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# A tale of trees and crooked timbers: Jacob Talmon and Isaiah Berlin on the question of Jewish Nationalism

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## Abstract

This essay seeks to examine the history of the intellectual comradeship between J.L. Talmon and the philosopher, political thinker, and historian of ideas, Isaiah Berlin (1909–1997). The scholarly dialog between the two began in 1947, continued until Talmon's death in 1980, and is well documented in their private correspondence. I argue that there were two levels to this dialog: First, both Berlin and Talmon took part in the Totalitarianism discourse, which was colored by Popperian terminology, and thus I claim that their ideas should be examined as part of the Cold-War political discourse. The second level stemmed from their similar East-European origin, their mutual Jewish identity, and their attitude towards the Zionist movement.

At times the two levels of discourse conjoined commensurably, but in other cases the juxtaposition of the two created conceptual tensions. Examining Berlin and Talmon's thought from this dual perspective, I argue, can shed new light on the inner conflicts and conceptual tensions that each of them had to face. In particular, I claim that both thinkers tried to integrate their Anglophile liberal heritage with their support of National movements in general, and the Jewish National movement in particular. Nevertheless, the different approaches of Talmon and Berlin present two concepts of liberal Nationalism: While Talmon assumed that Zionism solved the Jewish individual's dilemmas by making Jews members of a commune attached to soil; Berlin sought to preserve the individual in an inviolable sphere and thus was more ambivalent in his attitude towards the state of Israel. In conclusion, I offer to see Talmon as a classic Zionist liberal and Berlin as a supporter of what I call "Diaspora Zionism", an approach, which would later provide the grounds for Berlin's celebrated pluralism.

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"My attitude to the writing of history may be a residue of the atavistic or a childish fascination with the story, the tale, which has a beginning, a middle, and above all a denouement," wrote the Israeli historian of ideas Jacob L. Talmon (1916–1980) to his Old Oxonian friend, the Jewish-Russian philosopher Isaiah Berlin (1909–1997), in July 1979, a few months before his death.<sup>1</sup> Talmon's view of his craft may seem naïve and outdated when viewed from today's critical vantage point, after various post-modernist assaults on traditional

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<sup>1</sup>The Sir Isaiah Berlin Papers Archive, Bodleian Library, Oxford (henceforth *IBPA*) MS. Berlin 286, fol. 122: Jacob (Yaakov) Leib Talmon to Sir Isaiah Berlin, 1–7 July 1979.

historiography and the Linguistic Turn have forced historians to reassess their method. Talmon's sudden reflection on questions of methodology was due to the fact that at the time he was busy writing the outlines of his new historiographical project, tentatively titled *The History of the Jews in Modern Times*. With Berlin serving as mediator, Talmon had signed a contract with publisher George Widenfeld to write a book on Jewish history in the summer of 1966,<sup>2</sup> but only more than 10 years later, as he finished writing his famous trilogy which had begun with *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (1952),<sup>3</sup> did he find the time to start materializing the project, which he had postponed for so long.

Talmon was familiar with Berlin's historical essays and his writings on the philosophy of history. Nonetheless, rather than turning to Berlin for suggestions about new path-breaking historiographical methods or recommendations regarding contextualization, Talmon wanted to confess to Berlin that when it came to writing a volume on the history of modern Jewry, he had no idea how to narrate his story:

[H]ow am I to handle in the Jewish national renaissance and its main expression, which[,] besides modern anti-Semitism (that other and most horribly affective force) [,] emerged around 1880 and swept on Jewish history? To present it as a success story? As a sort of Babel story? As Sisyphus myth? As a beginning only? [...] [As] a *Sturm und Drang* German-Russian saga (in the age of H- bomb, missiles, electronics, etc.)? As another Crusader-story, as the Arab continue to believe? As the case of an eventual world catastrophe? As glorious fulfillment? As an unspeakable חורבן [*Hurban*, lit. destruction<sup>4</sup>] tragedy? As an inconceivable, eternal mess?<sup>5</sup>

For anyone familiar with Talmon's writing, this intimate letter may come as a surprise. The voice of Talmon we find in this letter is full of doubt and hesitancy, very unlike the bold and decisive voice, which characterized Talmon as a lecturer and as a writer. The deeply sentimental tone of the letter, in which Talmon examined his writing corpus in retrospect, as well as his dense and in parts, quite undecipherable, handwriting, expose the fact that the Israeli historian of ideas was in an agitated state of mind when writing to his friend. It was as if Talmon was conscious of the fact that he was writing his own epitaph.

What made Jacob Talmon so disturbed and disconcerted when moving from European to Jewish history, and why was it Isaiah Berlin, of all people, in whom he chose to confide his doubts and distress? Both leading Jewish liberal intellectuals, the friendship between Talmon and Berlin lasted over three decades and offers a fascinating example of mutual intellectual enrichment and companionship. Nevertheless, I will not attempt to tell the entire story of their association in this paper, or provide a systematic comparison of their thought. Instead, I will focus on key chapters in the story of their friendship and answer the above questions by showing that in both cases we find a similar connection—as well as tension—between their liberal and anti-totalitarian agenda and their treatment of nationalism in general and Zionism in particular.

Their dialog branched into two areas: a strong liberal and essentially anti-communist approach to politics and history provided the fundamental glue for their companionship, but their shared Jewish identity also provided the grounds for a continuing dialog about Zionism, Jewish identity and the nascent Jewish State. These two aspects of their dialog I argue, were not as separate or unrelated as they may appear at first glance and even evolved out of one another, laying the groundwork for the remarkably similar intellectual ways Talmon and Berlin responded to the ideological challenges of their day.

In answering the questions, I pose above I rely not only on the writings of Talmon and Berlin but also on the vast correspondence between the two.<sup>6</sup> The first part of this paper examines the common anti-totalitarian ground, which inspired their friendship and furthermore, provided an entry point into their

<sup>2</sup>*IBPA*, MS Berlin 286, fol. 54: Talmon to George Weidenfeld, 13 July 1966, see also *IBPA*, MS Berlin 286, fol. 19: Talmon to Berlin, 27 October 1957 & fol. 55: Berlin to Talmon, 7 September 1966.

<sup>3</sup>Jacob L. Talmon. *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*. (London: Secker & Warburg, 1952). Published in the US under the title *The Rise of Totalitarian Democracy*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1952). The two other volumes in the trilogy were titled *Political Messianism: The Romantic Phase*. (London: Secker & Warburg, 1952) and *The Myth of the Nation and the Vision of Revolution: The Origins of Ideological Polarisation in the Twentieth Century*. (London: Secker & Warburg, 1981).

<sup>4</sup>The word *Hurban*, which Talmon used here, has clear biblical and religious connotations, for traditionally the word implies the destruction of the Jewish Temples and the beginning of Exile.

<sup>5</sup>*IBPA* MS. Berlin 286, fol. 122: Talmon to Berlin, 1–7 July 1979.

<sup>6</sup>See corresponding details above. Talmon's private letters are still held in his family's private custody.

thinking about history and politics. I claim that their early writings should be examined as part of the Cold-War political discourse and point to several common themes and features that characterize their anti-totalitarianism.

The second part of this paper examines the branch of Berlin and Talmon's intellectual dialog that stemmed from their shared sympathy for Zionism. The two dimensions of their dialog, I argue, are inseparable, and in fact, their fervent anti-communism shaped much of their analyses of and attitudes towards, intra-Israeli politics during the 1950s. In addition, when reacting to the Stalinist anti-Semitic campaign of those years, both thinkers, and especially Talmon, developed what I call an anti-cosmopolitan liberalism. Anti-cosmopolitanism was not only a tool used to oppose the Left's internationalist utopias, but also provided Talmon and Berlin a departure point from Popperian Cold-War liberalism, which was also a variation of cosmopolitan universalism.

In the third part of the paper, I use Talmon's writings on Rosa Luxemburg and Berlin's writings on Marx and Moses Hess to exemplify how their anti-cosmopolitan approach was translated into their historical narratives. Associating self-denial and illusion with cosmopolitanism they made the self-assertion of Jewish identity the core of Zionism. However, as I show in part four, Talmon and Berlin differed in the way they resolved the conceptual tension between their liberal convictions and their support of Jewish nationalism. While Talmon was willing to make a noble exception for the sake of Zionism and envisioned one's relation to one's land and nation almost in organicist terms, Berlin remained more hesitant. It is here where the "tree"—Talmon—differed from the "crooked timber"—Berlin.

In the last part of the paper, I return to Talmon in the last years of his life, and show that his previous conviction—that one can be a liberal critic of Israeli policies without reaching anti-Zionist conclusions—was shaken from the late 1960s onwards. Overwhelmed by the fact that intellectuals were not only negating Israel's policies, but the Zionist idea as a whole, Talmon developed what I call a siege mentality, and he was no longer able to distinguish anti-Semitism from anti-Zionism. Eventually, it was precisely this personal and intellectual anxiety that made the task of writing a book on Jewish history impossible for him.

## I

Viewed from today's perspective, it is tempting to label Berlin and Talmon as anti-communist Cold War intellectuals. Not in all cases are these mere *ad hominem* attacks: Talmon had no problem admitting that he considered his magnum opus, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (1952), as his contribution to the Cold War effort. He believed that by coining the term "totalitarian democracy" he was providing the historical genealogy of the ideological clash of his day. In Talmon's reading Jacobin and Bolshevik oppression did not simply resemble each other, but were causally related to each other since the latter was a product of the former. By fostering civic celebrations and demanding social unanimity, Rousseau formulated the kind of ideological goal that both the French and later the Bolshevik revolutions could use to legitimate persecution, forced subjection, "re-education" and "terrorist dictatorship in the name of freedom".<sup>7</sup> In the eyes of Talmon's critics this narrative suggested nothing but an "imaginative prehistory of communist regimes", as John Dunn called it,<sup>8</sup> while other commentators, more sympathetic towards his project, regarded this as "sensitivity to the present that informs [Talmon's] account of the past".<sup>9</sup>

Isaiah Berlin also had no doubts in which of the two hemispheres the correct understanding of the words freedom and democracy were to be found. In his classic critique of Berlin's pluralism, Leo Strauss was probably the first to notice "Berlin's comprehensive formula is very helpful for a political purpose—for the

<sup>7</sup>Talmon. "The Wish to be Free. Society, Psyche and Value Change by Fred Weinstein & Gerald M. Platt [Review essay]." *History and Theory* 14:1 (February 1975) 121–137 at p. 122. Compare with Talmon's reading of Rousseau in his *Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, esp. pp. 46–48, 286, 390–391, 405. On Talmon's reading of Rousseau see my introduction to this issue as well as José Brunner, "From Rousseau to 'totalitarian democracy': The French Revolution in J.L. Talmon's historiography." *History and Memory* 3 (1991) 60–85.

