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# THE ANARCHIST SAGE/*DER GOEN ANARKHIST*: RABBI YANKEV MEIR ZALKIND AND RELIGIOUS GENEALOGIES OF ANARCHISM

Anna Elena Torres

**Abstract:** *This paper examines the religious anarchist thought of Rabbi Dr. Yankev Meir Zalkind, the prolific philologist, editor, Orthodox rabbi, and mentor to poet-assassin Sholem Shvartsbard. In the early twentieth century, Zalkind developed a political philosophy of anarchism from his study of Talmudic ethics, retaining the particularity of Jewish identity and cultural autonomy within a vision of life liberated from capitalism, militarism, statism, and institutional oppression. His capacious politics dissolve the binary between religious conservatism and leftist atheism, anticipating the rise of the “spiritual Left” and critiques of political secularism. Zalkind drew political inspiration from the condition of diaspora, forging a theory of anti-statism from his experiences of statelessness. Rather than retrofitting secular radicalism or “judaizing” anarchism, Zalkind articulated his anti-statism through the language and logics of Jewish scripture while fiercely opposing contemporaneous anarchist strains of atheism, universalism, and antisemitism. This paper examines a series of interwoven elements of Zalkind’s work and worldview, including his translations of the Talmud; his intense relationship with Shvartsbard, particularly their ruminations on justice and Orthodoxy; his discord with secular anarchists; his editorship of London anarchist newspapers; and his aspiration to build a Jewish anarchist society in Palestine.*

Rabbi Dr. Yankev Meir Zalkind encompassed the breadth of possible identities for a Yiddishist in the early twentieth century: he was at once an Orthodox rabbi and fierce anarchist, a classical philologist and rabble-rouser, an anti-militarist and settler, a conscientious objector and an assassin’s mentor.<sup>1</sup> Zalkind developed a political philosophy of anarchism from his study of Talmudic ethics, retaining the particularity of Jewish identity and cultural autonomy within a vision of life liberated from capitalism, militarism, statism, and institutional oppression. Zalkind’s capacious politics confounds the binary of religious conservatism versus leftist atheism, anticipating the rise of the “spiritual Left” and critiques of political secularism. His contemporaries remarked that his expansive political imagination “breached every boundary”:

[While many individuals hold many radical divergent views,] in all such examples, we are able to locate the central point of that person’s thought in which its roots burrow and from which its fundamental stem grows ... Jacob Meir Salkind’s thought... had no such point. Rather, it had many centers at once ... He

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<sup>1</sup> His name is also spelled Jacob Meir (or Meyer) Salkind.

was a man of contradictions who breached every boundary ... or so it appeared to us; he himself saw no contradiction at all. For him, everything grew from a single stalk ... He did not pass from camp to camp, from Zionism to Socialism and Anarchism, from Hebraism to Yiddishism, from faith to heresy, from piety to libertinism... Rather, he inhabited all these camps at once, he thought every thought at once, entertained every belief at once, inhaled every atmosphere in a single breath and perceived no inconsistency in it.<sup>2</sup>

Recent years have brought new scholarly attention to the religious anarchist thought of major German Jewish intellectuals including Gustav Landauer, Martin Buber, and Gershom Scholem.<sup>3</sup> Zalkind has remained obscure, although his influence radiated out through more famous figures—much like the enigmatic, itinerant talmudist Monsieur Chouchani was a formative influence upon Elie Wiesel and Emmanuel Levinas. Zalkind befriended such diverse characters as the pioneering Hebrew poet Chaim Bialik; the anarchist writer and general strike organizer Rudolf Rocker; and the poet-assassin Sholem Shvartsbard, who killed Ukrainian nationalist Symon Petliura to avenge the pogroms. Even within scholarship on London's Yiddish milieu, Zalkind's contributions remain largely unstudied.<sup>4</sup> Recognized early as a “flam-fayerdik ile” (child prodigy),<sup>5</sup> Zalkind is said to have mastered between twenty-one and thirty ancient and modern languages. Dubbed *der go'en anarkhist* (the anarchist sage), his philological studies include prayer books with grammatical annotations, a linguistic analysis of the Song of Songs, and a translation of a Hebrew-Yiddish dictionary; his secular translations include the works of Molière and the French anarchist Sébastien Faure. He left a number of large projects unfinished or unpublished, including a history of the Jewish press and *Di filosofye fun anarkhizm* (*The Philosophy of Anarchism*). Zalkind's grandest undertaking was rendering the Talmud into Yiddish, a project which consumed more than twenty years of his life. In addition to these projects, Zalkind was a wildly prolific writer, said to have published more than one thousand newspaper articles and editorials in Russian, Ladino, and Hebrew, and other languages. Zalkind continued to lecture and organize salons for the religious anarchist community until his later years.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Sholem Schwarzbard, “Dr. Yankev Meyer Zalkind un zayn gemore af yidish,” *Der moment*, 20 January 1929, 5.

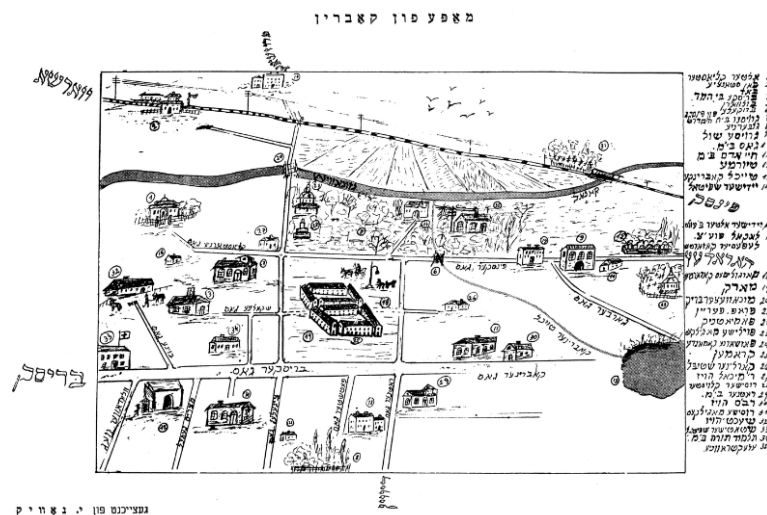
<sup>3</sup> See David Biale, “Gershom Scholem on nihilism and anarchism,” *Rethinking History* 19, no. 1 (2015): 61-71; Sam Brody, *Martin Buber's Theopolitics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018); and Paul Mendes-Flohr, Anya Mali, Hanna Delf von Wolzogen, eds., *Gustav Landauer: Anarchist and Jew* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Rudolf Rocker's memoir *The London Years* (London: Robert Anscombe, 1956) and W. J. Fishman's *East End Jewish Radicals 1875-1914* (London: Duckworth, 1975) are the indispensable chronicles of this period. Neither mention Zalkind.

<sup>5</sup> Itskhok Kharlash, “Yankev Meyer Zalkind,” in *Der Leksikon fun der nayer yidisher literatur*, vol. 3, ed. Shmuel Niger and Jacob Shatsky (New York: Marsten Press, 1960), 535.

<sup>6</sup> Moshe Goncharok, “The Fate of Jewish Anarchists” (Судьбы еврейских анархистов), <http://www.jewniverse.ru/biher/goncharok/anarchie/8.html>, accessed 12 December 2018.

Zalkind and his comrades drew political inspiration from the condition of diaspora, forging a theory of anti-statism from their experiences of statelessness. Rather than retrofitting secular radicalism or “judaizing” anarchism, Zalkind articulated his anti-statism through the language and logics of Jewish scripture while fiercely opposing contemporaneous anarchist strains of atheism, universalism, and antisemitism. This paper examines a series of interwoven elements of Zalkind’s work and worldview, including his translations of the Talmud; his intense relationship with the assassin Shvartsbard, particularly their ruminations on justice and Orthodoxy; his discord with secular anarchists; his editorship of London anarchist newspapers; and his aspiration to build a Jewish anarchist society in Palestine.



An illustrated map of Kobrin, Zalkind's birthplace, by Y. Novik for Kobrin Zamlbukh (the Kobrin collection) a memorial volume published in 1951.

## Life and Times of an Anarchist Rabbi

Yankev Meyer Zalkind was born on August 16, 1875, in the largely Jewish city of Kobrin (Kobryn), White Russia. Descending from an eminent Portuguese Jewish family, his father was a *maskil* who traced their lineage to the Baal Shem Tov, Rashi, and several illustrious sages.<sup>7</sup> As a young man, Zalkind studied for two years at the

<sup>7</sup> In the dedication to his translation of tractate *Kil'ayim*, Zalkind writes:

To the memory of the holy souls of my unforgettable parents  
My father Mordkhe Yehuda Leyb son of Mikhl Yoysef Halevi Zalkind (whose soul is in Eden)  
A grandson/descendant of the Besht, a branch of the renowned Don-Yichye family  
And my mother Khaye Esther Ha'isha, daughter of Rabbi Yankev Meyer Soloveitchik (whose soul is in Eden)

prestigious Volozhin yeshiva, where he befriended the young Hayim Nahman Bialik, who went on to become a prominent poet. After yeshiva, Zalkind received special permission to attend the Russian gymnasium in Kiev. His earliest literary writing appeared in 1900 in *Ha-tsefira* (*The Dawn*), the first Hebrew newspaper in Poland, which reported on scientific advances for a primarily Hasidic readership. His student years were devoted to religious Zionist activism, which he continued organizing in his first years after emigrating to London around 1903. A decade later, when Russian Jews residing in England were offered the choice between conscription and deportation, Zalkind became radicalized as an anti-militarist. While serving as a rabbi, educator, and lecturer, he became the primary editor of a few Yiddish anarchist newspapers. A commitment to radical education ran through his work, and he continued to teach and write Hebrew plays for children, which were frequently staged in Jewish schools.<sup>8</sup> In 1930, he settled in Haifa to advocate for a Jewish national home built upon an anarchist foundation; he continued his political and scholarly work there until his death in December 1937.

Since his early years as a student activist, Zalkind was known for his provocative personality. He established Zionist associations in Switzerland, set up kosher halls to counterbalance the assimilationist influence of “Russian cafeterias,” and founded a union called Kadima. The group’s name linked ideologies of time and territory in a single term, as Hayyim Rothman notes: “This Hebrew word, which means ‘eastward,’ ‘forward,’ and ‘before’ or ‘preceding’ was chosen in order to signify the three broad aims of the group: ‘eastward toward Palestine, forward to the future, and before in the sense that Zionist youth must restore the nation to its former glory.’”<sup>9</sup> Following the Kishinev massacre, Zalkind organized a self-defense group in Bern called the Mogen David, whose members learned to shoot and march in military formation.<sup>10</sup> This rag-tag group

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A descendant of Khokhem Tsvi, Tosfos Yom Tov, and other great ones  
Who have taught me to love the God of Israel, his Torah, his people  
and his land with the full fervor of a Jewish soul  
I inscribe, with awe and compassion, this work which would certainly have given them the  
greatest happiness during their earthly lives.  
— Their son, the author.

Yankev Meyer Zalkind, ed., *Talmud bavli (gemore in yidish)*, vol. 4 (London: B. Vaynberg, 1932), frontispiece. The *Leksikon* entry details his heritage: “His father Mortkhe-Yehude-Leyb Zalkind [...] drew his pedigree from the Baal Shem Tov and from Rabbi Mendeley Don Yehia (rabbi in Drise [Verkhnedvinsk]) who came from a prominent Jewish family in Portugal. His mother, Khaye-Ester, a great-granddaughter of the rabbi of Lublin, Rabbi Meshulem-Zalmen Ashkenazi, descended from generations of celebrated men and rabbis—from Hakham-Tsvi (1656-1718) back to Maharshel (1510-1574), Tosefet-Yom-Tov (1579-1654), and Rashi (1040-1105).” Kharlash, “Yankev Meyer Zalkind,” 535. Translation by Joshua Fogel from <http://yleksikon.blogspot.com/2016/07/yankev-meyer-zalkind-j-m-salkind.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Jerucham Tolkes and Leonard Prager, “Salkind, Jacob Meir,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, vol. 17 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 691.

