

The Conflict Between Zionism and Traditionalism Before World War I

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The seeds of conflict between traditional Judaism and secular-political Zionism were inherent in the Zionist idea itself. The conflict between adherents of traditional Judaism – who variously opposed the movement or affiliated themselves with it – and secular nationalists – who variously perceived religion as synonymous with the spirit of the ghetto and therefore an anathema, or sought to incorporate, in varying degrees, aspects of the Jewish traditional past into the new culture of the nascent homeland – shaped the development of the Zionist movement.¹

The pioneers who came to Palestine at the turn of the century, mostly from Eastern Europe, are often characterized as iconoclasts and rebels. They were highly critical of any established norms and the Jewish tradition in particular. Religion was therefore regarded by many as outdated, exerting a stifling influence on modern Jewish life. Rejecting the lifestyle of their elders and predecessors, the pioneers also distanced themselves from synagogue, ritual, and faith to such an extent that religion seemed to have been entirely discarded. However, not all members of this group shared this same attitude toward religion. Moreover, even those who rebelled against established religion were haunted, as it were, by the specter of their ancestral faith. The attachment to the Jewish people, the return to the ancient homeland and to Hebrew, the language of the Bible, left their indelible mark on their attempt to create a “brand-new” society.

The newly shaped Hebrew culture and society in Palestine drew its spiritual sustenance from ancient sources and, while negating traditional Judaism, clung to its foundations. This dynamic inevitably caused much soul-searching on the part of individuals as well as society as a whole.

But wide-ranging and conflicting responses and soul-searching were not unique to the secular Zionist camp. Zionism was taken seriously by the Orthodox from the outset. Some regarded it as their mortal enemy. Some spiritual leaders had stated well before the advent of political Zionism that Jews had to hope and pray for their return to Zion, but actively to accelerate the redemption was a sin and strictly prohibited. Accordingly, Zionism was interpreted as the most recent and the least reputable of a long series of catastrophic pseudo-messianic attempts to forestall the redemption through human action, and the religious sages of Eastern Europe joined in a chorus of condemnation. Yet, when all was said and done, there was still the religious obligation in the Bible to settle in the Land of Israel, and the issue continued to trouble the Orthodox camp.² This essay attempts to examine the conflict between Zionism and Traditionalism before World War I, against the backdrop of developments in the World Zionist Organization and particularly those in Palestine.

The much debated distinction between proto-Zionism and historic Zionism rests on the commitment of the latter to seek a secular solution of the Jewish problem through the return to Zion.³ The emotional source of the Zionist commitment was revulsion against the passive submission with which traditional and modern Jews alike adjusted to exile. Positively stated, the emotional core of historic Zionism was expressed in the slogan of autoemancipation.⁴

This emotion was most effective, even to the point of trauma, among the Russian-oriented intelligentsia and young *maskilim* who joined the movement. Little more than this emotion was definite at the outset. The only thing clearly perceived were those aspects of Jewish life against which Zionists rebelled. They knew what they passionately rejected: the economic dependency of a people of middlemen; the enslavement of traditional Jewish culture to petrified codes, and of Jewish modernists to Gentile fads and fashions; and, above all, the political incapacity of the Jews to defend themselves, or act militantly in their own behalf, because of the collapse of their social cohesion and discipline. The new secular Zionists were favorably disposed toward *anything* that seemed inherently opposed to or likely to counteract these abhorred conditions.

For the religious proto-Zionists who had been active since the 1860s much of what the new Zionist converts deemed most radical in their views was common ground, reminiscent of traditional attitudes towards exile and redemption. Nevertheless, by moving the focus of the pro-Palestine movement from religious-eschatological to secular Jewish concerns, Zionism posed latent ideological issues for the traditionalists in the movement – issues that became open and acute in time.⁵

Men like Shmuel Mohilever, Yehiel Michal Pines, and Eliezer Rokeach came into Hovevei Zion out of the same background as those of the antecedent

proto-Zionist movement. They were as much involved with that religiously-based, traditional milieu as with the new pro-Palestinian coalition with secular Zionists, and their strategies and tactics reflected both connections. The prickly relations between Pines and Rokeach, for example, had much to do with the kinship and cultural ties of Pines with leading *perushim* (strict observers of the Mosaic Law) and of Rokeach with leading Hasidim in the Old Yishuv. Mohilever's initial problems with the Old Yishuv,⁶ and his way of dealing with them, were the same as those of the earlier proto-Zionist leaders in relation to the *halukah* establishment. Competition for funds collected in the same traditional circles, by essentially the same methods, produced frictions which were resolved from time to time by agreements on the coordination of their separate efforts and by statements of support for the *halukah* by the Orthodox Zionists. And when the Turks reacted to what they perceived as a wave of nationalist immigrants by pursuing Jews in the streets and in their homes for overstaying their permitted pilgrimage time, the Old Yishuv establishment joined in the Zionists' efforts, with Western help, to have the harsh Ottoman policy rescinded, blocked or otherwise evaded.⁷

The major difficulty inherent in a coalition with secularists could be met by the religious conformity that the traditionalist Zionists were able at first to impose on their secular Zionist associates, particularly on those who settled in Palestine. Secular Zionists like Ben Yehuda and the Biluim in Gedera (in both cases, closely associated with Pines) were willing – at least initially – to abide by the norms of traditional orthopraxy. Pines, as their friend and sponsor, supervised their outer religious conformity while being himself constrained by the suspicious surveillance of the established Old Yishuv leadership. On this basis an Orthodox Zionist could straddle both camps without being obliged by a decisive break between them to side with one against the other.⁸

Decisions were forced in 1888/89 by an issue that set the Old Yishuv leaders against the Rothschild administration more immediately than against the Zionists. That year was another sabbatical year in the Jewish calendar, like that of 1881/82 which had precipitated the abandonment of the initial settlement of Petah Tikva.⁹

This issue led to troublesome problems for all concerned – the settlers, Baron Rothschild and his agents, the Hovevei Zion of all religious colorations, and the Old Yishuv's Ashkenazi establishment as well. Existing relationships came under strain and rifts that signaled the inevitable – and for Orthodox Zionists, unwelcome – development of new alignments began to appear. The secular Hovevei Zion as well as the Rothschild administration were shocked and outraged by the settlers who complied with the Jerusalem decree of sabbatical rest and who expected to be supported in idleness. A few leaders of the Zionist-rabbinical coterie, very reluctantly, were driven into a position of antagonism towards the rabbis in Jerusalem by the overriding need to mend their

relations with the Baron.¹⁰ The Old Yishuv Ashkenazi establishment, for its part, had assured the settlers that their needs would be met by others if their current patrons failed them – a pledge that they were unable in the event to make good.

