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# WAS THE JEWISH LABOR BUND IN CZARIST RUSSIA A “NATIONAL MOVEMENT”?

Joshua Zimmerman

*Studies on nineteenth and early twentieth-century nationalism have focused on state-seeking movements for the attainment of territorial sovereignty. While often referring to Herzlean Zionism as a typical example of nineteenth-century secular nationalism, the recent literature on nationalism makes no mention of the Jewish Labor Bund. By omission, these theoretical works reflect a consensus that the political program of the Bund, its own definition as a socialist party committed to class struggle, as well as the absence of territorial aspiration, places it outside the group of movements in Europe commonly known as “national.” This essay examines the program and ideology of the Bund in light of the recent literature on nationalism and argues that the organization’s demands for the Jews of Imperial Russia were consistent with the aims of other ethnic nationalism movements in fin-de-siècle eastern Europe.*

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In the year 1983, four groundbreaking studies on nationalism appeared, attracting tremendous scholarly attention in all the disciplines, and which continue to stimulate debate within the international academic community.<sup>1</sup> These works of Eric Hobsbawm, Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner and Anthony Smith were followed by competing studies which constructed models and typologies of national movements in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>2</sup> Among the areas of agreement emerging from this corpus of literature are that the rise of national movements was a late phenomenon, that educated elites played a central role in constructing, identifying, and articulating the demands of "the nation," and that the term itself, "nationalism," first appeared in the late eighteenth century.

While scholars still debate the antiquity of "nations," they agree that national movements for separation or autonomy originated in the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Scholars have distinguished between two stages in the development of nationalism: an inclusive liberal nationalism, which began with the French Revolution and ended with German and Italian unification in 1871, and the rise of integral, or ethno-linguistic, nationalism in the last third of the nineteenth century, which took root in the multi-national empires of central and eastern Europe.<sup>4</sup>

While the new literature on nationalism has certainly had an impact on historians of Zionism, this cannot be said for studies of the Jewish Labor Bund, the dominant Jewish socialist party in Czarist Russia.<sup>5</sup> This is chiefly due to the decline in scholarly interest in the Bund, beginning in the early 1980s, which coincided with the rise of interest in the phenomenon of nationalism.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, historians of the Bund researching in the 1960s and 1970s did not pay particular attention to the theoretical question of whether the movement should be defined as "national" or only "socialist," nor did they seek to place the rise of the Bund within the context of contemporaneous ethnic nationalisms in *fin-de-siècle* eastern Europe.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, the new literature on nationalism, while often referring to Herzlean Zionism as a typical example of state-seeking secular nationalism, makes no mention of the Bund. By omission, these theoretical works reflect a consensus that the political program of the Bund, its own definition as a socialist party committed to class struggle, as well as the absence of any territorial aspiration, places it outside the group of movements in Europe commonly known as "national movements."

But if scholars of the phenomenon of nationalism ignored the Bund altogether, this cannot be said of historians of modern Jewish history, who, depending on their orientation, locate the Bund

either in a "nationalist" or "socialist" camp. A brief survey is revealing. In his 10-volume magnum opus completed in the 1920s, Shimon Dubnow presents the Bund in the section, "The National Movement," while Salo Baron, some thirty years later, writes about the Bund in a section entitled, "Varieties of Jewish nationalism."<sup>8</sup> More recently, Jonathan Frankel writes of "emerging Bund nationalism" in his authoritative study, while Yoav Peled refers to the Bund's "nationalist ideology" in his monograph.<sup>9</sup> Ezra Mendelsohn, in a recent work, similarly places the Bund within the rubric of "Jewish nationalists" next to Zionists, Territorialists and Folkists.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Evyatar Friesel, in his popular *Atlas of Modern Jewish History*, includes the Bund in his section on "Jewish Nationalism," while in a recent history of modern European Jewry, David Vital refers to Bundists as "secular nationalists," who exemplified a "Yiddishist-populist" type of nationalism.<sup>11</sup>

However, equally prominent historians dispute the notion that the Bund was a Jewish national organization. Shmuel Ettinger, for example, excludes the Bund from his chapter on "The Growth of the Jewish National Movement," instead placing it in the chapter, "The Socialist Movement Among Jews."<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Robert Seltzer, himself a specialist on diaspora nationalism, clearly denies the designation "national movement" for the Bund, emphasizing that the Bund never wavered from its commitment to the primacy of class struggle. "The natural ally of the Jewish proletariat," Seltzer writes, "was the proletariat of other peoples, its principal enemy (apart from the Czarist regime), the capitalist class, including the Jewish bourgeoisie."<sup>13</sup>

The disagreement over how to interpret the Bund in Jewish historiography, and its absence from general studies on nationalism, is primarily the result of the unique ideological synthesis developed by Jewish socialists in Czarist Russia, to whom we now turn.

### **The National Program of the Bund, 1897-1914**

The General Jewish Labor Bund ("Union") in Poland and Russia was founded in October 1897 in Vilna and was the first modern Jewish political party in eastern Europe as well as the first mass political party to use Yiddish as its language of agitation. By 1905, at the height of its popularity in Czarist Russia, the Bund was arguably the single most popular Jewish party in Russia. After World War I, the Bund became active in independent

Poland, where, in the municipal elections of the 1930s, the Bund won more Jewish votes than any other Jewish political party. Following the Holocaust, the emergence of the State of Israel and the disappearance of a Yiddish-speaking working class in the Diaspora, the Bund went into rapid decline and today consists of a few centers of mostly elderly Yiddish-speaking Jews. Yet during the first half of the twentieth century, the Bund was a major force in eastern European Jewish life.

