

**Abstract**

*How are political identities formed? This thesis takes a historical-institutionalist, process-based view of the phenomenon of political identity formation in the United States, specifically focusing on the mixed impacts that party actors as agents asserting ideational claims have on the consolidation of in-group belonging. Using the case of the Jewish Labor Bund, a revolutionary socialist party in the Tsarist-administered Pale of Settlement from 1897-1943, this thesis traces Bundist party diaspora members' movement from the Pale to New York City in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, using historical process tracing to causally establish the relationship between three facets of Bundist ideology—cultural national autonomy socialism, Yiddishism, and trade unionism—and the formation of a post-diasporic American Jewish identity in New York City. Ultimately, this thesis concludes that the result of the “party diaspora” asserting its ideational commitments was the marginalization of cultural-national autonomy socialism, the depoliticization of Yiddishism, and the incorporation of trade unionism into the Jewish labor movement—suggesting that political identity is not unitary, but itself contested. These insights indicate that a process-based view of identity formation which incorporates historical contingency, institutional encounter, and the agency of political actors has substantial benefits for the study of identity, diaspora populations, and the movement of ideas in political science.*

**Fragments of Revolution:  
The Jewish Labor Bund and the Making of American Jewish Political Identity**

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## Introduction

### Ghosts of the Past: The Development of American Jewish Political Identity

*If identity is everywhere, it is nowhere. If it is fluid, how can we understand the ways in which self-understandings may harden, congeal, and crystallize? If it is constructed, how can we understand the sometimes coercive force of external identifications? If it is multiple, how do we understand the terrible singularity that is often striven for—and sometimes realized—by politicians seeking to transform mere categories into unitary and exclusive groups? How can we understand the power and pathos of identity politics?*

-Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper<sup>1</sup>

In 1903, a young Jewish socialist living in the segregated Pale of Settlement in Tsarist Russia found himself in a perilous situation. He had been distributing socialist propaganda leaflets for the Jewish Labor Bund, a revolutionary political party in Tsarist Russia which aimed to represent all of the Jewish working classes in the Pale. He hoped to convince his fellow Jewish workers that their safety and prosperity could be guaranteed by the Bund, and by participating in labor strikes in their vulnerable communities. Trudging through the urban milieu of the Lithuanian section of the Pale, the young socialist tried to rally his neighbors to the Bund's fast-growing cause. He came to have a reputation as a rabble-rouser among his comrades, willing to take risks, sometimes recklessly, in allegiance to his beloved party.

One day, the young Bundist came back to his small, disorganized apartment to find it in an even more frenetic state than usual. Rifling through his personal belongings, he slung his jacket on the chair next to his bed and began to investigate who had been through his things. Turning around slowly, he came face to face with two Cossacks, a paramilitary Russian ethnic group which targeted enemies of the Tsarist regime and religious and cultural minorities. The Cossacks, speaking Russian, demanded to see the socialist materials that the young man had

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<sup>1</sup> Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" *Theory and Society* 29, no. 1 (2000): 1.

been distributing throughout the town. Turning his apartment upside down, the Cossacks searched in vain for evidence which could condemn the young socialist on the spot, and likely send him to his early death. Exasperated by their inability to locate the pamphlets, the Cossacks finally left the young Bundist's apartment, letting him off with a stern warning. As soon as the Cossacks left, the young man, trembling with equal parts fear and adrenaline, gingerly removed the damning materials from the one place the Cossacks did not check—the pocket of the jacket that the young socialist had removed moments earlier.

The very next week, the young man, weary of his prospects in the economically and culturally deprived Pale and fearing for his safety as a revolutionary socialist and enemy of the Tsar, departed on a ship for America. He arrived in New York City in early 1904, settling down with his Yiddish-speaking wife in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn. The young man began painting houses, and eventually established and led the first house painters' union in Southern Brooklyn. He had four children—Esther, Isidor, Louis, and Phillip, with his wife Yetta. As she became older, his daughter Esther had two children, Paul and Charles, both of whom were steeped in the vibrant Yiddish and left-wing culture of Jewish southern Brooklyn. The boys worked summer shifts at hotels belonging to the Workmen's Circle, a Jewish cultural society that had been established in New York by immigrant Jews at the turn of the century. They took Yiddish language classes, encouraged by Esther, who remembered when that was the only language that her parents spoke. More importantly, they were always reminded of their daredevil grandfather's exploits in Russia, with the same story about his remarkable escape from the Cossacks' evil grasp told again and again, eventually becoming somewhat apocryphal and existing in a mythologically distant past.

The young Bundist who fled the Pale of Settlement and landed in Brooklyn was named Max Ginsburg, and he was my great-grandfather. I too listened with rapt attention as my father, Paul, told the story of the infamous Max, even as the details of the tale changed with each retelling. Was he held at gunpoint, or did he invite the Cossacks in for tea? Did he leave the day after the encounter, or in the months following the incident? To what degree was Yetta, my great-grandmother, involved in his socialist agitation? I wondered why these details seemed unimportant to my father, and desperately craved factual clarity. Eventually, the story of my family's immigration to the United States became more and more of an anachronism in my mind. As the story was retold over generations, the peril of my great-grandfather's life-threatening journey was smoothed out, and the story of my father's extended family's upbringing in Brooklyn became quaintly situated in the past.

Besides the small bust of Eugene Debs in my house, I did not grow up with a full understanding of my great-grandfather's socialist bona fides. As far as I knew, he angered some Russian military officials, got himself in a great deal of trouble, and fled for America. He encouraged his children and grandchildren to learn to speak and write Yiddish, and to remain active in struggles for labor rights. I distinctly remember my father telling me to never cross a picket line as a child, and then ascribing his pro-worker values to his secular Jewish upbringing. To me, the Yiddish-speaking, secular, radical Jewish culture of my father's childhood seemed distant from my experience of Judaism, which was Hebraic and oriented around religious practice. Although I understood that Jewish-Americans had a long history of participation in social justice movements in the United States, I did not perceive a relationship between the Jewish socialist movement in the Pale in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the political liberalism often ascribed to American Jews thereafter. Instead, I internalized the tale that had been told to me by



my rabbis, by my relatives, and by my own inferences—that Jews in America were typically liberal because of the historical relationship between Jews and oppression. The hardship endured by Jews all over the world for millennia, I reasoned, rendered Jews sympathetic to groups experiencing targeted, identity-based discrimination, and therefore, people like my family tended to vote for Democrats.

### **Who is a Jew? Towards a Theory of American Jewish Identity**

This view of American Jewish liberalism, which I call the “hardship thesis,” is widespread in contemporary accounts of American Jewish political behavior. In his 2012 book *The Crisis of Zionism*, Jewish journalist Peter Beinart argues that it is the overwhelming liberalism, regard for human rights, and functional disconnect from the state of Israel embodied by young American Jews that is imperiling their relationship with Israel.<sup>2</sup> It is the memory of genocide, expulsion, and oppression which leads young American Jews to voice discontent with the treatment of Israel’s Palestinian population, while the older generations of American Jews tend to balance a liberal sensibility with a pro-Israel attitude cultivated by that very same lineage of anti-Semitic violence. This view acknowledges a generational duality which governs the ideological liberalism of American Jews, but still understands the political identity formation of US Jews as dependent upon experiences of hardship, or a lack thereof.

Of course, the hardship thesis is not the sole concern of scholars of the American Jewish diaspora. Many Jewish studies scholars, particularly sociologists, have measured how Jewish religious practice has impacted the experience of Jews in America. Notably, several scholars have claimed that the “particularism” of Jewish doctrine accounts for its marginality in the

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Beinart, *The Crisis of Zionism* (Henry Holt: New York, 2012), 11.

diaspora, and for the segmentation of American Jews into either reform or secular practice on the one hand, or Hassidic insulation on the other.<sup>3</sup> The scholarly practice of relating American Jewish social and political behavior to religious practice is well-trod terrain, and I am not interested in this element of inquiry into American Jewish identity. In fact, in 2013, the Pew Research Center determined that a growing number of American Jews identify within Judaism not religiously, but culturally and ancestrally—about 22 percent claim that they are areligious.<sup>4</sup> A more recent report found that Jews are more likely than mainline Protestants, evangelical Christians, and Catholics to claim that President Donald Trump favors Israel at the expense of Palestinians.<sup>5</sup> These statistics indicates a startling reality—that Israel and religion are less influential in shaping Jewish political behavior than some conventional wisdom suggests.

If the relationship of Jewish identity to religion is fraying, and if the relationship between Jewish American political ideology and Israel is less central than commonly understood, where are we to locate Jewish American political identity? Some scholars have argued that we should understand political identity writ large to be reflective of the attempt by political parties to articulate coherent voting blocs out of the enfranchised population. Cedric De Leon, Manali Desai, and Cihan Tugal claim that this process of “political articulation” enables political parties to naturalize “class, ethnic, religious, and racial formations as a basis of social division and hegemony.”<sup>6</sup> The analysis of these scholars of the articulation capacities of political parties extends beyond the practice of creating coalitions out of potential voters based on categories of

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<sup>3</sup> Samuel C. Heilman, “The Sociology of American Jewry: The Last 10 Years,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 8, no. 1 (1982): 135.

<sup>4</sup> Pew Research Staff, “A Portrait of Jewish Americans,” Pew Religion and Public Life, Pew Research Center, October 1, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Gregory A. Smith, “U.S. Jews are More Likely Than Christians to Say that Trump Favors the Israelis too Much,” Pew Religion and Public Life, Pew Research Center, May 6, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Cedric De Leon et. al., “Parties and the Constitution of Cleavages in the United States, India, and Turkey,” *Sociological Theory* 27, no. 3 (2009): 193.

ascriptive hierarchy. However, these authors still locate the agents of identity formation in the political party—from the top down, from the out-group to the in-group. While the thesis of the articulation school is certainly valuable in understanding the critical role that political parties play in the creation of identity, it begs the question—how do rank and file *members* of a political party create a sense of party belonging and ideational commitments that have a formative effect on political identity?

In fact, the existence of multiple sets of actors that participate in the process of consolidating an in-group identity indicates that factors other than individual agency must be considered a part of this process. After all, if competing agents have conflicting ideational and material commitments, what historical and institutional factors mediate which actors win out? The contribution of the articulation school recalls the insistence of Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, two scholars of groups, that identity must be located and described and not simply deconstructed to be acquitted “of the charge of ‘essentialism.’”<sup>7</sup> Identifying which agents are responsible for the formation of political identities is surely an important task, but it is equally critical to understand the influence of circumstances and institutions on the ability of actors to express their ideational commitment and pursue their materialist goals. In other words, it is crucial to interrogate *how* identity is formed, *where* it takes shape, and *who* is involved in and responsible for its construction. Rather than merely theorizing whether identity is constructed from the top down by a powerful institution or exclusive in group, or determined from within by the members of the identity group, it is important to examine the interactions that various actors have with the political and social institutions and historical circumstances that

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<sup>7</sup> Brubaker and Cooper, “Beyond ‘identity,’” 1.

they encounter. What follows from this is a specific characterization of political identity—as a historical-institutional process of the consolidation of in-group belonging.

Viewing Jewish-American political identity as a process, rather than a static sense of belonging or a fixed list of characteristics and traits, has many theoretical advantages. As Orren and Skowronek point out in their seminal introductory work to the approach of American political development, “because a polity in all its different parts is constructed historically, over time, the nature and prospects of any single part will be best understood within the long course of political formation.”<sup>8</sup> Questions of how identity is formed are critical in understanding the complexity and contentiousness of the American polity. New scholarship on identity, most notably Ashley Jardina’s *White Identity Politics*, acknowledges this centrality. Jardina specifically demonstrates that even groups at the top of ascriptive hierarchies in the American politics are retrenching material and ideational benefits through the consolidation of in-group belonging.<sup>9</sup> While these accounts are useful insofar as they trace the contours of white Americans’ current sense of identification with whiteness and other white people, they do not address how white identity is built throughout time and space, or if whiteness itself can be located anywhere beyond the individual subjectivities of white Americans.

In this thesis, I aim to show how the influence of the ideas of a political party which cleaved Jewish subjects together in the collective practice of politics influenced the development of Jewish American political identity. How did my great-grandfather’s self-identification as a Jewish labor Bundist change when he encountered New York municipal institutions, including the Germanized Jewish labor movement? How did the ideational commitments of the Bund as a

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<sup>8</sup> Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, *The Search for American Political Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 5.

<sup>9</sup> Ashley Jardina, *White Identity Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019): 5.

whole percolate into his children and grandchildren’s understanding of secular Judaism? Most importantly, how is the ongoing fragmentation and consolidation of American Jewish identity influenced by the successes, and even the failures, of past political parties dedicated to Jewish self-determination?

### **The Bund as a ‘Party-in-Diaspora’**



Fig. 1.1: The Process of Party Diasporic Movement

In this thesis, I will thoroughly discuss the causes of the Bundist diasporic movement from the Pale of Settlement to New York City, a movement which was precipitated variously by pogroms against the Pale’s Jewish population, conflicts between Bundists and Bolshevik revolutionaries, and the economic destitution that the Pale represented to many Jews. However, I argue that the diaspora should not merely be considered in its conventionally viewed “before and after” temporality. Instead, I will articulate a framework which examines what I see as the three major stages of the process of consolidating what I call the “party diaspora”—party creation, party dispersion, and party articulation. In the stage of party creation, Bundists forge constituencies of Jewish members which develop a sense of in-group identity based on shared struggle to establish labor protections, to protect cultural facets such as Yiddish, and to push for a program of cultural-national autonomy within a federated socialist polity. As I will show, the varying degrees of success that Bundist leaders and rank and file had in the consolidation of these

ideational aspects of the Bundist project had dramatic impacts on the resilience of these ideas in the diaspora.

Next, I will examine the phenomenon of Bundist party dispersion. This analysis will not simply acknowledge that the fragmentation and diasporic movement of the Bund from one polity to another occurred—I will also show that the circumstances under which the migration took place had a formative effect on the salience of Bundist ideas post-diaspora. Finally, and most importantly, I will trace the party articulation that takes place in the diaspora, where the Bund succeeds or fails to reconstitute the party in some form or another. Fundamentally, I argue that the Bund's most profound impact can be seen in the transference of ideational facets of the partisan project from one political setting to another. Establishing the import of these ideas on diaspora Jews, and showing how Bundist ideational commitments contributed to the consolidation of Jewish in-group identity, is my main task.

However, my focus on the articulation of the “party-in-diaspora” cannot survive without an examination of the phenomenon which truly encapsulates the quandary faced by political parties transplanted from one setting to another—institutional encounter. As I will show, the main exertive forces on the Bund in its diasporic movement from the fluctuating polity of revolutionary Russia to the stable regime of the United States were the dispersion of the rank and file elements of the party *and* the new municipal institutions that party members had to contend with when attempting to ideationally influence American Jews in America. As the Bundist diaspora made its way through Manhattan and Brooklyn, I will argue, their attempts at political organization and activism necessitated interactions with the local political institutions—more specifically, with the Democratic party machine of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in New York, Tammany Hall. I hypothesize that while the Bund was able to leverage trade unionism into multiple

successful interactions with the Tammany Hall machine, the Bundist adherents' foray into socialist organizing with third parties countering the hegemonic machine was unsuccessful in integrating Bundists as a fixture in New York political life. By contrast, the cultural project of Yiddishism survived through the proliferation of Jewish-American civil society organizations. In short, Yiddishism became *depoliticized*, trade unionism became *incorporated*, and socialism was *marginalized* as left-radical ideologies and parties were subsumed by New Deal liberalism.

### **Process-Tracing Jewish Diaspora Identity**

The process of tracing the influence of Bundist ideology on the development of American Jewish liberalism represents a theoretical departure from prevailing schools of thought vis-à-vis Jewish political identity, which typically adhere to a binary divide between Zionism, which advocates Jewish political identity subsumed in the nation-state, and cultural autonomy, which advocates a vision of a Jewish “nation within a nation.” Alternately, I will argue, the Jewish Labor Bund’s interactions with the municipal political institutions has led to a third iteration of Jewish political identity—one in which the American-Jewish diaspora has become partially integrated into these institutions themselves through successful trade unionization campaigns and the creation of community-based organizations.