The uproar over these issues eventually was stilled as all the involved parties tried to restore a measure of essential tolerance. The sabbatical year was handled on subsequent occasions in the manner proposed by the Zionist rabbis. But, despite the attempts of men like Mohilever to restore their former position, bridging the gap between the Old and New Yishuv and firmly anchored in both, the role of Orthodox Zionists had become distinctly more problematic. The dispute over the sabbatical year was a crux that forced such men to align themselves openly with Western modernists and the New Yishuv. They then came under pressure from critics of their association with sinful unbelievers. But now a new crisis arose over the aggressive secularism which traditionalists perceived in the educational and cultural activities of Ahad Ha'am and the Bnei Moshe. Men like Pines then joined ranks with the Old Yishuv establishment in attacking the secular radicals.¹¹

With the appearance of Herzl's political Zionism, which tended to suppress the issue of secular versus sacral Jewish culture, Pines and like-minded Orthodox Zionists returned to the national movement. Religious Zionism continued to reflect the tension of its bipolar anchorage, and its protagonists had constantly to justify themselves before two courts of public opinion, ruled by often opposing norms.

Asher Ginzberg, before he became famous under the nom de plume Ahad Ha'am, was a member of the "Bnei Zion" committee Leo Pinsker and Moshe Leib Lilienblum consulted in Odessa before the 1884 Kattowitz conference and one of the severe critics of the restricted aims Pinsker was forced to adopt. In 1889, he assumed the responsibilities of grand master of Bnei Moshe which was then founded and began to write a series of trenchant publicistic essays that marked an epoch in Hebrew letters.¹² Through these channels he exerted a widespread and lasting influence.

In spite of the great esteem in which Ahad Ha'am was held and the position of leadership bestowed upon him by the Bnei Moshe, his views were not shared in detail by all of the order's varied membership. The *maskilim* and Russian intelligentsia among the Hovevei Zion shared a mood of rebellion against the frustrations of the movement, and leading members of Hovevei Zion everywhere were glad to join an elite secret order which sought radical new paths. For Ahad Ha'am himself the priorities were clear: the first was the revival and activation of the Jewish national consensus, through cultivating patiently a free, creative Hebrew culture. This implied severely restricting, if not abandoning, other activities, especially the ill-starred Palestine colonization, which he regarded as premature and positively damaging.¹³

Notoriety and conflict developed over the Bnei Moshe's attitude toward traditional Judaism. This was from the beginning a potentially divisive question among the heterogeneous membership. In an attempt to bridge differences, the initiation oath of Bnei Moshe invoked the "name of the God of Israel," a formula which Lilienblum, for one, found acceptable because of its nationalist reference, while he held that a traditional term like the "Lord of the Universe" would have offended the scruples of skeptics.¹⁴ On the other hand, there were those who saw at least a hint of religious coercion in the provisions adopted by Bnei Moshe. Ahad Ha'am himself felt that, "the form of the oath which begins, 'In the name of the God of Israel' etc. will make it harder for many of our best people to join us – on both sides, of course – while the truth is we could well believe in men like our brethren without their invoking such guarantees..." Accordingly, he had the oath changed to read "by my heart's faith and in the name of all that is precious and holy to me."¹⁵

In addition to such inner differences a persistent, violent attack by traditionalist elements in Palestine involved the order in religious scandal and notoriety. The bone of contention was the secular-nationalist educational reform initiated in Jaffa by immigrants who formed a communal structure independent of the Jerusalem establishment and were seen as increasingly opposed to it.

In 1889, after leaving Gedera, Israel Belkind set up a private school in Jaffa, designed along the lines of the modern Hebrew schools promoted by secular nationalists in the Diaspora.¹⁶ By 1892, he was no longer able to carry the financial burden of his school and turned to the Jaffa leadership of Bnei Moshe. They were able to take over the school and expand it by forming a partnership with the Alliance Israélite Universelle with some aid from the Hovevei Zion in Odessa.¹⁷ The school became a major force in the revival of Hebrew in Palestine – but also a central issue in disputes that arose between its sponsors and the traditional establishment.

The Jaffa school, in spite of its limited ability to carry out the full nationalist cultural program, served as a catalyst for the consolidation of an activist group committed to that goal. Associated with the group were Zionist-minded teachers who pressed vigorously for a Hebrew-based secular program of education in the rural settlements. Here they encountered not only the resistance of some Rothschild administrators who managed the colonies on his behalf, but in places like Petah Tikva or Rishon Lezion the much more direct and open competition of traditionalists allied with the Old Yishuv establishment.

When the Jaffa school and its secular-nationalist teachers became the focus of the wider controversy, old alliances were broken and latent ideological issues that were formerly downplayed among the Hovevei Zion emerged in an embittered polemic. In particular, the bonds between Pines and such nationalists as Ben Yehuda and the Bnei Moshe were severed. Pines, who had been assailed

by the Ultra-Orthodox for his support of worldly education, joined them in an assault on a school whose staff included free-thinking pedagogues who publicly profaned the Sabbath.¹⁸ Ben Yehuda, who previously had accommodated his public behavior to the norms of traditional decorum, made his journal *Hazvi* an organ of militant opposition to the Orthodox establishment.

Following the Palestinian economic “boom and bust” cycle of 1891, in which the Bnei Moshe were so equivocally involved, Ahad Ha’am retired from active leadership of the society, a role for which he felt ill-suited and believed he had ill performed. He remained responsible for the secret society as its spiritual guide.¹⁹ Soon a generation of young Zionists turned impatiently against his Zionist policies. They pressed for a resolution for the material needs of the suffering Jews. They readily embraced Theodor Herzl.

