

RETHINKING RELIGION AND SECULARISM: A DISCUSSION ON JEWISH  
SECULARIZATION AND THE EMERGENCE OF JUDAISM AS A MODERN  
RELIGION

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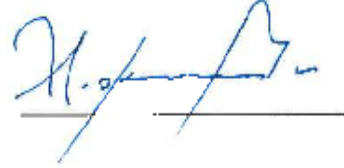
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## **ABSTRACT**

### **RETHINKING RELIGION AND SECULARISM: A DISCUSSION ON JEWISH SECULARIZATION AND THE EMERGENCE OF JUDAISM AS A MODERN RELIGION**

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The encounters between religions and modernity has been a widely discussed issue in the social sciences literature. This study focuses on the tension between the assumption that secularization will bring the dissolution of religions and the criticism that rather than causing dissolution, the secular demand constructs and gives life to a category of the religious which is harmonious with itself. By relying on that critique of secularity, it elaborates the Jewish modernization in the 18th and 19th centuries, with a particular focus on the Jewish secularization and the emergence of Judaism as a modern religion in relation to that process of secularization. To that end, following an analysis of the secularization of Jewish historical imagination, the deep impact of the Jewish historicist idea is discussed. Finally, it analyzes the emergence of Reform Judaism with references to the influence of Jewish historicist thinking, with a particular focus on the works of Abraham Geiger and how he constructed Judaism as a historical and universal religion.

Keywords: Secularism, secularization, religion, Judaism, European Jewish History

## ÖZ

### DİN VE SEKÜLERİZMİ YENİDEN DÜŞÜNMEK: YAHUDİ SEKÜLERLEŞMESİ VE MODERN YAHUDİLİĞİN ORTAYA ÇIKIŞI ÜZERİNE BİR TARTIŞMA

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Dinlerin modernite olgusuyla yüzleşmeleri meselesi sosyal bilimler literatüründe çeşitli başlıklar altında epeyce tartışılan bir konu olmuştur. Bu çalışmanın kavramsal odağı sekülerleşmenin dinlerin ortadan kalkmasına neden olacağına dair varsayımla, varlıklarının ortadan kalkması yerine dinlerin sekülerleşme süreçleri içerisinde, sekülerliğin taleplerine uygun formlar edineceği eleştirisi arasındaki gerilimdir. Modernleşme kuramının sunduğu sekülerleşme tezinin eleştirisinde temellenen bu çalışmada, 18. ve 19. yüzyıllarda Avrupa Yahudilerinin içinden geçtiği modernleşme ve bilhassa sekülerleşme süreçlerine odaklanılmakta ve Yahudiliğin modern düzlemde bir din haline gelişi, sekülerleşme süreçleriyle ilişkilendirilerek incelenmektedir. Bu amaçla Yahudi tarih algısının sekülerleşmesi incelenmiş ve Yahudi tarihselciliğinin geleneksel din algısındaki değişime yaptığı derin etki tartışılmıştır. Bu tarihsel ve kuramsal tartışma nihai olarak Reform Yahudiliğine bağlanmaktadır. Seküler bir alan olarak görülen Yahudi tarihselciliğinin Reform Yahudiliğinin ortaya çıkışındaki etkisi, Abraham Geiger'in eserlerinde modern Yahudiliğin tarihsel ve evrensel bir din olarak inşa edilişi üzerinden tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sekülerlik, sekülerleşme, din, Yahudilik, Avrupa Yahudi tarihi

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	iv
ÖZ .....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	vi
CHAPTERS	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1. Introduction .....	1
1.2. The Possibility of Being Jewish and Secular .....	5
1.3. Secularisms in Clash .....	8
2. EMERGENCE OF THE EUROPEAN JEWISH PUBLIC LIFE .....	15
2.1. Emergence of the European Jewish Public Life .....	15
2.2. Jewish People, Jewish History, Jewish Religion .....	20
2.3. Traditional Totality .....	22
2.4. Judaism as a Religion .....	25
2.5. The Dialectics of Assimilation .....	27
2.6. Haskalah and Judaism as a Religion .....	28
2.7. Political Horizons of Secular Jewish Identity .....	33
2.7.1. The New Jew .....	33
2.7.2. After the State .....	35
3. THE EMERGENCE OF JEWISH HISTORICAL THINKING .....	38
3.1. Introduction .....	38
3.2. Exile .....	39
3.3. The Jewish Tradition and History .....	41
3.4. Modernization and Jewish History .....	43
3.6. Judaism within the Bounds of Mere History .....	49
3.7. The Fragmentation of Traditional Totality .....	52
3.8. Jewish Historicism .....	54
4. REFORM JUDAISM: THE EMERGENCE OF JUDAISM AS A MODERN RELIGION .....	60
4.1. Introduction .....	60
4.2. The Science of Judaism Reconsidered .....	63
4.3. Introduction to Jewish Reform: Social and Historical Background .....	66
4.4. Jewish Reform and Making of Judaism a Religion .....	69

4.5. Abraham Geiger .....	71
4.6. Geiger, Christianity, and Islam.....	76
4.7. Abraham and Jesus .....	79
4.8. Conclusion.....	89
5. CONCLUSION .....	91
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	97





# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Introduction

The secular-religious tension has always been an important item of the Israeli social and political agenda (see Freilich, 2014; Ben-Porat, 2013; Yates, 2012; Yadgar, 2011; Sharkansky, 2005). Tensions between the orthodox and secular factions of the Israeli society expanded to different domains of social and political life; from taxation to military recruitment (see Ephron, 2012; Haaretz Editorial, 2012; Knight, 2011). However the tension coined as the one between secularism and religion reaches much beyond the matters of daily life in Israel, historically following the course of heated debates of Jewish modernization in Europe. Eventhough it appears as a hot topic in the news coverage, the collusion around secularism and Judaism is somehow connected to various debates in the Israeli society as well as the Jewish diaspora in various parts of the world. That fault line appears in different shapes in various conflictual situations ranging from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the citizenship definitions of the State of Israel <sup>1</sup>. Therefore it is a tension that is directly or indirectly related to all other tensions.

In line with being a fundamental tension, it is discussed in a variety of –but strictly interrelated- contexts with different concerns. One of these contexts in which the secularism and religion in Israel been discussed is the liberal democracy and the “true nature” of the State of Israel. For some, the State of Israel has been a true example of anachronism for a “Jewish state’—a state in which Jews and the Jewish religion have exclusive privileges from which non-Jewish citizens are forever excluded—is rooted in another time and place” (Judt, 2003). According to some others, to keep a Jewish and a liberal democratic way is definitely possible (Mazie, 2004). Another context of debate regarding religion has been the legal framework of the State of Israel. Most of those who discuss the issue of Israel’s inexisting constitution relate it to the discussions

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<sup>1</sup> Yoav Peled provides a legal discussion on religion and the citizenship in Israel. See: Peled, Y. (2007). Citizenship betrayed: Israel's emerging immigration and citizenship regime. *Theoretical Inquiries In Law*, (2), 570. A similar discussion can be seen in Lehmann, D. (2012). Israel: state management of religion or religious management of the state?. *Citizenship Studies*, 16(8), 1029-1043.

between the religious and secular Jews and the hesitations of both sides regarding making a constitution under the heavy influence of the opposite camp (Goldberg, 1998). Judaism as a religion in the Israeli public sphere is considered as another important issue that needs to be discussed. In this regard, the main point of contention seems to be the extent to which the practice of Judaism would allow for a pluralistic public sphere in Israel with a particular focus on Israeli Orthodox Jews (Fisher, 2016; Fischer, 2003). In the cultural mapping of the Israeli society as well, the secular-religious dichotomy holds an important position. According to Israeli sociologist Gideon Katz, the Israeli society and culture can be understood through understanding the motives of secular and religious cleavages that challenge one another and that is the “*Kulturkampf* of Israel” (Katz, 2008). The secular-religious tension in Israel is discussed from a spatial perspective as well. In one of his widely cited articles, Uri Ram discusses the trajectory of Zionism through focusing on the two spatio-political poles of Israel: Jerusalem and Tel Aviv and how they radically differentiate from one another in terms of the secular-religious tension (Ram, 2005). Regarding the literature on religion and politics in Israel, it can be concluded that the discussions on Judaism and secularism are quite vivid and continuous and the issue of religion holds an important place in various social domains as well as the political arena.

As a main characteristic of the discussions on secularism and religion in Israel, the concepts of secularism and religion are located as diametrically opposed to each other. The issue is seen from a “secularism versus religion” perspective. This is very much related to the fact that Zionism as a modern and secularist ideology has long been leading to the anticipation that with the foundation of the State of Israel, the pre-modern, traditional and ethnically fractured Jewishness of diaspora would be replaced by a modern, unified, and secular Jewish identity (Yadgar, 2011). Therefore one of the most basic discussions of modern Jewish identity has been based on such a dichotomy, in a very political way in essence, by taking secularism as the sole historical destination.

Curiously, the religion that was expected to fade away in the due course of time, made it to the headlines in the first decade of 21st century through the discussions of “religious resurgence”, through a secularist discourse reflecting the idea that once the religion was almost gone and now it is back. One of the latest discussions on Judaism

and Israel from a sharply secularist “religious resurgence” perspective was delivered by Michael Walzer in his book *Paradox of Liberation* (2015) where he discusses the cases of India, Israel and Algeria in terms of the secular anti-colonial revolutions they had gone through and the resurgent religious movements that followed. Eventhough Jews have never been a colonized people, Zionism has been a ideology of liberation for Jews as it gave them a state. However, considering the current situation, Walzer takes the late “messianic militancy” in Israel that he considers a resurgent form of Judaism as “the real challenge to Zionist liberation” (Walzer, 2015, 61) which he considers “a secular project” (Walzer, 2015, 36). In terms of secularization discussions, Walzer occupies a position which has been dominant throughout the 20th century, and from this standpoint secularization has been seen as an inevitable process and the modern times was considered as the “Golden Age” of secularism. However now, according to Walzer, the secular project of the State of Israel is left alone with a rising messianic militancy. The long and the short of it, the dichotomy of secularism versus religion still holds a dominant position in the literature and for any discussion of religion that needs to be taken into account.

On the other hand, at the beginning of the 21st century, the steadfast position of secularism began to be questioned (Joskowitcz & Ethan, 2015) as another result of the “religious resurgence”. “Secular” as a foundational epistemological category began to be challenged (Asad, 2003). Critical approaches to the issue of secularism such as the one developed by Talal Asad (2003) provided a ground for discussing it from a well nuanced and critical perspective. By challenging the position held by Michael Walzer, Asad opposes the taking of secularism for granted and points out the necessity of taking secularism as an object of anthropological inquiry (Asad, 2003). This has surely destabilised the foundational position of secularism and it began to appear as a rather relational concept. Asad states that secularism presupposes a new concept of religion (2003, 2) and therefore secularism and religion can not be thought free from each other. That relational reading of secularism appears to be a big challenge to the secularism vs religion binary adopted by Michael Walzer. We can simply ask, what can Asad’s reading of secularism say us about Judaism and its relationship to secularism? Instead of taking secularity for granted as Michael Walzer has done, working through the genealogies of Jewish secularism and bridging its relationship to the modern conceptions of Judaism forms the basis of this work.

This study aims looking at the historical roots of “secularism versus religion” dichotomy in the Jewish case and how Jewish secularism, following a process of secularization of the European Jewry- has paved the ground for the definition of Judaism as a religion. Therefore the methodological approach in this study involves reconstructing the discussions on Jewish religion and European public life from 18th and 20th centuries made by European Jewish and non-Jewish intellectuals, locating the discussions on Jewish religion and history into the European socio-political context in the beginnings of the modern period. Both for discussions regarding the early modern European Jewish context and later on the Reform Judaism in particular, I will analyze first and second hand sources through a close reading, particularly in the fourth chapter on Reform Judaism and the making of Judaism a modern religion. Fortunately, there are first hand sources which are books written by the founding figure of the Reform Judaism, Abraham Geiger. Particularly in the fourth chapter of the work, I will provide a close reading of Geiger’s work *Judaism and Its History*, in relation to Jewish secularization and making of Judaism a modern religion.

In the literature on secularization, the advancement of secularity is usually depicted as a process through which religion fades away through time through further modernization. However the outlook of modernization theory was begun to be questioned in the late years, particularly the assumption that secularization necessarily leads to the fading away of religion rather than taking up new forms. Reconsideration of the modernization theory apparently requires questioning the way religion has been seen and defined by that theory. The case of Jewish secularism and the definition of Judaism as a religion in the modern period constitutes an interesting case in this regard. Contrary to the assumptions of the modernization theory that secularism and religion are independent phenomena we can still ask could Jewish secularism which came into existence as a result of Jewish modernization, and Judaism as a religion be understood in isolation from each other? Numerous European Jewish intellectuals who lived in the 18th to 20th centuries got involved in discussions on Jewishness and Judaism from various perspectives. Especially the question of what formed the basis or the essence of Jewishness has been an important question for the Jewish intellectual circles particularly with the advancement of Jewish modernization. Some Jewish intellectuals at the time responded to that question by defining the essence of Jewishness through framing the liturgic practices and sacred narratives in the form of religion as a reified

and stabilized category of which certain elements were defined and conceptualized in the sense of religion as a modern category<sup>2</sup>. Some others rejected to be adherents of Judaism as a religion but still claimed to be Jews by adopting a secular notion of history which got divorced of Judaism as a religion (see Biale, 2011 and Batnitzky, 2011). In this regard, the Jewish thinkers of the modern period not only merely developed or reacted to an idea of secularism but also proposed modern interpretations and approaches to the religious realm of Judaism (see Batnitzky, 2011). Manifestations of Judaism as a modern religion, as handled by modern European Jewish intellectuals, have been tightly related to the secular Jewish thought.

As a point of departure, I will provide a brief discussion on Jewish secularism. I will outline the context in which discussions on Jewish identity went on, with references to Jewish historical criticism and religious conception that got rooted in the modern context of Jewishness.

## **1.2. The Possibility of Being Jewish and Secular**

The idea of defining one's Jewishness through rejecting being defined religiously as Jewish and preferring rather a historical definition of Jewishness has laid the ground for Jewish secularism, defined as "a revolt grounded in the tradition it rejected" (Biale, 2011, 1). Apparently that rejection, in the case of secular Jews, did not take the form of surrendering one's Jewishness but rather defining it on secular grounds such as history. This has been considered as one of the biggest outcomes of Jewish modernization. Another outcome, related to the phenomenon of secularization has been the emergence of history as a secularized and modernized domain that had a linear and progressive stance regarding the course of events since the very beginning of time. As a result of that, everything could be measured in the scales of history. The emergence of history as a point of reference rather led to the historicization of tradition, via making "historical change" the standard of validity for the tradition (see Rotenstreich, 1972). As it will be discussed in greater length, the rejection of tradition's overarching position and history's becoming an essential element of modern Jewish identity did not simply pave the way for the decline of the Judaic religion and its practices. Quite contrary to what secularization theory would suggest

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<sup>2</sup> For further discussion on stabilizing and reifying religion, see Shahab Ahmed's posthumously published book *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (2015, Princeton University Press).

(Bruce, 2011, 2), with modernization an exclusive domain was “invented” which is identified with Judaism (Batnitzky, 2011, 13).

Contrary to the strict separation between the Jews and larger societies in the pre-modern period that had solid theological and social foundations, with the Jewish involvement in modernization the efforts towards reconciliation of Jewishness with secular universalism has been one of the most visible themes<sup>3</sup>. Beneath the surface, such an effort clearly reflects the notion of reconciling faith with modernity; Judaism with universal truths (Batnitzky, 2011). As a consequence of modernization, the references of defining Jewishness have begun to change and the identification with tradition and faith has turned into a problem for Jews themselves. A Jew who would leave his ghetto and begin to live with German or French fellow citizens in the same sphere would not define himself with reference to his faith only. The modern times already marked the emergence of a different public identity than the ones merely based on Jewish tradition for Jews as well as for others. When Jewishness is defined solely in reference to Jewish tradition with religious highlights, secular Jewishness may sound nonsense. However together with modernization, some began to defend the view that Jewishness is something beyond religion with references to Jewish history. This has rather been the consequence of a pursuit of modern self definition on the same ground with the larger society. Therefore a rather secular and historical notion of self definition has taken root among the European Jewry and led to the emergence of pluralism among the European Jewry based on differing definitions of Jewishness. What makes a Jew Jew, when Jewishness is defined beyond religion and faith? Or we can ask it in another way; if it is possible to define Jewishness independent of “the superstitious authority” of Judaism; what is Judaism as a category? Reading through the references of those who take Judaism as something separable from Jewishness, it is possible to dismantle the components of premodern Jewish tradition such as history, religion and, ethnicity (Biale, 2011, 92). According to them, Judaism as a religion is a natural outcome of the Jewish past; all the past that Jews survived through had shaped Judaism. Beyond merely embedding transcendent truths and revelation, Judaism is a

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<sup>3</sup> In the second part of her book, *The Jews as a Chosen People* (2009, Routledge), Salime Leyla Gürkan provides a detailed account of Jewish modernization and Jewish claims to universality around the idea of chosenness in Judaism. The work is a comprehensive illustration of how particular topics have been transformed through modernization.

historical religion; it bears the marks of all what happened in Jewish history. (Batnitzky, 2011, 37)

Secular Jews who prefer to be defined historically rather than religiously reflects the fact that history provides an alternative ground to the definitions of Jewishness on religious grounds, with references to Judaism. Therefore there appears to be a possible distinction between the Jewish history as a secular realm and the Judaism as the realm of faith and religion. However it is important to note that, the definition of Jewishness on historical grounds and on religious grounds separately was not the case before the modernization. The definition of Jewishness on the ground of mere religion is as modern as the definition of Jewishness on a secular historical ground, for the mutual exclusion of the concepts of history and religion history came to be a modern phenomenon. In line with that, in the coming pages, I will argue that the history as a modern domain has paved the ground for the construction of Judaism as a modern religion.

