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Jewish Culture  
and Civilization

Deborah Dash Moore, *Editor in Chief*

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**VOLUME 7: NATIONAL RENAISSANCE AND  
INTERNATIONAL HORIZONS, 1880–1918**

Israel Bartal and Kenneth B. Moss, *Editors*

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# Introduction to Volume 7

*Israel Bartal and Kenneth B. Moss*

## *Section I: Seven Points of Departure for an Anthology of Global Jewish Culture 1880–1918<sup>1</sup>*

Around the world, many Jews, perhaps *most*, experienced the period covered by this volume as one of dramatic transformations in every aspect of life. In demographic and economic terms, the great concentrations of world Jewry in Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean world were drawn, painfully, into the main streams of an increasingly global capitalism. In both those regions, a significant minority benefited from new business and professional opportunities while a larger part—particularly in the ever-burgeoning East European Jewish population of some six million to seven million—faced pauperization as its traditional economic niches collapsed. Thus, many chose to join the mass migrations that convulsed both regions. By 1914, more than two million Jews had left Eastern Europe—Russian Poland and Ukraine, Austrian Galicia, Romania—for North and South America as well as for Western Europe, South Africa, and Australia; tens of thousands of North African and Ottoman Jews flowed to the New World too (even as others flowed into British-controlled Egypt, making it proportionally as much an immigrant Jewish society as the United States). Fatefully, the migration of some 1.5 million Jews to the United States implanted one of the largest Jewish communities in the world into a functioning democratic republic relatively open to merit—as long as one was deemed white—and particularly in New York, the economic and cultural dynamo of the country’s emergence as a global power. On a far smaller scale, yet with profound implications for subsequent Jewish history, some thousands of Jews from Eastern Europe settled in Ottoman Palestine in the service of newly minted Zionist ideas of national revival. And those who remained at home did not necessarily remain in place. Economic forces drove Jews to cities. Even as New York became home to the largest urban Jewish population in history, Jews also flowed en masse into numerous “Old World” cities. By 1914, Jews made up a full third of the population of Baghdad and Warsaw alike, a full 50 percent of Jews in the Russian Empire lived in urban centers with more than one hundred

thousand people, the Jewish population of Sigmund Freud's Vienna had quadrupled in a few decades—and this pattern was repeated around the world.<sup>2</sup>

Politically, this period also witnessed a profound recasting of Jewish political conditions. In Western and Central Europe, a decades-long emancipation process was now essentially completed and Jewish sociocultural integration seemed irreversible. Yet integration gave birth to new forms of rejection. In Britain, barriers to Jewish social integration even at the highest levels continued to fall, but the once famously open island kingdom precociously closed its doors to East European Jewish immigration at the turn of the century. In Germany and France, Jews enjoyed political and social integration as never before; yet there also took shape—in crosscurrents of racial theory, hostility toward East European Jewish immigrants, and the general pains of social and cultural upheaval—a newly far-reaching secular antisemitism that framed Jews as essentially inimical to society.<sup>3</sup>

In the Middle East and Mediterranean regions, the Jewish political situation was shaped not only by local forces in state and society, but also by the dynamics peculiar to the age of West European imperial power in those zones. In North Africa, where Jewish life had long been closely interwoven with that of Muslims, direct and expanding French rule (and, in Egypt, somewhat less direct British rule) brought actual European citizenship to some Jews and various kinds of extraterritorial European legal status to many others—among the better-off. In the Ottoman-ruled Arab Levant from Syria through Palestine and into Iraq, Jewish horizons were reshaped in crosscurrents of indirect but robust French and British influence, emerging civic movements for social reform and Arab political awakening, and the Ottoman state's demands for loyalty and greater civic engagement. Like Jews in the Arab world, Ladino-speaking Sephardic Jewish communities in the Turkish and Balkan heart of the Ottoman Empire were also drawn with ever greater force toward French culture as the supposed apex of a proper modernity. But politically, they reacted to newly assertive Ottoman state demands for communal loyalty by casting themselves, more or less successfully, as the empire's most loyal minority, even as the empire's Armenian and Greek communities were increasingly subjected to suspicion and brutal violence.<sup>4</sup>

In Eastern Europe, the Jews of the Russian Empire—far and away the world's largest Jewish community—faced a threatening turnabout in the policies of the ruling regime. For a century, tsarist policy had been to modernize Jews, using some carrot and much stick. And indeed, in our period a growing minority of Russian Jews first began to lead their lives primarily in the Russian language. But from 1881 on, the last two tsars and their regimes feverishly reimagined the millions-strong Russian Jewish community as intrinsically untrustworthy, subversive, indeed destructive—somehow the special bearers and perhaps even inventors of dissolving modern political and cultural norms that threatened autocracy and social stability. Reactionary policies on the part of the state were compounded by the flourishing of robust anti-Jewish sentiment in both Russian society and in the Polish and Ukrainian ethnic heartlands under Russian and Austrian rule where Jews were concentrated. This cocktail of reactionary politics at the top and disturbingly volatile and mobile popular anti-Jewish sentiment across many populations within the multiethnic Russian Empire grew ever more toxic—and lethal—in the course of the period this volume covers. Indeed, the single worst mass

murder of Jews in modern times prior to the Holocaust began to unfold across what had been the Russian western borderlands, particularly in Ukraine, in the very years 1918–1919 with which this volume closes. And this mass murder was the fruit of seeds planted in the 1880s: the temporal *starting* point of our volume, 1881, witnessed a first unprecedented wave of anti-Jewish violence concentrated in some of the very same spaces where far worse would transpire thirty-seven years later. For many Jews, the pogroms of 1881–1882 suggested that the nineteenth-century ideal of political emancipation in exchange for acculturation might be stillborn in Eastern Europe even as it was being called into question in Western Europe and put to an unprecedented test in the United States by mass immigration.<sup>5</sup>

These new conditions provoked dramatically new Jewish political responses, which in turn fed long-standing internal conflicts and processes of normative change—and, most importantly for readers of this volume, cultural change—within Jewish society. Eastern Europe’s rough road to economic modernization, and the particular stresses to which Jews were subjected as a petite bourgeoisie in a declining economic niche, midwifed proportionally outsized Jewish engagement with various forms of social-radical politics that envisioned the creation of a socialist order in Eastern Europe via revolution (although only a minority of Jews moved in this direction). At the same time, the ethnically defined travails of East European Jewry intersected with its still-profound ethnic distinctiveness to open many to new ideals of Jewish nationalism. This rapidly intensifying Jewish nationalist impulse expressed itself most popularly in Zionism, that fractious family of movements bound together by the conviction that Jewish national rebirth had to happen in and through Jewish settlement and society-and state-building in what many Jews regarded as the Land of Israel and what was, in our period, Ottoman Palestine. The Jewish nationalist impulse, however, spilled out beyond Zionism in any number of ways. It produced political supplements or alternatives to Zionism that envisioned some sort of nonstate communal self-determination in the diaspora (diaspora nationalism, autonomism) or in some new land other than Palestine (territorialism). Of special import for this volume, the idea that Jews were and should continue to be a nation also exerted tremendous impact on the content, intensity, and very character of Jewish *cultural* creativity in Eastern Europe and wherever East European Jews settled—a point to which we return repeatedly in what follows. And although Jewish nationalism flourished primarily in Eastern Europe—where Jews could not evade the categorizing logic of nationalism imposed by both the state and rising nationalist movements—it gave form to a unique “outpost” with tremendous consequences for Jewish life in the decades to come: a loosely organized Jewish national settlement in Ottoman Palestine that would come to call itself the New Yishuv and see itself as the vanguard of a process of Jewish national reconstitution.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time, Jewish engagements with socialism flourished widely in a strangely bifurcated fashion, finding particular resonance in the unevenly developing Russian Empire on the one hand and, on the other, among Jewish immigrants in the world centers of an increasingly global market system like New York, Paris, London, and Manchester. In the former, our era saw massive impoverishment for many Jews even as others found ways into Eastern Europe’s expanding urban middle classes; the outcome was more a vast Jewish *Lumpenproletariat* than the factory workers

mythologized by Marxism, but desperate poverty fed radicalism. In the latter, Jewish immigrants found themselves thrown into a world of industrial garment work that indeed produced a genuine large Jewish proletariat, if only for one generation. Robust Jewish socialist subcultures also took shape in port cities around the world, from Ottoman Salonika (now Thessaloniki) to Buenos Aires.<sup>7</sup>

These new forms of nationalist and socialist politics moved from the margins to the centers of Jewish life over the course of the four decades covered by this volume. But they were hardly unchallenged. Such untraditional movements provoked resistance among many traditional Jewish leaders in Eastern Europe and spurred the growth of full-fledged Orthodox politics mobilized *against* Jewish political and cultural transformation. Zionist and other Jewish nationalist ideas and idioms found only a limited purchase in Western European, Middle Eastern, and North African Jewries, where they vied with scattered local Orthodoxies in Frankfurt and Tunisia but—more to the point—with powerful state-loyalist and liberal-integrationist commitments.<sup>8</sup>

Naturally, all of these transformations, tensions, and possibilities inscribed themselves in Jewish *culture*, which we may first approach here in its broadest sense as that which Jewish people thought and expressed in some enduring form. Of course, the history of Jewish culture in our era is not solely one of radical change. Many Jews continued to live more or less as they had previously and to cherish established ideas and identities. In Eastern Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East, long-established forms of religious creativity—homiletic, legal, philosophical, and mystical interpretation of God’s word and will, commentary on the ever-vaster rabbinic canon rooted in the Talmud, ethical and pietistic preachment—continued to find robust expression in a globally shared rabbinic Hebrew and in regional Jewish languages like Yiddish, Ladino, and Judeo-Arabic. On the more mundane level too, many Jews continued to create objects for daily and ritual use in old and well-established ways, sometimes specifically resisting or deflecting rapid innovation to preserve an aura of tradition. And, of course, many Jews continued to be observant of tradition and consumers of its many products and offerings.

Yet that said, within the framework of dramatic and centrifugal economic, social, political, and cultural transformation in Jewish life between 1880 and 1918, several epochal developments profoundly altered what “Jewish culture” could mean and be. In the rest of this introduction, we sketch seven dimensions of cultural change in that era that, while hardly exhaustive and of quite varied character and reach, seem to us to offer essential angles of approach to Jewish culture and creativity in this age of dizzying global transformation. These are secularization as a global phenomenon; the consolidation of a new kind of relationship between nationalism and culture in Eastern Europe, the region where most of the world’s Jews lived; the proliferation of movement-cultures or politically charged countercultures both in the Old World and the New in an age of socialist and nationalist contestation; the apotheosis of Jewish acculturation and integration in Western Europe, albeit amid undercurrents of nationalist and antisemitic discontent; the apex of West European imperial domination over the non-European world, with profound implications for culture and consciousness of, among others, Middle Eastern Jews; the birth of a new global popular mass culture driven by novel consumer desires and new technologies like recording and film, and emanating particularly from the

United States; and the indistinct but omnipresent impress of a modernist temper and impulse that turned mixed fascination and discontent with modern civilization into a vast congeries of experiments in art, life, and perception.

1. First, *secularization* among Jews, however defined, clearly reached a tipping point in this period. This is the first era in which large numbers of Jews embraced secularism as a principle, and in which vast masses of Jews of all backgrounds made the production and consumption of secular cultural forms central to their lives. Well before 1880, of course, the Jewries of Western Europe were mostly already quite distant from any encompassing forms of Jewish religious practice and participated fully as consumers and producers in their larger national cultural spheres. Now, after 1880, such sensibilities also reached deeply into the lives of Jews in the far larger and more tradition-saturated Jewish communities of Eastern Europe and the Middle East. In the Russian Empire, as late as 1900, 80 percent of Jewish boys were still attending a traditional Jewish religious school rather than a modern elementary school of any sort, by the historian Shaul Stampfer's calculation.<sup>9</sup> But as Jeffrey Veidlinger has shown, within the next ten years, secular libraries, newspapers, and even theater troupes—with their associated humanistic reading and viewing practices—became fixtures even of small-town life in Jewish Eastern Europe.<sup>10</sup> Rapid cultural secularization also played out unevenly but powerfully among Jews in the Turkish, Balkan, and Arab reaches of the Ottoman Empire, in Cairo and Alexandria, in the coastal cities of North Africa, and in Algeria where most Jews were actually French citizens. In Ladino, our era saw an efflorescence of literary forms—the press, belles lettres, and theater—that, as Olga Borovaya puts it regarding the Ladino case, had absolutely “no counterparts in previous epochs.”<sup>11</sup> Perhaps most dramatic was the incredibly rapid self-secularization of many of the new Jewish immigrants in the United States, who became notorious in the Old Country for the gusto with which they cast off most forms of religious devotion and restriction and embraced both socialist ideas and new forms of cultural consumption.<sup>12</sup>

2. Second, the spread of Jewish national consciousness in Zionist and other forms profoundly transformed how Jewish culture could be imagined and expressed. Particularly in Jewish Eastern Europe, secularization intersected with *rising* Jewish ethnonational consciousness to effect a genuine revolution in what Jewish culture itself was supposed to be and do.<sup>13</sup> Beginning in the 1880s, growing numbers of young Jews in the Russian Empire's ethnically mixed borderlands embraced the radical idea that Jews had to create a new *kind* of Jewish culture centering not around divine revelation, Torah, and commandedness, but instead around this-worldly, modern, and above all aesthetic creativity by a posited “Jewish nation” and the individuals who comprised it. Initially, the protagonists of this quiet revolution were mostly young men with one foot in the world of traditional texts and the other in Russian or Polish or German culture—figures like the era's preeminent Hebrew poet Chaim Nahman Bialik and the Yiddish writer-cum-seer Y. L. Peretz. By the turn of the century, the visionaries of the new culture came to include men and women with modern European educations.

Like traditional Jewish culture, this new Jewish culture was to be housed in its own language. Hebrew, with its rich textual inheritance, initially seemed the only candidate, but soon some insisted

that Yiddish, the only language actually spoken and read by millions of Jews, made more sense. Yet if embrace of Hebrew or Yiddish established a kind of continuity with East European Jewish tradition, the main story was nevertheless one of *rupture*. In place of traditional practices of study, commentary, mystical exercise, and philosophical speculation, the new Hebrew or Yiddish culture would enthrone human creativity in the modes that had defined European high culture since the Renaissance, taken new form in the previous century's ideal of *Bildung*, and been revitalized in nineteenth-century Romanticism: poetry, theater, plastic and musical art, and the writing of secular history as realms in which the self could express itself, realize its powers and ends, define its identity and community, and find some harmony with the world.

Jewish nationalism as an ethos and a closely linked vision of a new kind of secular-national Jewish *Kultur* flourished above all in Eastern Europe and the New Yishuv in Palestine. In ways that still demand further inquiry, it also attracted some in the Sephardic Ottoman Balkans, particularly in Bulgaria, and in the Middle East and North Africa, where it resonated for a network of traditionally educated but modern-minded intellectuals from Tripoli to Jaffa to Baghdad who wrote in Hebrew and already identified with the Haskalah, the transnational nineteenth-century Jewish Enlightenment movement. Where Jewish national consciousness flourished, it profoundly changed the character of Jewish cultural practice. It is no accident that in our period full-fledged modern literatures in Hebrew and Yiddish traversed in the space of just a few decades a four-hundred-year history of European literature. Hebrew and Yiddish literatures moved in our era beyond sentimentalism and satire to encompass the whole territory of literary realism and naturalism, leapt from belated Romanticism to sophisticated neo-Romanticism to daring modernist experimentation, attained to a the full range of lyrical expression in poetry, achieved the grand human comedy of the Russian Jew and Yiddish writer Sholem Rabinovitsh, better known as Sholem Aleichem, and the stunning poetic artistry of the Hebrew poet Shaul Tshernikhovski. So too, in our period growing numbers of artists and actors, composers and musicians, began to imagine that Jews “like all the other peoples” could give birth not only to worthwhile individual paintings, dramas, and musical compositions but to collective formations of Jewish visual art, theater, and art music.<sup>14</sup>

Of course, the flourishing of Hebrew and Yiddish literature that looms so large in this anthology was no mere by-product of either secularization or Jewish nationalism. The urge to artistic creativity that exploded among users of those two languages was born of many impulses, including a desire to capture one's own mixed experience of modern life and transmute it into something of one's own making. And sometimes, accidents of place and linguistic surroundings played the decisive role. As a young woman raised in the Belarusian-Ukrainian borderlands of the Russian Empire, Celia Dropkin quite naturally began her poetic career at the turn of the century writing in *Russian*—naturally, both because she received an unusually fine Russian-language education for someone of that generation and because Russian was a language of recognized poetic merit while her native Yiddish was not (yet). But when conditions drove her to immigrate to New York in 1910, she found herself in a milieu where Russian-language literature was suddenly a merely spectral presence and a bold Yiddish poetry scene was emerging. Translating her own early work into Yiddish, she then embarked

on a career as one of the language's most daring voices, although her best poetry would be written in the interwar years. Dropkin's rebirth as a Yiddish poet reminds us that there is plenty of historical accident and personal will and desire in the cultural history we assay here.<sup>15</sup>

More generally, the history of Jewish culture from 1880 to 1918 can hardly be limited to this particular project of "the new Jewish culture." Nor indeed can it be reduced to a struggle of two ideals we have already briefly surveyed, the secular-national as against the traditional religious.

3. A third quite new tendency in Jewish culture, which manifested itself in Eastern Europe, the United States, Argentina, and Palestine especially as well as in Sephardic Bulgaria and in Ottoman Salonika, was the creation of a new sort of "movement culture" by Jewish nationalist and socialist political movements. Driven by visions of political and social transformation, every variety of Zionist and Jewish socialist movement began to produce its own media and propagandistic literature, movement songs, polemicists, and educational venues for children and adults. Turning our gaze not only to Jewish Palestine but also to Argentina, we might note the tremendous energy—both economic and cultural—that some Jews of the era poured into recreating themselves as farmers and noncapitalist agrarians. Invoking biblical models, Marx, and Tolstoy in the same breath, East European Jewish settlers in the Galilee and Argentina's Pampas created experimental cooperative or indeed communist agrarian communities in our period (often with the support of the same West European Jewish organization eager to reduce the number of impoverished Jewish peddlers). Though the Israeli kibbutz was the longest-lived offspring of this endeavor, at the time Argentina was the greatest center of such settlement and community-building, which also saw outposts in the United States and Canada.<sup>16</sup>

4. A fourth kind of Jewish cultural expression central to the 1881–1918 era demands to be understood in very different terms than the first three tendencies we have sketched: the creativity of people we might variously call "acculturated," "assimilated," or "integrated" Jews. Our period saw a vast corpus of culture created in English, French, German, Hungarian, Polish, Russian, Italian, and Arabic by individuals of Jewish backgrounds who shared the language and civic culture of larger communities and who were increasingly indistinguishable from their non-Jewish compatriots in comportment, aspirations, loyalties, beliefs, and loves. The traditional religious culture and insurgent Yiddish and Hebrew secular-national culture introduced above were both programmatically Jewish undertakings, *intended* as "Jewish," albeit in clashing ways. Though different in intent, the third cultural mode mentioned, political movement culture, was also intended specifically for Jewish audiences. But what are we to make of works of culture created by people who were Jewish by origin (whatever that meant) but who identified with a larger national community, who wrote in languages with overwhelmingly non-Jewish potential readerships and often saw themselves as creating not for Jews specifically but for some larger audience?

In some respect, the story of Jewish creativity within acculturation has a clear geographic center: just as the rise of Jewish nationalism and its cultural consequences centered largely in imperial contexts and above all in the fractious multiethnic Russian Empire ruled by a reactionary state, to make sense of Jewish creativity in the "language of the land" in our period we must start—though

not end—in Western Europe. Already well before 1881, the Jewish populations of France, Britain, of recently united Italy and Germany, and of the United States *before* the great East European immigration were largely severed from traditional Jewish culture (with the exception of a fiercely committed Orthodox minority in Germany), and identified fully and enthusiastically as members of the larger nation. These were populations where almost all Jewish parents sent their children to modern non-Jewish schools to receive a secular education—one that instilled not Jewish identity but French, British, German, Italian, or American identities. These Jews consumed a diet of “general” culture with at most an admixture of Jewishly identified culture and ritual. Thus, it is not surprising that most of them directed a large part or even all of their creative energies not at specifically Jewish cultural endeavor but at a larger national or human conversation.<sup>17</sup>

Where does creativity by Jewish people in and for larger not-specifically-Jewish cultural spheres belong in a book on Jewish culture and civilization? One simple but not wholly satisfying answer might be to limit ourselves to that *subset* of creators who, though they wrote in larger languages, did *manifestly* address questions of Jewish identity, culture, community, and thought. Readers will indeed meet many such figures here. Within Western Jewish communities, especially in Germany, there were some who challenged their coreligionists’ seamless identification with larger West European societies and the concomitant narrowing of what Jewishness could mean. Martin Buber gained a following among some young German Jews with arguments that German Jewry could only be revitalized by a “spiritual Zionism” that forged connections with both the forgotten religious tradition and new Jewish secular-nationalist cultural currents in Eastern Europe and Palestine. The German poet and painter Else Lasker-Schüler wove into her work a protean exploration of Jewishness not only as a lamentable social fate but also as a fount of distinctive aesthetic possibility. Moving in a milieu permeated by tropes of Jewish difference as inexpungeably “Oriental,” “primitive,” and “racial,” Lasker-Schüler presented herself in poetry, in art, and in a cultivated public persona as “Prince Yusuf,” a time-, ethnicity-, and gender-bending composite of Jew and Muslim, Hebrew and Arabian, ancient Egyptian and medieval Near Eastern, man and woman. The modernist giant Franz Kafka also belongs to this pantheon of idiosyncratic and ideo-syncretic post-assimilated explorers of the Jewish condition. His intense personal engagement with Jewish identity in ethnically divided Prague, with Yiddish and Hebrew culture, and with Zionism, was matched by his work’s obsessions with lost or concealed revelations, with creatures neither fully human nor fully animal, and with characters who are betwixt and between, neither lord nor peasant, nonnatives and strangers, unable to find their place in the social system or able to do so only at great cost. The young man turned bug of *Metamorphosis* is one such, of course, but so also is the unlovely Odradek creature, ambiguously “Slavonic” or “German” in origin, whom we encounter in “Cares of a Family Man.”<sup>18</sup>

Yet if figures like Kafka or Lasker-Schüler show how new forms of self-consciously Jewish cultural exploration could emerge—dialectically?—from acculturation amid the continued problematization of Jewishness by the larger society, we must nevertheless recognize that most cultural creativity by individuals of Jewish background in Western and Central Europe in our era was not intended to be

a “Jewish contribution” first and foremost, or even at all, but rather a contribution to a French, English, German, Italian, or world culture. There is little evidence of any interest in Jewishness in the work of Léon Bakst, the famed creator of the Ballet Russe’s lush visual aesthetic, or of the painter Sonia Delaunay, who moved seamlessly from a cosmopolitan upbringing in a completely Russified family to a significant role as avant-garde painter in Paris. Many cultural figures of Jewish background, some profoundly central to their larger cultural milieus, engaged Jewish questions or themes only in very limited and intermittent fashion. We might think here of Osip Mandelstam in Russia (who played as much or more with Christian and Hellenic identification in his poetry as with Jewishness), Georg Brandes in Denmark (for whom the discovery he was nominally Jewish was initially experienced as a kind of inexplicable misfortune), and French luminaries such as Émile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, and Marcel Proust, whose work might never have engaged Jewishness at all had larger forces in French and European life—like the Dreyfus Affair that put French Jewish loyalty on trial between 1894 and 1906—not reinvested the Jewish question with unexpected significance. Even writing that was expressly about Jews could be intended mostly for the larger culture: in the United States, the English-language immigrant writer Anzia Yeziarska made much of her Jewish background but did so for *non*-Jewish readers, as a story of escape from Jewish patriarchy’s bonds directed to an Anglo-American society she aspired to join.<sup>19</sup>

Having identified this fourth cultural mode with “the West,” it is vitally important to note that it is precisely in our period that Jewish creativity in languages identified with larger communities spread *elsewhere* too, to Eastern Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East. In St. Petersburg and Warsaw, in the Polish-dominated Austrian-Galician cities of Lwów (now L’viv) and Kraków, in Budapest, and in the great cities of the Arab world from Beirut to Cairo to Baghdad, growing numbers of Jewish men and women embraced the language and culture of larger sodalities and saw themselves as participants therein. In Budapest, a generation of completely Magyarized Jews imagined themselves as chief “junior partners” in the Hungarian nationalist movement. In the Middle East, a region-wide movement for a suprareligious Arabic cultural renaissance, the *Nahda*, attracted a small but growing cohort of Jews like Ya‘qub Sannu‘, the Cairene playwright and gadfly who called himself “the Egyptian Molière,” the Beirut-born Esther Azhari Moyal, and the Safed-born and Cairo-raised Nissim Malul (though it should be noted that whereas Sannu‘ identified himself exclusively with an Arabic cultural project, figures like Moyal and Malul combined such interests with support for visions of Jewish national renaissance, deeming both compatible with loyalty to a supraethnic Ottoman imperial citizenship). At the same time, and on a larger scale, growing numbers of Jews in North Africa and both the Middle Eastern and Turkic-Balkan lobes of the Ottoman Empire began to create in French and (more locally) English and Italian in this period. This was both testament to a deep kind of assimilation and a highly paradoxical form thereof. To make sense of it demands that we turn to the distinctive history of Jews in the Muslim world, particularly in the Arab Middle East and the Ottoman Balkans, and to a fifth point of departure in the history of Jewish cultural modernity.<sup>20</sup>

5. To speak of “Jews of the Muslim world,” or “Jews of the Middle East” circa 1880 is to speak of roughly one million Jews who in fact belonged to numerous, quite different communities (a point

to which we return in Section II). Though bound together to some degree by a shared Sephardic rabbinic and textual tradition, the Ladino-speaking Sephardim of the Ottoman Balkans lived quite distinct lives from Judeo-Arabic speaking communities of the Arab world in the Maghreb (North Africa) and the Ottoman-run Arab Levant or Mashriq, who were themselves by no means one single community but a congeries of many (although migratory circuits bound them in important ways). And there were many smaller, more isolated communities scattered across the Indian Ocean basin or far into Central Asia. Yet one thing that bound these disparate “Eastern” Jewish communities together in our period was that they negotiated their relationship to cultural modernity under the unique pressure of spreading West European colonial and imperial control or influence throughout the region. The dizzying complexity of Middle Eastern Jewish cultural creativity in this period—a creativity undertaken in Judeo-Arabic, Ladino, and Hebrew, but also in French, Italian, English, mainstream literary Arabic and even, marginally, Turkish—cannot be adequately understood without taking into account both West European imperial and colonial rule in North Africa coupled with great economic, political, and cultural influence in much of the Ottoman Empire *and* the political, cultural, and religious reactions this domination spurred in the region’s states and societies.<sup>21</sup>

