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“[B]eide zu einem harmonischen Ganzen verschmolzen”: Particularism, Universalism, and the Hybrid Jewish Nation in Early German Zionist Discourse

This article analyzes the relationship between universalism and particularism in early Zionist discourse. Like every national movement, the Zionists saw themselves faced with the paradox between universalism and particularism that is inherent to nationalist theory. The Zionist response to this paradox is not only fruitful for the understanding of national ideology in general, but can also help us to understand the arguments put forward by movements of minoritized groups. In this context, the concept of hybridity is of major importance: for the Zionists, the idea of a nation—just as for other activist groups notions of ‘identity’, ‘culture’ or ‘essence’—rather than reflecting the aforementioned paradox, formed a hybrid entity consisting of both particularist and universalist aspects. The article further uncovers a fact research thus far has neglected: in support of their argument and for tactical reasons, German Zionists referred to other minority movements, such as the African American or Civil Rights movements, the Native American movement, and the women’s movement.

Dieser Artikel widmet sich dem der nationalen Theorie inhärenten paradoxen Verhältnis zwischen Universalismus und Partikularismus und wie dieses im deutschsprachigen zionistischen Diskurs dargestellt wurde. Dieses Paradox verweist auf den Zusammenhang, dass Nationalismus einerseits verspricht, eine universale Antwort zu sein, andererseits jedoch seine tatsächlichen Manifestationen partikuläre Entitäten formieren. Interessant ist in dieser Hinsicht der deutschsprachige Zionismus aufgrund der folgenden Zusammenhänge. Einerseits ist es eine Besonderheit, dass sich die zionistischen Autoren mit diesem Paradox auseinandersetzten. Sie fanden eine Lösung, die nicht nur entscheidende Aspekte für das Verständnis des Nationalismus verdeutlicht. Für die Zionisten ist die ‚Nation‘ – wie für andere marginalisierte Gruppen ihre ‚Identität‘, ‚Kultur‘ oder sogar ‚Essenz‘ – eine hybride Entität aus universalistischen und partikularistischen Aspekten. Zweitens ist bemerkenswert, dass die Zionisten aus taktischen Gründen Vergleiche zu anderen Minderheitenbewegungen, wie der African American und der Civil Rights Bewegung, der Native American Bewegung und der Frauenbewegung zogen, ein Fakt der bisher in der Forschung nicht beachtet wurde.

There is a central “paradox” inherent in the theory of nationalism. As Benedict Anderson, one of the key figures in research on nationalism today writes, this paradox becomes clear in “[t]he formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept—in the modern world everyone can, should, will ‘have’ a nationality, as he or she ‘has’ a gender—vs. the irremediable particularity of its concrete manifestations [...]”¹ In other words, on the one hand nationalism promises a universal answer, and on the other hand it is a particularistic ideology.

In German-speaking Zionist discourse two aspects of this dialectic become obvious. On one hand, the German-speaking Zionist discourse took over this paradox. It accepted the nationalist view that human beings are naturally divided into groups called nations and conceived of the Jewish community as a separate national community.² The Zionist discourse, however, also aimed at the universalistic attributes of nationalism: the Zionist worldview criticized the idea of universal humankind, but simultaneously aimed at embedding the Jewish nation in it, as one of the nations of the world. What makes the German Zionist discourse an interesting case is that the texts reflect—on the other hand—an awareness of this paradox. In addressing this contradiction, the early German Zionists formulated thoughts that were, in the past as well as in the present, crucial aspects in movements of minoritized groups. Various minority movements—and not only those that aim at constructing a separate nation, but also a separate ‘identity’ or ‘culture’—are often criticized due to their particularistic outlook. As a result, the discourse of particularism versus universalism is especially present within these movements.

Further, German Zionists pointed to other minority movements like the African American or Civil Rights movement, the Native American movement, and the women’s movement to prove their argument, a fact that has hitherto been ignored in research.

First, I will discuss the political and philosophical reasons for the development of national and other emancipation movements like German Zionism and how these were already embedded in the discourse of universalism/particularism. Furthermore, I will address the criticism that German Zionism received for formulating these particularistic ideas and how they reacted to that criticism. Moreover, I intend to illustrate certain dynamics which German Zionism and other minority movements actually shared with special regard to the discourse of particularism and universalism. Finally, I will point to the Zionists’ reaction to the accusation of particularism. By addressing one of the key issues in relation to the notions of ‘nation’, ‘identity’ or ‘culture’, the Zionists referred to nationalism as being simultaneously particularistic and universalistic.

The processes responsible for the emergence of national and other emancipation movements are very complex. The long 19th century marks—after the revolutions in France and the USA—a century shaped by the consolidation of different emancipation movements. The following conditions demonstrate crucial aspects for the formation of these movements: not only the ideals of the Enlightenment and the

¹ Anderson, Benedict: *Imagined Communities*. London and New York 1991 [1983], p. 5.

