

# 1 Origins

Zellig Harris, born in Ukraine October 23, 1909, died in his sleep May 22, 1992, after a full day of work. Although he spent most of his life in the United States, his Jewish-Ukrainian origins played a key role in determining the type of work he undertook in his lifetime and the attitudes he brought to each of the many domains to which he eventually contributed. Harris was also very much an American, in that he both defined and followed values and approaches typical of certain American Jewish milieus, themselves best understood by a brief look back to the worlds from which they came.

Harris's family came to the United States when he was four years old, and he was naturalized in 1921, at the age of 12. He was one of the multitude of Jews who came to America from 1880 to 1929 and, like his younger brother Tzvi [or Tzvee], he became a leading American light, a central figure in a distinctly American school of academic research. It is fascinating to follow the narrative of how a boy like Zellig Harris, who grew up in a Jewish family from a small Ukrainian town, could become such a universalist figure with cosmopolitan, internationalist, and in many ways distinctly American values. This is owing to his family background, to the scholarly influences of the Jewish tradition within which he was raised, and also to an allegiance to the "scientific method" that was so celebrated in certain intellectual circles at that time. Thomas A. Ryckman, a historian of science, recalls that Zellig Harris did not consider himself a linguist but instead preferred to think of himself as a "methodologist,"<sup>1</sup> as though there were universal human values at stake, values that could only be understood with impartiality, rigor, and rationality. Zellig Harris was an original thinker who came to define, rather than follow, a version of what it meant to be a Jewish intellectual in America.

### Sitting in a Corner in the Middle of the Room

Why should we be concerned about Zellig Harris? Because he exerted considerable influence upon crucial intellectual currents of the twentieth century and along the way came into contact with some of the leading intellectual figures of the Western world, most notably Louis D. Brandeis, Noam Chomsky, and Albert Einstein, while fostering a kind of inner circle of acolytes, friends, colleagues, and fellow travelers who have each contributed significantly to an array of fields and projects. And yet, strangely, he is little known, even among knowledgeable intellectuals in the fields to which he contributed, which inclines me to describe him in terms of the Israeli literary critic Dov Sadan's image of a person "sitting in a corner in the middle of the room." There is one well-known Zelig (a variation on the name Zellig), the scribe with chameleon-like tendencies who is featured in Woody Allen's film by the same name, but links between them, although provocative, are faint. Nonetheless, it is the case that most people did know him "in segments," as Eva (Chava) Rapkin (née Samuel), suggested to me in interviews in 2009 and 2010, the consequence of his not being a "fully rounded person," someone who "did not relate to people well at all." As such, she suggests, his identity was "fragmented," and therefore, "different people saw very different aspects of him." Rapkin, the daughter of Maurice Samuel (1895–1972), the renowned writer, translator, and lecturer, was married to Chester Rapkin (1919–2001), the influential theorist of urban planning, who she met through her affiliation with Avukah. Meyer Rabban, renowned psychologist and professor of child development, who also met his wife of sixty years, Elana Rabban, through involvement in Zionist organizations, suggested in an interview in 2009 that Harris did not necessarily manifest fragmented personalities, but he was an iconoclast, a polyglot, an expert in many fields, which may have fostered the impression that he dwelled in, and mastered, distinct realms. For Elana Rabban, who had been a member of Hashomer Hatzair, this made him quite difficult to be around: "There are people like him who are very brilliant, very interesting fellows, but they can be arrogant know it alls." Harris, in her opinion, was like this, both in terms of range and diversity of knowledge, but also in his presentation of this knowledge to others.

Some of these characteristics contributed to an aura, a sense of his being considered apart from others, even by his colleagues and friends. Even the name, Zellig, is unusual, a variant form of the Yiddish *selig*, from the German and Old English, meaning blessed, or holy. Each letter in the Jewish alphabet has special meanings, with Zellig—comprised of zayin,

ayin, lamed, yud, and gimel—signifying (zayin) sword, to ornament, to sustain, (ayin), eye or fountain, (lamed), to learn and to teach, (yud), emanation, the highest level in the Four World paradigm of Kabala, and (gimel) associated with loving kindness. W. C. Watt, who had been a student of Harris, adds to our understanding of the symbolism of Zellig Harris's name when he recalls in *Biographical Memoirs* 87 that Harris's middle name, Sabbatai, "set beside his brother's first name, 'Tzvee,' appears to identify the family as followers of Sabbatai Tzvee or Tsvee (1626–676), the 'False Messiah of the Caucasus'" (201). It is interesting to note that Tzvi himself was responsible for changing the spelling of his given name to the less common Tzvee to prevent mispronunciation. And finally the family name Harris, a somewhat common name even among Russian Jews, appears to be the Americanized form of a like-sounding Jewish name.

