

**“A source of satisfaction to all Jews, wherever they may be living”
Louis Miller between New York and Tel Aviv, 1911**

by *Ehud Manor*

Abstract

Although throughout the middle-ages Jews used to live in urban environment more than non-Jews, urbanization process in the 19th century was as critical to Jewish modern history as in other cases. Modernization, in all aspects, had a deep impact on Jewish demography, socio-economic life and self understanding. On the same time Jews were immigrating by the millions to the “new world” (mainly to the United States), a small current of Jews was heading to Palestine (Eretz Israel if to use their specific term). As opposed to a common understanding of Zionism, the future city and the neo-urbanization of the Jews – and not only the new villages (Moshavot, Kibbutzim, Moshavim) – was a main Zionist goal. This article describes one of the first comprehensive observations of these issues, as seen from the eyes of Louis Miller, himself a Jewish immigrant that settled in the outmost city of the modern world: New York. In 1911 he paid a visit to the one-year-old Tel Aviv, and managed to see in this new modest garden-city the cradle of the Zionist revolution. Not less important: Miller understood as early as 1911, the crucial role Jewish settlements in Palestine would have in the crystallization of modern Jewish peoplehood. Tel Aviv took major part in this development. It still does.

The New Jewish Politics: *Klal Yisrael* – thoughtful policy or after-the-fact phenomenon?

In his *From Periphery to Center* the historian Michael Graetz delineated the model that characterized politics in the 21st century, both Jewish and non-Jewish. In the dynamic reality of modern times, traditional leadership has retreated, and new problems/ considerations/ constituents? From the periphery have taken center stage. These new forces are derived from either – ‘charisma’ or ‘rationality’ – to use Max Weber’s terminology – and most often a combination of the two.¹

In his magnum opus *Prophecy and Politics – Socialism, Nationalism and the Jews of Russia, 1862-1917*, the historian Jonathan Frankel examines

¹ Michael Graetz, *From Periphery to Center – Chapters in 19th Century History of French Jewry – From Saint-Simon to the Foundation of the Alliance Israelite Universelle*, (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1982 [Heb]).

Russian-Jewish politics and the framework of its terminology in a crucial period of history.² His research focuses on Russian Jews, wherever they were living at the time, including those in the new world, the U.S., and those in the old-new world, *Eretz Israel*. The goal was the consolidation of a Jewish national consciousness [a similar term was *Klal Yisrael*³], or a Jewish-Socialist consciousness, or some combination of the two ideologies, Nationalism and Socialism, born of the French Revolution. This included the concept that ‘prophecy’ is the legitimate business of the modern leader, even when such prophecy rests on the shifting sands of politics. Politics in the 19th century articulated the essence of man’s new understanding of himself as the master of his fate, as a demiurge of the human condition. One of the most powerful expressions of this ideology was Max Weber’s call for the intellectual elite to understand the word ‘vocation’ in the slogan “politics as a vocation” in the sense of ‘mission’.⁴

Migration, the Press and Politics

All of this took place during the 19th century, but reached full expression during the time of the great Jewish immigration, which paralleled the period of classical Zionism, the period of the first and second *aliyot* and the period of political integration in Western Europe. While in *Eretz Israel* the norms regulating settlement and the first organizational campaigns were being established – largely by Eastern European Jews, the Eastern European Jews in the U.S. were doing the same thing with nearly equal zeal and commitment. In other words, historically speaking, this was a time in which Eastern European Jews, in particular, saw the founding of a new Jewish society in *Eretz Israel* as a mission. While in *Eretz Israel*, the re-building was a slow, gradual and multi-faceted endeavor, encompassing the economy, language, culture, institutions, etc., in the U.S.A., the Jewish immigrants found a ready-made civilization, albeit one in constant flux. They were very quickly assimilated into that culture, at least on an economic level, but Jewish institutions, such as social clubs, fraternities, unions, political party branches and newspapers, drew on the familiar, or the old world, as well as the “new world” understanding and lessons gleaned from recent immigrants.⁵

² Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics. Socialism, Nationalism and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917*, (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1989).

³ Joseph Gorney, “‘Klal Israel’ bemivchan hahistoria”, *eyunim betkumat Israel*, vol. 12 (2002): 1-9.

⁴ Max Weber, *Politics als Beruf*, (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1962).

⁵ Irving Howe, *World of our Fathers*, (New York: Touchstone, 1976).

This difference is clearly reflected in at least one example. In *Eretz Israel*, a unique Jewish entity was slowly being established and expressed in several areas of the culture⁶, while the development in New York was mostly one-dimensional – with a focus on identity, consciousness, ideology. It is no coincidence that any discussion regarding the traditions of the first *aliyot* involves the concepts of a “return to the land,” settlement, the Baron’s network of offices and clerks, the *haluka*, political parties, and so forth, terms that reflect the multi-dimensional character mentioned above. In contrast, historians of Jewish immigration in the U.S. generally rely heavily on immigrant newspapers which were written mainly in Yiddish, as a reflection of the fact that almost all Jewish immigrants came from Eastern-Europe, where Yiddish dominated the Jewish public sphere. From among the tens of newspapers printed in Yiddish during that period of immigration, a special place is reserved for *The Forward*, the most widely circulated Yiddish newspaper of all time. Established in 1897, this paper suffered difficult birth pangs, like most if not all its colleagues, but by the end of the first decade of its existence it reached a position of enormous influence in the life of Jewish New-Yorkers and beyond.⁶

This influence was first evident in the remarkable number of papers sold; more than one hundred thousand copies per day in 1908. That number doubled with the outbreak of WWI. The increase in sales is explained in part by a dramatic increase in the population of Yiddish readers – in 1906 alone, more than 150,000 Jews arrived from Eastern Europe. - It was not only a matter of quantity however, *The Forward* also had a special quality, a message. Under the leadership of Abraham Cahan whose ‘rational charisma’ brought him from a small town in Lithuania, all the way to New York City. *The Forward* succeeded in creating a secular Jewish, old-new world identity, derived from a re-interpretation of the long history of Jewish segregation and alienation. One specific consequence of this was Cahan’s explicit, sustained and determined hostility towards Zionism in general and towards the Zionist endeavors in *Eretz Israel* in particular. Cahan understood very well that the essence of the Zionist idea was that Jews embrace their history, relinquish their feelings of alienation and re-define their identity in the modern world.⁷

Cahan’s position and intransigence exposed him to criticism. The Orthodox regarded socialism as a modern fruit, rotten to the core, and

⁶ Moses Rischin, *The Promised City*, (New York: Harper, 1962).