² Kedourie, Elie: *Nationalism*, London 1960.

political outcome of the French Revolution—the rise of nationalism specifically—but also developments in the philosophical realm of the society prove to be crucial. In his two fundamental works, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (1989) and *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (1994),³ the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor stresses three major philosophical transformations that were pivotal for the emergence of the modern self and therefore for every modern emancipation movement. The three philosophical transformations can also be found in the discourse of universalism versus particularism. Bearing this in mind, it can be argued that the notions of particularism and universalism are of major importance in every emancipation movement.

The first philosophical transformation was characterized by the universalistic ideas that were disseminated during and after the French Revolution. They exerted a strong influence on the understanding of the self within society. For example, a modern understanding of dignity replaced the former understanding of honor. While honor itself was a particularistic concept, dignity had a universalistic connotation. In other words, while in the past only some people deserved honor, now everybody deserved dignity.⁴ “Dignity” is an often-used term within early Zionist discourse: Hebrew writer Ahad Haam (1856–1927) in the introduction to Leon Pinsker’s (1821–1891) *Auto-Emancipation*—in a later edition from the original from 1882—described the main feature of Pinsker’s “national consciousness” (“nationalem Bewusstsein”) and his “unusually deep feeling for national *dignity*” (“ungewöhnlich tiefes Gefühl für die nationale Würde”), or for “national *self-dignity*.”⁵ The Zionist historian Adolf Böhm referred to this, when he wrote in his *History of the Zionist Movement* as early as 1920: “[I]njured human dignity, the hurt and craving for recognition were psychological roots for the emergence of Zionism, which can be seen in its founding fathers, Pinsker and Herzl.”

This universal approach to the concept of human dignity was combined with the second philosophical transformation, namely the process of individuation in general. Thirdly, a process of authenticity developed and became essential for the formation of the modern self. Taylor thus states that

“[...] the importance of recognition has been modified and intensified by the new understanding of individual identity that emerges at the end of the eighteenth century. We might speak of an *individualized* identity, one that is particular to me, and that I discover in myself. This notion arises along with an ideal, that of being true to myself and my own particular way of being. [...] I will speak of this as the ideal of ‘authenticity’.”⁶

³ Taylor, Charles: *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge 1989; Taylor, Charles: *Multiculturalism and “The Politics of Recognition,”* in: Gutmann, Amy (Ed.): *Multiculturalism and “The Politics of Recognition.”* An Essay by Charles Taylor, Princeton, NJ 1992, pp. 25–73.

⁴ Taylor, *Multiculturalism*, 1992, p. 26f.

⁵ Achad Haam: *Ein stolzer Jude*, in: [Pinsker, Leon]: “Autoemanzipation!” Mahnruf an seine Stammesgenossen von einem russischen Juden. Mit einer Vorbemerkung von Achad Haam, Berlin 1934, pp. 3–4, see p. 3. It is important to add here, however, that the term of honor was also used extensively in German Zionist discourse.

⁶ Taylor, *Multiculturalism*, 1992, p. 28.

Taylor refers here to Herder and his “idea that each of us has an original way of being human: each person has his or her own ‘measure’.” According to Taylor “this idea has burrowed very deep into modern consciousness.” Thus he explains:

“[Authenticity] is a new idea. [...] There is a certain way of being human that is *my* way. I am called upon to live my life in this way, and not in imitation of anyone else’s life. But this notion gives a new importance to being true to myself. If I am not, I miss the point of my life; I miss what being human is for *me*.”⁷

The importance of the notion of authenticity within the Zionist movement becomes clear in the following example: when using the term emancipation we have to keep in mind that it begins before the actual legal emancipation. The emancipation process focuses in this context on becoming equal, that is to be the same as the ‘majority’ and not to be distinct. In Zionist rhetoric, this process is also known as the negatively connoted term ‘assimilation’, a notion that was obviously—for the Zionists—opposed to striving towards authenticity. In other words, the Zionist individual had to be conceived as authentic and the notion of ‘acting to be somebody else’ was generally rejected. Nathan Birnbaum went as far as to describe opposition to authenticity as an “addiction to assimilate” (“Assimilationsucht”).⁸

These three philosophical issues, first the universalistic ideals that every human being deserves a certain status, second, the increasing centrality of the individual, that had—thirdly—an inner self that needed to be fulfilled, are very important in German Zionist discourse, not only as an emancipation movement, but especially as a national emancipation movement. In addition, the need emerged for the authenticity and distinctiveness of a group to be recognized in the society. Charles Taylor wrote:

“[A] person or a group can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.”⁹

Against this background, one could say that Zionist discourse evolved on account of a contradiction: During and after the emancipation process, the proto-Zionists and Zionists sensed that despite their legal equality the discriminative discourse and its social consequences continued. This paradox of the legal status they now enjoyed and the serious social discrimination they still faced was exacerbated by the rise of modern anti-Semitism. The Zionists also sensed that they had to advocate and defend their own distinctiveness and therefore formulate a campaign for winning *true* equality in their European countries, one which would fight for recognition of their authenticity, as individuals and as a nation.