The process of attempting to understand the influence of Jewish Labor Bundists on the development of American Jewish liberal identity is essentially a process of tracing the impact of ideas on the development of a coherently articulated political identity. This method poses significant challenges and risks and is sure to require more empirical rigor than materialist explanations of choices made by key actors.<sup>10</sup> As I will show, the outcomes of choices made by

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<sup>10</sup> *Materialist* explanations are broadly defined by Jacobs as “variation in choices...caused by variation in the objective, material parameters of actors’ choice situations” (Jacobs 44).

members of the Jewish Labor Bundist diaspora at contingent moments were likely influenced primarily by the ideas held by the Bund as an organization, and those choices in turn had a determinative effect on the contemporary political identity of American Jewish liberalism. According to Jacobs, establishing ideational causation must fulfill three major tasks in order to pass muster: “measuring the independent variable...establishing the exogeneity of the independent variable...and finding evidence of a causal mechanism.”<sup>11</sup> In practice, this will mean tracing the contours of Jewish Labor Bundist ideology, situating this ideology at a remove from circumstances faced immediately by Bundists in their new environment after diasporic movement, and determining how Bundist ideology impacted the decision-making processes of these actors in navigating the institutions of New York City politics.

My initial task in ideational process-tracing will be to disaggregate Bundist ideology into three distinct independent variables—Yiddishism, trade unionism, and socialism. This focus will allow me to discuss the cultural, tactical, and programmatic aspects of Bundism, and trace their integration or demise in the development of American Jewish liberalism. As Jacobs suggests, isolating material concerns facing political actors from their ideological commitments is a challenge in any instance, as empirical evidence has demonstrated the systematic correlation of these two factors.<sup>12</sup> In the case of the Bund, this methodological quandary becomes even more acute. After all, the very tenets of Bundist ideology include some fidelity to historical materialism, and trade union advocacy for improvement of workers’ material conditions formed part of the basis for the Bundist project. However, my task is not to uncritically accept a binary divide between materialism and ideology and measure for the latter without considering the

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<sup>11</sup> Alan M. Jacobs, “Process tracing the effects of ideas,” in *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool*, ed. Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 48.

<sup>12</sup> Jacobs, “Process tracing the effects of ideas,” 56.



former. Rather, the methodology of ideational process-tracing will enable me to understand if core facets of Bundist ideology caused key actors to make specific decisions when alternative choices were available to fulfill the material needs of Jewish-American diasporic communities.

## Chapter 1

### The Marginalization of Bundist Cultural-National Autonomy in the Jewish Diaspora

*Already in the early years of the twentieth century there had emerged a double-edged stereotype of Eastern European Jewry in the modern period: on the one hand, a nostalgic, reverent, romanticized image of an idyllic 'shtetl' existence—a society marked by blissful, integrated, seamless spirituality; on the other hand, this idyll was said to be engulfed in a perpetual battle for its very existence, a never-ending fight with a dastardly external enemy always either threatening or engaging in physical violence. In other words, over the blissful idyll there hovered an omnipresent cloud of pogrom that erupted regularly and steadily, until it overtook that idyll and destroyed it, in the inexorable descent of doom.*

-Michael Stanislawski, "Eastern European Jewry in the Modern Period"<sup>1</sup>

*[A]n angel of forgetfulness sits at the door leading to America, slapping the newcomer on his face. He in turn, forgets his sins, his humble origins, his lack of education and becomes immediately a holy, saintly, wise man, a know-all.*

-Ha-Ivry, July 10, 1892<sup>2</sup>

#### Introduction: Challenging the Narrative of Bundist Socialist Demise

Much of the academic discourse concerning the Jewish Labor Bund's vision for revolutionary socialism in the Pale of Settlement evaluates the relative success or failure of the organization as a political party. The Bund has been judged by its efficacy in providing safety and stability for its membership of working-class Jews, in its dealings with the Menshevik and Bolshevik factions of Russian revolutionaries, and in its efforts to achieve its stated political projects. Most of these

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Stanislawski, "Eastern European Jewry in the Modern Period: 1750-1939," in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies*, ed. Martin Goodman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 396-7.

<sup>2</sup> Hadassa Kosak, *Cultures of Opposition: Jewish Immigrant Workers, New York City, 1881-1905* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 37.

appraisals have focused on the Bund's activities in the Pale, where the working-class base of the organization was confined. In his definitive history of the Jewish Labor Bund in Poland, Bernard K. Johnpoll defends this focus, claiming that "Political organizations do not arise spontaneously, nor do they originate without consideration of their environment... Thus the Bund did not arise in a vacuum, nor was its origin dissociated from the condition of the Jews in Czarist Russia; nor was the later Bund in independent Poland without an ecological base."<sup>3</sup> By Johnpoll's account, no discussion of the Bund's political trajectory as a revolutionary party dedicated to achieving its brand of socialism should be undertaken without first and foremost understanding its geographical origins. This, according to Johnpoll, necessitates that any successful political party make demands of the state that have a reasonable chance of victory. From that premise, Johnpoll endeavors to define the Bund as a political failure in its path towards socialism, arguing that "Where the Bund should have been attempting to influence the direction of the Polish state, as part of the Socialist party of Poland, it was busy evading that role while it kept its revolutionary posture unsullied."<sup>4</sup>

There is no shortage of evidence indicating that the Bund failed to advance its specific platform of socialism consisting of a federated, democratic state conferring cultural-national autonomy onto the Jewish working class. Indeed, the Bund's stated desire to avoid centralization for the purposes of protecting the Jewish people publicly clashed with the position of many prominent Russian revolutionaries affiliated with other factions. Specifically, Lenin and Trotsky insisted at the 1903 Russian Social Democratic Worker's Party (RSDWP) conference that the "Bund had to divest itself of its views before other business could begin."<sup>5</sup> Bundist calls for

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<sup>3</sup> Bernard K. Johnpoll, *The Politics of Futility: The General Jewish Workers Bund of Poland, 1917-1943* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 20.

<sup>4</sup> Johnpoll, *The Politics of Futility*, 270.

<sup>5</sup> Henry J. Tobias, *The Jewish Bund in Russia: From its Origins to 1905* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), 207.

cultural-national autonomy clashed with Bolshevik desires for a unitary, centralized state apparatus, in which cultural difference serves as no impediment to the liberation of the Russian proletariat.

This story of Bundist socialism, of Bundist demands for cultural-national autonomy, is not a story of success or failure. It is not a story which deals with the achievement of concrete demands by a political party representing an ethno-religious minority group within a larger polity which oppresses that minority. Indeed, many have already told the story of Bundist socialism within the various territories held first by the Tsar of Russia and later by the Soviet regime, and its various tactical achievements and missteps. The period of negotiation between Bolsheviks and Bundists during the lead-up to the Russian revolution, and the Bundist failure to codify an alternative to Bolshevik centralization, has been especially prominent in secondary source literature. Even more present throughout the literature is the visceral depictions of World War II Bundist annihilation, especially in Poland where a substantial majority of the Jewish population was wiped out by the Nazi regime.

Alternate accounts of Bundist activity in the Pale have characterized the Bund not as a failed political party, but rather as a vector through which previously oppressed, dispossessed, downtrodden workers were transformed through collective struggle—given a voice, a sense of in-group solidarity, and a concrete improvement in their material conditions.<sup>6</sup> In these narratives, while Bundist cultural-national autonomy, and with it a federated, democratic socialist state, was not achieved, the members of the Bund who were almost crushed under the weight of pogroms and marginalization found a reprieve in a political party which aimed to participate in the

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<sup>6</sup> Israel Getzler, “The Jewish Bund and the Dignity of Man,” in *Religion, Ideology and Nationalism in Europe and America*, ed. Israel Getzler (Jerusalem: Historical Society of Israel and the Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 1986), 341.

revolutionary winds which provided the best promise of Jewish liberation in centuries. The proliferation of militias of self-defense among communities in Lithuania, Poland, Belorussia, and other territories administered by the Tsar strengthened a collective sense of resistance against the brutal regime, and further empowered Jewish workers. By 1905, the Bund was the single largest political party in Tsarist-controlled areas to represent the Jewish population.<sup>7</sup> These rosier perspectives lend nuance to the literature surrounding Bundist socialist struggle, acknowledging the profound transformative effect the party had on its membership in the Pale of Settlement.

Both of these perspectives—one which denies any political success the Bund may have had, and the other which traces the Bund's influential trajectory through its geographical roots—fail to tell the whole story of the impact of Bundist socialist ideology. As I will show, key figures shaped by aspirations of Bundist socialism in the Pale joined the Jewish diaspora to America prior to the Russian revolution and in the interwar period. Once in America, these former Bundists became members of Congress, trade unionists, and key movement actors. The Bundist socialist aspirations for cultural-national autonomy within a federated socialist polity did not die when the adherents of this ideology reached American shores. Rather, the interactions of Bundists in the diaspora with the Tammany Hall Democratic machine and third-party candidacies can be measured through ideational process tracing. I will demonstrate that the political actors who were influenced by the tenets of Bundist socialism in the diaspora to Brooklyn and Manhattan interacted with these municipal institutions—an interaction which produced a compromise in the articulation of Jewish American political identity. This compromise was characterized by an eventual marginalization of Bundist socialism within the larger left-liberal and machinist milieu of New York City electoral politics, while Bundists in the

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<sup>7</sup> Joseph L. Wiczyński, "Bund," in *The Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History*, ed. Joseph L. Wiczyński (USA: Academic International Press, 1978), 32.

diaspora nevertheless employed a substantive vision of cultural-national autonomy for international Jewry in their electoralism.

This chapter will not attempt to impress the entirety of Bundist socialism onto the ideology of the Jewish diaspora to America from the Pale of Settlement. After all, in-group belonging or membership in a representative political party does not confer full ideological fidelity to the entire partisan project. Nor can it be asserted that every member of the Jewish diaspora from Tsarist-controlled territories had objectives other than day-to-day survival, and obtaining relief from the constant state of siege suffered under the Tsarist regime.<sup>8</sup> Instead, I intend to trace the trajectory of Bundist socialist ideas through decisions made by key actors in the diaspora in an attempt to gain a fuller picture of how politicized Jewish populations oriented towards revolutionary socialism interacted with the municipal institutions of a new polity.

In essence, this account will make an attempt to address why reconfiguring modern accounts of Bundist socialism and rejecting the framework of “failure” is necessary within a historical-institutional approach. While Bundist socialism gave its Jewish adherents a sense of hope, belonging, and agency within the context of the Pale, the project came into collision with a number of pre-existing political institutions in New York City. The resulting attempt by Bundists to square their socialist ideals of cultural-national autonomy with the setting of a new polity complicates the agential process of identity formation. As I will demonstrate, a historical-institutional approach to studying the trajectory of Bundist socialism within the diaspora denaturalizes the phenomenon of a politicized Jewish-American identity, as well as rejecting the premise that political identity groups are “articulated” by external political actors for their own

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<sup>8</sup> Joan Comay, *Who's Who in Jewish History: After the Period of the Old Testament* (London: Routledge, 2002), xxi.

gain.<sup>9</sup> Instead, the articulation of American Jewish political identity must be understood through the interaction of politicized diasporic Jews with a polity structured by divided sovereignty—therefore allowing for a contested agential process of political identity formation to take hold.<sup>10</sup> Through employing archival materials and historical secondary source literature, I will construct an alternative historical-institutional account of the development of American Jewish political identity through the Bundist diaspora. This multi-agential, denaturalized view of American Jewish political identity will qualitatively improve how scholarship interprets the fate of Bundism as a political force throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>11</sup>

### **Socialism as Refuge from Pogroms**

The Jewish Labor Bund was founded in 1897 in Vilna, modern-day Lithuania. The Bund was founded to organize Jewish workers in the Pale of Settlement, which was a pogrom administered by the Russian Tsar with geographical parameters set in 1835. The Pale's territory included parts of Russia, the Ukraine, Belorussia-Lithuania, Polish territories added to the Empire after the Napoleonic wars, and some areas in the Baltic provinces.<sup>12</sup> For Jewish peasants in partitioned Poland, the imposition of Tsarist reign over their longstanding homeland constituted “a forcible incorporation into an alien Empire.”<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, as a result of this hasty conquest, several subsequent Tsarist regimes faced difficulties in assimilating Jewish peasants into 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian Orthodox society. The incompatibility of Jews with Russian culture was further

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<sup>9</sup> Cedric De Leon, Manali Desai, and Cihan Tugal, “Political Articulation: Parties and the Constitution of Cleavages in the United States, India, and Turkey,” *Sociological Theory* 27, no. 3 (2009): 194-5.

<sup>10</sup> Leora Batnitsky, “Political Theory: Beyond Sovereignty?” in *The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy: The Modern Era*, ed. Martin Kavka, Zachary Braiterman, and David Novak (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 593. <sup>11</sup> Rogers M. Smith, “The politics of identities and the tasks of political science,” in *Problems and Methods in the Study of Politics*, ed. Ian Shapiro, Rogers M. Smith and Tarek E. Masoud (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 2004), 43. <sup>12</sup> Ezra Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale: The Formative Years of the Jewish Workers' Movement in Tsarist Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 3.

<sup>13</sup> Henry J. Tobias, *The Jewish Bund in Russia: From Its Origins to 1905* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), 1.

fomented in the minds of Tsars by pervasive anti-Semitic attitudes held widely within Russia at the time, as exemplified by Tsar Nicholas I's Council of State proclaiming the "moral peculiarities of the Jews" to be a hindrance to assimilation.<sup>14</sup> After the Russian conquest of Polish territory in 1772 but prior to the official establishment of the Pale of Settlement, successive Tsarist regimes established laws excluding Jews from commerce, expelling Jewish residents from newly annexed territories, and banning Jews from resettling in rural areas after being expelled from their native towns.<sup>15</sup> It was in this milieu of displacement and upheaval that the Pale of Settlement was founded, in an ultimate attempt to confine Jewish workers to a territory administered totally by the Tsar, where the Jewish national minority would be largely subjugated to an underclass position and expressly forbidden from partaking in the relative freedom of movement that other Russian peasants and workers enjoyed.

Ironically, the physical confinement of Jewish workers in the Pale of Settlement provided the perfect structural context for the construction of a representative political party. While the first Zionist conference was held simultaneously in Switzerland, the founding of the Jewish Labor Bund to represent Jews administered within pogroms represented the genesis of a party which was a "Marxist, social-democratic movement that advocated Jewish cultural autonomy based on Yiddish...opposed to religion...as well as to Zionism."<sup>16</sup> The Marxist character of the Bund, its secularism, and its opposition to Zionism adhered the organization to the burgeoning class agitators in Russia: the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks. Most Russian Marxists at the time perceived the push to create a Jewish state in Palestine as a reactionary, imperialist project, and

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<sup>14</sup> Tobias, *The Jewish Bund in Russia*, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale*, 3.

