

Nikola Tucakov

Institute of European Studies

THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT AS CULTURAL TRANSFER: ZIONISM AND JEWS IN THE KINGDOM OF YUGOSLAVIA

Abstract: The chapter examines cultural transfer as a feature of the Zionist movement in interwar Yugoslavia as part of a broader Europe-wide political project. It identifies and explains the ways in which the connections between the European Zionists and the Yugoslav Zionists resulted in various forms of cultural transfer to the Yugoslav Jewish community, primarily in the domain of political and national identity and self-understanding. By examining the role of Jewish periodicals and Zionist youth organizations, including individuals who were instrumental to their work, the article demonstrates how a minority national movement may provide fertile ground for cultural transfer, even without significantly impacting the dominant culture in which the minority finds itself or without nation-states playing a prominent role in said transfer.

Keywords: Zionist culture, minority nationalism, national cultural transfer, interwar Zionism, Jews of Yugoslavia

Introduction

The notion of cultural transfer from the historical perspective has, through contributions such as Wolfgang Schmale's, become intertwined with the notions of modernization and Europeanization, particularly when it comes to Europe's periphery.¹ As Schmale noted, cultural transfer can also be framed in terms of nations, national cultures, and nation-states but serves to ultimately dismantle these categories as "essential" and provides insight into the highly contingent processes by which they are constructed. However, just as these three points—modernization, Europeanization, and national culture—may be examined on the level of existing states, they may also be of great analytical use when applied to contexts of various stateless populations, such as religious and ethnic minorities. Cultural transfer thus operates not merely to modernize, Europeanize, and build up a certain national culture with a national self-understanding held by a nationally appropriate population—but also through other, less plainly visible channels—to produce those same effects on populations who find themselves (or have been found by the majority) unable or unwilling to be assimilated into the dominant national culture.

The processes of consolidation of national cultures in the Balkans, interwoven with Europeanizing and modernizing efforts, have necessarily

1 Wolfgang Schmale, "What Is Cultural Transfer?", in *Cultural Transfer Europe-Serbia*, ed. Slobodan G. Markovich (Belgrade: Faculty of Political Sciences; Dosije Studio, 2023), 13–31, https://doi.org/10.18485/fpn_ctes_mic.2023.ch2.

excluded groups within local populations, but these groups were nonetheless profoundly affected by the same processes, which raises questions about how this exclusion should be addressed. One of the responses—a distinctly nationalist one—lay in undertaking a different, separate effort of creating a national self-understanding that would provide its own national culture based on the same modern and European model, despite the lack of a nation-state but not precluding its eventual founding.

Such an effort is apparent in the case of the Zionist movement among the interwar Serbian Jewry, which itself was to be a product of an extensive cultural transfer, primarily in the political sphere. At the same time that various intermediaries and mediators, whether individual or collective, were acting to transfer cultural units from Western Europe to the dominant culture of today's Serbia, so too were different intermediaries and mediators going between the global Zionist movement and the local Jewish communities via the newly formed Zionist organizations. In both cases, transfers would profoundly change the cultural landscape of the recipient society and compel its members to reckon with their place in the global order. Schmale's argument that cultural transfer research ultimately presents a case for the dissolution of national borders is acutely reflected here: the entire process of transfer was wholly unconcerned with national borders, dealing with a cross-state political movement and Jewish populations present across many nation-states of the time, including the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

The aim of this chapter is to identify some of the major actors actively engaged as agents of transfer between the international Zionist movement and the local Jewish population in Serbia, within the first Yugoslav state, as well as to point towards the main units of transfer and the channels utilized for it. This would provide further insight into the process of consolidation of Jewishness as a nationality by the Yugoslav Jews and reveal the extent of the influence that cultural transfers exerted on the political self-understanding of this minority population during the interwar period.

Sources and Methodology

The question of a primary source for this kind of cultural transfer raises some methodological problems. First, the lack of a significant surviving record of Jewish cultural self-conception and political participation in the period, along with the almost complete destruction of the community during the Holocaust, significantly limits the available sources. Second, the vast economic, cultural, and linguistic disparity between Jewish communities not only in the territory of what is today Serbia but the entirety of the former Yugoslavia skews the scope of sources towards the



Omladinci iz kena (udruženja) "Hašomer Hacair" u Novom Sadu, 1933 god. U gornjem redu (izdižu se uzrastom) vodstvo kena, a leva na desno: Avram Stark, živi sada u Tel Avivu, Ruben Kadoša, sada član Kibuca Saar Haamakim, Cvi Loker, sada menahel Liškat Haganasi (šef kabineta Predsednika države Izrael) u Jerusalimu, Šaje-Alexander Eckstein, sada profesor Harvard-Universiteta u USA.

