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Baron Hirsch, the Jewish Colonization Association and the Future of the Jews



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Abstract: When Baron Maurice de Hirsch established the Jewish Colonization Association in 1891 to facilitate the settlement of Russian Jews in agricultural colonies, it was the largest charitable organization in the world. This article demonstrates that, far from representing a proto-nationalist project anticipating “territorialism” (much less Zionism), Hirsch was uninterested in collective notions of Jewish “peoplehood.” In a little-known 1889 interview, he decisively embraced assimilation, and in the crucial early months of the JCA colonization scheme, his correspondence and public pronouncements show that, although he shifted his focus from education to migration and colonization, his underlying approach to the future of the Jews remained the same. Unlike the religious reformers or early Zionists of the *fin-de-siècle*, Hirsch maintained his belief in the “amalgamation” of Jews with Christian society. He was not interested in preserving Jewish difference, religious or national, but in overcoming Jewish difference altogether.

Key words: Philanthropy, assimilation, Jewish nationalism, migration.

One Sunday morning in June 1895, the Paris correspondent of the Viennese newspaper *Neue Freie Presse*, Theodor Herzl, ascended the great marble staircase at 2, Rue de l’Elysée. As he took in the display of old paintings, Gobelin tapestries and ancient Tanagra figurines, Herzl readied himself for his meeting with the prominent Jewish banker, railroad entrepreneur and philanthropist, Baron Maurice de Hirsch.¹ He had brought some 20 pages of handwritten notes, and he hoped to win Hirsch over to his utopian idea of creating an independent Jewish state as the ultimate response to European antisemitism.² The baron had gained notoriety for having made a fortune from building the railroad linking Constantinople to the Habsburg Empire in the 1870s and 1880s. He had since crowned a long career as a philanthropist by establishing, in 1891, the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA), which was designed to facilitate the establishment of Jewish agricultural settlements in Argentina and was, according to one historian, the largest charitable organization in the world at the time.³ In the event, Herzl’s

1 See Theodor Herzl, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, ed. Alex Bein et al. (Berlin: Propyläen, 1983) 2.56.

2 Herzl, *Briefe*, 2.760.

3 Richard Evans, *The Pursuit of Power: Europe 1815–1914* (New York: Penguin, 2016) 475.

meeting with Hirsch ended inconclusively. Herzl chastised the baron's colonization plans in Argentina as "a petty solution" in a subsequent letter,⁴ and Hirsch, for his part, wondered: "Where will you get the money? Rothschild will subscribe five hundred francs."⁵ Yet when Herzl publicized his ideas the following January in the London-based *Jewish Chronicle*, he still wondered, "Shall we choose Argentine or Palestine?" and his programmatic book, *The Jewish State*, published after Hirsch's death in April 1896, included a brief chapter entitled "Palestine or Argentina?"⁶

Scion of a family of Bavarian court bankers, Maurice (Moritz) de Hirsch was born in Munich in 1831; in 1855 he married into a renowned Belgian Jewish banking family when he wed Clara Bischoffsheim.⁷ In 1869 Hirsch obtained the concession to build the railroad that would later be called the Orient-Express, and by the time the first trains began to travel the route from Vienna to Constantinople in 1888, he was one of the wealthiest men of his generation.⁸ Following a prolonged sojourn in the Ottoman capital in the late 1860s, Maurice and Clara settled in Paris in 1870. Though Hirsch acquired Austrian citizenship in 1878 and spent much time in England, the center of his far-flung business and philanthropic operations remained in Paris.⁹

4 Herzl, *Briefe*, 2.141; *The Diaries of Theodor Herzl*, transl. and ed. Marvin Lowenthal (New York: Dial, 1962) 26.

5 Herzl, *Briefe*, 2.61; *Diaries*, 19.

6 Herzl, *Jewish Chronicle*, 17 Jan 1896; Theodor Herzl, *Der Judenstaat* (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 1920) 24–25.

7 For an overview of Hirsch's life, see Shalom Adler-Rudel, "Moritz Baron Hirsch, Profile of a Great Philanthropist," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 8 (1963) 29–69, and Kurt Grünwald, *Türkenhirsch: A Study of Baron Maurice de Hirsch, Entrepreneur and Philanthropist* (Jerusalem: Israel Program for Scientific Translations, 1966); neither is based on archival research. There are two more recent, non-scholarly biographies: Dominique Frischer, *Le Moïse des Amériques: vies et œuvres du munificent baron de Hirsch* (Paris: Grasset, 2002); Serge-Allain Rozenblum, *Le baron de Hirsch: un financier au service de l'humanité* (Paris: Punctum, 2006). As can be appreciated from their very titles, these popular biographies present a rather triumphalist interpretation of Hirsch's life.

8 *Actes de la concession des chemins de fer de la Turquie d'Europe* (Constantinople: Typographie et Lithographie Centrales, 1874); Christopher Clay, *Gold for the Sultan: Western Bankers and Ottoman Finance 1856–1881: A Contribution to Ottoman and to International Financial History* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000); Bülent Bilmez, "European Investments in the Ottoman Railways, 1850–1914," in *Across the Borders: Financing the World's Railways in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Ralf Roth and Günter Dinshöhl (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008) 183–206.

9 Hirsch had a close relationship with Crown Prince Rudolf of Austria, who in turn introduced him to Edward, Prince of Wales; their friendship with the Jewish banker raised eyebrows in both countries. See Brigitte Hamann, *Kronprinz Rudolf: Ein Leben*

Hirsch's experience in the Ottoman Empire sparked his interest in the plight of the local Jewish communities, and in December 1873 he reached out to the Paris-based Alliance Israélite Universelle, an international organization established in 1860 with the purpose of fighting antisemitism and promoting modern, Francophone education among Jews in North Africa and the Middle East.¹⁰ He wrote to the president of the Alliance,

During my repeated and lengthy stays in Turkey, I have been painfully struck by the misery and the ignorance of the great majority of the Israelites who live in that empire. There is progress everywhere in Turkey, but the Israelites hardly benefit from it on account of their poverty and their lack of enlightenment.¹¹

Hirsch's donation of one million francs to support the creation of an Alliance school in Constantinople was the beginning of his long career as one of the, and perhaps the, most significant Jewish philanthropist of the period.¹²

Prompted by the untimely death of their only son in 1887, Maurice and Clara de Hirsch significantly expanded their involvement in Jewish beneficence. They set up committees in various cities of the Habsburg Empire, and in 1888 they created the Baron Hirsch Foundation in order to establish modern schools for the impoverished Jews of Austrian Galicia and Bukovina, with an educational agenda that echoed the politics of "regeneration" espoused by the Alliance in its schools across North Africa and the Middle East.¹³ Thanks to the mediation of his old friend Oscar Straus, a former US

(Munich: Piper, 2006) 201–205 and passim; Jane Ridley, *Bertie: A Life of Edward VII* (London: Vintage, 2013) 259–60, 270–71.

10 On the Alliance and its schools in the Ottoman Empire, see Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews: The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860–1925* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Lisa Moses Leff, *Sacred Bonds of Solidarity: The Rise of Jewish Internationalism in Nineteenth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

11 Maurice de Hirsch, Brussels to President of the AIU, Paris, 9 Dec 1873 (AIU France III N 07.06). English translations of sources in other languages are my own.

12 Though a comprehensive comparison of Hirsch's philanthropy with that of his contemporaries is impossible here, a juxtaposition of Hirsch's expenses on the JCA and its projects in Argentina with the support provided by Baron Edmond de Rothschild for Jewish colonies in Palestine is instructive. The initial endowment of Hirsch's JCA alone (50 million francs) exceeded the 40 million francs that Rothschild disbursed in Palestine over an almost twenty-year period from 1882 to 1900; Haim Avni, "Territorialism, Territorialist Settlement and Zionist Settlement" (Hebrew) *Yahadut Zmanenu* 1 (1983–4) 69–87: 81.

13 The Baron Hirsch Foundation was officially recognized by the Habsburg government, following lengthy negotiations, in February 1891. For a comparison between the Alliance Israélite Universelle of Paris, the Israelitische Allianz of Vienna and the Baron Hirsch Foundation in Galicia, see Björn Siegel, "Das 'Es werde Licht' ist gesprochen ...? Die Bildungsmissionen der Israelitischen Allianz zu Wien, der Baron Hirsch-Stiftung

ambassador to Constantinople now back in New York, Hirsch also took an interest in the fate of the growing number of Jewish migrants from Eastern Europe in North America. In 1891 he set up the Baron Hirsch Fund in New York to assist Jewish immigrants in the United States.¹⁴ That same year, he launched his most ambitious project, the JCA, which was incorporated in London with capital of 50 million francs, or two million pounds sterling.¹⁵ The goal of the JCA was to facilitate the emigration of Russian Jews and their settlement in agricultural colonies, primarily in Argentina. Though the initial results were modest (when Hirsch died in April 1896, just 6,757 colonists lived in the JCA's four Argentinian settlements¹⁶), his ambitions had been transformative, and it was not surprising that Argentina still appeared plausible as a potential Jewish homeland when Herzl paid his visit to Hirsch in 1895.

Whereas there is a good deal of research on the JCA's agricultural colonies in Argentina, looming large in the collective imaginary of Argentine Jewry,¹⁷ historians have paid much less attention to Hirsch and the ideas that

und der Alliance Israélite Universelle im Vergleich, 1860–1914,” *Transversal* 12 (2011) 83–112.

