Secular vs Religion: Two Approaches to Reconstruct Zionism in American Terminology

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Recently, historians such as Melvin I. Urofsky and David Ellenson have noted that the cultural, social, and political contexts of the United States shaped the particular visionary and ideological framework of the American branch of the Zionist movement.[1] Unlike its European counterpart, the twentieth-century American Zionist movement portrayed itself as faithful to American ideals such as democracy, freedom, equity, humanity, and justice. American Zionists argued that their Zionist pursuit—namely the social justice for the persecuted remnants of the diaspora Jews in Eastern Europe and elsewhere—was identical with the ethos that animated their Jewish and American identities.[2] The compatibility of Jewish nationalism, American ideals, and American patriotism is itself an intellectual power that kindled the spark of political enthusiasm of American Jews to engage themselves in the American Zionist movement.

While previous accounts of the American Zionist narrative have elucidated the role of political actions in the American Zionist movement, they seldom paid sufficient attention to the intellectual groundwork laid by Horace Kallen (1882-1974) and Shlomo Bardin (1898-1976). Two leading American Zionists, Kallen and Bardin both aimed to reconstruct Zionism in American terminology, but they approached Zionism in two different ways: a secular one and a religious one. To Kallen, he became convinced in what he called the secular Jewish cultural identity. Kallen rejected Jewish religious rituals and observance but rather merged Zionism with American

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[1] Melvin I. Urofsky, *American Zionism from Herzl to the Holocaust* (Lincoln: Plunkett Lake Press/University of Nebraska Press, 2020), 226.

[2] Ibid., 232-35; Dennis Wepman, *Immigration: From the Founding of Virginia to the Closing of Ellis Island* (New York City: Facts on File, 2002), 56.

ideals and his formulation of cultural pluralism.[3] In contrast to Kallen's secular approach, Bardin founded and ran the Brandeis Camp Institute (BCI) dedicated to making secular American Jews better Jews by engaging themselves in spiritual recreation where its centerpiece was Shabbat.[4] Although their views on reconstructing Zionism were at odds with each other, Kallen and Bardin both aimed to make Zionism more palatable to American Jews—especially those being alienated from Jewish culture—by highlighting the compatibility of Jewish and American identities.

Rather than tracing the history of the Zionist political organizations in America, it is crucial to probe and understand the intellectual groundwork that prepared American Jews (including Zionists and non-Zionists) to feel confident in the political actions of Zionism. My paper thus juxtaposes Kallen's secular approach and Bardin's religious approach to examine how two strands of Jewish American revivalist thinking helped shape the ethos of the twentieth-century American Zionist movement. My paper asks how and under what circumstances did Kallen and Bardin winnow the ideological framework of Zionism and transform American Jews' views of Zionism? How did Kallen and Bardin see the relationships between American Jewry, the United States, and the future State of Israel? How did their early life experience affect their attitudes toward Zionism and prompt them to reclaim their Jewishness?

By answering the above questions, my paper argues that examining the two different approaches Kallen and Bardin utilized to reconstruct Zionism in American terminology enables us to discern American Jews and their experience with Zionism from two angles. For one, the two different approaches demonstrate that American Jewry engaged themselves in the American Zionist movement at a cultural (American ideals), philosophical (cultural

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[3] Sarah Schmidt, "Horace M. Kallen and the 'Americanization' of Zionism," 61, 63, 65, 68, 71.

[4] Bruce Jay Powell, "The Educational Philosophy of Shlomo Bardin: A Study of The Nature And Purposes of the Brandeis-Bardin Institute" (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1979), 12-19.

pluralism), and educational (Brandeis Camp Institute) level. By contrast, previous historical inquiries centered on how individuals (such as Abba Hillel Silver) and organizations (such as World Zionist Organization) became active in the American Zionist movement at the political level (canvassing American politicians, raising funds for Zionist projects, et cetera). Secondly, the two different approaches provide new evidence to consider the unique role of Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis (1856-1941) in the American Zionist movement. Horace Kallen's synthesis of American ideals, cultural pluralism, and Jewish nationalism influenced Louis Brandeis to become one of the most prominent Zionist leaders in America. Louis Brandeis, whose philosophy of American patriotism combined with Kallen's reconstruction of Zionism, urged Shlomo Bardin to found and run the Brandeis Camp Institute (BCI), where American Jews reclaimed their Jewishness via spiritual recreation.

