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Essays on Russian-Jewish Intellectual Life

BRIAN HOROWITZ

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To Benjamin, Rebecca, and Sophia, whom I love.

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Note on transliteration:

I use the Library of Congress system in transliterating from Russian, with the exceptions of the adjectival ending “ii,” for which I use “y” (so Dostoevsky, not Dostoevskii), and yo in Semyon. Also I use English standard forms of names when conventional forms exist. For Hebrew and Yiddish I observe the Library of Congress system.

INTRODUCTION

This book has two goals. One is to present the varieties of Jewish identities that were normative in tsarist times, and the other is implicitly to compare American- and Russian-Jewish consciousness. Despite the differences in the two countries and their times, Russian Jewry serves as a model in the attempt of secular Jews to integrate into the host society and still find a way to express their Jewish identity.

In some instances integration and identity were overtly political. Maxim Vinaver, among others, persuaded liberals in the Constitutional Democratic Party to give priority to Jewish rights. In another direction, Avram Idel'son, a Zionist, invented the doctrine of *Gegenwartsarbeit* (*Doigkei*) in order to release Jewish political energies in the struggle for rights in the diaspora. Lastly, Semyon Dubnov looked to Russian culture as a source for his ideas of cultural nationalism. These various ideas were meant to promote a politics of synthesis (Jewish integration and separation simultaneously).

From another perspective, culture came to the forefront. Mikhail Gershenzon, for example, employed his "Jewish genius" in explicating Russian intellectual life of the nineteenth century. He was accused of "universalizing" and "de-nationalizing" Russian intellectuals, such as Pyotr Chaadaev and the Slavophiles. By refusing to convert, this "Jew in the Russian elite" functioned as a mirror of Russian chauvinism. In this regard he entered into polemics with Vasily Rozanov and also invited debates with Pyotr Struve, Georges Florovsky, Viacheslav Ivanov, and Nikolai Berdiaev on the meaning of Slavophilism, Russian Orthodox Christianity, and Russian power.

Historical scholarship offered an opportunity for secular Jews to "perform" Jewish identity. The study of Jewish history and the establishment of institutions for the publication of historical research supplanted more traditional, religious forms of Jewish expression. For example, the Jewish Ethnographic and Historical Society had its own journal, *Evreiskaia starina* (Jewish Antiquities). Philanthropy also played an operative role. For example, in Odessa of the 1880s and 90s, Mikhail Morgulis rebuilt the Jewish community through involvement

in educational reform and direct aid to the city's poor.¹

It should already be fairly clear that the kind of Jewish identities depicted in the book depart from the familiar preconceptions of Russian Jews either as religious (orthodox or Hasidic) or anti-religious (revolutionary, socialist, or anarchist). They were neither assimilated nor traditional, they did not live in shtetls or avoid Russian culture. They were not rabbis or cantors, moneylenders, industrialists, or merchants, and not musicians, artists, or writers. The Jews examined in this study lived primarily in Russia's capital cities, Moscow and St. Petersburg. Some were lawyers, others were journalists, teachers, and historians. The rise of an intellectual class reflects the maturation of Jewish society from a religious community into a multifarious, occupationally diverse and ideologically pluralistic body.²

The book also examines methodology and historiography. I employ a contemporary form of intellectual history that emphasizes the role of individual and inimitable experience in the construction of ideology. Ideas matter but they are not divorced from the context in which they originate and function. In this case, ideas such as nationalism, socialism, and liberalism operate in more than just a political context; they also play a part in other debates over economics, social change, religion, and gender. These debates in turn shaped individual discourse and identity.

Several essays deal with the approach of Jewish historians toward the topic of Jewish history in Russia. Research methods, knowledge, and identity evolved in response to, among other things, tsarist government policies. Historians from the era, such as Dubnov, had a preponderant influence on our understanding of the Jewish past. In recent years Jewish historians have liberated themselves from Dubnov's grasp.

The emphasis in these essays is on Jewish liberals who have been neglected by Jewish historians in their studies of the extreme political left or right. The liberal center has not received enough scholarly attention in part because its truncated existence following the October revolution. However, a Jewish political and ideological center has grown strong in the United States, and this Jewish center, removed by time and space from its Eastern-European origins, has much to gain from examining a

1 Brian Horowitz, *Jewish Philanthropy and Enlightenment in Late-Tsarist Russia* (Seattle: University of Washington, 2009).

2 Jeffrey Veidlinger, *Jewish Public Culture in the Late Russian Empire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

Russian Jewry similarly engaged in the difficult synthesis of uniting the human being and Jew, citizen and Jewish interests, universalism and particularistic identities.