Ted Live, Harris's nephew, notes that "I have never been able to find out what Harris was, since Russian doesn't even have an 'h'. I never thought of asking anyone in my younger years what the real name was back in Russia. There is a lot of denial about things like that in the family. Even my own name, Live, should have been Suckaberg, because that was my father's name in Europe. When they came to the States they changed it to Live, and nobody else in the family knew this. I only found out when I was going through some of my father's papers after he died. I imagine that Live was more of an American name, without knowing anything else about it."

Part of Harris's legacy, including the Harris family aura, can therefore be traced to this interesting symbolic combination of meanings, but the concrete basis for it is to be found in his broad ambitions and accomplishments. He worked to revolutionize language studies, and, partly through his relationship with the renowned mathematician Bruria Kaufman, who was one of Einstein's principle assistants when he worked at Princeton, he came to be rather close to the physicist (and occasional social thinker) Albert Einstein. On the political front, he worked to update earlier versions of scientific socialism through careful study of industrial society, a passion he shared with the likes of Paul Mattick and the astronomer and social thinker Anton Pannekoek,<sup>2</sup> and which inspired students and colleagues, most notably Seymour Melman. And his work on Zionism, reflected in particular by his contributions to the Jewish Zionist student organization Avukah, retain a currency even today by the ambition and prescience of his approach.

Benjamin Harshov in *Language in Time of Revolution* describes the relationship between Jewish origins and the work undertaken by individuals,

which is revealing for work on Zellig Harris. “For every individual, whether he was aware and proud of his Jewish origin . . . or whether he tried to deny it and ignore it . . . set out to be a secular, ethnically neutral, physicist in the general physical sciences, linguist, filmmaker, revolutionary, German or American writer, and so on, as an individual. Such Jews set out to adapt to the rules of the general cultural domain they embraced, whether it was science, modern fiction, or painting” (43). Harris, whose links to Judaism were through Jewish cultural affairs, Zionism, and his early studies of Semitic languages, had a complex relation to his “people,” because most links were defined in terms of history rather than religion, but it is certainly the case that he followed Harshov’s formula and gained recognition independent of his family’s religion or origin. Nevertheless, the background, including the origins of his family, help us situate the work that Harris eventually undertook.

### **Zellig Harris’s Balta Homeland**

Zellig Harris was born in Balta, Odesskaya (Odessa oblast), Ukraine, 200 kilometers northwest of Odessa and 107 kilometers from Uman on the Kodyma River.<sup>3</sup> In the sixteenth century, Balta was part of the Kingdom of Poland, and from the beginning of the eighteenth century it became part of the Ottoman Empire. In 1791 it was annexed by Russia, possibly explaining why most Jews from this region describe themselves as Russian, even today. From 1924 until 1929, it was the capital of the Moldavian autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within Ukraine, and it remained throughout the twentieth century the chief city of the district of the Odessa province. The earliest known Jewish community in Balta dates back to the beginning of the eighteenth century, and its Jewish inhabitants suffered persecution there beginning with attacks by Haidamacks (Russian brigand banks) from 1768 to 1782. A pattern of recurring violence prevailed throughout Ukraine; in Odessa, for example, pogroms occurred in 1821, 1859, 1871, 1881, 1882, and 1900, and there were critical upheavals in 1891–1892, 1903–1905, 1917, 1919, and 1933, leading up to the Second World War. Balta was significantly less important than Odessa, but it nevertheless saw its share of anti-Jewish violence, particularly with its growth as a commercial center subsequent to the construction of the Odessa-Kiev railroad in 1866.

Life for the roughly 9,000 Jews who lived in Balta at the time of the construction of the railroad was bearable, relatively speaking, with employment possibilities in wholesale and retail grain dealing, the processing of

agricultural products, the production of tobacco and soap, tanning, flour milling, and liquor distilling. Things changed dramatically in 1881, however, when a pogrom led to the killing of forty Jews, the rape of several hundred women, the wounding of several hundred people, and the pillaging of over 1,200 Jewish houses and shops.

The year 1881 marks a turning point in the history of the Jews as decisive as that of 70 A.D., when Titus's legion burned the Temple at Jerusalem, or 1492, when Ferdinand and Isabella decreed the expulsion from Spain. On March 1, 1881, Alexander II, Czar of Russia, was assassinated by revolutionary terrorists; the modest liberalism of his regime came to an end; and within several weeks a wave of pogroms, inspired mostly by agents of the new government, spread across Russia. For the Jews packed into the Pale and overflowing its boundaries, the accession of Alexander III signified not only immediate disaster but also the need for a gradual reordering of both their inner life and their relationship to a country in which Jews had been living for hundreds of years. The question had now to be asked: should the east European Jews continue to regard themselves as permanent residents of the Russian empire or should they seriously consider the possibility of a new exodus?<sup>4</sup>