⁷ Taylor, *Multiculturalism*, 1992, p. 30.

⁸ See [Birnbaum, Nathan]: *Die Assimilationsucht. Ein Wort an die sogenannten Deutschen, Slaven, Magyaren etc. mosaischer Confession. Von einem Studenten jüdischer Nationalität*, Wien 1884.

⁹ Taylor, *Multiculturalism*, 1992, p. 25.

There is, however, a second narrative in Zionist discourse. In this second narrative, the Zionists distance themselves from the need to be recognized by the ‘outside’ and concentrate on the ‘inside’. Achad Haam, the key figure of this second narrative, criticized that anti-Semitism was the reason for the emergence of Zionism in the first narrative. He constructs an alternative view in which Jewish nationalism is ‘naturally’ evolving, without the need from outside factors.¹⁰ By this, Achad Haam formulates a merely particularistic narrative that cannot be detached from the universalistic attributes that are inherent in the national theory in my opinion.

To secure the distinctiveness of a certain group remains central in the Zionists’ argument – in both narratives. As Nahum Sokolow stated in his book about the history of *Hibbat Zion* (1934): “[T]he great characteristic [...] and the central thought running through all its aspirations is the care for the collectivity of the nation, its identity, its distinctiveness, its revival, and its future.”¹¹ As it is, nationalism—or in this regard the Jewish nation—would not only secure the group’s distinctiveness, but would also deliver the political framework for the individual to fulfill the ideal of authenticity.¹² Adolf Böhm referred to this idea as early as 1920:

“The [...] striving for greater differentiation of the personality [...] led on the part of the Jews to a dissociation of the individual from the community [...]. [...] Judaism, however, did not know modern individualism [...]. Only with the emergence of modern Zionism did a Jewish movement come into being, which on the one hand accommodates the conditionality of the individual, and on the other hand sets itself the goal to build a Jewish community, where there was room for the free development of the individual.”¹³

In other words, to be part of a particularistic entity—the Jewish nation—was necessary for Jewish survival as well as for the Jewish individual to be true to him- or herself and to fulfill him- or herself in the view of the Zionists.

For formulating these particularistic statements, the early Zionists were harshly criticized.¹⁴ In the early Viennese Zionist journal *Selbst-Emancipation*, the author “B”—probably Nathan Birnbaum (1864–1937)—relates to this criticism in his article “Philistines Upon Thee” (“Philister über Dich!”):

¹⁰ See for example Achad Haam: *Judenstaat und Judennot*, in: *Am Scheidewege. Gesammelte Aufsätze. Zweiter Band*, Berlin 1923, pp. 45–67.

¹¹ Sokolow, Nahum: *Hibbat Zion*, Jerusalem 1934, p. 56. My italics.

¹² Smith, Anthony D.: *National Identity*, Reno, Las Vegas 1991, pp. 76–77. See also Kedourie, *Nationalism*, 1960.

¹³ Böhm, Adolf : *Die Zionistische Bewegung. Die Bewegung bis zum Tode Theodor Herzls*, Berlin 1920, p. 15. “So wirkte [...] der Grundzug der modernen Menschheitsentwicklung, das Streben nach immer höherer Differenzierung der Persönlichkeit, auch bei den Juden mächtig in der Richtung der immer stärkeren Loslösung des einzelnen von aller Gemeinschaftsbindung, während das Judentum [...] einen Individualismus im modernen Sinne nicht gekannt hatte [...]. *Erst im modernen Zionismus ist eine jüdische Bewegung entstanden, die einerseits der [...] Bedingtheit des Individuums entsprach, andererseits den Aufbau einer jüdischen Gemeinschaft sich zum Ziel setzte, in der für die freie Entfaltung des Persönlichen Raum bleiben könnte.*” My italics.

¹⁴ Also Nahum Sokolow finds it necessary to isolate the Hibbat Zion movement in his work on the philosophy of Hibbat Zion from a “chauvinist Jewish nationalist war-cry” and a “selfish political speculation.” See Sokolow, Nahum: *Hibbat Zion*, Jerusalem 1934, p. XVII.