⁷ About Cahan, see: Ehud Manor, *Forward – The Jewish Daily Forward (Forverts) Newspaper: Immigrants, Socialism and Jewish Politics in New York, 1890-1917*, (Beighton & Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2009).

Zionism (at least in the early stages), as a barricade against assimilation.⁸ There was also the opposition of the Jewish socialists, who regarded the relentless coverage of *Klal Yisrael* subjects by *The Forward* as a perversion of their ideology, a deceitful consciousness. What is most surprising and significant in this context was the determined opposition and incisive criticism from Louis Miller. Miller, one of *The Forward's* founders who also edited and managed the paper for a number of years, was a friend and cohort of Cahan's. As we will attempt to demonstrate in this article, just as Cahan regarded Zionism and especially the Zionist endeavors taking place in *Eretz Israel*, as a threat to the new Jewish politics that he desired to promote, so Miller viewed these as the very essence of the new Jewish politics that he envisioned. Consider the matter well: Miller did not identify himself as a Zionist, he was not a member of the movement and he did not pay the annual fees [the *Shekel*]. He never even considered immigrating to *Eretz Israel*. Miller, Cahan and others of their generation dealt with the question of organizing the American Jewry, the Jewish immigrants from Eastern-Europe and especially the proletarian population among these. In other words, the political goal that had brought them from the periphery to the 'capital'? Was to lead the Jewish immigrant community from the margins of society to the heart and center of the political sphere/ active political life?

This was no small task: an immigrant is by definition an outsider, marginalized by virtue of his "new-ness" and by his linguistic, cultural and economic differences. Further, in the case of the Eastern-European Jewish immigrant, there were additional obstacles to assimilation and political empowerment in along history of oppression within Russian society and in the backwardness of Russia even generally speaking. When the Eastern European immigrant arrived in the U.S., he was confronted with a veteran American Jewish elite -, different from him in every aspect - economic status, religious affiliation, life style, class status, residential neighborhood, and perception of self. Of course there were exceptions (not all American Jews were part of the Reform denomination and some of them were staunch social reformers), but for the most part, this elite regarded the immigrant as malleable clay – to be shaped into a virtuous "American," a Reform Jew, a Republican, someone who lived a conservative lifestyle. As in any typical immigrant story, Miller and Cahan, both together and separately, and against all odds, strove to realize their goals.

⁸ Jeffrey Gurock, *Orthodox Jews In America*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009).

Louis Miller

Louis Miller was born as Leon or Levy Bandes in Vilna in 1866 and died in New York in 1927. Miller arrived in the U.S.A. in 1884, in the midst of one of the most significant periods of the development of socialism and progressivism. America at the time was either blessed or cursed, depending on the eye of the beholder, by its image as the cradle of capitalism and an impenetrable fortress. At that time, the U.S. was undergoing a process of rapid industrialization, urbanization as well as a giant wave of immigration; in 1886, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) was founded, the “8-hour work day” movement was expanding, and Henry George was a candidate for the office of Mayor of New York. George tried to pave his way to one of the most important political posts in the country under the “single tax” slogan. Miller was a witness to this period of great hope, and it can be said with a measure of certainty that the profound impressions this period made on him remained with him until his final days.⁹

Between his arrival in the U.S.A. and his death, Miller’s public career took many twists and turns. In 1888, together with his older brother and mentor, he founded a Russian language workers’ newspaper. His brother’s untimely death from tuberculosis was a terrible blow and publication ceased. A year after that he represented the *United Hebrew Trades*¹⁰ at the first International Socialist Convention in Paris. In 1890 he played a major role in the founding of the *Arbeiter Zeitung*, the first socialist daily in Yiddish. The paper’s goal was to serve as a home for all of the leftist movements active in the Jewish community. In reality however, it became a battleground for opposing forces and it was fraught with infighting between hard-liners and those in favor of a more open and flexible approach. Miller himself led the moderates and for a time he was able to hold things together. But when things reached a crisis in 1897, the moderates, under his leadership, founded another Yiddish socialist workers’ daily – *The Forward*. In 1905, Miller resigned from *The Forward* and founded *The Warheit – The Truth*. This paper was a commercial success from the beginning, due not only to the aforementioned increase in the number of Yiddish readers during that period, but also due to Miller’s way of addressing Jewish issues from a progressive, socialist point of view. This was evidenced in his coverage of a long list of community milestones beginning with the establishment of the Jewish *Kehila* in New York in 1909. At the same

⁹ *Lexicon fun der nayer Yiddisher literatur*, vol. V (New York, Ziko, 1960): 628-630.

¹⁰ This was the umbrella organization of all of the Jewish unions. In Yiddish, it was called *Di Fareinigkte Yiddishe Gewerkschaften*. The term ‘Hebrew’ in the English version is evidence of the “purity” of language used by the regime in the U.S.A. at that time when referring to Jews. Of course, no one in those unions spoke Hebrew...

time, and against the background of on-going issues, *The Warheit* served as a forum from which Miller attacked his ex-friend and colleague, attacks that in time were interpreted as stemming from purely mercenary motives.¹¹ Even if those motives undoubtedly played some kind of role, the true reasons went much deeper.

It is in this light that Miller's 1911 trip to Europe and *Eretz Israel* should be understood. Certainly, the motivation for this trip involved his personal drives and commercial interests, but as we shall see, the deeper motivations were more significant by far. At the end of 1914, about four months after the outbreak of "The Great War," he was fired from his position as the editor of *The Warheit* – which at the time had a circulation of 100,000 copies a day¹² – due to either his 'courageous' or 'opportunistic' public stands, depending again, on the eye of the beholder. Miller advised the immigrant population to overcome the anti-Russian sentiments that rightfully characterized them, and to give their support to the Allies, including Russia. If his 1911 journey to *Eretz Israel* signified the height of his influence, his dismissal in 1914 represented the beginning of his fall from power. Miller tried to return to the public arena three times via journalism, the method he knew best. He founded an unsuccessful paper in 1915, a weekly that was relatively successful between 1917-1918, and the third opened and closed in 1925.