That same year Jews organized self-defense groups that were eventually suppressed by the police but nevertheless influenced later Zionist movements; indeed, the mindset of self-dependence and resisting state authority may explain why so many left-wing Jews in Zellig Harris's milieu remained nonaligned, despite pressures from the various "isms" and parties that sought to recruit them. An interesting example of this is provided by the American political sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset (1922–2006) in his academic memoir:<sup>5</sup>

My parents were both born in Czarist Russia in Minsk and Pinsk. My mother, Lena, came to America as a young child in 1907. Her parents, who died before I was born, in the 1918 flu epidemic, were religious Jews. She was a seamstress before she married, and she kept a kosher home afterwards. My father, Max, arrived as a young adult in 1911. He had apprenticed as a printer (compositor) in Russia. Shortly before he died in 1945, he told me of his experiences in Russia. The most noteworthy related to his membership in the printers' union in Kiev. Since the Russian printers, while supporting the Social Democratic party, refused to ally themselves with the Bolsheviks or Mensheviks, major leaders of both factions spent time at union meetings to win support. (112)

The harsh conditions of the region coupled with the increase in violence in this period produced an uptick of Jewish emigration; Chimen Abramsky, a Jewish Studies professor, commenting on Jonathan Frankel's *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism and the Russian Jews 1862–1917*,<sup>6</sup> described this period as "a watershed in Jewish life. Millions of Jews left for America,

Britain, Canada, Argentina, Palestine and South Africa, transporting with them their culture, institutions, and customs; these they adapted to the environment of their 'new' countries, as well as creating new institutions and absorbing ideas from the lands they had entered."<sup>7</sup>

It is nevertheless surprising that the 1881 pogrom in particular was so momentous, given the history of violence against the Jews in this region. Abramsky's explanation is that "the Jews were stunned not only by the pogroms and by the regime's passivity towards them, but also by the hostility of the new Czar, Alexander III, and the open declaration of his leading minister Ignatev, that 'the Western frontiers are wide open' for those Jews who wish to emigrate" (61). From that point on, it would appear that there was a high-level plan to target Jews.

In a word, with few exceptions, complete freedom to beat the Jews, to injure and mutilate them, to violate their wives and daughters, and to steal their property was granted [by the authorities]. Meanwhile, apart from a few rare exceptions, the rioters did not allow themselves any improper pranks against the authorities, or even against the lowest ranking officials. On the contrary, they often listened to the admonitions of private persons, . . . Christians not from the official ranks. Only thanks to this, several Jewish homes and shops with goods were left untouched. Many Christians themselves saved Jewish moveable property from destruction.<sup>8</sup>

The question of uprooting to move elsewhere became urgent, and the Harris family, living in one of the worst areas of violence, had to weigh the limited options.

Even in the wake of the worsening pogroms, the Harris family didn't leave immediately, and family members may have had a part in the widespread debate that raged after 1882 to determine whether some communal policy should be enacted in Russia. In his magnificent book titled *World of Our Fathers*, the historian, social critic, and literary figure Irving Howe offers some insight about the period that can help us understand the issues discussed at the time: "As early as 1882 a conference of 'Jewish notables' met in Saint Petersburg to discuss this question. The majority of the delegates feared that mass emigration, officially encouraged by the Jewish community, would appear unpatriotic and might undermine the struggle for emancipation" (Howe, 24–25). Citing *Russky Evrei*, a Russian-language weekly edited by Jews, Howe also notes that "pogroms are a result of rightlessness and when that has been obviated the attendant evils will vanish with it. By supporting mass emigration the Jews would be playing into the hands of their enemies, who hope they will flee from the field of battle" (25). As the inhabitants of the region waited to see the long-term effects of the violence upon their community, the number of Jews in the

revolutionary movement grew steadily; between 1884 and 1889, Jews comprised around 13 percent of the movement, a figure that grew to 30 percent from 1900 to 1910, even though as a community Jews only represented 4 percent of the overall population (62–63). This increase came in response to fundamental changes that were occurring in Jewish communities throughout the world: “In this brief period there came into existence the largest free Jewish community in the world—in America—a development which led eventually to the creation of the State of Israel. It was the Holocaust which made Israel into a reality, but without the work of Russian-Polish Jews and their superhuman efforts in 1881–1923 there would have been no Israel. The period also witnessed the most remarkable and lively debate within East European Jewry in journalism, publicistic writings and Yiddish literature. This debate in turn gave rise to all the Jewish modern political movements which coalesced around the ideas of socialism and nationalism” (Howe, 63).

Benjamin Harshov goes even further in *Language in Time of Revolution*, describing a virtual revolution at every level of Jewish life.

