

The Jewish Diffusion of French Nationalism

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Nineteenth-century French nationalism was a force that united citizens under the mandate of homogeneity. This national unity generated beliefs of governmental loyalty and state brotherhood; however, this form of unity also created an environment in which the masses perceived non-French diversity as a threat to internal cohesion. National acceptance of French Catholicism further added to growing hostility since it justified the persecution of non-Christian people as a divine and civic responsibility. The unification brought about by nationalism offered France many positive rewards, but it also supported the alienation of citizens who refused to conform to new French ways. An example of this alienation occurred between the French people and the Jewish-French population. Many French citizens believed that willing submission to the ruling government aided in prosperity. Also, nationalistic French citizens believed France should receive priority in the lives of all its loyal citizens. Yet many French Jews refused to compromise their culture and became nonconformists to the bustling spirit of French nationalism. Unfortunately, the Jews encountered bitter resentment due to their growing affluence as well as their differing religion. The hostility grew so great that Theodor Herzl wrote *The Jewish State* to offer Jewish people a plan to create a refuge from centuries of disenfranchisement and anti-Semitic abuse. Herzl's experience with French nationalism, however, had positive repercussions as

to question the status quo."¹⁶ Young was obviously influenced by these ideals as well, being a proponent of progress, one of the main goals of the Enlightenment. In fact, the very reason he was in France was to bring new ideas to England, to help English agriculture to progress.

Thus, through Arthur Young's *Travels in France During the Years 1787, 1788, 1789*, we can see several things. First, we have a very specific, detailed, and first-hand view of not only the poverty of rural France, but the things that locked the impoverished in their condition, the poor agricultural conditions, the seigniorial rights, the heavy taxes on the peasantry, and the apathy of the nobility. Second, we see Young supporting the attack on the nobility due to their oppression of the peasants, something that lets us see not only the lack of medieval influence on Young as a representative of the English gentry, but the strong Enlightenment influence. Through Young, then, although his influence was strongly technically agricultural, we get a brilliant picture of the agricultural cultures of both France and England.

¹⁶ John Markoff, "The Social Geography of Rural Revolt at the Beginning of the French Revolution," *American Sociological Review* (1985), 766.

he borrowed from the French nationalistic movement. Theodor Herzl's *The Jewish State* used ideas found within nineteenth-century French nationalism and adapted these ideas to Jewish traditions in order to support his call for a united Jewish State.

French liberty, equality and fraternity shaped Herzl's outlook of Jewish treatment. Nineteenth-century France embodied the spirit of nationalism by emphasizing common links among French citizens. These links greatly helped the French army rise to success by promoting ideas of defending "the great republic" and offering a renewed hope to the French people through trust in the nation rather than a specific regime. As a result, notions of national loyalty emerged in the nineteenth century. This inclusive spirit, however, excluded the Jews. Jewish non-conformity to French culture caused much resentment and evoked great hatred. Herzl witnessed one of his friends, a Jewish officer of the French General Staff named Dreyfus, wrongfully arrested and unjustly convicted of treason. Although he later gained freedom in a second trial, the anti-Semitism displayed by the French public outraged Herzl. He wondered how a land that boasted of liberty, equality, and fraternity could resort to framing an official and rigging the first trial based on one's Jewish background.¹ This event proved to Herzl that Jews may reside in a nation, but their lack of conformity caused them to become unaccepted by the masses. Therefore, Herzl sought to engineer the creation of a state where Jews could live peacefully under the centrality of the Jewish faith.

Judaism provided Herzl with a common link with which all Jews could identify. Herzl adapted the idea of homogeneity from French nationalism. He believed this common link would persuade other Jews to support his efforts for a Jewish State. Also, the religious foundation and the traditional Jewish idea of a return to Israel generated opinions that a greater Jewish identity would come from citizenship to a Jewish nation.² Herzl united

¹ Ian J. Bickerton, *A Concise History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Englewood, NJ, 1991), 23.

² Hillel Halkin, "After Zionism: reflections on Israel and the Diaspora," *Commentary* 103 (June 1997): 25.

equality, fraternity, and liberty in his state by emphasizing that Jews represented a united people under the Hebrew faith. He also stated that Jews suffered numerous attacks throughout the Diaspora and that they would nurture equality for their fellow Jewish brothers by upholding the right to liberty of which most Christian nations had deprived them. He maintained that peace would ensue if every Jew relocated to the new country because persecution would stop against them in other nations. Herzl's experience in France convinced him "that anti-Semitism was an incurable Gentile pathology."³

The issue of assimilation caused hardships for a dispersed population. Herzl stated that assimilation remained an option of which Jews would never partake. He claimed the success of his people and the peculiarity of Jewish practices would limit the acceptance of assimilation by any non-Jewish society. Although many nations encouraged this act of achieving national homogeneity, immense jealousy and profound ignorance severed the tie of Judaism to any national authority other than a Jewish State.⁴ Furthermore, Jewish tradition and the intense study of the religion restricted non-Jewish assimilation and caused conflicts.⁵ Herzl believed the Jewish State must exist to unite his people under the only binding force that had helped them survive: their religion.