<sup>8</sup>John Dunn. "Totalitarian Democracy and the Legacy of Modern Revolutions—Explanation or Indictment?" *Totalitarian Democracy and After: An International Colloquium in Memory of Jacob L. Talmon, 21–24 June 1982*. Ed. Yehoshua Arieli et al. (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1984) 40.

<sup>9</sup>James H. Billington. "Rival Revolutionary Ideals." *Totalitarian Democracy and After*. 56.

purpose of an anti-communist manifesto designed to rally all anti-communists”.<sup>10</sup> The vast and fast-growing literature on Berlin tends to neglect or overlook this aspect, probably due to the fear that presenting Berlin as an active participant in the Cold War’s intellectual front would blemish his reputation.<sup>11</sup> But not unlike Talmon, many of Berlin’s post-war publications bear witness to the fierce anti-communist attitude he developed, probably following his visit to the USSR in 1945. Already in 1949, for example, Berlin argued that “the root of both democracy and communism [are to be traced] in 18th-century rationalism” and, as a forerunner of Talmon, already claimed that “Rousseau formulates the basic proposition of Communism, Fascism and all other totalitarian orders”.<sup>12</sup> The Soviet Union was in his view “a vast prison”, characterized by “the suppression of original thought, fears, mutual suspicions and the haunting sense of political insecurity”,<sup>13</sup> and the so-called new Soviet man was nothing but “the result of so many years of Stalinist conditioning” governed by “bullying and half-cynical semi-Marxist philistines”.<sup>14</sup>

The anti-totalitarianism of the early post-war years was also the platform on which Talmon and Berlin’s friendship initially began to grow. In his obituary of Talmon, Berlin still remembered their first meeting in Oxford in 1947:

He [Talmon] wished to discuss movements in the eighteenth century Western thought, which, in his opinion, had not been correctly interpreted by most writers on the subject. I realised, before the end of the first hour, that I was listening to an original thinker, a very lively talker, with interesting ideas resting on a solid basis of erudition, that he was imaginative, warm-hearted, passionately anxious to convey his vision of the French thinkers of the Enlightenment and the political consequences of their ideas. I pressed him to stay for longer than he had intended, and he readily agreed. We spent the rest of the day discussing what afterwards became the central theme of his most famous book, [*The Rise of*] *Totalitarian Democracy*, and since my ideas were tending in the same direction, I found that talking with him was highly stimulating and intellectually delightful.<sup>15</sup>

This was the beginning of a long friendship and mutual intellectual influence, which lasted for more than three decades. Five years later, during the academic year of 1953–1954, Berlin and Talmon were given another opportunity to strengthen their friendship, this time on American soil, as Talmon was invited by Carl J. Friedrich to join him at Harvard for a year while Berlin was visiting the Russian Research Center at the same university, to which he was annexed.<sup>16</sup> Talmon wrote to Berlin in pride that Friedrich was not only using his book at his seminar, but also invited him to participate in a conference on totalitarianism he had organized with the support of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.<sup>17</sup> With George Kennan, Erik Erikson as well as a large group of exiled German-scholars who participated in Friedrich’s forum, Talmon was entering an elitist milieu and taking part in what he considered to be the most cutting-edge interdisciplinary laboratory on totalitarianism in the world.

<sup>10</sup>Leo Strauss. “Relativism”. *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*. Ed. T.L. Pangle. (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1989) 15–16. Originally published in Eds. Helmut Schoeck and James W. Wiggins. *Relativism and the Study of Man*. (Princeton, 1961) 135–157.

<sup>11</sup>See in particular Joshua Cherniss. ‘Isaiah Berlin: A Defence’. *Oxonian Review of Books* 5:2 (Spring 2006) 10–11. For the opposite views see Perry Anderson. “Components of the National Culture”. *Student Power*. Eds. Alexander Cockburn and Robin Blackburn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969) 214–286, esp. 239–242, 281 (Originally published at the *New Left Review* 50 (July–August 1968) 3–57) and Christopher Hitchens. ‘Moderation or Death’, *London Review of Books*, 26 November 1998, 3–11; Perry Anderson. “Goodbye to Berlin”. *Unacknowledged Legislation: Writers in the Public Sphere*. (London: Verso, 2000) 138–139. A balanced view can be found in Duncan Kelly. “The Political Thought of Isaiah Berlin”. *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*. 4:1 (April 2002) 25–48.

<sup>12</sup>Berlin. “Democracy, Communism and the Individual” (Summary of his talk at Mount Holyoke College, 1949) <<http://berlin.wolf.ox.ac.uk/lists/nachlass/demcomind.pdf>> in Ed. Henry Hardy. *The Isaiah Berlin Virtual Library* (accessed October 8, 2007).

<sup>13</sup>Berlin. ‘How do you do, Tovarich? (Review article)’. *Listener* 38 (1947) 543, 545.

<sup>14</sup>Berlin. “Soviet Russian Culture.” *The Soviet Mind: Russian Culture under Communism*. Ed. Henry Hardy. (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2004) 156, 165. Idem. “The Soviet Intelligentsia”. *Foreign Affairs* 36 (1957) 122–130. (The latter piece was originally published under the pseudonym “L.”)

<sup>15</sup>Isaiah Berlin. “A Tribute to my Friend”. *Forum* No. 38 (Summer 1980) 1.

<sup>16</sup>Michael Ignatieff. *Isaiah Berlin: A Life* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1998) Chapters 10–11, 13.

<sup>17</sup>*IBPA*, MS Berlin 286, fol. 2 verso. It remains unclear, however, whether Talmon eventually participated or presented a paper in the conference. See also Abbott Gleason. *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) Chapters 6–7.

Berlin of the early 1950s was moving ahead in a parallel way. The sudden and urgent need to train Sovietologists played into Berlin's hands, and the pre-war analytical philosopher quickly attained a reputation as an expert on Russian Affairs. By 1953 the Russian Research Center in which he was a fellow was already "the locus of fruitful collaboration between the [US] intelligence agencies and Harvard," to use Sigmund Diamond's description.<sup>18</sup> Many of his essays on Russian history were guided by Cold War concerns, aiming primarily to find "what went wrong", and to explain how noble ideals were transformed into a bloodthirsty Bolshevik revolution. Writing for American magazines such as *Foreign Affairs*, the journal of the Council on Foreign Relations, which in those years adopted Kennan's policy line, or the *Encounter*, the CIA-funded magazine, it would be hard to believe Berlin was not conscious of the fact that he was participating in a cultural Cold War.<sup>19</sup>

It was only in 1957, five years after Talmon had attained his worldwide fame, that Berlin would reach a similar status after giving his Inaugural Lecture as Chichele Professor of Social and Political Theory on negative and positive freedom.<sup>20</sup> While in Talmon's book a historical description of the abuse of the idea of freedom and democracy was provided, in Berlin's lecture, the central aim was to identify and describe *philosophically* the conceptual mutation of the term. It is difficult not to see the similarity between Berlin's division of freedom into positive and negative terms and Talmon's historical analysis: If citizens in liberal democracies understood liberty in negative terms, that is, as the absence of constraints on the individual ("freedom from"), in totalitarian regimes, liberty was defined in positive terms as the ability to pursue and achieve willed goals, self-rule, and self-realization ("freedom to"). The two distinctions—liberal versus totalitarian democracy and negative versus positive freedom—were designed not only to explain the past but also to describe the present.

In Berlin's view, the positive conception of freedom not only involved an erroneous conceptual alteration of the correct meaning of the term freedom, but also made the term easily used and abused by totalitarian regimes, which sought to justify their coercive practices. Although he would seldom explicitly use the term "totalitarianism" and preferred to refer more generally to oppressive or authoritarian regimes, it was Berlin's main aim to show that the use of positive liberty enabled such illiberal regimes to present themselves as *liberating* people by subjecting, or even sacrificing, them to larger ideals. This was exactly what Talmon described in his book. Both also agreed that the philosophers were to blame. Rousseau, and in Berlin's writings also Kant and T.H. Green, were all preparing the grounds for totalitarianism because they began the process that eventually allowed the sacrifice of an actual, "empirical self" to an abstract "true" or higher self. Talmon spoke similarly of liberal-democracy as "empirical": "From the vantage point of the mid-20th century", Talmon wrote, "the history of the last hundred and 50 years looks like a systematic preparation for the headlong collision between *empirical* and liberal democracy on the one hand, and *totalitarian* democracy on the other".<sup>21</sup> The use of the adjective "empirical" as an antonym of "totalitarian" was not coincidental, and shows to what extent both were led by similar Anglophile biases. To Berlin anti-totalitarianism required rejection of metaphysics in the name of "empiricism" and "reality". Positive liberty was rejected and "our poor, ignorant, desire-ridden, passionate, empirical selves"—saved.<sup>22</sup> Developing the Talmonian anti-totalitarian perspective, Berlin could now argue that what was important was not only to preserve a minimum

<sup>18</sup>Sigmund Diamond. *Compromised Campus: The Collaboration of Universities with the Intelligence Community, 1945–1955*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 51, Chapters 3–4 are dedicated to the Russian Research Center. Diamond cites a memo from 1949 which shows that in fact FBI personnel were suspicious of Berlin and disturbed by the course he gave at the Center on "The Development of Revolutionary Ideas in Russia". (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 57).

<sup>19</sup>Berlin. "Generalissimo Stalin and the Art of Government". *Foreign Affairs* 30 (1952) 197–214 (originally published under the pseudonym "O. Utis"); Berlin. "Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century". *Foreign Affairs* 28 (1950) 351–385 (later reprinted in Berlin's most famous collection, *Four Essays on Liberty* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969). Many other anti-communist writings by Berlin were collected post-humously in *The Soviet Mind: Russian Culture under Communism*. Ed. Henry Hardy. (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2004). Talmon, probably following Berlin's advice and help, also contributed to *Encounter* from the early 1960s onwards. On *Encounter* see Frances Stonor Saunders. *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters*. (New York: The New Press, 2000) and David Adams Leeming. *Stephen Spender: A Life in Modernism*. (New York: Henry Holt, 1999).

<sup>20</sup>Berlin. "Two Concepts of Liberty". *Four Essays on Liberty*, pp. 118–172.

<sup>21</sup>Talmon. *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup>Berlin. "Two Concepts of Liberty", p. 194.

area of freedom from interference for the individual, but also to retain a “clear sighted empiricism” and to remember that “words and ideas are no substitute for experience”.<sup>23</sup>

## II

The Cold War, therefore, and especially its strict anti-totalitarian discourse, provided the intellectual foundation on which Talmon and Berlin's intellectual dialog was originally established. Understood as a Manichean clash between forces of light and evil, the bi-polar confrontation also offered them a global perspective from which they tried to analyze Israel's very ambiguous ideological position. Was Israel about to become an “open society” where citizens are educated to cherish negative liberty and secure liberal democracy or a “closed society,” a regime which used notions of positive liberty to justify coercive totalitarian practices that are formally democratic? In the early 1950s, this was still unclear. Israel's birth in 1948 coincided with the onset of the Cold War, and in the eyes of Talmon and Berlin alike it was caught in its early years between Western liberalism and Russian communism.<sup>24</sup> It would be only after the 1956 Anglo-Israeli military cooperation in Suez that they would be positive that Israel was an ally of “the West”. Until then, they were still unsure and worried by the idea that Israel, being dominated by leaders who came from the Leftist-socialist camp within Zionism, could potentially be radicalized and drawn away from the West.