The collection is composed of two parts: 1) seven selected essays on Jewish history and historiography in Russia and 2) seven studies on the life and work of Mikhail Osipovich Gershenzon in the context of Russia's modernist culture. Although some of the essays have appeared elsewhere, a number were published in foreign languages (Hebrew, German, and Russian). For the majority of the essays this is the first English-language publication.

I

VARIETIES OF RUSSIAN-JEWISH HISTORY:
LIBERALS, ZIONISTS, AND DIASPORA NATIONALISTS

1. THE RUSSIAN ROOTS OF SEMYON DUBNOV'S LIFE AND THOUGHT

Although it might seem self-evident to claim that Semyon Dubnov reflects the Russian environment from which he came, the subject of Dubnov's attitude toward Russia is not as simple or as clear as one might think. In his memoirs and other works, Dubnov emphasized European influences, chiefly the English philosopher John Stuart Mill, the German-Jewish historian Heinrich Graetz, and the French writer Ernest Renan.³ In fact, scholars have considered the subject of Russia as part of their general studies on Dubnov, but the question of Russia's meaning in Dubnov's work has not yet been the object of a concentrated study.⁴ What was the influence of Russia on Dubnov's life and work, and what was Dubnov's attitude toward Russia, the country in which he lived most of his life, and Russian, the language he preferred to all others. How does he use Russian themes in his self-presentation, when and why does he refer to Russian culture, and what do these allusions mean? In a general way, Russian influences can be divided into those that are direct and indirect. At the same time that one finds salient and easily documented parallels, one can also discover subtle and hidden borrowings in theme, structure, and language.

A re-examination of Dubnov's life and thought from the viewpoint of his borrowings from Russian sources demonstrate the degree to which Dubnov participated in and was influenced by the ideological, religious,

3 See S. Dubnov's memoir, *Kniga zhizni: materialy dlia istorii moego vremeni, vospominaniia i razmyshleniia* (Moscow-Jerusalem: Gesharim, 2004), 113-16, 154-56, 181-85, and elsewhere.

4 V. E. Kel'ner, *Missioner istorii: zhizn' i trudy Semena Markovicha Dubnova* (St. Petersburg: Mir, 2008); Robert Seltzer, "Coming Home: The Personal Basis of Simon Dubnow's Ideology," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 1 (1976); also Seltzer, "Simon Dubnow: A Critical Biography of his Early Years" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1970); Sophie Dubnov-Erich, *The Life and Work of S. M. Dubnov, Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Jonathan Frankel, "S. M. Dubnow: Historian and Ideologist," in *Crisis, Revolution, and Russian Jews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 239-75; Benjamin Nathans, "Russian-Jewish Historiography," in *Historiography of Imperial Russia: The Profession and Writing of History in a Multinational State*, ed. Thomas Sanders (Armonk, NY, London: M.E Sharpe, 1999); Yahudah Rozental, "Ha-historiografiya ha-yehudit be-rusya ha-sovyetit ve Shim'on Dubnov," in *Sefer Shim'on Dubnov*, ed. Simon Rawidowicz (London: Arat Publishing Company, 1954), 201-20; Jeffrey Veidlinger, "Simon Dubnov Recontextualized: the Sociological Conception of History and the Russian Intellectual Legacy," *Simon Dubnov Institute Yearbook* 3 (2004): 411-27.



1. St. Petersburg Choral Synagogue (photograph by William Brumfield).

and artistic ferment that took place in Russia. I hope to illuminate some of the contexts in which the larger Russian-Jewish interaction took place, contexts that helped shape Dubnov's worldview.

Dubnov was hardly a passive receiver. Mixing ideas and genres to build his original ideas of diaspora nationalism, he turned for inspiration to poetry, fiction, philosophy, and historiography. Russian literature in particular contributed to the development of his intellectual potential.

In contrast to the usual dichotomies in nineteenth-century Russian intellectual history—East versus West, Slavophiles against Westernizers, the idealists of the 1840s and the radicals of the 1860s—Dubnov takes ideas and approaches from contradictory sources. Engaging with Russians and Ukrainians of his own time, he also admires the poets and writers of the past, such as Mikhail Lermontov and Ivan Turgenev, and the radical critics of the 1860s. He was aware of the renaissance of secular Jewish culture that was occurring in Russia with the rise of Yiddish as a serious literary language and the expansion of Hebrew literature (in fact he announced the arrival of this renaissance).⁵ He did not appreciate the Russian avant-garde of the day (Bely, Blok, and Merezhkovsky).

In the first part of this essay, I will discuss Dubnov's formation as an intellectual and treat the way he presented himself in his memoirs. Then I will turn to an analysis of his political theories of diaspora nationalism and its relations to Russian-Jewish life. Then I will examine indirect parallels, treating Dubnov's attitude toward the title "Russian writer," and concluding with a discussion of Dubnov's professed love for the Russian language.