The Journey to *Eretz Israel*

Towards the end of 1910, a headline on the first page of *The Warheit* announced Miller's proposed visit to Europe, and from there, to the "main goal" of his journey, Palestine.¹³

The Warheit reported that Miller had "a letter of recommendation from the Minister of State, Knox" and added details about the goal of the trip: "to study the Jewish situation in general, especially with regard to immigration." "I am not a Zionist," Miller insisted, "but Zionism must be part of the larger question of Jewish immigration." Miller's statements were meant to pave the way for his upcoming trip and to lend it a *Klal Yisrael* sensibility. There was a general consensus as to the significance of the state of European Jewry but the future of immigration to the U.S. and *Eretz Israel*, or Palestine, was a somewhat less important factor, prompting Miller to emphasize the "non-Zionist" facet of his persona – known as he was as a Jewish socialist.

¹¹ Tali Tadmor-Shimoni, "The Newspaper Wars of Louis Miller", *Kesher*, vol. VIII (1990): 23-33 [Heb.].

¹² *Warheit*, April 17, 1914, 4.

¹³ *Warheit*, December 28, 1910, 1.

The seemingly anti-Zionist statements were meant to “kosherize” Miller in popular opinion during a period in which organized Zionism was viewed with tremendous skepticism.¹⁴

In spite of the controversy, at the end of December 1910, Miller crossed the Atlantic Ocean on his way to visit Palestine. He visited Europe first, and in Berlin met Isaac Leib Peretz, obtaining a promise from this celebrated author to write for *The Warheit*. A picture of the famous writer appeared on the front page of the paper.¹⁵ Miller spent three weeks in Russia and the reports of his visit, which started in the north, were bleak, although alongside an article entitled “Covert and Overt Political, Social and Economic Anti-Semitism,”¹⁶ Miller reported with wonder on “Jews who wanted to be soldiers.”¹⁷ The condition of the French Republic made a very poor impression on him, as did the hatred of “Jews and talented people” which he found there.¹⁸ In Paris, Miller met Max Nordau, one of those “talented Jews” and was so favorably impressed by their conversation that he gave Nordau the title of “Prophet and Propagandizer.”¹⁹ From Paris, Miller traveled to England to meet with Israel Zangwill, who also made a very good impression on him.²⁰ These meetings intensified Miller’s *Klal Yisrael* frustrations – he lamented “the old, old, old history” of the Jews which, in his opinion, was characterized by the difficulty they had “in organizing themselves for a common endeavor.”²¹

All of this was written just before he boarded the ship “Portugal” on his way east from Marseille. While he was on his way from New York to Europe, an editorial was published in *The Warheit* which sharply and clearly summarized the anticipated role of Zionism in connection to the “old, old history.” The title of the editorial posed this question: “Why should the Jews of America be Zionists?” And the answer was: because it makes them more patriotic. The notion that they have one center, one place that belongs to them, makes the Jews everywhere more patriotic.”²² By suggesting this idea, Miller was in fact expressing a common understanding among Zionists of this period. No one of them really believed that most – let alone all – Jews would eventually immigrate to their old-new homeland. Hence, for them it was no less important to promote a ‘real-politic’ approach among Jewish citizens all

¹⁴ Mark A. Raider, *The Emergence of American Zionism*, (New York & London: New York University Press, 1998).

¹⁵ *Warheit*, February 4, 1911, 1.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, February 28, 1911, 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, March 3, 1911, 4.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, March 19, 1911, 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, March 19, 1911, 4.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, April 1, 1911, 4.

²¹ *Ibid.*, March 18, 1911, 4.

²² *Ibid.*, January 8, 1911, 4.

over the world, especially in the emancipated countries in Europe and America. They supposed and expected that the fact that Jews are running their own state, would foster a deeper and more mature political consciousness among Jews elsewhere as well.

For Miller this claim was a sort of anti-dot counterpoint to? Against the sterile debates between anti-Diaspora and pro-Diaspora factions, or between “political” and “spiritual” Zionists, or between “assimilationists” and “keepers of Jewish tradition.” It was also significant as the link in a long chain of similar claims and actions proving that Zionism was meant not only to unite the Jewish people in the Diasporas, but was also a factor in making the Jew a loyal citizen in whatever country he lived. This loyalty itself was a positive value, and also preparation for *aliyah*, when and if the Jew decided on that course. This was the principle motivation (at least consciously speaking) for Miller’s journey to *Eretz Israel*. In other words, the editor of *The Wahrheit* meant to see to what extent the new *yishuv* in *Eretz Israel* had managed to transcend the boundaries of, in his terms, “the old, old, old, history” of the Jewish people.

His voyage across the Mediterranean lasted for ten days. The ship sailed from eastward from Marseille, and as was customary in those days, it stopped in Alexandria on its way to Jaffa. Miller spent a short time in Jaffa, and on the 13th of the month reached Jerusalem, where he stayed for two and a half weeks. On April 3rd, he sailed west, stopping at several Mediterranean seaports on his way to France where he boarded the “Mauritania” which brought him back to New York on April 28th. In all his voyage lasted about four months; he spent about three weeks of this time in Palestine.

His initial reactions were emotional. Miller shared with his readers his strange feeling of closeness to “the dirty, half-barbaric Arab and Egyptian” passengers, but not towards the others, who were “people ethnically closer to himself.”²³ He also wrote that although he knew he should be writing about his impressions of Jerusalem, Jaffa and the *moshavot*, he could not resist describing his impressions of the hurried visit to Alexandria, where he witnessed from up close, what he called “the new generation of “*avadim hayiinu* – slaves we were...” – (as he wrote in Hebrew, without vowelings).”²⁴ He was most impressed by the poorest of the 25,000 Jews living in the city, even though he noted the degree of assimilation of the middle and upper classes and the accelerated modernization of the port city in the wake of the British conquest. He also noted the fact that despite the British presence, the

²³ Ibid., April 6, 1911, 4.