This might explain why, when looking at the Israeli political scene, Berlin and Talmon were so concerned by *Mapam*, the Israeli United Workers Party. The party emerged from the left wing of Labor Zionism and adopted a Marxist-Zionist outlook. After the state was established it was already obvious that not only *Maki*, the Israeli communist party, but also many members of *Mapam* openly defined themselves as strong supporters of Stalin and looked at Moscow for inspiration. In light of the new circumstances established by the global conflict, Ben-Gurion objected to the party's strong pro-Soviet approach, and made efforts to exclude it from his governing coalition, also because he understood that the young state should keep itself out of the Cold War by preserving, at least officially, a non-aligned status. As a consequence a firm dividing line between the socialist-democratic Zionism of *Mapai*, Ben-Gurion's party, and *Mapam*'s Marxist-Zionism had emerged. *Mapam*, in other words, symbolized the potential “red menace” in the Israeli case. Berlin, who admired the liberal and pragmatic Zionism of Chaim Weizmann and was disturbed by his heirs, was especially suspicious.<sup>25</sup> His fear was that *Mapam*'s leaders would be able to influence Israel's foreign policy and would tilt it eastwards. Yisrael Galili, one of *Mapam*'s leaders, even came to visit him in Oxford in February 1952. Following the visit Berlin described Galili to Karl Popper as “a left-wing socialist leader from Israel, extremely nice, extremely sweet, high-minded good man”. Nevertheless, because Galili “is bound to be playing a prominent part in the affairs of his own country”, Berlin added, the opportunity to cure him of his naïve Marxism was particularly important:

As perhaps you don't know I hold the view that the entire political structure of that country is only acceptable in terms of pre-1914 Russian Socialist parties—it is in some ways what would have happened if Lenin had never come to Russia... Mr. Galili is really a sweet and sincere socialist. He belongs to the anti-communist faction of this left-wing party, but I daresay labours under some delusions still... I think there is a soul to be if not saved, at any rate converted<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup>A quality Berlin found in his greatest hero, Alexander Herzen. See Berlin. “Alexander Herzen.” *Russian Thinkers*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1979) 208–209.

<sup>24</sup>For a fairly good general background to the subjects discussed here see Avi Shlaim. “Israel between East and West, 1948–1956.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 36 (2004) 657–673.

<sup>25</sup>See Berlin's “Zionist Politics in Wartime Washington: A Fragment of Personal Reminiscence” (originally presented as the Yaacov Herzog Memorial Lecture, Jerusalem, 1972) in Berlin. *Flourishing: Letters 1928–1946*. Ed. Henry Hardy. (London: Chatto & Windus, 2004) 663–693; Berlin. “Chaim Weizmann's Leadership”. *Power Of Ideas*. Ed. Henry Hardy. (London: Pimlico, 2001) 186–194; Berlin. “The Origins of Israel”. *Power Of Ideas*. 143–161; Berlin. “Weizmann as Exilarch”. *Chaim Weizmann as Leader* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1970) 13–21. On Berlin's ambivalent approach towards Zionism before 1948 see my “Between Liberalism and Jewish Nationalism: Young Isaiah Berlin on the Road towards Diaspora Zionism”. *Modern Intellectual History*. 4(2) (2007) 303–326.

<sup>26</sup>Berlin to Karl Popper, 16 February 1954, Popper Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

What bothered Talmon not less was the response of *Mapam* leader to the anti-Semitic show trials of the early 1950s, which also led to a series of internal divisions between the communist and non-communist factions of the party. Much of what aroused the internal conflicts was the arrest of Mordechai Oren, *Mapam*'s envoy in Prague, who was accused of espionage in favor of Western imperialism. Stalin's propagandists made the Prague trials into a campaign against "the Zionist conspiracy" and the "rootless cosmopolitanism" which threatens the revolution.<sup>27</sup> Talmon was shocked to discover that many of Oren's colleagues, including his friend Moshe Sneh, did not condemn Oren's arrest.<sup>28</sup> The fact that Sneh, who led the communist faction of the party, was not only blinded by his admiration for the USSR, but also unwilling to hear and seriously acknowledge the very clear anti-Semitic tone that accompanied the Prague trials distressed Talmon tremendously. He could not but interpret this blindness as a dangerous Messianic illusion. In December 1952, he described to Berlin the internal debate in *Mapam* using the terms he borrowed from Gershom Scholem, the historian of Sabbataianism:

Poor Mapam: מיוצרי ואוי לי מיצרי [“*Oy li mi-yozri, ve oy li mi-yizri*”].<sup>29</sup> They are like the followers of Shabtai Zvi when the prophet put the tarbush and became Moslem. Some as you know, followed the prophet, convinced that there must be a great, awful mystery in it, some holy ruse. They are being spat on, and they say it is the rain which fortifies the Revolution, kicked and they say like the woman beaten by her husband who says: he may, he is my husband, is teaching me good behavior [Mordechai] Oren is subjectively innocent, but who knows objectively. He may have got involved in Titoist machinations. Ben-Gurion has brought it all upon us.<sup>30</sup>

The Prague Trials provided for Talmon, of course, another example of the way in which totalitarian logic operated. Nevertheless, what is more crucial here is the way in which these affairs pushed Talmon to reflect seriously on a possible connection between communist internationalism and Jewish identity. The problem of the communist leaders of *Mapam*, he thought, was similar to that of all Jewish revolutionaries in history—they were craving to unite themselves with a great ultra-national revolutionary emancipating movement that would release them from their status as infringed members of society. Their fundamental illusion was that communist internationalism is blind to the ethno-religious origins of its members. Ironically, the reality proved otherwise, and it was Moscow itself that was now purging “cosmopolitans”. What was new here was not the idea that the revolution kills its own children, for Talmon reached that conclusion already when writing his first book. The new moral derived from the state of contemporary affairs was that one could not escape one's Jewishness.

<sup>27</sup>See Tony Judt. *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945*. (New York: Penguin Press, 2005) 175–188 and Jonathan Brent and Vladimir P. Naumov. *Stalin's Last Crime: The Plot Against the Jewish Doctors, 1948–1953*. (New York: HarperCollins, 2003). Soviet officials made frequent use of the slogan “anti-cosmopolitan campaign” not only during the Prague Trials but also during the trials of the members of the Jewish Antifascist Committee, and the “dyelo vrachey”, known in the West as “The Doctor's Plot”. Clearly, it is hard to distinguish Anti-Semitism from other motivating forces that influenced Stalin and Khrushchev's policy towards Jews in general and towards those associated with Israel in particular. We should also take into our accounts the fact there was a very idiosyncratic “anti-intellectualist” way in which the term “cosmopolitanism” was used in Russian history, since tsarist times, when the term made its first appearance as an essentially pejorative term, used by Slavophiles who wished to denote Westernizing trends. See James H. Billington, *The Icon and the Axe: An Interpretive History of Russian Culture*. (New York: Random House, 1970) esp. p. 234.

<sup>28</sup>Sneh (ne Kleinbaum, 1909–1972) was one of the founders of *Mapam* and the deputy editor of *Al Ha-Mishmar* (Hebrew: *On Guard*), an influential Left-wing daily newspaper of *Ha'shomer Ha'tzair* movement and *Mapam*. His drift Leftwards began in the late 1940s, probably following his meetings in Paris with Hồ Chí Minh. In the early 1950s he led the Left pro-Soviet fraction of *Mapam* and in 1954 he joined the Israeli Communist Party (Maki). In the year of the split, Sneh published his *Conclusions on the National Question in Light of Marxism-Leninism*. (Tel-Aviv: The Left Socialist Party of Israel, 1954) [Hebrew], in which he openly argued that since its beginning Zionism was a reactionary nationalistic ideology, serving the Jewish bourgeoisie and collaborating with imperial forces, and demanded that Israel would cut its connection with “American Capitalism”. See Eli Shealtiel. *Always a Rebel—A Biography of Moshe Sneh*. (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 2000) [Hebrew]. Albeit the enormous ideological gap between them, Talmon respected Sneh, and even dedicated one of his last books, *The Age of Violence* (1975), to Sneh.

<sup>29</sup>In English translation: “Woe is me because of my Creator [*yozri*], woe is me because of my evil inclination [*yizri*]”. The source of the idiom Talmon is using here comes from Tractate Berakoth (“Benedictions”) of the Babylonian Talmud, Chapters 9, fol. 61a (trans. I. Epstein, London: The Soncino Press, 1948). The idiom can also describe either a person who was caught between the hammer and the anvil or a problematic situation or dilemma in which in either case the possible solution would be fraught.

<sup>30</sup>*IBPA*, MS Berlin 286, Talmon to Berlin, 22 December 1952, fol. 2 and 2 verso.

Why was this new insight—that one does not escape one's Jewishness—so crucial? As we have seen, this insight provided Talmon with a new anti-communist argument and also helped him understand why Moscow suddenly developed a very clear anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli policy. But more crucial is the fact that this insight made Talmon's Cold War vision the very opposite of Karl Popper's cosmopolitan view of liberal-democratic societies. Popper envisioned the concept of the 'open society' as a de-nationalized cosmopolitan republic where critical rationality, science and philosophy, rather than ethno-nationalism (coupled with what he called "scientism" and "historicism") rule. Membership in an open society was to be based on these universal criteria. Very unlike Berlin and Talmon, Popper's cosmopolitanism, to use Malachi Hacohen's term, was a neo-Kantian vision, informed by the spirit of the Enlightenment.<sup>31</sup> Popper treated all national, ethnic and religious identities as primitive, false and reactionary and reconstructed liberalism in his wartime and post-war writings according to this radical progressive cosmopolitanism. A good and just social order, he believed, is blind to all these superficial forms of cultural difference. The historical narrative that accompanies his *Open Society and Its Enemies* described western history from Plato to NATO as a continuous struggle between righteous universalism and reactionary chauvinism. And all forms of nationalism—Zionism included—were for him synonymous with atavistic tribalism.<sup>32</sup>

Arguing that one could not renounce one's Jewish identity was incompatible with the cosmopolitan-liberalism of Popper. Hence, because they were highly influenced by Popper, Talmon and Berlin were very cautious to avoid potential conceptual contradictions when writing about Israeli and Jewish affairs. Nevertheless, we find both of them gradually developing what we might call an *anti-cosmopolitan liberalism*. They began treating *all forms* of cosmopolitanism, whether it was Leftist internationalism, Popperian liberalism or, in fact, the Enlightenment project as a whole, as an impossible project that was potentially dangerous, and attracted Jews because it offered them the illusion that they might transcend their marginality. Using traditional and highly pejorative intra-Jewish terms such as *meshumad* (convert) or assimilationist, they began describing cosmopolitanism as guided by the same underlying logic used by those Jews who tried to deny or renounce their identity.<sup>33</sup>

