



A Marxist-Psychoanalytical Appraisal of the “Jewish Question”

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Zionism to this day has been driven by two powerful myths. The first is that the history of the Jews is one of unmitigated persecution – sometimes labelled the ‘lachrymose theory’ – that the world always has been divided into Jews and innate anti-Semites. The second myth is that the Jews withstood the unrelenting onslaught of the Gentile world, ensuring their survival as a people, because of their devotion to religious Judaism and to nationalist ideals. The portrayal is especially interesting given that many other ancient peoples – the Phoenicians, Assyrians, Babylonians, and ancient Egyptians - were assimilated into dominant cultures and disappeared as distinct ethnic groups. So what isn't mythical?

Leon's Critique of Zionism - and His Critics

Abram Leon in his *The Jewish Question: A Marxist Interpretation* argued instead that the Jews formed a vital social group with distinct economic functions, firstly commerce and later, because of church injunctions, usury. Ancient Palestine was a crucial corridor for goods. The region became thickly populated with great cities thriving on commerce. Hence, geographical position, above all else, explains a robust trend of Jewish emigration and its attendant commercial character. The Jews therefore, were a 'people-class' whose economic activities enabled them to preserve a common ethnic identity based on shared religious and linguistic features. This is not to say all Jews were merchants any more than all Romans were soldiers.¹

During the first millennium, following the Roman conquest of ancient Israel/Palestine but also after the fall of the Roman Empire, Jews were the principal traders in western Europe and moved from one region to another, creating and fulfilling new economic needs. Opportunities abounded for commerce within feudal society too, mostly through selling goods to feudal lords. Leon argued that the deeper the economic decay, as in the case of the Roman Empire, or the less developed the society, as in early feudal Europe, the more the commercial role of Jews grew in importance. In the tenth century, they were practically the sole economic link between Europe and Asia.²

Despite varying impositions of restrictions Jews played a significant role in cities, enjoying freedom of movement necessary for commerce, the right to own and sell property, and sometimes hold municipal office. Spanish Jewish communities enjoyed wide-ranging economic and legal powers. In the Rhineland in the 10th and 11th centuries, and in Poland in the 15th and 16th centuries, Jews were invited in by the rulers in order to develop trade and new cities. In the mid-1650s following the English Civil War Oliver Cromwell for similar reasons encouraged the resettlement of Jews in England. In feudal society the Jews' legal status in countries such as Spain, France,

¹ Leon, 1970, p.112.

² Pirenne, 1939, p. 174, in Leon, pp.127-8; Roscher, 1944, p.16, in Leon, p.128.

Germany and Poland was far higher than that of the serfs, in many cases approaching that of the nobility. On the other hand, Jewish fortunes in medieval Europe certainly were subject to sudden, dramatic transformation. They could and did become easy victims of massacres carried out by lower class forces rebelling against usury or high taxes.

The French revolution emancipated the Jews, eliminating the last legal obstacles to Jewish assimilation. But as discrimination was ebbing in the west, it surged with redoubled violence in Eastern Europe.³ At the start of the nineteenth century the vast majority lived in Eastern Europe, mainly Poland.⁴ There “they exchanged the precious products of Asia, spices and silks, for the raw materials of Europe.”⁵ Polish agriculture temporarily became a vital component of the western mercantile economy [and so] ‘Jewish migrants began to settle in the numerous small towns and villages belonging to these great landlords.’⁶ However, the Polish *Arenda* system soon atrophied, creating the conditions for the partitioning of Poland at the end of the eighteenth century. “The mass of impoverished Jews ended up in the Tsarist Russian Empire.”⁷ Leon concluded, contrary to Zionists, that “if the Jews have been preserved, it was not *despite* their dispersal, but *because* of it.”⁸

