925–26. Photograph by Geoffrey Clements. Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.)

society on the national soil of Palestine—as well as the fiercely anti-Zionist Bund—a proponent of Diaspora nationalism that wished to transform Poland and the other countries where it was active into socialist societies in which the national cultural rights of all minorities would be guaranteed by law. It also included the socialist-dominated Jewish (or mostly Jewish) trade unions in America and in Eastern Europe—some pro-Bundist, some pro-Zionist, some neither one nor the other—and the various Jewish sections of general socialist and Communist organizations. Nor should we forget the existence of Orthodox proletarian organizations, identified with either the Mizrachi or the Agudah on Jewish issues but leftist in their social orientation; in some cases these organizations felt a strong if uneasy kinship with the secular Jewish left.⁵⁸

The cultural orientation of the Jewish left was primarily pro-Yiddish; this was, after all, the language of the Jewish masses it claimed to represent, and it was closely associated with Yiddish cultural activities. But the strong socialist Zionist component, with only a few exceptions, rejected Yiddishism and labored to create a new Hebrew-speaking Jewish working class in Palestine. In practice many socialist Zionist parties adopted a complicated two-language policy: Yiddish for the Jewish working class of the present East European and American Diaspora, Hebrew for the Jewish working-class-in-the-making in Palestine.

Divided in these highly significant ways, the Jewish left found common ground in its search for a usable Jewish past. If the integrationists admired the prophets for their universalism and lofty moral standards, so did the socialists, who also regarded them as pioneers in the struggle for social justice, as protosocialists (see fig. 10). Moses the lawgiver was much admired. Barukh Charney Vladeck, a Bundist in the old country and a pillar of the Jewish left in America, in 1920 wrote a play called *Moses Our Teacher* in which the lawgiver is depicted as a heroic fighter against slavery.⁵⁹ In general Jewish leftists were proud to point out that the Hebrew Bible, far more than the writings of the other ancient nations, was a source of progressive, even revolutionary, social thought. Thus the scholar Isaac Mendelsohn (who was also a Jewish Communist) claimed in his treatise on slavery in the ancient world that “the first man in the Ancient Near East who raised his voice in a sweeping condemnation of slavery as a cruel and inhuman institution, irrespective of nationality and race, was the philosopher Job.”⁶⁰ The Jewish artist and left-winger Ben Shahn invoked a famous, if rather obscure, verse from Leviticus in his poster calling for racial equality and cooperation (see fig. 11). And Raphael Soyer cited the prophet Amos as proof of his socialist conviction that all men are created equal (see fig. 12).

Suitable post-old Testament exemplars for the modern Jewish left were more difficult to unearth. Great rabbis would not do, and, unfortunately, there were no Jewish leaders of specifically Jewish social revolutions at hand—no Jewish equivalents to the Russian peasant leaders Stenka Razin or Yemelyan Pugachev. Jesus was a possibility—“my own Reb Yes-

hua,” as the socialist Jewish writer Alfred Kazin calls him—but this link with the founder of Christianity was, for atheistic Jewish socialists, a bit problematic.⁶¹ It was, however, possible to identify with the exploited Jewish masses, sorely oppressed by the Jewish rich—most dramatically during the reign of Nicholas I in Russia, when lower-class Jewish children were rounded up by the “kidnappers” of the Jewish community and drafted into the army (where they were often converted to Christianity and lost forever to the Jewish community). And popular religious movements could also be enlisted, above all early Hasidism, interpreted by some Jewish Marxists as a revolutionary movement directed against the oppressive establishment.⁶² Of course, the modern era had provided a large number

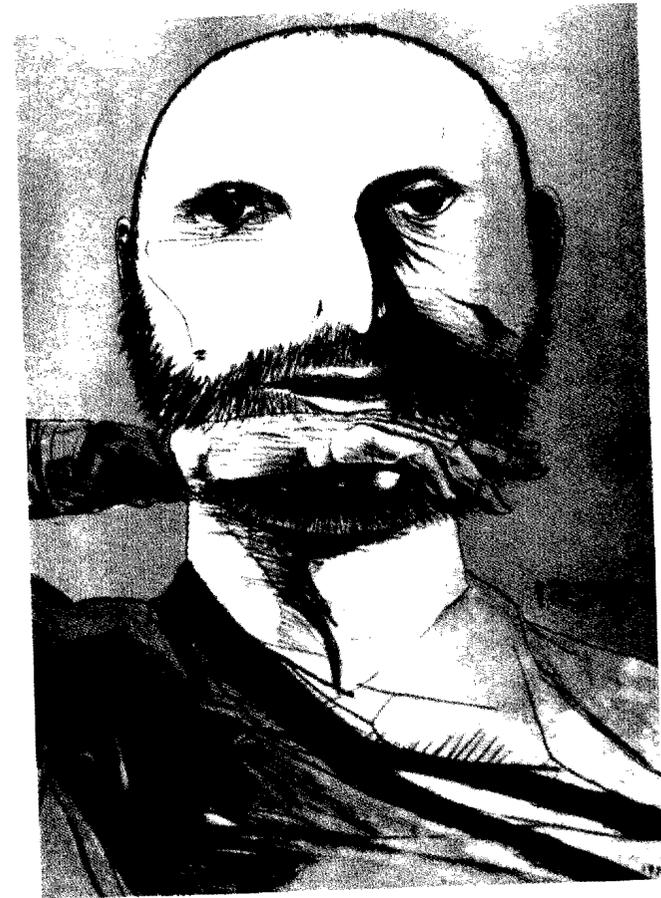


Fig. 10: *The Prophet as Socialist?* This modern Isaiah, as rendered by an American Jewish artist, has the look of a left-wing agitator. (Leonard Baskin, *Isaiah*, 1976.)

לא תעמד על-דם לעך
 "THOU SHALT NOT STAND IDLY BY..."

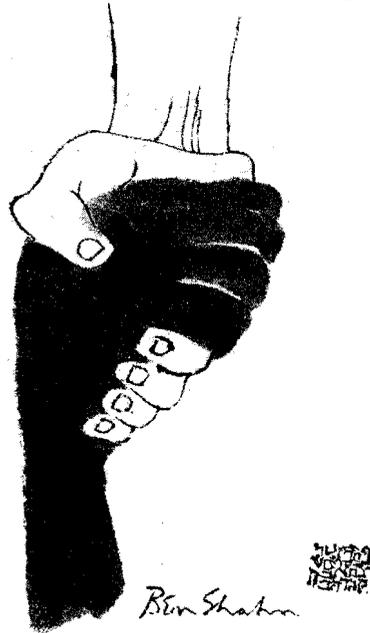


Fig. 11: The Bible Preaches Equality. The Torah is mobilized in support of the ideal of universal brotherhood. (Ben Shahn, *Thou Shalt Not Stand Idly By*, 1965. Philadelphia Museum of Art. Given by the Lawyers Constitutional Defense Committee of the American Civil Liberties Union. Estate of Ben Shahn/VAGA, New York, 1992.)

of left-wing heroes and martyrs of Jewish origin—starting with Karl Marx himself, whose blatant and inconvenient antisemitism was ignored or explained away. Their portraits decorated the meeting halls and party offices of Bundists, socialist Zionists, and Jewish Communists.

Thus the Jewish left—whether fully committed to Jewish nationalism or not, whether Zionist or anti-Zionist, whether Yiddishist or Hebraist—established a historical pedigree that enabled its predominantly secular, anti- or nonreligious leaders to claim that modern socialism was not foreign to the Jewish tradition. Its many factions were also agreed on the tremendous importance of linking up with the non-Jewish left in the name of international proletarian solidarity, of the need “to live in brotherhood with their neighbors and to fight shoulder to shoulder with them for a better world. . . .”⁶³ Alliance building for this Jewish political camp was

invested with great importance because the solidarity of Jewish and non-Jewish workers was seen not as a matter of temporary expediency but rather as the supreme test of the ideal of internationalism. It would demonstrate that non-Jews could be brothers, comrades-in-arms, partners in building a new world. This was an especially important matter for the Bund, since its version of the Jewish future was dependent to a very great extent on close cooperation between Jewish and non-Jewish socialists.