In the Zionist organization reconstructed by the genius of Theodor Herzl, all the old Zionist views, together with the new political Zionist ideology, were brought within the framework of a disciplined body committed to action. Ideological differences in this setting had eventually to be organized in the form of factions, if they survived. In the course of time, such factions did emerge. The ideological positions by which they were defined often paralleled the alternative positions abstractly outlined during the long, many-sided debate with Ahad Ha’am.

Herzl was well aware, of course, that constructing the Zionist Congress in the likeness of a Jewish parliament was his own decisive historic achievement. But this form of organization presented certain immediate tactical difficulties. He could build his diplomacy on the base of the Congress only if it appeared firm, united, powerful, and reasonable in its social as well as political aims. Herzl could achieve this public effect at the Congress only by applying all his skills in order to control the inherent tendencies of the highly segmented delegate groups towards impulsiveness, factionalism, indecisiveness, and irrationality.²⁰

With such a view, even though Herzl proclaimed the Zionist Congress a Jewish forum where at last the Jewish problem would be raised for free, frank, and public discussion, he could not welcome unrestricted debate, let alone the organization of factions. He counted it one of the benefits inherent in the Zionist movement that it made room, for the first time, for the whole range of current ideologies within a Jewish consensus; but he was firmly convinced that Zionists should wait until the state was founded before organizing in rival political parties.

Among the ideologies which could be expected to produce factional organizations, Herzl had a well-defined, rather subtle attitude toward two: socialism and Orthodoxy. Herzl’s political models were such modern conservative virtuosos as Benjamin Disraeli and Otto von Bismarck, who understood how to steal the thunder of popular and labor radicalism. He regarded the appeal of leftism to the oppressed Jewish *déclassés* as a major danger and he

believed Zionism could provide an outlet for their frustrated energies. Herzl's attitude toward Orthodoxy – in his eyes, the Jewish analogue of clericalism in a Christian state – manifested the same conservatism and aristocratic sophistication. It goes without saying that traditional Judaism could make no claim on one's private religious beliefs, but it deserved to be publicly respected and cultivated as a bulwark of popular loyalty to the national cause. The power and magnificence of the courts of Hasidic *zaddikim* fascinated Herzl. His diaries refer repeatedly to the “Wonder Rabbi of Sadigor” as he speculates about the possible uses of the rabbis in creating and sustaining the Jewish state.²¹ He is equally interested when he believes he has penetrated behind the pious facade to the shrewdly cynical tactics by which these *zaddikim* maintain their power, and even when he has to deal with clerical politicians at the Zionist Congress. His comments then show none of the contempt and anger with which he assails the motives of other Zionists who, at one time or another, obstructed his aims. They reveal instead tolerant, if bemused, appreciation.

Thus, if Herzl would have liked to prevent the emergence of a religious Zionist faction, it is not, as with socialism, because he thought that one of the functions of Jewish nationalism was to serve as a substitute for religion. He simply wished to eliminate from the Congress debates any issues that could divide the Zionist camp and divert attention from the political objectives he considered primary. This did not mean, of course, that Herzl ignored political crosscurrents which affected the course of his policy, whether in the Jewish community at large or in the narrower confines of the Zionist movement. He was, in fact, sensitive to the smallest maneuvers of friend and foe alike and, in his efforts to impose his own view, he frequently found useful allies among the Orthodox Zionists.²²

Orthodox leaders from Russia and Poland had no reason to share the anti-Zionism of Western *Protestrabbiner* who feared that a Jewish congress might produce an impression of “dual loyalties” or suggest a “state within a state,” thus imperilling civic emancipation. The rabbis from Eastern Europe were no less interested than the secular Zionists in strengthening the internal discipline and autonomy of the Jewish community – of course, under their own control; they had even less faith in, or desire for, social integration among the Gentiles and they had been lending practical support to Jewish settlement in Zion since long before secular Zionism arose.

Fifteen years of cooperation with secularists in the Hovevei Zion movement had led the Orthodox leaders to develop new ideological distinctions. They now accepted, and adopted as their own, a “pure Zionism” which went beyond the religious proto-Zionism of the 1860s by seeking both an economic solution for Eastern European Jewish emigrants and the political conditions for such a solution in Palestine. They rejected, on the other hand, the new “cultural Zionism” represented by Ahad Ha'am and his followers. These distinctions were sharply focused in the preliminary conference held in Warsaw by the large Russian delegation on its way to the Second Zionist Congress in Basel.²³

During the period of Rabbi Shmuel Mohilever's dominance, a council of eminent rabbis was appointed to oversee Hovevei Zion activities, though it had no well-defined authority. Now in Warsaw it was proposed that a rabbinical conference be held, at Zionist expense, to create a rabbinical committee authorized to supervise all Zionist educational endeavors, as well as all World Zionist Organization (WZO) propaganda and agitation. The already existing Zionist executive would be left free to administer "pure Zionist" activities, like diplomacy and resettlement, as it saw fit. Another, more moderate rabbi favored a second expedient also reminiscent of Mohilever: since cultural programs could not be pursued in unity by Zionists, the WZO should undertake no cultural projects of its own, but support the existing projects of secularists and traditionalists alike, under proper safeguards respecting Jewish tradition.

These Orthodox views were rejected in Warsaw, and the Russian delegation came to the Congress with a resolution strongly supporting cultural Zionist programs. The Orthodox delegates, however, tried to press their own proposals. Rabbi Elijah Akiba Rabinovitz of Poltava, who had fought in Warsaw for a rabbinical committee to supervise all Zionist educational, propaganda, and agitational work, now lobbied for the same demand in Basel.²⁴ Yet the cultural commission's resolution included no more than Herzl had already promised the Orthodox faction when he failed to appease them at an earlier meeting – a promise that the Zionist movement would never do anything offensive to religion.²⁵

The rabbis who stayed with the WZO did not conceal their displeasure, however. Under such pressure, Herzl came to regard the cultural debate as an unnecessary nuisance at the Congress.²⁶

Despite Herzl's reluctance, the cultural question continued regularly to be discussed at the Zionist congresses, and regularly produced disputes between the Orthodox and cultural Zionists. As nothing significant was done by the World Zionist Organization in spite of the resolutions adopted, the Orthodox Zionists remained reasonably satisfied with the situation. But proponents of Zionist cultural programs were seriously discontented; and this was an important factor in the growing opposition to Herzl, particularly by the Democratic Faction which by 1901 had been well-launched.²⁷