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Youth from ken (association) Hashomer Hatzair in Novi Sad, 1933.

Serbo-Croatian-speaking, literate, and politically active sections of the Jewish population. Potential sources on dissent and critical responses to this kind of transfer from other cohorts are thus largely absent from historical records. The sources for this analysis, therefore, lie in what has been preserved of the Jewish interwar press, as well as secondary sources on the history of the Zionist movement and the Jewry of Serbia. It is worth noting that while means of mass communication (and thus potentially mass cultural transfer) is of great interest and constitutes the bulk of examined sources, their limitations in terms of ownership and readership, as well as the fact that only some of it has been preserved and archived, must not be disregarded.

Following Schmale's typology of culturemes, coherences, and macrocoherences, these categories are applied broadly to the framework of Zionist thought and the ways in which it was transferred. Thus, a *cultureme* may be a particular motif, event, individual, or practice considered culturally significant enough to be transferred and referenced as part of the larger Zionist cultural lexicon. Coherences, in this case, could be extended narratives or habits made up of several of such culturemes, such as transfers or particular nationally significant stories or the linking of religious beliefs and practices for the purposes of national self-understanding. Finally, I would reserve the term macrocoherence for the unambiguously nationalist precepts of the global Zionist movement—the consciousness of Jews as a nation aspiring to form its own nation-state within the political framework offered by Zionism, as well as the calls to and participation in political action to achieve such a goal.

With respect to actors, the focus here largely rests on collective entities (i.e., newspapers and political organizations), although taking note of several highly prominent individuals who operated on the national and the international scale, creating links that would enable the transfers. As individuals, Zionists and representatives of the local Jewish community are mostly dealt with in terms of their publishing activities and public advocacy that incorporated significant amounts of cultural transfer from outside their immediate context and often through direct personal links with the Zionist movement abroad. In dealing with political organizations, I use secondary sources to infer how cultural transfer occurred through the framework of sustained and externally directed (or inspired) collective action, which fundamentally shaped local Jewish culture in line with the Zionist cause.

The Zionist Movement and Interwar Serbia

Though the Zionist movement had several notable precursors in both thinkers and organizations, it is with good reason that its organizational consolidation with the first Zionist Congress in 1897, largely on the initiative of Theodor Herzl, is usually considered its definite starting point. Although accounts of these precursors customarily include Rabbi Yehuda Alkalai, a religious thinker born in Sarajevo who served as the rabbi of Zemun,² there is little evidence of his proto-Zionist thought being influential among the local Jewish population. The actual spread of Zionism in the area would occur through the activity of the Herzlian movement.

By the end of World War I, the Zionist movement had existed in its official, institutionalized form—The Zionist Organization (ZO)—for 21 years. Though divisions had appeared almost immediately after its founding, three major factions emerged during the interwar period: Labor Zionists, General Zionists, and Revisionist Zionists. The Labor Zionists presented a diverse group of those who stood for a fusion of Zionist and socialist ideas and principles, to varying degrees, combining the class struggle of their working class and agrarian base with the general Zionist struggle for establishing a nation-state.³ The Revisionists, espousing an ethno-monist, militaristic, and expansionist form of strictly political Zionism, led by Vladimir Ze'ev Jabotinsky, eventually seceded from the Zionist Organization and founded the New Zionist Organization (NZO) in

- 2 For two such accounts of Alkalai, see Shlomo Avineri, "Alkalai and Kalischer: Between Tradition and Modernity" in *The Making of Modern Zionism* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 49–58 and Gideon Shimoni, "Traditionalist Precursors" in *The Zionist Ideology* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1995), 71–82.
- 3 Anita Shapira, "Labour Zionism and the October Revolution", *Journal of Contemporary History* 24, no. 4 (1989), 623–656.

Deo učesnika na XV. svetskom cionističkom kongresu u Baselu 1927 god., a među njima: Dr. Aleksandar Licht, predsednik Saveza cionista Jugoslavije (stoji sa štapom, s leva) i Šarika Berger-Kohn, najraniji rukovodilac cionističke omladine u Novom Sadu počev od 1919 god. (stoji četvrta s desna)



Several participants at the 15th World Zionist Congress in Basel in 1927: Dr Alexander Licht (standing with a cane), the President of the Union of Zionists of Yugoslavia, and Šarika Berger Kohn (fourth from the right), the first leader of the Zionist Youth in Novi Sad (from 1919).

1935. General Zionism, a broad term encompassing the majority of the movement that found itself within none of the other camps, often lacked any unifying characteristic beyond this rejection of a distinct ideological agenda. The presidents of the Zionist Organization during the interwar period—Otto Warburg, Chaim Weizmann, and Nahum Sokolow—are usually identified as General Zionists.