The idea that one of the characteristics which constitutes the mental condition of the "assimilated Jew" was his uncontrolled craving to be accepted and become part of Gentile society was not new, and was borrowed from the classic Zionists like Ahad-Ha'am and others who warned that Western emancipated Jewish individuals who lost their communal attachment were also too quick in surrendering their national identity.<sup>34</sup> *Haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment) ideals, Ahad Ha'am understood, went hand in hand with the assimilatory drive of the emancipated Jew because it gave him the illusion that he could become a citizen in a universal *Humanität*. Berlin and Talmon's novelty lay in transplanting this highly suspicious view of the Jewish

<sup>31</sup>Malachi H. Hacohen. *Karl Popper—The Formative Years, 1902–1945: Politics and Philosophy in Interwar Vienna* (Cambridge University Press, 2000) as well as idem, "Dilemmas of Cosmopolitanism: Karl Popper, Jewish Identity, and 'Central European Culture'." *Journal of Modern History* 71 (March 1999) 105–149. As Hacohen showed, Popper's own cosmopolitanism emerged from Jewish marginality and was inherently linked to his experiences as a Viennese assimilated Jew and to the multicultural interaction that characterized Central Europe. A somewhat similar description of Popper's Jewish origins can be also found in David Edmons and John Eidenow. *Wittgenstein's Poker*. (New York: Ecco/Harper Collins, 2001) esp. pp. 107–108.

<sup>32</sup>Hacohen. *Karl Popper*, pp. 299–309.

<sup>33</sup>As sociological-descriptive terms, the words "assimilation" and "assimilated" are, of course, value-neutral. Nevertheless, in the intra-Jewish discourse—including that of Berlin and Talmon—they acquired a very clear derogatory meaning, and were used to denote and condemn Jews who were either on the verge of religious conversion ("Hitbolelut") or those who were ashamed of their ethno-religious roots, trying to imitate their non-Jewish surrounding. Like many Zionist thinkers, they used the quasi-religious term in a way that supported their nationalist conclusions. For use of this discourse in the Anglo-Jewish context see Gideon Shimoni. "Zionists and 'Assimilationists' in England." *Zionism and its Jewish Opponents [Hebrew]*. Ed. Haim Avni and Gideon Shimoni. (Jerusalem: Hassifriya Hazyonit, 1990) 101–114 as well as Todd Endelman. "The Englishness of Jewish Modernity in England." *Toward Modernity: The European Jewish Model*. Ed. J. Katz. (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1987) 225–246.

<sup>34</sup>Ahad Ha'am's essays "Slavery Within Freedom" (1891) and "Imitation and Assimilation" (1893; reprinted in *Selected Essays of Ahad Ha'am*, tr. and Ed. Leon Simon (New York: Atheneum, 1981) 171–194, 71–75) provide the best summaries of the argument. On Ahad Ha'am's "politics of assimilation" see Shlomo Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism: Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State*. (New York: Basic Books, 1981). Chapter 12; David Vital. "Ahad Ha-'Am as the sage of Zionism". *Jewish History*. 4:2 (September, 1990) 25–32 and David Vital, *The Origins of Zionism*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974); Steven Zipperstein, "Ahad Ha'am and the Politics of Assimilation." *Assimilation and Community: the Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Eds. Jonathan Frankel and Steven Zipperstein. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 344–365.

emancipation process into their treatment of communist internationalism and thus arguing that both followed the same “assimilating” logic.<sup>35</sup> It was in Talmon’s treatment of Rosa Luxemburg and Berlin’s treatment of Karl Marx and Moses Hess that we find this ‘transplanting’ impulse at work. Now they could equate and find the connections between the assimilating ethos of liberal Jews and the utopian vision of the Jewish revolutionaries.

### III

For Talmon, Rosa Luxemburg was the best example of the way in which the pathological condition of the “assimilated” Jew, who dreams that emancipation will give rise to a cosmopolitan society in which he will no longer be treated as a guest or an outsider, was translated into the internationalist cravings of Jews who became enchanted by revolutionary illusions. Influenced by his teacher Lewis Namier,<sup>36</sup> Talmon had no problems using quasi-Freudian vocabulary to analyze Luxemburg’s personality: Luxemburg, Talmon argued, suffered from painful self-deception, which was itself a product of distress and dangerous repression. Her contempt and mockery of nationalism in general and Jewish nationality in particular was one of the symptoms of her disease. Her anti-nationalist beliefs were so deeply embedded and so intense that “they became furious obsessions bordering on the neurotic”.<sup>37</sup> This character analysis led him to question whether her anti-nationalism was “a fundamental uncertainty about her own identity? ...[or] the result of a *cosmopolitan rootlessness*, which came from not being instinctively anchored to a stable tradition and fixed mode of life?”.<sup>38</sup>

The “cosmopolitan rootlessness” Talmon found in Luxemburg became the source of the problem, and in fact—a very “Jewish” disease. What led these Jews to be fascinated by the idea of revolution was the fact that they suffered from “nervous impatience with the present [and] the urgency of the expectation of the new dispensation”.<sup>39</sup> Their enemies, both within and outside the revolutionary camp were quick to recognize that revolutionary Jews are inclined towards “single-minded purposefulness and terrible reductionism [typical] of the messianic Jews from Eastern Europe”. Rosa and her Jewish revolutionary friends were not simply highly impressionable people, but Jews who converted their religion, operating under the self-delusion that the “religion of the revolution” would erase the one thing that is ineradicable—their Jewish identity. Luxemburg became, thus, a paradigmatically distraught figure, suffering from the typical syndrome he believed most Jewish revolutionaries suffered from. Fear, shame and an ambivalent relationship to their own identity motivated these revolutionary Jews, and what was a better solution for Jews who tried to hide or deny their origins than to unite themselves under this grandiose, yet impossible, a-national project called the revolution?

One is reminded of an aphorism by the Hebrew writer Chaim Hazaz in his tragic-comic novel on the impact of the Bolshevik Revolution in a Jewish townlet in the Ukraine. A Gentile Russian, Frenchman or German

<sup>35</sup>According to Gary Kates even Talmon’s interpretation of the French revolution was guided by this Zionist perspective, paving the way to an erroneous but nevertheless “powerful interpretation that blamed the tragic events of the 20th century on the French revolutionary emancipation process itself”. See Gary Kates. “Jews into Frenchmen: Nationality and Representation in Revolutionary France.” Ed. Ferenc Féher. *The French Revolution and the Birth of Modernity*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) 103–116 (quote appears on p. 107). Although Kates argument is quite convincing when applied to Rabbi Arthur Herzberg’s *The French Enlightenment and the Jews*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), whom he criticizes in his essay, it is somewhat problematic when used to interpret Talmon’s *Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, especially because it requires Kates to mix the conclusions Talmon reached in his later years with his earlier writings. See in particular Kates, p. 115, nt. 7.

<sup>36</sup>See Talmon’s obituary. “The Ordeal of Sir Lewis Namier: The Man, the Historian, The Jew”. *Commentary* 33 (1962) 237–246, reprinted in Talmon’s *The Unique and the Universal*. (London: Secker & Warburg, 1965), as well as his 1975 review essay “*The Wish to be Free. Society, Psyche and Value Change*”. Berlin who also admired Namier as a historian, compared Talmon to his mentor in one of his letters, writing about “those [historians] who understand these tiny details, and are able to react to the nuances, are capable of splendid flights of the imagination, which nevertheless are not divorced from the evidence on which they are founded—Namier was such: I firmly believe that you will be another”. See Berlin to Talmon, 7 September 1966 in *IBPA*, MS Berlin 286, fol. 55 verso.

<sup>37</sup>Talmon. *The Myth of the Nation*, p. 217.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 90 (emphasis mine, A.D.).

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 221.

wants to redeem his nation, or the proletariat of his county; the Jewish revolutionary is out to save the whole mankind at once.<sup>40</sup>

Talmon and Berlin's anti-cosmopolitan perspective was connected to Talmon's strong belief that there was something about Jewish identity that was not definable yet still immanent, so deeply rooted in one's soul that even religious conversion could not erase it:

Rosa and her Jewish comrades wished to forget that they were descendants of a people with a history of four millennia, with an exceptional degree of self-consciousness, with a religion which prescribed and dominated every minute of life, burdened with a **collective fate which they could never escape** [...]. How could they have **shed all their genes**, shaken off all heredity and heritage, become able to rid themselves of all the ancestral residuary reflexes and compulsions—and become nothing but pure products of and believers in dialectical materialism?<sup>41</sup>

Talmon's use of the term "genes", as well as his description of an inescapable collective fate, point to his understanding of Jewishness as an immanent layer of one's identity. Revolutionary zeal was a modernized version of religious conversion, but like any other conversion it required self-deception. Zionism, he claimed, was to symbolize the end of such self-deceptions, a shift from "self-surrender" to "self-assertion".<sup>42</sup>

We find a strikingly remarkable resemblance when we compare Talmon's treatment of Luxemburg to Berlin's treatment of Marx. Already in his first book Berlin depicted the father of communism as a dislocated person, frustrated by his incapacity to assimilate into bourgeois society. Marx, in Berlin's analysis, craved for a sense of belonging, and it was very much Marx's need to belong that drove him to produce the communist utopia.<sup>43</sup> In his "Jewish Slavery and Emancipation" (1952) Berlin developed his analysis of assimilationist yearnings, also presenting Jewishness as an immanent and inescapable aspect of one's identity, and reaching Zionist conclusions that were very similar to those of Talmon.<sup>44</sup> In Berlin's essay on Moses Hess, written around 1957, these arguments were further developed to explain why "the Red Rabbi" who played such an important role in transforming Hegel's dialectical-idealism theory of history into the dialectical materialism of Marxism was "converted" from Marxism to Zionism. Here, Marx also plays the role of the villain and the attraction of the false cosmopolitan aura of Marxism is revealed in its true colors: Marxist "assimilationism" and anti-Semitism. Unlike Marx, Hess "did not suffer from a self-hatred that made him wish to commit acts of violence against his nature. He did not try to cut the traces of his origins out of himself because he did not feel it as a malignant growth that was suffocating him and of which he was ashamed".<sup>45</sup> Early Hess, like Marx, believed that the "real emancipation [of Jews] would occur only when all hatred and contempt for them on the part of others disappeared. In short, he repeated the noble common places that have formed the staple doctrine of liberal assimilationists everywhere and at all times".<sup>46</sup> It was therefore Hess' rejection of the idea that Jews would only be emancipated if they would be "educated out" of their queer and particular identity

<sup>40</sup>Talmon. *The Myth of the Nation*, p. 218. The book by Hazaz, which Talmon is probably referring to is *Gates of Bronze*, tr. S. Gershon Levi (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1975). The novel was published in Hebrew in 1968.

