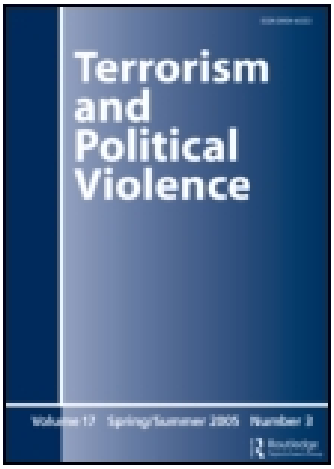

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Jewish Identity and the Russian Revolution: A Case Study of Radical Activism in the Russian Empire

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Jewish Identity and the Russian Revolution: A Case Study of Radical Activism in the Russian Empire

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The article deals with Jewish revolutionaries in the Russian Empire from the 1880s until the October Revolution of 1917, approaching them through the prism of their identity crisis during a period of transition. The author's aim is to uncover the cultural and psychological mechanisms of Jewish radical motivation and to elucidate the factors which led to the formation of a radical consciousness and to growth in radical activity. Some of these mechanisms are universal, while others specifically characterize Jewish society in Russia. Equally essential are the modes of transformation of traditional Jewish concepts into the specific elements of revolutionary ideologies.

Keywords Aron-Shmuel Lieberman, Grigory Gershuni, July Martov, Leon Trotsky, Narodniki, Pavel Axelrod, People's Will, self-hatred

Messiah and Judaism—both have died,
Another Messiah has come:
The Jewish Worker (the rich man's victim)
Raises the flag of freedom.
—Semion An-sky, "To the Bund"[1]

> . . . I wanted to find out then and quickly whether I was a louse like everybody else or a man. Whether I can step over barriers or not, whether I dare stoop to pick up or not, whether I am a trembling creature or whether I have the *right* . . .
> —Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*[2]

> The Jewish question shrank and paled into insignificance in the face of the magnificent perspective of the world reign . . . of the poor and oppressed masses, equality and fraternity. . . . And I decided to devote myself to working for the sake of liberation of all the poor and oppressed in Russia. . . . I came to the conclusion that it is necessary to prepare the revolution in Russia . . . and we need an underground organization for this purpose.[3]

The above are the ruminations of a young Jewish revolutionary, one of the leaders of the reformist wing of the Russian Social Democrats (the Menshevik Party). His

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name was Pavel Axelrod (1850–1928), born and raised in a *shtetl* and acculturated at an early age, receiving his primary education in Russian. Axelrod believed that the question of Jewish emancipation would be solved with the liberation of the masses. This approach was typical of thousands of Russian Jews, who joined the ranks of different revolutionary parties and movements between the late 1870s to 1917. We can appreciate the extent of Jewish involvement in radical movements based on the official statistical data indicating the number of Jews among the political prisoners in the Russian Empire. For example, in 1901–1903, this figure reached 29.1 percent—seven times the percentage of Jews in the Empire's total population.[4]

A number of explanations can be offered for such large-scale activity. The simplest is political, related to the repressive policies of the Russian authorities toward the Jews. Pogroms and discrimination prompted many Jews to join the struggle against the regime. Nonetheless, this explanation, while it points to an important factor responsible for Jewish involvement in radical movements, does not provide a complete picture of the motives which held sway among the Jews. For instance, it leaves out entirely the ideological and psychological aspects of the Jews' radical activism.

The present article attempts to uncover the cultural and psychological mechanisms behind Jewish involvement in radical political movements in the Russian Empire between 1880 and the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. The issue is a must for understanding key factors which led to the formation of a radical consciousness and to a growth in radical activism during this period. Some of the aspects of the question addressed in this article are universal, while others are peculiar to Jewish society during this period of transition in Russia. In the present study, Jewish involvement in revolutionary activities will be considered in the context of the emergence of a new identity as a result of the transition from traditional community to modern society.

Jewish Acculturation in Russia in the Period of the Great Reforms of Alexander II (1855–1881)

The reforms introduced by Alexander II shaped the political, social, and economic backdrop for the radicalization of Russian Jews. The reforms drastically changed the life of Jewish society, including that of the communities within the Pale of Jewish Settlement. Based on the new legislation concerning education, the Jews, in addition to traditional schooling, were also given a compulsory general education. A law passed in 1861 permitted Jewish graduates of post-secondary schools to occupy state positions and to reside outside the limits of the Pale of Jewish Settlement.[5] Jewish schools founded by proponents of the *Haskalah* opened in the Pale, introducing Jewish students to both Jewish and general subjects, including study of the Russian language. From 1847 on, two state-directed Rabbinical seminaries for Jewish teachers began to operate in Vilna and Zhitomir as part of the project of Jewish integration into Russian society. The new schools put considerably greater emphasis on the study of Russian and the secular disciplines than on the Jewish subjects. During Alexander's reign, students of the seminaries were provided with financial support by the authorities.

Between 1859 and 1874, some of the state restrictions on the Jews' places of residence and choice of occupation were lifted. For instance, Jewish merchants who belonged to the First Guild (the highest merchant class) and Jews in the medical professions were allowed to settle with their families in cities outside the Pale; compulsory military service for secondary school graduates was shortened to one year. The number

of Jews in the liberal professions, such as physicians, lawyers, maternity nurses, editors of Russian-language newspapers, and journalists increased significantly. As a result, by the end of the 19th century and especially during the first decade of the 20th, a sizable stratum of Russian Jewish intelligentsia appeared, integrated to varying degrees into Russian society. Some of the members of this new intelligentsia had severed their connections with their Jewish origins, going as far as converting to Christianity in order to become part of their Russian milieu.