Tracing its roots to student organizations, namely Bar Giora and Esperanza in Vienna, disparate local societies in modern-day Croatia, as well as the personal participation of Zionists from future Yugoslav territories, it was only after World War I that an official section of the Zionist Organization was established: the Alliance of Zionists of Yugoslavia (Savez cionista Jugoslavije—SCJ), founded in 1919. With its de facto headquarters in Zagreb, the Alliance maintained local organizational units, which conducted the primary political work. The SCJ provided the basic institutional structure for collaboration and communication not merely among Zionists from various parts of the newly formed state but also with the Zionist movement abroad, its principal centers in Western and Central Europe. The network of subsidiary organizations and publications it provided was to be particularly important for the kind of cross-border interactions that correspond to cultural transfer.

While the SCJ encompassed the entirety of the new state, the pre-1918 differences among its newly united lands still held firm. While the movement in former Austro-Hungarian territories, dominated by Ger-



*David Albala (1886-1942),
one of the founders of the Yugoslav Zionist movement.*

manized or Magyarized Ashkenazim, had its precursors in the former empire, it was a largely new phenomenon in what had been the Kingdom of Serbia. In Belgrade (as in the rest of Serbia), Sephardim were predominant, both among the Ladino-speaking lower class of the traditional settlements of Dorćol and Jalića and the emerging middle and professional classes in the more central urban neighborhoods.⁴ Apart from this cultural distinction, the Zionist movement had few adherents prior to unification—the most notable exception being David Albala, who had founded the Zionist association Gideon in Belgrade,⁵ as well as Cion in Niš.⁶ Instead, an alternative conception of nationhood, championed by prominent individuals such as David A. Koen, was that of “Serbs of the Mosaic faith,” within which Jewishness was understood purely as religious affiliation, entirely compatible with patriotic allegiance to the Serbian

4 Ženi Lebl, *Do “konačnog rešenja”: Jevreji u Beogradu 1521–1942* [Until the “Final Solution”: Jews in Belgrade 1521–1942] (Belgrade: Čigoja štampa, 2001), 171.

5 Nebojša Popović, *Jevreji u Srbiji 1918–1941* [Jews in Serbia 1918–1941] (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1997).

6 Ženi Lebl, “Jevreji u Nišu” [Jews in Niš], in *Jevrejski Almanah 1971–1996* [Jewish Almanac 1971–1996] (Belgrade: Savez jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije, 2000), 137–152.

nation.⁷ An integrationist conception of a dual Yugoslav-Jewish identity would also be advanced well into the 1930s by Sephardic community leaders in Belgrade, Jakov Čelebonović and Avram Ozerović.⁸ These conceptions, reinforced by efforts to highlight the participation of Jews in the Serbian army, would greatly modify the reception of Zionist ideas. In particular, it meant that Zionism was never detached from at least some notion of patriotic loyalty to the South Slavic state.

Transfer in the Jewish and Zionist Press

In the interwar period, the Jewish press provided an unprecedented medium for the dissemination of Zionist ideas in Serbo-Croatian, the lingua franca not merely of the new state but also of the local Zionist movement, as confirmed by the decision to make it the official language of the SCJ. While Zionist publications such as *Židov* [The Jew] in Zagreb and *Židovska smotra* [Jewish Review] in Osijek were already in circulation prior to unification, virtually all newspapers of significantly Zionist character on the territory of contemporary Serbia appeared in this period.

What is particularly characteristic of Serbian-language Jewish periodicals of the time is the absence of any differentiation between their general Jewish and their Zionist character. This may be understood as a consequence of significant overlap between the editorship of Jewish periodicals and membership in the Zionist movement, exemplified by figures such as David “Dale” Levi, a prominent figure in Belgrade’s Zionist organization and the editor of both the newspaper of Belgrade’s Sephardic community — *Vesnik jevrejske sefardske veroispovedne opštine* [Courier of the Jewish Sephardic Religious Community] (VJSVO) — and the annual Jewish Folk Calendar (*Jevrejski narodni kalendar*, JNK). This identification of Jewishness with Zionism was to be of particular use in facilitating cultural transfer that could draw on the former as a cultural-religious identity to reinforce a specific political project.

In many cases, it was these local actors that undertook the bulk of the work on transfer, by interpreting and relaying Zionist culturemes rather than simply translating texts by European Zionist authors. The most basic and yet the most wide-reaching form of cultural transfer was to be the very notion of a Jewish *nation*, articulated as an ethno-religious whole with a common political interest in founding its own nation-state, and thus an

7 David A. Koen, *Besede: posvećene srpskoj omladini Mojsijeve vere* [Speeches: Dedicated to the Serbian Youth of Mosaic Faith] (Belgrade: Sv. Nikolić, 1897).