- 14 Straus had first put Hirsch in contact with Michael Heilprin, an American Jewish intellectual who was promoting the idea of industrial and agricultural settlements for Jewish immigrants. See Adler-Rudel, “Moritz,” 19–20.
- 15 See agreement between Hirsch and JCA (draft), 26 Oct 1891 (Plymouth and West Devon Record Office, Plymouth, UK [PWDRO] 1637/3).
- 16 Haim Avni, *Argentina: The Promised Land* (Hebrew; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1973) 285. In 1925, the size of the JCA's agricultural settlements reached their peak. Sandra McGee Deutsch estimates their number at just over 33,000, or 20 percent of the Argentine Jewish population; S. McGee Deutsch, *Crossing Borders, Claiming a Nation: A History of Argentine Jewish Women, 1880–1955* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) 250.
- 17 The most extensive overview of the JCA and its colonization work in Argentina is Avni, *Argentina: Promised Land*. See also Theodore Norman, *An Outstretched Arm: A History of the Jewish Colonization Association* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985). On the role of JCA's colonies in the collective imaginary of the Argentine Jewish community and its self-definition as part of the Argentine nation, see Judith Noemí Freidenberg, *The Invention of the Jewish Gaucho: Villa Clara and the Construction of Argentine Identity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009); Iván Cherjovsky, *Recuerdos de Moisés Ville: la colonización agrícola en la memoria colectiva judeo-argentina* (Buenos Aires: Teso, 2017). Much of the existing scholarship on Argentine Jewish history focuses on the 20th century. See, for example, Eugene Sofer, *From Pale to Pampa: A Social History of the Jews of Buenos Aires* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982); Victor Mirelman, *Jewish Buenos Aires, 1890–1930* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990); Haim Avni, *Argentina and the Jews: A History of Jewish Immigration* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1991); Ricardo Feierstein, *Historia de los judíos argentinos* (Buenos Aires: Galerna, 2006); Raanan Rein, *Argentine Jews or Jewish Argentines? Essays on Ethnicity, Identity, and Diaspora* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); McGee Deutsch, *Crossing Borders*; Adriana Brodsky and Raanan Rein, eds., *The New Jewish Argentina: Facets of Jewish*

drove him.¹⁸ When he does appear, his significance is often seen within the framework of the genealogy of Jewish nationalism. Noting that Herzl had equivocated between Palestine and Argentina as the best place to establish a Jewish nation state, Haim Avni – the foremost historian of the JCA and its activities in Argentina – suggested that Hirsch and Herzl had ultimately pursued an “almost entirely identical vision and goal.”¹⁹ Gur Alroey, on the other hand, has claimed Hirsch as a precursor of “territorialism,” a kind of Jewish proto-nationalism that sought to establish an autonomous or independent Jewish commonwealth, usually somewhere in the Americas or in colonized Africa and competing with the Palestine-centric activities of the Zionist movement.²⁰ Citing the two most prominent thinkers of early Zionism, Alroey argues that Hirsch “sought to realize the principles of the ideas of Pinsker’s *Auto-Emancipation* and those of Herzl’s *Jewish State* simultaneously,”²¹ and he draws a parallel between the “ideological” immigration of Zionists to Palestine and colonists under the auspices of the JCA to Argentina.²²

Experiences in the Southern Cone (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Mollie Lewis Nouwen, *Oy, my Buenos Aires: Jewish Immigrants and the Creation of Argentine National Identity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013); Adriana Brodsky, *Sephardi, Jewish, Argentine* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016).

- 18 While Hirsch usually makes a cursory appearance in books on Jewish immigration to Argentina, his role remains unexplored and he is often mis-characterized. McGee Deutsch, for example, introduces him incongruously as “an Alsatian philanthropist” (*Crossing Borders*, 15).
- 19 Avni, “Territorialism,” 83; see Avni, *Argentina: Promised Land*, 65–67, 307–308. Earlier Zionists, too, have claimed Hirsch as a proto-nationalist. Nahum Sokolow, for example, writes that “Hirsch was not a Zionist, nor do we desire to claim him as a national Jew. ... He was not interested in abstract ideas. Nevertheless his actions became those of a national Jew”; Nahum Sokolow, *History of Zionism* (London: Longmans, Green, 1919) 1.252. Interestingly, probably because of the baron’s ill-fated encounter with Herzl and his dismissal of the Hovevei Zion, Michael Brenner refers to Hirsch in passing as an “anti-Zionist,” which does not capture his intentions either; M. Brenner, *In Search of Israel: The History of an Idea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018) 252.
- 20 On the territorialist movement see, most recently, Gur Alroey, *Zionism without Zion: The Jewish Territorial Organization and Its Conflict with the Zionist Organization* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2016); the Jewish Territorialist Organization (ITO) was established in 1905. On various territorialist schemes of the 19th century, see Adam Rovner, *In the Shadow of Zion: Promised Lands before Israel* (New York: NYU Press, 2014).
- 21 Gur Alroey, *The Quiet Revolution: Jewish Emigration from the Russian Empire, 1875–1924* (Hebrew; Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar, 2008) 198.
- 22 Gur Alroey, “Aliya to America? A Comparative Look at Jewish Mass Migration, 1881–1914,” *Modern Judaism* 28 (2008) 109–133. In a sense, Alroey’s interpretation pushes

This article interrogates this understanding of Hirsch and the ideas behind his philanthropic projects. The goal is not simply to set the record straight, as it were, and to gain a better sense of Hirsch as an individual; for all his idiosyncrasies, he is also representative of the larger elite of wealthy philanthropists that influenced the political fortunes of the Jewish diaspora in the mid- to late 19th century. We have plenty of sources produced by organizations like the French Alliance, and historians have long pored over the writings of intellectuals, nationalist thinkers and religious leaders in order to understand how Jews of the fin-de-siècle responded to the challenges of nationalism, emancipation and antisemitism. But even though there is a growing literature on Jewish philanthropy,²³ we still know too little about the thinking that drove individual philanthropists like Hirsch. The political history of Jews in the 19th century has largely been written as revolving around three competing ideologies – liberalism, nationalism or Zionism, and socialism – and has privileged the role of intellectuals and writers as the leaders of Jewish public opinion before the transition to mass politics around the turn of the 20th century.²⁴ With the recent shift towards economic history, however, actors have moved into view that modern

back against an earlier Zionist narrative that saw Hirsch's JCA as an "anti-nationalist" organization; while his critique is valid, I disagree with re-characterizing the JCA as the vanguard of the territorialist-autonomist movement. On the classical Zionist understanding of the organization, see Derek Penslar, *Zionism and Technocracy: The Engineering of Jewish Settlement in Palestine, 1870–1918* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991) 27, and the earlier literature cited there. The idea of Hirsch's project as promoting a Jewish autonomous settlement still shapes public perceptions of the JCA's Argentine colonization scheme: see, for example, "This is all that Remains of the Dream to Establish a Jewish Autonomy in the Argentine Pampas," *Haaretz*, Oct 11, 2018, with a report from Moisés Ville, Argentina.

- 23 See, for example, W. E. Mosse, *Jews in the German Economy: The German-Jewish Economic Elite 1820–1935* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); W. E. Mosse, *The German-Jewish Economic Elite, 1820–1935: A Socio-Cultural Profile* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Fritz Stern, *Gold and Iron: Bismarck, Bleichröder, and the Building of the German Empire* (New York: Knopf, 1977); Niall Ferguson, *The House of Rothschild: The World's Banker, 1849–1999* (New York: Penguin, 2000); Abigail Green, *Moses Montefiore: Jewish Liberator, Imperial Hero* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2012); Thomas Adam, *Transnational Philanthropy: The Mond Family's Support for Public Institutions in Western Europe from 1890 to 1938* (New York: Palgrave, 2016); Hasia Diner, *Julius Rosenwald: Repairing the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).
- 24 See, for example, the still influential studies by Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862–1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), and Ezra Mendelsohn, *On Modern Jewish Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); more recently, see Eliyahu Stern, *Jewish Materialism: The Intellectual Revolution of the 1870s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018). Liberalism has received less scholarly attention than Jewish socialism and nationalism,

Jewish historians have not typically paid attention to.²⁵ The rise of modern capitalism facilitated the emergence of a new type of leader – the banker (and, more often than not, railway entrepreneur) as philanthropist – who took the place of the “court Jew” of the pre-emancipation era.²⁶ In fact, much of political power within the Jewish world of the 19th century rested with this philanthropic elite, of whom the Rothschilds were the most well known and Hirsch another prominent example.²⁷ Yet though private philanthropy continues to play an important role in Jewish society even today, historians have paid little attention to understanding the ideas that guided the philanthropic leaders of the 19th century in the creation of a Jewish political economy.²⁸

One way to read Hirsch is as a participant in a transnational conversation about the future of the Jews in the late 19th century. Unlike the shapers of Jewish public opinion, whether nationalist thinkers (of Zionist or territorialist persuasion) or religious leaders (reformers or Orthodox), Hirsch's response to the predicament of modern Jews was not guided by an overarching concern for ensuring Jewish continuity, or collective survival of Jews *as Jews*. Unlike *maskilim* and rabbis, he was not interested in the future of Judaism as a religion, and unlike the nationalists, he did

but see Leff, *Sacred Bonds*, and there is a forthcoming volume on Jews, liberalism, and antisemitism edited by Abigail Green and Simon Levis Sullam.