Although the Russian authorities had removed certain restrictions affecting the wealthiest sector of Russian Jewry, they were in none too great of a hurry to grant complete equality to the Jews. Even so, the reforms which had been enacted led to expectations of full emancipation among the Jews. The murder of Alexander II in 1881 put an end to the liberalization, leading to a return of the restrictive anti-Jewish policies and a wave of pogroms in southern Russia. Moreover, the Czarist regime almost openly supported and even initiated the violence.

The new policies brought a sense of hopelessness and desperation in their wake. Some members of the Jewish intelligentsia and Jewish students organized self-defense groups, an initiative which gradually evolved into revolutionary activism, based on the idea that the success of the revolution would provide a solution to the Jewish problem. Hence, Jewish revolutionary groups emerged, primarily of an anarchistic bent, which organized a self-protection effort against the pogroms. The activists in these groups threw bombs at pogrom perpetrators and policemen and liquidated officials involved in the initiation and support of the anti-Jewish violence. In 1903–04, such anarchist groups, made up primarily or even entirely of Jews, appeared in cities such as Bialystok, Nezhin, Odessa, Ekaterinoslav, and Zhitomir.[6] Some of these groups' members joined because of their own personal traumatic experiences: they had lost family members in the pogroms or even been eyewitnesses to the brutal murder of relatives.

The dramatic changes taking place in Jewish society were an outcome of the rapid transformation affecting all spheres of life in Russia at this time, as the entire country went leaping from feudalism to capitalism within a few decades. This was a period of intense industrialization and economic growth, which also saw the formation of civil society and institutions, as well as the emergent manifestations of individualistic modern consciousness. These processes unfolded concomitantly with a host of other changes: the abolition of serfdom (1861), which caused a migration of the former peasants into the cities; the spread of literacy among workers and peasants, and of the knowledge of the Russian language among ethnic minorities; the growth of positivistic science and, as an outcome of this last, the development of a strong nihilistic and atheistic mood and mode of thinking. The impact of the appearance of these mindsets involved disorientation, an increasing number of suicides,[7] and a growing interest in socialism and various forms of radicalism, including terrorism; this last was enthusiastically supported by the Russian intelligentsia.[8] Mass support of terrorism and other radical tendencies reflected the intelligentsia's view that social problems could be resolved by the extermination of the enemy (in this case—the authorities), instead of a search for or development of new mechanisms of interaction between the authorities and the various groups comprising Russian society.

Moreover, being a revolutionary had become fashionable in Russia. According to the impressions of Boris K. Zaitsev, a contemporary:

> The revolution was seen as the bearer of freedom from outrage. The revolution interceded for the humiliated. There was inspiration in revolution,

> while the imperial regime was gradually and unceasingly decomposing. The young people, of course, yearned for something new, fresh and pathetic. This pathos, however, appeared to be misery; the "new" people turned out to be wretched, but in the ambience of the time this was accepted at face value. It was a kind of hypnosis.[9]

Many political parties and movements emerged, but most of them "expressed a set of the intelligentsia's utopias of doctrinal wishful thinking in a concentrated form, or else sectarian intransigence; they were not an outgrowth of specific social groups' interests."[10]

These accelerated changes and processes, which brought about a transformation in mass consciousness in different groups of the population within the Empire, directly or indirectly nurtured a revolutionary mood among the Jews, as well.[11]

Jewish Radicals and the Ideological Trends That Shaped the Jewish Revolutionaries

As Jewish youth, both students and workers, stepped outside the closed world of the community and came into contact with a new hostile environment, they exhibited greater susceptibility to revolutionary sentiments and propaganda than the non-Jewish Russian population. Many of them joined different groups and movements, ranging from literary to anarchistic ones. The 1880s and 1890s became the peak period for the spread of revolutionary organizations in the cities of the Pale, including Vilna, Minsk, Odessa, Gomel, and Warsaw. It was the young people, including the intelligentsia and university and gymnasium students, who played an especially significant part in the movement's growth.[12]

Aron-Shmuel Lieberman (1844–1880), Aron Zundelevich (1851–1923), Vladimir Iokhelson (1855–1937), and other members of the Vilna revolutionary cell[13] were all students at the state rabbinical seminary in Vilna. The group which they founded later became the origin for many of the members of the "People's Will."[14]

The members of all these groups gave lectures and taught illiterate workers reading and writing, arithmetic, and the basics of the natural sciences. In addition, they disseminated the teachings of Karl Marx and the tenets of the revolution of the proletariat. These underground activists smuggled in literature from Europe, established illegal printing houses, and published booklets and leaflets filled with revolutionary appeals.

It should be emphasized that Jewish Marxist-oriented radicals had some trouble fitting within the framework of Marxist teaching. Marxist doctrine required dividing society into two struggling classes, the exploiters and the exploited. The latter included the masses, composed of the workers and the peasantry. The Jews, among whom there was no peasantry and a very small working class, by their very existence created a doctrinal problem for those who wanted to fight for the people's liberation. Marx had defined the Jews as an economic substance engaged in usury and small trade. This meant classifying the Jews with the exploiters, but the Jewish adherents of Marx's teaching were not eager to identify with this anathema class. They sought ways to disengage themselves from it, preaching internationalism instead and focusing their struggle on the liberation of the Russian peasants and workers.

