

Herzl's Road to Zionism

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THEODOR HERZL'S MOST QUOTED statement, surrounded by an almost prophetic aura, is undoubtedly the entry in his diary written after the conclusion of the first Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897, "In Basel I have founded the Jewish state." To this he added wistfully: "Were I to state this loudly today, the response would be universal derision. Perhaps in five years, certainly in fifty years, all will admit it." Fifty-one years later, in 1948, Israel gained its independence under the leadership of David Ben-Gurion.

For all its almost mystical bravura, the famous statement conceals more than it reveals: Herzl's first choice was not Basel, nor did he initially intend to convene a public congress. As his diaries clearly show, his original policy options were quite different, and only a combination of failures, contingencies, and sheer serendipity—those inscrutable building-blocks of so much of history's tortured process—led him to Basel and to what eventually became a winning strategy of Zionist politics and diplomacy.

First, as to the venue: When Herzl became aware that only a public—and well-publicized—world gathering of Jews might grant him the breakthrough he was seeking for his ideas, his first choice was Munich, a major metropolis in powerful Germany, not a mid-size provincial town in Switzerland. At that time, Munich boasted a vibrant artistic, intellectual, and architectural life, and was also conveniently located for easy railway access to most areas in Central and Eastern Europe, from where most of the delegates were to come. It also had a sizeable Jewish community.

Ironically, however, it was the rabbis and leaders of the Jewish Kultusgemeinde of Munich who foiled Herzl's attempt to inscribe the name of Munich in the annals of Jewish history. But for their refusal to have the congress meet in their city, Herzl's statement would probably have been: "In Munich I have founded the Jewish state."

The reason the worthies of the Jewish community of Munich recoiled in horror from being involved in any way in Herzl's project can well be understood. Wealthy and prosperous, viewing themselves as proud Jews as well as ardent German subjects, the Jewish community leaders of Munich found it offensive and imprudent to be even indirectly associated with the outlandish idea of a political movement calling for the return of

Jews to Zion—it might cast aspersions on their German patriotism and their loyalty to the recently unified German Reich; it could even raise the disturbing specter of double loyalty. It is to these considerations that the Zionist movement owes its luck of not being associated with a city that would have its own symbolic resonance in other, far darker chapters of modern European and Jewish history.

Having been singled by this rebuttal, Herzl lowered his sights and, rather than looking for an alternative major metropolitan center in a major country, began looking for a less visible venue. Switzerland presented itself as a viable alternative—again, due to its centrality regarding train connections, but also due to its political marginality. By this time Herzl was already treading carefully, and, as his correspondence and diary suggest, he passed over the obvious choice, Zurich, fearing a similar rejection from the leaders of what was then—as it is now—the major Jewish community in Switzerland.

There was, however, another reason. Zurich, with its cosmopolitan atmosphere, had over decades been the magnet for revolutionaries from around the world, who found its atmosphere congenial as a place of refuge and asylum (Lenin was to spend some time there later); it thus became known as a hotbed of anarchism and sedition. Herzl was adamant in presenting his nascent movement as eminently respectable and unthreatening to the powers-that-be, unconnected in any way with the seedy political refugees, suspicious-looking revolutionaries, and bomb-throwers associated with the émigré culture of Zurich. Hence the choice of laid-back Basel. Even its Jewish community, one of Herzl's correspondents wrote him, was insignificant: "It cannot help us much—but neither can it hurt us," wrote the Zurich lawyer David Farbstein, one of Herzl's earliest supporters.

Herzl was also satisfied that, despite its small Jewish population, Basel did possess a kosher restaurant, which would make it possible to draw observing Orthodox Jews to the congress. While himself wholly nonobservant (during the congress itself he complained about having to eat the unpalatable kosher food offered in what was obviously an indifferent eating house), Herzl was respectful of the symbolic meaning of religious traditions and understood that in order to succeed, the Zionist movement would need at least some support from Orthodox quarters. How important this symbolism was to Herzl is also evident from his decision to go to the synagogue in Basel on the Sabbath preceding the opening of the congress. He was honored with an *aliyah* to the Torah, and though never a synagogue-goer, he did confide to his diary that the occasion moved him deeply—even more than his own speech at the opening of the congress the next day.