<sup>16</sup> Zvi Gitelman, "A Century of Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe: The Legacy of the Bund and the Zionist Movement," in *The Emergence of Modern Jewish Politics: Bundism and Zionism in Eastern Europe*, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003), 4.



this view was compatible with Bundist's desire for Jewish self-determination outside of a nationalist framework. The opposition of the Jewish Labor Bund to the Zionist project was also predicated on a general distrust of ethno-nationalist endeavors, a skepticism engendered by Bundist's experience with their own oppression at the hands of the Tsar both within the Pale of Settlement and within Poland. As an ethnic minority within a regime which sought to marginalize its members after failed attempts at assimilation, Jewish workers who subscribed to the Bund were familiar with the pitfalls of constructing a state or a revolutionary movement which emphasized cultural and ethnic homogeneity at the expense of democratic freedoms and multiculturalism. Moreover, the Bund sought to incorporate Yiddish books, music, and art into their vision of political emancipation, placing the elevation of Jewish working-class culture into revolutionary context.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Russian Revolution and the Collapse of Cultural-National Autonomy**

When contrasted with the aspirations of other movements which sought to emancipate Jewish workers, peasants, and merchants from Russian oppression, the political character of the Jewish Labor Bund was initially primed for collaboration with Russian revolutionaries. For one, the Bund shared the Marxist worldview of the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, which emphasized a binary divide between the Russian proletariat and bourgeoisie. The common aspiration of the Bund and the Russian revolutionaries to overturn the whole of Russian society in a "social revolution" made the pairing of non-Jewish Russian Marxists and Bundists natural. As Theda Skocpol notes, social revolutions entail "rapid, basic transformations of socio-economic and

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<sup>17</sup> Samuel Kassow, "The Historiography of the Bund," *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 29, no. 7 (2017): 127.

political institutions...effectuated through class upheavals from below.”<sup>18</sup> Rather than aiming to accomplish narrow and limited political goals under the boot of the Tsarist regime, the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks both aspired to restructure Russian society by unleashing the potential of the entire Russian working class. In this way, the aspiration of the Bund to achieve cultural emancipation and autonomy interlocked with the Marxist desire to overthrow the Tsarist regime, which had been responsible for the marginalization of the Jewish working class within systemic pogroms, violence, and displacement. For the Bund, the realization of political power for the Jewish working class was contained in the wholesale transformation of Russian society.

It was against this backdrop that the formation of the Jewish Labor Bund into a powerful and representative political party began. The proliferation of Jewish Social Democratic organizations between 1894 and 1897 reflected the growing class consciousness of Jewish workers in the Pale of Settlement, and a coalescing of the tactics used to reflect labor militancy. Between 1894 and 1897, the number of organized workers and trades grew precipitously in Minsk and Vilna, two primary industrialized locales within the Pale.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, the class conflict waged by these Jewish Social Democratic militants had a two-fold character—while striving against the violence of the Russian Tsar on the one hand, Jewish workers also rebelled against Jewish managers and merchants within the Pale itself.

The tension between the organized Jewish proletariat in the Bund, prominent Bolshevik leaders, and the lack of a physical territory for the Jewish minority came to the fore at the turn of the century when the Bund began to assert a right to cultural autonomy. In 1901, at the national Bundist conference, the party officially “called upon Russia to become a democratic

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<sup>18</sup> Theda Skocpol, *Social Revolutions in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 133.

<sup>19</sup> Tobias, *The Jewish Bund in Russia*, 37.

multinational federal republic, and to repudiate anti-Jewish laws and the persecution of Jews.”<sup>20</sup> Over time, this idea was denounced roundly by Bolshevik leaders, most prominently, by Stalin and Lenin. The chief tension between Stalin and Lenin on the one hand and the Jewish Labor Bund conference on the other can be located in the question of Jewish assimilation. According to Stalin in his perennial “Marxism and the National Question,” the Bund’s newly adopted national program constituted a contradiction in terms. For Stalin, “the peculiar position of the Jews as separate national minorities within compact majorities of other nationalities in integral regions” posed a challenge to the process of resisting Jewish cultural assimilation into Russian society, a process which led to calls for “cultural-national autonomy.”<sup>21</sup> Parroting a classic canard, Stalin claims that “the Jews as a rule serve ‘foreign’ nations as manufacturers and traders and as members of the liberal professions...all this, taken together with the increasing reshuffling of nationalities characteristic of developed forms of capitalism, leads to the assimilation of the Jews.”<sup>22</sup> Here, Stalin ironically outlined his opposition to the resistance of Jewish assimilation by the Bund, warning of the potential nationalistic elements. The creation of the Pale of Settlement and the dispersion of Jewish workers and merchants alike in different administrated sections of Russia rendered the Jewish population untethered to a specific piece of territory upon which cultural-national autonomy could be claimed. Stalin claimed that this demographic problem posed a political problem for the Bund, arguing against the establishment of institutions in a secular, post-revolution, democratic Russia which would endeavor to protect the rights of Jews. Indeed, in his fury, Stalin fumed that “Preservation of everything Jewish, conservation of all the national peculiarities of the Jews, even those that are patently harmful to the proletariat, isolation

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<sup>20</sup> Johnpoll, *The Politics of Futility*, 27.

<sup>21</sup> Joseph Stalin, “Marxism and the National Question,” last modified April 10, 2019, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1913/03a.htm>.

<sup>22</sup> Stalin, “Marxism and the National Question.”

of the Jews from everything non-Jewish, even the establishment of special hospitals—that is the level to which the Bund has sunk!”<sup>23</sup> For Stalin, the Bundist emphasis on culture constituted a bourgeois betrayal of the unified character of the burgeoning Bolshevik revolution, and the insistence of the Bund on cultural-national autonomy ultimately resulted in nationalism. The consistent refusal of the Bund to embrace the Zionist project, coupled with the party’s desire to preserve a cultural heritage apart from the ethnically majoritarian working class, placed the party in an unusual position of defending itself from anti-Semitic accusations of cosmopolitan internationalism on the one hand, and Jewish nationalism on the other.

Lenin concurred with Stalin on the question of cultural-national autonomy, denouncing the Bundist desire to preserve a modicum of Jewish and Yiddish culture as a call for “bourgeois nationalism,” claiming that “it is precisely the economic and political life of the capitalist countries which *forces* us at every step to break down the senseless and obsolete national divisions and prejudices...”<sup>24</sup> The vehement opposition of non-Jewish Bolshevik leaders to the establishment of a democratic state in Russia which recognized the autonomous rights of Jewish citizens was visceral in the lead-up to the 1917 revolution. While the Jewish Labor Bund did not begin merely as an organization for the Jewish working class in Russia, and indeed organized plenty of Polish and Lithuanian workers in tandem, by 1913 the Jewish character of the organization had subsumed its other capacities. In the conflation of the call for cultural-national autonomy with a general call for nationalism, Lenin hinted that the Jewish Labor Bund trended closer to Zionism ideologically, widely regarded by Bolshevik leaders at the time as a deeply reactionary project. Lenin furthered his opposition to the Bundist cultural-national autonomy project by 1913, claiming that “among the various representatives of Marxism in Russia the

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<sup>23</sup> Stalin, “Marxism and the National Question.”

<sup>24</sup> Vladimir Lenin, *Lenin on the Jewish Question* (New York: International Publishers, 1934), 18.

Jewish...those known as the Bundists—are carrying out a policy of *separatism*.”<sup>25</sup> Lenin’s eventual opposition to a federal democratic state, which included recognition for cultural-national Jewish autonomy, was further articulated in the ire he reserved for the competing Menshevik revolutionaries, who he deemed “petty-bourgeois democrats using near-socialist phraseology.”<sup>26</sup> Moreover, Lenin denounced the Menshevik position, and he insisted that “That the state is an organ of the rule of a definite class which cannot be reconciled with its antipode...is something the petty-bourgeois democrats will never be able to understand.”<sup>27</sup> While initially sympathetic to the notion of a post-revolutionary decentralized federal state, Lenin’s writings here indicate a distrust of the discontinuity implied by national segmentation. While the Bundists demanded that the post-revolutionary Marxist state include guaranteed legal protections for their minority status, prominent Bolshevik revolutionaries objected to the use of the state for purposes which were divisive to the proletariat class.

The dissonance between Bundist and Bolshevik political projects only became starker once the Bund began to advocate for secular aspects of Jewish culture, such as the Yiddish language. At the 1903 RSDWP conference, the decisive split between the Menshevik and Bolshevik factions occurred. However, this widely understood historical development was accompanied by a far less publicized split—that of the Bund from nearly every other faction present at the conference. Immediately after the commencement of the conference, revolutionaries including Lenin and Trotsky began to stridently object to the Bund’s vision of a multi-federal democratic state with incorporated minority rights, and insisted that “the Bund had

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<sup>25</sup> Lenin, *Lenin on the Jewish Question*, 19.

<sup>26</sup> Lenin, “The State and Revolution,” last modified April 10, 2019, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/ch01.htm#s1>

<sup>27</sup> Lenin, “The State and Revolution.”

to divest itself of its views before other business could begin.”<sup>28</sup> Throughout the course of the conference, the Bundists were forced to make successive concessions from their original position, as even Menshevik leader Julius Martov insisted that “It was impermissible...for part of the party to represent one stratum of the proletariat or its interests, whether national or professional.”<sup>29</sup> Gradually, the split between Bolshevik and Menshevik leaders on the one hand and Bundists on the other over the question of cultural-national autonomy morphed into a broader dispute over the character of the post-revolutionary state. As far as Lenin and Martov were concerned, preserving and privileging the class character of the proletarian revolution above all other considerations was a task of paramount importance. The desire of the Jewish Labor Bund to preserve their autonomy against forces of oppression was secondary in the minds of the empowered factions of the RSDWP.

In order to conceive of the split between the Bund and other factions of the RSDWP, it is useful to consider the political differences within the organization itself that contributed significantly to the evolution of the Bund towards a preference for cultural-national autonomy. Examining factors other than Bolshevik and Menshevik opposition to the project of cultural-national autonomy can help illuminate the relative failure of the Bund to leverage the revolutionary situation to their advantage. Indeed, vigorous debates within the Bund occurred over tactics, ideology, and culture. On the left flank of the party, many Bundists allied with the Bolsheviks in their rejection of parliamentary democracy and open desire for violent revolution to overthrow the oppressive Tsarist regime. However, these left-wing Bundists did not favor a centralized state in the vein of the Bolshevik ideology, but instead preferred a more egalitarian form of socialist governance. On the other end of the Bund’s ideological spectrum, members

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<sup>28</sup> Tobias, *The Jewish Bund in Russia*, 207.

<sup>29</sup> Tobias, *The Jewish Bund in Russia*, 209-10.

argued for non-violent means of resistance to the Tsarist regime, and favored parliamentary democracy as the most viable route towards liberation for the Jewish proletariat. Many other Bundists opted to mediate between these two factions, preferring to take more flexible and less dogmatic positions on tactical matters.<sup>30</sup> However, these splits often hampered the ability of the Bund to take a unified position when in contest with the Bolsheviks, and very possibly led Bundist leaders to undervalue the utility of partisan unity in the pursuit of their political program. As the Bund attempted to further their programmatic goals, they were simultaneously hampered by internal splits, a failure to forge alliances with affiliate parties, and the overwhelming opposition by the most powerful members of the RSDWP.<sup>31</sup>

It has been established that debates over cultural-national autonomy for the Jewish people during the Russian Revolution foreshadowed similar arguments regarding multiculturalism in pluralistic democratic societies.<sup>32</sup> However, the specific circumstances of the revolutionary situation undoubtedly rendered these conflicts more fraught and unpredictable in the case of the Bund. While reformist processes allow for the gradual implementation of political projects through incremental change and targeted action, the contestation of revolutionary politics meant that the Bund had to navigate a much more unpredictable terrain in attempting to accomplish the goal of a federalized democratic state. Instead of enshrining specific tactics in a well-established advocacy structure, or participating in a liberal parliamentary democracy, the Bund was faced with the prospect of forging alliances and building power with fellow revolutionaries who dismissed the notion of cultural-national autonomy for the Jewish people as divisive and bourgeois. The difficulty faced by the Bund in advocating for a minoritized group under

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<sup>30</sup> Johnpoll, *The Politics of Futility*, 8-9.

<sup>31</sup> Johnpoll, *The Politics of Futility*, 260.

<sup>32</sup> Zoav Peled, "The Concept of National Cultural Autonomy: the First One Hundred Years," in *Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe: The Bund at 100*, ed. Jack Jacobs (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 258.

circumstances of extreme flux was eventually realized in the marginalization of the Bund and their political goals in favor of a centralized party-state which did not include protections for vulnerable members of the Jewish minority.

### **From Pogroms to Diasporic Movement: Escaping to New York City**

The previous section of this chapter outlined the political opposition faced by Bundists in their attempts to enact an agenda of cultural-national autonomy within the machinations of the Russian Revolution. Next, I will enumerate the various other factors which led Bundists to flee the Pale of Settlement and settle in New York City. At the very beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the class conflict that defined politics in Russia presented myriad opportunities for the oppressed Jewish population of the Pale of Settlement. Ironically, even as revolutionary hopes in Tsarist Russia for revolution swelled between 1897 at the Bund's founding and 1905, deadly pogroms against Jewish populations increased. In 1903, a particularly brutal pogrom against Jews in Kishinev precipitated a massive wave of tens of thousands of Jewish immigrants out of the Pale of Settlement and into the United States.<sup>33</sup> In some cases, these pogroms were legitimately unrelated to the Tsarist state and the vigilante Cossacks, and in others, the Russian state police actively assisted the violence against Jewish families and shtetls. In other cases, rumors were spread implicating Russian state involvement in the violence, thereby further instilling fear in the Pale's Jews.<sup>34</sup> Jewish shtetls were not the only target for state violence during this period—but burgeoning Bundist revolutionaries were also seen as enemies of the state, disproportionate to

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<sup>33</sup> Migration Studies and Statistics, 1948, Series I, IV-34, HIAS-HICEM Archives, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York, New York, United States of America.

<sup>34</sup> Nora Levin, "The Influence of the Bund on the Jewish Socialist Movement in America," *Gratz College Annual of Jewish Studies* 5, no. 1 (1976): 53.



their involvement with the RSDWP. By 1904, 54 percent of the Russian state's political prisoners were Jewish, many of whom were directly involved with the Bund.<sup>35</sup>

The peril faced by the Jewish population, marginalized to the Pale of Settlement, under Tsarist control persisted well into the revolutionary period. The constant turmoil surrounding the status of European Jewry was accentuated by the peculiar oppressions imposed on the Jewish population of Russia, and the potential for revolutionary socialism did little to ameliorate this state of affairs. For one, the ideological gaps between Bundist cultural-national autonomy and Bolshevik centralization and class reductionism actively contributed to an environment of hostility towards the Bund, especially in the aftermath of the fateful 1903 RSDWP conference. In essence, the root causes of mass Jewish migration to New York City during this period were twofold—Jewish populations writ large were facing violent oppression at the hands of pogroms, and Bundist political adherents faced opposition and hostility to their political program from the Tsarist regime and Bolshevik revolutionaries alike. This untenable position contributed to the massive growth in the Eastern European Jewish diaspora population between the years of 1900 and 1905. However, as I will demonstrate in my next section tracing the trajectory of Bundist socialist ideas through New York party politics, Bundist fidelity to the project of socialism and reconstructing a modicum of cultural-national autonomy did not die on the shores of Ellis Island.

### **The Interaction of Bundist Socialism and New York Institutions**

There are different schools of thought regarding the fate of Bundist socialist thought in the American-Jewish diaspora. Most of these historiographies take place in the center of the American Jewish diaspora in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century—New York City. In “The Promised City,”

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<sup>35</sup> Moses Rischin, *The Promised City: New York's Jews, 1870-1914* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 45.

Moses Rischin suggests that the main role of Bundist socialism in the diaspora was inspirational—for New York’s Jewish population, looking towards a political force that actively resisted both the tyranny of the Tsar and asserted Jewish political autonomy in the coming revolution. Rischin also contends that in the interwar period, the Bund participated vigorously in refugee resettlement and anti-Nazi organizing in New York City, to help grow the diaspora in anticipation of fascist political takeover.<sup>36</sup> In this view, the Bund was one of many facets of the Jewish-American diaspora, serving both as a lifeline for Jews still in Russia and a source of cultural affinity. The ideological contributions of Bundist socialism to New York City politics is never mentioned in Rischin’s account.

