Introduction

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This volume originates from a conference that took place at Tulane University, New Orleans, in the winter of 2009: "The Expanse of Russia in Israel." The conference aimed at exploring the role played by Russia—in its tumultuous political, intellectual, and cultural history—in the development of Jewish national politics and cultures in general and of Israeli politics and cultures in particular. Indeed, one would be hard pressed to think of Jewish modern politics and cultures, both in Israel and beyond its borders, sans the impact Russia had on them. It is not only that by the 19th century some 80 percent of Jews resided under tsarist rule before being swept away by a flood of emigration that carried them to the four corners of the earth. Not merely, indeed, that much of the impetus to the rise of Jewish national movements in the late 19th century derived from economic, political, and intellectual developments within the Russian Empire: urbanization and industrialization that pauperized the Jewish masses; the anti-Jewish riots in the 1880s and then, again, in the 1900s; the spread of nationalism among the many ethnic groups that resided under Russian rule; and the spread of socialist thought and revolutionary sentiments among the Russian intelligentsia. It is neither that the burgeoning Zionist movement relied, by and large, on the Russian Jewish masses to provide it with the "manpower" for its nationalist endeavor, nor is it that so many of the political, intellectual, and cultural leading figures of Jewish nationalism were born and educated in tsarist Russia: Hayim Weizmann, Israel's first president; David Ben-Gurion, the founding father of the state and its first prime minister; Hayim Nachman Bialik, poet laureate of Jewish nationalism; Yosef Hayim Brenner, one of the most influential novelists and critics of Hebrew letters; Asher Ginsberg and Ze'ev (Vladimir) Jabotinsky, two of the most important ideologues of the rising Jewish nationalist consciousness, to mention but a handful of the most obvious names.

The expansive impact of "Russia" in Israel is not merely "old history." As one walks the streets of Tel Aviv, not to speak of Ashkelon or Ashdod, a vibrant Russian presence is most vividly and viscerally felt in the street signs, newspaper headlines, food and book stores, graffiti in Slavic vernacular, and, first and foremost, in the presence of the hundreds of thousands of Russians who have immigrated to Israel since the fall of the Soviet Union. What the articles collected in this volume suggest, however, is that the expanse of Russia in Israel runs both deeper and wider.

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Scholars have readily acknowledged the central role "Russia" played in shaping and molding Jewish national culture and politics. Surprisingly enough, however, the topic is nevertheless both greatly understudied and curiously under-theorized. Too often and with all too few exceptions, scholars are satisfied by noting coarse similarities between intellectual, cultural, and political phenomena and institutions in the "Jewish national spheres" and in the "Russian spheres" but fail to consider what precisely is meant by such "similarities." Two examples should suffice here.

In a seminal article on the Jews of Eastern Europe, Ezra Mendelsohn claims that the democratic institutions, parties, organizations, and political engagement of Jews in Eastern Europe cultivated respect for democracy in Israel.[1] Anita Shapira, on the contrary, notes the authoritarian tensions in the Labor Party in 1920s Palestine as caused by the attempts of its leadership to emulate Lenin's Bolshevik party.[2] These two examples tell us that the Eastern-European legacy is felt very much as salient, real, and powerful, yet is anything but simple and univocal. More importantly for our purposes, both Mendelsohn and Shapira fail to consider how one identifies the particular Russian-ness of the phenomena they describe. For neither democracy nor authoritarianism are particularly Russian in the said periods of time, and they could be traced to other sources. Indeed, both Mendelsohn and Shapira could have asked what exactly is meant by saying that political institutions and organizations in one cultural setting take shape under the influence of institutions and organizations in other cultural settings. That is, in what ways and how can one define "influence"? It is this question of influence that stands, we believe, at the heart of the essays collected in this volume: not only how did the Russian inheritance of so many Jews who chose to tag the nationalist route influence (and continue to do so) Israeli cultures and politics, but also how does one identify and gauge such an influence? What does it mean to say that Jewish nationalist cultures and politics were molded and formed under the impact of Russia?

It should be underscored that, as the examples above make patently clear, by talking about the "expanse of Russia in Israel" we do not argue for some unchanging force whose presence is felt uniformly and homogeneously throughout Jewish nationalisms and Israeli culture. On the contrary, divergent historical periods appear to present divergent cultural and political patterns and so to unfold an uneven story. Indeed, the Russian influence during the early Zionist period may have been overwhelming, but it appears to have decreased following the repression of Jewish nationalist organizations and Hebrew and Yiddish cultural institutions in the Soviet Union in the 1920s

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[1] Ezra Mendelsohn, "Reflections on East European Jewish Politics in the Twentieth Century," *YIVO Annual* 20 (1991): 23–37.

