



# Rethinking the History of Jewish Nationalism

## An International Symposium

**January 30 – 31, 2011**

314 Royce Hall

Convened by:

David N. Myers (UCLA) & Arieh Saposnik (UCLA)

Sponsored by:

The UCLA Center for Jewish Studies

The UCLA Younes & Soraya Nazarian Center for Israel Studies

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This conference highlights recent scholarship that challenges, enhances, and complements prior research on the history of Jewish nationalism. In particular, scholars have sought to recover the crowded marketplace of Jewish nationalist ideas and ideologies in the early to mid-twentieth century and their place in the making of modern Jewish life. The eventual ascendance of Zionism over its rivals, and the establishment of a world center for Jewish historical research in Israel, have necessarily focused the preponderance of scholarly attention on Zionism. And yet, over the past decade, new perspectives have emerged that complicate the view that Zionism's triumph was either obvious or inevitable. At this symposium, leading scholars engaged in this work will assess the potential and possibilities of a new way of framing the history of Jewish nationalism.

**Session I:**

Chair: David Myers  
Respondent: David Biale

**Session III:**

Chair: Sarah Stein  
Respondent: Rogers Brubaker

**Session II:**

Chair: Arieh Saposnik  
Respondent: David Engel

**Session IV:**

Chair: Hagit Lavsky  
Respondent: Dan Diner

**Advance registration is required.** To RSVP please call (310) 267-5327 or email [cjsrsvp@humnet.ucla.edu](mailto:cjsrsvp@humnet.ucla.edu). Parking is available, all day for \$10 and metered spaces are available in lots 2, 3, and 4. For maps and parking information visit [www.transportation.ucla.edu](http://www.transportation.ucla.edu). Please be aware that the parking kiosk at the corner of Hilgard and Westholme is closed on weekends.

**SUNDAY, JANUARY 30, 2011 • 314 ROYCE HALL**

**10:00 AM • Graduate Student Forum**

Chair: Liora Halperin (UCLA)

**Akhmad Sahal** (Penn)

*Religious Law and the State in Israel and Egypt: Isaac Breuer's Torah-State and Rashid Rida's Caliphate State*

**Erik Greenberg** (UCLA)

*Israel Zangwill's Territorialist Critique of the Zionist Project*

**Alexander Kaye** (Columbia)

*The Legal Constructivism of Eliezer Goldman*

**Yael Allweil** (UC Berkeley)

*Building a Home-Land: Zionism as a Regime of Housing, 1870-2005*

**Mihaly Kalman** (Harvard)

*Bronstein's Dilemma: Jews, Violence and Nationalisms during the Russian Civil War*

**12:00 PM • Lunch Break**

**1:00 PM • Opening Remarks**

**David N. Myers** (UCLA)

**Arieh Saposnik** (UCLA)

**1:15 PM • Session 1**

**Liora Halperin** (UCLA)

*Babel in Zion: Rethinking Language and Nationalism in the Pre-State Yishuv*

**Joshua Karlip** (Yeshiva University)

*Yiddishism and Diaspora Nationalism Between Hope and Despair*

**Joshua Shanes** (College of Charleston)

*Using My Religion: Jewish Nationalism's Ambiguous Relationship with Orthodoxy*

**4:00 PM • Session 2**

**Kenneth Moss** (Johns Hopkins University)

*Unchosen Peoplehood: Jews and the Fact of Nationhood in the Interwar Period*

**Noam Pianko** (University of Washington)

*Zionism and the Roads not Taken: Jews, World War I, and the Future of Nationalism*