The faction itself failed to build an effective structure. After the next congress, it disappeared altogether owing to the new issue that divided Zionists: Herzl's proposal to investigate East Africa as an alternative, at least temporarily, to the exclusive concentration on resettlement in Zion. The protests and relative success of the Democratic Faction at the Fifth Zionist Congress in 1901 had an ominous look not only to the Orthodox but also to many of Herzl's partisans in Russian Zionism. At the suggestion of the latter, an Orthodox leader, Rabbi Isaac Jacob Reines of Lida, convoked a meeting in February 1902 in Vilna.²⁸ Most of the participants were opposed to cultural activity by the WZO and committed to

“pure” or political Zionism. Others, notably the Orthodox scholar and intellectual Rabbi Zev Jawitz, could not conceive of Zionism without a positive cultural program. Their view, fully developed by Jawitz in later years along the lines of his close associate Pines’ doctrines, specified an inherent functional relationship between Zionism and Judaism: the two were mutually dependent in the fullest sense. There could be no true Zionism except one that was thoroughly traditional, and no vital Orthodoxy except one revived by applying itself to all the social, legal, and cultural problems of a free Jewish society in Zion. In 1902, however, this was a minority viewpoint which was not elaborated, even in documents written by Jawitz, such as the first manifesto of the new organization. The majority view was also expressed in the form of organization adopted at Vilna. It was decided to organize not an independent religious Zionist body, but a “spiritual center” for Zionism, like that of Rabbi Shmuel Mohilever and under the name Mizrahi, which would be integrally related to the territorial organization of Russian Zionists.²⁹

The issues opened up in Mizrahi’s first year went on to be discussed in the movement. The beginning made in Russia attracted attention elsewhere, and in 1904 it was thought necessary to consolidate the Orthodox Zionists on a global scale. A convention was called in Pressburg (Bratislava), the center of Hungarian Orthodoxy, which was renowned for its hardbitten conservatism and for maintaining a separate community from the liberal and moderate Hungarian Jews.³⁰ To organize a religious Zionist world organization in this environment was a triumph for Jewish nationalism. But the move also marked a drift toward greater independence within the Zionist organization.³¹ An Orthodox ideological movement on a world scale required a more elaborate structure than a “spiritual center” within the Russian Zionist organization. The convention also added to the existing “spiritual center,” commanded by Rabbi Reines in Lida, a second headquarters for work in Central and Western Europe. This was located in Frankfurt, which, like Hungary, was a center of Orthodox communal separatism. As Russia entered into a new time of troubles in 1904-05, control of the whole movement was assigned to the Frankfurt headquarters. Under its aegis Mizrahi completed the transition to a full-fledged independent Zionist federation (or “world union,” as these formations were later named).

The Orthodox Zionists knew what to expect at the Tenth Congress, for the Zionist “peace” conference of the previous year clearly foreshadowed significant changes. With the practical Zionists about to take command of the movement, one could certainly anticipate an attempt to make the world organization actively responsible for a cultural program.³²

The discussion of the cultural question at the Congress was for the first time introduced by a presentation in Hebrew and conducted by the chairman in Hebrew. After further consideration in committee, the following resolutions, presented by the cultural commission, were approved:

I. The Tenth Zionist Congress instructs the Smaller Action Committee to organize and control cultural activities in Palestine and the Orient.

II. The Tenth Zionist Congress declares its intention that nothing which is contrary to the Jewish religion should be undertaken by any institutions for cultural activity created by the Zionist organizations.

III. The Congress declares cultural activity in Diaspora countries to be an autonomous concern of the several territorial organizations and federations; but it obligates every Zionist and all territorial organizations and federations to work for the advancement and dissemination of Jewish national culture in all fields of Jewish creativity and folk life.³³

This formula was accepted, however reluctantly, by rabbis representing the Orthodox in the cultural commission. But even as the Congress debated it, some Mizrahi members made clear their intransigent opposition. A party conference was held in Berlin immediately after the Congress to consider the situation. The Frankfurt leadership proposed that Mizrahi should now leave the Zionist organization. Upon the defeat of this proposal, some of these leaders themselves withdrew and in the following year joined German Orthodox separatist leaders and Eastern European Orthodox opponents of Zionism in forming a general Orthodox world organization, Agudat Israel.

In the course of time a clear, hard ideological distinction developed between this body and Mizrahi. Agudat Israel eventually set itself up in direct opposition to the Zionists both in Eretz Israel and the Diaspora: while the Zionists claimed to be authoritative spokesmen of the political will of the Jewish people, Agudat Israel's rival claim to be the Jewish people's legitimate spokesman rested on the authority of a council of rabbis, considered to be the authentic interpreter of the divine law to which all Jews were bound. The religious Zionists defined maximum and minimum objectives which enabled them to work within the consensus of the world Zionist body. They aimed ultimately to persuade or maneuver the whole Jewish people, through Zionism, into complete submission to traditional Jewish law, adapted to the new demands of a restored Zion; in the meantime they cooperated directly with the political and economic Zionist activities and conducted parallel cultural activities, so long as the Zionist organization respected Jewish tradition in its public forums and facilities. Agudat Israel, on the other hand, began with separation from the secular Zionists and later opposed them vigorously on their own chosen ground, the political affairs of Palestine.

It was not until the end of World War I, however, that this opposition was fully crystallized. The founding conference of Agudat Israel declared its intention to avoid political matters; members of Mizrahi not only participated on this occasion but continued a relationship with both organizations for some time. Moreover, some Mizrahi activities remained under the influence and authority of men who were now more closely associated with Agudat Israel.

Thus, the development of the characteristic partisan Zionist character of Mizrahi, both in ideology and in practical activities, was masked and retarded by the continuing obscurity of its relations with Agudat Israel. After the war, however, the break between the two became even clearer and irrevocable. At that time, Mizrahi intensified and expanded its specific Zionist functions, stamping its own ideological image on many emerging institutions.

As the Diaspora conducted an ideological struggle over the issue of culture and religion, significant developments of immediate practical effect took place in Eretz Israel. Local needs and local initiatives rather than the policy of nationalist leaders abroad brought about a critical advance in the revival of spoken Hebrew and a major development of secular education conducted in Hebrew under the direction of nationalist pedagogues.