[2] Anita Shapira, *Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Force, 1881–1948* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 144, 148.

and the establishment of Hebrew national culture in mandatory Palestine and, ultimately of a Jewish national polity there in the late 1940s. If one looks to Russia as a source for a community of Zionists, one should not forget the Soviet repression of Zionism, the Russian, and then Soviet government's antisemitism and historical alliance with the Middle Eastern Arab states for much of the history of the State of Israel. Yet, as Zvi Gitelman suggests, the vicissitudes of Russia in Israel have more to do with demographic changes and, more specifically, with the emigration of Russian Jews than with any particular state politics, either Russian or Jewish. The "Russian impact," if we may so name it, was thus determined by and large by the ebbs and flows of Jewish immigration from tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union, first to Palestine and then to the State of Israel. Cultural, social, and economic ideas were trafficked by these immigrants. Present-day Israel is accordingly undergoing radical changes under the impact of the massive emigration wave from Russia over the last decades that was instigated by the collapse of the Soviet Union.

It is important to acknowledge that the "expanse of Russia in Israel" is hardly an entirely new subject, although, as noted, certainly still an under-researched one. It is only courtesy to acknowledge the pioneers in the field. Among others, we should mention the work of Yehuda Slutzky, Israel Klausner, Shmuel Ettinger, Jonathan Frankel, Anita Shapira, and Itamar Even-Zohar. Moreover, it is important not to forget the pioneering work of the Israeli historical journal *He-Avar: Rivon le-divre yeme ha-yehudim ve ha-yahadut be-russya* (1953–77), which once stood at the center of Russian studies in Israel.

The articles in this volume cover a wide range of disciplines, periods, languages, and topics. In fact, we intentionally tried to produce a mixture of works on culture, history, and politics. In the field of politics are featured discussions by Edith Rogovin Frankel and Zvi Gitelman, already noted above. In history there are pieces by Jonathan Dekel-Chen, Gur Alroey, Taro Tsurumi, Brian Horowitz, and Stefani Hoffman. And in literature one will find pieces by Shai Ginsburg and Rafi Tsirkin-Sadan.

The role played by emigration in circulating ideas is best exemplified in Jonathan Dekel-Chen's paper. Dekel-Chen traces how ideas and ideals of agricultural colonization have traveled with Jewish immigrants from the Pale of the Russian Empire to the preferred destinations of Jewish immigration, and so shaped strikingly similar Jewish economic and political endeavors in such divergent contexts as pre-State Palestine, Argentina, the United States, and even in the Soviet Union itself. Consequently, Dekel-Chen claims that one should look at emigration to Palestine and explain it not as unique but, rather, as but one trend in the much larger Jewish emigration movement of the turn of the 20th century.

Gur Alroey, Rafi Tsirkin-Sadan, and Brian Horowitz link Jewish culture in Russia and in Israel with the Russian sources that nourished it. Alroey's paper turns attention to the violence and terror that characterized the activity of the Ha-shomer Association, one of the first Jewish military organizations in pre-State Palestine and a primary symbol of the renewal of Jewish settlement in Zionist historiography. This violence was directed, Alroey notes, not only against the Arab opponents of the Jewish colonization endeavor in Palestine, but also against the Jewish employers of Ha-shomer members. He traces the violent tactics of the latter to their clandestine activities in underground socialist cells and in Jewish self-defense organizations in tsarist Russia in the years preceding their immigration to Palestine.

Rafi Tsirkin-Sadan treats another symbol of the burgeoning Jewish nationalist presence in pre-State Palestine, namely, of the writer and cultural critic Yosef Hayim Brenner. Brenner, whose honed and agonized ironic prose was made into the teaching of the Jewish Labor Movement in pre-State Palestine, owed many of his critical concepts, argues Tsirkin-Sadan, to his readings of 19th-century Russian literary critics in general, and of Vissarion Belinsky, the great critic of the period, in particular. In fact, it seems that Brenner's critical project as a whole could be read as an attempt to reflect upon the Jewish experience, and the Jewish nationalist endeavor in particular, through the terms developed by these Russian critics.