8 Harriet Freidenreich, “Sephardim and Ashkenazim in Inter-War Yugoslavia: Attitudes toward Jewish Nationalism”, *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 44 (1977), 53, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3622507>.

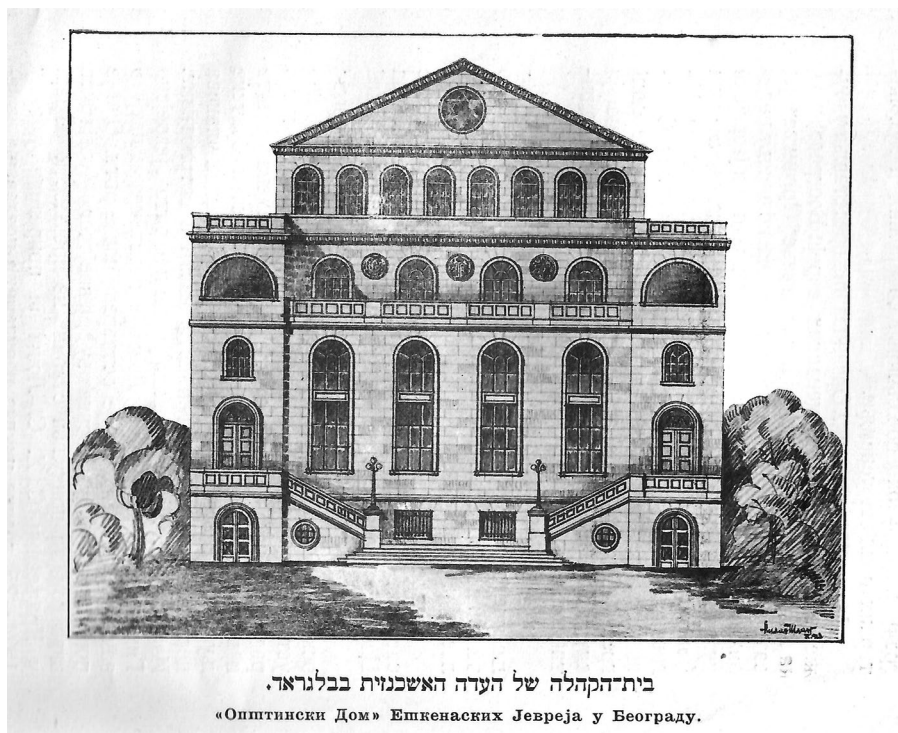


Sephardic Synagogue Beth Israel in Belgrade, built in 1908 and demolished by Third Reich troops toward the end of their occupation of Belgrade (1944).

unmistakably Zionist innovation among the myriad possible conceptions of self-understanding among Jewish populations that preceded it. Treating the entire conception of a political nation engaged in its national project as an overarching macrocoherence, we can see the coherences and culturemes that constituted it.

Nation and Tradition as Transfer

Perhaps the most obvious of the Zionist innovations is the idea of a Jewish nation (*nacija*), as opposed to merely a people (*narod*) or a religious group. A key component of the Zionist project was not merely to introduce this kind of national self-understanding into the general Jewish culture, but also to define what such a nation should be. In the world at large, the Jewish nation would have to encapsulate people from a huge variety of linguistic, cultural, geographic, and even religious backgrounds; yet, at the level of Yugoslavia, the main task was promoting a national idea that could integrate the Ashkenazim and Sephardim into a national whole. As Krinka Vidaković-Petrov noted, the Zionist movement and its press were therefore



“The Communal House” of Ashkenazi Jews in Belgrade, which hosts the Sukat Shalom Synagogue. The House was completed in 1929.

compelled to relay these concepts to its own localities and encourage such a unification, especially against assimilationist tendencies.⁹

The first issue of VJSVO opens with an editorial by David Albala stressing the publication’s aim to “realize national ideals and the reestablishment of the national homeland.”¹⁰ Similarly, an article in the first issue of JNK not only uses the term *nacija* but goes on to exemplify what would be a key feature of Zionist cultural transfer—the interpretation of millennia-old religious-cultural customs as being of national-political importance, filled with guidelines for understanding the task of national renewal.¹¹ In Vojvodina, the German-language *Jüdisches Volksblatt*¹² [Jewish

9 Krinka Vidaković-Petrov, “Jewish Identity in Yugoslavia Before and After the Holocaust”, in *The Balkan Jews and the Minority Issue in South-Eastern Europe*, ed. Jolanta Sujecka, Colloquia Balkanica (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo DiG, 2020).