“National Judaism is *separatism, exclusivity*. This is the first thing we hear. *Accusations* like this are stemming from the approach, that contradictions of the past are presented as contradictions of the present [...]”¹⁵

By “contradictions of the past” the author refers to the misconception of what Zionism meant to be. “We can only speak of separatism in the hateful meaning of the word,” he explains, “when any community segregates itself strictly and unnaturally; separation, however, loses this hateful connotation, when it is built on the *natural* difference of nationality.”¹⁶ It becomes obvious that inherent in national ideology is a very static and essentialist understanding of one’s self. Of course there were other important trends in society that favored this development. The scientific achievements of the nineteenth century, for example—one of the most important being the emergence of a full-fledged concept of race—promoted the idea of an authentic and natural self that one has to discover and express. The anonymous author continues to evaluate the relation between particularism and universalism in Zionism.

“The orthodox Jew, who *separated himself* out of allegedly religious reasons from the society of another religion, has indeed been a separatist, *the national Jew, however, who commits openly to a particular tribe and its distinctiveness, and precisely through this strives to affiliate with the rest of the nations, albeit as an independent and equal companion to them, is not a separatist [...]*”¹⁷

In other words, being a nation does not separate the Jews, but rather includes them in a world of nations. The author concludes with a rhetorical question, which will be of central interest for the following elaboration. He asks: “*Who would dare to call a slave, who wants to stand on his own feet, a separatist?*”¹⁸ This is only one example where Zionists related to other emancipation movements, to enforce their arguments. Interestingly, it is no exception that the Zionists themselves referred to various other minority movements to explain their point, such as the African American, the Native American, and the women’s movement. In short, the fact that women, African Americans in the USA as well as Jews, among several other “minority groups,” had a similar agenda was observed by Zionist writers. As early as 1862, Moses Hess explained in *Rome and Jerusalem* how the emancipation of the Jewish minority—which he called a *race*—relates to the same reasons that motivated other national movements:

¹⁵ B.: “Philister über Dich!”, in: *Selbst-Emancipation*, No 7, 1.4.1891, p. 1. “Das Nationaljudenthume sei *Separatismus, Eclusivität*. Das ist das Erste, was wir zu hören bekommen. *Vorwürfe*, wie dieser, kommen eben daher, wenn Gegensätze einer früheren Zeit als Gegensätze der Gegenwart ausgegeben werden [...]” Italics in the original.

¹⁶ B., Philister, 1891, p. 1: “Separatismus im gehässigen Sinne des Wortes liegt nur vor, wenn sich irgend eine Gemeinschaft unnatürlicher Weise streng absondert; die Separation verliert aber ihren gehässigen Charakter, [...] wenn sie auf den *natürlichen* Unterschied der Nationalität sich gründet.” My italics.

¹⁷ B., Philister, 1891, p. 1: “Der orthodoxe Jude, der aus angeblich bloß religiösen Gründen *sich selbst* aus der Gesellschaft der Andersgläubigen *ausschloß*, war thatsächlich Separatist, *der Nationaljude aber, der sich offen zu einem besonderen Stamme und dessen Eigenart bekennt, und gerade deshalb den Anschluß an die übrigen Nationalitäten, freilich als selbstständiger und gleichwerthiger Genosse derselben, suchen muß, ist kein Separatist [...]*” Italics in the original.

¹⁸ B., Philister, 1891, p. 1: “*Wer würde es wagen, den Sklaven, der sich gerne auf eigene Füße stellen möchte, einen Separatisten zu nennen?*” Italics in the original.

“The ‘spring of nations’ started with the French Revolution [...]. The resurrection of the dead marks nothing unusual in a time, when Greece and Rome awaken, Poland revives, Hungary prepares for battle, and in the same time all these oppressed races prepare to rise up, that have been abused alternately by Asian barbarism and European civilization, by stupid fanaticism and clever calculation to question the right of dominion of the barbarian and civilized arrogance of the dominating races.”¹⁹

Leon Pinsker, in his *Auto-Emancipation*, criticized the condition of the Jews as a minority, which meant that they had to be “emancipated” like “negroes” and “women”. He was among the first to advocate a national status as a solution to the problem, and lack of recognition of the Jews.²⁰

“The Jews are aliens who can have no representatives, because they have no country. Because they have none, because their home has no boundaries within which they can be entrenched, their misery too is boundless. The *general law* does not apply to the Jews as true aliens, but there are everywhere *laws for the Jews*, and if the general law is to apply to them, a special and explicit by-law is required to confirm it. Like the Negroes, like women, and unlike all free peoples, they must be *emancipated*.”²¹

Heinrich Loewe, the Berlin Zionist, wrote in his *Zikhronot* (“memories”) about “the national-Jewish propaganda” relating to African Americans:

“I called [Baptism] ‘escaping from the race’, and pointed to the example of a *negroe who presented himself as a white person*. In front of these [assimilationist] Jews, who wanted to be more German than the Germans, I loved to cite – successfully – Schiller’s *Wilhelm Tell* [...] or the *Ruetli oath* [...]”²²