During the 1870s, many young Jewish extremists joined the *Narodniki* (Populists) movement.[15] Like the Russian populists, these Jewish *Narodniki* believed that the achievements of culture and society were an edifice constructed upon the

suffering of the peasants; accordingly, they saw themselves, as well as all of society, as malefactors who had to make amends to the mistreated tillers of the soil. They were ready to sacrifice their own lives and destroy social institutions for the sake of the future paradise of the People. Jewish revolutionaries such as Pavel Axelrod felt that they owed everything to the Russian People:

> It is impermissible to quit Russia [and the] Russian People, whose hard-earned money we used for our education . . . our sacred duty is to remain among them and to work for their benefit. . . . I vividly saw deserting Russia as a crime toward the Russian People, whom I saw as the bereaved, downtrodden and uneducated masses . . .[16]

Such a position can well be understood as guilt, intrinsic to many a revolutionary's way of thinking, rather than love for the motherland.

What were the ideas that nourished such views among the Russian Jewish intelligentsia, contributing to the Russian Jews' radicalization? E. Haberer[17] interprets Jewish involvement in radical movements in Russia as a consequence of the *Haskalah* (Enlightenment), whose second-generation followers adopted an ideology of emancipation and assimilation.[18] According to Haberer, the radical character of the *Haskalah* led to an ideological fusion with Russian nihilism, which had become widespread among Russian students and intelligentsia in the 1860s.[19] This closeness found its expression in the espousal by the proponents of both movements of ideals of the liberation of the individual and society, self-improvement, social responsibility, secularization, and the utility of knowledge. In fact, the worldview and the fate of many young Russian-speaking Jews were dictated by their reading of A. Herzen, N. Chernishevsky, D. Pisarev, and other radical populist and nihilist gurus of the period. Lev Deich, a Jewish *Narodnik*, noted:

> . . . We, the Jewish youth, brought up on the foremost works of literature, were in ecstasy as we read the works of the Russian classics, poets, belletrists, critics and publicists. We had completely forgotten that we belonged to the nation persecuted and unloved by the indigenous population, that we were restricted in our rights, that we constituted the exception to the rule . . .[20]

But nihilistic views became widespread among more than just the proponents of the *Haskalah* or the supporters of assimilation. In many cases, involvement in the *Haskalah* was more of a background than a motive for assuming a nihilistic stance. The same situation obtained in connection with Jews' taking part in many of the other movements becoming popular at this time. Lev Deich points out that young yeshiva students (*yeshibotniki*) were particularly ready to respond to nihilistic ideology: "... two or three conversations with a nihilist were often enough for a *yeshibotnik* to give up all his patriarchal beliefs, as well as his specific appearance and habits . . ."[21] Deich explains:

> It is clear why nihilism succeeded among young Jews: it appealed to logic and reason, deepening the search for meaning, consistency and expedience. It provided a response to the very needs which stimulated smart and very talented young Jews to immerse themselves in the study

> of ancient Jewish texts, texts which, however, could not satisfy their insatiable desire for knowledge.[22]

These young Jews gradually dissociated themselves from the traditional content of Jewish cultural paradigms, which included the desire for Torah learning, messianic beliefs, and the imperative of *tikkun olam* (making the world a better place), replacing these contents with atheistic and nihilistic meanings. The former yeshiva students became guardians and interpreters of the "sacred texts" of the new teachings, rearing both the Russian and the Jewish masses in their correct understanding.

Jewish Radicals: A Social and Psychological Profile

A socio-cultural and psychological profile of the revolutionaries is essential in order to analyze the mechanisms of their radical motivation. Even so, no psychological theory or specific personal traits can provide an exhaustive explanation or proof where historical processes or events are concerned. Elements of theory or particular facts usually function as concomitant givens, each comprising only a part of the whole picture. The same follows from an argument put forth by J. Horgan to demonstrate the limitations of motivation theories. Horgan claims that explanations of terrorism (as well as of other forms of radicalism) which focus on personality traits are insufficient because they fail to address the question of why some individuals with certain traits join radical groups, while others under similar conditions do not. Attempts to explain the phenomenon along these lines do not take into consideration the real complexity of all the factors involved, exhibiting methodological weakness as a result.[23] The goal of this section of the paper is not to come up with an exhaustive theoretical model of Russian Jewish revolutionaries' motives, but to typologize their socio-cultural and psychological givens.

The same pattern can be traced in multiple cases: most Russian Jewish revolutionaries came originally from the Pale of Jewish Settlement, acquired some general education, then shifted away from the traditional community and migrated to the large cities. The well-known case of the terrorist Grigory (Hersh) Gershuni (1870–1908) is an example. Gershuni was born in the Kovno Province (Lithuania), attended *heder* and studied Russian beginning at the age of eight. At fifteen, he left home to begin pharmaceutical studies with his uncle. In the early 1890s, Gershuni settled in St. Petersburg; he later studied at Kiev University. After coming into contact with socialist ideas, Gershuni joined the "People's Will" and established a militant Socialists-Revolutionaries' organization. He planned the liquidation of officials, himself finding the individuals ready to sacrifice their lives "for the sake of the people's happiness" and to put his plans into effect.

Gershuni separated from his family and from the traditional Jewish community at an early age. He joined a marginal group, working his way up to an important social function. A new identity was the result. At various points during the succeeding years, many Russian Jewish radicals failed in their attempt to fuse with society as a whole. This led to a sense of antagonism and confrontation for many, who eventually joined marginal groups involved in illicit activity. For many Jews from the Pale, this kind of unconventional career choice opened the way to socialization and integration into society; most other options were closed to them by the anti-Jewish policies of the authorities, or else required baptism. These Jews found socialist

movements and organizations attractive because of their cosmopolitan ideology and their view of religion as "opium for the masses."