**6:30 PM • Dinner**

**MONDAY, JANUARY 31, 2011 • 314 ROYCE HALL**

**9:00 AM • Session 3**

**Michelle Campos** (Florida)

*Middle Eastern Jews between Community and Nation*

**Dimitry Shumsky** (Hebrew University)

*Zionism and the Nation-State: A Reevaluation*

**11:15 AM • Session 4**

**James Loeffler** (Virginia)

*Nationalism without a Nation? On the Invisibility of American Jewish Politics*

**Roni Gechtman** (Mount Saint Vincent University)

*Non-Statist Jewish National Programs: Simon Dubnow and the Jewish Labour Bund*





abstracts

## Abstracts

### GRADUATE STUDENT FORUM

**Akhmad Sahal** (Penn)

*Religious Law and the State in Israel and Egypt:*

*Isaac Breuer's Torah-State and Rashid Rida's Caliphate State*

The establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 was largely the work of secular Zionists. But Rabbi Isaac Breuer (1883-1946), the ideologue of the Agudat Israel Organization, envisioned a Torah-State for the land of Israel. Thus, in contrast to Herzl's vision of a secular "Jewish state," he asserted that the Torah is the law of the Jewish people, and its binding force is independent of acceptance or non-acceptance by the people. In the meantime, the collapse of Ottoman Empire and the rise of the Kemalist secular nationalism in the 1920s gave rise to the debate about the relationship of religious law and the state in Egypt. Ali 'Abd al-Raziq (1887-1966), advanced the religious justification for political secularism, contending that Islam is a "religion, not a state; a message, not a government." Rashid Rida (1865-1935), by contrast, called for a revived doctrine of the Caliphate and condemned Ali 'Abd al-Raziq's ideas as a foreign corruption imported from the West. My paper would like to compare and contrast Breuer's vision of the Torah state with Rida's insistence on the Caliphate state by situating them in the historical context of Israel during the Yishuv period and Egypt in the 1920s respectively. It is my contention that while both called for theocracy of some sort, they displayed different understanding regarding the relationships of religious law and politics, which ultimately allowed for their contrasting responses toward secular nationalism.

**Erik Greenberg** (UCLA)

*Israel Zangwill's Territorialist Critique of the Zionist Project*

**Alex Kaye** (Columbia)

*The Legal Constructivism of Eliezer Goldman*

Most religious Zionists have understood Jewish law as an all-encompassing, unified system whose natural environment was that of an independent Jewish state. The most authoritative and influential religious Zionists, noting that 1948 marked the felicitous return of Jewish law to this natural environment after an aberration of two millennia of exile, looked to the traditional Jewish legal corpus to formulate their ideas of what the laws of the Jewish state should be and also to articulate the basis for the authority of the state's institutions and even for its very existence. Some religious Zionist thinkers, however, diverted from this approach. One of the most sophisticated among them was Eliezer Goldman. He repudiated the claims of many of his colleagues that a formalistic reading of the legal corpus was capable of producing a legal blueprint for the Jewish state, especially as the state was a modern construct about which the traditional sources said nothing at all. He proposed instead a 'halachic constructivism', a jurisprudence that forged a third way between those who claimed that the traditional sources held immediate and obvious answers to all questions, and those who wanted to abandon them altogether. Goldman's approach remains an under-studied and valuable alternative to the view that continues to dominate the religious Zionist landscape.

**Yael Allweil** (UC Berkeley)

*Building a Home-Land: Zionism as a Regime of Housing, 1870-2005*

The received study of Zionist practices, focusing on events of war, waves of immigration and cultural products largely disregards a cardinal aspect of Jewish nationalism: the role of housing in producing and inhabiting the home-land. This research offers a new perspective on the history of Zionism as a huge housing project, identifying housing as the key site for the formation of subjects (Zionists) and place (Zion) and their intimate relationship to each other. Housing is at the same time an action (to house), scheme of action (set of policies), value system (a basic right), architectural form (physical houses), and settlement (location and typology), and is thus deeply involved in attempts to form national identity and citizens-subjects. Hobsbawm (1996) stated that the formation of a nation necessitates material realization. "Nationalism is a political program" he declared "it holds that groups defined as nations have the right to, and therefore ought to, form territorial states. Without this program, realized or not, 'nationalism' is a meaningless term". Jewish nationality's unique task to materialize a national home where none existed for millennia, made individual and national homes intertwined (Kallus, 2005). Archival research of texts and planning documents indicates that the materialization of Jewish nationalism was understood by Zionist leaders as a housing problem. This paper discusses key milestones of architecture and settlement and examines Jewish nationalism as a regime of housing.