In his memoir, *Book of Life* (*Kniga zhizni*), Dubnov expresses awareness of the tension between his inner world and the external events that occurred during his life. He writes from exile, geographically distant from Soviet Russia and intellectually alienated from Communism. "Due to a historical cataclysm, the century's intellectual currents, that were interwoven in my life and the lives of my contemporaries, have temporarily been interrupted. And we, the last representatives of this former epoch, are obligated to produce a monument to it. I am publishing my memoirs as the 'material for a history of my life'; at the start [it is] a

5 See Shmuel Niger, "Simon Dubnow as Literary Critic," *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* 1 (1946): 335-58.

history of an intellectual struggle and at the end, a political struggle.”⁶

In this passage, written in the early 1930s while Dubnov was preparing the first volume of his memoirs for publication, one can sense the historian’s emotional condition. He feels ripped from the intellectual world that gave order to his life, and feels an obligation to memorialize earlier times.⁷ There are reasons why Dubnov cherished his life in Russia. Young maskilim in the 1860s and 70s, such as Dubnov, were animated by the changes taking place there. Committed to breaking with the past, they read forbidden books, joined reading circles, and found purpose in spreading the word about the possibilities of life outside the religious community.⁸ The influence of the revolutionary movement was more important than the government, since young people emulated the behavior and discourse of the revolutionaries. The rise of a secular Jewish culture in three languages inspired many intellectuals of the time, and provided them with a sense of mission and purpose.

Russian culture played a large part in Dubnov’s intellectual development. In *Book of Life* he wrote about his early teen years, “Having little work to do in school, I devoted myself again to reading books from the library of our [literary] circle. The universal melancholy of the young Lermontov was of course more to my liking than Pushkin’s stylized poetry. Turgenev’s romanticism captivated my imagination, and I found myself under its spell many years later. I was hopelessly in love with all those dreamy heroines of Turgenev’s stories.”⁹

As this passage shows, Dubnov was attracted to realist fiction and had significant limitations in his literary taste and sophistication. In his preferences he shows a strong attraction to Populist literary criticism of the 1860s.

Dubnov’s interest in Russian realist literature had significant consequences for the development of his worldview since in his youth he attributed to literature a more profound purpose than mere entertain-

6 Dubnov, *Kniga zhizni*, 23. All translations by Brian Horowitz except where noted. For more on Dubnov’s life in Western Europe, see Simon Rabinovitch, “The Dawn of a New Diaspora: Simon Dubnov’s Autonomism from St. Petersburg to Berlin,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 50 (2005): 267-88; Cecile Kuznits, “The Origins of Yiddish Scholarship and the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research” (PhD thesis, Stanford University, 2000), 61-111.

7 On Dubnov in European exile, see Simon Rabinovitch, “The Dawn of a New Diaspora,” 267-88.

8 Two paradigmatic narratives of rebellious maskilim, who fight Orthodox Jewry can be seen in the lives of Moses Leib Lilienblum and Shimon An-sky.

9 Dubnov, *Kniga zhizni*, 63.

ment or even art. Literature, he asserted, conveyed the emotional dimension of the human spirit and stood as a bulwark against an unlimited confidence in reason. He wrote in *Book of Life* about the mid-1880s:

In essence I attributed to poetry a religious function in the realm of the unknowable and therefore assigned it serious demands: it should be an intellectual poetry of world problems and universal melancholy. In those summer days I allowed myself a treat: I reread Turgenev's stories and Goncharov's novels that I had read in my youth without giving them proper attention. Once, having finished Turgenev's "An Unhappy Girl," I covered my head in my pillow and cried.¹⁰ There was no one in the room, but I was ashamed of my tears that brought me down to the level of the crowd and sentimental school-girls. Nonetheless, there was a lesson for me: I understood that it was wrong to separate reason and emotion so sharply, that a true work of art, even one without a definite underlying idea, can serve as a source for deep thoughts just like a fine philosophical treatise.¹¹

The novella relates the life of a young Jewish girl, the illegitimate issue of a Jewish woman and a French nobleman who has moved to Russia. After her mother's death, she is left in the hands of hostile caretakers who inhibit her chances for love. The story ends with the young girl's suicide and a funeral that erupts in a senseless brawl. The girl's life is shown as bereft of joy and deeply tragic.¹² What is typical of the period is the attribution to literature of functions that are outside literary significance. The critics of Dubnov's time looked to literature to provide political commentary, a guide for behavior, and philosophical import.¹³

10 Ivan Turgenev's story, "Neschastnaia," published in 1869, can be found in I. S. Turgenev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v dvadtsati vos'mi tomakh*, 28 vols. (Moscow-Leningrad: Nauka, 1965), vol. 10, 71-160.