Maxime Rodinson argued that in the ancient Diaspora no functional specialisation distinguished the Jews.⁹ They engaged in trade but also in various craft activities and agriculture in equal or greater measure. Rodinson stresses the diversified professional structure of Oriental Jewish communities. Eastern Jewry differed from Western counterparts largely through the importance of the artisan class.¹⁰ The majority of Jewish artisans were small entrepreneurs selling their goods to the customer in their own booths on credit. They were employed exclusively by Jewish employers.¹¹ The survival of the Jews and of Judaism, both in the Latin West prior to the Crusades and in the Muslim world down to the present, is due to the relative weakness of those states and their inability to impose a unified ideology on minorities. Yet Rodinson accepted Leon's thesis “has some validity from the lower Middle Ages onwards in Western Europe.”¹²

³ “In the period when Jews in Western Europe were being massacred... a large number of Jews had sought refuge in the countries where capitalism had still not penetrated.” Leon, 1970, p. 183.

⁴ Rose, 2008, p. 136.

⁵ Leon, 1970, p. 184.

⁶ Israel, 1989, pp.27-29 in Rose, 2008, p. 136.

⁷ Rose, 2004, ch. 6.

⁸ Leon, 1970, p.122, quoted in Rose, 2008, p. 130.

⁹ Rodinson, 1968, *Jewish Nation to Jewish Problem* pp. 79-80.

¹⁰ Subdivided into three categories. Firstly, corporations catering directly for the needs of the Jewish community (bakers, millers, butchers, barbers, etc.). Secondly, artisan groups enjoying a privileged status whose activities, as in Western Europe, derived directly from those of Jewish traders: jewellers, silk workers, craftsmen producing luxury goods. Thirdly, the depressed crafts: the marginal artisan sector that developed out of the downgrading of the Jewish merchant status, as in Yemen. This decline is reminiscent of the status of declassed Jews at the end of the Middle Ages: ragmen, pedlars, dyers. Weinstock, Introduction to Leon, pp.42-44

¹¹ Rodinson, 1968, p. 100.

¹² *ibid*, p.79, 107.

Leon contends Jewish history is that of the preservation of Judaism and of the assimilation of large numbers of Jews as well. In North Africa in pre-Islamic times, in Germany in the fourth century, and in South America, we see the assimilated disappearance of the Jews as a distinct ethnic group. Similarly with the Jewish warrior tribes in Arabia. This is explained by the fact that the Jews, by turning to agriculture, ceased to constitute a separate economic class.¹³ Weinstock mentions two further illustrations, the poor Sicilian Jews who converted to Christianity which for him confirms Leon's conclusion that wherever the Jews cease to constitute a 'people-class', they lose their distinctive ethnic and cultural features.¹⁴ The second example is Palestinian Jewry, among whom the farmers became progressively assimilated into the surrounding population whereas the merchants retained their Jewish identity.¹⁵

What is Missing in the Myths?

Weinstock chided Rodinson for presenting a narrow, schematic interpretation of Leon's thesis. In no sense does Leon suggest that all Jews developed a functional specialisation. Leon describes the process by which the Jews were transformed into a people-class as a dynamic one of 'permanent selection' extending over several centuries and continually renewed (for example, the shift from Western to Eastern Europe). The process is not a sudden or unilinear one but allows for shifts and pauses. It is a historical tendency, not a mechanical progression, and only in the long run does it hold. Jewish professional occupations appeared "as a visible materialisation of monetary economy in a society that rested... on use-values."¹⁶ In Western Europe in the early Middle Ages, Rodinson emphasises, Jews practised professions which at first sight do not lend themselves to the 'people-class' hypothesis: traders, but also money-lenders, handicraft workshop owners, goldsmiths and silversmiths, shipowners and slave traders.

Note, however, these are all occupations linked with trade, and much land belonging to Jews in the early Middle Ages represented the fruits of commercial or usurious activity.¹⁷ Jewish agriculturists specialised in vine-growing, the cultivation of orchards or in truck and dairy farming - all closely linked with the urban economy, dependent on heavy capital investment and producing for exchange.¹⁸ Vine-growing would have fulfilled an important commercial role within the wider community (Jewish and Catholic), given the ritualistic importance of wine. It is thus arguable that until the eleventh century, Jews were prominent in trade but not exclusively so, many still working as agriculturists. Many of the latter did become assimilated while the rest migrated to the towns, partly to take advantage of new economic opportunities, and partly to avoid

¹³ "Could they at all have taken to agriculture, they could hardly have done so without scattering through the country and its numerous villages, which, in spite of the difference in religion, would probably in a few generations have resulted in complete assimilation. Engaged in commerce and concentrated in towns, they formed agglomerations and developed a social life of their own, moving and marrying within their own community." Ruppin, p.132, quoted in Leon, 1970, p. 80.