**Mihaly Kalman** (Harvard)

*Bronstein's Dilemma: Jews, Violence and Nationalisms during the Russian Civil War*

### SCHOLARS

**Michelle Campos** (Florida)

*Middle Eastern Jews between Community and Nation*

The history of Jewish nationalism in the Middle East is fraught with polemics over Orientalist romanticism, Zionist apologetics, anti-Zionist counter-narratives, internal Israeli ethnic politics, and refugee accounting, both bodily and monetary. In too many cases, the debate can be characterized as ahistorical, grossly generalizing across space and time, and implicitly (if not explicitly) acting as a referendum on the state of Israel. This paper seeks to re-situate the history of Jewish nationalism in the Middle East around the central debate of Jewishness between community (*kehila*), ethnicity (*'edah*), and nation (*umah*, or *le'om*). Focusing on various moments and figures from the Ottoman and inter-war period, I explore the complex ways in which Sephardim and Maghrebim approached collective identity, political affiliation, and their relationships with their non-Jewish neighbors.

**Roni Gechtman** (Mount Saint Vincent University)

*Non-Statist Jewish National Programs: Simon Dubnow and the Jewish Labour Bund*

Since the early twentieth century, the program of national-cultural autonomy formulated by the Jewish Labour Bund in Czarist Russia and



## abstracts

the non-territorial Jewish autonomy envisioned by proponents of 'diaspora nationalism', mainly Simon Dubnow and his followers (such as the Folkist party), have been linked in the minds of many scholars and laypeople alike. What the two programs had in common was that both the Bund and Dubnow viewed the Jews as a nation but believed that the solution to the Jews' problems was a limited self-government in the context of non-territorial autonomies rather than a Jewish state or even a Jewish territory. Moreover, both the Bund and Dubnow developed a secular conception of history lacking any form of divine intervention. But here the similarities ended. Bundism and Dubnovian diaspora nationalism were based on very different understandings of Jewish national identity and Jews' historical destiny, which in turn derived from different philosophical and political traditions (the major influences were Marxism in the Bund's case and positivist historicists such as Renan and Taine in Dubnow's). Whereas Dubnow conceived the Jewish people as an 'organic unity' that could transcend a territorial state and realize its nationalist aspirations through local autonomous governing bodies, the Bund, while opposing nationalism in all its forms, defended the national-cultural rights of Eastern European Jews not because the Jewish nation was special in any way but because all national groups should enjoy such rights in the context of multinational democratic states. My paper will examine the significant but often overlooked differences between the two non-statist Jewish national programs, drawing on a selection of theoretical statements produced by the two currents at the turn of the twentieth century.

**Liora Halperin** (UCLA)

### ***Babel in Zion: Rethinking Language and Nationalism in the Pre-State Yishuv***

The adoption of Hebrew and marginalization of other tongues epitomized a larger Zionist nationalist project to recreate the Jewish nation spiritually, sever ties with the past, and assert self-sufficiency rather than interdependence. The great achievements of pro-Hebrew efforts have been chronicled. Nonetheless, Babel—understood in Hebrew to refer both to the linguistic mixing at mythical Tower of Babel and the cultural mixing that characterized exile—was deeply embedded in the reconstituted Zion. The Yishuv, consisting largely of Jewish immigrants, evolved in contact with diaspora Jewish communities, the majority Palestinian Arab population, and the British authorities who ruled Palestine from the end of World War I until 1948. These contacts were fundamentally inter-lingual and they persisted, in various forms and with never flagging intensity, even as Hebrew language institutions flourished. In discussing the role and scope of foreign language use in a variety of social settings, members of the pre-state Jewish community in Palestine engaged in protracted and existentially difficult reflections on their relationship with outside entities and on the logic and feasibility of total ethnic homogenization and separation.

**Joshua Karlip** (Yeshiva University)

### ***Yiddishism and Diaspora Nationalism Between Hope and Despair***

This paper will examine the development of the ideologies of Yiddishism and Diaspora Nationalism from their inception at the turn of the twentieth century to their moment of greatest crisis during the Holocaust. As

East European Jews increasingly viewed themselves as members of a nationality, many turned to Yiddish as the source of their national culture. These Yiddishists joined forces with proponents of Diaspora Nationalism, who envisioned the Jewish national political and cultural future as occurring in Eastern Europe, where the Jews would enjoy broad Jewish national autonomy. After a brief introduction to these ideologies and their founders, this paper will focus upon the careers of three second-generation, Yiddishist, Diaspora Nationalist thinkers (Yisroel Efrogin, Elias Tcherikower, and Zelig Kalmanovitch). Their careers, which spanned roughly from 1905 to 1945, embodied the central themes of these movements during these four pivotal decades. The paper will discuss the emergence of these ideologies in the late Tsarist period, the moment of these ideologies' greatest promise in the aftermath of the February Revolution, the Yiddishist and Diaspora Nationalist reaction to the rise of the Soviet Union and the successor states, and finally, both the ideological despair and retrenchment elicited by the advent of World War Two and the Holocaust.