Jewish acculturation and the complete or partial break with Jewish roots were part of the process of modernization, a change which is typically accompanied by painful developments in traditional societies. Modernization increases the gap between social groups in traditional society, violating the consensus about values held in common and requiring new strategies of adaptation. The process may lead to the disintegration of the traditional society as a result of total polarization; otherwise, it may lead to the emergence of new elites capable of devising new forms of adaptation. The young Russian Jewish intelligentsia played the role of such an elite for the less pious segment of Jewish society. At the same time, in the course of the rapid collapse of Jewish communal life, some of the elites ceased to identify with community ideals. They underwent a process of complete radicalization and embarked on a search for a universal solution.

An identity crisis in society (or in a group) normally occurs in tandem with a crisis in individual self-identity.[24] The German sociologist Töennies Ferdinand defines this type of crisis as inherent in the process of modernization. Based on the distinction between *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society),[25] Ferdinand discusses the transition from traditional community to modern society, seeing this as a process in which the individual tries to find a substitute for his or her original social milieu by associating with a new group capable of providing its members with social, psychological, and, possibly, even financial support. In societies undergoing rapid modernization, this process of transition is bound up with a crisis of identity, leading to a variety of consequences which find their expression in nationalism and radical activism of different stripes. One of the implications for 19th-century Europe was the growth of nationalism and the subsequent emergence of new independent states. In Arab countries, where the process of modernization and urbanization began in the mid-20th century, millions of peasants poured into the capital cities (Cairo, Amman, Algiers); their severance from their communities and traditional way of life led to an identity crisis. The resulting void was frequently filled by radical Islamist movements, which offered the disoriented migrants a new identity based on the values of puritanical Islam (an Islam different from the traditional way of life and thinking generally accepted in rural communities) and including a revolutionary struggle against secular authorities and the "evil West."[26]

Two principal tendencies can be observed among Russian Jews undergoing modernization and as an outcome of the impact of the *Haskalah*: the emergence of various forms of Jewish nationalism (such as Zionism, Autonomism, Territorialism, and others), and involvement in radical movements' activities; this last frequently led to assimilation. Both tendencies were usually associated with the search for a new identity.

In addition to the social elements, the Jews' motives for joining in the activity of radical groups derived from significant psychological factors, as well. As one of the groups most persecuted and discriminated against in the Russian Empire, the Jews labored under a unique emotional burden. Ongoing humiliation, the traumatic experience of the pogroms, their lack of control of their own destiny, and a repressed aggressiveness deriving from the Jews' inability to protect themselves—taken together, these psychological elements were essential in shaping a propensity for radicalism. In addition, the contradiction between their relatively high level of education and their penchant for self-reflection, on the one hand, and their being rejected

by society as a whole, on the other, enhanced the Jewish inferiority complex, making the Jews look for ways to change reality.

As many revolutionaries testified, it was the trauma of the pogroms that determined the trajectory their lives would follow. The biography of the Russian Jewish revolutionary July Martov (1873–1923), grandson of the *maskil* Alexander Zederbaum (who had served as chief editor of the Jewish periodicals *Hamelitz* and *Razsvet*), is a case in point. In his memoirs, Martov wrote: "Would I have become what I became if Russian reality had not imprinted her coarse fingers on my plastic young soul on that memorable night and carefully planted . . . the seeds of redeeming hatred . . . "[27]

But J. Horgan argues against the view, held by a number of psychologists, which attaches pivotal significance to a central traumatic life experience of the kind that many radicals stressed in their interviews or autobiographies. Horgan points to the common phenomenon of the radicals' citing particular events as contributing factors in the history of their terrorist activity, which they treat as a *provoked reaction*. Horgan sees this as an attempt on the part of the terrorists to limit their own personal responsibility for actual events.[28] Even so, he agrees that the incidents in question may have functioned as a catalyst in the radicals' choice of a life path to follow. Interestingly, the word "hatred" serves as a key term in revolutionary lingo aimed at the authorities and the "class of bourgeois exploiters." The word connotes a holy, redeeming, liberating, uniting hatred, even to the point of inciting mutual love among the fighters united in their joint struggle against the Czarist regime. In his characterization of mass movements, Eric Hoffer notes that: " . . . hatred is not only a means of unification, but also its product."[29] The widespread use of the word apparently reflects the psychological phenomenon of self-hatred among radicals, which they projected onto their environment.

Self-hatred in an individual person or underprivileged group results from a full or partial projection onto themselves of stereotypes borrowed from surrounding society.[30] The projection leads to an inferiority complex, enforcing the self-rejection and self-hatred. Both of these last are common among radical activists, regardless of ethnicity or ideology. The self-rejection frequently results from the rejection of primary roots by the individual, including familial, ethnic, religious, social, or cultural belonging. According to E. Hoffer, "The estrangement from the self, without which there can be neither selflessness nor a full assimilation of the individual into a compact whole, produces . . . a proclivity for passionate attitudes, including passionate hatred."[31]

The biographies of many Jewish revolutionaries eloquently testify to the phenomenon of self-hatred and self-rejection. For instance, Leon Trotsky (1879–1940) wrote in his memoirs that the chasm between him and his family grew over time.[32] He was constantly critical of his parents in every sphere of their lives, and wrote about their life and death as if they were strangers. He saw his father, a successful farmer, as a "capitalist" enriching himself at the expense of the exploited peasants.[33] He wrote that he grew up beyond the confines of the Jewish community: there was no strict observance of the commandments in his family. Trotsky stresses that:

> At first, appearances were kept up through sheer inertia: on holy days my parents journeyed to the synagogue in the colony; Mother abstained from sewing on Saturdays, at least within the sight of others. But all this ceremonial observance of religion lessened as the years went on—as the children grew up and the prosperity of the family increased.[34]