²⁴ Ibid., April 8, 1911, 6.

language of the middle classes was French, which was also the official language of study in the Jewish school that had opened in the city and that served 1350 pupils.²⁵

And the pyramids caused him to write from Jerusalem: “I find I cannot organize my feelings, impressions and thoughts.” His feelings had to do with his Forefathers – “buried beneath them” -, and he was deeply impressed by the degree of construction and development. His thoughts concerned the necessity of the pyramids as opposed to the “disappearance of Napoleon” who, as did Miller, stood and gazed at them.²⁶

Miller was aware of his stormy emotions and therefore refrained from commenting on what was happening in *Eretz Israel*, writing instead about Egypt. He was suspicious of “first impressions,” which he described as similar to a dangerous “falling in love,” and promised to concentrate on his “last impressions” on the journey westward.²⁷ As to his first impressions of Jaffa, his account of disembarkation at the modest port of the main city of Palestine was not very different from other descriptions written by people in that period, such as Shmuel Yosef Agnon. Louis Miller, exactly like Yitzchak Kumar, the main character in one of Agnon’s novels, was not pleased after his first encounter with the Holy Land and also like Kumar, lost his way on one of the city’s filthiest streets.²⁸ As imaginary is it might sound – after all Agnon was writing literature – this description echoes the memoirs of many new comers in that period. However, as opposed to Kumar, Miller quickly reminded himself of the purpose of his visit:

“Jaffa the vibrant, which connects Jerusalem to the rest of the world by way of railroad tracks, Jaffa of the new Jewish settlement, Jaffa as the center of Zionism, Jaffa of the newly opened gymnasia, Jaffa, the neighbor of the new area called Tel Aviv...”²⁹

“Nature Itself has Cast a Spell on *Eretz Israel*.” This was the title of the opening article of the series that dealt with current happenings in Palestine.³⁰ It is perhaps necessary to explain that Miller, and not only Miller, needed to use both terms – *Eretz Israel* and Palestine. Miller

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., April 13, 1911, 6.

²⁷ Ibid., April 14, 1911, 6.

²⁸ Shai Agnon, *Tmol Shilshom*, (Tel Aviv: Shoken, 1945). This novel deals with the “Second Aliyah”, namely the flow of Jewish immigration in the years 1904-1914. *Tmol-Shilshom* is a Hebrew expression meaning ‘yesterday’ or ‘heretofore’ [see *Book of Ruth*, 2:11].

²⁹ *Warbeit*, April 14, 1911, 6.

³⁰ Ibid., April 15, 1911, 6.

clarified that “when he said Palestine, he was referring neither to its Biblical meaning nor to its Utopian- Zionist connotations. He intended “Palestine” as an existing and concrete political and social reality.”³¹ As to a spellbound “Nature,” Miller claimed that no one could ever visit the country without similar feelings, even if he didn’t believe in Zion, [sic], *Eretz Israel* [sic] or the redemption of the Land.” He was especially enchanted by the starry nights. “Even if you believe in nothing,” he wrote, “you must come here and take in the star studded skies [...] then you will understand why this people relied on the stars in the past [...] and why dreams are so important for human beings [...]”³² These emotional words from the socialist and rationalist Miller about the stars and dreams must be taken in context, as Miller was certainly moved from his first encounter with this land. In his second article he again promised his readers “to discuss his trip to *Eretz Israel* in the context of the larger Jewish question.” Until then, there was no choice but to come down from the “sky and stars” to the “vulgar” reality of Jerusalem.³³

Miller wrote “And between the sky and the earth stands the Bezalel Institute.” *The Wahrheit* editor lavished warm words on the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design. In other articles, he mentioned it in the same breath as other educational institutions founded by “the new *yishuv*”: the Tel Aviv Gymnasia, the Polytechnic [Technion], whose goals were to educate “**Jewish children**” [bold in the original], who would be capable of devoting their lives to the service of the Jewish people.”³⁴

As for Bezalel, alongside his description of the activities of “150 workers between the ages of 12 to 60,” including “widows and orphans,” Miller described his meeting with Boris Schatz “under the apple tree in the Bronx,” six years earlier. Schatz and Miller shared their dreams; Miller dreamt of “founding a free newspaper, not beholden to any political party,” while Schatz “dreamt of an academy of art for the Jewish nation [...] Schatz’s idea was to provide an economic base and also to foster the spirit of the nation by nurturing the creation of a unique culture [...]” Miller summarized by saying: “Dreams are not only possible, they are necessary.”³⁵

Miller contrasted the impossible aspirations and the reality of what Schatz had created at Bezalel with what he termed “the fall of the new

³¹ Ibid, May 12, 1911, 4.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., April 16, 1911, 4.

³⁴ Ibid., May 2, 1911, 4.

³⁵ Ibid.

Jerusalem.”³⁶ The city suffered socially and economically, as noted, and the situation could be summed up in three words “the *Haluka* system,” or as Miller defined it – “the religious industry of the miserable,” “the holy-business enterprise” or “the shnorr industry run by the beggars and the psalm readers.”³⁷ Miller apologized to his readers for these harsh descriptions and confessed that he hadn’t wanted to write about Jerusalem’s poverty, depression and misery. He wanted to talk about the “new yishuv in Palestine, how the communities built by our brethren had flourished and been transformed in a few years from arid deserts to flowering gardens and had transformed a people from helpless cripples to a proud, competent nation.” However, the sights he saw in the holy city “broke his heart.”³⁸

But Miller also saw another Jerusalem, that of “the quiet martyrs of *Eretz Israel*” [sic], of “the Jewish Narodniks” - in short, the Jerusalem of the pioneers of the Second *Aliyah*. For example, he told the story of a doctor who earned less than a dollar for a hard day’s work. When he asked how she managed, she replied that she “hadn’t come to *Eretz Israel* to find personal happiness, but to help others.” Miller added “You find others like her in the fields, in the villages, in the settlements and in the schools, and they represent the new spirit of the people.” Miller talked about “a small pioneer army, soldiers and generals, doing their best hour by hour, day by day, with a shovel, a hoe, as teachers, settlers or small businessman, working to transform this country into the land of milk and honey and to make Palestine a symbol of a progress.”³⁹ Miller wrote that “when you meet them you understand how rich in its poverty and strong in its weakness this nation truly is.”⁴⁰

“Jews who, until 10 years ago were traders in grain, peddled used underwear or sat behind the counter, within a year became the flag bearers of agriculture and teachers of the economics of the land [...] and this fact itself should be a source of satisfaction to all Jews, wherever they may be living and regardless of their opinions about the yishuv.”⁴¹

And from Jerusalem to the “Berg Fun Friling” or Tel Aviv, Miller could not contain his emotions when writing,

³⁶ Ibid., April 19, 1911, 4.