Having become the venue for the first Zionist Congress through a se-

ries of unlikely causes, Basel eventually developed into the virtual capital of the Zionist movement in its first phase. Out of the eleven Zionist congresses that met before the outbreak of World War I, seven met in Basel; at one point Herzl even contemplated asking one of his associates, the well-known architect Oscar Marmorek, to draw up plans for a "Congress Hall" in Basel, but the idea never materialized.

Yet convening a congress was not, in the first instance, the way Herzl imagined promoting and achieving his ideas. When Herzl set himself the task, in the summer of 1895, of addressing "the Jewish Question," he was at first utterly at a loss how to go about it. As the evidence of his diaries suggests, he initially played with the idea of writing a popular novel about the plight of the Jews and their deliverance in a Jewish state. He started collecting material and making notes for it, hoping to reach a wide audience through a literary medium. (Eventually, Herzl carried out another version of this idea in his utopian novel *Altneuland* ["Old-New Land"], but by then the Zionist movement had already been launched.) Basically Herzl thought that he would achieve his goal of creating a Jewish commonwealth by attracting to his vision the European Jewish moneyed aristocracy. These were the heads of the Jewish merchant banking houses whose influence and financial power stood at that time at their pinnacle, even as they evoked (and Herzl was well aware of this) the kind of anti-Semitism which claimed that, through their money, the Jews ruled the world.

Herzl had in mind primarily two banking magnates: Baron de Hirsch, known for extending to the Ottoman Empire the credit that made, among other things, the building of railways there possible, and who was already involved in Jewish philanthropy, mainly by supporting the establishment of Jewish agricultural settlements in Argentina; and the Paris Rothschilds, who were already known for their support of some of the first Jewish villages in Palestine, which they had rescued from bankruptcy.

Herzl's initial plan was to present himself before these financiers and convince them that he held the only key to the solution of the Jewish problem: the establishment of a Jewish commonwealth, preferably in Palestine (though at that time, mainly in deference to Hirsch's philanthropic projects in Argentina, he did not rule out South America as an option).

As these ideas were being formed in Herzl's mind in 1895, he was about to return to Vienna after a few years' stay in Paris as the correspondent for the prestigious Viennese liberal newspaper *Neue Freie Presse*. He was also known as a playwright, some of whose plays had been performed, to modest acclaim, in Vienna. Yet he was not a public figure, had as yet no organization or financial support behind him, and was basically speaking for himself. The idea that he could just walk into Hirsch's or Rothschild's gilded chambers and charm them into following his plans was

totally unrealistic, even ridiculous, and was obviously doomed to fail. Nor did Herzl, for all his political acumen, realize that the last people likely to get involved in such a revolutionary scheme were Jewish financiers, pillars of the economic and political international order, who would do nothing to upset it or their role in it. They might contribute handsomely to Jewish philanthropies, as they did; but the last thing they would dare to get involved in was Jewish independent politics.

Yet Herzl failed to perceive this. He thought that his idea could be launched if a significant number of Jewish bankers would form a "Society of Jews" to finance the enterprise, or if a Jewish Council of Notables could be convened. He did gain access to Baron de Hirsch in his Paris mansion, but the outcome was embarrassing. Herzl had prepared a lengthy oration, and the baron, who probably expected another Jewish petitioner for another Jewish philanthropic cause, was taken aback and cut him off virtually in mid-sentence; Herzl was politely shown the door. He continued to bombard Hirsch with memoranda, but never got another chance to present his case.

For a proposed meeting with the Rothschilds he prepared himself in a more organized way. Herzl hoped to be able to address the whole House of Rothschild at one of their estates, but his attempts to arrange an audience never succeeded. However, out of the careful notes he prepared as the basis for his "Address to the House of Rothschild," he put together most of the material he would use in his brochure *Der Judenstaat* ["The Jewish State"], which he published the following year and which became the founding manifesto of the Zionist movement.