The dramatic influence of the West on the cultural lives and outlooks of many denizens of this diverse region, including not least Jews, was at one level mediated by straightforward economic determinations. In a world where trade and production were being reoriented by the economic power of Western capitalists and banks backed by the influence of their states, it was simply natural that many “locals” would see the learning of Western languages, the emulation of Western lifestyles, and contact with Western culture as key to finding new economic opportunities. But beyond economic calculi, the dramatic extension of West European power in the region was widely understood both by the dominators and the dominated as demonstrating that Western Europe’s version of political, economic, and cultural modernity was superior, or at any rate demanded response. While Western imperial thinkers elaborated Orientalist views of the Middle East as intrinsically decadent or stagnant (with a growing helping of racialist theories thrown in), many people in the Mediterranean world felt compelled to undertake what historian Aron Rodrigue calls “an open-ended phenomenon of mimesis, emulation, adoption, or adaptation of Western ways”—a process also shadowed by some internalization of the view that one’s own local culture was indeed inadequate and by the paradox that no matter how much one self-Westernized, one would not really be accepted as a Frenchman or Englishman.<sup>22</sup>

Importantly for us, this multifaceted process of negotiating a relationship to Western culture played out with great force in Jewish communities across the Middle East and the Mediterranean world, first among merchant elites but quickly reaching more middling strata. This Jewish encounter was mediated, shaped, and even imposed less by European administrators than by Jews from Western Europe, particularly through institutions affiliated with the French Jewish Alliance Israélite Universelle. Founded by French Jews in the mid-nineteenth century to aid “less fortunate brethren” elsewhere, the Alliance found its true *métier* in the 1880–1918 period in the project of “regenerating”

Jews of the Middle East. In nearly two hundred schools from Tangiers to Izmir, Baghdad, and Tehran in Qajar Iran, thousands of Jewish boys and girls were taught a curriculum rich in French culture, European languages, a modern approach to Judaism, and the idealization of “Western civilization” (though French Jewish commitment to the ideal of Jewish integration also ensured that some of these Alliance schools would also offer fine instruction in standard Arabic or Turkish).<sup>23</sup>

Concretely, Westernization in the Middle East meant a profound transformation in the cultural and textual order of the region in our period. Even as traditional lifeways and forms of culture persisted, new forms of cultural creativity associated with the West flourished in every language of the region, including the languages of the region’s Jews: the modern press, new literary forms, and new kinds of scientific and social criticism. At the same time, many in the region—particularly urban strata, among whom most Jews of the region could be counted—invested great cultural energies in learning and using the languages of Western culture and power: Italian in some places, English in others, and above all French.<sup>24</sup>

It should be noted that not all historians would place quite so much emphasis on Westernization—both imposed and chosen—as the chief force remaking Middle Eastern and Mediterranean cultural life in our period. Where Ottoman power remained robust, particularly in the Asia Minor and Balkan core of the empire, Sephardic cultural life was reshaped not only in relation to a sense that Western culture was the path to modernity but also in relation to a reforming Ottoman state that in the name of modernization offered—and demanded—new forms of patriotism, self-modernization, and social participation from all of the ethnoreligious groups that made up the empire. These included Greeks and Armenians (whom the state also increasingly targeted for terrible violence), Arab elites both Muslim and Christian in the Levant, and Jews. We will see much Jewish cultural engagement with the question of how to be a good Ottoman citizen, a question shadowed by the issue that loomed large in the Russian and Austrian Empires too: how exactly were Jews supposed to maneuver between imperial belonging and rising nationalist challenges to imperial rule? Some historians of the Arab world (both the parts that were under Ottoman rule and the parts that were not) similarly emphasize indigenous processes of social change in accounting for cultural change, particularly the transregional emergence of a new multireligious urban middle class ready to rethink old hierarchies, beliefs, and roles. This small but rapidly emerging stratum entertained new visions of an Arab identity defined not by religion but by the shared Arabic language and culture. It produced an outpouring of avowedly modern Arabic journalism, criticism, scholarship, and literature in centers like Cairo, Beirut, Jaffa, and, toward the end of our period, Baghdad. Although few Jews had the linguistic wherewithal and cultural disposition to take part in this endeavor in our period, a small coterie did so and thus opened the door to yet another distinctive Jewish trajectory in the Middle East.<sup>25</sup>

Yet the presence and power of the West as something that could be emulated or resisted but neither simply joined nor simply ignored was a central feature of Jewish cultural change across the Middle East. In addition to changing how many Jews thought of themselves and what kinds of cultural

products they valued and consumed, Western cultural influences provoked increasingly sharp internal Jewish struggles regarding traditional Jewish norms of religious belief and social order, not least as these related to traditional gender roles. At the same time, Jewish cultural change and concrete Jewish economic, legal, and political connections to Western colonial powers, chosen and unchosen, had mixed impacts on Jewish relations with their Arab Muslim neighbors. In some places, Europeanization positioned Jews to play outsized roles in mediating new cultural forms to majority-Muslim societies; this was the case in Egypt, where the remarkable emergence of an immigrant Jewish banking and mercantile elite linked to European colonial capitalism in our period laid the groundwork for the next generation to stand at the center of Egyptian cultural modernity in realms like cinema and music. But in other places, outsized Europeanization among Middle Eastern Jews opened widening cultural rifts between them and their Muslim neighbors.

It is also important to note new forms of Jewish communitarian self-understanding, including Zionism, were not absent from the Middle Eastern scene, though full-fledged Jewish cultural nationalism attained a far smaller cultural footprint than in Eastern Europe. But even these positive agendas of Jewish communal reformation were in many ways dialectical responses to the challenge of the West in which already-Westernized Eastern Jews negotiated new syntheses of modern ideals and practices with a selective reevaluation of their own indigenous cultures.<sup>26</sup>

6. Our first five angles of approach to Jewish culture in the 1880–1918 period had globe-spanning dimensions but also quite local points of concentration. Perhaps most genuinely global was a sixth dimension of cultural change so central to this period: the explosive development of what we can call modern mass culture, popular culture, or commercial culture. This was a development in which numerous persons of Jewish descent played what can be called only a disproportionate role, at least in Western Europe, the United States, and later, parts of the Arab world. By popular or mass culture, we mean culture created not in service of any particular idea (though it could brim with ideas in practice) but for an ever-growing *market* for entertainment, for new experiences in an age of technological wonders like film, for the pleasures of song and dance, for titillation, for distraction from hard work and hard circumstances. Such culture has existed as long as there have been potential consumers, of course, but economic, sociological, and technological factors peculiar to the 1880–1918 era made it the watershed to our own age of mass culture: an era that saw a vast expansion in the sheer amount and range of consumer entertainment, both in old forms like print culture and in the defining new forms of the era like radio, records, and film.

Here, as with “high culture” created by Jews but directed toward larger communities, the question of which instances of mass culture created, curated, or consumed by Jews belongs in this volume turns out to be complex. To begin with, we should remember that much popular culture, and particularly the emerging genres of film and recorded music, demanded collaborative production involving several or even many “authors,” and this itself complicates any attribution no matter how we wish to define “Jewish culture.” But even leaving such matters aside, the universe of popular or mass culture poses questions of definition for this volume similar to those that mark the universe of high culture created by acculturated Jews participating in larger metropolitan cultural and linguistic

spheres. Some popular culture created by people of Jewish background in our period was manifestly intended and shaped for specifically Jewish audiences; this is definitionally true of work created for mass consumption in Yiddish, Ladino, or Judeo-Arabic. But numerous Jewish individuals also participated in creating the entertainment culture that flowed from theaters, studios, and factories in America, Germany, France and points east to entertain burgeoning global audiences hungry to experience moving pictures in the streets and records at home or, as was common from Salonika to Jaffa to Baghdad, on a coffeehouse gramophone.

Much of what these Jewish cultural producers created cannot be related to matters Jewish, however defined, in any straightforward way—not least because, with every technological leap in our era, there were yet more very good commercial reasons to aim products at the broadest audiences possible. Thus, the Jewish individuals who in many ways founded Hollywood were *not* striving to create “Jewish culture” or reach particularly Jewish audiences; on the contrary, keen to reach every possible American and indeed global viewer, they shaped the production of their studios accordingly.<sup>27</sup>

That said, as with high culture created by and for European, American, or Arabic cultural milieus by people who happened to be Jewish and for whom Jewishness meant many different things, there was plenty of room in the burgeoning world of popular culture for Jewish questions to “swim up”—whether in the work itself in some relation to authorial intention, or in the way the work was received and appropriated by audiences. And as with the case of high culture born within the framework of acculturation and cultural integration, we proceed both by seeking instances of popular culture that spoke to or about Jewish questions and by seeking to capture in some social-historical sense the sheer range of open-ended creativity in which Jews in this era, more than any previously, suddenly found themselves involved.

7. Finally, we cannot fully understand much of the Jewish cultural and intellectual creativity that took shape in this era without considering a larger cultural revolution underway in Europe and the United States, with increasingly global reach: a vast panoply of aesthetic and intellectual experiments, impulses, questions, breakthroughs, and impasses often subsumed under the packed term *modernism*. The term is often used to mean in the first instance a prolonged explosion of kaleidoscopic experimentation in the arts, guided not by a single aesthetic—far from it—but by a will to break with established and received forms of representation and instead find new ways of seeing and thinking with art. Relatedly, the term *modernism* invokes a congeries of shared endeavors and movements of aesthetic experimentation and unfolding particularly in our period in the great metropolises of Paris, London, Vienna, Berlin, New York, and St. Petersburg. Yet the term also captures a broader cultural watershed. It connotes a widespread multiform impulse toward experimentation and transformation not only in art but also in life. It connotes a strange mixture of giddy optimism and deep pessimism: a sense of unfettered human capacity to remake culture and selfhood through one’s own sovereign will coupled with rising worry about, alienation from, and even revulsion against the modern world itself. This in turn fed an urgent sense that human capacity and selfhood needed renewal or reinvention. Put in more concrete fashion, *modernism* can name the outpouring of tension-ridden responses by numerous artists and thinkers to the extraordinary and unsettling political, social,

and economic developments that constituted a seemingly irreversible modernity: the consolidation of global industrial capitalism, mass urbanism, new forms of mass consumption and mass politics, extraordinary technological and scientific breakthroughs with vast practical implications, and the apex of Western global power. Modernism on this view was Janus-faced. On the one hand, it meant a thrilling impulse to fully explore modernity's new potentials—including unprecedented potentials for intellectual, aesthetic, and lifestyle self-determination. On the other hand, it meant fierce critique of the increasingly global modern civilization that had now taken shape. Some of modernism's chief discontents included the bourgeois society birthed by and consecrated to capitalism and the self-delusions and compromises it demanded even of the people who benefited from it; the seeming "corruptions" or "decadence" or "exhaustion" connected to the modern lifestyle; and the terrifying and dizzying sense that somehow the new civilization was destroying the last remnants of faith in old systems of value while not providing any new ones, or worse still, making it impossible to relate to life and each other in anything other than a cynical and instrumental fashion. Hence modernist art's famously unstable mix of love and hatred of bohemianism, of the big city, and of mass culture, and its capacity to align with both reactionary and radical politics.<sup>28</sup>

This double impulse invested the arts particularly with new significance. Whether in the service of realizing modernity's possibilities or critiquing its dangers, the writer or artist was called upon to help cleanse, renew, or reinvent perception and consciousness by reinventing art. And reinvention demanded daring experimentation. For some, this meant an emphasis on discovering the specific possibilities and inner logic of each individual art. Others were driven by a powerful sense that dramatic formal innovation was necessary to better capture and represent reality, particularly the complex realities of inner life and subjectivity; here we can think of Proust's effort to invent a kind of novelistic structure and writing that would capture the memory-mediated character of inner life, and readers will find some of the same impulses in the Hebrew novelist Uri Nisan Gnessin and Yiddish novelist Dovid Bergelson.<sup>29</sup> These drives to experimentation shared a hostility to existing modes of realism in fiction, drama, and the visual arts and existing canons of form and self-expression in poetry and music. They shared a desire to violate and recast the calcified expectations of readers and viewers so as to awaken them to something new. Much modernist art exhibited special fascination with "primitive" art forms (of others, often colonized others, but also of one's own community) as a source of renewal (something readers of this volume will see in Lasker-Schüler's provocative self-presentation as Prince Yusuf and in secular Yiddish literature's growing fascination with the very Hasidic and mystical traditions it had once derided). So too, much modernist art manifested a love-hate relationship with burgeoning popular market-driven culture and new technologies of photography and film.

Furthermore, some scholars see the same double modernist impulse of embrace and critique of modernity as a key not only to the arts but also to many philosophical, social scientific, therapeutic, architectural, religious, political, and even scientific currents of the age. Such scholars deem symptomatic such developments in the intellectual life of our era as philosophy's bifurcation between

those seeking a new objective ground of knowledge and those seeking to move beyond a felt impasse of meaninglessness and contingency; sociology's double-edged proposal that one could ameliorate some human problems if one understood that we were not free self-determining individuals but the products of social forces; or psychoanalysis's revelation that we are not rational decision-makers but rather beings driven by needs and drives largely invisible to us and at best only partly comprehensible and controllable through painstaking self-investigation. Then too, some accounts of modernism connect artistic and intellectual transformations to what can be seen as a plethora of countercultural experiments in living: the 1880–1918 period is replete with bold searches for a different kind of life, intentional communities of all sorts connected mostly by their shared refusal of bourgeois life, intensive contestation of gender roles, a new emphasis on the body's plasticity, and new sexualities deemed freer than the "Victorian" age had allowed.

What does all this have to do with Jews and Jewish culture? To this, there is one simple answer and many imprecise ones. The simpler point to make, and the most important for the sake of this volume, is that numerous Jewish individuals of every background were seized by the modernist impulse, drawn to the modernist temper, and moved to create culture in a consciously experimental mode and with a conscious sense of participating in something new. This is perhaps most evident in art and thought produced by Jews fully integrated into the metropolitan American, French, German, and Russian scenes that housed so much of the era's great modernism, but by the same token, readers who trace the trajectory of Yiddish and Hebrew poetry and fiction from the beginning of our period to the end will see a clear course of dissatisfaction with fixed forms, be they realist fiction in a Victorian mode or sentimental poetry, and concomitant experimentation of all the sorts flagged above: psychological prose concerned with interiority, neo-Romantic and "primitivist" refiguring of tradition into modern myth, poetic gestures of joyful Nietzschean self-making, ruthless self-analysis, and the new rhythms of urban life.<sup>30</sup>

Much less precise and satisfying answers can be offered to a different question that scholars cannot leave alone, namely, whether there was a special and particular connection between Jewish experience and the modernist temper: was there a line of modernism that we should call "Jewish" modernism? Was there some special elective affinity between Jews' social position or cultural experience and modernist ways of seeing and thinking? It is easy to convince oneself that Jews played an outsized role in modernism if one strings together names such as Proust, Stein, Kafka, Mina Loy, Delaunay, Freud, Georg Simmel, Chagall, and Bloom, James Joyce's Jewish protagonist in *Ulysses*. But one could just as easily tell a prosopography of modernism in which Jewishness is decidedly secondary, one centering around Nietzsche, Eliot, Pound, Woolf, Picasso, Bracque, Weber (the German sociologist, not the American Jewish artist), Debussy, Diaghilev, Musil, Yeats, Synge, James and James, Faulkner, Cendrar, Matisse, Mussorgsky, Biely, Blok, Goncharova . . . Similarly, it is tempting to think that the ostensible Jewish experience of outsiderhood in Western culture produced a special capacity for critical insight into the alienations, problems, and dangers modern life was seeding for humanity. Certainly, there is reason to see real connections between Kafka's experience of

Jewishness as something inescapable in a nationalizing Austro-Hungarian Empire and a racializing Europe and his insights into the special modern terror of judgments that cannot be appealed, transformations that cannot be achieved, and fates that cannot be escaped. But there were plenty of Jews whose experience of modernity did *not* turn them into modernists. Perhaps the one stable point we can add here is that whether it was true or not, growing numbers of contemporaries in Europe, America, and the Middle East did *think* there might be a special connection between modernism, modernity, and “the Jews.” Often, this was not meant as a compliment: our period saw the deepening and extension of a line of thought that identified Jews as special bearers of modernity’s inauthenticity, superficiality, decadence, unbelief, and so on. Finally, whatever our doubts about grand narratives of a special connection between Jews and modernism, it is a fact that, as the reader will soon see, some Jews were cocreators of global modernism in distinctive ways: Nietzscheans stood at the center of Hebrew secular culture, Tolstoyans reshaped Zionism, psychoanalysis was an almost entirely Jewish dispensation, and Jews loomed large in New York bohemian culture, global feminism, photography, and film.<sup>31</sup>

As we close this section, let us remind the reader that we are not just talking about culture in sense of the arts. The final two decades of the nineteenth century and first two decades of the twentieth century saw a period of dramatic developments, tensions, and ruptures in Jewish *thought*—of intense Jewish reflection, argument, and activism regarding Jews’ collective situation, regarding questions of political belonging and social justice, regarding gender norms in Jewish life, and regarding God, self, and society in theological, philosophical, and sociological veins. These impulses too, and the works of polemic and history, social critique and thought that they spurred, find ample representation here.

With these first sketches in mind, let us now turn to more deliberate exploration of some key historical developments that shaped Jewish cultural creativity of the era. The next section of this introduction will introduce readers in detail to the political and cultural geography of Jewish life circa 1880–1890. Section III, the longest section, examines in more depth some of the forces that dramatically transformed Jewish life and culture between 1880 and 1914: wrenching global economic change and the responses it spurred from migration to socialism, the subtle but no less profound transforming effects of mass secularization and revolt against Judaism’s traditional gender order, the deepening effects of Western imperial power, promises, and prejudice on the culture of Middle Eastern Jews, the consolidation of new and more dangerous forms of antisemitism in Europe, and the complex impact of nationalism, both of others and of Jews themselves, on the very grammar of what Jewish culture could be. As we survey these developments, we will simultaneously introduce readers to some of the main kinds, themes, problems, and achievements of Jewish expressive culture created around the globe in this tumultuous era and introduce as well a related transformation in Jewish civilization: the rise of a new kind of Jewish politics. Section IV will once again survey Jewish communal life globally, not as of 1880 but as of 1914, as a means of charting the extent of the transformation; it will also survey the terrible and transformative impacts of World War I and the Russian Revolution,

1914–1918. Finally, the last section will offer a few further framing perspectives on the works that await readers of this anthology.

### *Section II: The Jewish World circa 1880*

In 1880 there were approximately 7,663,000 Jews in the world. Of these, 5,727,000 (88.4%) lived in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, while 1,044,000 resided in Western Europe (less than one-fifth of all Jews on the continent). In Asia and Africa (including Palestine) there were about 630,000, with another 262,000 in the American continents and Oceania. In other words, the vast majority of the Jews of the world lived in the “Old World,” and merely a little more than 3 percent resided on these last continents, which had been home to only about 11,000 Jews in 1825.<sup>32</sup>

This situation, in which only a negligible minority of Jews in the world lived outside the continents in which their grandparents had lived, was to change dramatically in less than forty years. Moreover, it was not only Jews’ places of residence, legal status and sources of livelihood that would undergo a transformation: their languages, clothing, foods, habits, and customs from the Old World, were also to change. Western modes of modernity not only influenced those who headed west to new countries but also reached into the lives of people who remained in place with ever greater intensity.

Profound changes in Jewish life, planted by political, social, and economic transformations in the early modern period in the North Atlantic region of Europe, were already discernible in communities of Europe and the Mediterranean basin as early as the seventeenth century. Western influences were precociously marked among merchants and financiers involved in international economic activity and among intellectuals who benefited from the patronage of the wealthy. The broadening contacts of individuals and groups with agents of political, economic, and cultural change in Western and Central Europe was not limited to any one Jewish population, but rather shared by Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazim, Ladino-speaking Sephardim, Judeo-Italian-speaking Italian Jews, and Jews of the Mediterranean Basin speaking Judeo-Arabic.

These initial encounters with modernity by Jews in port cities from Rhode Island to Odessa to Mogador deepened as the influence of northwestern and central European countries expanded to the eastern and southern fringes of the continent and across the Mediterranean. It was only in the nineteenth century, however, with globalization of capitalism and the overseas expansion of European colonial activity, that Western influence over Jews took on unprecedented proportions.

Beyond economic and social transformations, the shifting policies of states and governments were also a powerful force for change, as regimes of various sorts sought to encourage the acculturation of ethnic-religious minorities into the larger national or imperial culture. The administrations in those places—where most of the world’s Jews lived at the time—used the mechanisms of the state for this purpose, especially state education systems and conscription into the army. The contact—and conflict—between Jews and Western influences took on a political-ideological character in the

nineteenth century, with far-reaching political, social, economic, religious, and cultural implications of its own.

Jews reacted differently to the changes unfolding around and among them. Some enthusiastically accepted the spirit of the new age and sought to adjust both themselves and their nation to fit in with the different values of the Western Enlightenment. Others shied away from the antitraditional messages of modernity and sought to fortify the walls of their traditional community. Finally, there were many others whose lives changed spontaneously, as they adapted to the changing political orders and social reality without offering either opposition or avowed support.

One way or another, the struggle between Jews and the various manifestations of modernity involved a cross-border political confrontation that lasted for many years, a clash mainly between a postcorporate religious society—a network of thousands of local ethnic-religious communities, each with unique cultural features but all sporting a shared set of institutions—and imperial or colonial governments. And yet, a significant part of the conflict occurred within the Jewish communities themselves, between those who were seen as agents of Westernization and those who considered themselves the flag-bearers for Jewish continuity in an age of change.

This conflict did not unfold simultaneously throughout the Jewish diaspora. Its pace and power differed from place to place, and the same is true of the eventual product—both social and cultural—created by these encounters with the various manifestations of the new era. The diverse sources brought together in the current anthology show that what occurred to the Jewish people from 1880 until the end of World War I was in fact, to a large extent, an intensification of processes that had already begun, and the expansion among growing populations of sets of ideas, methods of organization, customs, and artistic genres that already existed on an influential level in previous decades. However, in our period, the pace of change accelerated to such a degree, and such large sections of the Jewish people experienced such sweeping social and cultural transformations, that we may deem the period beginning at the end of the nineteenth century a new chapter in the global history of Jews.

What characterized this Jewish society that was about to be so dramatically transformed in the decades to come? It is useful to offer two kinds of “survey maps” of Jewish life circa 1880, viewing Jews both in terms of the distinct, if interwoven historical-cultural communities to which many of them still meaningfully belonged, and in terms of the diverse political situations that Jews found themselves in as denizens of dozens of distinct and rapidly changing states, polities, and societies.

### Diverse Diasporas

Seen from a broadly anthropological perspective, most Jews circa 1880 still belonged in meaningful—though rapidly attenuating—ways to three large diasporas spread across different countries and stretched over thousands of miles of the Old World: the Ashkenazic diaspora, the Sephardic diaspora, and the diaspora of speakers of the Judeo-Arabic dialects. Although one could find legally separate Sephardic communities in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, and the Ottoman Empire by the end of the nineteenth century, these communities continued

to share a common culture and many ties. Similarly, the Jewish Arab diaspora stretching from Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia in the west to Syria and Iraq in the east was divided among the spheres of influence of the French and British colonialists and provinces ruled by the Ottoman sultan, yet was bound together by any number of migratory and familial ties. The Ashkenazic diaspora crossed the borders of several countries, from France and the Netherlands in the west to the Russian Empire in the east; within this variegated expanse, many of the Ashkenazic Jews of Eastern Europe particularly continued to maintain robust ties of language, culture, religiosity, and sociability with little regard for the national borders that separated the Russian Empire, Romania, and Austro-Hungarian Galicia.

Alongside these three large groups were other Jewish ethnic communities throughout the Jewish Old World of the continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Their geographical spread was more limited. In southeastern France were four communities of Provençal Jews, who maintained their own prayer customs and spoke in Shuadit (Judeo-Provençal). In Italy, there was a community of Jews who preserved the Judeo-Italian language and Italian customs, despite the fact that this ancient community was already at an advanced stage of absorption into the Sephardic and Ashkenazic (Tedeschi) communities. Quite a few Jews lived in Greece, spoke an ancient Judeo-Greek and prayed in accordance with the Romaniot prayer rite. In Iran, northeastern Iraq, and the south of the Russian Empire (in today's Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Azerbaijan) lived tens of thousands of Jews whose languages and customs derived from long-standing Persian Jewish culture and who had their own Jewish Iranian tongues, including Judeo-Persian, Judeo-Tajik (Bukhari), and Judeo-Tat (Juhuri). Near them, in the geographical seam between Iran, Iraq, and Syria, one could find the Jews of Kurdistan, speakers of various dialects of Aramaic (sometimes known as Jewish Neo-Aramaic of Hulaulá). In Ethiopia there was an ancient community with a liturgical language (Ge'ez) in addition to two spoken languages, Amharic and Tigrinya, whose customs differed completely from those of Yemeni Jews living on the other side of the Red Sea and speaking Judeo-Arabic. The Indian subcontinent featured two groups, Cochin Jews and Bene Israel, each with their own language and customs. Finally, the Karaites, who rejected the Mishnah and Talmud in favor of their own (nonrabbinic) interpretive tradition of the Written Torah, were scattered across the three continents—from Lithuania and Ukraine in the north, through the Crimean Peninsula and Turkey, to Iraq and Egypt.

The three large diasporas presented above were shaped by an extended process of population movements, some of which lasted for centuries. In many cases, waves of immigrants from different Jewish ethnic groups arrived at the same destinations, with older residents from one ethnic group welcoming new settlers from another Jewish ethnic group. Thus, “overlapping areas” were formed between two or three of the great diasporas, in which Ashkenazim and Sephardim, or Sephardim and Judeo-Arabic speakers lived side by side. A large tract of this kind, between the Ashkenazic and Sephardic diasporas, stretched from the Black Sea through the Balkans to northern Italy.

Jewish ethnic-demographic diversity had existed even in the early modern period in commercial cities such as Aleppo in Syria, or Istanbul, capital of the Ottoman Empire, and in a number of commercial centers in North Africa. It now expanded into large cities whose economies attracted Jewish immigrants of various origins in the late nineteenth century. Sometimes the different groups merged

within a few generations into one community. In many cases, however, the communities lived separately, side by side—for example in Amsterdam, Jerusalem, Cairo, and new diasporic centers in the United States, Latin America, and Western Europe.

However, contacts between the various ethnic-cultural groups were not limited to daily meetings of neighbors. Intercommunal ties that crossed political boundaries and bypassed cultural and linguistic barriers have continuously existed between Jewish ethnic-religious groups since antiquity. These contacts did not disappear with the disintegration of traditional corporate frameworks. On the contrary, the upheavals of the new era intensified such ties, albeit in new forms and via modern technologies. These new links allowed immigrant communities to live in their new places and become close to Jews from a different group, while at the same time maintaining a kind of “imagined community” of their original group.