One of the most interesting comparisons is presented in the article “The New Indians” by Dr. Emil Simonsohn—one of the early Berlin Zionists—written the year 1903. In this article Simonsohn refers to the work of the *Native American Zitkala-Sa* and states:

¹⁹ Hess, Moses: *Rom und Jerusalem*, Leipzig 1862, p. XIV. My translation. The English translation translates “race” as “nation.”. See Hess, Moses: *Rome and Jerusalem. A Study in Jewish Nationalism*. Translated from the German with Introduction and Notes by Meyer Waxman, Ph.D., New York 1943, p. 36: “Springtime in the life of nations began with the French Revolution. [...] Resurrection of nations becomes a natural phenomenon at a time when Greece and Rome are being regenerated. Poland breathes the air of liberty anew and Hungary is preparing itself for the final struggle of liberation. Simultaneously, there is a movement of unrest among the other subjugated nations, which will ultimately culminate in the rise of all the peoples oppressed both by Asiatic barbarism and European civilization against their masters, and, in the name of a higher right, they will challenge the right of the master nations to rule.”

²⁰ Also, as a very interesting parallel between the emancipation movements of the women and the Jews, the famous 1781 book by Christian Wilhelm Dohm *About the Civic Improvement of the Jews* (*Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden*) was followed 11 years later, and including a reference to the former, by the book *About the Civic Improvement of the Women* (*Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Weiber*) written by Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel.

²¹ Pinsker, Leon: *Auto-Emancipation*. Published by MASADA, Youth Zionist Organization of America 1939, p. 12.

²² Loewe, Heinrich: *Baderech Lezion. Sichronoth Kap. 59m*. Aus der national-jüdischen Propaganda. Central Zionist Archives (CZA) A146/176. Original in German.

“It is remarkable of the New Indian, that he, even when he wears the clothes of the White Man, in order to dress inconspicuously and to move unmolested between whites [...] *still remains himself* [...] integrating philosophically in the new order of things, but not giving up his distinctiveness. He learns from the white man what he wants to learn, *but he does not ape* [nachäffen] *him like the negroe.*”²³

To remain ‘authentic’ is of major importance in minority as well as national movements. In research, it has often been stated that German Zionism held a special position within general Zionist discourse. Emigrating to Palestine was not of major interest to the Zionists activists. Rather, they came to Zionism to work on issues of their ‘identity’.²⁴ As a consequence, it can be said that German Zionism mainly aimed at ‘identity politics’.²⁵ Taking a closer look at other minority movements engaged in identity politics makes it obvious that the accusation of particularism remains until today one of the major critiques which identity politics receives. The term ‘identity politics’, however, was coined in an activist pamphlet by the *Combahee River Collective*:

“We realize that the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation is us. Our politics evolve from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters, and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work.

This focusing upon our own oppression is embodied in the concept of *identity politics*. We believe that the most profound and potentially the most radical politics come directly out of our own *identity* (...).”²⁶

Parallels in Zionist sources to this statement are numerous. As early as in Hirsch Kalischer’s (1795–1874) *Drischat Zion, oder Zions Herstellung*, written in 1861, one can read: “Therefore we depend on *our* striving, to try for the colonization of the holy land [...]”²⁷ Nachum Sokolow (1859–1936) writes about the concept of self-help in his work on the philosophy of the Chibbat Zion movement: “[T]he salvation

²³ Simonson, Emil: Der neue Indianer, in: Jüdische Rundschau, 7th August 1903, No. 32, p. 4. Original in German.

²⁴ See for example Poppel, Stephen M.: Zionism in Germany 1897–1933. The Shaping of a Jewish Identity, Philadelphia 1977.

²⁵ For an overview of the theory of identity politics see Heyes, Cressida: Identity Politics, in: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, online at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-politics/> [21.12.2013]. Other important works are: Alcoff, Linda (Ed.): Identity Politics Reconsidered, New York 2006; Appiah, Anthony and Gutmann, Amy: Color Conscious. The Political Morality of Race, Princeton 1996; Asante, Molefi K.: The Afrocentric Idea, Philadelphia 1998; Boxill, Bernard: Race and Racism, Oxford 2001; Butler, Judith: Gender Trouble, London 1990; Connolly, William: Identity / Difference. Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox, Minneapolis 2002; Dean, Jodi: Solidarity of Strangers. Feminism after Identity Politics, Berkeley 1996; Fanon, Franz: Black Skin, White Masks, New York 1968; Foucault, Michel: The History of Sexuality, New York 1980; Hekman, Susan: Private Selves, Public Identities. Reconsidering Identity Politics, University Park 2004; Heyes, Cressida J.: Line Drawings: Defining Women through Feminist Practice, Ithaca 2000; Kruks, Sonia: Retrieving Experience: Subjectivity and Recognition in Feminist Politics, Ithaca 2000; Ryan, Barbara (Ed.): Identity Politics in the Women's Movement, New York 2001; Spelman, Elizabeth V.: Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought, Boston 1988, and the other works mentioned in this article.