When the attempt to gain the attention and support of Jewish merchant bankers failed—as did a similar attempt to enlist the support of Vienna's chief rabbi—Herzl moved to an equally unsuccessful attempt to gain the support of major world leaders. His diaries for 1895–96 abound in feverish correspondence with a host of personalities, Jewish and non-Jewish, some eminently respectable, others less so, aimed at getting him access to the major courts and chancelleries of Europe and the Ottoman Empire. All these attempts failed, as they were doomed to. What serious statesman or king would deign to listen to a little-known journalist and playwright who thought that he and he alone knew how to solve one of Europe's most vexing problems, the so-called Jewish question? As many entries in his diaries attest, Herzl was aware that many of his interlocutors may well have considered him a crackpot, if not a confidence man; nonetheless, he tried again and again—in vain.

It was only after he had failed to get access to the powers-that-be that he decided to go public and try to build up a popular movement. Herzl's failures with Jewish bankers and world leaders convinced him that as a purely private person he was powerless and destined to remain so. Being

a journalist and a chronicler of European political life, Herzl eventually realized that he needed public support—an organization, a funding source (until then all his efforts had been financed by his own and his father's limited resources). He had to speak for a movement, for an organization, for masses of people; only then would he be taken seriously and be listened to. Thus the idea of convening a congress came into being.

It is also significant that in the course of his frantic and futile attempts to reach Jewish magnates and world leaders, Herzl's own network of friends, supporters, and useful contacts constantly widened. To his own surprise, he learned that he was not the first to invent the Zionist wheel, that in Eastern Europe there already existed a network, albeit small yet with some resonance, called *Hovevei Zion* ("The Lovers of Zion"), that was supporting the few Jewish agricultural settlements already established in Palestine. He now also became aware for the first time of the Hebrew Enlightenment movement (*Haskalah*) in Eastern Europe and the literary revival of the Hebrew language among some members of the Jewish intelligentsia in Galicia, Lithuania, and southern Russia.

Thus the Zionist Congress was born, and the idea became flesh. Herzl himself commented ruefully that if the rich Jews would not follow him, the masses would. Strictly speaking, the masses never did flock to Herzl's movement. However, out of the failure of his attempt to enlist the rich and the powerful, there grew the Zionist movement as we know it—based on voluntary membership, developing representative and elected institutions and fund-raising structures, engaging in education, propaganda, and political lobbying—in short, "the state in the making" (*ha-medinah ba-derekh*) that was to become the World Zionist Organization and as such the underpinning of the eventual structure of the State of Israel. In this sense the statement "In Basel I have founded the Jewish State" transcends its boastful bravura intent. The entity created in Basel—paradoxically owing its genesis to the failures of Herzl's initial strategies—did indeed become the foundation of the very institutional structures that made possible the emergence of the Jewish state and determined to a large extent the contours of the representative, democratic, liberal, consensus-seeking, and coalition-building nature of Zionist and eventually Israeli politics.

The first Zionist Congress was not an elected body but a gathering of individuals who came in response to Herzl's invitation. Although he was still merely a private person, Herzl's name had become moderately known in Jewish circles due to the publication of *The Jewish State* in 1896. But the lawyers, doctors, writers, journalists, poets, and intellectuals who met in the staid and stuffy bourgeois atmosphere of the Basel Civic Union, known as the *Stadt-Casino*, felt that, even though they were not elected, they were doing something quite revolutionary and representative of the

Zeitgeist: they were reconstituting Jewish political life. The members of the congress saw themselves—and Herzl's diary entries attest to this repeatedly—as a Constituent or National Assembly, creating, by its very existence, something that Jews had not possessed for a long time, a Jewish political will institutionalized. The painting by Menachem Okin of the opening of the congress, melodramatic and stylized in the way it pictures Herzl in front of the delegates, clearly suggests an *Assemblée Nationale*, a Reichstag—the rebirth of a nation.

With this in mind, the delegates set out to create both the infrastructure and the legitimacy of the movement they called into being by their very meeting. The next congress was already elected on the basis of a voluntary membership fee, the symbolic shekel, evoking memories of the contributions made by Jews all over the Roman Empire to the coffers of the Temple in Jerusalem during the Second Commonwealth. This form of payment became both the initial financial basis for the organization as well as a symbol of its legitimacy and a mark of participation and membership in the newly created national enterprise. Every Jewish person paying the shekel—whose cost was computed in every country in its own currency—was entitled to vote in elections for delegates to the congress, which was to meet annually. At the Second Congress, meeting once again in Basel in 1898, an overwhelming majority decided that women who paid the shekel would have equal rights to vote and be elected to the congress—this at a time when women did not yet enjoy the suffrage in any European country or in the United States.