In the absence of responsibility for institutions comparable in scale to those of the Old Yishuv or the Western philanthropists, proponents of cultural Zionism were free to develop far-reaching plans for education in the spirit of secular nationalism. They pressed for schooling not restricted to four elementary grades but advanced to the gymnasium level and beyond that, to a Hebrew university in Palestine. Their militant activists insisted on Hebrew as the language of instruction not simply in Jewish studies, but in all subjects, including the most technical – a proposal that implied an extraordinary, deliberately accelerated development of a language that had been confined to very narrow uses for centuries. They envisaged a program of retraining in the schools aiming not only to make self-supporting artisans or tradesmen out of indigent, dependent Jews, but to transform every aspect of their character and lives which were held to be degraded by centuries of oppression in exile. The new Hebrew-speaking Yishuv was to be based on productive working farmer families, rooted in their own soil. They were to be free and proud soldiers if need be and possess a broad liberal culture as well as an intimate understanding and creative mastery of the Hebrew heritage. Eretz Israel was to be transformed socially as well as economically by their dedicated labors.³⁴

Thus, when in 1906, under a resolution of the Seventh Zionist Congress of the preceding year, Bezalel, a Zionist-inspired arts and crafts school, was established in Jerusalem, it aimed not simply to provide vocational training for the Yishuv, along the lines of already existing philanthropic institutions. Its founders, the artists Boris Schatz and Ephraim Moses Lilien, hoped to create a new Jewish-Palestinian art style, embodying Eastern and Mediterranean influences with the traditions of craftsmanship that Jews brought with them from their varied backgrounds.³⁵ At the Twelfth Zionist Congress in 1913, a proposal to establish a Jewish university in Palestine, originally advanced at the First Congress in 1897, was at last launched – at least, in the form of an exploratory commission headed by Chaim Weizmann.³⁶ In the circumstances of that time, the projected university could be imagined as the capstone of the Hebrew educational network already existing in a rudimentary form in Eretz Israel.

A more active, though still secondary role was played by the Russian Hovevei Zion. Bnei Moshe, and its offshoots that continued to be active after its demise, had a major impact on the nationalist Hebrew revival in the Diaspora; it had a more diffuse effect in Eretz Israel, achieved mainly through the initiative of individuals once associated with the order. The Odessa committee extended some aid for secular Hebrew education in Palestine, especially after the prospects for major resettlement projects dwindled. Given the limits of its fiscal resources, the Odessa committee could not attempt major administrative tasks on the order of the Rothschild-ICA project. It became a source of grants for communal services in the villages and for other applicants who proposed suitable undertakings – a procedure which imposed a much lighter burden of supervision on the beneficiaries and reduced the Odessa committee's power of direct control.

The most significant contribution of the Odessa committee to Hebrew revival in Palestine was its role in the organization of a teachers' union, an association that became an active local force behind nationalist reforms in the schools of Eretz Israel. This came about as an incidental effect of a broader aim repeatedly pursued by Hovevei Zion leaders: to unite all elements in the Yishuv in a common, representative communal organization. During Mohilever's pilgrimage in 1890 he sought not only to smooth relations between the *halukah* and the Hovevei Zion fund collections but to bridge differences between Sephardim and Ashkenazim in the Old Yishuv. Ahad Ha'am, coming shortly after, urged the agents of various land-purchasing societies to work through the Hovevei Zion central agency in Jaffa. Success in both cases was significant but temporary. The most ambitious attempt was that of Menahem Ussishkin in his 1903 mission to Eretz Israel. He was able to assemble a broad selection of leaders from both the Old and New Yishuv, including activists in the Zionist and philanthropic services; at the same time, he sponsored a meeting of Jewish teachers at which they united in a general, professional union. The major objective, to unite the Yishuv in a generally shared communal structure, quickly collapsed under the pressure of internal strains and the coolness or opposition to it of the Yishuv's Diaspora sponsors, both Zionist and philanthropic. The teachers' union, however, survived and flourished – if not as a functional apparatus, then as a coherent, persistent influence for nationalist, progressive pedagogy in Eretz Israel.³⁷

The teachers' union did not control directly a nationalist school system, but it set standards and provided models for a growing corps of dedicated adherents. In all these, it could only offer, but not impose itself as a professional authority. Those willing and eager to accept the guidance provided formed a force within the community that moved the school system in the direction of secular nationalism. Thereby they aggravated existing tensions and provoked the protagonists of traditional Judaism, especially among educators and rabbis, not only to sharper opposition, but also to rivalry by emulation.

A hard line of total avoidance and excommunication was the primary and most salient but not the exclusive response of the Orthodox Ashkenazi establishment to the challenge of modern education. In one sector of the growing Yishuv, the new rural settlements, they undertook to compete with the modernists on the same ground. As a consequence of this rivalry, there were recurrent clashes between protagonists of secular nationalist schooling and the conservative adherents of the old ways of Ashkenazi religious education in the villages. Younger settlers often welcomed the free spirit introduced by Zionist school teachers, forming social bonds with them and looking to them for what they felt was needed for their children as they began to form families. Among the older settlers, who considered the life style that attracted the young to be libertine and impious, the radical Zionist teachers and young workers were seen both as a threat to religious tradition and a provocation to the Ottoman authorities and the Arab milieu. They looked to the Old Yishuv for the kind of elementary instruction that would implant traditional culture and loyalty in the settlements. Jerusalem supplied rabbinical support – including *halukah* grants to a small number of settlers – and provided the teachers for such settlements as Petah Tikva and Ekron, as well as for the conservative faction in other settlements. Old-style classes were maintained in such villages in competition with the secular-nationalist schooling that was being slowly and persistently developed by Zionist pedagogues.

The area of competitive struggle spread to those sectors in the cities where a growing middle class included elements who desired for their children the advantages of modern schooling in a developing market economy but feared the seduction of religious license. The issue was forced by the rise of secondary schools in Jaffa, Jerusalem, and Haifa in the early twentieth century – particularly by the foundation in 1906 of the Hebrew gymnasium (or as it was later called, Gymnasia Herzliya) in Jaffa.³⁸

Post-elementary education, primarily oriented toward vocational training, was earlier provided by Western-sponsored schools in Jerusalem. These institutions were avoided by the Jerusalem Ashkenazim and served primarily the needy among Sephardi boys and girls in the city. Modern-minded, Zionist-inclined teachers on the staff of Western-supported schools successfully convinced the German *Hilfsverein* to build a teachers' seminary in Jerusalem when it began its work in Palestine in 1903. By that time, tolerance for such schools within recognized limits had become conventional in the variegated Jerusalem community.