11 Dubnov, *Kniga zhizni*, 125.

12 The girl's Jewish background does not matter because she lives among non-Jews who are indifferent to her origins. Although it is hardly one of Turgenev's best stories, the treatment of Suzanna is at least not hostile to Jews, as is for example his infamous story, "Kike" ("Zhid") (1847).

13 Literature in nineteenth century Russia fulfilled many supra-literary functions. For a study of

An important stage in Dubnov's development was signaled by the shift from the binary opposition of universalism and national particularism, Western thought and Jewish culture, to the realization that Jewish history and culture could serve as a path to reach a higher universalism.¹⁴ By studying Jewish history, he realized that he was better able to see the totality of world history since the Jews had existed since nearly the time of earliest documentary evidence and had lived in the largest and most important empires from ancient to modern times.

In the 1880s, Dubnov took over as *Voskhod's* literary critic, a position that defined his intellectual path.¹⁵ He concluded that, just as Western culture was thriving in its Jewish context, so too a study of the central issues of Western society could take place through a focus on Jewish history. He wrote in *Book of Life*:

I felt that the fateful tortures of self-definition had come to an end, that I finally had to define my vocation, decide on one of the many plans of action that drew me in different directions. The twenty-seventh year of my life was a decisive moment for me. Until that time my ideas still dissolved in universal literary plans, although in fact I was working in Jewish literature. [...] It became clear to me that the general knowledge I had acquired and my universal strivings could give productive results when combined with the inherited treasures of Jewish knowledge and national ideals that had not yet been defined.¹⁶

Secular Jewish culture of the 1880s opened Dubnov's eyes to the idea that Jews could embody and contribute to the highest European ideas. Dubnov witnessed an explosion of secular Jewish creativity in such authors as Semyon Frug, Mendele Moicher Sforim, Itzak Leib Peretz, Sholem Aleichem, Lev Levanda, and Ben-Ami. In memoirs (published separately from *Book of Life*) Dubnov showed how he perceived Russian-

the social critics, see Victor Terras, *Belinskij and Russian Literary Criticism: The Heritage of Organic Aesthetics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974).

14 Sophie Dubnov-Erlich treats this development; see *The Life and Work of S. M. Dubnov*, 52-59.

15 This argument is not entirely new and was first promulgated by Shmuel Niger in his article, "Simon Dubnov as Literary Critic," 335-58.

16 Dubnov, *Kniga zhizni*, 146-47.

Jewish culture as bridging two separate worlds. Writing about the poet Frug, Dubnov remarked, "Frug wrote primarily in Russian, masterfully using the Russian poetic language, but nevertheless remained a Jewish national poet—this is his main characteristic and huge advantage. He stood on the border between two literatures—Jewish and Russian—and if he had devoted himself solely to presenting general, I mean, exclusively poetic themes, he could occupy a central place in the 'Russian Parnassus,' where many people situated him."¹⁷ Dubnov himself had such a double vision.

In presenting his own intellectual development in *Book of Life*, Dubnov used Russian paradigms that reflected the influences that guided his behavior and thought.¹⁸ He depicts himself as a rebellious teenager in Mstislav with an image of generational conflict. He clashed with his grandfather, a religious scholar, who brought him up in place of his father. While living in Mstislav, he refused to go to synagogue on Yom Kippur, thereby wounding his grandfather. Dubnov writes, "Our break with the old world was even sharper than what a young Russian experienced, because for us it involved the destruction of both the religious and national connection with the people..."¹⁹

For one familiar with *Haskalah* literature, the allusion to *The Sins of Youth* by Moshe Leib Lilienblum is obvious.²⁰ However, once again nineteenth-century Russian literature is also relevant. Dubnov admits to modeling his own life on Ivan Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*, the novel that foregrounded an ideological conflict between the nobility and *raznochintsy* (men of various ranks and classes), the old generation and the new. Dubnov explains, "Russian literature was generally speaking my hobby. [...] We had a philosophy of life in the types of heroes from Turgenev's novels and those of other writers. Bazarov and Rakhmetov (heroes from Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* and Chernyshevsky's *What Is To Be Done?*) were symbols of the 'new men,' 'nihilists,' i.e. repudiators

17 S. Dubnov, "Vospominaniia o S. M. Fruge," *Evreiskaia starina* 4 (1916): 448.

18 Russian literature was often read as a how-to book for life. Irina Paperno has studied the life-art issue in nineteenth-century Russian culture. See her book, *Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

19 Dubnov, *Kniga zhizni*, 78.

20 M. L. Lilienblum, *Hat'ot neurim, o, Vidui ha-gadol shel ehad ha-sofrim ha-ivrim* (Vienna: Buchdruckerei von Georg Brög, 1876). For a discussion of generation gaps in Hebrew literature, see Alan Mintz, *Banished from their Father's Table: Loss of Faith and Hebrew Autobiography* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

of the old world and creators of a new order, where the free ‘critically-thinking individual’ set the tone.”²¹