<sup>9</sup> Hayyim Rothman, “The Case of Jacob Meir Salkind, Part One: On the Making of a Religious-Zionist, Anarcho-Communist, Pacifist, Rabbi,” unpublished TS, 18.

<sup>10</sup> Kharlash, “Yankev Meyer Zalkind,” 535.

of impoverished former yeshiva students caused a colorful spectacle in the streets of Bern, as A. Mukdoni recalls:

Until today, my face reddens with shame when I recall my first confrontation with such terrible mimicry. ... The Jewish group and its members appeared so comical that even the generally reserved Swiss students would laugh upon seeing this group marching in public with its hats and ribbons and glossy boots ... The leader of this group in formation was the late Dr. Jacob Meir Zalkind. This Zalkind was short, wide-boned, bearded, and had the gait of a bear. He wore a colorful hat on top of his head and a colorful sash in a manner similar to that of high-diplomats and kings. He wore lacquered boots and marched in a military fashion with all the manners of a junker-corporation. It was the most comical picture one can imagine.<sup>11</sup>

When he arrived in London around 1903, Zalkind continued his Zionist activism, organizing the seventy-member group “Aḥuzah.”<sup>12</sup> On behalf of Aḥuzah’s impoverished members, he visited Palestine in 1913 and purchased land at Karkur to build a settlement on the coast near Haifa. In 1914, Zalkind collaborated with Y. M. Pozikov on a fiery pamphlet, titled *Di milkhome un di yidn-frage* (The War and the Jewish Question).<sup>13</sup> The pamphlet’s publishers advertised Tolstoy’s *Resurrection* (*Tkhies-hameysim*), suggesting a sympathy towards anarchism; proceeds from the publication benefited “the Palestine Workers Fund and the Hebrew Schools in Erets Yisroel.” In place of an introduction, Zalkind wrote an open letter to Pozikov: “Esteemed comrade! [...] We find ourselves now in one of the most difficult and frightening moments of our history. I want you to truly understand what I mean by the word ‘us.’ [...] I mean not the millions of martyrs, young free human lives, that fell like sheaves [...]. In the *maror* of their bodies, there is at least a little sweetness.” Zalkind excoriates his community for its complacency, imploring readers not to wait for the Messiah “for another year, while singing serenades to assimilation and equal rights.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> A. Mukdoni, *Oysland: Mayne Bagegenishn* (Buenos Aires: Tsentral Farbund fun Poylishe Yiddn in Argentine, 1951), 98–99. Translation by Rothman in “The Case of Jacob Meir Zalkind,” 23.

<sup>12</sup> Kharlash, “Yankev Meyer Zalkind,” 535.

<sup>13</sup> Y.M. Pozikov, *Di milkhome un di yidn-frage*, foreword by Y. M. Zalkind (London: Vest-Tsentral tse’ire tsiyon, 1914). This appears to be the only instance when Y. M. Pozikov used his own name in a publication, whereas he usually used the pseudonym Arnold Posy. Under this name he edited and contributed to *Der yidisher ekspres*, *Milvoker yidishe shtime*, *Jewish Home*, *Kosher Butcher Shtime*, and other newspapers. Born in Belarus in 1893, he moved to London in 1914, which is when this pamphlet was published. He came to the United States in 1920. His other pamphlets included “Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* and the Present War.” He also contributed to *Oyfkum* and *Der khaver* and corresponded with many writers including Aaron Zeitlin. In 1966, he published the book *Mystic Trends in Judaism*, which emphasized the messianic aspects of Kabbalah. His other Yiddish works are primarily plays and dramatic poems. See Fruma Mohrer and Marek Web, eds., *Guide to the YIVO Archives* (New York: YIVO, 1988), 223.

<sup>14</sup> Pozikov, *Di milkhome un di yidn-frage*. Pozikov writes in a similarly urgent vein: “And when it comes to pass to us here, when my neighbors the Arabs will enrich themselves through robbery, then look: how proud sits upon the blazing horse, my child the guardian! He is no longer afraid of the merest breeze, as

Zalkind's anti-nationalist radicalization began during his first years in London. Few East European Jews had heard the word "anarchism" before arriving in England or the United States.<sup>15</sup> London in this time was, in Rudolf Rocker's words, "a clearing house for the Jewish revolutionary labour movement."<sup>16</sup> Emma Goldman recalled that period in her memoir: "England was the haven for refugees from all lands, who carried on their work without hindrance. By comparison with the United States the political freedom in Great Britain seemed like the millennium come."<sup>17</sup> Rocker describes these Yiddish diasporic circuits:

Most of the Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe who came to Great Britain continued their journey to America or to other countries overseas. They took with them to the United States, Canada, Argentina, or South Africa the socialist ideas they had first picked up in London. They formed groups in their new homes, and maintained contact with their original group in Britain, which remained the motherland of the movement. [...] The threads went out from London to all countries where there were large numbers of Jewish immigrants, and later even to their original homes in Russia and Poland, when the first anarchist underground groups began to form in Bialystok, Grodno, Vilna, Warsaw, Lodz, and other places.<sup>18</sup>

Anarchist communities emerged in London in the 1870s, as political expatriates and refugees from across Europe sought shelter.<sup>19</sup> The landscape of publicly-proclaimed ideologies in this radical milieu remained always heterogeneous, including communists, socialists, trade unionists, territorialists, and anarcho-Zionists.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the world's first Yiddish anarchist newspaper, Morris Winchevsky's *Arbeter fraynd* (*Workers Friend*, London, 1885), published both anarchist and socialist writing until 1892, and *Vorhayt* (*Truth*, 1889), the first Yiddish anarchist newspaper in the United States, published the poets Dovid Edelshtat and Morris Rosenfeld.<sup>21</sup> Though now known

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are you who dwell in goles ... Remember, my poor brother, your childhood years, on the eve of Tisha B'av, when you studied in the little shtetl cheder? Do you remember the stories that your old rabbi told of the Maccabees? [...] The messiah is ALREADY HERE LIVING AMONG YOU. See, my brother, how the sun still shines over our holy land. Zion begins to teach the whole world Torah, and God's word and teachings will fill the whole world with light, as in ancient golden times, do you remember?"

<sup>15</sup> Kenyon Zimmer, *Immigrants Against the State: Yiddish and Italian Anarchism in America* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 2–3.

<sup>16</sup> Rocker, *London Years*, 66.

<sup>17</sup> Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*, vol. 1 (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), 165.

<sup>18</sup> Rocker, *London Years*, 66.

<sup>19</sup> For a study of Italian anarchist migration and forced exile to London in the 1870s, see Pietro Di Paola, *Knights Errant of Anarchy: London and the Italian Anarchist Diaspora (1880-1917)* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> See Mina Graur, "Anarcho-Nationalism: Anarchist Attitudes towards Jewish Nationalism and Zionism," *Modern Judaism* 14, no. 1 (Feb 1994): 1–19.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Portraits* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 179. After moving to New York City in 1886, Rosenfeld published socialist writing and his later work included Zionist poems.

primarily as a socialist, Rosenfeld was first drawn to anarchism upon visiting London, where his parents had immigrated.<sup>22</sup> These threads of Russian Jewish diaspora stitched back through London: S. Yanovsky, the influential editor and literary critic of *Fraye arbeter shtime* (*Free Voice of Labor*), worked in London with Rudolf Rocker's circle, before returning to the US. While social spheres allowed for greater collaboration between radicals of different stripes, on paper, ideological elasticity reached its breaking point more quickly. One Socialist-Anarchist effort in 1890 to print a joint newspaper was derided as producing merely "parve lokshn" (food neither dairy nor meat), symbolizing noncommittal politics. This disinterest in ideological purity and binarism has long characterized anarchist thought, to the frequent irritation of more orthodox communists and socialists.

As he began turning towards English anarchism and away from his prior German Zionist student activism, Zalkind took pains to distinguish militarized nationalism from aspirations towards national autonomy. In an article in *Arbeter fraynd* from 1920, Zalkind recognized that Zionism was beyond the pale in radical circles: "I hear many comrades crying out in despair, 'Is this not pure nationalism?!'" He acknowledges "that nationalism has led to disgusting phenomena like militarism, diplomacy, intrigues, and so on," but nonetheless aspires towards a generative, pluralistic, non-militarized nationalism:

We condemn nationalism when it lies in the hand of the filthy imperialists and capitalists. However, we see no objection to a nationalism which is based on the principle of the brotherhood of humanity and which begins to dissolve the hatreds that exist among peoples together with the idea that one people is better than and thus has a right to rule another, which teaches that humanity arises from a federation of people-families equal in right if different in historical development, life-ways, and so on, and that peoples are but chords in a human symphony which is more beautiful the more diverse it is.<sup>23</sup>

Before Zalkind edited *Arbeter fraynd*, its coverage of Zionism was much less significant; nonetheless, as early as 1903, Rocker staged a debate in its pages between an "Anarchist-Zionist" and an "Anarchist-Anarchist." The "Anarchist-Zionist" argues that "Zionists and anarchists alike protest: (a) against the thousand-year custom of letting people remain homeless, (b) to awaken within the indifferent a feeling of self-awareness, (c) against the old belief in awaiting miracles for help ... [Moreover,] whoever believes that Zionism is a movement which seeks to found a new state with new laws and new prisons knows absolutely nothing about Zionism. At the congresses and, for the most part, at local meetings they speak only about pursuing a place for workers, homeless

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<sup>22</sup> Benjamin Harshav and Barbara Harshav, *Sing, Stranger: A Century of American Yiddish Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 56.

<sup>23</sup> Zalkind, "Tsen far a konferents," *Arbeter fraynd*, 15 December 1920, 1-2. Translation from Rothman, 54.



Jewish workers.”<sup>24</sup> Rothman compares the “soft nationalism” of Zalkind’s 1920 essay and the 1903 “Anarchist-Zionist” letter with Kropotkin and Rocker’s views, finding a common emphasis on “cultural and communal autonomy” amid their varied shades of anarchism.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the aspiration towards cultural autonomy demands the cultivation of *greater* communal mutual aid. To practice anarcho-Zionism, then, would require solidarity amongst all classes and ethnicities of Jews. Zalkind lambasted Jabotinsky for reactionary adventurism and critiqued the Zionist establishment for mistreatment of Yemenite Jewish immigrants in Palestine. He warned against Zionism becoming “a business deal” and an imperial project: “Our first step into the realm of colonialistic ethics [became] a mark of shame for the Jews which can never be washed off; it is the blackest blood to have been written into the black history of colonial politics, a crime of which the conquistadors of America [...] would barely have been able.”<sup>26</sup> The contrast between his dream of an autonomous anarchist Jewish society in Palestine and his view of mainstream Zionist leadership is stark.

Zalkind was not the sole anarchist to derive theories of anti-statism from Jewish religiosity or take diaspora as a model for ethical statelessness. This worldview rejected both Zionist ideas of statehood as redemption of diasporic abjection and Bundist parliamentarianism, which encouraged Jews to seek political representation through national party systems. The German intellectuals Martin Buber, Gershom Scholem, and Gustav Landauer all articulated political theologies drawing from Jewish mysticism and critiques of state power, though Landauer was the most explicit and ardent in his anarchism. He believed that only through revolution would true religion grow: “The religion of deed, of life, of love that ensouls, redeems, overcomes. What remains of life? We all eventually die, we all are destined to die... Nothing lives on but what we have made from out of ourselves, what we have set in motion... Nothing lives but the act of honest hands and the rule of pure, genuine *Geist*.”<sup>27</sup> Beyond the sphere of German intellectuals, Jewish religious anarchists before Zalkind included Aron Lieberman, a former yeshiva student and revolutionary new to London, who wrote around 1876: “Our most ancient social system is anarchy; our true federation over the entire earth—the International. The great prophets of our time, Marx, Lasalle, and the others, based themselves on the spirit of our peoples and thus attained inner ripeness.”<sup>28</sup> The inclusion of Marx shows some of the capaciousness and non-orthodoxy of Jewish anarchism.<sup>29</sup> In Israel, Rabbi Abraham Yehudah Khein (1878-1957) sought to synthesize Kropotkin and Tolstoy’s ideas with the Kabbalah.<sup>30</sup> Khein framed teachings on poverty

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<sup>24</sup> Rocker, “A Zionist Anarchist,” *Arbeter Fraynd*, 4 September 1903, 7. See Rothman 58–61 for a detailed discussion of this debate.