One of the most significant outcomes of Jewish modernization has been the making of Judaism an object of historical criticism by Jews themselves. That already involves the idea that history has been a rather authoritative domain on Jewish faith and sacred sources. Before the 17th century, it was not possible to speak of a secular Jewish history that had a regulative power over Judaism as a religion, but with the emergence of historicism, Judaism, as well as Christianity, was historicized and it was begun to be understood from a modern historical perspective. Thus “the seventeenth century, the historical character of Judaism has become increasingly central to reflection on Judaism and its nature in the modern world” (Morgan, 1992). History’s gaining a central character in the reflections on Judaism has followed the adoption of the modern notion of history by Jews. With modernization, as it will be discussed with further details in the coming pages, the Jewish willingness to be a part of the modern world reflected itself through being a part of the world history in a universalist sense. History has been very important for Jewish secularists for they defined their Jewishness on the historical grounds instead of the religious one. Therefore, reaching at a secular universalism through Jewish history has been an important effort for Jewish secularists. Isaac Deutscher a prominent Jewish socialist of his time, exposes this state of mind in one of his essays:

Religion? I am an atheist. Jewish nationalism? I am an internationalist. In neither sense am I therefore a Jew. I am, however, a Jew by force of my unconditional solidarity with the persecuted and exterminated. I am a Jew because I feel the pulse of Jewish history; because I should like to do all I can to assure the real, not spurious, security and self-respect of the Jews. (Deutscher, 1968, 51)

On the other hand, Deutscher points out that “the Jewish heretic who transcends Jewry belongs to a Jewish tradition” (Ibid) and gives references to traditional figures, not only modern ones. For him, transcending Jewish tradition at the expense of excommunication and exclusion from the community and family was a very Jewish thing. That is what we can see, according to him, in the case of Elisha ben Abuya of the 2nd century, Baruch Spinoza of 17th century and Sigmund Freud of 20th century. For Deutscher, only Jews who lived on borderlines of various nations and cultures could transcend Judaism; “They were in each society and yet not in it, of it and yet not of it. It was this that enabled them to rise in thought above their societies, above their nations, above their times and generations” (Ibid, 52). What we see in Jewish secularist thinking is not simply the renunciation and rejection of religion as it had been assumed by secularization theorists. Rather secularization occurs and leads to the emergence of a more different idea of religion than that of the pre-modern times.

As David Biale (2008) points out, instead of fading away of religion, it turned into a reified category as a consequence of the secularization of European Jewry. Therefore secularization creates a category of religion in a relationship of mutual constitution.

### **1.3. Secularisms in Clash**

Secularism appeared to be one of the most contentious areas of discussion in the recent decades and it has been continuously exposed to new challenges. The main contention regarding secularism has its roots in the discussions on religious resurgence that came to the fore in 2000s. “It was only in the closing decades of the twentieth century –when scholars and pundits began to speak of the global resurgence of religion- that secularism became the center of heated discussions. Today, the secular is no longer considered the norm; it has become something to be explained and studied.” (Joskowicz & Ethan, 2015, 1). What made secularism a norm in social sciences is an important question to ask. From the 19th century on, the idea of secularism gained the position of “an epistemic knowledge regime that may be held unreflexively or be assumed phenomenologically as the taken-for-granted normal structure of modern



reality, as a modern *doxa* or an ‘unthought’ (Casanova, 2011) in social sciences through relying on the sociological assumption that modernization would automatically lead to further secularization (Bruce, 2011). However not only “the fundamentalist violence” of the recent decades but also public manifestations of religions in terms of visibility and claim to modern politics marked the inadequacies of secularization theory. Rather than the decline of religion as a result of disenchantment of the world (Weber, 1971,21), we feel obliged to discuss it every second: “The world today, with some exceptions . . . is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever. This means that a whole body of literature by historians and social scientists loosely labeled ‘secularization theory’ is essentially mistaken.” (Berger, 1999)

Critics of secularization thesis not only pointed out its inadequacies but also framed it as an ideology and they have pointed out to the fact that besides remaining solely in the analytical realm of modern social sciences, secularism has also been an operative tool for modern ideologies in the 20th century. Rather than being an ideology that can be circumscribed, it is seen as an epistemic knowledge regime that had a shaping effect from the idea of history to the policy-making of the modern nation-states as well as cultural policies; already inherent in the modern epistemology (Casanova, 2011, 55). In the West, the rise of modern politics is viewed as going hand in hand with a process of secularization. According to this line of thought, modern politics was set in contrast to the medieval political order in which the true tone of politics was set by the religious doctrine and the clerical authority. As the medieval order began to collapse with the strikes of new science and the religious wars, so the story goes, religion turned into a discordant concept for the political domain. Thus “the great separation” (see Lilla, 2008; Funkenstein, 1989) of religion and politics also meant the emergence of a modern, self-evident political thinking that places the political domain at the top of the social phenomena through “(...) the unquestioned acceptance of the secularist division between religion and politics. Standard privatization and differentiation accounts of religion and politics need to be reexamined. Secularism needs to be analyzed as a form of political authority in its own right (...)” (Hurd, 2007,1).

The emergence of the modern political domain brought the exclusion of religion from the public sphere as a consequence of the changes since the Religious Reformation in

Europe. The imagination and the normative placement of religion out of the public sphere and into the private sphere has been one of the biggest novelties brought about by the Enlightenment. Secularization thesis leads us to consider all knowledge on social phenomena as devoid of superstition and suggests a reading that positions religion as an isolated domain; one that should be kept away from the knowledge of the world. According to this line of thought, by this way social phenomena should be comprehended and explained via excluding religion from the analytical domain. However theoretical challenges to this line of thought are not rooted only in history but also in our time, in the academic reflections to the violence of 9/11. In the following period there have been discussions of secularism(s) through various historical/geographical contexts and in different conceptual relationalities and the exclusion of religion as an analytical concept has been questioned. (see Hurd, 2007; Cavanaugh, 2009; Calhoun, Juergensmeyer, & VanAntwerpen, 2011; Hurd, 2007) Combined with that the discourses of Bush period US foreign policy pointed to the inadequacies of the underlying assumptions of sociology and international relations theories in providing outlooks for the apparent theological languages in clash. “Much contemporary foreign policy, especially in the United States, is being quickly rewritten to account for this change. Second, the power of this religious resurgence in world politics does not fit into existing categories of thought in academic international relations.” (Hurd, 2007, 2)

The phenomenon termed as “the religious resurgence” had a shaking effect over the assumed secularity of modern social sciences and been a challenge to secularization theory. Desecularization discussions that appeared as a critique of the secularization theory turned to be inclusive for understanding the religious and the relationship between the religious and the public (see Berger, 1999; Calhoun, Juergensmeyer, & VanAntwerpen, 2011). Recent discussions on the position of religion in understanding the political and the social does not simply outlaw the concept of the secular. Rather they point out to the embeddedness of the secular and the religious in the modern context and discuss how the two get into interaction so that they can not be understood in isolation from each other. (Asad, 2003, 22-25) Thus religion began to appear as an important component of the social phenomena in the social sciences literature and the epistemological assumptions of the modernization theory that assumed the fading away of religion appeared to be contentious. In addition to that, the concept of

“religious resurgence” threatening the political realm has been criticized as it discursively reconstructs secularization as a normative sociological process:

Many contemporary observers maintained that the worldwide explosion of politicized religion in modern and modernizing societies proves that the thesis is false. Defenders of the thesis have in general retorted that the phenomenon merely indicates the existence of a widespread revolt against modernity and a failure of the modernization process. This response saves the secularization thesis by making it normative: in order for a society to be modern it has to be secular and for it to be secular it has to relegate religion to nonpolitical spaces because that arrangement is essential to modern society. (Asad, 2003, 181-182)

All these combined, the secularization theory came under a serious criticism and new ways have been conceptualized for understanding the secular. New (particularly anthropological) approaches to the secular began to look beyond the secular’s relationship to modernization and to build new relationalities around the concepts of the secular and the religious. The anthropological approach to secularism put forth by Talal Asad suggests that “the religious/sacred” should be considered as the constitutive other of “the secular”, meaning that “the contemporary resurgence of religion is clearly a complex response to secularism as secularism was –and still is- a response to religion.” (Biale, 2011, 2)

The anthropological approach to the secular paved the ground for more holistic approaches to the religious and its relationship to the modern so that we can reach a new understanding of the secular without isolating crucial concepts from one another. One of the most crucial steps in this regard has been the reception of “the religious” as a reified category which is transhistorical and transcultural, for “this effort of defining religion converges with the liberal demand in our time that it be kept quite separate from politics, law, and science.” (Asad, 1993, 28) The consideration of the social phenomena as devoid of religion and unrelated to it, gave birth to a division through which the particular spaces and processes of the human life were considered to be either secular or religious. In addition to that, the definition of reality in relation to perceptibility and measurability with references to modern scientific approach brought out the idea that physical existence could be known only through reason. What stood

opposite the physical existence has been the superficial or metaphysical existence that could not be known through the measures of reason. What stood in the realm of metaphysical could not be known, they could be believed only. Therefore the modern idea of existence did not only constitute the standards of what can be known but also set out the realm of what can not be known but that can be believed. That laid down the foundation for the consideration of sensible/measurable existence as secular for it is not grounded in the domain of superficial/metaphysical. This way, the belief and faith were constituted as relative and individualistic. With the consideration of perceptible and physical reality as devoid of belief and faith which are relative, the ground on which the social contract could be reached was considered to be secular (see Schulman, 2011). The religious life could be an element of the private sphere. The secularist thinking set an ideological position by defining the ideal state of existence by rendering belief as a matter of individualistic/private sphere (Calhoun, 2011). However besides being content with that rendering, modern social theorists who assumed the normal state of social existence as secular, defined religion in accordance with social processes and the modern idea of progress. “In much nineteenth-century evolutionary thought, religion was considered to be an early human condition from which modern law, science, and politics emerged and became detached.” (Asad, 1993, 27) However the conception of religion in twentieth century anthropology was more different. Rather than religion being an outmoded and primitive form, it was considered as an irreducible and distinctive human practice. Therefore it had an essence that made it a distinct area from politics; so the two have been considered as essentially different.

The definition of religion as an essential form that is essentially distinct from politics and other social phenomena has been one of the cornerstones of secularism. In the vocabulary of Leo Strauss, this separation was expressed through the tension between the philosophy and revelation. (Meier, 2006, 6) The definition of the religious through an essential difference from the profane has rather functioned for keeping it epistemologically distinct from other social forms and institutions (see Eliade, 1957). Secularism in the twentieth century has been grounded on the conception of a religion that could be defined universally and transhistorically (Asad, 1993, 30). Epistemologically, religion was positioned out of the political realm and rather than thinking of that matter in a mutually constitutive framework, the role of politics in the

trans/formation of the religion was not considered as a matter of scientific inquiry. The ideological position of restricting religion to the private sphere or to the consciences of individuals turned into a postulate for the modern social scientific theory. Yet as Talal Asad points out “(...) this separation of religion from power is a modern Western norm, the product of a unique post-Reformation history.” Therefore, the definition of religion should be evaluated as “the historical product of discursive processes” (1993, p. 28).

Obviously, what determined the central discussions of modern social sciences has been the political events and social trends in Europe from the 18th century on. Looking at European history, discussions on the state, society and religion in Europe appear to have drawn the main contours of social scientific thinking. Discussions on the relationship between the state and the church in Europe, remained as one of the exemplary cases and gave a direction to secularism discussions, especially to the structure of the secularization theory (Calhoun, Juergensmeyer, & VanAntwerpen, *Rethinking Secularism*, 2011, 17). That theoretical dominance of Christianity – Catholicism and Protestantism- had its influence not only on secularism discussions but also on various disciplines of social sciences. The founding fathers of modern philosophy and sociology, from Kant to Weber, have focused on the cases of Catholicism, Protestantism and secularization of Christian populations. Eventhough not very much discussed as an epistemological matter, adoption and thinking through a single line of secularization appear to be quite a problem regarding the discussions around Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism (Turner, 2011). The classification of “world religions” other than Christianity, not only meant to list them under a single category of “religion” but also rendered them having a similar relationship to “politics” and to the societies that live through these spiritual and worldly disciplines categorized as “religion”<sup>4</sup>. As Jose Casanova states:

It is important to open the debate to explore and recognize the (...) multiple and very different historical patterns of secularization and differentiation within European and Western societies (...) it facilitates the additional recognition that with the worldhistorical process of globalization initiated by the European

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<sup>4</sup> Tomoko Masuzawa presents a brilliant discussion on the concept of “world religions” in his book *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (The University of Chicago Press, 2005) focusing on the cases of Islam and Buddhism. Masuzawa discusses the emergence of the concept in the Western academia in relation to the expansion of Western colonialism.

colonial expansion, all these processes everywhere are dynamically interrelated and mutually constituted. (Casanova, *The Secular and Secularisms*, 2009, 1051)

The criticism that we need a more fragmented and multifaceted approach to the “religious” experiences and disciplines of non-European societies than the one presented by modern sociology, paves the way for rediscussing the contexts in which modernization and religion have had encounters. Surely that kind of a discussion would entail discussing secularism, too. It had a huge impact on the critique of the secular as a monolithic category and the idea that without considering the category of the religious, the secular could not expose itself, prepared the ground for more nuanced discussions on secularism. What is visible beyond the monolithic category of the secular is various epiphanies of “the religious” that is taking up new forms, negotiating with different patterns of modernity and leading either to violent ambitions or to harmonization with modern political institutions. Therefore the meaning of the religious is turning into a questionable concept/category considering the fact that it has contextual relationships with multiple patterns of modernity and secularity. And it becomes a must to speak of secularities and religiosities as well as of modernities in a pluralist framework.

It is important to state that discussing the categories of the religious and of the secular without considering modernity is impossible. An important and decisive impact of modernity on the medieval belief systems has been the fragmentation and the reproduction of traditional categories. The category of religion has been one of the categories that transformed into a category with different references, definitions and relationalities with other concepts than it had been the case in the pre-modern period. The case of Judaism as a modern religion appears to be an interesting one in this regard. The encounter with modernity brought the dissolution and transformation of many concepts of the Judaic belief and gave birth to new ones. Also, there has been changes regarding the functions and status of old concepts and the new ones’ gaining new functions.

## CHAPTER 2

### EMERGENCE OF THE EUROPEAN JEWISH PUBLIC LIFE

#### 2.1. Emergence of the European Jewish Public Life

The beginnings of the Jewish modernization are traced back to late 18th century by historians (Feiner, 2010). Modernization led to the emergence of a starkly different world for Jews than that of the tradition. The concept of citizenship that found its real expression following the French Revolution has been one of the biggest outcomes of Enlightenment. That concept contained the assumption that all members in society are equal by birth, thus eliminating all discriminations based on economic, social and religious status and putting emphasis on the human reason which is also related to the newly emerging methods of government as Talal Asad points out:

A critical rearticulation was being negotiated between state law and personal morality. This shift presupposed the new idea of society as a total population of individuals enjoying not only subjective rights and immunities, and endowed with moral agency, but also possessing the capacity to elect their political representatives –a shift that occurred all at once in Revolutionary France (excluding women and domestics), and gradually in nineteenth-century England. The universal suffrage was in turn linked –as Foucault has pointed out- to new forms of government based on new styles of classification and calculation, and new forms of subjecthood. (...) The discursive move in the nineteenth century from thinking of a fixed “human nature” to regarding humans in terms of a constituted “normality” facilitated the secular idea of moral progress defined and directed by autonomous human agency. (2003, 24)

As a consequence of modernization, as reason began to be a measure of what is to be known and considered valid, the unit of society slid from community to individual. Therefore the Enlightenment shifted the focus of social organization from faithful community member to rationalist individual citizen. “When the modern state came into being and set out to destroy the medieval corporations and estates and to build a new citizenship, it could no longer suffer the existence of an autonomous Jewish corporation. Sooner or later it had to give to the Jews equal rights in civil and public law and to impose upon them equal duties in turn.” (Baron, 1964, 60) An aristocratic politician of the French Revolution period, Comte de Clermont-Tonnerre Stanislas Marie Adelaide’s words are quite revealing the process of Jewish citizenship:

We must refuse everything to the Jews as a nation and accord everything to Jews as individuals. We must withdraw recognition from their judges; they should only have our judges. We must refuse legal protection to the maintenance of the

so-called laws of their Judaic organization; they should not be allowed to form in the state either a political body or an order. They must be citizens individually. (Adelaide, 1789)

It can be argued that in the modernization of European Jewry, the spatial change that Jews went through had been one of the biggest changes in terms of internal communal structure. The pressures of the newly emerging modern state on Jewish communities to leave the ghetto and be a part of the surrounding societies combined with the temptations of Jews to be involved in the economic and cultural affairs of the surrounding societies for the sake of having a public representation within them have prepared the ground for the emergence of Jewish publicity within European urban spheres. (Baron, 1964) According to pioneering Jewish historians such as Jacob Katz and Salo Wittmayer Baron, Jews' leaving of the ghetto has marked the beginning of the biggest internal crisis in Jewish history; the crisis of modernization (Katz, 2000). They had always been very critical to the "benefits" of modernization. For Salo Wittmayer Baron, the widely used word "emancipation" referring to the modernization process does not reflect the truth; Jews were not the only segment in the society that was segregated and been the subjects of unequal treatment. Therefore modernization could not be regarded as "emancipation" for everyone, implying that it has been a victory for the Jews of Europe. Rather it has been the result of an overall social transformation which is nothing exclusively favorable to Jews (Baron, 1964, 53-54). Already walled ghettos were not a result of one-way imposition on Jews by the European states. It was also related to the traditional Jewish communal existence formed around the religious authority over worldly and religious matters. "There were locks inside the Ghetto gates in most cases before there were locks outside" as Salo Wittmayer Baron stated (Baron, 1964,55). Leaving the ghetto paved the way for important changes for the European Jewry.

The life in the city would obviously necessitate a public identity as Jews got involved in the larger societies. Under the conditions of segregation in which Jews and gentiles shared common spaces for particular purposes such as commerce, the encounter between the two segments of the society were limited. Following Jewish modernization, the encounters expanded to a larger scale, Jews and gentiles began to share the same space. Jewish definitions of the self and the other could not be the same as before (Stratton, 2015). This has been the first time that Jews felt obliged to have a



public identity through which they would not be represented only by setting the theological difference between themselves and Christian gentiles. However, for Salo Baron who is one of the highest authorities of modern Jewish history, setting a “complete contrast between the black of the Jewish Middle Ages and the white of the post-Emancipation period that most generalization about the progress of the Jews in modern times are made” (Baron, 1964, 51) can not be proven historically. For him not only Jews were subject to unfair treatment in many ways but many segments of society faced discrimination such as peasants. “It is, then,” Baron writes “not surprising and certainly no evidence of discrimination that the Jews did not have ‘equal rights’- no one had them” (Baron, 1964, 52). Therefore explaining the change that took place in European Jewish environment through binaries between Christianity and Judaism is not that helpful. The change could rather be understood through broader social processes such as secularization of the society. Following the bloody Wars of Religion, the idea that ethnicity and religion were inseparable was abandoned as a consequence of the process that began with the Protestant Reformation in Europe. What was demanded from the Jews was the abandonment of the national elements and the adaptation to the cultures of the lands in which they lived. Jewish modernization was born as an affirmation of these demands (see Katz, 2000).