¹⁴ Weinstock, 1970, p. 42.

¹⁵ *ibid*, p. 41.

¹⁶ Leon, 1970, p. 39.

¹⁷ *ibid*, p. 42.

¹⁸ *ibid*, p. 44.

intensified obligations to swear Christian allegiance.¹⁹ But with this latter group, their unwillingness to do so had an economic motive.

Ruben points out that great occupational differentiation among Jews does not, in itself, refute Leon's thesis since one could argue that Jewry survived only because of those, whatever their numerical proportion, in occupations connected with exchange, who had a 'coat-tail' effect ensuring the survival of other Jews.²⁰ For Ruben, Leon's thesis fits only one case: that of international trade in early feudal western Europe between 700 and 1100. Only in that period might the Jews be indispensable representatives of exchange. A major reason was the control of the Mediterranean by the Moors and the consequent cutting off of trade routes between Western Europe and Asia. Jewish merchants in Western Europe had available to them an international trading network linking them to Jewish trading communities in various parts of Asia. Jews also were seen as neutral in the wars between Muslims and Christians. There was thus a powerful economic motive for Jews to remain Jews since to have abandoned Jewry would have been to have abandoned their means of existence.²¹ Moreover, according to Baron, between the sixth and twelfth centuries:

the Jewish occupational stratification underwent a radical change. A people theretofore still largely deriving its livelihood from farming and handicrafts was being transformed into a predominantly mercantile population with a strong emphasis on the money trade . . . Even in ancient Palestine and Babylonia, Jewish landownership had been exposed to heavy taxes and chicaneries by the powerful Roman and Persian bureaucracies... During the numerous wars between the Eastern Roman Empire and Sassanian Persia, all farming in the Babylonian borderlands must have suffered severely, Jewish farming doubly so, since Jews also had to contend with the aroused fanaticism of the combatants on both sides."²²

However, there are three problems with confining Leon's 'People-Class' theory to the years 700-1100 CE. Firstly, how does one then account for the exodus of Jews from ancient Israel/Judah in the centuries preceding Christianity and the survival of Jewry during the first to the eighth centuries CE? It would seem that the latter question has been answered in terms of cultural and psychological factors (Ruben's 'internal' factors): the strength of Jewish religious culture, their sense of their ethno-religious identity, i.e., an 'idealist' explanation. This leads to the second problem: doesn't providing different interpretations for different periods of Jewry's survival – a cultural and an economic – lead to an unhelpful eclecticism? Thirdly, if, as Sand argues, agreeing with Leon (see below), a large percentage of Israelites were living outside ancient Israel/Judah long before the Roman conquest, why did they not assimilate into the surrounding populations, as other ethnic groups did? Could it have been solely due to 'internal' factors? Was Marx not right when he wrote: "It is not men's consciousness that determines their being but their social being that determines their consciousness."? If so, we must adduce 'external' social and economic factors to account for Jewry's survival and relative lack of assimilation outside ancient Israel in the centuries prior to 700 CE.

¹⁹ Rodinson, 1968, p. 105.

²⁰ Ruben, 1982, p.210. Rodinson argues similarly: "this does not mean that the Jews were the only ones to engage in money-lending, nor that all Jews were money-lenders..."

²¹ Ruben, 1982, p.218; Rodinson, 1968, pp.104,107.

²² Baron, 1952, p. 151.