<sup>25</sup> Rothman, “The Case of Jacob Meir Salkind,” 58.

<sup>26</sup> Zalkind, “Vi mir kolonisiren?” *Arbeter fraynd*, 1 August 1920, 4–5. Cited by Rothman, 59 and 72.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Mendes-Flohr and Anya Mali, eds. *Gustav Landauer: Anarchist and Jew* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 6.

<sup>28</sup> Fishman, *East End Jewish Radicals*, 238.

<sup>29</sup> See Kenyon Zimmer’s forthcoming work on Y. A. Merison’s translation of *Das Kapital*.

<sup>30</sup> Abraham Yehudah Chein, “Cedars of Lebanon: ‘Sanctify The Ordinary,’” *Commentary*, 1 February 1959, 151–52.

and purity as anti-capitalist: “This quality of purity and cleanliness which inheres in poverty, and the recognition of gold as a defect in holiness, passes like a thread through the whole life of Torah and holiness.”<sup>31</sup> Other anarchists emerged from Hasidic backgrounds, which continued to inform their thinking even after they separated from those communities. Among these was Ahrne Thorne, who edited the newspaper *Fraye arbeter shtime* (*Free Voice of Labor*, 1890–1977) in its last years as the world’s longest-running anarchist newspaper in any language.<sup>32</sup> Dr. Katarina Yevzerov, the anarchist suffragist, journalist, and wife of Y. A. Merison, was reportedly the inspiration for Bashevis Singer’s *Yentl* (although the short story ends before its muse came to the United States, obtained a degree from New York University’s medical school, and became a suffragist). Other Jewish anarchists, such as Emma Goldman, used talmudic terminology in their arguments against statehood.<sup>33</sup>

Atheist anarchism in Europe was shot through with antisemitism. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865), the French “father of anarchism,” harbored a paranoid hatred for Jews, advocating for their expulsion from France or, failing that, extermination.<sup>34</sup> The Russian social anarchist Mikhail Bakunin (1814-1876) invoked a range of antisemitic canards, from parasitism to vampirism, in *God and the State*. Rather than celebrating the revolutionary potential of transnationalism, he excoriates Jews for “that exclusive national spirit which distinguishes them even to-day” and “that mercantile passion which constitutes one of the principal traits of their character, they had spread through all countries, carrying everywhere the worship of their Jehovah, to whom they remained all the more faithful the more he abandoned them.”<sup>35</sup> Around the same generation of antisemitic writing, anti-clerical anarchists also parodied Jewish religious texts: from 1890 to 1893, the Pioneers of Freedom printed thousands of copies of a paper on the eve of Yom Kippur with the Hebrew title *Tefila zaka la-yamim ha-nora'im, le-shabatot, le-mo'adim, u-lekhol yemot ha-shana* (A Pure Prayer for the Days of Awe, for Sabbaths, Holidays and for All Days of the Year), which contained satirical prayers and revolutionary poetry, as well as a revolutionary Passover *hagode*.<sup>36</sup> Anti-Judaic texts, then, were produced by both Jewish and antisemitic anarchists. The earliest anarchist statement on the “Jewish question” most likely appeared in Moyshe Katts’s 1889 article in *Vorhayt*. Katts posited that the experience of persecution “binds together the Jewish people,” and so shared ethnic identity might be dissolved once the working

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Steven Fischler and Joel Sucher, dirs., *Free Voice of Labor* (AK Press, 1980), 130 min.

<sup>33</sup> Anna Torres, *Any Minute Now the World Streams Over Its Border!: Anarchism and Yiddish Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>34</sup> Pierre Joseph Proudhon, *Carnets de P.J. Proudhon* (Paris: M. Rivière, 1960), 337–38.

<sup>35</sup> Bakunin, *God and the State* (New York: Dover, 1970), 10. *God and the State* was written in 1871 and translated to French by Carlo Cafiero and Elisee Reclus in 1882. It was intended to be the second volume of a longer work on European resistance to imperialism, but the manuscript was fragmented and ends abruptly. A corrected English translation was issued in 1910. Yanovsky translated from the earlier version.

<sup>36</sup> *Hagode shel pesakh: The Hagada* [Prayer-book for Passover according to a new liturgy] (London: Worker's Friend, 1888), International Institute of Social History archive, Amsterdam.

classes have overthrown their antisemitic exploiters.<sup>37</sup> Zimmer notes, “Other Yiddish anarchists did not believe that ‘the Jewish question’ was even worth discussing in a country free of pogroms and antisemitic laws; when Katts visited the offices of *Varhayt* to inquire about the response to his articles, Jacob Maryson brusquely responded, ‘Ach, what? Rubbish! Discover America!’”<sup>38</sup>

Zalkind himself appeared on the receiving end of one of these religious parodies. In 1911, the editor Dr. Avrom Margolin (Avreml) published a comic poem titled “A pekl nevies” (A bundle of prophecies), based upon part of Ezekiel, read in synagogue during the festival of Sukes. Ezekiel prophesies the end of the world, when all will be made topsy-turvy. In Avreml’s version, London is upended and its social order reversed; he lists a series of public figures by their real names, including Churchill, Rocker, playwright Jacob Gordin, actors and restaurateurs—and Zalkind. The historian Vivi Lachs recounts that in Avreml’s parody prophecy, “The chief rabbi would stand down, and questions and rulings would be taken to the secular Ahad Ha’am. Zalkind would become editor of the Anglo-Jewish newspaper the *Jewish World*. Rocker would leave anarchist ideology and become an inspector of kosher meat... The main Yiddish papers, the *Idisher ekspres* and the *Idisher zhurnal*, would switch to English, and the new editor would be Churchill. And so on.”<sup>39</sup> Since this roster includes luminaries both major and minor, we cannot be sure from Avreml’s poem what level of popular fame Zalkind did in fact enjoy. Lachs concludes, “It suggests that parochial Whitechapel does not have to wait until the Messianic end of time because it is already an upside-down place full of conflicting ideologies and opinions.”<sup>40</sup>

Tensions between atheist and religious iterations of Jewish anarchism crystalized around the Yom Kippur Balls. These mockeries of the High Holiday originated as a socialist action in London in 1888 and were adopted by New Yorkers the following year; the custom spread in the 1890s and 1900s to Newark, Philadelphia, Providence, St. Louis, Paris, Montreal, Havana, and elsewhere. The first Yom Kippur Ball in New York City drew a crowd of 2,000 people, which represented one percent of the city’s estimated Jewish population. Yosef Cohen, editor of *Fraye arbeter shtime*, called Yom Kippur Balls “a very popular institution among the people” which brought visibility to the anarchist cause.<sup>41</sup> Despite their popularity, the stridency of these balls belied the complexity of Yiddish anarchist perspectives on religion. Cohen also details the planning of “Kol Nidre” balls and their subsequent fall-out, documenting the varied arguments over how to relate to religious Judaism.<sup>42</sup> As Kenyon Zimmer notes, “[A]narchists would privately host shabbes dinners where traditional gefulte fish was served but the songs of

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<sup>37</sup> Moyshe Katts, “Di yudenfrage,” *Varhayt*, February 15–March 22, 1889.

<sup>38</sup> Zimmer, *Immigrants Against the State*, 26.

<sup>39</sup> Vivi Lachs, *Whitechapel Noise: Jewish Immigrant Life in Yiddish Song and Verse, London 1884–1914* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2018), 205.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 206

<sup>41</sup> Yosef Cohen, *Di yidish-anarkhistishe bavegung in Amerike: Historisher iberblik un perzenlekhe iberlebungen* (Philadelphia: Radical Library, Branch 273 Arbeter Ring, 1945), 70.  
. Cited in Zimmer, *Immigrants Against the State*, 75.

<sup>42</sup> Cohen, *Di yidish-anarkhistishe bavegung in Amerike*, 90.

David Edelstadt replaced religious liturgy. In September 1904 the general secretary of the Workmen's Circle, Leo Rozentsvayg, sparked weeks of debate in the Yiddish anarchist and socialist press with a letter to the *Fraye Arbayer Shtime* condemning Circle members who attended Rosh Hashanah prayer services as 'three-day-a-year Jews' and 'traitors.' Orthodoxy and radicalism were framed in sharply antagonistic terms, although as Rozentsvayg's letter revealed, some Jews tried to juggle commitments to both.<sup>43</sup>

Zalkind grew disgusted by the behavior of London anarchists celebrating Yom Kippur Balls. Using the pseudonym *Mibney Heykhalah*, he opined in a Hebrew-language editorial:

This year, 'days of awe' were truly 'terrible.' In the ghetto—which is usually empty on the Day of Atonement—and especially in the area where the socialist and Jewish anarchist clubs are found, thousands of people stood waiting from Kol Nidre until the middle of the night after the Day of Atonement. The two streets on which the clubs are located filled up with police waiting for 'little socialists' to strike down. Obviously, they would occasionally strike in error the unfortunate passing Christian or the Jew leaving his prayer hall to chat for a moment. Thus, the anarchists gathered together in their clubs and threw empty bottles from the fourth floor, injuring two children. In previous years, the socialists would intentionally provoke the Jewish community ... yet, these amounted to minor disputes ... This year, the event seemed more like a pogrom, for the socialists were especially brazen. These folk opened a Russian community center near an Orthodox synagogue and proceeded to harass the congregation in a coarse and disgusting manner until the people were unable to endure it any longer. They affixed their newsletters to the door of the House of Study and sent to the religious functionaries invitations to come to theirs for lunch. During the blowing of the shofar, they cheered, and on the first day of Rosh HaShanah, which happened to fall on the Sabbath, one of them blew smoke in the face of an elderly man.<sup>44</sup>

Zalkind details the violent provocations of the anarchists and socialists, from harassing the elderly to wounding children, by using the loaded term *pogrom*—implying that the anti-Jewish violence which some had fled was to be found in London, again, and this time perpetrated by his co-religionists. Fermin Rocker reflected on his father Rudolf Rocker's views about the Balls:

I doubt that my father would have gone in for such infantile diversions [as eating a ham sandwich on Yom Kippur to annoy the Orthodox]. But you have to remember that there was very strong anti-clerical[ism] in all the movements of

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<sup>43</sup> Zimmer, *Immigrants Against the State*, 89.

<sup>44</sup> Mibney Heykhalah [Zalkind], "Mikhtavim me-angliyah," *Hatsefirah*, 6 October 1904, 3. Translation from Hebrew by Rothman in "The Case of Jacob Meir Salkind," 7.

the Left. You see what happened in Spain, too ... Now, among the Jews, this manifested itself in this very strong opposition against the Jewish establishment. And I fancy, in those days, that establishment was even more conservative than it is today [...]. And I think they—the religious lot—had their strong-arm gangs too, it wasn't all a one-sided affair, but all these things can sometimes become a bit infantile. There's nothing achieved by simply outraging the feelings of one's opponents. On the other hand, you could argue that if someone's eating a ham sandwich outside a synagogue, that's his perfect right—as long as he doesn't go inside and eat it there! [Laughter]<sup>45</sup>

By 1905, the once-riotous Yom Kippur balls of New York had mellowed to Yom Kippur picnics on Long Island, far from the densely-populated Lower East Side.<sup>46</sup> Anti-clericalism likewise shifted, as Lilian Türk and Jesse Cohn note: “[R]ejection of religion was no longer a sine qua non of Jewish anarchism. [...] Thus, the rejection of domination came to characterise anarchism more specifically than its rejection of religion, even if the antireligious stance remained widespread.”<sup>47</sup> The scandal of the Yom Kippur Balls demonstrates the multiplicity of anarchist positions on religion, from antagonistic anticlericalism to Rocker's moderate response to Zalkind's outraged editorials published not in Yiddish, but Hebrew. Beyond ideology, this diversity of tactics reflected the material struggle between Jewish classes, pitting what Rocker termed “strong-arm gangs” of the conservative establishment against anti-assimilationist militants. Thus Yiddish anarchist movements encompassed a diversity of approaches, from secular resistance to European leftist antisemitism to ardent embrace of Jewish religious identity.