One of the outcomes of Jewish modernization would be the emergence of Judaism as a religion proper (Batnitzky, 2011, 13). What made Jews distinct in this new social fiction was their allegiance to the “Judaic Confession” (Halpern, 1961). The new Jewish publicity in the European public sphere has been the ground on which tradition, religion and the Jewish space have been contended, renegotiated and given new meanings. The tendency of those who were favoring leaving the ghetto and acculturation within the larger societies involved in new pursuits of definitions regarding Jewishness. However the Jew who was building up a new public identity through graying the difference between the self and the gentiles was acting opposite to the traditional stance. The difference from the larger society on which Jewish tradition and communal structure was based, already involved various pillars that founded the difference as a cosmological separation. The foundational difference between Jews and Christians, that involved various categories of difference, ceased to function as a cosmological wall, together with modernization and it was reduced to a rather slight difference which is religion in word’s modern sense. This is the reason

why Jacob Katz defined Jewish modernization as a crisis between the Jewish tradition and the demands of modern European public life (see Katz, 2000). For the Jews who had been in favor of assimilating into European societies, it was possible and the ideal way to be a German or Frenchman of Judaic faith. This meant the dissolution of the difference articulated on a broad basis between Jews and Christians, involving various elements of difference.

Jewish modernization brought about a new context in which the difference between two segments of the society would take new forms with different priorities and emphases. The need for a new public identity by Jews and the deterioration of the settled difference between Jews and gentiles led to the dissolution of traditional structures of European Jewish communities. In the ghetto, the institutions, corpus and the historical experience, all categorized as “traditional” later on, already constituted the sources of communal authority, rabbinate was taking care of the legal as well as liturgical affairs and the regulations of relations with the world outside of the walls. In a world regulated by tradition, the distinction of worldly and religious affairs had not had much sense. Tradition, its sources and its keepers had already been occupying all spheres of life. The “other” of the traditional Jewish worldview was the surrounding gentile society and the segregation was one of the main elements that provided a ground of authority for the traditional structure.

From the point of Jewish tradition, modernity marked the beginning of an era of questions. The change in the axis of difference and the efforts of European Jewry to wipe out the lines of difference in an era of assimilation, tradition has turned into a questioned element and that questioning paved the way for the emergence of new binaries. What did tradition stand for? What were its limits? These were important questions. It was the first time the limits of tradition was being questioned. In the ghettos of pre-modern Europe, in a universe in which the halakhic<sup>5</sup> set of values and principles, the writings of elders, and the rulings of respected rabbis as well as the implicit consensus over the communal practices draw the lines, the tradition did not have any limits as it did not exist in its current meaning. There was no word for tradition in this sense of the term since within the walls of ghetto, as the authority now

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<sup>5</sup> Halakhah is the collective body of Jewish religious rulings derived from Torah and Talmud as the two principle sources regarding Judaism.

we label as “traditional” did not face a challenge. The word tradition implied the methods employed for the interpretation of scriptures and the writings of elders rather than being a word signifying the sources and the form of the authority in pre-modern Jewish communities (Rotenstreich, 1972). Tradition’s gaining of such a meaning occurred with Jewish modernization as it became an object of criticism and thus it began implying the conditions and the deeds that made the pre-modern Jewry “pre-modern”. It turned into a signifier marking the difference between the modern and the traditional, the new and the old, the ghetto and the city, the bonds of authority and the spirit of freedom. Thus it became a new marker of difference. It was reified and from the same point of view, it was invented. The reification of tradition as a concept drew the spatial and temporary contours of a particular type of communal existence<sup>6</sup>. On the other hand, this cosmos already embodied various elements immanently that provided content for particular concepts such as history, religion, ethnicity and so on. Is it possible to talk about a Jewish history, considering history with its modern meaning and historical baggage, stands as an interesting question. The same applies to Judaism as a religion. Can we speak about Judaism as a religion? How do we define religion, if we can? After digging out these concepts by considering how they came into existence and what functions they hold in modern social theory, one feels obliged to reconsider these concepts such as Jewish history and Judaism as a religion.

While different interpretations of Judaic existence would follow urbanization and assimilation of the European Jewry, the consensus held firm by traditional authority over the meaning of particular concepts would be replaced by perplexity and the emergence of new concepts as well as new domains of discussion amongst Jews themselves. Scholars of modern Jewish history point out to the modernity of particular concepts such as Jewish history and Jewish religion. Nor being ever present neither recently invented, they were born out of Jewish modernization in terms of their rearticulations in the modern period and appeared through the fragmentation of particular elements of the traditional era. Therefore the period through which Jewish intellectuals reconsidered, renegotiated and reified particular concepts at the moment

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<sup>6</sup> On the invention of tradition, Michael K. Silber presents a brilliant discussion on modernization, and the uses of tradition in the context of Jewish ultra-orthodoxy in “The Emergence of Ultra Orthodoxy: The Invention of a Tradition” in *The Uses of Tradition* (Wertheimer, 1992).

of encounter between Judaic and modern views, still holds primary importance for more nuanced approaches in discussing the Jewish modernization.

After all, Judaism has historically been a religion of law and hence practice. Adherence to religious law, which is at least partially, if not largely, public in nature, does not seem to fit into the category of faith or belief, which by definition is individual and private. It is the clash between the modern category of religion and Judaism that gives rise to many of the creative tensions in modern Jewish thought as well as to the question of whether Judaism and Jewishness are matters of religion, culture, or nationality. (Batnitzky, 2010, 1)

The question of what makes Jewish secularism particularly “Jewish” stands as a key one for the enquiry presented here. To be able to discuss Jewish secularism, we need to discuss secularization and its various expositions. Centrality of Christianity in secularism discussions resulted in the domination of particular cases in the social theory, as it was discussed earlier. Almost all the discussions and conceptualizations took into the center the church and politics. However Jews were also going through a process of secularization and even if that did not have an influence on the political domain in the 18th century, today it is inevitable to discuss it for understanding Zionism in depth. Instead of articulating Jewish secularism to the mainstream secularism discussions, there is a need to discuss Jewish secularism through relying on the European Jewish experience, through putting forward its particularities. A discussion underlining the particularities of Jewish secularization and secularism is also helpful for understanding the interactions and interchanges between the Jews and larger Christian societies surrounding them as the underlying purpose of this study is to discuss a type of secularism from within the Jewish experience by relating the categories of the secular and the religious.

## **2.2. Jewish People, Jewish History, Jewish Religion**

Discussions revolving around the question of what Jewishness is, from 18th century till today brought about divergent positions on the true meaning of it, led to schisms between Jewish congregations in the West and paved the way for diametrically opposed interpretations (Batnitzky, 2011, 33). There has never been a single answer to the question and a variety of arguments have been available depending on where one is positioned. With the Jewish modernization in Europe (Haskalah), three paradigmatic views have been determinant regarding the essence of Jewishness in its relationship to Jewish history (Batnitzky, 2011, 33). The idea that Jewish tradition and the communal life are the basis of Jewishness marked the main stance of Orthodox

Judaism that emerged as a reaction to modernization and strived to preserve the traditional mode of Jewish existence. In this regard, the idea that Judaism is subject to historical change was rejected by Orthodox Jews (Batnitzky, 2011, 40). The Orthodox idea that Jewry should be segregated from the larger societies in which they lived was against the integrationist and assimilationist stance of Maskilim (those who adopted the ideal of Jewish Enlightenment/Haskalah) and Orthodox Jews stressed the necessity of keeping exile as the organizing principle of the Jewish communal life both in temporal and religious matters (Neusner, 2006, 155). According to Orthodox Jews, ceasing to be Jews and being German or Frenchmen of the Jewish faith would mean the dissolution of Jewishness. The mere organizing principle of Jewishness has been considered as the tradition shaped by the exilic condition and neither the Jewish history as divorced from the traditional faith nor Judaism as a separate domain of identity in the form of religion were taken seriously.

According to Maskilim who have been the proponents of Jewish enlightenment, answering the call of newly rising modern state for Jewish integration to the society was not only an option but also a necessity of the time. For some thinkers of the times as well as the statesmen, Jews had to be parts of societies in which they lived. The religion based segregation was not in line with the values of Enlightenment. In retrospect, it is also possible to see that, integration and assimilation were demanded by the modern state that is intolerable to the existence of any autonomous communal structure within the realm of sovereignty. In this new world, individual had to replace the community. Individual citizens has been the approved form of social unit. Jews who were in favor of integration had to pave a different way than that of the traditional communal existence. On the other hand, there was a trend towards the integration of Jews to the European urban life, after leaving the ghetto as a segregated space. The integration of Jews to the European urban sphere brought with itself a deeper economic penetration and acculturation in the European public sphere. This was a broad trend leading to changes in all aspects of Jewish life (Wertheimer, *The Modern Jewish Experience: A Reader's Guide*, 1993, 118; Steinweis, 2006, 147; Dotterer, Moore, & Cohen, 1991, 29). As a prominent example, Jewish education took a new direction towards the study of general subjects beyond halachic learning (Etkes, 2010) and that was a result of the urgent need felt by Jews themselves to open up to the outside world. Jews had to be involved in the study of worldly topics; the specialization on halachic

literature could be restricted to a group of students (Etkes, 2010) and this marked a big rupture with the traditional logic of Judaic education. In the next stages of Haskalah, the attempts of prominent learned figures of European Jewry would be towards rethinking Judaism as a religion could be reconciled with reason. This was not only an attempt of reconciliation but also a new definition for the Judaic faith; a new form and a new social status within European societies. With the words of Salo Wittmayer Baron; "Jewish Reform may be seen as a gigantic effort, partly unconscious, by many of the best minds of Western Jewry to reduce differences between Jew and Gentile to a slight matter of creed, at the same time adopting the Gentile's definition of what was properly a matter of creed. The reality of the living Jewish ethnic organism was to be pared down to the fiction of the Jewish 'Confession.'" (Baron, 1964, 61)

### **2.3. Traditional Totality**

As it was discussed previously, modernization brought about many novel terms and conceptions for the modern Jews that were getting integrated to the European societies. It is not quite correct to assert that these terms and concepts came into existence ex nihilo. It is crucial to note that the modern terms and conceptions such as history, ethics, and religion already existed in a traditional framework and in relation to the faith to a divine authority that is omnipotent and determinant of the affairs of the world. The faith to an omnipotent divine authority has provided the solid ground for the idea of a causality that had the authority of God in the center. In its traditional sense, the course of history is determined by the God himself in the Jewish case. In such a framework, the thinking of history outside the bounds of divine causality, which is the secular conception of history was impossible. As it will be touched upon in greater detail in the coming chapter, the concept of history as divorced from the idea of a divine authority appeared as a consequence of Jewish modernization. Similar things can be told about the Jewish ethics. In the latter phases of Jewish modernization, Jewish morality began to be discussed as independent of Divine authority which could not be the case in terms of Jewish tradition. However in the modern period, the Jewish ethics were made possible to be discussed as independent of *Halakhah* and particularly as a matter of the Jewish individual (Magid, 2005, 176). Another term; the Jewish religion in its contemporary sense has gained its current meaning and usage as a consequence of the modernization. Apparently not divorced from the idea of a Divine

authority, Judaism as a religion –which is the subject of this work- was constructed on the idea that religion can be practiced out of the public sphere and as an individual matter. That constituted the biggest threat to the concept of tradition due to the fact that tradition itself has been kept alive as a communal entity. As the religion is rendered as a private matter and as an alternative that the individual can pick, has been a fatal blow to tradition. The point about the religion will be evaluated in a more nuanced way in the coming pages as it constitutes the foci of our study. The premodern forms of these concepts already existed in the Jewish tradition and they have never been thought as autonomous domains but rather they were thought under the regulative principle of Divine omnipotence. Therefore it can be easily told that there had been an umbrella of tradition under which the previous pre-modern forms of concepts such as history, ethics and religion had existed. That traditional entity can be termed as the traditional totality.

Discussions on Jewish modernization throughout decades and centuries reveal the fact that it is impossible to speak of a transhistorical Judaism that had been defined at the very outset and one without transformation (Boustan, Kosansky, & Rustow, 2011, 327). On the other hand, the conceptualizations of Jewishness have very much been dependent on social and political contexts of which Jews have been a part. Therefore it is not reliable to speak of a Judaism which has constituted the religious ethos of Jewishness. There is a need to make sense of the changes that modernization brought about:

Jewish consciousness had once stemmed from and involved the whole of life. It was sustained by customs, traditions, considerable legal autonomy, and by the hostility of the gentile world. But when in the last years of the eighteenth century European society showed itself ever more readily to integrate the Jew, the price was always elimination of incongruous prerogatives and peculiarities. It was a price the more acculturated elements were perfectly willing to pay. For them the old Judaism resembled an all-encompassing shell which now felt strange and confining. Yet if the shell were cast away, what was left? Was one any longer a Jew? What did it mean to be a Jew when no longer recognized every law and custom as possessing divine sanction? (Meyer, 1967)

Furthermore, recent works reveal that Judaism has been a religion in the modern sense of the term with the process of Jewish modernization (see Batnitzky, 2011; Biale, 2011). The making of Judaism a religion has been through a process in which the defining essence of Jewishness has been questioned but no clear answers were given. Out of the efforts to define the essence of Jewishness, not merely Judaism as a religion

but also multiple components of the Jewish tradition gained new meanings. In addition to the concepts of Jewish ethics, Jewish history, and Jewish religion, as touched upon above, “we can begin to understand why the question of whether Judaism and Jewishness refers to a religion, nationality, or culture is particularly modern one. It simply was not possible in a premodern context to conceive of Jewish religion, nationality, and what we now call culture as distinct from one another (...)” (Batnitzky, 2011, 4).

Particularization of the components of premodern Jewishness as “the complex phenomenon of a total way of life for the Jewish people, comprising theology, law, and innumerable cultural traditions” (Encyclopedia Britannica) has been due to Jewish modernization. Therefore the process can be termed as the fragmentation of traditional Jewish totality that already embraced the “Jewish law, which was simultaneously religious, political, and cultural in nature” (Batnitzky, 2011, 4). In the modern period, the components of the all-embracing Jewish law (Halakha) has been subjected to historical criticism as we see, for example, in the case of Torah. The subjection of Torah to historical criticism has laid the ground for the predominance of reason over the Jewish dogma, with the terms of Leo Strauss, of philosophy over revelation:

The notion of someone claiming to be a believing Jew but denying the concept that the Torah came from heaven was entirely unknown in the medieval period. Moreover, as historian Marc Shapiro has noted, the medieval period has lacked the current denominations we have today, and therefore even the most ‘radical philosophers. . . all seem to have lived in accordance with Jewish law, even if their view of its significance diverged drastically from that of the Talmudists. (Kwall, 2015, 85)

Thinking in terms of traditional totality, as explained above, and communal integrity of the premodern period, from one aspect, the consequence of Jewish modernization has been a kind of fragmentation. With regard to communal integrity, the fragmentation has been the emergence of modern religious denominations which are Reform Judaism, Conservative Judaism and Orthodox Judaism. This type of a fragmentation can be termed as horizontal, as it operated at the communal level and has been a consequence of the dissolution of traditional Jewish communal authority. Another type of fragmentation that operated at the conceptual level, as it was touched upon above, has been the fragmentation of traditional totality which can be termed as the vertical fragmentation. It is vertical because it led to the emergence of new uses of the traditional concepts as very differently than in the premodern context. The vertical



fragmentation rather led to the emergence of new conceptual hierarchies. As Talal Asad states with reference to Wittgenstein's idea of grammatical investigation: "It is a matter of showing how contingencies relate to changes in the grammar of concepts – that is, how the changes in concepts articulate changes in practices" (2003, 25). As it will be elaborated further in the coming pages, the emergence and the changing status of the concept of Jewish history that got separated from the traditional Jewish conception is an exemplary case. According to Leora Batnitzky, Judaism can not be seen as a religion prior to modernity as Jewishness did not indicate a clearcut notion of culture, religion or nationality. "Rather, Judaism and Jewishness were all these at once: religion, culture, and nationality. The basic framework of organized Jewish life in the medieval and early modern periods was the local Jewish community, which was an autonomous legal body that had jurisdiction over the Jewish population in a particular area." (Batnitzky, 2011, 2) However with modernization, there emerged contentious notions of Jewishness, especially together with the influence of modern historical thinking. Therefore tracing emergence of a modern domain of Jewish history and its having a regulative role in the definition of Judaism as a religion apparently show fragmentation of the traditional totality and a change in the premodern conceptual hierarchy. Therefore, Judaism as a religion can be evaluated in terms of vertical fragmentation of Jewish traditional totality through looking at the relationship between Jewish modernization and the modern conception of Judaism as a religion.