From a demographic-geopolitical perspective, the political borders at the end of the nineteenth century did not match the ethnic-cultural boundaries between the Jewish diasporas. In 1880, on the eve of the great mass migration, the vast majority of the three great Jewish ethnic groups still lived in the territories of three multiethnic empires in the Old World: the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman empires. But shifting political borders and the onset of mass migrations began to alter this situation dramatically. Substantial numbers of Ashkenazim and Sephardim found themselves in young nation-states that had recently gained independence from imperial rule: the kingdoms of Italy, Greece, Serbia, Romania, and Bulgaria. Immigration to West European countries placed rapidly expanding Jewish populations in countries whose citizens enjoyed democratic, parliamentary rule and a well-developed capitalist economy and that were in the midst of a massive colonial expansion. Britain and France were establishing colonies or maintaining various levels of involvement in territories that were under a different type of control. Small numbers of Jews from all three Old World groups had already found their way to overseas European colonial outposts before 1880, and Ashkenazic immigrants from Eastern Europe began to join them in significant numbers in our period.

### The Geopolitics of Jewish Life

Let us consider the situation of the various Jewish ethnic-religious diasporas in the different geopolitical units around the world in the early 1890s. The diverse panoramic picture that emerges can be arranged according to the size of the specific Jewish population. This provides a starting point for understanding the rapid changes that immigration brought about in a relatively short period of time.

The multinational Russian empire, a highly diverse ethnic, cultural, and linguistic mosaic, contained in 1880 by far the largest Jewish population in the world. The vast majority of nominally Russian Jews were actually part of the eastern wing of the pan-European Ashkenazic diaspora, descendants of the Jews of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth who continued to live overwhelmingly in the same Polish, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian regions that their ancestors had inhabited for centuries. Though subjects of the tsar for a century, few were Russified in any meaningful sense, though that was beginning to change; most still used Yiddish as their primary language and lived lives

permeated with an eastern Ashkenazic religious and cultural tradition that layered rabbinic, folk, and Hasidic traditions bound together with a strong sense of ethnoreligious distinctiveness from their neighbors. Adding to the complexity, this population was subjected to not one but rather two clashing powerful acculturative currents; while some “Russian” Jews looked to Russian as the language of modernity, those in the heart of old Poland, which Russia ruled but never colonized, looked to Polish high culture as the beckoning alternative if they felt any acculturative attractions at all.

Not all the Jews of Russia were Ashkenazim. In the Asian territories north of Afghanistan, Iran, and the Ottoman Empire, which were annexed to Russia in the nineteenth century, there were centuries-old communities of Bukharan, Caucasian, and Georgian Jews. These were joined over the course of the century by Russian-born Ashkenazic immigrants who moved to the developing commercial and industrial centers of Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Georgia. The Crimean Peninsula was home to a small ancient community of Krymchaks who spoke a vernacular Turkic. Karaites who had their own Turkic language lived in ancient communities of Lithuania in western Ukraine, the Crimean Peninsula, and in the new community of Odessa.

Jews in Russia did not enjoy equal civil rights—such a thing did not exist in Russia until 1917—but they did have the legal privileges accorded townspeople. Due to legal restrictions on the permanent residence of Jews in all areas of the empire, which were first established in the late eighteenth century, most Ashkenazic Jews continued to live in what was known as the Pale of Settlement: the western governorships of the empire, stretching from the Baltic region to the northern shore of the Black Sea in the south. In 1881, some 2,912,000 Jews lived in the Pale of Settlement, more than 11 percent of the total population,<sup>33</sup> while 1,020,000 lived in Russian Poland (Congress Poland), 13.62 percent of the population. Most of these Jews still maintained traditional lifestyles, although since the reforms of Tsar Alexander II in the 1860s, a Jewish bourgeoisie oriented toward the Russian language and toward imperial culture had begun to develop in cities large and small.<sup>34</sup>

Internal population movements led to the transfer of a significant portion of Jews living in the northern governance of the Pale of Settlement to the southern regions, turning Odessa into the empire’s second largest Jewish center after Warsaw and creating new Jewish communities in cities like Kharkov and Ekaterinoslav. In 1880, only a small percentage of all Russian Jewry lived in large cities outside the Pale of Settlement. However, this group, especially residents of Moscow and St. Petersburg, which included a Jewish intelligentsia that embraced the language of the empire and maintained ties with the Russian cultural world, would play an important role over the coming decades in the political life of Russian Jewry and the blossoming of a multilingual Jewish culture.<sup>35</sup>

The assassination of Tsar Alexander II by radicals in March 1881 and an ensuing wave of pogroms led to a new era in the history of the empire’s Jews. Thereafter, the government pursued a largely anti-Jewish policy marked by extreme suspicion of Jewish loyalty; this produced a growing rift between the Russian government and much of Russia’s diverse Jewish population, including those Jews who had already undergone a process of Russification and identified with the state culture. Meanwhile, economic hardships that resulted in the disintegration of the old socioeconomic order accelerated

internal and external migrations and further advanced political radicalization. Those political seeds had already begun to germinate in the 1860s and 1870s.

More than 1.5 million Jews, who enjoyed full civil rights from the 1860s, lived in the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1880.<sup>36</sup> Like its Russian neighbor, this great empire at the center of Europe incorporated a bewildering variety of ethno-nations, and Jewish modernity there took shape as regional elites and nationalist movements jostled both with the imperial regime and with each other for sway. Already in 1867, the Hungarian aristocracy had won formal political equality and autonomy, recasting the Habsburg Empire as the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Although Polish aristocratic elites did not win quite the same formal parity, Austrian Galicia, populated largely by Ukrainians and Jews in a cultural sense, came under Polish-language cultural dominance. At the same time, local Germanic, Hungarian, and Polish elites all confronted the strengthening of local national movements (Czech, Ukrainian, South Slavic) in the territories under their control. The large Jewish minority, with its variety of socially and culturally distinct groups, was not officially recognized as a nation as such—though as one headed further east, one found a Yiddish-speaking ethnoreligious community quite distinct from its Slovak, Polish, and Ukrainian neighbors. Politically, eastern Austro-Hungarian Jews were pulled between different cultures and competing political strategies. Growing numbers identified strongly with the dominant local ethnicities and cultures, with both political and cultural implications: Lwów and Kraków became centers of Jewish Polonism in this period, and many of the 638,000 Jews in the Hungarian part of the empire, which included Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia, identified fully with Hungarian nationalism even as others cultivated one of the most extreme sorts of Orthodoxy and antimodernism to appear in the Jewish world of that era. In the German parts of Austria, as well as in Bohemia and Moravia, which had been exposed earlier to processes of economic modernization, the process of acculturation that had begun in the early nineteenth century was now well underway. And it was in the empire's west, particularly the glittering capital Vienna and for different reasons Prague, that German remained the undisputed language of high culture. There, swelling populations of Jews of all sorts of backgrounds could take part in a transnational German-language high culture, as did for instance Sigmund Freud, Theodor Herzl, and Franz Kafka.

Other factors complicated matters still further. Even as imperial society continued to see the Jews of the empire's east as "barbaric" Ostjuden, by contrast with the Westjuden identified from midcentury with the German cultural universe, Jews themselves were on the move. In 1880, a total of 72,588 Jews lived in Vienna, but that number doubled to 146,926 within two decades. The Jewish populations of other cities in the empire swelled in similar proportions, adding to the populations of more Germanized, Magyarized, or Polonized Jews.

Yet throughout all this variegation, many and probably most Jews with the exception of the Hungarian and some Polonized elements continued to identify less with one or another national group in the empire and more with the Austro-Hungarian emperor and the imperial state themselves—perhaps even more so as nationalist tensions and new forms of antisemitic sentiment bubbled up around them. Prague's German-language culture was largely a Jewish creation, but the city's Jewish elite identified with neither the ethnic German nationalists nor the Czech nationalists that struggled

to control the city. Not least because the imperial state offered Jews fair treatment—the number of Jews in the Austrian officer corps was higher than anywhere else in the world with the exception of France—Jews won a reputation as especially *Kaisertreu*, loyal to the emperor.

The third-largest Jewish community in Europe lived in the German Empire, which came into being in 1871 after a decades-long protracted and complex process of unification. The unification of Germany—from Alsace in the southwest of the country to East Prussia in the northeast—occurred under the sign of German nationhood. The newly unified Germany was home to 561,612 Jews in 1880.<sup>37</sup> About two-thirds of them—363,000—lived in Prussia, of whom 54,000 were in Berlin, the capital of the empire. Rapid urbanization reduced the number of Jews in the small localities, and increased their population in the major cities of Berlin, Frankfurt am Main, Leipzig, and Cologne.

Most German Jews, who now enjoyed full political equality, integrated into urban bourgeois society and adopted the lifestyle, culture, and mentality of the middle class. A Jewish German culture in its various forms replaced the traditional Ashkenazic religious culture: there was a great increase in the number of Jewish students enrolled in German high schools, and many graduates acquired higher education and joined the liberal professions. Social integration in the era of emancipation, which was especially rapid in urban centers, marked a real demographic turning point. In 1880, there was a 1:10 ratio between interfaith marriages in Prussia to intra-Jewish marriages. A mere ten years later, one in five weddings involving a Jewish person would be interfaith. The number of conversions to Christianity remained small but continued to grow; where 76 Prussian Jews converted out in 1880, 460 did so in 1900. A declining birth rate decreased the overall number of German Jews, especially in relation to the rest of the population. Yet even as German Jewish integration became ever more complete, there was a sudden and unexpected surge of antisemitism (the term itself was coined in German in 1879) which, though it would ebb and flow in strength over the next decades, would thereafter remain a central dimension of cultural life. In all these respects, good and bad, the situation of German Jewry in 1880 indicated what was in store over the following decades for widening swaths of Jewish society around the world—how Jews would experience an age of equal rights, urbanization, developing capitalism, and cultural integration, but also an age marked by new forms of fear and uncertainty in a rapidly changing world, the rise of “scientific” racism across the West, periodic economic shocks, and deep wells of discontent with modernity’s effects and the perceived role of Jews therein.

In the Ottoman Empire, the Jewish population, which numbered several hundred thousand in the last decades of the century, was highly diverse. It remained diverse even as the empire lost borderland territories—and some of its Jews—to European powers and nationalist secessions. In the northwestern provinces of the empire, as well as in several Ottoman territories that became independent states, such as Serbia and Bulgaria (1878), the dominant group was Ladino-speaking Sephardim. But in the Kingdom of Greece (which had separated from the empire as early as 1827) and in Albania, there remained several pockets of Romaniote Jews, descendants of the ancient Jewish communities of the Byzantine Empire who did not assimilate with the Sephardim, descendants of exiles from

Spain and Portugal. In the Ottoman Empire's Middle Eastern provinces through the Levant (and reaching, after 1873, to Yemen), most Jews were speakers of Judeo-Arabic in various dialects. Communities in such large cities as Alexandria in Egypt or Aleppo in Syria were joined in the nineteenth century by Ashkenazic immigrants from Eastern Europe, as well as by Italian Jews.

Across the Ottoman Empire, Jews enjoyed relatively equal access to the expanded political rights offered Ottoman subjects since the reforms of the 1850s; like the other ethnoreligious communities of the empire, they were also organized as a formally recognized religious community with substantial religious autonomy within the state's administrative framework. As noted, the Ottoman state's offer of expanded citizenship came as part of a program of defensive reform in the face of European and local challenges, and went hand in hand with growing demands by the state for active loyalty and participation by the diverse communities that made up its population. The stance toward Jews of Ottoman administrators and elite strata linked to the state was not free of suspicion, but it more resembled that of the Austrian imperial regime than the Russian: amid rising and increasingly bloody tensions between the imperial power and various ethno-nationalist movements, particularly in Ottoman southern Europe and Ottoman Armenia, Jews were generally viewed as a quiescent and unthreatening population. In this context, Jewish leaders and intellectuals across the empire eagerly and with genuine feeling cultivated a public culture of undivided loyalty to the Ottoman state and the imperial commonwealth. Internally, Ottoman Jewish culture was in profound flux, not least as growing numbers both in the Turkish-Balkan and Arab reaches of the empire began to acquire Western education in the dozens and soon hundreds of modern Jewish schools created by Western Jewish philanthropic organizations, such as the aforementioned Alliance Israélite Universelle. But neither the state nor the Jews saw internal Westernization as necessarily contradicting Ottomanism (whereas cultivation of Greek, Armenian, or other incipient national cultures was typed as a threat), and Jews thus developed a relatively stable hybrid identity of Ottoman loyalty, traditional religious culture (generally in rapid decline), and orientation toward Western and particularly French modernity which, paradoxically, dominated the burgeoning Ladino-language and (perhaps to a lesser degree) Judeo-Arabic print culture that flourished in this era.

If we think not in terms of the Ottoman Empire but in terms of the Arab world, matters grow more complicated. On the one hand, in the Arab Levant, political Ottomanism enjoyed if anything greater general support than in the northern core of the empire; Muslim Arab elites from Beirut to Baghdad chafed less at Ottoman rule than, say, the empire's Armenians or Greek subjects, and no robust secessionist Arab nationalism was yet to be seen. Thus, political Ottomanism among Jews in the Levant, including in the unique space of Palestine, was something that connected them to their Muslim neighbors. At the same time, as noted, in those Arab cities both within and beyond Ottoman rule where a self-consciously modern Arab culture was blossoming and finding support in a growing, modernized middle class, a few Jewish intellectuals began, as mentioned previously, to forge relations with Muslim and Christian Arab intellectuals committed to a largely suprarreligious vision of "Arab renaissance." Only in the interwar period would Jewish involvement in modern Arab culture

become mainstream (albeit never majoritarian) in Baghdad and Cairo; in our period, it remained a small dispensation and, like Jewish Westernization, was not seen as a challenge to the state.

That said, other trends complicated Jewish status in the Arab world, both Ottoman and non-Ottoman. Even where European rule did not extend directly, imperial power was not limited to the “soft” power of cultural influence. European states worked assiduously to extend their authority in the region by offering substantial extraterritorial legal status to elite individuals and their families in exchange for economic and political support and service—something the Ottoman state had been forced to accept. Middle Eastern Jews (and even more so Christians) seem to have taken these offers up disproportionately, or at any rate extensively. In a place like Cairo or Alexandria, virtually every elite Jewish family had clear ties to one or another European power; there and even more so in Palestine (the Holy Land, to European Christendom), even non-elite Jews were able to draw support from consuls competing to patronize them, as well as an alphabet soup of Western Jewish organizations eager to “regenerate” them.

The Jewish situation was even more complicated and fissured in the Maghreb (North Africa), where Italy, Britain, Spain, and above all France imposed much more direct rule (not least through massive violence). Already early in the nineteenth century, France had not only conquered Algeria but had made it part of France, and in our period it extended direct imperial rule over Tunisia and Morocco, where the region’s largest Jewish population lived. Britain took direct administrative control over Egypt’s centers, and Italy dominated Libya with its deeply rooted Jewish population in Tripoli, Benghazi, and smaller settlements. The implications of such direct rule for Jews were dramatic. As noted, many of the Jewish communities scattered across the vast expanses of Arab and Berber North Africa had entered the nineteenth century with especially close cultural affinities to their Muslim neighbors, though at the same time their place in society was generally thickly and sometimes violently circumscribed by especially stringent versions of the traditional Muslim custom governing the differentiation of tolerated religious minorities. As of 1880, this was still true for most Jews, particularly in more isolated inland cities like Marrakesh. But already before the modern era, small but non-negligible Jewish communal elites particularly in North African port cities had cultivated special ties with Italian and West European business interests, won special protections, and begun to adopt Western cultural forms. In our period, direct European rule turned such exceptional identification into much more of a norm. Though European conceits about “Oriental” backwardness, decadence, and ineducability cast a shadow over Jews too, generally imperial administrators came to see Jews as corrigible while conveniently judging the much larger indigenous Muslim populations as much less so. A growing number of Jews, and not only those of great wealth, gained access to European legal protection. More directly and dramatically, the Jews of Algeria actually received French citizenship en masse in 1870, though what that would mean concretely was hashed out throughout our period. In short, for Jews in North Africa, Westernization could mean something far more politically concrete than elsewhere in the region. North African Jews increasingly tied their fates to identification with the culture of the European metropole, although in Morocco and Libya some more provincial

communities remained rooted in older lifeways or grew even more conservatively tied to their local traditions as competing European powers divided the region piecemeal.

While most “Eastern” Jews remained denizens of the old empires and others became denizens of new ones, some found themselves citizens of—or unwelcome minorities within—new nation-states. Great Power struggles and nationalist movements in southern Europe brought erosion to the northwestern reaches of the Ottoman Empire; the 1870s saw the creation of new Bulgarian and Romanian states, and the creation of new Jewish political communities in the process. The roughly 30,000 Bulgarian Sephardim enjoyed equal rights, though antisemitism emerged as a serious problem in the 1890s. The new Romania unwillingly housed a much larger population of roughly 250,000 Jews at the start of our period (which would eventually grow much larger), mostly Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazic immigrants from the north. Unlike Serbia and Bulgaria, Romania granted full civil rights to only a small proportion of its Jews—making it, as the Russian Jewish historian Simon Dubnow put it at the time, “a kind of miniature version” of Russia.<sup>38</sup>

There were a variety of the ancient Jewish ethnic-religious groups located east of the territories of the Ottoman Empire. Several tens of thousands of Jews lived in Iran, where there has been a continuous Jewish presence since ancient times. Possessing the protections accorded by Muslim law to a “people of the Book,” Iran’s Jews were nonetheless particularly vulnerable to harm and discrimination due to the austere approach of Iranian Shi’ism. Representatives of the colonial powers intervened in their favor, but many Jews were displaced from the various communities throughout the kingdom and joined the larger community of Tehran. More than a few immigrated to Palestine over the last decades of the century, settling in Jerusalem. Afghanistan, where the British presence was strengthening, was home to several thousand Jews who were historically associated with the communities of Iran and Bukhara, which lay across the border in the Russian Empire. In India, under British rule, there were three distinct groups of Jews in the last decades of the nineteenth century who maintained separate cultural identities: the Bene Israel, who lived in the Konkan region of western India, south of Bombay; Cochin Jews in Kerala, in the southwest of the country; and Jewish immigrants who started arriving from the Ottoman Empire from the eighteenth century onward. Most notably, the trading families of Sassoon, Judah, Gabbai, and Ezra came from Iraq and joined the international financial-commercial network that spread throughout the British Empire. The Jews of India—many of whom moved to the centers of colonial rule that were focal points of the developing economic activity—also came under the influence of imperial culture and were integrated into British governmental systems.

New immigrants from Europe and the Middle East, participants in the economic advance of the colonial powers into the huge Chinese kingdom, also established new communities in its major trading cities. Many had set out on their path by working in one of the companies owned by the Sassoon family.<sup>39</sup>

Having placed East Central Europe and the Mediterranean world at the center of our tour so far, and having even tarried in the “Far East,” we turn now to what were in fact the fairly small Jewish

communities of the West. We begin with the “Far West”—with the U.S. Jewish population that was still quite small before masses of immigrants from the Russian Empire and Austrian Galicia began to flow across the Atlantic in the 1880s. In the United States, the “old” community of some 300,000 Jews as of 1880, descendants of early modern Western Sephardic mercantile communities and (mostly) mid-nineteenth-century Central European immigrants, was spread out across the country’s industrial north, the Jim Crow South, and the expanding west. Living mostly in small numbers in in hundreds of cities and towns, American Jews enjoyed full equal rights; and although this community encountered some social discrimination and religious suspicion, in most places it was ever more solidly integrated into an expanding urban middle class. This was so not least because even after the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation, America remained a country where whiteness remained the entry ticket to full belonging and opportunity, and racial distinctions trumped concerns about ethnic origin or religious difference. In the Midwest and especially the expanding West, Jewish officeholders and mayors were not unheard of.

If the early modern legacy of European colonization, dispossession of indigenous peoples, and African enslavement on a mass scale shaped Jewish life in the United States in ways not always fully acknowledged by Jews themselves, that same legacy had much more varied outcomes in the much smaller Jewish communities of the Caribbean. These communities of a few thousand were descendants of the early modern Western Sephardic merchant diaspora, who had over time acculturated to English and Dutch culture. By our period, they were integrating ever more fully into larger sodalities on the islands; but in a world shaped by racism, integration meant many things. In the British colony of Jamaica, our period saw ever-deepening integration of the small Jewish population into a white planter class growing ever more concerned about maintaining the color line. Conversely, places like Curaçao and Suriname were home to uniquely multiracial Jewish communities. Of course, that multiraciality was testament not to some irrelevance of race or absence of colonial racism, but rather to tangled histories of Caribbean Jewish slaveholding, contested emancipations and claims to belonging by formerly enslaved people and “mixed-race” descendants of Jewish slaveowners, and families shaped by recent realities of extreme power imbalances and patriarchal-racial domination as much as by care and communality.

Turning to Western Europe apart from Germany, we should begin by reminding ourselves how small its Jewish communities were as of 1880. In Britain, the cradle of the Industrial Revolution, there were only about 60,000 Jews all throughout England, Scotland, and Wales as of 1880, most of whom had come from German and Polish lands; a full 40,000 of these lived in London, the capital of the empire and a center of world capitalism.<sup>40</sup> Approximately 80,000 Jews lived in France in the early 1880s. These Jews had enjoyed full political equality since the days of the French Revolution and were already deeply enmeshed in French culture. The Jews of both countries enjoyed full equality of civil rights and the Jews of France particularly stood out for the degree of their participation in the life of the French state, with growing numbers entering state service and army service. There were important differences of class and origin in both communities. Anglo-Jewry included Sephardim as well as Ashkenazim from German and Polish origins, and French Jewry on the eve of

the era of massive immigration consisted of Provençal Jews in southeastern France, Spanish-Portuguese Jews in Bordeaux and other cities in the southwestern region, and Yiddish-speaking Jews of Alsace and Lorraine. But such internal ethnic differences were declining in significance, and both small Jewish populations of these great world powers were, as noted, ever more fully integrated and acculturated into the urban middle classes. As we shall see in a moment, Jewish life in France and Britain was profoundly reshaped, demographically if not institutionally, by the mass migration of East European Jews that began in the 1880s. At the same time, again as we shall see, the integration of French Jewry, like that of German Jewry, was challenged with growing force by new forms of antisemitism; but this only served to consolidate French Jewish devotion to the French republic.

A still more fulsome integration marked the trajectory of a Jewry at once ancient and new, that of Italy. In 1881, there were 37,401 Jews in Italy. A small minority within a vast Catholic majority, with roots reaching back to antiquity, they did not gain full emancipation until the unification of Italy in 1870. Yet in this new country still divided regionally, Jews stood out for their quick and full integration, acculturation to a still-young Italianness, and their commitment to Italian secular-liberal nationalism.<sup>41</sup>

The Jewish community of the Netherlands offered an interesting parallel to that of France and the pre-1880s United States. Here was another older community in a democratic country with a developing capitalist economy and an overseas empire, made up of remnants of an early modern Spanish and Portuguese Jewish merchant elite and a much larger, poorer, but ever more integrated Ashkenazic component. In 1879 there were 81,693 Dutch Jews, of whom 3,618 were Spanish-Portuguese. By 1899, following waves of immigrants from Eastern Europe, the number of Ashkenazim increased to 98,343.<sup>42</sup>

Belgium, which gained independence in 1831 in territories torn away from Holland and France, was home to a small Jewish community. In 1880, there were roughly 8,000 Jews in Antwerp alone, the important commercial city in the Flemish region. Another group of Jews from the Ottoman Empire immigrated to Antwerp and joined the city's older community of Portuguese Jews. Tiny Jewish communities in the Scandinavian countries were little altered in our era, mostly avoiding any substantial immigrant influx during the great migration from the neighboring Russian Empire.

This then gives us a picture of Jewish life around the globe in 1880. But vast changes were soon to come due to mass migration from Eastern Europe, and on a smaller scale, from the Mediterranean world. This mass migration led in many directions. Some Jews headed south and even southeast. In Oceania—Australia, New Zealand, and Tasmania—there were only a few thousand Jews at around 1880; these numbers would jump, relatively, after that year, as Eastern European Jewish immigrants joined other impoverished Europeans sailing southeast.<sup>43</sup> The Boer and British colonies in South Africa constituted another site of Jewish migration. Jews from Lithuania in the northwest of the Russian Empire, particularly Jewish men, favored this destination.<sup>44</sup>

On a far larger scale, multitudes of East European immigrants, later joined by tens of thousands of Jews from Ottoman lands, turned the Atlantic New World into a center of Jewish population rivaling the old. In Canada, there were 4,223 Jews in 1880, mostly concentrated in Montreal; within

thirty years Canada's Jewish population exploded to 74,564. Negligible Jewish communities in Spanish and Portuguese Latin America swelled with equal rapidity. The tiny Jewish community of Argentina, where the first Jewish wedding was officially recorded in 1860, multiplied after 1889 as thousands of East European Jews arrived annually, along with a smaller but substantial influx of Jews from North Africa and the Ottoman Empire. By 1914, there were almost 100,000 Jews in Argentina, most of them Ashkenazim whose mother tongue was Yiddish. Nearly 20,000 of these settled in a uniquely extensive network of agricultural colonies founded by the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA); historian Haim Avni estimates that the total number of Jewish immigrants employed in agricultural jobs in Argentina by 1914 reached at least 35,000—though the same period saw streams of migration from these settlements to the large city of Buenos Aires, where most Jews moved.<sup>45</sup> In the same period, new communities of some thousands emerged in Mexico, Cuba, Brazil, Uruguay, and Bolivia. Later, Jewish immigrants established similar communities in Chile and Peru, most of whose members had previously lived in Argentina, and they also spread to neighboring countries.

Today, in the third decade of the twenty-first century, by far the largest concentrations of Jews are to be found in the United States and Israel. Yet at the beginning of the period covered by this volume, both of those sites were on the demographic fringes of world Jewry. When the earliest historical sources included in this volume were formulated, the number of Jews in North America and what would become Israel were very small compared to the huge concentrations in Central and Eastern Europe, and their impact on Jewish life in the world was quite limited. This situation changed, albeit at a different pace for the two places, in the four decades covered by this anthology.

In the United States, the opening of the country's gates to mass immigration from eastern and southern Europe in the 1880s transformed American Jewry. The 300,000 "old" American Jews were almost immediately swamped by a largely East European Jewish wave eventually five to six times its size, accompanied by a smaller wave from the Ottoman Empire. The Jews who encountered the Yiddish-speaking immigrants landing in New York were people who had succeeded economically, had successfully integrated into civil society, and were well assimilated into the American cultural world and way of life. Virtually all of them were tradesmen or members of the liberal professions. These "Uptown" businessmen who admired German culture, worshiped at Reform temples or decorously modern Orthodox synagogues, and had found a place in both the Republican and Democratic parties clashed on economic, political, and social grounds with the poor "Downtown" Yiddish speakers who filled the Lower East Side.<sup>46</sup> This confrontation, during the period covered by the anthology before us, produced the twentieth-century Jewry of the United States,<sup>47</sup> as well as the Jewish communities in Canadian cities including Toronto and Winnipeg.