### **Zalkind and the London Anarchist Press**

London's anarchist movement was linguistically heterogeneous. There Zalkind befriended the non-Jewish, German-born writer and anarchist leader Rudolf Rocker, who had established the Jewish Bakers Union, instigated mass protests of 25,000 people, and organized 3,000 Jewish tailors during the 1912 general strike to abolish sweatshops—triumphs made possible in part by his knowledge of Yiddish.<sup>48</sup> Emma Goldman recalls, “The moving spirit of the work in the East End was Rudolph [sic] Rocker, a young German, who presented the peculiar phenomenon of a Gentile editor of a Yiddish paper. [...] In order to fit himself the better for his activities in the ghetto, he

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<sup>45</sup> Oral history conducted by Andrew Whitehead, audio collection, British Library.

<sup>46</sup> Rebecca Margolis, “A Tempest in Three Teapots: Yom Kippur Balls in London, New York, and Montreal,” in *The Canadian Jewish Studies Reader*, ed. Richard Menkis (Calgary: Red Deer Press, 2004), 52.

<sup>47</sup> Lilian Türk and Jesse Cohn, “Yiddish Radicalism, Jewish Religion: Controversies in the *Fraye arbeter shtime*, 1937–1945,” in *Essays in Anarchism and Religion*, vol. 2, eds. Alexandre Christoyannopoulos and Matthew Adams (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 2018), 10.

<sup>48</sup> William J. Fishman, *Jewish Radicals: From Czarist Shtetl to London Ghetto* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 295–99.

had lived among the Jews and mastered their language. As editor of the *Arbeiter Freund* and by his brilliant lectures Rudolph Rocker was doing more for the education and revolutionizing of the Jews in England than the ablest members of their own race.”<sup>49</sup> The Yiddish anarchists composed one part of London’s multilingual radical spheres. In an oral history recorded for the British Library, Rocker’s son Fermin recalls the linguistic texture of his father’s community:

From reading the *London Years*, one gets the somewhat erroneous impression that it was almost exclusively a Jewish milieu, which it wasn’t—because up in that flat, which was 32 Dunston Houses, you heard all kinds of languages: French, Italian, Spanish ... Any time there was any kind of injustice, which God knows there were plenty of, Spaniards would come. My father had a working knowledge of Spanish, his French was quite acceptable, and you see there too, he was one of the few in the East End who could converse with these people in their father tongue, so you see he was at least as interested in those people and their goings-on as in the Whitechapel events.<sup>50</sup>

Fermin Rocker emphasized that “to think of [Rudolf Rocker] as a spokesperson for the East End Jews is really a bit erroneous,” although he “moved away from his own compatriots [the Germans in London] ... a breed with whom he never really got along very well... [He] found a much more congenial atmosphere among the Jews of the East End.”<sup>51</sup> It was in this milieu that Zalkind’s ideological commitments began bending towards religious anarchism between 1915 and 1920. A. Mukdoni recalls him as a charismatic, uncompromising personality, whose self-presentation shifted in keeping with his political identity:

He was fervently Orthodox when I first met him in Bern, but he became an anarchist and an anarchistic writer. He was always honest, openhearted, straightforward, his later ideological shifts not considered. But his honesty stings, bites, and is also provocative [...]. He wore his wild-growing beard in order to provoke people. While all the other students appeared without a beard, he wore one. But later on, I saw a photograph of him without a beard. His beard was the first sacrifice he made to the anarchism to which he had by then turned.<sup>52</sup>

In 1916, Zalkind organized a “Defense Committee” to prevent the draft of Jews into the army and established a daily newspaper, *Yidishe shtime* (Jewish Voice). He

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<sup>49</sup> Goldman, *Living My Life*, vol. 1, 254.

<sup>50</sup> Andrew Whitehead oral history interviews with political radicals, 27 September 1985, Audio recording, British Library.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> A. Mukdoni, *Oysland: Mayne Bagegenishn. Das Poylishe Yudentum*. ed. M. Turkov (Buenos Aires: *Tsentrāl Farbund fun Poylishe Yiddn in Argentine*, 1951) 97. A. Mukdoni is a pseudonym for Alexander Kappel. Translation by Rothman in “The Case of Jacob Meir Salkind,” 18 and Appendix 1.

co-organized a group called “The Foreign Jews’ Protection Committee against Conscription, Deportation to Russia and Compulsory Military Service,” which was one of several Jewish immigrant organizations that agitated against enlistment in the period leading up to 1918. Co-edited by Zalkind and A. Bezalel, *Yidishe shtime* was the official newspaper of that group. Its membership grew “by leaps and bounds” after 1916, according to Scotland Yard surveillance notes.<sup>53</sup> Secret reports submitted by the Special Branch of Scotland Yard’s Criminal Investigation Department document how members of these immigrants’ groups were strongly anarchist, and the mere existence of these reports suggest the level of scrutiny immigrants experienced.



Arbeter fraynd: anarkhistish-komunistisher organ, London, July 1922. The headline reads: “Der zig fun moskve un abisl muser haskl,” “The victory in Moscow and an object lesson.” Zalkind’s usage of Hebraic and Aramaic elements in Yiddish makes it easy to recognize the period of his editorship of the publication.

In the years following the war, Zalkind single-handedly revived the Yiddish anarchist paper *Arbeter fraynd* (Worker’s Friend). The paper was suppressed during the war when Rocker, its previous editor, was deported to Holland; its editors and writers, including Rocker’s partner Milly Witcop, were arrested for circulating a leaflet in the East End denouncing military recruitment.<sup>54</sup> Zalkind edited the paper from 1920 until 1923, expanding it from a weekly to a daily publication. Before the war, its circulation was estimated between 3,000 and 5,000 copies; since it was shared and read

<sup>53</sup> Confidential memorandum, dated 23 October 1916, in Public Records Office (London), Home Office Files, CID Reports 1916–17, HO 45/10819, file 318095/132. See Stuart A. Cohen, “How Shall We Sing of Zion in a Strange Land? East European Immigrants and the Challenge of Zionism in Britain, 1897–1918,” *Jewish Social Studies* 1, no. 2 (Winter 1995): 121.

<sup>54</sup> Rocker, *London Years*, 199.

aloud in workers' halls, its actual readership was much larger. Under Zalkind's editorship, the paper gained a new focus on *Jewish* anarchism, discussing the Zionist movement at length and rapturously reporting on events such as Yiddish poetry readings. The back pages reveal that *Arbeter fraynd's* London readers favored masquerade balls, "soirees," and tea parties, whereas their New York counterparts preferred cafe gatherings. Ads for lectures heavily featured Zalkind and Rocker (before his deportation); these events were often held on Fridays evenings, maintaining the structure of Shabbat sociality but replacing Torah study with radical communal study. The ads announced lectures on topics from *venerishe krankheytn* (venereal diseases) to Henrik Ibsen's work, "Anarchist Ethics" to talmudic lessons. Rocker's series of twenty-five articles were most likely the first Yiddish critique of Marxist concepts of history.<sup>55</sup> Its literary supplement published Yiddish writers Y. L. Peretz and Leyb Kvitko alongside translations of Oscar Wilde (*Der egoistisher riz*/"The Selfish Giant"), Maxim Gorky, Jules Renard, Henrik Ibsen, Emile Zola, Hans Christian Andersen, Nietzsche, the Dutch anti-colonialist novelist Multatuli, and parts of Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid*. Its staff held a range of political positions: *Arbeter fraynd's* typesetter Narodiczky, for example, "believed that a Jewish Palestine would offer a better field for social experiments than the old countries of Europe."<sup>56</sup> This view seems to adopt Zionist images of Mandate Palestine as an "open field" available for Jewish settlement, while rejecting the idea of a Jewish nation-state.



Weekly literary supplement for *Arbeter fraynd*.

*Arbeter fraynd's* overall style was more accessible than New York counterparts such as *Fraye arbeter shtime*, which heavily favored *deytshmarisms* (non-fused

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 72.



germanic orthography and vocabulary). Tony Michels notes that such *deytshmarisms* could perplex “the uninitiated, who mistook the abbreviated word for comrade, *gen*. (*genose*), to mean a military general. Many immigrants were surprised: ‘Who knew there were so many Jewish war heroes in the United States?’”<sup>57</sup> If *daytshmerish* posed challenges for those wanting to telegraph both sophistication and anti-classism through “internationalism,” Zalkind’s *loshn koydesh*-dense vocabulary presented an obstacle to readers without a yeshiva education. In the article titled “A shtikl midresh” (A bit of midrash), for example, Zalkind draws parallels between Roman patrolmen of the Mishnaic period and the British police in pre-State Palestine.<sup>58</sup> In this article, Zalkind collapses time and space: the death of Rabbi Meir remains as immediate as the loss of life during the Jaffa riots, and the police, whether Roman or British, register affront to those grieving.

Zalkind’s position as editor of the anarchist paper is all the more remarkable for occurring in an anti-clerical milieu—and this suspicion was mutual. In its earlier days, London clerics repeatedly attempted to sabotage *Arbeter fraynd*:

The representatives of the Anglo-Jewish community considered the *Arbeter fraynt* and the young Jewish socialist movement a danger to the Jewish name. They tried hard to get the paper stopped. They thought money could do it. The *Arbeter fraynt* was printed at that time by a Jewish printer who seemed to be very much inclined to its ideas. The back page of each issue carried a call in heavy type: “Workers, do your duty. Spread the *Arbeter fraynt*.” The compositor was bribed, with the result that when No. 26 appeared it carried the legend in this way: “Destroy the *Arbeter fraynt*.” The bribe was enough for the man to take himself off to America. The next move was to bribe the printer himself. [...] No Jewish printer could be found in London with enough courage to resist the leaders of the community. But the news of what had happened, how the free expression of opinion had been suppressed, started a spontaneous movement, especially in America, to raise money to buy a printing press. The result was that the *Arbeter fraynt* became independent of outside printers.<sup>59</sup>

As editor of *Arbeter fraynd*, Zalkind printed a series of autobiographical tales by Sholem Shvartsbard between 1920 and 1923. The vignettes tell of Shvartsbard’s experiences as a soldier and his encounters with Jewish survivors of pogroms. Some of the survivors initially feared him due to his uniform and blonde hair, a characteristic which ironically allowed him to “pass” as a non-Jew.<sup>60</sup> Shvartsbard dramatically recounts acts of derring-do and a meeting with a peasant who was hiding a Jewish family, with whom he broke bread once danger was past. After the assassination of

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<sup>57</sup> Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts*, 112–13.

<sup>58</sup> Zalkind, “A shtikl midresh,” *Arbeter fraynd*, 19 Nov 1921, 3.

<sup>59</sup> Rucker, *London Years*, 61.

<sup>60</sup> Kelly Johnson, “Sholem Schwarzbard: Biography of a Jewish Assassin,” Dissertation, Harvard University, 2012, 113–16.