The Jewish right is more difficult to define than the Jewish left. If Jewish political parties of the left were proud to declare their ideological sympathy with the general European left, their opponents were usually unwilling to admit any ideological sympathy with the general European right, which in the interwar period was often synonymous with fascism (and, of course, antisemitism). Nonetheless, if we define the right as con-



Fig. 12: Scriptural Support for the NAACP. The prophet Amos’s message as interpreted by the artist, who includes the following Hebrew text in his picture which can be translated as, “Are you not as the children of the Ethiopians to me, O children of Israel?” (Raphael Soyer, *Amos on Racial Equality*, 1960s? Collection of Rebecca S. Beagle, Oakland, California. Photograph by Lisa Rubens.)

stituting a political camp fiercely opposed to socialism and conservative in its view of how Jewish society should be organized, a Jewish right in the interwar period is definitely discernible. Its main unifying characteristic was its single-minded emphasis on the absolute need for Jewish unity and consequently its deep hostility to all political movements that preached the idea of class war or even class division within the Jewish world. One of the favorite terms in the political vocabulary of the secular right was *monism* (*had-nes* in Hebrew; one flag), implying the supremacy of national unity, a traditional Jewish value, over social division. The Jewish left was attacked for its importing into the Jewish world of dangerous "foreign" ideas that falsely set Jew against Jew and therefore played into the hands of the common enemy, the antisemite.⁶⁴

If the holy principle of Jewish unity was a hallmark (though by no means a monopoly) of the entire Jewish right, on other matters, like the left, it was deeply divided. One of its chief components was Agudat Israel, which was anti-Zionist and antinationalist, at least in the modern sense of the term *nationalist*. This movement's social as well as its religious outlook was very conservative, even reactionary; it held that traditional Jewish elites should continue to dominate the Jewish community and represent it to the gentile community—on this matter its labor organization, Poalei Agudat Israel (workers of Agudat Israel) was not always in agreement with its parent organization.⁶⁵ If the left believed that Jewish society was "sick"—class-ridden, priest-ridden, and in urgent need of drastic reform or even revolution—Agudah stood firmly for the domination of the learned and the rich. It was neither by temperament nor by doctrine wedded to democracy, a point made in dramatic fashion by the protagonist of a novel on orthodox life who castigates the secular Zionists as "these enemies of Torah, these heathen-Jews, these swine that peddle away our tremendous spiritual heritage in return for—Democracy!"⁶⁶

Such were not necessarily the views of the major secular component of the Jewish right—the Zionist revisionist movement, established in the mid-1920s and the last of the major Jewish political forces to appear on the stage. It vehemently opposed class struggle on the Jewish street, but despite its socialist enemies' insistence that it possessed fascist characteristics, its mainstream never rejected the democratic way of doing politics. Whereas Agudah was the leading Jewish representative of the traditional, conservative right, the revisionists were dynamic, radical, and militant. As Zionists they were opposed to the status quo in the *galut*, in absolute opposition to the Agudah. Within the Zionist movement, the revisionists were branded as representatives of the right not only because of their hatred of socialism but also because of their emphasis on the need to establish in Palestine a Jewish state (as opposed to something less than that, a "homeland" perhaps) within large, maximalist, "historical" frontiers as well as their insistence on the need for Jewish military action to conquer Palestine. Their youth movement, Betar, was famous (or infamous, as the case may be) for its semimilitary character. Moreover, the revisionists,

under the leadership of Jabotinsky, not only wished to make alliances with the East European moderate right but were open admirers of the variety of East European integral nationalism represented by Marshal Piłsudski, the founder of the Polish legionary movement, the man who, so his admirers believed, had won Polish independence—by means of a military, not a social uprising.⁶⁷ The fact that the Jewish right was composed of two such distinct, indeed, mutually hostile elements, made a united front extremely unlikely, just as it was virtually impossible to create a united front of Jewish socialist organizations. It is only in our day, in Israel, that such a front has come into being, featuring an alliance between the Likud party, heir to Polish revisionism, and various Orthodox, non-Zionist factions, including the Israeli version of Agudat Israel.

What was neither the Jewish left nor the Jewish right must by default go under the name of the Jewish center. Those Zionists who were neither socialist nor revisionist sometimes went under the rather strange name of General Zionists (*Tsiyonim klaliim* in Hebrew). Many of the most celebrated Diaspora Zionist leaders of the interwar period—for example, Chaim Weizmann, Nahum Sokolow, and Louis Brandeis—were members of this group. The Orthodox Zionists, the Mizrachi, also probably belong to the Jewish center—because they were more modern and more progressive in most things than was the Agudah—as do the major integrationist organizations discussed earlier. Also belonging to the center were the Folkists, Diaspora nationalists, but not socialists. The right word for this camp was moderation—a moderation in social views and in religious practice that distinguished them from the more ideological and often more fanatic socialists, nationalists, and religionists of the left and right.

In conclusion, several words of caution are in order. In politics, as in life, theory is one thing, reality another. Political typologies are fun to play with, even helpful (I hope) in trying to understand the subject, but they do not always correspond to real life. I have already said that the answers to the questions I have posed in order to arrive at a typology were sometimes ambiguous. The "frontiers" separating the various camps were not always clearly defined—for example, in the case of the various Jewish socialist "sections" and the members of such Jewish socialist organizations as the Bund. An important complicating factor was the international status of the Jewish people. Since the Jews' situation differed greatly from one country to another, it made perfect sense, and was quite common, for some Jewish organizations to claim that in one country (the United States, for example) the Jews constitute a religious group, but in another country (for example, Poland) the Jews may well be a nation and therefore should have national rights. Jewish socialists in America might well sympathize with the moderate national program of the Polish Bund while believing that this program was not appropriate in the New World, where the Jews evidently did not constitute a national minority in the East European sense of the word. This led to the phenomenon of fellow-traveling, meaning that many Jewish organizations, while clinging to their own ideological views, nonetheless,

Geography

found it possible to support other Jewish organizations with quite different, even diametrically opposed, positions. For example, American integrationists were often Zionist fellow travelers. They did not convert to the doctrine of Jewish nationalism, but they reasoned that what was good for the fortunate Jews of the "golden land" might not be good for the oppressed Jews of benighted Eastern Europe.

To complicate things further, dramatic events impinging on the Jewish world demanded agonizing reappraisals and changed old attitudes. Jewish organizations in Germany were not likely to preach in 1935 what they had preached in the more hopeful days of, say, 1925 or even 1932.

In short, my typology serves only as a general guide, a kind of scorecard to help identify the main players. The next chapter will discuss the impact of different environments on these "players" and on the different camps of Jewish politics; it will move us away from this academic exercise toward a more realistic, multidimensional picture of interwar Jewish politics.

Having named the main varieties of modern Jewish politics, my next task is to give them a local habitation, that is, to make the connection between politics and geography. Jewish politics was international in character. How was it influenced by the very different surroundings in which it operated? Which environments, both general and Jewish, were most supportive of which sorts of Jewish politics? Where were the ideal environments, the core areas of the major Jewish political camps located? How did the character of a given Jewish political orientation differ from one country to another? Where, for example, is one most likely to find a strong Jewish integrationist movement? What was the core area of Jewish nationalism, of Orthodoxy, of the Jewish left? Why was Polish Zionism so different from American Zionism?

Ideal Environments

According to a famous Yiddish proverb, "As the Christians go, so go the Jews" ("Vy es kristlt zikh, azoy yidlt zikh"). Applying this excellent example of folk wisdom, one should expect that the ideal environment for modern Jewish nationalism would be a region in which nationalism in general was the dominant political force, assuming that this particular type of nationalism was so defined to exclude the Jews rather than to include them. I have in mind, for example, Poland of the interwar period, a country whose politics was dominated by the kind of nationalism that excluded Jews from "Polishdom," and not Hungary of the pre-World War I period, a time when mainstream Hungarian nationalism was prepared—albeit

with some reservations—to embrace the Jews as potential members in good standing of the Magyar nation. All-powerful and exclusivist (therefore usually antisemitic) nationalism is a key ingredient in the ideal environment for Jewish nationalism because it rebuffed individual Jews seeking to merge into the dominant nationality (for example, the Polish nationality in Poland) while serving as a significant model and inspiration for autonomous national Jewish politics. Indeed, it stands to reason that antisemitism in general—whether or not it is linked to nationalism—is a “good thing” for Jewish nationalism, for one thing because it disabuses Jews of the hope that integrationist solutions are possible, for another because it often precludes Jewish economic progress and upward social mobility. When antisemitism is combined with some terrible cataclysm (war, revolution, a combination of the two), Jewish nationalism may do particularly well. Indeed, in some areas of Eastern Europe the rapid rise of Jewish nationalism is at least in part to be explained by the enormous impact of World War I, which led to economic and political collapse, a dramatic rise in nationalist sentiments among the smaller nations of the region, and a sharp decline in Jewish–gentile relations.

It is also more likely that Jewish nationalism will flourish in binational (or multinational) regions inhabited by two or more well-defined national groups whose national status is officially (or informally) recognized by the state rather than in countries that are (or claim to be) mononational and refuse to grant legitimacy to the existence of full-fledged national, as opposed to religious or even ethnic, minorities. Moreover, the national school of Jewish politics is likely to do well in those environments in which the nationalities among whom the Jews live are culturally or socially “unattractive.” Peasant or largely peasant nations with national cultures believed by everyone except themselves to be backward or even virtually nonexistent were not likely to tempt Jews to embark on the course of acculturation or integration (at least not at first), even if they attained political power. By the late nineteenth century many Jews wished to transform themselves into Russians and Poles, but hardly any wished to be Belorussians, Lithuanians, Latvians, or Ukrainians, even if they knew that such nations existed.

The cause of Jewish nationalism is also likely to receive a significant boost when a long historical process of Jewish acculturation and integration is brought to a sudden and unexpected halt as the result of some kind of political upheaval—for example, by the rise to political power of previously subjugated nations owing to the collapse of long-standing, once-formidable political–cultural entities. This actually happened after World War I, when the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires collapsed and a number of totally new states were established. Such an event was, in certain regions, of tremendous benefit to Jewish nationalism.

Finally, I would expect that socially and economically more backward environments have the potential to be conducive to Jewish nationalism because in such places there is likely to be less contact between Jews and non-Jews, less Jewish upward social mobility, no well-established non-

Jewish middle class into which the Jews might aspire to integrate. A backward social structure dominated by remnants of the old aristocracy, the established church, and the peasantry is not one that will facilitate Jewish integration. One has only to compare modern Jewish history in the neighboring lands of Poland, where there was comparatively little Jewish integration, and Germany, where integration was thought by some to be a great success, to be convinced that this is the case.