Others have perceived all parts of the Jewish diaspora from Russia in this period, Bundist or not, as willing to abandon their previous political commitments in favor of cultural assimilation. Writer Horace Kallen made this prediction writing for the *Nation* in 1915, claiming that “[Jews] come with the intention to be completely incorporated into the body-politic of the state.”<sup>37</sup> The belief that rootless, cosmopolitan Jews, bereft of a homeland or safe harbor, would sacrifice any political membership in order to be readily absorbed into the United States polity dominated the rosier perception of the Russian Jewish diaspora at the turn of the century. Other accounts of Bundist socialist diaspora paint the Bund as one of many constituent parts of a general morass of Jews immigrating to the United States in the pre-revolutionary period, barely distinct in their political commitments from other left-wing Jewish tendencies. Other accounts

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<sup>36</sup> Rischin, “The Promised City,” 163.

<sup>37</sup> Horace M. Kallen, “Democracy Versus the Melting-Pot: A Study of American Nationality,” in *Jews & Diaspora Nationalism: Writings on Jewish Peoplehood in Europe and the United States*, ed. Simon Rabinovitch (Boston: Brandeis University Press, 2012), 162.

barely distinguish between the various strands of Bundist thought, conflating socialism, trade unionism, and Yiddishism into one incorporated phenomenon.<sup>38</sup>

Of the views which recognize a distinction between different aspects of the Bundist project, few recognize a need to trace the path of Bundist socialist thought through the American Jewish diaspora. According to Nora Levin, the failure of the 1905 Russian revolution had a profound demobilizing effect on the radical aspirations of Bundists in the American Jewish diaspora. Drawing primarily from Yiddish press such as *The Forward*, Levin extrapolates a mood of resignation among radical Jewish socialists in New York City, and a desire to assimilate into the federalist American political system. While some Bundists maintained a dream of cultural-national autonomy within the American polity, Levin asserts, those aspirations died in the turn away from mass political socialism and towards trade unionism.<sup>39</sup> Hadassa Kosak's more substantial account of Jewish class conflict in New York City claims that Bundism was one of many visions of self-determination in a socialist state offered to American Jews looking for political identity at the turn of the century.<sup>40</sup>

Instead of understanding the impact of Bundist socialist ideology on the Jewish diaspora as merely aspirational or actually marginal, it is both historically accurate and analytically useful to recognize the impacts that Bundists professing their socialist ideals of cultural-national autonomy had on the development of American Jewish political identity through various interactions with New York political institutions. I will argue in this section that although advocacy in favor of Bundist socialist ideas had no small impact on the consciousness of the

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<sup>38</sup> Jonathan Frankel, "The Bundists in America and the 'Zionist Problem,'" in *The Emergence of Modern Jewish Politics: Bundism and Zionism in Eastern Europe*, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003), 185.

<sup>39</sup> Levin, "The Influence of the Bund," 68.

<sup>40</sup> Kosak, "Cultures of Opposition," 30.

New York Jewish working class in the diaspora, the larger aspiration of enacting cultural-national autonomy became marginalized in the American polity. The reasons for the marginalization of Bundist socialist ideology within the American polity are manifold—the anti-communist Red Scare which engulfed the party duopoly in the inter-war period, the structural entrenchment of an existing Tammany Hall Democratic party machine in New York City, and the attractiveness of trade union organizations as a vector for political action for Jewish immigrants. However, the most concrete reason why Bundist socialism became marginalized as a material goal for the American Jewish diaspora is the diffusion of the Bund as an organized party apparatus upon the arrival of the Bundist diaspora to America. While the Bund lost the ability to mount a structural challenge to the institutions of the American polity, individual Bundists in the American diaspora had an important impact on the *political identity formation* of American Jewry. As the Bund broke apart and individual Bundists contended with advocating for their ideological goals within the confines of American political institutions, the aspirations of the Bund and their visions for Jewish political self-determination had a profoundly resonant effect on the development of American Jewish political identity.

It is tempting to attempt to construct a totalizing framework through which to understand Bundist socialist organizing in New York City. However, just as the diaspora dispersed the organizational structure of the Bund, so were Bundist individuals pigeonholed into individual action structures and roles which circumscribed the scope of their ambitions. One such individual is Meyer London—the second socialist member of Congress elected from a third party in American history. London was elected as the U.S. Representative for the 12<sup>th</sup> New York district in 1914, after immigrating from the Pale in 1891. A Bundist by origin, London came to stridently advocate on behalf of the activities of the Bund in his native Poland. In New York City, prior to

his election to Congress, London obtained a law degree and advocated on behalf of labor militants, especially those textile workers whose collective actions were spearheaded by members of the Jewish diaspora.<sup>41</sup> However, while London was able to retain the labor militancy and socialist stylings of the Bund, his substantial contributions to building a socialist partisan alternative to the hegemonic Tammany Hall machine in New York were limited. Indeed, London even eventually dropped the Bundist opposition to the Zionist project of colonizing Palestine and establishing a Jewish homeland, writing to the Poale Zion of America in 1918: “I am decidedly in favor of presenting to the international Peace Congress...the question of securing a free state ‘to which such of the Jewish people as desire to do so may return and may work out their own salvation free from interference by those of alien race or religion.’”<sup>42</sup>

London’s apparent turnaround in regards to strict Bundist opposition to the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine may be reflective of his own idiosyncratic preferences, perhaps diverging from the party line. In both secondary source biographical materials, as well as primary source documentation which contains his personal records, London’s process of deliberation which led him to abandon opposition to Zionist nation-state building is absent. However, it is clear from records of his Congressional career that London was preoccupied with questions of impending warfare in continental Europe, a specter which threatened organized Jewish life in his homeland.<sup>43</sup> It is against the backdrop of this peril in which London apparently forsook the notion of organizing an autonomous cultural state in America along the Bundist party line. The contingencies of London’s decision-making in this context reflect the difficulties faced

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<sup>41</sup> Meyer London Anonymous Biographical Materials, undated, TAM-028, Box 1, Folder 26, Meyer London Papers, Tamiment Library and Roger F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York, New York, United States.

<sup>42</sup> Letter to SLP Poale Zion of America, Sept. 6, 1918, TAM-028, Box 1, Folder 25, Meyer London Papers, Tamiment Library and Roger F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York, New York, United States.

<sup>43</sup> Meyer London Biographical Materials, 4.

by Bundist adherents in the formal institutions of the U.S. federal government. The hegemony of the party duopoly, the relative stability of America's formal institutions, and the circumstances of precarity facing Jewish workers in Europe and in the American diaspora all worked to marginalize Bundist socialist visions for a culturally-nationally autonomous Jewish people within a federal socialist state.

London attempt to triangulate his ideological commitments to the Bund with the institutional facets of the American state is a well-documented phenomenon. London collaborated with Eugene Debs and Morris Hillquit to found the Socialist Party in America, but soon discovered that in order to represent his heavily Jewish East Side constituency, he needed to combine a critique of capitalism with an acknowledgement of the particular oppression faced by Jews. After his first election to Congress, London quipped, "I hope that my presence will represent an entirely different kind of Jew from the kind Congress is accustomed to seeing."<sup>44</sup> Once in Congress, London pushed a programmatic approach which often set him at odds with his colleagues. London's strident opposition to warfare, the growth of U.S. military operations overseas, and advocacy for U.S. recognition of the new Soviet state in 1917 ultimately engendered deep opposition among his congressional colleagues.

### **The Bund and the Palmer Raids**

In order to more deeply probe the fragility of the Bund's foray into American electoral politics and the limits of this approach, I will discuss Bundist figures' larger collaboration with the Socialist Party of America (SPA) in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Crucially, while Bundist party diaspora members found refuge in Eugene V. Debs' populist political party which opened its

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<sup>44</sup>Gerald Sorin, "London, Meyer (1871-1926)," in *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, ed. Bernard K. Johnpoll and Harvey Klehr (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 250.

arms to the party diaspora's constituency—that is, the influx of Eastern European Jewry into Lower Manhattan and Brooklyn—the Socialist Party *itself* came under siege in the Red Scare of the 1920s. As Matthew Silver has argued, non-Bundist American Jewish support for the vision of cultural-national autonomy advanced by the Bund was weakened by the persecution faced by its diasporic adherents after the Palmer Raids and during the Red Scare, when SPA members were purged from public office by the U.S. Department of Justice.<sup>45</sup> My argument here is twofold—while the U.S. government's persecution of SPA members shocked and alienated the Eastern European Jewish diaspora, which was deeply invested in the SPA's electoral success, it also had a negative reverberating effect on the international debate over Jewish self-determination. This impact was largely precipitated by the alliance forged between SPA elected officials and international advocates for Jewish cultural-national autonomy.

In order to explain how international support for cultural-national autonomy dovetailed with American-Jewish political organizing, it is first necessary to detail the rise of auxiliary groups dedicated to this goal in Russia. As Alexander Orbach describes, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a novel class of Russian Jews who had been permitted to selectively participate in the apparatuses of Russian schooling and professional life emerged outside of the Pale of Settlement. These formally educated Jews developed a discourse surrounding human rights, liberal freedoms, and cultural autonomy supposedly exemplified in countries apart from the repressive Tsarist regime under which most Eastern European Jewry lived. While this class of Jewish intellectuals abhorred the conditions faced by their fellow Jews in the segregated Pale of Settlement, they espoused liberal civil ideals rather than the revolutionary socialism advocated for by the Bund. Rather than advocating for the overthrow of the Tsarist regime writ large, this

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<sup>45</sup> Matthew Silver, "Louis Marshall and the Democratization of Jewish Identity," *American Jewish History* 94, no. ½ (2008): 56.

Jewish intellectual class aimed to reform the “web of legal and economic restraints” that confronted Jews hoping to assimilate into Tsarist Russian society.<sup>46</sup> Partially assimilated into Russian culture and politics, this group of reformists wished to democratize Tsarist Russia so as to accommodate the cultural and economic demands of the Jewish working classes. Mirroring the later Progressive era reformers in America, this group built the basis for a politics of reformist egalitarianism based on meritocracy and transparency.

In the United States, this reformist form of advocacy for Jewish cultural autonomous rights manifested in the creation of organizations such as the American Jewish Committee, which helped to translate the revolutionary clamor for cultural-national autonomy into an American idiom. As Matthew Silver notes, these efforts had to be tempered because of a fear that Jews might be accused of dual loyalty for attempting to “craft a state within a state”—the exact sort of polity model proposed by the Bund in the Pale.<sup>47</sup> However, a kaleidoscope of Jewish cultural organizations created for the expressed purpose of advocating for marginal Jewish subjects in oppressive areas such as Tsarist Russia contributed to the growing demand for international solidarity. Instead of the Bund and the internationalism-oriented SPA dominating discourse and policy around the treatment of Jews in the Pale, a pluralistic set of interests including civil rights attorneys and Zionists contributed to American Jewish debates over the establishment of political rights and physical safety for Russian Jews.

The participation of figures such as Congressman London in this ongoing debate, threatened even before the federal crackdown on SPA members during the Red Scare, was quashed by the 1920 Palmer Raids. During these raids, the U.S. Department of Justice expelled

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<sup>46</sup> Alexander Orbach, “The Jewish People’s Group and Jewish Politics in Tsarist Russia, 1906-1914,” *Modern Judaism* 10, no. 1 (1990): 1.

<sup>47</sup> Matthew Silver, “Louis Marshall and the Democratization of Jewish Identity,” *American Jewish History* 94, no. ½ (2008): 43.



all five members of the New York State legislature who belonged to the SPA from the chamber, and placed them under arrest. This event traumatized and shocked Jewish constituents of these members, as the SPA depended on Eastern European diasporic Jewish populations for electoral support. While prominent Jewish figures in the international fight to establish political and civil rights for Russian Jews protested stridently, a general unease about the inclusion of Jewish communists and socialists in these organizational efforts set in across the liberal proponents of these initiatives.<sup>48</sup> In short, the United States' systematic efforts to rid the ranks of government of socialist influences had a significant impact on the participation of domestic organizations in international advocacy for Jewish self-determination in the Pale.

The difficulty faced by the SPA in gaining a foothold in efforts to shape the debates over Jewish cultural-national autonomy in the Pale demonstrates the limits of agential action by party diaspora members in enacting the party's vision. While Bundist party diaspora members were able to find hospitable company in the SPA, the institutional roadblocks faced by the party amidst the Red Scare and the pluralism of civil rights interests in the U.S. made the realization of cultural-national autonomy socialism near impossible for the Bundist party diaspora. Moreover, the multiplicity of participants in the U.S. advocacy structure created a quandary for the party diaspora—among the competing visions for international support for Jewish efforts to establish civil rights for oppressed Jews under the Tsar, socialist Bundists faced a distinct disadvantage. While in the Pale, the Bund's assertion of sole representation of Jews in territories administered by the Tsar might have held plausibility, the more established polity of the U.S. with its patchwork of political and civil interests made it significantly more difficult for the Bund to assert its vision of cultural-national autonomy on a systematic scale.

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<sup>48</sup> Silver, "Louis Marshall," 57.

## Chapter 2

### Culture as a Weapon: The Depoliticization of Bundist Yiddishism in the Diaspora

*These cultural institutions are the principal parts of the Cultural Society, the basis of every genuine workers' cultural activity; they are the green oases on the dry path of our workaday lives—the fresh well from which will flow happy belief in our own cultural possibilities; they are the strongest weapons in the hands of the Jewish workers against darkness and slavery; embedded in them is the shining hope and guarantee that we will not be emptied spiritually in America and will not be left without suitable inheritors for our happy future.*

-“The Strongest Weapons in the Hands of Jewish Workers,” United Jewish Workers’ Cultural Society, 1924

*All the violence done to words is so vile that one can hardly bear to hear them any longer.*

-Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry,” 1944

#### Introduction: Why Yiddish?

The central question animating this thesis is as follows—what is the effect of diasporic migration on political organizations, and how does this dispersion impact political identity formation? Many historical assessments of Bundist impact on the American Jewish diaspora have considered the constituent facets of Bundism—cultural-national autonomy, Yiddishism, and trade unionism—as inextricably linked.<sup>1</sup> To that end, as I have emphasized in my previous chapter regarding Bundist aspirations for cultural- national autonomy, it is necessary to consider the ideational facets of Bundism as analytically distinct. This approach is grounded in both a theoretical and empirical basis. On the one hand, previous failures to analyze how specific ideational commitments and projects of the Bund may have been in conflict with one another constitutes a gap in the literature. Bolshevik leaders, such

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<sup>1</sup> Tony Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 5.

as Stalin and Lenin, viewed Yiddishism and resistance to Russian language assimilation as an obstacle to Marxist proletarian unification. Those reservations, even if misplaced, had a material impact on the successes and failures of the Bund within the larger constellation of revolutionary organizations advocating for Tsarist overthrow. The dominance of Bolshevik demands for centralization after the 1903 RSDWP conference marked a moment of peril for the Bund as a unitary project, as Bundist goals for cultural-national autonomy within a federated democratic polity became infeasible. Therefore, even before considering the fragmentation of the Bundist project within the American diaspora, one can note the challenges that a unitary project of Bundism faced within the Russian revolutionary milieu. To drive the point home, it is crucial to disaggregate the various aspects of Bundism from one another in part because the Bund had no prospects of success as a unified project in the Russian revolutionary context. It is incumbent upon students of the Bund to study the differential impacts of Bundism in various polities.

After acknowledging the necessity of considering the facets of Bundist ideology as analytically distinct, it is important to discuss why it is important to trace the impact of Yiddishism specifically on American Jewish political subjectivity. In the Bundist context, Yiddishism can be understood as the political project of the preservation of Yiddish language and culture. Two of the most important tasks of this chapter are to assess whether or not it is possible to consider Yiddishism as an ideational project distinct from the materialist goals of socialism and economic autonomy for the Jewish proletariat of the Pale, and what impact this ideational commitment had on the development and formation of American Jewish political identity. As I have established, it is historically accurate to consider the various ways in which facets of Bundist ideology were cleaved from one another as a result of political pressure. However, this analytical framework is also methodologically sound within the context of

ideational process-tracing.<sup>1</sup> While it is intuitive to assume that Jewish workers participated in labor organizing and socialist advocacy in order to improve their material conditions, such an inference cannot be easily drawn in the case of Yiddishism. Indeed, Bundists clung to Yiddishism in the face of tremendous pressure from more powerful factions of the RSDWP. These conditions suggest an ideational mechanism driving Bundist commitment to the project of Yiddishism, and it is certainly worth measuring the impact of this mechanism on the Bundist diaspora.