Petliura, when Shvartsbard had become a hero and figure of fascination, these stories were reprinted “in almost all the Yiddish papers,” causing Zalkind to complain about his lack of credit as the initial editor and publisher.<sup>61</sup>

*Arbeter fraynd* published an educational supplement for youth titled *Der yunger dor* (*The Young Generation*) from September 15, 1922 to January 12, 1923. The phenomenon of anarchist children’s publications was not unique to the UK, and Jewish anarchists in the United States were also concerned about transmitting their ideology to the non-immigrant generation. Both *Fraye arbeter shtime* and *Road to Freedom* published special “youth pages” in English, but these did not seem to become popular. The children’s paper *Der yunger dor* served as a vehicle for Zalkind’s pedagogical philosophy. He viewed education as a significant instrument of revolution, writing: “Education is inherited like capital, and the vast majority of people find themselves in the deepest intellectual darkness.” All children, he insists, must have equal opportunity for an education “based on truth and beauty” and purged of the “idolatries of militarism, nationalism, and egoism.”<sup>62</sup> Zalkind’s critique of bourgeois education echoes that of Catalan anarchist educator Francesc Ferrer i Guàrdia (Francisco Ferrer), instigator of the Modern School movement who attracted enthusiasts such as Tolstoy to his classrooms. Ferrer aimed to build “a school of emancipation, which will be concerned with banning from the mind whatever divides men, the false concepts of property, country, and family, so as to attain the liberty and well-being which all desire and none completely realizes.”<sup>63</sup>

Founded during the heyday of radical Ferrerian pedagogy, *Der yunger dor* aimed to provide liberatory educational materials for Jewish youth. The paper invited its young readers to participate actively and promoted events for children, such as a “kinder-kontsert” at the Jewish Radical School. The first issue’s letter “to our children” emphasizes that, while English-language options are available, *Der yunger dor* is in “the language of your parents.” Zalkind stresses the importance of cultural pride and “growing the circle of Jewish children who think, speak, and read Yiddish!” He proclaims that though the newspaper is small now, so are its readers, so they shall grow together: “*Der yunger dor* is and will be your best, dear friend. It will inform you of the great, bright world in which we live and of its wonders, of nature’s phenomena and humanity’s dreams, of what people have done and what they must do; it will teach you what is necessary to know and open your eyes to see what is real, good, and gleaming [...].”<sup>64</sup> *Der yunger dor* printed educational articles ranging from literature and religion

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<sup>61</sup> Zalkind, “Shvartsbard als yid un als mentsh,” *Haynt*, 15 July 1926, 3. Cited in Johnson, “Scholem Schwarzbard,” 113.

<sup>62</sup> Zalkind, “A likht in abgrund,” *Arbeter fraynd*, June-July 1920, 7. Translation by Rothman, “The Case of Jacob Meir Salkind,” 35.

<sup>63</sup> Paul Avrich, *The Modern School Movement* (Oakland: AK Press, 2005), 6. In 1909, Ferrer was executed by the Spanish government; his life’s work and the scandal of his execution inspired the founding of Ferrer Schools across Europe and the US, including the Ferrer Center in New York City, where Man Ray, Upton Sinclair, Margaret Sanger, and other artists and activists lectured, studied, and enrolled their children.

<sup>64</sup> Zalkind, “Tsu undzere kinder,” *Der yunger dor*, 15 September 1922, 1.

to science, health, and hygiene, largely written by Zalkind himself. The paper's series "Fun undzer kval" (From our well) offered simple, socialist-inflected lessons from Jewish teachings, such as "The one who says 'what's mine is mine and what's yours is yours' is a normal person; the one who says 'what's mine is also yours' is a good person; and the one who says 'what's mine is mine and what's yours is also mine' is a bad person."<sup>65</sup> Other maxims included "The one who is shy cannot learn, and the one who is angry cannot learn otherwise"; "Your friend/comrade's honor should be as precious to you as your own"; "If not I, who will? And if not now, when?"; "A position does not bring honor to a person; a person brings honor to his position"; "Labor stands higher than *yikhes* (lineage)." *Der yunger dor* printed information on religions besides Judaism, such as an article on how Brahma created the world in "Indian legend."<sup>66</sup> The recurring feature "Anecdotes, Jokes, Proverbs, and Riddles" expressed children's fear and anxiety towards teachers and other authority figures. One joke hinges on the interaction between a doctor and a child too scared to stick out his tongue for the exam because in class, "Our teacher disciplines me when I stick out my tongue!"<sup>67</sup> This comic release of terror towards teachers and exams perhaps expressed Zalkind's own experience with physically sadistic teachers in *cheder*. Against such educational hierarchy, *Der yunger dor* invited students to send in their creative writing and printed the names of those who figured out the answers to riddles.

As editor of *Der yunger dor* and *Arbeter fraynd*, Zalkind hailed experimental modernists like Peretz Markish and Leyb Kvitko.<sup>68</sup> In his own poetry, however, Zalkind favored a Labor Romantic style: Yiddish interpretations of the conventions and aspirations of English Romantic poetry, Russian ballads, and Walt Whitman. While this more conservative form may seem at odds with its message of the right to expression, Kathy E. Ferguson insightfully notes, "Romanticism gave subversive names to some of the things that went without saying among the genteel moralists. It offered a joyous celebration of life and eros, an impudence towards authority, and a spiritual validation of the common person [...]."<sup>69</sup> Zalkind's generation of Yiddish anarchists created a vibrant body of poetry that lived in public through newspapers, songs, declamation, and memorization. One such poem from *Der yunger dor* iterates familiar metaphors of anvil and smithy in simple rhymes: "We forge tomorrow / without borrowing, without sorrowing / we forge— / we are the children of tomorrow."<sup>70</sup> Another, the pastoral "Tsu mayn shtetele" (To My Village), is dedicated to his student.<sup>71</sup> Zalkind's poetry has strong rhyme and rhythm, and its heroes are both girls and boys. Zalkind's interest in the arts

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<sup>65</sup> "Fun undzer kval," *Der yunger dor*, 27 October 1922, 4. The article is unsigned but presumably authored by Zalkind.

<sup>66</sup> Natan B. Weiser, "Kegnzaytike libe," *Der yunger dor*, 24 November 1922, 4.

<sup>67</sup> Unsigned (likely Y. M. Zalkind), "Anekdotn, vitsn un vertlekh," *Der yunger dor*, 15 September 1922, 4.

<sup>68</sup> See for instance Leyb Kvitko, "A kleyd dem vald," *Der yunger dor*, 29 December 1922, 1.

<sup>69</sup> Kathy E. Ferguson, "Gender and Genre in Emma Goldman," *Signs* 36, no. 3 (Spring 2011): 733–57.

<sup>70</sup> Zalkind, "Kinder fun morgn," *Arbeter Fraynd*, 29 September 1922, 2.

<sup>71</sup> Palme [Zalkind], "Tsu mayn shtetele," *Der yunger dor*, 8 December 1922, 1. The poem was originally written in 1918.

extended to the visual realm, and he served as one of the founders of the Ben Uri art society in London, together with the fervent anti-assimilationist artist Lazar Berson.<sup>72</sup>

In 1923, Zalkind published a four-scene play by Shvartsbard in *Der yunger dor* under his pseudonym Baal-Ha'khloymes (The Dreamer) which epitomizes the style of Labor-Romanticism.<sup>73</sup> Shvartsbard's play was staged by the Paris Jewish Children's Troupe. Titled "Farn yungn dor" (To the Young Generation), it begins with a choir of children in animal masks singing in a garden. A wanderer with a bindlestiff arrives, singing of a village where swamp frogs croak and puppies bark and the smithy's hammer resounds; the play unfolds like a ballad, repeating and accumulating the sounds of this landscape. Soon another child appears, "disguised as a teacher in spectacles," and asks a series of unanswered, politically-tinged riddles: "Who has treasures, who has money? / Who has orchards, who has fields? / Who owns all, who lacks nothing? / Who is the happiest in the world?"<sup>74</sup> Then children march out and unroll a flag, emblazoned with the slogan *Undzer moto iz dos lebn / Undz geher dos un der tsukunft*, "Our motto is life / Hear us and the future."<sup>75</sup> The play concludes with a young girl dressed as a flower-seller, who strews blooms while extolling the utopia of nature:

אַרויס פֿון שול, פֿון ענגע שטובן,  
אין אַ וועלט פֿול מיט דופֿט  
און זאָלן זילבער קולות קלינגען,  
זיך צעטראָגן אין דער לופֿט.

נאָט אייך, קינדער, מיין מתנה,  
מינע שמעקנדיקע פראַכטן-קווייטן,  
פֿון דער זון געקושט, פֿון טוי,  
נאָר וואָס געקומען פֿון בייטן.

Go forth from school, out from the cramped houses,  
into the perfumed world  
where silver shouts resound,  
carrying through the air.

Children, here's my gift,  
my splendid-smelling flowers  
kissed by the sun and dew,  
just picked from the garden bed.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>72</sup> See two articles by David Mazower: "Lazar Berson and the Origins of the Ben Uri Society," in *The Ben Uri Story; From Art Society to Museum* (London: London Jewish Museum of Art, 2001), 37–58 and "Ben Uri and Yiddish Culture" in *Ben Uri; 100 Years in London: Art, Identity and Migration* (London: Ben Uri Gallery, 2015) 36–51.

<sup>73</sup> Shvartsbard, "Farn yungn dor," *Der yunger dor*, 12 January 1923, 1–3.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

The children's choir retreats to the winds, singing the chorus, "Our motto is life ... " as the play ends. Shvartsbard's play in verse aligns with Zalkind's pedagogical ideals: liberation from the cramped and narrow schools of the village, attention to the lives of laborers and migrants, cultural pride in Yiddish, unity with nature, and an effulgent future for the children of Jewish workers.

In the period just before Zalkind assumed his editorial position at *Arbeter fraynd* and *Der yunger dor*, his own relation to family life and childrearing was quite fraught. His wife Sonia Zalkind sued him for being the "kept man" of a wealthy businesswoman named Pauline (Puah) Wengrover; immediately after the dissolution of his first marriage, he and his new partner both took the name "Wengrover Zalkind" and had a child.<sup>77</sup> This case put him at even greater odds with the Jewish religious establishment, which tried to strip him of rabbinical status, invoking his anarchism as grounds for dismissal as much as his treatment of his wife. While Zalkind's provocative behavior extended from his politics to his love life, it is not evident that he articulated a philosophy of free love or sexual autonomy, as did anarcha-feminists in that period. He worked as an instructor in a girls' school, and *Der yunger dor* is fairly inclusive of its female readers, but I have not yet found any writing explicitly reflecting his views on gender, marriage, and childrearing, apart from his indictment of bourgeois educational systems.

### **Zalkind's Translation of the Talmud**

Uniting his pedagogical aims and rabbinic training, Zalkind devoted himself to translating and disseminating religious and philological texts in Yiddish and Hebrew. Zalkind edited with Arn-Leyb Bisko one of the few Yiddish-Hebrew dictionaries published in the early twentieth century, *Milon male veshalem zhargoni-ivri* (1913). The dictionary was later retitled "... *Yehudi-Ivri*," re-translating the term for "Yiddish" from the more informal, loaded *zhargon* (jargon) to the higher-register *yehudi*.<sup>78</sup> Notably, the other contemporaneous dictionary of Yiddish and Hebrew was published by a fellow anarchist philologist: Alexander Harkavy. Their publication of Hebrew-Yiddish and trilingual dictionaries demonstrates the expansiveness of Jewish anarchist language politics, unbothered by debates about championing "the Jewish language" or privileging Hebrew over Yiddish.