The organization of the congress and the nascent Zionist movement followed in the best traditions of European parliamentary life. Congress debates were public, and verbatim reports of the debates of each congress were published soon after its adjournment; in addition to plenary sessions, committees (on finance, education, membership, etc.) were established; between annual congresses an elected executive ran the affairs of the organization. Herzl himself was elected president of the congress and of the movement. Early on, factions emerged, first informally and later in a more structured form, giving rise to the eventual political parties that contested elections for congress—“general” (i.e., liberal) Zionists, socialist Zionists of various stripes, religious Zionists (Mizrachi), and so forth. The politics of coalition-building and inclusion gave rise to the need for political compromise, especially on issues like religion, with the Zionist movement—basically secular and nonobservant—nonetheless expressing respect for religious sentiments and traditions. Last but not least, as recently shown in Michael Berkowitz's perceptive study, this amalgam of modernity and tradition gave rise to the grammar of a modern Jewish national culture, encompassing literature, festivals, symbols, ceremonies, visual arts, and political procedures and activity. The line

from Basel to the present achievements and tribulations of Israeli political life and culture is clear.

The Roots of Herzl's Zionism

Any assessment of Herzl's historical stature must, of course, try to respond to a fundamental question regarding the very core of his intellectual odyssey: what made Herzl, a successfully integrated cultural figure in fin de siècle Vienna, move from his initial liberal-integrationist position—one shared with so many other acculturated, comfortable Jewish intellectuals of his generation in the German-speaking world—to what at the time surely looked bizarre, advocacy for a Jewish state? In fact, this trajectory had already been followed before Herzl, but with hardly more than a ripple effect on the course of history, by such disparate people as Moses Hess and Leo Pinsker. Yet the specifics are always intriguing, in the case of Herzl even more so than most people are aware of, including those versed in Zionist history and myth.

The conventional wisdom is that what triggered Herzl's Zionist trajectory was the Dreyfus Affair. Herzl was present in Paris as a correspondent for his Viennese newspaper during the first phase of the protracted affair. He reported, with indignation and obvious pain, on the travesty of justice visited upon the hapless captain; he was present and reported again, with barely suppressed anger, on the public degradation of Dreyfus, when he was deprived of his commission after his first guilty sentence—his epaulets removed, his sword symbolically broken—all in a public military ceremony intended specifically to humiliate and degrade. Yet, on the evidence of Herzl's own diaries and correspondence, it would be wrong to see the Dreyfus Affair as responsible for his quest for a national solution to the plight of the Jews and for his despair over the fate of the European liberal dream.

The picture is more complicated, and the reasons for Herzl's change of heart are multiple. Though Herzl did report frequently about the first phase of the Dreyfus Affair (the later and politically much more stormy stages occurred when he was already back in Vienna and after he had launched the first Zionist Congress), there is hardly any reference in his reports and dispatches to the Jewish angle of the matter. What Herzl stressed in his reports (which he later also published in the collection of his articles from the Paris period in the volume *Palais Bourbon*) was the general xenophobia and chauvinism characterizing French public life; its rabid anti-German revanchism (for many French nationalists Dreyfus was primarily an Alsatian, with a suspect sympathy for Germany, which had annexed Alsace-Lorraine in the wake of France's defeat in 1870–71); the venality of the French press; the corruption of French parliamentary

life; the unholy alliance among politicians, churchmen, and generals; the travesty of military justice; the vulgar populist outpourings of French politicians; and the masses' quest for a sacrificial lamb. Dreyfus's Jewishness is hardly mentioned by Herzl.

Moreover, the perusal of Herzl's diaries, covering hundreds of pages for the period 1895–1904, fails to come up with more than a couple of mentions of Dreyfus's name. His release from Devil's Island hardly merited more than half a sentence in the diaries, and even this was tucked away in a passage about a conversation with an Austrian politician.