10 David Albala, “Prva reč” [First Word], *Vesnik jevrejske sefardske veroispovedne opštine* [Courier of the Jewish Sephardic Religious Community], 1 January 1939.

11 More, “Ele Moade Adonaj...”, *Jevrejski narodni kalendar* [Jewish Folk Calendar], 1936.

12 “Unser Weg” [Our Path], *Jüdisches Volksblatt* [Jewish People’s Paper], 14 January 1921.

People's Paper] and *Israel*,¹³ as well as the Serbian-German *Jevrejske novine* [Jewish News],¹⁴ also opted for clear national positions from the earliest extant issues, the former two declaring themselves explicitly Zionist.

The Zionist press needed to do more than insist on the national character of Jewishness—it needed to supply an adequate interpretation of Jewish cultural-religious heritage that would underpin the Zionist project and prove suitable for the diverse Jewish communities of Yugoslavia. Such a task was a facet of the same goal that the European-led Zionist movement had set for itself with the entirety of the Jewish world in mind, so European Zionists could supply the means, effectively resulting in a form of cultural transfer. As Uri Ram points out, European Zionists were concerned with the merging of Jewish tradition and history with the movement's conception of Jewish nationality through considerable intellectual effort,¹⁵ in the process creating an array of culturemes and coherences to be used by local activists, such as those in interwar Yugoslavia.

One of the principal Zionist transfers into the local Jewish tradition was the re-interpretation of the *galut* (Exile). In the Zionist view, the Jewish exile was not to be viewed in terms of a divinely ordained state to be ended by the Messiah but as a political state to be negated by the attainment of a nation-state through political and cultural action.¹⁶ The Zionist press in Serbia would repeatedly relay this idea, portraying the *galut* as a stepping stone to settling in Palestine¹⁷ and affirming its negation as the only solution to continued Jewish existence in the face of anti-Semitism, but also the positive duty of Jews everywhere, not a future act of God.¹⁸ Arguing for the Religious-Zionist perspective in *Israel*, Marthef¹⁹ openly

13 Marthef, "Unser Weg...von Marthef" [Our Path...by Marthef], *Israel: Jüdische Wochenschrift von Marthef* [Israel: The Jewish Weekly by Marthef], 3 July 1925.

14 Fridrih Pops et al., "Jačajmo obim i snagu jevrejskog narodnog ognjišta" [Let us Bolster the Scope and Strength of the Jewish National Hearth], *Jevrejske novine* [Jewish News], 18 November 1938.

15 Uri Ram, "Zionist Historiography and the Invention of Modern Jewish Nationhood: The Case of Ben Zion Dinur", *History and Memory* 7, no. 1 (1995), 91–124.

16 David Engel, "Zionism and the Negation of the Diaspora", in *The Oxford Handbook of the Jewish Diaspora*, ed. Hasia R. Diner, 1st ed. (Oxford University Press, 2021), 151–165, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190240943.013.5>.

17 Albert Alkalaj, "Povodom dvadesetpetogodišnjice svetske omladinske organizacije Hašomer Hacair" [On the Occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the World Youth Organization Hashomer Hatzair], *Vesnik jevrejske sefardske veroispovedne opštine*, 1 March 1939.

18 Dale, "Tragedija poljskog jevrejstva i dužnosti ostalih delova jevrejskog naroda" [The Tragedy of Polish Jewry and the Duties of Other Parts of the Jewish People], *Vesnik jevrejske sefardske veroispovedne opštine*, 1 November 1939.

19 Nickname and pen name of Pinkas Keller, Zionist activist and chief rabbi of Bačka Topola.

invoked a passage from Herzl's *The Old New Land*, claiming that the apparent contradiction between messianic redemption and political action was a false one—the very fulfillment of Zionist goals would be impossible without divine will, and would therefore be its proof.²⁰

Besides the *galut*, the Zionists also tried to re-imagine Jewish holidays and historical figures as symbols or precursors of Jewish national liberation. Thus, the Jewish press would report that the Congress of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities of Yugoslavia (Kongres Saveza jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije) had proclaimed the Jews of the *yishuv* (Jewish settlements in Palestine) to be “the new Maccabees”²¹—echoing the conclusion of Herzl's *Jewish State* and many subsequent Zionist associations named after them—or report on how Zionist leader Menachem Ussishkin invoked the words of the prophet Jeremiah in his debates with the British government over the sale of land in Palestine.²² In all of these cases, the press made effective use of cultural transfer—either by adapting cultural interventions already present within the European Zionist movement or outright citing prominent European Zionists as legitimate interpreters of tradition.