Herzl organized his ideal State to secure individual loyalty among the new population. He did this by enabling the State to address the needs of the citizens. Also, he began by creating two distinct organizations to manage the affairs of this State. The first group received the name The Jewish Company. This body would manage financial affairs and handle land distribution. The second group received the name The Society of the Jews. The Society of the Jews would be devoted to taking actions that would aid in governing the lives of its citizens. Although these two bodies would operate with two distinct objectives, their exist-

³ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁴ Trade Weiss-Rosmarin, "Assimilation and Jewish Existence," *Jewish Existence in an Open Society* (Los Angeles, 1970), 71.

⁵ Hillel Halkin, "After Zionism: reflections on Israel and the Diaspora," 29.

ence and actions would legitimize the authority and power of the State. The progress achieved by these two government-supported programs would appease the population and decrease the possibility of rebellion and dissension. In addition, the fact that Herzl favored rule by an oligarchy supported the notion that state incentives could suppress future opposition. Therefore, Herzl constantly reminded Jews that these groups would work for unity within Jewish progress.

The Jewish Company would force the citizens to maintain a strong reliance on the State. The Jewish Company would provide transitional aide to vital aspects of the Jewish State. This company would resemble that of a joint-stock company and would have the responsibility of securing land under the terms of international law and the legitimacy of civil law. Once territorial ownership of either Argentina or Palestine had been transferred into Jewish possession, this company would devise a method of distribution and begin work on the national infrastructure. Also, this company would implement mass production industry and serve as a major immigrant transporter to support incoming citizenship. In addition, this body would have the authority to liquidate immovable assets belonging to the incoming population within the parameters of a profit motivated market. Ultimately, the Jewish Company would provide essential services to entice more Jewish migrants and to build a society which promoted liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Herzl tied the common people to his cause by providing them with opportunities. He did this by declaring that the readiness of the state would depend on the willingness of unskilled workers to immigrate first. This order would enable poor, unskilled laborers to acquire property and possessions by working on the infrastructure of the State. Herzl also derived an idea which compared his State to a "Promised Land" whose future rested on its classification as "a land of labor."⁶ Herzl initiated such propaganda to attract Jews, but also to motivate the laborers of this

⁶ Israel S. Chipkin, "Judaism and Social Welfare," *The Jews: Their history, culture, and religion* (New York, 1960), 1657.

task. Under Herzl's plan, the Jewish Company would serve as the foundation for the future state by providing "material assistance." Therefore, the state would aid and benefit from poor Jews while offering them an opportunity for newfound success. He also guaranteed workers the right to work overtime to secure additional money as well as incentives like ownership of a home.

The basis for authority in the State centered on the centrality of moral behavior. Herzl believed citizens had to owe allegiance to The Society of the Jews since it represented the governmental aspect of his movement. Also, he maintained that this society would have the duty of creating a constitution based on the morality of the Jewish religion.⁷ The adaptation of religious morality to the law ensured the further longevity of Judaism within all aspects of societal life. Judaism represented the strength of each Jewish citizen, and its presence within the law prompted others to never forget the past troubles and present victories of the Jews. Under the spirit of nationalism, Herzl stated that the society had an obligation to draw citizens into national unity by creating a flag which would serve as an emblem of pride and an army which would defend the nation and symbolize national power. This power would signify that Jews endured and transformation nineteenth-century French nationalism from a motivation for Jewish persecution into a motivation for Jewish perseverance.

Theodor Herzl created *The Jewish State* to provide Jews with the "Promised Land" from which they were expelled. Although Herzl perceived his actions as countering the hostile plight of Jews in France, his actions represented the central aspects of French nationalism. In his plan, Herzl united his people under Judaism and used such governmental agencies as the Society of Jews and the Jewish Company to build a belief that the upcoming government could meet the needs of Jews. Also, the homogeneity, which had disgusted Herzl in France, appeared in *The Jewish State* by connecting religion and the government to the unifying force of patriotism.

⁷ Mordecai Kaplan, "A Philosophy of Jewish Ethics," *The Jews: Their history, culture, and religion* (New York, 1960), 1011.