#### **2.4. Judaism as a Religion**

In his nuanced and eloquent analysis of Jewish secularism, David Biale points at an important fact about Judaism:

Although the term 'Judaism' appears from time to time prior to Mendelssohn, he undoubtedly played a major role in identifying the beliefs and practices of the Jews with this reified concept. Mendelssohn's particular way of defining this entity called Judaism was intended to mark it as the most modern of religions, that is, the most suitable for a modern state in which religion is relegated to the private sphere. (Biale, 2011, 101)

Biale's approach reveals some certain points about the relationship between the making of Judaism as a modern religion and Jewish modernization. Judaism's becoming a religion as a consequence of modernization (Batnitzky, 2011, 13) brings about a more nuanced approach to the issue modernization. Contrary to the general presumptions of the modernization theory on the direct connection between

modernization and secularization, the modernization process did not necessarily lead to the fading away of Judaic faith but rather paved the way for its taking up new forms. In this regard, what happened was the attempt to constitute an autonomous essence of for the sake of drawing a line of separation between the religious and political domains. Therefore efforts on framing Judaism as a reified concept, as something totally separate and autonomous from what is considered as the “non-religious” or “profane” can be discussed in its relationship to secularization:

Yet the insistence that religion has an autonomous essence –not to be confused with the essence of science, or of politics, or of common sense- invites us to define religion (like any essence) as a transhistorical and transcultural phenomenon. It may be a happy accident that this effort of defining religion converges with the liberal demand in our time that it be kept quite separate from politics, law, and science –spaces in which varieties of power and reason articulate our distinctively modern life. This definition is at once part of a strategy (for secular liberals) of the confinement, and (for liberal Christians) of the defense of religion. (Asad, 1993, 28)

What is coined as the “liberal demand” in the work of Talal Asad has been an important element in the mindset of Jewish Enlighteners (Maskilim). The idea of adaptation and assimilation to the larger society has been a multifaceted process that would lead to a renewal of the Jewish grammar. Moses Mendelssohn, who is regarded as the pioneering figure of Jewish Enlightenment (Haskalah), was the biggest proponent and bearer of that renewal. In his book, *Jerusalem or on Religious Power and Judaism* he initiated a conceptual clarification regarding the relationship between Judaism as a religion and the political power held by the newly emerging modern state:

In the first section of the book Mendelssohn alleges that by definition, the state concerns power and coercion, while religion, properly understood, does not. This means that Judaism, or ‘Jerusalem,’ is not concerned with power and therefore does not conflict with the possibility of the Jewish integration into the modern nation-state. In the second section of the book Mendelssohn asserts that the Jewish religion is not a matter of belief but rather of behavior. As he puts it, ‘Judaism knows of no revealed religion in the sense in which Christians understand this term. The Israelites possess a divine legislation -laws, commandments, ordinances, rules of life, instruction in the will of God as to how they should conduct themselves in order to attain temporal and eternal felicity.’ Hence, Mendelssohn concludes, because Judaism does not demand belief of any sort, it by definition does not conflict with enlightened reason and in fact only complements it. (Batnitzky, 19-20.)

Therefore while preparing the ground of reconciliation between the Jewish existence in the modern European societies and the modern politics, Mendelssohn was also forming the modern grammar of Judaism. Curiously, the idea and the practice of remaking the domain of a religion, and reinterpretation of the fundamentals, as we see

in Mendelssohn's case, is something quite contrary to the idea that religions have universal and timeless essences. Therefore in the light of recent discussions on the phenomenon of religion, it is crucial to consider that "like the notion of Jewish religion, the modern concept of religion more generally is not a neutral or timeless category but instead a modern, European creation, and a Protestant one at that." (Batnitzky, 1) The idea of the timeless essence of religion has rather been a product of modernization as the "late nineteenth-century anthropological and theological thought that rendered a variety of overlapping social usages rooted in changing and heterogeneous forms of life into a single immutable essence, and claimed it to be the object of a universal human experience called 'religious'" (Asad, 2003, 31).

## **2.5. The Dialectics of Assimilation**

With turning of Judaism into "a single immutable essence" as the denominator of "human religion experience", Jewishness has become a contested concept for the Jews claiming the same public space with the European societies for "by calling himself a Jew he expresses only one of multiple loyalties. And yet external pressures and internal attachments combine to make him often more aware of this identification than of any other" (Origins of the Modern Jew, Meyer, p. 8). For some, Jewishness began to be defined in relationship with a secular conception of the Jewish history rather than belief. For some others, Judaism as the religion of the Jewish people mattered the most. There have been other groups defending the idea that Jews are a part of the humankind and therefore they should have become a part of the nations in which they live. For them, the religious teachings of Jewishness could be understood as humanistic principles and not necessarily religious dogmas. Therefore with the modernization, the Jewish views on the essence of Jewishness varied from Jewish orthodoxy to Jewish humanism.

Apparently, the dialectics of integration to the larger societies have paved the ground on which the self-definition of distinction in the form of Jewishness has been negotiated with the demands of the larger societies. However that kind of a negotiation brought about a fragmentation of the traditional integrity as it involved the emergence of "different components of the Jewish selfhood":

Conscious of an influence which Jewishness has upon his character and mode of life, he tried to define its sphere and harmonize it with the other components of

self. Such Jewish self-consciousness -while not entirely without precedent in Jewish history- has been especially characteristic of the last two centuries. In the considerable isolation of the ghetto, Jewish existence possessed an all encompassing and unquestioned character which it lost to a significant extent only after the middle of the eighteenth century. It is the age of Enlightenment that Jewish identity became segmental and hence problematic. (Meyer, 1967, 8) “The liberal demand” (Asad, 1993, 28) of the newly emerging modern Prussian state has played a key role in the emergence of Jewish identity a problematic. The demand towards the Jew’s ceding of peoplehood and the hope of unification in a messianic future would entail changes in the Jewish law as these elements have formed the temporal basis of traditional Jewish ethos. “In other words, political rights for Jews means Judaism must become a religion in Schleiermacher’s sense, assigned to its distinct sphere of private feeling. Significantly, Schleiermacher proposes that the state control the process of transforming Jews into citizens as well as Judaism into religion in order to protect Christians and Christianity.” (Batnitzky, 2011, 26) Apparently, the preconditions of Jewish political rights have made the emergence of a distinct sphere for Judaism as a religion and it is strictly related to a particular conception of state sovereignty. In the case of Jewish integration to the Prussian society, the state seems to have assumed an apolitical role to religion. Thus, Judaism is rendered as an individualistic belief and thus the “neutrality of the public sphere” is protected by modern state’s assuming control over Judaism. Apparently, the demands of the modern state and its control over Jewish identity can not be framed in a secularist discourse as that control not only assumed a neutral public sphere but it has also paved he way for the emergence of Judaism as a religion.

## **2.6. Haskalah and Judaism as a Religion**

The Jewish response to the demands of the modern state has followed an adoptionist attitude. The process eventually led to the emergence of citizens of Judaic affiliation. The distinction that defined the Judaic existence was relegated to the category of religion. Moses Mendelssohn, the pioneering figure of Haskalah, has always been at the center of debates regarding the status of Judaism in the modern society. His work, *Jerusalem or on Religion Power and Judaism* was seen as a discussion on Judaism’s relationship to the newly emerging modern state and the political power. To talk of the context briefly, in order to understand what led Mendelssohn to clarify the relationship between Judaism as a religion and political power, it is necessary to state that the rise of Protestantism following the Reformation has initiated a rediscussion of the sources

of Christianity. The urge to return to the uncorrupted origins of Christianity, study of the Jewish Torah (the Old Testament of Christianity) has marked the basis of an intellectual movement, Christian Hebraism. In this regard Torah has been a focus of Protestant reading for revealing the origins of Christianity. Not only the revealed Torah but also the commentarial sources of Jewish tradition, Talmud being the principal one, have gone through a Protestant reading. Those readings of the religious sources have not been of purely “religious” purposes in the modern sense of the term but also led to the emergence of Protestant political visions. The term “Mosaic theocracy” appeared as a popular concept in Protestant terminology as a true form of governance purely based on religious principles. In this context “the true Judaism” that Prophet Moses has brought was associated with particular political principles. Those have been the discussions going on in the European Protestant atmosphere of which Moses Mendelssohn was not immune to, especially following the political outcomes of Protestant expansion such as Calvinism in England (see Nelson, 2013). Consequently, the Protestant Reformation has associated its own reading of Judaism with the ideal principles of government. However from the point of Jewish integrationism, the association of Judaic religion with politics was not in compliance with the demands of modern state from Jews. They could not be recognized as an autonomous community which has relationship to politics as a political body but only as individual citizens of Judaic faith. This is important to understand the thinking of Moses Mendelssohn. In his case, Haskalah has not only been a project of Jewish integration to the larger society. It has also been a process of depolitization of Jewishness for making it safe for the modern state. What Moses Mendelssohn said was that Judaism as a religion, the common denominator of Jews, has no claim to political power, neither do Jews. For doing that, he laid the ground of Judaism as a religion of conscience and universality. His attitude to Judaism did not remain as a particular approach but rather turned into the paradigmatic stance of modern Jewishness that influenced modern Jewish denominationalism and Jewish secular thinking.

Making Jewishness in compliance with the values of the enlightened society has been an idea that is problematic in terms of the Judaic doctrine as well. How a people that believe themselves as chosen by God could be equated with a Gentile society without breaching the Judaic law? Moses Mendelssohn suggests a historical stance regarding that problem. According to him, a distinction can be made between Judaism and the

universal religion of mankind. According to him, “Judaism boasts no exclusive revelation of eternal truths. . . . The voice which let itself be heard on Sinai on that great day did not proclaim, ‘I am the Eternal, your God, the necessary, independent being, omnipotent, and omniscient, that recompenses men in a future life according to their deeds.’ This is the universal religion of mankind, not Judaism.” (Mendelssohn, 1983, 97) By telling that Mendelssohn means, the revelation that was given to Moses on the Mount Sinai was particularly sent down to a particular group of people which are Jews; a message sent down in a particular historical context to a particular group. It was not directed at every humanbeing as a universal message. Therefore as Leora Batnitzky (2011, 20) points out; “in contrast to the universal religion of humankind, which Mendelssohn equates with morality, Judaism, he maintains, is a historical, temporal truth that makes demands only to the Jewish people, and not on society and morality at large. . . . Judaism makes no demands for belief on anyone and no demands for action on non-Jews.” This way, according to Mendelssohn, Judaism is in compliance with the values of enlightened society without any claim of truth or commandment on non-Jews.

Therefore Judaism imposes particular requirements on a particular people instead of humankind. Furthermore, they are not dogmas that claim to be eternal truths but rather they are based on God’s revelation at Sinai for the Jewish people which is something historical. At that point Mendelssohn introduces an interesting formulation regarding the Jewish law. According to him, it requires a constant interpretation as a “living script”: “The ceremonial law itself is a kind of living script, rousing the mind and heart, full of meaning, never ceasing to inspire contemplation and to provide the occasion and opportunity for oral instruction” (Mendelssohn, 1993, 102-103).

In his defense of the idea of Jewish law as a living script that truly catches the spirit of religion, he states that Judaism effects the mind and heart, he explicitly referring to the dead letter of the Christian spirit. “Mendelssohn declares that Christianity does not supersede Judaism, and that the Jewish religion far from embodying the dead letter of the living Christian spirit, is especially prepared for a new age in which church and state would be separated not only as an ideal but also as a reality.” (Batnitzky, 22) By doing that Mendelssohn does two things. By putting Judaism in the same category with Christianity he explicitly defines Judaism as a religion. Furthermore, he states that

Judaism is in better compliance with the values of the new age, of which politics is based on the separation of church and state. By making the distinction between Judaism and the universal truth, he saves Judaism from being depicted as a threat to it. Also by idealizing Judaism in terms of the separation of church and state, he points out to the distinction between the Judaic law and the state law. Thus he politically makes Judaism safe from the political involvement by defining Judaism as a religion which is, by essence, distinct from politics. Regarding the definition of Judaism as essentially distinct from politics, Leora Batnitzky points to the common logic behind Mendelssohn's thinking and that of Friedrich Schleiermacher a German Protestant theologian:

Mendelssohn wants to have it both ways: Judaism is a religion of law requiring action and stimulating contemplation. But when it comes to questions of universal action -that is, state law- and when it comes to universal contemplation -that is, the eternal truths of philosophy- Judaism remains separate and indispensable, except insofar as Judaism calls for obedience to the state's law. To apply Schleiermacher's words to Mendelssohn, 'Jewish law maintains its own sphere and its own character only by completely removing itself from the sphere and its own character of universal speculation as well as from that of universal praxis. (Batnitzky, 2011, 27)

Apparently, the position of Maskilim to defend and remake a "Judaism" that is in compliance with the values of the enlightened society did not simply speak to an abstract doctrine of Enlightened values but rather to Protestantism. While evaluating the emergence of Judaism as a modern religion, Leora Batnitzky refers to the modern concept of religion as a Protestant category (Batnitzky, 2011, 1) and she discusses at length in her book, *How Judaism Became a Religion*, the issue of how the modern conception of a monolithic and universal conception of Judaism was mainly shaped by the Protestant conception of religion. As it was discussed above, while modern category of the religious has been a constitutive other of the secular, there has been a similar kind of constitutive relationship between Protestant Christianity and Judaism. If we are to look at both of the denominators of Christian and Judaic faith; Christianity (particularly Protestantism) and Judaism in terms of the modern category of religion, in the context of modernization, the former one has been the constitutive other of the latter. The Jewish secularization, as it was discussed earlier, led to the fragmentation of a traditional totality in the premodern European Jewish context and the Judaism as a religion came out of this process. The modern conception of Judaism has not only been based on the thinking that it is convenient to the norms of the modern society.

The conception of Judaism introduced by Moses Mendelssohn, which has formed the roots of Reform Judaism has also paved the way for a single Judaism that erodes the plurality of Jewish practices and conceptions in different parts of the Jewish world:

What provided the justification for the changes was the theory of the incremental history of a single, linear Judaism. The ones who made changes and founded Reform, then Conservative Judaism -and hence Rabbinical schools- rested their case, first of all, on an appeal to the authoritative texts, read historically (as a collection of irrefutable facts). (Neusner, 2002, 9)

The historical reading of the authoritative texts led to the historicization of Judaism on the one hand. On the other hand, such a reading influenced the modern Jewish historical imaginary. In this process, the modern idea of a single and ethnically united Jewish people emerged in opposition to the traditional communal understanding of Klal Yisrael which is based on a doctrinal and faithful conception of the Jewish peoplehood. Therefore the imaginary of a single Judaism through a historicist reading of the authoritative texts is also related to the historicization and therefore secularization of the imaginary of a single and ethnically unitary Jewish people.

The issue of a single Judaism involved a secular component as well: a single Jewish people (realized in due course in the founding of the Jewish state, the state of Israel). So in another arena altogether, Zionist historians wrote the history of 'the Jewish people,' meaning one, coherent social entity, with a single, linear, incremental, unitary history; periodizations, of course, distinguished the ancient, medieval, and modern, with the advent of the national movement, then the formation of the Jewish state, defining the contemporary and imposing perspective and order on all that had come before. Under religious and secular auspices, therefore, the study of Judaism and of the Jews rehearsed the category 'Judaism' professed by the Jewish nation. In this iron consensus of unities, Christian scholarship was happy to concur: Judaism was an ethnic, national religion, in contrast to the universality and transnational character of Christianity. Or to put it differently: Christianity truly brought the God of (ancient) Israel to all humanity. (Neusner, 2002, 4)

Therefore, as Jacob Neusner points out, the construction of Judaism in the mirror of Protestantism led to the imaginary of a single Judaism that undermines the different Jewish experiences and practices around the world. Such a unitary conception has also led to the imagination of the Jews as a people which is united by history. However in the premodern period, a monolithic Judaism has never been the case since the beginnings of the Judaic religion. That fact correlates with the modernity of a monolithic conception of a normative Judaism (Neusner, 2002, 4).



The conception of a single normative Judaism as in the case of Moses Mendelssohn, a Judaism which is in perfect compliance with the values of enlightened society even more than Christianity laid the basis for Reform Judaism by suggesting particular changes to the Judaic liturgy (Arkush, 1994, 273). Through time, there emerged reactions to the reformist conception of Judaism. Therefore, the unity assumed by Mendelssohn could not be maintained.

In the academic, not-theological, and not-ideological study of ancient Judaism, 'Judaism' therefore has nearly everywhere given way to 'Judaisms,' a brief way of stating a complex category formation. Consequently, efforts to explain away the diversity of data, or to define an 'essence of Judaism,' or to pick and choose among the data the writings that were normative -these efforts mount a holding action, a last-ditch defense of conceptions that have lost plausibility. (Neusner, 2002, 4-5).

With the striking back of the Orthodox Judaism with modern problems in mind, and the diversity of the Jewish positions on the historicity of Judaism as initiated by Mendelssohn, there have emerged challenges to a single Judaism. History of the modern Judaism since the nineteenth century took shape around the discussions of Jewish denominations. Orthodox Judaism and Conservative Judaism challenged the argument that Judaism as a religion that has a history, would always lead to its present outcome, that is Reform Judaism. As it will be discussed further in the last chapter of the work, by admitting particular points or getting involved in an active rejection, all of the three denominations share the modern conception of Judaism as a religion. "The mode of argument, appealing to issues of a historical and factual character, and the premises of argument, insisting that history proved, or disapproved, matters of theological conviction, characterized all the Judaisms of the nineteenth century and therefore shaped the intellectual life of all Judaisms of the synagogue in the twentieth century as well." (Ibid, 10)

## **2.7. Political Horizons of Secular Jewish Identity**

### **2.7.1. The New Jew**

In any history book on Jewish modernization, Moses Mendelssohn appears as the key figure of Jewish enlightenment who laid the theological ground for Jewish integration into European societies. Personally, he appeared as the embodiment of Haskalic ideals, as a Jew learned in Jewish sources and committed in his observance, and he was also recognized as a philosopher by the major figures of his time such as Immanuel Kant. He has been a pioneer showing that integration to the larger society was possible and

deserved. What made Mendelssohn a monumental figure was not only his intellectual capacity that allowed him to get involved in discussions with Kant and earned his appreciation. But he also reflected in his personality the ideal enlightened Jew that he preached.

