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## Glorious, Accursed Europe

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## THE EMERGENCE OF THE MODERN EUROPEAN JEW

*Why does Europe create such a powerful, magical, alluring impression on us, no matter who we might be?*

FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY,

*Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*<sup>1</sup>

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*What Europe owes to the Jews? Many things, good and bad.*

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE,

*Beyond Good and Evil*<sup>2</sup>

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*The Jews of France and Germany, England and Italy strive with all their might to be French and German, English and Italian, and to be Jewish no more. Their country's tongue and ways are now their own . . . They have forgotten their roots, and the bonds between them and their brothers in other lands have been broken.*

Y. L. GORDON,

*"A Vial of Perfume"*<sup>3</sup>

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*We are part of the household of Europe, and we consider ourselves children of the land in which we were born and raised, whose language we speak and of whose knowledge the foundations of our spirit are built. We are Germans, Frenchmen, Englishmen, Magyars, Italians, and more.*

ADOLF JELLINEK,

*"A Conversation with Pinsker"*<sup>4</sup>

The nineteenth century in Europe was called, among other things, the *Judenjahrhundert*—the Jewish century. Nietzsche offered one explanation for this label in *The Dawn of Day*, describing Jews' prominence in all

dimensions of the European experience as nothing less than a “Jewish conquest,” which he considered both desirable and necessary for Europe’s future. In his opinion, European Jews—by which he meant the Jewish German bourgeoisie and intelligentsia—were a people of great vitality; they were becoming increasingly European both physically and spiritually, and they “distinguish[ed] themselves in all departments of European distinction.” He predicted that the turning point in Jewish history was rapidly approaching, and that the question of the day would be whether Jews would “become masters of Europe or . . . lose Europe, as they once, centuries ago, lost Egypt.” Jewish control over Europe, he added, would not be a result of conquest or violence; rather, “some day or other Europe may, like a ripe fruit, fall into their hands” and they would become “the pioneers and guides of the Europeans.” In this way, “Israel shall have changed its eternal vengeance into an eternal benediction for Europe.”<sup>5</sup>

A similar vision was cultivated and disseminated by antisemitic literature, which depicted Jews as striving, both in broad daylight and under cover of night, to achieve control over Europe, or effectively controlling it already. The Jews were Europe’s masters; they were the agents of modernity, who propagated values in Europe that undermined the foundations of its society; it was they who had brought the world all the ailments of modern society: alienation, cosmopolitanism, and capitalism<sup>6</sup>—or, antithetically, revolutionary radicalism.<sup>7</sup> In 1879, Wilhelm Marr’s *Der Sieg des Judenthums über das Germanenthum* (The victory of Judaism over Germanism) presented a vision of Jewish control over society, politics, and religious thought, in which 1,800 years of attempts to conquer and enslave the Germans had resulted in victory for the Semite Jews. In another infamous book, Eduard Drumont described how Jews had usurped control of France.<sup>8</sup> Other antisemites wrote that Jews had taught the rich how to exploit the poor through modern methods such as usury and capitalism—or, conversely, that the Jews had taught the poor to despise the rich, just as the nineteenth-century proletariat did. In his 1874 novel *Metamorphosis*, the Polish writer Józef Ignacy Kraszewski declared that Jews had imposed their values on European culture: the prophecies had come to pass, the Kingdom of Israel had arrived, and Jewish bankers were now the masters of the world.<sup>9</sup> This cross-European antisemitic literature warned of the negative consequences of Judaizing Europe. Such warning cries against increasing Jewish control were perceived as a crucial and effective method of self-defense against Jewish influence—whether real or imaginary—in order to save Europe’s soul.<sup>10</sup>

## THE “JEWISH CENTURY” AND THE JEWISH REVOLUTION

These two opposite, fabricated depictions—one of complete, harmonious Jewish integration in European society, and the other of Jews as conspicuous and controlling Europe—as well as Jews’ conceit that they had a moral mission to fulfill in Europe, developed in part because of the emergence of a new Jewish archetype: the modern European Jew. The nineteenth century was not really the Jewish century, but it was the century in which the modern Jewish revolution took place, during which the so-called Jewish Question came into being,<sup>11</sup> and which determined the fate of Jews throughout the next century. This was a revolution because processes of change, change—and awareness of change—in multiple spheres, and agendas for change and initiatives to realize them were all involved.

Jews in nineteenth-century Europe did not become European because they were ensnared by the charms and temptations of Western culture, fell victim to its allure, and thus abandoned their identity—in fact, they were eventually betrayed by Europe, which declared a crusade of destruction against them. They became European because it was not possible for them to become modern Jews—that is, to adapt to the modern world and adjust Jewish life to it—without actually becoming, in one sense or another, European. The main reason for this was that, in contrast to inhabitants of lands under Western colonial rule, the Jews encountered the full spectrum of Western culture (or cultures)—and not through the intermediary of literature or through representatives of colonial rule, but in a direct and intensive way. Because of this, the process of their Europeanization was general and comprehensive.<sup>12</sup>

The Jews of medieval Europe were also European. This is not only due to the fact that they lived in Europe, but also because they were never, in any part of it, a closed society, disconnected and isolated from their environment; their culture was influenced by and reflected many dimensions of Christian culture. Nonetheless, the Europeanism of nineteenth-century Jews was an entirely new development. It was created by the influence of the range of processes and phenomena that gave rise to the modern European world: demographic growth; industrialization and urbanization;<sup>13</sup> the strengthening of nationalistic movements and the emergence of nationalist states; political and social radicalism; and civil wars and revolutions. All these destabilized and reconstructed every layer of the Jewish experience—in different ways, of course, depending on the circumstances

of time and place. It might be said that to a great extent the outside penetrated the Jewish world, while the inside (the Jews) penetrated the outside (non-Jewish) world to a great extent as well. The magnitude of this process is also evident in its influence beyond Europe, in every region touched by European influence. The desire for “European forms of culture,” Graetz wrote, spread even to the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>14</sup> In other words, Jews in Europe were European because they underwent similar processes of change, transformation, adaptation, and adjustment wherever they lived in Europe.

Jews in Europe were sometimes described as Europhiles in the days before any inhabitant of Europe was called European, and during the period when other nations searched for a more general framework for themselves in ideas like pan-Slavism and pan-Germanism.<sup>15</sup> However, to call Jews the only Europeans would be a pretension that conflicted with reality. There were Europeans with a sense of European identity far before that perception existed among Jews, and many Jews made an effort to emphasize their attachment to the particular state and culture in which they lived—a phenomenon that Stefan Zweig described correctly in his *The World of Yesterday* as “a longing for homeland, for rest, for security,” which “urge[d] them to attach themselves passionately to the culture of the world around them.”<sup>16</sup>

However, a distinction should be drawn between declarations of beliefs and self-image on the one hand, and cultural reality on the other hand. The Jewish elite not only adopted cultural values that were identified with particular European cultures, but it also adopted values and ways of life that were widespread in European culture as a whole. Naturally in the age of nationalism, much weight was placed on the differences between various national cultures. Even so, ideas, values, and the cultural repertoire were not bound by strict national or political boundaries, instead crossing these boundaries by means of cultural agents, being adopted into new cultural environments, and becoming an inseparable part of them. This process of Europeanization influenced not only the elite but also—in various ways and to varying extents—other groups within the Jewish population.

In the research literature, examples are frequently cited of the processes of adaptation and integration of central figures in the Jewish world, tracing their awareness of these processes and their misgivings toward all that related to defining their identity. In many cases, the literature highlights the great tension between declarations on the subject of full integration and disappointment and despair. However, concepts such as

personal identity, collective identity, and true nature are hazy and difficult to define,<sup>17</sup> nor are groups like German Jews, Russian Jews, or Polish Jews monolithic. The result is that the use of generalizing terms paints a one-dimensional and integrative picture, while the reality consisted of a hybrid situation in which new and traditional norms existed side by side, their relationship evolving over time. The variety and dynamism of that relationship is a clear testament to the profound transformations that took place in Jewish life during the nineteenth century. Thus instead of discussing essence and identity, we find it preferable to examine the Jews' real culture, values, and "habitus"—in other words, the pre-arranged models that shaped Jews' lives and informed their conduct in specific situations according to their social standing.<sup>18</sup> These models reflect the social and cultural norms that different groups follow in their everyday lives, rather than vague and general declarations.

