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Thesis Summary

In this study, I examine the shtetl, Zion, and Palestine-longing songs of the Jewish, Eastern European immigrants to America at the turn of the century. Because These immigrants were uprooted from their homes, they suffered dislocation and trauma which led them to yearn for a mythic past when life felt easier and more whole. Thus, these immigrants longed for an imagined shtetl.

In addition, because these immigrants moved to America precisely at the rise of Zionism, they experienced two different emotions towards the distant, Jewish homeland. On one hand, they embraced a traditional, mythic idea of Zion for similar reasons to which they longed for the shtetl – as an image to counter-act present instability. On the other hand, they felt a pull towards Palestine, towards the real, attainable land which was even then being settled.

I begin the study with an examination of the development of the traditional idea of Zion in Jewish culture and history. In chapter two, I briefly examine the psychological functions of home-longing, how it operates for an individual as well as a culture. In chapter three, I address the idea of immigrant music making, and look at the Yiddish Theater in this context. In chapter four, I examine the shtetl-longing songs, looking at their motifs and portrayals of home. In chapter five, I study the Zion and Palestine-longing songs and compare them with each other. Finally, in the conclusion, I address issues of Jewish home-longing today. In addition to examining the songs themselves, I have read a wide variety of secondary sources, drawing from disciplines such as performance studies, Zionist thought, psychology, and ethnomusicology.

HOME LONGINGS:
THE SHTETL, ZION, AND PALESTINE SONGS OF AMERICA'S EASTERN EUROPEAN IMMIGRANTS

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For Masters of Sacred Music Degree.

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Introduction

"No people can long exist without a bond to its land."[1] For some nations, this bond between nation and land, which scholar Eliezer Schweid considers essential, is an obvious one -- direct, and unencumbered; it is an unquestioned identification, untested by dislocation or exile. Jewish history can not offer us such simple stories, though, nor can Jews lay claim to their homeland in such a literal way. After all, our relationship to home has never been simple. Instead, at least since the destruction of the second Temple, we have adapted to exile and dispersion by forging a new kind of bond to homeland – a ritualized bond of longing. Thus, until the advent of Zionism, we have defined ourselves traditionally not so much by the plot of land on which we stood but by the direction towards which we faced. We reinvented home by making the longing for Zion into a kind of place to live in the meantime, even if the meantime took up the whole of our lives. So doing, we introduced into the idea of home a constant, creative tension, a tension which is strengthened every time a Jew in the Diaspora turns to face Jerusalem.

Granted, during the two thousand odd years between the destruction of the second Temple and the birth of the state of Israel, the extent of Jewish longing for Zion has waxed and waned. For example, at times of safety and prosperity in Muslim Spain, a Jew

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[1] Eliezer Schweid, *The Land of Israel*, trans. Deborah Greniman (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 1985), 36.

may have prayed for redemption in Zion in a ritualized manner alone, only to feel those emotions in earnest as soon as Jewish life became unsafe. Schweid explains:

> During periods of relative peace and prosperity [in Jewish history], the land of Israel was relegated to the realm of ritual meaning alone and aroused no feelings of obligation. Such periods, however, never lasted very long. Jewish settlement in a country generally provoked jealousy and religious fanaticism. The venting of this hatred reawakened [Jews'] feeling of foreignness in all its force, and the land of Israel, symbolizing the present exile and the redemption to come, once more became central to the Jewish experience.[2]

In this way, what may be called "the Zion concept" functions within Jewish culture as traumatic memories do on an individual level, moving back and forth in the mind between rehearsed ritual and active psychological need, lying dormant until revived by present troubles. Scholar Fred Davis writes about this movement in the case of nostalgia, but his comments can extend to home-longing as well: "in its collective manifestation, nostalgia also thrives... on the rude transitions rendered by history, on the discontinuities and dislocations wrought by such phenomena as war, depression, and civil disturbance."[3]

Davis' comments point us towards an essential aspect of home-longing – it is always intimately connected and reawakened by the present: "the nostalgic evocation of some past state of affairs always occurs in the context of present fears, discontents, anxieties, and uncertainties."[4] Therefore, because home-longing is a response to current dislocation, it can teach us as much about present emotions and identity as it can about a remembered home. After all, the places we yearn for in retrospect are inevitably quite different than the places in which we actually lived. It is for this reason that sociologist Clifford Geertz recommends laying aside ontological questions when seeking to

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[2] Ibid, 45.
[3] Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday* (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 49.

understand a culture. He writes: "the thing to ask [about a culture's events, memories, and sacred places] is not what their ontological status is. . . . The thing to ask is what their import is: what it is . . . that in their occurrence and through their agency, is getting said."[5]

In the present study, I will examine the expression of longing for home in the early-twentieth century music of Eastern European immigrants to America, as it played itself out towards the shtetl, towards mythic Zion, and towards Palestine. The turn of the century in America is a fascinating and unique period within which to examine aspects of Jewish home-longing. Certainly, there are many other periods in Jewish history in which migration or exile provoked a yearning for home. Yet, the art of early twentieth century Jewish immigrants is unique because of the unprecedented rise of Zionism.

In addition, then, to expressing longing for the shtetl which had been left behind, as well as evoking traditional images of Zion, these newcomers to America were helping to create a new kind of Jewish longing as well – the longing for Palestine. This new longing differed essentially from a traditional belief in Zion because it addressed a material land and not a utopian vision, advocating action over waiting, strength over passive acceptance of God's will. At the same time, the longing for Palestine is similar to traditional Zion longing because both are products of the Diaspora, of Jews positioned outside their homeland, looking in.

Taken together, these Yiddish songs of shtetl, Zion, and Palestine-longing provide us with an excellent example of a moment in Jewish history in which multiple emotions of home-longing were being expressed at the same time. In order to understand all these

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[4] Ibid, 49.
[5] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 10.

songs within a larger cultural context, I will begin, in chapter one, by outlining the historical development and religious function of the Zion idea within traditional Judaism. It is essential to understand the Zion idea precisely because it serves as the backdrop, spoken or unspoken, for all other kinds of Jewish home-longing. It is the original mold of all forms of Jewish place-longing. In chapter two, I will shift from the national to the personal, and examine place-longing from a psycho-analytic perspective, seeking to better understand its purposes in Jewish tradition. It must be noted that by examining the sociological and psychological functions of the Zion idea, I am by no means dismissing its theological authenticity, only seeking to understand its human components as well.

In the third chapter of this work, I will lay aside both the Zion idea and psychological functions for the moment and examine the act of immigrant music-making. Specifically, I will address its power to transmit the values of the Old World and ease the transition to the New. In this context, I will examine the role of the early Yiddish Theater, from which most of the songs in this study originate. I will also examine performance's unique ability to memorialize things, people, and places that have been lost. Because, as I argue, performance has a special function in helping its audience wrestle with loss, it is the perfect lens through which to look at Jewish acts of home-longing.

After laying the necessary groundwork -- understanding the development of the Zion idea, the psychological functions of home-longing, and the power of immigrant music-making -- I then turn to in chapter four to the shtetl-songs themselves. I divide the songs into a number of categories, reflecting the different aspects of shtetl-longing which the songs themselves express. Though I do examine the music at times, and often give a

context of when the songs were performed, I am focusing in this chapter on the songs' lyrics.

In chapter five, I will turn from the songs of the shtetl to those of Zion and Palestine, thereby completing our picture of home-longing songs among Jewish immigrants at the turn of the century. This chapter is divided into two parts: the first examines the immigrants' traditional Zion-longing songs; the second looks at those Zionist songs which express longing for Palestine. Throughout chapters four and five, I will be referring to the background laid in the first two chapters. I will conclude with a few personal reflections on home-longing. Throughout this study, it is my intention to shed light on that art of song-making which at once encouraged, ritualized and transformed the immigrants' inner need for home.

The Idea of Zion

In his essay, "Diasporas in Modern Societies," sociologist William Safran asks:

> How long does it [usually] take for a Diaspora consciousness to develop, and what are the necessary and sufficient conditions for its survival? Does such consciousness [typically] weaken with the passage of decades or centuries, as the relationship with the real homeland is lost, or conversely, does the homeland focus become more deeply embedded in the collective consciousness of a minority as concrete experience is replaced by myth?[6]

Safran's questions are an excellent entry point from which to begin examining the image of Zion in Judaism. The religious and cultural myth of Zion -- balanced by its opposite, exile -- forms a core of Jewish belief and practice. Precisely because of its centrality, we need to ask – what were "the necessary and sufficient conditions" for its growth? Why and how did Jews continue to dream of Zion when they lived so far away from there? What purpose did this place-longing serve? Surely, the belief in Zion flourished because it fed a need, because it served a religious and sociological purpose. It behooves us, then, to understand this purpose better.

To do so, we must begin by acknowledging that the ideas of Zion and Galut are inseparable: the promised home is linked inextricably to its shadow land, its double. One cannot subscribe to one without the other; as soon as one yearns for Zion, one calls up the specter of Galut, that waiting station of punishment and separation from God.

On the other hand, when one relinquishes a messianic vision of Zion, one is also freed to rethink the Galut. Secular Zionists proved this point well, for just as they

reconfigured traditional notions of Zion, they also reconfigured the Galut. Eliezer Schweid explains: "No longer was [the land of Israel, for secular Zionists,] seen as the land of destiny, the holy land; rather it was a land to be possessed, a foundation upon which the national might of a people could stand. . . . Elements of traditional thought provided historical justification for the new secular outlook, which progressively obscured the traditional view."[7] Thus, unlike a traditional picture of the Galut, the Zionists' image was free of sin and alienation; suffering could be eliminated through one's own efforts, simply by settling Palestine. When we examine the Zion-longing and Palestine-longing songs in chapter five, we will notice both images of the Galut employed, either as a place of waiting and suffering, "light-years" away from the holy land, or as a physical reality from which one can free oneself and move to Palestine.