We can date the beginning of this revolution in the year of the pogroms, 1881–1882, in Russia. What happened from then on completely changed the nature of the lives of Jews and their descendants in the world. It was the most radical change in the historical situation of the Jews in the last two thousand years, entirely transforming their geography, modes of living, languages, professions, consciousness, culture, politics, and place in general history. It was borne by a multifaceted, centrifugal movement with many directions and varying outcomes. Prominent failures, brutal disappointments, and dreadful sacrifices were part and parcel of these transformations. Individuals who experienced the change in their own bodies and souls paid an extraordinary emotional price for leaving their hometown, their parents’ home, their childhood language, their beliefs, their ways of talking, and for the conquest of new modes of behavior, a new language, new traits, conventions, and beliefs. (8)<sup>9</sup>

To contemplate alternative approaches to life, within or beyond the Pale, involved confronting enormous obstacles, according to Howe. “Except for the religious and cultural movements, which by their nature were self-sufficient, all the new energies within the Jewish world of eastern Europe were doomed to failure. Neither communal growth nor political gradualism, neither socialist aggressiveness nor Zionist preparations could break, or break out of, the limits of the Pale. If nothing else, the cultural-political revival of these years made the Jews painfully aware of how intolerable their life remained” (23).

Jews occupied a precarious space in Russian society, and in the eyes of many younger Jewish radicals of the period even the Bund (the union

of Jewish workers in Poland and Lithuania that engaged in revolutionary activity on a large scale) was locked in a kind of political impotence. Alternatives, such as the revolutionary movement, which at that time was gaining strength, were fraught with difficulties as well, on account of the populist aspirations of revolutionary groups such as *Narodnaya Volya*, which “defended pogroms against Jews on the grounds that such outbursts expressed the legitimate resentments of the peasants against their exploiters” (Howe, 23–24). In *Troubled Waters: The Origins of the 1881 Anti-Jewish Pogroms in Russia*, Michael Aronson reiterates this point in the context of a discussion on the rise of a broader revolutionary movement supported by leaders affiliated with groups like the Black Repartition, such as Georgii Plekhanov and Peter Lavrov. A Jewish leader of this organization, Lev Deich, made some revealing comments in response to Lavrov’s April 1882 comment that revolutionaries had to walk a very fine line between condemning acts against the Jews and encouraging those who committed these acts to rise up against the ruling regime.

Realistically, in practice, the Jewish question is now almost insoluble for the revolutionaries. What, for example, are they to do now [1882] in Balta where they beat up the Jews? To intercede for them means, as Reclus says, “to call up the hatred of the peasants against the revolutionaries who not only killed the tsar but also defend the Jews.” This is simply a dead-end avenue for Jews and revolutionaries alike. . . . Of course, it is our utmost obligation to seek equal rights for the Jews, . . . but that, so to speak, is activity in the higher spheres; and to conduct pacificatory agitation among the people is presently very, very difficult for the party. Do not think that this [situation] has not pained and confused me; . . . but all the same, I remain always a member of the Russian revolutionary party and do not intend to part from it even for a single day, for this contradiction, like some others, was of course not created by the party.<sup>10</sup>

These contradictions relate to a series of measures in effect during this period, ranging from the resettlement of Jews, to restrictions on Jewish trade and commerce, and culminating with the May 1881 laws that “prohibited new Jewish settlement outside towns and *shtetlekh* [little towns of the Pale] prohibited Jews from buying property in the countryside, and banned Jews from trading on Sunday mornings or Christian holidays,” augmenting the arbitrary authority of local officials, while doing nothing to stem the pogroms, which culminated during that fateful Easter week of 1882. “This outbreak [in Balta] was notorious for the brutality and destructiveness of the *pogromshchiki* [pogroms], and the callousness of the provincial administration, who took the occasion to lecture the Jews on their own responsibility for the disorders. As one writer lamented soon after-

wards, it was apparent that pogroms had now become an annual tradition in Russia.”<sup>11</sup>

### Jewish Self-Determination

These events in Ukraine are integral to Harris’s background, in part because they may have promoted self-determination through the establishment of Jewish self-defense groups, which were “supported in certain towns (e.g., Odessa) even by cautious Zionist and national thinkers such as Ahad Ha-Am and Simon Dubnov” (Abramsky, 63). Taking matters into their own hands seemed essential to Jews because, Aronson points out, “the anti-Jewish, or pro-pogrom, or noncommittal positions taken by the various *narodnik* [Russian socialist movement] leaders and groupings made many Jews leave the revolutionary movement in disgust and rejoin their own people in its struggle for survival and a dignified existence”; nevertheless, “other Jewish socialists, perhaps the majority, remained loyal to their revolutionary comrades.”<sup>12</sup> Whatever the reaction on the part of individuals in the community, there was certainly intense discussion about these pogroms, particularly the 1882 Balta violence. There was even stunned outrage in the Russian press about what had happened, including an article in *Golos* [Voice, a Russian newspaper] that cried out: “Everything pales before Balta!” The historian Stephen M. Berk notes that for weeks afterward, detailed analyses of the pogrom were widely reported. “Articles appeared which depicted the terrible suffering of the Balta Jews and their enormous losses of property. Coverage was given to the trials of people accused of raping Jewish women and girls. The paper dwelled upon the shortcomings of the military, police, and local civilian authorities who failed to prevent the pogroms and did not quickly suppress them.” Most significantly, Berk recalls the conclusions that *Golos* drew from the Balta pogrom. “The Jews had to be made equal with other citizens so as to lessen their vulnerability and the government had to take the firmest possible measures to stop the pogroms. *Golos* speculated that, if the pogroms were not halted, the violence would spread from attacks on the Jews to other groups in society leading to a breakdown in order culminating in anarchy.”<sup>13</sup>