This is a matter not only of behavioral patterns in society and culture, as we see, for example, in the 1833 description by Michael Benedict Lessing of the extensive transformations that had taken place in Jews' language, lifestyle, pastimes, attributes, and customs, which he illustrated by comparing the East European Jewish world to its urban German counterpart: "In the last half of the eighteenth century—in contrast to the first half of the nineteenth—it was impossible for one to encounter Jews at concerts, parties, balls, festivals, cafés, or trading floors, taking interest in the daily newspapers, participating in musical, artistic, or scientific circles, or in any intellectual or other circles, to find Jews who were not inferior to the rest of society in manners or knowledge."<sup>19</sup> This description is exaggerated with regard to the start of the nineteenth century, but accurate with respect to its latter half.

The nineteenth-century Jewish revolution brought about the most radical transformations in Jews' circumstances since the destruction of the Second Temple. Its revolutionary nature—as Benjamin Harshav correctly described it—was expressed not only in transformations that took place in various aspects of the Jewish experience, but also in the fact that "it was the framework that reconstructed the various details that characterized the whole as an inclusive, entirely new phenomenon."<sup>20</sup> In other words, this was a matter of reconstructing the entire scope of Jewish life, and in doing so, forging a new tradition.<sup>21</sup> The fundamental questions regarding identity, belonging, and the desirable boundaries of Jewish culture and the surrounding European culture appeared on the Jews' agenda because at the start of the nineteenth century, Jews were required to work out

for themselves—and to explain to others—how Judaism could exist in its new environment. The success of their integration and acculturation was measured not only by how Jews evaluated the outcome of these processes, but also—perhaps primarily—according to the reaction of the non-Jewish environment. In order to answer this pressing question for themselves, Jews formulated various strategies to deal with everything related to the construction of their new identity and its desired character. The strategies that were proposed created different camps in European Jewish society and brought about a war of ideas and perspectives that continues to this day. Indeed, one of the central expressions of the Jewish revolution in the nineteenth century was that new ways of life and new self-definitions became available to European Jews as a whole—as well as, for the first time, as individuals; these were determined by the broad freedom of choice and action that was granted to them by various European societies. One could now choose not only whether to be Jewish, but what sort of Jew to be.

The nineteenth-century revolution also created entirely new criteria concerning everything related to the boundaries between Jews and their environment.<sup>22</sup> These criteria may be grouped as follows:

1. The extent of Jews' presence in all fields of general cultural activity, whether as creators or as consumers. This presence was described as participation in or contribution to Western culture.<sup>23</sup>
2. The extent to which Jews identified with a specific nation or the national culture in which they lived—that is, the manner in which Jews expressed an awareness of their belonging to the nation in which they lived, and the ways in which they identified with it.
3. The nature and content of the Western cultural models and repertoire of cultural values that Jews adopted and internalized—that is, the nature of the processes of Jewish integration and acculturation into their environments.<sup>24</sup> The desired results, or those actually achieved, were a broad range of transformations that were described in many ways—as identity, growing proximity, integration, acclimatization, absorption, and assimilation—and were evaluated as positive or negative.
4. A comparison between nineteenth-century Jewish norms and values and those of Jews in equivalent social groups during previous generations. What, for example, was the difference between what was seen as normative in traditional society, and what was considered normative in Jewish society in the modern era?

5. The reactions of the non-Jewish environment to the processes of adaptation, acclimatization, and integration, and the boundaries it set for these processes.

### EUROPEAN JEWS—BETWEEN NATIONALISM AND EUROPEANISM

Which Europe is at issue here?

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the cultural characteristics of East European Christian society were described in Jewish literature as a product of social standing rather than as ethnic or national differences.<sup>25</sup> Thus this period had not yet experienced the creation of a repertoire of stereotypes for the characteristic aspects attributed to various peoples. This repertoire began to appear toward the latter half of the century as a result of the discovery of peoples, and of folk identity, in the various European societies according to typical group traits.<sup>26</sup> The *maskil* Baruch Lindau, for example, proposed the following observations in his 1788 book *Reshit Limudim*: the Portuguese were indolent, miserly seamen, wholly unskilled for labor; Spaniards were lazy and coarse; the French were “intelligent and crafty,” skilled in every science and discipline; Germans were industrious in science and lovers of knowledge; Italians were easygoing and particularly talented in painting and music; the British loved art, knowledge, and science; and the Swedes were “hard of heart and weak of mind.”<sup>27</sup> Another example of the use of this repertoire of national characteristics is Herzl’s opening speech at the Second Zionist Congress, in which he noted “the Germans’ industry, the Romanians’ nimbleness, the Slavs’ endless patience,” and so forth.<sup>28</sup>

The national characteristics that were attributed to Europe’s various nations and perceived as expressing their deeply rooted collective essence were eventually depicted as qualities that also cast their mark on, and shaped the identity of, the Jews who lived in these nations. Differences among the various types of Jews, or between different Jewish populations in Europe, were delineated according to these typical characteristics.<sup>29</sup> As Richard Cohen has noted, “the construction of German, Italian, English, Dutch, or Austro-Hungarian identity was an inseparable part of the modern Jew’s historical experience.”<sup>30</sup> Thus European Jews were classified as German Jews, Russian Jews, and so forth, and one could speak of their Britishness, Germanness, or Russianness. Over the course of the



nineteenth century, Jewish society in Europe became more divided and heterogeneous than ever. The great Jewish center in Germany dissolved, and the differences between German Jews and the Jews of Eastern Europe became increasingly stark throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>31</sup>

East European Jews were depicted in the West as old-fashioned and frozen in time, mired in ignorance and characterized by religious zealotry; in other words, they were not considered a cultured group. The rift was especially profound in all that concerned the East European Jewish Orthodoxy's relationship to German Jews, but modern non-Orthodox Jews in Eastern Europe also had an ambivalent attitude toward German Jews. Even a radical *maskil* such as Y. L. Gordon, for example, disliked what he saw in Berlin in both the Reform and neo-Orthodox movements: "None of what I have seen thus far in Berlin has brought me pleasure or peace of mind."<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless, the fissure between German and East European Jews was even deeper than another fissure, that between East European and West European Jews generally.

During the 1880s, following the emergence of national revival movements in Eastern Europe, Gordon maintained that Jews' integration into various national cultures had divided European Jews according to their affiliation with one national type or another. In 1882, the Viennese scholar and preacher Dr. Adolf Jelinek wrote to Leon Pinsker, whose pamphlet *Autoemancipation* had just been published, that Jews were at once both Europeans and members of the nations in which they lived. Jews were "children of Europe, and [we] see ourselves as part of the lands in which we were born and raised, whose tongues we speak and whose cultures shape our intellectual being. We are German, English, Hungarian, Italian, etc., in every fiber of our being. We have long since ceased being true racial Semites, and a long time has passed since we lost the sense of Hebrew nationalism."<sup>33</sup> Simon Dubnow claimed that Jews did adhere to an overall Western culture—but that because there was no single culture truly shared by all of Europe, and instead there existed a "culture of nationalist form . . . built on the language, education, and literature of a nation's people," it became inevitable that "each branch of the Jewish Diaspora would have acquired the national culture of the land in "which it settled." According to him, Jews' education in school and at home "made [them] German, Russian, French—not Jewish."<sup>34</sup> Nathan Birnbaum wrote that life among the *Gattungskulturen*—the various types of European culture—created tribal divisions among Europe's Jews:

Take heed! Cultural contrast! The issue is not that Jews in Poland exist on a lower cultural level but that they possess a different culture than that of the German Jews. They [Polish Jews] have acquired not the European culture but rather the medieval culture of the Ghetto Jew, which is, in the eyes of one who has been educated in Europe, un-aesthetic and not superior.<sup>35</sup>

The response Birnbaum desired was not assimilation into the dominant culture, but rather *Nationalisierung* (nationalization) and *Liebe zum Eigentümlichen* (love of one's unique identity), because taking pride in belonging to another people would never result in inner satisfaction.<sup>36</sup>

These stereotypes of Jewish traits according to Jews' provenance were destined for a long existence. They were used, for example, to describe the differences between *Ostjuden* (Eastern Jews) newly immigrated to Germany and longtime German Jews:

It cannot be denied that there are differences between the "Yekkes" and the "Ostjuden." Some are really cultural differences, some are differences of habit, some are very profound differences in ways of thought . . . German Jews grew up at the knees of German idealism and the logical, Kantian, German way of thinking. Our brothers to the East have a more moderate way of thinking that has been defined to a greater extent by another form of logic . . . There are also differences in other areas . . . German Jews have been educated in a very formal manner. Etiquette carries great weight with them.<sup>37</sup>

Ahad Haam summarized the situation in a sad letter to Dubnow: "we can speak no longer of a single Jewish people, but rather of Jewish peoples."<sup>38</sup>

There is no doubt that the particular cultural experience of the European nations—language, literature, education, construction of sentiment, and collective historical memory—made a deep mark on the Jewish culture of each country. However, as we have seen, particularity need not obscure the existence of a shared, universal European background, which also informed daily life and conduct. Consequently, we should distinguish between, on the one hand, the results of Jews' integration and assimilation in various, particular European societies, and on the other hand, the manner in which they accepted and internalized universal European values.