The atmosphere that Haskalah provided would pave way to Jewish nationalism around the end of the 19th century. The emergence of Jewish nationalism following Haskalah can be read as a dialectical process, following the persistence of anti-Semitism and a disappointment with the hopes for integration to the larger societies. On the other hand, the *weltanschauung* of Jewish nationalism was made possible by Haskala regarding the emergence of domains such as Jewish historical imagination as divorced from the Jewish religion. The thinking that there is a Jewish history which began before the adoption of Judaic faith and the one that contains that religion has been the key of imagining of an ethnic identity for Jews which at the very base a Hebrew nation existed before Judaism; namely before Torah was given to Moses in Sinai, and also one can exist after the religion. For this line of thinking, the religion of Jews in its traditional meaning (in the sense that was adopted and defended by Orthodox Jews) was mostly shaped by the exilic condition and struggle for survival. Therefore it could not be the religion of emancipated Hebrews by remaining as it has been. The need was not only a new religious framework that was already provided by Haskalah. Jewish nationalism, a little later that would adopt the name 'Zionism', demanded new subjects, too. "Although in socialist Zionism there are positions that are radical and that are more moderate, the common denominator between them is the 'new Jew' who does not seek to leave the Jewish world but to renew Judaism as a means of reforming the individual and the nation" (Ohana, 2012, 11). Already before the appearance of Zionism, the ideal of creating "the new Jew" was inherent in the imaginary of Haskalah (Ibid, 9). Enlightenment already demanded the creation of the new Jew that could be a part of the European society. "The Western cult of progress that envisaged a continual improvement of humanity necessarily involved the idea of improving the status of the Jews on condition that they conformed to the European environment." (Ibid, 9) The way Moses Mendelssohn, the philosophical father of Haskalah was appreciated in Germany reflects the profile of the new Jewishness being demanded as it is apparent in the words of Immanuel Kant:

(...) how much I admire the penetration, subtlety, and wisdom of your *Jerusalem*. I regard this book as a proclamation of great reform that is gradually being imminent, a reform that is in store not only for your own people but for other nations as well. You have managed to unite with your religion a degree of freedom of thought that one would hardly have thought possible and of which no other religion can boast. (Rotenstreich, 1984, 23)

The new Jew that was envisaged by Zionist ideology was different than that of Haskalah in some respects. In Haskalic thought, the very soil of the new Jew was Europe, but for Zionists, he could come into being in Palestine only. “Just as the people needs the land to attain its full life, so the land needs the people in order to attain its full life” (Ohana, 2012, 10). And that new *übermensch* had to be “able to contend on his own with the challenges of the future, the burden of Jewish history and the ‘sicknesses’ of exile” (Ibid, 10). Eventhough the new Jew had to be a secularized individual as a subject for Zionism, a new tradition was in the making characterized by an escape from what Jewish secularists considered as “the oppression of an obscurantist, medieval religion and to create a new Jew and a new society”. (Biale, 2011, x)

### **2.7.2. After the State**

With the foundation of the State of Israel, contentions on the essence of Jewishness with the participation of different groups presented theological and political challenges to the secularist assumptions of the ruling elites and laid the ground for responses of staunch secularists in return. At a time that discussions on “religious fundamentalism” in Israel is on the rise, secularism and religion matters are turning into top agenda issues in the academic circles. While Israeli settlements expanding beyond borders agreed in 1948, radical and violent factions of Israeli settler groups are discussing to destroy Israeli regime (Weinglass, *The Times of Israel*, 2015) that they see as evil for being secular. We apparently see once more that discussing Judaism’s relationship to modernity and secularism is of an apparent importance at a time the premises of secularization theory are subject to further contention. On the other land, recent works show us the ideological tendencies of the secularization thesis. In his book, *The Paradox of Liberation* (2015), Michael Walzer looks at the achievements of secular political movements and the challenges of religious movements to these achievements. Walzer asks “what happened to the national liberation?” Claiming that even though India, Algeria and Israel were “liberated from the foreign rule” in the directly political

sense of the term, these nations could not exist in the form and content as envisioned by the original leaders/founding fathers. As they were rootedly committed to secular projects, nowadays there emerged political dynamics grounded on “fundamentalist religions” in a very powerful way, as Walzer puts forward. “Roughly twenty to thirty years after independence, the secular state was challenged by a militant religious movement.” (Walzer, 2015, xii). According to Walzer, this is the stark paradox of national liberations. The reason why these secular movements were called liberationist has been their democratic and secular commitments and they are being attacked for being westernizing by their religious critics. Therefore, regarding Walzer’s stress on secularism as a “liberating” idea, the initial question of “what happened to the national liberation” can be asked in another way; “what happened to secularism?”

According to Walzer, “the first settlers and political founders of Israel freed themselves from the religious establishments of the Old World (implying the traditional Jewish life in Europe) and they set up the first secular state in world history” (Walzer, 2015, xiv). In the national liberation projects, “the nation had to be liberated not only from external oppressors -in a way that is the easy part- but also from the internal effects of external oppression”, meaning the internal domination of traditional elites. The most important thing to be overcome, according to liberators, has been the passivity and the quietitude of the dominated people and the traditional ghetto Jew appears to be that kind of a prototype in that story. Coupled with accommodation, “taking the form of withdrawal from political activity to communal concerns, even acceptance of the political “superiority” of the foreign rulers”, the passivity of the traditional Jew was seen as a fatal mistake. This position of the traditional Jew was surely seen as “false consciousness” and liberationists aimed at a radical transformation in this regard. That surely required a struggle against the existing society and turned into an anti-religious struggle in the case of Zionism as in many cases. For national liberationists, this has been a struggle against accommodationism that is the source of passivity and submission to foreign rulers. Examining the Jewish national movement within the national liberation framework points to a deep anachronism since it connotes liberation from a colonial domination as in the cases of India and Algeria. However in the case of European Jewry and Zionism, it rather took the form of colonization rather than liberation from a colonial rule. By doing that Walzer reduces the 2000 years of Jewish exilic past to a history of pure oppression and

he does not even consider the fact that within the worldwide Jewish population, Jews in Israel still constitute a minority, in spite of all “national liberationist” efforts. However the way he discusses the matter provides a new ground the Jewish secularists’ positions on Jewish tradition and traditional Jews can be discussed. As the idea of national liberation is entirely new from the lens of 2000 years long Jewish history, this newness is not only a matter of history but also of mentality. “Indeed, newness is the mantra of the liberators. They offer the oppressed people a new beginning, a new politics, a new culture, a new economy; they aim to create new men and women.” The discourse of backwardness and passivity regarding the traditional Jews was adopted by the liberationist idea and what it offers has been newness, enlightenment and scientific knowledge. The biggest thing it offered was a national homeland in Palestine. However the old ways had to be overcome. Secularism was seen as the only option standing at the end of the history. “The Jewish religion was destined to pass from the scene sooner or later, because it contradicted the needs of modern life, was accepted by practically all the Zionist intelligentsia.” (Ehuz Luz, p. 287.) Therefore the traditional Jew had to leave everything behind and accommodate himself with the requisites of modern politics. The new Jew had to return to history and to the politics. However what would make him a “Jew” henceforth? Or should we speak of new components of Jewish identity?

In order to understand the Jewish return to history, we need to understand the Jewish reception of modern historical thinking. The adoption of the modern historicist thinking in particular by the Jews has prepared the ground for the making of Judaism an object of historical criticism that will be elaborated further in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE EMERGENCE OF JEWISH HISTORICAL THINKING

#### 3.1. Introduction

In this chapter I will mainly look at the emergence of Jewish historical thinking. The Jews' seeing themselves in a historicist framework and writing of their history with references to a universal historical idea have been a modern phenomenon (see Myers, 2010). The question of why Jews did not write history throughout centuries up until the 19th century is an interesting and telling question. In the pre-modern period, there is an extensive literature on the position of Jewish people in history "but comparatively little interest in recording the ongoing historical experience of the Jews. There is much on the meaning of Jewish history; there is little historiography" (Yerushalmi, 1996, 31). Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi points out to the memory-oriented mode of thinking of the pre-modern European Jews, something which existed contrary to the modern idea of history embedded in the idea of progress. For him, the adoption of modern attitude of historiography, namely the writing of history had been one of the steps toward modernity and integration to the European societies. The main point is that the pre-modern European Jewry was quite alien to the European notion of history and they had a rather different relationship to past than the modern man had.

Yerushalmi makes an anthropological reference to the premodern conception of time by stating the difference between the "historical" and "mythic" times by stating that in the premodern societies, only mythic rather than a historically conceived time is real in the sense that this mythic conception refers to the beginnings of the time and paradigmatic first acts. In the Jewish case, such a conception corresponds to the creation of the world and follows a lineage of prophets as recorded in Torah. The mythic beginnings, in the Jewish case, and the Jewish prophetic history stands as "the dream-time when the world was new, suffering unknown, and men consorted with the gods. Indeed, in such cultures the present historical moment possesses little independent value. It achieves meaning and reality only by subverting itself, when, through the repetition of a ritual or the recitation or re-enactment of a myth, historical time is periodically shattered and one can experience again, if only briefly, the true time of the origins and archetypes." (Yerushalmi, 1996, 6-7)

In the Old Testament, God introduces himself through history, by reminding Exodus as an occurrence from the times past: “I the Lord am your God who brought you out of the Land of Egypt, house of bondage” (Exodus 20:2). However the times past take another form other than written history, which is memory. “For here as everywhere, ancient Israel knows what God is from what he has done in history. And if that is so, then memory has become crucial to its faith and, ultimately, to its very existence” (Yerushalmi, 1996, 9). In different parts of the Old Testament, command to remember takes place. However the past events that God commands Israelites to remember in various occasions are rather mythic rather than historic. What are commanded to remember are the events themselves and their relationship to other occurrences rather than the years that mark the exact point of occurrence within a universal/secular narrative. “It is above all God’s acts of intervention in history, and man’s response to them, be they positive or negative, that must be recalled.” (Ibid, 11) The same logic of remembering applies to the latter times of the Jewish past, such as the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem twice. They stand as symbolic events functioning such as marking the destruction of Jewish commonwealth twice; first by Assyrians and second by Romans, and the expulsion of Jews from the land promised to them by the God himself. In Judaic faith, these expulsions are believed to be through the orders of God for Jews did not keep it with the commandments and committed sins (see Scott, 1997, 338; Halvorson-Taylor, 2011, 24).

### **3.2. Exile**

The time beginning with the destruction of the Temple up until the present marks the period of exile in which Jews have been living dispersed amongst nations and until the coming of Messiah, Jews must live in exile away from the land and without a state.. “The term ‘exile’ referred to the dispersal of the Jews, as well as to their politically and socially inferior status, their being out of place (and time). (...) Exile refers to a state of absence, points to the imperfection of the world and embodies the desire for its replacement.” (Raz-Krakotzkin, 2007, 532)

The exile marks the state of living out of time and space, as it marks existing in a non-ideal world for the redemption of the sins that caused to exile. Emanating from the matters of faith, exile meant to admit the dispersed conditions of Jews and give consent to live without a state, political power, without territory and history, under the authority

of other nations. “In major canonical texts, exile from the land is considered the end of ‘history’ as a significant phenomenon.” (Krakotzkin, 2007, 533) Judaic liturgy itself is based on keeping a particular form of memory alive and, cyclical remembering of the occurrences past rather than a historically particularist remembering of the event itself:

The Jews who mourned in the synagogue over the loss of the Temple all knew a date of the month, but I doubt if most knew or cared about the exact year when either the First or the Second Temples were destroyed, let alone the tactics and weapons employed. They knew that Babylonians and then Romans had been the destroyers, but neither Babylon nor Rome could have been historical realities for them. The memories articulated in dirges of great poetic power were elemental and moving, but phrased in modes that simply bypass our notions of ‘knowing history.’ (Yerushalmi, 1996, 43)

Therefore rather than a history progressing within the flow of time, a mythical past repeating itself was functioning in the Judaic liturgy and thinking. The certain moments of Jewish past recorded in the Old Testament marked the cornerstones of that very act of remembering. “Merging of historical and liturgical time, of verticality and circularity, was obviously present also in the historical festivals and fasts to which we have alluded. (...) The historical events of the biblical period remain unique and irreversible. Psychologically, however, those events are experienced cyclically, repetitively, and to that extent at least, atemporally.” (Ibid, 42) The whole Bible is read from cover to cover annually, in all of the synagogues around the world exposing the fact that the very act of remembering is at the very base of Jewish liturgy and forms the main axis of praying.

Besides that, dealing with the human history was considered to be of no use and it was a total waste of time. Maimonides, who can be seen as the vanguard of Jewish rationalism, is a big opponent of the study of human stories from the past: “They are heretical books (...) lacking science and utility, rather a vacuous waste of time, such as the books found among the Arabs on chronicles, the lives of kings, Arab genealogies, books of songs, and the like, in which there is neither science nor physical benefit but are merely a waste of time” (Stroumsa, 2011, 107).



### 3.3. The Jewish Tradition and History

With modernization, we see the emergence of a dichotomy between the tradition and the modern condition. Throughout the process, it is possible to see the emergence and consolidation of the category of tradition signifying the daily and communal practices and institutions of the premodern European Jewish life. Just like Judaism, tradition also emerges as a concept with modernization. However it is used to signify the premodern and in some cases, the anti-modern character of the Jewish life before the arrival of modernity. Therefore in order to understand the emergence of Jewish history in its modern sense, we need to look at the different approaches to the tradition as an “other” of the “modern” in the Jewish context.

Different definitions of the tradition in terms of Judaism refer to different historical approaches and positionings. Nathan Rotenstreich puts forward three main approaches to the concept of tradition. The first refers to the textuality of the Bible itself and its carrying over through time as unchanged. The second meaning of tradition is rather related to the domain of religious writing; the Biblical interpretation in theoretical and legal aspects. “In trying to establish a connection between the first and the second meanings of tradition, the nineteenth-century Christian philosopher F. J. Molitor declared that the first refers to the external aspect of the word of the Bible and the second to its external aspect, that is, its content.” (Rotenstreich, 1972, 7) Leaving aside the definition of tradition in relation to the sacred text, he points to a rather different definition that sheds light on the problem of tradition in the modern period:

The secondary character of tradition, which received scant attention in the Middle Ages, became an increasingly important element in the philosophical and historical thought of later centuries, and a central problem in the nineteenth century. If revelation comes first and tradition second, obviously the latter becomes derivative and secondary. But the secondariness of tradition is offset by the fact that tradition is the avenue to the meaning of revelation, which must be re-interpreted continually according to the changing spirit of the times. To put this in the language of values: the value of revelation lies in its status as the original and primary stage of religious consciousness, while the value of tradition is derived from its being the advanced stage of progress of that consciousness (Rotenstreich, 1978, p. 9).

By any means, the Jewish tradition based itself on the Bible and has been formed through the interpretation of the text. “For over a thousand years, “the vital and exciting action was not in the Bible, but in the Bible commentary. It was there that you made your discoveries and defined yourself and your values” (Steinberg, 1969, 792).

The concept of tradition considered through the two approaches are mainly centered on the text of Bible and its interpretation without providing insights for discussing the social manifestations of the text and its commentary. However a text centered approach is not helpful for exhausting the concept of tradition with its various aspects. What it meant in the context of Jewish communal life and lived experience remain to be unanswered when the approached to the tradition are textual. Tradition needs to be understood as a historical reality and lived experience.

According to Nathan Rotenstreich, a third approach to the tradition within the Jewish context is functional to understand tradition as a textual and intergenerational phenomenon. While getting formed around the text and its interpretation, and being handed down between generations, tradition could preserve its vitality and accommodation between times. “Since the literary document is not merely theoretical but the very fabric of the social life of the community, the text itself constitutes an essential factor in the historical continuity of the people. In other words, the content of the Bible entails obligations in the practical conduct of the individual and the community; and as such conduct touches on the sphere of history, a necessary relation is established among text, interpretation and the history of the society.” (Rotenstreich, , 1978, 8)

Considering tradition as the totality of life beyond its merely textual function is key to initiate a discussion on the historical consciousness of European Jewry. In the premodern period, as the Jews have not considered themselves as a people holding a particular type of worldly power, the Jewish tradition has been based on a mode of historical ethos that rested on a theologically grounded conception of political powerlessness. That historical ethos has been named as exile and connoted the self (also imposed from outside) exclusion of Jews from the larger societies and their social affairs. However together with modernization, things began to change and Jews involved in processes of integration to the larger societies, being a group of people amongst others. This surely brought about a change on the function and the meaning of tradition. Instead of tradition as “the lived past”, an idea of “distancing past” came to occupy Jewish historical thinking. Rather than being an umbrella term, tradition came to imply a particular way of life among the Jews. With modernization, it implied

a strict affinity with religiosity, exilic life and passivity. Therefore the tradition itself became a subject of historical inquiry.

In the modern condition, nothing could be without history anymore, including the faiths and religious institutions formed around them. While religions and religious institutions were evaluated as consequences of a historical process, the question of essence came to the fore. How to make the distinction between the evolving elements within the body of religion and the non-evolving essence? “While modern historiography is the study of change over time, the goal of much eighteenth- and nineteenth- century historiography was to come to the unchanging essence of a phenomenon that either unfolded in time or was distorted by what were contingent historical circumstances” (Batnitzky, 2011, 35). The reception of the early modern notion of history for Jews and the adoption of historicist stances regarding the Jewish history have brought about questions and efforts regarding the definition of the essence of Judaism.

### **3.4. Modernization and Jewish History**

One of the consequences of Jewish modernization has been Jews’ return to time and space. What does the word “return” imply? As we have touched upon, in the premodern period Jews were living in segregation from the larger societies of Europe. This mode of communal life was based on the exilic mentality. Not only in terms of space but also in terms of historical understanding, Jewish experiences has been towards keeping a separate memory; remembering and reconstructing a memory based on what was prescribed in the traditional Judaic scriptures and the tradition.

With modernization, large portions of the European Jewish population began to leave their segregated realms in the European cities and got settled in different parts of the European urban landscape. They were no more forced to live in segregated neighborhoods. At the societal level, it meant the change of the status of Jews in the European public sphere. By the 19th century, Jews were not merely marked as Jews in the European public sphere but rather, the equal citizens of the newly born modern states (see Snyder, 2013, 2). For the first time in the European history, Jews had become a part of the public and they had public identities apart from their religious identifications in the larger society (see Jarrasse, 2001). As it has been extensively

studied and discussed through secularization, one of the outcomes of modernization has been the emergence of public and private spheres for individuals. Modernization brought with itself the emergence of public and private sphere for Jews, too. In terms of the European public spheres, the demand was towards their Jewishness to be a part of their private lives (Eisen, 1998, 8; Sidney Schwarz, Ruth Messinger, 2008, 238).

As it has been discussed previously, in the premodern condition, Jews were bearers of an exilic identity that made them keeping a separate memory and not being a part of the common historical narrative of the larger societies. However with modernization, the modern progressive historical thinking began to be received by Jews themselves. While traditionally the writing of history was not an acceptable attitude toward the sacred form of the Jewish past, the modernization urged Jews to narrate the stories of their existence in Europe (see Feiner, 2002).