At its founding congress in 1897, the Bund's national demands were limited to equal civil rights for the Jews of Russia and the repeal of anti-Jewish laws. The organization's founders were second-generation *maskilim* and products of secular Russian education that embraced an integrationist solution to the Jewish question in Russia. As assimilationists, they were indifferent to "national" questions and opposed the principle of Jewish nationality, which they believed perpetuated Jewish separateness rather than promote social integration. Initially, the Bund leaders of that period envisioned the Russification of the Jewish masses, which would prepare them for entry into the Russian labor movement. But in 1901, just four years after its founding congress, the Bund boldly declared that "the term 'nationality' applies to the Jewish people" and demanded national rights for Russian Jewry.

The Bund's national program dates to 1899, when a national wing of the party began to coalesce around the figure of John Mill, head of the party's foreign committee in Geneva. In the pages of the foreign committee's organ, *Der yidsher arbeyter*, the Jewish national idea crystallized. Here, for the first time, the term "nation" was unambiguously and affirmatively applied to the Russian Jews. In the first issue of *Der yidisher arbeyter* under Mill's editorship, in March 1899, we read the following statement: "We vigorously maintain that the Jewish nation, like all others, should possess equal political, economic and national rights. We shall even fight for it."<sup>14</sup> Moreover, it is in *Der yidisher arbeyter* that we find the first clear rejection of linguistic acculturation as a long-term goal: "we seek neither Russification nor Polanization."<sup>15</sup> Mill brought these two ideas—first, that the Jews constituted a nation equal to all others, and second, that the socialist Bund should include Jewish national rights as a political demand—to the party's Third Congress, held in Bialystok in December 1899.

Despite Mill's strong appeal for the introduction of Jewish national rights into the party platform, all of approximately twenty delegates steadfastly rejected Mill's proposal.<sup>16</sup> They feared that such a demand would alienate the Bund from non-

Jewish workers and accused Mill and his Geneva division of having become more nationalist than socialist. In a heated debate, Mill was accused of a "nationalist deviation" that threatened to undermine the class-consciousness of Jewish workers and could lead to chauvinism.

The uniformly negative reaction to Mill's ideas in Kovno reveals just how new the idea of secular Jewish nationalism was. Mill recalled that the majority of delegates were not in a position to intelligently discuss the national question. Hillel Katz-Bloom, a native of Dvinsk who had been present at the Bund's First Congress and represented Bialystok at the 1899 gathering, similarly recalled that the issue of Jewish national rights was new for most of the delegates, some considering them "heretical" ideas.<sup>17</sup> Another delegate—Tsvia Hurvitz—also noted that the first time she ever seriously considered the idea that the Jews constituted a separate nation was at the third party congress.<sup>18</sup> Mill later described the atmosphere:

The debates were heated and excited. Some of the delegates did not want to know or hear anything about our changes on the Jewish question. Cosmopolitans from head to toe, they refused to even touch upon national questions. For them, anything that smelled of nationalism, with any relation to national problems, was *treyf*.<sup>19</sup>

In the end, the delegates in Kovno chose to preserve the party platform. The Bund's third party congress adopted the following kind of resolution: "The 'Bund,' among its political demands, calls only for equal civil—not national—rights." The resolution did state, however, that further discussions on the national question should continue in the pages of *Der yidisher arbeyter*.<sup>20</sup>

Over the next sixteen months, between the Bund's third and fourth party conferences, the party debated the Jewish national question in the pages of *Der yiddisher arbeyter*. Moreover, the national question was assuming increasing importance in the social democratic movement in Austria-Hungary and Germany. Of particular importance was the historic Austro-Marxist congress that took place in September 1899 in Brünn.

Because of the increased tensions between the various nationalities in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Austro-Marxists discussed the national question at length. During the course of the debate, Etbin Kristan from Trieste, a South Slav delegate, made an argument that would later be seized upon by the Bund: Kristan argued that a resolution on the national question should endorse

the rights of extra-territorial nationalities.<sup>21</sup> The South Slav proclaimed that a free society must unshackle itself from the assumption that a nation must be defined by territory. "The principle of a free society finds its parallel," Kristan declared, "in the separation of the idea of nation from that of territory. We have to make it clear that equality of rights is possible only if the nation is defined not as the population living in one territory, but as the sum total of all individuals claiming a particular nationality."<sup>22</sup> The Congress, nevertheless, rejected the South Slav delegate's proposal. Instead, the Austro-Marxists adopted the principles set out in Karl Kautsky's writings, advocating national autonomy along territorial lines.

Three months following the Brünn congress, Mill informed readers of *Der yidisher arbeyter* that the long awaited answer to the difficult national question had arrived. Distorting the actual conclusions of the Austrian congress, Mill maintained that the solution to the national question was the transformation of Imperial Russia into a federation of nationalities in which each nation, including the Jews, would be granted autonomy. The solution of federation or autonomy "rests on the principle...that each nation should have its own worker's organization; [that] each language, literature and national culture be given equal rights," Mill wrote, adding that "no social democrat can in any form be against the national strivings of each *folk*."<sup>23</sup> Mill emphasized two important principles that were raised at the Brünn congress. The first was that all nations had equal rights, and that the development of their national cultures, languages and literatures was in the interests of the working class. Second, the postulate of extra-territorial national rights was particularly relevant for the Jewish populations of Eastern Europe. The South Slav delegate had made "a great distinction between land and the nation (*folk*), and does not hold that only a people with territory should be regarded as a nation and can demand national rights."<sup>24</sup>

The penetration of the national idea in the Jewish socialist camp culminated in the Bund's historic fourth party congress, in Bialystok in April 1901. Here, in the landmark resolution, the Bund, after much debate, hesitatingly declared that the term "nationality" applied to the Jewish people:

The Congress resolves that a Social Democratic program must not allow the oppression of one class at the hands of another, or of one nation or language by another. The Congress recognizes that a state such as Russia, which is made up of many different nations, will in the future be transformed into a federation of na-

nationalities, and that each will enjoy full autonomy, independent from the territory in which it resides. The congress maintains the term "nationality" should also apply to the Jewish people [*Der tsuzamenfor halt, az dem bagrif natsyionalitet darf men onvendn oykh oyfn yidishn folk*].<sup>25</sup>