Now for the Jewish environment. I would argue that modern Jewish nationalism is likely to be especially appealing to Jews who are rooted in traditional cultural and religious life but at the same time are beginning, under the influence of enlightenment ideas, to distance themselves, at least spiritually, from the ghetto. Such a process might, of course, lead not only to rapid acculturation but even to integration; but if this is rendered difficult or ruled out altogether by the general environment (owing to antisemitism, economic backwardness, or the absence of an “attractive” nation into which to acculturate), many may opt for a Jewish national “solution.” Such a solution is particularly attractive because it makes possible an identity both modern and Jewish—thus, the appeal of Thon’s statement, “The Jews are a [modern] nation,” meaning a community no longer identical with the Orthodox ghetto but still a distinct and well-defined, proud group whose self-identity is not a function of the attitude of the outside world, of the *goyim*.

Where, exactly, is the core area of modern Jewish nationalism to be located? Obviously, in Eastern Europe, home to the largest Jewish communities on the Continent, the most backward part of the Continent and the most antisemitic, a multinational region par excellence whose politics were dominated by competing nationalisms, the place where Jews were far more separated from their non-Jewish neighbors—culturally, demographically, and in every other way—than in the West. But “Eastern Europe” is a rather vague phrase, and a process of elimination may be employed in order to arrive at a more precise geographic definition. The interwar Soviet Union, where nearly three million Jews resided, should have been an excellent environment for the flourishing of Jewish nationalism. It was, after all, in czarist Russia where modern Jewish nationalism and many modern Jewish national movements were invented. But Soviet communism and Jewish nationalism were unable to coexist. During the 1920s the new regime systematically outlawed all prewar Jewish national organizations. True, it was willing to countenance Jewish cultural activities in Yiddish and even promoted a Jewish homeland of sorts, a kind of Soviet Palestine, in far off Birobidzhan. But virtually the only Jewish organizations it was prepared to sanction were firmly under the control of the Communist party and its “Jewish sections.” And even these sections were abolished in 1930. Jewish nationalism of both the Zionist-Hebraic and autonomist, Bundist-Yiddish varieties came to be strictly forbidden.

One must, therefore, turn to anti-Communist Eastern Europe, or East Central Europe, as it is sometimes called. Here political and cultural plural-

ism if not always Western-style democracy prevailed, despite a sharp turn in the 1930s to the authoritarian political right in most of the countries of the region. Jewish nationalism did not fare especially well in the westernmost outposts of this area—Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The Hungarian case, of considerable interest, will be considered later. Czechoslovakia was certainly a reasonably favorable region for Jewish nationalism. It was officially a multinational state in which the Jewish nationality enjoyed official recognition. Its Jewish inhabitants, prewar subjects of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and traditionally strongly attracted to German culture (in the Czech lands) and Hungarian culture (in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Rus'), suddenly found themselves living in a new political-cultural reality dominated by the previously subservient and oppressed Czechs and Slovaks. But Czech acculturation had made deep inroads into the basically middle-class Jewish society of Bohemia and Moravia even before World War I, and the relative absence of virulent antisemitism in this part of the world, where liberalism and democracy reigned until 1938, also played a role in making Jewish nationalism in Czechoslovakia a significant but not very impressive force.¹

This leaves us with the Balkans (Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania), the Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia), and, of course, Poland. From a simple numerical standpoint, by far the most important Jewish centers here were in Poland (over 3 million Jews, some 10 percent of the total population) and Romania (around 800,000 Jews if we are to believe Romanian statistics). The other countries were home to very small Jewish populations—about 150,000 in Lithuania (where the Jews constituted 7 percent of the total population), 100,000 in Latvia, no more than a few thousand in tiny Estonia.

If one keeps in mind the factors enumerated in my discussion of what constitutes an "ideal environment" for Jewish nationalism, it will be obvious that the Baltic region represented precisely such an environment. Both Lithuania and Latvia were new political creations (the former had been an independent state long ago, in the Middle Ages, before being swallowed up by Poland; the latter had been politically and culturally dominated for nearly a thousand years by an endless succession of Germans, Swedes, Poles, and Russians). Their politics was dominated by nationalism. Both the Lithuanians and the Latvians presided over multinational populations and granted a degree of cultural autonomy to their officially recognized national minorities. Antisemitism was certainly present, though it was not, by East European standards, too oppressive. Above all, the idea of a Jew actually becoming a Latvian or a Lithuanian *by nationality*, that is, a Latvian or Lithuanian "of the Mosaic persuasion," was exceedingly farfetched, almost comic. The new Lithuanian and Latvian ruling cultures were both utterly foreign to, and looked down on by, the Jewish population, whose educated elite had, in the old czarist Russian days, gravitated to either Russian or German culture (the latter was historically important in mostly Protestant Latvia). The stormy events of 1917–

18, which led to the wholly unexpected, almost undreamed independence of these two countries from Russian rule, created a cultural vacuum for the Jews—the old cultural orientations were no longer acceptable, whereas the new ones were as yet unknown and clearly undesirable. Consider the plight of Moyshe Halpern, an imaginary but representative Jew, born, say, in Kauņas (Kovno in Russian) in 1895. The son of well-to-do, somewhat enlightened Yiddish-speaking parents, he attended Russian-language schools and came to identify strongly with the politically dominant Russian culture. The establishment of an independent Lithuanian state in 1918 (itself a certain indication of the tremendous appeal of nationalism) found him totally ignorant of the new reigning language and national culture—and contemptuous of it as well: Where were the Lithuanian Pushkins and Tolstoys? With Russian now regarded as the language of the vanquished but still-dangerous enemy and Lithuanian a totally foreign language, might not Moyshe's process of Russification be brought to an end, to be replaced not by Lithuanian acculturation but by a new appreciation for, and a new readiness to, embrace a modern Jewish national identity? If it was no longer expedient for Halpern to identify with Russian culture and if he could not imagine himself to be a Lithuanian, what could he do? It was precisely the logic of this situation that led some Zionist leaders to favor with great enthusiasm the establishment of an independent Lithuanian state where, so they correctly predicted, there would be no pressure to acculturate, let alone assimilate, and every chance for their political ideology to capture the hearts and minds of the Jewish population.

The character of the Jewish Baltic communities, shaped by centuries of Polish and Russian rule, was also conducive to the flourishing of Jewish nationalism. These were to a large extent working-class and lower-middle-class Jewries, mostly Yiddish-speaking, rooted in Orthodox Judaism but strongly affected by the Jewish enlightenment movement (historically strong in the Lithuanian lands). Most were not adherents of Hasidism, the most conservative and closed of Jewish Orthodox sects. Such communities could be expected to provide support for Jewish nationalism in all its varieties.

In fact the connection between modern Jewish nationalism and the region of Lithuania (encompassing those areas that were part of "historical Lithuania," or to be more precise "Lithuania-Belorussia"—but not included in the interwar independent state) antedated World War I (see fig. 13). The Lithuanian lands in the nineteenth century acted as a kind of buffer zone between Polish culture, with its capital in Warsaw, and Russian culture emanating from St. Petersburg and Moscow. The inhabitants were mostly non-Russians and non-Poles. A "modern" Jew in Warsaw or Łódź, the heartland of ethnic Poland, might aspire to true integration into the Polish nation, and a Jew in some southern Russian city, say Odessa, might hope to integrate into the Russian nation. However the Jews of Kovno and Vilna lived neither in ethnic Poland nor in ethnic Russia but rather in a classic multinational region dominated by "weak" nationalities



Fig. 13: *The Russian Empire Province-by-Province*. The Lithuanian-Belorussian lands comprise the provinces of Kovno, Grodno, Vilna, Vitebsk, Minsk, and Mogilev. (Map by Carta, Jerusalem, Israel.)

and far from the Polish and Russian capitals. Our imaginary Moyshe Halpern may have been Russified, but he almost certainly did not regard himself as a Russian by nationality and was not so regarded by the Russians themselves.

