Ahad Ha’am

Father of Cultural Zionism

Marie Schulte-Bockum
Political Zionism vs. Cultural Zionism

• Theodor Herzl
  - Practical Zionism
  - Sought support from political leaders of the day
  - Considered Uganda
  - REACTIONARY Zionism – solves a problem

• Ahad Ha'am
  - Conscientious, theoretical, ‘slow’ Zionism
  - Strove to unite Jewish diaspora through a new Hebrew culture
  - PROACTIVE Zionism

If you will it, it is no dream; and if you do not will it, a dream it is and a dream it will stay

We are used to thinking of the Arabs as primitive men of the desert, as a donkey-like nation that neither sees nor understands what is going around it. But this is a GREAT ERROR. The Arab, like all sons of Sham, has sharp and crafty mind . . . Should time come when life of our people in Palestine imposes to a smaller or greater extent on the natives, they WILL NOT easily step aside.
Benedict Anderson – “Imagined Communities”

• A nation [is] conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. This fraternity makes it possible to willingly die.”
My thesis

- “Whereas Theodor Herzl and his companions of the political Zionism movement built the actual frame for a Jewish state, it was Ahad Ha’am’s cultural Zionism that filled the concept of Israel with life: he built the nation for the state"
Jewish Life at the turn of the Century

- East vs. West
- Languages
- Lifestyle
- Professions
- Rights
Where did Jews live?

- 20% Image taken on Manhattan's Lower East Side's Jewish Quarter
- 10% Mizrahi, Persian, Sephardic Jews living in the Middle East & Maghreb
- 10% Egypt
- 10% Persia
- 10% Iraq
- 10% Jerusalem
20-30% Western Europe

Vienna

Paris

Berlin

London
Pale of Settlement

Jewish Population Density in Europe about 1900

- 1% to 4% Jewish population
- 5% to 9% Jewish population
- 10% to 14% Jewish population
- 15% or more Jewish population

40-5%
0%

City with over 25% Jewish population
City with over 50% Jewish population
European Demographic, Societal, Political Shifts, 18th – early 20th Century

- **1789 French Revolution** is the spark for
  - Nationalism (leftist movement)
  - Universal Human Rights and Citizens’ Equality
  - Jewish Emancipation

- **1881 Assassination of Tsar Alexander** is the spark for
  - Pogroms and renewed rise of anti-Semitism across Russian Empire
  - Ideological spread of Marxism and workers’ revolution as antidote to Tsarist rule
  - New waves of Jewish migration

- **1894 Dreyfus Affairs is the spark for**
  - Theodor Herzl’s political Zionism
  - Concern about anti-Semitism in Western Europe
  - First Zionist Congress in 1897
Pogroms in the Russian Empire

Map of Pogroms and Anti-Semitic violence, 1871-1906
The Dreyfus Affair
Anti-Semitism through the Ages

Paris, 1894

U.S. Presidential Election, 1899

Italy, 1914
“The Jewish Problem” & “The Question of the Jews”

- “The Eastern form of the moral trouble is absolutely different from the Western. In the West it is the problem of the Jews, in the East the problem of Judaism.” – Ahad Ha’am, 1897 – First Zionist Congress
- Hitler first mentions “Question of the Jews” in 1919
Asher Ginsberg → Ahad Ha’am

Jewish population of Skvyra:
1775 - 116 Jews
1847 - 2,184 Jews
1897 - 8,910 (49.5%)
1926 - 4,681 (33.6%)
1939 - 2,243 Jews
1950 - 1,000 Jews
1960 - 500 Jews
2009 - 120 Jews
“This Jewish settlement, which will be a gradual growth, will become in course of time the center of the nation, wherein its spirit will find pure expression and develop in all its aspects up to the highest degree of perfection of which it is capable. Then from this center the spirit of Judaism will go forth to the great circumference, to all the communities of the Diaspora, and will breathe new life into them and preserve their unity.”
A Zionism full of Contradictions

• Metropolitan and global, yet deeply religious
• Hebrew as the native language for an non-fluent population
• A Jewish nation in an Arab-inhabited land
• A pinnacle of Jewish culture and achievement, far away from most Jewish settlement
An Ambitious Zionism

• Ahad Ha’am’s “Otsar HaYahadut Belashon Ivrit” (A Treasury of Judaism in the Hebrew language)
• 15 volumes encompassing millennia of Jewish thought
• Told his sponsor Wissotzky, “the leaders of the [Jewish] people who wish to ensure its continued existence must first concentrate their attention on the state of Jewish knowledge in our midst”
• Inspired Bialik’s later Kinusim works (anthologies of Hebrew literary culture)
Conclusion – What Remains?
Right-wing parties hold 60 seats in the 120 seat parliament.

**ISRAEL’S KNESSET TODAY**

**CENTRE LEFT**
- Yesh Atid (There is a future) 19
- Labor 15
- Hatnuah 6
- Meretz 6
- Kadima 2
- UAL-Taal 5
- Hadash 4
- Balad 3

**ARAB**

**RIGHT**
- United Torah Judaism 7
- Shas 11
- Bayit Yehudi (Jewish Home) 11
- likud-Beiteinu 31

Source: The Jerusalem Post / National Post News Services

Richard Johnson / National Post
Benedict Anderson – “Imagined Communities”

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Shmaryahu Levin

• “before we build Palestine, we have to build the people”