Now that we have acknowledged the link between the Zion idea and a traditional rendering of Galut, where should we begin a deeper examination of these ideas? Eliezer Schweid recommends that we begin with the Torah, reasoning that "the Bible is more than simply the collection of ideas, concepts, and symbols that the Jewish people has drawn upon... in every generation; it is itself the [primary] spiritual link between the people and its land."[8] Turning to the Scriptures, we are reminded throughout the Torah that the land of Israel is considered intrinsically holy, not because the soil is different there, but because "God chose to dwell among His people precisely in the land of Israel, in Jerusalem, on Mt Moriah, and nowhere else." While it is true that God appeared to the children of Israel in all sorts of temporary dwelling places in the desert, these locations

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[6] William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 6 (1997): 95.
[7] Eliezer Schweid, *The Land of Israel*, 2.
[8] Ibid, 15.

were never considered permanently holy, "while the holiness of the land of Israel and the Temple mount abides forever." Moreover, "after the settlement of the land is completed, God dwells among his people only in Israel, only in Jerusalem, only in the Temple."[9]

Yet, though the Scriptures teach us that God's dwelling in Zion is permanent, the people's claim to the land is not. It is conditional upon living a life of Torah. In other words, "they are to dwell in Israel perceiving it as a Promised Land whose inheritance is conditional."[10] Such a life of holiness would cause the people to live with "a constant readiness for the future destined for them," for Messianic redemption. In this way, according to Shweid, "the image of the land of Israel reflects the vision of its future more than it reflects its past and present. In this sense, too, it is a Promised Land, a land that one day will fully become what it was destined to be by the will of God." According to Schweid, throughout the history of Jewish thought, philosophers, rabbis, and poets alike returned to this promised vision of the land, that place where one day, the Jewish people would again "live a life of holiness in the [immediate] presence of God."[11]

A life within the land is a life of closeness to God, whereas Galut is predicated upon distance. In the present study's immigrant music, as we will see, there is evidence of this sense of distance from a place considered more holy. However, in this case, the place in question is the shtetl . These immigrants saw in the archetypal shtetl a world close to God, in which fixed methods of communication ensured them a safe and constant relationship with the Divine. But, so their story continues, those methods were lost or complicated upon arrival in the golden land. It is as if they had lost the Temple all over again.

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[9] Ibid, 27.
[10] Ibid, 28.

While the Torah teaches us the supremacy of the land of Israel, it also points to an inter-dependence between exile and Zion. As early as the Book of Genesis, the Patriarchs leave and return to Galut with some frequency. Indeed, it is Abraham's very willingness to uproot himself and follow God's directions which is the beginning of his intimacy with God. As archeologists Zali Gurevich and Gideon Arad claim, it may be the Patriarchs' wanderings in and out of the Promised Land, and the complicated relationship to place which those wanderings engender, that to a great extent define who we are.[12]

In his book *Galut*, Arnold Eisen points out the tensions vis-a`-vis the Galut at the close of the Torah as well. He writes: "As Israel prepares to cross the Jordan, Moses tries to conjure up a picture of the life awaiting his people on the other side.... Yet, here too the imagination of home is overpowered by the specter of homelessness. Curse routs blessing; home remains unachieved, and incompletely imagined."[13] Even at its conclusion, then, the Torah does not offer the reader the satisfaction of a journey completed, a home possessed, and an exile finally left behind.

Rather, the Torah is completed just before the children of Israel enter the land. In this way, both the Israelites and the reader remain at the story's close in a state of expectancy, a state of longing, waiting for the command to enter the land. It makes no difference that the nation does enter Canaan shortly thereafter, in the book of Joshua. For the Torah itself -- that book defining our most basic myth of peoplehood -- leaves us waiting at its close. The Torah's unresolved ending forces us to recognize that "the Land of Israel was not the birthplace of the Jewish people, which did not emerge there, as most

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[11] Eliezer Shweid, *The Land of Israel*, 27.
[12] Arnold Eisen, *Galut* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 7.

people have on their own soil. On the contrary, it had to enter its own Land from without; there is a sense in which Israel was born in exile." The Torah's unfinished ending also teaches us not to confuse the narrative of longing for Zion with that of its possession, as described in the Book of Joshua. The first is the narrative of a nation out in the desert, looking in; the second tells the complex, this-worldly story of a people's possession of a land.

Yet, one may ask: while the Scriptures contain deep and complicated relationships between Zion and Galut, is there proof of the same during later periods, especially after the destruction of the second Temple? Scholars Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin point to the existence of Jewish communities outside Palestine prior to the destruction of the Second Temple as historical evidence of the interdependence between Zion and exile. They write: "the Diaspora is not the forced product of war and destruction – taking place after the down-fall of Judea – but that already in the centuries before this downfall, the majority of Jews lived voluntarily outside the Land."[14] Eliezer Schweid rejects the Boyarins' analysis of the Diaspora:

> Before [the destruction of the Second Temple,] the people of Israel could be considered... a people dwelling in its own land; after the destruction, it was a people in exile. More precisely: as long as the people of Israel had some kind of proximity to the land, and even those who dwelt in the Diaspora maintained their ties to it and could still make their pilgrimages to the Temple, . . . the dispersion did not assume its full spiritual and religious significance. Once the Second Temple was destroyed, however, and it became clear that it would not be speedily rebuilt, even the land of Israel itself was transformed more and more into a place of exile.[15]

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[13] Ibid, xv.
[14] Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin, "Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity," *Critical Inquiry* 19 (Summer 1993): 722.
[15] Eliezer Schweid, *The Land of Israel*, 33.

At Yavneh, Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai and his disciples were confronted with a dilemma. They understood that the supremacy and uniqueness of the land could not be relinquished. At the same time, reality now dictated that the Jewish people must find a way to survive in Galut. Schweid explains, "the eternal uniqueness of the land of Israel...had to be preserved, yet an alternative nevertheless had to be created, one that would consciously and emphatically be no more than a substitute, never competing with the original but constantly maintaining the tension of the people's anticipation that they would yet return to their true home."[16] To survive outside and yet to live in longing, to carry out a holy way of life in exile and yet never to consider that place a homeland – this is the state of creative tension the rabbis sought to foster.

Thus, for example, although the Temple service was eventually transformed into prayers and study, the original Temple arts were never exactly replaced (we find constant evidence of them, in the musaf prayer, the Avodah service, the treatment of the Shabbat table, to name a few.) Thus, whatever new structures of meaning the rabbis created, these structures were never allowed to transcend or obliterate the original service of the Temple. Instead, the Temple became a second lost paradise in the Rabbinic imagination, a place where the people had once been closer to God, purer and more whole.

Throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance, Jewish suffering, isolation, and social inferiority in the Diaspora only confirmed traditional Jewish notions of Galut. It is impossible to say whether the land of Israel would have ultimately retained its spiritual supremacy without periods of anti-Semitism, for Jewish yearnings for Zion seem so often to have been reignited by discrimination and hatred.

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[16] Ibid, p.36.

Though the limits of this study preclude an examination of many of the important thinkers about Zion, including Yehuda Halevi and Rambam, it is worth noting briefly the contribution of the Lurianic Kabbalah to the discourse on Galut and redemption. In the Kabbalah, Rabbi Isaac Luria Ashkenazi (1534-72) expanded upon earlier portrayals of Galut as a distancing of the people from God to include within it the entire world's suffering. According to Gershom Scholem, "the Galut the Ari's Kabbalah saw as a terrible and pitiless state permeating and embittering all of Jewish life, but Galut was also the condition of the universe as a whole, even of the deity." Therefore, "by connecting the notions of Galut and redemption with the central question of the essence of the universe, [the Kabbalists] managed an elaborate system which transformed the exile of the people of Israel into an exile of the whole world, and the redemption of the their people into a universal, cosmic redemption."[17] In this way, the Kabbalists helped both to sanctify the life of a Jew in Galut and to make a state of pious longing the people's only real alternative.

[17] Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, trans. Michael Meyer (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 43.

The Psychological Function of Home-Longing

"'Nostalgia is memory with the pain removed.'"[18] At first glance, this definition of longing from a 1975 *San Francisco Chronicle* article can be misleading. Ah, we say to ourselves – how simple it is after all. Just remove the pain from the total picture and there you have it – the memory remains intact. Upon further reflection, though, we realize the sophistication of the statement, for removing the pain – removing any emotion from a memory – essentially alters that memory, making it one more step removed from actual events. Of course, all memory is a form of fiction, a story we write and rewrite constantly, with each passing year. In sociologist Fred Davis' words: "The past is never simply something there just waiting to be discovered. Rather, the remembered past, like all other products of human consciousness is something that must be filtered, selected, constructed, and reconstructed."[19] Thus, though the way in which we remember our pasts can teach us only a limited amount about what actually transpired, it can offer us considerable insight into who we are at each new moment of remembering.

When one yearns for somewhere absent, whether that place is the shtetl or Jerusalem, one is creating a situation of tension. There are suddenly two locations instead of one – the place in which I stand and the place I envision. These two points imply a relationship. Because this relationship is built on the tension of longing, it naturally seeks some form of resolution. Mario Jacoby agrees, explaining that "the

[18] As mentioned in Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday* (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 37.
[19] Ibid, 116.

longing for a place or condition of bliss [must include within it] the desire to close the gap which separates one from it."[20]

While the desire for resolution may have been essential in the creation of immigrants' home-longing songs, this desire does not get expressed through a hunger for action, except in the case of the Palestine-longing songs. In fact, none of the Yiddish Theater songs we will look at in chapter four exclaim, "I am going home." Instead, they say, "I yearn for home" or "I wish I were home." Similarly, the specific Zion-longing songs we will examine in chapter five employ a traditional posture of distanced, irresolvable longing. It is only the Palestine-longing songs of chapter five that try to dissolve longing through action. But, interestingly enough, this call to action is directed more towards others – towards the Jews of Eastern Europe – than towards the immigrants themselves.

It seems, therefore, that longing can also exist in the mind, can even be psychologically useful, without the mind seeking its resolution in any practical, external way. Such longing fulfills a psychic need, one which is helpful through its very tension. Because "longing harbors within it the yearning for confidence in some solid, nourishing ground," an expression of that longing helps the individual, and by extension the nation, to continue searching for that stability which is absent.[21] In this way, the Jews' belief in Zion expresses the people's collective "desire to overcome [their] own self-alienation, to achieve consonance with [their] own wholeness." [22] It is this very act of expression which is healing.

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[20] Mario Jacoby, *Longing for Paradise* (Boston: Sigo Press, 1985), 215.
[21] Ibid, 8.
[22] Ibid, 9.