The Jewish inhabitants of this area were known as Litvaks or Lithuanians (*Litvakes* in Yiddish); in the Jewish world of Eastern Europe these Litvaks were celebrated—or damned—for their well-known tendencies toward modernization, secularization, radicalism, and the logical extension of all this, namely, modern nationalism. The Litvak as an agent of change is a staple of Jewish fiction and memoirs. Israel Joshua Singer (Isaac Bashevis Singer's brother) recalls in his memoirs of pre-World War I Jewish life how he, a Polish Jew visiting in Warsaw, encountered "Lithuanian Jews wearing modern dress that was strange to me. . . ."2 It was from a Jew who hailed from Grodno, an important Lithuanian town, that Singer "learned about Zionism, Socialism, about strikes and revolutions, about

the assassination of policemen, officers, generals and even emperors."³ And in his novel of Jewish life in Łódź Singer tells us of the famous "invasion" of Lithuanian Jews into that great metropolis in the Polish heartland that began in the 1890s. The "invaders," we are told, brought with them "their secular Hebrew and general spirit of enlightenment."⁴

If individual Lithuanian Jews brought with them, wherever they traveled, the idea that the Jews constituted a modern nation, Jews who traveled to Lithuania from other regions in the Russian Empire were well aware of the fact that they were entering the very heartland of modern Jewish nationalism. Some were converted. In Sholem Asch's novel *Three Cities*, Mirkin, a Russified Jew quite estranged from Jewish life, travels to the old Lithuanian capital of Vilna. There he is transformed:

Like every exiled Jew who has spent his whole life in a foreign environment and has neither seen nor known Jews, Zachary Gavrilovich Mirkin was profoundly impressed by the Jewish national tradition when he encountered it for the first time, and succumbed to this national Zionist atmosphere which stilled the longings of his hungry soul. Like everyone who first comes into contact with Jewish national feeling he, too, was wildly enthusiastic and even entertained vague projects of going to Palestine and doing pioneer work of some kind!⁵

The Jewish socialist Bund, which combined nationalism and socialism, was founded in pre-World War I Vilna, as was the Orthodox Zionist organization, the Mizrachi. In the interwar period the link between Jewish nationalism and Lithuania became truly dramatic. In the 1920s and 1930s independent Lithuania functioned as a kind of paradise for this modern Jewish political camp (see fig. 14). National schools, the most important institutions of national cultural autonomy, flourished, in particular Zionist-inspired Hebrew schools of the Tarbut network (*tarbut* means culture in Hebrew). It was possible for Jews in this country to receive their entire education, from kindergarten through high school, in these institutions. Jewish politics in the 1920s and 1930s was dominated by Zionism; nowhere else in the Diaspora did such a high percentage of Jews purchase the shekel, signifying their support for the Zionist venture, and a significant number of Lithuanian Jews actually went to Palestine.⁶ For Zionist emissaries Lithuania appeared to be an oasis of "Palestinianism," whose Jewish communities supported Tarbut schools and Zionist youth movements and where the youth, imbued with the right sort of national consciousness, were busily engaged in preparations for aliyah to Palestine.

If independent Lithuania was a mecca of Jewish nationalism in the interwar period, adjacent areas, some actually part of historic Lithuania and now separated by "artificial" post-World War I frontiers from the Lithuanian state, also qualified as core areas of Jewish nationalism. This was true of Latvia, particularly southern Latvia, known as Latgallia, whose capital city was Dvinsk (Daugavpils in Latvian). It was also true of large parts of Poland, the eastern borderlands, known in Polish as the *kresy* (see



Fig. 14: Independent Lithuania. (Reproduced from Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the Two World Wars* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983].)

fig. 15). The Jews of this region (which included the city of Vilna), many of whom were no less *Litvaks* than their neighbors in independent Lithuania, maintained in the interwar period the national traditions of their immediate forebears, all the more so since the new Polish ascendancy brought a halt to the previous process of Russification and made a Jewish national orientation even more probable. Within the context of interwar Polish Jewish history it was probably this region that was the most imbued with modern Jewish nationalism, more so than Central (Congress) Poland and Galicia, where Jews were much more Polonized (and where antinational Jewish Orthodoxy was much stronger). The modern, national Hebrew-language Tarbut schools flourished in the *kresy* as nowhere else in the Polish state (see fig. 16). Here, in the words of one Zionist observer, was the "crucible (*kur*) of national Judaism."⁷

Modern Jewish nationalism also flourished in the Romanian province of Bessarabia, and for similar reasons. For one hundred years Bessarabia had been a backwater of the Russian Empire, a multinational region, a capital of antisemitism (recall the Kishinev pogrom of 1903), whose largely Yiddish-speaking Jewish population was gradually exposed to Russian culture. Then, suddenly and unexpectedly, Bessarabia became a part of

the much-expanded Romanian state. Jews who went to bed as "Russians" woke up to find themselves "Romanians." Once again a Jewish national orientation seemed the logical course of action for a Jewish community now cut off from Russia and largely ignorant and probably contemptuous of Romanian. During the interwar period Bessarabia was a great center of Zionism, of Hebrew and Yiddish secular schools, and of the national Jewish political party, which was Zionist-dominated. If Vilna was the Jerusalem of Lithuania, Bessarabia was the Jerusalem of Romania. It was rivaled in this regard only by the once-Austrian and now brand-new Ro-

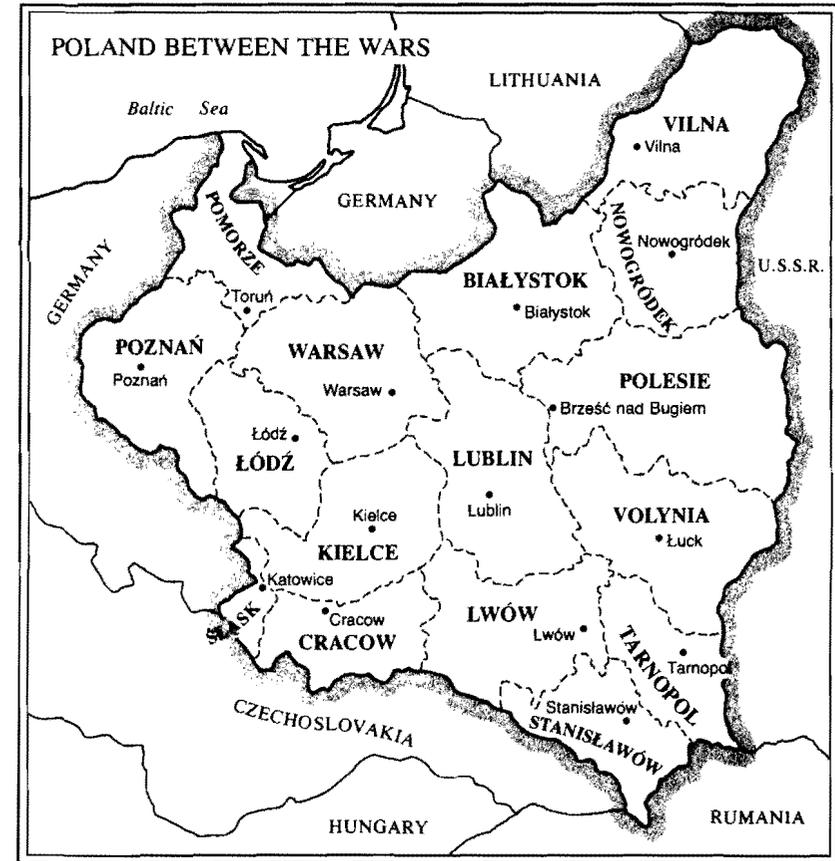


Fig. 15: Interwar Poland. The eastern borderlands (*kresy*): Vilna (Wilno in Polish), Nowogródek, Polesie, Volynia, and the eastern part of Białystok; Western Galicia: Cracow; Eastern Galicia: Lwów, Tarnopol, Stanisławów; Congress Poland: Łódź, Kielce, Warsaw, Lublin, and the western part of Białystok. (Map reproduced from Israel Gutman, Ezra Mendelsohn, Jehuda Reinharz, and Chone Shmeruk, eds., *The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars*, copyright 1989 by the Trustees of Brandeis University, [Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1989].)



Fig. 16: *Tarbut High Schools in Poland, 1929*. Asterisks indicate the existence of a Tarbut high school. Note that they are virtually all located in the eastern regions (*kresy*). (Source: *Ha-va'ad ha-merkazi le-ha-histadrut ha-tsiyonit be-folaniyah* [Warsaw, 1929]. Map by Carta, Jerusalem, Israel.)

manian province of Bukovina, where speakers of German, Yiddish, Romanian, and Ukrainian mingled and where, as in the Lithuanian lands, the Jews were ignorant of the language of the land and no single nationality dominated the scene (see fig. 17).

Core areas of Jewish nationalism were typically peripheral areas so far as the majority nationality was concerned; indeed, from the Jewish national point of view it was often the case that the more peripheral, the better. This was certainly true in Poland, Romania, and Czechoslovakia. In the ethnic heartlands of these countries—Central Poland and Western Galicia, Wallachia and Moldavia, Bohemia and Moravia—Jews were more

subject to acculturationist pressures and more likely to identify with the cultural orientation of the dominant nationality than in the multinational, economically backward borderlands, where Polish, Romanian, and Czech culture were so much weaker. The Lithuanian-Belorussian lands were also, after all, peripheral areas within the context of the pre-World War I Russian Empire.