## HOMELAND, NATIONALITY, AND DIVIDED IDENTITY

Jews' adaptation to the reality of nineteenth-century Europe was expressed in their attempts to become an integrated part of the national society and culture of the countries in which they lived. These attempts took different forms and had different results in multinational, multiethnic countries than in more culturally homogeneous countries. Zeev Jabotinsky, who wrote a great deal on the subject, was not alone in pointing out the profound difference between life in unilingual and life in multilingual states. In a 1911 article titled "Letters on Nationalities and Oblasts: Jewry and its Attitudes," for example, he wrote:

In Russia . . . the Jews live en masse among the Little Russians, Belorussians, Poles, Lithuanians, and Moldavians; they have the least contact with the Great Russians. Thus, even if they accepted Russification, the Jews would be assimilated not by the majority population around them but by a people that constitutes a weaker, scattered minority within the Pale of Settlement and dominates today only thanks to state coercion. In the event of the elimination of that coercion, the local national cultures would develop and thrive, forcing Jewry also to separate finally into a distinct cultural group. It would be impelled not only by the attraction of example . . . but also by necessity, born of a sense of political self-preservation.<sup>39</sup>

During the age of nationalism, it was possible to think of acculturation as an admission ticket to the universal European culture, but even more than that, it was a ticket to individual, nationalistic cultures. Entry into one of those cultures meant not only treating it as more than a temporary refuge, but also belonging to and identifying with it. Nation and location became homeland and home. One's homeland consisted of both the autochthonic human landscape and the natural surroundings. For example, Mendele Mokher Seforim described Jewish integration into these surroundings in his 1887 novel *Beseter Raam* (A secret thunder):

And they lived together in friendship for many days, visiting each other and consulting each other when they had need. Many of them [the gentiles] visit the homes of their Jewish friends, know their children by name, are fond of them and play with them . . . and speak with them in Yiddish. When a Jew sees his sons wed and the *klezmer* [wedding band] plays, these "uncles" often come to the banquet, and when the jester plays they join the crowd in laughter.<sup>40</sup>

From the middle of the nineteenth century onward, not only did Jews have neighborly relations with Christians in their immediate area, but they also were aware of belonging to a homeland and its national culture. The concept of homeland had appeared at the end of the eighteenth century; during the following century, it became, together with the concept of a nation, a fundamental idea that shaped the era. German Jews' patriotic awakening and the emergence of their feeling of belonging to a homeland, which began during the time of the Napoleonic wars, was clearly expressed in a proclamation titled *Zuruf an die Jünglinge* by Eduard Kley, a reform preacher from Berlin, and Karl Siegfried Günsburg: "O what a heavenly feeling to possess a fatherland! O what a rapturous idea to be able to call a spot, a place, a nook one's own upon this lovely earth."<sup>41</sup> National identity was applied to Jews both by themselves and by others.<sup>42</sup> From this point on, the extent to which one belonged to one's homeland and identified with it was measured by one's affinity for its national culture and the depths of one's patriotic sentiment.<sup>43</sup> Such a formulation of the consciousness of affinity and belonging appears in 1862, in Mendele Mokher Seforim's novel *Fathers and Sons*. Ben David, the protagonist, lives abroad but yearns for Russia, which is not only a place but a homeland:

On beholding another man from my homeland, whether Jewish or not, I rejoiced at the sight of him as one would at the sight of God; I touched his clothes and their smell was the scent of those God-blessed fields . . . And I, as though arriving at the outskirts of my blessed homeland, knelt and kissed the ground and rejoiced in its soil and told myself with an overflowing heart: "I am a Russian man!"<sup>44</sup>

In February 1882, in response to pogroms and widespread persecutions, Haim Hissin—a member of the Bilu movement, a group committed to settling in Israel, founded in Russia in 1882; a physician; and one of the founders of Tel Aviv—wrote that he considered himself Russian and loved the Russian people, and therefore "absolutely could never leave Russia forever." He also wrote that he felt a spiritual connection with Russian folk song and the Russian peasant. However, the pogroms had brought him to the conclusion that "the Jews have no place in Russia," and that they must pick up "the age-old walking staff" and search for "a new home." On July 19, sailing from Odessa to Jaffa aboard the *Russia*, he wrote that in Russia "my dreams and heart's desire lie buried." He had grown up there, and it was there that his sentiments had taken form, but

“you pushed me away, my beloved homeland.”<sup>45</sup> It is hard to tell to what extent this attitude toward Russia as a homeland was shared by the young generation of the Jewish Russian intelligentsia and semi-intelligentsia, not to mention by broader groups.

In 1931, a seventeen-year-old student from Tarnow in Galicia, Salo Wittmayer Baron, who became a distinguished historian, responded to the assertion that Jews neither were nor desired to be Polish with a long essay in the weekly *Haivri*, which was published in Krakow. Not satisfied with describing the Jews’ extensive involvement in Polish culture, Baron also declared that the unbroken Jewish presence in Poland over the course of six centuries granted them “a historical right” to define themselves as natives of the land, no less than the Poles.<sup>46</sup> In general, a positive and affectionate image of the Poles, and a sense of Polish patriotism, existed among Polish Jews until the end of 1942.<sup>47</sup>

However, modern Jews did not wish to assimilate into the autochthonic human landscape, and certainly not into rural peasant society, which was considered an environment of dark ignorance. Their model was not the East European peasant, who was generally described in Jewish literature as “simple folk, by nature ignorant, unenlightened, coarse, and crude, tending to drunkenness and other ‘bestial’ passions.”<sup>48</sup>

Modern Jews wished to integrate into the nationalist society represented, in their opinion, by the urban, bourgeois, and intellectual classes, depicted as rational and “aesthetically refined.” They wished to integrate into the Europe that was a product of “science and reason” and thus enlightened and tolerant. Such an environment already existed in their opinion in Western Europe, where “Jews live without fear and are not subject to persecution . . . Little by little they become closer to the native folk, will become loyal citizens to the nation of their birth, will stride with a mighty step on the path of knowledge . . . [and] will purify their customs”—so wrote Nahum Sokolow in “A General Outlook on the Year 1879 and Its Significance for Our Jewish Brothers,” an 1880 article in *Hamagid* in which he predicted that in the future, such an environment would also arise in Eastern Europe.

Dubnow wished to distinguish between two foundations of patriotism, the first based on “civic consciousness of the common needs of all members of the state,” and the second on the “natural feeling of love for one’s homeland.” Since “Europe has become a second fatherland for the majority of the Jewish people, they have developed a natural feeling of love of fatherland wherever they settled.” Because the Jewish people

formed their own culture, they could be a patriotic “nationality among nationalities” in any country they inhabited.<sup>49</sup>

Patriotism, civic awareness, and the awareness of a nationalistic belonging to a specific homeland and culture characterized sizable groups of Jews in both Western and Eastern Europe. The dilemma was, of course, whether it was possible to differentiate between patriotism, citizenship, and national bonds.