It was typical among Russian intellectuals to emulate the lives of literary characters, as Irina Paperno has shown.²² Similarly, as the literary critic for *Voskhod*, Dubnov mimicked radical writers. “[...] At that time [in the 1880s] I got pulled into the orbit of ideals from the Russian intelligentsia of the time whose radical wing had its origins in Belinsky up through Dobroliubov, Chernyshevsky, and Pisarev.”²³ According to Jeffrey Veidlinger, Dubnov was also influenced by the sociological approach of the 1840s and 50s in his own research methodology, especially his view of the nation that he may have borrowed from the Slavophile Konstantin Aksakov.²⁴

In his nearly forty years of journalism, Dubnov branded the tsarist regime as medieval, backward, repressive, and vindictive. In 1891, the government closed *Voskhod* for six months because of one of Dubnov’s articles, depriving him and his colleagues of income.²⁵

It is intriguing to consider the extent to which Dubnov’s political and historical ideas emerged as reactions to actual events of his time.²⁶ For example, although he explained the meaning of assimilation in his analysis of the French Revolution, he learned about assimilation firsthand in Odessa in debates over funding for a national school in 1901-02. There Dubnov clashed with Mikhail Morgulis and other leaders of the Odessa branch of the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment among the Jews of Russia, who adamantly upheld the principle that subsidies

21 Dubnov, *Kniga zhizni*, 77. The critically-thinking individual was the watchword of Petr Lavrov, the radical and leading theorist of the Socialist Revolutionaries.

22 Paperno, *Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism*.

23 Dubnov, *Kniga zhizni*, 77.

24 Veidlinger, “Simon Dubnov Recontextualized,” 422-23.

25 John Klier, “S. M. Dubnov and the Kiev Pogrom of 1881,” in *A Missionary for History: Essays in Honor of Simon Dubnov*, eds. Kristi Groberg and Avraham Greenbaum (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 65-66; S. Dubnov, “Iz pisem A. E. Landau (1884-1894) s predisloviem i primechaniiami S. M. Dubnova. Materialy dlia istorii *Voskhoda* (1884-1896),” *Evreiskaia starina* I (January-March 1916): 106. Dubnov’s objectionable article was published in *Nedel’naia khronika ‘Voskhoda’* 13 (March 20, 1891). It is worth recognizing that today’s historians reject Dubnov’s claim that the government was directly responsible for pogroms. In fact, they claim, no evidence has been found that the government actually planned or carried out violence against its Jewish subjects.

26 For the classic study of Dubnov’s political ideas, see Koppel S. Pinson, “Simon Dubnow: Historian and Political Philosopher,” in *Nationalism and History: Essays on Old and New Judaism by Simon Dubnow* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1958).

should only go to schools that offered a curriculum of “universal” subjects (math, science, world history, Russian literature) and had none, or at most, only a few hours of Jewish subjects per week.²⁷

In his view, such a school fostered assimilation, and during debates, Dubnov fashioned a definition of assimilation. In *Letters on Old and New Judaism* (*Pis'ma o starom i novom evreistve*) he wrote, “Assimilation is not so much a doctrine as a fact of life, unavoidable under the present circumstances against which nationalism struggles. It is the direct practical result of the rejection of the national idea. If you are not a Jewish nationalist, you inevitably will become assimilated, if not in the first, then in the second generation. And that is why we have a full moral right to call those who reject Jewry’s national evolution facilitators of assimilation, whether they are conscious of it or not.”²⁸ In this case Morgulis and the other leaders were incorrigible “assimilationists.”²⁹ These debates also helped Dubnov formulate a theory of national education. In “Letter Nine” he expressed his ideas about the ideal Jewish school and its relationship to the national program:

Our old school, the heder and yeshiva, educated only the Jew, but not the individual, and it educated even “the Jew” in an extremely one-dimensional way, affecting only his religious feeling and thought. The new secular school has it the other way. It completely forgets about “the Jew” and educates only “the individual,” that is factually, a Russian, Pole, or German, in view of which spirit and language dominate in that particular school. This is the thesis and its antithesis. The synthesis comes out by itself: the simultaneous education of “the individual” and “the Jew.” A school should prepare a youth for the struggle [to defend] his own individuality and his national individuality since in a Jew’s life the struggle for the former is tightly connected with the latter. The hostile world persecutes us not only as individuals who

27 A study of Mikhail Morgulis can be found in my book, *Empire Jews: Jewish Nationalism and Acculturation in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Russia* (Bloomington: Slavica, 2009).