Schlomo Sand's anti-Zionist Intervention

In 2009 Schlomo Sand provoked a powerful reaction with his book *The Invention of the Jewish People*. His basic argument is that East European Ashkenazi Jews are not descended directly from the ancient Land of Israel, but from the Khazars, a Turkic tribal people whose rulers converted to Judaism in the eighth century CE. They did so in order to fend off “mighty, grasping empires – the Orthodox Byzantine Empire and the Abbasid Mujslim Caliphate... Had the Khazars adopted Islam, for example, they would have become the subjects of the caliph.”²³ Sand emphasises that Ashkenazi Jews of Eastern Europe reached those areas from Khazaria. Sand does a splendid job debunking Zionism’s favourite biblical myths. Firstly, following Persian emperor Cyrus’ declaration ending the Babylonian exile, “only some of the exiles and their offspring returned to Jerusalem. The rest, possibly the majority, chose to remain and prosper in the cultural centres of the flourishing East, where the elites nurtured rich religious traditions that would spread around the ancient world.”²⁴

Secondly, the myths of the Exodus from Egypt and the conquest of Canaan dissolve. The 1967 war and the occupation of the Palestinians territories created new openings for Israeli archaeological research.²⁵ Sand notes the centrality of the Exodus in the Zionist construction of Jewish identity.²⁶ However, in the thirteenth century BCE, the alleged period of the Exodus, “Canaan was ruled by the still-powerful pharaohs. This means that Moses led the freed slaves out of Egypt ... to Egypt.”²⁷ Moreover, such a momentous event as a large population moving through the desert for forty years should have left some epigraphic or archaeological traces. “The ancient Egyptians kept meticulous records of every event, and there is a great deal of documentation about the kingdom’s political and military life. There are even documents about the incursion of nomadic peoples into the realm. Yet there is not a single mention of any ‘Children of Israel’ who lived in Egypt, or rebelled against it, or emigrated from it at any time... No traces have been found in the Sinai desert of any significant movement of population through it at the said period...”²⁸

Thirdly, Sand repudiates the claim that the Romans expelled the Jews from ancient Israel following their destruction of the temple in 70CE. “The Romans”, he states, “never deported entire peoples... neither did the Assyrians and Babylonians move entire populations from the countries they conquered. It did not pay to uproot the people of the land, the cultivators of produce, the taxpayers. But even the efficient policy of deportation practiced by the Assyrian, and later the Babylonian, empire - in which whole sections of local administrative and cultural elites were deported – was not followed by the Roman Empire.”²⁹ The Khazars were a trading people, living at the crossroads of important caravan routes, and Judaism, the religion of Jewish traders, would have appealed to them as the ideology most suited to their economic role. Leon too refers to

²³ Sand, 2010, p. 222.

²⁴ Sand, 2010, p. 144.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 115.

²⁶ *ibid.* p. 118.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 118.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 118.

²⁹ *ibid.* p. 130.

the Khazars, asking whether there might be “a relation between the commercial function of this tribe and its conversion to Judaism.”³⁰ This, of course, begs the question as to why the Khazars needed to adopt a monotheistic religion in the first place. Perhaps the socio-economic basis of Judaism provides a clue.

The Torah is replete with precepts dealing with business, and the Talmud, the source of Jewish oral law, elaborates and expands Torah law. The process is ongoing, and rabbinical authorities build on decisions of their predecessors to apply Jewish law to modern problems. Some issues examined by Friedman include honesty in the marketplace, fair pricing, employer-employee relations, and environmental issues. Jewish law is not only concerned with practical legal advice but in encouraging individuals to go beyond requirements of the law and practice the ‘way of the pious.’ Judaism does not have a negative attitude toward business and wealth—indeed, most of the Talmudic sages had occupations, and some were quite wealthy — but riches must be acquired honestly and used to help the poor, the needy, and the stranger.³¹ But were the Khazars exclusively Jewish? According to Hoffman, an Arabic visitor to the Khazar capital in the first half of the tenth century noted that there were seven judges - two each for the three major religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and a seventh for the ‘pagans’. Arabic sources estimated that more than thirty thousand Jews lived in the Khazar Empire.³²