I think that one must take this issue of Jews’ self-sufficiency very seriously, particularly if we are to understand the mindset of those who came to America and resisted affiliating with Communist Party politics. Zellig Harris, and many of those who came to be associated with him, rejected not only Stalin and the Communist Party but also the Trotskyites, the Schachtmanites, and other anti-status quo groups that were active in the

United States. He was influenced by different individuals who were associated with Marxist thought and by *anti-Bolshevik* Marxists, such as Karl Korsch, Paul Mattick, and Anton Pannekoek. Although not of the generation that endured the pogroms firsthand, he seems to have considered that even in America one must remain wary of those who claimed to speak on behalf of larger groups. This is in part a consequence of an awareness within the Jewish community in the United States of events within Ukraine, including the pogroms in Balta. "The news, including the shocking and grisly, did eventually manage to reach other countries and crossed the ocean to America. When it finally came, the news unleashed a response on the part of Jews and Gentiles which in magnitude and vociferousness was unprecedented. . . . It heightened Jewish consciousness in the West and served to coalesce Ashkenazi Jews in the face of assimilation and dispersion."<sup>14</sup>

The image that is slowly coming into focus here is determined by the classic "push-pull" factors, according to which a population is pushed out of a country of origin by violence and horrid living conditions and pulled into a new world: America.

America was in everybody's mouth. Businessmen talked of it over their accounts; the market women made up their quarrels that they might discuss it from stall to stall; people who had relatives in the famous land went around reading letters for the enlightenment of less fortunate folk . . . children played at emigrating; old folks shook their sage heads over the evening fire, and prophesied no good for those who braved the terrors of the sea and the foreign goal beyond it; all talked of it, but scarcely anyone knew one true fact about this magic land.<sup>15</sup>

The force of this pull proved to so strong that "in the thirty-three years between the assassination of tsar Alexander II and the outbreak of the first world war, approximately one third of the east European Jews left their homelands—a migration comparable in modern Jewish history only to the flight from the Spanish Inquisition" (Howe, 26). Of the 2.4 million Jews who left the region between 1881 and 1914, 85 percent went to the United States (especially New York), and 12 percent went to Canada, Argentina, Europe, and South Africa. Even those who made up the proportion of the remaining 3 percent who did go to Palestine in this period often used it as a "temporary way station on the road westward"<sup>16</sup> (a phenomenon that would be repeated subsequent to the fall of the Soviet empire when thousands of Jews went to Israel under the Law of Return only to leave afterward for America and Europe).<sup>17</sup> The reasons for this were multiple, including the slender human and material resources available in Palestine to foster Jewish immigration during this period, the uncertain state of the region,

and the sense that “next year in Jerusalem” was more a religious dream than a practical objective, something worth bearing in mind as we consider later on Zellig Harris’s promoting Palestine as a homeland for the vanguard he was training. Zachary Lockman, in *Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine 1906–1948*, offers valuable clarification on how a Jewish homeland was considered in a traditional Jewish framework.

[T]he idea of creating a sovereign Jewish state, in Palestine or anywhere else, was virtually unimaginable within the framework of traditional normative Judaism. For the few Jews who lived in Palestine, as for virtually all Jews before the modern era, only the end of history as manifested in the coming of the Messiah could bring about the termination of “exile” and its attendant sufferings, the redemption of the Jews, and their restoration to the land which God had promised to their ancestors but from which they had—also by divine decree—been uprooted. Despite its claims of ancient roots, unbroken continuities, and essential identities, then, Jewish nationalism—like Palestinian Arab and all other nationalisms—is a thoroughly modern phenomenon, a product of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Though it is possible to point to earlier precursors, modern Jewish nationalism, which came to be known as Zionism—a term which surfaced only in the 1890s, derived from the Hebrew *Tziyon*, a synonym for Jerusalem—emerged in a more or less recognizable form only in the last third of the nineteenth century. (23)

This obstacle to state-building in Palestine would be at the base of certain divisions that arose within the communities with which Zellig Harris had truck in his life. Nevertheless, even if Zion was not on the minds of all those in search of a new home, the urgency of finding an alternative to ever-present and mounting anti-Semitism certainly was. Harris’s Balta was far smaller than Odessa or Kiev, but in the final years of the nineteenth century, community leaders made it into the center of the Zionist movement in Podolia, Volhynia, and Bessarabia by issuing statements aimed at sensitizing the world (especially the United States) to events in the region, and at pressuring the tsar.