The psycho-analyst Mario Jacoby describes a number of his patients who suffered from obsessions with mythic homes, explaining that "what tortured them was the longing, the painful yearning for something they had apparently never actually experienced: a home situation that would provide them with the sense of an un-fragmented world, or what has been termed the 'unitary reality.'"[23] According to Jacoby, when a child does not experience "a conflict free, unity reality" during infancy, that same child may well grow up yearning for home or mythic mother, creating an inner fiction of the past and then craving it. It follows naturally then that when an infant does fully experience "unitary reality,' she will be able to successfully negotiate the process of separation from the mother, and will in adulthood perhaps not long for a mythic home. "This [longing, then,] is, at bottom, a longing for one's own well-being, which originally was dependant upon maternal care and protection."[24]

When we feel fragmented internally, we create fictions of original unity; when we strive for wholeness, we project back onto our past a vision of a fully integrated time. In Jacoby's words, "the world of wholeness exists mostly in retrospect, as a compensation for the threatened, fragmented world in which we live now."[25] Certainly, in the case of the shtetl-longings songs I will examine in chapter three, the immigrants who both wrote and enjoyed them idealized the old country because their new lives felt so fragmented. In point of fact, though, if the shtetl had been as blissful as described in these songs, the immigrants would never have left it for America. So too, the image of the land of Israel has always been like a lamp around which the many moths of our unconscious desires and fears collect. Though I do consider the Zion idea to be of divine origin, the way we

[23] Ibid, 6.
[24] Ibid, 7.

have used it over time is quite human, exhibiting our continued struggle to overcome dislocation and achieve, in exile, a certain wholeness.

It is important to remember that home-longing can be reactivated by any kind of upheaval, whether psychic or external. For this reason "nostalgic reaction is most pronounced during these transitional phases in the life cycle that exact from us the greatest demands for identity change and adaptation."[26] Traumas awaken old wounds, which then awaken our never fully extinguished longings for a true and lasting home. I will provide evidence of this in the shtetl and Zion-longing songs of chapters four and five.

Moreover, there seems to be a psychological relationship between longing for home and an inner sense of dislocation from one's body. Performance studies theoretician Peggy Phelan points out this correlation: "The psyche has no material form and yet in describing it we tend often to give it a body. . . . We talk about the psyche as something subject to wound, tears, to traumas. We believe it can be made healthy. We treat it, in short, as a body."[27] In this way, just as the homeland houses its nation, and the shtetl its community, so too the body houses the soul. By extension, a fantasized unification of the body may be conceived of as the longing for reintegration into the mother's womb, "a return to the utopia of biology and symbol united within the walled city of the maternal."[28]

Given this theory, it is important to note that the shtetl-longing songs make frequent reference to the body, both in its primary state of unity and then in a later state of

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[25] Ibid, 5.
[26] Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday*, 49.
[27] Peggy Phelan, *Mourning Sex* (London: Routledge, 1997), 5.
[28] Susan Stewart, *On Longing* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984), 320.

dislocation. We can find examples of body imagery in a number of the Zion and Palestine-longing songs as well. The Jewish people without Jerusalem are portrayed as a fragmented body, or a body without its heart. After all, the land of Israel "stood at the center of the geographic and cultural map of the world that the Jew created for himself."[29] Metaphorically, then, the Jew's body stood empty in the West, while her dislocated heart beat expectantly, far away, in the East.

As we turn from the psychological aspects of home-longing to a chapter on the nature of immigrant music, it would be useful to keep this metaphor in mind. After all, immigrant music struggles to bridge worlds, striving for a new kind of wholeness. It attempts to express that immigrant's experience who stands with his feet planted in a new land and his heart still far away from him, lingering at home.

[29] Eliezer Schweid, *The Land of Israel*, 45.

Performing the Immigrant Experience

"[A culture] must be performed to be transmitted; this is the source of its life."[30] Victor Turner's statement offers us a perfect key with which to unlock issues of immigrant music, transplanted memory, and longing. If, following Turner, a culture can only survive as long as it continues to perform itself, what does that mean for cultures which have undergone severe dislocation? What are the implications of Turner's statement for refugee cultures which have been torn away from their native lands? What can it mean for Jewish culture specifically, which has undergone continuous dislocation and migration throughout its history?

Adelaida Reyes Schramm, an ethnomusicologist who has written extensively on music and the refugee experience, points to the need to examine cultural transmission in refugee cultures differently from their more stable counterparts. She explains: "[Refugee cultures] urge a reexamination of what we understand by cultural transmission, because the disruption and loss of control, the traumas of escape, and the trying circumstances surrounding survival in a new and possibly hostile environment impede the usual channels through which traditions pass from one generation to the next."[31]

Obviously, the shtetl, Zion, and Palestine-longing songs to be examined in this study were not the products of refugees. Unlike the Jews of Spain, or many other refugees in Jewish history, the early-twentieth century composers, performers, and audiences who participated in these songs chose to leave their homes to come to the

[30] Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theater* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982), 37.
[31] Adelaida Reyes Schramm, "Tradition in the Guise of Innovation," *Yearbook for Traditional Music* (1986): 91.

golden land, placing them in a different category than the Vietnamese refugees about whom Reyes Schramm has written. Nonetheless, Reyes Schramm's analysis is useful in understanding the way the songs of the Eastern European immigrants transmitted values and preserved memories during a transitional time. From the music of radically dislocated refugee cultures, we may derive a frame of reference useful for the music of voluntary migrants as well. After all, the music of the Eastern European immigrants "retain[ed] its identity away from the culture from which it sprang. [It] change[ed] in a new context and still remain[ed] itself," just as did the music of the Vietnamese.[32] In this way, "the refugee experience offers a [particularly valuable] understanding of tradition, which is crucial for whomever is interested in issues of cultural survival."[33]

Trying to invent a category by which to understand refugee music, Reyes Schramm employs the term "transplanted music," explaining that "it refers to music that has been relocated, and is marked by a cultural past from somewhere else and a cultural present where it is not native."[34] Reyes Schramm offers an excellent example of such "transplanted music," describing a Vietnamese holiday performance in America, in which both Vietnamese and Western elements were noticeable:

> From an outsider's point of view, ambiguity in musical identity was a striking feature of the music in the stage presentations [of this major, public celebration day.] The special ornamentation of sung melodic lines, specifically in solo and recitative sections, the adherence to unison singing by vocal ensembles, and the strong tendency towards pentatonicism to which harmonic usage was frequently subordinated, argued against identification as Western. At the same time, Western harmony had an undeniable impact particularly on the instrumental parts. This fusion of Vietnamese

[32] Adelaida Reyes Schramm, "Music and the Refugee Experience," *The World of Music*, Vol. XXXII. No. 3 (1990): 4.
[33] Ibid, 6.
[34] Ibid, 18.

> and Western musical elements in [this] contemporary context . . can be seen as an analogy to the theme of unity on a deeper level.[35]

In the case of the music of the Yiddish Theater, Reyes Schramm's notion of "transplanted music" proves equally useful because, like the music of the Vietnamese refugees, Yiddish Theater music was also a hybrid of old and new sounds. Nusach, or traditional prayer chant, sat alongside Tin Pan Alley motifs; hazzanut and Yiddish lullabies found their way into songs directly influenced by vaudeville and musical theater. The ethnomusicologist Mark Slobin also links the Yiddish Theater to the popular form of the American melodrama:

> In many respects, immigrant theater in America emulated the amazing success of the melodrama, the dominant genre of Western entertainment. Melodrama offers exactly those characteristics cited by [Irving] Howe as being typical of Jewish theatrical fare. To quote a historian of the melodrama: 'Farcical scenes and scenes of violence and pathos follow each other in rapid alternation, this sequence being one of the trademarks of melodrama.'[36]

Those immigrants who started the Yiddish Theater in America -- the actors, singers, and musicians who left Russia after the pronouncement of the Czar's edict of 1882 banning all forms of Yiddish Theater -- recognized that they had a new job: "to explain America [to other immigrants], and to define the problems of adjustment to a New World."[37] To this end, they created a new Yiddish theater in America, a hybrid theater, a theater of "transplanted" performance and sound.

The values conveyed by the Yiddish Theater were "transplanted" as well. The rags-to-riches story was a very popular and typically American theme found in the

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[35] Adelaida Reyes Schramm, "Tradition in the Guise of Innovation", 96.
[36] Mark Slobin, *Tenement Songs* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 85.
[37] Ibid, 3.

Yiddish Theater. It was often expressed in the very same play in which a different character longed for the purity and poverty of the shtetl. In this way, the Yiddish Theater was "a theater of primary, un-evaded emotions, Jewish emotions that had only yesterday escaped from the prison-house of Europe. . . . It was a theater that staked almost everything on a high romanticism or gesture, a theater of festival."[38] It was for this reason an art form which could best express the ambivalence and contradictory desires of its immigrant audience, their hunger both to assimilate and to return to the bosom of the shtetl. It used its music, lyrics, character types and plot settings to exhibit this ambivalence.

Ultimately, though, the Yiddish Theater helped immigrants to assimilate into American culture by providing them with a halfway house between old and new worlds. According to musicologist Ruth Rubin, "the Yiddish theater played an important role in the Americanization process of the new immigrants, . . . and the songs that emanated from it, coupled with the songs created for mass consumption, inexorably weaned large sections of the Jewish population away from the old, traditional Yiddish songs from the Old Country."[39] Obviously, just as immigrants gradually stopped singing the old songs, so too did they relinquish the old ways.

But, why did the Yiddish Theater's immigrant audiences often choose its boisterous halls over the well-worn halls of the local synagogue? After all, America's synagogues were full of fabulous vocal artists during this period, masters at turning age - old liturgy into new drama. The new liturgical drama being created at this time also expressed the emotions and experiences of the immigrants, only differently than did the

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[38] Irving Howe, *World of our Fathers* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1976), 473.
[39] Ruth Rubin, *Voices of a People: The Story of Yiddish Folksong* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), 357.

theater. Certainly, many immigrants did continue to look to the synagogue for sustenance, but it is also clear that, for many, the Yiddish Theater "took the place of organized religion, by affirming a Jewishness that was elastic and didn't require any observance or piety."[40] The audiences of Yiddish Theater could be entertained by performers, some of whom had actually been a cantors in the old country, but were now singing hazzanut in the midst of an operetta. The immigrants could focus on memories of old world religion without being bound by its commandments; they could feel near to God without actually praying.