In Ottoman Palestine, there were between 23,000 and 26,000 Jews in 1880, according to most researchers. This is what is called the "Old Yishuv," with most of them living in four ancient cities in the Galilee and Judea: Safed, Tiberias, Hebron, and Jerusalem (the latter of which was home to about half of the entire population). Several hundred Jews resided in small urban settlements along

the Mediterranean coast: Haifa, Jaffa, and Gaza. Several hundred other “Musta’arabi Jews” (Arabic speakers who were in the country before the Ottoman occupation of 1517) lived in villages in the Galilean mountains. Palestine’s Jewry was a kind of microcosm of most of the ethnic groups in the diaspora. Immigrants began to arrive in Palestine from the Russian Empire, Romania (which had gained full political independence from Ottoman Europe only in 1878), and Yemen (under Ottoman rule from 1872). The agricultural colonies founded by East Europeans in the early 1880s outlined the future map of the “New Yishuv”: two territorially continuous blocks on the coastal plain south of Jaffa and on the slopes of the Carmel south of Haifa, and another block on the eastern side of the Upper Galilee, near Safed. Over the next few years, the gaps between these three blocs filled with more new settlements, coalescing into one social geopolitical entity that formed the basis for determining the borders of a Jewish state in the Middle East.<sup>48</sup>

### *Section III: Forces of Transformation: Jewish Culture and Consciousness in Global Crosscurrents Leading Up to World War I*

Jewish life circa 1880 continued to unfold largely in the places where Jews had long lived, mostly in the Jewish languages they had long spoken, and substantially within the framework of distinct Jewish institutions of religious and social life which they had long cultivated—with the signal great exception being the fully assimilated Jewish communities of Western Europe and the Atlantic world. Yet, in numerous ways that we began to chart in Section I, the next four decades would bring a reordering of Jewish experience, selfhood, thought, and culture unprecedented in its scale, reach, and in the rupture it entailed with long-established forms of Jewish life. In Section I we sketched many of the great globe-spanning forces that helped drive this transformation: the uneven and wrenching transformation of material conditions and social life around the globe by an ever more global capitalism, the extension of Western domination in multiple forms across the Middle East, the subtle but profound inner revolution of secularization and the ambient but encompassing sense that life now had to be “modern,” and new visions of how modern life should be organized. In competition and in tandem, these factors reshaped politics and culture around the globe, most dramatically in socialism and nationalism. This current section elaborates on the sketches of Section I selectively and along two lines, adding essential information both about the contours of those larger structuring forces that so profoundly reshaped Jewish everyday life and about some of the dizzying effects these processes had in Jewish cultural life itself.

Before we elaborate further on these great forces of change and their cultural impacts, it is important to register one essential circumstance general to Jewish life that mediated and also facilitated rapid cultural change: the fact of unusually high levels of literacy among Jews relative to many other collectivities, globally speaking. Of course, a substantial minority of Jews were functionally illiterate. Some scholars read Russia’s 1897 census as showing that as many as 30 percent of Jewish men were unable to read in any language despite the fact that Jewish law demanded and Jewish communal discipline tended to insure that all boys received at least a few years of education so as to give them

some modicum of access to Hebrew religious texts before the young men entered the workforce.<sup>49</sup> Though we lack such clear data for Jews in the Ottoman Empire and Middle East, it seems unlikely that the situation was all that different from that of East European Jewry. And as girls were not afforded the same education opportunities as boys in any traditional Jewish society, it is undoubtedly the case that Jewish women's illiteracy was significantly greater than that of men in both of those cultural zones.<sup>50</sup> Given that the very large majority of the world's Jewish population lived in those two zones and did not belong to an economic elite, Jewish illiteracy might have approached much higher rates than popular imagination tends to think. Yet taken as a group, Jews entered our period with relatively high rates of literacy. Certainly, simply as city-dwellers and a middleman minority, Jews were much more likely to be literate than the peasant populations among which most of them lived in Eastern Europe and parts of the Middle East. And, just as clearly, those literacy rates rose steeply for younger people.

This relatively high and rapidly rising literacy was a profoundly important factor conditioning Jewish culture because it provided the basis and a stimulus to an ever-expanding and ever more varied textual ecology in Jewish life. The explosive development of a new Yiddish high and popular culture in our period owed much to the fact that by 1880, several million Jews were literate in Yiddish and only in Yiddish. This was a vast potential consumer base waiting to be reached. The number of Ladino-literate readers was smaller by as much as a factor of 10, yet this too meant that at least several hundred thousand people able to read only in Ladino were open to new fare. So too were there hundreds of thousands of Middle Eastern Jews literate primarily or only in Judeo-Arabic, with the same market implications. Finally, in order to understand one of the most historically fateful developments in the Jewish cultural world of our era and since—the Hebrew cultural revival—we have to understand that even as traditional religious culture grew ever more embattled, it remained the case that traditional Jewish schooling in the Middle East and North Africa, and even more so in Eastern Europe, ensured a readership for Hebrew culture both old and new. Potential Hebrew readers must have numbered at least several hundred thousand globally circa 1900.<sup>51</sup>

Put in sociolinguistic terms, one of the most marked changes that would take place in the Jewish cultural life over the ensuing decades was a vast double linguistic transformation affecting the large majority of Jews around the world, who as of 1880, still operated exclusively or primarily in a specifically Jewish language—mostly Yiddish, Ladino, and Judeo-Arabic. These and similar Jewish vernaculars that derived from coterritorial languages continued to serve as the sole language of most women and men from the lower socioeconomic strata of “Old World” communities. In the decades covered by our volume, all of these vernaculars underwent revolutionary changes that transformed their cultural standing and saw them take on clearly nontraditional roles.

The Yiddish that 96 percent (!) of the entire Jewish population registered as their mother tongue in a census conducted in the Russian Empire in 1897 blossomed at the turn of the twentieth century from a disdained jargon into a national language and the medium of sophisticated literary expression. Furthermore, it was adopted by various revolutionary radical movements as the “language of

the people” (the “folk language”) and transformed into a suitable language for conveying the sharpest modern political messages. The Yiddish press, which, once released from chains of legal restriction in the Russian Empire, came to serve hundreds of thousands of readers between Warsaw and New York, was an influential agent of popularization. Yiddish in its modern incarnation provided a bridge for millions of East European Jews between their emotional affinity for the past cultures of a fading world and a quasi-messianic longing for the unknown lands of tomorrow.<sup>52</sup>

In this same period, a modern mass press also developed in the languages of Middle Eastern and Balkan Jewish communities, modernizing language and readership alike. A Ladino newspaper culture that flourished particularly in the three largest urban concentrations of Sephardic Jewry—Istanbul, Salonika, and Izmir—found tens of thousands of readers. Here too, the old vernacular spread innovative messages: readers of the Ladino press were inundated by content processed from West European cultural milieus (primarily from French).<sup>53</sup>

A similar process of modernization affected Judeo-Arabic in its various dialects. Several factors were influential here: European colonial cultures, the impact of the Hebrew Enlightenment movement, and literary works and political writing in an emerging general Arabic culture. Changes in the status of Judeo-Arabic occurred in large urban centers such as Tunis in North Africa and Baghdad in Iraq. In the case of Judeo-Arabic, too, one can point to the effect of immigration on the condition of language: immigrants from Baghdad to India preserved the traditional vernacular in the new land, as they printed books and published newspapers in that tongue—although this was matched by a gradual transition to English, the language of the British empire.<sup>54</sup>

This complex history of Jewish language usage and change was both a barometer of deeper cultural change and a structuring factor therein. The fact of mass literacy and its uneven distribution across languages allowed new forms and habits of cultural consumption to spread quickly and relatively easily among Jews of all sorts. This had the reciprocal effect of supporting, stabilizing, and stimulating the development of cultural forms still largely foreign to most Jewish communities, above all the newspaper and fiction. Jewish mass literacy laid the groundwork for not only a vast expansion but also a tremendous differentiation of print culture by and for Jews in nearly every language Jews used. By, say, 1910, the proverbial Jewish consumer in New York or Warsaw could buy—if he or she wished and could afford the price—a range of textual products directed at him or her as a Jew that had essentially not existed thirty years earlier. These ranged from pure-entertainment potboilers to Jewish dailies of all political and cultural stripes to intellectually rich and challenging weekly and monthly journals of opinion, scholarship, and especially literature and literary criticism in Hebrew, Yiddish, Russian, and German to journals speaking to ever more specific trade interests or hobbies.

As noted, however, our era witnessed a *double* sociolinguistic transformation: if modernity rapidly and profoundly expanded the reach and richness of cultural creation in Jewish languages, it also accelerated a process of their abandonment for metropolitan tongues. As Jewish communities all over Europe and the countries of the Mediterranean Basin suffered a breakdown of their premodern corporate social order, so too was there dramatic change in the languages that Jews spoke, read, and wrote. A weakening of sociological boundaries, the reduction of their geographical separation

from other population groups, together with a stepping up of acculturation processes following the displacement of millions of Jews from their old cultural environments—all these led to rapid, massive sociolinguistic transformation. Hundreds of thousands of Jews who entered the 1880–1914 period using a Jewish language soon acquired and began to use the languages of others for most or all of their cultural needs. For some, these were languages of empire that allowed for greater participation in an expanding multiethnic imperial commons: Russian for Russia’s Jews; German for Jews in the Austro-Hungarian Empire; French, English, or Italian for Jews in North Africa and the Middle East; even, marginally, Turkish for Ottoman Jews. For others, notably the mass of Jewish emigrants to the New World, these were the languages of new lands and opportunities, English and Spanish above all. For some living in places where nationalist ideals and programs were dominant, learning a language such as German, Polish, or Hungarian was both a path to modernity and an act of national rapprochement or even self-“conversion.” For a small but growing number of Jews in the Arab world, standard Arabic beckoned as a language of a supra-ethnic Arab modernity that could be shared with Muslims and Christians in a changing Arab society. By the end of our period, Jews played a significant role not only in the high literatures of places where Jews had long ago acculturated, but also in American English literature and the Spanish-language literature of Latin America. The author Anzia Yeziarska and the socialist activist and Yiddish newspaper editor Abraham (Abe) Cahan came as immigrants from Eastern Europe and within twenty years carved out a significant place in English-language American fiction—even while Cahan continued to function as the most influential newspaper editor in Yiddish letters. In 1910, Alberto Gerchunoff, a son of recent Jewish immigrants to Argentina, penned a Spanish-language novel about the life and passions about the Jewish immigrants turned cowboys and farmers on Argentina’s plains, *Los gauchos judíos*, that became a classic of Argentinian literature.<sup>55</sup>

Finally, it should be noted that the linguistic trajectory of Jewish cultural transformation was not only the product of external forces working on Jews, but also of Jews’ own projects. The 1880–1914 period marked a new stage in a Jewish linguistic project that dated back to the mid-eighteenth-century Enlightenment vision of Moses Mendelssohn and other *maskilim* or “enlighteners”: the transformation of Hebrew into a language of modern thought and creativity. Throughout the nineteenth century, self-proclaimed “enlighteners” in Eastern Europe and in the Middle East labored successfully to secularize the language of the prophets and the rabbis, which they had imbibed through traditional educations, into a supple and open-ended tool of modern expression. In our period, for reasons we will elaborate, Hebrew became a language of multifunctional and everyday communication, was endowed with unprecedented political significance by Zionism, and after the establishment of Hebrew schools in Palestine during the “First Aliyah” period (1882–1903), regained its status as the everyday spoken language of some thousands of boys and girls in Judea and the Galilee.<sup>56</sup>

That the fact of literacy opened up the possibility of a variegated Jewish mass press meant, in turn, an unusually high degree of openness (or vulnerability) to new ideas. As “everyday Jews” learned to read a newspaper as a genre, and as Jewish periodicals began to circulate in ever-farther reaches and ever-smaller towns, new ideas and sensibilities, including radically untraditional ones, became

inescapable. Jewish memoir literature about our period is replete with stories of encountering new ideas about Jews and about the world—ideas alternatively unsettling or inspiring—in the pages of a Yiddish or Ladino book or newspaper picked up essentially at random. Jews were, in short, equipped with the literacy and the reading habits to become deeply engaged consumers—and producers—of modernizing, Westernizing, secularizing, and often nationalizing cultural forms. In the 1880–1918 period, an array of wrenching material, cultural, and political changes rendered this potential an actuality for millions of Jews.<sup>57</sup>

### Capitalism, Mass Migration, and Socialism

For Jews around the world, as for all humanity, the 1880–1914 period brought the relentless, dizzying, perpetually life-altering whirl of the processes associated with the global transformation of material life by a now-global capitalism. As we have noted, the rapid, global, and wrenchingly uneven economic development of the era had radically divergent impacts in Jewish life. In Western and Central Europe, this era secured the extraordinary decades-long rise of most Jews into the region's bourgeoisie and haute-bourgeoisie; many talented and interesting voices in this volume were those of sons and daughters of this bourgeoisie—beneficiaries of university educations, metropolitan cultural milieus, and economic security who were also well-positioned to perceive and comment upon the great tensions and challenges of modern life. Conversely, as we have noted, the Jews of Eastern Europe and the Middle East lived through a profoundly divided capitalist modernity. Some successfully transitioned from old trade niches to new ones linked to expanding industries, finding their way to success. A small but significant—and disproportionate—number also found their way to higher education and the professions in societies that, though still largely agrarian, were increasingly literate. Famously, Jewish young men and women from the Russian Empire flooded into not only Russian universities but Swiss and German ones as well, with predictably wide implications for the character of Jewish thought and culture in Yiddish, Russian, Polish, German, and beyond. But for many more Jews, the 1880–1914 period brought economic struggle, impoverishment to the point of destitution and hunger, and desperation. In Russia's Pale of Settlement, in Austrian Galicia, and in parts of the Ottoman Empire, Jewish impoverishment shocked observers; in 1913, the prominent African American educator Booker T. Washington remarked that a visit to Kraków in Galicia had given him “some idea of the poverty, degradation, and squalor in which more than half of the Jewish race is living to-day in different parts of Europe.”<sup>58</sup> Impoverishment, however, was only one part of the story; mass migration was the other. Poverty and desperation drove literally millions of Jews from eastern and southeastern Europe to try their luck elsewhere, be it in rapidly swelling nearby cities linked to the new economy like Warsaw, Łódź, Kiev (Kyiv), or Salonika, or, for some two million Jews all told, overseas in New York, London, Buenos Aires, Chicago, or South Africa.<sup>59</sup>

The impact of massive economic change and of mass urbanization on Jewish culture and civilization was so vast and various that easy summary is impossible. Mass economic uprooting, new economic opportunities, and extensive urbanization were all in some sense necessary conditions for the

explosive development of new forms of popular culture aimed at Jewish consumers. In a deep anthropological sense, some scholars deem the Jewish encounter with the modern city itself as an essential force for the mass secularization of our era (on which more below), whether through the seductions and possibilities opened up by a new world of consumer goods and plenty, expanded possibilities of interaction with non-Jewish cultures and neighbors, or the destabilizing and often terrifying forms of disorder and pathology that plagued city life.<sup>60</sup> Capitalism's churn, and mass migration itself, seemed to produce new forms of crime, exploitation, and social suffering on a wide scale; for many concerned Jewish observers, one of the black marks of the 1880–1914 era was widely perceived oversized Jewish participation on a global scale in sexual commerce, both as sex workers and exploiters of sex work (see for instance texts by Bertha Pappenheim and Raphael Aaron Ben Simeon in this volume). In turn, critique and activism directed against the sexual consequences of impoverishment, migration, and urbanization were only one dimension of a vast Jewish discourse about capitalism's effects on modern life generally and on Jewish life particularly. Every domain of Jewish cultural expression in our period, from prose fiction to drama to popular cultural expression, is permeated by attention to the effects of wrenching economic change. Much of this discourse was marked by sharp concern and critique. Most spectacularly, of course, in 1880–1914 era, a substantial number of Jews around the world came to reject capitalism and all its works, and to embrace socialist visions of capitalism's overthrow or transcendence; we will return to the Jewish engagement with socialism below. But well beyond socialist circles, the Jewish culture of the era was pervaded by a sense that the new economic conditions were destroying families, inciting vice, rendering people brutish consumers of lowest-common-denominator fare instead of worthy literature and thought, and undermining commitment to Jewish community, languages, and culture.

Praise of capitalism's impact on Jewish life is more difficult to find, though arguably, many profoundly important developments in Jewish cultural life in our era were dependent on the new forms and degrees of consumption and choice it made possible.<sup>61</sup> It is hard to imagine the extraordinary flourishing of the new secular Yiddish culture in our era without mass consumption of the Yiddish press, which carried the more accessible works of many highbrow authors—and paid them for it, thus funding the development of less saleable forms of elite literary culture. Simultaneously, without the ever-expanding market for cultural experience that capitalism allowed, new cultural domains open to anyone with talent and entrepreneurial interest like photography, recorded music, and film would not have flourished and become a space of wildly disproportionate Jewish creativity. In the largest sense, of course, it was capitalism in all its Hydra-headed effects that both provoked and allowed the epochal recasting of American Jewry from a small Atlantic Jewish bourgeoisie to a community of several million, with all the cultural ferment that entailed and with profound long-term implications for global Jewish life.<sup>62</sup>

Indeed, if there was one obvious way in which uneven global economic development transformed Jewish life relative to the situation as it stood in 1880 and in our Section II, it was by inciting an unprecedented Jewish mass migration between 1880 and 1918 (while also producing the ravenous U.S. business demand for cheap labor that allowed this migration to occur). The vast waves of Jewish

immigration during the four decades preceding the outbreak of World War I were part of a massive wave of migration across the globe in those years. As the Industrial Revolution upended the old economic order, it also created the infrastructure that enabled these migrations to occur in practice. The construction of a network of railroads across continents, the improvement of maritime transport, and innovations in communication (such as the telegraph) shortened times and distances. A voyage to a destination across the ocean which at the middle of the century would have taken months now lasted a couple weeks, and was affordable even to those of quite modest means.

Several million Jews whose old economic environment had changed within a few years were among the multitudes who undertook the journey to new places between 1880 and 1914. Their journey was in many respects uniquely transformative. The demographer and statistician Liebmann Hersch (1882–1955), a pioneering researcher into international Jewish immigration in those years, determined that no other people changed as profoundly as Jews under the influence of world migration in the modern age.<sup>63</sup> Most Jewish immigrants, unlike immigrants of other ethnic groups, left their places of residence with no intention of returning; they included among the highest percentage of women and children among immigrants; the majority of Jewish immigrants were attracted to places with large and dense populations, in relatively wealthy and more economically developed countries. This was especially the case with regard to the big cities of the United States, but it was likewise true of Canada, Argentina, Mexico, and Brazil. This fact also helps account for the tiny number of immigrants to Palestine in those years. While Jewish immigration during the period covered in this volume rose and fell in response to riots, policy changes, and fluctuations in agricultural yields, it was nevertheless the occupational structure of Jewish society—that is, their economic situation in their countries of origin—that established and directed the massive flows of immigration. Thus, within a few years, Jews were transformed from inhabitants of villages and towns into a people that lived mostly in large cities, earning a living under the conditions of a capitalist economy in an industrialized environment.<sup>64</sup>

The largest source of immigrants was Eastern Europe. Contrary to what has become established in the collective memory of the Jews, mass migration from this part of the world did not originate with the infamous 1881 pogroms known as the “storms in the South,” which caused a large number of refugees to flee across the border between the Russian and the Austro-Hungarian empires. Rather, already in the early 1870s, famine in the northwestern (Lithuanian) provinces of Russia’s Pale of Settlement drove several thousand Jews to emigrate. If a second wave of Jewish emigration from Russia occurred after the pogroms in the southern provinces of the Russian Empire during the years 1881–1882, another wave ensued in 1890–1891 without any pogroms to act as drivers. And the numbers kept rising. Between 1904 and 1907 alone, more than half a million Jewish immigrants left tsarist Russia for the United States. In 1904, mass Jewish immigration for the first time crossed the 100,000-person mark each year, and in 1906—a record year for Jewish immigration—more than 150,000 emigrated from Eastern Europe to the United States. All told, some 1,700,000 Jews arrived in the United States between 1881 and 1914. From 1899 to 1914 alone, 1,486,641 Jews entered that country, of whom 928,000 settled in New York City. And this vast outflux to the United States

represented only part of the total East European Jewish emigration. In the same years, 300,000 East European Jews came to England; 100,000 sailed to Argentina; 80,000 to France; 60,000 to Canada; and 50,000 to South Africa. The same process transformed Palestine's Jewish community. The emigration waves of 1881–1882 and 1890–1891 included founders of the new Jewish agricultural colonies in Israel, who became known as the members of the “First Aliyah.” The fourth wave, which began in 1904 and contained a small minority of immigrants to Israel—the “Second Aliyah”—included the largest group of immigrants from Eastern Europe. It is estimated that approximately 60,000 Jews arrived in Palestine over the years 1881–1914.<sup>65</sup>

If the westward exodus of some two million East European Jews is the main Jewish migration story of our era, similar processes in other geographical areas, albeit on smaller scales, occurred in most of the Jewish diasporas around the world. The large Jewish community of Baghdad, long a commercial-economic metropolis, swelled by tens of thousands over the course of the period this volume covers, in part through an influx of arrivals from Middle Eastern communities that had lost their economic status. A similar situation played out in Istanbul. Warsaw, which attracted immigrants from towns and cities throughout Eastern Europe, had some 320,000 Jews at the end of World War I, and about 140,000 lived in Odessa, a flourishing port city in the late tsarist period.

The vast majority of immigrants in those years abandoned the places where they had been born and raised in an effort to extricate themselves from economic hardship and improve their living conditions. Motives for migration were not usually ideological or political. Throughout the period, a gap existed between the internal Jewish discourse and the policies of public activists, philanthropic organizations, and political parties, which tried to interfere in the spontaneous process of mass migration. Nevertheless, the ideological debates surrounding mass migration, and the experience of displacement from the old world and adaptation to a new and sometimes alienating one, catalyzed political and cultural responses to the impermanence and changeability of the old and the given.

If global capitalism's most spectacular effect on the everyday lives of Jews—and thus by extension on their culture—lay in this epochal mass migration, its most visible political effect was the way its processes (and revulsion against them) spurred mass Jewish engagement with socialist and anticapitalist ideas and politics of all varieties. The question of how and why socialism emerged as a global force in the period after 1880 gives rise to perpetual debate, with some historians treating socialism as the natural product of inequality and class-formation and others emphasizing that socialism was no less an ideology than it was a product of capitalism per se—that the era's apotheosis of socialist ideas, theories, and political sentiment must be attributed as much to intellectuals' work of interpretation and dissemination as to experience in factories or workshops and the discontents of impoverishment and uprooting. In any event, the story of socialism in Jewish life and culture after the 1880s partakes of both. The years 1880–1914 saw the full development of an unprecedented relationship in Jewish history—the link between radical ideas geared toward fundamental change in the social order and the political organization of hundreds of thousands of hired workers in large cities and towns. The disintegration of the structures of the feudal-corporate society and the rapid rise of the capitalist economy brought about an equally quick change in class divisions among the

Jewish people. By the second half of the nineteenth century, most Jews in the world were no longer a distinct ethnic-religious group that was identified legally, politically, and economically as a single unit within urban society.

Within a few decades, an extremely large class of Jewish day laborers formed. Men and women lost traditional livelihoods that had been anchored in the premodern economy and were instead sucked into the systems of production and consumption of the Industrial Revolution. Alongside this large group, which suffered severe economic distress, a new Jewish bourgeoisie emerged, which successfully integrated into the financial, commercial, and industrial activities of many countries.

At the end of the nineteenth century, 36.3 percent of Jews in the Russian Empire earned their living in handicrafts and industrial production, meaning living, often barely, by the hard work of their hands. Virtually all of these Jews were concentrated in the northwestern region of the Pale of Settlement (present-day Lithuania and Belarus), and in Congress Poland. A similar socioeconomic situation prevailed in the cities of the eastern provinces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the northwest of the Ottoman Empire, particularly Salonika and Ottoman Macedonia. The rapid urbanization of Jewish society, a result of both internal migration within the countries of the “Old World” and the outflux of hundreds of thousands to developing cities in new countries, saw the transfer of a significant portion of the Jewish poor from Eastern Europe into densely populated slums in the centers of the capitalist economy.<sup>66</sup>

The close connections between the demographic changes affecting Jews in the years 1880–1918 and the development of social radicalism insured that Jewish socialism would become an international movement from its first years. There was constant interchange of opinion and debate about ideology and organization between activists in the “Old Country” and their ideological partners who strove to organize workers and artisans in the slums of England and the United States.<sup>67</sup>

If the proletarianization of Jews in the Old World and the New provoked a panoply of radical visions, it also encouraged, dialectically, new modes of social and cultural preservation. The products of the Industrial Revolution in Europe and North America did indeed compete with great success with those of the domestic industries of Jewish cities, towns, and neighborhoods. This did not, however, lead to the disappearance of artisans, but rather to the co-optation of this large socioeconomic group, which was rooted and greatly involved in traditional communal life, into the rapidly changing economic order. Alongside modern factories constructed in the cities of Eastern Europe, where hordes of laborers toiled, workshops of the old type continued to operate. The conservative mindset of Jewish artisans in Eastern Europe affected the first trade unions of hired workers. This in turn spawned a national-modern consciousness—not only by reason of its ideology, but spontaneously, by its very corporate nature.

Although some Jews played a pivotal role in the development of European socialist thought in the nineteenth century—it is enough to mention the names Karl Marx, Ferdinand Lassalle, and Moses Hess—socialism became a central and influential movement in European Jewish society only once this movement, in several variants, reached Eastern Europe. The newly established relationship between radical ideas, part of the Enlightenment legacy, and the throngs of Jewish workers in Vilna,

Minsk, Białystok, Łódź, and Warsaw, was understood by socialists as a natural dialectic in a capitalist age, but it may just as well be understood as an ethnationally-inflected encounter between a Jewish intelligentsia with radical views and an increasingly impoverished Jewish population with a strong and distinct ethnic-religious identity.

Mass migration in turn prompted the formation of a global network of connections between ideologues seeking radical changes and people striving for an improvement in the economic and social situation of millions of Jews, a web that spread over the next forty years across Vilna, Warsaw, Salonika, Jaffa, London, Buenos Aires, New York, and Chicago.<sup>68</sup> This network covered a wide range of radical ideologies: from a romantic nationalism that encouraged intimate communities of workers (*Ha-Po'el ha-Tsa'ir*) through variations of Zionist-Marxism (*Po'ale Tsiyon*), to anarchism, which flourished among Jews in U.S. cities and in Buenos Aires, to Marxist social democracy that in all its forms abjured national identification.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the spread of socialist ideas intensified and an intercommunal, ideological-political mosaic of groups and organizations arose almost overnight. Some of these groups insisted on strict class politics, rejecting the notion that Jews across classes had any shared interests and politics and insisting that Jewish workers had to fight their own bourgeoisie uncompromisingly. But many Jews coming to socialism, particularly in places crosscut by complex ethnic differences and tensions, sought to articulate versions of socialism that could address the particular needs, and even rights, of Jews as a community—perhaps indeed a nation. Some of these in turn came to see territorial concentration of some or all Jews, in any territory generally or in Palestine/the Land of Israel particularly, as an essential piece of the socialist future to be won for Jews as for others.<sup>69</sup>

All of this was the outcome of a complex social process that left its mark in some of the cultural documents and objects we will encounter. The Russian-oriented Jewish intelligentsia began to exert an actual influence over the Jewish proletariat only in the early 1890s. However, since many of the workers did not speak Russian, the socialists were forced to address them in their native tongue—Yiddish. Activists learned from their direct contact with the Yiddish-speaking Jewish proletariat that there was a real need to establish a Yiddish-speaking (i.e., Jewish) workers' movement separate from the Russian and Polish workers' movements already emergent. This involved, to use the terms of the era, a transition from “propaganda” to “agitation”—that is, from the dissemination of socialist ideas in small circles to an attempt to inspire the masses to rise to action, by organizing them to fight for their rights. Simultaneously, activists in the newly emerging immigrant city neighborhoods in England and North America created similar organizations, using Yiddish in their political work. Jewish socialist movements combined, right from their early days, the Eastern European and immigrant experiences. In 1895, the first Jewish workers' organization (in the Russian Empire) was founded, encompassing many cities and towns in Lithuania.<sup>70</sup>

A similar encounter between the “intelligentsia” and the people occurred in the Sephardic communities of the Balkans during the last years of Ottoman rule. In Salonika—which, like Vilna, was a multinational city under imperial control until it passed to Greek control following the Balkan

Wars—Jews earned their living as port workers, fishermen, and artisans of many other kinds.<sup>71</sup> In 1908, the Ladino-speaking Jewish socialist Abraham Benaroya, a teacher and law student, founded the Circle of Socialist Studies, which operated within the city’s large Jewish community.