Disclosing the hesitancy with which the congress as a whole endorsed the principle of Jewish national rights, the resolution concluded with the following statement:

The congress, however, regards it as premature in present circumstances to put forward the demand of national autonomy for Jews. The congress maintains that, for the time being, we should only struggle for the repeal of all anti-Jewish laws; protest against the oppression of the Jewish nationality; and guard against inflaming national feelings that only clouds the class consciousness of the proletariat and leads to chauvinism.<sup>26</sup>

But despite almost universal opposition among European socialists to the principle of Jewish nationality, for the Bund, the 1901 resolution constituted a point of no return.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, not only did the Bund never retreat from the principle of Jewish nationality but it increasingly and more vociferously demanded that Jewry, as a whole, be recognized as a national minority. In the months leading up to the 1905 revolution in Russia, the Bund presented national-cultural autonomy as a *political* demand. In a widely distributed 1904 leaflet with a circulation of 58,000, the central committee argued that the demand for equal civil rights was no longer sufficient for workers of subjugated nations. It was now necessary to put forth demands shared by all oppressed nations: (1) the freedom, guaranteed by law, of cultural development for all nations; and (2) the equal right to use one's native language in all government and social institutions.<sup>28</sup> Jewish workers, the central committee proclaimed, "must have the opportunity to receive education in their own language. They must have the right to use their language in all governmental institutions, courts of law, in their relations with factory inspectors, at public gatherings, etc."

The decision to make national-cultural autonomy an official part of the Bund's program was adopted in the fall of 1905, when the central committee summoned 30 delegates to Zurich to attend the party's Sixth Congress.<sup>29</sup> The official resolution, passed with 25 votes in favor, and four opposing, called for the equality of all nationalities, which it defined in an extra-territorial manner.<sup>30</sup> It called for the promulgation of legal arrangements by the state recognizing the right of "nations" to free cultural development.<sup>31</sup>

By 1905, the Bund's solution to the national question in general and the Jewish question in particular consisted of three demands: (1) full civil and political equality for Jews; (2) legislation guaranteeing the right of Jews to use their native language in courts and all public institutions; and (3) national-cultural autonomy.<sup>32</sup> The Sixth Congress marked the final triumph of the Bund's national wing.

From 1904, Vladimir Medem emerged as the most important Bundist theoretician on the national question. In a series of articles in the Bund's Russian language organ, *Vestnik Bunda*, entitled, "The National Question and Social Democracy," Medem constructed a theoretical justification of the Bund's national program based on the principles of social democracy. Medem argued that in the debate between assimilationists and Jewish nationalists on the future of the Jewish people and Jewish culture, social democrats should remain neutral.<sup>33</sup> Let it be, Medem argued, that the objective course of history leads either to assimilation or to the growth and preservation of the Jewish nation in Eastern Europe. "We are not opposed to assimilation," Medem wrote. "We are opposed to the *striving* for assimilation; to assimilation as a goal." On the other hand, "we are not opposed to the national character of our culture; we are opposed to *nationalist* politics."<sup>34</sup> Yet the state had to also remain neutral, eschewing all attempts to impose the dominant culture on a minority nationality. Medem therefore argued that all nations deserved the legal right to full freedom of cultural and national development. But one could not simply trust that state institutions would grant minority rights for free cultural development. Cultural services such as public education would have to be removed from the jurisdiction of the state and turned over to each nation's autonomous institutions regardless of territory.<sup>35</sup> Medem's position, known as "Neutralism," became the semi-official Bundist position during the revolutionary period.

But beginning in 1908, Neutralism came under scrutiny from within the party. Publicists such as A. Litvak, Esther Frumkin and M. Olgin took Medem to task. How could the party be officially "neutral" on the question of the future of the Yiddish language and culture, or on the future of the Jewish people, when it was actively promoting that national culture? "One thing is clear," Frumkin wrote in 1908, "Only those who believe in the future of Yiddish can consciously work for its development, enhancement and improvement. How can those who...train their children in a language which is alien to the Jewish masses...fight for the rights of the mother tongue?"<sup>36</sup>

During the following year Medem set about clarifying his position. "We have long since become alien to the mood of cosmopolitanism," Medem wrote in 1909, "but neither are we idolatrous worshippers of the national idea."<sup>37</sup> It was A. Litvak's article, however, in the pages of the St. Petersburg Yiddish daily, *Der fraynd*, that prompted Medem to give his complete response to his critics. Litvak had questioned the suitability of Neutralism to the current conditions of the party. What did it mean, he asked, to be "neutral" on the question of whether the Jewish nation will flourish or become extinct, or be "neutral" on the question of the fate of the Yiddish language and culture? Did the Bund truly have no stand on such issues?<sup>38</sup>

Medem replied to Litvak in a 1910 article, entitled, "Nationalism or 'Neutralism'"<sup>39</sup> In this piece, we observe the beginnings of Medem's theoretical shift from neutralism to a more positive affirmation of the Jewish future, when he began to acknowledge that the term itself, "neutralism," implied both indifference and inactivity. Thus, on such questions as language and schools, "one has to come out one way or another—either for or against a folk school; and in such questions...one has to openly state if one desires a national school or not. Neutralism is, then, possible only by doing nothing; to be neutral means, in principle, severing one's self from [party] work."<sup>40</sup> At the same time, Medem reiterated his view that a prognosis of the Jewish future was impossible. Therefore, "our neutralism is a thousand times more honest than mystical nationalism."<sup>41</sup>