Since the late 1950s, historians have begun to highlight the forgotten roles of Horace Kallen and Shlomo Bardin in reconstructing Zionism in American terminology. Sarah Schmidt, who had pioneered and conducted the most prolific research into Kallen, offered a groundbreaking historiographic contribution as Schmidt chronicled Kallen's synthesis of American ideals, cultural pluralism, and Jewish nationalism. Schmidt illuminated that Kallen's synthesis not only alleviated Louis Brandeis' anxiety over "dual loyalty" but also provided the ideological vision behind Brandeis' leadership in the American Zionist movement. Sidney Ratner observed that Kallen saw cultural pluralism as a new rationale to reconstruct Zionism. Daniel Greene probed how cultural pluralism grew out of American Jewish thought. Greene also linked cultural pluralism to college-aged, second-generation American Jewry who sought to utilize "Americanized" Zionism to spark a Jewish cultural renaissance. Noam Pianko, a leading historian of Zionism and American Judaism, located Kallen's formulation of cultural pluralism in the discourse of American Zionism and white ethnocentrism. Bruce Powell, a former camper and counselor at the

Brandeis Camp Institute (BCI), detailed the theoretical and philosophical influences upon Bardin's Zionist thinking and educational pedagogy (namely "The Brandeis Method"). Deborah Dash Moore examined how Bardin restored Jewish spirituality to approach Zionism and employed Zionism to promote individual growth, self-knowledge, and group connectivity with a Jewish flavor. She added that Bardin reinvented Jewishness as something appealing and inspiring, which led campers to be willing to embrace both Judaism and Zionism.[5] Many—if not most—historians, such as Sarah Schmidt and Bruce Powell, provided substantive historical inquiries of either Bardin's or Kallen's approach, but no scholar ever linked their two approaches together.

Hence, my paper aims to address a lacuna in the existing historiographic discourse of reconstructing Zionism in American terminology by considering the two different approaches of Kallen and Bardin as equal elements in the development of the American Zionism movement. My paper suggests that the two different

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[5] Sarah Schmidt, "'Americanized' Zionism: The Forgotten Role of the Horace M. Kallen," *The Berman Jewish Policy Archive* (1956): 66-69; Sarah Schmidt, *Horace M. Kallen: Prophet of American Zionism*, 57; Sarah Schmidt, "Horace M. Kallen and the 'Americanization' of Zionism," *American Jewish Archives* (April 1976): 61-66, 71; Sarah Schmidt, "Messianic Pragmatism: The Zionism of Horace M. Kallen," *Judaism* 25, no. 2 (Spring 1976): 217-219, 211; Sidney Ratner, "Horace M. Kallen and Cultural Pluralism," *Modern Judaism* 4, no. 2 (May 1984): 194-197; Daniel Greene, *The Jewish Origins of Cultural Pluralism: The Menorah Association and American Diversity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011): 45-68; Noam Pianko, *Zionism and the Roads Not Taken* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010): 41-42; Noam Pianko, "The True Liberalism of Zionism: Horace Kallen, Jewish Nationalism, and the Limits of American Pluralism," *American Jewish History* 94, no. 4 (2008): 316-325; Matthew Kaufman, "Between Consent and Descent: Horace M. Kallen's and Psychological Inheritance," *American Jewish History* 103, no. 1 (2019): 51-53; Bruce Jay Powell, "The Educational Philosophy of Shlomo Bardin," 92-99; Deborah Dash Moore, "Inventing Jewish Identity in California: Shlomo Bardin, Zionism, and the Brandeis Camp Institute," in *National Variations in Jewish Identity*, ed. Steven M. Cohen and Gabriel Horenczyk (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 202-210.

approaches prompted American Jews to reclaim their Jewishness (either secular or religious) and become both intellectual and political Zionists. My paper solidly places the intellectual history of American Zionism into a much broader historical discourse of the American Jewish community.