This should not come as a surprise to anyone familiar with 1890s Vienna, or to any sensitive reader of Herzl's diaries. The sources of Herzl's skepticism about the failure of European liberalism and its internal fragility are deeply engraved in his own biography. The diaries reveal how much it was the development of politics and culture in his native Austro-Hungarian ambience, rather than French affairs, that left an indelible mark on his assessment of European politics and the future of the Jews. Incidentally, the number of Jews in France at that time was around 100,000, while more than two million Jews lived in the lands of the Habsburg Empire, encompassing not only Austria and Hungary proper, but also such centers of Jewish population as Bohemia, Slovakia, Galicia, Transylvania, and Bukovina.

After all, it was in his student days at the Law Faculty of Vienna University that Herzl found himself, like many other Jewish students, excluded from the local student fraternities (the *Burschenschaften*), because the Austrian fraternities, under the influence of anti-Semitic politicians and writers like Schoenerer and his Pan-German movement, were the first to exclude "non-Aryans" from their midst. It was the Vienna of the 1890s that also saw the emergence of a populist-nationalist movement, the Christian Social Party, led by Dr. Karl Lueger, whose xenophobic and anti-Semitic politics catapulted him, by popular choice and against the express wishes of the liberal government of Emperor Franz Joseph, to the post of mayor of Vienna—the first time an avowedly anti-Semitic politician was elected to public office in open, free elections anywhere in 19th-century Europe. It was in Vienna, not in Paris, that Herzl saw the collapse of the liberal, integrationist dream under the pressure of populist rabble-rousers, using the vote and the representative system to transfer political power from liberal to conservative politicians.

Herzl acknowledged this over and over in his diaries and correspondence: "I will fight anti-Semitism in the place it originated—in Germany and in Austria," he said in one letter. He identified the genealogy of modern, racist anti-Semitism in the writings of the German social scientist Dr. Eugen Duehring in the 1890s; it was here, in the intellectual discourse of the German-speaking lands, to which the names of Dr. Wil-

helm Marr and Prof. Heinrich Treitschke have to be added, that Herzl saw the seeds of the destruction of European culture. It was not thugs coming out of the gutter or effluvia of social marginality, but stars in the intellectual firmament of German and Austrian spiritual and social life who were responsible for introducing, for the first time, racial criteria into modern intellectual, scholarly, and political discourse.

To this Herzl's diaries add an awareness of the brittleness and vulnerability of what appeared to many liberals—and primarily Jewish liberals—as the best political guarantee against bigotry and intolerance: the multinational Habsburg Empire, in whose lands Jews enjoyed equal rights, religious tolerance, unprecedented economic prosperity, and social mobility and protection under the law, all presided over by the patriarchal yet liberal symbolism of the Old Emperor.

Herzl devoted innumerable entries in his diaries to evidence suggesting that this benign, liberal empire was about to unravel, due to the combined pressures of competing social and national movements. It was these ethnic hatreds, coupled with a populist social radicalism, that were, according to Herzl, about to overcome the benevolent attempts at compromise and tolerance identified with the politics of the Habsburgs.

Lueger's victory in Vienna and the restructuring of the student fraternities along "Aryan" lines were only two examples: Herzl's diaries contain descriptions of the ethnic tensions (now totally forgotten except by experts and the descendants of those involved) between ethnic Germans and Czechs in Bohemia and Moravia, as well as in the Parliament in Vienna. Herzl followed the development of these tensions, which were reaching their climax around the turn of the century and were beginning to undermine the stability of the government in Vienna, as parliamentary life was becoming increasingly overshadowed by the extreme bickerings between nationalist German and Czech deputies in the Imperial Diet in Vienna. Herzl followed the intense struggle over questions of language in schools in Bohemia, and on many occasions reported listening to the laments of Austrian ministers (many of liberal Polish and Czech background) about the systemic crisis enveloping political life in the empire and eroding its stability. He reported similar developments from Galicia and Hungary, where ethnic and linguistic strife between Poles and Germans, and among Hungarians, Croats, and Slovaks, was endangering the survival of the tolerant, multi-ethnic empire.