²⁶ The Combahee River Collective: A Black Feminist Statement, in: Feminist Theory Reader. Local and Global Perspectives, New York and London 2010, pp. 106–112, see p. 108. My italics.

²⁷ Kalischer, Hirsch: Drischath Zion, oder Zions Herstellung, Thorn 1865, pp. 41–42.

of the Jews can only come about in a natural way, by *self-help*.” And he adds in parentheses: “In this respect Kalischer was a precursor of Dr. Pinsker who only popularized the idea in a more modern form.”²⁸ One glimpse at Leon Pinsker’s pamphlet *Autoemancipation* proves Sokolow right. First of all, the title in itself (“*Auto-emancipation*”) reflects the program of self-help. Secondly, Pinsker introduces his pamphlet with a citation of Hillel, one of the most important sages in antiquity, “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if not now, when?”²⁹ Pinsker’s view on self help becomes obvious in the following quotation: “We have no more right to leave our national fortune exclusively *in the hands of all other nations* than we have the right to make them responsible for our national misfortune.”³⁰ The emergence of Zionist identity politics can be described in the words of F. Heman, author of *The Awakening of the Jewish Nation* (1897):

“The Jewish question entered a new, great [...] phase of a promise of salvation, because the Jews want to take the matter into their own hands. By this the matter has come to the right hands, because the Jewish question cannot be solved by anyone else but the Jews [...]”³¹

In *The Jewish State* (“*Der Judenstaat*”), Theodore Herzl (1860–1904) makes this idea explicit by saying that the Jewish question has to be solved by the Jews themselves.³²

In the various movements that were and are engaged in ‘identity politics’, the question of universalism/particularism remains central. In the context of identity politics of emancipation movements and feminism, Sonia Kruks puts it as follows:

“What makes identity politics a significant departure from earlier, pre-identarian forms of the politics of recognition is its demand for recognition on the basis of the very grounds on which recognition has previously been denied [...] The demand is not for inclusion within the fold of “universal humankind” on the basis of shared human attributes; nor is it for respect ‘in spite of’ one’s differences. Rather, what is demanded is respect for oneself as different.”³³

The conflict-laden quote by Kruks shows that it is not easy to oscillate between the ideas of particularism and universalism. But, to ask for “respect for oneself as different”, in Kruks words, means—contrary to Kruk’s statement—to *be* included in a universal humankind.

²⁸ Sokolow, Nahum: *Hibbath Zion*, Jerusalem 1934, p. 23.

²⁹ Pinsker, *Auto-Emancipation*, 1939, p.3. German original: [Pinsker, Leon]: “Autoemancipation!” Mahnruf an seine Stammesgenossen von einem russischen Juden, Berlin 1882- The unnumbered page after the title page reads: “Wenn ich selbst mir nicht helfe, wer denn? und wenn nicht heute wann denn?”

³⁰ English version: Pinsker, *Auto-emancipation*, 1939, p. 20. My italics. German original: Pinsker, *Autoemancipation*, 1882, p. 19: “So wenig wie wir das Recht haben, alle anderen Völker für unser nationales Unglück verantwortlich zu machen, ebensowenig sind wir berechtigt, unser nationales Glück einzig und allein in ihre Hände zu legen.”

³¹ Heman, F.: *Das Erwachen der jüdischen Nation. Der Weg zur endgültigen Lösung der Judenfrage*, Basel 1897, p. 3.

³² Herzl, Theodor: *The Jewish State. An attempt at a Modern Solution for the Jewish Question*, New York 1946.

³³ Kruks, *Retrieving Experience*, 2000, p. 85. My italics.

A paramount example from our times is the conservative Arthur Schlesinger. In his *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society*—1992 a bestseller in the USA—he referred to the African American identity politics as “artificial ethnic chauvinism.”³⁴ In his introduction of *The Afrocentric Idea*, the author Molefi Kete Asante 1998 reacted to Schlesinger’s accusations by claiming that:

“Schlesinger’s argument, based on an idealized vision of a united America, was that the Afrocentrists, along with the multiculturalists, had manufactured ideas that would fragment the nation and capture the imagination of the American public in a manner that endangered both our culture and our future. His assumptions about American society and his conclusions about Afrocentricity were equally wrong. In fact, the aim of Afrocentrists is to seek ways to unite the country based on mutual respect for the cultural agency of all its peoples.”³⁵

In other words, by constructing a separate identity, minoritized groups seek to unify society. By having an ‘identity’ like anybody else, which is different from other identities, true equality is reached.