Another region where Jewish nationalism flourished was Bulgaria. The very small community of largely Sephardic Jewry in this Balkan country was not subjected to strong acculturating influences during the period of Ottoman rule when, like other minorities, the Jews were treated as a distinct religious-national group and enjoyed considerable autonomy. Neither Turkish nor the local Slavic language made much impression during the preindependence period (up to 1878); the non-Jewish language with the highest prestige was French, which was taught in the schools of the Alliance israélite universelle. Modern Bulgarian nationalism, like its Lithuanian and Latvian equivalents, was a rather late bloomer, and Bulgarian culture was certainly not very attractive to the Jews. After the attainment of independence by the largely peasant Bulgarian nation, a process of acculturation began, but generally speaking Bulgarian Jewry made the transition from a prenatal religious Jewish identity under the Ottomans not to an integrationist-type identity as “Bulgarians of the Jewish faith,” but rather to a modern Jewish national, Zionist identity. As a historian of

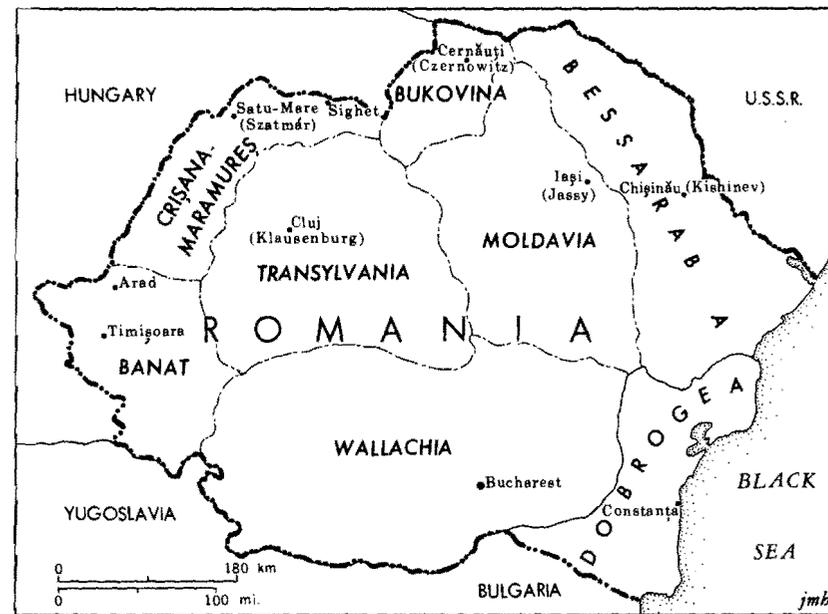


Fig. 17: *Interwar Romania*. (Map reproduced from Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe Between the World Wars* [Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974].)

Bulgaria puts it, "Lacking meaningful identification with the national and nationalistic aspirations of the Bulgarian majority, the Jews of Bulgaria identified more closely with the ideals of modern Jewish nationalism, of which political Zionism became the dominant expression."⁸

Outside Europe, in the East European Diaspora beyond the sea, an additional core area developed in a rather unlikely place—South Africa. Like the Baltic states, Romania, and Poland, South Africa was (and still is) a multinational state. Jews could not really become Boers, who constituted a peculiar national-religious entity reminiscent in some ways of the Jews themselves. They adopted English culture, but they did not come to see themselves and were not seen by others, in this unusual semicolonial setting, as Englishmen of the Jewish persuasion. Their leading historian has commented, "Owing to the Afrikaner-English duality, the pull of acculturation towards the English, with attendant erosion of Jewish distinctiveness, was bound to be considerably weaker than was the case in Britain itself, where English culture was both indigenous and supreme." The unique South African context endowed the Jewish identity with "an ethnic-national dimension of its own, which . . . found expression in Zionism."⁹ It probably helped that many Jewish immigrants in South Africa hailed from the great center of European Jewish nationalism, Lithuania.

It would be logical to assume that the ideal environment for Jewish integrationism must be in most ways the very opposite of the ideal environment for Jewish nationalism. That would mean, among other things, a country or region that was either mononational (in fact or claimed to be so) and that refused to recognize the legitimate existence of minority nationalities; a country dominated by a culturally "attractive" nation into which the Jews would be all-too-happy to integrate; and a country liberal enough to accept Jews into the national fold and to support the proposition that talent, not nationality, race or religion, determines one's economic success or failure. Far from being a backwater, one would expect this region to be characterized by economic dynamism and a growing urban sector.

As in the case of Jewish nationalism, Jewish integrationism requires the existence of a substantial number of Jews prepared to distance themselves from the spiritual ghetto. But in economically dynamic, culturally attractive, and above all politically liberal countries—in particular in their glittering urban centers—such Jews would be likely to reject not only old-style religious orthodoxy (in favor of some sort of modernized Judaism) but also modern Jewish nationalism. All ideologies of separatism would be repellent to them.

Was the United States such a country? It was certainly characterized by exceptional economic dynamism, and its high culture was extremely attractive. It also possessed a liberal tradition of integrating all minorities—or at least all white minorities—into the American nation. And in the long run most of its Jews certainly came to reject both Yiddish and East European

Orthodoxy. On the other hand this country, if not binational like the province of Quebec (a good place for Jewish nationalism, by the way), was very definitely and very dramatically multiethnic. Moreover, in the interwar period its Jewish community was dominated by fairly recent arrivals from the European heartland of Jewish nationalism and Jewish Orthodoxy. For both these reasons America, at least in the short run, was an environment less hostile to a certain variety of Jewish nationalism than one might assume.

A truly ideal environment for Jewish integration was France, the very model of a highly centralized nation-state with a brilliant high culture. Its capital acted as a magnet for ambitious Jews from the provinces, who usually discarded, soon after arrival, any vestiges of their old Yiddish language and their religious orthodoxy. The great majority of native Jews in this country did, indeed, define themselves as Frenchmen of the Mosaic faith and identified with the secular, pluralistic revolutionary tradition that had made possible their emancipation and their uniquely successful absorption (so they believed) into the French nation. If Jewish nationalism had any foothold in this country, it was in the more traditional communities of nationally mixed Alsace-Lorraine and among the new immigrants from Eastern Europe.¹⁰

But in general Zionism was notoriously weak among the "real French Jews," whose most famous organization, the Alliance israélite universelle, developed into a formidable enemy of Jewish political nationalism. The Dreyfus affair may have pushed Herzl, a Hungarian, in the direction of Palestine, but it did not have that effect on the French Jews.¹¹ It is difficult to come up with the name of a single distinguished or famous French Zionist leader in the interwar period. Moreover, as France refused to recognize the existence on French soil of national minorities and as all "real" French Jews spoke French, no Diaspora nationalism based on Yiddish could possibly develop.

Another splendid environment for Jewish integrationism was Italy. The equivalent in this country to the French Jews' passionate identification with at least certain aspects of the French revolutionary legacy was the Italian Jews' identification with the Risorgimento, the nineteenth-century secular, anti-clerical movement for Italian unification. An acute observer of Italian Jewish history has written that "the success of the House of Savoy in uniting the peninsula, and the unlimited support that the Jews gave to this nationalist, unitarian Italian policy, allowed them to integrate into the Gentile society more quickly and more deeply than in any other country, including the United States, and to believe in the existence of unique historical conditions."¹² Italian nationalism was perfectly happy to include Jews within its definition of Italians, and Jews were perfectly happy to be so defined. As King Victor Emmanuel III put it to Herzl in 1904, "Jews, for us, are full-blown Italians."¹³ Even Mussolini seems to have shared this view, at least during the early years of his reign.

In Central or East Central Europe the most interesting example of a

highly favorable environment for Jewish integration was Hungary. During the second half of the nineteenth century the Hungarians—more fortunate than the Poles—were able to establish their own virtually independent state within the context of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In their multinational part of this multinational empire they promoted with great vigor Hungarian national cultural hegemony. A great success of this campaign was the rapid development of a dynamic Hungarian political and cultural center in Budapest (which became a united city in 1873). It is particularly important to emphasize that Hungarian nationalism during the so-called liberal era (up to World War I) was inclusive, not exclusive, and delighted to absorb non-Hungarians. Thus Slovaks, Romanians, Germans, Serbs, and even Jews were invited to become Hungarians by adopting the Magyar language and otherwise identifying themselves with the Hungarian national cause.

Many Hungarian Jews, particularly in the heartland of the Hungarian nation (which became the fully independent Hungarian state in the interwar period) did so. True, Hungarian was not as attractive a culture as French or German, but thanks to the rise of Hungarian political power and the rapid development of its capital city it became ever more compelling. Many Jews not only became Hungarian speakers but they adopted Hungarian names and professed Hungarian nationalism. The Hungarian national composer Márk Rózsavölgyi's original name was Rosenthal; the famous Hungarian violinist Eduard Reményi was originally called Hoffmann; the philosopher György Lukács's family name was Löwinger. Numerous Jews left their small towns for Budapest, which became the home of a large Magyarized Jewish middle class that mostly adhered to a variety of Reform Judaism. True, this city produced the founder of political Zionism (Herzl left Budapest for Vienna at the age of eighteen) but integrationism, not nationalism, was the political credo of its Jewish community. By the interwar period Hungarian Jewry had been speaking Hungarian and identifying with the Magyar nation for half a century. For most of this period Hungarian Zionism, not to mention any other kind of Jewish nationalism, was virtually nonexistent.¹⁴

What would constitute an ideal environment for antinational and anti-integrationist Orthodox Jewish politics? As both orthodoxy and nationalism, in contrast to integrationism, were based on the fundamental idea that Jews should be to one degree or another segregated from the gentile world, both should do well in the types of communities where such segregation was traditionally part of the social order. Economic backwardness certainly helped to preserve traditional Jewish religious life. One would also expect, keeping in mind the Yiddish proverb quoted earlier (p. 37), that the more secular the society the less likely a powerful Jewish Orthodox presence. David Levinsky, the hero of Abraham Cahan's novel, came to America as an Orthodox Jew, but his Orthodoxy could not survive the economic and social dynamism and aggressive secularism of New York: "If you are a Jew of the type to which I belonged when I came to New York

and you attempt to bend your religion to the spirit of your new surroundings, it breaks. It falls to pieces. . . . It was inevitable that, sooner or later, I should let a barber shave my sprouting beard."¹⁵

This shaving off of beards was rather less likely to happen in the backward, traditional, highly religious and priest-ridden regions of Eastern Europe (though, of course, it happened there too). The celebrated Hebrew poet Chaim Nahman Bialik spoke of "abandoned corners of our Exile" where the flame of pure Orthodoxy still burned.¹⁶ Such corners were in fact not so abandoned—they were still inhabited by hundreds and thousands of Jews who resisted both the almost indecently rapid escape from traditional Judaism that Cahan describes as taking place in New York and the intense interest in gentile culture and politics that, as I. J. Singer tells us, was evinced by so many Litvaks.