Possibly, one of the reasons that Trotsky eventually became an atheist was the atmosphere of formal observance maintained in his childhood. But, taking into account a number of other factors which had an impact on him (such as the influence of his relative, the radical journalist Moisei F. Spencer, and Trotsky's own involvement in the revolutionary movement), it appears logical that his views motivated him to reassess the situation in retrospect. Viewing the past through an atheist lens and, possibly, suffering from feelings of guilt because he hailed from what could be classed as a retrograde bourgeois family, Trotsky tried to depict his parents as people who had little connection to religion, which he associated with backwardness and ignorance. In his account, his parents had broken with tradition. Trotsky adds that his "father did not believe in God from his youth, and in later years spoke openly about it in front of Mother and children."[35] As Joseph Nedava has argued, it is questionable that an illiterate farmer uninvolved in the *Haskalah* movement and insisting that his son get a traditional Jewish education could have been an outspoken atheist.[36]

As Trotsky claims in his memoirs, his every encounter with the Jewish tradition, whether during his studies in *heder* or later with a private Torah teacher, led him to feelings of frustration, indifference, or repudiation. He writes: "In my mental equipment, nationality never occupied an independent place, as it was felt but little in everyday life."[37] He intentionally ignored the fact of anti-Semitism. Trotsky interpreted the Kishinev Pogrom of 1903 as a manifestation of a lack of socialist consciousness among the Russian masses.[38] In answer to Vladimir Medem's question about his self-identity, he replied that he was neither Russian nor Jew, but a Social Democrat.[39]

According to Nedava, Trotsky succeeded in repressing his Jewish vulnerability.[40] That is, the way Trotsky intentionally ignored his own being Jewish and issues of specific concern to the Jews can be understood as an attempt to repress certain traumatic experiences and to renounce his Jewish past. His self-rejection, combined with repressed aggression toward himself and toward his hostile environment, prompted Trotsky, just as it did many other revolutionaries, to seek to change humanity and the world in radical and destructive ways. The revolutionaries proclaimed that the total rebuilding of society by means of mass reprisals and the liquidation of class enemies was the only way to make human beings more moral, healthy, and happy. To put it more bluntly, using the rhetoric of the time, this was the way to create the "new Man," who would replace the odious nature of the old, defective, imperfect, and frustrated humanity.[41] Trotsky believed that the revolution was destined to improve human nature, including both the human psyche and even the human anatomy: "To produce a new 'improved edition' of man is the future task of communism."[42] Aspirations along these lines have typically been a part of utopian thinking, intrinsic to many revolutionary leaders' visions at different points in history. Trotsky claimed that "As long as I breathe I shall fight for the future, that radiant future in which man, strong and beautiful, will become master of the drifting stream of his history..."[43]

Trotsky was one of the many leaders captivated by utopian ideals and living with his thoughts entirely in the coming days. The efforts of these utopian visionaries were all aimed at the "radiant future," while the present, unworthy and odious, was, in their view, to be systematically destroyed. Psychologically, utopian thinking of this kind provides an escape from reality, feelings of inadequacy and repugnance toward one's life, chronic depression, and suicidal tendencies, which may occasionally manifest themselves as an absence of an active will to live. Sigmund Freud, who treated some Russian revolutionary émigrés (his patients were supposedly

Socialists-Revolutionaries), wrote in 1909 that their desire to bring happiness to humanity as a whole combined in their minds with a strong disgust with the routine activities of everyday life.[44]

Like Trotsky, Grigory (Hersh) Gershuni avoided dwelling on the subject of his Jewish origins. He was usually embarrassed when addressed by his Jewish name and patronymic, Hersh Itzkovich.[45] Even so, in his memoirs Gershuni describes an interrogation scene during his imprisonment, where he casts himself as a Jewish hero:

> . . . I am a Jew. . . . You and the people who are stupid enough to believe you harp on the idea that Jews usually escape from danger and evade the gallows because they are cowards. Well and good! Get ready for an example of "Jewish cowardice." You say the Jews only know how to riot, don't you? Now you'll see if they know how to die. Tell your Plehve[46] there is nothing to negotiate about. Let him do his job: I have already done mine![47]

This pathetic scene,[48] taking place without eyewitnesses except the prison investigator and Gershuni himself, is reminiscent of a low quality theater play. It was probably fabricated by Gershuni himself in response to the accusations leveled against him by M. Melnikov, his comrade-in-arms, who claimed that after being arrested, Gershuni acted in an unworthy manner in court. According to Melnikov, Gershuni tried to save his own life by denying his involvement in the Combat Organization.[49] His self-glorification as a hero of the Revolution was a ploy he came up with a few years later, probably in an attempt to disprove Melnikov's account, which was detrimental to his image. Gershuni wanted to transform himself from a member of a hated and despised minority into a great hero, his Jewish origins playing a merely instrumental role in this made-up episode. It was supposed to serve Gershuni's aim of dissociating himself from the stereotyped image of the Jewish coward. He meant to topple the stereotype by showing its lack of a fit with reality, which featured the instance of his own personal valor instead.

Like Trotsky and many other radicals of the narcissistic personality type,[50] Gershuni created his own biography, in which he cast himself as an adequate personality and great individual who changed the course of history. Significantly, the combination of narcissism with self-rejection and self-hatred was the wellspring of destructive activity in these cases, including the planning and committing of murders. In his novel *In the New Watercourse*,[51] Semen An-sky (Shloyme Zaynvl Rapoport, 1863–1920), Jewish writer, ethnographer, populist, and Socialist-Revolutionary, delineates an entire spectrum of personality types to be found among Jewish revolutionaries in the *shtetl*, along with the factors providing their motivation.