28 S. Dubnov, “O rasteriavsheisia intelligentsii,” *Pis'ma o starom i novom evreistve*, *Voskhod* 12 (1902): 74-75.

29 Ibid., 87.

collide with it on the basis of personal interests, but also as members of a certain nation.³⁰

As this passage shows, Dubnov's approach to nationalism was founded on synthesis, a rejection of the *maskilic* division of Jew inside and individual outside, and valorization of the unity of Jew and person, universal and particular. What Dubnov would reject in the situation of French Jews was precisely their one-sidedness, their rejection of national difference in the rush to integrate into the majority.³¹

The Russian philosopher, Vladimir Solov'ev, was an important influence in helping Dubnov conceive of a nationalism characterized by tolerance. In *Book of Life* Dubnov wrote, "I modified Vladimir Solov'ev, the Christian humanist's formula—'Love all people as you would your own'—to this: respect the national individuality of every person as you would your own."³² In his book, *The Nationality Question in Russia* (*Natsional'nyi vopros v Rossii*), Solov'ev expressed the view that the separation of morality from politics was particularly harmful because politics bereft of morality led to the domination of one group over another. Solov'ev wanted morality to guide a nation's treatment of other nations. Instead of national "egoism," Solov'ev advised powerful nations to respect others on the grounds that all peoples compose individual parts of a single whole. "Moral duty demands from a people above all that it repudiate national egoism if it has surpassed its natural borders [...]. A people must recognize itself for what it genuinely is, i.e. merely a part of the cosmic whole. It must acknowledge its solidarity with all other living parts of the whole—solidarity with the highest universal interests—and not serve its own self-interests, but others' interests in accordance with the quantity of its own national forces and national qualities."³³

Solov'ev distinguished between "*narodnost*" (national qualities) and "*natsional'nost*" (nationality). *Narodnost*' refers to the nation's positive dimension, its national creativity and inspiration. Solov'ev's example

30 S. Dubnov, "O natsional'nom vospitanii," *Pis'ma o starom i novom evreistve*, *Voskhod* 1 (1902): 82-83.

31 S. Dubnov, *Epokha pervoi emansipatsii, 1789-1815, Noveishaia istoriia evreiskogo naroda*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Gesharim, 2002), 57-64 (reprint from the 1937-39 edition).

32 Dubnov, *Kniga zhizni*, 228.

33 V. Solov'ev, "Natsional'nyi vopros v Rossii," in V. S. Solov'ev, *Sobranie socheinienii v desiati tomakh*, vol. 5 (Bruxelles: Foyer Oriental Chrétien, 1966), 4.

for England includes Shakespeare, Byron, and Newton. As an example of *natsional'nost'*, he points to Warren Hastings and Lord Seymore.³⁴ Hastings, the first English Governor-General of India, and Edward Seymour, Home Secretary under Victoria, represented the egotistic side of nationality, the desire to "destroy and murder." True universal brotherhood, Solov'ev maintained, can only be attained through an understanding and celebration of distinctions among individuals of different nations.

In *Letters on Old and New Judaism*, Dubnov describes a vision of nationalism that alludes to Solov'ev.³⁵ "A Jewish nationalist says, 'As a citizen of the country, I participate in its political and civic life in accordance with the rights given to me. But as a member of the Jewish spiritual nation, beyond those rights I have my own internal national interests, and in this sphere consider myself autonomous to the degree that autonomy is permitted for political dependent nationalities in the state and in the realm of interests.'"³⁶ Dubnov's conception of "autonomy" bears Solov'ev's influence in that it valorizes spirituality and culture (as opposed to government), gives preference to pacifism over militarism, and upholds the equality of all the nationalities.

Following the 1905 Revolution, Dubnov tried to realize his ideas. He helped establish a new political party, the Folkspartai, to participate in the new State Duma.³⁷ As a small party, however, the Folkspartai needed to be part of a coalition. Therefore, Dubnov drew up a program for cooperation with the Constitutional Democratic Party in order to gain seats in the Duma, while simultaneously struggling for Jewish collective rights that would include the right to separate educational and cultural institutions, civil courts, and political institutions for administering internal Jewish issues.³⁸

His demand for collective national rights brings him closer to figures in the empire who struggled for national liberation, such as the Polish nationalist, Roman Dmowski.³⁹ However, Dubnov's claims for

34 Ibid., 13.

35 David Fishman, *The Rise of Modern Yiddish Culture* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburg Press, 2000), 67-68.

36 S. Dubnov, "Avtonomizm, kak osnova natsional'noi programmy," *Pis'ma o starom i novom evreistve*, *Voskhod* 12 (1901): 10.

37 Simon Rabinovitch, "Alternative to Zion: the Autonomist Movement in Late Imperial and Revolutionary Russia" (PhD diss. Brandeis University, 2007), 66.