<sup>41</sup>Talmon. *The Myth of the Nation*, p. 220 (my emphasis).

<sup>42</sup>Talmon. *The Nature of Jewish History—Its Universal Significance* (London: The Hillel Foundation, 1975).

<sup>43</sup>Berlin. *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment*. (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1939).

<sup>44</sup>Berlin. "Jewish Slavery and Emancipation." *Power of Ideas*. 162–185. According to Berlin, the assimilated Jew either tries to conceal his physiological deformity, or to argue, in self-deception, that he has no hump whatsoever. The majority of assimilated Jews, Berlin believed, were "timid and respectful cripples" who "tended to wear voluminous cloaks which concealed their precise contours". Clearly, the mistake of the assimilated Jews was to think that one could escape one's Jewishness by ignoring one's identity. Only the Zionists, he argued, were the ones "who said that a hump was a hump, an appendage which was neither desirable nor capable of being disguised, nor yet of being slowly diminished". (*Power of Ideas*, pp. 175–176). As his biographer shows (Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin*, Chapter 12), it seems that Berlin felt unease with the metaphors he himself used when comparing the Jew to a hunchback. This might partly explain why the essay, which was originally written for a Hebrew University Garland and also published in the *Jewish Chronicle* (during September and October 1951), was never reprinted during Berlin's lifetime.

<sup>45</sup>Berlin. "The Life and Opinions of Moses Hess". *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas*. Ed. Henry Hardy. (New York: Viking Press, 1980) 225. Originally published under the same title as the Lucien Wolf Memorial Lecture (Cambridge, 1959: Heffer).

<sup>46</sup>Berlin. "The Life and Opinions of Moses Hess". *Against the Current*, p. 226.

that was his first step towards nationalism:

Hess did not accept the Marxist doctrine of the unreality of nationalism as a basic factor in history. He condemned cosmopolitanism as the deliberated and unnatural suppression of real historical differences which enrich mankind. [...] [H]e sharply rejected the Hegelian distinction between 'historic' nations. And those unfortunate 'submerged' nationalities, which the more bellicose nations, chosen to 'play a historic role' in virtue of their superiority, had a 'historic' right to absorb and dominate.<sup>47</sup>

Like Talmon, who explicitly admitted he had written his essay on Luxemburg to counter the ideas of the young New Left radicals who mythologized "Red Rosa", Berlin's essay was also a reaction to the challenges of the Thaw generation. Immediately after the spring of 1968 he returned to Marx, in his essay on "Benjamin Disraeli, Karl Marx, and the Search for Identity". Here, Berlin wanted to historicize the need to belong, arguing that "this is a well-known condition of men forced into an alien culture, by no means confined to Jews; it is a well-known neurosis in an age of nationalism in which self-identification with a dominant group becomes supremely important, but for some individuals, abnormally difficult".<sup>48</sup> But the main purpose of the essay was not to explain what drives people to assimilate. Like Talmon, who was pointing his arrows at Luxemburg but in fact trying to batter the New Left, which mythologized her, Berlin's essay was informed by the need to respond to what he considered to be the return of nihilist anarchism.<sup>49</sup> We may also assume that the essay was a response to Hannah Arendt, who dedicated one of the chapters in her book on totalitarianism on Disraeli whom she described as the classic Jewish parvenu, and who, by that time, had already been cast out from the Zionist camp.<sup>50</sup> The very clear pro-Zionist statements in the essay<sup>51</sup> as well as its bold anti-assimilationist assertions give us clear evidence that Berlin had also developed an anti-cosmopolitan worldview, similar to that of his Israeli friend. When analyzing Marx's fierce anti-nationalism, Berlin did not hesitate to use the term *juedischer Selbsthass*—Jewish self-hatred—against him. "The baptized Jewish intellectual, still regarded as racially a Jew by his fellows, could not hope to be politically effective so long as nationalism remained a problem for him. It had somehow to be eliminated as an issue".<sup>52</sup> This explains why "Marx identified himself with a social force, the great international class of the disinherited workers, in whose name he could thunder his anathemas".<sup>53</sup> Marx idealized the proletariat, which remained an abstract category, but could never really be part of this class.

We see, therefore, that like Talmon, Berlin also connected his anti-communist view with his strong objection to assimilation. The "assimilationist" desire was to solve identity dilemmas and overcome marginality by "dissolving" into semi-abstract and universalistic entities we identify as "culture" or "humanity". But if one sifts through Berlin's writings carefully one finds that he believes Jews were drawn to liberalism for the same reasons they were drawn to communism. Both deduced their beliefs from the false Enlightenment premise that by using critical rationalism people would be able to transcend their particular and essentially irrational identity. The "assimilationist drive" was, in other words, an attempt to "enlighten" and educate people out of their primordial ethno-national identity. This was not something that was unique to Jews, Berlin claimed, but it could be best identified when examining the dilemmas of modern Jewry because historical circumstances made post-emancipatory Jews into a troubled and alienated people, feeling unease about their roots and origins. Viewed from a Jewish angle, the Popperian and progressive liberal cosmopolitanism, and the communist internationalist utopia were two sides of the same coin. Both sprang from the illusion that by "civilizing" people they would abandon their atavistic tribalism and instead absorb "a more enlightened way

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 230.

<sup>48</sup>Berlin. "Benjamin Disraeli, Karl Marx, and the Search for Identity". *Against the Current*, p. 255. Orig. pub. *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 22 (1968–1969).

<sup>49</sup>Ignatieff. *Isaiah Berlin*, Chapter 16.

<sup>50</sup>Hannah Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. (New York: Harcourt, 1951) Chapter 3, esp. section II (pp. 68–79). See also Cocks, Joan, *Passion and Paradox: Intellectuals Confront the National Question*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) Chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>51</sup>In one of the footnotes in his essay ("Benjamin Disraeli, Karl Marx, and the Search for Identity", p. 263 nt. 1) Berlin even thanked the Israeli politician Yigal Allon (1918–1980). It should be mentioned that this remark stands out, for anyone acquainted with Berlin's writings knows that as an author he preferred writing footnote-free essays, and it was very uncharacteristic of him to credit others.

<sup>52</sup>Berlin. "Benjamin Disraeli, Karl Marx, and the Search for Identity", p. 280.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 281.

of life—liberal, rationalist, socialist, communist—[that] will cause [Jews] to dissolve peacefully as a group into their social and national environment”.<sup>54</sup>

Talmon's Luxemburg and Berlin's Marx were, in other words, “non-Jewish Jews”.<sup>55</sup> For Isaac Deutscher, who coined the term and who was himself a devoted Marxist, this category was constructed to emphasize the positive contribution of Jews to humanity as a whole. But Talmon and Berlin were not seeking to transcend their particularity and contribute to the general *hümanitat*. Quite the contrary, after linking “assimilationism”, communist internationalism and liberal cosmopolitanism together they began walking in the opposite direction, towards a rehabilitation of the national predicament.

#### IV

From the 1960s onwards, Talmon began to emphasize a very important moment of disillusionment in his historical writings. It was not the moment in which one is disillusioned by Communism and the utopian belief in an ultra-national revolution, but the moment in which the Jewish revolutionary was forced to recognize the Jewish identity he had himself suppressed and sublimated. He identified this moment of disillusionment among Jewish idealists who had taken part in Russian populism and had encountered poisonous anti-Semitism:

The *Narodnaya Volya* provided a very uncomfortable environment for Jews. Eager and enthusiastic as they were to merge into the collective, pure and uncorrupt soul of the peasant masses, the mission of young Jewish young men and women, with Semitic facial features, foreign accents, and complete ignorance as to the practices and mentality of peasant life, ended more than once with the peasant's amazed and outraged outcry towards the son of antichrist: **But you are a Jew!**<sup>56</sup>

This outcry—but you are a Jew—had crucial importance for Talmon. Paraphrasing what Amos Funkenstein called “the dialectics of assimilation” we may argue that at the core of Talmon's as well as Berlin's Zionism stood the transformation from *fear* at this outcry to *pride* in their Jewish identity.<sup>57</sup> The two thinkers who had adopted liberalism, the anti-totalitarian discourse, and the very Manichean world-view of Cold War thinkers like Karl Popper, were unwilling to accept Popper's cosmopolitanism.<sup>58</sup> Talmon and Berlin shared the common belief that although modernity and emancipation separated Judaism from Jewishness, the latter, if understood as a label and marker of the secular Jew as well, remained immanent, ineradicable, and irrepressible. The fascinating intellectual transformation common to both thinkers, therefore, was that through their shared anti-communist totalitarian discourse they were gradually moved to focus their thinking on questions of Jewish identity and statehood, thus only reinforcing their belief that Jewish nationality is the right solution to the Jewish problem.

It is important to note, however, that the sort of Zionism Berlin and Talmon had developed was not identical. It was not only because Berlin admired Weizmann, whom he considered a pragmatic liberal nationalist, while Talmon, notwithstanding his criticisms, admired Ben-Gurion.<sup>59</sup> There was much pathos in

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 252.

<sup>55</sup>Isaac Deutscher. *The Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1968).

<sup>56</sup>Talmon. “The crossing of the Jewish Rubicon in the 20th century”, *Haaretz*, 10 May 1978 [Hebrew], quoted in Talmon, *The Riddle of the Present and the Cunning of History*. Ed. David Ohana (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2002), 63 [Hebrew] (my translation and emphasis, A.D.). Talmon returns to these moments of disillusionment and uses the same words also the chapter dedicated to “The Jewish Dimension” in *The Myth of the Nation*, esp. pp. 230–232. “Du bist ein Jud” (“You are a Jew”) is also the title of the fifth letter, which constitutes Moses Hess's *Rome and Jerusalem* (orig. pub. 1862) in which he describes his own disappointment when encountering anti-Semitism among German progressive intellectuals. Compare with Berlin's “The Life and Opinions of Moses Hess”, esp. p. 226. Clearly, the resemblance in the arguments of Talmon and Berlin on this point is not coincidental.

<sup>57</sup>Amos Funkenstein. “The Dialectics of Assimilation”. *Jewish Social Studies* 1:2 (Win 1995) 1–14.

<sup>58</sup>Hacohen. *Karl Popper, The Formative Years*, Chapters 7–10; Idem. “The Limits of the National Paradigm in the Study of Political Thought: The case of Karl Popper and Central European Cosmopolitanism”. *The History of Political Thought in National Context*. Ed. Dario Castiglione & Iain Hampsher-Monk, Cambridge 2001, pp. 247–279.