To that end, my paper, first of all, traces the history of Jewish assimilation into American life. Jewish history in America began in the mid-seventeenth century.[6] Sephardic Jews (namely Spanish and Portuguese Jews) came to America, followed by German Jews in 1720.[7] Sephardic and German Jews began to assimilate into American life as soon as they stepped off the ship. They adapted to the English language and mores of America. They enlisted, fought, and died for America in the Revolutionary War and World War I.[8] Sephardic and German Jews downplayed Jewish tradition since they considered that it was inconsistent with American ideals and was disloyal to the United States. They were well-off, politically engaged, and highly assimilated Jews, whose attitude towards the American Zionist movement was lukewarm.[9] Among them, prominent Jewish leaders (such as Jacob Henry Schiff, Louis Marshall, Mayer Sulzberger, and Issac Mayer Wise) openly opposed the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. These individuals regarded Zionism as a fanciful, unrealistic political ideology, which was not worth any form of support.[10] Before the late nineteenth century, anti-Semitism in the United States was considerably weaker than in Europe, as a result of American Jews' extraordinary endeavors to facilitate singular loyalty to the United States. During this time, they also became highly assimilated within the context of

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[6] Wepman, *Immigration*, 243.
[7] Ibid., 302-305.
[8] Simon Wolf, *The American Jew As Patriot, Soldier And Citizen* (Scotts Valley: Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2012), 10-12, 14-16, 20-24.
[9] Deborah Dash Moore, *At Home in America: Second Generation New York Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 46-49, 58-59.
[10] Julian Leavitt, "American Jews in the World War," *American Jewish Year Book*, Jan 1, 1920.

America's "melting pot" policy, namely an attempt to "Americanize" Jews and other immigrant communities.[11] When coupled with the fact that most Sephardic and German Jews enjoyed an affluent or at least middle-class lifestyle, it is no surprise that the American Zionism movement's original raison d'être diminished.[12]

However, the large-scale Eastern European Jews' immigration to America during the late-nineteenth and the early-twentieth centuries kindled the growth of anti-Semitism in America. By 1924, approximately three million Eastern European Jews fled to America with a strong desire for personal safety and a well-to-do life. These newcomers made up more than 3% of America's total population, but before 1900, Jews formed less than 1% of America's total population.[13] This skyrocketing increase, combined with the upward social mobility of some highly-assimilated Jews and America's fears about socialism, communism, and anarchism, paved the way for a growth of anti-Semitism. Moreover, Jewish immigrants from Poland, Lithuania, Russia, Ukraine, and elsewhere in Eastern Europe brought with them the political ideology of Zionism. Their interests in maintaining Jewishness never waned, in part because they had fresh memories of brutal pogroms (such as the 1905 pogrom in Yekaterinoslav, Ukraine), widespread anti-Semitism, and official measures of persecution in Eastern Europe.[14] These newcomers thus backlashed the "melting pot" policy, which

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[11] Deborah Dash Moore, Jeffrey S. Gurock, Annie Polland, Howard B. Rock, Daniel Soyer, and Diana Linden, *Jewish New York: The Remarkable Story of a City and a People* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 92-99.

[12] Barry Trachtenberg and Kyle Stanton, "Shifting Sands: Zionism & American Jewry," in *Dangerous Conflation: Zionism, Israel, and Anti-Semitism*, ed. Moshe Machover, Barry Trachtenberg, and Kyle Stanton (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2019), 15-16, 18.

[13] John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 149.

[14] Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers: The Journey of the East European Jews to America and the Life They Found and Made* (New York: Open Road Media, 2017), 127-129, 131-32.

worried native-born Americans, namely White Anglo-Saxon Protestants, even more.

In the meantime, not only Eastern European Jews but also other immigrant communities in America were concerned about assimilation and encountered prejudice or discrimination. For example, the anti-Catholic and anti-papal animosities that existed in America fueled significant hostility toward the large-scale Italian immigration to America during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Nearly all Italian immigrants had agrarian backgrounds, lacked a formal education, and competed with underclass Americans for lower-paid jobs and poorly-equipped housing. These newcomers brought with them not only the loyalty to the Catholic Church and the Pope but also an ideological disposition toward socialism and anarchism. Anti-Italianism has had as significant an impact on Italian immigrants as anti-Semitism has had on Jews. American nativists portrayed Jews as dangerous and "un-American" to further their anti-immigration agenda and American nativists did the same to Italian immigrants.[15]

As a response to widespread xenophobia among the general public and nativist politicians (such as Albert Johnson, David Reed, and Henry Cabot Lodge), Congress promulgated the Immigration Act of 1924 that required English literacy tests and established quotas. The 1924 law restricted immigration from any one country to 2% of that country's residents in the United States as of the 1890 census.[16] If, for example, there were 100 immigrants from a specific country according to the 1890 census, then only two immigrants from that country would have the permission of immigration in 1924. Thus, the 1924 law severely restricted immigrants from Eastern Europe, countries in which large numbers of Jewish immigrants were born. It is no surprise that the 1924 law accelerated

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[15] Jerre Gerlando Mangione and Ben Morreale, *La Storia: Five Centuries of the Italian American Experience* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992), 241-266.