The Zionist Movement as Jewish Culture

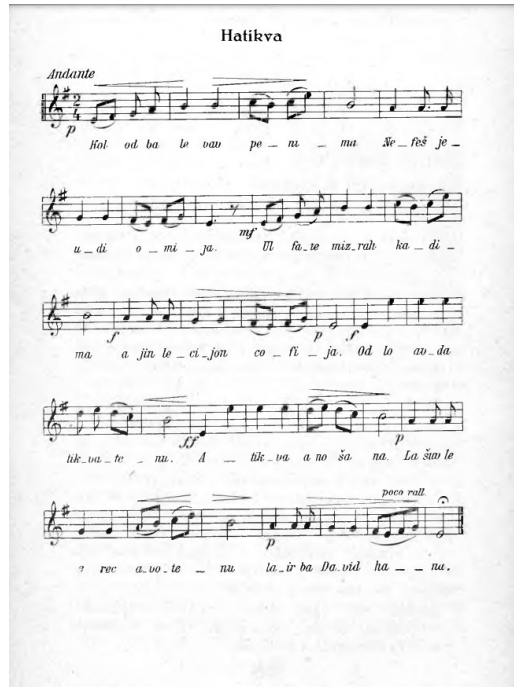
In addition to offering new interpretations from Jewish antiquity suited to the national project, the Zionists of Yugoslavia took great efforts to, like their European colleagues, effectively erase the distinction between participation in the Zionist movement and participation in a Jewish community. If Zionism was a natural expression of Judaism, to be a Jew in the contemporary moment was to be a Zionist. For the Jews of Yugoslavia generally and Serbia specifically, which had only recently seen a local branch of the movement officially established, this position necessitated a considerable cultural transfer that would bring the local culture into the fold of the international movement. The movement's events, names, and ideas, all firmly planted in Western Europe, needed to become familiar and significant from Bitola to Belgrade to Subotica.

Each in its own way, the Jewish newspapers contributed to this integration of Jewish and Zionist affairs. VJSVO regularly published news

20 Marthef, “Zionistische Organisation und Aguda” [The Zionist Organization and the Aguda], *Israel: Jüdische Wochenschrift von Marthef*, 10 July 1925.

21 “VII Kongres Saveza jevrejskih veroispovednih opština” [7th Congress of the Alliance of Jewish Religious Communities], *Vesnik jevrejske sefardske veroispovedne opštine*, May 1939.

22 M.L., “Jeremija Contra Macdonald” [Jeremiah contra Macdonald], *Jevrejska tribuna* [The Jewish Tribune], 15 March 1940.



Music sheet for *Hatikvah*, the *Zionist* anthem, with lyrics phonetically transcribed into Serbo-Croatian. Source: Jevrejski narodni kalendar, 1935.

about the Congresses of both the ZO²³ and its Yugoslav branch,²⁴ especially its reports and declarations. From its first issue, the JNK regularly included the Zionist anthem *Hatikvah* in its opening pages and concluded with a timeline of the Zionist Congresses and presidents of the ZO, even when a particular issue featured little overt Zionist content in its articles. Keren Hayesod (the official fundraising arm of the ZO) also issued its own periodical, *Vesnik Keren hajesoda za obnovu Palestine* [The Courier of Keren Hayesod for the Renewal of Palestine], while other publications, such as VJSVO and *Israel*, repeatedly published appeals to contribute to it as part of every Jew's national duty. For its part, *Jevrejska tribuna* [The Jewish Tribune] featured impassioned polemics with the ZO, in line with its official affiliation with the NZO, but it nevertheless contributed to an overall sense that a Yugoslav Jewish readership would have and should have been intimately familiar with the broader Zionist movement.

23 "Rezolucije XXI Cionističkog kongresa" [Resolutions of the 21st Zionist Congress], *Vesnik jevrejske sefardske veroispovedne opštine*, 9 September 1939.

24 Dale, "Posle Saveznog veća Saveza cionista: Cionizam" [Following the Alliance Council Session of the Alliance of Zionists: Zionism], *Vesnik jevrejske sefardske veroispovedne opštine*, 1 January 1940.

An article in JNK highlights the awareness with which the Zionist movement was advanced as an essentially European organization. A contribution from Heinz Stroh, a Prague-based Zionist activist, it describes Zionism as “carrying deep humanist ideals” and therefore “full of Europeanism.”²⁵ Stroh posited that only a people with a distinct land and national culture could participate in the greater European ideal, at the same time rejecting assimilation and drawing parallels between the new Czechoslovak state and the future Jewish one, underscored by the support of Eduard Beneš, “a great European and a good nationalist,”²⁶ for the Zionist cause. Stroh’s contribution is exemplary of texts authored by European Zionists that JNK regularly printed, allowing them to act as agents of transfer more directly than was usual for other periodicals.