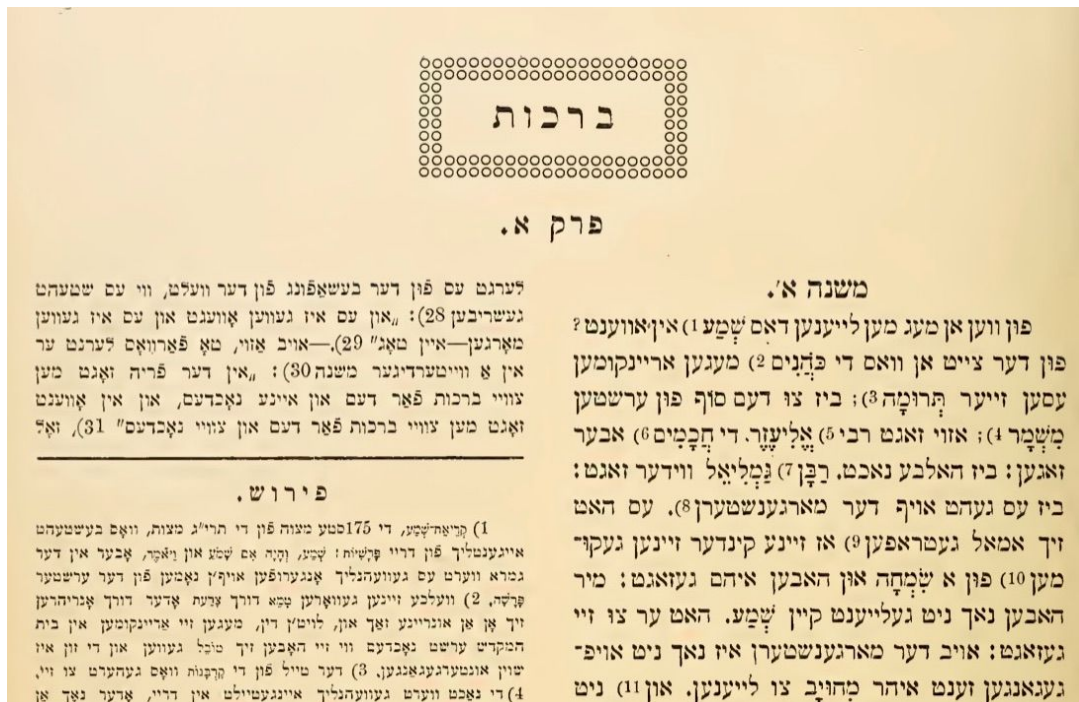
Zalkind wrote his dissertation at the University of Bern in 1905, titled *Die Peschitta Zu Schir-Haschirim: Textkritisch und irhem Verhältnisse zu Mt. Und LXX Untersucht* (The Peshita [Syriac translation] of the Song of Songs: Text Criticism and its Conditions Examined). Zalkind wrote in German on Peschitta, which he considered

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<sup>77</sup> Rothman, "The Case of Jacob Meir Salkind," 47.

<sup>78</sup> Arn-Leyb Bisko and Zalkind, eds., *Milon male veshalem zhargoni-ivri* (London: Narodski, 1913). See also Shimeon Brisman, *A History and Guide to Judaic Dictionaries and Concordances* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 2000), 140.

“sisters” to the Septuagint and Vulgate “and even the Targum.” The dissertation’s dedication page uses a combination of German, Yiddish and Hebraic conventions and Jewish calendar dates: “*Dem ewigen andenken meines lieben unvergesslichen Vaters, M. J. L. Salkind נַע גֶּעֶשְׂט. אַמ 17 Ellul 5658, in kindlicher Liebe un Dankbarkeit, Gewidmet vom Verfasser*”: “In eternal memory of my beloved unforgettable father M. J. L. Salkind, may his soul rest in paradise, passed away on September 8 1898, dedicated by the author with childlike love and gratitude.” As Naomi Seidman notes, a Jewish text’s dedication is a significant site for establishing genealogy and transmission: “Such formulas, absolutely familiar—although no less poignant for that—to the Hebrew reader, signify entirely differently in another language.”<sup>79</sup> The dissertation dedication is a site of Jewish multilingualism, calling to multiple audiences: his professors at the University of Bern, his readers in the Jewish world, and his family.



The first pages of the first volume of Zalkind's translation of the Talmud, *Brokhes* (1922).

With this philological background, Zalkind turned to his most ambitious project: translating the Talmud into Yiddish. His choice to translate into Yiddish rather than Hebrew caused the poet Bialik—once his study partner at Volozhin Yeshiva—to implore, “Please, with your abundant mercy, uproot your dwelling from the Yiddish to the Hebrew!”<sup>80</sup> The first volume of Zalkind’s *Talmud in Yiddish* appeared in London in

<sup>79</sup> Naomi Seidman, *Faithful Renderings: Jewish-Christian Difference and the Politics of Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 29.

<sup>80</sup> Chaim Nachman Bialik, letter to Zalkind, 19 January 1931, in *Igrot H.N. Bialik* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1939), vol. 5, 134–35.

1922. The literary critic Shmuel Niger hailed Zalkind's translation as written "in a mekhayedik-yidisher shprakh" (in a delightful Yiddish rendition), which in later volumes became even more "pure and refined."<sup>81</sup> In the introduction to *Berakhot*, the first volume of his *Talmud bavli—gemore in yidish*, Zalkind names himself as the "translator and clarifier" (*iberzetsen un derklerer*), a responsibility that he does not take lightly. Zalkind notes that his translation is "strongly literal, even when the style suffers for it," yet he has "taken pains to create a piece of work that would be accessible for all, useful for the beginner as well as for scholars." Pirush is "the main point, grounded in the explanations of Rashi, Tosefot, Maharsha, Rabeinu Yonah, and the armor-bearers (*noyse-keylim*) of Talmud."<sup>82</sup> In the introduction to *Pe'ah*, Zalkind notes, "We always aimed through our work not to make a '*visnshaftlekhe*' publication for specialists resounding with textual criticism, but to give ordinary Jews who want to 'learn' the possibility of clear understanding. Too many details would only distract, instead of helping them to learn the Mishnah." Zalkind employed a "scientific, Western" methodology to appeal to the post-yeshiva London and Tel Aviv generation of the 1920s, while excoriating the Jewish community for drifting from tradition. Zalkind positions himself as enlightening the reader with scientific clarity, noting that the *pirush* "is built, in the main, on the explanations of Rashi, Tosafot, Maharsha, Rabenu Yona, and other 'commentaries on the Talmud,'" but in certain places "we found it appropriate to offer our own opinion as well."<sup>83</sup>

Zalkind translated the tractates related to labor and the practices of daily life between 1922 and 1932: *Berakhot* (Blessings) from the Babylonian Talmud, and *Pe'ah* (Corner [of a Field]), *Demai* (Doubtfully Tithed Crops), and *Kil'ayim* (Hybrid) from the Jerusalem Talmud. *Pe'ah* discusses ethics in agriculture, including hospitality towards travelers, redistribution of crops to the poor, and the commandment not to reap the corners of one's fields. The desire to make *halakhah* more accessible drove many popular Yiddish publications of the previous centuries, including the genre of *tkhines* and the *tsenerene* mostly meant for women. For Zalkind, concern about access to scripture is related to class, rather than gender, and he aimed to make labor law accessible to laborers themselves. *Pe'ah* becomes a term related to the immediate redistribution of wealth, while *hefker*, surplus or abandoned property which may be gathered up by the poor, figures as a utopian goal—the prospect of abandoned field open for all to harvest.

The last tractate Zalkind published was *Kil'ayim* (Mixtures, 1932), which concerns the laws of agriculture, the mixing of species, and borders between property—subjects which would be of particular interest to an anarchist questioning the necessity of borders and property itself. Of the tractate *Kil'ayim*, Jacob Neusner notes: "In choosing to consider as orderly that which appears to be in order, Mishnah effectively makes the

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<sup>81</sup> Shmuel Niger, *Bleter geshikhte fun der yidisher literatur* (New York: Alveltlekhn yidishn kultur-kongres, 1959), 203–7.

<sup>82</sup> Zalkind, *Talmud Bavli (Gemara in Idish): Iberzetsen un erklehrt fun Ya 'akov Me 'ir Zalkind* (London : B. Veinberg, 1928).

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

point that the boundaries of order are established by human beings. The standards of ordinary perception, and not the way things ‘actually are,’ decide the final status of objects.”<sup>84</sup> Having earned a degree in agronomy in Glasgow with the aim of working the land in Palestine, Zalkind would have taken particular interest in this tractate. Indeed, the edition includes a large fold-out map of the land of Israel, designating the sites of settlements in Yiddish. Zalkind’s *Kil’ayim* lists its subscribers by name and region, which reveals that his work circulated in London, Glasgow, Manchester, Grand Rapids, Detroit, Milwaukee, Jersey City, New York, Cleveland, Switzerland, and France. Nearly 760 subscribers are named, most with the honorific “Dr.,” “Prof.,” or “Herr” (Sir). Synagogues and groups such as the Kobrin Aid Union are included as supporters, pointing to Zalkind’s reach beyond radical circles.

Sholem Shvartsbard paints an abject portrait of Zalkind slaving over his translations in seclusion for twenty years, “forgotten and mocked” for his Herculean undertaking, as his (unnamed) wife calls out plaintively about the nights he was apart from her:

A few years ago, when Dr. Zalkind published his first *Gemore Berakhot* in Yiddish, I earnestly asked him a question: “How much time did it take you, my dear Zalkind, to translate Berakhot with Perush?”—“Two and a half years.” His wife was sitting there and called out, “You must count the nights that you were awake—you forgot to count those.” Thus, if you encounter the usually ebullient Zalkind sitting and dozing in the afternoon, it’s no wonder [...]

—Twenty years of difficult work! No sleep, no life, isolated from everyone, estranged and ignored by others—as long as he accomplished his life’s dream and created a work that will exist in the future, what counted was his monumental work.”<sup>85</sup>

This portrait of a man consumed by the act of translation is corroborated by Zalkind’s own fiery introduction. He describes the sacrifices he made for scholarship and lambasts Jewish communities for slackening their devotion to Talmud and falling for modern luxuries as “gramophones, pianos, and radios”:

It took an entire two and a half years until, thank God, I finished a new volume of my *Talmud in Yiddish* and could release the fourth volume, tractate *Kil’ayim*. I feel that I owe an explanation to my good friends, who recognized the value of my work and waited with impatience for the publication of this volume. I want them to know that the delay is—God forbid!—not the result of indolence or negligence on my part. The delay resulted from my becoming in debt up to my neck to the printer, after the translation was ready—and by necessity, I must transform from an author into a book peddler, scrambling up a thousand steps and rapping at a

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<sup>84</sup> Jacob Neusner, ed., *The Talmud of the Land of Israel, Volume 4: Kilayim* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 3.

<sup>85</sup> Shvartsbard, “Dr. Yankev Meyer Zalkind un zayn gemore af yidish,” *Moment* (Warsaw), 20 January 1929, 5.



hundred doors to inquire whether there are still Jews here interested in the article that one calls Talmud. For that reason, thanks to the subversive tendencies and ignorance of Jewish culture (*ameratses*) which intruded upon our lives and demolished the patriarchal Jewish lifestyle with its holy solemnity, in the modern Jewish house there is a place for pianos, gramophones, radios, and whatnot, but not for the *seforim* cupboard once the pride of the old Jewish home.<sup>86</sup>

Zalkind laments that “even if there still remain survivors (*sheyres-hapleytes*) who respect Jewish books,” this community is “split between two hostile groups engaged in a bitter struggle”: one side are “so-called radicals, who tremble at the thought that, God forbid, they might be suspected of clericalism”; the other side are those “who believe that, based on the merits of the little reading they consumed in their childhood, they became distinguished scholars for their whole lives, and that in general, while engrossed in the gates of impurity of all kinds of parties and politics, we have no more time for the study of Torah ...” Zalkind recounts his “months of hard work and sleepless nights until the new volume was prepared”; yet although his “glass is filled with bitterness and humiliation,” he gives thanks for the “spiritual, edenic bliss that I enjoyed while writing this volume for the public! Is that not enough pure compensation for all that I have endured? Should that also in the future be a source of consolation in hours of despair and disappointment for the apathy of ‘the People of the Book’ to their books and scribes? [...] I do not have enough words to thank the God of Israel, that he found me worthy to entrust me with a such holy (though difficult) mission—the mission to distribute his holy word amongst a wide strata of his people, unblocking for them the life-source which sustained a hundred generations of Jews [with the] strength of giants.” Zalkind concludes:

I heard his voice in the desert of our modern Jewish life and I felt upon my lips the ardor of his holy fire [...]. I know that I am too small to have earned such favor and joy; therefore, so long as it remains his will to protect the soul he breathed into me, I will not cease to write and publish one tractate after the other, not even when I become tired. He, the Knower of All Thoughts, understands what a difficult sacrifice it is for people with a little self-dignity and pride in their lineage (*yikhes-shtolts*) to keep climbing up a thousand stairways and rapping on a hundred doors, searching for Jews who comprehend that the Talmud is and was and always will be the sine-qua-none condition of our national survival, and that his teaching must therefore be granted the same position of honor in our time as in the lives of our parents.<sup>87</sup>

Zalkind associates “politics and parties” with the “gates of impurity” (*sha’arey tum’ah* in Hebrew), raising Talmud transcendentally above the modern state and the indignities of contemporary Jewish life. In Shvartsbard’s account of their conversations, Zalkind was

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<sup>86</sup> Zalkind, foreword to *Kilayim* in *Talmud Bavli: Gemore in Idish*, vol. 4 (London: Vainberg, 1932).