In traditional terms, exile has never been considered as a normal state of existence for Jews. It has been an abnormal condition that Jewish had to bear till the redemption with the coming of the messiah. As Jews were deemed worthy of exile by the God, it could not be refused either. Exile had to be lived through till Jews would retrieve their normality again. According to Leo Strauss, exile “provides the Jewish people with a maximal possibility of existence by means of a minimum of normality” (Strauss & Zank, 2002, 85). However following modernization, the Jewish exilic experience in Europe turned into a source for historical narration. This meant the birth of Jewish historical idea in modern terms, the one based on secular causalities. This new historical thinking meant that the belief of divine intervention to history and to the events of the past lost its validity (see Raz-Krakotzkin, 2007). What happened after then could be understood, explained and studied through their own causalities. Therefore with modernization, the writing of history as a secular narrative has come into existence:

(...) ‘History’ implied a secular reinterpretation of the world, and that historical thinking as such accelerates the rate of profanation. This process could endanger the eternal connotation of ‘*Am Yisra’el*’ (the Jewish people) whose existence rests on sacred time and sacred law. History with a capital “H” challenges Jews and Judaism twice: in its profane understanding of the human condition and of human development; and in its association with categories and concepts of power, state, territory, and nationhood. In contrast to the core concepts of modern historical inquiry and to the meaning of profane time and concrete place

in modern politics, Diaspora existence is highly related to sacred time. (Diner, 2008, 90)

It is considered as secular because history is seen as a realm with its own method and causal mechanisms as divorced from the traditional conception of the past, declaring its own autonomy. Thinking of Jews themselves through modern historical narratives meant being part of the European historical thinking and social life by losing their minimum normality. That minimum normality has been through the conservation of the exilic mentality that provided Jews a segregated realm. However the adoption of modern historical mentality has been a significant sign of assimilation in European societies, meant to be part of the historical narrative of the world and of Europe. Therefore that also meant the rejection of the exile which had been the governing principle of the traditional Jewish life (see Raz-Krakotzkin, 2013).

The issue of history has been the source of a deep tension in the process of Jewish modernization. Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin provides a nuanced reading of it. According to him, the issue needs to be understood in theological terms. Because history as a concept having its roots in the European scholarship had always connoted a Christian stance towards past (Raz-Krakotzkin, 2007, 535). Therefore, we need to understand Jewish refusal to history within the context of Jewish-Christian polemics in the pre-modern period. Together with modernization, the very same tension took a different form, according to Raz-Krakotzkin (Ibid, 536).

The idea of modernity and the practices of the modern life were not received by Jews monolithically. It caused schisms and the emergence of different denominations of Judaism in Europe. From the idea of living in the same sphere with gentiles, to the writing of Jewish history in a modern way caused hotly debated and deeply divided positionings. The problem of assimilation of Jews into larger societies has been at the very center of the tensions created by modernization and emancipation. In the case of the Prussian Jewry, which witnessed the biggest discussions on the status of Judaism and Jewishness in the modern society, things began to change with the Edict of 1812. Following the defeat of Prussia by Napoleon, Prussian state initiated a series of reforms including extending citizenship rights to Jews following the adoption of French notion of equality. Therefore in this positive atmosphere of freedom, Jews did not have to be defined through their ontological difference from the larger society; namely through

their Jewishness. “The question now was: What value is there to Judaism in an age in which Jews don’t have to be defined as Jews, at least from the perspective of the modern nation-state?” (Batnitzky, 32) Assimilation appears to be a serious problem after that point. To what extent Jews could be a part of the German society? This question was not only directed in terms of social status of Jews in the society. In a broader sense, it also meant to inquire into the possibility of Jewish involvement in German culture as well as that of the conversation between Judaism and Protestantism. Therefore, following the routes of European Jewish history after the 18th century through the lens of this question exposes us three main Jewish attitudes.

First of them has been the total assimilation into the German culture and society, and withdrawing from any claim to Jewishness. Second attitude has been towards a conversation between Jewish and German cultures. The third attitude has been the defence of an autonomous Jewish identity at the expense of other identities and this did not open up much possibilities for dialogue between Jewish and German culture at the discursive level. In the German context this third attitude did not prove to be a common one. The second attitude of providing a space for the reconfiguration between Jewish and German cultures meant to reach at a reconfiguration of the relationship between Jewishness and the German culture and writing of a new grammar for dialogue between the two entities.

A sizeable number of German Jews did abandon Judaism for German culture, and (...) a good many Jews used German culture to refigure Judaism. But for the most part, German culture, and the German Jews who embraced it, did not allow for the possibility of Judaism or Jewishness being part of a larger German culture. As Katz puts it, “Jews had been emancipated; Jewishness was not. (Batnitzky, 2011, 32-33)

At the broader level, those who adopted the second attitude of opening up a space of conversation between Jewishness and German culture had a set of purposes regarding Jewishness and Judaism such as making them safe for the German context. One of them has been to prove that Judaism can get along with German culture and Germanness by not posing a threat to the German state and culture (see Gottlieb, 2011; Arkush, 1994). The main argument has been that Judaism does not have any claim to political sovereignty. Moses Mendelssohn was the main figure who forged this line of

thinking and initiated to make Judaism “safe for modernity” (Nelson, 2013, 106). A second purpose, as it will be discussed at length in the third chapter, has been to prove that Judaism is a religion just like Protestantism and Judaism has been source not only to Christianity but also contributed to the universal culture and ethics (Batnitzky, 2011, 36). Thus Jewishness and Judaism were depicted as worthy of recognition from many aspects and the efforts were mainly related to the concerns about how Judaism is seen by the larger society, where it could be located in the German society and made safe for modernity. That effort of making Judaism safe for the sake of its existence in the European public sphere led to a variety of questions. To what extent Judaism could be rendered to exist in a society in which Jews and Gentiles would live side by side? In such a society the religious differences would be minimized so that Jews would no longer appear in the society as merely Jews. This matter is closely related to the question asked in the previous lines: where would Judaism stand in the lives of Jews in such a social order? Therefore the main concern was revolving around the public manifestations of Jewishness and Judaism. The two points of concern to be balanced in the conversation between Jewishness and German society are the appearance of Judaism as the religion of a group of people in the German society and to the extent to which Judaism could be rendered as a religion. As the Judaic belief system has previously never been the religion of a certain group of people living in the same society with those who do not adhere to this religion, the need to draw the borders of Judaism had not been a problem of the traditional Jewry. It has rather emerged as a modern concern as living in the same society with non-Jews dictated the appearance of such a problem. In line with this, a simpler and deeper question laid down the basis for the heated debates of the periods to come: what is Judaism?

The question of what is Judaism is closely related to the relationship between the Jews and the modern nation state. As they began to be part of the modernizing Prussian state, they also became citizens. “As with the French model of nationality, to which the Prussian edict of 1812 was indebted, citizenship meant the subordination of any communal identity to the state and the relegation of religion to the private sentiment.” (Batnitzky, 2011, 33) Also the words of Comte de Clermont-Tonnerre is quite illuminative: “One must refuse everything to the Jews as a nation but one must give them everything as individuals; they must become citizens.” (Adelaide, 1789) In the premodern period, the individual Jew was not an imaginable category. The emergence

of the individual Jew corresponds to the end of the 18th century. As the European states moved towards empires from the feudal structures, Habsburg, Prussian and Ottoman Empires, absorbed the previously independent political entities. The social organization had been based on social estates.

Among other things, this meant that the eastern European Jewish individual, like their premodern ancestors, was still defined legally, politically, and theologically as a member of the Jewish community. But as a result of the economic and political turmoil of eastern Europe generally, the Jewish community changed dramatically from within. (Batnitzky, 2011, 111)

The communal life within a segregated space was the most important ground for defining the Jewish identity in the pre-modern period. Therefore excommunication, namely the legally and forcefully exclusion of a Jewish individual from the community which was the only place a Jew could retain his Jewishness in several ways, has been the biggest punishment. Excommunication in this sense meant to cut off the ties of the Jew from the communal body and thus, taking its Jewishness from himself. Without being part of a particular communal organization, being a Jew did not have a meaning in terms of identity. The idea that the Jewish communal authorities should not have the authority of excommunication would follow the process of modernization (Gottlieb, 2011, 43). With modernization and citizenship, the communal bonds once existed as the mere binding element among Jews ceased to be the only ones. It was possible to be free of communal bonds and strict adherence to rabbinical authority and keep a Jewish life at the same time. Actually, this was the demand of the modern state too.

Modernization and the loosening of the communal bonds made the private sphere possible for the Jewish individual in which he could observe particular rules and practices that he does not have to comply with, in the public sphere. In the context communal bonds and authority lost their validity, religion has been a matter of the private sphere of the individual. Therefore discussions on the status of Judaism as an internal matter of the Jews who reside in the European public sphere has led to the emergence of various positionings. On the other hand, Jewish efforts for making Judaism safe for modernity has appeared as an important concern. Because it was



apparent that Jews could not maintain their communal practices belonging their previously segregated realms in the public sphere that they shared with non-Jews. On the other hand there was a need to determine the common denominators of Jewishness in the modern public sphere. The common problematic of different reactions was to locate Jewishness in this new conjuncture. The effort to root Jewishness in the modern European context is closely related to the answers given to the question of what Jewishness is; whether its essential element is Judaism as a religion or the Jewish history containing the story of Jews as a group of people over the earth. In any of these options, the idea of history has appeared as a measure of validity for the Judaism itself. The question of what had given Judaism its current shape has invited the historicist inquiry into the realm of religion. Therefore the problem of history in the modern context appeared to be a defining matter for Judaism, in order to determine what has changed in Judaism throughout the history, what has not, and what could not have changed. Defining the essence of Judaism, this way, has been closely related to the adoption of modern historical thinking by Jews.

### **3.6. Judaism within the Bounds of Mere History**

The question of what Judaism is gained more prominence especially following the emergence of Jewish historicist thinking. Contained and considered within the universal history of humankind for the first time in its past, Judaism was considered to be part of the historical flow, history of the nations. Very similar to the Protestant conception of Christianity, Judaism was considered to be involving the unavoidable historical change. The question has been whether Judaism had an unchanging essence or it is product of a particular historical process:

Within internal Jewish debates in the nineteenth century, the idea that Judaism has an essence remained (and today remains) ambiguous and contested. If Judaism has no essence from a scientific-historical point of view, then there is no such thing as Judaism. Rather, there are many Judaisms, all of which, from a historical perspective, are equally valid or invalid. But if Judaism does have an essence, then that essence should provide some clue about how Judaism ought to be reformed in light of new historical circumstances -the advent of modern nation-state and citizenship for Jews. (...) Arguments about the relevance of Jewish history for appreciating the role of Jewish religion in the world were in the nineteenth century always simultaneously answers to the external question of Judaism's relation to Christianity as well as the internal question of what sorts of reforms Judaism needed in the modern world. (Batnitzky, 2011, 35)

The issue of the essence of Judaism has very much to do with the Jewish integration to the larger societies in Europe. What to do with Judaism when Jews were becoming a part of the European societies? The process of “becoming a part of Europe” brought with itself questions that were not asked before. The status of Judaism within the European society has been one of the questions that required an immediate answer. The question of what constituted the Judaic essence, has been taken seriously by the European Jews who were both for and against the Jewish modernization. Those who were in favor of modernization, such as Moses Mendelssohn, have defended that Judaism is coherent with the modern European political life and society. According to Mendelssohn, being the philosophical vanguard of Jewish modernization, the true Judaism, as a religion, did not have any coercive power in the political sense of the term but it was all about convincing the “heart and mind”. “He made the point that from the principles of natural law no resemblance of authority for coercing men’s mind could be derived. He insisted, moreover, that the notion of ecclesiastical power was absurd and self-contradictory. It destroyed the very character of religion” (Mendelssohn, 1983, 5). Through this line of thinking, Mendelssohn opposed to the excommunication since “reason’s house of worship has no need of locked doors. It does not have to guard anything inside nor does it have to prevent any one from entering.” (Ibid, 5) Apparently, Mendelssohn himself suggested some changes to the Jewish tradition beyond initiating a new interpretation and “making it safe for modernity” (Nelson, 2013, 106). His opposition to excommunication which had been executed by the Jewish communal authority was due to both his insistence on “Judaism as a religion convincing to hearts and minds”: “(...) and the religion, as religion, knows of no punishment, no other penalty than the one the remorseful sinner voluntarily imposes on himself. It knows of no coercion, uses only the staff [called] gentleness, and effects only mind and heart.” (Mendelssohn, 1983, 130). He defended the idea that Judaism is a non-political religion by making a clear distinction between the state and religion (Mendelssohn, 1983, 45) and added that Jewish religious authorities ought to spread the principles of reason rather than possessing political power: “But what must bring true joy to the heart of every honest man is the earnestness and the zeal with which several worthy members of the local clergy endeavor to spread these principles of reason, or rather true fear of God among the people” (Mendelssohn, 1983, 80).

It was a little while ago that Spinoza was subjected to excommunication for his views on Judaism. The major thing he did was to handle a historicist reading of the Old Testament and “casting Sinaitic Revelation as little more than a set of time-bound laws whose validity has lapsed, and then by challenging the claim of Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch” (Myers, 2010, 16). Mendelssohn would be stated as a bearer of the “historical-mindedness” who chronologically came after Spinoza (see Batnitzky, 2011, 35). However he would not subject the whole sacred history (*historia sacra*) to a historicist inquiry. Mendelssohn rather adopted “a more pervasive and textured ‘historical-mindedness.’” (Myers, 2010, 17) Mendelssohn’s stance, which David Sorkin has described as “historical without being historicist,” (Sorkin, 1996, 85) reflected both resistance and surrender to the growing historical-mindedness of the era. In recognition of this Janus-faced view, Hans Liebeschütz has asserted that “the debate between Judaism and historicism that formed such an important theme in Enlightenment-era thought . . . began with Mendelssohn.” (Myers, 2010, 17-18) The idea that some institutions could be abolished was surely the result of a historicist reading of Judaism. However beyond that, Mendelssohn was initiating a new definition that did not exist before and was trying to define Judaism as a religion in the Protestant sense of the term. “In characterizing Judaism as a religion, Mendelssohn is aware of and actually emphasizes the implicit problems that follow from trying to define it thus in a German Protestant vein. Indeed, far from simply assimilating Judaism into an alien category, Mendelssohn’s attempt to define Judaism within the modern Protestant category of religion brings with it not-so-subtle criticisms of this very category” (Batnitzky, 2011, 15). The modern times has been a period of confusion for Jews in terms of locating Jewishness and national identities such as Germanness. In such an age of confusion, the main motivation of European Jews was rather about drawing the borders of Judaism as a religion for the sake of building a European Jewish identity in coherence with the modern values of Europe.

The confusion regarding the Jewishness and Europeanness and modernization as the broader background of that confusion, as discussed above, stirred serious discussions among European Jewish intellectuals regarding Jewishness. The meanings of Judaism and Jewishness have been the subject of a semantic confusion as a result of the inquiries for drawing the borders of Judaism and defining the core of Jewishness. This is because of the fact that these two terms went through a serious process of separation.

As discussed before, historicist approach to Judaism represents one pole of the discussion. Therefore in order to grasp what happened to Judaism within the process of modernization, we need to look at the roots of the Jewish semantic confusion and then the Jewish historicist thinking.

### **3.7. The Fragmentation of Traditional Totality**

The issue of the fragmentation of Jewish traditional totality was already discussed in the previous chapter. Here, it will be covered in its relation to the Jewish historicist thinking. With the influence of the nationalism and modernization, the Jews transformed from a diasporic population into a nation with contested borders (Batnitzky, 2011, 147). This transformation did not merely lead to the emergence of the European Jewry as a body politic. As discussed previously, the transformation of the European Jewry into a political entity/nation is closely related to the emergence of Jewish historical thinking. One of the biggest consequences of Jews' adoption of modern historical thinking has been the emergence of an ambiguous semantics of Jewishness (see Diner, 2008). "(...) The Haskalah, or Jewish Enlightenment, coupled with its political aftereffects, dismantled the framework of premodern Judaism in which the Jewish individual was defined legally, politically, and theologically as a member of the Jewish community" (Batnitzky, 2011, 111). The word "traditional" is a commonly used one for the Jewish life in the premodern period. It implies the fact that premodern Jewish life was being lived in a totality in terms of world view, as shaped by a tradition that involves different forms of knowledge and practice. However modernization resulted in the fragmentation of a world of which all aspects were regulated by the tradition.

The fragmentation of the traditional totality meant the emergence of differing –and modern- realms such as ethics, nationality, ethnicity, history etc. As it was discussed under the topic of "Traditional Totality," in the previous chapter, the concepts such as Jewish ethics, Jewish history, Jewish nationalism and Jewishness as an ethnicity are modern concepts that gained their modern meanings as a result of the fragmentation of Jewish traditional totality. Dan Diner (2008) points out to a similar conceptual problem. He discusses the applicability of the concepts of power and politics to the case of European Jews and argues that "to apply the conceptual apparatus of political

history proper to the Jews” (Diner, 2008 89) is problematic as he gives references to the “non-Historical” experience of the European Jewry in the premodern period:

In contrast to the core concepts of modern historical inquiry and to the meaning of profane time and concrete place in modern politics, Diaspora existence is highly related to sacred time. What does this mean for modern Jewish politics and for Jewish political action? In order to do justice to our subject of interest – the Jewish experience in this world- one has to acknowledge the limited value of applying concepts drawn from territoriality and statist nationality. (Diner, 2008, 90)

Concepts of the modern Jewish history came into existence following the fragmentation of a traditional totality is an important point for discussing the relationship between Jewish secularism and Judaism as a modern religion. Eventhough there seems to be some sort of a clash between the secular and religious leanings of these concepts -such as Jewish religion, Jewish history, Jewish ethnicity and various discussions regarding the true nature of Jewishness- eventually they were contained in a premodern traditional totality. That phenomenon points to a tension in the use of premodern concepts within modern texts. History might be a good example in this regard. As it was discussed previously, it had a meaning quite external to the Jewish tradition and any endeavour regarding the learning of history was not welcome. History was not a Jewish term, it rather had Christian connotations in the medieval period as Raz-Krakotzkin points out. However with modernization, history has been an embraced concepts by Jews. The reception of modern historical understanding and the adoption of historicism had deep impacts on the Jewish modernization and the fragmentation of premodern traditional totality.

The fact that the opposing terms of modern Jewish terminology were existing in a coherent frame in the premodern period reveals that the terms of Jewish secularism, too, emerged out of the traditional totality of premodern period. It is important to point out the common roots of the modern Jewish terminology regardless of secular or religious connotations. Judaism began to emerge as a solid category, as a “religion” in the modern sense of the term though the process of modernization. Curiously the same process leads to the emergence of a secular Jewish identity. As the emergence of Judaism as a religion happens as the result of historicist readings of the Jewish past, so was the emergence of a secular Jewish identity based on the same historicist stance. Therefore, in order to evaluate the emergence of Judaism as a religion and of secular

Jewish identity in a mutual framework, and construe the relationship between the two, it is essential to think on Jewish tradition in the context of modernization.