Today, the anti-essentialist and deconstructive approaches in research have distanced themselves first of all from the concept of identity, and secondly from the construction of essentialist “identities” that are based on categories of difference. Still, the notions of ‘identity’ and ‘identity politics’ remain important in the field from which especially the latter evolved—activism. Linda Alcoff emphasized this in her reaction to the postmodern critique. She formulates

“[...] an approach to the question of identity that is better able than the postmodernist one to register and analyze the complexity that resides at the heart of identity-based political struggles and the subjective experiences on which these struggles draw. Although agreeing with some of the anti-essentialist critiques of identity that have been working to denaturalize identity categories, we argue against the conclusion that identities are merely fictions imposed from above [...] [and] are not our mysterious inner essences but rather social embodied facts about ourselves in our world; moreover, they are not mere descriptions of who we are but, rather, causal explanations of our social locations in a world that is shaped by such locations, by the way they are distributed and hierarchically organized. [...] Like identities, identity politics itself is neither positive nor negative. At its minimum, it is a claim that identities are politically relevant, an irrefutable fact. Identities are the locus and nodal point by which political structures are played out, mobilized, reinforced, and sometimes challenged.”³⁶

The Zionists’ ideology, which was based on the idea of an inner essence of every human being, does not concur with the post-modernist conceptions that are currently widely accepted in academic scholarship. Yet the Zionists would probably have agreed with Asante and Alcoff about the necessity of fighting for the survival and

³⁴ Schlesinger Jr., Arthur M.: *The Disuniting of America. Reflections on a Multicultural Society*, New York and London 1992, p. 90.

³⁵ Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea*, 1998, p. XI.

³⁶ Alcoff, Linda: *Reconsidering Identity Politics. An Introduction*, in: Alcoff, *Identity Politics Reconsidered*, 2006, pp. 1–9, see pp. 6–7.

recognition of their own “culture” and “identity,” through which they would be able to act in a society that is based on these concepts.



Illustration 1: Cover of the first issue of *Selbst-Emancipation*, 1885 through 1886 with Hillel's Citation

The response that the Zionist author Ibn Asrak gave in 1903 in *Die Jüdische Rundschau* to the question of universalism/ particularism in minority national movements, relates to the last part of Alcoff's statement. The author stressed that Zionism incorporates both universalism and particularism. To understand this combination it is necessary to come back to Hillel's citation mentioned earlier. This citation was shown in the header of the title of the first Viennese Zionist journal, *Selbst-Emancipation*. Its title was a clear reference to Pinsker's pamphlet and the appearance of Hillel's citation made this reference even more obvious.

Pinsker referred to Hillel's quotation from Mishna Avot 1,13³⁷ but blanked out the middle part, which reads “and when I am alone, what am I?” Following Ibn Asrak's article in the *Jüdische Rundschau*, this quotation became a slogan often used by Zionists. Ibn Asrak wrote, however, that this middle part was important to understand Zionism.³⁸ “The first part of this sentence” expressed for Ibn Asrak “egoism, individualism”, and the omitted second part “altruism, socialism”, or, respectively, the first part represented “nationalism” and the second part “universalism.”

³⁷ In Hebrew: “הוא היה אומר, אם אין אני לי, מי לי; וכשאני לעצמי, מה אני; ואם לא עכשיו, אימתי.”

³⁸ In Hebrew: “וכשאני לעצמי מה אני.”

“None of these contradictory ideologies alone, but both melded into a harmonic whole [beide zu einem harmonischen Ganzen verschmolzen] – that is the great thought mentioned by Hillel. He warns his *volk* of every one-sidedness, of both a rigid, plain [nackten] nationalism, as well as a blurred, vacuous [nichtssagenden] universalism and cosmopolitanism. Nationalism with a share of universalism, universalism with a dose of nationalism – that is the recipe he recommends. The mixture should become one consistent element that mustn’t be decomposed. To utilize one or the other of the original components [Urbestandteile] alone would mean to distort Hillel’s words.”³⁹

In the opinion of the author, Hillel’s words were distorted when people propagated a pure cosmopolitanism that drove the individual away from the “body of the people” [Volkskörper]. At the same time, promoting a “bizarre nationalism” is equally wrong. According to the author, the key to the right approach to these issues is to be found in the part that Pinsker and the *Selbst-Emancipation* left out. The third part of the quotation gives these two issues—particularism and universalism—a temporal quality. According to Ibn Asrak, the “two principles” particularism and universalism should exist simultaneously and thus form a “coherent entity.”

“What does Hillel prohibit us? To seal our person, our life, our culture, our thought and feelings, our knowledge and abilities hermitically against influences and impressions that come from somewhere else than from our own *volk* and only work and strive for our close community.