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

driven by both Jewish pride, a sense of ardent defiance towards European Christian scholars, and hope that less learned Jews might be enlightened:

We must not wait until the non-Jews grow to fear us. We must learn further with our children the Talmud, the Yiddish scholarship and morals, the Talmud must become popular and accessible to every Jew, not only for the select [*yekhidey-sgule*] ...

It must become clear to each why the Jesuits so greatly persecuted the Talmud in the Middle Ages, exterminated it, and burned it together with its readers...

And, strikingly: when Dr. Zalkind came to Berlin to the great German scholars of the last age of his Gemore in Yiddish, the non-Jewish scholar did not know to heap praise on the work and amused himself for a few hours by speaking about the theme of the Talmud. At the end, the scholar asked him a question: "Are you a Jew or a Christian?" Zalkind wondered at the question.

"I ask this to you," the German expert confessed, "because many Christians come to me, who now study Talmud in the original."<sup>88</sup>

When Zalkind reveals that the roots of the ethical texts they had studied were in fact found in the *Pirkey Avot*, the antisemitic Swiss scholars and students are "taught a hard lesson." Shvartsbard declares with pride that Zalkind proves Jews are not *pkhodim* (cowards) and impresses the non-Jewish colleagues with his "multifaceted, polylinguistic" knowledge. Yet despite the defiant aspects of the project, how striking that an anarchist devoted himself to translating *Kil'ayim*—that opus of separation—rather than hailing *no walls, no borders!* Any attempt on our part to reconcile the traces of his ideology with the literalness of his translation betrays only the boundary of our own categories, not the limitations of his politics based upon "fervent love for God, his people, his Torah, his land." If Proudhon wrote that "property is theft," referring to the theft of profit from workers' labor, then Zalkind's rendering of property law appeals to a religious understanding of land as temporarily loaned by God. Just as one may only disrupt the roots of another's plants to the depth of three hand-widths, without aegis over the land's depths, so too would Zalkind's readers come to understand property as contingent, worthy of respect but not worship.

### **"Call Me Vengeance!": Zalkind and Shvartsbard**

From their first meeting in 1920, Zalkind immediately became an intellectual mentor and father-figure to Sholem Shvartsbard. If comradeship is both the means and the aim of anarchism, then any study of Zalkind should take up this friendship, so life-shaping for both men. Zalkind supported Shvartsbard's writing and offered him new platforms with *Arbeter fraynd* and *Der yunger dor*, recognizing the younger man's aspiration to become a journalist. Shvartsbard worked as the Paris correspondent for

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<sup>88</sup> Shvartsbard, "Dr. Yankev-Meir Zalkind un zayn gemore oyf yidish," 5.

the New York City-based *Fraye arbeter shtime*, but even after living in France for several years, he remained haunted by the pogroms of 1919. Seeking vengeance for the murder of his family and town, Shvartsbard decided to assassinate Symon Petliura, whom he considered responsible for the deaths of 50,000 Jews. Shvartsbard fired his shot in broad daylight in a Parisian street on May 25 1926. Rather than fleeing, he awaited arrest, announcing to the police office, “I came to kill a murderer.”<sup>89</sup> A year and a half later he appeared in court, represented by Henri Torres, grandson of Alfred Dreyfus’ lawyer. Torres used the Parisian Yiddish papers to locate survivors of Ukrainian pogroms who might be able to provide reports. Zalkind was invited by Shvartsbard’s defense committee to travel to Paris as a consultant from London, and they remained in contact throughout the trial. The case functioned as a referendum on French antisemitism, as Shvartsbard delivered oratory from the stand excoriating French guilt towards vulnerable Jewry. Shvartsbard was acquitted of all charges by the jury. The packed courtroom erupted in chants of “Vive la France!”<sup>90</sup>



Popular Shvartsbard memorabilia, from the International Institute for Social History (IISH), Amsterdam.

Correspondence between the assassin and his rabbi sheds light on the theology Shvartsbard deployed to justify his act. Shvartsbard’s letter to Zalkind written from Prison de la Santé in Montmartre during trial refers admiringly to Judith, biblical

<sup>89</sup> Johnson, “Scholem Schwarzbard,” 1.

<sup>90</sup> “Brief Report on the Activities of the Defense Committee, August, September, October 1926,” in *The Assassination of Symon Petliura and the Trial of Scholem Schwarzbard 1926–1927: A Selection of Documents*, ed. David Engle (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 242.

assassin of Holofernes. Shvartsbard was long taken with Judith, Deborah, and female warrior figures in general, from his earlier time at the front.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, Judith was reclaimed as a Jewish anarchist icon: Emma Goldman also identified with her, writing in her memoir, “[A]t the age of eight I used to dream of becoming a Judith and visioned myself in the act of cutting off Holofernes’ head to avenge the wrongs of my people. But since I had become aware that social injustice is not confined to my own race, I had decided that there were too many heads for one Judith to cut off.”<sup>92</sup> Shvartsbard’s prison letter begins with a declaration of desire for vengeance:

My dear Dr Zalkind! The voice of my insulted people[,] the lives of the thousand martyrs [and] the cripple, helpless and weak, cry out—I am here! I have answered. In me has long burned the decree ... That sadist (Petliura) has bathed in Jewish blood, and the persecutions cast upon the Jewish people have torn at my heart.<sup>93</sup>

Shvartsbard describes reading Israel Zangwill’s *Dreams of the Ghetto* and George Bernard Shaw’s play *Saint Joan*, which moved him to tears. He addresses Zalkind intimately, considering him a conduit to the world outside prison: “I turn to you, my dear Zalkind, and through you, to all human hearts and deep souls.” The letter concludes with the dramatic lines: “I am with you *semper idem*, yet my name has changed: instead of Sholem [peace], call me Nekome [vengeance]!”

In a letter from his prison cell to the New York anarchist newspaper *Fraye arbeter shtime*, Shvartsbard withheld the religious sentiment he had poured out to Zalkind. “Enough of slavery, enough outpouring of tears, an end to imploring, crying, bribing,” he wrote, adopting the register of an Edelshtat poem. “I was too kind to this murderer under whose command thousands, tens of thousands of Jews, infants at the breast, old white-haired men, women and men, were exterminated [...]. Well, I didn’t spare any bullets for this murderer. I fired five shots into his ugly body!”<sup>94</sup> From these

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<sup>91</sup> In an important letter from the front, Schwarzbard tells his father of a conversion experience to a Jewish God that he associates with the warriors of Ephraim. He recalls standing alone at his post on a dark night, when a voice descended from the dark heavens, saying: “Go to the Valley of Jezreel and gather together the thirty thousand heroes of Ephraim. Those that didn’t wait for the Redemption to come, but brought it themselves. Those who preferred the choice of death by starvation and of burning deserts to the slavish ‘fleshpots’ of Egypt—and divide them in three groups. Give each a pot and in each pot place a fiery cinder and break it over the heads of your enemies. Take with you Aaron and Gideon, and the brave women Deborah and Judith, and also the prince Jonathan with his weapon carriers.... Go to the gates of Jerusalem and gather together the brave, old heroes, those who defended the gates of the city...” Schwarzbard, *In krig mit zikh aleyh* (Chicago: Sholem Shvartsbard komitet, 1933), 133. Translation from Johnson, “Sholem Schwarzbard,” 81. In Shvartsbard’s memoir, he also cites Bar Kochba as an inspiration.

<sup>92</sup> Goldman, *Living My Life*, vol. 1, 370.

<sup>93</sup> Letter held at YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Sholem Shvartsbard Collection, Folder 883.

<sup>94</sup> Jonathan Kirsch, *The Short, Strange Life of Herschel Grynszpan: A Boy Avenger, a Nazi Diplomat, and a Murder in Paris* (New York City: Liveright, 2014), 8.

two letters, both written from prison, we see that Shvartsbard crafted a more scholarly and controlled persona in communicating with his role model.



The “Avenger” street, Be’er Sheva.

Did Zalkind inspire Shvartsbard’s deed, as well as justify it? Torres argued in court that Shvartsbard’s act was the natural, liberated consequence of a Jew becoming a Frenchman, deploying the rhetoric of citizenship: “A Jew who would lift a stick to defend himself was an unknown phenomenon. Well! I say that when one becomes a French citizen as did Shvartsbard, when one experiences the freedom, full of life, among the Parisians, when a French soldier in a trench has held a hot steel in his hand, a new soul, ardent and trembling with excitement, then is awakened within him that one strikes out for the sake of justice.”<sup>95</sup> While persuasive to a French secular court, such rhetoric minimizes the religious current in Shvartsbard’s own writing, particularly in his correspondence with Zalkind, which document a great deal of discussion about vengeance. In a 1921 editorial in *Arbeter fraynd*, Zalkind lambasted the Zionist Revisionist leader Jabotinsky for his agreement with Petliura:

Someone who truly loves his people will not enter into partnership with a man like Petliura knowing that this might threaten the lives of thousands of Jews living under a Bolshevik regime not ashamed to take revenge on the innocent. One who is not black by nature would not undertake a dark adventure without regard for the fallout, [an adventure] which will turn into a disgusting fiasco.

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 11.

Therefore, the one who *does* undertake such things is an adventurer who is black by nature.<sup>96</sup>

This passage expresses Zalkind's concern about possible alliances between nationalists such as Jabotinsky and Petliura. While he does not advocate retaliation against Petliura explicitly and condemns "revenge upon the innocent" (Jews under Bolshevism), he does rule out nationalist responses to pogroms. Regardless of whether Zalkind directly inspired Shvartsbard to commit assassination, Shvartsbard's adoration of the rabbi was profound. Even the frontispiece illustration in his memoir, depicting a bare-chested man wrapped in *tallis* and *tfilin*, idealizes the whirling vision of Orthodox anarchism embodied by Zalkind. In a 1929 article, Shvartsbard reminisces about visiting the monument to the Paris Commune with his beloved rabbi:

Once, walking with Dr. Zalkind around [the cemetery] Père Lachaise in Paris, we paused at the monument to the Commune with its fiery inscription by Victor Hugo: "That, which we want, that, which we demand in the future—is not vengeance—merely justice."

"Indeed, the words of the great poet are fitting for us," Zalkind replied. "The entire world, which remains so guilty and ungrateful to us, will now demand justice from us ..."<sup>97</sup>

In this anecdote, Shvartsbard portrays himself and Zalkind as radical cosmopolitans, conversant with French literature and history. Viewing the non-Jewish Western world as simultaneously intellectually indebted to Judaism and neglectful of its Jewish people, they share a revenge fantasy in which individual Jews will arise to mete out justice when France, Russia, and other empires failed to act. Indeed, this worldview was manifested in Shvartsbard's courtroom speeches. As Kelly Johnson notes:

Schwarzbard's penchant for typologizing and drawing historical parallels [...] knew no limits. In another example from his trial, he even compared Petliura to the Roman Emperor Titus—the ancient destroyer of the Temple in Jerusalem. Thus, whatever other factors may have informed the assassination, on the level of Schwarzbard's philosophy of history, anger engendered by two thousand years of persecution rang out in the five shots fired that day. [...] After Schwarzbard had made yet another similar historical reference on the first day of the trial, chief prosecutor César Campinchi asked sarcastically: "You do understand, gentlemen of the jury, that we are dealing with a biblical story here, and not Petliura?"<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Zalkind, "Briv un barikhten: entferr fun di redaktor," *Arbeter fraynd*, 31 Dec 1921, 7. Translation from Rothman, "The Case of Jacob Meir Salkind," 68.