Sand, corroborating Leon, states: “Long before the destruction of the Second Temple, their forefathers (i.e., of the Israelites) preferred to live outside the Holy Land, and despite their traditional religious self-isolation, they were always an integral part of the people among whom they lived...‘They remained Jews, although also members of other nations.’”³³ Again, Sand, debunking official Zionism, states: “one of the main problems bedeviling the myth of destruction-expulsion was the fact that long before 70 CE there were large Jewish communities outside Judea,”³⁴ Sand also argues “...before and after the fall of the Second Temple, there were Jewish believers all over the Roman Empire, as well as in the Parthian territory in the east, in numbers vastly exceeding those of the inhabitants of Judea. From North Africa to to Armenia, from Persia to Rome, there were thriving Jewish communities, primarily in large cities, but also in towns and even villages.”³⁵ So Sand reckons that Eastern European Jewry descended from Khazars. In the early thirteenth century, the Mongolian invasion led by Genghis Khan swept away everything in its path, destroying the political, cultural and economic structures of Western Asia and Eastern Europe. The Mongols set up a new small Khazar kingdom but did not understand the land and the irrigation system. The result was “the flight of masses of people and depopulating the prairies for hundreds of years. Among the emigrants were many Jewish Khazars who, together with their neighbours, advanced into the western Ukraine and hence to Polish and Lithuanian territories.”³⁶

³⁰ Leon, 1970, p. 77.

³¹ Friedman, 2001,

³² Hoffman, 1998, p. 27.

³³ Cohen, 2006, pp.54-77 (Hebrew); Sand, 2010, pp.69-70.

³⁴ Sand, 2010, p. 143.

³⁵ *ibid*, p. 146.

³⁶ *ibid*, p. 229.

Hoffman contradicts Sand's claim, observing "by far the largest number of early Jewish immigrants in Poland came from German and Saxon lands... They were Ashkenazi Jews who brought with them an already developed tradition of Talmudic learning and the Yiddish language, which emerged from German dialects around the tenth or eleventh century."³⁷ Indeed, it is hard to accept Sand's claim that Eastern European Jewry emanated exclusively from the Khazars when we consider that Yiddish is a largely Germanic language. However, Sand believes that the number of Jews in western Germany in the eleventh to the thirteenth century was very small, estimates ranging from a few hundred to a few thousand.

Gieysztor also argues that "the Jewish merchants of Central and Eastern Europe did not cast their lot exclusively with Khazaria. Established along the great road of the central continent and along a few of its offshoots – one of which reached down through Hungary along the Danube and led to Byzantium – they took advantage of local markets, contributing to their vitality and encouraging a widespread flow of goods."³⁸ The great oriental road began in Gaul which was linked to Moslem Spain, and passed through Verdun, the main slave market, and on to Mainz and Regensburg, finally reaching the Danube. From here it proceeded through the principality of Moravia, which was already flourishing in the ninth century, and following the fall of that duchy, through the territory seized by the Hungarians. Here, as early as the tenth century various groups of merchants, both Moslem and Jewish, were active.

During the First Crusade (1096-1099) thousands of Jews in communities along the Rhine were attacked and killed. Despite these problems, German Jews continued to practice and develop their religious and social customs and traditions, including the Yiddish language and their Ashkenazi Jewish identity. Eventually, they created a uniquely Jewish occupation, working as Court Jews within the Holy Roman Empire.³⁹ Could East European Jews have used both the Khazarian and the West European routes? Given the large body of evidence documenting the movement of German Jews to Poland, Sand's thesis seems only partially correct. In an interview with John Rose in 2010, Sand expresses regret that he didn't take Leon's work into account and believes that their two approaches are compatible. Kasher asserts that

following the conquests of Alexander the Great, the migration and settlement of Jews throughout the Mediterranean countries blended successfully with the general framework of Greek migration...the sheer numbers involved in the Jewish diaspora made a vivid impression on Greek authors... However...in contrast to other immigrant ethnic groups, the Jews preserved their organisational separateness, national-religious identity, and spiritual affinity with their homeland throughout the generations.⁴⁰

The reasons for Jewish migration to the Hellenistic-Roman world were initially captivity, war and slavery. For example, Ptolemy I – Greek ruler of Egypt from 305/304 to 282 BCE - took 100,000 Jewish prisoners with him into Egypt. Jews also experienced political banishment, for example, during the War of the Diadochi (323-301 BCE).