Combining the reframing of established culture with the introduction of new, highly political, and often institutional elements, the Zionist press sought to remake local Jewish culture on basically all levels of Schmale’s typology. Relatively minor acts and convictions, such as paying the shekel to Keren Hayesod, seeing the Maccabean Revolt (167–160 BCE) as an example of national struggle or reading about *yishuv*’s affairs, could be considered culturemes. Coherences, such as conceiving of Jews as a national minority or adopting a view of Jewish history and religious practice as essentially those corresponding to a political nation, required a series of accepted culturemes and could significantly reorient one’s self-understanding as a member of the Jewish community. All of these were ultimately conducive to an overarching macrocoherence of full acceptance of and participation in Zionism as inextricable from Jewishness.

Zionist Youth Organizations in Jewish Life

As an active political movement, the Zionists in Serbia were not limited in their transfer to the press as a means of mass communication. Insofar as the entire movement, with its subordination to an organization centered in Western Europe (though where exactly changed over time), could be interpreted as the greatest form of cultural transfer in the sphere of politics, many smaller affiliated organizations could also become vectors of transfer, much better placed to affect local culture through day-to-day activity. Of these, Zionist youth associations were to exercise a particular influence.

As early as 1919, the Union of Jewish Youth Associations (*Savez jevrejskih omladinskih udruženja*) was founded under Zionist auspices,

25 Heinz Stroh, “Evropejci i Cionizam” [Europeanists and Zionism], *Ževrejski Narodni Kalendar*, 1938.

26 Ibid.

aimed at providing a nucleus for many different local associations united by a shared Zionist orientation and focus on various forms of practical work suited to the youth, along with its own publication, *Hanoar* [The Youth].²⁷ By far the most influential aspect of these new organizations on Jewish culture was the *He-ḥalutz* movement, which aimed to prepare the youth for settling on the land in a future Jewish state and which was vigorously embraced by prominent Zionist leaders in the first years of the 20th century.²⁸ This *ḥalutz* spirit was embodied by several youth associations. By far the most prominent was the Hashomer Hatzair, formed during the 1930s as a successor of the earlier Ahadut Hatzofim [Union of Scouts] but also as a branch of the Vienna-based organization of the same name, formed in 1916.²⁹ Along with other minor organizations, Hashomer Hatzair presented a link with the broader Zionist movement abroad, drawing on the experiences and organizational forms of affiliated organizations in Europe (and, increasingly, Palestine) and introducing a transformation of lifestyle and culture of the local Jewish youth.

As *ḥalutzim*, young men and women were trained for farm work and communal living on special agricultural estates, but their training could also include apprenticeships at various craft workshops,³⁰ according to the Zionist ideal of directing the Jewish youth towards agriculture and skilled manual work and away from the intelligentsia, trading, and other “unproductive” professions usually associated with the Jewish middle class. These training courses were accompanied by extensive political education along Zionist lines—in the case of Hashomer Hatzair, infused with Marxist and socialist thought, reflecting the positions of Labor Zionism. The connection to the Hashomer Hatzair headquarters in Vienna and, therefore, the movement as another form of transfer was underscored by the use of its 1917 manifesto, *The Guide to Hashomer Leaders*,³¹ also known as *The Red Guide* among Yugoslav members.³²

27 Andreja Preger, “Jevrejska omladinska društva u Jugoslaviji od 1926. do 1941. godine” [Jewish Youth Associations in Yugoslavia from 1926 to 1941], in *Jevrejska omladinska društva na tlu Jugoslavije, 1919.–1941. : Katalog izložbe* [Jewish Youth Associations on the Territory of Yugoslavia 1919–1941: Exhibition Catalog] (Belgrade: Jevrejski istorijski muzej, 1995), 17–26.

28 Israel Ritov and Yehuda Slutsky, “He-Ḥalutz”, in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale, 2007).

29 A. Preger, “Jevrejska omladinska društva u Jugoslaviji od 1926. do 1941. godine”.

30 Teodor Kovač, “Nešto o Hašomer Hacairu i njegovom “gnezdu” u Novom Sadu” [Concerning Hashomer Hatzair and its “Nest” in Novi Sad], in *Jevrejska omladinska društva na tlu Jugoslavije, 1919.–1941. : Katalog izložbe* (Belgrade: Jevrejski istorijski muzej, 1995), 27–34.

31 Elkana Margalit, “Social and Intellectual Origins of the Hashomer Hatzair Youth Movement, 1913–20”, *Journal of Contemporary History* 4, no. 2 (April 1969), 25–46, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002200946900400202>.