- 25 On Jewish economic history and Jewish philanthropy, see Derek Penslar, *Shylock's Children: Economic and Jewish Identity in Modern Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), esp. 174–222. Also Rebecca Kobrin, ed., *Chosen Capital: The Jewish Encounter with American Capitalism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012); Rebecca Kobrin and Adam Teller, eds., *Purchasing Power: The Economics of Modern Jewish History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Jerry Muller, *Capitalism and the Jews* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Gideon Reuveni, ed., *The Economy in Jewish History: New Perspectives on the Interrelationship Between Ethnicity and Economic Life* (New York: Berghahn, 2011).
- 26 The history of Hirsch's family itself illustrates the transition from the court banker of the old order to the rise of the modern capitalist entrepreneur; see Joseph Prys, *Die Familie von Hirsch auf Gereuth: Erste quellenmäßige Darstellung ihrer Geschichte* (Munich: self-published, 1931). The classic study on European court Jews is Selma Stern, *The Court Jew: A Contribution to the History of Absolutism in Central Europe* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1950); most recently on court Jews and antisemitism, see Yair Mintzker, *The Many Deaths of Jew Süß: The Notorious Trial and Execution of an Eighteenth Century Court Jew* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).
- 27 On the role of the financial elite and the shifting landscape of Jewish politics in Russia at the time, see Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) 165–198.
- 28 See Lila Corwin Berman, “How Americans Give: The Financialization of American Jewish Philanthropy,” *American Historical Review* 122 (2017) 1459–1489.

not ultimately embrace the ideas of Jewish peoplehood and national self-determination. Hirsch was not a systematic thinker, and his ideas were not always consistent and even sometimes contradictory. He was prone to change his mind, and, as one might expect from the successful businessman that he was, he would change course if faced with the prospect of failure. Yet there is a common thread that ran through Hirsch's thinking on the "Jewish question," as he fully embraced the ideology of "productivization"²⁹ and showed a surprisingly radical commitment to cultural and social assimilation.³⁰

In the absence of private letters or diaries, Hirsch's few public statements and his business correspondence are the best we have to get a sense of his thinking. In the following, I first look at a controversial interview that he gave to the *New York Herald* in 1889 and the way it was perceived by his contemporaries – something that has been completely overlooked by historians to date. I then turn to some of his writings, both published and unpublished, from the crucial early months of the Argentine project in the summer and fall 1891.

1. Amalgamation

"The Jews Must Disappear," read the headline in the *New York Herald*, introducing a rare interview with Maurice de Hirsch published in January 1889.³¹ The subtitle, "A Hebrew Millionnaire [sic] Spends Enormous Sums to Assimilate Them with Christians," would have done little to assuage the Jewish readers of one of North America's most widely-circulating papers. Not surprisingly, the musings of Hirsch caused a great deal of controversy.

²⁹ On the discourse on "productivization" and French Jewish philanthropy, see Penslar, *Zionism*, 13–37; also Penslar, *Shylock's Children*, esp. 205–216.

³⁰ On the question of "assimilation" in modern Jewish history, see Paula Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History: The Roles and Representation of Women* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995). Hyman offers a useful distinction between assimilation "as a sociological process" and "as a project," 13–14; on assimilation in America, 93–133. On "radical assimilation" of the kind entertained by Hirsch, see Todd Endelman, *Radical Assimilation in English Jewish History, 1656–1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); *Leaving the Jewish Fold: Conversion and Radical Assimilation in Jewish History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); and *Broadening Jewish History* (Oxford: Littman, 2011) 19–48. On "assimilation" in Jewish historiography, see the contributions in *Jewish Quarterly Review* 106 (2016), occasioned by the 50th anniversary of Gerson Cohen's "The Blessing of Assimilation in Jewish History."

³¹ *New York Herald*, 12 Jan 1889.

The interview “has been the absorbing topic of discussion during the last twenty-four hours,” the *Herald* reported a day after the initial publication, and it noted a few days later that it had “set all American Hebrews to thinking deeply about themselves and their religion.”³² The news was picked up by Jewish and non-Jewish papers on both sides of the Atlantic. A complete translation of the interview appeared in the influential French-language *L'Indépendance Belge*, a broadsheet newspaper that had a readership that stretched from its hometown, Brussels, to the major port cities of the Ottoman Empire.³³ The antisemitic press too (for example, the Viennese *Deutsches Volksblatt*) took note of the controversy.³⁴

The background for his controversial interview was Hirsch's announcement in 1889 that he was planning to endow the enormous sum of 50 million francs in order to foster vocational and agricultural training for Russian Jews, with schools that would be open to both Jewish and Christian children. In the interview, Hirsch argued, to the surprise of many, that in his view, “[t]he Jewish question can only be solved by the disappearance of the Jewish race, which will inevitably be accomplished by the amalgamation of Christians and Jews.” Speaking about the misery of Russian Jews, he noted:

I looked about and found that on the whole the condition of the Jews in Russia was worse than that of any large body of people in the civilized world. I am a Jew myself and I felt for those of the same race, and set about giving them a fair chance to work side by side with and assimilate themselves with the people of the country in which they live.³⁵

The purpose of mixed schools, he said, whether in Habsburg Galicia or in Russia, was to “knock out the corner stone” of the “Chinese wall around them isolating them from the rest of humanity.” Hirsch added, for good measure, that assimilation (or “amalgamation”) was already turning into reality in those countries where Jews enjoyed equal rights: it was “the

³² *New York Herald*, 13 Jan 1889 and 17 Jan 1889.

³³ *L'Indépendance Belge*, 19 Jan 1889, under the title “Une solution de la question sémitique.” Over the years, the masthead of *L'Indépendance* listed booksellers across Europe, as well as in Ottoman cities such as Constantinople (Istanbul), Smyrna (Izmir) and Salonika, where one could subscribe to the newspaper. The German-Jewish *Der Israelit* first reported about the interview on the basis of the article that had appeared in the Belgian newspaper; *Der Israelit*, 28 Jan 1889. That said, the echo in the European press was muted.

³⁴ The *Volksblatt* dismissed talk of Jewish patriotism and assimilation: “The Jew, at the end of the day, always and everywhere only loves himself.” *Deutsches Volksblatt*, 7 Feb 1889.

³⁵ *New York Herald*, 12 Jan 1889.

universal tendency of modern times. Younger members of the families of Rothschild and Montefiore and dozens of others are assimilated – that is to say, are married with the Grammonts, the Richelieus and the Roseberys.” This trend was not limited to the Jewish business elites: “In other strata of society the same law prevails. In Saint-Antoine and Belleville,” two working-class districts of Paris, “mixed Christian and Jewish marriages take place every week.” Thus, Hirsch repeated his main argument: “Let them be amalgamated by Christianity and merge in Christianity; let Jewish isolation be broken down; let the Jews as a distinct sect disappear. ... This will be the solution of the Jewish question and a blessing to civilization.”³⁶

The editors of the *New York Herald* itself seemed to be somewhat taken aback by the apparent radicalism of Hirsch’s pronouncement. This disappearance of the Jews, they noted in an editorial the following day, would be “extremely undesirable. The Hebrew race is a phenomenal race, with a phenomenal history.” It also seemed implausible: “The race that has been loyal to its own traditions for over one hundred generations is not likely to make so radical a change at the present junction.” They granted, however, that Hirsch had been correct “in declaring that the autocratic exclusiveness of the Hebrews [was] not consistent with progress.”³⁷ Many American Jews walked a tightrope as they considered their response to Hirsch’s challenge. Prominent Reform rabbis like Gustav Gottheil, of New York’s Temple Emanu-El, certainly shared the view that Jews should not isolate themselves from the rest of society, yet they objected to the baron’s suggestion that the Jews abandon any sense of religious difference in order to facilitate full assimilation. “Amalgamation – yes, in social life, in all civic relationships, in rights and services of the State, in charities,” Gottheil declared, but not “in those [things] in which man is not morally free to choose and in which he dare make no sacrifice – his belief.”³⁸

One consistent feature of the responses from American Jews that appeared in the wake of Hirsch’s interview was their liberalism and their embrace of the idea of civic and social, yet not religious, assimilation. A prominent member of an Orthodox congregation in Washington, D. C., echoed the sentiment when he pointed out to the *Herald*: “this separatism of us Jews applies only to our religious belief, the same as drawn among

³⁶ *New York Herald*, 12 Jan 1889.

³⁷ *New York Herald*, 13 Jan 1889.

³⁸ *New York Herald*, 14 Jan 1889. That day the *Herald* published several responses to Hirsch’s interview from various cities on the East Coast, most prominently that of Gottheil, under the headline “No, Good Baron, Israel Will Not Die.”

Christians between Protestant and Catholic, Presbyterian and Unitarian, and so on. But socially we know of no differences.”³⁹

Summarizing the overwhelming response received since it published the Hirsch interview, the New York paper wrote: “Letters Breathing American Patriotism and Liberal to the Limit, but Stopping Short of Agreeing to the Suicide of Judaism.”⁴⁰ The American context thus loomed large in the debate about Hirsch’s views. American Jews emphasized their patriotism and argued that the true solution to the predicament of the Jews was to take place “in the American fashion,” as Gottheil put it, by offering “Liberty for all alike.”⁴¹ The frequent reference to the Jews as a “race,” too, belied the particular context of this debate – and, as an unspoken subtext, the assertion that Jews hoped to claim a place as part of white society, something that did not remain uncontested among their Christian contemporaries.⁴² One Reverend William A. Leonard wrote, for example, that in his view Jews were “remarkable ... for the unity of their social relations. It is better that it should be so than that they should bring into the world a mongrel race, and so lose their integrity as a people and their sturdy virtues as well.”⁴³

Alexander Crummell, pastor of a Black Episcopal church in Washington, likewise found Hirsch’s program of complete assimilation to be dubious:

The obliteration of race is an impossibility. There are thirty millions of negroes on the American continent. Nothing but the wildest imagination can conceive of their being amalgamated with the white race. What is true of the races I have mentioned is also true of the Jews.⁴⁴

³⁹ *New York Herald*, 14 Jan 1889.

⁴⁰ *New York Herald*, 17 Jan 1889.