38 S. Dubnov, *Volkspartei: Evreiskaia Narodnaia Partiia* (St. Petersburg: Ts. Kraiz, 1907), 12.

39 On Dmowski, see Krzysztof Kawalec, *Roman Dmowski: 1864-1939* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy, 2002).

the rights of citizens in a democracy, his respect for the individual, and his rejection of class struggle and revolutionary excesses, link him in part to ideas that appeared in 1909 in *Landmarks*, the volume criticizing the revolutionaries and favoring individual conscience. However, it is important to note that the promotion of Great Russian nationalism by right-wing Kadets repelled Dubnov.⁴⁰

Allusions to Russia are palpable in theoretical discussions in *Letters on Old and New Judaism*, since Dubnov selected aspects from the experience of Eastern European Jewry to present his overall vision of Jewish purpose. As one may recall, in *Letters on Old and New Judaism*, Dubnov evaluated the development of nations according to a developmental hierarchy: racially linked tribes stood on the lowest step, while territorially and politically connected groups occupied a higher stage.⁴¹ He attributed the highest level to the spiritual nation. It is impossible not to sense that he had Eastern-European Jews in mind when he lauded a people who retained their national identity and heritage, despite the loss of territory, political independence, and a common language. He exclaims, "If, despite an external break, the people nonetheless exist and through many centuries creatively develop an organic way of life, showing a stubborn desire for further autonomous development, this people has reached the highest rung of cultural-historical individualization. Even under conditions of increased pressure on their national will, they can be considered indestructible."⁴²

Although the *Letters* are supposed to describe Jewish nationalism unconnected to any particular geographical area, Dubnov seems to allude to the experience of Eastern-European Jews when he promulgates national autonomy as the optimal basis for the development of Jewish culture. He writes, "Jews consistently paid the state regular and extraordinary taxes that were hardly compatible with the poverty of civil rights that were provided them, and therefore considered themselves free [of any inner obligation]. They did not have political rights or civil equality, but they preserved one right that was more valuable than anything else—the right to their own national life derived from communal self-

40 See P. Struve, "Intelligentsiia i natsional'noe litso," in *Patriotica: Politika, kul'tura, religiia, sotsializm* (Moscow: Respublika, 1997), 206-8; originally published in *Slovo*, 10 March 1909.

41 S. Dubnov, *Pis'ma o starom i novom evreistve*, 2nd ed. (St. Petersburg: Obshchestvennaia pol'za, 1907), 1-2.

42 Dubnov, "Avtonomizm kak osnova natsional'noi programmy," 5.

government.”⁴³

Dubnov refers to institutions that were established when the Jews of Poland had been politically autonomous. He looked to the traditional *kahal*, the institution of Jewish self-governance in Eastern Europe, as a model for modern Jewish politics on the local level and to the Council of the Four Lands in late medieval Poland as a supreme legislative body.⁴⁴ However, he was perfectly aware of the anachronism in selecting these institutions—the Council of the Four Lands had been in disuse for at least two centuries and the *kahal* system had been abrogated by czarist decree in 1844. Furthermore, he fully acknowledged the excesses of the *kahal* in earlier times, when it was used as a brazen tool of oligarchs, and had no illusions about the ambiguities of the Polish state vis-à-vis Jews in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Nevertheless, Dubnov believed the two institutions could be useful in a significantly modified form in the twentieth century. He maintained in his program for the Folkspartai (1907) that Jews should possess their own national parliament in which Jewish representatives would be elected democratically with full suffrage for the entire adult community, including women.⁴⁵ He explained that in his conception of the *kahal*, representatives would be democratically elected and therefore responsive to the electorate.⁴⁶ Furthermore, he asserted that national autonomy worked best in a constitutional state, where the individual rights of citizens were fully protected.⁴⁷

In discussions of the Jewish nation, Dubnov employed rhetoric that parallels the search for spirituality that was widespread among Silver-Age Russian intellectuals with their syncretism, eliding religious differences and mixing traditions. Already in the early 1890s, for example, Dubnov engaged in this kind of religious rhetoric, by explaining that secular Jewish history gives spiritual, even messianic, meaning. He writes in “What is Jewish History,” “The purpose of Jewish survival is ultimately

43 Ibid., 4.

44 S. Dubnov, *Volkspartei: Evreiskaia Narodnaia Partiia* (St. Petersburg: Ts. Kraiz, 1907), 12. For more on this, see Israel Bartal, “Dubnov’s Image of Medieval Autonomy,” in *A Missionary for History: Essays in Honor of Simon Dubnov, Yearbook Supplement* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1998), 11–18.

45 Needless to say, women’s suffrage had been restricted in elections to the tsarist Duma. Vladimir Levin, “Russian Jewry and the Duma elections, 1906–1907,” *Jews and Slavs* 7 (2000): 234.