### EUROPEAN CULTURE AND THE LIMITS OF ACCULTURATION

When the Orthodox weekly *Der Israelit* summarized the nineteenth century, it wrote, as we have seen, that “since exiting the Ghetto, Jews have been partners in creativity in all areas of life,” and this partnership reached its peak during that century.<sup>50</sup> The extent to which Jews’ integration was successful was measured according to the extent of their participation in all aspects of life, as well as the contributions they made over time to various fields of endeavor, and the degree to which they excelled or were prominent in those fields. The ability to integrate was considered a calling card that Jews must present when they knocked at the gates of European culture and society—a calling card on which they marked their successes in the present, their contribution to world culture in the past, and their qualifications to contribute in the future. In effect, this calling card represented a demand for the Jews to absorb the environment around them, which included “regeneration,” “correction,” and even fundamental change in, or a conversion of, their codes of behavior and values.<sup>51</sup> It was not enough to present accomplishments; it was necessary to point to their significance to the particular national culture.<sup>52</sup> Because the nations’ cultural level and the quality of their cultural achievements were a primary measure of their merit and their status among other nations,<sup>53</sup> the Jews’ active participation in this creation and their contributions to it—not to mention their qualifications to participate and contribute—became a new way to evaluate them. Jews seemingly wished to prove that they were able to fulfill—indeed, that they had already fulfilled—the expectations of the philosopher J. G. von Herder, who had looked forward to the day when Jews would “live by European laws and contribute to the good of the State’s interests.”<sup>54</sup>

At the end of the 1860s, when the *maskil* and popularizer Kalman Schulman, from Vilna, presented an impressive picture of Jewish integration

in European culture and society, he took pride in the speed with which Jews had entered all the branches of European culture—an achievement unrealized by other groups “for many hundreds of years.” The modern era granted Jews the opportunity to express “the precious merits and high talents which had slumbered within their souls during the dark years of oppression,” and had allowed them to cultivate “great poets, wondrous rhetoricians, lauded authors in all realms, renowned mathematicians and engineers, astronomers, historians, men well versed in religion and law, and knowledgeable in all branches of the natural sciences, famous physicians, psalmists, musicians, diplomats, sculptors, visionaries. And there is no wisdom, art or craftsmanship in which the Jews did not engage, and they became famous in the land for their prowess.”<sup>55</sup> In 1864, in the same spirit of spiritual uplift, Y. L. Gordon wrote:

Now there is no city or state in which young Jewish men do not draw the clear waters of alien springs . . . You can count the specialist physicians employed by the state . . . how many young Jews you will find today who engage in writing and speak the language of their country fluently, or German and French, and all of them born in the last generation, products of the last decade.<sup>56</sup>

In 1839, the Russian Jewish *maskil* Isaac Baer Levinsohn described with admiration a similar calling card of the Jews: “There is hardly any field of science, art and the crafts, even among the most prestigious and honoured, in which there are no Jews today.” In other words, Jews did not need to remain outside, or knocking at, the door of European culture because they had all the gifts needed for equal and active participation in it; the evidence was their ability to integrate into the modern European world.<sup>57</sup>

In 1858 Abraham Geiger, who was one of the leaders of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and of the Reform movement in Germany, responded to a Jew who wrote that he intended to leave the religion:

Let me tell you—and do not accuse me of arrogance—that the Jews are proving an ability to develop that is likely to earn them much favor . . . Less than a century has passed since their situation became considerably more comfortable, and today an entirely different generation has quickly sprung up! Improving in every sense, enormously energetic in all their aspirations, spiritually alert and making great achievements in all spheres despite the fact that quite

a few professions are closed to them. This is not a decadent population; on the contrary, it is brimming with lofty talents . . .<sup>58</sup>

A more impressive calling card presented the Jews as the begetters and instigators of modernism. Heine wrote that the Jews were the fathers of the *moderne Prinzip* (the modern principle) that was taking form in Europe.<sup>59</sup> Europe, wrote Graetz, had in the past been saved from the “Pagan filth” thanks to “our exalted prophets and poets, who injected a fresh spiritual wind into European history.” During the Renaissance, Europe was rescued from the influence of the paganism of the classical world thanks to the revival of the *Hebraica veritas* (Hebrew truth) which was brought about by the Reformation.<sup>60</sup> According to Graetz, modern Europe could be saved from the ills of modernism only through the influence and inspiration of Jewish values. Only these could “prevent the chaos threatening the nations of Europe . . . If Judaism disappeared, then with it would disappear the moral demands it comprehends, upon which depend the continued existence of society and civilization.” Graetz wished Edith, the “English Lady,” to take cheer in what “the Jews have achieved in less than one century. They perform well in all branches of science and literature and in some they are the leaders.” The “marvelous Jewish existence” which Graetz so admired included, among others, “the Rothschilds, who decide matters of war and peace”; the “sons of Jacob who dominate the European money market”; and the Jews who participated actively “in all branches of science and literature” and shaped public opinion as writers of front-page articles, political reports, and *feuilletons*.<sup>61</sup>

In a June 1895 letter to Baron Hirsch, Herzl too described the talents of the Jews who would join the Zionist movement, noting that these included “all the engineers, architects, chemists, physicians, technicians and lawyers who have emerged from the ghetto during the last thirty years.”<sup>62</sup> Dubnow, the ideologue of national cultural autonomy in Eastern Europe, wrote that Jews were not strangers in Europe: “History proves that the Jews are old inhabitants of Europe, that they established themselves in Europe even before the growth of European civilization and the spread of Christianity . . . The Jews are inhabitants of Europe since ancient times and their territorial rights are based not on property titles but on colonization and cultural influence.”<sup>63</sup> By “cultural influence,” Dubnow referred not only to past contributions—that is, to the fact that Jews brought the Old Testament to Western culture, and through it monotheism and the moral teachings of the prophets—but also to their contemporary



contributions. In the nineteenth century, Jews contributed to Europe in all fields of excellence: economics, art, and science. Jews' entry into the modern world, wrote Arthur Ruppin, as well as their integration in and contributions to it, stemmed from modern man's characteristic traits: "sharpness, diligence, ease of movement and ease of understanding, the rule of mind over desire, and constant vigilance of thought."<sup>64</sup>

In other words, according to this perception, modern Jews were European because their creative activity was an inseparable part of the whole of European cultural creation, and because this activity was part of the forces sculpting the spirit of Europe. Probably by the end of the twentieth century, a unified Europe would be described as an embodiment of the Jewish essence, and some have already claimed that everything in Europe—both good and bad—stems from a Jewish source.<sup>65</sup> In reality, this was not a matter of a collective, organized effort on the part of the Jews; however, the fact that even the research literature that avoids the concept of contribution devotes chapters to the detailed description of the Jews' part in German and other European cultures demonstrates the wish to consider these achievements as belonging to a distinct group, as well as to emphasize its relatively large role in various realms of activity and creativity.

Alongside the declarations that the Jewish spirit had given birth to modernism, leading humanity to the pinnacle of achievement—and that the Jewish spirit alone could rescue Western culture from moral corruption and degeneration—warning cries were heard, and not only from the Orthodox camp. Germany's Jews were urged to abstain from the evils of modernism, which were apt to corrupt them as well. Modern European culture, which exerted a magical, exuberant, and sometimes irresistible pull on Jews—they were enchanted by what they saw, or imagined they saw—was nothing but the "temptation of sirens of the formal beauty of Hellenism, which many choose in these times." European education in the spirit of classical Greece and Hellenism brought about "the spirit of detached individualism, love for artificial pleasures, meaningless minutiae, luxuries, subservience to women, a tendency toward various frivolous pastimes, and all that we generally associate with gentile behavior. All of these traits, which are the substance of European civilization, corrupt body and soul."<sup>66</sup> A solution to the tension between the desire to adopt certain European cultural values and the desire to reject others was sometimes found in the claim that the cultural values which could and should be adopted were those perceived as universally relevant and valuable—part of European culture. These values,

which personified the universal spirit, knew no national, ethnic, or religious boundaries; as a result, the distinction that modern Jews should make was between “positive acculturation” and “negative acculturation”—or, in other words, between “positive knowledge” and “counterfeit knowledge.”<sup>67</sup> According to this view, a sort of controlled or selective acculturation could be possible, its boundaries determined by Jews.