Even in these places, however, Orthodox Jewish politics could take root only if the local Orthodox leaders were prepared to enter the modern political arena, a step many regarded with great trepidation. The core area of Orthodox Jewish politics, therefore, was located in those regions of Eastern Europe where the traditional Jewish Orthodox elite was prepared to co-opt the ways of modern politics and to organize the God-fearing masses in order to combat the Jewish heretics—nationalists and integrationists—and all their works.

In his novel of Lithuanian Jewish life in the late 1860s and early 1870s, which takes place in a town whose Jewish inhabitants live "such a life as no European could imagine," a place "all of whose [Jewish] inhabitants are pious and God-fearing," Reuven Asher Braudes describes the establishment of such an organization, an early version of Agudat Israel called Mahazikei ha-dat (The Upholders of the Faith). "The Society was dedicated to the defense of the holy Talmud and the *Shulkhan Arukh*, and opposed to all those who slandered it, so that the wicked heretics might be answered as they deserve, so that the mouths of the transgressors against religion and its defenders might be stopped up."¹⁷

Lithuania, as already noted was particularly hospitable to modern Jewish national doctrines, but if it was crowded with *Litvakes* spreading the doctrines of nationalism and socialism, it was also a potential base of Orthodox Jewish politics because plenty of Jews in this backward part of the world still remained faithful to the world of their fathers and mothers. However, the main core area of modern Orthodox Jewish politics was not in Lithuania, but in Central Poland, also known as Congress Poland or the Kingdom of Poland. This area was heavily Hasidic, and its dominant Hasidic "dynasty," located in the town of Góra Kalwaria (near Warsaw) and led by the Gerer rebbe, took the lead in the early twentieth century in organizing the Orthodox masses around the Agudat Israel party in order to have some chance of defeating the very same enemies, now much increased, that Braudes's Orthodox forces had identified half a century before. As other Hasidic leaders did not care to engage in this kind of activity and also resented the hegemony of the Gerer rebbe within Agudah, Cen-

tral Poland became the heartland of Agudah activity. Polish Galicia was also a heavily Hasidic region, but the religious leadership there had little desire to get involved in the modern political game. They had, according to one historian, an "abhorrence of politics," meaning politics of the modern type.¹⁸ Subcarpathian Rus' (sometimes called Ruthenia, part of Czechoslovakia in the interwar period—an abandoned corner if there ever was one) was a bastion of Jewish Orthodoxy of the strictest kind where the Hasidic leaders were also not friendly to Agudah, which was regarded as too "modern," as an organization likely to contaminate the religious youth by its participation in elections, its publication of newspapers, its establishment of too-modern Jewish religious schools, and so forth.

Another important base of Agudah activity was, amazingly enough, Germany. True, in this country most Jews had abandoned strict forms of Judaism in favor of some form of reform; true, most, as we would expect, were supporters of integrationism (the largest single German Jewish organization in the interwar period was the Central-Verein). But a stubborn, small minority was able to combine an openness to the outside world with an absolute devotion to Orthodoxy. This minority provided the Agudah with some of its most notable leaders and cooperated with the Polish Hasidic rebbes in one of the strangest internal alliances of modern Jewish politics.¹⁹

If Jewish nationalism was naturally stimulated by the existence of a general nationalist atmosphere, if Jewish Orthodoxy was encouraged by a general spirit of strict religiosity and a lack of secularism, and if integrationism was stimulated by a prevailing liberal concept of the melting pot—even if there was no real melting—one should then expect the Jewish left to do well in areas where socialism was very much part of the general political culture. One would also expect core areas of the specifically Jewish left to be those regions where the "Jewish laboring masses," so beloved of Jewish socialist leaders, were an important part of the Jewish community and where they still possessed certain attributes of nationality—above all their Yiddish speech. Without these Yiddish-speaking masses one might have many Jews in the general left, but hardly a *Jewish* left.

Such conditions obviously existed in much of Eastern Europe: in the Soviet Union (where, however, an independent Jewish left was not possible), Poland, the Baltic region, and parts of Romania. The Bund, the most famous of all Jewish socialist organizations, was founded in Vilna and was, at least at the beginning, very much a Lithuanian party.²⁰ But Central (Congress) Poland, with its large industrial cities and huddled Jewish masses employed in the factories and workshops as well as its strong general socialist tradition dating back to the czarist period was probably the chief core area of the Jewish left in interwar Europe. One thinks in particular of Łódź, the Polish Manchester, whose textile factories and countless shops were manned by tens of thousands of Jewish workers and of Warsaw, less industrialized than Łódź but the city where the various Polish Jewish socialist parties of the interwar years had their headquarters. Thus

the narrator of Isaac Bashevis Singer's novel *Szoshna* describes the streets in the Jewish quarter of the largest Polish city:

"On Karmelicka Street I passed the 'Workers' Home,' the club of the left-wing Poale Zion. In there, they espoused both Communism and Zionism, believing that only when the proletariat seized power would the Jews be able to have their own homeland in Palestine and become a socialistic nation. In No. 36 Leszno Street was the Grosser library of the Jewish Bund, as well as a cooperative store for workers and their families. The Bund totally rejected Zionism. Their program was cultural autonomy and common socialist struggle against capitalism."²¹

Other strongholds of the Jewish left were in the great Jewish working-class centers created by the mass immigration from Eastern Europe—above all New York, to a lesser extent some other east coast American cities, and London. Jewish immigrants to these cities occasionally brought with them—along with their other belongings—some socialist baggage from the old home. Others, petty businessmen or *luftmentshn* (people who lived from nothing) in the *shtetl* became workers for the first time in the New World and joined unions in the garment trades that were often led by former Russian Jewish revolutionaries (see fig. 18).

Finally, the Jewish secular national right: The non-Jewish model for this variety of modern Jewish politics was the kind of nationalism that characterized, indeed, dominated the politics of interwar Poland, Romania, and the Baltic states, among other places. And one should therefore expect that revisionist Zionism, the representative organization of the secular right in Jewish politics, should do well in all these East Central European countries. Poland, and again in particular Central Poland, was its main base—here the dominant political tone was set by Piłsudski, a strong nationalist but no antisemite and therefore a legitimate inspiration and guide for Jewish politics—as nazism in Germany most emphatically was not. Singer's narrator continues his description of Jewish politics on Karmelicka Street by noting: "In another courtyard was the club of the Revisionists, the followers of Jabotinsky, extreme Zionists. They encouraged the Jews to learn to use firearms and contended that only acts of terror against the English, who held the Mandate, could restore Palestine to the Jews."²²

Right-wing Zionism was strong in countries like Poland, but it was obliged to contend there with a no less powerful socialist tradition. This was not the case in another, distant part of the Jewish world where the Zionist right flourished, namely, South Africa. In this peculiar country, socialism of any kind was almost entirely lacking, indeed, virtually illegitimate, and it was only natural that Jewish nationalism, so dominant there, would take on a right-wing coloring. In 1938 Jabotinsky went so far as to say, "South Africa is our main field."²³ What he meant by this, presumably, was that his movement encountered less Jewish hostility there than anywhere else.



Fig. 18: *The Formation of the American Jewish Proletariat*. Off the boat and into the sweatshop. (Larry Rivers, *History of Matsab: The Story of the Jews*, Part III, 1984. Collection of Sivia and Jeffrey Loria, New York City.)

I have suggested various recipes for the flourishing of various kinds of Jewish politics, but it must be conceded that these do not always work. There are surprises: I have already noted the presence of Agudat Israel in Germany—and Germany in general represented a special, complicated, “mixed” case. It should have been—and was—a center of integrationism, but Zionism, too, had deep roots and a fairly strong presence in Germany. In the prewar period the World Zionist Organization was located in Berlin, and the movement was especially strong (as one would expect) in the eastern, binational region of Posen (in German; Poznań in Polish); in the interwar period it remained a force, thanks among other things to the rising strength of antisemitism.²⁴ There were, too, some Zionists in France and Hungary, some Jewish socialists in South Africa, and if one looks hard enough one can find integrationists in Lithuania and Bulgaria.

Moreover, as I have noted on several occasions, the environment, both Jewish and general, was liable to change, sometimes rather suddenly. The establishment of the Soviet regime in Russia transformed a great center of Jewish nationalism and Orthodoxy into a cemetery of both these Jewish political camps. There were no similar revolutions in the other countries of

Eastern Europe, but there were dramatic changes in regions that, according to my criteria, were ideally suited to Jewish integrationism. The rise in the number of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe (Ostjuden) in Germany and France in the interwar period gave Zionism and Jewish socialism a boost in countries where liberal integrationism was the most natural and predictable Jewish political stance. In America the established German Jewish aristocracy, integrationist to the core, was challenged by the arrival, from the 1880s up to 1924, of hundreds of thousands, eventually millions of Ostjuden. Finally, in much of Central and Western Europe the history of the interwar period was marked by the defeat of the nineteenth-century tradition of liberalism and pluralism, which had fostered Jewish integrationism and without which integrationism as an article of Jewish political faith could hardly survive.