One of the types is embodied in the novel by the Jewish terrorist named Sender. This young man, full of self-hatred, condemns and avoids Jews. He believes only in the superiority of force. Sender explains that he was disgusted by Jewish weakness and abjection, the qualities which he saw pervading Jewish life and determining the Jews' behavior, habits, and national character. This is why, Sender claims, there were no prominent figures of Jewish origin among the members of revolutionary movements. At the same time, Sender idealizes the Russian national character, which he sees as healthy and strong:

> Look at the Russian People: they have both the masses and the intelligentsia. Both are full of power, simplicity and wholeness in their healthy

> nature. A Russian, no matter what he does, whether it is performing a heroic act or beating his wife, does it as an integral person, with all his being. This is enviable . . .[52]

Sender complains that even though he tried to become a part of his Russian milieu, living among Russian workers and disseminating revolutionary propaganda in the countryside, he failed to integrate with the Russians. He has returned to his Jewish community, which he strongly dislikes. He feels similarly about himself: "I am a weak and broken Jew, like the others. I cannot live either with them [the Jews], or without them."[53]

Sender feels strong only when holding a box of dynamite in his hands:

> I knew that I was lord of a great power; that just a single motion of my hand was enough to turn everything around me to death and destruction! And I felt like I was made of steel and dynamite, and my soul became calm and spacious as never before! As if I had regained something that I had been deprived of. Then I imagined our *sloboda*,[54] poor, miserable, and downtrodden. Every drunken lout could offend and trample its honor. It seemed to me that I was its envoy, except that I was not praying, humiliated and forceless, but powerful, a Decuman. My whole being was engulfed by a great rapture of power and might![55]

For radicals like Sender, the only way for a humiliated and self-hating person to regain self-respect and a sense of security was through violence and power; social justice and the happiness of the masses served as rationalization for the deeper impetus. Sender is a kind of Jewish Raskolnikov from Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, hating and despising himself for his weakness which reduces him to being "a trembling creature" no different from the others and unable to transcend absolute moral law in order to become a "superior person." Unlike Raskolnikov, however, Sender does not undertake murder, but goes on with his purely theoretical speculations, perceiving his inability to act as a tragedy.

The Combination of New Concepts With a Traditional World Outlook

The crisis following in the wake of modernization comes along with the search for a new identity, possibly an identity of a hybrid kind.[56] The search is an attempt to become part of a different culture, society, group, or organization.[57] Hence, the period of modernization produces countless combinations of traditional concepts with new ones, occasionally leading to internal contradiction.

Aaron Lieberman, a member of the Vilna Circle, escaped to London, where he joined the coterie of the socialist and populist Pyotr Lavrov. Lieberman took part in the publication of Lavrov's Russian-language periodical *Forward* (*Vperyod*). Lieberman stood for proletarian internationalism and mixed marriages, and hated rabbis. At the same time, he published three issues of the Hebrew periodical *The Truth* (*Ha-Emet*), from the pages of which he elucidated socialist principles with the help of references to the Bible and the Talmud. He introduced his ideas in the form of a vision dealing with the organization of revolutionary activity; he also used a style similar to that found in the texts of the Kabbalah. He depicted the revolutionaries as the mystical "36 Just Men" (*tzadikim*). In order to deceive Satan, the 36 Just Men come

in the guise of evildoers, but really act according to the Highest Law. They are prepared to wage a war of good against evil, persisting until the divine forces should defeat the satanic powers.[58] Many Jewish and non-Jewish revolutionaries criticized Lieberman's approach sharply. Lieberman justified himself by explaining that his purpose was to undermine the traditional beliefs of the yeshiva students in Russia, something which could eventually be helpful in advancing the aims of the Revolution. Gershuni, who had dissociated himself from the Jewish tradition, wrote to his baptized brother on the birth of a son:

> Your Zhen'ka! So to say, the successor of the line! And you see, our line is dying out! Have you thought about this? Lord, Master of my life! . . . Our ancestors used to stand next to the Tabernacle! Scary thought: there will come a time when all the lines will still exist, and ours, which once stood next to the Tabernacle . . . will die out! Zhen'ka remains alone! Well, you see, he is so small and what a great mission he has! . . .[59]

However, such moments of awakening of a national consciousness or the use of traditional concepts usually had little impact on most of the radicals' activities and everyday life. Jewish socialists, internationalists, and atheists, who had rejected the Jewish national idea and sometimes even adopted anti-Semitic views, were part of a general trend in contemporary Russian culture. This trend, according to the Russian thinker Sergei Bulgakov, was cosmopolitism, widespread among the Russian intelligentsia:

> . . . having been brought up on the abstract schemes of the Enlightenment . . . a member of the intelligentsia believes himself a "Weltbürger." This is no more than the cosmopolitism of inanity, the lack of a healthy national sentiment, which prevents the development of a national consciousness. . . . This [cosmopolitism] results in the distancing of the intelligentsia from the people.[60]

At the same time, another trend was manifesting itself among some of the Russian intelligentsia: an obsession with its self-distancing from the people, accompanied by a guilt complex of the "oppressors" living at the expense of the peasants. The same part of the intelligentsia initiated the populist movement of "going out to the people," which has already been mentioned above. Radical Jews combined both tendencies in their thinking, uniting cosmopolitism with the desire to be a part of the Russian nation.

Having retained some elements of the traditional Jewish way of thinking, the Russian Jewish radical intelligentsia tried to detach itself from its traditional roots by fusing with the Russian intelligentsia and developing a double identity. Jewish radicals adopted new political theories and turned to the Russian masses, for whom they wanted to forge a new future. Yet for their new activity, they resorted to using values intrinsic to Jewish culture; in particular, they responded to the appeal of education and knowledge and the values of *tikkun olam* and Jewish messianism, which they infused with a universal character and associated exclusively with the kingdom of wisdom and social and political justice.[61] The traditional notions were given a new meaning in their socialistic-nihilistic-atheistic incarnation.