Following the debate between Medem and Litvak, M. Olgin responded in a forceful anti-neutralist polemic.<sup>42</sup> Olgin criticized those Bundist intellectuals who continued to speak Russian or Polish in their private lives. It was a fact, Olgin wrote, that Yiddish remained a foreign language to many party intellectuals. "I do not know a single *intelligent* [person] who speaks Yiddish in the home with his wife and children."<sup>43</sup> By continuing to speak Russian and Polish in private life, "we are assimilating our children! In this way, we, the 'leftist' Jewish intelligentsia, are no better than the assimilationists."<sup>44</sup> The "tragedy" of the Bund's intelligentsia, Olgin maintained, was that together with the promotion of secular Yiddish culture, many continued to harbor the assumption that to be a man of culture meant to "to inhabit another cultural world, outside the Jewish sphere."<sup>45</sup> Neutralism, then, was used to justify such a state of affairs. The party could no longer afford to philosophize about a prognosis of the Jewish future. Neutrality on the question of the future of the Jewish people and its culture was no longer viable.<sup>46</sup>

The Bund's involvement in cultural work and programmatic discussions in the years 1907-1910 set the stage for an historic party conference. Taking place in October 1910 in Lemberg, twenty-five people attended the Bund's eighth party conference.<sup>47</sup> The participants included a virtual "who's who" of the Bundist world, including Noah Portnoy, Medem, Bronislav Grosser, Henrik Erlich, Esther Frumkin, and Vladimir Kossovsky.<sup>48</sup> For the first time in the Bund's history, Yiddish replaced Russian as the official language of the conference.

The eighth party conference focused its discussions on issues relating specifically to Jewish communal life. First, on the question of *kultur-arbeyt*, the conference called on its local organizations to found cultural societies for workers as well as to join existing associations.<sup>49</sup> Second, the conference passed a resolution regarding the Shabbat and Sunday rest day in Russia, demanding the "legally guaranteed right of the Jewish proletariat to observe the Shabbat."<sup>50</sup> Third, the conference called for the democratization of the *kehillah*, which it demanded become a democratically elected body.<sup>51</sup> The Bund issued the following resolution on the language and school questions:

Until the realization of national-cultural autonomy which will transfer responsibility for educational and cultural matters to the nations themselves, it is necessary to work for the establishment of a government school for each national group in the general population in which its own language will be used. All limitations on the use of one's mother tongue in public life, assemblies, the press, business institutions, school, *et cetera*, must be abolished.

In the struggle to achieve these demands, it is necessary to secure the rights for the Yiddish language, to whom they are denied more than any other language and which, moreover, is not even officially recognized, while the other non-dominant languages benefit from at least partial recognition.<sup>52</sup>

Following the demands for the rights of the Yiddish language, the Bund passed the following resolution on relations with other Jewish parties. "While making clear its reservations about those nationalist trends which turn the struggle for Yiddish into an instrument with which to blunt the class consciousness of the proletariat," the resolution stated, "Jewish Social Democracy... must conduct the struggle against the assimilationists and Hebraists to ensure that in all areas of Jewish life, especially, in the schools and cultural institutions, the Yiddish language receives the prominent position it merits as the national language of the Jewish people."

The eighth conference of the Bund constituted a significant milestone. According to *Di shtime fun bund*, the Bund's illegal organ, the conference was intended to send a message to the Gentile world: "Russian and Polish society...[and] the folk masses of all nations should learn that the Jewish people strive for an independent cultural existence; that it will not become Russified or Polanized; that it requires Jewish schools in which the Yiddish language will be recognized as fully equal."<sup>53</sup> By the following year, in 1911, the Bund had characterized the eighth conference as a landmark event that "concretized our national program."<sup>54</sup> A 1912 May Day leaflet, with a circulation of 25,000, echoed the party's new emphasis on language rights, advancing the slogan of "equal national rights; the right to our mother tongue in schools, courts, public meetings, trade unions and in all state institutions." It continued that the Bund vociferously demanded "the legally guaranteed right for the Jewish worker to a Shabbas rest day!"<sup>55</sup> In a detailed article on the conference, Vladimir Kossovsky remarked that:

The responses provided by the conference testify to the deep organic interest in the national needs and requirements of the Jewish proletariat and of the broad popular masses in general, and testify to a readiness to defend with the greatest energy the demands ensuing from these needs, externally as well as internally, within the Jewish environment proper.<sup>56</sup>

Thus, in 1910, there was a progression from the demand for political rights as a nation to an emphasis on the rights of Jews to develop a secular national culture through the formation of a Yiddish school network.

The resolutions of the 1910 Bund conference reflected a wider transformation in Russian-Jewish political life. Since the dissolution of the Second Duma in the summer of 1907 and the repressions that followed, all Jewish political parties gradually shifted from political agitation to cultural and communal work.<sup>57</sup> It is thus not surprising that issues relating to Jewish communal and cultural life began to preoccupy the Bund, whose increasing emphasis on the mother tongue as the source of its national ideology mirrored the themes of many other national minority movements in eastern Europe.<sup>58</sup>

## Theories of Nationalism

Having reviewed the development of the Bund's national program, let us now attempt to position the Bund and its national program within the typologies of national movements presented in the new literature on nationalism. This will bring us closer to answering the question posed in this essay: was Bundism a variety of Jewish nationalism or was it external to those movements commonly referred to as "national" in the new literature?

Benedict Anderson, Anthony Smith, and Eric Hobsbawm—three major scholars of nationalism—have argued that a vision of a sovereign land, of some territory, is a necessary component of a national movement. According to Anderson, a nation is an imagined political community which dreams of being free, and that the gauge and emblem of this freedom is the sovereign state.<sup>59</sup> Smith similarly argues that the transition from an ethnic group (*ethnie*) to a nation or national movement involves, among other factors, "a movement towards a universally recognized 'homeland' for the community; a compact, clearly demarcated territory." He continues that "a nation needs before all else, a national territory or homeland, and not just anywhere. The geographic terrain must simultaneously be an historic homeland."<sup>60</sup> Hobsbawm similarly places territory at the center of the national movement. While the nationalisms that developed between 1880-1914 in Europe could include, he acknowledges, "*any* body of people considering themselves a 'nation,'" he modifies this view, arguing that the demand for national rights "meant, in the final analysis, the right to a separate, sovereign, and independent state within their territory."<sup>61</sup> Thus, even if language and ethnicity "became the central, and increasingly the decisive...criterion of potential nationhood," Hobsbawm would still place the vision of a territory as an essential element.