One last point needs to be made. During my discussion of the geography of Jewish politics special claims have been made for one particular country. Poland has been named as a core area for a number of conflicting Jewish political tendencies—Jewish nationalism in general (in particular in Polish Lithuania), the Jewish left and Agudat Israel (in particular in Congress Poland), and the Jewish national secular right (also in Congress Poland). Interwar Poland, the home of over three million Jews, the heartland of East European Jewry, inevitably became the most important and dramatic of all the arenas in which the internal Jewish political struggle over the future of the Jewish people was waged.

Regional Variations on a Theme

Contrasting conditions in the various Jewish Diasporas had a considerable impact on the way Jewish political organizations functioned. Suffice it to point out that full-fledged Jewish *political parties* that participated in general elections and sought to elect representatives to national Parliaments and local city councils emerged almost exclusively in those countries that recognized and tolerated the existence and autonomous political activities of national minorities, and only in those countries where a sizable number of Jews identified themselves as members of a modern national minority. It never occurred to American Zionists to establish a political party in order to elect their leaders to the U.S. Senate or the House of Representatives, just as American Poles never considered such a step. Such political behavior was clearly illegitimate in America, where the various religious and ethnic groups were expected to make their way in politics through integration into the two-party system. But in Poland the Zionists did what seemed to almost everyone to be the natural thing when they formed their own national Jewish political party (or rather parties) and entered with great enthusiasm into the electoral campaigns for the Polish Sejm and Senate. In that country the most prominent Zionist leaders—Yitshak Grünbaum, Leon Reich, Yehoshua Thon—sat in Parliament as elected representatives

of the Jewish national minority, and so did leaders of the Agudah and other Jewish political parties. This was considered perfectly normal in a multinational state in which not only Jews but Ukrainians, Germans, Belorussians, and other minorities formed their own political parties and contested seats for the Parliament in order to further their special national interests. Jewish politicians in other multinational East European countries—Lithuania, Latvia, Romania, and even Czechoslovakia—emulated their Polish Jewish colleagues by establishing specifically Jewish national political parties. But German, French, and English Zionists, living in more or less homogeneous nation-states, did not.

In Poland the Jewish Bund was organized as a full-fledged political party, like all other socialist parties. It attempted, in vain, to elect its leaders to the Polish parliament, and did succeed in sending its representatives to Polish city councils. In Latvia, of all places, this organization managed to elect a delegate to the national parliament. In America, where there were plenty of Bundists, or former Bundists, almost all of whom had come to the New World from the Russian Empire, the Bund did not function as a political party. Its sympathizers were active in various Jewish left-wing organizations and established progressive Yiddish schools for their children. Rather than run their own candidates for office, they joined the American Socialist party (usually as members of its Jewish section) and transformed themselves into American socialists. The essential difference was noted by the celebrated Old World Bundist leader Vladimir Medem, who in 1921 addressed a convention of the Bundist-dominated Jewish fraternal society Arbeter Ring (Workmen's Circle) in New York:

The Arbeter ring and the [Polish] Bund are two different organizations in two different countries, with different tasks. . . .

We [in Poland] are a political party, you are a fraternal association. But still we have much in common . . . we both are characterized by the fact that we serve as a kind of home for the [Jewish] workers.²⁵

What was true of the Bund was also true of the Zionist socialists. The American leader of the Zionist socialist organization Poale Zion (Workers of Zion), Baruch Zuckerman, echoed Medem's words in 1934 in a discussion with members of the organization's youth movement:

Our Party in Eastern Europe in particular does play a political role in the Jewish kehila [communal organization] and in the minority struggle of the Jews with the ruling powers; our party in America has no specific political physiognomy and does not engage in any political struggle save as an auxiliary to the American Socialist Party or within the American Jewish Congress.²⁶

I have no similar quotations from Agudah rabbis, or rebbes, but surely no Orthodox religious leader in the interwar years ever dreamed of sitting in the U.S. Congress as the representative of a special political party of "Jewish Jews." After all, the relatively weak pro-Agudah forces in America realized that the American Congress was not the Polish Sejm.

If the nature of the general environment often governed the *form* of

Jewish politics, it also played a role in determining the *content* of these politics. Indeed, form and content were closely related, as the Zionist case will illustrate.

There were, as Zangwill's wretched hero David Ben Amram discovered, a bewildering number of Zionisms—religious Zionism and secular Zionism, cultural Zionism and political Zionism, socialist Zionism, general Zionism, and right-wing revisionist Zionism. But the movement was also divided by geography. It is impossible to understand the history of modern Zionism without making the necessary distinction between "western" and "eastern" varieties of the movement, "east" meaning Eastern Europe, "west" meaning Central and Western Europe and the New World. Generally speaking, East European Zionism was Palestinocentric and Hebraic, meaning that it possessed a strong commitment to aliyah (that is, sending its supporters to the Holy Land) and to cultural work aimed at the revival of Hebrew as the spoken language of the Jewish community. It expended much energy and funds on training young people for productive lives in the Jewish-state-in-the-making and on establishing Hebrew elementary and high schools based on Palestinian models. But the majority of its mainstream leaders regarded themselves as representatives not only of Zionism in this narrow, "classical," Palestinian and Hebraic way but of the entire East European, Yiddish-speaking Jewish nation, a nation living in a hostile environment and involved in a life-and-death struggle for civil and national rights—the latter regarded as an absolutely necessary stage in the all-important process of Jewish nation building. Their effort to lead this struggle obliged the Zionists to abandon a purely Hebraic orientation in favor of a bilingual (Hebrew-Yiddish) or even trilingual (Hebrew-Yiddish-Polish) strategy in their Jewish education policy; more important, this struggle obliged them to become deeply involved in what was called in the Zionist lexicon *Landespolitik* (local politics) or *Gegenwartsarbeit* (lit. "present work"). As was stated earlier, Polish Zionist leaders were, as leaders of political parties, bona fide Polish politicians. Yitshak Grünbaum, head of the Polish General Zionists in the 1920s, was a fervent advocate of aliyah, a propagandist in favor of the Hebrew-Zionist Tarbut school system, and a fund-raiser for Palestine. But he was also a Sejm delegate, a mover and shaker on the local political scene, a man who wished to play (and for a time in the early 1920s did in fact play) a great role in general Polish politics as a leader of those forces fighting against Polish chauvinism and for a more democratic, pluralistic, tolerant Polish "state of nationalities" (rather than "nation-state") in which all citizens, irrespective of nationality or religion, would receive equal treatment and equal opportunity. The dual commitment to classic Zionist aims (for example, aliyah and the revival of Hebrew) and to the local political struggle for Jewish civil and national rights in Poland (implying a commitment to the struggle for Polish democracy) was a serious source of tension within East European Zionism. But its leaders had little choice; after all, they could hardly abandon the arena of local Polish politics to their

opponents—the advocates of *doikoyt*, the Agudah, the Folkists, the Bundists, and even the integrationists—and concentrate only on transferring Jews to Palestine. Such a policy might well have resulted in completely marginalizing the Zionist movement, in losing the support of the Jewish masses whose main concern (in the short run at least) was with the difficult, even threatening situation in Poland (and in Romania, Czechoslovakia, and the Baltic states). Theirs was, by necessity, a broad, all-inclusive, catholic variety of Zionism, as required in the new era of mass democratic politics in the multinational East European states.

In the West things were entirely different. Here there was no Jewish national minority in the East European sense of the word and it followed that no one, including the Zionists, was interested in fighting for the implementation of Jewish national autonomy—an outlandish notion in France, England, Germany, Hungary, or the United States. *Gegenwartsarbeit* was not much of an issue because there were no Jewish political parties active in the local political arena. Individual American Zionists might be Democrats (like Stephen Wise) or Republicans (like Abba Hillel Silver), but the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), in sharp contrast to the Polish Zionist Federation, wished to play no official role in local politics. There was no equivalent in Washington, D.C., or Berlin to Yitshak Grünbaum of Warsaw or Leon Reich of Lwów.

In theory Western Zionists were pro-Hebrew, but they entertained no fantasies about “Herbraizing” the Jewish communities in their countries and, in contrast to their Polish and Lithuanian colleagues, they made no serious efforts to create national alternatives—in either of the two Jewish languages—to the local state-run school system. The situation was similar with regard to aliyah, the cardinal Zionist activity without which all the rest was useless. If it was impossible to persuade American Jews to speak Hebrew, it was equally impossible to persuade them to leave the “golden land.” True, by no means all East European Zionists packed their bags and went off to Palestine. The Hebrew novelist Shmuel Yosef Agnon makes note of this when, in his novel of interwar Poland, he has one of his characters remark, “If we make a reckoning we will find that more of us died for Poland’s freedom than in draining the swamps [of Palestine].”²⁷ Still, East European Zionism was able to boast of a fair number of dynamic, truly Palestinocentric movements whose only purpose was to send its people to the Zionist paradise—for example, the various pioneering youth movements and, above all, the Halutz (Pioneer) organization. West of the Polish border such organizations also existed, but only in pale imitation of Eastern Europe. A few American Zionists actually did go to Palestine—for example, Henrietta Szold, the celebrated founder of the women’s Zionist organization Hadassah. But even she wrote in 1932 of her urgent desire “to ‘devolute’ here and return to America for the remainder of my days.”²⁸ In one of his ironic stories of Anglo-Jewish life Israel Zangwill captured the terror that descended upon Jews of the West when contemplating removal to Palestine. Mabel, one of his characters, remarks

that many Christians harbor pro-Zionist sentiments, “Zionism’s all very well for Christians,” she thinks, since “they’re in no danger of having to go to Palestine.”²⁹