Although American Jews needed no incentive after the first reports of the Easter atrocities drifted across the Baltic and the Atlantic, eye-witness accounts of refugees and Russian novelists served to heighten the prevailing attitude of horror and disgust. In April, 1903, Roosevelt received 363 addresses, 107 letters and 24 petitions, one of which was signed by 12,500 Americans of all faiths (including United States senators, governors, mayors, three archbishops and seven bishops), urging the Czar to cease and desist from religious persecution. Organized protest was initiated by Oscar Straus’ “small committee,” the Jewish Publication Society and the Independent Order of B’nai B’rith. Indeed, a June 1903 resolution made by the Jewish Publication Society, and acted upon a few years hence, requested that Congress denounce the 1832 commercial treaty with Russia, whose discriminatory policies

violated the treaty's principle of equal rights to all American citizens. Such notables as Jane Addams, Carl Schurz, William G. Choate, August Belmont, John F. Dillon and Jacob Schiff played important roles in the protest movement. Between April and June, 1903, seventy-seven anti-Russian meetings were staged throughout the country. There were rallies in Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, New Orleans, San Francisco and St. Louis, and, most significantly, at Carnegie Hall in NYC, on May 27, 1903, where Mayor Seth Low introduced a most prominent speaker to address the gathering, ex-president Grover Cleveland.<sup>18</sup>

The situation worsened as the twentieth century followed its bloody path toward World War I and the Russian Revolution. During this period, the British government became committed to establishing a Jewish home in Palestine (Eretz Yisrael), an effort that culminated with a letter from Arthur James Lord Balfour to Lord Rothschild on November 2, 1917, a document that marked the first political recognition of Zionist aims by a great power.

Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of his Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet.

"His Majesty's Government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country."

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

Yours sincerely,

Arthur James Balfour

Two years later, a special appeal to the countries of the West was organized by representatives of Jewish communities in Ukraine to help those who had suffered as a result of the pogroms.

ATTENTION! ATTENTION! ATTENTION! STOCKHOLM, COPENHAGEN, BRUSSELS, BERLIN, VIENNA, ROME, PARIS, BUENOS-AIRES. . . . It is for 4 years now and, especially, since 1918 that the Ukrainian Jewry has been suffering from a permanent pogrom. . . . Jewish settlements have been committed fire and sword, peaceful Jewish population, i.e. children, women, and the old have been brutally exterminated; even machine-gun shooting was used. . . . Each of the towns of Proskurov, Yelisavetgrad (Kirovograd now) lost up to 2,000 people at a time. Zhitomir, Balta, Fastov, Cherkassy, Felshtin, Trostinets, Zlatopol, Uman, Gaisin lost some hundreds people each.

The assistance of the Red Cross and the state cannot be sufficient. We appeal to Jewish communities and request that they should send in groups of assistance, medicines, food, and clothes immediately.<sup>19</sup>

In combination with worsening conditions in the old country and growing concerns about the future of Palestine as a Jewish homeland, a better system of transportation to the United States, as well as more complete information about what to do upon arrival there, encouraged families like the Harris's to make the journey. One such group was the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), originally founded in 1881, dissolved 1883, and then revived, in New York, in 1892. In 1908, the HIAS had begun to issue a bilingual monthly, *The Jewish Immigrant*, which was circulated widely in Russia, providing reliable information (in Yiddish) on who could and could not be admitted into the United States. For example, Alexander Harkavy wrote a column for the paper, explaining immigration laws and giving advice on proper behavior at Ellis Island. Such bits of information proved extremely valuable, providing the immigrants not merely practical guidance but a sense that there were friends waiting for them in the host country. It is not clear whether the HARRISES knew of the HIAS activities, but what is certain is that they arrived at a time when many people were informed about the possibilities of traveling to and settling in the United States.

### The Harris Family in America

The HARRISES came to America in 1913, at the tail end of a thirty-three-year period of heavy emigration from Russia, during which time an estimated two million Jews made the same trek. Irving Howe's *World of our Fathers* provides a vivid image of this flight.

No matter what the more Russified Jewish intelligentsia said by way of caution or how the handful of wealthy Jewish merchants hesitated, the masses made their own decision. Millions would soon tear themselves away from the land that held the dust of their ancestors; millions would leave the *shtetlakh* and cities in which they had built their life, their Houses of Study and burial societies, their wooden synagogues and paintless houses, their feeble economy and thriving culture. Obsolete artisans, socialist firebrands, bewildered wives, religious fanatics, virtuosos of the violin, illiterate butchers, scribblers of poetry, cobblers, students, *luftmenshn*—above all, the numberless ordinary Jews, the *folksmans* for whom being a Jew was not an idea or a problem but the vibrant substance of their lives—now began to ready themselves. And not merely because their life in common was weak, but because as Jews they knew themselves to be strong. (25)