To Herzl, all this had a specific Jewish angle: in Bohemia, for example, most Jews, especially in the capital, Prague, historically gravitated toward an identification with the German-speaking population, since emancipation and integration meant for them integration into the dominant German-language culture. When ethnic German parties and organizations adopted an "Aryans only" policy in the 1890s, many Jewish intel-

lectuals and professionals found themselves excluded from what they considered their spiritual home; Herzl mentioned a number of personal tragedies ensuing from this development. When some of these Jews, now excluded from German-speaking associations, turned toward Czech groups, some Czech leaders loudly hooted them out, rightly pointing out that it was only German anti-Jewish attitudes that made those Jews embrace Czechdom. As a consequence, many Jews found themselves excluded from both German and Czech identity, thrown, so to speak, out of modern society and thrown back, sometimes against their own will, on their Jewish identity. Herzl enumerated additional instances from other regions of the Habsburg Empire.

There is a surprising amount of material in Herzl's diaries dealing with the political ascendancy of exclusivist ethnic nationalism in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Herzl maintained close contacts with Austrian liberal politicians who tried to stem the tide of emerging nationalism, and on one occasion even prepared a draft for a compromise on school language policy at the request of the Austrian prime minister, Count Badeni (himself a Polish aristocrat from Galicia, with whom Herzl had numerous meetings dealing with, among other matters, the national and social plight of Jews in that province). Yet all was to no avail, and Herzl followed with a sinking sensation the gradual disintegration of the policies of tolerance and the ascendancy of the shrill calls for an ethnocentric politics marked by intolerance and xenophobia.

It was this awareness on Herzl's part that the era of the Good Old Emperor was drawing to a close in *Mittleuropa* that propelled him to the realization that Jewish life in Central and Eastern Europe was in danger of being swept into the vortex of conflicting ethnic hatreds—with the Jews in the cross fire, with nowhere to escape to. That Jewish masses were suffering in Czarist Russia or Romania was common knowledge, but now that Herzl began to feel the Austro-Hungarian Empire itself beginning to unravel, he saw the Jewish tragedy moving to Central Europe, to the lands in which liberalism and tolerance were supposed to guarantee a safe Jewish existence and allow the Jews to lead decent lives and to prosper.

Herzl was one of the first to realize that this was about to happen, at a time when most commentators still believed in the longevity of the Central European equivalent of Victorian liberalism and in its capacity to survive and reform. His frantic search for a way out for the Jews ("out of the quarrels and battles of Old Europe," as he put it) was an outcome of this realization.

Herzl's road to Zionism was thus premised not on an emotional response to an individual tragedy in the West, emblematic as it might be, but on a structural analysis of the malaise of European politics in gen-

eral at the turn of the century—with anti-Semitism only one ingredient in a new grammar of politics which Herzl discerned and correctly identified as being, alas, the wave of the future. In this cultural ambience of Central and Eastern Europe lay the seeds of the collapse of the European 19th-century balance of power and its accompanying liberalism, leading to the cataclysms of World War I and eventually to World War II. It was in Vienna, after all, only ten years later, as ethnic clashes intensified, that a young and not too successful painter was swept into the eye of the storm of these hatreds, out of which he wove together his own destructive brand of racism and anti-Semitism. Yet well before Hitler ever heard the names of Schoenerer and Lueger, Herzl's political sensibilities and understanding alerted him to the rumblings of the coming earthquake.

The Holocaust was only one—the most murderous—consequence of the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the demise of a dream of a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and tolerant Central Europe. The social and economic tensions in the Russian Empire, of which Herzl became gradually aware once he was launched on his Zionist politics, similarly alerted him to the collapse of the traditional mode of Jewish existence even in the less hospitable lands of the czars. Because of the Russian government's exclusionary politics, Jews were constantly pushed toward revolutionary activity, and the Jewish salience among revolutionaries further ignited anti-Semitism and xenophobic politics.

Herzl's Zionism, combining the best traditions of European liberalism and a modern, basically secular interpretation of the Judaic heritage, was at its root a critique of the failure of European culture, an awareness of the coming crisis in European politics, and an almost uncanny deciphering of the writing on the wall that exploded into the terrible European series of wars and massacres starting in 1914 in Sarajevo. That this dark chapter of European history has not been totally exorcised became dramatically evident with the siege of Sarajevo and the massacre at Srebrenica in the 1990s.