⁴¹ *New York Herald*, 14 Jan 1889. On American Judaism at this time, especially religious identity, see Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) 135–207; on the Jews of the 19th-century United States, see Hasia Diner, *The Jews of the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) 71–202; Eli Lederhendler, *American Jewry: A New History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) 56–131; on the Jewish reform movement in America, see Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988) 225–295; on the social reality of everyday assimilation, see Shari Rabin, *Jews on the Frontier: Religion and Mobility in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: NYU Press, 2017).

⁴² There is a growing scholarship on the question of race in American Jewish history. See, for example, Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999); Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). See also the classic study by Milton Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion and National Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

⁴³ *New York Herald*, 15 Jan 1889.

⁴⁴ *New York Herald*, 15 Jan 1889.

Both Jewish and Christian writers in the United States thus integrated their responses to Hirsch into their own narratives, shaped by the American context, markedly different from the concerns of Russian Jews – the ostensible focus of Hirsch's interview and philanthropy – or Jews in Western Europe.

A second feature common to much of the critique leveled against Hirsch's ruminations about Jewish assimilation was to question his standing as a legitimate spokesman of the Jewish people. Rabbi Gottheil thundered in his speech at Temple Emanu-El:

I am here today to protest against the arrogance of a man who, besides his princely money gifts, has no claim whatever, neither as a scholar nor even as a believer, to be our leader in our religious aspirations. ... Financial talent and a philanthropic heart are not sufficient to understand a question involving the religious faith of eight millions of people – of a people with such a history behind them as the Jews.⁴⁵

What was at stake, then, in the polemic that was playing out in the pages of the *New York Herald* in January 1889 was the negotiation of the limits of acceptable discourse about the place of Jews in modern society, and the competing claims to the mantle of leadership once the traditional framework of Jewish communal life had lost its power. The frequent slippage between religious and ethnic identity – between “faith” and “race” – in the pronouncements of American rabbis and lay leaders alike pointed to a dilemma that modern Jews faced on both sides of the Atlantic, once the constraints of civic exclusion and the hold of religious tradition weakened or disappeared. Could Jewish difference plausibly be defined, and maintained, in terms of a denominational identity? Could a sense of ethnic identity be reconciled with the ideal of social and civic inclusion? Could one embrace assimilation and Jewish continuity simultaneously?

With his declarations concerning Jewish assimilation, Hirsch intervened in this contemporary debate over the place of the Jews in the modern world. By raising the issue of intermarriage and “fusion” with the Christian majority society,⁴⁶ Hirsch challenged the basic assumptions of the discourse of religious reform (not to mention religious Orthodoxy), and he appeared to challenge the monopoly of the rabbinic elite (regardless of their place on the spectrum of modern Jewish religious ideologies) to speak on behalf of the Jews.

⁴⁵ *New York Herald*, 14 Jan 1889.

⁴⁶ “Fusion” is the term Hirsch used in French correspondence; e.g., in “Statuts de la Fondation du Baron Maurice de Hirsch pour l’Education de la Jeunesse Israélite en Russie,” enclosure to letter from Hirsch to Count Delianoff, Russian Minister of Public Education, 1 Jun 1888 (YIVO Archives, New York, RG 318).

On the European side of the Atlantic, the response to Hirsch's interview with the *Herald* was more muted than in the United States. Nevertheless, those publications that picked up the story were no less critical of the baron's program of assimilation than their American counterparts. As with the latter, their views were shaped by their own narratives about the future of the Jews. Thus, the mouthpiece of Orthodox Judaism in Germany, *Der Israelit*, carried a front-page editorial entitled "Caution!" and warned that, if in fact true, Hirsch's interview suggested that his much-celebrated philanthropic endeavors were in fact nothing less than a "Trojan horse" and "the beneficence of Mr. von H. one of the greatest dangers to Judaism." Yet they reassured their readers that "*nobody* will succeed to bring about the destruction of the Jewish nation, not through fire and sword nor through assimilation. God will guard us from our enemies no less than from our supposed friends."⁴⁷

Further East, *Ha-Magid*, a *maskilic* newspaper published in the Prussian city of Lyck by Dov Gordon and supportive of the early Zionist colonization efforts in Palestine, dismissed Hirsch's views as coming from someone who could not claim to speak for the Jewish nation as a whole:

As one of the great and wealthy men of the world it is incumbent upon [Hirsch] to support the poor of his people and to rescue them from misery and to redeem them with his wealth and his riches. Whether his thinking about Judaism in general is warranted or not is all the same to us In the end, his actions are no doubt valuable and there is no relation or connection between them and his private views regarding the future of his people.⁴⁸

Though that stance may have been disingenuous, the editors of *Ha-Magid* were supportive of the modern schools that Hirsch had set up in Galicia and his philanthropic work in Russia. But we should not see their position as cynical; they echoed the position of American rabbis who questioned Hirsch's standing as a spokesman of his people, instead claiming this role for *maskilic* intellectuals like themselves. While *Ha-Magid* took note of the animated debate across the Atlantic and welcomed the fact that American rabbis had come out forcefully in defense of the future of Judaism and against assimilation, its religious and Zionist view also set it apart from the public discourse about the future of the Jews that was playing out in the pages of American newspapers. "Until now it was only those writers who write in the holy tongue [Hebrew] who have been fighting against the idea of assimilation, and the European intellectuals laughed at them."

⁴⁷ *Der Israelit*, 28 Jan 1889.

⁴⁸ *Ha-Magid*, 28 Feb 1889.

Now *Ha-Magid* felt vindicated, as Western Jewish leaders were also coming out against a program of radical assimilation. Yet the Hebrew newspaper remained skeptical of the American response, and in a surprising turn, the editor concluded: "Is not Baron Hirsch, with all his lack of faith in the eternity of Judaism, better and dearer to us than all those faithful reformers?" After all, *Ha-Magid* maintained, the "slogan 'assimilation' that he used was invented by the enlightened reformers themselves."⁴⁹

The discussion about the future of Jews and Judaism in the modern age thus not only played out on a transnational level, with news and views being exchanged between Western Europe, North America and Eastern Europe, but it was also shaped by the specific, national contexts of the various participants in this debate. American reformers, Orthodox Jews in Germany, and Zionists in Eastern Europe all engaged with Hirsch's view on assimilation by fitting their response into their own narratives about the place of the Jews at the turn of the century. While agreeing in their rejection of "amalgamation" into Christian society, they envisioned radically different paths for the Jewish future. At the same time, the conflict between Hirsch and his critics involved the negotiation of competing claims for the power to shape modern Jewish politics.

Observers on both sides of the Atlantic agreed that they couldn't be sure whether Hirsch's views had in fact been reported accurately by the *Herald*. A common response was that the philanthropist "must either have mis-spoken or have been misunderstood,"⁵⁰ and many started their response with a disclaimer that they reserved judgment over what Hirsch had actually said. For the London *Jewish Chronicle*, in fact, it was "a well-known tendency of the American reporter to amplify, to use an amicable expression," and it noted that Hirsch "has given too many proofs of his devotion to Judaism and to the Jews to be suspected of hostility to the cause he had defended with so much spirit, and supported with such munificence."⁵¹ To many contemporaries, then, Jewish solidarity, as demonstrated by Hirsch's munificence, appeared incompatible with his views on assimilation and his blatant disinterest in ensuring a collective future for the Jews as a distinct religious or national entity.

Had Hirsch been in fact misunderstood? Did he really advocate radical assimilation, or "amalgamation"? The paper trail of Hirsch's negotiations

⁴⁹ *Ha-Magid*, 28 Feb 1889.

⁵⁰ *New York Herald*, 16 Jan 1889. Even the Orthodox *Israelit* followed up on its earlier editorial and seized on a "clarification" of Hirsch's views that had appeared in the *Herald* (6 Feb 1889); *Der Israelit*, 18 Feb 1889.

⁵¹ *Jewish Chronicle*, 1 Feb 1889.

with the Russian government about the creation of new schools makes it clear that the views he expressed to the correspondent of the *Herald* were indeed consistent with the agenda of his philanthropic oeuvre. The statutes that he had proposed in 1888 for the foundation in support of Jewish education in Russia explicitly stated the goal of a “fusion with the Russian population of the empire.”⁵² Hirsch’s instructions to Léonce Lehmann and the Marquis d’Alzac, whom he dispatched for negotiations with the authorities in St Petersburg, reiterated that his objective was “the moral uplifting of an entire population in order to facilitate and hasten their assimilation with their co-citizens.”⁵³ If this language echoed the moralizing, Westernizing ethos of the Alliance and its schools, Hirsch’s letter to the director-general of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox church went farther, rejecting the church’s insistence that the new schools should cater exclusively to Jews:

Nothing is further from my thinking than having this Foundation serve to further accentuate the religious difference between my coreligionists who are subjects to his majesty, the Czar, and the rest of the empire’s population. My goal is, to the contrary, to lift up the Israelites from the state of ignorance in which they find themselves now, to dispel the darkness that surrounds their minds ... and therewith to facilitate a social fusion (*fusion*), which after some generations can lead to a religious fusion.⁵⁴

When the imperial government returned an amended draft of the proposed statutes of Hirsch’s foundation, Hirsch protested against a change that would have perpetuated the clear distinction between Jewish and Christian schools. “I have no design,” he wrote to the Russian minister of education, “to create special Israelite schools in Russia of the kind that already exist and which are, in general, the main obstacle to raising the moral and intellectual level of the Jewish population in Russia and its assimilation, as soon as possible, to the rest of the empire’s population.”⁵⁵

Thus, in early 1889 Hirsch was sending a consistent message – privately to his representatives, in his official communication with the Russians, and to the wider public through his newspaper interview: assimilation, in fact a

⁵² “Statuts.”