A very different view emerges from scholars whose models of national movements are not premised on territory. In the early 1970s, the American political scientist, Walker Connor, developed the term "ethnonationalism" to denote those movements whose primary loyalty is to the nation rather than to the state. By clearly distinguishing "nation" from "state," Walker drew attention to the dramatic spread of national movements among stateless "self-aware ethnic groups" within the multi-national empires of central and eastern Europe.<sup>62</sup> In particular, Connor emphasized the revolutionary potential of the concept of national self-determination which entered the political lexicon in nineteenth-century Europe and became a leading Wilsonian principle during

World War I. "In its pristine form," Walker writes, "the doctrine makes ethnicity the ultimate measure of political legitimacy, by holding that any self-differentiating people, simply because it *is* a people, has the right, should it so desire, to rule itself."<sup>63</sup> In a recent article, Connor acknowledged that varying degrees of autonomy within a larger multinational state could just as well satisfy an ethnonational movement. In fact, Connor found that the majority of ethnonational movements did not demand statehood. Rather, "in the overwhelming majority of cases for which we have data, they are often prepared to settle for something less than independence." Among those ethnonational movements that did not demand independence, Connor found that the specific goals ranged over a broad spectrum between demands for limited cultural autonomy to full control over all internal affairs of a given region with the exception of foreign policy.<sup>64</sup>

In his masterful 1985 study, *the Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe*, the Czech historian Miroslav Hroch examined the national movements of non-dominant ethnic groups, or "small nations," in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Europe. Nationalism in Europe, Hroch argued, had two basic expressions: in the ruling, or historic nations, and in the non-historical, or "small" nations. Using the comparative method, Hroch makes a clear distinction between a movement that is "national" and one that is "nationalist."<sup>65</sup> While "nationalist" movements are always state seeking, national movements focus more on the demand for cultural autonomy within an imperial state. Hroch therefore defines a national movement as "the struggle for equal rights, for national language and culture, for a share in economic prosperity, for social liberation and for political autonomy: [this is what I term], a *national movement*."<sup>66</sup> He continues with the following statement: "The current tendency to speak of them as 'nationalist' leads to serious confusion. For nationalism *stricto sensu* is something else: namely, that outlook which gives an *absolute priority to the values of the nation over all other values and interests*."<sup>67</sup> The editors of a recent anthology on nationalism similarly challenge the generally accepted view that national movements can only be satisfied by the ultimate achievement of territorial sovereignty. It is possible, they argued, to satisfy national grievances "within a variety of state forms or political arrangements, of which federal ones or those making careful allowance for cultural autonomies are the most familiar. Indeed," Geoff Eley and Ronald G. Suny write, "it was probably the First World War and the triumph of Wilsonian principles in 1917-1919 that made full political sovereignty the leading demand of even the smallest national

minority, whatever the realism or viability. Until then, the principle of nationality might be articulated just as well through the call for cultural autonomy, with special regard for matters of language, institutions of learning, and religious freedom.”<sup>68</sup>

The important work by the American sociologist, Rogers Brubaker, similarly notes that the literature on nationalism has focused on state-seeking movements. But Brubaker maintains that the fight for recognition as a national minority without demands for separation constitutes a distinct type of nationalism. “They too,” Brubaker writes, “make claims on the grounds of their nationality. Indeed it is such claims that make them a national minority....Minority nationalist stances characteristically involve a self-understanding in specifically ‘national’ rather than merely ‘ethnic’ terms, a demand for state recognition of their distinct ethno cultural nationality, and the assertion of certain collective, nationality-based cultural or political rights.”<sup>69</sup> According to Brubaker, the claim by an elite group to be part of a minority nationality and to demand collective rights for that group should be included in typologies of national movements. As he states:

Three elements are characteristic of the political stance [of a national minority]: (1) the public claim to membership of an ethno cultural nation different from the numerically or politically dominant ethno cultural nation; (2) the demand for state recognition of this distinct ethno cultural nationality; and (3) the assertion, on the basis of this ethno cultural nationality, of certain collective cultural or political rights.<sup>70</sup>

One of the elite group’s purposes is to monopolize the legitimate representation of their national group.

## **Conclusion**

Most leaders of the Bund, particularly the more well-known interwar leaders, would have clearly rejected the idea that they were leading a movement that could be defined as a variant of nationalism. Being strict adherents of international Marxism, the Bund steadfastly sought and cultivated alliances with non-Jewish socialist parties and consistently refused to enter into any All-Jewish coalitions or fronts. Many Jewish contemporaries thus considered the Bund a renegade radical group operating outside the interests of the Jewish community as a whole. “May we perhaps consider the...Bund, which has acquired such an important

role in the revolutionary movement of our times, as a defender of our national needs?" asked Shimon Dubnov in the winter of 1905. He continued: "As a party with an exclusively proletarian class platform, the Bund consciously and knowingly works, not for the good of the Jewish people as a whole, but only for the good of one party, and the smallest party at that. For the Bund, the struggle between the interests of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat completely displaces the struggle for our general national needs."<sup>71</sup> We have seen that some Jewish historians subsequently shared Dubnov's view. And yet, in the period between 1907 and World War II, the Bund in fact cooperated with other Jewish political parties in the formation of Jewish cultural and educational associations.<sup>72</sup>

To begin answering the question posed in this essay, it is important to consider three criteria. First, did the Bund define the Jewish people as a "nation" or "nationality" equal to all others, and on what basis did they make such a claim? Second, did the Bund's program demand certain rights for the whole of Jewry or simply those pertaining to the Jewish working class? Third, whom did the Bund claim to represent? Addressing these three questions highlights the definitional problems and uniqueness of Bundism. Representing the only sizable non-territorial ethnic group in western Russia, the Bund demanded general rights for the Jews as a whole (equal civil rights, abolition of the Pale, separate schools, and the Sabbath rest day), while claiming sole representation of the Jewish working class, a small percentage of the Jewish population in late Imperial Russia. Despite the exclusion of the Bund from the general literature on nationalism, and the contemporary claims by some Jewish intellectuals that the organization never represented the interests of the Jews as a whole, I would argue that the Bund in Czarist Russia indeed constituted a type of minority national movement.