In addition, the Yiddish Theater, by nature a "theater of primary, un-evaded emotions," necessarily mirrored the immigrants' immediate experiences more directly than did liturgy. Instead of finding themselves within the larger liturgical framework of the service, they needed to see themselves specifically, their struggles, their memories, their language and associations and jokes. Though the theater employed mythic Jewish images, and peppered its musical fare with hazzanut, the shows themselves were culturally and historically specific. As Yiddish Theater expert Nahma Sandrow explains: "[This] theater [functioned like] a breath of home: the music, the plot situations, . . . even the actors themselves were all familiar from the old country. It filled the psychological gap in the immigrants' lives."[41] For this reason, because it was specific and not liturgical, "the Yiddish theater became [for these immigrants] the new Jewish sanctuary."[42]

Moreover, as "the new Jewish sanctuary," the Yiddish Theater helped create a space for longing, a liminal zone in which audiences were given permission to sit

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[40] Nhama Sandrow, *Vagabond Stars* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 77.
[41] Ibid, 78.
[42] Heather Feffer, "From Second Avenue to the Synagogue" (M.S.M. Thesis, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1991), 15.

and remember home, without repercussions, guilt, or the assumption that these emotions should be acted upon and resolved. Its performances functioned as rituals of grieving and transition, allowing the immigrant community to process and navigate their psychic difficulties within a limited island of fantasy. A kind of sacred space was held during these performances, a memorial to absent places, to Slutzk and Warsaw and Beltz, to unnamed shtetls in the Pale of Settlement, to places which people had left in body but not yet in spirit. In the Yiddish Theater shows, these distant, mythic places were evoked in a manner which ultimately drew attention both to their presence and their absence; the shows were performed as "enactments of [both] invocation and disappearance."[43]

According to Peggy Phelan, it is in the nature of performance to create such unique memorials to absence. She writes: "theater and performance respond to a psychic need to rehearse for loss, and especially for death. Billed as rehearsal, performance and theater have a special relation to art as memorial."[44] Perhaps this is the case because performance can present an audience with acted out versions of lost things, people, and places. In experiencing them again, the audience is privileged to feel at once united with the lost thing and forced, because theater is ultimately an illusion, to grieve its absence. This is what cultural studies theoretician Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimlett means by the production of cultural memory. She explains that any kind of cultural "memory requires [its] prosthesis," – not its open book for simple recording of events gone by, but its prosthesis on which to lean while producing its past.[45] For the Eastern European Jewish immigrants, their prosthesis was the Yiddish Theater, whose memorials helped to forge,

[43] Peggy Phelan, *Mourning Sex* (London: Routledge, 1997), 4.
[44] Ibid, 3.
[45] Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimlett, "Theorizing Heritage," *Ethnomusicology* (Fall 1995): 376.

out of still vivid recollections of the Old World, a reconfigured past which could ultimately be laid aside.

The Shtetl-Longing Songs

Noticing the tendency of Vietnamese immigrants to tamper with traditional musical forms, Reyes Schramm observes that, "given the inherent adaptability and the functional nature of tradition, and given the radically changed conditions under which refugees must reconstruct their lives, it is not merely understandable, it is in fact predictable that forms will change for the sake of conserving content." Reyes Shramm distinguishes here between the traditional content of Vietnamese music and its forms, which change in order to convey the content within a transplanted environment. This change in esthetics, then, is necessitated by a commitment to cultural continuity in the midst of social upheaval. Reyes Shramm emphasizes this point: "given a situation where Vietnamese-ness is either to be deliberately maintained or accepted as the function of cultural contrast in the American context, it is almost inevitable that the expression system should draw from Western music even as the content system retains traditional values."[46]

So too, the immigrants' shtetl-longing songs were strongly influenced by Western music. Slobin explains:

> The emigration song is typical of a whole group of ethnic American folksongs, emphasizing the intimacy and rootedness of the Old World environment and the pain of departure. . . . Early songs of ethnic nostalgia such as "Kitty Neil" [an Irish emigration song] served as the foundation for an emerging genre of homesickness songs that flooded the American market for generations. We find standardized 'back home' ditties sung about small-town America by Jewish entertainers from 1910 on. . . . So

[46] Adalaida Reyes Schramm, "Tradition in the Guise of Innovation: Music among a Refugee Population," 99.

> the ethnics' own concern for preserving memories of a past life elsewhere can be accommodated to a popular genre founded on the feeling of being uprooted, a strong emotion common to great masses of nineteenth century Euro-Americans, natives and newcomers alike.[47]

The widespread appeal of the emigration song is not surprising considering our analysis, in chapter two, of the function of nostalgia. Just as immigrant Jews' sense of dislocation aroused a yearning for the old home, so too did other immigrants pine for their homelands.

Yet, though it is important to compare the Jewish, Eastern European immigrant song to those of other immigrant groups, and important to see the Yiddish Theater within a larger frame of melodrama, it is also crucial to notice the ways in which this particular form of "transplanted music" was unique. Most important, hazzanut was being preserved, both when used as a conscious imitation of the style -- as when the speaker pretends to be the cantor and sings a page of hazzanut in the middle of the song *"Vos iz ge vorn fun mine shtetle?"* [What has become of my shtetl?] -- and as an easily included, familiar and comforting sound, brought in a phrase at a time.[48] At once uniting and dividing the Old and New Worlds, hazzanut in the context of the Yiddish Theater evoked memory while also signifying a change. The Yiddish Theater's hazzanut both "embraced the sounds of the Old World [and married itself to] the new American Jewish way of life."[49]

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[47] Mark Slobin, *Tenement Songs* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 59.
[48] Abraham Ellstein, *Vos Iz Gevor'n Fun Mayn Shtele?*, lyrics by Isadore Lillian (New York: Ethnic Publishing Co., 1949).
[49] Hether Feffer, "From Second Avenue to the Synagogue" (M.S.M. Thesis, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1991), 15.

Before we actually turn to the shtetl-longing songs themselves, we must first take note of the "symbolic shorthand" of stock images with which they are peppered. David Roskies explains:

> Jews were not the only people in modern times to have experienced a loss of their homeland. Nor were Jewish rebels, revolutionaries, and just plain immigrants the only ones to discover that 'you can't go home again.' What distinguished the Jews from the other uprooted peoples, however, was the symbolic shorthand that they developed, a modern semiotics of exile that allowed them to read their individual experience in the light of historical archetypes. At the heart of their cultural code lay the evolving image of the shtetl."[50]

When looking at a number of these songs, one is quick to notice the relative uniformity of images used to conjure up the shtetl. Typical images include a little goat, a little mill, a little shul, a bird, and one's childhood cradle. The image of a mother is often included as well, and she is usually depicted singing a niggun. These stock images are obviously not remarkable; what is surprising is the extent to which they repeat themselves from song to song.

Psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas attempts to explain this sort of aesthetic repetition, writing that "each generation selects its generational objects, persons, events, and things which have particular meaning to the identity of that generation."[51] Although I agree with Bollas, it is important to add that the act itself of selecting these images is important, and what is absent may be as important as what is selected. In the case of Yiddish Theater emigration songs, the image of the shtetl created by stock images helped to build a new sense of social cohesion through the creation of a common past. Although the shtetls from which immigrants came actually differed considerably from each other,

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[50] David Roskies, *The Jewish Search for a Usable Past* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 43.
[51] Christopher Bollas, *Being a Character* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 259.

depending on location, political environment, exposure to secular culture, and anti-Semitism, the Yiddish Theater shtetl-longing songs helped construct a unified vocabulary of memory. In this way, "the Jews, like the Irish, . . .found a certain path towards consensus during the immigrant years: through popular music and entertainment."[52]

This served both to unite the community and teach social values at a time of radical transition. For this reason, it mattered little if one actually came from a shtetl or a town, if the local mill had closed down, or if a particular shtetl's cantor was disliked. Individual memory became subsumed within a common, constructed past. Of course, this memory-making process was not a conscious one, especially not on the part of those audiences who watched the shows and sang the new songs to themselves afterwards. In the same way as nostalgia rewrites memory, so too did the Yiddish Theater's longing songs rewrite many disparate pasts into a single story. Thus, "the shtetl was reclaimed as the place of common origin (even if it wasn't,) [and as] the source of collective folk identity rooted in a particular historical past."[53]

We are now ready to turn to the shtetl-longing songs themselves. I will divide them up into five basic categories which reflect inter-connected but subtly different aspects of home-longing found in the songs. The categories are: a) longing for wholeness, and/or a return to the mother; b) longing for one's childhood or place of birth; c) longing for a time of religious innocence and greater intimacy with God; d) loss of an entire world; e) longing for the values of the Old World.

[52] Mark Slobin, *Tenement Songs*, 198.
[53] David Roskies, *The Jewish Search for a Usable Past*, 57.

a) The Longing for Wholeness:

This category can be separated into two parts – the longing for one's mother, and the longing for an inner unity personified in the image of the shtetl as a complete world. Concerning the yearning for one's mother, there are of course realities tied to this emotion: many young immigrants left parents behind in the Old Country. Those immigrants may also have felt guilty for being so far away. Despite these real concerns, the repeated presence of the mother in these songs does seem to be more symbolic than material. Just as nostalgia is memory without the pain, so the mother depicted in many of these songs is super-human, an idealized force of goodness and nurturing, a complete and foolproof barrier of safety. For example, let us look at Gilrod and Friedsell's 1921 hit, *"Ich beink a heim"* [I long for home] which was probably premiered by Rosa Zuckerberg as part of the operetta, *"Di Yiddish Neshomeh"* [The Yiddish Soul]. In this dramatic number, the speaker exclaims, *"A helft fin mein leben volt ich up gegebn tzu zein vider dort un mein mooter tzu zehn"* [I would give half of my life to be there again and see my mother]. In Rubin Doctor's 1917 concert song, *"Ich Beink noch mein Shteitele"* [I long for my little little shtetl], on the other hand, the speaker sings, *"Dort shteit mein vigele vie mein mames nigele far viegt hot mich noch alles kind."* [There still stands my little cradle, where my mother's niggun rocked me when I was a child].[54]

In addition to representing the mother, the image of one's cradle can symbolize a yearning for inner wholeness. Fred Davis explains, "The sureness of 'I was' is a

[54] Rubin Doctor, *Ich Beink Noch Mein Shteitele* (New York: Saul Schenker Co., 1917.) This song was probably premiered by Miss G. Hausner, whose picture appears on the front of the sheet music.

necessary component of the sureness of 'I am.'"[55] In other words, when I have lost my sense of who I am, I crave to retrieve my past, in order to be able to weave that past into a new, but still disconnected present. What could be further excavation into one's past then the yearning to retrieve one's cradle?

In Louis Hersher's self-titled 1927 "Hebrew folk song," *"Ich beink"* [I long], the speaker provides a list of objects he pines for, including his little goat and his cradle, concluding with the statement *"Ich benk noch mein mutter's gezang"* [I long for my mother's song].[56] Wedding the mother to her song is typical in Yiddish Theater numbers; most of the time when the mother is yearned for, she is imagined singing. Missing the mother's song is particularly interesting psychologically: just as her niggun drifted into every corner of the little house, and just as music can seem to surround and envelop us sometimes, so too the mother's protective nature is envisioned illuminating every corner of that child's perfect life.