³⁷ Hoffman, 1998, p. 29.

³⁸ Gieysztor, 1986, p. 17.

³⁹ Gay, 1994.

⁴⁰ Kasher, 1987/2008, p. 47.

According to Josephus, “after Alexander’s death, myriads more migrated to Egypt and Phoenicia in consequence of the disturbed condition of Syria.”⁴¹ Finally, there was migration for economic and demographic reasons. Overpopulation was a factor. But trade and commerce played an important role.⁴²

It is likely that Jewish settlement for reasons other than trade – for example, captivity, war, slavery, military settlement or political banishment – resulted over several generations in assimilation into the surrounding population. None of those motives would have required Jewish groups to retain adherence to Judaic norms and rules. Arguably, trade alone would have necessitated the retention of a tradition that provided an ideological and moral basis for their commercial activities. Leon painted a picture of a socially homogeneous Jewish trading community. However, Halevy describes ‘the embourgeoisement of a minority of Jews’ in the Russian Empire. By the end of the nineteenth century, “whole branches of manufacturing and small-scale industry, linked to the transformation of the methods of production in activities traditionally widespread among Jewish artisans (hat-making, clothing) were in majority Jewish, both bosses and the wage-workers. This temporary emergence of a Jewish proletariat, facing a Jewish bourgeoisie, gave rise to the Bund, a trade union organisation of Jewish workers...”⁴³ Moreover, recent scholarship has pointed to evidence that under modern capitalism Jews have been able to leave behind traditional fields of trade and usury/banking and enter the arena of capitalist production.⁴⁴ Finally, Rodinson concludes that “Leon may have been wrong on this or that point... But he was right about the essential thing... Judaism is explained by history and not outside it.”⁴⁵

II: Psychoanalytic Legacies

What are the psychoanalytical implications? Fromm classically compares what he calls the productive ‘character orientation’ with four types of non-productive ‘character orientations.’ The ‘productive orientation’ refers to our ability to realise our human potential for creativity and solidarity with others. Fromm’s notion has an affinity with Freud’s concept of the genital stage. As Funk describes it: it “is to be a *social* being and thus to be related to others and to oneself in a way that is oriented towards the development of love, reason, and productive work...”⁴⁶ One ‘non-productive orientation’ is the ‘marketing orientation’ which is based on a high level of pernicious manipulation. The modern market differs from its pre-modern ancestor.

⁴¹ *ibid*, p. 54.

⁴² The expansionist policy of the Hasmonaeen rulers (140-37 BCE) beyond the borders of Judea won them an important foothold on the international trade routes of those days ... Hasmonaeen control over important sections of the ‘King’s Road’ in Transjordan made the Hasmonaeen state a most important factor in the distribution of Arabian and Far Eastern goods in western lands... The remarkable expansion and success of Alexandrian trade at the time, and the close cooperation between the Ptolemies and the Hasmonaeans, could also have affected Jewish migration for reasons of trade. *ibid*, p. 60.

⁴³ Halevy, 1987, 134-5.

⁴⁴ Muller, 2011.

⁴⁵ Rodinson, 1968, p.116.

⁴⁶ Funk, 2010, in Sagall, 2013, pp. 71-2.

Ancient marketing was characterised by barter between sellers and buyers enjoying a face-to-face relationship at the local level. Moreover, wandering from one region to another selling goods, creating and fulfilling new economic needs, suggests an orientation that is closer to a productive than a modern manipulative one, arguably, therefore, closer to Fromm's 'productive orientation.'⁴⁷ Fromm's character orientations can be analysed in terms of basic psychoanalytical concepts, the principal building blocks or psychic components of psychoanalysis.⁴⁸ The modern authoritarian character has an overdeveloped super-ego whereas individuals in late feudal society perhaps had weaker super-egos, giving greater rein to the forces of the id. Jewish merchants of the ancient and feudal worlds would have developed Fromm's productive orientation, in which the ego would have felt the centre of its human potential and not be swamped by the dark forces of the id. Of course, they would probably have had powerful super-egos given their biblical and Talmudic background, but arguably they achieved some balance between the ego and the *superego*.