Whereas Dekhl-Chen, Alroy, and Tsirkin-Sadan look at the intellectual baggage carried by Jewish immigrants from the Pale of Russian and Soviet rule, the papers of Horowitz, Tsurumi, and Hoffman explore the attitude of those Jews who chose *not* to immigrate towards their Jewish identity, whether perceived in religious, ethnic, or national terms. Further, whereas many of the chapters of this book address symbolic moments and figures in Zionist historiography, Brian Horowitz chooses to focus on a figure almost forgotten under the weight of so many "significant" moments and figures: Avram Idel'son, one of the chief architects of Russian Zionism, who exerted considerable influence as editor of *Rassvet*. It is through the life and work of the likes of Idel'son that one is to gain insight into the essential dynamics and tensions between the divergent forces that cut through the lives of Zionists in Russia in the years leading to and immediately following the October Revolution. Only close attention to the tensions between conflicting ideals, Zionist strategies and tactics, the Russian milieu, and the life of the Jewish community could uncover the way Russian Zionists envisioned themselves vis-à-vis the Zionist ideals they were espousing.

This point is further developed by Taro Tsurumi in his essay. In his chapter, Tsurumi seeks to uncover the ways in which Jews in Russia imagined the Jewish nation. Like their fellow Zionists who chose to immigrate to Palestine, those Zionists who remained hinged their imagining of the nation on a similar conception of space and time. Acknowledging the importance of territory for fostering the social field crucial for the development of nations,

they envisioned, however, the combination of a social center based in territory in Palestine and social autonomy in Russia. Indeed, like the Bund, Russian Zionists also promoted the idea of a multinational statehood. Thus, the study of Russian Zionists, Tsurumi finally contends, brings to light the fact that Zionists supported a host of national imaginings, in which the one that took hold in pre-State Palestine and that ultimately led to the establishment of the State of Israel was but one.

Stefani Hoffman explores the shifting views of Zionism in the Soviet Union between the 1970s and 1990s. Pushed ever more forcefully by the blatant antisemitism of the regime and the support lent by leading Russian intellectuals to anti-Jewish campaigns, young people were encouraged to identify themselves as Jews. Yet, Hoffman maintains, not all enmeshed their newly found or formed Jewish identification with Zionism. Many, on the contrary, have remained rooted in Russian (non-Soviet) culture and some even converted to Christianity, both of which they viewed as expressing more universal values than Israeli parochialism. Surprisingly, she notes, this is true even of those intellectuals who chose, or were forced, to immigrate to Israel.

In her essay, Edith Rogovin Frankel remarks on the notable fact that notwithstanding over 60 years of Soviet attempts to expunge the particulars of Jewish identity, by the 1970s so many of the Jews who remained in the Soviet Union still identified themselves as Jews. She then goes on to explore the possible linkage between modes of Jewish self-identification and patterns of emigration out of the Soviet Union. Indeed, Jewish self-identification appears to vary across regions, to reflect the particular Soviet history of these regions. It ultimately corresponds to the urge of Jews to leave the Soviet Union and their choice of their destination upon immigration.

Yet, notwithstanding how evident the impact of Russia is on Jewish nationalist culture in Israel, the "expanse of Russia in Israel" is also often overstated, and Shai Ginsburg explores this tendency in his essay. For years, cultural critics have viewed the Hebrew culture of the so-called "1948 generation" as stamped by Stalinist socialist realism and censured it for it. Hebrew fictional prose in particular stood open to such censure. Turning to Hebrew war fiction of the late 1940s and early 1950s as an example and gauging it against the immense popularity of Soviet war novels among Hebrew readers at the time, Ginsburg contends, however, that rather than adopt the patterns of Russian socialist realism, Hebrew writers rejected them outright as unfit to the emerging Israeli reality. He then suggests that early Israeli high culture in general has to be read as a critique of the attempt to import Russian socialist realism into the Israeli context.

Alongside these more academic treatments of the question of the "expanse of Russia in Israel," this volume also includes a memoir by David Roskies, who describes a field trip of Israeli students and scholars to the heartland of Jewish Eastern Europe. Roskies offers a personal account of a first physical encounter with the sites and landscapes of what many consider

to be among the most significant cradles of modern Jewish cultures. Roskies's piece suggests that "Russia" is not merely a scholarly subject but an emotional one as well.

The relationship that exists between the structure of scholarship and the structure of emotions is adumbrated by Scott Ury in his essay-eulogy to Jonathan Frankel, who was a pioneer in the field of Russian Jewish Studies and a professor at Hebrew University for over 30 years before his passing in 2008. In fact, we have dedicated the volume to Jonathan Frankel's memory; for many of us he was a lodestar, an ideal scholar, and deeply moral human being.

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