In Rumshinsky's 1934 hit, *"Ich beink aheim"* [I long for home], taken from the musical, *"Dem Rebbe's Niggun"* [The rabbi's niggun], we encounter memories of a mother singing as well, this time a Shabbat prayer. The speaker imitates his mother praying over her candles, *"Es fleg sein finster in shtieb ven mein Mameniu flegt singen azoi lieb – 'Gott fun avrohom, fun Yitzchok un fun Yakev. Al dos beinz fun unser hois, al dos guts in unzer hois."* [God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob – take all the bad from the house].[57] These opening words are actually taken from a traditional woman's prayer which was recited before havdalah. The prayer, titled *"Gott Fun Avrohom"* after its

[55] Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday* (New York: the Free Press, 1979), 30.
[56] Louis Hersher, *Ich Benk* (Baltimore: Alexander Mueller Pub. Co., 1927.) This song was probably premiered by Cookie Cohen, "the sunshine girl," who is featured on the front of the sheet music.
[57] Joseph Rumshinsky, *Ich Beink Aheim*, words by Ludwig Satz (New York: Metro Music Co,

opening words, "was designed both as a prayer and as a source of inspiration, [and was therefore] composed in Yiddish, the prevailing language among Eastern European Jews."[58] Reciting these words of protection at the start of the new week, the mother in *"Ich beink aheim"* appears as a kind of guardian angel, whose prayers protect the home from evil spirits, and from the dangers of the outside world.

On the other hand, in the popular 1936 folksong *"Slutzk,"* the speaker remembers his mother not as a presence at home but out in the world, fighting for her children in the marketplace. This speaker states: *"Yedn frimorgn mit beigl fleg di mame in mark handlen di kinder zoln zate zain"* [Every morning, my mother used to do business in the market -- so the children will be well fed].[59] In both cases, the speakers long for an inner sense of protection, one which the struggles of the New World have dislodged. Lacking this inner sense, they turn back in hunger to the image of the mother figure, to that fantasy of "an unfragmented world, or what has been termed the 'unitary reality.'"[60]

Obviously, there are many Yiddish Theater songs, including famous ones like *"My yidishe momme"* [My Yiddish mother], which yearn for a lost, archetypal mother. In fact, as Slobin points out, all "America had a passion for songs of home and mother [at that time], an obsession that cut across ethnic lines."[61] What is different, however, about the songs in question is that they contextualize this yearning within a larger framework of place-yearning. It is not just the mother that is missed in these songs. It is the whole lost world which she inhabits.

1934.)

[58] Rabbi Nosson Scherman, Rabbi Meir Zlotwitz, ed, *The Complete ArtScroll Siddur* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1984), 621.

[59] H. Wohl, *Slutzk*, lyrics by A. Lebedeff (New York: Harry Lefkowitch Co., 1936.) This song was first performed by Celia and Misha Boodkin, whose pictures appear on the front of the sheet music.

[60] Mario Jacoby, *Longing for Paradise* (Boston: Sigo Press, 1985), 6.

[61] Mark Slobin, *Tenement Songs*, 125.

Ruminshinsky's *"Ich beink aheim"* [I long for home] is a telling example of the longing for wholeness personified in the image of a whole and complete shtetl. In this fabulous theater song, the speaker traces the year in his shtetl through its many songs and melodies, including those of *"shabbes koidesh,"* the dancing songs of the Hassidim, the hazzanut of the meshorerim on Yom Kippur, the nusach of *"der shabbes rosh choidesh,"* and the heder chanting which surrounded *"shabbes hagodel."*[62] In this way, the speaker creates a musical map of his lost home, painting a picture of a world which seemed to attend to all spiritual needs, from joy to sorrow, awe to petition. There were no holes or moments of silence in this imagined world; the fabric of one's year was intimately woven into a constant array of suitable melodies.

It is interesting to note the absence in all of these shtetl-longing songs of non-Jews or anti-Semitism. As is the case in Rumshinsky's *"Ich beink aheim,"* the shtetl world depicted seems totally autonomous. Roskies reinforces this argument, explaining that "the shtetl was seen, for better or worse, as a kind of Greek city state: independent, self-regulating, and oblivious of the contemporary world."[63] This was, of course, a nostalgic reconstruction of the truth. In actuality,

> the fate of the actual, historical shtetl hung in the balance along the nexus of Jewish-gentile relations. There was no safety in numbers. . . . As recompense for the loss of their homes, the survivors and ex-patriots either demonized the Goyim, or erased them from the landscape, to conjure up a place more perfect and durable than ever existed.[64]

Interestingly enough, life in the shtetl probably did feel deeply autonomous because it was extremely introverted – the outside world was ignored and denied, despite

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[62] Joseph Rumshinsky, *Ich Beink Aheim.*
[63] David Roskies, *The Jewish Search for a Usable Past*, 44.

or perhaps because of its constant threat of violence. Of course, shtetls did have elaborate methods of internal government, increasing each community's sense of autonomy. Yet, many of these governing bodies were reinstated in some way in the Lower East Side. Therefore, this repainting seems to be have been caused by the immigrants' exposure to the accessibility and tolerance of non-Jewish America. What the immigrants may then have actually missed was a life without the viable presence of the outside world. Ironically, in their shtetl world, Jews had felt part of a seemingly autonomous, but fundamentally unsafe world; in America their world became safe, but suddenly full of many other cultures' voices. They were now living in a society which considered them citizens, did not pass anti-Semitic decrees against them, and certainly did not threaten them with pogroms. At the same time, they were no longer unified in isolation from the outside world.

b) Longing for Childhood or Place of Origin:

In many of the songs, childhood memories are seen as somehow larger than life. In Ellstein and Lillian's *"Vos iz gevorn fun mayn shtetele?"* [What has happened to my shtetl?] for example, the speaker remembers walking at night, a simple activity, surely, yet in that place and time remarkable, and somehow more alive. He/she sings: *"In de sheyne vinternekht, flegn mir shpatsirn geyn, un kholemen khaloymes on a tsol. Oy, vi demolt is geven, azoy hartsik, azoy sheyn, ven mir flegn geyn farbay di shul"* [In the lovely winter night, we used to go for a walk, and dream dreams without number. Oh, how it was then, so heartfelt and so lovely, when we used to walk by the shul].[65]

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[64] Ibid, 46.
[65] Abrahan Ellstein, *Vos is Gevor'n Fun Mayn Shtetele?*

Obviously, that person could walk by a shul at night on the bustling, urban Lower East Side as well, but it would not be the same. The poet, Rella Lossy recognizes this tendency to glorify one's childhood:

> And more was important,
> more was uneven,
> than it has been since. . . .
> and I mean
> it was important,
> being young there.[66]

Similarly, childhood is yearned for as a timeless realm, far from the bustling, inescapably temporal milieu of the Lower East Side. In Rumshinsky's *"Ich beink aheim"*, which we have already examined briefly, the world surrounding the musical calendar takes note only of liturgical time, and not of years passing or seconds slipping by. In this sense, the lyrics seem to point to a timeless world. So too, in Louis Hersher's "Ich benk" [I long], the speaker admits: *"Ich benk noch dem vigele, dos goldene tzigile, dos vasser by dem milichel, dos ferdile mein shpielichel"* [I long for the cradle, for the little goat, for the water and the mill beside it, for the pony I used to play games on].[67] These sentiments express yearning for a period in which time didn't matter, in which one lived without its pressures, in which eternity seemed more real than the long week of work ahead.

Irving Howe acknowledges this shift from an Old World clock to the racing clock of America:

> [The] condition of permanent precariousness [in shtetl life] gave
> the Eastern European Jews a conscious sense of being at a distance
> from history, from history as a conception of the Western World.
> Living in an almost timeless proximity with the mythical past and

[66] Rella Lossy, "Once upon a Time," in *Time Pieces*, (Berkeley: Reflections Press, 1996), 136-137.
[67] Louis Herscher, *Ich Benk*.

> the redeeming future, with Abraham's sacrifice of his beloved son to a still more beloved God and the certain appearance of a cleansing messiah, . . . the Jews could not help feeling that history was a little ridiculous, an often troublesome trifling of the gentile era. Once the shtetl began to crumble under alien pressures, the sense of history, suddenly rising to acute consciousness, became an obsession; or, more accurately, the modern idea of time as the very stuff of life which can never be held or held back, was absorbed into a faith that had always been addressed to eternity.[68]

What these songs seem to be pointing to, then, is a missing sense of mastery over time, an Old World value muted greatly by the struggle for achievement in America. Expressing the yearning for childhood becomes one way of wishing oneself still free of time, above its ticking seconds.

c) Longing for a Time of Religious Innocence and Intimacy with God:

In Alex Olshanetsky's *"Ich vill tzurik aheim"* [I want to go home], the speaker pines for his synagogue in the Old World, exclaiming: *"Sis gevesn mir fil liver in mein kleinem orimen shtebel vi ba main tatn in dem raichn land"* [It was more beloved to me there, there in my poor shteibl, than here with my father in this rich land].[69] This statement exhibits a longing for a time of greater connection with God. In the aforementioned quote, the speaker pits the wealth of the New World against the poverty and purity of the Old.

Again and again in these shtetl-longing songs, we find such sentiments as "I miss the shul," "I miss the cantor," "the praying was so lovely there." This may strike us as somewhat strange considering that the synagogues of the Lower East Side at this time were experiencing an amazing musical flowering, as great cantors from Europe made

[68] Irving Howe, *World of our Fathers* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1976), 11.

their way to the New World. Nonetheless, despite its Old World hazzanut, the Lower East Side was still a product of the New World and, as such, could not duplicate the religious world left behind in Europe. It is precisely this earlier world which the immigrants seemed to miss.

The longing songs therefore do not so much pine for the shtetl's religion as for a time in which Jews' relationship to religion was simple. In the relationships of the Yiddish stars themselves to the synagogue, we find ample evidence of present complexity. In her thesis on the Yiddish Theater, Heather Feffer explains: "some of the nostalgia for Shul – for a purity of the old way of worship – was as against this new, complicated world of the Yiddish Theater, in which so many of its participants had been meshorerim and cantors in the Old World, and now they were doing that music and worship in a half-way place, the Yiddish Theater." That half-way place was, in turn, used by audiences "unceremoniously, as a meeting place, just as their fathers used the little synagogue back home to study, gossip, pray, drink shnapps, and eat black bread and butter."[70] Here, then, was a strange, New World, in which old liturgical songs were sung by former cantors, and enjoyed by audiences for whom they may well have taken the place of formal prayer.