⁵³ Maurice de Hirsch, Paris to Léonce Lehmann and Marquis d’Alzac, Paris, 18 Dec 1888 (YIVO RG 318).

⁵⁴ Maurice de Hirsch, Paris to Konstantin Pobedonotsev, Haut Procureur Général du Saint-Synode, St Petersburg [n. d.] 1889 (YIVO RG 318). I take the French “fusion” as essentially expressing the same idea as the term *amalgamation* that Hirsch used in his interview with the *Herald*.

⁵⁵ Maurice de Hirsch, Paris to Count Delianoff, Russian Minister of Public Education, St Petersburg, 28 Jan 1889 (YIVO RG 318).

merging with the Christian majority population, was the best way to lift up the Jews and defeat the scourge of antisemitism.⁵⁶

“Assimilation” is, of course, a contentious concept in modern Jewish history. As David Myers has observed, “In contemporary parlance, this word induces panic in Jewish community officials, who point to high intermarriage rates and weakening organizational affiliation as signs of the impending disappearance of the Jews.” Historically, however, “assimilation refers to the process by which Jews ... absorbed the linguistic and cultural norms of their Gentile neighbors – and then shared their own,” which, in fact, was “*necessary* to the survival of the Jews,” whose culture otherwise would have become “fossilized.”⁵⁷ However, for a 19th-century philanthropist like Hirsch, “amalgamation” meant precisely the kind of assimilation that would lead to the eventual disappearance of the Jews as a distinct group, and there is no indication that he saw any contradiction between this commitment to assimilation and his sense of solidarity with those Jews who suffered from poverty or persecution. In 1889 Hirsch considered complete cultural, social and even religious assimilation to be desirable, achievable ultimately through intermarriage, and the only viable solution to the predicament of Jewish alterity.⁵⁸ Assimilation, then, rather than an accident of the post-emancipation order, could very much be a project for the future, even if a utopian one.

2. Colonization

In the event, the project of creating a network of modern schools to educate Russian Jews was thwarted by opposition from the imperial government and the Russian Orthodox church.⁵⁹ Not only did the Russian

56 Hirsch explicitly stated his preference for the “amalgamation of the Israelite element with the indigenous element” also in other contexts – for example, with regard to Jewish colonies in North America in a letter written only a few months after his interview with the *Herald*: Maurice de Hirsch, Paris to Myer Isaacs, New York, 6 Jul 1889 (American Jewish Historical Society Archives, New York (AJHS) Kohler Papers P7 box 7 folder 8).

57 David Myers, *Jewish History: A Very Brief Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017) xxiv–xxv.

58 Margot Asquith recalled that Hirsch approached her and asked her to marry his son, Lucien, allegedly insisting that, “above all he must marry an Englishwoman”; *Autobiography of Margot Asquith* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1920) 96.

59 See Avni, *Argentina: Promised Land*, 29–31; Frischer, *Moïse*, 326–336; Rozenblum, *Le baron*, 159–170.

authorities reject Hirsch's proposals, the situation of the Jews in the Russian Empire appeared to deteriorate even further. In the summer of 1891, the authorities expelled some 20,000 Jews from Moscow, and Jewish leaders in the West were alarmed by reports that the Russian government was about to implement new restrictions on Jewish life in the Pale of Settlement that might go even beyond the measures of the infamous "May Laws" of 1882.⁶⁰ Whereas others sought to mobilize diplomatic intervention by European governments, and the Paris Rothschilds decided to withdraw from a planned refinancing of Russian foreign debt, Hirsch concluded that such endeavors were futile and decided that time had come to facilitate mass emigration.⁶¹ He continued to support Jewish education as a path to integration elsewhere, especially in Austrian Galicia and schools operated by the Alliance. But by 1891 he began to lose faith in the prospect of achieving "amalgamation" of Jews into non-Jewish society in Russia. Hirsch thus reached the conclusion that the future of the Eastern European Jews lay outside Europe, and his philanthropic work began to focus on emigration and colonization.⁶²

In a statement to the Reuters news agency in 1891, reprinted in the American magazine *Forum*, Hirsch claimed that the "only means to raise [the] condition [of Russian Jews] is to remove them from the soil to which they are rooted and to transport them to other countries ... where they will cease to be pariahs, and become citizens." In fact, he went a step further, saying that he accepted the "expulsion" of the Jews from Russia as "an

⁶⁰ Concerning the reports about new measures against the Russian Jews, see, for example, Myer Isaacs, New York to Salomon Goldschmidt, Paris, 6 Aug 1890 (AJHS Kohler Papers P7 box 9 folder 10). In 1890 Viacheslav Pleve, who was director of the imperial police in the early 1880s and worked in the ministry of interior in the 1890s, circulated a program of renewed anti-Jewish legislation (which was never approved). On the expulsion from Moscow and the Pleve project, see Hans Rogger, *Jewish Policies and Right-Wing Politics in Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) 69–74. On the May Laws adopted after the pogroms of 1881–2, see John Doyle Klier, *Russians, Jews and the Pogroms of 1881–1882* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 207–233. On Jews in the Russian Empire in the late 19th century, see, for example, Nathans, *Beyond*; Eugene Avrutin, *Jews and the Imperial State: Identification Politics in Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010); Brian Horowitz, *Jewish Philanthropy and Enlightenment in Late-Tsarist Russia* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009).

⁶¹ Maurice de Hirsch, Carlsbad to Oscar Straus, New York, 2 Aug 1891 (AJHS Kohler Papers P7 box 9 folder 11). On the response of the Rothschilds, see Rogger, *Jewish Policies*, 74.

⁶² Thus, the statutes of the JCA explicitly excluded "Europe and Asia" as possible locations for Jewish settlement; "Jewish Colonization Association, Memorandum and Articles of Association" (PWDRO 1637/10).

accomplished fact” and that he saw his main task to help establish an orderly and gradual removal of the Jews from Russia.⁶³

For Hirsch, the “Jewish question” was playing out differently not only between Eastern and Western Europe, but also as a consequence of social class. In fact, “East” and “West” could be seen as denoting class differences within Jewish society as much as geographic, and thus political and cultural, distinctions.⁶⁴ The Russian Jews, Hirsch maintained, were mostly poor – and the best way to improve their lot was to steer them into agricultural and productive manual labor in a new homeland. In Western Europe, he felt, antisemitic hostility was directed at the wealthy, the Jewish bankers and entrepreneurs, whose success had stoked resentment. Nevertheless, he was optimistic about the future of the Jews in the West and about the possibility of assimilation: Jewish wealth, after all, had “to be thanked for the construction of railways, the setting on foot of great industries and the like, that have aided the states concerned to attain greater prosperity.” Moreover, Jewish business leaders were at the forefront of “the material development which characterizes the 19th century [and which] has redounded largely to the benefit of the lower classes.” In Hirsch’s estimation, it was only natural, and just a matter of time, for antisemitism in the West to disappear, “*faute de combattants*,” as he put it.⁶⁵

Hirsch therefore focused his attention on the Jews of Eastern Europe, in particular Russia. Ever since the pogroms in 1881–82, Jewish leaders in the Russian Empire, as well as Jewish organizations in Europe, had debated whether working towards improvements at home or encouraging emigration was the best path forward.⁶⁶ Though Hirsch had initially supported the first approach, hoping to facilitate the integration of Jews into Russian society through education, he now turned towards mass emigration, and resettlement in agricultural colonies, as the best solution. There was nothing unusual about his embrace of agricultural labor as a response to antisemitism. His ideas were entirely consistent with the contemporary discourse on “productivization” of the Jewish economy, an idea that went back to the early days of debating emancipation in Europe in the 1700s.

63 Maurice de Hirsch, “Refuge for Russian Jews,” *Forum* (Aug 1891) 627–629.

64 The tension, often expressed in terms of a cultural dissonance, yet just as much a matter of social class, was common in both Europe and the U.S. See, for example, the classic study by Stephen Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800–1923* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982); and Jack Wertheimer, *Unwelcome Strangers: East European Jews in Imperial Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

65 Hirsch, “Refuge,” 632–633.

66 See Klier, *Russians*, 264–287, 296–323.

Numerous other schemes to establish Jewish agricultural colonies appeared throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, with varying success.⁶⁷ Whereas Jewish social reformers sought agricultural labor as a way to the collective “moral betterment” of Jewish society, however, Hirsch was single-mindedly focused on finding a response to antisemitism: as he expressed it in a letter in 1894,

all the endeavors that have been made to date have essentially as their goal to demonstrate to anyone, especially to the detractors of our race, that the Jews are just as capable to become good agriculturalists as any other people.⁶⁸

But where would the flow of Russian Jewish migrants be directed, and where were the new agricultural colonies to be established? In 1891 the early Russian Zionists of the Hibbat Zion movement reached out for Hirsch’s support of their plans for establishing Jewish colonies in Palestine.⁶⁹ Hirsch remained opposed, not for ideological reasons, but because he considered their plans impractical and poorly thought out. He cautioned that they would do well to ignore “religious memories and ancient traditions,” as such sentiments alone were not enough to guarantee a solid basis for establishing a new homeland. Hirsch was convinced that large-scale agricultural colonization was impossible in the Ottoman Empire, whose government he considered to be corrupt and ineffective.⁷⁰ For him, the “negative outcomes” of the colonies funded by Baron Edmond de Rothschild to the tune of “several million francs ... without any useful result” were proof enough that Palestine was not a viable option.⁷¹ He also expressed his concern about the longevity of the Ottoman Empire, which he feared could fall at any moment

67 See, for example, Ellen Eisenberg, *Jewish Agricultural Colonies in New Jersey, 1882–1920* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), including a discussion of colonies supported by the Baron Hirsch Fund; Israel Bartal, “Farming the Land on Three Continents: Bilu, Am Oylom, and Yefe-Nahar,” *Jewish History* 21 (2007) 249–261; Penslar, *Zionism and Technocracy*; or, for a later period, Jonathan Dekel-Chen, *Farming the Red Land: Jewish Agricultural Colonization and Local Soviet Power, 1924–1941* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

68 Maurice de Hirsch, Eichhorn to Direction JCA, Paris, 29 Sep 1894 (Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem [CAHJP], JCA/Lon 409/3).