What does he command us? To preserve our distinctiveness, to work restlessly for the Jewish *volk* and to think simultaneously about the whole, the large community that includes all humans.”⁴⁰

With this approach, Ibn Asrak aimed at unifying “two modern antinomies to a truly ideal *weltanschauung*.”⁴¹ By this, the hybridity of categories of difference in movements of minoritized groups such as ‘nation’, ‘identity’, and ‘culture’ becomes clear. On one hand, these concepts, as they are, construct a difference, which provides on the other hand the activists with an instrument to achieve true equality in a society.

German Zionism identified the notion of “nation” not as a notion of difference, but rather as a hybrid notion oscillating between difference and equality. It is important to classify this thinking, however, as an activist view that is shared by various other social movements who fought and still fight for recognition of

³⁹ Asrak, Ibn: Gegen den abstrakten jüdischen Nationalismus, in *Jüdische Rundschau* Januar 2, 1903, pp. 2–3, see p. 2. „Keine der entgegengesetzten Weltanschauungen allein, sondern beide zu einem harmonischen Ganzen verschmolzen – das ist der grosse Gedanke, den Hillel ausspricht. Er warnt sein Volk vor jeder Einseitigkeit, sowohl vor einem starren, nackten Nationalismus, als auch vor einem verschwommenen, nichtssagenden Universalismus und Kosmopolitismus. Nationalismus mit einer Portion Universalismus, Universalismus mit einer Dosis Nationalismus – das ist das Rezept, welches er uns empfiehlt. Die Mischung soll zu eine, einheitlichen Elemente werden, das nicht zerlegt werden darf. Einen oder den anderen der Urbestandteile allein anwenden, heisst Hillels Worte fälschen.“

⁴⁰ Asrak, Gegen den abstrakten jüdischen Nationalismus, 1903, p. 3: „Was verbietet uns Hillel? Unsere Person, unser Leben, unsere Kultur, unser Denken und Fühlen, unser Wissen und Können gegen Einflüsse und Eindrücke, die von wo anders her als aus dem eigenen Volke kommen, hermetisch abzuschliessen und nur für unsere engere Gemeinschaft zu wirken und zu streben. Was gebietet er uns? Unsere Eigenheit zu bewahren, rastlos für das jüdische Volk zu arbeiten und dabei auch stets an das Ganze an die grosse, alle Menschen umfassende Gemeinschaft zu denken.“

⁴¹ Asrak, Gegen den abstrakten jüdischen Nationalismus, 1903, p. 3.

otherness in a broader society. As Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper put it: “Everyday ‘identity talk’ and ‘identity politics’ are real and important phenomena. But the contemporary salience of ‘identity’ as a category of practice does not require its use as a category of analysis.”⁴² Therefore these particularistic notions of ‘nation’, ‘identity’, ‘culture’, or even ‘essence’ should stay in the realm of activism and should not become, to use Brubaker’s and Cooper’s term, categories of analysis.

As we have seen, the answer which the Zionists gave to accusations of particularism proves not only to be fruitful for the understanding of national ideology in general. It also helps to understand the arguments of movements of minoritized groups and how categories such as ‘nation’, ‘identity’, and ‘culture’ are applied within their philosophy. In this context, the concept of hybridity is of major importance. For German Zionism, the notion of the nation—just as notions of ‘identity’, ‘culture’ or even ‘essence’ for other activist groups—does not reflect the paradox mentioned at the beginning of this article, rather, they represent hybrid concepts that are both particularistic and universalistic.

Citation Manja Herrmann: “[B]eide zu einem harmonischen Ganzen verschmolzen”: *Particularism, Universalism, and the Hybrid Jewish Nation in Early German Zionist Discourse*, in: *MEDAON – Magazin für jüdisches Leben in Forschung und Bildung*, 8 (2014), 14, S. 1-13, online http://medaon.de/pdf/MEDAON_14_Herrmann.pdf [dd.mm.yyyy].

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⁴² Brubaker, Rogers; Cooper, Frederick: Beyond ‘Identity’, in: *Theory and Society* 29, (2000), p. 1–47, see p. 5. They also refer to “nation”: Consider an analogy. ‘Nation’ is a widely used category of social and political practice. Appeals and claims made in the name of putative ‘nations’—for example, claims to self-determination—have been central to politics for a hundred-and-fifty years. But one does not have to use ‘nation’ as an analytical category to understand and analyze such appeals and claims. One does not have to take a category inherent in the practice of nationalism—the realist, reifying conception of nations as real communities—and make this category central to the theory of nationalism. Nor does one have to use ‘race’ as a category of analysis—which risks taking for granted that ‘race’ exists—to understand and analyze social and political practices oriented to the presumed existence of putative ‘races.’ Just as one can analyze ‘nation-talk’ and nationalist politics without positing the existence of ‘nations,’ or ‘race-talk’ and ‘race’-oriented politics without positing the existence of ‘races,’ so one can analyze ‘identity-talk’ and identity politics without, as analysts, positing the existence of ‘identities.’”