A year later, Benaroya, together with Dimitar Vlahov, a Bulgarian socialist, founded the Socialist Workers’ Federation, an organization that united workers of multiple nationalities. This double movement in Benaroya’s own socialist organizing bespeaks a much larger and constant tension the permeated the subcultures of Jewish radicalism in our era: a tension between ethnic particularism and supranational universalism. This tension had cultural ramifications as well as political ones. The Bund (a secular Jewish socialist political party established in Vilna in 1897) initially set out on its political-cultural path with the declaration (1899) that “the danger in having the Bund’s program include a demand for comprehensive equality of national rights lies in the possibility that it will blur the Jewish proletariat’s class consciousness, and, like every nationalism, it could lead to chauvinism.”<sup>72</sup> However, within a few years it had reversed its position entirely. In 1910, for example, the Bund demanded in its political platform the granting of cultural-national autonomy to Jews within the multinational empire, and stipulated that “the Yiddish language will acquire in all areas of Jewish public life—especially, in the schools and cultural institutions—the prominent position it merits as the national language of the Jewish people.”<sup>73</sup>

Jewish socialists, like members of other national-revolutionary movements, suggested several resolutions to this tension between internationalism and nationalism. From the heritage of the past, socialists chose certain elements that were considered “progressive” or which were consistent with the interpretations they gave to the course of history. For their part, those members of the Marxist Zionist Po’ale Tsiyon who had political ambitions identified “advanced” political and social foundations in Jewish history for the struggle against national oppression and the opposition to the rule of religious elites. One example of this is the approach of the Po’ale Tsiyon in Palestine during the Second Aliyah—they cited the battle of the Hasmoneans against the Seleucids and the Bar Kokhba revolt against Roman rule as precedents in support of the ideas of socialist Zionism.<sup>74</sup>

### Secularization and Gender Revolution

One need not be a thoroughgoing Marxist to recognize just how profoundly the transformation of Jewish socioeconomic life had an impact on Jewish consciousness, thought, and culture. But if capitalism seems to some the fundamental cause of the cultural upheaval that characterized the 1880–1918 period in Jewish life, others would emphasize a quieter but no less fundamental transformation in the basic norms and grammar of Jewish life—a revolution not of the tongue but of the heart and mind: mass secularization. Of course, in many places and forms, Jewish religion and religiosity continued to flourish throughout 1880–1918, be it in the form of new institutions for kabbalistic study in Palestine, the formalization of Conservative Judaism in New York’s Jewish Theological Seminary, the popularization of the pietistic Musar movement in the Lithuania region, or the popular reach in Warsaw and beyond of the sermons, teachings, and moral authority of the Hasidic leader Judah Leib

Alter of Ger, the *Sfas Emes*. But between 1880 and 1918, vast numbers of Jews profoundly attenuated their engagement with Jewish religious tradition, with God, and with the convictions about revelation, law, and commandedness that comprised the axial principles of all classical Judaism. They came to doubt that God vouchsafed the Jewish people an unfolding and inexhaustible revelation of law incumbent on Jews and defining of their Jewishness. And no less profoundly, the 1880–1918 period saw an ever-larger number of Jews re-center their aspirations and engagements around this-worldly and human-centered ideas, institutions, and values—indeed, around ideas, institutions, and values that Jews themselves saw as “Western,” “modern,” “gentile,” and “not ours.”

In concrete terms, between 1880 and 1918 large numbers of Jews throughout the world made two profound breaks with long-standing Jewish norms, and smaller but still quite substantial numbers made a third and more total break. First, and most often mentioned, is the surprisingly rapid and widespread decline in traditional religious observance among Jews who came from communities where religious observance had by all accounts long been the norm.<sup>75</sup> In America, in the absence of the parental generation, it quickly became normal and acceptable for young men and women to go to mixed dances and engage in forms of courtship that would have been unthinkable in many precincts of “Old World” Jewish life (though things were rapidly changing on that score back in Eastern Europe, the Ottoman Empire, and the Mediterranean world too).<sup>76</sup>

The question of degrees of observance and continued belief is hard to settle. Easier to measure was a second related transformation: a vast reorientation of Jewish cultural consumption, engagement, and energy from traditional Jewish books and practices toward products and practices that traditionally educated Jews themselves plainly understood as nontraditional and “un-Jewish”—and embraced anyway. By the turn of the century, such a vast and ever-accelerating reorientation was undeniable not only among immigrant communities in the United States but also in what had once been bastions of traditional Judaism in wide swaths of Eastern Europe, the Ottoman Sephardic world, and parts of the Middle East. Thus, Jewish tradition had long had little patience for the theatrical arts outside some very limited carnivalesque frames linked to festive holidays like Purim. But by the end of the nineteenth century, when rabbinic leaders including the Russian Empire’s Yisroel Meir Kagan (the Chofetz Chaim) thundered against Jewish attendance at theater (see his 1904 “Gloss on What Is Forbidden on Shabbat”), it was already a losing battle. By 1910 or so, amateur theater—which is to say, participation in performing and viewing dramas shaped according to the rules of the nineteenth-century European theater tradition—was a completely typical part of Jewish life. It flourished not only in New York City but also across the urban centers of the Ottoman Empire and throughout Jewish Eastern Europe, where amateur theater troupes began to pop up even in many of the small towns (*shtetls*, Yid. *shtetlekh*) so often imagined as bastions of tradition. Much the same situation unfolded around open consumption of nontraditional or *velttekh* (Yid. “worldly”) texts, secular fiction by both non-Jewish and Jewish writers. Even as modernizing East European Jewish intellectuals continued to trade in hair-raising stories about intolerant traditionalist authorities driving young men out of town for possession of forbidden books, it became commonplace in *shtetl* life for young people to organize a lending library, sometimes more than one, where locals openly borrowed books

by non-Jewish Russian or Polish writers and, increasingly, generically similar works by Hebrew and Yiddish writers.<sup>77</sup>

This is not to say that Jews in those same places simply ceased to read and study traditional religious texts of all sorts, both recondite ones and those intended for the common reader. Nor is it to say that religious opposition to untraditional reading and other forms of “gentile” culture evaporated. Indeed, in some respects it became more focused and cogent in redoubts of ultra-Orthodoxy from Galicia and Hungary to Jerba in Tunisia. But that was precisely because, between our dates of 1880 and 1918, one thing that quite clearly came to an end was the normative givenness of tradition’s exclusive value and anything like Orthodox hegemony over Jewish public and cultural life.

Neither fading observance nor new forms of consumption, however, get us to the heart of the secularist revolution that so profoundly altered the terms of Jewish culture in the 1880–1918 period. Looking back to his youth in the 1890s, the Yiddish writer Hersh Dovid Nomberg recalled a moment of terrible and transcendent crisis that had then befallen him:

It happened to me so suddenly, with such decisiveness. In the morning the seven heavens still hung over me; I struggled, steeled myself, held tight to my religious worldview with my last strength. By evening, all was lost.<sup>78</sup>

Nomberg was far from the only Jewish young person in our era to undergo a crisis of faith and emerge a fully and consciously godless, secular person. On the contrary, such a profound break became ever more common in our era: from Eastern Europe to North Africa, thousands and tens of thousands of young people raised in at least moderately observant homes came to consciously reject religion with a fierceness and openness unimaginable in previous ages of Jewish life. Many channeled or stabilized this inner revolution by way of the great secular spirits of nineteenth-century culture: Marx and Darwin, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. This was the third and most remarkable dimension of the secularizing revolution that distinguished Jewish life in our era from everything that had come before.

For some of these self-conscious secularists, the rejection of Judaism and the Jewish God was part and parcel of a more general rejection of Jewish communal bonds. But for many others, again particularly in Eastern Europe, secularization did not lead inexorably to the abandonment of Jewishness. For some, indeed, it had the opposite effect, with tremendous implications for modern Jewish culture after 1880. The aforementioned Nomberg took a fairly typical next step: bereft of God, seeing traditional Judaism as meaningless, he looked for new meaning in another source equally close to home: “I threw myself, a thirsting man, on [secular] books, on the Hebrew literature of that era.”<sup>79</sup> Nomberg ultimately discovered a new grounding of his self not in Hebrew but in Yiddish secular literature. Others, including his far more famous Jewish parallels Mikhah Yosef Berdyczewski and Yosef Haim Brenner, were equally dissatisfied with the particular Hebrew literature they found waiting for them—the mostly rather stilted or didactic products of the Haskalah (Hebrew Enlightenment) tradition—but set about reinventing it. What all such figures shared was the discovery of a

new ground of Jewish identity: rejecting tradition, they nonetheless chose to remain engaged in some substantial way with the Jewish community. Indeed, they sought to redefine Jewishness around art, secular culture, shared language, and shared national fate.<sup>80</sup>

Importantly too, for a considerable number of those Jews drawn to secularism in our era, the rebellion against religion was not merely a theological matter but part and parcel of a larger revolt—and feeling of revulsion—against many aspects of existing Jewish life: the role of the economic middleman, political weakness and vulnerability, and a feeling of cultural backwardness. Many of the young men and some women who came to define modern Hebrew and Yiddish culture saw precious little in the inheritance of Jewish life that they deemed worthy of preservation and transmission in any form. Instead, they demanded a full-fledged revolt against all forms of “inner slavery.”

Yet equally important, many of those who moved toward some form of Jewish secularism do not seem to have done so in great agony or with a particularly intense relationship to tradition one way or another. Recent histories of Ottoman Sephardic and Levantine Jewish life in our era suggest that for many Jews in those communities, religion rapidly diminished in importance without much inner individual struggle (of course, as the reader will see from a sermon preached in 1912 by the important Baghdad rabbi Shimon Aghasi, there remained fiercely traditionalist voices among Middle Eastern Jewry too).

And gender also powerfully inflected the question of whether secularization was a more or less fraught process. The scholar Iris Parush suggests that the very fact of women’s general exclusion from the central domains of traditional Judaism meant that young Jewish women’s path from traditional families to secular or worldly culture was less thorny and the outcome less often felt to be a grand Nietzschean rupture than was the case for men on average (though the traditional Polish Jewish woman turned Zionist-socialist and Hebraist activist Puah Rakovsky records a sense of religious crisis no less intense than her contemporary Nomberg’s).<sup>81</sup>

This brings us to a further and related transformation of the terms of Jewish cultural life in the 1880–1918 period: a transformation in its gender constitution. The new kinds of “worldly,” “modern,” or Western culture into which Jews threw themselves in our period blurred (though hardly eliminated) boundaries between men and women. Though “blurring” hardly sounds a revolutionary note, in this case it was a revolution. To blur the lines separating cultural roles appropriate to men and women was to break radically with traditional Jewish religious culture in all its forms. The world of traditional religious creativity that had long flourished and continued to flourish in Eastern Europe and the Near East was bisected by an especially sharp line of gender division. All the most normatively respected dimensions of intellectual and cultural life were reserved exclusively to men both as creators and consumers. Within all existing variants of Jewish tradition, by norm and to a substantial degree by law, only men could be scholars of the traditional texts and thus creators of new rabbinic, homiletic, mystical, or theological texts. Although there were always exceptional women who managed to gain access to the traditional library (meaning both recondite Hebrew-Aramaic knowledge and a wide-ranging textual-canonical erudition in traditional law, debate, and theological discourse necessary to make even most basic contributions to it), this was always an accidental

deviation from the norm and was undertaken against an entire educational system set up to give only boys access to the traditional library (albeit at wildly different levels). And with one or two fascinating exceptions, only men could become spiritual leaders and teachers of communal piety like the Hasidic rebbes, teachers of Talmud and mystical learning in yeshivas from Russian Lithuania to Jerusalem, and the like.

By stark contrast, the world of European-cum-global culture, high and low, to which ever-growing numbers of Jews around the world had or gained access to in our period was substantially open to women as well as to men, both as creators and consumers, though it was certainly not free of gendered and gendering assumptions and structures. In this period, unprecedented numbers of Jewish women claimed a place as producers of culture and laid claim to the right to speak about and shape Jewish life.<sup>82</sup> Of course, we do not mean to suggest that in our period's rapidly expanding world of nontraditional kinds of Jewish discourse and culture, there was a complete collapse of male domination or anything like real equality of access and expression for women. The Western modernity to which growing numbers of Jews around the world aspired in this period and which authorized and modeled what "modern culture" was supposed to be was hardly free of gender discrimination. In the new Hebraist and Yiddishist cultural spheres that flourished in Eastern Europe and in immigrant outposts like New York, Jaffa, and Jerusalem, the general attitude among the male writers and intellectuals who dominated those scenes might be summarized as genuine eagerness to get women—their proverbial and actual sisters—involved in Jewish cultural life coupled with powerfully limiting "romantic" notions that women were only suited to playing certain kinds of roles.<sup>83</sup> More generally, all realms of nontraditional Jewish cultural activity remained firmly dominated by men. Notable—and lamentable—testament to this fact is that one of the few things Orthodox and secular-national Jewish letters in our era had in common was the propensity of both camps to direct special suspicion toward women as (presumptively) insufficiently Jewish and too open to the seductions of non-Jewish culture, fashion, and mores. And rank misogyny was also hardly unknown in the Jewish cultural worlds of our era. It was a scion of Austrian Jewry, Otto Weininger, who wrote the fin de siècle's most far-reaching elaboration of essentialist misogyny in his scurrilous but immediately globally successful *Sex and Character* (1903) before killing himself, having grown convinced that the irredeemably sub-human character he imputed to women also applied to Jews, including himself.<sup>84</sup>

But just as clearly, our period of 1880–1918 marked the beginning of a new era in the gender constitution of Jewish culture. From here onward, nontraditional Jewish culture would be produced and consumed by both women and men. One key background condition of this was the rapid expansion of women's access to education, including higher education. This played out across the whole expanse of the Jewish world in our period, albeit unevenly, from the mandatory free public schools of the United States to the schools of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in the Middle East and Ottoman world (on which see below) to the universities of Western Europe, a magnet for Jewish women from across the continent. The result was a generation of elite and middle-class Jewish women who were at least as well educated by modern European standards as their figurative and literal brothers.<sup>85</sup>

It was not only in the sociological sense that the gender order of Jewish cultural life changed radically in the 1880–1918 period. This was also the era when a maturing feminism challenged age-old norms and institutions of male domination and the exclusion of women from public life, and when demands to rethink presumptions about “a woman’s place” made their way to the center of global public life. These questions resonated powerfully too in all precincts of the new Jewish culture high and low, Jewish national and acculturated. They even echoed in certain precincts of Orthodox culture and thought, albeit in muted fashion. Among Jews as among other groups, postulates of women’s equality and far-reaching critiques of the West’s gender order and its misogyny and abuse found their earliest and most far-reaching articulations in the rapidly emerging socialist and progressive camps. In the United States, this was helped along by the entry of tens of thousands of women into the labor force.<sup>86</sup>

In radical settings from New York to Warsaw to Jaffa and Degania, calls for reform extended into Jewish family and intimate life, as the reader can see from texts like Ben-Tsion Liber’s 1918 primer on *Dos geshlekhts-lebn* (*The Sexual Life*). At the same time, women like the Yiddish prose writer Fradl Shtok confronted the yawning gap between progressive ideals and realities. But the rethinking of the gender order took place not only among socialists, but also Jewish liberals (and liberal nationalists) of every variety. As readers will see, Zionists like the radical Hebraist pedagogue Yitshak Alterman (father of the Hebrew poet Nathan Alterman) saw women’s education as essential to national regeneration, the Beirut-born intellectual and Arabic journalist Esther Azhari Moyal assigned women a special role in the intellectual and moral modernization of the Middle East, and the American Ray Frank envisioned Jewish women as the guiding spirits of communal religious and moral development on the grounds that, as she put it in 1893, “the weaker sex physically, [the female sex] is the stronger spiritually.”

However, the partial collapse of the old gender divisions and restrictions on women’s creativity and voice did not have some singular, clear impact on Jewish cultural life. Rather, it infused new creative spirits and energies, while also bringing to the fore debates and questions that left their mark across every domain of cultural expression. Debates about the impact of Jewish mass migration were closely linked with worries about the unmaking of family structures and the pathologies of sexual commerce to which uprootedness exposed the immigrants. Critics of assimilation West and East asked whether women had a special role to play in upholding some remnant of Jewish tradition, while modern-spirited women laid claim, with some success, to the status of educators and leaders in matters of the spirit. In Eastern Europe and on New York City’s Lower East Side, the figure of the New Woman—free in thought and action, defiantly demanding her share of modernity’s possibilities—fascinated and perturbed many of the male literati who wrote in Hebrew and Yiddish, including the most innovative modernists of those literatures like Uri Nisan Gnessin and Dovid Bergelson.<sup>87</sup> Rapidly growing numbers of such actual New Women made their way into those literary spheres as writers, although—as the cases of such figures who appear in this volume like Dvora Baron, Fradl Shtok, and Yente Serdatsky all demonstrate—such entry involved overcoming formidable difficulties and was often derailed. Socialist currents simultaneously insisted on women’s liberation from the bonds of tradition. The apotheosis of Zionism and other forms of Jewish nationalism invested the family

with the utmost communal importance and made it seem imperative that women be educated—but only, perhaps, so that they could serve new kinds of needs in modern families and the modern nation. And in many ways, a felt crisis of Jewish *masculinity* became as central to much Jewish cultural discourse and creativity as any supposed crisis of feminine roles. This was particularly true in work shaped by Zionist and other nationalist sentiments, where male weakness was identified as one of the particular maladies and pathologies of exile.<sup>88</sup>

Just as the 1880–1918 period saw a revolution in gender consciousness and its effects, so too did questions of sex and sexuality move to the center of the new culture, high and low.<sup>89</sup> Themes of erotic love and its complexities shook off what was left of traditional censorship and reticence and moved to the center of Jewish literature and art in all its forms. Calls for sexual freedom transfixed contemporaries and provoked tremendous debate. And gender’s plasticity moved (or returned) to view in disparate parts of the Jewish cultural world, from a religious-legal responsum by the Izmir rabbi Joseph Pallache concerning the legal situation of a married woman who had “changed from female to male in every respect,” to an account of gender dysphoria by a German Jew who may have been the first person to successfully undergo gender reassignment surgery with the help of modern medicine.

### Western Imperialism and Middle Eastern Jewish Culture

While capitalist development, secularization, and multipronged gender revolution affected the lives of Jews everywhere, the roughly one million Jews of the Middle East, North Africa, and more indirectly of Ottoman southern Europe were also subject, as we noted, to the unique institutional and ideological conditions stemming from the manifold Western political, economic, and cultural domination of the region often referred to by the shorthand terms imperialism or colonialism. Predating the 1880–1918 period by decades, this dominance (achieved in variegated forms) deepened and widened in our period, as did the civilizationist, Westernizing, Orientalist, and racist sensibilities that subtended it, with complex and varied implications for all of the region’s denizens. Within this frame, the contours of which are now familiar to the reader both from Section I and Section II, several points about the specificities of the Middle Eastern Jewish experience and Jewish cultural horizons demand further elaboration.

A first important additional point to make is also one much debated by historians: that the ideologies of Western superiority and Middle Eastern stagnation that subtended Western domination in the region offered a considerably more ambiguous place—and room for maneuver—to Jews (and Christians) than to their much more numerous Muslim neighbors. Though it is tricky to generalize, it seems fair to say that even as European actors insisted with ever more vociferousness that Islam as a religion and/or alleged “racial difference” rendered most in the region essentially unreformable, Jews were judged more plastic and “redeemable”: though their culture was as it were “corrupted,” they could be “regenerated” with enough effort, if they willed it. Certainly, this is the view that Western European *Jews* took as they lobbied their own governments for Jewish rights in the region and built

their own vast network of educational institutions to reeducate their brethren—most famously, the Alliance Israélite Universelle and its nearly two hundred schools, and to a lesser extent the Anglo-Jewish Association and the Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden.<sup>90</sup>

This sense among Jews West and East that “regeneration” through self-Westernization was not only exigent but meaningfully possible for Jews was, it seems, one of the causes feeding the second factor we wish to further elaborate, namely the special intensity with which growing numbers of Middle Eastern Jews embraced Western and especially French culture and the far-reaching effects this had in Jewish cultural life. Particularly in the Jewish upper classes of the region, education in French and English had long been understood as valuable. But in the 1880–1918 period, such attitudes spread widely if unevenly across Middle Eastern Jewish society; these years saw a shift toward acceptance of Alliance school in numerous communities large and small.<sup>91</sup> Of course, the choice of growing numbers of parents to send their children to Alliance schools or similar modern institutions no doubt had at least as much to do with practical economic calculi about how their children might get ahead in a changing world than with aspirational Westernism. But the romance of the West played out in many spheres, saturated Middle Eastern Jewish cultural life in many ways, and was propounded increasingly by Jews of Middle Eastern, North African, and Ottoman Balkan background themselves. One of the most paradoxical features of the flourishing of a new secular-Western Ladino press and literary culture in the late nineteenth century was that many of the authors and editors who presided over this transformation imagined the Ladino culture they were creating largely as a means to Westernize their readers—and to lead them, ultimately, beyond Ladino to a cultural world demarcated by Turkish or Arabic as “the language of the land” on the one hand and French as “the language of civilization” on the other.<sup>92</sup> Ladino newspapers were replete with articles and advertisements advising readers on how to become more Western, from the texts they consumed to the clothes or even perfumes they wore.<sup>93</sup> A French-language press by and for Jews flourished across the region. Hundreds of graduates of the Alliance schools, both men and women, became Alliance teachers in turn (though a rigorous and segregated program of training under French Jewish tutelage in an Alliance teaching college in France) and propounded the organization’s Westernizing vision with vigor and often with sharply critical perspectives on the “traditional” Jewish life they found in the communities to which they were dispatched. A still-larger penumbra of Alliance graduates and other products of Western education, comprising a new regional Jewish bourgeoisie, created various kinds of social circles and organizations that not only supported the work of the Alliance schools but also independently propounded Westernizing critiques of traditional Jewish life, particularly it seems with regard to traditional gender norms. By the turn of the century, there was much emphasis among Jewish modernizers on the need to overthrow traditional gender roles that sharply divided male and female spheres of life and extend modern education to women, sometimes coupled with the argument that this “backwardness” reflected the negative influence of coterritorial Muslim culture. A number of texts in this anthology, such as those by Esther Azhari Moyal and the Salonikan Victoria Danon mark how Jewish women in the Middle East and Ottoman Balkans themselves increasingly made heard their own perspectives on these questions and the whole suite of questions

surrounding Westernization, tradition, and modernity's demands and affordances that concerned contemporaries.<sup>94</sup>

Some historians interpret this romance of the West in good part in terms of growing Jewish internalization of Western Orientalist prejudices about Middle Eastern "decadence"; others stress that the promise of a multifaceted liberation seemed very real to many Jews in the region, particularly in parts of North Africa and Algeria.<sup>95</sup> There is of course no necessary contradiction between these perspectives. Other historians, in turn, raise questions about the entire emphasis on Westernization both as process and project in the Middle Eastern Jewish world broadly understood, and this brings us to a third and multipronged clarification regarding other forces and sensibilities shaping Middle Eastern Jewish culture: however much weight we give the encounter with European power and culture, clearly the Westernizing impulse was not the only culture-shaping force nor did it have a unitary impact in Jewish life.