Few followed Herzl's call; not many were ready to internalize the cultural pessimism that informed Herzl's liberal and humanitarian vision of a Jewish state based on the principles of equality and justice. Yet Herzl's tragic achievement in successfully deciphering the hieroglyph of history is emblazoned on the world's map by the existence of a Jewish state in the Land of Israel—a state encompassing almost 5 million Jews, home to a vital, if contentious, modern Jewish culture, based on a not always easy combination of Judaic tradition, modern Hebrew language, and modern science and technology. The tragedy is that so few followed his prescient clarion call. Had many more Jews listened to his dramatic and tragic reading of modern history, it might have been otherwise.

Contemporary Echoes

Paradoxically, some of Herzl's analysis regained relevance almost a hundred years later, when Israel did already exist, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the onset of a set of civil wars in the Horn of Africa. One of the reasons why hundreds of thousands of former Soviet Jews chose to leave for Israel was that, with the collapse of the Soviet regime and the emergence of new nation-states from the ruins of the former USSR, questions of nationalism and ethnic identity again came to the fore. Jews who had earlier viewed themselves under the Soviet system as *homo Sovieticus* faced a novel challenge as new identities linked to historical ethnic and religious ties came to dominate much of public discourse. In newly independent Ukraine, for example, many Jews who historically identified with Russian rather than Ukrainian culture, and who were more conversant with the Russian than with the Ukrainian language, found themselves having to adopt a new identity, and in many cases learn a new language. Having to relate to Ukrainian historical memories was for many of them not only an alien but also a painful experience, given the complexity of Ukrainian-Jewish relations.

Similar challenges were faced in the Muslim Central Asian republics as well as in the Baltic states, where most Jews were Russian speakers and identified with a Soviet rather than with a local identity. In some cases, as in Estonia and Latvia, many Jews were denied citizenship rights by the newly emergent legislatures, as they were lumped together with other Russian-speakers as "aliens" and even "colonizers." It is not an accident that immigration to Israel today from the former Soviet Union comes primarily from these areas—to which Moldova and Belarus could also be added—where Jews are often caught in the cross fire of ethnic, national, and religious clashes over identity and sovereignty.

A similar fate befell the small remnant of the Jewish community in Sarajevo, itself one of the components of the historical multi-ethnic and multi-religious mix that has characterized Bosnia for generations. Despite its small numbers, this community also constituted an important ingredient in the Titoist construction of Bosnia. With the demise of Yugoslavia, it found itself stranded on the alien sea of ethnic and religious warfare among Serbs, Croats, and Muslims, and most Jews left the country, going mainly to Israel. The handful of Jews in Grozny, the capital of Chechnya, were similarly evacuated to Israel during the bloody Russian attack on the independence-seeking Chechen region.

The massive exodus of Ethiopian Jews to Israel occurred under somewhat analogous circumstances reminiscent of the Herzlian thesis regarding Jewish survival under conditions of ethnic strife. The civil war in Ethiopia toppled not only the Communist regime of Mengistu, but also

the Amharic hegemony inherited from the Ethiopian imperial heritage of Haile Selassie. The overthrow of Communism in Ethiopia was also an ethnic conflict over hegemony in multi-ethnic Ethiopia, and it was this that made the tenuous position of the Beta Israel communities even more precarious. While focusing primarily on East-Central European Jewry, Herzl was aware, incidentally, of the existence of black Jews, and this subject even came up in his meeting with the king of Italy, which at that time annexed neighboring Eritrea.

When viewed in this perspective, Zionism appears historically as one of the Jewish responses to the challenge of modernization and to the various transformations it caused in the uneasy equilibrium that made Jewish life in Europe possible, if not always easy. The emergence of modern Arab nationalism in the 20th century similarly threatened Jewish life in the Arab lands. Herzl's awareness of the dangers inherent in some aspects of modernity—and especially the consequences of the emergence of contending nationalist movements within the multi-ethnic area stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea—makes his analysis a powerful witness to a malaise in Europe and in world history which is, alas, still with us. By focusing on the plight of the Jews in these changing circumstances, Herzl brought his humanist and universal vision to bear on one specific aspect of modernity and its discontents, thus making Zionism an inseparable part of modern and contemporary history.