<sup>59</sup>As Ohana shows, Talmon contemplated writing Ben-Gurion's biography for several years, but cancelled the project in 1960 because he was unwilling to accept Ben-Gurion's censorship and control over the archival sources. See David Ohana, *Messianism and Mamlachtiut: Ben Gurion and the Intellectuals between political vision and political theology* (Sde Boker: Ben-Gurion Research Institute, 2003), esp.

the way Talmon described Zionism as the return of Jews to history, a slogan, which the Jerusalem school of historians used frequently.<sup>60</sup> Even in 1978 he still described the “new Zionist man” as one who “stands up to take responsibility for his own fate, renew his days as those before, and design the tools for his free and full self-expression as a nation in the family of nations.”<sup>61</sup> Talmon’s Zionism was based on the vision that Zionism was essentially a collective process of self-realization, and that eventually it demanded all Jews to immigrate to Israel. Berlin, however, remained highly ambivalent about Zionism throughout his life. Even after he had reconciled himself personally with the national predicate he was still defending a very individualistic liberal view that opposed all forms of collectivism or historical teleology. Hence, in “Jewish Slavery and Emancipation”, probably his finest pro-Zionist manifesto, he also felt the need to defend the continuation of Jewish existence in the Diaspora, and to justify it in strict liberal terms. The great emphasis Berlin’s writings put on the agony of making choices can also be explained, at least partially, from a biographical perspective. We may even surmise that many aspects in Talmon’s Zionism disturbed Berlin, personally as well as philosophically. This was what forced him to crystallize a conceptual alternative I have defined elsewhere as “Diaspora Zionism”,<sup>62</sup> Paradoxically, although Berlin became one of the most eloquent defenders of Zionism, whenever meeting his Israeli friends, Talmon included, Berlin clearly felt that he was forced to take an apologetic stance and felt obliged to defend his personal decision not to move from Oxford to Jerusalem. Talmon was aware of his friend’s Achilles heel and when he called him “ha-Zadik me’ All-Souls” (the righteous of All Souls), “Rabbi Isaiah” and even “Rosh Yeshiva” (head of a Talmudic college) in his letters, he used a mixture of fondness and sarcasm, which highlighted Berlin’s own sense of unease and belonging.<sup>63</sup>

As in the case of the Manichean dichotomies in the Cold War discourse, here too we need to pay careful attention to the way in which metaphor and imagery operated in the writings of Talmon and Berlin. Talmon was fond of essentially organic metaphors: his basic perception was that human beings need firm territorial foundations, a soil in which they need to be planted, like a tree. Only when he is firmly rooted both in the land and in the community, can man grow and develop. In his beautiful eulogy of Namier, who was not only Talmon’s mentor and close friend but also a zealous supporter of Zionism, Talmon used his friend’s words to highlight the close connection between soil and soul:

There is some well-nigh mystical power in ownership of spaces—for it is not the command of resources alone which makes the strength of the landowner, but that he has a place in the world which he can call his own, from which he can ward off strangers, and in which he himself is rooted—the superiority of a tree to a log<sup>64</sup>

The image of man as a firmly rooted tree gives us the best representation of Talmon’s vision of the merits of nationalism. Needless to say, the sense of freedom which stems from the self-realization and mastery felt by the tree, so to speak, i.e. the person living in a national community, is almost identical to what Berlin described and condemned as a false and positive conception of freedom.<sup>65</sup> The metaphor here is much more powerful

(footnote continued)

pp. 326–347 [Hebrew]. The uneasy relationship between Talmon and Ben-Gurion is also discussed in Michael Keren, *Ben-Gurion and the Intellectuals: Power, Knowledge, and Charisma*. (DeKalb, IL, Northern Illinois University Press, 1983) and in my introduction to this issue.

<sup>60</sup>On “The Jerusalem School” of historiographers see Shmuel Almog, *Zionism and History: The Rise of a New Jewish Consciousness*, tr. Ina Friedman (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987); David Myers, “Between Diaspora and Zion: History, Memory and the Jerusalem Scholars.” *The Jewish Past Revisited*. Eds. David Myers and David Ruderman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) 88–103 and David Myers. *Reinventing the Jewish Past: European Jewish Intellectuals and the Zionist Return to History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). See also Arnold Eisen. *Galut: Modern Jewish Reflections on Homelessness and Homecoming* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986) esp. Chapter 6. An influential, thought-provoking, but at the same time highly problematic interpretation of this school may be found in Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin. “Exile in the Midst of Sovereignty: A critique of the ‘negation of exile’ in Israeli culture”, *Theory and Criticism* 4 (1993) 23–56 [Hebrew].

<sup>61</sup>Talmon. “The national awakening”, *Haaretz*, 12 May 1978 [Hebrew], reprinted in Talmon. *The Riddle of the Present and the Cunning of History*, p. 69. (My translation, A.D.). An interesting textual exegesis is noteworthy here: in the Hebrew original Talmon uses the expression *hadash yamav kekodem* (“renew his days as those before”) taken from the Book of Lamentations (*Megilat Eikha*) Chapter 5, verse 21. The book, which deals with the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, is traditionally read on the fast day of Tisha B’Av.

<sup>62</sup>See my “Between Liberalism and Jewish Nationalism”. (op. cit.).

<sup>63</sup>IBPA, MS Berlin 286, Fols. 12 (3 September 1956) 28 (24 January 1960) 16 (17 March 1957).

<sup>64</sup>Talmon. “Lewis Namier”. *The Unique and the Universal*, p. 297.

<sup>65</sup>Berlin. “Two Concepts of Liberty”.

than the conceptual analysis, for Talmon's rhetoric takes us back to the organic imagery of the world of 19th century *Volkism*. "In Volkish thought" as George Mosse showed, "the image of the tree was constantly used to symbolize the peasant strength of the Volk, with roots anchored in the past while the crown aspired toward the cosmos and its spirit ... Rootedness and proximity to nature embraced the simple social virtues as well as the elemental strength derived from primitivism."<sup>66</sup> Talmon consciously embraced a very similar organicist and *Volkish* discourse. The civic realm of the tree is clearly opposed to that of the timber or log, which symbolizes the rootless individual and the atomization of civil society. In an almost Aristotelian manner this tree realizes its essence and reaches virtue when it is unified with a much larger and broader organism.

This was exactly the sort of rhetoric that Berlin, the great foe of the discourse of liberty as self-realization, could not accept. Symbolically, and maybe not coincidentally, Berlin was fond of a very similar botanical metaphor, and would frequently describe mankind as crooked timber. The source of the metaphor was Kantian, and in Berlin's writings the claim that "out of the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing was ever made" became almost a mantra.<sup>67</sup> Frequently reiterated, the metaphor was utilized by Berlin mainly to combat philosophical monism and the utopian yearnings of intellectuals who sought to improve humanity by improving and "enlightening", its members. Berlin's idea was, as we have seen, that they could thus easily fall back into the totalitarian catch, which legitimized the subjection of individuals in the name of a higher and nobler plan. Ironically, for many years Berlin mistakenly thought that the source of this epigram was to be found in R.G. Collingwood's writings, while in fact it was taken from Kant's "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose".<sup>68</sup> As Perry Anderson showed, Berlin's way of using the metaphor clearly demonstrates that the meaning he gave the metaphor was quite distant from that attributed to it by Kant, who believed that education would result in increased rationality and thereby improve humanity at large.<sup>69</sup> Clearly, the epigram was used by Berlin to protect individual freedoms and oppose utopianism, including that of Kant and the Enlightenment or, as a matter of fact, the nationalist project. In that sense "the crooked timber" was the complete opposite of "the tree." The two botanical metaphors denoted two opposite things: Talmon's metaphor gestured to a community resembling Ferdinand Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft*, that is, a closely bound community with a high degree of internal solidarity whose members hold to similar mores,<sup>70</sup> while Berlin not only defended the much more open social association which characterizes the civil society or the *Gesellschaft* but also still held to the idea that individualism and what he considered to be an almost sacred "area of inviolability"<sup>71</sup> should always remain at core of any political scheme.

It seems, therefore, that eventually Berlin remained much more skeptical than Talmon regarding the possibility of creating an association marked by some sort of a unity of will. Berlin's biography—as a Russian Jew who always felt somewhat of an outsider within English circles—probably explains why he found it hard to tolerate political philosophy, which described the desirable society as regulated by common mores or beliefs about the appropriate behavior and responsibility of members of the association, to each other and to the association at large. Curiously, no one has yet made the attempt to use the biographical context to explain the distance between Berlin and "neo-republican" thinkers like Quentin Skinner, or to understand Berlin's fierce objection to T.H. Green and the British Idealist School. The ideas of the Idealist group in particular are important in this context because they were dominant in Oxford during the time Berlin was a young student and because they envisioned a much more collectivist version of liberalism which also rested on

<sup>66</sup>George Mosse. *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich*. (New York: Schocken Books, 1981) 26.

<sup>67</sup>The phrase would later serve Berlin as a title of one his books—*The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas*. Ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton University Press, 1990).

<sup>68</sup>Immanuel Kant. "Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht" *Kant: gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin, 1900–), vol. 8 (1912), p. 23, line 22. In his foreword to Berlin's *The Crooked Timber* Henry Hardy argues that Berlin knew the metaphor was Kant's but mistakenly thought it also appeared in Collingwood's work.

<sup>69</sup>Perry Anderson. "The pluralism of Isaiah Berlin". *A Zone of Engagement*. (London: Verso, 1992) 231–234, esp. p. 232, nt. 5. An excellent overview and analysis of Berlin's use of the metaphor can be also found in David Miller "Crooked Timber or Bent Twig? Isaiah Berlin's Nationalism". *Political Studies* 53 (2005) 100–123.

<sup>70</sup>Ferdinand Tönnies. *Community and Civil Society*. Ed. Jose Harris (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>71</sup>Berlin uses these spatial metaphors in many cases. See for example "Two Concepts", pp. 126 and 165. "Like J.S. Mill", writes Bhikhu Parekh, "Berlin thinks that negative liberty requires a fairly clear demarcation of an area, a frontier or a portion of existence generally accepted as absolute and inviolable" Parekh. *Contemporary Political Thinkers*. (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1982) 40.

the idea that the “self-realization” of the individual is earned by active participation in society.<sup>72</sup> But was not Zionism, like almost all national movements who present themselves as freeing their subjects, also using ideas of self-realization and reviving the idea of active membership and participation in a republic? Here again, Berlin fell on the horns of a dilemma to which, I daresay, he never found a systematic conceptual solution.

This is a somewhat ironic closure of the circle: It was probably from the zealous anti-Rousseauian Talmon that Berlin borrowed the idea that “general will” very quickly becomes the precursor of totalitarian subjection. But if Talmon was willing to make the noble exception for the sake of Zionism, Berlin remained hesitant. He was caught between his loyalty to a very “negative” version of liberalism, encapsulated in the metaphor of the crooked timber of humanity and his deep sympathy for the Zionist project. Berlin was therefore forced to draw a dividing line between what he considered to be the legitimate need of the individual to feel that he belongs to a community in which he could flourish, and nationalism, which he described as a “pathological condition of national consciousness”.<sup>73</sup> He attempted to do so in his highly problematic interpretation of Herder as the father of a non-aggressive and pluralist version of cultural nationalism.<sup>74</sup> It is not surprising, then, that from the early 1960s onwards, in many of his writings on nationalism as well as pluralism, Berlin was looking for a way to conceptually reconcile nationalism with his own version of liberalism.