With its emphasis on Yiddish language and culture, and the rights of the Jewish vernacular in schools, administration and courts, the Bund mirrored other contemporaneous national movements in eastern Europe. Scholars of nationalism have repeatedly emphasized the importance of language in the nation-formation process among non-dominant ethnic groups particularly in Europe. In his important study on nationalism, Hugh Seton-Watson writes that "in the case of the new nations of nineteenth and early twentieth century Europe, the main factor in the creation of national consciousness was language."<sup>73</sup> Other authorities on nationalism, such as Walker Connor, Joshua Fishman and Peter Alter similarly argue that language served to carve out ethnic bor-

ders and therefore became markers and even symbols of ethnicity.<sup>74</sup> The Bund's application of the nationality principle to the Jews of Czarist Russia, and its eventual rejection of assimilationism, was in fact predicated on the national vernacular. Ironically, it was the Bund's Russian-speaking intelligentsia who made Yiddish the main legitimizing factor in their demand for the recognition of a separate Jewish nationality.<sup>75</sup>

While the literature on nationalism has generally focused on state-seeking national movements, recent works considered above have shown, empirically, that many ethnic nationalisms in nineteenth-century Europe lacked aspirations to territorial sovereignty, and instead set their focus on the attainment of national-cultural autonomy within a multinational setting. Until World War I, the national movements of non-dominant ethnic groups in Austria-Hungary and in Czarist Russia, including Czechs, Slovaks, Transylvanian Romanians, Croations, Lithuanians, Latvians, Belarussians and Ukrainians, generally fought for autonomous rights rather than separation.<sup>76</sup> In some instances, such as the Czech case, national leaders explicitly opposed the breakup of Austria-Hungary.<sup>77</sup> Thus, despite its unique synthesis of international socialism and diaspora nationalism, the Bund's demands for language rights and autonomy placed it alongside other ethnic national movements that emerged in the multinational empires of pre-World War I central and eastern Europe.

## Notes

I would like to warmly thank Shaul Stampfer and Shmuel Sandler for their comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this essay.

1. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1983); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), and Anthony Smith, *Theories of Nationalism* (New York: Homes & Meier, 1983).
2. These include, among others, Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985; reprint, Columbia University Press, 2000); John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); E. Hobsbawm, *Nation and Nationalism Since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992); and Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism and the Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

- nationalism Reframed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
3. Liah Greenfield, cited above, argues that national sentiment was present in England as far back as the early sixteenth century. More recently, Adrian Hastings has challenged Greenfield's thesis, pushing back the origins of self-determining nations and national sentiment to late medieval England. See Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Yet Hastings acknowledges that "As a political theory—that each 'nation' should have its own 'state'—[nationalism] belongs to the nineteenth century." *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.
  4. Recently, however, some scholars have challenged the distinction between "ethnic" and "civic" nationalism, arguing that the two types of movements are more similar than has previously been thought. See David A. Bell's comments in, "The Unbearable Lightness of Being French: Law, Republicanism and National Identity at the End of the Old Regime," *American Historical Review* 106, no. 4 (October 2001):1215-1217; and Bernard Yack, "The Myth of the Civic Nation," in *Theorizing Nationalism* Ronald Beiner (ed.) (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1999), pp. 103-118. Walker Connor has argued that the term "nationalism" only applies to the ethnic form, whereas "civic nationalism" is too often confused with the phenomenon of patriotism. See Walker Connor, "A Primer for Analyzing Ethno national Conflict," in *Ethnic Conflict: Religion, Identity and Politics*, S.A. Giannakos (ed.) (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002), p. 24.
  5. See, for example, the recent anthology of studies on Jewish nationalism, which reveals the impact of the general literature on nationalism. *Le'umiyut upolitikah yehudit*, Gideon Shimoni (ed.) (Tel Aviv, 1996). For an important study of the ethnic roots of Zionism, which takes into account theories of nationalism, see Shmuel Sandler, *The State of Israel, the Land of Israel* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1993), ch. 2. For a discussion of the dual legacies of Zionism and Bundism, see Zvi Gitelman, "A Centenary of Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe: The Legacy of the Bund and the Zionist Movement," *East European Politics and Society* 11, no. 3 (Fall 1997):543-559.
  6. The Jewish labor movement was a dominant theme in East European Jewish historiography between the 1960s and early 1980s, at a time when the categories of class, race and gender (rather than "the nation") attracted much scholarly attention. See Bernard K. Johnpoll, *The Politics of Futility: the General Jewish Workers Bund of Poland, 1917-1943* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967); Ezra Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale: the Formative years of the Jewish Workers Movement in Tsarist Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Henry Tobias, *The Jewish Bund in Russia from its Origins to 1905* (Stanford: Stanford