### **3.8. Jewish Historicism**

The 19th century was a “historical century” as Ernst Cassirer pointed out (Cassirer, 2009, 197). The religious domain has been subjected to the assaults of historicism especially following the Protestant Reformation in Europe. Various expositions of the historical enquiry on different aspects of Christianity dominated the theological agenda in the 19th century. Discussions on “historical Jesus” that had begun in the 18th century, left its mark on the historical and the religious thinking. The biblical criticism that is based on the idea of *sola scriptura* contributed to the judgement of religion from a historical and textualist perspective. The Protestant idea of *sola scriptura*, as a foundational doctrinal principle, puts an emphasis on the text of the Bible that overrides the authority of traditional commentary and the ecclesiastical institutions. Martin Luther’s idea that “a simple layman armed with Scripture is greater than the mightiest pope without it” also emphasizes the possible role of the individual in the religious learning and practice at the expense of institutions and tradition. The Bible not only became a book that can be read and understood by the simple layman, it has also been subjected to textual criticism “with the application of critical scholarship - Wissenschaft- to biblical hermeneutics” (Howard, 2006, 2). Obviously, the application of historical criticism to the Bible, had deeply affected the emergence of modern historical thought. (Ibid, 2)

In evaluating historicism, the relationship between the theology and history in the German context is a neglected factor. While theology was the “queen of the sciences”, history was rather considered as the “handmaiden of theology” (Jaraush, 1986, 31). However with modernization and secularization following the Protestant Reformation in Europe, “history became an autonomous Wissenschaft, and perspectives and methods drawn from history began to affect other areas of inquiry, notably theology and biblical criticism” (Howard, 2006, 2). The dominance of historicism was perceived as “one of the greatest intellectual revolutions that has ever taken place in Western thought” (Meinecke, 1972, liv.), and the secularization of the historical thinking that followed the historicization of theology, a transformation first of its kind in the past, has been one of the firmest pillars of modern Western thought. “Historicism bespeaks

a “Weltanschauung,” observed Karl Mannheim, “which came into being after the religiously determined picture of the world had disintegrated and when the subsequent Enlightenment, with its dominant idea of a supra-temporal Reason, had destroyed itself . . . . Historicism alone . . . . provides us with a world view of the same universality as that of the religious worldview of the past” (Mannheim, 1952, 85).

Obviously, Jewishness as an ethos was being shaped by the changes going on in the conceptions of religion and history. As it was discussed previously, Jewish modernization brought not only the spatial integration of the European Jewry to the larger societies but it also led to the adoption of modern historical thinking by the European Jews. Beginning with Spinoza who had a very radical position within the general scope of modern Jewish history, sources of the Jewish religion was begun to be considered from a historicist perspective. The consideration of the Old Testament within a particular historical context was not exclusive to the European Jewry and actually compared to the Protestant scholars, Jewish contribution to the historicization of the Old Testament has been very proportional. Beyond being merely the creator of the historicization of the sacred texts of Judaism and, therefore of Christianity, European Jewry has been rather been the receivers or the refuters of the historicization of the sacred texts. For Jews, as discussed previously under the topic of tradition, the meaning of the text had a way deeper meaning and influence within the Judaic tradition in the premodern period and the text has been an inseparable element in the communal life and in the production of meaning. However with modernization, the texts and the tradition in which the text occupied a central and transcendent location, lost their prominence and they had been the objects of enquiry within a historical lens. Therefore in the course of the 19th century, in line with the developments in Europe, Judaism became a subject of modern historical inquiry. “Just as the nation-state had emancipated the individual Jew from the corporate Jewish community, the historian of the Jews sought to free the study of Jewish history from the authority and self-understanding of Jewish tradition. (...) Rather than secularize Judaism, the academic, historical study of Judaism actually helped to crystallize Judaism’s new standing as a religion” (Batnitzky, 2011, 36). Actually the historical study of Judaism paved the ground for the distinction of the realms of history and religion, and thus paved the ground for the emergence of a secular Jewish identity. Curiously, the very same process of distinction of realms led to the crystallization of Judaism as a religion.

As transcendence of the divine realm came under the heavy attack of historicism, the Jewish historical thinking has shifted towards the idea that all the patterns and the processes of Jewish communal life has been the product of historical circumstances. In the eyes of moderns, a category was in the making to which both Christianity and Judaism were belonging; the category of religion which has been an outcome of the Protestant experience (Batnitzky, 2011, 24). Berlin Maskilim (Jewish Enlighteners of Berlin), the disciples of Moses Mendelssohn introduced historical relativism to the European Jewish thought. While Mendelssohn himself had not directly involved in historical theory of any sort, his disciples got involved in the making of a new educational program and allocated secular subjects in it and history has been an important part of that. They were identified as the “direct forebears of modern Jewish historical scholarship in Europe.” (Myers, 2010, 20) *Wissenschaft des Judentums* was born out of Berlin Haskalah. As a movement dedicated themselves to the objective study of the Jewish history beyond the bonds of tradition (Rotenstreich, Tradition and Reality, 1972, 23; Terry, 2000, 316), the main figures of the “Science of Judaism” have reflected the modernist ideals of Haskalah in terms of Jewish integration to the German society by adopting German as the language of their studies rather than Hebrew that has traditional connotations. Another reason behind the use of German in the Jewish historical scholarship was the adoption of a critical stance on Jewish history: “The move to a non-Jewish language –German- was a major stimulus to the rise of the dominant tradition of critical Jewish scholarship in the nineteenth century. (...) At the same time, it was a clear signal that the circle of scholars associated with it had begun to embrace the fundamentals of the historicist creed.” (Myers, 2010, 21)

The purpose of the modern Jewish scholars who founded the Society for the Culture and Science of Judaism aimed “to bring the Jews into harmonious relations with the age and the nations in which they live.” (Rotenstreich, 1972, 22) The founding generation of the Society that went through changes within time, rendered Judaism as the subject of “scientific research.” At the very base of this purpose, there was “the assumption that the severance of all connections with the world of tradition was an accomplished, incontrovertible fact. The purpose of the Science of Judaism was not to restore that world but, by close study, to understand it.” (Rotenstreich, 1972, 22) Therefore, there was no intent in interpreting any of the various sources, customs and traditions of Judaism to expose it to the living Jews for educational purposes. Rather,



the various components of Judaism and of Jewishness were considered as material to be studied through the “scientific method” of modern history.

In 1818, the pioneering figure of the *Wissenschaft*, Leopold Zunz published an essay titled “On Rabbinic Literature” (Etwas über die rabbinische Literatur). The main motive behind the writing of the essay was to outline an agenda for Jewish scholarly research. The *wissenschaft* of the 19th century German historical scholarship in the agenda of Zunz: adoption of the critical scientific method without getting involved in the superstition and distortion of the past; particularly the religious tradition of the past. “Indeed, an important subtext of Zunz’s essay was the desire to wrest the classical sources of Judaism away from the hands of traditionalist rabbis whose wisdom, he boldly claimed, “had, perhaps, been extinguished forever.” (Myers, 2010, 22)

In a historicist perspective, the main motive of *Wissenschaft* was to contextualize Judaism for the sake of scientific understanding and to determine its place in the universal history of cultural evolution. “Furthermore, the special mark of this approach lay in its assumption that the chain of creativity had been broken, the source of inspiration had dried up, and the previous, living body of Judaism had been laid to rest. The Science of Judaism (*Wissenschaft des Judentums*) did not derive its historical perspective from the feeling that it was introducing changes into the world of Judaism, but from a consciousness of the distance between that world and itself” (Rotenstreich, 1972, 23). Therefore a scientific approach to Judaism that introduced the consideration of Judaism within a historical context derived its dynamics mainly from the desire that the distance between the Jews and the outside world shall be closed. For that end, Judaism had to be seen through the lens of modern ideal of progress and be rendered as a part of universal history of humankind. The historicist stance of *Wissenschaft* rather functioned as a kind of autopsy of Judaism and thus outlined the historical framework of integrating Jewish existence to the European public. The objectivity has been the motto of the *Wissenschaft* scholars, referring to the rejection of value-dependence in the scientific enquiry: “The only values of relevance to the Science of Judaism must be scientific values” (Rotenstreich, 1972, 25).

The fragmentation in the totalistic understanding of Judaism in traditional terms is visible in the deployment of the scientific method in the scientific inquiry on Judaism.

The vanguard of the Wissenschaft, Leopold Zunz, identified three areas of Judaism out of that totality: “(1) the dogmatic aspect, in which the relationship of God to man was defined; (2) the historical or symbolic aspect, which took in the nature of the covenant between God and Israel and the various institutions, which witnessed the covenant and with which the acts of religious life were bound up; and (3) the ethical and the juridic-societal aspect” (Rotenstreich, 1972, p. 25). The impact of Jewish secularization and its impact on the emergence of modern categories in Jewish thought are quite visible in this categorization. The relationship between the God and the man is reduced to an individual and private matter and this level was taken as the domain in which “Jewish dogma” would function. The second aspect was considered as the domain in which the manifestation of the covenant between the God and the Israelites laid down the ground for the community. In this domain the acts of communal religious life take place and institutions take their shapes. The third domain is reserved for the ethical premises of Judaism that motivates social action. This analytical division illustrates the resolution of Judaism into its various components for the sake of identifying its various components and elements. However on the other hand the very same division declares that the ethics, history and the dogma are divorced from each other in the modern Jewish conception which has never been the case in the premodern period. However considering simply the separation and consolidation of the Jewish ethics or the Jewish dogma from the traditional Judaic totality might not shed enough light on the case. There should be another question asked: has there ever been a Jewish ethics as a separate category or might it have come into existence with modernity? The same question applies to other categories as well as the category of religion. Has Judaism ever been a religion as an individualistic category relegated to the private domain between the believer and the God? Through the same thinking can we think of an ever-valid analytical separation between the dogma and the religious institutions? Obviously the emergence of Jewish historical thinking led to the fragmentation of the traditional totality of Judaism. Out of that fragmentation, Judaism emerged as a religion in the modern sense of the term, as the founding other of the secular Jewish domain.

Apparently, a split between the Judaic past and the “dogmas of Judaism” meant a division of realms between the temporal existence of Jewishness and its ahistorical laws, the tradition that functioned as a category that blended the two aspects of Judaic

existence in a totalistic form has lost its power and validity in the modern Jewish life. For the *Wissenschaft* thinkers, it could not be restored and nor there was a need for that. The Jewish past that was contained within the body of tradition could only be studied from a modern scientific/historical perspective.



## CHAPTER 4

### REFORM JUDAISM: THE EMERGENCE OF JUDAISM AS A MODERN RELIGION

#### 4.1. Introduction

In the very beginning, I have discussed secularism and their relevance to Jewish secularization in Europe and pointed out the relationship between the categories of the secular and the religious in the modern European Jewish context. Later on in the second chapter I looked at the modernization experience of the European Jewry and provided an account of the Jewish modernization in Europe. In doing that, I looked at the reception of modern historical thinking by the European Jewry and the founding problematics of the modern Jewish historical thought. After that, I will try to point out the relationship between Jewish historical thought and the Jewish religious realm by problematizing the emergence of a “religious” realm as a distinct category: How the European Jewry went through a process of modernization that rendered Judaism into the category of religion in the modern sense of the term? And how the Jewish historicist thinking that paved the way for Jewish secular conceptions also affected the thinking of Judaism as a modern religion? As it was discussed in the previous chapter, *Wissenschaftliche* figures “who attempted to bring Judaism into the modern world by writing its history” (Batnitzky, 2011, 33) presented an indifferent stance regarding Jewish religion and their claims to objectivity in framing the Jewish history. And the historical thinking in the modern Jewish context had a serious impact on the conception of Judaism as a separate religious realm. Because the writing of the history of Judaism meant that it has been subject to historical change and its written sources and dogmas were the products of a formation process. Nothing was exact everything has been changing as they have a history. There, in this chapter, I mean to ask, how that kind of a historicist thinking affected the emergence of Judaism as a modern religion? I will mainly look at the influence of the modern Jewish historical imaginary on the religious realm and further, I will examine the emergence of Judaism as a modern religion in relationship to modernization and secularization with a particular focus on the emergence of Reform Judaism and its conception of Judaism as a religion. The reason for choosing the Reform Judaism as the case of inquiry is the fact that it is considered as the principal modern denomination of Judaism and others followed it by directing critiques to Reform.

One of the consequences of Jewish modernization in the domain of religion has been the emergence of modern Jewish denominations. The denominations that came into existence as a result are Reform Judaism, Conservative Judaism and Orthodox Judaism (Gürkan, 2009, 59). Understanding the relationship of each denomination to modern Jewish imaginary and historical thinking is quite revealing for evaluating Judaism as a modern religion. The late 18th century marked the beginning of a new period as the modernization began to influence Jewish communal structures and the religious conception. Modernization gave rise to different positionings regarding Jewish religion and history, as it was discussed in the previous chapter. Modernization meant to be a process of fragmentation for the traditional Jewish ethos and that fragmentation has already been indicated as the vertical fragmentation. Modernization also brought about differing interpretations of Judaism that led to the emergence of various Judaic denominations that can be termed as the horizontal fragmentation for Jews. The emergence of modern historical imaginary had been one of the primary factors that accelerated the emergence of horizontal fragmentation by having a deep impact on the traditional conception. That rather led to the emergence of new conceptual hierarchies with the involvement of new concepts in the modern Jewish context. However fragmentation was not at the epistemological sphere only. Previously, another form termed as horizontal fragmentation was conceptualized that rather operated at the communal level. The emergence of Jewish denominations can be understood in terms of horizontal fragmentation.

Reform Judaism, being the principal modern denomination, appeared with the idea of adaptation to the European society in which Jews had been the equal parts. Tracking the path of Moses Mendelssohn, Reformist Jews defended the idea that Judaism is a historical religion and it has always been subject to change through time (Neusner, *Judaism: The Basics*, 2006, 151). As the Judaism itself has been subject to transformation over the course of history, the Jewish practice could be changed in line with the changes in the Jewish life in Europe, according to the requirements of the new circumstances. However the Reformist initiative met with some challenges. In objection to the Reformists claiming that Judaism has been subject to change through the history, Orthodox Judaism stated that “at ‘all times and in every situation,’ Judaism and Jewish law are ‘an untouchable sanctuary which must not be subjected to human

judgement nor subordinated to human considerations” (Batnitzky, 2011, 40). 19th century witnessed the emergence of another Judaic denomination that emerged as a critique of the Reform movement. The Positive-Historical School, Conservative Judaism in other words, rose against the Reformist conception of Jewish history that posited Jews as the passive subjects of Jewish history and depicted the larger societies as the makers and the real authorities of Jewish history. Conservatives opposed the Orthodox position and rather understood “Jewish law as the product of active, creative Jewish activity that can and should be altered in the modern age but in no way discarded” (Batnitzky, 2011, 44) and therefore while the Conservative Jews remained bound by it, the Reform Judaism rendered Halakhah or the Jewish law to an option:

Changes [that modernization brought about] compelled many Jews to alter their religious practices and to forge new forms of Judaism which were, in their view, more consistent with modern knowledge and contemporary realities. Some wished for a type of Jewish religious practice which was broadly similar to that of their Christian neighbors and allegedly more acceptable to them. From the early nineteenth century, some Jews denied the everlasting, binding nature of Halakhah and made changes to the time-honoured liturgy and ritual. (Meyer, 1967, 45)

Eventhough these three denominational lines seem to be rejecting one another ontologically, they have a common problem they have been dealing with which is the problem of history and each denomination takes position in relation to that problem. The issue of history in the modern Jewish context was already discussed previously. In the case of history’s turning into a theological problem, Reformist Judaism surrendered traditional claims to a historicist understanding, and Orthodox Judaism totally rejects the idea of Judaism as a religion which has been subject to historical change. Conservative Judaism held a middleground by giving credit both to the idea of historical change and the authority of Judaism as a religion by providing a historical reading. It is important to recognize that defending the partial or total ahistoricity of Judaism by telling that Judaism has an unchanging essence is a modern idea as much as the Reformist idea that Judaism is subject to historical change and thus it can be reformed according to the needs of the time. “Despite their differences, each movement in its own way adapts Judaism to the modern world and all three share the claim that theirs is the true, original Judaism: the orthodox movement because Judaism is defined as law, the reform Judaism because Judaism is defined as ethics, and the conservative movement because Judaism is defined by the dynamic tension between tradition and change” (Batnitzky, 2011, 33). Therefore, all denominations are either

embracing modernity or rejecting it, but anyhow each one is based on a modern conception of Judaism. However, due to the scope of the work, we will look into the emergence of Reform Judaism that is considered as the paradigmatic ground for understanding the emergence of Judaism as a modern religion.

#### **4.2. The Science of Judaism Reconsidered**

The attitude of reaching at a clear-cut definition of “the true nature of Jewishness” has been a consequence of modernization. In encounter with modernity and integration to larger societies, the parameters of defining the Jewish ethos went through a serious change. The process of Jews’ being a European people paved the ground for a modern Jewish identity that existed for the public spheres in Europe. How Jewishness would have to be defined in the European public sphere in which religion has increasingly been a distinctive matter? The question of what had to be the essentials of modern Jewish identity which is unitary and monolithic standing in contrast with the premodern Jewishness (see Neusner, 2002) seems to have led to one of the biggest crises of in the history of European Jewry originating from the fact that with modernization, there has emerged an encompassing category of Jewish peoplehood and Judaism as a religion that meant to include all Jews. That can be thought as an effort of the standardization regarding the various conceptions of the Jewish life in Europe including the Jewish identity. Apparently, the urge for a Jewish self-definition in the form of collective identity and considering Jews as a part of the European public life appeared as a novel problem as Jews in the premodern European societies did not have to reach at a self-definition in the form of modern identity. However;

for the Jew in the modern world Jewishness forms only a portion of his total identity. (...) Conscious of an influence which Jewishness has upon his character and mode of life, he tried to define its sphere and harmonize it with the other components of self. Such Jewish self-consciousness-while not entirely without precedent in Jewish history-has been especially characteristic of the last two centuries. In the considerable isolation of the ghetto, Jewish existence possessed an all encompassing and unquestioned character which it lost to a significant extent only after the middle of the eighteenth century. It is the age of Enlightenment that Jewish identity became segmental and hence problematic. (Meyer, 1967, 8)

In a conjuncture in which Jews turned into citizens and the subjects of the modern state, a need for redefining the parameters of difference between Jews and the larger societies became apparent. Therefore the adoption of the modern historical thought by Jews and its relationship to modern Jewish identity needs to be examined through the

consideration of this historical fact. The identity concept refers to a mode of self-definition that sets up a dialogue between the self and the other; Jews and the Gentiles in the case of European Jewry. Identity also stands for defining the attributes of the self, the differences that sets the self distinct from the other.