The Mass Psychology of Zionism

Zionism fulfils an indispensable ideological function in legitimating the theft of Palestinian land. But in addition, it is possible to identify at its heart four psychological mechanisms enabling Zionist Jews in Israel and the Diaspora to deal with the anxiety and anger aroused by modern antisemitism.

(a) *The fantasy of a return to the ideal mother*

A key psychological attraction of Zionism is the fantasy of an ideal protective mother to whom one returns. Israel, land of milk and honey, gathers in her dispersed, wandering children, offering them protection from persecutors. Part of this fantasy was the denial of the existence of Palestinian 'half-siblings' competing for the same mother. (The Hebrew word for land 'Adama' is also the female of Adam, i.e. mother). Needless to say, Zionism doesn't merely express this fantasy but also, most dangerously, acts it out. Far from a safe haven, Israel turned out to be a hazardous place for Jews, feared and hated by those whom they dispossessed.

(b) *Identification with the Oppressor*

This has been an important psychological mechanism used by Zionism to deal with the fear and anger aroused by modern antisemitism. Anna Freud described a schoolboy whose master complained that when scolding the boy he would make faces, causing the whole class to burst out laughing. However, the boy wasn't making fun of the master as he believed. "Through his grimaces, he was assimilating himself to or identifying himself with the dreaded external object... By impersonating the aggressor, assuming his attributes or imitating his aggression, the child transforms himself from the person threatened into the person who makes the threat."⁴⁹ Clearly, the history of systematic oppression of Palestinians by Zionists carries tragic, if ironic, echoes of Jewish suffering at the hands of antisemites. In Jacqueline Rose's book *The Question of Zion*, she quotes Sara Roy's description of an Israeli soldier ordering a Palestinian old man to stand behind a donkey and kiss its behind. She quotes Grossman's novel *See*

⁴⁷ Fromm, 1949, pp. 82-107; Fromm & Maccoby, 1970, p. 99.

⁴⁸ Sagall, 2013, pp. 104-106.

⁴⁹ Freud, 1937/1968, pp.110/113; Kovel, 1988, p. 247.

Under: Love, in which nine-year old Momik discovers photos of a Nazi soldier “forcing an old man to ride another like a horse.”⁵⁰

(c) *Projection of Guilt*

Another defence mechanism is projection of guilt. The aggressor’s hostility and destructiveness is repressed and projected outwards. This mechanism enabled Zionists to deal with unconscious guilt at the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians. Israel is a society ill at ease with itself. The late Prime Minister Begin compared Palestinian nationalists with the Nazis, almost as though Palestinians were to blame for the Holocaust. The result often seems to be a collective paranoia whereby Israelis perceive Palestinians as the source of all aggression. There is an echo here of Klein’s ‘projective identification’, whereby these destructive impulses are projected on to the Palestinians – sadly, there is little sign of the ‘depressive position’ with its need for reparation.⁵¹

(d) *Compensatory Mechanism*

Zionism encouraged Jews to deal with modern antisemitism through the prism of their reconstructed earlier, more privileged history, through the lens of the 'Chosen People.' Ben Gurion famously said: ‘The Bible is my mandate’. And Sand highlights the importance of the ‘Chosen People’ self-image: “To what extent is Jewish Israeli society willing to discard the deeply embedded image of the ‘chosen people’, and to cease isolating itself in the name of a fanciful history or dubious biology and excluding the ‘other’ from its midst?”⁵² The 'Chosen People' idea acquired different meanings according to changing political and ideological needs of the community as interpreted by its rulers. According to Biale, the notion was probably originally developed to justify the invasion of Canaan in the time of Joshua. But it also served the political purpose of attempting to impose unity on highly fragmented tribes.⁵³ In medieval times, the idea remained important as a means of enabling Jews to make sense of their unique, contradictory position in society: outsiders who were yet insiders, aliens who nevertheless had the ear of kings and noblemen. It was a justification of the power held by the autonomous Jewish communities of medieval Europe.⁵⁴