Notes

1. Semyon An-sky, "To the Bund" http://www.jhom.com/personalities/ansky/index.htm.

2. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (Boston: The Harvard Classics Shelf of Fiction, 1917), 135.

3. Pavel Borisovich Axelrod, *Perezhitoe i Peredumannoe* [Experiences and Reflections] (Cambridge: Oriental Research Partners, 1975), 73–74.

4. In the Vilna Province, this figure reached 65%, while it stood at 55% in Odessa and at 48.2% in Kiev. About 15% of the members of the Party of the Socialists-Revolutionaries were Jews, and the vast majority of anarchistic groups, especially in the Pale of Settlement, consisted of Jews. See Al. Noemi, "Politicheskie Prestupleniya i Evrei" ["Political Crimes and the Jews"], in A. Serebriannikov, ed., *Soblazn Sotsializma: Revolutsia v Rossii i Evrei, Issledovaniya Noveishei Russkoi Istorii* [The Temptation of Socialism: Revolution in Russia and the Jews, Studies in Modern Russian History] (Paris: Ymka-Press—Russkii Put', 1995), 460. See also Naimark Norman, "Terrorism and the Fall of Imperial Russia," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 2, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 174.

5. Between 1853 and 1886, the number of Jews attending state schools increased from 159 (1.3% of all school students) to 9,225 (10.2%). The number of Jewish university students increased during the years 1864–1886 from 129 (3.14%) to 1,858 (14.30%). See Yehudah Slutsky, *Ha-itonut Ha-Yehudit-Russit Ba-Meah Ha-Tesha-Esreh* [The Russian Jewish Press in the Nineteenth Century] (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1970), 27.

6. Moshe Goncharok, *Vek Voli: Russky Anarkhism I Yevrei* [The Age of Freedom: Russian Anarchism and the Jews] (Jerusalem: Mishmeret Shalom, 1996), 15–17.

7. This tendency found its expression in Russian fiction, newspapers, and research, as well as in the founding of suicide clubs and similar groups. See the profound and exhaustive study in: Irina Paperno, *Suicide as a Cultural Institution in Dostoevsky's Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

8. Anna Geifman, *Death Orders: The Vanguard of Modern Terrorism in Revolutionary Russia* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 2010), ch. 7.

9. See the memoirs of the contemporary: Boris K. Zaitsev, *Sochineniya v Trekh Tomah* [Works in three volumes], vol. 2 (Moscow: Terra, 1993), 390: "The revolution was considered as the bearer of freedom against outrage. The revolution interceded for the humiliated. There was an inspiration in revolution, while the imperial regime was gradually and unceasingly decomposing. The youth, of course, yearned for something new, fresh and pathetic. This pathos, however, appeared to be misery; the 'new' people were revealed as wretched, but in that ambience it was accepted at face value. It was a kind of hypnosis."

10. Vladimir Buldakov, *Krasnaya Smuta* [Red Strife] (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1997), 40.

11. For further detail on the historical and intellectual background of this period and the growth of terror in the Russian Empire, see Geifman (see note 8 above), ch. 1.

12. Nahum A. Bukhbinder, "Evreiskie Revolutsionnye Kruzhki 80-h i Nachala 90-h Godov" ["Jewish Revolutionary Circles of the '80s and Early '90s"] in Serebriannikov (see note 4 above), 212–218.

13. The circle was organized in 1869 by Mark Natanson, becoming known as the Chaikovsky Cell. It focused on spreading revolutionary moods and ideas among the peasants. The Russian anarchist theoretician Pyotr Kropotkin was one of the Cell's members.

14. A terrorist organization founded in 1879, which aimed to force the government to carry out democratic reforms. It is best known for the murder of Czar Alexander II.

15. The movement arose among the Russian intelligentsia in the 1860s. The movement's members "went out to the People," seeking a rapprochement with the peasants, from whom they wanted to learn the lessons of "wisdom" and "morality." The aim was to educate the peasants, inciting them to revolt against the Czarist regime so as to establish socialist rule based on Russian commune values. *Narodniki* abandoned their families and careers "to go out to the People"; many were imprisoned for their activities.

16. Axelrod (see note 3 above), 82.

17. Erich E. Haberer, "Haskalah and the Roots of Jewish Radicalism in Nineteenth-Century Russia," in Menahem Mor, ed., *Jewish Sects, Religious Movements and Political Parties: Proceedings of the Third Annual Symposium of the Philip M. and*

Ethel Klutznick Chair in Jewish Civilization (Omaha: Creighton University Press, 1992), 123–147.

18. Ibid., 137.

19. Ibid., 139.

20. Lev Deich, *Rol' Yevreev v Russkom Revolutsionnom Dvizhenii* [The Role of the Jews in the Russian Revolutionary Movement] (Berlin: Grani, 1923), 30.

21. Ibid., 35–36.

22. Ibid., 30–31.

23. John Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 75–77.

24. The concept of "identity crisis," widely used today in various fields in the humanities, was coined by the physiologist Erik H. Erikson. See, for example his book *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968).

25. Ferdinand Töennies, *Community and Association: Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963).

26. Francis Fukuyama, "Can Any Good Come of Radical Islam?" *Commentary Magazine* (September 2002), http://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/can-any-good-come-of-radical-islam/.

27. July Martov, *Zapisky Sotsial-Demokrata* [The memoirs of a Social Democrat], ed. I. Getzler (Cambridge: Oriental Research Partner, 1975), 19.

28. Horgan (see note 23 above), 88.

29. Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), 93.