**James Loeffler** (Virginia)

### ***Nationalism without a Nation? On the Invisibility of American Jewish Politics***

In this paper, I will argue that the bulk of the history of American Jewish nationalism has been largely invisible, even, paradoxically, to scholars of the subject. I will explore this thesis through a re-reading of two key historical moments: the American Jewish Congress movement of 1915-1922 and the American Jewish Conference, 1943-1949. In the process, I will discuss the relationship between Zionism and other Jewish nationalist ideologies in the United States; the crisis paradigm as the primary explanatory model of American Jewish nationalism; the links between nationalism and internationalism in Jewish affairs; and the nomenclature of Jewish nationhood in the United States.

**Kenneth Moss** (Johns Hopkins University)

### ***Unchosen Peoplehood: Jews and the Fact of Nationhood in the Interwar Period***

Recent years have seen a flood of historical writing in every field of modern history on imperial identities, local identities, hybridity. Much if not all of this work is framed as an effort to recover alternatives to nationalism - implicitly assuming that nationalism is best understood as a choice. In Jewish studies too, continued and increasingly critical investigation of Jewish nationalism and especially Zionism is now accompanied by a concomitant growing interest in Jewish imperial or cosmopolitan identities. My paper seeks to reach beyond both forms of analysis to ask a more contextualized question: how did Jews of all ideological slants come to terms with the fact of a world reshaped by the nationalism of others, whether they wanted to or not? In the period between the two world wars, a plurality if not a majority of Jews lived in nation-states run by nationalist elites committed to nationalizing programs which quite explicitly placed Jewish belonging in doubt. All Jews, with the exception of those living in the Soviet Union found themselves living in a world redefined as a world of nations and nation-states, in the sphere of international politics most obviously. Finally, in the course of the interwar period, the new society and nation envisioned by the most





## *abstracts*

significant Jewish nationalist project, Zionism, became a demographic and political reality that invited reconsideration on the part of Jews who might previously have dismissed Zionism's claims as mere fantasy. Focusing on interwar Poland, this paper investigates a range of Jewish negotiations with nationhood in everyday life and in their views concerning their own political future. In particular, it looks at how Jews who were not Zionists negotiated their relationship to the Yishuv.

**Noam Pianko** (University of Washington)

### ***Zionism and the Roads not Taken: Jews, World War I, and the Future of Nationalism***

Zionism's eventual association with national sovereignty was not inevitable. This talk explores the thought of interwar intellectuals who defined Zionism's central mission as challenging the model of a sovereign nation-state.

**Joshua Shanes** (College of Charleston)

### ***Using My Religion: Jewish Nationalism's Ambiguous Relationship with Orthodoxy***

Abstract

**Dimitry Shumsky** (Hebrew University)

### ***Zionism and the Nation-State: A Reevaluation***

The aim of this paper is to reassess the generally accepted view among most of scholars of Zionist nationalism, according to which the ultimate political goal of Zionism as a Jewish national movement was to create a (Jewish) nation-state. Contrary to this view, I intend to demonstrate that the major currents within the Zionist movement during most of its existence, including uncompromised statisticians such as Vladimir Jabotinsky, aspired to establish in Palestine a state along the lines of the multi-national democracies. This aspiration reflected faithfully the complexity of Zionist nationality claims in the pre-Holocaust period, which included a territorial autonomy of the Jewish national collectivity as a majority in Palestine, as well as tangible collective national rights for the Jewish national minorities in Eastern and East-Central Europe. The establishment of a political framework in Palestine whose regime would be a multi-national democracy rather than a one-nation state was therefore intended to reinforce the general principle of a multi-national state, thereby indirectly promoting the granting of autonomous rights to the Jewish nationality in its various Diasporas.

## OTHER INVITED GRADUATE STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

**Jeremy Gillick** (UC Davis)

**Zia Miric** (University of Illinois, Urbana Champaign)

**Yehuda Sharim** (UCLA)