For Talmon, who lived in Jerusalem and whose personal fate was tied with that of the Israeli state, the challenge of the 1960s and 1970s was different. Considering himself both as a liberal critic of Israeli policies and, at the same time, as an informal ambassador defending his country abroad, Talmon’s basic intellectual persona was divided in two. Inside Israel Talmon was to become the first intellectual to openly stand against Ben-Gurion and question both his practices during what became known as the Lavon affair as well as his use of theological and even messianic discourse in describing the meta-historical role of Zionism.<sup>75</sup> Against the very strong collectivist ethos of Labor Zionism, Talmon brought in the concerns he dealt with as a Cold War intellectual and promoted a much more liberal-democratic ethos, becoming, in his last years, known for his furious attacks on Menachem Begin. But no less serious was the task he took upon himself to improve the image of Israel in the eyes of non-Israeli scholars and intellectuals. Here Talmon again differed from Berlin. This time, the difference was in their views as much as in the way they understood their own role as critical intellectuals.

## V

Talmon and Berlin’s anti-cosmopolitan liberalism as I call it, was closely connected to their belief in the immanence and permanence of Jewish identity. Even the most secular, modern, and well-assimilated Jew, they insisted, was forced to acknowledge his Jewishness when he realized that crucial elements of his life were predetermined, to his dismay or luck, by the decisions made by his Jewish forefathers, and even worse, by anti-Semites. Their efforts to explicate their new understanding of anti-cosmopolitanism helped them move beyond Popperian Cold-War liberalism but at the same time also required that they develop an intensified sensitivity to anti-Semitic prejudices. In Talmon in particular we find a cruel dialectic; his belief that Jewishness is something that can never be erased in the life of a single individual led him to admit that it was unfortunately the anti-Semite who was best at seeing the repressed Jewish identity that is hidden behind the mask of the internationalist revolutionary.

Isaiah Berlin is further distinguished from Jacob Talmon by the fact that Talmon gradually found it harder to distinguish between anti-Semitic prejudices and anti-Israeli expressions. When trying to trace the roots of the new “anti-semitic crusade” back to the mid 1950s in his last book (published in 1979), Talmon talked explicitly about “the baffling change that has come into the relations between Jews and revolution over the last

<sup>72</sup>On Berlin’s reading of T.H. Green see Avital Simhony. “On Forcing Individuals to be Free: T.H. Green’s Liberal Theory of Positive Freedom”. *Political Studies* 39 (1991) 303–320 and Richard Bellamy. “T.H. Green, J.S. Mill and Isaiah Berlin on the Nature of Liberty and Liberalism”. *Jurisprudence: Cambridge Essays*. Eds. Hyman Gross and Ross Harrison. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) 257–285.

<sup>73</sup>Berlin. “Nationalism: Past Neglect and Present Power”. *Against the Current*, 333–355.

<sup>74</sup>Berlin. “Herder and the Enlightenment”. *Three Critics of Enlightenment*, see in particular pp. 181–182, 206–207, 231–232.

<sup>75</sup>See in particular Talmon. “The Lavon Affair: Israel democracy at the crossroads”. *New Outlook* 4:5 (March–April 1961) 23–30, and my introduction to this issue.

two or three decades, with the emergence of Soviet anti-semitism, and the alignment of the forces of communism, the Third World, the New Left and, of course, the Arabs against Israel, which is now alleged to be the moving spirit of contemporary imperialism".<sup>76</sup> The fact that intellectuals had a dominant role in what he saw as a new anti-Israeli coalition strengthened his conviction that universal humanism and morality is a chimera that can be easily exploited by the new anti-Semites. Paradoxically, Talmon argued, as a result of the new crusade "the future of the Jewish people as such has become inseparably bound up with the fate of the Jewish state".<sup>77</sup> Once again Zionism was the only right answer.

One of the episodes that unquestionably pushed Talmon to strengthen his beliefs was his debate with the Oxford historian Arnold J. Toynbee (1889–1975) after the 1967 Six Day War. Talmon was not the first Zionist to plunge into a debate with Toynbee. The famous historian had initially made many Jews, Zionist and non-Zionist alike, furious because he had decided to describe modern Jewry in his 12-volume study on of the rise and fall of the world's civilizations as a "dead relic" and a historical "fossil" of the ancient Israelites whose historical survival is in principle anomalous.<sup>78</sup> This quasi-historical debate was quickly colored by contemporary political affairs as it became known that Toynbee, who was also the director of the Royal Institute of Foreign Affairs at Chatham House, had also developed pro-Arab and anti-Zionist views. Abba Eban, Israel's ambassador to the US, was probably the first to try and answer Toynbee in his 1955 address entitled "The Toynbee Heresy".<sup>79</sup> Israel's ambassador to Canada, Rabbi Jacob Herzog, was the next to enter the debate, inviting Toynbee to an intellectual duel in the Beit-Hillel Club of McGill University in 1961. During this public debate and also in a newspaper interview in 1964 Toynbee also argued that what Israel did to the Arabs during its Independence War was worse than what the Nazis did to the Jews.<sup>80</sup> Toynbee's comparison was, in the eyes of most Israelis, unbearable, but even anti-Zionist Jewish intellectuals like Elie Kedourie were annoyed.<sup>81</sup> By the time Talmon entered the polemic with Toynbee in 1967 it was already clear that the debate between the anti-Imperial thinker and the defenders of Jewish nationalism was gradually turning into a modernized version of the medieval debates between Christians and Jews.

Berlin, who was a friend of Philip Toynbee (Arnold's son) since their College days, initiated the exchange between Toynbee and Talmon when he passed on the paper Talmon had written less than a month after the Six Day War, entitled "For Total Peace in the Middle East".<sup>82</sup> It seems that Berlin wanted to prove to Toynbee that there was a strong liberal and peace-seeking element among Israeli intelligentsia that was not blinded by the speedy triumph of June 1967. Toynbee opened the letter with, the admission that he felt a personal responsibility to do anything he could to help achieve peace in the Middle East. He added that as British citizen he had "a share[d] responsibility for my country's past actions," and on a more personal level, felt duty-bound because as a young man he had worked on Middle-Eastern affairs for the Foreign Office, and also because he was aware of his reputation as "a Western spokesman for the Arab cause". Much of Talmon and Toynbee's discussion was concentrated on practical questions regarding borders, refugees and the international status of Jerusalem and the holy sites, but the basic moral-historical claim that Toynbee relied upon was essentially similar to the one he had used in previous debates with Israelis. "The Palestinian Arabs

<sup>76</sup>Talmon. "The Alien Fermenting Ingredient and the Mountainous Shadow". *The Myth of the Nation*, pp. 169–170.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>78</sup>Arnold Toynbee. *A Study of History*. Vol. XII: *Reconsiderations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961) 298–299. See also Oskar K. Rabinowitz, *Arnold Toynbee on Judaism & Zionism*. (London: W.H. Allen, 1974) and Hedva Ben-Israel. "Debates With Toynbee: Herzog, Talmon, Friedman". *Israel Studies* 11:1 (2006) 79–90.

<sup>79</sup>Abba Eban. *Voice of Israel*. (New York: Horizon Press, 1957). See also Natan Aridan's introduction to the reprint of the address "Abba Eban, *The Toynbee Heresy*", *Israel Studies* 11:1 (2006) 91–107.

<sup>80</sup>The protocol of the Toynbee-Herzog debate from 1961 was later printed in Herzog's *A People that Dwells Alone: Speeches and Writings of Yaacov Herzog*. Ed. Misha Louvish. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1995). Berlin's obituary of Herzog was added as preface to this volume.

<sup>81</sup>Elie Kedourie. *The Chatham House Version and Other Middle Eastern Studies*. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970). Even in the eyes of a conservative thinker like Elie Kedourie, who was highly critical of Jewish nationalism as he was of Arab nationalism, Toynbee personified the moral defeatism of the English left, and he considered his theory to be an exercise in moral self-flagellation that denied the civilizing role of empires, Britain's included.

<sup>82</sup>Talmon. "For Total Peace in the Middle East". *International Problems* (Quarterly of the Israeli Institute of International Affairs) 6 (1967) 60–68, reprinted in *The Riddle of the Present*, pp. 177–187. On Berlin and Philip Toynbee's relationship see Philip Toynbee, *Friends Apart*. (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1954) 75–80.

have suffered injustice”, he wrote, “[to] put it simply, they have been made to pay for the genocide of Jews in Europe which was committed by Germans, not by Arabs”.<sup>83</sup>

Talmon understood that Toynbee’s historical and political arguments were backed by a strange mix of Christian theological views and post-colonial feelings of guilt. Nevertheless, he tried to bypass the fossil debate claiming that even he felt he could not explain the “mystery of Jewish martyrdom and survival” and that he respected the prophetic and even “‘Judaic’ ingredients” in Toynbee’s work as a historian.<sup>84</sup> Clearly, he was trying to move the debate from the quasi-theological and historiographical realm into contemporary politics, and here, very much like Toynbee, he nominated himself as an unofficial spokesman (“I have reason to claim that I voice the sentiments of most Israelis”, he wrote). He argued wrathfully that Toynbee’s arguments rest on the fact that he fails to see that “Zionism did not begin with Hitler”, and that it would be inconsistent of him to defend the moral claim of Arab nationalists and at the same time attack the basic right of Jews to exist as an independent nation state. Many of his arguments were based on the claim that Israel is entitled to security and that there is no reason for one to lose oneself in the sanguine illusion that the Arabs had abandoned the idea of exterminating the Jewish state. In the Middle East one had to replace naïve fantasies with morbid “realism”. But this “realism” led him backwards, for almost inevitably, the instinctive reliance on the threat of extermination which he had used to counter Toynbee’s moral claims, threw him back to Hitlerism:

I recoil from the idea of Jews lording over others, it is at variance with the image of Judaism I cherish, and the example of other nations makes me fear the dangers to the moral fiber, the psychological balance, and spiritual values lying in wait for a master race. [...] You speak movingly of your grandchildren, I understood you well. I am a younger man and I have two small children. When I look into their eyes, I think of the million Jewish children who, the Nazis separated from their parents, starved to death and killed in the gas chambers. At such moments my heart goes out to all the children of the world, Arab, Vietnamese and all others, and I feel again like crying aloud: ‘Never, never again’.<sup>85</sup>

The fear of extermination, then, became the ultimate argument in the defense of Jewish nationalism. Knowing the two opponents intimately and playing a significant role behind the scenes of the Talmon–Toynbee debate, Berlin probably agreed with many of Talmon’s claims. Nonetheless he was not haunted by the same extinction anxieties that gradually made Talmon feel under siege. Always preferring to stay in the background, Berlin provides us only with hints about his emotional involvement in the affair. In his opinion, Toynbee the historian was motivated by the traditional Christian outlook on history, and already in his essay on Hess (1957), had argued that one should distinguish history from historiosophy, which is “the attempt to make history do the work of theology or speculative metaphysics,” and that Toynbee “was the leading, if maybe the last, representative of this type of *secular messianism* in our day”.<sup>86</sup> But the disturbing element in the debate with Toynbee as well as in other debates during the 1970s was the fact that leading world-intellectuals were quick to turn their critique of specific Israeli policies into an argument against Zionism as a whole.