In an 1886 *feuilleton* titled “A Vial of Perfume,” Y. L. Gordon described a young Jew torn between the “wise and tasteful halls” of European culture and Judaism, which he saw as “the fields of Israel, mired in mud!” The wavering youth wrote to Gordon: “I am young and have been a supporter of the *Haskalah*. The source of my education has been European literature and culture . . . In short, I am a slave to the jewels of Japheth, and he has struck me with fever.” However, he added, the riots against Russia’s Jews brought him to a crossroads, and he knew not which path to choose: “whether the path called European culture or the path called nationalism!” This was Gordon’s response:

Our ancient fathers too carried Japheth’s jewels into Shem’s tent and drank their fill of the wisdom of their time, each man in his own way. And even if they are correct who say that the learning of the sons of Japheth is “flowers without fruit,” they forget that while there are flowers without fruit there are no fruit without flowers; therefore, what will prevent us from constructing this wreath from the grapevines of Israel so that we may have both fruit and flowers and so that our tree of life may be both good to eat and pleasing to the eye? The *Haskalah* is not a concept that stands alone; it is not wisdom or learning which is already known. Enlightenment is treading the paths of reason and knowing to think things through, and this is necessary and a requisite for every man, whoever he may be, wherever he may be, whatever station he may possess. Enlightenment is fresh air to the soul . . . And who tells you that the fields of Israel must be mired in mud? If you are one of those who truly possesses culture, and if the light of Enlightenment shines upon you, then by that light you will walk, and when you return to narrow lodgings you will know to keep them clean of mire and refuse . . . Culture, which is Enlightenment, is useful and necessary for every Jew, including the most nationalist of nationalists.<sup>68</sup>

According to Gordon, therefore, only one culture existed—that of Europe—and he distinguished between true and counterfeit European cul-

ture. Viewpoints that were considered alien to the spirit of Judaism were described as counterfeit culture, as were phenomena that were perceived as negative and leading to heresy and licentiousness. In his 1899 short story “In Exchange for Shoes,” Gordon painted a portrait of the heresy that resulted when the negative values of European culture dominated Jewish society:

It is true that lately the generations have degenerated . . . now the crowd will jostle like bulls at the feeding trough of the supposed Enlightenment and will learn the ways of the gentiles around them and take after the most corrupt of them. Now the sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob infest the theaters and circuses,<sup>69</sup> they are teeming like locusts . . . Group by group they will stroll in the gardens and orchards to see the gentile girls who dance in the vineyards, look in a pitcher and in what lies inside it, and listen to the voices of the singing women and court the daughters of gentiles; group by group, they will gather at dances in clubhouses full of the frolics of men and women, in which men and women are all intermingled, and play at cards and dice, and hurry from there to the dance halls where men wear women’s clothing and women wear the clothes of men and disguise themselves with powders and masks until they can no longer tell the accursed Haman from the accursed Zeresh [tell the difference between men and women]. Alas for the generation whom this befell! Because from that day honor was exiled from the synagogues and *batei-midrash* [halls of study]. In the synagogue courtyards weeds will grow from the lack of traffic, and between the walls of the *batei-midrash* echoes will sound and coo like doves: alas for the sons exiled from their fathers’ tables.<sup>70</sup>

Mendele Mokher Seforim also believed that “low culture” would lead to evil—yeshiva students would abandon their faith and play at dice and cards<sup>71</sup>—while Moshe Leib Lilienblum distinguished between *Haskalah*—“reason, questing for truth, pure virtue, and love for the natural sciences”—and culture—“Greco-Roman civilization, its taste and beauty and external delicacy.” But he also found many positive ideas in European civilization whose adoption would bring about desired change in Jewish society: “All Jews [should] know how to recognize the value of life in this world, citizenship and civilization, and they should strive to end the chain that binds us to the days of darkness, with the Talmudic spirit and all the Asiatic wildness.”<sup>72</sup> At the same time, Lilienblum maintained that

“our faith will not be repaired in Europe, nor have we any life there”;<sup>73</sup> the return to a full and authentic life could be achieved only in Palestine. Leaving Europe would allow Jews to distinguish between the good and bad foundations of Western culture and hold on only to what was necessary, good, and of the highest quality.

### HOMELAND AND NATIONAL CULTURE

German Jews, perhaps more than any other Jewish group in Europe, made intellectual and emotional efforts to define their relationship to their country, homeland, and national culture; they also reformulated their Jewish consciousness (*jüdisches Selbstverständnis*). Even Heine—whose warning about what Jews could expect from “the scent of Germany of the future” (i.e., from German nationalism) we will discuss later—wrote in 1838 that Jews and Germans had been natural allies since the beginning of their histories, and that the ancient land of Israel had been a sort of “oriental Germany,” just as nineteenth-century Germany was the fertile ground of prophecy and “the stronghold of pure spirituality” deriving from the Bible. Thus, Heine maintained, there was a profound kinship between the two peoples: both were moral people.<sup>74</sup> In Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus*, on the other hand, Saul Fitelberg, a Jewish music impresario born in Lublin—“provincial Poland”—who achieves greatness in Germany, says:

To be German, that means above all to be national—and who expects a Jew to be nationalistic? Not only would nobody believe him, but everybody would bash his head in for having the impudence to try it on. We Jews have everything to fear from the German character, *qui est essentiellement antisémitique* [which is essentially antisemitic]; and that is reason enough, of course, for us to strive for the worldly side and arrange sensational entertainments.<sup>75</sup>

Gabriel Riesser, a resolute fighter for Jewish rights and the editor of *Der Jude* from 1832 to 1835, denounced those who proposed to deny Jews rights because of their different nationality: “The thunderous sounds of the German language, the works of the German poets, are what sparked and fed the sacred flames of liberty . . . We want to belong to the German fatherland; we *will* belong to it wherever we may be; it is possible and even likely to demand of us whatever one is entitled to demand of its citizens.”<sup>76</sup> Germany’s Jews hoped not only for a harmonious coexistence of the fraternal

nations—the Jewish minority and the German majority—in which both peoples would live at peace with each other, but they also expected full entry as German Jews into German-educated, bourgeois society. Liberal Jews even found some similarity between Judaism and liberal Germany: both were imbued with patriotism, moderated by cosmopolitan humanism. In 1879, Moritz Lazarus issued an enthusiastic declaration of total belonging to Germany: “The Germans: these—we are—they are what we wish to be—we cannot be otherwise. The language itself makes us German. The land in which we live; the state which we serve; the law to which we are loyal; the science scholarship from which we learn; the education which lights our way; the art which uplifts us—all of these are German. Our mother tongue and fatherland, both German, together form our inner core.”<sup>77</sup> In his 1915 essay *Deutschtum und Judentum*, the philosopher Hermann Cohen described Germany as the soul’s homeland, not only with respect to German Jews but for all Jews everywhere.<sup>78</sup> Cohen, in fact, believed that modern Judaism was similar to Protestantism, and he faced severe criticism as a result. Jakob Klatzkin claimed that there was no common background between Germanness and Jewishness, because Germanness had never escaped its pagan, Teutonic background; this was a matter of “two expressions of two rich cultures opposed to each other from beginning to end.”<sup>79</sup> Franz Rosenzweig’s response, which he wrote as a young soldier in the German army, was entirely different:

To be German means to feel responsibility for the German people as a whole; harmonize not only with Goethe and Schiller and Kant but also with the others, and especially with the inferior and average, with the assessor, the little public servant, the fat-headed peasant, the stiff *Oberlehrer* [senior teacher] . . . Cohen confused what he finds as a European in *Deutschtum* with what the German finds in it . . . In Cohen there is only *Europäertum*; he lacks genuine *Deutschtum*.<sup>80</sup>

According to Rosenzweig, then, true Germanness was not necessarily the Germanness of liberal thinkers and humanists (whose primary model was Friedrich Schiller), but the “deep-seated,” “empirical” Germanness that Buber described as “a true, natural bond with the earth and culture of the nation.”<sup>81</sup> From this perspective, the German language was seen not only as useful and necessary for civilian integration, but also—in the spirit of the times—as a clear expression of the inner soul of the German Jew. Thus Abraham Geiger wrote that the very fact that Germany’s Jews had become entirely German in sentiment and being found its true expression

in the German language, through which these Jews plumbed the depths of their souls and rose to the greatest heights; language was a matter not of appearance but of essence.<sup>82</sup> German Jews were described as “rooted in [their] old homeland even in difficult times.”<sup>83</sup> The identification with Germany and its perception as the refuge of European humanism was expressed in Rabbi Leo Baeck’s declaration in August 1914 that the war would determine Europe’s morality and culture, and that Europe’s fate rested in Germany’s hands.<sup>84</sup>