Harris's nephew Ted Live told me in an interview (May 2009) that the "only thing I know about why the family left Balta was that there was increasing unease at that time about being Jewish. As far as the pathway, I know that there was some overland travel in Europe, which took a while, and then they boarded a boat to New York." From New York they chose to settle in Philadelphia, and once settled there, they came to be well known among a group of Jews who found both refuge and hospitality in the Harris home. Zellig Harris's father, H. H. (Hyman was the name he used for publishing) Harris, ran a drugstore, and his wife, Rachel, raised the four children. Shoshanna Harris (Tzvee's wife) spoke with great fondness of Rachel Harris, describing her as "a very bright, very well-read, up-to-date woman. She fit in to that scene in every way, and she was interested in Zionism and Jewish cultural affairs." Friends and family described her husband Hyman as a very pleasant man who worked on a range of fronts. He eventually became very important to a portion of the surrounding Jewish community, in part because his family, and eventually the children (in particular the two sons), all had very good connections with the left wing Zionist group in the United States, and because the Harris father used to run high holiday services in the vast basement in their house. "He would set up a couple of hundred folding chairs, and he would bring in other people to sing, and to do the services," recalls Ted Live. "These were non-official services, it was important for the members of the Jewish community who were not part of the established temples or synagogues, but who wanted to celebrate the holy days on a less official level." But even Hyman, who ran these services, was culturally Jewish but totally nonbelieving. "He did it out of Zionism, and he would collect money for the Zionist fund, not for himself, not for his house."

Murray Eden recalled meeting Hyman Harris when he was in his seventies (Zellig Harris was then in his mid-to-late thirties), and ended up developing "very close relations with the whole family." He also recalled Harris's involvement in Jewish cultural affairs, including scholarship on cantorial music (about which he wrote a book), and his work as a *mohel* (someone trained in the practice of circumcision), for which he (with his son Tzvee) invented a safer method. Their circumcision device required both a cutting motion and a compression component, and it was eventually used on a large number of the young males in this community, including Noam Chomsky. It is in all of these regards, according to Harold Orlans, that the Harris family was unmistakably Jewish; but the children's interests, outlook, and conversation—and even the socialist-Zionism espoused by the two boys in particular—was completely secular, according

to Harshov's discussion earlier on, even if the father, Hyman Harris, did study Talmud and believed in the revival of the Hebrew language.

Faced with the decision of speaking Yiddish, Russian, Hebrew, or English in the home, the Harrises chose the Hebrew that was being created in the Yishuv in Palestine. English was used outside of the home, because, as Ted Live described, the Harris parents "didn't want to speak broken English, and thereby impact the kids' English. They wanted them to learn pure English, from native speakers. And they didn't want to speak Russian because of all the negative connotations they had of Russia." A generation later, the urgency of promoting Hebrew had abated, so the grandparents spoke Yiddish together, and the grandchildren spoke English among themselves. But Hebrew had left its mark, even in terms of the professional language work that was done in the milieu. Nathan Glazer indicated in an interview with me (May 2009) that "if you think of his own career, and that of Chomsky, you can consider his native use of Hebrew from the very beginning. It's true that it's a far cry from Hebrew, especially the Hebrew he spoke at home, to his early work in Near Eastern Semitic Dialects rooted in Cuneiform documents. But one reason he went into it was that he thought that he had a base in it from which to work. Interestingly, Noam Chomsky's father was also involved in advocating the new spoken Hebrew, and he wrote the first grammar of this modern Hebrew in the U.S., used when modern Hebrew was introduced as a language in some New York City high schools."

H. H. Harris was not particularly active politically, but he did add his signature to at least one of the editorials signed by his children, and by others who came to be part of their circle of friends and colleagues.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, he was considered to hold "advanced views," which got him into trouble with the Philadelphia rabbinate, evidenced in his first accepting and then deciding to bow out of officiating for Murray Eden's 1945 wedding to a non-Jewish woman who had wanted a "religious" wedding. Eden, like so many others, recalled the cultural activities of the Harris household and the legendary hospitality of the Harris parents, who frequently hosted groups of friends, including himself, Harold Orlans, and Seymour Melman for weekend visits. The setting was gregarious, with lavish Friday night meals with all of the children, their spouses, and assortments of other folks including mathematicians, musicians, and medical scientists. Conversation was always vibrant, creating a cohesive and argumentative salon like atmosphere in which Jewish, scientific, and Zionist issues were discussed. Harold Orlans recalled his occasional stays in the family home, at 2222 N 53rd Street, a large white stucco house with brick

trim, that comfortably accommodated the family and many visitors. He described the ambience as “pleasant comfort,” with an emphasis on cultural discussions, notably about books and records. Eva Rapkin, born in 1921, also attended gatherings at the Harris household, and she remembers with great fondness the conversation and the hospitality. Ted Live was often a part of these dinners, but remembers more nonpolitical “very social gatherings with neighbors. Partly I may have been too young to remember the more political discussions. This applies as well to visits at Zellig’s and Bruria’s apartment. I recall people visiting them, but I probably wasn’t completely aware of everything that was going on.” Overall, though, “I remember Zellig Harris as an unassuming, friendly relative who seemed like all my other relatives, when he was around, but he was a lot less visible than my other relatives because he didn’t live close by most of the time, as did his siblings and my grandparents. He was helpful, he certainly didn’t strike me as being a particularly difficult person.”