West European and American Zionism was therefore much more narrowly conceived than its East European counterpart. In fact fund-raising was often its most significant activity. This was true even in South Africa, where Zionism may have been very much in the ascendency but where it was very definitely of the Western variety. In that bastion of Jewish nationalism fund-raising “was the axis around which revolved the practical commitments of Jews who considered themselves to be Zionists. For many it was, to all intents and purposes, synonymous with Zionism.”³⁰ True, South African, American, and other Western Zionists lobbied their governments to promote the Zionist cause and did their best to persuade the Jewish community to support the idea of transforming Palestine into a Jewish homeland or state. Their Jewish nationalism, however, was basically that of acculturated or acculturating Jews who were fighting for the national rights of Russian and Polish and Romanian Jews. It was far removed from the nationalism of their counterparts in Poland where, as the English gentile Zionist Wyndham Deedes put it (with a measure of exaggeration), “The Jews . . . are for the greater part ardent Zionists. No ‘lipservice’ Zionists; but men and women who have already done great things for and in Palestine.”³¹

The contrast between the Eastern and Western models of Zionism sometimes led to clashes within the World Zionist Organization—thus the struggle immediately after World War I between Russian-born Chaim Weizmann and the American Louis Brandeis is sometimes represented as a conflict between the little town of Pinsk (where Weizmann grew up) and the capital city of Washington.³² It is but one of many examples of how different environments produced variations on a particular Jewish political theme. As was noted earlier, in Poland the Agudah was antiacculturationist, devoted to Yiddish, medieval headgear, and *peyes* (long sidelocks worn by men). In Germany, however, a modern nation-state with an acculturated Jewish community, the Agudah spoke German and its leaders were rabbis learned in secular subjects and sometimes even enthusiastic about European culture. The tension in world Zionism between Zionist Pinsk and Zionist Washington was paralleled in the antinational Orthodox world by the tension between Hasidic Warsaw and acculturationist Frankfurt a/M. The ideological twists and turns of the Jewish left were also much affected by the general environment. Thus Poale Zion split in 1920 into left and right factions—the former pro-Communist, opposed to any cooperation with the “bourgeois” Jewish world, and strongly Yiddishist; the latter less enchanted with Soviet Russia, more inclined to cooperate with mainstream Zionism, and more favorable to Hebrew. The left dominated in countries like Poland, so exposed to radical influences emanating from the East, whereas the right did better in the more moderate socialist atmosphere of Central and Western Europe and the United States.

Particularly instructive, I believe, is the example of the integrationist school of modern Jewish politics. There were integrationists everywhere in Europe, but it was usually the case that the further east one went, the more integrationists were willing to abandon what might be called the classical integrationist position in favor of compromise with the nationalist position. Consider the case of interwar Romania. In that country the leading integrationist organization was the Union of Romanian Jews (UER) whose leader, Wilhelm Filderman, was considered by some to be the Louis Marshall of Romanian Jewry. The UER was committed to the principle of the political integration of Jews into the Romanian state and therefore opposed the establishment, by the Zionists, of a national Jewish party. But in the extremely unfriendly, antisemitic atmosphere of this multinational state par excellence, many Jews (especially those of the new territories of Transylvania, Bukovina, and above all Bessarabia) clearly regarded themselves—and were regarded by others—as a national, not merely a religious minority. Thus the UER found it difficult to maintain a pure integrationist position. It held long, inconclusive debates on the question of whether the Jews might or might not be a national group, and included within its ranks people who were certainly not prepared to accept the formula that defined the Jews as merely “Romanians of the Mosaic persuasion.”³³

In pre-World War I Russia, too, integrationist-type organizations and leaders flirted with definitions of the Jewish people that sound rather different from those of Louis Marshall and Jacob Schiff. The famous Russian Jewish lawyer G. B. Sliozberg—a liberal and fighter for Jewish emancipation, as well as a leader of both the “defense bureau” established to protect Jewish rights and of the Union for the Equal Rights of Russian Jews—was a great admirer of Marshall’s and certainly no Zionist. The Jews, he believed, were fated to become an integral part of Russia, where they had resided since the very beginnings of Russian history. Nevertheless, Sliozberg was operating within the context of an officially antisemitic empire in which resided a huge, mostly nonacculturated proletarian and lower-middle-class Jewish population in the multinational Pale of Settlement. This was not France or even the United States. It is not surprising, then, that Sliozberg and his colleagues believed in the existence of a “Jewish national culture,” a Jewish people (*narod*), and a Jewish “cultural-historical unity” in Russia.³⁴ For him and many of his colleagues the idea that Jews might be “Russians of the Mosaic faith,” members of the Russian nationality, was alien, probably impossible.³⁵

Such notions were not completely alien in regions of Polish ethnic domination—in Galicia, for example and especially in Central (Congress) Poland. I have suggested that this latter region was a core area of Jewish nationalism and of Agudat Israel, but it also spawned, remarkably enough, a relatively small but influential group of Jews who during the nineteenth century did in fact subscribe to a classic integrationist position. Congress Poland, after all, was a kind of Polish nation-state within the Russian Empire, totally dominated culturally, if not politically, by the Polish na-

tionality; its Jewish population included a small number of secularly educated, wealthy people who wished to adopt Polish culture—a “high culture” in the East European context—and (if possible) integrate into the Polish nation.

In interwar Poland, now an independent state, several Jewish organizations—student groups, associations of Jewish war veterans, and so forth—held up the banner of Polish patriotism and extolled the tradition of Polish Jewish cooperation symbolized by Jewish participation in the struggle for Polish independence. They fought against such avowedly separatist forces in Jewish life as Zionism, Diaspora nationalism, and Orthodoxy. Even in the ranks of these organizations, however, a certain amount of rethinking took place in the 1920s and 1930s, the result, no doubt, of the fact that Polish antisemitism refused to disappear. In 1937 when anti-Jewish feelings were running high and were being promoted by the state, the third conference of the Society of Jewish Veterans of Poland’s Wars of Independence heard one of its leaders declare, “We do not ask to what nationality [our members] belong,” thus allowing for the existence of “Jews by nationality” as well as “Poles of the Mosaic persuasion” in the ranks of this superpatriotic, so-called (by its enemies) assimilationist organization.³⁶

The lot of Polish Jewish integrationists was not a happy one, especially in the late 1930s. Something similar happened in Germany. In contrast to Russia, Romania, and Poland this country was long a stronghold of integrationist sentiments and the home of the powerful Central-Verein, which certainly boasted of far more members than did the Zionist movement. In the Weimer period—when Jewish optimism in the future had been somewhat shaken by World War I, the increase in anti-Jewish feeling and the rise of extreme “Volkist,” exclusivist German nationalism—some integrationists began to emphasize that a purely religious definition was not sufficient. The idea that the Jews constituted a tribe (*Stamm*) gained greater currency. Thus in 1929 Ludwig Holländer of the Central-Verein emphasized that German Jewry was a “Schicksals—und Stammesgemeinschaft” (community of common fate and common origin). This did not, however, imply that the German Jews were a political nation that required national rights in Germany.³⁷

The search on the part of the integrationists for a proper formula to express the essence of their Jewishness points to the particular vulnerability of this Jewish political camp. Jewish nationalists (at least of the Zionist persuasion) usually gained from growing antisemitism, which their doctrine predicted; the Orthodox were also more or less immune to gentile hostility, which they expected. But the integrationists, as Max Mandelstamm put it in 1897, wanted to “hug and kiss” their gentile compatriots.³⁸ When the latter responded by saying, “What’s the hurry?” or by outright rejection, long-standing ideological positions had to be reconsidered. In short, both in multinational settings where many Jews defined themselves as a nationality (as in czarist Russia and interwar Romania) and in nation-states where antisemitism was strong and getting stronger (as in

Germany), the line between Jewish integrationism and Jewish nationalism was likely to be rather blurred.

The aim of this chapter has been to demonstrate the obvious—the vital importance of regionalism in Jewish politics. My next task is to concentrate on several of these regions and consider the results of the struggle among the various Jewish political forces for hegemony on the local “Jewish street.” Who won and who lost—and why?

3

Dynamics

One way to study the balance of power among the various schools of Jewish politics is to employ the case study method. I propose in this chapter to consider the dynamics of Jewish politics in the two largest and most important Jewish communities in what was once called the “free world,” those in Poland and the United States.

Poland

Enough has already been said about the Jewish community of the interwar Polish Republic to indicate that it was unique. It was huge—by far the largest in non-Communist Europe. Most Polish Jews were rooted in Orthodox Judaism, although many were in the process of abandoning it; most were Yiddish-speaking, although during the interwar years many of those who did not know Polish learned it; most declared themselves, on official census forms, to be “Jews by nationality,” not only “Jews by religion.” Most were lower-middle and working class, although the relatively small number of Jewish professionals and intellectuals played a great role in Polish cultural life. Many lived in little “Jewish” towns (*shtetlakh*), but Jews also constituted around one-third of the population of the great Polish cities of the central and eastern regions of the state. In all essentials the Jews of Poland were very different from the more acculturated, less religious, less numerous, and richer Jews of Central and Western Europe, though in some ways rather similar to the much smaller Jewish communities of the Baltic states and Romania.

The general environment in which the Jews of Poland lived was also