This was harder for Talmon than for Berlin, because he considered himself to be an un-nominated ambassador of the liberal camp in Israel and at the same time a critical intellectual who was not frightened to speak out against the decisions of the Israeli government. This duality—of being critical “internally” but at the same time more apologetic when defending his nation-state from “external” criticisms—was much weaker, almost absent, in Berlin’s case. Feeling himself somewhat of an outsider both in his relation to England and in his attitude towards the Israeli “sabras” (native-born Israeli Jews), it is understandable why Berlin did not suffer from the same levels of anxiety which his deeply-committed Zionist friend from Jerusalem felt. In that sense Berlin was, somewhat ironically, fortunate. Being an Anglophile and a pro-Zionist Berlin was willing to defend the certain “virtues” or values he associated with Britain (“empiricism”, “sense of reality”, etc.) or

<sup>83</sup>Arnold J. Toynbee and J.L. Talmon. “Arabs and Jews: An exchange of letters.” *Encounter* 29:4 (October 1967) 69, 70.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., pp. 71–72.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>86</sup>Berlin, “The Life and Opinions of Moses Hess”, pp. 217–218 (emphasis mine). Toynbee himself also admitted that Christian theology guided him: “It is difficult for anyone brought up in the Christian tradition to shake himself free from the official Christian ideology. He may have discarded Christian doctrine consciously on every point; yet on this particular point he may find that he is still influenced subconsciously, by the traditional Christian view in his outlook on Jewish history ... I am conscious that my own outlook has been affected in this way”. Toynbee, *Reconsiderations*, p. 478.

Israel (“normalizing the Jews”, offering Jews a sense of belonging, etc.<sup>87</sup>), but at the same time he could more easily distance himself from both, and avoid direct confrontations by falling back on a basic feeling of “otherness” that placed him in the position of an external observer. Talmon, a classic “organic intellectual” in Gramscian terms, interpreted the value of intellectual engagement differently.

Berlin was probably one of the very few people to whom Talmon could confess that he felt caught between hammer and anvil. During Golda Meir’s prime-ministership, as the occupied territories, the Palestinian question and the deterioration of the relations between the UN and Israel became the burning issues, Talmon felt particularly disturbed. “Being abroad I feel as usual less critical of my government and its policies, deeply saddened as I am by the idea that our standing attitude towards the UN is so very reminiscent of that of Mussolini in the 1930s”, Talmon wrote to Berlin in October 1971.<sup>88</sup> “What an irony!” he added. This irony was replaced by bitterness and deep anxiety after the Yom Kippur War of October 1973. Very unlike the euphoric triumph of 1967, after 1973, Talmon, like the majority of Israeli-Jews, felt once again that his country was miraculously saved after being on the verge of physical extermination. Traumatized, it became harder for him to pardon the vocal critics of Israel.

These were not merely abstract or theoretical questions that had no impact outside academic ivory towers. Decision 3379 of the United Nations Assembly from the winter of 1975, which clearly stated “that Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination” marked the lowest point of the ebb in the relation between Israel and the United Nations. Talmon was not the only one who felt that it became extremely difficult to separate anti-Israeli critiques from anti-Semitic views following this point. Chaim Herzog, Israel’s Ambassador to the UN, condemned the resolution as an assault on Judaism itself. Symbolically, Herzog remarked in the opening of his speech, the resolution was passed on November 10th, on the 37th anniversary of *Kristallnacht*, the night in which Nazi gangs ransacked synagogues in Berlin. Once again the Holocaust became a central argument in the defense of Israel’s existence, and the whole Jewish history—a series of endless persecutions. Herzog ended his speech by stating that “For us, the Jewish people, this is but a passing episode in a rich and event-filled history... For us, the Jewish people, this resolution based on hatred, falsehood and arrogance, is devoid of any moral or legal value”.<sup>89</sup> By 1976 Talmon reached a similar conclusion, declaring that “one can no longer defend the distinction between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism after Auschwitz and after 1948”.<sup>90</sup>

Talmon had thus developed what we might term a “siege syndrome”. The sense of a crusade or a blockade developed throughout the 1970s, and turned in the last years of his life into an existential crisis. Once again, it was to Berlin that Talmon confessed his troubles: “My basic difficulties are ideological, psychological, fundamentally matters of conscience ... In his Young Man Luther Erikson highlights the crisis of identity of the young man when about to decide about the role he should play in the world. In the last few years I am going through a type of crisis of identity: on the threshold of old age perhaps”.<sup>91</sup> Talmon’s self-analysis as suffering from a crisis-identity was inseparable from the sense of siege and incoming catastrophe.

It was under these circumstances that Talmon began to seriously contemplate how he should make the transition from modern European history to modern Jewish history. We can now return to his last letter to Berlin, with which we opened this paper, in which he confessed his difficulty in making the transition from “General” to “Jewish” history. “[In] my vol. III I may have become guilty of punishable audacity in making forays into fields where I had not the sufficient equipment to wander”, Talmon wrote to Berlin. But what really bothered him was not the lack of proper methodological tools or intellectual daring, as much as the growing feeling that the latest criticisms of Israel made him question his previous conviction in the success of the Zionist project. Moreover, he realized he would not be able to separate his personal doubts and anxieties as an intellectual from his historiographical work. Acutely aware of the fact that the sense of siege would

<sup>87</sup>Berlin. “Jewish Slavery and Emancipation”; Berlin. “A Nation Among Nations”. *Jewish Chronicle*, 4 May 1973, esp. pp. 28, 31; Berlin. “The Cost of Curing an Oyster”. *Jerusalem Post*, 10 February 1986, p. 8.

<sup>88</sup>IBPA, MS Berlin 286, fol. 61.

<sup>89</sup>Chaim Herzog. “Statement in the General Assembly by Ambassador Herzog on the item ‘Elimination of all forms of racial discrimination,’ 10 November 1975”. *Israel’s Foreign Relations: Selected Documents*, vol. 3: 1974–1977. Ed. Meron Medzini (Jerusalem: Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 1976) 129. See also Chaim Herzog. *Who Stands Accused? Israel Answers Its Critics*. (New York: Random House, 1978) and Yohanan Manor. *To Right a Wrong: The Revocation of the UN General Assembly Resolution 3379 Defaming Zionism*. (New York: Shengold Publishers Inc., 1997).

<sup>90</sup>Talmon. “The New Anti-Semitism”. *The New Republic* (18 September 1976) 18.

<sup>91</sup>IBPA, MS. Berlin 286, fol. 121 verso: Talmon to Berlin, 1–7 July 1979.

inevitably shape his historical narrative, Talmon feared he would fall back on a narrative that was all too familiar. “*Be-khol dor va dor, kamin aleynu lechalotenu*”, it reads at the Passover Haggadah: “in each and every generation they stand against us to exterminate us.” In his old age, the feeling that Jews were a minority permanently surrounded by a hostile majority and that Jewish history was the story of endless persecutions overcame Talmon. The siege syndrome, he understood, would push him to produce what the Jewish-American historian Salo Baron famously condemned as the “lachrymose conception of Jewish history”.<sup>92</sup>

Talmon was unable to separate his concerns as an intellectual operating in the present from his role as a historian examining the past. For Talmon, the practice of history itself was one of the facets of intellectual engagement. This approach dominated his writings, both as an anti-totalitarian Cold warrior and as a historian writing about Jews. He was a firm believer that the historian of ideas (or, as a matter of fact, any historian) should interpret the events of the past according to the realities of the present. In his last letter to Berlin Talmon reiterated his belief: “The historian has two vantage points and imperatives: get under the skin of the people of the past with whom he is concerned, assess what has come to their intentions and doings when viewed to-day”.<sup>93</sup>

It was not coincidental that he chose to quote Jules Michelet’s epigram—“*L’histoire ne servirait a rien, si l’on n’y met les tristesses du present*”, “history becomes useless, unless one imbues it with the sorrows of the present”—as a motto to his last book.<sup>94</sup> In the introduction Talmon wrote to Jacob Burckhardt’s *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen* he explicitly described this historiographical vision: “history (as a science) is all those things of past generations that in later periods humans find interest in”. The role of the historian, he added, is not to “tell and describe” past events in a Rankeian spirit, but to “reveal the *inner meaning of the events* and interpret them”. In such a situation, Talmon added, “a question arises: a meaning *for whom?*” Talmon’s answer to his own rhetorical question was decisive: “Clearly, for the generation of the writer. But we will be even more accurate if we say: for the writer himself.”<sup>95</sup>

This approach made historical writing part of general intellectual engagement. It was precisely this method that he found difficult to apply when it came to Jewish history. The problem was not how to interpret Jewish past *per se*, but how to interpret it from the vantage point of contemporary Jewish affairs. Trying to stay true to his own historical method, the dilemma of the devoted liberal Zionist was translated into a fear of impotence as a historian. Under the new circumstances of the 1970s Talmon’s former conviction that Zionist history should be told as a success story became shaky. Jewish contemporary history offered an uncertain future and an unstable reality, which was unwilling to surrender to one historical narrative. There were too many possible and competing meta-narratives: the Sisyphus myth, renaissance, *Sturm und Drang* nationalism, Crusader-story, optimistic fulfillment and tragic destruction. There were too many ways to tell the story of modern Jewry and Zionism.

Historical perspectivism, that is, the feeling that there is no external or objective authority that can determine which of these different narratives is true, drove Talmon to agony. In the light of Talmon’s methodological approach of attempting to interpret the past in light of the present, Talmon’s uncertainty regarding the way he should understand the present situation of contemporary affairs, made the construction of a historical narrative of the Jewish past an impossible task.

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<sup>92</sup>Salo W. Baron. “Ghetto and Emancipation: Shall We Revise the Traditional View?”. *Menorah Journal* 14:6 (1928) 515–526.

<sup>93</sup>IBPA, MS. Berlin 286, fol. 122: Talmon to Berlin, 1–7 July 1979.

<sup>94</sup>Talmon. *The Myth of the Nation*, p. viii.

<sup>95</sup>Talmon. “Yaacov Burckhardt”. Burckhardt, *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen*, tr. Chaim Isaak. (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1962) x, xiv–xxv [Hebrew]. The emphasis and the translation from Hebrew is mine, A.D.