³⁷ Ibid., April 20, 1911, 4.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., April 30, 1911, 4.

⁴⁰ Ibid., April 29, 1911, 4.

⁴¹ Ibid., May 4, 1911, 4.

“Within a year, a neighborhood, yishuv, city, town - whatever you want to call it – has emerged from nothing. Not a tree stood, there was only sand, and now? Beautiful homes, clean streets, shade trees, truly a miracle - and all of it the fruits of Jewish labor. Tel Aviv is a tribute not only to those who built it, but to the entire nation. [...]. It matters not what you think or feel about Palestine – one feels pride and exaltation knowing that it was Jews who built Tel Aviv [...] it’s not the beautiful streets or the graceful houses that make Tel Aviv so important, but the power it gets from the people who pass through it, who create the very soul of this wonderful town.”⁴²

Miller devoted two long articles to his impressions of Tel Aviv. After all, this was in his opinion, “the most beautiful and interesting creation in all of Palestine.” Doubtless Miller was expressing his own subjective perceptions. Even staunch Zionists such as the writer Yosef Haim Brenner was skeptical about those “sixty houses” built near Yaffo.⁴³ However for Brenner, Tel-Aviv was another dimension of reality, whereas for Miller it played a major role in his campaign to foster Zionism within his New York crowd (among his fellow new-yorkers?). Nevertheless, Miller also considered the practical aspects of the issue. While describing Tel Aviv he related the particulars of how the city was built, that is by “Loans from the Anglo-Palestine Company, the Zionist Bank, which have to be returned within 18 years at the rate of one dollar a week.” And also how it was governed - by a “seven member committee responsible to the Ottoman regime, authorized to collect taxes and distribute funds, led by a ‘Lord Mayor’ [sic]... there is no police force, just three night guards who patrol the streets and search for the robbers who come only from the Arab areas.” As for the people, his chronicle revealed a light-hearted citizenry: “they walk quietly in the streets, in no hurry to get anywhere, singing and making music.”⁴⁴ Like many who preceded and followed him, Miller compared Tel Aviv to Jerusalem,

“Just as the sky and the blinding sun are the soul of Jerusalem, and the soul of *Eretz Israel*, so the singing is the heart of Tel Aviv, and the continual happy laughter of the people there in that place near Jaffa is the very essence, heart and soul of the settlement.”⁴⁵

“It is not a utopia,” Miller noted, and also “not a commune or a cooperative, but a place that has created life from a barren land and a

⁴² Ibid., April 30, 1911, 4.

⁴³ Yosef Haim Brenner, *Reshafim*, February 1910.

⁴⁴ *Warbeit*, May 1, 1911, 4.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

desert of death [...] we can neither expect nor wish for anything more [...]” Again, Miller’s excitement should be understood as part of his effort to depict Zionism as a unquestionable promise for the Jewish people.

Miller confessed that “he himself couldn’t live in such a quiet place” and assumed that this would be true of most of his readers. And more than a few of the people in Tel Aviv failed to get used to the “calm, quiet and monotony, and returned to Russia where there were petty quarrels aplenty.”⁴⁶

Miller left open the question of what constitutes a better life: “a dynamic, stormy life, in New York, or a small, worry-free, removed-from-global-politics life in Tel Aviv,” a place where “people read the paper three weeks after it was published” and therefore were exempt from the “troubles of the world.” Miller declined to answer the question himself but he did point out that there was more sorrow and pain in one block in New York than in all of Tel Aviv and more sorrow and pain in one day in one block in New York than in all of Tel Aviv in an entire year.”⁴⁷ And from Tel Aviv and Jerusalem to other places. “Jerusalem’s name is great and so is her significance,” wrote Miller stating the obvious, and great are “the Wailing Wall, the tombs and Bezalel.”⁴⁸

“Tel Aviv, with its gymnasia, is beautiful, and we can expect the Polytechnic of Haifa, now being built, to be even more beautiful and have even greater influence, but the future of Palestine lies mainly with the settlements.”⁴⁹

Miller emphasized the idea that the settlements were “the hope of Zionism”, and the basis for “the incredulity of anti-Zionists.” After all, Jerusalem was “a large, historical cemetery”; for the ground-breaking institutions such as “Bezalel, the Gymnasia and the Polytechnic and others not yet built” there was a chance “to enhance the cultural glory of the nation” but even that,

“...depended on the flesh and blood of the people. On the Jewish people, who will build the nation with their heart and blood, and not with donations from the Haluka [...] that is the goal of the yishuv, and that goal must totally encompass all of *Eretz Israel*.”⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., May 3, 1911, 4.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid, May 5, 1911, 4.

Miller also visited Rehovot, Rishon LeTzion and the Herzl Forest. He described his visit to the Judean *moshavot* more than a month later, while his ship was crossing the Sea of Marmara on its way to the Black Sea. By then *The Warheit* had managed to insert a picture of Rishon LeTzion above the article. A stopover in Athens, and a tour of the archeological sites caused Miller to wonder whether “the end of the Jews will be like the end of Greek civilization where the only things remaining are tourist sites.” What he had seen in Rehovot and Rishon had convinced him that the chances of that happening to the Jewish civilization were very slim. Miller wrote: “The Jews are building their future by themselves, rather than exploiting slave labor,” and that is the difference between the civilization being built in *Eretz Israel* and the Greek and Roman cultures that fell.⁵¹ No doubt Miller was referring to the past of Greek and Roman civilizations, because at the same time there was modern Greek and Italian nationalism, that inspired among many other nationalist movements throughout the 19th century also the Zionist movement. The idea was that as much as ancient Greek and Rome were part of History, so was ancient Judaism. Likewise, just as the Greek and the Italian peoples managed to create modern Greek and Italian nation-states, so would the Jews, through Zionism.