In establishing Yiddishism's effects on diasporic Jewish political identity, it is important to reduce the multicollinearity which defines the Bundist ideology as a whole. For the purposes of this thesis, I isolate socialism, Yiddishism, and trade unionism as the independent variables impacting the development of American Jewish political identity. However, despite my previous discussion of the historical reality of Bundist ideological fragmentation, it is important to apply specific empirical tests which establishes Yiddishism as distinct from trade unionism and cultural-national autonomy socialism. In order to fragment Yiddishism from its ideological siblings, it is necessary to establish "whether materialist factors vary over time, while ideational measures and outcomes remain constant."<sup>2</sup> My interpretation of this methodological imperative is straightforward—if the existence of Yiddishism as a political project is historically dependent upon conditions of sub-citizen status, economic oppression, and cultural marginalization, we should observe the impacts of Yiddishism as an idea petering out during the diaspora. After all, Jews saw marked improvements in their status as political actors in American society relative to their subjugated position within Tsarist and later Soviet Russia. Therefore, this improvement of

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<sup>1</sup> Alan M. Jacobs, "Process tracing the effects of ideas," in *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool*, ed. Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Jacobs, "Process tracing the effect of ideas," 52.

material conditions in the diaspora is very telling, and the fate of Yiddishism within this context can help reconceptualize the impact of strains of Bundist ideology on diaspora Jewish political identity.

In order to conduct an empirically sound historical process trace, it is imperative to define what Yiddishism is as an ideology and political project. Historian Tony Michels, perhaps the preeminent scholar of Yiddish-speaking socialist political parties in New York City, asserts that socialism had little to offer diaspora Jews in the realm of material benefits at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Instead, Michels argues, Jewish immigrants' fidelity to Yiddish-speaking communist and socialist political parties was tied directly to "deep-seated conflicts within the immigrant Jewish community...at the heart [of which] was a fundamental tension in modern Jewish politics...between particularistic and universalistic goals and political strategies."<sup>3</sup> Rather than articulating a singular vision for Jewish political self-determination, or one cohesive mandate for the integration of Yiddish into a political practice in the diaspora, the synthesis of the Yiddish language and the practice of politics in the American Jewish diaspora represented a site of struggle among various groups of diaspora Jews.

Moreover, some Jewish radicals rejected organizational efforts to preserve the Yiddish language in the diaspora altogether, with one member of the Arbeter Ring claiming: "Show me a member of the Arbeter Ring who can pronounce the word 'geology' without stammering? In the old country, none of us ever heard such a word. A person who studied in school learned either in Russian or German, or in some cases in Hebrew. But not in Yiddish."<sup>4</sup> In the minds of some

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<sup>3</sup> Tony Michels, "Socialism with a Jewish Face: The Origins of the Yiddish-Speaking Communist Movement in the United States, 1907-1923," in *Yiddish and the Left*, ed. Gennady Estraiikh and Mikhail Krutikov (Oxford: European Humanities Research Center, 2001), 25.

<sup>4</sup> B. Sheyfer, "A Language That He Wants to and Must Forget (1918)," in *Jewish Radicals*, ed. Tony Michels (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 185.

diaspora Jews in the inter-war period, it was the very reliance on the Yiddish language which doomed Jews to marginalization within the American polity and held them back from advancement and upward mobility. Other proponents of the language's survival, such as Russian-Jewish academic Chaim Zhitlowsky, attempted to uphold the dignity of the language, publishing "the first book on philosophy in Yiddish" in 1910, "as if to quash doubts as to the vernacular's dialectical capacities."<sup>5</sup> Across the diaspora, revolutionary Jews were torn over Yiddish's role in the self-determination of the Jewish people. Was it a necessary tool in organizing the monolingual Jewish working class? Was it an archaic and shameful burden on the Jewish masses, a result of the continued expulsion of Jews from one land to another? Or was the Yiddish language a positive symbol of the resilience of the Jewish masses, one that ought to be preserved and promoted at all costs?

My goal in this chapter is not to negotiate between the all of the various normative perspectives on the Yiddish language's fate in the diaspora that sprung up at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Instead, I aim to understand specifically how Bundist commitments to Yiddishism as a political project had a causal impact on the development of American Jewish political identity. The Bundist Yiddishist project had many participants both prior to, during, and after the diasporic movement of Jewish immigrants from the Pale of Settlement to the United States. Views on the viability of the promotion of Yiddish-language cultural institutions in the US were divided even among the pro-Yiddish partisans of the Bund, and these disagreements are evident in vast reams of primary source documentation from the establishment of Yiddish-language institutions in the US. However, the empowerment of Jewish workers through the Yiddish language was not merely viewed as a particularist concern by its Bundist proponents. As the

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<sup>5</sup> Moses Rischin, *The Promised City: New York's Jews, 1870-1914* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 166.

United Jewish Worker's Cultural Society proclaimed in 1924, these Bundists aimed to create cultural institutions which "now play a large role in our struggle for a spiritually rich future and the rights of our secular Yiddish culture in America."<sup>6</sup> Rather than representing a parochial, petit-bourgeois cultural concern, Bundists viewed the preservation of the Yiddish language in the diaspora as a trans-continental, historical, and political task. In other words, Yiddishism represented nothing less than the survival of the Jewish people. In this chapter, I will trace the influence of the pursuit of this task by Bundists through the establishment of civil society organizations in New York City, thereby outlining the extent of the impact of Yiddishism on American Jewish political identity.

### **Party, Organization, or Mishpokhe? Yiddish in the Pale of Settlement**

The task of tracing the impacts of Bundist Yiddishism on American Jewish political identity must be preceded by an account of the ideology's pre-diasporic formation. I argue that the period in which Yiddishism was most robustly articulated in the Pale of Settlement by Bundists constitutes an under-represented time period in the literature on the Bund. As previous sections of this thesis have discussed, many prominent works of history and social science produced on the Bund have focused chiefly on the failure of the Bund to foment a formal role as the sole representative of the Jewish working class in the Pale prior to 1905.<sup>2</sup> Other accounts focused later in the inter-war period tell a story of Bundist decline, including the failure of Bundist advocacy for an empowered and state-recognized Yiddish culture.<sup>3</sup> In these discussions of Yiddishism's trajectory in the Pale of Settlement, it is the interactions with the RSDWP, most importantly Bolshevik and

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<sup>6</sup> United Jewish Worker's Cultural Society, "The Strongest Weapons in the Hands of Jewish Workers," in *Jewish Radicals: A Documentary History*, ed. Tony Michels (New York: New York University, 2012), 19.

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<sup>2</sup> Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale*, 20.

<sup>3</sup> Johnpoll, *The Politics of Futility*, 70.

Menshevik revolutionaries, which ought to be examined as the predominant site of Bundist influence.

However, I contend that in disaggregating Bundist ideology into its component parts, the influence of various Bundist ideas are located separately, both temporally and structurally. Just as I have delineated socialist cultural-national autonomy, Yiddishism, and trade unionism as the three aspects of Bundist ideology worth examining separately, so will I link the time periods in which these ideas gained currency with the structural conditions they faced. Accordingly, the pre-diasporic history of Yiddishism is most appropriately considered within the period between 1905 and 1917, when one revolution failed and another found success. The case for this periodization has been made by Joshua Zimmerman, who argues that “The second stage of the Bund’s ideological completion...took place between 1907 and the First World War. It culminated...in the lengthy debates over the *shul-frage* (the school question), the *shprakh-frage* (the language question), the *kehila-frage* (the community question), on the party’s attitude towards the Jewish figure, and on the question of a Shabbat rest day for Jewish workers.”<sup>7</sup> Clearly, Zimmerman makes the case for a unitary consideration of the articulation of the Bundist project in the inter-revolutionary period. Most instructive, however, is Zimmerman’s discussion of the platform of the Bund which emerged in order to bolster Jewish pride in the Yiddish language and Yiddish cultural artifacts.

### **The Origins of Bundist Yiddishism**

In order to understand Bundist Yiddishism in the diaspora, it is necessary to explore the uptick in pogroms against Jews in the Pale of Settlement at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This phenomenon

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<sup>7</sup> Joshua D. Zimmerman, *Poles, Jews, and the Politics of Nationality: The Bund and the Polish Socialist Party in Late Tsarist Russia, 1892-1914* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 228.



reveals a puzzle—namely, why did a surge in anti-semitic violence *encourage* an expression of Yiddishism as expressed through the Bund as a political party? It seems intuitive that outbursts of violence and destruction of Jewish communities might lead to an assimilation effect, stemming from a collective desire to erase any cultural difference which marks Jews as other. However, in the aftermath of some of the worst anti-semitic pogroms in Tsarist history, revolutionary socialist alternatives to Zionism such as the Bund, and specifically detailed programs of Yiddish language and cultural preservation, came to the fore. In fact, I argue that it was the very experience of violence, cultural marginalization, and repression which lended the Bund’s program of Yiddishism popular legitimacy prior to the 1905 revolution.

The most violent massacres of Jews in the Pale of Settlement and destruction of Jewish property at the turn of the century came with the April 1903 Kishinev pogroms. On April 19, 1903, Easter Sunday, in modern-day Moldova, bands of teenaged boys and men proceeded to smash the windows of Jewish-owned businesses and homes, disrupting the celebration of Passover that many of the 50,000 Kishinev Jews were partaking in. Eventually, as the Tsarist police deputized to oversee the violence stood back and allowed the violence to proceed, 41 Jews were murdered and 495 were wounded. The devastation wrought by the rioters surpassed that of the pogroms of 1881, similarly targeted against Jews in the Pale of Settlement.<sup>8</sup> Scholar Joshua Karlip hypothesizes that in the aftermath of the 1903 devastation, a multi-generational coalition of Jews in the Pale turned to Bundist Yiddishism as an alternative to the intelligencia Zionism that gained purchase in the 1880s. Karlip asserts that in 1903, Zionism seemed “out of touch with the life-and-death struggles of the Jews in the Pale of Settlement.”<sup>9</sup> Why, then, did Yiddishist

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<sup>8</sup> Monty Noam Penkower, “The Kishinev Pogrom of 1903: A Turning Point in Jewish History,” *Modern Judaism* 24, no. 3 (2004): 187.

<sup>9</sup> Joshua M. Karlip, *The Tragedy of a Generation: The Rise and Fall of Jewish Nationalism in Eastern Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 27.

ideas gain purchase in 1903 and not 1881? There are three credible reasons why this is the case—the Bund’s founding in 1897 consolidated a Yiddishist and socialist platform for Pale Jews, the revolutionary murmurs against the Tsarist regime created a structural opening for Jewish self-determination, and the need for the Bund to differentiate itself from other revolutionary parties in Tsarist Russia helped it to articulate a distinctly Yiddishist program for its constituents. Crucially, the Bund understood the power of linguistically targeted propaganda in order to rally different groups to its cause, utilizing Polish and Russian-language materials to convince non-Jewish populations of the Bund’s program to combat the pogroms. Instead of valuing assimilation as a means to unify the working class, the Bund embraced the coalition-building opportunities posed by linguistic difference in the territories administered by the Tsar.<sup>10</sup>

As previous chapters have noted, cultural particularity was understood to be disruptive to the Bolshevik project of liberating a unitary working class. Although early Bolshevik leaders such as Lenin and Stalin acknowledged that the oppression of Jews was evidence of the irredeemability of the Tsarist regime and the social organization of Russian society, a Bolshevik consensus against the promotion of ethno-religious particularity in a future socialist state had developed by the time of the 1903 RSDWP conference. In face of this opposition, why did the Bund double down on its commitment to Yiddish cultural autonomy? In his groundbreaking history of the Bund’s relationship with the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) after 1903, Joshua Zimmerman claims that the Bund’s Yiddishist program developed in response to Polish, and not Russian, culture. In response to the PPS’s success in uniting Polish and Yiddish-speaking Jewish and Christian workers in opposition to Tsarist rule, the Bund worked to develop a political organ which advocated specifically for the preservation of Yiddish cultural institutions against Polish

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<sup>10</sup> Susanne Marten-Finnis, “Outrage in Many Tongues: The Bund’s Response to the Kishinev Pogrom,” *Eastern European Jewish Affairs* 33, no. 1 (2003): 60.

or Russian assimilation. From the time of the 1881 pogrom to the failure of the first Russian revolution, the Jewish population of Poland grew by half a million. This growth can be reliably attributed to rapid industrialization, a trend which combined with the cultural and geographic isolation of Pale Jews created urban pockets of Yiddish cultural isolation. In Poland and the Pale of Settlement, over 95 percent of Jewish residents claimed Yiddish as their first language.<sup>11</sup> The threat posed by the PPS in organizing working-class Jews into a multi-lingual, multi-cultural coalition opposed to Tsarist rule contributed significantly to the Bund's oppositional promotion of a Yiddishist cultural program.

As the secondary source literature has indicated, the Bund's development of a program emphasizing the establishment of Yiddish language cultural institutions in the Pale of Settlement, and insisting on autonomy and protection for the Yiddish language stemmed from multiple sources. On the one hand, Polish nationalism in the face of Tsarist imperial aggression threatened to incorporate its significant share of the Jewish population into socialist struggle, splintering the organizing potential of the Pale's entire Jewish population into various camps. Alternately, anti-Semitic violence in the Pale strengthened Bundist claims that attacks against Jews in the Pale were culturally based, thereby warranting linguistic protections for the Jewish population of any post-Tsarist socialist state. The resilience of this political program, as I will show in the following section, was sustained in the diaspora through Bundist confrontations with the established structure of American civil society.

### **Bundist Yiddishists in the Diaspora**

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<sup>11</sup> Zimmerman, *Poles, Jews, and the Politics of Nationality*, 8-14.

The relationship between Yiddish-speaking socialists in the Pale of Settlement and members of the Jewish labor movement in the United States has been theorized by social scientists and historians over a period of decades. Historians have explored granular-level details of Yiddish's percolation into the majority-Jewish communities of the Lower East Side and sections of Brooklyn in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, scholars of this time period have encountered somewhat of a chicken and egg problem—while some insist that the strength of the Yiddish-speaking Jewish labor movement in the diaspora aided Bundist efforts abroad and strengthened socialism among Jews in the Pale of Settlement, others insist that it was the strong program of Yiddishism articulated by the Bund and affiliated organizations which led to the growth of a Yiddish-speaking Jewish socialist majority in the diaspora.<sup>12</sup> In the following section, I will turn from a historical discussion of the Bund's pre-diaspora project of Yiddishism to an examination of the transference between this cultural program and the growth of the Yiddish-speaking Jewish diaspora population in New York City. I argue that it is the exchange of ideas across continents, specifically the Bundist insistence on the establishment of cultural institutions dedicated to the preservation of Yiddish, that sustained what I call the “diaspora party”—imagined membership in a trans-continental, diasporic political community based around a shared set of ideological commitments and influences. In fact, the extent to which Yiddish-language cultural institutions took hold in the American diaspora indicates that the Bundist commitment to the preservation of Yiddish found fertile ground in the civil society structure of the American polity. In turn, this transference had a significant impact on the development of a stable American-Jewish identity in the Yiddish-speaking sections of Manhattan and Brooklyn in the inter-war period.

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<sup>12</sup> Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts*, 5.