30. Kurt Lewin, *Self-Hatred Among Jews: Identifying with the Group* (Johannesburg: Information Department of the South African Federation of Student Jewish and Zionist Associations, 1950), 7.

31. Hoffer (see note 29 above); ibid.

32. Leon Trotsky, *My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography* (London: Thornton Butter Worth, 1930), 79.

33. Ibid., 6.

34. Ibid., 84.

35. Ibid.

36. Joseph Nedava, *Trotsky and the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1972), 40.

37. Trotsky (see note 32 above), 80.

38. Vladimir Medem, *Fun Mein Lebn* [Of My Life] (New York: [s. n.], 1923*)* II, 8–9. See also Robert S. Wistrich, "Leon Trotsky," in *Revolutionary Jews from Marx to Trotsky* (London: Barnes & Noble Books, 1976), 195.

39. Medem (see note 38 above), 9.

40. Nedava (see note 36 above), 40.

41. One of the most striking instances of self-hatred among individuals who set out to improve human nature and society is the case of the Nazi elite. Most of its members became National Socialists because they had failed to integrate into society as they would have liked and suffered from a number of psychiatric, physical, and sexual problems, as well as unresolved questions of origin (the leading Nazi figures were not born in Germany and were not associated with the German aristocracy). They constructed an ideology whose ideal was a perfect individual unburdened by any of these defects. There was a popular joke in Germany: "What is a pure Arian man? He is blond like Hitler, slender like Göring, and tall like Goebbels."

42. In this and other articles, Trotsky claims that human nature needs to be improved by means of Soviet science, including psychology, anatomy, and medicine. See his "Neskol'ko Slov o Vospitanii Cheloveka" ("A Few Words on the Education of Man"), in Leon Trotsky, *Sochineniya* [Works] (Moscow–Leningrad: Gosizdat, 1927), vol. 21, 110.

43. Isaac Deutscher, ed., *The Age of Permanent Revolution: A Trotsky Anthology* (New York: Dell, 1973), 64.

44. GARF (The State Archives of the Russian Federation) F 5881, op. 2, D. 317, p. 37, 73. Quoted in Buldakov (see note 10 above), 39.

45. Gershuni preferred to use his substitute Russian name of Grigory Andreevich.

46. Plehve, Vyacheslav Konstantinovich, served as the Russian Minister of Internal Affairs and the Chief of Police from 1902 on. He tried to suppress the revolutionary

movement, and initiated and supported anti-Jewish pogroms. He was killed in 1904 by a member of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party, then headed by E. Azef. The murder was supposedly committed as revenge for the Kishinev Pogrom.

47. Grigory Gershuni, *Iz Nedavnego Proshlogo* [From the Recent Past] (Paris: Izdanie Tsentral'nogo Komiteta Partii Sotsialistov-Revolutsionerov, 1908), 43.

48. In the same prison interrogation scene, Gershuni makes his pro-revolutionary apologetic speech to the investigator, proclaiming his readiness to give up his life rather than be granted a conditional pardon by Plehve. See ibid., 39–43.

49. R. A. Gorodnitsky, "G. A. Gershuni—'Krestnyi Otets' Eserovskogo Terrorizma" ["G. A. Gershuni, the 'Godfather' of the Socialists-Revolutionaries' Terror"], in Oleg Budnitsky, ed., *Evrei i Russkaya Revolutsia* [The Jews and the Russian Revolution] (Moscow: Gesharim, 1999), 261.

50. For research dealing with the part played by narcissism in motivating terrorism, see Horgan (see note 23 above), 59–60.

51. Semyon An-sky, "V Novom Rusle" ["In a New Watercourse"], in Semyon An-sky, ed., *Sobranie Sochinenii S. An-skogo* [The Collected Works] (St. Petersburg: Prosveshchenie, 1913), vol. 4, 33–213.

52. Ibid., 170.

53. Ibid., 171.

54. *Sloboda* is a type of Eastern European settlement, where the residents were initially freed from various taxes and dues; by the first half of the 18th century, this special privilege had been abolished.

55. Ibid., 172–173.

56. The concept is familiar from post-colonial discourse. For more on this, see Homi Bhabha, "Culture's In-between," in S. Hall and P. du Gay, eds., *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage, 1996), 53–60.

57. This is how Hoffer describes this process: "The chief burden of the frustrated is the consciousness of a blemished, intellectual self, and their chief desire is to slough off the unwanted self and begin a new life. They try to realize this desire either by finding a new identity or by blurring and camouflaging their individual distinctness; and both these ends are reached by imitation." Hoffer (see note 29 above), 94.

58. Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862–1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 42.

59. Gorodnitsky (see note 49 above), 256.

60. Sergei Bulgakov, "Geroizm i Podvizhnichestvo" [Heroism and Selfless Devotion"], in M. O. Gershenzon, ed., *Vekhi: Sbornik Statey o Russkoy Intelligentsii* [Milestones: A Collection of Articles about the Russian Intelligentsia] (Moscow, 1909), 60–61.

61. Interestingly enough, the Russian tradition featured concepts comparable to messianism, which were expressed in a new form by the Russian intelligentsia: "... it was a belief in a miracle, in the very miracle that the intelligentsia so contemptuously rejected, but a miracle clothed in a new form—in their preaching about worldwide revolution, about the equality of all people .... To the ordinary folk, socialist paradise meant fabulous wealth and promised lands from the legends of religion." See Valerian N. Murav'ev, "Rev Plameni" ["The Roaring of the Flames"], in S. A. Askoldov et al., eds., *Iz Glubiny: Sbornik Statey O Russkoy Revolutsii* [From the Depths: A Collection of Articles about the Russian Revolution] (Moscow: Moscow State University, 1990), 196.