The Jaffa gymnasium was born and developed in a more challenging manner. Its founder, the teacher Yehuda Leib Metman-Kohen, embarked upon his career inspired by a report, delivered by Ahad Ha'am in 1899 upon returning from Palestine, on the need for a Hebrew professional intelligentsia in the Yishuv. In 1900 he went to the Swiss University of Bern to study pedagogy, returning to Palestine in 1905.³⁹

The announcement of a projected post-elementary private school in Jaffa in the 1905/06 academic year clearly met the felt need of a number of local parents. After the first year, Metman-Kohen was able to invite one of his old Bern comrades to join him and in the following year the remaining member of the Bern triad joined the gymnasium faculty. In the second year, a local support group was formed to help finance the school, supplementing the tuition fees paid by prospering parents. The school drew not only on local children, but attracted young people sent to Jaffa by Zionist families in the Diaspora to be brought up in a Hebrew environment.

The Jaffa gymnasium, which was widely discussed in the Jewish press, and the development of secular-nationalist education in the new settlements and the cities broadened the horizons of parents and young people in the Yishuv. They presented a particular challenge to religiously conservative middle-class urban settlers who grew in number with the economic expansion of the towns. They could not rely on the instruction the Old Yishuv could provide as readily as villagers of similar religious leanings believed they could. The skills their children would need in order to compete in the growing urban economy seemed to require secular schooling not available in the traditional Ashkenazi curriculum. In 1904 a group of parents in Jaffa organized a private school to provide religious education for their children – based on the traditional texts, with instruction in oral Yiddish translation – together with courses in history and arithmetic, taught in Hebrew. They set up a board headed by the recently arrived Rabbi Abraham Hacohen Kook (who assumed responsibility for the religious guidance of Jaffa and the agricultural settlements) and appointed as director a rabbi who changed the name of the school (now called Tahkemoni) and brought his own ideas for reforming the traditional curriculum.⁴⁰

After its first years, the new school began to prove too costly for its local board alone to finance. They sought help from Mizrahi, which until then had not been active in promoting education in Eretz Israel. But the lively discussion provoked by the opening of Metman-Kohen's project in Jaffa, together with internal development in the religious Zionist organization led to a decision of the Diaspora leadership in 1908 to take over the school as a counter measure against the perceived threat of the secular-nationalist Jaffa gymnasium and similar institutions.

From its earliest days, Mizrahi was divided between two tendencies in regard to its proper role in Zionism. The dominant opinion favored confining both the Zionist movement as a whole and Mizrahi's involvement in its work to what was called "pure Zionism" – that is, political Zionism and such "practical" activities as were of common interest. A strong minority view, however, held that religious Zionists should be especially interested in cultural activity – on strict Orthodox lines, to be sure – and should favor it particularly as a Zionist function. The compromise adopted at the 1902 Russian Zionist conference in Minsk – the

agreement that the Zionist movement should support separate secular and Orthodox cultural activity – was a program that they wished to see Mizrahi pursue actively within its own sphere, both in the Diaspora and in Eretz Israel. But for years Mizrahi refrained from any cultural work in Palestine and confined itself to Diaspora activities: pro-Zionist agitation among Orthodox Jews and study groups among its own members. This was also the program it tried in vain to impose on the Zionist Congress in 1911.

Thus, the decision to assume responsibility for the Tahkemoni school in 1908 as the first step toward active engagement in cultural work in Eretz Israel was a significant break with past policy. But the practical effect of the decision, in terms of concrete educational reform, was limited. The divided opinions among Mizrahi leaders on the subject remained in evidence, and what central control the Diaspora movement could exercise remained in the hands of the Western Orthodox conservatives. But the Russian advocates of an activist cultural program gained influence gradually. They found in Rabbi Kook an ideologue who took up the themes of messianic Zionism sketched out in the earlier generation of Rabbis David Alkalai and Zvi Hirsch Kalischer and developed them with greater depth and radical definition – though with a clarity beyond what like-minded Mizrahi leaders were themselves prepared to subscribe to at that time.⁴¹

Kook asserted not only that Zionist work in Palestine represented a preliminary stage of messianic redemption, a prerequisite condition of its final consummation; he also drew the further, radical conclusion that all those who built the New Yishuv in Eretz Israel were instruments of God's purpose and will, however profane their deeds and heretical their ideas. He also concluded that the true role of religious Zionists must be not simply to recruit support among the pious but to bring the Torah into the camp of the profane unbelievers who, despite themselves, were laboring in the holy cause. Not simply tolerance of the secularists, and openness towards them, but a militant, benevolent campaign to bring them back under the yoke of the law must be the immediate agenda of religious Zionism.⁴²

Both of Kook's doctrines – the justification of working together with secularists and the goal of restoring the rule of the Torah over them – were in principle acknowledged by all religious Zionists. However, those actively involved in the movement who were closest to his position were bound by the demands and possibilities of immediate responsibilities of which he was free. Their openness to working more closely with secular nationalists – which they had continually to defend against the inclination of others to withdraw further – was confined by narrow competitive perspectives of the embryonic parallel cultural projects they had just begun to create. An aggressive campaign to win over the secularists to traditional piety was more than they were prepared to undertake.

The drive to build a Mizrahi counterpart of the Hebrew cultural revival promoted by secularists in Palestine did not materialize in substantial achievements until the British Mandate in Palestine produced a radically different environment for Zionist work. As this essay attempted to show, the realities of life in Palestine, as well as the desire of Herzlian Zionism to achieve a rapprochement with Orthodox circles, prompted and accelerated the development of religious Zionism while tempering – to some degree – the ideological and political ambitions of both traditionalists and non-traditionalists, particularly in Palestine.

Thus the Zionists of the New Yishuv gradually absorbed and unified diverse, independently sponsored services in the course of developing a general Jewish community. At the same time Zionist parties based on divergent social ideologies gained new scope for expression. Partisan political ideas and interests were pursued not only through the governing councils of the community but in the whole construction and functions of its service institutions.