On the one hand, as in Eastern Europe, the Middle East boasted strongholds of traditional Judaism that persisted throughout this period, particularly in parts of Morocco, Libya, and Palestine/the Land of Israel; in these places, Middle Eastern Jews of various sorts not only continued to produce rabbinic, homiletic, and mystical writings in a traditional vein and live a traditional Jewish life with all of its lifeways and sacred objects, but also found ways to push back against aspects of the externally driven modernization they saw around them.<sup>96</sup> Scholars of Judeo-Arabic culture note that while, on the one hand, there was a flood of translation-adaptations from Western culture parallel to what was unfolding in Ladino, there was also much room in our period and beyond for a flourishing of still-traditionalist religious and moralistic popular literature linked to the classical canon. Harvey Goldberg observes that while Judeo-Arabic publications in Tripoli emphasized translation from French, their contemporaries in Jerba launched a sustained Judeo-Arabic and Hebrew project of textualizing and sacralizing local traditions (while also thwarting four attempts to found an Alliance school).<sup>97</sup> Daniel Schroeter and Joseph Chetrit argue that the extension of French colonial rule from Algeria to Morocco cut Moroccan Jewry off from what had once been a shared Sephardic-Mediterranean cultural world and thus, paradoxically, *strengthened* traditionalist Moroccan Jewish "religious life and traditional beliefs, such as in the veneration of saints on a wider scale than before."<sup>98</sup>

Equally complicating of an exclusive emphasis on Westernization as the master process of Middle Eastern cultural change is the Ottoman dimension. Jews in the empire's Turkish core and Balkan near-peripheries, and in a more complicated fashion Jews in the Ottoman Levant, were only under indirect European imperial domination after all, and much historical scholarship suggests that their cultural choices were as much a response to the demands of a changing Ottoman state and variegated Ottoman society as to Western pressure and promises. The situation of Sephardim living alongside Christian Greek and Armenian minorities and Muslim Turks under a reforming Turkish-ruled state demanding more active forms of loyalty and political participation was arguably as much akin to the political situation of Jews in the Austro-Hungarian Empire as it was to the cultural situation of North African Jews subject to Western regeneration ideologies. Thus, although very few "Turkish" Jews actually spoke or read Turkish, our era saw a rising drumbeat of demands by Ottoman Jews as varied

as the Istanbul-born lawyer Avram Naon and the prominent Zionist Hebraist activist and denizen of Ottoman Palestine Eliezer Ben-Yehuda that Jews learn Turkish—just as Jews from Vienna to Prague had long held that learning German was an essential part of imperial citizenship and loyalty.<sup>99</sup>

A third alternative to the story of Westernization also began to take shape in our period, though it bore most of its fruits in the interwar era, namely, Jewish participation in what has come to be called “the Arab awakening.” As noted, in our period a small but growing circle of Jewish intellectuals in Cairo, Jaffa, Jerusalem, Beirut, and (later) Baghdad became participants in a project of supra-religious Arab cultural and national renaissance that sought a path to a distinctly Arab modernity. Thus, in Cairo in 1899, Azhari Moyal founded a pioneering journal of women’s concerns *Al-Ā’ila* (The Family, 1899–1902); written not in Judeo-Arabic but modern literary Arabic, it addressed itself not to Jewish readers particularly but rather to an emergent modern Arabic readership that was primarily, indeed overwhelmingly, Muslim and Christian. As noted, however, one of the ironies of our period was that some of the most prominent exponents of this “Jewish Arabism” like Azhari Moyal, her husband Shimon Moyal, and Nissim Malul, combined this project with support for Zionist visions of some sort of Jewish national renaissance in Palestine. In turn, they identified *politically* neither with Arab nor Jewish political nationalism but with the new supra-ethnic Ottoman citizenship ideal propounded by the reformers who took over the Ottoman state in 1908. This combination made sense in an Ottoman framework, if only for a short while. Representing arguably a distinct Arab Jewish Zionism in Palestine, it resonates with similar “impossible” combinations of mixed national identifications and imperial loyalties that actually flourished among Jews in the Russian and even more so the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This in turn reminds us that for all the distinctiveness of the Middle Eastern Jewish trajectory in our period, East European Jews were exposed to some of the same complex combinations of local and imperial modernities and some took similar paths.<sup>100</sup>

### The New Antisemitism

If capitalism’s and secularization’s effects on Jewish culture were global and imperialism’s largely regional, a third phenomenon that shaped Jewish culture and fate in the 1880–1918 period (and beyond) was a product of Western and Eastern Europe that soon attained global significance—albeit, fortunately, to quite varying degrees. This was a phenomenon about which Jews decidedly did *not* have complex and mixed feelings, but only fear: the phenomenon that many historians call the new antisemitism. Beginning in the 1870s, discourse about Jews across Europe—most notably in German, French, Russian, Romanian, and Polish culture—was reshaped by a revival and transformation of the age-old Judeophobic claim that Jews were fundamentally incorrigible and unalterably dangerous to the societies in which they found themselves because they were in essence enemies of the rest of humanity who hungered—who could not but hunger—to dominate it. The conviction that Jews as such, no matter how much they changed, were, could only be, and would forever be a threat to their neighbors gave rise to a distinct antisemitic culture across Europe. Actual political movements emerged devoted to “defending” society against “the Jewish threat” alongside a vast antisemitic

print culture in French, German, Russian, English, Polish, Hungarian, and Romanian devoted to revealing Jewish perfidy to both educated and uneducated readers. Increasingly such views became acceptable or at least thinkable even among well-educated people. The most dramatic exemplification of this turn was the eruption of anti-Jewish sentiment in France in the context of “the Dreyfus Affair.” Jews across the world were shocked when the conviction of a highly-placed French Jewish army officer for espionage on behalf of Germany (wrongfully, it turned out) touched off a shockingly wide and at times violent discourse of Jewish treason and perfidy across substantial swaths of French society.<sup>101</sup>

At the same time, and perhaps most consequentially of all in the twentieth century, by the 1890s antisemitic convictions became central planks of right-wing and reactionary politics. Belief in Jews’ ineradicable alienness and malignancy, and even in a massive organized global Jewish conspiracy, came to be part and parcel of reactionary politics and critiques of modernity more generally. It was tightly interwoven with nationalist ideals in many places, and was increasingly infused with the pseudoscientific authority of “race theory.”

This introduction is not the place to take up the perennial question of *why* such elaborate and intensified hatred should have taken shape precisely at the moment when actual Jewish difference from their non-Jewish neighbors was either already nonexistent or so rapidly eroding. What truly mattered both for the antisemites and their Jewish victims was not the question of *why* “the Jews” were incorrigibly evil people joined in a conspiracy to cruelly dominate the rest of humankind, but the conviction that they were. The *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, history’s most influential work of antisemitic culture to this day, was produced in 1903 by Russian reactionary writers close to the tsarist regime. Its point was not to explain anything but to convince people of good conscience to see “the Jews” for what they “really” were underneath various guises, to reject all their “works” (which included, in the *Protocols*’s telling, everything from democracy and gender upheaval to nihilism, and both socialism and capitalism alike), and to act against them collectively.<sup>102</sup>

What all this meant for Jewish *culture* is, of course, a complicated question. Perhaps the most cogent basic answer is that as the new antisemitism spread, the wide variety of Jews who cared in some way about what the non-Jewish world thought about them, or worried about what it might do to them, had to wrestle with the relevance of antisemitism for their own expressive choices. Some Jewish creators wrestled intensely with the rediscovery that they were still being cast as the fundamental Other of Christian civilization. Other Jewish writers and artists wrestled with implications of the notion increasingly central to the new antisemitism that Jews embodied modernity too fully and too well. Most straightforwardly, the new antisemitism clearly boosted Jewish interest in Jewish nationalist ideas. Encounters with rising antisemitism in France and Germany shaped Theodor Herzl’s Zionism and that of many others.<sup>103</sup> Confrontation with still more violent acts of Jew-hatred, like the three-day carnival of murder and rape that ravaged the Jewish community of Russian Kishinev in 1903, seared itself into some of the central artistic works of the era, perhaps most famously Bialik’s epochal 1903 Hebrew poem and Zionist cri de coeur, “In the City of Slaughter.”

## Nationalism and Jewish Culture and Civilization

A final ideological development of our era that profoundly altered the character of Jewish culture, particularly in tandem with secularization, was the global consolidation of *nationalism* and the internalization of the set of assumptions inscribed in that ideology or family of ideologies by ever-growing numbers of Jews themselves. We often think of nationalism as in essence a political demand: that a people (but what is a people?) ought to have “its own” state in and through which it can enjoy political self-determination. Or, framed in darker terms, nationalism refers to the insistence that a given territory is rightly the property of one particular community of people, from which it might follow that those deemed not to belong to that group of people cannot lay equal claim to life in that territory and are outsiders. And indeed, by the 1880s, these ways of seeing things had moved from the margins to the center of how plenty of modern people not only in Europe but also in Asia and the Middle East thought about proper political order. But to understand how nationalism so profoundly altered Jewish life and culture both from without and from within, we have to understand that nationalism was far more than a vision of political organization.

In the course of the four decades under discussion here, millions of people around the world came to believe that they belonged not simply to humanity or to a global religious community on the one hand and their kin and locality on the other, but also to a particular community bound together—and separated from other such communities—by shared lifestyle, history, values, needs, fate, and language. They came to believe—and to feel—that they themselves as individuals were part of one such “nation,” and that this mattered a great deal not only in their political choices but also in their choices of which language to speak to their friends and family, what they ought to teach their children, with whom they ought to cultivate community, and what and how they ought to read, write, and create. By 1918, a great many people—and a great many people *particularly* in the places where most Jews lived, including a quite substantial number of Jews themselves—had to some degree internalized the view that the particular characteristics of their historical community were valuable (and beautiful) in themselves, worth cultivating, worth institutionalizing, and worth fighting for and over. For some, this went hand in hand with uglier convictions that outside forces and other communities were harming and even endangering the well-being and aspirations of their own community, and that the struggle for one’s own nation’s collective self-realization—whatever that entailed—was also necessarily a struggle against other nations.<sup>104</sup>

Readers can already see how powerfully such ideas and sentiments could recast culture. To the degree that someone had internalized such views, the practice of cultural consumption and creation took on grand collective significance and had to be thought about not only in terms of what one liked or disliked but in terms of duty, obligation, authenticity, one’s own particular tradition, and the needs and capacities of one’s imagined national brothers and sisters. The spread of such ideas around much of the world presented Jews with the specter of an unforeseen exclusion and two quite different possibilities of expanded creativity.

To begin with the potential exclusion and one possibility of expanded creativity: individual Jewish people who sought to create for larger *non*-Jewish communities of cultural consumers—German, French, Polish, Russian, Arab—now increasingly created under a new kind of question mark. In the age of nationalism, the question was not the Enlightenment-born question of “are Jews capable of becoming properly modern people who think and write in a proper modern language and fashion,” but the much trickier question of whether someone who was born Jewish could ever really speak legitimately and participate authentically in the *spiritual* communion of “our nation” and be counted as a full-fledged national brother or sister. In the 1880–1918 period, in virtually every nationalism around the world, it remained possible to answer “yes” to that question, and in our period an ever-growing variety of individual Jews around the world joined the French, German, and Anglo-American Jews who had, since the early nineteenth century, seen themselves as loyal and legitimate participants in the creation and curation of a shared national culture. In Baghdad and Alexandria, Warsaw and Budapest, Trieste and Petersburg, small but rapidly growing numbers of Jews devoted themselves body and soul to the creation and promotion of a new modern Arab culture, a new modern Russian culture, a Polish, Hungarian, or Italian national culture in the making.

Yet in this same era, the countervailing idea that Jews really were not and could not be true members of the nation moved from the margins to the center. When in 1850 Richard Wagner declared that German classical composers of Jewish origin were in *essence* un-German and their music *intrinsically* injurious to the German culture it purported to serve, such views were not mainstream.<sup>105</sup> But the period between 1880 and 1918 saw such exclusionary sentiments advance from the margin to the center of nationalist thought and sentiment, hand in hand with new forms and intensities of antisemitism, especially in Eastern and Central Europe.<sup>106</sup>

And then there was the *inner* impact of nationalism on Jews themselves, above all in Eastern Europe and of course in the budding Zionist community in Ottoman Palestine. For those Jews who embraced the idea that Jews comprised and ought to comprise a nation no worse than (if not necessarily better than) Germans, French, or Poles, it followed that they as individuals were obliged to create and consume culture not only with an eye toward entertainment, the market, or individual interest, but also under the compulsion and privilege of participating in a great work of collective creation. For such figures, cultural creation was never an individual task only but participation in the formation of a shared new “Jewish national culture” in the making. It meant to think thus: I as an individual creator am a participant in a shared endeavor to fashion a worthwhile modern culture for the Jewish people and to shape that people through the culture I create; I must think about how my work can serve the betterment and regeneration of my people, how my choice of language, form, or content should or should not be negotiated in relation to a larger ideal of national regeneration through culture.

The idea that Jews should define themselves as members of a distinct nation and shape their cultural expression accordingly left an ever-deeper impression on Jews in all sorts of places—West and East, Old World and New. But undoubtedly, for reasons we have already begun to explore, the greatest impact of this idea was felt in the world’s largest Jewish community, the Jews of the

Russian Empire. There, a unique mix of factors provoked, stabilized, and fed the idea that Jews could and should create their own modern national culture and become modern as members of a national collective. As of 1880, the vast majority of Jews in Russia spoke Yiddish, were fluent only in Yiddish (or, in the case of a male elite of several hundred thousand, Hebrew), and lived a communal life still demarcated from that of their neighbors by language, clothing, work, habitus, the uses of space, the way the year and life-course was organized in time, and theological self-image. As we noted in our discussion of secularization, the period covered in our volume saw traditional norms and ideas begin to give way in East European Jewish life. Growing parts of that vast population became more open to the ideals and aspirations (and pleasures and prejudices) of European-cum-global secular modernity that were already a given among more assimilated Jewish populations to the west. But unlike in the West and in the Arab Middle East, in Eastern Europe's ethno-nationally mobilized and conflict-ridden Polish-Ukrainian-Lithuanian-Jewish western borderlands, there was no nationally neutral option for Jews linguistically, though Russian beckoned as at least a supra-ethnic possibility of imperial belonging. More directly—and in ways that set the Jews of the Russian Empire substantially apart from Galician and Balkan Jews living in similar multiethnic empires—Jewish ethnoreligious difference was repeatedly and intensely politicized after 1881 by the ethnic discriminations and frank antisemitism of the tsarist regime, the increasingly anti-Jewish ethnopolitics of coterritorial Polish and Ukrainian nationalism, and the surprisingly robust antisemitism among both educated and uneducated elements of the empire's variegated population. Thus, although large numbers of East European Jews embraced either Russian or Polish culture and strove to become full participants in the those larger cultural spheres (texts by figures who held this stance, like Osip Mandelstam, Franciszka Arnsztajnowa, and Aleksander Kraushar, appear, for instance, in the poetry section), many could not unthinkingly pursue the “West European” model of Jewish modernity according to which becoming a fully modern person and leading a fulfilling modern life demanded assimilation to a dominant language and culture and the clearing away of obtrusive and collective modes and practices of Jewishness. Rather, social facts and political pressures ensured that even as the definition of Jewishness became ever more contentious, identification with “the Jewish people” would nonetheless remain a powerful axis of group mobilization and individual self-identity for several million Russian Jews, at least to some substantial degree. And in Eastern Europe, to be a nation meant above all to have a *culture*, in the sense pioneered in Germany a century earlier: to each *Volk* its *Kultur*, its folkways, traditions, language, and history. Thus, as secularization undermined the hold of religious tradition, socioeconomic upheaval eroded old communal structures, urbanization galloped along, and new horizons of modern selfhood beckoned, a substantial part of Russian Jewry was primed to be open to a national ideal and even the radically new idea of a secular-national Jewish culture. This was to be a culture built not around revelation, commandedness, and the holy texts but on the same profoundly antitraditional principles that increasingly moved others across Europe and around the world: a fusion of the general secular-modern idea that Art and aesthetic experience were the foundations and finest flower of human subjectivity coupled with a passionate devotion to one's

own national language and historical experience, a sense of responsibility toward one's own people and its sufferings and historical experience, and a desire to somehow fuse modern subjectivity with reconstructed national community.<sup>107</sup>

Thus, in Eastern Europe, Jewish nationalists affirmed as a matter of course that Jews both already possessed their own distinct national culture in the anthropological sense and that they needed to “renovate” and modernize that culture as a means of renovating and modernizing the individual and the collective Jewish self. Such views did not remain confined to theory, but rather had great import for much of the actual cultural creativity that flourished in this context, as readers will see. The nationalist imagination dictated that Jews had to have a distinct collective history as a “nation” and that it was intrinsically worth studying, whether as a repository of collective experience or as a reminder of collective fate. And accordingly, Jewish history-writing became a central preoccupation for nationally minded East European Jews. Among the many works of history writing that readers will encounter in this volume, the ones produced in Eastern Europe by historians such as Simon Dubnow stick out immediately for their insistence that the object of their study could not be only the history of Judaism and Jewish thought but also the peregrinations through historical time of a posited “Jewish people” imagined and narrated as a collective subject.<sup>108</sup>

No less marked was the impact of the national idea on the arts. Nationally conscious Jews, like their Polish, Ukrainian, and indeed Russian nationalist peers, enthusiastically reappropriated old Jewish traditions almost as soon as they'd broken with them—but recast and “transvalued” them not as religion but as “our national cultural tradition.” Then too, in Eastern Europe, rediscovered cultural tradition was supposed to serve, in turn, as a vitalizing and authenticity-generating source of *new* cultural creativity—and such a view resonated powerfully in much Jewish literature and art created there. As readers will see, many avowedly secular works of Hebrew and Yiddish literature—most famously perhaps those by the Hebrew writer M. Y. Berdyczewski and Hebrew-turned-Yiddish writer Y. L. Peretz—vibrate with traditional intertexts, play with traditional figures and tropes, and embrace figures from the Jewish past and from Jewish tradition while transposing their thought, conflict, vices, and virtues into a humanist and secular vein.<sup>109</sup>

Nor do works of history and literature exhaust the story of how “the New Jewish Culture” emerged out of what the Yiddish literary scholar David Roskies has called “creative betrayal” of the tradition.<sup>110</sup> Nationalist enthusiasms sent some modernized Jews “back to the sources” and “out to the field.” Some returned to the high Hebrew-rabbinic tradition to “read it against the grain” and extract from it a countertradition that would speak to modern Jews. The dominant Hebrew poet of the era, Bialik, devoted years to extracting the narrative bits of the rabbinic corpus from their homiletic, legal, and theological settings and collating them into *Sefer ha-Aggadah*, a *Book of Legends* that recast Jewish tradition as literature. Berdyczewski, the truest Hebrew Nietzschean, undertook similar work with more unabashedly countertraditional radicalism. Others turned not to the traditional library with new eyes, but to the “simple folk” with new interest. For many nationally minded (and quite modernized) East European Jewish intellectuals, Jewish folklore offered not simply a grab-bag of aesthetic curios and possibilities but its own world of rough but deep beauty. Some, like the Russified

but Jewishly engaged writer S. An-ski, even came to espouse the view that East European Jewish folk tradition offered a distinct ethos—pacifistic, in his version—on which modern Jewish culture and national ethos had to be built. Ventures into folk culture yielded not only such (fanciful) theories but a rediscovery by and for moderns of rich corpus of folk songs and folktales, some of which the reader can encounter here thanks to the collecting work spurred by Jewish cultural nationalism. And soon this same energy was extended beyond the word to the image: where Jewish national consciousness as such dictated that Jews ought to have their own national music and plastic arts no less than their own literature, Jewish traditional arts, crafts, and music offered a ready-to-hand “authentic” source for such an endeavor. Readers of this volume will begin to see how artists as different as Solomon Yudovin and the young El Lissitzky were shaped by and reshaped encounters with the already half-forgotten traditions of art that contemporaries rediscovered painted on synagogue walls and carved on Jewish gravestones.<sup>111</sup>

And even as this nationalist impulse to transvaluation produced a growing scholarly and aesthetic yield, it also raised new and burning questions about the nature and content of Jewish culture itself. Confronted with both the long, storied “high” Hebrew tradition and the local East European Yiddish-language folk tradition, increasingly Jewish cultural nationalists felt as though they had to choose. As secular-national Hebraists transvalued scripture and rabbinic tradition into the cornerstone of “our national literature,” an emerging subculture of secular-national Yiddishists insisted with ever greater confidence after about 1900 that the “living language” and local culture of the simple folk had to be the ground of modern Jewish nationhood.

Moreover, transvaluation of tradition into national culture was by no means the sole impulse that gave shape to the works of “New Jewish Culture” that readers will encounter in this volume. Arguably, that emerging new culture drew just as much if not more vitality, urgency, and momentum from a different point of departure common to East European nationalist imagination: an overwhelming confidence in the importance and power of Art, above all modern literature, to speak for and to the modern nation. In 1902 assuming the editorship of the pre-eminent Hebrew journal of the era, the Odessa *Ha-shiloah*, the Zionist and resolute Hebrew humanist Joseph Klausner (great-uncle to the late Amos Oz), explained his plans to expand the poetry and fiction selections in the journal thus: “*We believe poetry has an immense spiritual power, and that its influence on the evolution of the Jewish nation must continue to grow.*” He lamented, “The Jew has yet to accustom himself to the idea that all poetic compositions are significant assets of human culture and have immense national value. Without them, no nation deserves to be called *nation*.” This dual belief in literature’s unequalled national significance and its sovereign power over hearts and minds may strike the contemporary reader as naïve or peculiar. A century ago, however, such notions were common currency in the burgeoning post-traditional East European Jewish cultural sphere and articles of faith for many in both the Hebraist and the Yiddishist intelligentsia. Young Jewish writers and artists in Eastern Europe were lionized as national heroes by growing numbers, their faces printed on postcards or captured by artists like Ira Jan, a Kishinev radical turned participant in Palestine’s fledgling Jewish art scene after 1906, whose portrait, *The Lad Bialik*, readers will find in the Fine Art section of this

volume. More generally, readers will find this Romantic sensibility pervasive in the literary and cultural criticism selected for this volume.<sup>112</sup>

This exaltation of Art was not confined in its effects to debates about the task and character of Hebrew or Yiddish literature. It was a deeply *felt* sensibility for the two generations of would-be Jewish cultural creators who came of age in the period under discussion here. It was through poetry that Bialik expressed his searing and indelible indictment of Jews themselves for their ostensible passivity in the face of violence in his 1903 “In the City of Slaughter.” And it was in an 1886 poem, “Remember the Horn,” that Sarah Shapira, one of the few Hebrew women poets of her generation, offered a terrifying vision of Jewish women’s vulnerability to sexual predation—not, in this case, by pogromists attacking women, but, it seems, by Jewish householders exercising power over young maids in their homes.

This deep conviction of the special power of poetry and all forms of art, which we might call a veritable “cult of Art,” had both fructifying and fraught implications for the Hebrew and Yiddish literature and Jewish art created under the banner of “the new Jewish culture.” Beyond this shared conviction of Art’s unequaled moral power and human value, the mostly East European and Palestinian Jewish cultural creators who saw themselves as participants in the collective creation of a “new Jewish national culture”—and to some degree, this applies to most of the Hebrew and Yiddish writers encountered in these pages (as well as some of the Russian-language ones, too)—were convinced that it was *not* tradition or history but Art that ultimately made a national culture worthwhile or not. And they increasingly vectored on a second conclusion: that if a great national art was to flourish, it had to be able to change, to embrace new topics, to grow *beyond* tradition of any sort. While some leading figures of the new culture like Bialik, An-ski, or Peretz insisted that the new Jewish culture had to remain rooted in the soil of tradition somehow, others increasingly bridled at this restriction. Already in the 1890s, other figures no less committed to the ideal of a new Jewish culture than Bialik or Peretz were beginning to insist that Jewish writers needed to focus less on recasting Jewish tradition in a secular vein than on emulating and mastering the evolving European, Western, or even global literary tradition to which Jews were latecomers. Bialik’s great project of recasting rabbinic writing as a literary tradition was matched by Russian Hebrew poet Shaul Tshernikhovski’s decades-long devotion to translating the key works of the *Western* epic tradition—Homer, *Gilgamesh*—into Hebrew. The aforementioned Klausner would hail the Hebrew translation of Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as a great step forward for the national literature precisely because it was *not* in any way about Jewish matters. The Yiddish literary critic Ezra Korman would complain at the same moment that a Yiddish translation of *Hiawatha* had too little “wigwam” and too much shtetl—that is, it was too old-fashioned in its Jewish style at a moment when what Yiddish literature needed most was an injection of tones and sensibilities from other cultures and traditions in order to grow.<sup>113</sup>

And increasingly it was not just a matter of expanding the canon, but also of freeing the *content* of the new culture from any confining expectations about what was “Jewish.” As early as the mid-1890s, a cohort of Hebrew Nietzscheans around Berdyczewski attacked the fledgling Hebraist

“literary establishment” and its leading thinker Ahad Ha-Am for insisting that Hebrew writers focus their work on addressing manifestly Jewish concerns and needs and striving for collective national regeneration. For this younger cohort, by contrast, it was not only theoretically correct but also personally profoundly important to insist that Hebrew literature should be allowed to address itself to the entirety of the modern individual’s experience and to every aspect thereof—to the human as well as the national in the parlance of the time. Within a decade, these same arguments made their way into an increasingly autonomous Yiddish literary sphere, where they flowed together with growing impatience with the weight of socialist and progressive expectations about literature’s civic responsibilities and obligation to confine itself to forms that uneducated readers could understand.<sup>114</sup>

And as readers of this volume will see, these intense struggles over the content of the new Jewish culture were not driven solely by arguments about the prerogatives of the artist and artistic freedom. Those who read heartfelt texts in our “Cultural Thought and Pedagogy” section like the 1908 editors’ introduction to the first exclusively cultural journal in Yiddish *Literarische monatsschriften*, Rachel Katznelson-Shazar’s incisive 1918 essay “Language Insomnia,” or A. Litai’s jarringly entitled “Intellectual Abstention or Assimilation” will see that what was also at stake was whether the new Hebrew or Yiddish literature would keep pace with the needs of a readership that was itself becoming ever more modern. This was a readership that demanded an open horizon of creativity and art that would speak to all of the needs of the modern self, because it was already comprised of such modern selves, people who *needed* a wider art and culture and wanted desperately to be able to satisfy those needs in Hebrew or Yiddish.

Of course, the literary texts born in this environment of intense debate and searching were not narrow manifestos for these or any other ideas. The ways which Hebrew and Yiddish writers pushed against the limits of narrowly “Jewish” themes and expectations—and the paradoxical sense in which they were empowered to do so not least precisely by the expansive cultural nationalist urge to aesthetic rebirth that they might seem to have been targeting—cannot be seen clearly by looking at any individual text. But knowing this background may help readers of this volume appreciate more fully the genuine revolution involved in Shaul Tshernikhovski’s 1910 “My Astarte”: here, suddenly, and wonderfully, the hero of Jewish culture is not the male prophet railing against idolatry but an Israelite woman speaking to her fertility idol in hopes of finding a lover, someone who values this-worldly beauty and Eros rather than an intolerant servant of a jealous God hurling imprecations against both (and here Tshernikhovski meant both the biblical prophets and their rabbinic and even contemporary Hebraic heirs). His systematic, funny, and moving cultural inversion was a watershed: the modern Jewish poet was called to champion beauty, love, humanism. Readers will find further fruits of this freeing of the Jewish literary voice from the moralistic traditions in the uninhibited lyrical and personal tone of the New York Yiddish poet Mani Leib or in the exuberant sense of freedom in his younger contemporary Dovid Hofshsteyn’s Yiddish modernism. Readers will also find this paradoxical drive to regenerate the nation by liberating it *from* any narrow Jewishness in a place the American Jewish readers might find surprising: in the Hebrew and Yiddish literature for children that was also a product of the national turn in Eastern Europe. American Jewish readers who have had the mixed

blessing of reading contemporary Jewish children's books in English—generally inartful things written mechanically to preach some ostensibly Jewish message, embroider a Jewish holiday, and provide a kind of “booster shot” of Jewishness—will be surprised, we think, to find here traces of Hebrew and Yiddish children's literatures created with equal attention to Jewish tradition and to the larger world and its beauties.

In one key respect, readers of this volume will not be able to see something profoundly central to so much of the self-consciously modern culture created in Hebrew and Yiddish: the exuberant, sometimes shocking, always extraordinary recasting of those languages themselves. This recasting was not only a by-product of cultural revolution but also a central concern and project, even obsession, of almost all those who chose to create new kinds of culture in Hebrew or Yiddish. Many were the would-be creators of a modern culture in Hebrew or Yiddish who registered a sense of simultaneous transgression, discovery, and thrilling invention. This was a sense that one was wresting these languages out of their accustomed and appropriate place in the study house and synagogue or kitchen and street, to make them worthwhile to a modern person, combined with the arresting discovery of how much beauty and power was already contained in those languages and their corpora. And this was combined with the sheer delight of turning these languages to new ends, inventing new words, inventing whole new registers of expression. As devotees of Hebrew and of Yiddish came to face off against one another in an increasingly bitter battle over the nature of the new Jewish peoplehood to be created, they jointly presided over strangely convergent transformations of both languages, with their profoundly different roles and histories, into equally supple vehicles of modern and poetic expression in every valence and tone.