[16] Harry Linfield, "A Survey of the Year 5683," *American Jewish Year Book*, Jan 1, 1924.

the growth of anti-Semitism in America. Immigration aside, private schools, colleges, and places of employment all imposed quotas and restrictions against Jews. Media and physical attacks on Jews were commonplace in major cities such as New York and Detroit.[17]

The promulgation of the 1924 law, and the increasing anti-Semitism it ensued, seemed to be a turning point in which the American Zionist movement developed a noticeable presence among American Jews. Before 1924, the American Zionist movement attracted few followers, most non-Zionist Jews in America preferring other political or ideological options to save diaspora Jews from homelessness, persecution, and financial hardship.[18] There was no unified Zionism program among Zionist Jews in America either. True, unlike Sephardic and German Jews, Eastern European Jews refused to assimilate. However, regardless of assimilation, Sephardic, German, and Eastern European Jews thought uniting together would protect themselves while facing the growing anti-Semitism. For self-defense, American Jews thus sought to bury their differences in the degree of assimilation into American life and highlight their interdependence on Jewish culture, values, and identity.[19] It was Zionism that coalesced American Jews into an avowedly American Jewish community where they united to ensure self-defense. In other words, it was the 1924 law that compelled American Jews to emphasize their Jewish identity and pushed them further toward Zionism.

To provide an ideological framework that prompted American Jews to become politically engaged Zionists, Horace

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[17] Steven G. Koven and Frank Götzke. *American Immigration Policy: Confronting the Nation's Challenges* (New York: Springer, 2010), 10-11; "La Follette Denies Criticizing Jews: Declares He Always Has Opposed Racial Discrimination and Religious Intolerance. Answers Louis Marshall Latter's Concern About Document Printed in Record Is Called a 'Political Trick'," *New York Times*, November 2, 1924; "La Follette Replies To Questions Of Jews: Restates Opposition to Klan and Denounces Workings of Immigration Law," *New York Times*, September 16, 1924.

[18] Linfield, "A Survey of the Year 5683."

[19] Ibid.

Kallen coined and publicly proposed the concept of cultural pluralism in 1924. Cultural pluralism blended American ideals of democracy, freedom, equity, humanity, and justice. William James (1842-1910) and Barrett Wendell (1855-1921) motivated Kallen to regard himself as not only an American but also a secular American Jew. Kallen realized that Zionism, namely the means of re-creating another state dedicated to the secular Hebraic ideals or to what he called the secular Jewish cultural identity, was consistent with his commitment as a secular American Jew.[20] Despite his heavy reliance on the American terminology, Kallen's reconstruction of Zionism was far beyond transplanting the United States to the Eretz Yisrael (literally meaning in Modern Hebrew "Land of Israel"). Kallen explained his belief that the Jewish prophetic tradition was the intellectual source of American democracy. To Kallen, therefore, reconstructing Zionism in American terminology was comparable to reconstructing Zionism based on the secular Jewish cultural identity.

Through the influence of rabbis such as Solomon Schechter (1847-1915) and Mordecai Kaplan (1881-1983), Horace Kallen regarded the American Zionist movement as a crucial bulwark against Jewish assimilation into American life. To Kallen, cultural pluralism laid an intellectual groundwork to manage American Jewry's dilemma of whether or not to assimilate. Since the late nineteenth century, American Jews—especially those having an Eastern European origin—had been concerned with "Americanization," namely an attempt to conform all ethnic/cultural groups into a mass of singular American identity. American Jews would lose their Jewish cultural identity if they assimilated into the "melting pot," where native-born Americans predominated and favored. Unlike "Americanization," cultural pluralism argued that someone of diverse ethnicities should keep their cultural identity

[20] Sarah Schmidt, "Messianic Pragmatism: The Zionism of Horace M. Kallen," 219.

freely and therefore neither government nor the general public should hamper them.[21]