The innovative and highly scientific agricultural practices being developed by the Jews strengthened his conviction. In the 600 acre Herzl Forrest (some 2400 *dunam*, Miller met the agronomist Williakovski, “who had studied agriculture in Paris, Berlin and other places, and who could have earned at least \$4000 a year in the U.S.A., yet was willing to come here for only \$700 – about half the salary of a Jewish tailor in New York.” The methods employed in agriculture on this farm were gaining recognition, and even the Arabs, who knew the soil well, came to learn. Miller estimated that “it was only a matter of time before the Arabs worked the land as well as the Jews [...]”⁵²

As part of his discussion of the establishment of the new settlement, Miller noted the contributions made by Baron Rothschild. Under the paradoxical title, “Baron Rothschild’s Socialism in Palestine,” Miller once again told the story of the Baron’s settlements (*moshavot*). And in what sense was this “socialism”? In the sense that Rothschild “gave millions,” not for his own profit, but rather to a relatively large number of people, who took it upon themselves to do the hard work. In other words, Miller saw Rothschild’s philanthropy as a democratization of capital, or expansionary policy. In any case, Miller quoted settlers as saying, “There was no other way to save the yishuv.” Miller found

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, May 7, 1911, 4.

⁵² *Ibid.*, May 4, 1911, 4.

himself torn between the practical and the progressive elements of his political philosophy and concluded that although he did not see “these things in such a positive light,” he was willing to defer final judgment until he had the chance to study the issue in depth.”⁵³

Miller’s opinion about the *yishuv* was based not only on what he saw with his own eyes, but also on David Trietsch’s *Handbook of Palestine*, first published in 1907. Miller summarized Trietsch’s main argument as a combination of the problem of human resources; the difficulty “of transforming the urban Jew into a farmer” and the financial problem, since “without a large sum of money, it would be impossible to enrich the soil and create the necessary conditions.” Although Miller maintained that “the farmers in Palestine were not only happier than those in Russia, but they were also happier than the Jewish farmers in America” - it would be impossible to have American-style farmers in Palestine.”⁵⁴ It is important to note that Trietsch who supported “maximalistic” Zionism, criticized what he described as the overly conservative approach of Arthur Ruppin. Trietsch’s influence on Miller was as great, if not greater, than that of Ahad Haam.⁵⁵

These observations were the beginning of the discussion that Miller had promised his readers when he landed in Jaffa, but which he delivered many days later, on his journey westward. His enthusiasm for *Eretz Israel* was one thing, his passion for “that small army of pioneers” was another, and the *moshavot*, especially Tel Aviv, was another still - and all of these were “sources of pride and surging emotions.” However, the situation in Palestine as a factor of the larger “Jewish question” and it demanded a more critical discussion. Miller was especially troubled by the question of the political future of the country. For him, a political future was a necessary condition for the development of an economy on a scale that would allow masses of Jews to immigrate there in the future – whether of their own free will or by necessity, in the event that his dire predictions as to American immigration policy came true. When Miller addressed the economic future of *Eretz Israel*, which he claimed was dependent on the political situation, he prefaced his remarks with the unequivocal declaration of his own “non-Zionism.”

In an article entitled “The Dark Sides of Palestine,” Miller apologized to those among his readers who, because of his enthusiastic reports from *Eretz Israel*, had received a mistaken impression:

⁵³ Ibid., May 14, 1911, 4.

⁵⁴ Ibid., May 3, 1911, 4.

⁵⁵ *Encyclopedia Judaica*, s.v. “Trietsch, Davis”.

“I have never been further from what people understand by the term ‘Zionist’[...], the editor of *The Warbeit* asserted, referring to the political dimensions of the movement, namely ‘The Charter’. Yet in spite of his disavowal, he also repeated his praise for the commitment of the *Eretz Israeli* Jews in the moshavot, the schools and other institutions, which had inspired in him feelings of national pride and honor “such as no others of any of his brethren, in any other place, had ever done.”

However, the limited list of agricultural crops grown in *Eretz Israel* – oranges, grapes and olives – no corn, wheat or other grains - proved that agriculture alone could not support an economy worthy of the name. Miller claimed that “the fundamental problem is the high cost of the land as opposed to its poor quality. And the Jews were buying the worst land, as far as soil quality went.⁵⁶ But the high cost of land was only one problem. Another fundamental problem was “the advantage of the Arab proletariat.”⁵⁷ But, as noted, the greatest obstacle was the political problem.

“The development of agriculture and an economy requires natural resources, rivers, ports, water, and a central location. The people in Palestine are convinced that the land is rich and their location central, that they have natural resources, and that ports and roads can be constructed. The problem is that most of the land is under Arab control [...] it is not likely that the world will allow the Jews to control it [...] and the Turkish regime is not the only obstacle to the old political Zionism. All of the world powers involved in Palestine, such as Austria, France, Russia or Germany, oppose the establishment of a ‘Jewish state’ [...]”⁵⁸

Behind the political problem was the question of “anti-Semitism in Palestine.” Miller wondered if perhaps it might not exist, not only in light of the fact that other “Semitic people lived there,” and not only because “public opinion and a popular press” didn’t exist there, but mainly because the Muslims didn’t accuse the Jews of killing their god. In any case, Miller avoided passing judgment, due to his difficulty in understanding the issues directly, as he termed it “the problem of language.” His discussion of anti-Semitism was based on talks with Jewish and Turkish public figures. Miller eventually proposed a distinction between industrial-economic anti-Semitism, and a hatred of the Jews for religious reasons. He explained that the hatred many Arabs

⁵⁶ *Warbeit*, May 8, 1911, 4.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, May 9, 1911, 4.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, May 10, 1911, 4.

felt towards the Jews in Palestine was the result of the “weakness of the Jews” and he added that “hatred of the weak is prevalent in the East.” Even if it could be assumed that the Jews themselves would change as a result of building their society, economy, and politics, Miller predicted that, “in any case, the Arab population has a problem with the regime [namely the Ottoman Empire. E.M], and the Jews will have to align themselves with the Arabs against the regime, or with the regime against the Arabs.”⁵⁹