It is therefore not surprising that the songs reflect this complexity even as they perpetuate it, expressing yearning for the old ways even as they continue to create the new. As Gilrod and Friedsell's hit, *"Ich beink a haim"* bemoaned, *"dus shteebele dorten zoo shain, a helft fin mein ben volt ich up gegebn tzu zein"* [The little shul over there,

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[69] Alex Olshanetsky, *Ich Vill Tzurik Aheim,* lyrics by Jacob Jacobs (New York: Henry Lefkowitch, 1932.)
[70] Nahma Sandrow, *Vagabond Stars* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 77.

which was so lovely – I would give half my life to be there again].[71] With the performance of every new theater song, that simple relationship to worship was becoming more removed.

The immigrants' longing for the old shul also reflects a belief that in the past, one was more connected to God.[72] This religious nostalgia arises when the present methods of relating to God are shaken, as they most certainly were for Eastern European immigrants. This is obvious in *"Voz is ge vorn fun mine shetele?"* [What has happened to my shtetl?] in which the speaker describes walking by the shul and hearing the cantor. Interestingly, he feels no need to go inside. Yet, even that casual encounter with the tradition seems to have satisfied him emotionally. In that special and distant time, the song seems to tell us, even walking by the shul could bring one very close to God. Now that same level of intimacy required considerably more effort.

d) Loss of an Entire World:

One of the most famous Yiddish Theater songs, Jacobs and Olshanetsky's *"Mein Shtetele Belz,"* illuminates this category. First performed by Isa Kremer in 1930, in Olshenetsky's play, *The Song of the Ghetto*, *"Belz"* was one of the first specific town longing-songs and certainly the most famous. This sub-genre of specific town songs dates from approximately 1930; none of the specific town songs considered for the purposes of this study were published before that time. It is entirely possible that this

[71] L. Gilrod and Louis Friedsell, *Ich Baink a Haim* (New York: Theodore Lohr Co., 1921.) This song, part of the operetta, *Di Yiddish Neshomeh*, was probably premiered by Rosa Zuckerberg.

[72] See chapter one for an explanation of this idea in the Zion myth, which assumes that, during Temple times, Jews knew how to relate with God in a way that has since been lost.

sub-genre arose in response to the actual destruction of the shtetl in Europe occurring at that time. Indeed, the sub-genre only grew in popularity during and after the Holocaust.

The song opens with a conversation between the speaker and an old man who recently arrived from the shtetl: *"Der tzeil mir alter, der tzeil mir geschvind – weil ich wil vissen, alles a tzind. Wie sait ous dus shtiibel, wuv hot a mul ge glanzt?"* [Tell me, old man, tell me quick. I need to know right away. What has happened to my little home, that used to shine in the sun?] the speaker asks frantically. When the old man tells him that Belz is now destroyed, the speaker launches into the song's refrain, *"Belz, mein shtetele, Belz, mein heimele,"* [Belz, my shtetl, Belz, my little home].[73] Interestingly, when this speaker first asks about his home, he doesn't seem to yearn to return. Instead, he simply wants to know that it is still standing, along with the tree he planted there years ago, before leaving for America. He wants to know that he can rely on his memory, that it still corresponds to a living place, that he does not carry that world solely within his own mind.

When the speaker discovers, though, that the shtetl has been destroyed, he begins to pine for it in its entirety. Burdened by the weight of his now subjective memory, he is forced to sing in order to make up for the loss of the actual town. His song, then, becomes a kind of memorial to the destroyed shtetl. In singing, this sole survivor (the old man cannot count because he is not portrayed as engaged by the loss) is thereby engaged in "performing [his] mourning [in order to] recover from the trauma of loss."[74]

[73] Alexander Olshanetsky, *Mein Shtetele Belz*, lyrics by Jacob Jacobs (New York: Kammen Music, 1932.)
[74] Peggy Phelan, *Mourning Sex* (London: Routledge, 1997), 4.

e) Longing for the Values of the Old World:

Many of the longing songs also express yearning for an old way of life, one in which money was unimportant. Irving Howe provides us with an immigrant's statement, written in mock-Mishnaic style, which parodies the greed of America: "'The New World stands on three things: money, money, and again money. All the people of this country worship the Golden Calf.'"[75] This parody reminds us how shockingly new the possibility of self-advancement and wealth were for so many immigrants. In Rubin Doctor's *"Ich beink noch mein shteitele"* [I long for my shtetl], the speaker exclaims, *"Dort, in dem shtetl, die shtub in dus kleitel, vie mein tate mame senen helend a lein. Nor dort leigt mein glik – es tzit mich tzu rik"* [There, in the shtetl, is the room where my mother and father sit, poor and alone. Only there lies my happiness – it draws me back]. In other words, only there, amidst the abject poverty of the shtetl, will I be able to reconnect with my lost values, and become once more who I used to be.

In Jacobs' and Olshanetsky's *"Ich vill tzurik aheim"* [I want to go home], on the other hand, the speaker bemoans not only the American race for riches, but the lack of real relationships in America as well. He sings in the chorus, *"Ich vil tzurik aheim, in shtele in dem, vi ich hob gelebt sich ruhig un bak dem. Ich kennit mer sain do vikain fraindshaft is nishto – ich vil tzurik in main alter heim"* [I want to go home to the shtetl, in which I had lived peacefully and quietly. I can't be here anymore, where there is no friendship – I want to go home].[76] A paradigm is being set up in this song between Old World poverty, purity, and emotional depth, on one hand, and New World riches,

[75] Irving Howe, *World of our Fathers*, 75.
[76] Alex Olshanetsky, *Ich Vill Tzurik Aheim*.

corruption, and superficiality on the other. If only the speaker could return to the shtetl, he would be able to reconnect with all that is brightest and best in himself.[77]

Throughout all of these shtetl songs, shades of longing are being painted in the broad strokes so popular in the Yiddish Theater. Taken together, these shades of longing helped create magic spaces within which immigrants could process their unresolved yearnings. Together, too, these performative acts of memory helped audiences not only to remember, but also to forget. After all, it is only when our past homes have been sufficiently digested -- sufficiently retold, restructured, and rethought -- that we are finally able to relinquish them. We do not need to long for them anymore; we are once more standing on stable ground.

Songs of Zion, Songs of Palestine

According to historian John Stratton, the notion of the Jewish Diaspora cannot be equated with those of other migrant cultures for one reason: until the late nineteenth century, the overwhelming majority of Jews did not think of bringing themselves home. "One crucial aspect of Galut thinking," Stratton explains, "is that the Jews should not return to Eretz Israel until the coming of the Messiah. This is founded on a fundamentally religious view of a return which, by implication, advocated acceptance of exile as a punishment from God."[78]

This fundamentally religious view provides the line with which to separate the immigrants' Zion-longing songs from their songs to Palestine. What is the difference, though, between Zion and Palestine – are they not two names for the same place? These terms actually represent two vastly different attitudes towards the homeland. The first represents a homeland which will be rewarded only in the mythic future, after the punishment of exile has been fully meted out. The second is the product of Zionist thought, reconstructing the land from Messianic home to modern nation state. Thus, instead of waiting patiently for God to act, a Zionist could actually bring himself home, casting aside the specter of the Diaspora for good.

Both of these attitudes towards the homeland are reflected in the music of Eastern European immigrants to America at the turn of the century. The traditional Zion-longing songs were popular in the Yiddish Theater for a number of reasons: longing for Zion is a

[78] John Stratton, "(Dis)placing the Jews: Historicizing the Idea of the Diaspora", *Diaspora: Journal of Transnational Studies* 6 (1997): 307

standard part of liturgy, and since many immigrants were attending the theater more frequently than the synagogue, the ritual of longing for Zion became transferred to the theater's domain as well. In addition, Zion songs were popular for the same reason as were shtetl songs – as the expression of an inner need for wholeness and unity with the past.

Yet, the popularity of the Palestine-longing songs among immigrants to America requires a bit more explanation. After all, the immigrants examined in this study had made a clear choice of America over Palestine. Why then were they singing Zionist songs? This question is complicated by the fact that the majority of these immigrants were rather uninvolved in Zionist affairs, certainly until 1917, after the Balfour Declaration. Samuel Halperin describes both immigrants and natives' apathy towards the Zionist cause:

> The desperately poor and newly arrived Jewish masses from Eastern Europe were sympathetic to the movement they had fostered in the spiritual degradation of the Ghetto and the Pale. But America was too bewildering, and the daily struggle for economic survival too arduous, to permit them the luxury of much Zionist activity. . . . [Thus,] When the Federation of American Zionists met in Rochester, New York, in 1914, after almost a generation of labors, less than 15,000 American shekel-payers were represented, and the annual budget for the entire American movement totaled a mere $12,150. . . . Though many talented Zionist poets and writers, orators, and polemicists had left their mark on the Jewish community, particularly amongst the Yiddish-speaking masses, Zionism was still an Old World movement, scorned and vilified by those affluent Jews who considered themselves legitimate Americans.[79]

Yet, if these immigrants were not active Zionists, why were songs of Palestine popular in the Yiddish Theater? The immigrants needed songs of Palestine for different reasons than they did the songs of Zion -- as expressions of solidarity with a real place,

and not a promised utopia. Thus, though they called for action, the songs did not in fact cause the immigrants to pack up and transfer to Palestine. Instead, immigrants participated in a new kind of Jewish longing, this time for the actual, attainable land of Israel. Through the songs, they struggled to redefine their relationship to the distant homeland.

Turning first to our Zion-longing songs, we notice that they can be divided into a few categories of longing, just as were the shtetl-longing songs of chapter four. These categories reflect aspects of a traditional reading of the Diaspora more than they actually portray Zion: a) passive waiting; b) moving towards Zion, but never arriving there; c) incessant retelling of the story of the exile; d) exile as God's punishment; d) God's singular ability to end the exile. Taken together, these categories comprise the traditional stance towards Zion, a stance overturned by the radical movement of Zionism.

a) A Position of Passive Waiting:

The 1926 folksong "*In mitn veg shteyt a boym*," [A tree stands halfway down the road] exemplifies our first category. The song reads: "*fort a yid keyn erets-yisroel, mit farveyente oygn. Got, got groyser got! Lomir davnen minkhe. Az yidn vein forn keyn erets-yisrol, vet zayn sosn-vesimkhe*." [A Jew is traveling to Palestine with eyes full of tears. God, dear God! Let's say the afternoon prayers. When Jews will come to Palestine, there will be great rejoicing].[80]

Although the song does describe a Jew traveling towards Palestine, instead of simply waiting in Galut, this traveler does not arrive there during the course of the song.

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[79] Samuel Halperin, *The Political World of American Zionism* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1961), 11.
[80] S. Ginzburg and P. Marek, "In Mitn Veg Shteyt a Boym," in *Pearls of Yiddish Song* (New York:

Meanwhile, those waiting behind get ready to once again pray mincha. This minyan seems to live in a timeless realm whose only markers are dictated by praying. Its members are always looking towards the future, towards a time of expected rejoicing, when the Jewish people, like the children of Israel at the end of the Torah, will finally inhabit its land. Until then, rejoicing will simply have to wait.