In speaking of nationalism and Jewish culture, we have focused in this section almost exclusively on Eastern Europe generally and the Russian Empire particularly. The attentive reader, however, will note that some of our examples are drawn not from that space but from New York, Jaffa, and here and there Vienna and Berlin. Neither the national impulse nor the literary-linguistic impulses with which it was entangled were confined to the Russian Empire; as Jews left Russia and Eastern Europe, some brought these ideas with them, especially after 1905. A disproportionate number of the small number of emigrants who left for Palestine in the course of our period were of course full-fledged Zionists and committed Hebraists to begin with; the irrepressible literary rebel and indefatigable Hebraist Yosef Haim Brenner took his ironclad commitment to Hebrew literary creation with him first from Russia to London and then from London to Jaffa. Conversely, the story of Yiddish secular literary creativity in the United States stands in a considerably more complicated relationship to national consciousness, in ways that our sketch in Section I of Celia Dropkin's unexpected turn to Yiddish in New York underscores. But in the United States too, the idea that the Yiddish language and ongoing literary creativity in it was intrinsically valuable found its most robust ideological support in some idea of Jewish nationhood.

And what of Jewish nationalism and Jewish cultural creativity under the sign of Jewish nationhood *elsewhere*, particularly in the Middle East and the Ottoman Empire? Scholarship on the region offers a divided and complicated picture on both scores. Clearly, as we have noted, Jewish nationalist ideas

and Zionist ideas in particular found some purchase in the region; committed Zionist intellectuals and activists could be found from Ottoman Europe and Bulgaria to Baghdad.<sup>115</sup> And so too can we see a host of phenomena that suggest at least ambient openness in the region to ideas of Jewish culture in a national mode. Middle Eastern Jewry had a rabbinic-Hebraic traditional elite just as European Jewry did, and some within this elite were active participants both in the nontraditional Hebrew press centered in Eastern Europe and in the burgeoning Zionist Hebraist community of Palestine. Thus, the journalist and historian Shimon Moyal played a leading role in Palestine's fledgling Hebrew cultural sphere even as he hewed an independent line in Zionist Hebraist circles and cultivated a career in Arabic letters alongside his wife Esther Azhari Moyal. The image and products of Jewish national culture found mass circulation too: among the many translation-adaptations from Western literature that the Ladino press of Ottoman Europe and the Judeo-Arabic press from North Africa to Calcutta offered readers were a substantial range of translations from contemporary Hebrew and Yiddish literature. Then too, some recent scholarship points to what we might call national-dialectical cultural outcomes of Westernization in various sites across the region. In our period, a number of Ottoman Jewish intellectuals produced communal histories or called, as Mercado Joseph Covo did in 1892, for the systematic modern study of the Sephardic Jewish "nation's" past (see Covo, "A Call for the Creation of a Sephardi Society for the Study of Jewish History and Culture"). The historian of Jewish North Africa Jessica Marglin argues that at about the same time, a cohort of younger Westernized Jews in Morocco were combining harsh critique of traditional society with a newfound interest in shaping and celebrating a distinctive Moroccan Jewish identity and cultural tradition.<sup>116</sup>

Whether all this adds up to a Sephardic and Middle Eastern parallel to the East European Jewish national project is unclear, and some differences are notable. One profound difference is the relative absence of sustained linguistic nationalist ideologies and projects in the Middle Eastern and Ottoman Jewish worlds parallel to the valorization of native tongue so central to national cultural projects around the globe: though Jewish intellectuals sometimes articulated a sense of the value of Ladino and Judeo-Arabic in various ways beyond their mere use as tools of modernization, there was no robust "Ladinism" or "Judeo-Arabism" parallel to Yiddishism or Hebraism. Then too, whether all the aforementioned forms of communal cultural valorization were connected with nationalism as discourse or consciousness is disputable; Covo's call for Sephardic history frames his goals in terms of communal apologetics on the one hand and an ideal of progress on the other that bears closer comparison to German and French Jewish history-writing than to nationalist historians like Dubnow. Indeed it is the German and French Jewish historical traditions he invokes. And the aesthetic ideology and practice that stood at the center of most national projects, including the East European Jewish one, namely the idea of creating a national Literature and Art in "our national language," seems to have had at most a spectral presence in Middle Eastern and Ottoman Jewish life; though there was some original literary production in Ladino and Judeo-Arabic, there seems not to have been any sustained effort by a cultural nationalist intelligentsia to foster a freestanding original modern Ladino or Judeo-Arabic art literature (by contrast not only with the East European Jewish case but also with the case of Ottoman Jews' Greek neighbors). Then again, Hebraists in the region not

only continued to participate in the evolving Hebrew cultural sphere in Palestine but also shaped an arguably distinctive tradition of Hebrew literary creativity and scholarship informed by intimate knowledge of the surrounding Arab culture and familiarity with Arabic literary traditions (Yitshak Shami, who appears in “Fiction,” is one notable case). As research into the complexities of Middle Eastern Jewish cultural creativity in a modern vein continues, scholars may discover thicker strands of national consciousness than hitherto appreciated, or they may refine categories appropriate to this culture that stand at a remove from what was an increasingly global idiom and idea of nationhood.<sup>117</sup>

### The Birth of Modern Jewish Politics

We have dwelled on the foregoing processes of deep social, economic, cultural, and political change because we believe that knowing something about them will help readers appreciate the stakes, tensions, and questions at the heart of many of the cultural texts and images in the volume that follows. Readers will find the marks of Jewish wrestling with this challenging, enticing, centrifugal, and dangerous modernity in every form of cultural expression in this volume, from lyric poetry and fiction to popular theater, philosophical reflection, and the visual arts. But the portrait would be incomplete if we do not offer readers a few words about another realm of Jewish response to the challenges of the age, one that was both a radically new form of life into which tens of thousands of Jews threw themselves and which *itself* became a force that reshaped Jewish culture and consciousness more broadly, namely, the emergence of a new kind of Jewish *politics* and political sphere. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, the politicization of Jewish society increased and intensified. Individually, a remarkable number of Jews threw themselves into general political life, and quickly came to play a visible and perhaps disproportionate role in socialist, progressive, and liberal movements, especially across Europe, the United States, and the Middle East. Some of the Jewish voices in the ranks of global radicalism in our period are still famous, the Polish German Marxist thinker Rosa Luxemburg and the inimitable American anarchist Emma Goldman being two of the most familiar whom readers will encounter here. But figures of Jewish background, and sometimes proud Jewish engagement, loomed large in other branches of what we might call a global progressivism. Readers interested in the history of liberalism as a fighting creed will be interested in a 1907 speech by Ernesto Nathan, the London-born Italian liberal who became mayor of Rome in that year and fought to institute a secular educational system in the city against the will of the Catholic church. Readers interested in Jewish involvement in the era’s emerging feminism will encounter not only the still-familiar Bertha Pappenheim, best remembered for her indefatigable work against global sex trafficking, but also debates unfolding in the Middle East, where figures like Graziella Benghiat of Izmir articulated what some have called “a familial feminism” that posited women and men as equal but different in their callings while the aforementioned Esther Azhari Moyal explored a more critical and challenging line. Of course, it was not only on the progressive side of the ledger that Jews as individuals threw themselves into wider political life. Readers of Ernst Lissauer’s “Hymn of Hate

Against England” will encounter a Jewish voice indistinguishable from the chorus that led Europe to cataclysm in 1914.

The most remarkable change appeared in the emergence and proliferation of a new institution in Jewish history: Jewish political parties and movements. These organized efforts to represent Jews as a collective with its own needs and interests aimed to reshape Jewish fate in accordance with ideological visions and through new forms of organized public expression. The emergence of Jewish political *parties* marked a new stage in the sociocultural history of hundreds of thousands of Jews in Eastern Europe, the Ottoman world, and in the new immigrant communities that were developing at a gallop across the globe.<sup>118</sup>

These new political organizations fundamentally changed the relationship of individual Jews with community, society, and state (as did, of course, a panoply of non-Jewish political parties, both liberal and socialist, in which quite a few Jews in Eastern and Central Europe were active). Within Jewish communal life, they served to carve out a nontraditional Jewish public space and accelerated the development of novel communication patterns. Importantly, many of the new Jewish organizations rejected, both in theory and practice, the oligarchic nature of existing Jewish political organizations, whether traditional or modern, as they sought to appeal directly to the masses of the Jewish population. Unlike the traditional community, to which the individual Jew belonged by virtue of a given obligating legal system, and from which one could not resign unless one converted or moved to another country, each person had the option, the free choice, of joining or leaving a Jewish political party. At the same time, for many party members, the ideological platform, political interests, and cultural discourse of the new party replaced a supposed mystical-organic connection among Jews touted by members of the traditional community. These features likewise supplanted the contractual corporate integration of sociopolitical systems that had persisted for centuries in the feudal kingdoms with their multiethnic empires, and which continued to survive well into the nineteenth century.

Ideological discourses and the struggle to achieve political goals shaped social relations within each party and dictated a complex array of affiliations between the various parties.<sup>119</sup> The new political party was clearly a factor in the push toward secularization in the sociological sense. Not even the parties that represented observant Jews were exceptions to this rule—rather, their declared ideology was religious devotion in its various forms.

However, despite its innovative nature and the crucial role the party played in advancing processes of acculturation, and notwithstanding the radical ideas (with regard to Jewish society) to which its members became attached, from a historical perspective the political party can also be seen as a clear manifestation of continuity. The party filled, to a not inconsiderable extent, the roles of the traditional corporatist institutions. These bodies were abolished by central government authorities, or gradually disappeared with the decline of the corporeal-feudal order.

Although the political party was ostensibly a strictly voluntary organization, its members accepted upon themselves, of their own free will, certain bylaws and platforms that often deprived the individual of his freedom (especially in the more radical parties). Democratic thought, freedom of

speech, and tolerance for a diversity of opinions did not characterize this new Jewish political discourse. This led to divisions and splits and spawned a sharp polemical style that radically negated contrary views.

The submission and total identification that a political organization sometimes demanded from its members, and its presence permeating all areas of their lives, resembled the situation that had prevailed in the premodern Jewish community. Moreover, with the rapid disintegration of old sociological centers of collective Jewish identity, these Jewish parties often served as alternative sources of identity to the congregation, the Hasidic community, the yeshiva, or the prayer group.

The effect of Jewish political parties on social life, especially in Eastern Europe, was somewhat similar to the influence of the Hasidic movement in the nineteenth century: it weakened the individual's attachment to the family cell and transferred the focus of personal commitment from the local community to a supra-local voluntary organization. At the same time, it bound followers to a group that recognized the teachings of one specific "tsadik," and did not look favorably (to say the least) on the devotees of competing "rebbees."

In many respects, the new secular identification with the political party also resembled the affinity that had existed between the individual and the premodern community. The individual was negated in favor of the community, felt a collective commitment to the group, its ideas and leadership, and preferred the party affiliation over all other bonds. In terms of its influence over the mind of the individual party member, the "membership card," especially for adherents of the more radical parties, resembled the communal enactments that were recorded in protocols.

Furthermore, as in the premodern community, the influence of the party over the individual incorporated many areas of life, extending beyond the ideological platform and political goals shared by its members. In the traditional community, the texture and norms of life and sensibility (for men, primarily) had been shaped by the individual's embeddedness in a thick network of communal organizations devoted to the discharging of essential religious commandments from burial of the dead to group reading of psalms to the dowering of brides (the last a framework for women's public engagement). Against this backdrop, the transition to finding community in the political party embodied another undeniable manifestation of the secularization of the frameworks of Jewish society. A new connection was formed: distinctly secular ideas, whether taken from the repository of modern nationalist notions or from various socialist theories, merged with a mode of organization that flourished in the sociological vacuum left by the abolition of the corporate regime. This connection contributed to the new Jewish national identity, which resulted in a cluster of novel political movements in Central and Eastern Europe toward the end of the nineteenth century.

The supranational nature of the new political party, together with the novel communication systems that it operated from its centers in the major cities, provided an alternative source of identification for individual Jews who had lost the traditional sense of belonging to the religious community. Concurrently, the party also retained the supranational ties that had existed throughout the Jewish Diaspora of the premodern era. Through political parties that advocated various combinations of

national and social radicalism, Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe formed international networks of identification, which spread across Odessa, Warsaw, Berlin, London, New York, Buenos Aires, Melbourne, and Jaffa. For example, branches of the Russian Jewish socialist Bund in England, France, the United States, Argentina, and other major centers of immigration became subdivisions of a single ethnic, cultural, and linguistic entity that fostered a national-secular culture in Yiddish; Jewish anarchism flowered in tandem in London, Philadelphia, Buenos Aires, and many cities throughout the Russian Empire. Along mostly separate circuits, Ottoman Jewish social radicalism flowed from Salonika to the New World. Zionism too was an international movement par excellence, and the Po'ale Tsiyon party, which bound socialism and Zionism together in a ramified party framework of the sort we are describing here, connected activists and resources in Eastern Europe, the United States, and of course Palestine.

This politicization left a deep imprint on culture. The decision regarding which language the party would select for its addresses to the public, from the smorgasbord of options that were available, and which it would choose as the preferred cultural language of its platform, played a significant role in literature and art. The processes of politicization that hastened the Jews' acculturation into one form or another of state culture or the culture of the most influential ethnic group also intensified their secularization and played a significant role in the creation of various expressions of Jewish culture. For many in the Russian Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and also for proponents of Jewish autonomy in the Ottoman Empire, it seemed on the eve of the Great War that it might be possible to develop successfully a secular, democratic version of the old Jewish community within a multinational framework, or to establish a modern version of the Ottoman *millet* in the Middle East, as the leaders of Po'ale Tsiyon sought in Palestine.

Political parties were not the only new formations of Jewish self-organization outside the ambit of the old community. Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe and the Levant founded a vast network of mutual aid societies in their new homes. Many of these were *landsmanshaftn*, bodies organized around shared cities or towns of origin. Unlike Jewish political parties, the *landsmanshaft* was not, at its core, an ideological or political organization, although regulations of these associations did contain ideological statements, and political goals were often included in the lists of their many functions. But like the party, they served an important role as centers of social identification that helped preserve Jewish identity in the midst of a powerful shift toward acculturation. And some such mutual aid-type societies came under the influence of the trade unions, whose members numbered tens of thousands of first-generation immigrant laborers. Socialist-minded immigrants themselves organized their own mutual aid society in the United States, the Arbeter-ring or Workmen's Circle. One way or another, these associations of emigrants from cities and towns—which arose in their new countries—served as a unifying factor that preserved some of the characteristics of the traditional corporate relationship despite their uprooting and the alienating character of the capitalist order and the big city.

The spirit of organization into political parties, which became a dominant sociological pattern of Jewish society at the beginning of the twentieth century, did not pass over the circles of Orthodoxy.

These circles took on a defensive mode as they tried to cope with the threats of modernity to their spiritual world and way of life. Here too, the new political organizational model was copied. Rabbis, who in the premodern community had been employed by the congregation, gained novel powers and roles in the new era that their predecessors had not enjoyed in the Jewish self-government of the premodern age.

### On Continuity and Change: Religious Culture and Vernacular Art in the 1880–1918 Period

Throughout this introduction, we have laid great emphasis on forces of change in Jewish life and thought because we believe that the central story of Jewish cultural life in the 1880–1918 era is, indeed, one of transformation—and rupture with traditional Judaism. It is no exaggeration, we think, to say that millions of Jews experienced this era as one of transformation in everyday life and also in consciousness. And the concomitant transformations in Jewish expressive culture thus rightly take center stage in the volume that follows. Readers who proceed according to this volume’s organizational structure will first find themselves in a section the very existence of which is a testament to transformation and rupture, “Literature”: perhaps the most markedly new, untraditional, even antitraditional phenomenon of the 1880–1918 period is the vast energy that tens of thousands of Jewish men and women poured into the creation, consumption, and celebration of literature as Art, the word as expression of human creativity and will rather than as a means of understanding divine revelation and the duties it imposes: Literature and not Torah. Much the same can be said about many of the texts and images readers will find in Visual Arts and Performance Art, and, certainly, Philosophy and Social Theory, Political Writing, and Cultural Thought and Pedagogy.

But though we are convinced that emphasis should indeed be placed on new genres and new forms of thought and life in a volume on Jewish culture and civilization 1880–1918, we do not wish to suggest to readers that the traditional, fundamentally religion-centered Judaic culture that had flourished for two millennia suddenly evaporated. As anyone aware of the forces at play in Jewish cultural life *today* knows, it certainly did not. On the other hand, neither did it remain frozen in time nor fully insulated from the forces transforming so much in Jewish life. In this final subsection, we draw on the learning of our colleagues Yonatan Meir and Shalom Sabar to give readers some points of entry into what we might call two worlds of tradition turned “counterpoint” in the 1880–1918 era: the world of traditional(ist) rabbinic, Hasidic, and kabbalistic thought and culture that continued to flourish particularly in Eastern and East Central Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East, and the world of vernacular or “folk” creativity that accompanied Jewish lives still bound to the traditional lifestyle and calendar.

As regards what we might call the high tradition of traditional Judaism, the 1880–1918 period marked a new stage in the consolidation of Jewish traditionalism. Particularly in the parts of Eastern Europe where the pietistic Hasidic movement held sway—Ukraine, Galicia, parts of Hungary and Slovakia—but also in Jerusalem, Safed, and Hebron where self-selected and stringently religious communities mixing Ashkenazic and Sephardic traditions met, growing numbers of religious Jews

recognized that traditional belief faced an unprecedented crisis, and reacted accordingly. Mass defection from proper religious observance, even mass secularization, demanded ever more vigorous, and, ironically, innovative response. Readers will find many marks of crisis and of a growing consciousness among Orthodox religious leaders regarding the need to find new ways to strengthen and mobilize religious commitment, stringency, and intensity in our section on “Religious Ideology and Rituals.” At the same time, readers will see that the flip side of reaction was innovation: thunderous denunciations of any Jewish engagement with secular modernity and gentile culture went hand in hand with Orthodox efforts to find new, more effective modes of thought and organization. Our era saw the proliferation of new Orthodox publishing ventures from Piotrków to Jerba, a nascent Orthodox newspaper culture in Hebrew and Yiddish, innovations in Orthodox educational institutions and practices to reach more young people more effectively, as well as the appropriation of modern literary forms—a development that readers will find in Hasidic hagiographical literature like Reuben Zak’s “Story of Rebbe Yisroel of Ruzhin” (1906, *Religious Ideology and Rituals*) as well as anthologies that both responded to and borrowed from works of critical scholarship like Yitshak Dov Ben ben Tsvi Hirsh’s *Emunas tsadikim* (1900, *Anthologies*). During these years there likewise appeared novel works of Orthodox theology that offered a response and alternative to the modern secular world, as readers will see in the writings of Rav Abraham Isaac Kook or Reb Tsadok ha-Kohen of Lublin.<sup>120</sup>

It remains to add that traditional Judaism continued to shape Jewish thought in many other ways in our era, well outside the bounds of an increasingly mobilized and antimodern Orthodoxy. Famously, at the turn of the century, many modern Jewish cultural creators—from the East European Jewish literati Y. L. Peretz and S. An-ski to the budding philosopher Martin Buber—began to find in the Hasidic tradition not (only) superstition and reaction but inspired ethical and philosophical attainments. More dialectical processes of exchange between tradition and secular modernity also played out in the agonized works of the Hebrew-Yiddish-German writer and thinker Berdyczewski, a scion of Hasidism who became a fierce Nietzschean rebel against tradition yet intermittently accorded it a central place in his work and thought, and Hillel Zeitlin, a figure raised in a Chabad Hasidic environment, who, inspired by the writings of Nietzsche and the Russian philosopher of Jewish origin Lev Shestov, presented a religious vision of a “Hasidism for the Future” as an alternative both to the Hasidism of his day and to secularism.

When we turn from the realm of traditionalist religious thinkers and leaders facing the challenge of secularization to the texture of everyday religious and ritual life, matters become considerably more complicated. Jews of quite varying degrees and types of religiosity continued to participate in religious life and religious ritual, and consequently, the rich physical and visual culture surrounding Jewish observance, from public buildings like synagogues to ritual objects for intimate family use like wine goblets and spice boxes persisted and continued to develop throughout our period, sometimes in unforeseen ways. In some regards, modernization, even as it dissolved traditional religiosity, endowed religion—or at least its symbols—with new significance. The very inroads of modernization and Westernization that so unsettled traditionalist elements in Eastern Europe and the Middle

East also moved small but disproportionately wealthy modernizing elites in cities like St. Petersburg, Detroit, Cairo, and Bombay to build magnificent synagogues in grand European “revival styles” that mirrored the building styles of assimilated Jewish communities in Rome, Milan, Florence, Potsdam, Frankfurt, and Essen—and by extension mirrored the interior of Christian religious buildings. Readers can see images of the St. Petersburg, Detroit, Cairene, and Bombay synagogues in “Visual and Spatial Culture.”

The era of change also left its mark on artisanal practices central to Jewish life everywhere and at all times: the production of Jewish ritual objects. In the urban centers of late nineteenth-century Europe, the craft of manufacturing traditional holy artifacts gradually deteriorated—they were less frequently made with the same meticulous attention of the preceding generations. During this period, more and more ritual objects were manufactured in considerable quantities based on standard models. At the same time, technology and new styles in the decorative arts were also influential; in our “Visual Culture” section, readers will encounter a spice box from Brno, Austro-Hungarian Empire in the form of a train locomotive. In Islamic countries the process of modernization had a certain effect on ritual ceremonies for life cycle events and the yearly calendar (i.e., wedding invitations and Purim costumes), but a lesser impact on the design of ritual objects compared with Christian Europe. Such influences are particularly noticeable in large cities that were under Western influence (e.g., Casablanca, Tunis, and Baghdad). Traditional crafts continued, although new motifs appeared here and there, by way of travelers and trade with Europe (such as figurative motifs copied or adapted from printed books that came from Livorno or Amsterdam to India, Iraq, Morocco, and elsewhere, or decorative *mizrah* plaques for walls that faced Jerusalem, which arrived from Central Europe and influenced local images as well as carpets woven in Iran, especially Kashan). The Jewish society of Ottoman Palestine offered a unique space for such fusion and cross-fertilization. Among the members of the Old Yishuv, traditional crafts were preserved in accordance with the countries of origin, but at the same time a distinct and fascinating blend was formed between the various communities. Folk artists from Iran, for example, wove images from Eastern Europe into the objects of their creation, as readers will see in the case of Tehran-born Jerusalem artist Moshe Mizrahi’s 1902 “Purim Story” and 1913 “Akedah.” Correspondingly, when these items were sent to Europe or Islamic countries, for the raising of funds, the Palestinian amalgamation in turn influenced local Judaic imagery. And even as religious traditionalists mobilized against untraditional political and cultural trends in Jewish life, vernacular religious production for ritual purposes offered ample space for untraditional motifs. A 1902 Simḥat Torah flag from Bobruisk in the Russian Empire by S. M. Sochora includes the figures of Theodor Herzl and Max Nordau alongside those of Moses and Aaron. At the same time, some declaredly modern Jewish creative projects relied on traditional artistry.<sup>121</sup>

#### *Section IV: Jewish Life in 1914, Jewish Life in 1918*

Jewish life in 1914 differed dramatically from what it had been in 1880. Earlier we mentioned the extensive demographic changes that unfolded over these thirty-five years in various communities

around the world and which exposed millions of Jews to new and unfamiliar realities. These transformations led, sometimes within a few weeks, to changes in the way many earned their livelihoods, the removal of the sources of authority that had maintained control for many years, and the eradication of customs that had been faithfully observed by their parents.

Migration from small rural areas to large cities rapidly created inter-regional, cross-state, and international Jewish Diasporas, linking together thousands of small communities, which still preserved a traditional lifestyle, with huge populations in large cities and towns. We noted above that even before the start of World War I, hundreds of thousands of Jews had already moved far from the places where they or their parents were born and raised. Almost all the immigrants in the period under discussion came from localities, regions, and countries that were still in less advanced stages of capitalist economic development, or being pushed into a perpetual peripheral status by capitalism's globalization itself. They moved to parts of the world that were already in a highly developed phase of these global economic transformations. The more experienced immigrants had already been exposed for more than three decades to completely different cultural environments than those of their places of origin.

In their new homes, the immigrants met Jews who had already settled into this environment decades before, and who had changed their language and lifestyles. Some were already at an advanced stage of assimilation into the surrounding population. Large-scale urbanization sped up the processes of acculturation in all countries, and assimilation was also advanced by the intense social integration of the new urban centers.

However, in a small territory on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean, which was rediscovered as a historical homeland, history took a different path. In Palestine, the tens of thousands of immigrant arrivals—which was a relatively small number—encountered a different reality, and a different version of Jewish life than the one discovered by the millions who flocked to the rest of the world. In January 1915, when the Ottoman Empire entered World War I, there was a small Jewish settlement in Palestine, with voluntary social and organizational patterns of Jewish self-government, and it was already possible to speak of a Jewish national culture with a language recognized as its “national” tongue—modern Hebrew.<sup>122</sup> It is true that only a tiny proportion of the Jewish mass movement from the “Old World” across the seas and oceans ended up in Palestine. Nonetheless, on the eve of the Great War, there were already political, social, economic, and cultural signs of the birth of a voluntary, autonomous national entity in the small Jewish community. Political views, intertwined with ideas of nation-building and improving the world, left their mark on innovative forms of social organization and affected the direction of cultural creativity. Everything was in miniature, but it could still be claimed—at least, this was the thinking of the activists of the new national parties that had been formed only a few years earlier—that those tens of thousands formed the nucleus for the growth of a Jewish entity that would be further boosted by the arrival of millions more in the coming years.

Two Jewish intellectuals and public activists combined up-to-date information with a kind of political prophecy, as they sketched a broad overview of the demographic-cultural situation at the

beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century. Let us entertain their perspective, as presented in 1911.

The Zionist sociologist and economist Arthur Ruppin (1876–1943) devised a socioeconomic cultural model that largely reflected the international condition of the Jewish community on the eve of the Great War, without any reference to the settlement in Israel. He introduced this model in 1904 in his book *Die Juden der Gegenwart* (*The Jews of Today*), although he updated it in an edition published in 1911 (and several more times in the following years) based on changes in the given statistics. The bottom line of this study was that immigration and urbanization, first and foremost in lands which had political freedom, such as England and the countries of North America, were deterministically leading to the elimination of the Jewish entity. The second observer, the British historian Lucien Wolf (1857–1930), one of the greatest critics of Zionism, was forced to admit in 1911, in an entry he wrote for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, that the Zionist movement had reached a position of great influence in the Jewish world.

According to Ruppin, the status of the Jews on the eve of the war reflected the results of an ongoing process of socioeconomic transition, which also determined their cultural status. Ruppin exposed the close relationship between immigration and urbanization, and he witnessed its most extreme example—the complete assimilation that developed among Berlin Jews. After analyzing the positions of hundreds of thousands of Jews in the slums of London and New York, he concluded that immigration and urbanization were also raising up the Jewish masses from poverty to affluence in a relatively short time and providing many thousands of Eastern Europeans with secure livelihoods.