46 Dubnov, *Volkspartei*, 12.

47 Ibid., 13.

transcendence.” Dubnov emphasizes the next sentence by writing it entirely in italics; “Really, *the history of the Jews is the most philosophical, ideological, and didactic part of general history*. Before you appears a picture of the continuous development of the spirit that overcomes the sufferings of the flesh.”⁴⁸ Alluding to Pushkin’s “Elegy” (1830) and the famous phrase, “to ruminate and suffer”—“мыслить и страдать”—to evoke the idea that suffering leads to spiritual growth, Dubnov affirms his idea that modern Jewish identity gets its meaning from a sense of shared history and not religion. Consciousness of history should give tribute to the people’s suffering in the past. Dubnov argued that the German historian Heinrich Graetz also used the concept of suffering to describe a Jewry that was abused externally, but internally was productive, creative, and profoundly alive.⁴⁹ Later in his memoirs he would attribute the same paradigm to his own development. “Maybe that was how it had to be: the Jewish writer could not take advantage of the privileges of a diploma, but had to suffer together with the Jewish masses. Then from his own experience he could depict this suffering in the critic’s book of ‘great anger’ and with the controlled pathos of the historian.”⁵⁰

Alluding here to Akim Volynsky’s writings on Dostoevsky, Dubnov affirms Volynsky’s idea that the great novelist experienced the depths of personal anguish and also the heights of spiritual idealism.⁵¹ Volynsky helped Dubnov find a solution to a “human yearning for internal freedom.”⁵² At the same time Dubnov, formally imitating Volynsky, uses religious rhetoric and invokes Christianity to describe a path to salvation. Such ecumenical expressions were typical of the Silver Age, in which authors portrayed a thirst for spirituality as a general human attribute.⁵³

48 S. Dubnov, *Ob izuchenii istorii russkikh evreev i uchrezhdenii Istoricheskogo obshchestva* (St. Petersburg: 1891), 8.

49 Heinrich Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden von den ältesten Zeiten bis an die Gegenwart: Aus den Quellen neubearb* (Leipzig, 1874–1902).

50 Dubnov, *Kniga zhizni*, 95.

51 Akim Volynskii, “Tsarstvo Karamazovykh,” in *Dostoevskii* (St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2007), 264. Interestingly, Akim Volynsky and Dubnov had been friends in the early 1880s when Flekser (Volynsky’s real name) was not yet a Symbolist.

52 V. Kotel’nikov, “Skvoz’ kul’turu (Akim Volynsky kak ideolog i kritik),” in Akim Volynsky’s *Dostoevskii*, 57; see also Elena Tolstaia’s masterpiece, *Apollon v snegu: Sintezy Akima Volynskogo*, unpublished manuscript.

53 Akim Volynsky’s book is *Kniga velikogo gneva: kriticheskie stat’i, zametki, polemika* (St. Petersburg: Trud, 1904).

In addition to his thoughts, it would be valuable to depict Dubnov's feelings regarding Russia. An opportunity to do this appears in his reaction to an invitation in 1913 from Semyon Vengerov, the well-known literary scholar, to contribute an autobiographical entry in the illustrious *Critical-Biographical Dictionary of Russian Writers*.⁵⁴ In two letters to Vengerov, Dubnov poured out his objections to his inclusion in the dictionary. Because of the significance of these documents (and their unfamiliarity to the public), I will quote at length. The first excerpt is from March 25, 1913 and the second, longer one from April 8, 1913.⁵⁵

1. Unfortunately I cannot take the opportunity to respond to your invitation in the letter I received concerning giving biblio-biographical information about myself for your *Dictionary of Russian Writers*. Not considering myself a Russian, but a Jewish national writer—although by the force of the historical tragedy of Jewish culture I write primarily in Russian—I contend that my name should not figure in the *Dictionary of Russian Writers*.⁵⁶

2. The expression “Russian writers” (*russkie pisateli*) allows for two interpretations: 1) the writers are Russian, leaders of a Russian national literature or 2) all who write in the Russian language.⁵⁷ However much the editors of the *Dictionary* may explain to the reader that they conceive of this term in the second technical meaning, the first national meaning will always become attached to the epithet “Russian” in the book's title. The term's ambiguity can give cause to think that a Jewish writer, by force of fatal circumstances and writing his scholarship in Russian, at the same time considers himself in the

54 Semyon Vengerov, ed., *Kritiko-biograficheskii slovar' russkikh pisatelei i uchenykh*, 2nd ed. (Petrograd, 1915).

55 Vladimir Levin alerted me to these letters; I thank him for the aid.

56 Letter from S. Dubnov to S. Vengerov, March 25, 1913, located in Semyon Vengerov's archive in the Russian National Library, St. Petersburg (377-7-1398).

57 Dubnov uses the adjective “Russian.” Scholars often speak of a distinction between “*russkii*” and “*rossiiskii*,” although “*russkii*” is used most often and “*rossiiskii*” was used mainly in official documents.