- University Press, 1972); Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics. Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); and Moshe Mishkinsky, *Reshit tnuat ha-poalim ha-yehudit be-rusya* (Tel Aviv, 1981). Also see Moshe Mishkinsky, "Yesodot leumiym be-hithavuta shel tenuat ha-poalim ha-yehudit be-rusya (me-reshita ve-ad 1901)" (Ph.D. Diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1965). Since the early 1980s, Zionism and Orthodoxy have become increasingly dominant themes. See Ezra Mendelsohn's comments in the introduction to *Essential Papers on Jews and the Left* (New York: New York University Press, 1997).
7. Representative works during this period include J. S. Hertz, G. Aronson, and S. Dubnov (eds.), *Di geshikhte fun bund*, vols. 1-2 (New York, 1960-1962); Mishkinsky, "Yesodot leumiym"; Mishkinsky, *Reshit tnuat ha-poalim ha-yehudit*; Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale*; Tobias, *The Jewish Bund*; Allan K. Wildman, "Russian and Jewish Social Democracy," in *Revolution and Politics in Russia: Essays in Memory of B.I. Nicolaevsky*, Alexander and Janet Rabinowitch (eds.) (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), pp. 75-87; Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*.
  8. Shimon Dubnow, *History of the Jews* (South Brunswick, 1973), 5:701-706; Salo Baron, "The Modern Age," in *Great Ages of the Jewish People*, Leo W. Schwarz (ed.) (New York, 1956), pp. 356-357; Salo Baron, *Modern Nationalism and Religion* (New York, 1960), p. 224.
  9. Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, p. 171; Yoav Peled, *Class and Ethnicity in the Pale: the Political Economy of Jewish Workers' Nationalism in Late Imperial Russia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), p. 1.
  10. Ezra Mendelsohn, *On Modern Jewish Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 18.
  11. David Vital, *A People Apart: the Jews of Europe, 1789-1938* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 517.
  12. H.H. Ben-Sasson (ed.), *A History of the Jewish People* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 908-914.
  13. Robert Seltzer, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought: the Jewish Experience in History* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1980), pp. 639-640.
  14. *Der yidisher arbeyter* 6 (March 1899), p. 11.
  15. *Der yidisher arbeyter*, 8 (Aug. 1899), p. 44.
  16. Mill, *Pionern un boyer* (New York: Der Veker, 1949), II, p. 66.
  17. Hillel Katz-Blum, *Zikhroyes fun a bundist: bilder fun unter-erdishn lebn in tsarishn rusland* (New York: Arbeter Ring, 1940), p. 184.
  18. Cited in Wildman, "Russian and Jewish Social Democracy," pp. 84-85.
  19. John Mill, "Di natsyonale frage un der 'bund'," *Di Tsukunft* no. 2 (January 1918):117.

20. "Der driter tsuzamenfor fun dem algemaynem idishen arbeyter bund in rusland un poyln," *Der yidisher arbeyter*, no. 9 (1900):7.
21. Arthur G. Kogan, "The Social Democrats and the Conflict of Nationalities in the Habsburg Monarchy," *Journal of Modern History* 21, no. 3 (September 1949):208-210.
22. *Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des Gesamtparteitages der sozialdemokratischen Arbeiterpartei in Österreich* (Vienna, 1899), p. 85, cited in Kogan, "The Social Democrats and the Conflict of Nationalities in the Habsburg Monarchy," p. 209.
23. Mill, "Di natsyionale frage oyf dem kongres fun der estraykher sotsyal-demokratye in brin," *Der yidisher arbeyter*, no. 8 (December 1899):25.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 27. See also Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, pp. 218-219.
25. "Der ferter kongres fun algemaynem idishen arbeyter-bund in rusland un poyln," *Der yidisher arbeyter*, no. 12 (1901), p. 99; For a partial translation in English, see Paul R. Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (eds.), *The Jew in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 340-341; and Frankel, p. 220.
26. "Der ferter kongres....," p. 100; Frankel, pp. 220-221. For a full reprint of the Bund's Fourth Congress resolutions and protocols, see Bund, *Materialy k istorii evreiskago rabocheho dvizheniia* (St. Petersburg, 1906), pp. 111-128; N. Bukhbinder, *Di geshikhte fun der yidisher arbeter-bavegung in rusland* (Vilna, 1931), pp. 104-112.
27. Opposition to the Jewish national idea among many leading European socialists partly stemmed from the widely accepted position that a nation had to include a common territory. In 1912, after eleven years of open attacks on the Bund's "separatism" and nationalist deviation, the Russian Social Democrats made their opposition to the principle of Jewish nationality official in Stalin's tract, *Marxism and the National Question*, where the nation was defined as "a historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture." The Jews, it was thus argued, were not a nation, since common territory was one of the aspects of nationhood, and that the Bund's program of national-cultural autonomy was a form of right-wing deviationism.
28. Bund Archive, File MG7/20; "Vos toren mir ist nit fargesen?" n.p., December 1904, Central Committee of the Bund.
29. J.S. Hertz, "Di ershte ruslender revolutsye," in *Di geshikhte fun Bund*, II:250.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 253.
31. It is significant here that the term "nation" is now applied regularly to the Jews in the Bundist press. We thus observe a critical shift in the language employed by the Bund in the period 1901-1905, reflecting the new official line.
32. *Ibid.*
33. For a summary of Medem's theory of neutralism, see Koppel S. Pinson, "Arkady Kremer, Vladimir Medem, and the Ideology of the