By linking cultural pluralism with American ideals and the American Zionist cause, Kallen made it possible for American Jews to join the American Zionist movement without worrying about being accused of "dual loyalty."[22] After 1924, ordinary American Jews began their intense involvement in Zionism and mobilized their resources to assist the diaspora Jews in and beyond Europe. Kallen's reconstruction of Zionism prompted the previously lukewarm American Jewish community to undertake their burgeoning sense of responsibility for the fate of the Jews around the world. The American Zionist movement grew further following the rise of the Nazis to power in 1933. Not only ordinary American Jews but also Supreme Court Justice Brandeis, one of Zionism's leading spokespersons in America, benefited from Kallen's reconstruction of Zionism. It was from Kallen's argument about the compatibility between American and Jewish identities that Brandeis explained his belief as below: "Multiple loyalties are objectionable only if they are inconsistent…There is no inconsistency between loyalty to America and loyalty to Jewry."[23] Brandeis argued that every Jew in America must stand up and aid in advancing the American Zionist movement since there were no "multiple loyalties." Brandeis devoted a great deal of his time, passion, and money to champion the American Zionist movement. In his later years, Brandeis was concerned about the loss of Jewishness among American Jews. His encouragement and financial support to Bardin

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[21] Sidney Ratner, "Horace M. Kallen and Cultural Pluralism," *Modern Judaism* 4, no. 2 (May 1984): 191-192; Horace Kallen, "Democracy versus the Melting Pot," *The Nation*, February, 1915.

[22] Sarah Schmidt, "'Americanized' Zionism: The Forgotten Role of the Horace M. Kallen," 72-74.

[23] Louis Brandeis, "The Jewish Problem: How To Solve It," speech given at a Conference of Eastern Council of Reform Rabbis, April 25, 1915.

ultimately led to the foundation of the Brandeis Camp Institute (BCI) in 1941.[24]

Unlike Kallen, Bardin approached Zionism not by identifying with the secular Jewish identity but rather by restoring Jewish spirituality. At the BCI, Bardin aimed to not only stop college-aged campers from rejecting their Jewish culture but also demonstrate the compatibility of Jewish nationalism and American patriotism. Bardin's aim was in line with Brandeis' Zionist thinking that "To be good Americans, we must be better Jews, and to be better Jews, we must become Zionists."[25] Bardin regarded Zionism as the key to reviving the Jewish spirit of American Jewry, namely a Jewish cultural renaissance. Therefore, Bardin recast Zionism not as a physical relocation to a Jewish homeland but rather as a return to one's spiritual center of Judaism and Jewish vitality. Bardin's commitment to both Judaism and Zionism became an intellectual source to run the spiritual recreation program at the BCI. The influence of Bardin's Zionist thinking began in California in the 1940s and spread throughout the United States in the 1960s. The spiritual recreation programs at the BCI flourished and further matured during the 1960s and continued through the 1970s. After the death of Brandeis in 1941, Bardin did more than anyone else to prompt the majority of American Jews to embrace pro-Zionist views.[26] Following Bardin's intellectual leadership during the 1940s, the American Jewish community continued its intensive Zionist involvement in the American public arena by canvassing

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[24] Shlomo Bardin, "The Brandeis Camp Institute," *Journal of Jewish Education* vol. 17 (June 1946): 26–27; Deborah Dash Moore, "Inventing Jewish Identity in California: Shlomo Bardin, Zionism, and the Brandeis Camp Institute," 205, 207, 211-213.

[25] Louis Brandeis, "The Jewish Problem: How To Solve It," speech given at a Conference of Eastern Council of Reform Rabbis, April 25, 1915; "The Brandeis Effect," *Time Magazine*, July 15, 1971.

[26] Bruce Jay Powell, "The Educational Philosophy of Shlomo Bardin," 36-38, 43, 101, 279.

pro-Israel politicians and influencing American policies in the Middle East.

Bardin's views on reconstructing Zionism were similar to Kallen in some respects (for example, to make Zionism more palatable to American Jews) while containing sharp contrasts at other times (religious versus secular). My paper illuminates how Kallen's secular approach and Bardin's religious approach functioned as a catalyst for changing the ethos of American Zionists. Linking Kallen and Bardin, there is no unified Zionist thinking that prompted Jews to engage themselves in the twentieth-century American Zionist movement. Although they adopted two different approaches, they both regarded the compatibility of Zionism, American ideals, and American patriotism as an intellectual power to reconstruct Zionism.