These observations were also correct to one degree or another—albeit on different scales from place to place—with regard to the rest of the Jewish Diaspora, in its various communities. In the Middle East, for example, immigrant communities were built up in urban centers that grew rapidly in the late nineteenth century, as ancient commercial centers lost their economic importance and were replaced by modern commercial port cities in the eastern Mediterranean Basin. Thus, Beirut in Lebanon, like Odessa on the coast of the Black Sea, served as a magnet for various ethnic-religious groups. In the city, the new arrivals were exposed to Western influences in the educational institutions of the colonial powers and also to a modern Arab culture, as Beirut was one of its leading focal points. One can identify a similar development even in the emigration of thousands of Yemeni Jews to Palestine, which reached its apex right before the outbreak of the Great War, with some of them settling in the regenerating coastal cities.

Budapest, at the time still an imperial capital, had a population of roughly 200,000 Jews on the eve of the war. This city attracted tens of thousands of Jewish settlers from all over the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Between 1880 and 1910 the number of Jews in the city increased almost threefold! While the Jewish commercial elite enthusiastically accepted this policy, underwent a process of profound Magyarization, identified with Hungarian nationalism, and took a significant part in the cultural scene, the city was also home to thousands of immigrants from peripheral communities who devoutly maintained a traditional Jewish life. Accordingly, it was difficult to find significant support for the Zionist

version of nationalism in prewar Budapest. One way or another, the state of affairs in the capital of the Hungarian section of the dual monarchy shows that the extent of modern Jewish national awakening in highly populated areas of urban immigrants was largely determined by the government's integration policy. It would seem that the Budapest case, on the eve of World War I, matched the rosy picture that Lucien Wolf had hoped to see before him: "under the influence of religious toleration and the naturalization laws, nationalities are daily losing more of their racial character."<sup>123</sup>

Jewish life, after three decades of massive immigration, dramatic exposure to the promising, and at the same time threatening, challenges of the capitalist economy, and the reorganization of society in an urban reality, or into innovative and unprecedented forms that were designed to shape a "new Jew," did indeed incorporate a dialectical combination of centrifugal and centripetal forces. However, these were far more complex than Ruppin and Wolf suggested in their quasi-prophetic statements of 1911. Crime and prostitution flourished in Warsaw, Odessa, Constantinople, New York, and Buenos Aires. By contrast, the rapid social mobility of immigrants in the urban environment and their swift integration into the liberal professions, the written media, literature, and art, as well as architecture, were perceived by non-Jews in the urban environment as a taking over, and/or "Judaizing" of the surrounding society.

Growing Jewish visibility in urban space intensified antisemitic reactions. The increased anti-Jewish sentiment among the surrounding populations fed into the more radical strains of modern antisemitism, which would erupt volcanically within a few years, not only in the cities of the old homelands, but also in those places where integration had been a great success until the breakout of war.

For its part, the Jewish counterreaction consisted of an appeal to Jewish nationalism and the strengthening of Zionism, or at least for certain manifestations of recognition and sympathy toward the realization of the embryonic Zionist project in Palestine. Zionism began to appear to non-Zionist personalities and organizations, as Theodor Herzl had predicted, as offering an alternative possible migration, to a distant destination. This option eased the integration into new places for recent immigrants.

In 1880 Jews were still a people of the "Old World," whose periphery in the "New World" lay far beyond the sea. By 1914, Jews were an *international* people. New centers that had only recently been created operated alongside the old centers and would soon inherit their place. Everything was now international, from political networks that spread across continents and philanthropic schemes that crossed borders, via entire webs of written communication systems, to the scattering of cultural centers that conversed with each other while writers, poets, and artists moved to-and-fro between them.

Although their nodes were located in the new urban concentrations, these networks eventually spread even to the small towns that Jewish immigrants had left for the big city. With millions of its members on the move, East European Jewry became, for one generation, a kind of transnational Yiddish ethnos, whose language and culture were nourished by the tension between the declining *shtetl* and the flourishing cities. The destructive and assimilatory power of the cities was dialectically

entangled with the preserving force of political, social, and communication networks in the race against the disintegration of the Jewish entity.

The Great War that swept across Europe and the Middle East from 1914 to 1918, which fundamentally rewrote the geopolitical map, marked the end of the era of multinational empires in the Old World. For Jewish history, this was a chapter of murder, destruction, displacement, revolutions, and intense struggles for survival and adaptation in an environment that changed beyond recognition overnight.

World War I, which began in August 1914, inflicted a mortal blow on the economic infrastructure upon which the existence of millions of Jews had depended. It undermined the basic political systems that had allowed—albeit not always on easy terms—their survival in the places where they were born and lived. The war further accelerated some of the processes of demographic and social change that had been gathering pace in the various Jewish diasporas over the previous decades. Internal immigrations within the empires increased, while processes of urbanization intensified. By contrast, mass migration overseas declined, as the movement of migrants to ports in Central and Western Europe halted. The global Jewish population on the eve of the war was about 13.5 million,<sup>124</sup> and yet in 1918 it was only an estimated 13.8 million, a relatively moderate increase that can be explained, among other factors, by the large number of dead in the war, which included tens of thousands of Jewish soldiers killed in battle.

The reader might be surprised at the numbers of Jewish soldiers in the armies of the world: approximately 1,350,000 Jews (10 percent of all Jews on the planet!) fought in the armed forces of the various combatants. The Imperial Russian Army included half a million Jews; about 320,000 Jews were in the Austro-Hungarian Army; some 250,000 Jews served in the U.S. Army, a large proportion of whom were of East European descent; roughly 100,000 in the German Reich; the French Army contained approximately 55,000; while about 50,000 Jews fought under the flag of the British Empire. Military service during the war wrenched masses of Jewish conscripts from their familiar surroundings and forced them into close quarters with members of the various ethnic groups who served in the different imperial armies. Furthermore, Jews from the army of one country encountered their religious brethren of another country—sometimes fighting and killing one another on the battlefields of Europe and the Middle East. The number of casualties among Jewish soldiers is estimated at around 70,000, a little over half of 1 percent of world Jewry.

The greater proportion of Central and East European Jewry were still living in territories fought over by the armies of Russia, Austro-Hungary, and the German Reich, and found themselves inside war zones. Many towns were devastated by tremendous destruction. Hundreds of thousands of refugees fled the frontlines to other regions within the empires.<sup>125</sup> The arrival of tens of thousands of refugees to governorates where Jews had not been previously allowed to settle effectively led to the abolition of the “Pale of Settlement.”

The plight of so many Jews during the war years triggered a surge of philanthropic activity on the part of Jewish organizations around the world. In particular, American Jewry, rapidly becoming the largest Jewish community in the world, mobilized substantial resources to aid families and

communities in war-torn Eastern Europe. Elements in the immigrant community with markedly different political and cultural outlooks came together under the guiding hand of older “German” Jewish elites to form an aid organization, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, that mobilized unprecedented amounts of aid with pleas like this one, made in March 1917: “American Jewry, Awake! You and You Alone Can Answer the Prayer Put by Suffering Millions! Feed Us! Save Us!!”<sup>26</sup> Paradoxically, the war strengthened the supranational ties among Jewish communities around the world, rallied varied and very different political groups to the Jewish cause, and gave impetus to the continuation of a unique Jewish policy that incorporated philanthropy, education, and diplomatic activity.

In large sectors of the two crumbling empires, violence against Jews did not end with the conclusion of the war. Jews in Eastern Europe were subjected to unprecedented levels of physical violence, most spectacularly in the aforementioned mass killings of tens of thousands of Jews by pogromists of every variety across war-torn Ukraine in 1918–1919. Nothing like such violence touched the Jews of the Ottoman Empire, by stark contrast to the genocide unleashed by Turkish forces against the empire’s Armenian community (readers will find reference to reports of those latter terrible events in Aleksander Benghiat’s wartime diary, in *Life Writing and Reportage*). But the Zionist settlement project in Ottoman Palestine halted when the Ottoman Empire joined the war alongside Germany and Austro-Hungary. Between 1915 and 1918, the Land of Israel was either close to the frontline or actually subsumed within battle zones. The war caused economic distress in Palestine. When the British army completed its occupation of Palestine in the summer of 1918, only 56,000 Jews remained in the country, little more than half their number in 1914.

In the wake of the revolutions of 1917 and the disintegration of the geopolitical order caused by the war, throngs of Jews, both subjects of multinational empires and immigrants who had become citizens in their new places, sought the realization of alternative visions. Social and national radicalism, two political currents that had joined forces as early as the 1880s when they had begun to change Jewish society and shape modern Jewish culture in an unprecedented manner, seemed to have achieved their desired goal in 1917. The October Revolution of 1917 (which actually happened in November) and the Balfour Declaration occurred only five days apart. The Bolsheviks’ seizure of power in Petrograd on November 7th offered to millions of Jews the promise of world and human redemption in the Marxist spirit. At the same time, this was an ominous sign for the continued existence of the traditional way of life. Meanwhile, the brief letter that the British Foreign Secretary Lord Balfour sent to Lord Rothschild on November 2nd proposed a political infrastructure for the Zionists’ aspirations, sponsored by a European power. These events were not only of political significance to the whole of world Jewry; their messianic-apocalyptic character reached into general culture. Though less dramatic in their impact, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson’s promise of expanded ethnic self-determination in his Fourteen Points for rebuilding a new Europe following the Great War bolstered Jewish hopes for ethnic self-determination right where they were, in Eastern Europe, rather than only in Palestine.

The terrible violence and upheaval of the era did not utterly erase long-standing patterns of Jewish life. In the new states of Poland and Lithuania and expanded state of Romania, Jews

retained their distinctive—and obtrusive—economic, social, and demographic character. They remained a large minority comprising 10 percent or more of the population as a whole and a far, far higher percentage in the cities. In some cities and towns, Jews continued to form a majority of the population.

But terrible upheaval was, undoubtedly, the central fact of Jewish life during the war from the eastern provinces of the German Reich to the depths of Russia and into the territories of the Ottoman Empire. The quasi-messianic expectations awakened by the revolutions in Russia, the Balfour Declaration, and Wilson's Fourteen Points were rudely confronted by a quasi-apocalyptic state of destruction and annihilation.

However, this upheaval did not lead to political collapse or quiescence. On the contrary, independent Jewish political activity intensified, and the politicization of Jewish life reached its peak, as Jewish nationalism and social radicalism in all its manifestations amalgamated into a wide range of political parties. The war, for all its destructiveness, led to a renewed outburst of pan-Jewish political activity in which the aspirations of Jews for achieving autonomy within their countries of residence were integrated, in various ways, with the Zionist striving to establish a Jewish autonomous political unit in Palestine.

So too, those who followed the events of late 1918 could not ignore the role of Jews (or those who were considered Jews) in promoting Bolshevik revolutions. In Russia, Lev Bronstein, better known as Leon Trotsky, who was born on a Jewish agricultural colony in southern Ukraine, transformed the Red Army. In November 1918, the communist leader Béla Kun (whose Jewish father had converted, but retained his clearly Jewish name) returned to Hungary from Russia with a band of hundreds of Bolshevik supporters. He founded the Hungarian Group of the Russian Communist Party at the end of the year. In that same month, Rosa Luxemburg, a Polish-born Jew who was one of the leaders of the Bolshevik Spartacus League movement, was released from prison and resumed her activities in preparation for a revolution in Germany, which had recently ceased to function as an empire.

For all the havoc it wreaked in Jewish life, above all in Eastern Europe, World War I and its hydra-headed aftermath did not bring about anything like a total rupture in Jewish cultural life and thought. For Jewish secular nationalists in Eastern Europe, the February overthrow of the tsarist regime and its apparatus of censorship and repression meant that the intellectuals, activists, and writers who had collectively shaped the contours of post-traditional Jewish culture within the narrow legal, political, and discursive bounds of tsarist Russia could now articulate and act on their visions of Jewish culture without constraint. New Hebrew and Yiddish cultural centers sprang up circa 1916–1917 in Moscow and Kiev (Kyiv; cities partially closed to Jews before 1914), direct outgrowths of prewar efforts in Warsaw, Vilna, and Odessa, organized by veterans of those earlier ventures. Even the new conditions ushered in by February—the freedom to organize on a mass scale, the enhanced openness of the Jewish population as a whole to the new culture, and the glittering possibility of state support in a federal Russia or an independent Ukraine—initially served not to alter but to reinforce prewar cultural visions.<sup>127</sup>

### *Section V: Turning to This Volume*

We close this introduction with a few notes about methodological complexities and impasses that we as editors have had to negotiate, believing that awareness of what remains unresolved in this volume, and even what is *not* in this volume, will help orient readers as they turn to the rich array of texts and images that comprise this collection. After everything that has been said, readers will be aware that most of the texts and objects readers will encounter in this volume were created outside the framework of Jewish tradition, by Jews who had in some fundamental sense embraced the idioms and genres of European-cum-global modernity, or had never known anything else, and were in some cases self-consciously secular people to boot. Yet conversely, some of the texts that follow were created by people deeply invested in traditional Jewish religious belief and practice. To make some sense of these latter, readers must understand that they are texts deeply and pervasively structured by religious intentions, generic traditions, and long-standing religious conversations often centuries old or older, indisputable (for the authors) traditional beliefs about God and divine providence, a purposeful world, the truth of God's revelation to the Jewish people, and the nature of the good life and its relation to commandedness.

Appreciating the cultural creativity framed and inspired by the countervailing modern and secular dispensation requires its own interpretive care. Many of the untraditional texts and objects featured here were created intentionally for Jewish audiences, whether works of art and literature meant to speak to the imagination, works of political ideology or social critique meant to mobilize Jews to collective ends, or works of popular culture in Yiddish, Judeo-Arabic, and Ladino meant to educate or entertain. But we have also included many selections by authors and artists who seem to have had no coherent intention to create something "Jewish" or contribute to a specifically Jewish conversation. Did Tina Blau, whose career in Munich and her native Vienna made her, it is generally agreed, the first Jewish female artist to achieve recognition in the art-world of the 1880s and 1890s, have any intent to be a Jewish artist creating Jewish art? The answer seems to be no. We say this not because she converted to Protestantism early in her career, but rather in deference to what we can understand of her own aspiration to be a European creator of modern culture unmarked by a difference she seems to have regarded with *indifference*. Yet if this and similar cases raise unanswerable questions, there are also serious arguments to be made that creators of Jewish background especially in our fraught era were shaped by complexes of historical or sociological factors peculiar to Jewish life, in ways that we may be better equipped to see than they were. Some Jews were, usually unhappily, part of paradoxical communities that some historians have come to call "communities of assimilation": Jewish subcultures whose members identified deeply or even *totally* with some larger non-Jewish culture but who for various reasons remained substantially separate both from other Jews who did not share that identification and from actual non-Jewish society. The paradoxical effect of such an aspirational assimilation coupled with persistent actual separation was the creation of a "hothouse" communal version (or simulacrum?) of the larger culture. We might think here of the subculture of Polish patriotism created by the Polonized Jewish community of Warsaw or Kraków, or of Middle Eastern

Jewish “Francophilia” complete with substantial production of French-language culture read not by Frenchmen but only, it seems, by Jews themselves. Such works clearly belong in this volume. But we have gone further and decided to include works by figures who *do* seem to have fully integrated into larger metropolitan cultural spheres and art worlds like Blau, Sonia Delaunay, or Léon Bakst on the grounds that excluding such works in the name of a tightly intentionalist account of Jewish culture risks erasing interesting lines of connection and trajectories of Jewish experience that readers should be able to consider.

Third, we have taken the rubric of “culture *and* civilization” seriously and have included many texts and objects that reach beyond expressive culture to many other domains of modern Jewish experience. But some readers may nevertheless conclude that we have not been broad enough. Thus readers will find in what follows a very rich representation of Jewish political thought and debate from this period of such profound political upheaval and reorientation. Works of modern thought and inquiry, both philosophical and social-analytical, also find a place. Readers will also find memoir and other writings that allow us some sense of how people lived, the shape of their daily experience. As noted, readers will gain at least a sustained glimpse at the worlds of religious thought, devotion, and creativity that many Jews continued to embrace, and that can only be called “culture” at the risk of obscuring the relationship to God, commandedness, and revelation that animated believing creators and consumers. Readers will encounter both material objects that were largely functional and images and texts that allow us to capture some dimension of deep changes in how Jews lived in space and time. But no doubt we could have cast our net still more broadly.

Finally, a word about unity and division. The riches contained in this volume can be seen as shaped by a shared historical condition. But they did not issue from a unified community as a single act of creation. Rather, they testify to something like the opposite: they reflect clashing visions, radically different hopes and expectations, divided and in some key respects perhaps irreconcilable versions of what it means to be Jewish and what Jewish culture should be. The people whose voices resound in this volume were not one big happy family, and it is not even clear if they were even one big *unhappy* family. One profound chasm, perhaps the most unbridgeable, ran between *frum* and *fray*—between those who remained committed to tradition’s teachings and those who with varying degrees of consciousness could not or would not. There was little possibility of any dialogue between defenders of traditional faith and champions of “the new Jewish culture,” a completely new and different kind of Jewishness built on secular foundations. As one Hasidic leader in Poland, the Sokolover Rebbe, put it by 1919, “free literature” (*sifrut hofshit*)—by which he meant precisely modern *Hebrew* and *Yiddish* literature written by and for Jews—was a “deadly poison” that had “torn away from us our sons and daughters with a breach that will never heal.”<sup>2128</sup>

Nor was this the only profound disagreement that divided Jewish life in our era. Jewish revolutionaries, of whom there were suddenly more than a few in our era, *sometimes* found ways to accommodate and valorize some version of Jewishness—but many did not. Most versions of Marxist thought simply left little room for a positive outlook on religion as such or a positive relationship to national and cultural difference, and perhaps even more to the point, almost no room at all for the idea that

there could be shared Jewish community, culture, or political needs and interests across class divides. Some of the socialist voices we have included would have found it unthinkable, ridiculous, or appalling to have their words categorized as “Jewish culture and civilization” and included in a volume packed with “nationalists, rabbis, and other reactionaries,” as it were; and some of the latter might have returned the favor.

Even *within* various “camps,” the 1880–1918 era brought many tensions, many of which widened into deep divisions. The “movement culture” or “party-culture” of Zionist and especially socialist parties that readers will encounter particularly in the “Political Writing” section stood in a close but actually quite complex relationship with the secular “new Jewish culture” whose creators loom large in our Fiction, Poetry, and Cultural Thought and Pedagogy sections. On the one hand, institutionally speaking, Zionist and socialist party journals and publishing houses served as important venues for a number of literati, and movement milieus (from Vilna and Odessa to Jaffa in the Zionist case or from Vilna to Paris’s immigrant quarter Pletzl to New York in the socialist case) helped train a generation of readers primed to seek out modern Hebrew or Yiddish literature as a part of their basic intellectual and spiritual fare. On the other hand, over time, many would-be creators of a new Hebrew and Yiddish culture found the ideological demands of Zionism or revolutionary socialism too constricting. As readers will see in some of our sources, the maturation of secular Hebrew and especially Yiddish culture in our era took shape through repeated efforts by cultural creators to free themselves from the ideological constraints of movement-dominated milieus and create for themselves an autonomous cultural scene with its own journals devoted solely to literature and art, with nonparty publishing houses and the like.<sup>129</sup>

And no less tension-ridden among those committed to the “new Jewish culture” idea was the relationship between the Hebrew and Yiddish cultural endeavor. In the 1880s, when our volume begins, it was almost universally self-evident to nationally minded East European Jewish intellectuals that Hebrew—the language of high culture, high status, the Bible and the tradition—was “the Jewish national language.” The only real question was what place *non-Jewish* languages, most obviously Russian, would have in the project of national cultural revival. Yiddish, the language most Jews spoke and the only language most literate Jews could actually really read at that juncture, had a clear but also clearly subordinate and delimited place: it was a language of outreach, simplification, and feeling but not thought. But over the next two decades, even as the Hebrew culture movement made gigantic strides socially as well as literarily, many of the intellectuals and writers engaged with Yiddish came to feel that that other language had equal if not greater literary and cultural potential, use, and value in itself. As their efforts gave birth almost accidentally to an increasingly formidable freestanding modern Yiddish culture, powerful populist and socialist crosscurrents drove a younger cohort of intellectuals toward the insurgent view that Yiddish—the language of the “folk,” the “masses,” the earthy vernacular, “young” and “alive”—should be the living language of a living culture rather than “dead,” “elite,” “staid,” or “matronly” Hebrew. By the time our volume ends, in 1918–1919, Hebraism and Yiddishism were two wholly separate and opposing movements, completely divorced and equally committed to a wholly monolingual cultural revolution in Jewish life, literature, and education.

Of course, there were then, as now, surprising channels of communication to be found, and weird, even paradoxical fructification across boundaries. Orthodox people did sometimes read secular literature, even secular Jewish literature. More dialectically, neither the plastic art nor orchestral music that flourished in hothouse Jewish nationalist “scenes” from Kiev (Kyiv) to Jerusalem’s Bezalel art school would have come into being without immersion in metropolitan non-Jewish Russian, Central European, and French cultural milieus.

Yet it remains the case that many of the people included in this volume bore irreconcilable views about Jewishness, and some saw one another as actual enemies for that or other reasons. Jewish culture in our era was not a structure but a maelstrom, filled with chaotic movement, inner strife, and uncertainty. Kafka famously remarked in a 1914 diary entry: “What do I have in common with the Jews? I barely have anything in common with myself.” Ironically, Kafka’s brilliantly diagnosed inner self-division *was* something he had in common with many other Jews of the time indeed. As readers engage with the riches in the pages that follow, we hope that they will see as well the profound *inner* tensions that freighted Jewish cultural life. Several leading figures of the secular cultural ideal like Peretz or Bialik became its vociferous critics as they and it grew older. Readers will see Bialik’s darkening view of the very possibility of creating a new Jewish secular culture in essays like “Halakhah and Agadah” excerpted here. Fradl Shtok, whom we now recognize as a deeply accomplished Yiddish writer and celebrate in anthologies of Jewish women writers and of Yiddish prose in translation, was discounted as so many women writers were in her day. Hebrew writer Y. H. Brenner’s deep sense that contemporary Jewish life was degraded and degrading provoked a savage impatience with anything he regarded as self-satisfied cant—Jewish self-praise was Jewish self-delusion—and this in turn drove him treat the very idea of “the new Jewish culture” with suspicion even as he helped reinvent Hebrew fiction.

Here then is a volume about “Jewish Culture and Civilization” in an era when the totality and range of cultural expression by Jews had never been so rich and various, we even dare say, so beautiful and vital—but when that totality was anything *but* a unity. Having offered some historicization, we know that readers will encounter this totality as they wish: as a jagged landscape to be traversed carefully, as a mosaic in which many separate parts produce an illusion of a supervening harmonious whole, as a family attic (yours or someone else’s) in which to rummage, as a sea to swim in without direction or goal with many swift and cross-cutting currents, and most of all, we hope, as a starting point for further and deeper exploration of a fascinating piece of the Jewish and human drama.

### *Notes*

1. This introduction attempts to give readers a global portrait of Jewish cultural life in the 1880–1918 era and the political, social, intellectual, and cultural forces that shaped and reshaped it—a portrait sufficiently broad but also sufficiently detailed and interpretively elaborated that it can serve as a helpful point of entry into the tremendously rich but also bewilderingly various galaxy of texts and images this volume collects. To produce such a synthesis, which necessarily ranges across cultural, artistic, political, economic, and social history and around the globe, we as authors have of course relied on the specialized work of literally hundreds of fellow

scholars past and present, many of whom work on areas of Jewish history and culture we only know as generalists and all of whom, by definition, know some strands of the history we seek to synthesize here better than we do or can hope to. This means not only that there are many opportunities in a synthesis like this for errors of fact and interpretation to creep in, for which we alone are responsible, but also that were we to cite every book and article from which we have learned, the citations alone would run to dozens of pages. For that reason, we have confined ourselves in what follows to citing scholarly works only when we are quoting directly; drawing a very particular, important, or sometimes disputed point of fact or interpretation from a particular source; or developing an important point that derives inarguably from a specific work. Knowing that one could always cite more generously and carefully, particularly in the last regard, we apologize for any inadvertent exclusions. Furthermore, given the presumptive readership of this book, our citations emphasize works in English and to a lesser degree Hebrew despite the fact that we ourselves have learned much from works in other languages as well, where facility has allowed.

This introduction has benefited from the critical attention and advice of our advisory editors and other readers who have been willing to share their specialized knowledge and insight. We wish to thank Olga Borovaya, Julia Phillips Cohen, Richie Cohen, James Loeffler, Tony Michels, Deborah Dash Moore, Anita Norich, Avery Robinson, Shalom Sabar, Maurice Samuels, Leonardo Senkman, the participants in the University of Chicago's Transnational Approaches to Modern Europe Workshop, and the two anonymous readers for Yale University Press for their especially helpful comments and suggestions. We also extend special thanks to Yonatan Meir and Shalom Sabar for writing texts on religious thought and folk- and vernacular visual culture that we have incorporated in modified form into the text that follows.

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94. Marglin, "Modernizing Moroccan Jews," 581, 588, 591, 594, 598; Rodrigue, *Images of Sephardi and Eastern Jewries*.
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96. Boum, "Schooling in the *Bled*," 5, 7; Goldberg, "Jerba and Tripoli," 278–299.
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98. Jessica M. Marglin, introduction to *Across Legal Lines: Jews and Muslims in Modern Morocco* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2016); Daniel J. Schroeter and Joseph Chetrit, "Emancipation and Its Discontents: Jews at the Formative Period of Colonial Rule in Morocco," *Jewish Social Studies* 13, no. 1 (2006), 171.
99. Benbassa and Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry*; Borovaya, *Modern Ladino Culture*; Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans*.
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111. Apter-Gabriel, *Tradition and Revolution*; Mark W. Kiel, "A Twice Lost Legacy: Ideology, Culture, and the Pursuit of Jewish Folklore in Russia until Stalinization (1930–1931) (PhD diss., Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1991); Adam Michael Rubin, "From Torah to *Tarbut*: Hayim Nahman Bialik and the

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113. Moss, *Jewish Renaissance*, 1–22, 60–100, 173–216.

114. Moss, “Between Renaissance and Decadence.”

115. Gribetz, *Defining Neighbors*; Bezalel, *Noladetem tsiyonim*.

116. Levy, “Reorienting Hebrew Literary History,” 130–131, 147–148, 157; Marglin, “Modernizing Moroccan Jews,” 576, 586; Devin Naar, “Fashioning the ‘Mother of Israel’: The Ottoman Jewish Historical Narrative and the Image of Jewish Salonica,” *Jewish History* 28, no. 3/4 (2014): 337–372.

117. For claims about incipient Ladinism, see Benbassa and Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry*; David Bunis, “The Ottoman Sephardic Jews and the ‘Language Question,’” in *Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewries: History and Culture in the Modern Era*, ed. Harvey E. Goldberg (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 226–239. Lital Levy makes the point that even Middle Eastern Jewish Hebraism was more linked to ideas of Jewish religious and cultural enlightenment (Haskalah) than to the emerging Zionist Hebraist discourse of “national revival” (*tehiyah*), in Levy, “Reorienting Hebrew Literary History.”

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125. Giuseppe Motta, *The Great War against Eastern European Jewry, 1914–1920* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017).
126. American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, “Relief Work Must Continue—Do Your Share!” *The Bulletin of the Joint Distribution Committee* 1, nos. 6–7 (February and March 1917), 78.
127. Moss, *Jewish Renaissance*, 23–59.
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