- Jewish Bund,” in *Emancipation and Counter-Emancipation*, A. Duker, et. al. (eds.) (New York: Ktav, 1974): pp. 298-313; and Peled, *Class and Ethnicity in the Pale*, pp. 58-61.
34. “Di sotsial-demokratie un di natsionale frage,” in Medem, *Vladimir medem tsum tsvantsigstn yortsayt*, pp. 189-190.
  35. For a concise summary of Medem’s position, see Yoav Peled, “The Concept of National Cultural Autonomy: the First One Hundred Years,” in Jack Jacobs (ed.), *Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe*, pp. 225-258.
  36. E-R [Esther Frumkin], *Di naye tsayt* (Wilna, 1908), pp. 86-87, cited in Goldsmith, *Modern Yiddish Culture* (London, 1976; reprint (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), p. 216.
  37. *Di naye tsayt* 7 (1909), p. 47, cited in Pinson, “Arkady Kremer, Vladimir Medem, and the Ideology of the Jewish Bund,” p. 302.
  38. *Der fraynd* no. 139 (St. Petersburg, 1910), reprinted in Menes, *Der yidisher gedenk in der nayer tsayt* (New York, 1957), p. 127.
  39. V. Medem, “Natsionalizm oder ‘neytralizm’,” *Tsay-fragen* 3-4 (Wilna, 1910), pp. 15-25. The article was reprinted in V. Medem, *Zikhroynes un artiklin* (Warsaw: Farlag “Yiddish,” 1938), pp. 112-134.
  40. Medem, *Zikhroynes un artiklin*, p. 123.
  41. Cited in Pinson, “Arkady Kremer, Vladimir Medem, and the Ideology of the Jewish Bund,” p. 306.
  42. It was, in fact, Bronislaw Grosser’s defense of Medem, in Zeltser [B. Grosser], “Tsu di shtrayt-frage,” *Tsau-frage* 5 (Wilna, 1910), pp. 68-83, that prompted Olgin’s reply.
  43. Olgin, “Di yidishe shprakh in unzer privat-leven,” *Fragen fun leben* 1 (Wilna, July 1911), p. 40.
  44. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
  45. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
  46. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
  47. *Berikht funder 8-ter konferents fun bund* (1910), pp. 3-4.
  48. *25 yor: zamlbukh* (Warsaw: Di Velt, 1922), p. 118; S. Dubnov-Erlich, “In di yorn fun reaksye,” *Di geshikhte fun bund*, II:576.
  49. *Berikht funder 8-ter konferents fun bund*, p. 74.
  50. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
  51. *Ibid.*
  52. M. Rafes, *Ocherki po istorii Bunda* (Moscow, 1923), cited in *The Jew in the Modern World*, Reinharz and Medes-Flohr, p. 421.
  53. *Di shtime fun bund* 3 (1910), p. 3.
  54. *Di shtime fun bund* 4 (April, 1911), p. 4.
  55. Bund Archive, RG1400 MG7, folder 20. May Day leaflet, 1912. Central Committee of the Bund.
  56. *Otkliki bunda* 5 (1911), cited in Medem, *The Life of a Legendary Socialist*, note on p. 474.
  57. See Christoph Gassenschmidt, *Jewish Liberal Politics in Tsarist Russia, 1900-1914: the Modernization of Russian Jewry* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), pp. 56-71, which is one

- of the few works that focuses on Jewish political life in Russia between 1907 and 1914.
58. On the role of language in the growth of national consciousness in eastern Europe, see, among others, Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, ch. 3; and the introduction to Hugh Seton-Watson's *Nations and States: an Enquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1977).
  59. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 7.
  60. Anthony Smith, "The Origins of Nations," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 12 (July 1989), reprinted in *Becoming National: a Reader*, Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (eds.) (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 119-120.
  61. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, p. 102.
  62. See Walker Connor, "The Politics of Ethnonationalism," *Journal of International Affairs* 27, no. 1 (1973):1-20; Connor, "Nation-Building or Nation-Destroying," *World Politics* 25, no. 3 (April 1972):319-355; and Connor, "A nation is a nation, is a state, is an ethnic group is a....," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 1, no. 4 (October 1978):377-400.
  63. Connor, "Nation-Building or Nation-Destroying," p. 331.
  64. Walker Connor, "A Primer for Analyzing Ethnonational Conflict," pp. 31 and 40.
  65. Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985; reprint, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).
  66. M. Hroch, "How Much Does Nation Formation Depend on Nationalism?," *East European Politics and Society* 4 (Winter 1990).
  67. M. Hroch, "From National Movement to the Fully Formed Nation: the Nation-Building Process in Europe," *New Left Review* 198 (March-April 1993), in *Becoming National*, p. 62.
  68. Eley and Suny (eds.), Introduction to *Becoming National: a Reader*, p. 10.
  69. Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, pp. 5-6.
  70. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
  71. S. Dubnow, *Nationalism and History: Letters on Old and New Judaism* Koppel S. Pinson (ed.) (Philadelphia, 1958), p. 208.
  72. On the participation of the Bund in cultural work after 1905, see my *Poles, Jews and the Politics of Nationality: the Bund and the Polish Socialist Party in Late Tsarist Russia* (forthcoming, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), ch. 9.
  73. Seton-Watson, *Nations and States*, p. 9.
  74. See Walker Connor, *Ethnonationalism: the Quest for Understanding* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 153; Joshua Fishman, *Language and Nationalism: Two Integrative Essays* (Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, 1972); and Peter Alter, *Nationalism* (second ed.) (London and New York: Edward Arnold, 1994), p. 43.

75. The fact that the Bund's Russian-speaking leaders defended the rights of Jews as a separate nationality is not unique in the history of the nation formation process in eastern Europe. In many cases, so-called "national awakeners" among non-dominant ethnic groups in eastern Europe were secular elites who had adopted either the state language or the nearest language of high culture. A good example is Frantisek Palacky, the founder of modern Czech historiography and of Czech nationalism, who wrote his first works on the history of the Czech people in German [*Geschichte von Böhmen*, 5 vol. (1836–67)]. The founders of national movements were often patriotic elites who initially agitated for a national revival not in the vernacular but in the language of the state.
76. On the nation-formation process in eastern Europe, see Józef Chlebowski, *On Small and Young Nations in Europe. Nation-Forming Processes in Ethnic Borderlands in East-Central Europe* (Wrocław: Polskie Towarzystwo Historyczne, 1980). For examples of works on individual national movements and their demands, see Nicholas P. Vakar, *Belorussia: The Making of a Nation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956); Constantine R. Jurgela, *History of the Lithuanian Nation* (New York: Lithuanian Cultural Institute, 1948); and Jean-Paul Himka, *Galician Villagers and the Ukrainian National Movement in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988).
77. On the Czech national movement, see Arnost Klima, "The Czechs," in *The National Question in Europe in Historical Context* M. Teich and R. Porter (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 228-247; and Joseph F. Zacek, "Nationalism in Czechoslovakia," in *Nationalism in Eastern Europe*, Peter Sugar and Ivo J. Lederer (eds.) (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1969), pp. 166-192.