All of this caused Miller to believe that it would take “the largest order miracle” to say the least, for the Jews to achieve “ownership of the land and political power” for themselves in *Eretz Israel*. Due to his reliance on the fact that, “the most enthusiastic Zionists” (as he defined them) had already “admitted that the dream of a sovereign Jewish state in Palestine was something that could not be achieved,” Miller concluded by saying that “political Zionism was a hopeless Don Quixotic cause.” From his meetings with Zionists in *Eretz Israel*, Miller already knew that they “were searching for a new ideological foundation, and following that, a new practice for the children of Zion”; in other words, “a new Zionism of practical work.”⁶⁰ And what does this ‘practical Zionism’ consist of? “Two elements: economic strength and a cultural center.” Under a picture of two women harvesting grapes, Miller wrote “this is what the Jews in Palestine want and aspire to after realizing that there is no hope for statehood.”⁶¹

“In the same way that Paris is a global cultural center, Italy a center for opera, and England for industry, the Jews of Palestine want to be the cultural center for the Jewish people. This is where the language of the Jews will be cultivated, as well their art and literature [...]. They will be satisfied if a **certain number** [bold in original] of Jews establish settlements in this land and live in them. And alongside of them, schools and universities will arise, where Hebrew will be the language of education, the humanities and the arts. This is both the minimum and the maximum plan of the new Zionism.”⁶²

Miller called for an open discussion of the question of whether “this plan was viable,” based on the assumption that it was clear that “settling in Palestine is a solution for the few.” Miller advised any Jew who had amassed between six to seven thousand dollars and who was fed up with “the hell of the slums of New York,” to purchase “a farm

⁵⁹ Ibid., May 13, 1911, 4.

⁶⁰ Ibid., May 10, 1911, 4.

⁶¹ Ibid., May 11, 1911, 4.

⁶² Ibid.

in Palestine, rather than a farm in the Catskills,” since he would immediately profit from it.”

“His Christian neighbors will not make fun of him and his children will receive a Jewish education, [...] it was only there that I saw how the young are changing, with my own eyes I saw a Jewish lad with a rifle on a horse ‘taking care of’ an Arab who tried to steal one of his flock. This new spirit can only be nurtured in Palestine.”⁶³

Alongside farmers with small but significant fortunes, Miller was convinced that it would be possible to encourage “Jews with certain occupations and those with the means to establish new industries”⁶⁴ to make a life in *Eretz Israel*. As for the cultural factor, Miller opened with praise and ended with denunciation: on the one hand, he was awed by the education system in *Eretz Israel*, but on the other hand, he was furious with the *yishuv*’s attitude toward Yiddish. For him, as for many others, including many Zionists, Yiddish was an important element of Jewish history - not only for understanding or respecting the Jewish past in Europe, but also, and even more importantly, for the revival of Jewish national present. For Miller and his New York based public, Yiddish was a defining characteristic of Jewish culture and he fiercely opposed its derogation for the benefit of Hebrew.

As for the praise, Miller lavished enthusiastic words on what he had seen at the Gymnasia in Tel Aviv. He proposed that it be regarded “not only as belonging to Tel Aviv and *Eretz Israel*, but to the entire Jewish nation,” since its goal was “to educate Jewish children so that they would be capable of committing their lives and their blood to serve the Jewish people.”⁶⁵ Miller supplied the following edifying details: “the school opened with 17 pupils, and today has 253, including 95 girls [...], Jacob Schiff donated \$1,000, as did the Odessa Committee, but most of the budget of \$25,000 was funded by Lord Bedford.” However, in Miller’s opinion, the greatest contribution came from “the excellent teachers, who came to the Gymnasia from the finest colleges and universities of Europe, and were paid \$10 a week.”⁶⁶

The graduates could continue their education at the Polytechnic in Haifa or at institutes of higher learning in Europe, since their curriculum contained not only the natural sciences and Hebrew, but also Arabic, Turkish and French and gymnastics, music and drawing. The higher classes studied classical literature and Latin. The students came from many countries, such as Russia, South Africa, and others.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., May 2, 1911, 4.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

All of the above engendered in Miller great expectations for the next generation:

“[...] the hope, here in *Eretz Israel*, is the children. The children growing up here, the children whose hearts are developing together with the new culture, which is being nurtured today.”⁶⁷

And in the meantime, till those children grew up, there was the “intelligentsia”, that same group of people who wanted to “transform Palestine into a national cultural center.” Miller offered his readers a “material foundation’ for debate on the subject.”

“As in nature, where the large fish swallows the smaller one, so it is with the relationship between the cultures of different nations. When a nation is a minority, its culture is influenced by that of the majority, as is evidenced by the bearers of our culture in Russia, Germany and even France [...] and in America. The situation is different in Palestine. Here, the few Jews determine the spiritual developments. And they are liberated not only from cultural influences, but religious, ethical, social and political ones as well. Yes, from political ones. Because the regime in Palestine is weak, they are even freer of political pressures than the Jews of America, much to the dismay of those American Jews.”⁶⁸

Miller didn’t ignore the fact that Jews in Palestine were also a minority. He took the weakness of the ottoman regime as an advantage because it would not interfere with the cultural development of the Jews. His good intentions and positivism notwithstanding, Miller was no doubt exaggerating as to the possibilities for cultural development in the other places he mentioned. Judaism was also developing also in the United States, albeit her regime was stronger. At the same time, he also deplored certain political and cultural ‘policies’ and in this Miller was caught in a seeming contradiction. He emphasized (as he would continue to do throughout his life) that “in that [freedom from political pressure] there is no solution to the Jewish question. A million times no.”⁶⁹ As for the “condemnation” of cultural policy, Miller deplored the fact that in *Eretz Israel*, a “ban had been imposed on Yiddish.” Miller couldn’t understand how Jews could call Yiddish by the derogatory term ‘jargon’ and in this express “disdain for those writers such as Peretz, Jacob Gordon, Sholem Aleichem and others,” and he added that “the schools teach Turkish and French, but not Yiddish [...]” Miller tried to get to the root of the issue:

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., May 12, 1911, 4.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

“I asked the Hebrew fanatics in Palestine, who of course speak Yiddish, why a child in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv shouldn’t be able to read Peretz. Why deny the young access to what is happening in the Jewish world, on the Jewish street, in the press, in literature, when this knowledge is readily available to the older generation? Why? Why not? I got no reply to my question.”⁷⁰