Interestingly, this popular song spurred many variations on its opening lines, including a version sung by halutzim, and a later, Holocaust version by Zalman Schneourh, which included these lines: "*Lebn kloyster shteyt a boym, shteyt er ayngeboygn. Hengt oyf im der rov fun shtetl, mit oysgepikte oygn.*" [Near the church, a bent tree stands. On it the rabbi of the town hangs, with gouged out eyes].[81] By using this well-known song as a backdrop, it is as if Schneourh is showing his audience what horrible, unromantic tragedies an attitude of waiting can engender.

b) Moving towards Zion, But Never Arriving:

In Abraham Goldfaden's hit, "*Hasheveinu nasad, oder Kehr unz zurik*" [Restore us, return us, bring us home] which premiered in 1898 as part of his opera, *Yidisher Faust* [The Yiddish Faust, the Jews wander endlessly. In this way, although the song opens with the command "*Ven di sho shlogt oys: Gey mentsh, aroys! Farloz dayn hoyz dayn kind un dayn vayb!*" [When the hour rings out: you must go, man -- depart! Quit your house, your child, and your wife] that Jew who, like Abraham, is willing to depart cannot actually succeed in arriving anywhere. Goldfaden writes: "*Er vandert un blonzet – veyst nit vuhim tsu geyn. In mitn dem veg blaybt er plutslung shteyn. Er shteyt on entshlsen, er*

Workman's Circle, 1988), 183.
[81] Ibid, 183.

shpirt epes shlekts. Er veyst mit tsu zol er geyn grod; tsu zol er geyn links, tsu zol er geyn rekht. Tsu gor – 'Hashivenu nazad!'" [He wanders along lost, not knowing where to go. Then suddenly, in the middle of the road, he comes to a halt. He stands, hesitating, sensing something wrong. He doesn't know which way to go, straight, left or right? To the end – 'Restore us, return us!']82 Although the man in question takes the proactive step of leaving his home, he cannot ultimately reach Zion through his own efforts. Only God can restore and return this wanderer.

c) Incessant Retelling of the Exile Story:

Another Goldfaden hit, "*A pashtuchel*" [The little shepherd], taken from his historical operetta, *Bar Kochba*, exhibits our third category nicely. This song, which Irene Haskes calls as "almost as well known as Goldfaden's "*Rozhinkes mit mandlen*," tells the story of the Galut, from Temple times through the present.[83] It concludes with the following statement: "*Derfar seyt men ihm haynt yogn, tsu sayn taten veynen un klogn. Er zol ihm shoyn mehr nit shlogn; ihm shenken nokh hayntigs mol.*" [Thus, one finds (the exiled shepherd) now, mournfully crying to God, his father, to restore his children to their inheritance].[84] This crying shepherd could be, like the opera's audience, an immigrant to America who realizes he is still in exile and is crying out to God. Yet, it seems more likely in the context of the song that the shepherd is an Eastern European Jew, still waiting in his shtetl. Perhaps the Yiddish Theater audiences unconsciously

[82] Abraham Goldfaden, *Hashivenu Nazad: Ker Unz Tsurik* (New York: The Hebrew Publishing Co., 1921.) The complete lyrics can be found in *Di Yidishe Bihenah* (Warsaw: 1910.)
[83] Irene Haskes, ed, *The Music of Abraham Goldfaden* (New York: Tara Publications, 1990), 15.
[84] Abraham Goldfaden, "Dos Pastuchel," in *The Music of Abraham Goldfaden*, 15-17.

considered their counterparts in the Old World the true inheritors of the Jewish story of exile.

At the end of every verse, the song's chorus respond with the following refrain: "*Oy, si'z zis, yo gornit mies; dertseyl biz in der sof!*" [Yes it is a good tale; so tell it to the end!"][85] This chorus seems to know the story well already, and are egging the speaker on to tell it just one more time. But why is the chorus eager to hear this well-worn story again?

Perhaps, the ritualized telling of this story is itself a healing act, reminding the listeners why they are still living in exile. It is as if the chorus has forgotten how to make sense of their suffering, and must be reminded of the ritual method with which to justify it. The opera's immigrant audiences may have needed to hear the story again for similar reasons. They may have even squeezed their own story of immigration into this ongoing Jewish drama. Perhaps, watching *Bar Kochba*, they could almost hear an additional verse to this song, one which added their story to the larger Jewish litany. This imagined verse would proclaim that Eastern European Jews had been forced by pogroms and poverty to uproot themselves and begin again in America, and their chapter in Jewish history was also part of God's plan.

d) Exile as God's Punishment:

For these immigrant audiences, as for many Jews before them, suffering was understood as part of God's continued punishment. In Yossele Rosenblatt's song, "*Lomir zikh ibertn, ovinu shebashamayim*" [Let's make up, father in heaven], which the super-star cantor sang for chief Rabbi of Palestine, Rav Kook, the speaker pleads, "*Vayl nisimn*

venifloes hostu dokh tsugezogt, tsu vayzn undz azoy vi a mol. Genug shoyn, genug shoyn, geplogt un geyogt, un bafray dayn folk yisroel." [Because you have promised to reveal miracles and wonders just as in the past. Enough persecution and chasing. Liberate your people Israel]. Notice the use of the word "enough" – it is as if the necessary quota of suffering has been filled, and now the time has finally come for redemption. Meanwhile, Cantor Rosenblatt himself had chosen to immigrate to America; the land for which he yearns is certainly not earthly Palestine. He concludes with these words: "*Lomir zikh iverbetn, zayn dayne verter mekayim. Leshone habo birusholayim!*" [Let's make up, fulfill your promise. Next year in Jerusalem!][86]

The lyrics of "*Yiddishervanderer*" [Jewish wanderer], another Goldfaden hit taken from the 1911 historical opera, *Dr. Almasada*, provides us with a second example of Jewish suffering which is justified. Irene Haskes describes the song's widespread influence:

> [It was a] great favorite among immigrants to America. Its melody was adaptive of traditional liturgical chant, and its lyrics underscore an age-old message. Although the Jews has given the world the Holy Bible, Ten Commandments, and Book of Psalms, the Jews themselves had been driven off, oppressed and rejected. . . . So significant was this text by Goldfaden that [a] Jewish educator. . .prepared an extended English translation of it for the immigrants whom he tutored at the Educational Alliance on the Lower East Side of New York City.[87]

The song itself begins with these words: "*Feromert, ferklogt, fun zayn heym feryogy, far zayne groyseh tsind. Azoy umetum blondzhet arum, fun Gott dos fersholteneh kind.*" [Wailing and weeping, chased out of his home on account of his sins,

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[85] Ibid, 15-17.
[86] Cantor Yossele Rosenblatt, "Lomir Zikh Iberbetn, Ovinu Shebashomayim," in *Pearls of Yiddish Song*, 214.
[87] Irene Haskes ed., *The Music of Abraham Goldfaden* (New York: Tara Publications, 1990), 38.

God's tormented child wanders about].[88] Like many other Yiddish hits of the day, this song internalizes the traditionally non-Jewish image of the wandering Jew. Again it seems clear that this wanderer does not represent the immigrants but their counterparts in Eastern Europe instead.

Mark Slobin reinforces this idea, explaining that "the [early twentieth century] sheet music songs tend to stress Zionism as the alternative for the European, but not for the American Jew. The stock figure in these songs texts is the persecuted 'Wandering Jew' who needs to find his home in his ancient land, rather than in the New World."[89] Thus, for the immigrant audiences, a traditional vision of exile became delegated to the Old World alone, and not to the Lower East Side. Exile still existed for the Jews, as did punishment, and though these immigrants would not have claimed themselves redeemed, they did see themselves as standing outside the traditional narrative of Diaspora and return.

e) God Alone Can End the Exile:

There are many Yiddish theater and folk songs which reinforce this passive stance, including the above mentioned "Yiddisher vanderer", "A pastuchel", and "Lomir zikh iberbetn, Ovinu shebashomayim". Rabbi Zadok Ha-Cohen Rabinowitz advocates this position in his 1900 anti-Zionist letter, writing that "if we [really] were believers and truly trusted in the salvation of the Lord. . . we would even today be dwelling in our holy land."[90]

[88] Abraham Goldfaden, "Yiddisher Vanderer," in *The Music of Abraham Goldfaden*, 38.
[89] Mark Slobin, Tenement Songs, 140.
[90] Rabbi Zadok Ha-Cohen Rabinowitz, "The Zionists are not our Saviors," in *The Jew in the Modern World*, ed. Paul R. Mendes-Flor and Jehuda Reinharz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 432.

It was exactly this attitude of waiting for redemption, for God to "hashivenu nasad" [redeem us, return us] which the Zionists fought.[91] Instead of passivity, secular Zionism argued for self-liberation, as witnessed in the words of Theodor Herzl:

> The [Zionist] idea must make its way into the most miserable holes where our people dwell. They will awaken from their gloomy brooding, for into their lives will come a new significance. Let each of them think but of himself, and what vast proportions the movement must assume! . . . A wondrous generation of Jews will spring into existence. The Maccabeans will rise again.[92]

Instead of waiting for God, Herzl hopes that these new Jews will "think but of themselves," thereby freeing themselves from their self-inflicted "miserable holes."

Before we shift from the traditional Zion-longing songs of the immigrants to those which bespeak Zionism, it would be useful to examine a song that belongs in the middle of the two. J. Engel's "*Tatenyu*," published in 1923, is a character song in which a speaker is telling of his fantasy of redemption. His words paint a traditional picture: "*Er soll gich uns ois leisn, fun Golus un alz beisn. Der ner tomid soll uns laichtn, unser Mame zollmen acht'n, binureinu biskoneinu l'artzeinu.*" [You should redeem us quickly, from the Golut and all that is bad. The eternal flame should shine for us, our motherland should be respected, and all of us, young and old – to our land]. The speaker even imagines a voice from heaven answering his plea, comforting him and telling him to be patient: "*Oi du, Sunju, Sunju, Sunju, nem sich nit, main sun, zum hatzn – der Beis Mikdosch wet geboilt wern; d'Mame wel ich ois leisn gern.*" [Oh, my son, my son, my son, don't take it to heart – the Temple will be rebuilt; the motherland I will gladly redeem]. All these lyrics are standard variations on the traditional Zion idea.

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[91] Abraham Goldfaden, "Hashivenu Nasad," in *The Music of Abraham Goldfaden*, 33.
[92] Theodor Herzl, "A Solution to the Jewish Question," in *The Jew in the Modern World*, 426.