Irene Schumer, who had been an important member of Avukah right up to its dissolution in the early 1940s, recalled with great fondness the HARRISES’ generosity and the intellectual ambience of the period. She would visit the Harris household with Nathan Glazer, and she described the whole group of visitors as being very excited about being with the Harris family, who they considered a vanguard in the Jewish community—a crucial insight to understanding Zellig Harris’s inner circle, as we’ll see. Schumer recalled that these trips with Glazer from New York City to Zellig Harris’s home were a “big thing” for them, and she remembers great discussions with all members of the family, and also the real challenges they faced in making the journey, given their meager resources. Glazer, who had met Harris through Melman, also recalls that the HARRISES lived as an extended family, so Zellig and Tzvee lived in the family home even after they had appointments on the faculty of Penn. Everyone would gather for extended meals, “and the food choices reflected Tzvee’s views on good nutrition, which he developed in the course of his studies.”

The youngest child in the Harris household, Tzvee became a doctor and an immunologist. Everyone from the neighborhood described him with great fondness, including Al Katz who recalled to me in the course of an interview (March 2010) Tzvee’s warmth, friendliness, and charisma. “You had to like him, and you believed, you had to believe, that when he said something he had thought through it, with intelligence, and not just for effect.” Tzvee married Shoshanna (known as “Little Shush,” in contrast to her sister-in-law, Zellig and Tzvee’s sister, whom they called “Big Shush”). Shoshanna Harris, like her husband, worked in the field of immunology,

to which Zellig also contributed later in his career through his efforts to normalize medical discourse for the purpose of advancing research possibilities. Tzvee's wife ["Little Shush"] had been a participant on a Hashomer Hatzair farm, intended to train American Jews for kibbutz life in Palestine. She left when she married Tzvee but maintained her devotion to the idea of Hashomer Hatzair, an organization she recalled with great fondness in my own discussions with her and Tzvee.

Tzvee and Zellig had two sisters, Enya and Shoshanna ["Big Shush"], who became elementary school teachers and eventually collaborated on a set of didactic history / ESL textbooks, designed for the grades they were teaching.<sup>21</sup> Their views on education were progressive, and they had difficulties in finding educational establishment approval for their nonstandard interpretations. Enya and Shoshanna were extremely close to one another, as is characteristic of the Harris family as a whole. They attended Penn at the same time, they both won the same scholarship, and then both of them taught English in high school. Enya (who went by the name Anna outside of the household) eventually married Israel Live, a veterinarian (Ted Live's parents), and Shoshanna married Yitzhak Sankowsky, a gifted and imaginative artist whose colorful and gleeful pictures usually depicted women, of different ages. In the late 1950s, Enya returned to Penn for an M.A. in romance languages, focusing on Provençal French. She then was awarded the PhD in linguistics in 1963, the same year her son Ted graduated Penn with a BA in biochemistry. Live recalls that "I attributed her studies in linguistics as being linked to her thinking of Zellig as a kind of mentor or paragon. That was why she worked in linguistics, it was an easy field for her to get into, but this doesn't do her justice. In fact, it never came up that Zellig was really paramount in his field, I never had a sense of that, even from him. I discounted that idea as silly old worship, a sisterly admiration that Enya had of Zellig."

Zellig Harris saw linguistics as a science, and indeed most of the family worked in some branch of the sciences, although Live thinks of it more as their being in academia. "Maybe they thought that science was more rigorous. But in most cases it wasn't to save the world, or to solve major issues. In my case it was to try to better understand life, and the environment around me, which is what drew me to biochemistry. This lasted until I figured out that biochemistry meant doing one tiny little thing in a lab, which meant that it would take forever to learn one tiny thing." There was a gender difference in Zellig's generation though, "so the two sisters weren't scientists. The boys were scientists, the girls were teachers, which was not atypical." Live recalls that "during that time Enya had begun teaching ESL

courses at Penn, which she continued doing after completing her doctorate, and she ran a small ESL program when she stopped working as a high school teacher. She was interested in linguistics but not the structural work that Zellig was doing." The degree to which the community remained tightly-knit is remarkable, and, despite differences in gender and generation, came to participate in and contribute to a range of projects relating to the study of language, the promotion of Jewish cultural issues, and of course Zionism. And it is to Zionism that the far-reaching organization called Avukah was devoted, and Harris's involvement therein would dictate a general approach to society, with far-reaching implications.