Liberal Jews were not alone in this sentiment; it was also the position of neo-Orthodoxy. The neo-Orthodox German Jews did not lag behind in declarations of loyalty to the homeland. *Der Israelit* declared in 1870 that “we are the German Jews; we are Germans, and nothing more,” and in 1881 that “we are Germans, both by birth and in mentality” and that the German *Bund* (the German union), was the new homeland, replacing the old. In effect, the neo-Orthodox Jews in Germany who followed the teachings of S. R. Hirsch were consumers of German (and European) culture, but their integration into German society and their involvement in German culture were very limited.<sup>85</sup>

The yearning for the complete removal of obstacles to this *Zweiheit* (double identity) and for complete integration from a position of equality—for the creation of an internally consistent integration, which became known as *Deutschjudentum* (German Jewishness)—led to a rift among German Jews and many personal crises. Those who accepted the perception that personality, whether individual or collective, was an organic and authentic entity could not fail to be aware of this rift and, as a result, to search for ways to blend in with the new authentic entity. The question at hand was thus whether that entity would be found outside of Judaism, within Judaism, or in the integration of the two worlds. Could Jews manage to free themselves from their essence and become integrated into a different, opposing essence? In 1862, Moses Hess wrote: “even in the West, a place to which Jews are bound by a thousand cultural threads and with which they are in direct contact, the *Haskalah* was unable to diminish the existence of Judaism and its traditions.”<sup>86</sup>

Most of the members of the Jewish elite were conscious of this tragic trap of split identity. Modern Jews wished with all their might to belong to their environment, but they were rejected by it. This awareness created a crisis of identity and belonging and forced them to search for new ways to escape from the trap, to rehabilitate their identity, and to belong to a separate, unique framework of their own.

Many modern Jews' private crises stemmed not from the realization of how strong their ties were to the old Jewish world, but from the revelation that the path to true Germanness was blocked. It was obstructed not only by Jews' inability to shed their Jewish organic essence, but because non-Jewish society did not permit them to shed it. This was the sharp and painful conclusion reached, for example, by Leo Wolf, a student of philosophy and the protagonist of the 1892 novel *Werther, der Jude* (Werther, the Jew) by the forgotten German Jewish author Ludwig Jacobowski (1868–1900).<sup>87</sup> Wolf wishes to erase all traces of his Jewish identity, “to think and feel in a German way.” However, this proves impossible—not because of the thousand threads that bind him to tradition, but because the German environment constantly reminds him that he is “an offshoot of an alien branch” and therefore not able to be “a native-born German” in the Germany he loved so well. As a result of this revelation, he takes his own life. In his poem “Dank” (Thanks), Jakobowski, who committed suicide in December 1900 at the age of thirty-two, wrote:

O Germany, what will you grant me,  
in return for my generous gifts?  
Ah, bestow upon me love—  
love alone have I desired.

Three thousand days have I toiled,  
twenty long hours each day;  
If my pay has been in searing wounds—  
these were the wounds of victory!

O Germany, O terrible land,  
what will you grant your servants?

Only a handful of sand for the living  
and sand for the grave as well!<sup>88</sup>

In the same spirit, but in an entirely different historical context, the poet Karl Wolfskehl, who had escaped from Nazi Germany, wrote in 1933:

A German province gave me life,  
It was German bread that nurtured me,  
Grapes plucked from the German Rhine  
A thousand years fermented in my blood.<sup>89</sup>

Jacobowski was one of the many German-Jewish intellectuals and literary figures who earned the title “Germany’s stepchildren.”<sup>90</sup> Not only

were some of them able to continue to believe in the possibility of Jewish-German duality, but they even wished to be rid of the burden of the Jewish part of this dual identity, maintaining that it was impossible to create compatibility between Judaism (Semitism) and Germanness (Aryanness). Other Jews professed an unrestricted spiritual attachment to Germany, both the nation and its culture, and cultivated a hatred of their Jewish identity.<sup>91</sup> “My ancestors and I,” the politician Walter Rathenau proudly declared, “were raised on German soil and in the German spirit and we have given the German people all that was in our power to give.” Consequently, from his perspective, Jews were as much a Germanic tribe as the Saxons and Bavarians were.<sup>92</sup> Franz Oppenheimer classified the Jews of Western Europe as a tribe (*Stamm*) and the Jews of Eastern Europe as a people (*Volk*). In his opinion, the German Jews were not a part of Jewish culture but rather belonged to German culture. If he were to examine his own sensibilities, he wrote, he would find “ninety-nine percent Kant and Goethe and only one percent Old Testament.”<sup>93</sup> The Jews of Russia and Poland belonged to the Jewish culture, which was a lesser culture—that of the ghetto and the Middle Ages—while Germany’s Jews were “patriots of our landscapes, our homeland, our people, and our culture. We are not [in Germany] as ‘guests.’”<sup>94</sup> Oppenheimer’s article sparked profound controversy. Among other responses was the claim that, contrary to the views of the *Völkerpsychologie* school, that culture was not an acquired quality but rather an inherited identity, and as a result, German Jews belonged to the Jewish culture and were more closely related to East European Jews than to Germans. National identity was an organic trait, not a form of association. Other Jews claimed that Jews were an inseparable part of German civilization, but this was a way of life and not a quality; therefore, Jews could be partners and part of the family in the various civilizations among which they lived.<sup>95</sup> The debate also included the opinion that German Jews were able to distinguish between civilian duty, patriotism, and national sentiment, and nations demanded only the first form of attachment; furthermore, the German Jews may have drunk from the fount of German culture, but they were still part of the overall culture of humanity.<sup>96</sup>

However, during a period of nationalistic awakening and rising patriotism, it was sometimes difficult to distinguish between the German tradition of humanism and the awareness of belonging to Germany’s national culture and national destiny—in other words, to distinguish between *Kultur* and *Volkskultur*. Such a distinction was also difficult because



of the new separation between religious and national cultural identity. This gave rise to an entirely novel dilemma: religious conversion was effected by a symbolic act and was received not only as betrayal, but also as a pathological manifestation of a futile attempt to deny one's self<sup>97</sup> because it was a conversion to a different human essence—an exchange of one soul for another that was entirely different. In contrast, cultural integration and assimilation were multidimensional processes and were thus considered less binding than religious conversion. In theory, therefore, integration into the culture of *Bildungsbürgertum* (educated bourgeoisie) as it was manifested in thought, literature, music, arts, and education did not present an insurmountable obstacle.<sup>98</sup> However, if national culture was a unified and all-encompassing system of perceptions, concepts, values, and lifestyles—in effect, a system more demanding than religion because it was manifested not in supranational values but rather in values stemming from the unique spirit of the nation (or, as Hegel called it, “ein besonderer Volksgeist”<sup>99</sup>)—the question arose as to whether Jews could integrate into that system, live in it, and build on its foundations. If culture, rather than religion, formed the foundation and focus of identity and uniqueness—the creation of the specific spirit (*Geist*) of a people (*Volk*) or even of a race—then surely foreigners, such as Semitic Jews, would never be able to change and become part of this different culture. And if modern European culture was indeed permeated by the Christian and the pagan Greco-Roman heritages, then it was clear that the boundaries between Judaism and secular European culture were insurmountable. Jewishness was an unalterable fact, not because Jews could not become Christians or because their Christianity would always be counterfeit, but because no Oriental could become a German.

German Jewish literature abounded with biographies, both real and invented, which involved this dilemma and recounted tales of self-denial and uprooting on the one hand, and of tragic awakening from the delusion of complete integration and assimilation on the other hand.<sup>100</sup> It is important to note that patriotic sentiment and identity with German culture were shared not only by assimilated, or liberal, Jews, but also by Orthodox Jews and Zionists. Most Jews in Germany saw themselves as German citizens and patriots and believed that they were an inseparable part of German culture. At least part of the quest to integrate and merge with a vague concept like “the German spirit,” with the goal of erasing their duality, arose from Jews' desire to find an alternative to the limited social integration that Nathan Birnbaum hyperbolically described:

“First and foremost, the mutual distance between the Jews and others is reflected in the paucity of reciprocal connections. The full separation between Jews and non-Jews stands out in social clubs, public houses, and cafés . . . Even more significant is the rarity with which social relationships between Jews and non-Jews develop from their business relationships.”<sup>101</sup> Birnbaum painted an extreme picture, and it is necessary to distinguish between personal ties in the private sphere (such as a gentile’s visit to a Jewish home) and professional and social ties in the public sphere (schools, workplaces, etc.) on the other. German society was not closed off to Jews; it was, in fact, very open to them.<sup>102</sup> In any case, acculturation is not necessarily linked to social integration, and a minority may adopt values from its immediate environment without becoming assimilated to or integrated into it.