## The Workmen's Circle

In the following section, I will discuss the *landsmanshaftn* organizations in America in which the Bund had maximal impact in spreading their commitments to Yiddishism. Of these mutual aid societies, the most influential and extant remains the Workmen's Circle, founded as a branch of the Arbeter Ring in New York City.<sup>13</sup> The year of the Workmen's Circle's founding is disputed—historian Moses Rischin puts it at 1900, while feminist theorist Mary McCune dates the organization back to 1892.<sup>14</sup> These two estimations bookend the founding of the Bund in Vilna in 1897, but the question of which organization preceded which should not obscure a larger truth—that members of the Bundist party diaspora had a significant impact on the scale, ambitions, and trajectory of the Workmen's Circle. Moreover, the Bund party diaspora attempted to utilize the Circle as a vehicle for the construction of an international Jewish population which viewed cultural and political struggles as deeply intertwined. As Michels argues, “Bundists...opposed [American Socialist Party Members’] dismissal of *yidishkeyt* (Jewishness) as irrelevant or harmful. According to Bundists, socialism ought to serve Jewish cultural and political goals. Socialism needed to be given a Jewish character...not simply translated into Yiddish.”<sup>15</sup> For the Bund, the promotion of *yidishkeyt* through cultural institutions dedicated to the preservation of Yiddish in the diaspora had far-reaching implications for the international socialist movement. The Bund viewed the transference of *yidishkeyt* from the diaspora to the Pale of Settlement and vice-versa as key to the empowerment and preservation of the Jewish working class.

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<sup>13</sup> Rischin, *The Promised City*, 105.

<sup>14</sup> Mary McCune, “Creating a Place for Women in a Socialist Brotherhood: Class and Gender Politics in the Workmen's Circle, 1892-1930,” *Feminist Studies* 28, no. 3 (2002): 585.

<sup>15</sup> Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts*, 157.

The Workmen's Circle also contributed significantly to the growth of other civil society organizations in New York City, notably the Jewish Labor Committee, which attempted to combat fascist and anti-semitic ideologies in the inter-war period. In 1939, the Committee anticipated that 16 percent of its income, disbursed in expenditures abroad and in the diaspora, would come from Workmen's Circle revenue. Both in the American diaspora and in Europe, these funds were earmarked for Jewish refugee resettlement, anti-fascist propaganda, and labor union boycotts against Nazi Germany.<sup>16</sup> Even in the late interregnum between wars, the Bund's vision of Yiddishism directly related to the safety of international Jewry—the question of cultural survival was directly tied to physical safety. Far from embodying the particularism that critics of the Bund accused the organization of, the Bund attempted to create a trans-continental socialist movement of culturally fortified Jews through promoting the diasporic transference of ideas. The Workmen's Circle, which operated hotels, Yiddish-language schools, and other pillars of a community organization, was fertile ground for members of the Bundist party diaspora to experiment with their expansive vision of Yiddishism.

Relatedly, the experience of the pogroms of 1881 and 1903, both of which contributed to the diasporic movement of Jews from the Pale of Settlement to Manhattan, bolstered the Bund's internationalist approach to preserving Yiddish language and culture. For Eastern European Jewry, the pogroms, expulsions, and anti-semitic propaganda that plagued the Pale of Settlement did not call for assimilation. Rather, Bundist party diaspora members used American civil society organizations dedicated to cultural preservation of Yiddish and refugee resettlement in tandem, as a worldwide defense of oppressed Jews under siege. For Bundists, the Workmen's

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<sup>16</sup> Proposed Budget for 1939 Jewish Labor Committee, Series I, IV-34, HIAS-HICEM Archives, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York, New York, United States of America.

Circle's collaboration with the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) and the Jewish Labor Committee (JLC) represented a realization of a worldview which privileged cultural survival and physical safety, without prioritizing one over the other.

### ***The Forward***

One of the most significant avenues through which Bundist party diaspora members attempted to uphold Yiddishism was the Yiddish-language press, primarily active in New York City. Of the various Yiddish-language papers and periodicals that sprung up in New York City, the most influential was the Jewish daily *Forward*, spearheaded by prominent publisher Abraham Cahan. The emergence, longevity, and success of the *Forward* demonstrates not only the influence of these dailies in the Jewish socialist political activities of the Bundist diaspora, but also the relationship of the Yiddish-speaking Eastern European Jewish diaspora to the presses. As Rischin recounts, "At the founding of the *Forward* at Walhalla Hall in 1897, workmen filled collection plates with love offerings of prized pocket watches, watch chains, and personal jewelry."<sup>17</sup> The extent to which the *Forward* became embedded in the political activities of trade unionists, Socialist party members, and endeared itself to the diaspora population reflects the Bundist vision of a positive Yiddishism which empowered the masses. Affirming that the Yiddish-speaking diaspora had the right to a daily which spoke to its needs in its first language, rather than the more dignified and respectable German, English, or Lithuanian, reified a key aspect of Bundist ideology, which viewed Yiddish as a tool to organize the Jewish working classes. The *Forward* served a similar function in the diaspora, acting as a vector through which Bundist ideational commitments could be expressed and could find a natural constituency.

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<sup>17</sup> Rischin, *The Promised City*, 159.

The *Forward*, or *Forverts* in Yiddish, was founded in New York City in 1897 as the result of a “factional dispute” which split a group of dissidents from the first Yiddish-language daily, *Dos abend blat* (The Evening Sheet).<sup>18</sup> The establishment of *Forverts* influenced the Bund to create *Der Veker* (The Awakener) in the following years, mirroring the *Forward* by disseminating socialist rhetoric through a Yiddish-language forum. However, far from simply encouraging the use of Yiddish-language dailies as a tactic through which to organize constituencies, Bundists also directly participated in the editorial trajectory of *Forverts* in the diaspora. As Michels recounts, two Bundist revolutionaries, Ben-Tsion Hofman (known as Tsivion) and A.S. Zaks, wrote regularly for the *Forverts* after immigrating to America. In fact, Tsivion participated in *Der Veker*’s creation in the Pale of Settlement prior to his migration to the United States.<sup>19</sup> Both Bundists understood the unique opportunity that the Yiddish-language press offered the socialist project—a forum through which Bundist party diaspora members could communicate with the Jewish Eastern European immigrant masses in their colloquial tongue. While the establishment of a Yiddish-language daily in the Pale of Settlement allowed for the basic survival of the cultural institutions which the Bund viewed as vital to the safety of an oppressed Jewish minority, in the United States, the task of the Yiddish-language press was in part to advocate for cultural survival against the forces of assimilation.

The collaboration between Abraham Cahan, the *Forverts*’ founder, and the Bundists in the editorial rank-and-file, was shortly threatened by a labor dispute which highlighted the stark tactical differences between the various factions competing for page space in the Yiddish press. In the winter of 1909, Cahan abruptly terminated the contract of a popular writer, who was then supported by his colleagues in a protest against the firing and in favor of more favorable terms of

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<sup>18</sup> Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts*, 95.

<sup>19</sup> Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts*, 162.



employment. The dissonance between the Bundist editorial staff, who envisioned *Forverts* as a laboratory for cultural production which resisted the workplace exploitation of capitalism, and the business-minded Cahan could not have been more stark. Crucially, Tsivion and Zaks envisioned not only a Yiddish daily oriented towards the Jewish socialist movement, but one which was actually undergirded by a party apparatus. As Michels explains, “[In the Pale] party leaders determined editorial content according to political imperatives, not commercial interests or financial gain...Tsivion and Zaks wanted to protect the *Forvert*’s socialist integrity against the logic of the commercial market. They wanted to subsume the *Forverts* under a political authority.”<sup>20</sup> The dissonance between the Bundist party diaspora and Cahan, who promoted managerial interests above the claim to labor rights advanced by the fired writers, is exemplified by the diverging visions for the future of the daily.

The short-lived conflict between members of the Bundist party diaspora and the management of *Forverts* reveals the roadblocks faced by Bundists in their attempts to establish a durable Yiddishist politics in the United States. While revolutionary socialists might have been given a voice by Cahan in the editorial section, the actual function of the daily in the Yiddish-speaking world of Jewish New York could not be subordinated to Bundist interests. The dispersive effects of the diasporic movement between the Pale and the U.S. scattered the main party apparatus, and the structural influence of the Bund in implementing policy which could further the preservation of Yiddish language in culture could not extend to commandeering the most popular Yiddish daily in the country for the Bundist party goals. The structural conditions of the New York daily market allowed Bundist party diaspora members to advocate for cultural preservation and influence its trajectory. However, these same party diaspora members found it

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<sup>20</sup> Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts*, 165.

difficult or impossible to turn the *Forverts* into a tool for the goals of the international party, even as their participation in the production of the daily contributed significantly to the views of its readership in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Conclusion: The Bifurcation of the Party from Yiddishism**

The experience of Bundist party diaspora members in advocating for Yiddishism in the U.S. reveals the difficulty faced by Bundists in reconstituting the party in their new setting. The panoply of civil society organizations created by immigrant Jews reflected the municipal structures confronted by Bundists in the U.S.—a stable party duopoly, a Democratic party machine dedicated to patronage, and a regime invulnerable to threats from revolutionary socialists. More importantly, Bundists discovered that although they could influence the cultural institutions that perpetuated Yiddishism in the diaspora, they could not control them. While in the Pale, the revolutionary circumstances of Tsarist vulnerability, coupled with the insularity of the Pale itself, allowed the Bund to constitute and reconstitute the party apparatus in accordance with the democratic wishes of the Jewish working classes, the entrenched nature of American political institutions allowed for much less innovation on the front of Yiddishism. Demanding platforms of Yiddish-language schools, presses, and other organizations, intended to be implemented in any future socialist state, was no longer an option for Bundist party diaspora members. Instead, the Bund had to compete with other Jewish socialists, including many non-Yiddish speakers, for the right to establish cultural hegemony.

More importantly, the Bund's success in advocating for Yiddishism as a part of a unitary socialist party which exerted control over every organ of influence in the Pale was facilitated by the dire circumstances of life and death faced by the Jewish population. In the Pale, the Bund

argued for a unified, Yiddish-speaking, empowered Jewish working class who proudly belonged to a political party which fought for the enfranchisement of its cultural rights in a socialist state which integrated minority concerns. The unity of trade union agitation, socialist principles, and Yiddish-language cultural preservation allowed for the project of Yiddishism to be envisioned by the Bund in a much less fragmented set of circumstances than faced the organization in the diaspora. The process of cultural production in the United States could not be dictated by a party apparatus from the top down, but rather took the form of a competition between Yiddish speakers of various political and sectarian backgrounds to sculpt the changing landscape of the Yiddish daily press. While the Bund might have viewed the Yiddish-speaking Eastern European Jewish population as a constituency to be organized, these immigrants were as much consumers as they were subjects.

### Chapter 3

#### **Fight of a Lifetime: The Bund's Contentious Entry into the American Jewish Labor Movement**

*The overwhelming bias of modern Jewish history has been towards the life of the mind rather than the toil of the hand.*

-Rebecca Kobrin, "The Chosen People in the Chosen Land"<sup>1</sup>

*Dominating the entire history of the Bund was an almost obsessive concern with human and Jewish dignity, and a scathing contempt for self-humiliation and servility, particularly that attributed to, and gleefully observed within the class enemy—the Jewish bourgeoisie.*

-Israel Getzler, "The Jewish Bund and the Dignity of Man"

#### **Introduction: Organizing the Yiddish-Speaking "Masses"**

The final chapter of this thesis will address perhaps the most practical and tangible contribution of the Bund to American Jewish diasporic politics in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century—the distinct brand of trade unionism subscribed to by the Bund and other Jewish revolutionary socialist organizations in the Pale of Settlement. The central concern of this chapter is as follows—how did the clash between German Jewish immigrants to the United States and the trade union movement they formed on the one hand, and Bundists eager to implement their programmatic and unitary approach to politics on the other, shape Jewish American political identity? As I will discuss later on in the chapter, the emergence of German-Jewish hegemony over the Jewish labor movement in New York City in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century posed a significant challenge to Bundist members of the party diaspora. In contrast to the German-Jewish population, most Bundists and

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<sup>1</sup> Rebecca Kobrin, *Chosen Capital: The Jewish Encounter with American Capitalism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Press, 2012), 2.

Jewish immigrants from the Pale of Settlement were Yiddish-speaking and working-class, a divide which created a great deal of cultural and class-based enmity between the two groups in trade union disputes.<sup>2</sup>

I will argue that the dispute between different geographical and political groups of the Jewish diaspora to the United States over trade union campaigns challenged the ability of the Bund to assert itself as the sole representative of the Jewish worker, and this conflict resulted in class conflict between different groups of Jewish immigrants and the eventual integration of Bundist trade unionism into the general Jewish labor movement of the Lower East Side. As historian Rebecca Kobrin has pointed out, much scholarship of the Jewish relationship to U.S. capitalism has rested either on anecdotalism or conjecture, creating a “lacuna” of knowledge on the subject: “we know very little about the real or imagined role of Jews in the creation, expansion, and maintenance of American capitalism.”<sup>3</sup> One way in which I propose to fill this gap is to examine the various political forces which exerted ideational influence on the development of a working-class consciousness among Jewish immigrants to the United States. After all, it is not merely the owners of capital who determine the shape of the political and economic system in a municipality, state, or country. Instead, political parties dedicated to revolutionary socialism in the pre-diasporic period had a demonstrably profound impact on shaping the ways in which Jews perceived capitalism in their new home country, and assessed their ability to participate in or disrupt that system. Other scholars, such as Bernard K. Johnpoll, have asserted the marginality of the Bund due to “particularist” demands waged in labor struggles. However, as I will demonstrate, it was the very specificity of the Bund’s merging of

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<sup>2</sup> Hadassa Kosak, *Cultures of Opposition: Jewish Immigrant Workers, New York City, 1881-1905* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 108.

<sup>3</sup> Kobrin, *Chosen Capital*, 2.

culture and anti-capitalism which allowed the party diaspora to assert itself into the center of debates about the trajectory of the Jewish labor movement in the United States.

In fact, it was the very advocacy on behalf of the “Yiddish-speaking masses,” so disdained by Jewish immigrants from Western and Central Europe which allowed the Bund to build ideational hegemony in certain sections of working-class Jewish New York. The promotion of Yiddish-language cultural institutions, and the defense of the unassimilated, poor Eastern European Jewish immigrant created a sense of in-group solidarity, as well as a defense of a culture worth fighting for against the forces of American assimilation. The Bundist party diaspora’s attempts to build an ideational hegemony among the Jewish working classes of New York in turn allowed members of the diaspora to more effectively assert demands in trade union struggles. The muscular presence of Bundists in factionalizing labor disputes in New York City gained notice from some of the most prominent Jewish trade unionist organizations, especially in the post-war period. Eventually, organizations such as the Jewish Labor Committee (JLC) were making trans-continental requests for Bundist representation at JLC annual meetings, demonstrating the Bund’s ability to cement itself as a constituency impossible to ignore.<sup>4</sup>

Scholar of the Bund Jonathan Frankel has taken a significantly more demure assessment of the Bund’s influence in the Jewish labor movement, asserting that “The graduates of the Bund in America were frequently able as individuals to achieve important positions of influence and leadership within the preexisting labor movement. On the other hand, their attempts to recreate some approximate reincarnation of the Bund never achieved more than marginal success.”<sup>5</sup> This

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<sup>4</sup> Letter from JLC Committee to Central Committee of the Polish Bund, November 14, 1946, NYUAG91-A1, Jewish Labor Committee Records, 1934-1947, Tamiment Library and Roger F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York, New York, United States.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Frankel, “The Bundists in America and the ‘Zionist Problem,’” in *The Emergence of Modern Jewish Politics: Bundism and Zionism in Eastern Europe*, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003), 196.

view of Bundist participation in the American Jewish labor movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century views the Bundist metric of “success” within strictly structural confines. Johnpoll also reiterates this discourse in his discussion of the Bund’s plight in Poland, arguing that “Faced with preclusion from an actual role in the government of the state, individual Bundists could assume a certain importance by directing the destiny of the party itself. The factional struggles within the Bund allowed the Bundists to become involved in political activity in which victory was possible, even if the victory was within a powerless party.”<sup>6</sup> Frankel and Johnpoll both view Bundist success or failure as a function of the party’s varying levels of integration into the formal state apparatuses of the polity in which the party found itself. The ability of the Bund to influence politics, these scholars argue, is mostly determined by the structural presence of the party within the functions of state governance. To these scholars, the Bund should be measured on the yardstick of a constitutive party machine—one which anchors or is anchored by a robust trade union movement in the polity.