Finally, during persecutions of the Jews, the theory of divine election encouraged a readiness to endure the lot of the martyr and outcast.⁵⁵ Following the massacres of the First Crusades (1096), Judah Ha-Levi argued that the election of Israel was proved by its suffering. In sixteenth century Prague, in the aftermath of ghettoisation, Rabbi Judah Loew (Maharal) asserted the religious and moral superiority of Jews, a sign of Israel's election and messianic destiny.⁵⁶ And in modern times, particularly in the Eastern European 'shtetl' (Jewish small town or village), the doctrine of divine election remained central, again as a means of dealing with persecution. "Nazi records of the Polish occupation tell of 'stubborn' Jews who said they would rather die than transgress the Sabbath - even though they knew that God would pardon them the violation of His

⁵⁰ Rose, 2005, p. 143.

⁵¹ Klein, 1957.

⁵² Sand, 2010, pp. 312-3.

⁵³ Biale, 1987, p. 29.

⁵⁴ *ibid*, pp. 58-9.

⁵⁵ Katz, 1961, p. 13.

⁵⁶ Katz, 1961, chapter 11.

‘mitzva’ in the face of mortal danger.”⁵⁷ The reality of powerlessness gives rise to the myth of power.

Faced with the Holocaust, the climax of late nineteenth and twentieth century antisemitism, many Jews experienced a sense of powerlessness, creating a need for this compensatory mechanism. Zionism enables Jews to deal with the anger against the perceived loss of their 'Chosen People' status by seeing the Palestinians as an obstacle to its recreation. This mechanism often seems to be present in the attitudes and behaviour towards Palestinians of West Bank settlers.

Conclusion

Isaac Deutscher argued that there was an alternative modern Jewish tradition to Zionism - that created by Jews who chose to remain outside the mainstream of society, enabling them to hold a critical stance in relation to it. It is the tradition represented by Spinoza, Heine, Marx, Freud, Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg. The tradition of the Jew as outsider and internationalist is far more in keeping with nearly two millenia of Jewish history than that of the Jew as possessor of a national state. “The Jews were conditioned by the circumstances of their existence to rise above the limitations of the nationalist outlook, to overcome the fetishes of state or empire, and to look forward to supra-national forms of social existence.”⁵⁸

In the Tsarist Empire the majority of Jews were small traders and artisans. At the outbreak of the Russian Revolution, the Bolsheviks had little support among the Jewish population – far more supported the Jewish socialist anti-Zionist Bund and the liberal Kadets. But nor did Zionism command much support. However, the Bolsheviks outlawed antisemitism. Then, during the Civil War, the Whites carried out terrible pogroms, while the Reds tried to defend Jewish communities. Also, the Bolshevik Central Committee that won a majority in All-Russian Soviets in October 1917 contained six Jews out of twenty-one members, unthinkable in the dark days of Tsarist oppression.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Jews played a significant role in the Social Democratic parties of Germany, Russia, Austria-Hungary, and Poland. They helped to build the Communist and Labour Parties and trade unions in the US, UK and South Africa. The history of the Bund is also instructive. As late as 1936, in the Polish Jewish community council elections – *kehilla* – and in 1938 in the Warsaw City Council elections, out of 20 elected Jewish councillors, 17 were associated with the Bund. Similar results came in from Łódź, Wilno, Lublin, Białystok, Grodno, Piotrków, Tarnow, and other cities. The Bund also performed well in municipal elections held in January 1939.

If Deutscher was right, then Israel and Zionist colonisation is an aberration, to be explained by the destructive character induced in so many Jews by the Holocaust but also by the failure of Stalinism to usher in a socialist world. Interestingly, Fromm argued that “the claim of the Jews to the land of Israel cannot be a realistic claim. If all nations would

⁵⁷ Zborovsky & Herzog, 1952/1971, p. 116.

⁵⁸ Deutscher, 1968, p. 123.

suddenly claim territory in which their forefathers had lived two thousand years ago, this world would be a madhouse.”⁵⁹

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⁵⁹ Fromm, in Wolfson, 1959, p. 13.

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