Yet in the accompaniment and musical markings which the piece dictates, we find another story entirely. Engel's piece is marked by rapid tempo changes, especially during the repetition of the word "*arzeinu*" [our land]. Together with an often angular and syncopated accompaniment, these tempo changes create a sense of frenzy in the piece which unsettles us and causes us to doubt the speaker's emotional solidity. By making the lyrics somewhat at odds with the music, Engel draws attention to the escapist nature of traditional Zion-longings, through a speaker who moves from depression to a sort of manic elation at the conclusion of the piece. In this way, the composer forces us to question the song's whole picture, both its suffering and its escapism, leaving us wondering if there may be another way.

Turning to the immigrants' Palestine songs, it is not surprising to find, in this study's selection of songs, each aspect of Zion-longing refuted by an opposite attitude in Zionism. Each traditional aspect of Zion-longing finds its match in these modern, nationalist attitudes. Thus, the Zionist songs call for: a) an end to waiting and wandering; b) telling a new story; c) forgetting God's punishment; d) self-redemption.

a) An End to Waiting and Wandering:

M. Shneyer's 1917 musical setting of "*Yam Lid,*" a poem by Yehuda Ha-Levi, is a journey song similar to that of "*In mitn veg shteyt a boym*" [A tree stands halfway down the road], only in this case, the speaker is on board a ship to Israel. Though he does fear the sea – "*breng mikh nor ahin besholem,*" he prays [bring me there unharmed] – he is nonetheless ultimately confident of his arrival. This is evident in his asking the west wind to fly to his old home and tell his family of his happiness in Israel: "*Grisn zoistu ale*

libste, un dertseyl zey fun mayn glik" [Give greetings to all my loved ones and tell them of my happiness].[93] Here is no eternally passive Jew, waiting for liberation; here is a pilgrim who believes he can create his own happiness. So too, this seafarer chooses a real destination for his voyage, a place where he can actually arrive – the physical land of Israel. Because his aim is attainable, he is not forced to wander endlessly.

b) Telling a New Story:

The tendency to retell the story of the Diaspora, examined in Goldfaden's "*A pastuchel*" [The shepherd], finds its opposite in David Meyerowitz's and Louis Gilrod's "*Yisrolik, kum aheym!*" [Yisrolik, come home!] This theater song, taken from the play *Tate-mames-tsores* [The Troubles of Father and Mother] was premiered by the famous actor and director, Boris Thomashevsky in 1908. Instead of singing the age-old song of exile, "*Yisrolik's*" speaker admonishes the old-world Jew to wake up: "*Nu, shlof mer nit, yidele. Makh dayne oygn oyf, un fun dem goles-lidele sol shoyn zayn a sof!*" [Don't sleep anymore, little Jew. Open your eyes and let's put an end to this song of exile]. Similarly, the song closes with an admonition to put an end to the old, traditional litany of exile and punishment: "*Yetst zingt mit mir lidl shoyn, on kumt aheym mit mir!*" [Now sing the song with me and come home with me!][94] Because the stories or songs which we hold on to are those which shape our character, "*Yisrolik*" urges its listeners to stop singing the same old song of Galut, and begin making the music of Palestine instead.

[93] M. Shneyer, "Yam Lid", poem by Yehuda Ha-Levi, Yiddish translation by Chaim Nachman Bialik, in *Pearls of Yiddish Song*, 212.

c) Forgetting God's Punishment:

In his *Tenement Songs,* Mark Slobin offers an example of an immigrant song in which the speaker admonishes the traditional Jew for keeping himself enslaved. In Thomashefsky's "*Shuldik*" [Guilty], the speaker blames, not God, but the Jews for their homelessness: "*Kemstu keyn dorem trefstu a shturem. Kemstu keyn tsfon gefinstu keyn heym. Dayne kinder tsetribn, vos is dir geblibn? Zog ver iz shuldik in dem? Ver, ver, ver, ver, ver, ver, ver? Shuldik bistu yidele aleyn.*." [If you come to the south, you find a storm. If you come to the north, you find no home. Your children dispersed – what's left to you? Tell me, who's guilty in this? Who, who, who, who, who, who, who? You yourself are guilty, Jew]. Instead of receiving praise for patiently accepting God's punishment of exile, this traditional Jew is blamed for his homelessness. The song does offer a solution to the wanderer's suffering, though – buying land in Palestine: "*Du koft dir beser op dayn eygn land.*" [It's better to buy up your own land].[95]

d) Self-Redemption:

The early Zionist ballad, "*Dort vu di tseder*" [There where the tall cedars] is an interesting and complicated example of the attitude of self-redemption. According to some scholars, this early expression of Zionism can be traced to the First Zionist Congress, in Basle. Concurrent with the national anthem of Israel, "*Hatikva*", "*Dort*" seems to have been early competition for that role, with advocates of the Uganda Plan choosing to sing "*Dort*" over "*Hatikva*" at the Sixth Zionist Congress. In fact, "*Dort*" was often published together with "*Hatikva*" in the same sheet music, as in the 1921

[94] David Meyerowitz, "Yisrolik, Kum Aheym!" lyrics by Louis Gilrod, in *Pearls of Yiddish Song*, 227.
[95] "Shuldik," in Mark Slobin's *Tenement Songs* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 140.

Hebrew Publishing Co. Yiddish/Hebrew version of the two, which included pictures of Herzl on the front cover.[96] "Dort" was equally popular in both Europe and America.

Because both "*Dort*" and "*Hatikvah*" were sung among immigrants and American natives alike, it is interesting to compare them, trying to understand why "*Hatikva*" was ultimately chosen as Israel's national anthem. The differences are obvious: "*Hatikva*" is in Hebrew, while "*Dort*" is in the language of the Diaspora. Moreover, although it is clearly a Zionist song, "Dort" does express a traditional stance of waiting for redemption: "*Un ven es iz mir shikzal dokh bashert, tsn shtarbn fray oyf fremde lenders erd, dan leygt mikh shnel in kerers kalte vent.*" [There (in my grave) I rest quietly, calm with patience, until my people's guilt will be forgiven, until we've met our quota of suffering].

"*Dort*" thus mentions Jewish suffering in exile explicitly, while it is only alluded to in "*Hatikva*". For example, "*Dort*" exclaims, "*zayt der sone, hot mikh fun dort entrisen, in fremde lender zoy oft mayn blut tsu gisn*" [The enemy has driven me out from there, into foreign lands, where so often my blood would pour].[97] "*Hatikva*," on the other hand, is content to describe the Diaspora Jew looking toward Zion: "*iyeen l'Zion homeeyah*" [the eye looks longingly towards Zion]. In this way, "*Hatikva*" mentions only hope, not punishment or endless waiting. It is not surprising, then, that "*Hatikva*" was ultimately chosen to represent Israel over that song which, though Zionist, was still enmeshed in a traditional discourse of Zion-longing. The national anthem of Israel needed to be free from guilt, sin, and waiting. It needed to embody a radically new relationship to the land.

Looking back at the sum of Zion and Palestine-longing songs examined in this chapter, it is important to recognize that these two expressions of place-longing both

[96] L.N. Imber, *Dort Wo Die Zeder* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co., 1921.)
[97] Yosef and Chana Melotek, *Perls fon der Yiddishe Posia* (Israel: Y.L. Peretz Publishers, 1974), 511.

arose as responses to the trauma of immigration. The songs of Zion-longing offered the Eastern European immigrants a vehicle to process the past and the present. These songs arose from the same inner need that gave rise to the songs of shtetl-longing.

The songs of Palestine, on the other hand, arose in response to the immigrants' own choice of America over that distant land. Moving to America at a time when Palestine was an increasingly viable (though no doubt difficult) alternative forced the immigrants to reformulate their positions towards the distant land. This process of redefining their relationship towards the real, and not mythic homeland was important in their assimilation to America because it helped them position themselves psychologically within a new kind of exile, one which was self-perpetuated. By identifying with the Zionist spirit through the Palestine-longing songs, Yiddish theater audiences thus felt part of the larger Jewish enterprise of reclaiming the land -- without having to move there. They imagined themselves close to Palestine's courageous and self-redemptive spirit without ever leaving the golden land.

Conclusion: Personal Reflections of Longing

This study examines a brief period in Jewish history in which the trauma of immigration gave birth to expressions of place-longing. The Eastern European immigrants reacted to dislocation by hungering after images of the shtetl and by envisioning their suffering within the traditional model of Zion and exile. In addition, these immigrants responded to the rise of Zionism by participating in a uniquely new form of Jewish longing – the longing for Palestine. Together, these expressions of longing did not separate the immigrants from the New World, but actually helped to adjust to their surroundings. As Arnold Eisen writes about Zion-longings: "memory of and aspiration for the land paradoxically made possible and meaningful a life lived somewhere else."[98]

It did not take long for the immigrants and their children to adjust fully to America and leave behind last vestiges of the Old World. As the needs of the immigrants changed, so too did the importance and style of their songs of longing. Yet, the need to long for absent places has never quite disappeared.

As the granddaughter of immigrants from Hungary, I know the legacy of bitterness and yearning with which my great uncles and aunts used to whisper about the Old Country. From my parents, I also received an inheritance of Palestine-longing in which Israel became a beacon of drama, passion, and hope to buffer against the mundane nature of life at home. I myself made aliyah in my twenties and spent five years living in Jerusalem before deciding to return to America. I now find myself living far away from

[98] Arnold Eisen, *Galut* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 310.

the one place I truly love, and struggling still to make sense of this choice religiously. I have no easy framework: I do not believe that the Zion spoken of in the Torah and in Rabbinic thought is purely Messianic, with no relation to the modern day nation-state. I agree with Rav Kook that the state of Israel is the beginning of the flowering of our redemption. And yet I choose to live in the Diaspora.

I have come to understand that there are many levels of arriving home. Spiritually and culturally, Israel is my home; in other basic ways, I rest more easily in America. Like much of the Jewish people before me, then, I live in state of inner tension, yearning for Zion while living quite well in exile. There is immense creative energy in this act of longing for home. It connotes dissatisfaction, but it also spurs on change. It puts one at odds from one's surroundings, but it bolsters imagination as well. I have come to embrace this familial and national legacy of longing as a source of vision and inspiration. It is a gift I have been given, the ability to live well under tension. For others who have never left home, for whom home remains a simple location, it is perhaps hard to see the ability to live with tension as a gift. But for those of us who recognize that we are trapeze artists – poised between America and Israel, between exile and Zion, between different halves of home -- the gift of walking lightly is itself a blessing.

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