The earliest source of such division was Mizrahi. As noted earlier, the major condition demanded by the religious Zionists for working within the WZO was support for autonomous Orthodox cultural institutions; at least, until the whole movement could be won over to full acceptance of Orthodoxy. In 1914, when Zionists took on major responsibilities for education in the wake of the language dispute with the *Hilfsverein*, the Mizrahi school, Tahkemoni, was also brought into the network of Zionist-supported schools. Mizrahi education expanded together with other Zionist schools under the Mandate; continuing on the lines established before the war, religious Zionist schools formed a largely autonomous section under the general supervision of the Vaad Leumi's department of education. Moreover, all the extensive activities of the new Chief Rabbinate became closely associated with the religious Zionist party. Agudat Israel and other ultra-traditionalists boycotted this section of the secularist-dominated Jewish community organization.

The Mizrahi precedent regarding education was followed after World War I by the labor Zionist movement. They, too, created autonomous institutions within the Zionist-supported school system supervised by the Vaad Leumi's education department. Like Mizrahi, the Zionist workers accepted curricular standards set by the general Zionist educational program for general studies and Hebrew culture but added special requirements of their own. Mizrahi schools devoted a fourth of their hours to the traditional rabbinic texts, in addition to intensive study of the Bible required by the general curriculum; labor schools devoted the same proportion to scientific and vocational training for labor and the development of attitudes and indoctrination of ideas appropriate to workers, according to the version of socialism favored in one or another workers' settlement. Commitment to the special purposes of Mizrahi and labor schools was further strengthened by party control over the administration and teaching staff of the respective schools. The supervision by the nominally superior central body was mainly indirect and limited to general subjects in the curriculum.

The labor Zionists were motivated in part by the same considerations that made Mizrahi insist on autonomy. Their ideological position, going to issues of basic social philosophy, seemed to them to require freedom to determine their own subjects and methods of study and to maintain a staff committed to their point of view; subordination to the general system had to be limited to matters of general Zionist consensus. But there was in addition a special motivation which activated the labor drive toward autonomy. In their schools, as in all other aspects of their broad-gauged activity, the Zionist workers believed themselves to be building a new, organic society. What primarily concerned Mizrahi was the need to protect their children from demoralization by a secular, general education. The socialist workers had similar apprehensions about bourgeois values in the general schools, but this was secondary. They were mainly motivated by their commitment to start afresh, autonomously, in every sphere of human activity; and hence, also, in education.

What was common to both labor parties – and equally characteristic, for that matter, of all Zionist factions that shared in the work of Palestine – was the concentration on a particular function, or approach, which each, according to this ideology, singled out as centrally important to the success of the entire Zionist enterprise. Religious Zionists devoted themselves to the regeneration of traditional Judaism through the creation of a self-sustaining Orthodox settlement of pious Jews in Zion. Cultural Zionists hoped for a revival of the national ethos through Hebrew language and literature, based on a solid Jewish society in Zion, and constituting a value system that would restore Jewish creativity and active solidarity throughout the Diaspora. Labor Zionists hoped, in two different versions, for a revolutionary restoration of the Jewish people as an active historic entity: Hapoel Hatzair, through the construction of an Hebraic, populist, cooperative farmer-worker society, healing the corruption of the Jewish urban ghetto by striking new roots in the ancestral soil; the Poalei Zion, and especially Ahdut Avodah and the dominant Histadrut leadership, through the concerted, centrally directed, voluntary commitment of all Jewish workers in Palestine to the creation of a new Jewish nation out of the constructive achievements of the new Jewish working class.⁴³ All of them, Mizrahi, Hebraists, populists, and socialists alike, were convinced that the functions they alone were carrying out were the key element of the solution of the Jewish problem for all Jews, and all expected that the social forms and institutions they were creating as partisan ideologists would ultimately encompass the entire, redeemed Jewish people in Zion.

What emerged from these diversely single-minded, ardent efforts was a highly pluralistic society. They shared a common ultimate perspective only because and insofar as it was not clearly focused. Only by concentrating their rival, absolute ideological claims on limited, immediate tasks that could be pursued side by side, were the jostling parties saved from frontal clashes.

The decade of the 1930s brought Hitler and the unspeakable tragedies of European Jewry, which placed Palestine under a pressure of Jewish immigration beyond anything imagined before. The Yishuv and the WZO faced tasks: political, social, fiscal, and technical, incomparably greater than anything in their earlier experience, and unprecedented anywhere. The political trials that accompanied these challenges were an even greater strain, under which the established structure of the national home cracked, buckled, and shifted, but held firm and found new strength.

NOTES

This paper is based on a larger work by Ben Halpern and Jehuda Reinharz, to be published by Oxford University Press.

1. For a concise and useful analysis in this regard see Eliezer Schweid, "The Attitude Toward the State in Modern Jewish Thought Before Zionism," in Daniel J. Elazar, ed., *Kinship and Consent: The Jewish Political Tradition and Its Contemporary Uses* (Washington, D.C., 1983). Of related interest is ha-Rav Moshe Avigdor Amiel, "Hayesodot ha-Ideologiyim shel ha-Mizrachi," in Yitzhak Rafael and S. Z. Shragai, eds., *Sefer Hazonut Hadatit I* (Jerusalem, 1977), 3-11.
2. Ehud Luz, *Parallels Meet: Religion and Nationalism in the Early Zionist Movement, 1882-1904*, translated from the Hebrew by Lenn J. Schramm (Philadelphia, New York and Jerusalem, 1988), 17-25; Yosef Salmon, *Dat vezionut* (Jerusalem, 1990), 20-22.
3. Yosef Salmon distinguishes between observant and secular *maskilim*. The former were intellectuals "who adopted – wholly or in part – modern values and thought processes as opposed to traditional Jewish attitudes." They were "moderately modern in outlook, within a traditional framework." The latter were radical secularists who professed a "nationalist-*maskil* position." See Yosef Salmon, "The Emergence of a Jewish Collective Consciousness in Eastern Europe During the 1860s and 1870s," *AJS Review* 16/1-2 (Spring & Fall 1991): 107-32.
4. Jacob Katz, "Leberur hamusag mevasrei hazionut," *Shivat Zion* 1 (1950): 95.
5. Moshe Leib Lilienblum is an exemplary figure in this regard. See the excerpt ("The Way of Return") from his diaries in Arthur Hertzberg, ed., *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader* (New York, 1981), 168-71. For a thoughtful analysis of the transformation of religious Zionism see Eliezer Don-Yehiya, "Review Article: Religion, Modernization and Zionism," *Studies in Zionism* 12/2 (1991): 187-201.
6. Yosef Salmon, "Tahalikhei kituv bayishuv hayehudi baaretz bishnot ha-90," *Cathedra* 12 (1979): 12.
7. Salmon, "Tahalikhei kituv": 12.
8. Luz, *Parallels Meet*, 70-73.
9. Simon Schama, *Two Rothschilds and the Land of Israel* (New York, 1978), 99-105.
10. Most of the Hovevei Zion rabbis, however, agreed with the demands made by the Jerusalem rabbis.
11. Israel Klausner, *Mi-Kattowitz ad Basel II* (Jerusalem, 1965), 282-83; Luz, *Parallels Meet*, 73-77.