69 The literature on early Zionism is too large to be cited here extensively, but see, for example, Gideon Shimoni, *The Zionist Ideology* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press: 1995) 55–60, and on Pinsker and the Hibbat Zion, 29–51; David Vital, *The Origins of Zionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) 109–186; and Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism* (New York: Holt, 1972, 2003) 70–83.

70 Maurice de Hirsch, “Note concernant le Projet de l’émigration russe et de création d’une Banque agraire dans la Turquie d’Asie,” 29 Jul 1891 (CAHJP JCA/Lon 379/2).

71 Maurice to Hirsch, Paris to L. M. Goldberger (German Central Committee for the Russian Jews), Berlin, 7 Sep 1891 (CAHJP JCA/Lon 215/7).

under Russian domination, only to bring the Russian emigrants once again under the rule of the Czars – an objection that he also raised when approached with the idea of developing Jewish agricultural settlements in the Ottoman province of Izmir.⁷² In his view, “it is the duty of all those who really want the best for our coreligionists to combat the colonization project in *la Turquie d’Asie*,” i. e., in Palestine.⁷³

In the fall of 1891, Hirsch developed the most ambitious version of his own plan for managing Jewish mass migration out of Russia (and Romania) in a note that he wrote in preparation of a major conference of Jewish notables he hoped to convene in London in early 1892.⁷⁴ If Palestine was not suited for mass colonization, other nations – like the United States, which already saw an ever increasing Jewish immigration at the time – would soon suffer a backlash in public opinion against the influx of large numbers of Jewish migrants.⁷⁵ “What to do then?” he wondered.

72 Hirsch, “Note,” 29 Jul 1891. For Hirsch’s response to the idea of agricultural colonization in Izmir and Aidin: Maurice de Hirsch, Thatford to Isidore Loeb, Paris, 29 Jan 1890 (AJHS Kohler Papers P7 box 7 folder 9).

73 Hirsch, “Note,” 29 Jul 1891. In his initial response to the plans of Hibbat Zion, Hirsch also expressed concern that the settlement scheme in Palestine would “disperse the movement of [Jewish] emigration, rather than concentrate it,” which he perceived to be a problem, as dispersion had been “the undeniable cause of their weakness and the continuous dangers” they faced (Hirsch, “Note,” 29 Jul 1891). Yet that same month he sent a very different message when he wrote in the *North American Review* that any “new settlement [of Russian Jews] should be scattered through different lands and spread over a large space, so that there shall be no opportunity for social or religious rupture.” He considered Argentina, Canada and Australia to be the most promising locations, adding that he “expect[ed] to begin with the Argentine Republic.” (Maurice de Hirsch, “My Views on Philanthropy,” *North American Review* 416 [Jul 1891] 4.) As Dmitry Shumsky has argued, the proto-Zionist thinker Leon Pinsker, who published *Auto-Emancipation* in 1882 and inspired the Hovevei Zion movement, did not abandon the prospect of Jewish emancipation in the diaspora either, even though he advocated for a territorial nationalism. Pinsker never, however, embraced the kind of radical assimilation that Hirsch advocated, and Hirsch did not follow Pinsker’s logic that the Russian-Jewish predicament warranted a national-territorial solution. See Dmitry Shumsky, “Leon Pinsker and ‘Autoemancipation!’: A Reevaluation,” *Jewish Social Studies* 18 (2011) 33–62.

74 Hirsch, “Conférence de Londres: Exposé,” [n. d.] [October 1891] (CAHJP JCA/Lon 302/2). Unfortunately we have no list of the people that Hirsch intended to gather for this conference.

75 Hirsch would be reminded of this fact when the U. S. superintendent of immigration visited London and Paris in 1894 and inquired about the possible illegal assistance provided by the JCA for Jewish immigrants to North America. See Sigismund Sonnenfeld, Paris to Maurice de Hirsch, Eichhorn, 24 Sep 1894 and Maurice de Hirsch, Eichhorn to Sigismund Sonnenfeld, Paris, 28 Sep 1894 (CAHJP JCA/Lon 409/3). Schiff was one who repeatedly warned Hirsch about the “difficult situation” created by the massive

Is there a practical measure? Perhaps there is, and even if it appears fanciful at first sight, it no longer remains in the realm of the impossible today. I would like to speak of the purchase of an entire country, which meets all desirable conditions and where the [Jewish] colonists would become the uncontested owners. ... Does such a country exist? Is such a purchase possible? ... Could one perhaps establish a society like the old East India Company?⁷⁶

The *Jewish Chronicle* and the London *Times* both reported on Hirsch's plan to convene an international conference of Jewish notables to consider measures for the rescue of Russian Jews.⁷⁷ The American banker and philanthropist, Jacob Schiff, however, expressed his skepticism to Hirsch and doubted that such a conference would yield any practical results.⁷⁸ He wrote: "It is the nature of the calamity which afflicts all of Israel together that the measures adopted in each country to lighten the unhappy fate of our Russian coreligionists must be of a different kind." In other words, Schiff believed that the circumstances in each country were unique, and a pan-Jewish initiative to solve the problem of the Jews in Russia was impossible. He argued that no European country would take in Russian Jewish refugees; the only countries overseas that might be in a position to do so were the United States and "perhaps Australia." In the end, the London conference never materialized, and Hirsch did not further pursue the idea of purchasing "an entire country" for the Jews.⁷⁹

influx of Jewish immigrants to the U. S.; see Sigismund Sonnenfeld, Paris to Maurice de Hirsch, London, 2 Jun 1894 (CAHJP JCA/Lon 409/2).

⁷⁶ Hirsch, "Conférence." The intriguing reference to a "society like the old East India Company" points to the fact that contemporary schemes to find a territorial solution to Jewish homelessness outside Europe occurred in the broader context of European colonialism. For a discussion of this context, see Ethan Katz, Lisa Moses Leff and Maud Mandel, eds., *Colonialism and the Jews* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017).

⁷⁷ *Jewish Chronicle*, 6 Nov 1891; *The Times*, 6 Nov 1891.

⁷⁸ Jacob Schiff, New York to Maurice de Hirsch, Paris, 23 Oct 1891 (CAHJP JCA/Lon 379/1). On Schiff, see Naomi Cohen, *Jacob H. Schiff: A Study in American Jewish Leadership* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1999).

⁷⁹ Someone who did respond positively, and in fact enthusiastically, to the idea of "purchasing an entire country" for the Jews was Wilhelm Löwenthal, the first director of Hirsch's JCA in Buenos Aires. When Löwenthal received notice of his boss's plans for the London conference, he suggested that Argentina might be just the place for realizing the utopian vision of a Jewish country. Getting somewhat carried away, he also suggested that, alternatively, it might be worth considering Paraguay, where one "could, by taking over the central bank and all the finances, indeed take over the government." Still, he warned, making the "political intention" of creating a Jewish country public was liable to undermine the possibility of finding a refuge anywhere for Russian Jews in need of a new home. Wilhelm Löwenthal, Buenos Aires to Maurice de Hirsch, Paris, 3 Nov 1891 (CAHJP JCA/Lon 302/2).

In the summer and fall of 1891, Hirsch was responding to an acute crisis, sparked by the expulsion of Jews from Moscow and rumors about new restrictions in the Russian Pale of Settlement. To Wilhelm Löwenthal, his representative in Buenos Aires, Hirsch wrote from the Bohemian resort of Carlsbad,

The closer I come to the scene of the suffering of our Russian coreligionists, the more I encounter people who have seen with their own eyes the misery that is gathering at the borders of Russia, the more I realize that the plan, which I have designed [for colonization in Argentina] will need to be of much larger dimensions.⁸⁰

But once the immediate crisis of 1891 began to subside, Hirsch's plans, though remaining ambitious, lost some of their urgency. By the end of the year, when he was still trying to assemble a conference of Jewish notables in London, he sent mixed messages to Argentina, and Löwenthal was no longer certain about the direction of Hirsch's project. In November 1891, he wondered whether Hirsch was "still thinking about the settlement in large swaths of South America, of which I am no longer sure after your most recent cables."⁸¹

A year later, Hirsch responded to a request he received from Berlin for funding rescue operations for Russian Jewish refugees:

I am surprised that you want to apply my pledge, which I made the previous year under very different circumstances, to the current year. ... Last year [1891] emigration developed, as a result of the forced measures [of the Russian government] in a frightful way and nobody could foresee what catastrophe this emigration might lead to. ... Since then the circumstances have changed considerably.⁸²

After the ascent of Czar Nicholas II in 1894, Hirsch even allowed himself a measure of optimism, following (unfounded) rumors of an impending liberalization of the regime's policy towards the Jews. He instructed the Buenos Aires office to "proceed cautiously with the purchase of additional lands: should there really occur a radical shift in Russia, we will have to examine whether [agricultural] colonization might not be more advantageous in Russia than in Argentina."⁸³ By 1891 Hirsch had embraced emigration as

⁸⁰ Maurice de Hirsch, Carlsbad to Wilhelm Löwenthal, Buenos Aires, 17 Aug 1891 (CAHJP JCA/Lon 308/1).

⁸¹ Wilhelm Löwenthal, Buenos Aires to Maurice de Hirsch, Paris, 3 Nov 1891 (CAHJP JCA/Lon 303/2).