Six years after the illusion of Jewish-German symbiosis was shattered in 1933, Martin Buber wrote that there was indeed an organic bond between Jews and Germany. This was a true symbiosis that was expressed not only in Jews’ participation in German culture, but also in “a special cooperation between the German spirit and the Jewish spirit.” However, despite the tragic end to this symbiosis, Buber wrote that German Jews brought with them to Palestine, “in their Jewish bones[,] something of the noble spiritual foundation which their persecutors deny and strangle in their own people.”<sup>103</sup> Though he saw the symbiosis as a “phantom in a void” and addiction to self-delusion, Gershom Scholem also refrained from criticizing the ensemble of values and cultural assets that Jews received from Germany.<sup>104</sup> Buber and Scholem evaluated the processes of assimilation and acculturation among German Jews on an idealistic scale, or according to the high bar of expectations set by some German Jews. However, it is impossible to evaluate the success of acculturation processes by such measures.

The reality in Eastern Europe was entirely different from the reality in Germany. Even ardent Jewish believers in Russification, for example, understood that they could not identify with organic Russian nationalism and that, from their perspective, being Russian in heart and soul merely meant using the Russian language as the language of culture. In effect, it was possible to integrate only into the middle class and liberal intelligentsia—or, in other words, into the Russian version of Western culture. A Jewish *maskil* in Odessa wrote in 1841 that “throughout Russia, Odessa is the only place where Jews try to be perfect Europeans.”<sup>105</sup> Russification in the sense of social and cultural integration into the Russian middle

class and intelligentsia was at first the concern of a small percentage of the Jews in czarist Russia and depended on place of residence—within the Pale of Settlement or in Russia proper.<sup>106</sup> The groups that underwent the process of Russification did so by entering defined social groups such as student organizations or, later, revolutionary movements. In January 1882, the writer Lev Levanda wrote in the journal *Russkii Evrei* that Russian antisemitism was propelling the Jewish intelligentsia “into the kingdom of darkness.” However, if events changed, he would join the chorus that would be singing: “I am a Russian and love my land.”<sup>107</sup> Osip Rabinowich, on the other hand, wrote in *Razvet* in 1861 that Jews in other European countries had learned the local tongue; only in Russia did they “persist in speaking our corrupted jargon [i.e., Yiddish].” Yet it was necessary for them to learn Russian as a gateway to the Enlightenment: “The Russian language must serve as the primary force animating the masses . . . Our homeland is Russia—just as its air is ours, so its language must become ours.”<sup>108</sup> The weakness of Russian civil society made it difficult for the intelligentsia and the upper middle class to integrate into it, and in most cases, the integration was partial at best. Russification was expressed primarily in Russian language instruction, and afterward in active participation in various areas of secular Russian culture and the Western values that it absorbed and internalized.<sup>109</sup> In 1911, Alter Druyanov described Vilna as a “Yiddish-speaking” city—but only in streets where Jews lived. Outside those areas, one heard only “Russian, Russian, Russian.” In the public library, he found that half of the books were in Russian, and that the Hebrew newspaper had at most 400 readers. His conclusion was that half of the Jewish intelligentsia in the city “do not know how to read a Hebrew book or paper, and there are quite a few sons in the homes of the intelligentsia who do not even know how to pray from a *sidur*.” The Jewish intellectuals in Vilna, Druyanov wrote, made sure that lower-class children studied the Bible and Talmud, but sent their own sons to study medicine and law.<sup>110</sup>

In Russia, as in Germany, the extent and substance of Jews’ participation in the national culture were topics for debate. Did a list of distinguished Jews who wrote in Russian suffice to demonstrate Jews’ contribution to Russian culture—and, indeed, to the world and humanity? (It was on the basis of this contribution that the Russification of Russia’s Jewish intelligentsia was derogatorily called “cosmopolitical.”)<sup>111</sup> Zeev Jabotinsky proposed a criterion for evaluating the nature of this contribution: it was not the language in which literature was written that mattered, but the

identity of the audience at which the writing was directed, and the issues that it raised.<sup>112</sup> The clear expression of the modernity of Jewish society in the czarist empire was its politicization, which was manifested in the political struggle for civic and national emancipation and the cooperation among many of the empire's internal constituents in the struggle to change the face of Russian society and the czarist regime.<sup>113</sup>

In Poland, the situation was different. Heine's image of the authentic Polish Jew, whose character was not heterogeneous, was no longer accurate after the middle of the nineteenth century. As the journalist Eliezer Eliyahu Friedman wrote in 1926:

A notable phenomenon in the life of Polish Jews is the adaptation to Polish rule and culture . . . Were it not for the unconcealed anti-semitism in Polish society, which does not permit Jews to approach it and thus relegates Jews to a separate existence, this process of "Polonization" would be very rapid . . . Even so the Jews are the Polonizers of the frontier, and not in Galicia alone. I'll give an example. The Third of May is a Polish national holiday. Radical Polish circles do not celebrate it, nevertheless one can find Jewish students in many villages participating in the parades, as well as the village firemen, who are mostly Jewish and participate in these parades and sing the national songs in a non-Polish environment.<sup>114</sup>

This description is quite exaggerated.<sup>115</sup> In Poland, the processes of modernization and westernization did not lead to assimilation outside of a narrow stratum, which displayed a deep attachment to the Polish homeland and the Polish state—that is, an identification with the land, its people, its culture, and its landscape—an identification that caused great distress among Jews when Poland, during the 1920s and 1930s, became a "step-motherland." In David Cohen's journal of his travels in mid-1930s Poland, he describes his renewed encounter with the "landscape of my homeland," which was accompanied by "the profound pain of a child who returns home only to be greeted by his step-mother." Cohen relates his visit to Wołyń, where a Jewish resident tells him:

We were bound by birth to this land. What have the *goyim* [gentiles] not done to us? They have destroyed, robbed, massacred, and abused us. But we resembled a tree with many branches: they came with saws and axes and felled the trunk, but the roots remained, and we grew again, and bloomed again, and it was hard to uproot us. But now these Poles are uprooting the tree.<sup>116</sup>

Thus Poland was not just a place to do business, but also a place to live. It was a natural place for Jews to live as an inseparable part of the landscape, and a place where they became indispensable over the course of centuries, even if a great many of them were not partners in Polish culture and did not feel they belonged to it.

However, wrote Jabotinsky, assimilated Jews were the true outsiders in Poland; in contrast, traditional Jews, despite their demonstrated segregation from their environment, were an intimate part of “that intimate group called Poland,” where “the tradition of neighborliness [lay] deep in the blood and bones” of its people.<sup>117</sup>

### THE UNIVERSAL EUROPEAN BACKGROUND OF JEWISH MODERNITY

The emphasis on affinity and belonging to a particular European culture blurred the all-European nature of Jews’ acculturation and modernization in Europe. These latter concepts became the subject of various analyses in the general academic literature, including, of course, in the context of Jewish studies.<sup>118</sup> By acculturation, we mean the adoption and absorption of cultural—and, in this case, modern—values and norms from the surrounding environment. Since Jews’ acculturation was targeted at the modern strata of society and culture, there was a nearly complete identity between it and modernism. It is possible to distinguish between modernism—as a manifestation of the adoption of elements from the realm of the reality culture, which are neutral in a value-normative sense—and acculturation—as a manifestation of the adoption of elements from the realm of value culture. Indeed, modernism can in many cases be a neutral phenomenon that does not require changes in the normative system.<sup>119</sup>

Theoretically, European Jews could adopt various elements from the repertoire of modernism without influencing their own self-definition or the normative system according to which they lived. However, the process of acculturation for a subsociety or minority culture living within a modern majority society was also necessarily accompanied by the adoption of cultural values and the loss of some traditional values and norms.<sup>120</sup> Modern Jews could not avoid adopting at least a part of the majority’s habitus—whether in order to better to resemble it and facilitate their integration and assimilation, or in order to rebuild the normative system of Jewish society itself.