12. Yosef Salmon, "Ahad Ha'am and Bnei Moshe: An Unsuccessful Experiment?" in Jacques Kornberg, ed., *At the Crossroads: Essays on Ahad Ha'am* (Albany, 1983), 99.
13. See "Emet me-Eretz Israel" in Ahad Ha'am, *Kol Kitvei Ahad Ha'am* (Jerusalem, 1947), 23-33; Joseph Goldstein, *Ahad Ha'am: biografyah* (Jerusalem, 1992), 122-43.
14. Samuel Chernovitz, *Bnei Moshe utekufatam* (Warsaw, 1914), 31-32. Cf. Ahad Ha'am, *Al parashat drakhim IV* (Berlin, 1930), 204.
15. Chernovitz, *Bnei Moshe*, 63, 70. Cf. Ahad Ha'am, *Al parashat drakhim IV*, 208; Goldstein, *Ahad Ha'am*, 194-207.
16. *Sefer haishim: leksikon erez israeli* (Tel Aviv, 1937), 537.
17. The Bnei Moshe school for boys opened in December 1892; the school for girls opened three months later. From an educational point of view both schools failed. They served more as a symbol.
18. Rachel Elboim-Dror, *Hahinukh haivri be-Eretz Israel I* (Jerusalem, 1986), 142.
19. Ahad Ha'am, *Al parashat drakhim IV*, 227.
20. Theodor Herzl, *The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl II*, ed. Raphael Patai and tr. Harry Zohn (New York and London, 1960), 587ff.
21. Herzl, *Diaries I*, 34, 155; *ibid. II*, 640-42.
22. Herzl, *Diaries II*, 654.
23. The majority of Russian delegates wanted to draft resolutions for the Second Congress session, committing the world organization to the "practical" and "cultural" Zionism pursued in Russia. They hoped to realize the objectives vaguely outlined in subparagraphs of the First Congress Basel Program. In regard to the latter see *Zionisten-Congress in Basel (29. 30. und 31. August 1897) officielles Protokoll* (Wien, 1898), 114.
24. David Vital, *Zionism: The Formative Years* (Oxford, 1982), 36-44.
25. *Stenographisches Protokoll der Verhandlungen des II. Zionisten-Congresses gehalten zu Basel vom 28. bis 31. August 1898* (Wien, 1898), 78.
27. Jehuda Reinhartz, *Chaim Weizmann: The Making of a Zionist Leader* (New York and Oxford, 1985), 63-64, 100-103.
28. *Ibid.*, 220.
29. Vital, *Zionism*, 220-22.
30. Nahum Sokolow, *History of Zionism, 1600-1918 II* (New York, 1969), 368.
31. Mordechai Eliav, *David Wolffsohn: Haish uzmano, hatnuah hazionit bashanim 1905-1914* (Jerusalem, 1976), 277-84.
32. Y. L. Hacohen Fishman, "Toldot ha-Mizrahi vehitpathuto," in *Sefer ha-Mizrahi* (Jerusalem, 1946), 169. See also Israel Klausner, "Bereshit yisud ha-Mizrahi" in Yitzhak Rafael and S. Z. Shragai, eds., *Sefer Hazionut Hadatit I*, 325-71.
33. *Stenographisches Protokoll des X. Zionisten-Congresses in Basel vom 9. bis inklusiv 15. August 1911* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1911), 336-37.
34. This attitude differed sharply from the one held by a majority of First Aliya settlers. In 1907, Manya Shohat conducted a survey for ICA and toured a large number of First Aliya settlements. She reported the settlers' despondent outlook and summarized their attitude in the following terms: "Here a Hebrew agricultural proletariat will never be created!" Cited in Muki Tsur, Tair Zvulun and Hanina Porat, eds., *Kan al pnei adamah* (Tel Aviv, 1981), 22.
35. Elboim-Dror, *Hahinukh haivri*, 258-61.
36. Reinhartz, *Weizmann*, 386-90.
37. Elboim-Dror, *Hahinukh haivri*, 208-24.
38. *Ibid.*, 244.
39. *Ibid.*, 242-43.
40. *Ibid.*, 287-89.

41. Zvi Yaron, *Mishnato shel ha-Rav Kook* (Jerusalem, 1974), 231-84, 323-71. Shlomo Avineri posits that Rabbi Kook undertook “a radical interpretation of the whole religious tradition in order to turn a passive religious messianic hope into the basis for collaboration with an activist secular movement;” Shlomo Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism: The Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State* (New York, 1981), 189. For a brief but informative analysis in this regard, see chapter 16, “Rabbi Kook: The Dialectics of Redemption,” in *ibid.*, 187-97.
42. This notion was expressed several years earlier by Rabbi Shmuel Mohilever; Salmon, “Jewish Collective Consciousness”: 59. Mohiliver’s well known message to the First Zionist Congress is also noteworthy: “... the purchase of land and the building of houses, the planting of orchards and the cultivation of the soil – is one of the fundamental commandments of our Torah. Some of our ancient sages even say that it is equivalent to the whole of the law, for it is the foundation of the existence of our people;” see Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea*, 402.
43. Mitchell Cohen, *Zion and State: Nation, Class and the Shaping of Modern Israel* (Oxford and New York, 1987), 107-11.

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