However, as I have previously argued, the influence of political parties, even when fragmented by diasporic movement, can and should be measured by more than the party’s structural power within a formal polity. In this chapter, I will measure the influence of Bundist ideology on the Jewish American trade union movement, and I will demonstrate the resilience of the ideational commitments formed in pre-diasporic times through Bundist union agitation. As Israel Getzler memorably states, the ethos of the Bund is described well as “a deep and consistent dedication to the patient, painstaking work of organizing and educating the downtrodden Jewish proletarian masses, with the objective of turning them into both conscious and dignified fighters and upright Jews.”<sup>7</sup> This insistence on the dignity of the worker, the

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<sup>6</sup> Johnpoll, *The Politics of Futility*, 168.

<sup>7</sup> Getzler, “The Jewish Bund and the Dignity of Man,” 345.

refusal to sacrifice working-class Jewish culture through assimilation, and the discipline required to achieve large-scale labor victories all percolated into Bundist activity in the trade union movement in the United States. The divisions sewn between other groups who were a part of the Jewish diaspora to the US and the Bund extended an enmity which had existed in the Bund's politics in the pre-diasporic period: a willingness to mark the Jewish ruling classes as an enemy of the Bundist's ideological project. Therefore, as I will demonstrate, the Bundist party diaspora's primary influence on the Jewish labor movement can be traced through ideational commitments which created new fissures and battle lines in the trade union movement itself.

### **Fire Fight: The Roots of Bundist Trade Unionism in the Pale**

For the purposes of establishing a chronology consistent with the advent of trade unionism within the Bund pre- and post-diaspora, I will largely focus on the perils of the inter-war period for the Bund, especially in Poland after the Bund was formally outlawed in Russia. However, the political activities of the Bund in the Pale of Settlement, and later in Poland and Lithuania, were heavily punctuated by the constant threat of physical annihilation from the beginning. This stark reality, more than any other, guided the Bund's pre-diasporic agitation for worker's rights and participation in organized trade union activities in the inter-war period. In fact, I argue that the conditions of violence that the Bund was subjected to in its campaigns to win worker's rights in inter-war Eastern Europe largely set the tone for the clashes with the leadership of the American Jewish labor movement post-diaspora.

In the inter-war period, anti-Semitic formal state policies in Bundist stronghold countries such as Poland rendered the Bund's struggles for labor rights a fight on multiple fronts. As Johnpoll shows, by the interwar period the Polish state had found a way to support its large



armed forces through disproportionately taxing urban areas, which had large Jewish populations. Additionally, the “Polonization” of many industrial enterprises through nationalization, which employed thousands of working-class Jews, resulted in a massive loss of employment for the urban Jewish population of Poland in the 1930s. This state exclusion from work, coupled with informal discrimination by municipal governments, created a dire situation for working-class Jews in Poland struggling to maintain subsistence conditions for their families. The Polish state’s convoluted process of obtaining a license as an artisan trade worker was further eroded in the 1920s, when ordinances were passed making it more difficult for Jewish artisans to pass entry exams.<sup>8</sup> These near-emergency circumstances prompted the Bund in Poland to intervene in order to stem the tide of anti-Semitic discrimination. For the Bund, the issues of worker’s rights and physical survival soon became intertwined. This existential threat to organized Jewish life in Poland prompted the Bund to direct action to preserve the safety of their comrades. The Bund soon resumed a relationship with the PPS, working together to organize work stoppages to pressure Polish business owners not to terminate their Jewish employees. In one memorable incident, the Bund and PPS together saved the jobs of 11 Jewish schoolteachers by threatening a disruptive strike between the Jewish and Polish teachers.<sup>9</sup> For the Bund in this period, solidarity was not merely a mechanism through which working-class Jews could improve their material conditions, but a *precondition of survival*.

The extreme violence which defined this period of Bundist organizing in Poland was also a mechanism of Soviet Russian repression against any non-communist revolutionary parties remaining in the former Pale during World War II. In the 1940s, in the midst of the annihilation of the Jewish population of Poland by the Nazi regime, the Stalin regime was attempting to

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<sup>8</sup> Johnpoll, *The Politics of Futility*, 210.

<sup>9</sup> Johnpoll, *The Politics of Futility*, 211.

conduct a purge of anti-Stalinist socialists. In 1943, the Stalin regime likely executed Henryk Ehrlich and Victor Alter, who helped lead the Jewish Labor Bund in Poland in the inter-war period. In the aftermath of the murders, Stalin's regime published propaganda alleging the fidelity of these Bundists to the Nazi regime, an absurd charge which was thoroughly rebutted by *The New Internationalist*, the anti-Stalinist communist daily: "Ehrlich and Alter, leaders of a movement and a people which have been butchered by the Nazi barbarians, opponents of fascism to their last days were murdered by Stalin on the charge that they were German agents."<sup>10</sup> The assassinations, likely in retaliation for the anti-Soviet activities of certain Bundists in Poland, delivered a crushing blow to the morale of the Polish Bund. While enduring factional disputes with the PPS, whose solidarity with Bundist organizers had been crucial in holding out against formal policies of discrimination against Jewish workers, Stalinist anti-Bundist purges threatened the very basis of that alliance. Violence, discrimination, and the erosion of critical relationships with Polish political parties created a treacherous terrain for the Polish Bund during World War II. The genocidal violence of the Nazi regime against Polish Jews rendered the Bund's organizing position untenable.

The reality facing the Bund in Poland in the inter-war period and during World War II lays bare the dual challenge facing the organization, one which would come to heavily influence the Bund's participation in the Jewish labor movement in America. On the one hand, the Bund was involved in a positive struggle to alleviate the economic pressures faced by the urban Jewish population in Poland, a fight which was waged on multiple fronts by the Bund and other socialist organizations. On the same note, the Jewish population of Poland also faced genocidal violence and formal laws excluding their participation in a variety of organized trades which Jews had

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<sup>10</sup> The New Internationalist, "The Murder of Ehrlich and Alter," in *Jewish Radicals: A Documentary History*, ed. Tony Michels (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 267.

thrived in for centuries in Poland. The duality of this oppression was felt keenly by Bundists and working class Jews, many of whom struggled to make the diasporic movement to America in this period. The relationship between existential violence from the German, Polish, and Soviet states, coupled with exclusion and betrayal by other political parties in the region, and trade union organizing had a powerful resonance in the minds of Bundists migrating to America.

### **Class Conflict in the Diaspora: The Bund's Vision of Trade Unionism in America**

In the next section of this chapter, I will discuss how the Bund's experience of organizing under conditions of genocidal violence and marginalization shaped the organization's participation in the American Jewish labor movement. As I will show, the profound experience of life-threatening disenfranchisement established a trauma related to the labor struggles that the Bund engaged in pre-diaspora and entrenched the firmly held ideals of Jewish cultural preservation and worker's dignity in the US. While Bundist party diaspora members no longer faced genocidal state violence, pogroms, or much of the formal state discrimination encountered in Poland or the Soviet Union, these refugees found meaning in advocating for a culturally autonomous, economically empowered Jewish diaspora. This advocacy took shape in adversarial actions against Jewish immigrants in the United States who were seen to participate in the exploitation of the Jewish working classes, a phenomenon which for Bundist diaspora members recalled the humiliation and indignities of state oppression in Eastern Europe.

An important starting point for exploring the structural relationship between Bundist ideational commitments to trade unionism which empowered the Jewish working class in New York can be found in the relationship between Bundists and the *Forverts*, an important organizing force for the international Bund in the period before World War I. Prior to the inter-

war period, as Nora Levin argues, the Jewish labor movement in New York was weakened by a lack of organizational discipline, natural constituency, and ideological conflict. However, early members of the Bundist party diaspora found consistency and haven in the pages of the *Forverts*, and especially in the patronage and support of its publisher, Abraham Cahan.<sup>11</sup> However, this relationship subsequently soured, and Bundist writers for the paper found conflict with its publishers under the auspices of labor abuses. After several writers were fired from *Forverts* in 1909, Bundist writers for the paper organized thousands of strikers to rally at Clinton Hall against the paper's management. The Bundist writers also organized many branches of the Arbeter Ring to formally sue the paper for its unexplained terminations, a suit which the paper was forced to settle.<sup>12</sup> The ferocity with which the Bundist writers endeavored to defend the fired writers reflected a labor militancy forged in the fire of violence, persecution, and marginalization. Convinced that the incursion of labor rights against fellow Jewish workers would lead to further indignities, the Bundist party diaspora members did everything possible to rectify the circumstances and retain the writer's jobs—a struggle much like the organization faced in pre-war Poland.

### **The Bund and the Contradictions of Diaspora Class Struggle**

In the introduction to her groundbreaking account of Jewish diaspora class struggle in New York City in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, historian Hadassa Kosak outlines various perspectives taken by sociologists, political scientists, and other scholars in classifying the nature of this particular site of class conflict. Among sociological and political explanations, Kosak also

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<sup>11</sup> Nora Levin, "The Influence of the Bund on the Jewish Socialist Movement in America," in *Gratz College Annual of Jewish Studies*, ed. Isidore David Passow and Samuel Tobias Lachs (Philadelphia: Gratz College Press, 1976), 68.

<sup>12</sup> Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts*, 163.

identifies an “ethnic identity” approach to understanding Eastern European Jewish class conflict in New York City, championed by Kathleen Neils Conzen and others, who define ethnicity as “a process of construction or invention which incorporates, adapts, and amplifies preexisting communal solidarities, cultural attributes, and historical memories.”<sup>13</sup> While I am not interested in engaging debates over ethnicity which rightly problematize essentialist characterizations of Jews as possessing a homogenous “nature” which could be used for nefarious political purposes, Conzen’s perspective is valuable insofar as it refers to the consolidation of identity as process-based. While Conzen is principally concerned with how to understand ethnic groups as unitary peoples, I aim to trouble this homogenizing narrative through demonstrating not how processes of identity construction incorporate, adapt, or amplify in-group belonging, but rather fragment, disrupt, and challenge a unitary notion of identity. In the party diaspora, Bundists were forced to reconcile an ideology of worldwide cultural-national autonomy for all Jews with the stark reality of exclusion and hierarchy within diaspora Jewish communities. After all, the dual Bundist goals of class emancipation for the Jewish proletariat and cultural-national emancipation for world Jewry met institutional and ideational limits in the American diaspora, as the material interests of Eastern European Jewish workers were often counterposed with those of culturally assimilated, upwardly mobile Western European Jewish populations.

In his writings on Jewish cultural-national autonomy which presaged the Bundist demand for socialist cultural-national autonomy, Jewish historian Simon Dubnow anticipated this tension, arguing that “the process of disintegration has already manifested itself to such a degree that it is apparent where the danger lurks. Among the Jewish upper classes in the nineteenth century, the communal center shifted from our internal national life to the external surrounding

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<sup>13</sup> Kosak, *Cultures of Opposition*, 9.

environment, and into the sphere of foreign national interests. The pillar of our community moved from within our national circle to beyond it, thus creating an unstable equilibrium, a dangerous national vacillation.”<sup>14</sup> Here, in an attempt to forge unity between Jews of different national origins, diasporic landing points, and class positions, Dubnow indicts the Jewish ruling class for an unraveling of collective identity politics waged on behalf of world Jewry. Whoever is to blame for the contentiousness of class struggle within diaspora Jewish communities, Dubnow’s critique reflects a conflict built into the socialist cultural-national autonomy model furthered by the Bund—between proletarian class struggle on the one hand, and Jewish national liberation on the other. However, as I have discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, although many scholars of the Bund argue that this ideology posed a seemingly irreconcilable contradiction, I will show in the following section that Bundist leaders in the Jewish labor movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in America ironically acted as agents of reconciliation within the diaspora Jewish working class. By cementing positions of influence within the Jewish labor movement and employing Bundist labor tactics on behalf of the Jewish working class as a whole, Bundist party diaspora members succeeded in practically rectifying this internal contradiction through class struggle.

### **German Jews and Pale Jews in Class Struggle**

As Kosak describes in her sweeping history of Jewish diasporic entrants to the U.S. labor movement in the pre-World War I era, there was significant political and cultural conflict between the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century German Jewish immigrant population, and their Eastern European

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<sup>14</sup> Simon Dubnow, “Jews As a Spiritual (Cultural-Historical) Nation Among Political Nations,” in *Jews and Diaspora Nationalism: Writings on Jewish Peoplehood in Europe and the United States*, ed. Simon Rabinovitch (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2012), 44.

counterparts. However, I argue that it was this very dissonance which created an atmosphere for Bundist party diaspora members to provide critical linguistic, tactical, and political expertise in organizing Jewish workers in New York City, allowing their version of trade unionism to gain currency. At the outset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Jewish Americans from the German diasporic wave insisted stridently that Eastern European Jews ought not to immigrate to the United States, and should instead advocate for political and social rights within their respective polities. As Tsarist political repression, pogroms, and revolutionary failure created an untenable position for many Eastern European Jews, especially in the Pale of Settlement, these Jewish communities arrived in droves on the shores of Ellis Island, largely populating the Lower East Side of Manhattan and challenging the numerical majority that German Jewish diasporic populations had previously claimed in the U.S.

As the secondary source literature readily acknowledges, members of the Bund who immigrated to the U.S. during this period made several successful individual entrances to the Jewish labor movement, previously dominated by German Jewish populations who regarded their Eastern European comrades as unassimilable (Rischin 1977, Kosak 2000, Michels 2005). Some of these accounts dismiss the participation of individual Bundists in the Jewish labor movement as marginal. However, the experiences of Bundists organizing workers in the Pale against conditions of death and destruction allowed Bundist party diaspora members to import these lessons into the new municipal setting of New York City. As the conflict between editorial workers at *Forverts* and the ownership demonstrates, the Bund played an active role in early 20<sup>th</sup> century labor conflicts within the ranks of Jewish organizations. The experience of representing the interests of marginalized Jewish workers in the Pale primed Bundist party diaspora members to participate in the struggles outside of the confines of inter-community Jewish conflict.

While the attitudes of German Jewish diaspora members in the U.S. might have remained spoiled against their downtown, Eastern European Jewish counterparts, the participation of Bundists in the Jewish labor movement allowed for the cohesion of Jewish workers from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Using knowledge acquired under conditions of extreme duress, Bundist party diaspora members incorporated Eastern European, Yiddish-speaking Jews into labor unions in New York City, making use of the cultural divisions within the larger Jewish diasporic community in order to gain a foothold in the movement. The unique historical and institutional knowledge held by Bundist party diaspora members helped not only to cement the influence of the party diaspora in the Jewish labor movement, but helped to unify the movement itself.



### **Conclusion: Who is a Jew?**

The central theoretical inquiry of this thesis has been as follows—how are political identities formed? The Jewish Labor Bund is a curious place to begin this query—after all, the Bund was a political party which failed to survive past the Russian Revolution in the Pale of Settlement, and its membership was nearly destroyed in Poland during World War II. However, these circumstances make tracing the trajectory of Bundist ideational commitments all the more intriguing, since one would expect an organization which faced so much adversity to have little influence on the identity formation of the Jewish diaspora. However, as I have shown, the Bund had a strong *ideational* impact on the organization of Jewish working class culture in New York City. This impact can be measured through the many interventions that Bundist party diaspora members made in several of the major struggles of Jewish political organizing in this period, including the attempts to establish a robust Yiddish-speaking political majority on the Lower East Side and Brooklyn and the labor struggles both with and against Jewish institutions in America.