There is not necessarily any essential antinomy between Jewish tradi-

tion and modernism. However, changes in patterns of social organization, the nature of occupations and livelihoods, dress, possibilities for social mobility, and the like are generally accompanied by changes in the system of values and norms. Fluency in a local language, for example, can simply serve utilitarian or pragmatic purposes, but it also grants access to the culture of the surrounding environment and throws open the doors to external influence. As a result, in many cases it is very difficult, at least in the context of European Jews, to distinguish between modernization and acculturation, and in effect these are two similar phenomena whose difference is solely a question of extent. Since modernism was a European creation and was identified with Europe, accepting and absorbing the values of modernism meant also accepting at least some of the values of European culture. Moreover, the fact that European society had undergone a process of secularization, which resulted in the conduct of life becoming less and less dependent on religious norms,<sup>121</sup> tightly bound the processes of acculturation and modernization among European Jews to the secularization of Jewish society. All the attempts to mark the desired boundaries of intercultural contact, and to define what was permitted and denied in all that related to the adoption of external values, could not absolutely and permanently determine the actual boundaries.

The way in which Jews dealt with this issue was to distinguish not only between the positive and negative aspects of European culture, and between culture and civilization, but also between *Kultur* in the nationalistic sense and *Kultur* in its overall European, humanistic, and even universal meaning—where these universal traits were manifested in the moral and humanistic understanding and in the values of *Bildung*, *Sittlichkeit* (morality), self-actualization, rationalism, freedom of thought, and humanism,<sup>122</sup> as well as rules of behavior and etiquette. These were all the values of liberal, bourgeois, civil society.<sup>123</sup> Rabbi Isaac Breuer, one of the leaders of German neo-Orthodoxy, insisted that this was a matter of new values that were not part of the old normative Jewish system. Breuer wrote that modern European culture had confronted traditional Judaism with a bitter foe: namely, individualism. Individuality in Jewish life—that is, individual self-awareness—was a European phenomenon that created a new Jewish prototype—the “solitary Jew,” in the words of Eliezer Schweid,<sup>124</sup> who was not part of any organized community. Breuer wrote:

We are accustomed to evaluate all the phenomena of life according to our traditional individualistic instinct. However, the moral in-

instinct of most German Jews is not at all different from the modern moral instinct of Western Europe in general. It will be no surprise, therefore, if the support of most German Jews will in fact be given to the German judge who overrules the Jewish Law, rather than to Jewish Law itself.<sup>125</sup>

Breuer pointed to the fact that acculturation did not mean only the adoption of external characteristics such as language, dress, or customs, but also the abandonment of traditional values in exchange for new ones. Modern Jews therefore transformed themselves into European Jews not only because they spoke European languages, appeared in European dress, and adopted the norms that delineated European private life (the age at marriage, family size and relationships, leisure pursuits, and the like). Nor were they European Jews simply because they read European newspapers or literature, were educated in kindergartens and modern schools<sup>126</sup> (both European institutions), studied at the university, or attended exhibitions and concerts. The reason they were European Jews was because they had undergone the process of acquiring a new culture. This was far more than simply a matter of etiquette and custom; it was a matter of various models of a broad habitus that encompassed all the domains of everyday life.<sup>127</sup> In Eastern Europe, the sizable Jewish population acted as a roadblock to processes of acculturation accompanied by absorption, but at the same time, it encouraged political involvement based on modern ideologies and modes of action. East European Jews' politicization from the latter half of the nineteenth century onward, and their involvement in local politics, were an integral part of the modernization of Jewish existence there.

Modern Jews, therefore, were European Jews because they thought about and interpreted the world, Judaism, and themselves in European terms, and imbued traditional values with European content.<sup>128</sup> In April 1915, Shmuel Hugo Bergman, who became a well-known philosopher, wrote his teacher Martin Buber from the front:

Now that we have fought in the name of German culture, we sense more than ever how significant it is for us and how entirely it envelops us. I cannot imagine that our generation's ties to Biblical Judaism, Hasidic Judaism, etc., which were formed after all in an artificial manner, will ever be as natural as its ties to Fichte or to those European cultural figures who have shown us the way to the human experience. Only because we had Fichte and found ideas parallel to his in Jewish culture did we study our religion. There we were

educated; here we discovered revelations. But if so, only as Germans will we be able to enter Jewish cultural life.<sup>129</sup>

According to Bergman, the modern Jewish existence was Germanness in Jewish clothing, or Jewishness in German clothing; but it seems more accurate to call it Jewishness in European clothing, or Europeanness in Jewish clothing. This is also true with respect to Jews who adopted the views, concepts, and behavioral codes of the European counterculture—the revolutionary intelligentsia and the labor class’s culture of sociopolitical radicalism. The Jews’ involvement in the revolutionary movement clearly expressed the belief that Jews needed to take an active part in fundamentally changing the European world, and it expressed confidence that change for the good was possible. Not only the Enlightenment but European Romanticism and nationalism shaped the spiritual and intellectual world of the modern Jew.<sup>130</sup> Thus Europe was a store of values, ideas, and institutions from which one could borrow, among other things, Romantic nationalism and revolutionary radicalism; the model of a centralized state; and concepts of civil society, collectivism, individualism, and secularism.<sup>131</sup>

In recent years, there has been a trend in the research literature toward emphasizing the tension between maintaining Jewish uniqueness and integrating into the surrounding society, and emphasizing the impact of the Jews’ confrontation with their environment. The emphasis is not solely on processes of adaptation, adjustment, integration, or even assimilation, but on the processes of reconstructing Jewish society and its identity in response to and as part of this encounter.<sup>132</sup>

The construction of a new ethnocultural identity is perceived as a way in which a group forms a new foundation for reciprocal relations between itself and other groups, rather than as a form of assimilation and loss of its unique identity.<sup>133</sup> A clear expression of this is the transformation of the concepts “tradition” and “culture” into the chief delineators of Jewish culture and its contents. The research on this subject has for the most part accepted Nietzsche’s claim in *The Dawn of Day* that the Jews were characterized by values and a way of life that distinguished them from their surroundings: family values, flexibility, spiritual intelligence, and more.<sup>134</sup> This was the source of the observation that inherent Jewish traits and ingrained cultural traditions were what prevented a large number of Jews from integrating fully into European cultures, and that as a result, the main consequence of the acculturation process was the



reconstruction of the unique Jewish identity, its contents, and its institutions. According to this view, the acculturation and modernization of a minority do not equate to its full integration into the host society. Nor is acculturation an act of imitation, but rather a process of selectively accepting and adopting borrowed cultural values; this process also involves internal changes in the acculturating society and its value system. If so, in the Jewish case—as in others—the processes of modernization did not lead to the loss of the Jews' unique identity; on the contrary, they forged new paths toward national and cultural renewal and revival.

However, the great emphasis placed on describing the preservation of traditional Jewish foundations in the modern Jewish culture, and on the vital necessity of these foundations, demonstrates the awareness of an essential difference between traditional and modern society. The correct means by which to evaluate the results of the acculturation, modernization, and cultural change that Jews underwent is to examine the scope of the new repertoire of insights, worldviews, and social and cultural norms that modern Jews accepted and internalized, which had not been part of their culture or way of life in previous generations. Such an examination cannot focus only on specific figures (generally intellectuals, writers, and the like<sup>135</sup>); it must include the entire Jewish population in all its layers. Such an examination would reveal that even when it was careful to preserve some of the components of the traditional Jewish identity, and even when it created new Jewish values, a large part of the modern Jewish world that was forged in the nineteenth century was in fact a European world in Jewish dress, or a Jewish world in European dress. While this world had a different character in the framework of Europe's various national cultures, an important part of it reflected a universal European background. Highlighting the contrasts created through the influence of national cultures and their presentation as oppositions blurs this shared European background. In one way or another, Jews in Europe were not only German Jews or Polish Jews, but European Jews as well. The system of values that they adopted was taken from the general store of European culture, and over time it became self-evident, to the extent that its particularistic origin became largely inconsequential.