Yiddish aside, it was clear to Miller as well as to the Zionists, and to other supporters and dissenters alike, that in the immediate and even middle range future, a Jewish state could provide no solution to the “Jewish question,” which involved over 14 million Jews, a number that was only growing. As far as Miller was concerned, this “larger question” remained unanswered. “What to do with the Jews? What to do with this people, who have been wandering not 40 years in the desert, but wandering back and forth in the Diaspora for 2000 years?”⁷¹

Back Home

Miller returned to New York near the end of April 1911. The first page of *The Warheit* informed its readers of a “great thanksgiving dinner” to be held in honor of his return, where Miller would deliver a speech about “his voyage to the heart of the Jewish world, a journey that may enable him to found a movement to unite the Jewish people.”⁷² And in fact, Miller would later participate in establishing a movement in this spirit: The Jewish Congress Movement, organized during WWI.⁷³ The American Jewish Congress was founded in spite of the determined and coordinated opposition of the Jewish economic elite and the left, under the leadership of *The Forward* Miller, a devoted Jewish socialist and an ex-*Forward* leader himself only a until a decade earlier, was putting into political practice his seems-to-be remote and detached statements, by which “*Eretz Israel* was the only place where Jewish culture and ethics was being developed.”⁷⁴ The idea was that Jewish nationalism should play a decisive role not “only” in the middle-east, but also in the lower side of New Yorks’ east.

⁷⁰ Ibid., May 21, 1911, 4.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., April 28, 1911, 1.

⁷³ Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, 504-611.

⁷⁴ *Warheit*, May 18, 1911, 1.

In 1913, Miller's play, "*The Mo'ser*",⁷⁵ debuted on stages throughout the city. The story takes place in four typical apartments: on the border between Eastern and Western Europe, in a "*cheder*", at the home of an apostate, and in a *moshava* in *Eretz Israel*. The main characters are simple people arriving at a crossroads in their lives: either in their relationships with family members or in the location of their future homes. Most of the action takes place in Eastern Europe, but America and Palestine are always present. It is a simple drama, typical of those staged by the Jewish theatre during the period when folk art comprised what today is provided by commercial television.⁷⁶ The subject that concerned Miller from the start of his public career – the Jewish question – also led him to this type of artistic expression. As in similar works, the dilemmas remained unresolved, and in the event that some sort of resolution is achieved, it comes at a very high price. In this case, most of the main characters are contending with dilemmas such as whether to immigrate to the west or to Palestine; whether to be loyal to "the revolution" or to their beloved families. Other questions include whether a father should be more loyal to tradition or to freedom of choice for his daughter and what must a young woman do when saving the life of her sick child entails the apostasy inherent in getting treatment from the missionary hospital. The gentiles in the drama also find themselves faced difficult choices - ethnic loyalty versus loyalty to their professed liberal and enlightened beliefs. Even god himself appears in a small supporting role.

However, throughout these struggles and unanswered questions, it seems that Miller's own position is quite clear and ultimately, compatible with his conviction that *Eretz Israel* was the only place where a life of culture and ethics was developing, which, in retrospect, seems even more controversial. The play ends in a *moshava* in *Eretz Israel*. The scenery is beautiful; people eat, drink and make merry. They are celebrating Purim, and they take the opportunity to sing '*Hatikva*'. The conflicted heroine, called by the symbolic and diasporic name *Esther*, is a beloved and much admired teacher. In the very moving conclusion, she reconciles with her father, *Moshe*, who had betrayed her by informing on her revolutionary fiancé and handing him over to the authorities.. Esther manages to move on from her previous love and considers the possibility of giving her

⁷⁵ Yiddishized Hebrew word meaning "shtinker" or "informer." Literally 'limsor' in Hebrew means 'to give' or 'to hand over'. In Jewish tradition this term bears a deep negative significance. According to some Halachic interpretations such a person who "hand over" his brothers [by giving others, mainly gentiles, incriminating information about them] merits capital punishment.

⁷⁶ Stefan Kanfer, *Stardust Lost. The Triumphs Tragedies and Mishegas of the Yiddish theatre in America*, (New York: Knopf, 2006).

heart to her cousin Ben-Zion, who had immigrated to *Eretz Israel* alongside her.

Happy ending or not, the play undoubtedly illuminates several familiar aspects of the Jewish question which concerned Miller and others of his generation. In hindsight, it is clear that in the completion of the circle – from anxious waiting at an unknown site, in an inn at the border, to a secure vineyard haven with fig trees in the *moshava* in *Eretz Israel* – there is something of a prophecy, because it contains the ideals of a Jew whose feelings of belonging and responsibility to “Klal-Yisrael” do not come at the expense of his socialist ideals.

Miller could not have predicted the transformation of the *moshava* to a teeming city, or of *Eretz Israel*, at least some aspects of it, to a suburb of America. In 1914 he traveled again to Europe, in order “to assess the situation [...] and ensure a larger network of foreign correspondents for *The Wahrheit* than that of any other paper.” At that time, when Miller was an ailing 58 year-old, his output waned, even though his keen insight into the Jewish question was undiminished. Before he boarded the *Lusitania* in New York, Miller traveled to Washington and met with President Wilson, both to convey and receive encouragement in the struggle over free immigration - Wilson himself was a supporter. According to the President, “the law against immigration will die,” promised a front page *Wahrheit* headline, one day before Miller sailed to Europe. It was not only the transformation of the *moshava* into a city, and the transformation of at least a part of the culture and ethics of *Eretz Israel* into something American that Miller failed to foresee, but also the intransigence of the Jewish question Despite various reformulations. In any case, he, before and more clearly than any of his contemporaries in the proletarian camp, especially those swayed by Cahan’s magical rhetoric and by *The Forward*, discerned the significance of *Klal Yisrael* organization as a means of protecting the interests of the Jews. This was especially true with regard to free immigration and the right to organize and become citizens wherever they chose to live. Further, Miller’s ideas highlighted the importance of the settlements in *Eretz Israel*, both as a goal unto itself and as a point of reference for Jewish life in the Diasporas.

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