<sup>97</sup> Shvartsbard, "Dr. Yankev Meyer Zalkind un zayn gemore af yidish." Strangely, I have not located any documentation regarding the quotation; the monuments in Père Lachaise do not seem to have any such inscription about justice and vengeance.

<sup>98</sup> Johnson, "Scholem Schwarzbard," 10.

Such rhetoric bears the hallmarks of Zalkind's thought: collapsing contemporary political events into biblical temporal schemas, identifying proudly with the "insulted Jewish people," and defying the state justice system to instead align with transcendent Talmudic law. Shvartsbard held Zalkind in high regard as a figure of everyday resistance, as well. In one article, Shvartsbard related how the scholar attacked a group of Nazi brown-shirts with his walking stick: "Just a short while ago, he was riding in a car in Berlin. A pair of swastika-toting young men [*haknkroytser*] walked by ridiculing Jews. My Zalkind wasn't lazy—and shattered his cane on them."<sup>99</sup> Zalkind too lived in the tension of desiring both *sholem* and *nekome*.

Shvartsbard shared Zalkind's dream of forming an anarchist Jewish society in Palestine, but when he attempted to sail there in 1928 without a visa, he was turned away through the coordinated efforts of anxious colonial officials. Johnson notes, "French authorities in Beirut turned him back with a 'wink' to the British. The paper *Israël* in Cairo reported that the reason behind the refusal was the fear of the colonial authorities that 'the arrival of Schwarzbard might provoke disturbances in the country.' They preferred to wait 'until the Jewish sentiment excited by the Schwarzbard trial calmed down a bit.'"<sup>100</sup> Following his attempted entry, Shvartsbard returned to journalism, published his two-volume memoir, and embarked on an international speaking tour in the early 1930s. Although his name was bankable to crowds eager to meet the "Jewish Avenger," these events were starkly unsuccessful:

To some, the personal contact with Sholem Schwartzbard was a matter of disappointment... His person was so without outward glamour, his demeanour so void of every attempt to impress, his speech, his very handshake so lacking in the accepted formalism of the refined ... In fact, in the United States, some people, when introduced to Schwartzbard, bluntly blurted out: "You are not the real Schwartzbard." The people had created their image of this heroic figure, and since reality did not conform to this vision of theirs, reality was surely wrong.<sup>101</sup>

Shvartsbard floundered in charisma and erudition, the arenas of Zalkind's mastery. Rejected from the shores of Palestine, he toured in South Africa, where he passed away from a heart attack in 1938. In 1967, following the wishes expressed in his will, Shvartsbard's remains were exhumed and repatriated to the soldiers' cemetery at Moshav Avihayil near Netanya, Israel—quite close to Zalkind's home, which he could not visit in life. Today, streets are named for "Ha'nokem" (The Avenger) in Jerusalem and Beersheva.

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<sup>99</sup> Sholem Schwarzbard, "Dr. Yankev Meyer Zalkind un zayn gemore af yidish."

<sup>100</sup> "On refuse à Schwartzbard l'entré en Syrie et en Palestine," *Israël*, 3 April 1928. Cited in Johnson, "Sholem Schwarzbard," 234.

<sup>101</sup> R. Feldman, "Schwarzbard: The Man," in *In Memory of Sholem Schwartzbard* (Johannesburg, South Africa: Sholem Schwartzbard Memorial Committee, 1938), 2. Cited by Johnson, "Sholem Schwarzbard," 249.



Thus Shvartsbard, once an anarchist refugee rejected at Palestine's shore, was reburied in Israel as a military hero. His unlikely trajectory disrupts any simple, linear narrative about Jewish anarchist relations to history and territory. A 1920s letter from Jerusalem published in *Arbeter fraynd* refers to Mandate Palestine as the "Old World," and the author describes their dejected state, begging for entrance to England, flipping the Zionist narrative of Israel as the sole site of sanctuary in a hostile world. In "We Refugees," an essay in conversation with Hannah Arendt's piece of the same name, Giorgio Agamben cautions that "nation-states must find the courage to call into question the very principle of the inscription of nativity and the trinity of state/nation/territory which is based on it." Agamben prescribes a condition of universal refugeeism, figured upon an image of Jerusalem within which two political *communities* dwell "in the same region and in exodus one into the other, divided from each other by a series of reciprocal extraterritorialities, in which the guiding concept would no longer be the *ius* of the citizen, but rather the *refugium* of the individual," allowing for the "old concept of people ... [to] again find a political sense by decisively opposing the concept of nation." Agamben concludes with an inversion of citizen/refugee identity and territorial unbordering: "It is only in a land where the spaces of states will have been perforated and topologically deformed, and the citizens will have learned to acknowledge the refugee that he himself is, that man's political survival today is imaginable."<sup>102</sup> In his return to the category of *people/nation* rather than the *state*, Agamben's vision of a *refugium* harmonizes with Shvartsbard and Zalkind's ideal of a Palestinian anarchist society containing Ashkenazi refugees beside Yemenite Jewish immigrants beside non-Jewish Arab communities and others. Agamben's topologically-perforated future territory could describe the two anarchists' peregrinations: the borders of pre-state Palestine forbid Shvartsbard but admitted Zalkind, and Zalkind's home became a *refugium* for the religious anarchist community of Haifa, one space perforating the dream of another.

### **"The Anarchist Is an Eternal Wanderer Into Infinity": Zalkind's Futurity**

What ideology of the future is produced by Zalkind's scholarly attention to the past? Is there a distinct Jewish anarchist politics of temporality? Zalkind's comrade Rocker wrote "I am an anarchist not because I believe anarchism is the final goal, but because there is no such thing as a final goal. Freedom will lead us to continually wider and expanding understanding and to new social forms of life. To think that we have reached the end of our progress is to enchain ourselves in dogmas, and that always leads to tyrannies."<sup>103</sup> Rocker here defines his anarchist identity through a critique of deferral and messianism, distinguishing it from socialist or communist revolutionary horizons. Like Rocker, Zalkind rejected the idea of absolute revolution, writing in 1921:

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<sup>102</sup> Giorgio Agamben, "We Refugees," Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures 49, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 118–19.

<sup>103</sup> Rocker, *London Years*, 111.



Even the society of the new dawn will have its anarchists, for even in the morning people will not be free. Even in the morning, the struggle *toward what is new and different* will express itself in a new struggle and new forms of suffering. Anarchism is a perpetual struggle that does not end with any one victory. The anarchist is an eternal wanderer into infinity.<sup>104</sup>

Zalkind refuses both religious messianism and Communist deferral of revolution, transforming the trope of the Jewish “eternal wanderer” or *eybiker yid* into an anarchist figure. This passage renders the *Jewishness* of this refugee figure unmistakable. Even the ostensibly-universalist Emma Goldman employed this trope: “Every government now arrogates to itself the power to determine what person may or may not continue to live within its boundaries, with the result that thousands, even hundreds of thousands, are literally expatriated [...]. Veritable Wandering Jews, these unfortunates, victims of a strange perversion of human reason that dares question any person’s right to exist.”<sup>105</sup>

Zalkind claimed Jewish textual tradition as fuel for struggle against assimilation, nationalism, militarism, capitalism, and antisemitism. Although anarchism is frequently posited as a utopian project, deferring realization of “the Idea” to the future, Zalkind and other Yiddish anarchists claimed a radical lineage through tradition rather than severing the present from the past. Jewish anarchist aesthetics continually adapted forms and structures of traditional life, reifying them even in anti-religious practices (such as Yom Kippur Balls, seder parodies, and satirical prayer books learned even in their heresy). Utopian Jewish writing is a more strongly-developed Zionist tradition, from Edmund Eysler’s *Ein Zukunftsbild* (1885) to Theodore Herzl’s *Altneuland* (1902). In contrast to those speculative tendencies, Zalkind labored throughout his life at philology and translation, the literary practice of touching past time.

Zalkind’s model of radical temporality rejects secularism as the determining mark of modernity. Walter Benjamin famously writes, “We know that the Jews were prohibited from inquiring into the future: the Torah and the prayers instructed them in remembrance. This disenchanted the future, which holds sway over all those who turn to soothsayers for enlightenment. This does not imply, however, that for the Jews the future became homogenous, empty time. For every second was the small gateway through which the Messiah might enter.”<sup>106</sup> Such anticipation renders the *present* a messianic moment. In a 1920 *Arbeter fraynd* essay, Zalkind writes: “The past is a cemetery for dead dreams. The future is a nursery where fresh dreams grow. The present is like a volcano; it is covered with extinguished dreams, beneath which rumbles

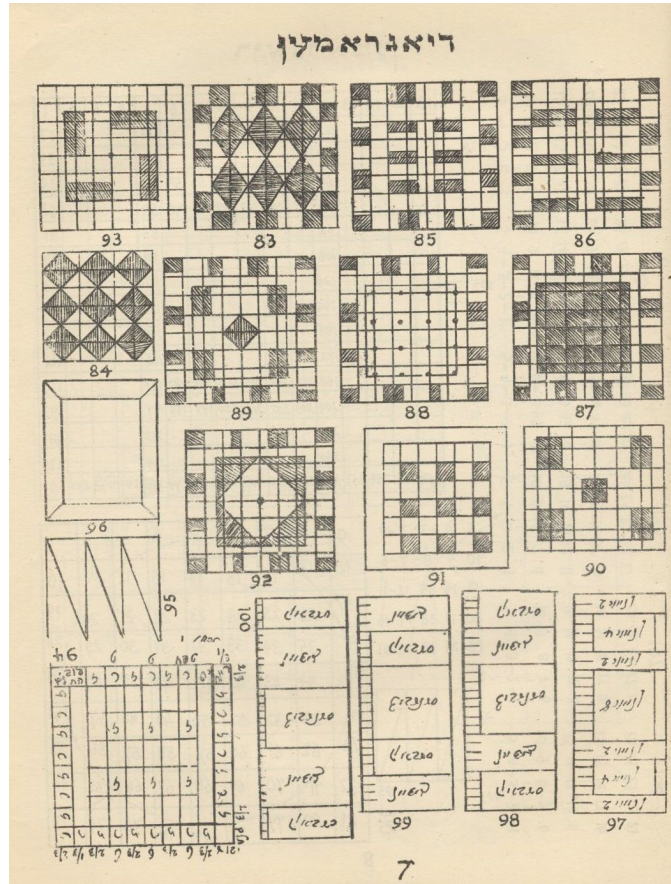
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<sup>104</sup> Zalkind, “Anarkhism un shmerts,” *Arbeter fraynd*, 26 March 1921, 4–5. Translation in Rothman, “The Case of Jacob Meir Salkind,” 20.

<sup>105</sup> Emma Goldman, “A Woman Without a Country,” in *Quiet Rumours: An Anarcha-Feminist Reader* (San Francisco: AK Press, 2002), 81.

<sup>106</sup> Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” trans. Harry Zohn, in *Selected writings of Walter Benjamin, volume 4, 1938–1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2003), 397.

fresh, hot, boiling lava that searches for an opening.”<sup>107</sup> In describing life as an eternally turbulent state of hope, Zalkind channels the Yiddish modernist poetics of his era, shattering linear time into new forms capable of transmitting revolutionary euphoria. Claiming a talmudic genealogy for anarchism was furthermore an anti-assimilationist strategy, reaching from a radical present moment into Jewish deep time to displace secular, capitalist, and Christian temporalities. Zalkind proclaims: Through memory thrums possibility.



Illustrations by A. Vayner for Zalkind's Yiddish translation of tractate Kilayim (1932)

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<sup>107</sup> Zalkind, “Gedanken-punken,” *Arbeter fraynd*, May 1920, 3. Translation in Rothman, “The Case of Jacob Meir Salkind,” 20.