⁸² Maurice de Hirsch, Paris to German Central Committee for the Russian Jews, Berlin [n. d.] [May (?) 1892], CAHJP JCA/Lon 215/7.

⁸³ Maurice de Hirsch, London to Sigismund Sonnenfeld, Paris, 2 Dec 1894 (CAHJP JCA/Lon 409/3). In response, Sonnenfeld warned: "Historical experience teaches that, in Russia, each time a liberal regime is again followed by a reactionary one." Sigismund

the key to dealing with the predicament of Russian Jews, but he had not changed course when it came to his overall vision for the Jewish future as one of productivization and assimilation.

Though Hirsch spoke in late 1891 of the idea of acquiring “an entire country” for the Jews, emphasizing the need to centralize Jewish immigration and speculating about some degree of Jewish self-government, historians have made rather too much of this. Seizing on the musings about Jewish political autonomy in Hirsch’s correspondence with Löwenthal in Buenos Aires, some historians have claimed Hirsch as a precursor of territorialism or Jewish nationalism. Avni and Alroey, for example, have identified Hirsch’s colonization scheme as an example of “territorialism.”⁸⁴ Avni has also pointed out, as evidence of the alleged overlap between Hirsch’s goals and those of the Zionists, that Löwenthal’s successor, Colonel Albert Goldsmid, was a well-known early supporter of Hibbat Zion in England.⁸⁵ It was precisely Goldsmid, however, who pushed back against measures in Argentina that were liable, in his view, to awaken suspicions of the JCA creating a state within a state. On one occasion he worried about creating “the unique spectacle of ‘Imperium in Imperio’ in this country [Argentina]”; on another, he objected to organizing rural police units “on a Militia basis to safeguard the colonists from all aggression interior or exterior. ... One can hardly expect a Nation to suffer the subjects of a foreign power to raise a force military or civil in its dominions.”⁸⁶ Historians have also identified the enthusiasm expressed by some early colonists with the overall direction of Hirsch’s own goals,⁸⁷ invoking, for example, the memoirs of Mordechai (Marcos) Alpersohn, who writes about the excitement generated by Löwenthal’s plan to organize a short-lived Jewish militia to ensure law and order in the colony Mauricio: “a brilliant hope lit up our eyes ...: a fatherland of our own! A Jewish land! At least a new Babylonia that we are going to create!”⁸⁸ But one of the problems of the colonization program was precisely the disconnect between the colonists’ expectations and Hirsch and

Sonnenfeld, Paris, to Maurice de Hirsch, London, Dec 3, 1894 (CAHJP JCA/Lon 409/3).

⁸⁴ In addition to the sources cited earlier, see also Alroey, *Zionism*, 8.

⁸⁵ Avni, “Territorialism,” 79–80.

⁸⁶ Albert Goldsmid, Buenos Aires to Maurice de Hirsch, Paris, 4 Aug 1892 and 8 Oct 1892 (CAHJP JCA/Lon 303/1).

⁸⁷ Alroey, “Aliya,” 120–121.

⁸⁸ Marcos (Mordechai) Alpersohn, *Colonia Mauricio* [Yiddish] (Buenos Aires: Koperschmid, 1922) 74–75; order for establishment of *Bürgerwehr* (Guardia Urbana Mauricio), signed by Wilhelm Löwenthal, Buenos Aires, 15 Nov 1891; enclosure of Wilhelm Löwenthal, Buenos Aires to JCA, Paris, 15 Nov 1891 (CAHJP JCA/Lon 302/2).

the JCA's actual plans, and the evidence (published decades after the events it describes) of Alpersohn's memoirs and similar texts should not be confused with Hirsch's own intentions.

Hirsch's colonization project, moreover, needs to be understood in its wider context, not merely as one of many responses to antisemitism and the predicament of the Jews in late imperial Russia. The Russian Jews signing up to join the Argentinian colonies of the JCA were part of an unprecedented trans-Atlantic migratory movement that involved millions of people,⁸⁹ triggered by what José Moya has called the convergence of "five global revolutions" (demographic, liberal, agricultural, industrial and in transportation).⁹⁰ While many Russian Jews certainly fled persecution, pogroms and antisemitism were not the main factor that led Russian Jews to search for new opportunities.⁹¹ Ultimately, they participated in what Jürgen Osterhammel has called an "emerging international labor market [that] filled a vast space from the Jewish Pale of Settlement in western Russia to Chicago, New Orleans and Buenos Aires."⁹² Though far outnumbered by migration to the United States, Argentina attracted about half of all immigrants to Latin America, some four million people between 1881 and 1914.⁹³ The Argentinian constitution of 1853 offered foreigners the "civil rights of citizenship" and mandated that the federal government "foment

89 As well as, in smaller numbers, to European colonies in southern Africa and to Australia. The extant literature on European migration at the close of the 19th and the early 20th century is vast. For a recent study focusing on migration from Central and Eastern Europe, see Tara Zahra, *The Great Departure: Mass Migration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World* (New York: Norton, 2016); for the Jewish case, see Alroey, *Silent*.

90 José Moya, *Cousins and Strangers: Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850–1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) 13–44.

91 See Alroey, *Silent*, 23–56; John Klier, "Emigration Mania in Late-Imperial Russia: Legend and Reality," in *Patterns of Migration, 1850–1914*, ed. Aubrey Newman and Stephen Massil (London: Jewish Historical Society of England, 1996) 21–29.

92 Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014) 155.

93 The period after the Argentine financial crisis of 1890 to the beginning of the First World War was characterized by the power of the nation state and its institutions, and the dramatic growth of an export-focused agricultural economy. See Pilar González Bernaldo de Quirós, "El largo siglo XIX," in *Historia mínima de Argentina*, ed. Pablo Yankelevich (Madrid: Turner, 2014) esp. 144, 222. On Argentine immigration policy, see Moya, *Cousins*; Carl Solberg, *Immigration and Nationalism: Argentina and Chile, 1890–1914* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1970); Donald Castro, *The Development and Politics of Argentine Immigration Policy, 1852–1914: To Govern Is to Populate* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1991). Before 1914, about 25,000 Jews moved to Argentina under the auspices of the JCA and its colonies, and another 25,000 on their own, mainly settling in Buenos Aires; Solberg, *Immigration*, 39. Jewish

European immigration.”⁹⁴ In the 1860s and 1870s, the government created agricultural colonies for immigrant settlers, and the rapid expansion of Argentine export-heavy agriculture (exports quintupled in the two decades between 1890 and 1912) increased the demand for immigrant labor.⁹⁵ There was nothing particularly unusual or “proto-nationalist” about Hirsch’s colonization scheme in Argentina.

Even when Hirsch and Löwenthal were speculating about a limited Jewish “autonomy” in Argentina, they echoed ideas that were pondered by political leaders in the Habsburg Empire, Germany and Italy, who sought to foster the creation of “autonomous ‘colonies’ of settlers” in countries overseas.⁹⁶ The idea to divert immigrants from major cities and settle them in agricultural colonies, too, was not unique to Hirsch, or to Jewish immigration. Thus, the Irish Catholic Colonization Society, founded in 1879, worked to relocate poor Irish migrants from Chicago to farms across the Midwest, and similar plans were hatched to channel Italian immigration to agricultural colonies in the south of the United States.⁹⁷ Contemporaries were aware, of course, of the non-Jewish counterparts to Hirsch’s colonization project. For example, among various recommendations about organizing emigration from Russia to the New World, Sigismund Sonnenfeld, the baron’s right-hand man in Paris, suggested the establishment of “local committees, which will provide the prospective emigrants with the necessary information, just like the St Raphael associations are doing in Germany and Belgium for Catholic emigrants.”⁹⁸ Schiff, too, invoked a non-Jewish example when he suggested to Hirsch that it might be worth considering colonization in Mexico, as proved by the fact that Mormon groups had studied the potential for agricultural settlement there and embraced the idea.⁹⁹ In Argentina itself, comparisons with other agricultural colonies established by a wide range of European immigrants were frequently invoked in the JCA’s deliberations. Faced with widespread discontent and outright rebellion in some

immigration to Argentina accelerated considerably in the 20th century. On Jewish immigration to Argentina, see Avni, *Argentina and the Jews*.

⁹⁴ Moya, *Cousins*, 50.

⁹⁵ Solberg, *Immigration*, 6.

⁹⁶ Zahra, *Great Departure*, 69–70. (In fact, not much came of these schemes.)

⁹⁷ Lawrence McCaffrey et al., *The Irish in Chicago* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987) 37, and Humbert Nelli, *The Italians in Chicago, 1880–1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970) 15–17, cited in Lederhendler, *American Jewry*, 70.

⁹⁸ Sigismund Sonnenfeld, Paris to Maurice de Hirsch, Chatsworth, 9 Jan 1894 (CAHJP JCA/Lon 408/1).