32 T. Kovač, “Nešto o Hašomer Hacairu i njegovom “gnezdu” u Novom Sadu”.

Alongside sports organizations (almost invariably named “Maccabi”), Hashomer Hatzair and other *He-ḥalutz* organizations introduced a Zionist concept already established in the West European center of the movement: the “New Jewish Man,” closely linked with Max Nordau’s concept of *Muskelyudentum* (usually translated as “Muscular Judaism”). The “Muscular Jew” presented a departure from the image of the physically weak and intellectually gifted Jew, unfit for the project of land settlement and national regeneration, and although, as Michael Berkowitz notes, Palestine was portrayed as the only place where this transformation could be completed, Europe could serve as the training ground for this new type of Jew.³³ In relation to modernization, a cornerstone of the cultural transfer framework, Todd Samuel Presner has posited that the bodily discourses introduced through *Muskelyudentum*—racial, national, colonial, eugenic, and aesthetic—reflected the concurrent trends in European thought, especially in Germany.³⁴ From European “body culture”, perhaps best exemplified in Serbia at the time by the Sokol movement,³⁵ to the discourses of European colonialism, Presner’s conclusions point towards this project as one that sought to profoundly remake traditional Jewish culture in line with the pace of modernity. Furthermore, while such trends may be examined on the level of Serbian, Yugoslav, and indeed Balkan societies of the time, it emerges that it was within a concretely Zionist political program that the Jewish version of these modernizing trends would develop, underscoring the intricately intertwined nature of nationalism and modernity.

Conclusion

This article has been an attempt to map out the primary lines and forms of cultural transfer between the interwar Zionist movement in Europe and the Jewish communities in Serbian urban centers in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Working without official state institutions, the Zionists nonetheless endeavored to induce change in the culture, particularly in the political spheres of Serbian Jewry towards their own conceptions of a unified, nationally defined Jewish identity and political orientation.

Making full use of the press as a means of mass communication, individuals associated with the Yugoslav branch of the Zionist movement, some of whom traced their commitment to Zionism since before the founding of the first Yugoslav state, took up the task of translation,

33 Michael Berkowitz, *Zionist Culture and West European Jewry before the First World War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 109.

34 Todd Samuel Presner, *Muscular Judaism: The Jewish Body and the Politics of Regeneration*, Routledge Jewish Studies Series (London: Routledge, 2007).

35 Also a form of cultural transfer, with its origins in 19th century Prague.

adaptation, and articulation of Zionist culture, coherences, and macrocoherences in writing. This entailed a process of reframing familiar cultural elements, drawing on established Jewish traditions and histories to produce a Zionist interpretation of them, but also the introduction of Zionism itself as a key aspect of Jewishness.

Zionist youth organizations, for their part, introduced new practices and ideas inspired by the movement in Europe, including mass preparation for future settlement in Palestine and the reform, along Zionist lines, of traditional lifestyles with an explicitly Jewish-national agenda. In the case of Hashomer Hatzair, the most prominent of these associations, this agenda evolved into a specifically Labor Zionist one, further enmeshing Yugoslav Jewish youth with the main currents of the global Zionist movement.

Although any assessment of the extent to which these cultural transfers succeeded in remaking Serbian or Yugoslav Jewry is bound to be tentative, the record of Zionist efforts to do so has profound implications for the movement's impact on modernization and Europeanization of local Jews. The question of Jewish nationhood was to be rendered precisely in terms of European modernity—the “awakening of long-sleeping nations” after 1848 and especially following the collapse of multi-ethnic empires after World War I, the need for a nation-state ensured by public law, the possibility of large-scale colonization as a valid instrument for securing it, and the need to reform Jews themselves to attain a national goal, among others. Importantly, this process occurred against a backdrop of similar trends affecting the modern formation of Serbian national and state identity, and in this regard, Zionist transfer was opposed to alternative conceptions of Jewishness, such as that of “Serbs of the Mosaic faith.” Additionally, the general Jewish character of the movement aimed to encompass both Sephardim and Ashkenazim, preventing the formation of new national identities along those lines and developing a modern sense of nationality that could accommodate the difference.

This mapping of interwar Zionist cultural transfer is only preliminary, however. The scope of major urban centers in present-day Serbia excludes two vastly different but no less salient regions—that of Croatia, where Ashkenazi dominance and other historical factors saw it as the *de facto* seat of Yugoslav Zionism; and that of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where tensions between the Sephardic and Ashkenazi communities in Sarajevo and the stronger influence of the Sephardic Movement significantly impacted the local dynamics of Zionist transfer. Moreover, further research into the institutional history of the Yugoslav Zionist movement may yield additional insights into the most crucial agents of transfer and their own understanding of the intricate connection between the politics of Zionism and the formation of contemporary Jewish culture and identity in the Balkans. These possibilities ultimately testify to the versatility and adaptability of the cultural transfer framework.

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