The impacts of Bundist ideational commitments, whether those be advantageous or detrimental to the material interests of the Jewish diaspora, are felt in the legacy of the institutions that the Bund interacted with in America. The Bund's encounters with American political institutions, some of which were thoroughly Jewish in character, left a marked impact on the participants of these struggles. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, American Jewish political activity is host to a resurgence of left-wing Jewish organizing. Groups like Jewish Voice for Peace, an explicitly anti-Zionist organization advocating for a unitary Israeli state which grants the franchise to every citizen in Palestine, has had audiences with several members of the U.S. Congress. IfNotNow, a Jewish advocacy group which has attempted to stake out a position for

left-wing Jews in U.S. politics, effectively pressured several members of the U.S. Senate to condemn Israeli responses to Palestinian protest activity in Gaza. Never Again Action, recently created to protest the detention of migrants in ICE facilities, successfully staged several direct actions in August which stirred the national consciousness.

How can this resurgence of left-wing Jewish political organizing, one which recognizes the traumatic and corrosive impact of violence and marginalization on migrant and stateless populations, be credibly explained in this period of American nationalism? A century earlier, the Bund struggled to fight for Jewish dignity and survival against forces of unthinkable adversity. As I have shown, this engendered a deep recognition of the scars born by populations facing conditions of state oppression among Bundist party diaspora members, a cautiousness that extended even when these party diaspora members were granted a semblance of peace in the diaspora. The impacts of Bundist trade unionism, cultural-national autonomy socialism, and Yiddishism helped the diaspora Jewish population of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century consolidate identity through struggle through time and space—against the circumstances of history which snuffed out the organization’s chances to establish a state apparatus which could credibly hold their ambitions. However, the clever innovations that party diaspora members achieved—to help consolidate an identity of resilience, labor militancy, and cultural pride—resonated deeply with the American Jewish diaspora as a whole. It is worth examining further whether these struggles have influenced modern left-wing Jewish politics, a phenomenon not witnessed on this scale since the Bundists made their mark on American shores one hundred years ago.

### **Towards an Understanding of Judaism as a Historical-Institutional Experience**

“It hurts so badly when people try and erase Bernie’s Jewish identity because it looks a lot like mine.” These were the words tearfully spoken by a young Jewish organizer for the presidential campaign of Senator Bernie Sanders in 2020. At present, the self-described democratic socialist is locked in a race for the Democratic Party’s nomination with former Vice President Joe Biden, and looks likely to be the most viable Jewish presidential candidate in U.S. history. Sanders’s candidacy has dovetailed with the resurgence of Jewish left-wing civil society organizations in the U.S., with Sanders receiving the endorsement of IfNotNow, a powerful group opposing the occupation of Palestine by the Israeli government. In their statement of endorsement, IfNotNow’s co-founder Dani Moscovitch articulated the group’s support for the senator, claiming that “As a movement of young Jews fighting for freedom and dignity for all, we are proud to be the first Jewish organization to endorse Senator Bernie Sanders for President. We are inspired and moved to action by Bernie and the #NotMeUs movement, which deeply embodies the Jewish call to pursue justice and repair our broken world. As much of the American Jewish and political establishments are uniting to stop his campaign and protect the status quo, we are called to get off the sidelines.”<sup>1</sup>

Closely observed, IfNotNow’s statement makes several notable rhetorical moves. For one, it identifies the political organization as helmed by members of an in-group—in this case, young Jews. Next, the statement establishes IfNotNow’s choice to endorse Sanders as a paradigmatic shift in the political activities of the “American Jewish and political establishments,” which the organization implicitly counterposes against what it views as Jewish values—the “call to pursue justice and repair our broken world.” The statement not only

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<sup>1</sup> Yonah Lieberman, “‘This Fight is Not Over,’ IfNotNow Movement Will Endorse Bernie Sanders for President, Becoming the First Jewish Organization to Endorse the Jewish Candidate,” IfNotNow Press, IfNotNow, March 11, 2020.

identifies Sanders as aligned with “deeply Jewish” values, but also implies that the group has a strong claim to represent politicized Jews as a whole, rather than the corrupt establishment organizations which merely *claim* to represent American Jewry. Moreover, the IfNotNow statement contains a call to “get off the sidelines”—an indication that the group understands its agential, rather than passive, role in consolidating the politicization of Jewish identity. By endorsing Sanders for president, IfNotNow identifies themselves as members of an in-group, attaches a set of moral values to that in-group, and crucially, acknowledges that the organization has a role to play in the practice of politics. IfNotNow is not only endorsing Sanders in their agential capacity as a civil society organization, or as a group of citizens, but as Jews.

This is not to valorize or otherwise acknowledge IfNotNow’s theory of change as correct *per se*. Rather, it is important to notice how IfNotNow’s statement invokes a certain view of identity which contains possibilities for present and future political activity, and, crucially, by *invoking the past*. For IfNotNow, Jewish American political identity is not merely a matter of inherited historical lessons, attributes, or political agency, but rather, it contains all three. Politicized Jews have an opportunity to claim the mantle of Judaism to advocate on behalf of a certain set of ideational commitments. In the case of IfNotNow, those commitments include ending the occupation of Palestinian territories, while other Jewish organizations have claimed the identitarian mantle to advocate for the exact opposite. The political practice of tying questions of identity and ideology together is barely new. However, in a political setting in which many different groups claim the mantle of identity for specific ideational aims, how are students of identity to negotiate between these various claims, to make normative judgments regarding which ideological claims correspond to “true” expressions of identity?

Attempting to understand which ideological claims “truthfully” correspond to the content of identity—trying to orchestrate an identity metaphysics of sorts—is not the aim of this thesis. Instead, I have shown how an organization of political agents belonging to an in-group attached a set of ideational commitments to the question of Jewish identity, and in turn influenced the development of American Jewish political identity through their encounter with American political institutions. The durability of these ideational commitments waxed and waned with the outcomes of different instances of institutional encounter, as well as the historical experiences which wedded Bundists to their ideational commitments to various degrees.

### **The Comparative Benefits of the Process-Based View of Identity**

There are a multitude of advantages to the view of identity which I have laid out in the preceding chapters. As the fate of Bundist party diaspora demonstrates, identity must be understood as more than a set of observable attributes—whether those attributes are determined by members of an in-group or articulated by an institution. Adhering to views of identity which emphasize attributes first and foremost typically ignore the often multiple and competing claimants to an identity group. For instance, if American Jewish political identity is determined solely by a fixed set of ideological preferences, or a group of shared historical experiences, which agents decide the meaning inscribed in those experiences, meaning which is often transmitted into ideological beliefs?

As Brubaker implies, there are moments when identity hardens and calcifies—moments in which identity becomes salient to members of an in-group. In my view, moments of identity calcification can be found as members of an in-group test ideational commitments against new institutional settings. However, the “success” or “failure” of an inherited ideational commitment

in a novel institutional setting is also influenced by the conditions under which the relationship between in-group identity and ideology is forged. In the first chapter of this thesis, I gave a comprehensive overview of the formation of the Bundist commitment to cultural-national autonomy in the critical inter-revolutionary period in Tsarist administered territories. The Bund's practical vision of a federated socialist polity in which Jews enjoyed, in theory, some level of control over day-to-day life, was extinguished by the insistence of dominant revolutionary factions that such a state structure would be particularist. These political differences between RSDWP members, Tsarist allies, and Bund members not only led to the extinction of the cultural-national autonomy polity model in the post-1905 revolutionary setting, but also contributed to the diaspora of Bundist party members to New York City in this period. The physical violence that accompanied the inability of Bundist party agents to successfully integrate their ideational commitments into the revolutionary milieu precipitated Bundist party *dispersion*.

As I show in the following section, Bundist party diaspora members encountered significant obstacles in re-articulating the party in the New York City municipal setting, as well as in national U.S. politics. The stability of the U.S. regime, the existence of the party duopoly, and the relative marginality of the U.S. socialist party all made it difficult for the Bundist party diaspora to find a vehicle through which to test their ideational commitments to cultural-national autonomy. However, as Bundist party diaspora members such as Representative Meyer London forayed into U.S. electoral politics through the SPA, they were able to rhetorically style themselves as representatives of the Jewish-American diaspora—not only as workers, or immigrants, but as the oppressed Jewish minority population. This rhetorical commitment did not negate the marginalization that the cultural-national autonomy ideology faced post-diaspora. As the relationship between Bundist party diaspora members and the SPA shows, even symbolic

international commitments to the Bundist cultural-national autonomy vision were challenged by the anti-communist Red Scare in the inter-war United States and the Palmer Raids. Defeated on multiple fronts, Bundist cultural-national autonomy aspirations became marginal as party diaspora members recommitted themselves to other programmatic strategies for socialist self-determination in the diaspora.

Two other such ideational commitments fared much better when Bundist party diaspora members tested them against the institutions of the American polity. The Bundist politicization of the Yiddish language in the Pale of Settlement served as a powerful tool to organize Jewish workers, as well as to advocate for cultural concerns against assimilationist forces in the revolutionary vanguard and within middle-class Jewish society. Furthermore, the Bund exploited linguistic differences in Polish, Russian, and Yiddish speaking populations in order to propagandize on behalf of their organization, a tactic which formed the kind of cultural-linguistic cohesion which would endure the diaspora. Once in America, the Bundist commitment to Yiddish-language preservation translated into encounters with community-based organizing in the form of the Workmen's Circle, and class conflict involving the burgeoning Yiddish-language press. The Yiddish-language press, most prominently *Forverts*, provided an avenue for Bundist party diaspora members to advocate for better conditions for writing staff, to set forth political priorities for the densely packed constituencies of the Lower East Side, and to call attention to the dire conditions faced by Jews remaining in the Pale. However, the pluralistic nature of the Yiddish press in the U.S, with several Yiddish-speaking political actors jockeying for influence over the predominantly Ashkenazi Jewish diaspora population, allowed for the Bund's commitment to Yiddish to survive, albeit decoupled from their larger political project. While the

Bundist goal of advancing Yiddish language survival and cultural pride was re-articulated in the diaspora, it ultimately became depoliticized.

Finally, I explored the relationship between the Bund and class struggle—a relationship expressed practically through the vector of the labor movement and trade unionism, both pre and post-diaspora. As I showed, for the Bund, the practical work of organizing Yiddish-speaking Jewish workers in the Pale was often a matter of life-and-death. While the Tsarist state attempted to withhold employment from Jews through formal acts of discrimination, Polish businesses and state agencies fired Jewish workers en masse in order to accommodate non-Jews in certain trades. As anti-Semitic employment discrimination coincided with violent pogroms against Jewish populations in the Pale, the imperative of labor agitation and trade unionism as a bulwark against death and destruction became salient in the eyes of many Bundists. This penchant for militant trade union tactics, often mounted against the apparatuses of the Tsarist state, served Bundist party diaspora members well in America, as they obtained positions of leadership within the German-dominated Jewish labor movement in the interwar period. As Bundist party diaspora members advanced their positions within the Jewish labor movement through tactical contributions, the Bundist ideational commitment to trade unionism became *incorporated* into that movement.

This thesis ultimately posits that identity formation should be understood as a process through which identity becomes consolidated. This does not imply, however, that the process of identity formation is teleological, moving towards a determined endpoint which sees a unity between identity and ideology. Nor does my view of identity discount the contributions of various accounts which have instead accomplished important empirical work in establishing how various identity groups are impacted by outside institutions such as political parties or how those



groups develop discrete sets of attributes and behaviors. Instead, I have attempted to unify the agency of ideological in-group actors, the encounters between ideological claims to identity and political institutions, and the historical circumstances which in-group actors both shape and are shaped by in their attempts to practice politics. The case of the Bund's diasporic movement demonstrates that there is no straightforward path for ideological actors to coalesce members of an in-group around their vision for that group's self-determination. However, the demonstrable impacts that the Bund's attempts to assert their ideational commitments had suggest that even "losers," so to speak, have a stake in the process of identity consolidation. In moments of peril and contention for Jewish populations both pre and post-diaspora, the Bund's assertion of their ideational claims made salient Jewish personhood—in other words, made political subjects of Jewish people.

Viewing the "party diaspora" as a vehicle through which political agents can intervene in the process of identity formation has serious implications for the study of political parties and identity in American politics. Focusing solely on the influence of domestic political agents and organizations in articulating the boundaries of self-determination of identity groups typically ignores the fluidity of in-group identity in diasporic populations to the American polity. Examining identity groups, in my case the Eastern European Jewish diaspora population, at such fluid points helps demonstrate the developmental moments in which identity becomes salient. After all, viewing diaspora populations as merely assimilationist does not elucidate the process by which ideological groups attempt to assert radical political possibilities for members of an in-group, nor does this view attempt to comprehend the institutional barriers and historical circumstances encountered by these political actors. If identity becomes salient anywhere, is it

not at the moments when the political subjectivity of a diaspora group is in flux relative to the political circumstances in which that group finds itself?

### **Through the Looking Glass: My Family and the Bund**

As I mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, my motivations for this project were initially personal. While accounts of Jewish identity I had encountered usually emphasized voting behavior, religious practice, or historical hardship, my own family history told a very different story. My father's family was deeply influenced by the looming presence of my Bundist great-grandfather, Max. My relatives' political beliefs, whether those be as specific as supporting organized labor or as abstract as claiming collective responsibility for vulnerable members of society such as immigrants, seemed to be profoundly influenced by Max's legacy. However, it was not only the knowledge of Max's political activities that compelled my father's family to adopt a certain notion of what it means to be Jewish. My family also directly participated in the enactment of that vision in America—joining unions themselves, learning Yiddish at Workmen's Circle schools, and eventually championing civil and political rights for plenty of non-Jewish groups struggling for self-determination.

At the same time, as I have witnessed in my family and many other Jewish families with similar origins, certain aspects of the Bundist ideological project have faded from memory. Max's penchant for radicalism often placed himself in direct physical danger, as my introductory anecdote recounts. What American citizenship and cultural assimilation has offered members of the Eastern European Jewish diaspora—material advancement, political and civil rights, physical safety—has outweighed socialism, cultural-national autonomy, and cultural particularism for many American Jews. The aim of this thesis has not been to totally discount the significant pull

of assimilation that so many scholars of early 20<sup>th</sup> century European diasporas have focused on. Nor can the evidence for the intervention of a political party in the process of identity formation be found through contemporaneous expressions of fidelity to the Bund. Instead, what I aimed to understand was why my family history was underrepresented in the literature about the political identity of American Jews. What I uncovered, subsequently, showed how the attempts of a party diaspora to assert its vision for Jewish self-determination interacted with American political institutions and historical circumstances. This phenomenon suggested to me that Jewish-American identity is not as simple or unitary as contemporary accounts have described. Instead, Jewish-American identity should be understood as a site of political contestation, where different ideological groups compete to establish meaning in the face of institutional and historical conditions.

I often wonder what Max would say if he assessed the state of the Jewish-American population today. Would he regard Social Security and Medicare as political advancements worthy of the label of socialism, as my father sometimes suggests? How would he comprehend the Bernie Sanders candidacy, a Jewish socialist with a Brooklyn accent rising to such astronomical political heights? What would he think of the state of Israel, and its relationship with the United States? Would he be disturbed by the resurgence of neo-Nazism in America, and would it reinforce his understanding of how Jews can survive in the face of danger and oppression? I cannot answer any of these questions definitively, not even by using Max's strident political positions as a template for how he might view present circumstances. What I do now understand, however, is that Max's story isn't just a relic of the distant past, passed down as an inheritance on my father's side. Instead, it is a prism through which my family's understanding of Judaism as a political identity is reflected. Max's influence on my family's political identity

formation is not merely an exceptional story—it reflects a pattern through which the Bund interacted with the American polity and helped contribute to the historical development of American Judaism. What this project has demonstrated about Jewish-American political identity is that there is no discrete beginning and end. Instead, the story of Max's fortitude, idealism, and struggle extends from his moment of arrival in the United States into the very present.

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