⁹⁹ Jacob Schiff, New York to Maurice de Hirsch, Paris, 15 Oct 1891 (CAHJP JCA/Lon 379/1).

of the colonies, Sonnenfeld wrote to Hirsch noting that such unrest was not uncommon in Argentina, and that Swiss, French and Russian-Mennonite colonies had all overcome such problems and ended up thriving.¹⁰⁰

3. The business of philanthropy

Maurice de Hirsch wanted to be seen as “more a man of deeds than of word or pen,” as he pointed out in *North American Review*; his readers, he added, should not expect any “theoretical discussions” from him, but he would offer “the practical method” of his philanthropy instead.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, there were certain ideas that were central to Hirsch’s thinking and shaped the way he conceived of his Argentinian colonization project and its implementation; but questions of religious reform, political self-determination or Jewish peoplehood, which were of so much interest to modern historians and to some of his contemporaries, were not central for Hirsch. For him, establishing Jewish agricultural settlements in Argentina was a philanthropic and not a national project.¹⁰² It was meant to be economically self-sustaining and, as he emphasized in his exposé for the London conference, colonization would be “a business like that of constructing and operating a railroad line, or any other industrial or agricultural enterprise.”¹⁰³

In fact, Hirsch’s ideas had little in common with those of the Zionists and territorialists, not only because he considered their plans to be impractical, but also because they offered a political solution based on Jewish national self-determination, whereas Hirsch was pursuing a solution focused on individual initiative and driven by economic considerations. At the core of Hirsch’s thinking stood the conviction that the proper task of philanthropy was “to make human beings who are capable of work out of individuals

¹⁰⁰ Sigismund Sonnenfeld, Paris to Maurice de Hirsch, London, 16 Feb 1893 (CAHJP JCA/Lon 297/2). On agricultural colonies in Argentina, see Ezequiel Gallo, *Farmers in Revolt: The Revolutions of 1893 in the Province of Santa Fe, Argentina* (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 1976) and *La pampa gringa: la colonización agrícola en Santa Fé (1870–1895)* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1983).

¹⁰¹ Hirsch, “My Views,” 1.

¹⁰² Contemporaries opposed to Zionist ideas were sure to point out, approvingly, that Hirsch “was uninterested in the realization of any Jewish national aspirations”; “Beim Baron Hirsch,” *Der Israelit*, 19 Jul 1894.

¹⁰³ Hirsch, “Conférence.” Zionist settlement in Palestine was also guided by technocratic considerations, of course, but in their case, technocracy was subservient to a larger, political goal. See Penslar, *Zionism and Technocracy*.

who otherwise must become paupers.”¹⁰⁴ In 1895 he informed the Viennese “ladies’ committee” that had overseen the disbursement of charitable donations on his behalf about a reorganization of his philanthropic activities, emphasizing the need to facilitate individual moral and economic “improvement” and prioritizing the provision of loans over handing out charity.¹⁰⁵ This did not represent, he stressed, a departure from his original instructions in 1889:

What was expressed there, prior to years of experience in the area of regularly organized beneficence on an entirely humanitarian basis without taking into view the long-term future, will now be strengthened and developed on a philanthropic-economic basis.

Colonization in Argentina, too, was to be organized on a “philanthropic-economic” basis, in order to provide a long-term solution to the problem of Russian Jewry. It was precisely because Hirsch intended his Argentine project to be realized on a massive scale that he sought to provide assistance to carefully selected individuals or small groups of colonists. He emphasized that prospective colonists would have to “accept the obligation for all to engage in manual labor” and that “those who emigrate must not ignore that from the day they set foot in South America, they will have to labor as simple workers.”¹⁰⁶ In practice, however, Hirsch’s Argentine colonies got off to a rough start. While mismanagement on part of the local administrators, and sometimes misguided micro-management by the JCA head office in Paris, were part of the problem, Hirsch himself also blamed the poor selection of the colonists and their sense of entitlement.

“Many colonists are and remain unable ever to become good farmers,” he complained in a letter to the Central Committee for Russian Jews in Berlin. “Others have become spoiled, aggressive and demanding because of a bad [local] administration, believing that the fortune of Hirsch is there for them, allowing them to lead a life full of *dolce far niente*, without any serious labor.”¹⁰⁷ Echoing the contemporary discourse distinguishing the “worthy poor” from paupers, Hirsch insisted not only that colonists be properly vetted before dispatch to Argentina, but also that those who were prone to cause trouble, were seen as work-shy, and defied the expectations

¹⁰⁴ Hirsch, “My Views,” 1.

¹⁰⁵ Maurice de Hirsch, Paris to Wiener Damencomité, Vienna, 19 Jul 1895 (CAHJP JCA/Lon 380/2).

¹⁰⁶ Maurice de Hirsch, Paris to Wilhelm Löwenthal, Buenos Aires, 1 Dec 1891 (CAHJP JCA/Lon 308/1).

¹⁰⁷ Maurice de Hirsch, Paris to German Central Committee for the Russian Jews, Berlin, 2 Aug 1892 (CAHJP JCA/Lon 215/7).

of the organization be removed from the colonies in a process he referred to as *nettoyage*, or cleansing.¹⁰⁸

The capitalist spirit of his understanding of the colonization work in Argentina can be appreciated in Hirsch's correspondence with the successive directors of the JCA in Buenos Aires and his administrators in Paris. If the colonists liked to celebrate Hirsch as a father-figure, Hirsch himself wanted the relationship of the JCA with the colonists understood in economic terms and saw his role as an investor – not for his own benefit, but with the understanding that the capital of the JCA would be constantly replenished and colonization would become a self-sustaining enterprise. This tension played out, for example, in the protracted conflicts over the contracts that the JCA drew up for its colonists: the latter could not fathom how their patron and protector could possibly charge them interest on the land and start-up costs provided.¹⁰⁹ Criticizing the medical doctor serving the colony of Mauricio for siding with the colonists and acting against the interests of the JCA, Hirsch wrote:

[Dr. Wechsler] seems to consider our colonists to be a privileged race who need to be treated differently than ordinary peasants. ... We fight in the most absolute manner against the idea that our Jewish colonists, because they are Jews, should be treated any differently than one commonly treats the peasants of any other country. We will not allow that. It is precisely one of the reasons that have particularly contributed to the rise and growth of antisemitism: that disposition of the Jews who think that they are made from a more delicate dough than common mortals. ... we

¹⁰⁸ Hirsch repeatedly excoriated Goldsmid for delaying the *nettoyage* of undesirable colonists and their return to Europe or onward expedition to the United States, e. g., Maurice de Hirsch, Paris to Albert Goldsmid, Buenos Aires, 19 Aug 1892 (CAHJP JCA/Ar 8599). Though Goldsmid faithfully carried out Hirsch's orders, he also at times intervened in defense of the colonists. On one occasion, he wrote: "Do not believe the whole of your present colonists are beggars. There is excellent material to be found amongst them"; Albert Goldsmid, Buenos Aires to Maurice de Hirsch, Paris, 22 Jul 1892 (CAHJP JCA/Lon 303/1). On the discourse on poverty and charity at the time, see Brent Ruswick, *Almost Worthy: The Poor, Paupers, and the Science of Charity in America, 1877–1917* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013); Rainer Liedtke, *Jewish Welfare in Hamburg and Manchester, c. 1850–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Mordechai Rozin, *The Rich and the Poor: Jewish Philanthropy and Social Control in Nineteenth-Century London* (Brighton: Sussex Academic, 1999).

¹⁰⁹ See Alpersohn, *Colonia*, 276. In 1893 Hirsch stipulated the principle that "one should not charge the colonists anything but what is absolutely fair, and one should rather claim less than more. The eagerness of the colonists for their work will be stimulated if they are convinced of the generosity of the JCA"; Maurice de Hirsch, St Johann to JCA, Buenos Aires, 19 Dec 1893 (CAHJP JCA/Ar 9308). On the issue of the contracts, see Avni, *Argentina: Promised Land*, 219–222, 239–248.

are not a philanthropic society, but a colonization enterprise that is called upon to produce practical results. ... Dr. Wechsler is a utopian whose place, it would seem, is rather with a charitable or philanthropic outfit than in an agricultural colonization enterprise.¹¹⁰

Hirsch thus identified the “wrong” kind of philanthropy with humanitarian relief, charity and utopian thinking. By contrast, he emphasized his own approach as businesslike (the German term *geschäftsmäßig*, and sometimes its English and French equivalents, feature prominently throughout his letters) and his colonization project as a commercial undertaking.

In the *Forum* article of August 1891, where he expressed a deep sense of solidarity with his suffering Russian-Jewish “coreligionists” and spoke about the need to find a refuge for the Russian Jews, Hirsch also noted:

Where the Jews are free from ... shackling fetters, there their best powers have turned to scientific investigation, to art and to poetry. The names of [Benjamin] Disraeli, [Felix] Mendelssohn, [Fromental] Halévy, [Giacomo] Meyerbeer, [Heinrich] Heine, to which can be added a long list of others, sufficiently illustrate this assertion.¹¹¹

That three of the five examples he cited (Disraeli, Mendelssohn and Heine) were individuals of Jewish origin but baptized as Christians was hardly a coincidence. All five, in fact, were notable for their contribution to “general” public life, from politics to music to literature, and not specifically to an identifiably Jewish culture. The ideal for Hirsch remained, therefore, the eventual “amalgamation” of the Jews with their non-Jewish neighbors, even after he had come to accept the futility of trying to ameliorate the situation of the Jews in Russia itself and had begun to focus on agricultural colonization beyond the Atlantic. While religious reformers sought to ensure the continuity of Judaism, and Zionists and territorialists developed programs for the political self-determination of the Jewish nation, Hirsch saw himself as leading what he called a “philanthropic-economic” enterprise that was to facilitate the productivization and assimilation of Jews as individuals. We should not assume that Jewish solidarity, as expressed through philanthropy, was necessarily linked to an ideological program of religious modernization, cultural revival or national self-determination. Radical assimilation, at the turn of the century, remained for some an entirely legitimate and plausible way forward. While Hirsch was invested in overcoming antisemitism – or, as he would have put it, in solving the “Jewish question” – his was

¹¹⁰ Maurice de Hirsch, Paris to JCA, Buenos Aires, 20 Feb 1895 (CAHJP JCA/Lon 100/1).

¹¹¹ Hirsch, “Refuge,” 630.

a program that was ultimately focused on empowering individual Jews, not on a vision of a collective Jewish future. He was not interested in preserving Jewish difference – either religious or national – but in overcoming Jewish difference altogether.