As discussed previously, before modernization the relationship between Jews and the larger societies was restricted to a number of domains. However as Jews have been the citizens of the modern state, the domain of interaction multiplied into several domains. This led Jews to setup their difference from the larger societies in various domains of social interaction. In this regard, Jewish history turned into one of the grounds on which the difference of Jewishness could be constructed. However this construction was surely based on the modern parameters and in the same vein, Jewish historical understanding rose on the pillars of modern European historical thinking. In other words, the Jewish ethos is translated to a modern historical form through the concepts of modern historical thought. Therefore modern historical thinking began to stand at the very base of Jewish identity. Curiously, the modern notion of Jewish history as discussed previously is also the basis of Jewish secular thinking as it provides a ground on which Judaism forms a portion of Jewishness. And even Judaism itself can not be understood as independent of its history: “A great Jewish historian of the nineteenth century, Heinrich Graetz, early in his career pointed out that Judaism could not be understood by philosophical analysis of its beliefs, but only by the study of its history” (Meyer, 1995, vii). In this sense, Jewish history as a modern concept provides an alternative ground to traditional definitions of Jewishness. This is the ground on which Jewish secular thought has its foundations. However this secularity needs to be elaborated further.

Regarding the recent discussions on the concept of the secular, as it was indicated in the first chapter, it is apparent that speaking of the secular as an independent concept reflects an ideological stance through a narrow reading of the secular. As Talal Asad discusses the issue, reaching at a clarity about the secular is possible through discussing it from an anthropological perspective and rendering the secular an anthropological object of study “to investigate some of the ways secular was constituted” (Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 2003, 23), just as the religious has been occupying this place as an object of study in modern anthropology. Asad points out to



the fact that by discussing the secular in relation to the concept of the religious, it becomes apparent how the “effort of defining religion converges with the liberal demand in our time that it be kept quite separate from politics, law and science—spaces in which varieties of power and reason articulate our distinctively modern life” (Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 1993, 38). Moving on from that point, the idea of a secular Jewish history, which is distant to revelation and “superstition” like in the case of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, is also questionable. In the light of critical approaches to the secular, the idea of a Jewish history which is totally independent of Judaic belief and tradition beyond religious bonds needs to be questioned and rediscussed. Was the idea of a Jewish history of that kind indeed able to remain beyond or independent of the religious realm? Or to put it in another way; the modern Jewish historicist thinking did not really influence the religious realm through an intervention?

The history of Jewish denominations, as it will be discussed in the case of Reform Judaism, does not reflect a clear boundary between the two. In the context of Reform, the realm of history plays a founding role for the evaluation of what is essential and what is the changeable side of Judaism as a religion. Particularly the influence of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* is visible in the thought of Abraham Geiger, the founding figure of Reform Judaism, as he involved in the *Wissenschaft* movement himself (see Hill, 2007). On the other hand, the modern historical idea is rejected by Orthodox Judaism. Through that way history becomes the constitutive other of religion in the case of Orthodox Judaism. When Conservative Judaism reconciles the religion with history, it does that on the paradigmatic ground laid out by *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. As Talal Asad points out, the secular and the religious gets intermingled in the case of the relationship between Jewish history and Judaism as “the differences between these movements stem from nineteenth-century debates about whether Judaism has changed throughout history, and how answering this question might be a precedent for ascertaining Judaism’s relation to the modern world” (Batnitzky, 2011, 34).

The core of the issue; how Judaism became a religion and how Judaism’s becoming a religion is related to the modern conception of history do actually refer to a political point that should be kept in mind while digging the matter deeper. That issue is how Jews should be integrated and/or assimilated into the European societies in general and

to the Prussian society in particular. The process of rendering Judaism a religion and drawing its boundaries within the European public sphere stands at the core of many discussions within Jewish circles. Therefore adopting history as a form of past for the Jews themselves does not stand as merely a philosophical or religious issue but also as a political one:

Like their Christian counterparts and often with even greater urgency, Jews debated the nature of their religious tradition and its place in modern life. Over the course of the century, legal restrictions on Jews in the German states were gradually eased, opening the door to a greater degree of assimilation than had previously been possible. Jews, therefore, had to determine what continued to be religiously obligatory, as opposed to what had derived from their legal and social position in German society and could change as that position improved. For scholars like Leopold Zunz (1794–1886) and Abraham Geiger (1810–1874) this was first an historical question: what was the nature of the Jewish tradition as it had been manifest in history? (Hill, 2007, 329)

The Science of Judaism did not only provide a modern ground for modern Jewish historical idea. It also laid the ground for the emergence of modern Jewish religious denominations. Apparently that fact leads us to question the clear line drawn between the secular and the religious in the modern Jewish case. And it requires a further inquiry. In this section we will be looking into the case of Reform Judaism and how it is related to the modern Jewish historical thinking, particularly the one presented by Wissenschaft des Judentums.

### **4.3. Introduction to Jewish Reform: Social and Historical Background**

Following Haskalah and integration to the European societies, the status and essence of Jewishness appeared to be a problem for both Jews and Gentiles. Because Jews have lived in their communal boundaries autonomously in their internal affairs. Therefore the nature of Jewishness had never been a matter of public sphere in Europe. As discussed earlier, newly emerging modern state brought with itself an understanding of full sovereignty over its territories and societies. This led to the disappearance of the premodern forms of Jewish communities who had been autonomous in their internal affairs. With modernization and integration, Jews turned into the people of the European urban sphere and the process of integration led to the rise of some questions about the status of Jews. Living in the same space with Gentiles, led to the rise of some questions about what made Jews different than the larger societies. What made the Jews Jews when they shared the same public sphere with gentiles? This has been the

point where questions about the essence of Jewishness was begun to be asked both by Gentiles and Jews themselves.

Answers to the question of what made Jews distinct or to the questions regarding the essence of Jewishness was mainly from a historicist point of view. What made Jews distinct was considered as an historical difference in terms of origins, and Jewishness was defined as an historical category. That rather points out to a difference of historical between Jews and Gentiles. The historical definition of Jewishness was a definition of the Jewish peoplehood and the phases of history it passed through. And the definition of Judaism as a religion has been through history particularly in the case of Reform Judaism that is an important cornerstone in the definition of a Judaism anew:

The appeal to history, a common mode of justification in the politics and theology of the nineteenth century, therefore defined the principal justification for the new Judaism: it was new because it renewed the old and enduring, the golden Judaism of a mythic age of perfection. Arguments on precedent drew the Reformers to the work of critical scholarship, as we shall see, as they settled all question by appeal to the facts of history. (Neusner, Three Formative Questions of Judaism, 2002, 10)

The definition of Judaism on the basis of history also laid the ground for the idea of a monolithic Judaism which is one and only. This idea has been quite contrary to the historical and geographical plurality of Judaism. As Jacob Neusner reflects, this has been a consequence of the modern historical thinking:

Judaism is one. Judaism has a history, that history is single and unitary, and it was always leading to its present outcome: Reform Judaism. Others later on would challenge these convictions. Modern integrationist Orthodox Judaism insisted on the historicity of everything, producing precisely that natural outcome, the authentic, Torah-true, Orthodox Judaism; and other, self-segregationist Orthodox Judaisms would deny that Judaism ("the Torah") had a history at all. Conservative Judaism, calling itself "positive Historical Judaism," would discover a different goal for history from that embodied by Reform Judaism. But the mode of argument, appealing to issues of a historical and factual character, and the premises of argument, insisting that history proved, or disapproved, matters of theological conviction, characterized all the Judaisms of the nineteenth century and therefore shaped the intellectual life of all Judaisms of the synagogue in the twentieth century as well. (Neusner, 10)

As it was discussed previously, the firmest ground of modern Jewish mind has been the modern notion of history. This notion has also been the ground on which Jewish secular thinking had its foundations. With modernization, the historical definition of Jewishness has been the defining ground of Judaism as a religion. As much as

defending Judaism as an unchanging body within the historical process, the idea that Judaism has always been subject to change has been taken seriously in a religious framework and discussed on a historical ground. The latter formed the paradigmatic ground of Reform Judaism. Abraham Geiger, the founding figure of Reform, formulated the urge for reform in Judaism through the idea that since the very beginning Jewish tradition involved in a process of change as it owes its existence to that involvement. In his book, *Judaism and Its History*, he provides an account of that dynamic through a modern reading of far Jewish past and draws parallels between early Jewish past and the 19th century Jewish condition in Europe. Geiger's historical reading paving the way to the idea that change and reform are inherent to Judaism will be further elaborated in the coming pages.

Judaism as a modern religion rose on the pillars of three major denominations which were either for a reformed Judaism or against it. Reforming Judaism appeared as the pioneering Jewish response to modernization and it appears to be the exemplary case for revealing the relationship between Judaism as a religion and modern notion of Jewish history. At the very beginning Reformist position asserted that "Judaism is one. Judaism has a history, that history is single and unitary, and it was always leading to its present outcome: Reform Judaism. Others later on would challenge these convictions" (Neusner, *Three Formative Questions of Judaism*, 2002, 10). Reformist Jews defended the view that as Judaism has already been subject to change, Jews themselves should handle the change and make Judaism in compliance with the needs of time. With regard to Reform Judaism's relationship to the Jewish-Gentile relations in the modern period and to the context in which Reform Judaism emerged, Salo Wittmayer Baron highlights the context in which Judaism as a modern religion came into existence;

Jewish Reform may be seen as a gigantic effort, partly unconscious, by many of the best minds of Western Jewry to reduce differences between Jew and Gentile to a slight matter of creed, at the same time adopting the Gentile's definition of what was properly a matter of creed. The reality of the living Jewish ethnic organism was to be pared down to the fiction of the Jewish 'confession' (Baron, 1964, 61).

Reform Judaism was born as a response to modern condition and first steps for reform were taken in the realm of traditional Jewish liturgy. One of them was the replacing of Hebrew with German as the language of synagogue services. Also with the introducing

of organ, synagogue prayers were rendered closer to the services in the churches (Cohn-Sherbok, 2003, 259). On the other hand, there had been changes to the synagogue structures in terms of architectural style, naming and in terms of the meaning attributed to the concept of synagogue. First reform congregation initiated by Israel Jacobson in 1810 in Germany, named the congregational places as “temple” as opposed to synagogue that evokes traditional worship. “ (...) The term ‘temple’ would be widely used by the Reform movement, in conscious imitation of the Temple in Jerusalem,” (Meyer, 1967, 48) as in the nineteenth century, Reform Jews rejected the idea of return to Zion and restoration of the Temple with the belief that any place Jews live as equal citizens is Zion. In the second Reform conference in 1845 in Frankfurt, it was “recommended that petitions for the return to Israel and the restorations of the Jewish state be omitted from the prayerbook” (Cohn-Sherbok, 2003, 261).

Obviously, the Reform Judaism was born as a search for a Jewish path of integration to the modern society and this search for integration has operated in multiple domains. The adoption of German as the liturgic language, the introduction of organ in the synagogue services, the changes made in the conception of synagogue had been outcomes of aesthetic and social pursuits on behalf of Jews, as well as religious and political ones. (Ibid, 259) For Abraham Geiger who is known as the founder of Reform Judaism, “(...) Judaism had always been a progressive religion. From its inception, the people of Israel had both to preserve the integrity of their distinctive religious spirit and to live in the world. Consequently, they always had to balance the demands of religious integrity with the need to accommodate to, and benefit from, the larger culture within which they lived” (Hill, 2007, 330).

#### **4.4. Jewish Reform and Making of Judaism a Religion**

Reforming a traditional structure, from the eyes of Reformists, has never been merely a reform of the religious practice. As in the case of other reformist movements as well, reform involves multiple aspects of what is conceived as traditional structure. As it was discussed previously, traditional Judaism did not have a modern conception of religion that reserved a sphere for religion, rather imposed an authority on multiple spheres such as liturgy, jurisprudence, ethics, aesthetics et al. Therefore Jewish Reform had not been bound to reforming a particular sphere of activity such as

religious practice rather, it established the “religious” sphere which stood in contrast to the secular sphere.

The definition of a religious sphere which stood in contrast to the secular sphere reflects a fragmented and dualist picture for the Jewish tradition. As it was discussed in the first chapter, phenomenologically the religious and the secular constitute each other mutually and therefore they are based on a duality. Such a conception of the religious which is dualist by nature is way too modern for the traditional stance. Therefore according to Reformist Jews, a past lived in segregation and shaped around the traditional integrity had to be surpassed historically in terms of institutions and conceptions. Therefore an important aspect of the Jewish Reform has been its search for a historical precedent:

It is a characteristic of reforming movements that they seek precedents. Unlike revolutions, they tend to stress continuity, links with the past rather than radical departure from it. “From its beginnings, (...) exponents [of the Jewish Reform movement] were therefore perpetually concerned to show that they were merely elaborating elements found within Jewish history. They argued that religious reform had been indigenous to Judaism since the earliest times and that they were simply giving new energy to currents that had dried up, mostly through persecution and isolation. Classical Judaism, they maintained, had been hospitable to reform. (Meyer, 1967, 3)

The seeking of precedence in history also functioned as a way of adopting a modern approach to religion by easing the tension between traditional Judaic conception and modernization or Jewish involvement in history. Already by Reformist Jews such as Abraham Geiger, the tradition itself was seen as an ever changing way for Jews. Therefore Reform was doing what tradition used to do in the premodern period. Jewish return to history, as it was discussed at length, has been a decisive moment for the European Jewry on its path to modernization and integration. For Reform Judaism, the adoption of modern historical notion has been of great importance in for modernizing and reforming Judaism in accordance with the codes of modern society for the sake of making Judaism safe for modernity. Therefore history occupies an important position in the Reform agenda and Reformist approach to history is important for understanding the emergence of Judaism as a religion. As the founder of Reform Judaism, Abraham Geiger’s reading of Jewish history should be treated with caution as it contains the codes of Jewish reform through intense discussions of the Jewish history from its beginnings.

#### 4.5. Abraham Geiger

Abraham Geiger is considered as one of the most prominent figures of modern period of the Jewish history. He is seen as the founding father of Reform Judaism. He was a scholar and a Jewish religious leader. He was born in Germany and since his childhood he got involved in Jewish education. In addition to that, he was also educated in classical humanities, studying Greek and Latin. Therefore he did not only take a traditional Jewish education. Later on in his life, he went to Heidelberg University and studied languages such as Syriac and Arabic. He had studies on Koran and “the Jewish elements in it”. He also served as an active rabbi in Wiesbaden in Germany; not only led religious services but also got involved in theological discussions and introduced some changes to the religious services.

As much as he got involved in theological discussions, he has also written numerous books on Jewish history. Therefore he was not simply a religious leader but also a devoted historian. He has been a part of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement as a Rabbi and had close relations with Leopold Zunz who was one of the pioneering figures of *Wissenschaft*. Already the relationship between Reform Judaism and the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* was elaborated in the previous pages. Particularly in two of his books; *Judaism and Its History (Das Judentum und seine Geschichte von der Zerstörung des zweiten Tempels bis zum Ende des zwölften Jahrhunderts)* and *Judaism and Islam* (its original name is *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judentume aufgenommen?: What did Muhammad Borrow from Judaism*), Abraham Geiger has paved the historical ground of the depiction of Judaism as a universal religion that has deeply influenced the course of world history. In addition to that, by writing these two books, he prepared the ground for the reforming of Judaism by demonstrating that Judaism as a religion has always been subject to change and therefore it should be reformed in line with the necessities of the modern times.

Abraham Geiger initiated a novel periodization of the Jewish history in a progressive sense. According to him the Jewish history is composed of four periods which are revelation, tradition, legalism and liberation:

Revelation ‘is an era of free, creative information from within’ that extends to the close of the biblical era. Tradition marks the period from the completion of the Bible to the completion of the Babylonian Talmud. Legalism is ‘characterized by the toilsome preoccupation with the heritage as it then stood’

and lasts, Geiger argues, until the middle of the eighteenth century. Finally, liberalism begins just as legalism ends. This is Geiger's own era, in which 'the bond with the past has not been severed,' and 'what is being attempted is solely to revitalize Judaism and to cause the stream of history to flow forth once again. (Wiener, 1962, 156-157)

For Abraham Geiger, Jewish tradition is shaped by the toilsome character of the middle ages. The legalism of that period should finish and the true spirit of Judaism should be revitalized (Wiener, 1962, 157). The transition from the legalistic period to the period of liberation which is the present time of Abraham Geiger, forms the period of reform. In this very period, "Geiger hopes to reform first and foremost what he takes to be contemporary Judaism's fixation on Jewish law" (Batnitzky, 2011, 37). Apparently, what was needed for reform was a new vocabulary and historicizing Judaism (HaCohen, 2010, 184) has been an important method for a rather crystal clear normative commandments rather than the traditional flexibility of argumentations that does lack a practical aspect (HaCohen, 2010, 183). Geiger himself points out to the historicity of certain words and terms and their changing meanings and functions. Then he proceeds to the nature of the scripture as its meaning has very much been dependent on the political and religious context. As he demonstrates in his book, *Judaism and Its History*:

Words and terms which, at the time when they were first used, had quite a different meaning, are now taken in a sense which was gradually attributed to them, and is now the ruling one. Hence, when we read the ancient writings containing these expressions, according to our usage of the language, we must necessarily arrive at gross misconceptions; nevertheless, men will resist, whenever the original meaning is demonstrated, and, accordingly, the whole mode of thinking of that time elucidated. The terms: Pharisees, This world, the Future World, the Kingdom of God, and the like, belong, according to our settled conviction, to that class of words whose meanings have undergone an important change. I appeal, therefore, to ingenuous examination, that it may gain the strength to wean itself from acquired prejudices, and arrive at the knowledge to transpose itself to historical events long passed. (Geiger, 1866, iv)

As it will be discussed in greater detail in the coming pages, Reformist Jews looked at the Prophetic period as a paradigmatic time, "a golden age' when Judaism spoke to all humankind of the obligations of justice and mercy" (Neusner, *Between Time and Eternity: The Essentials of Judaism*, 1975, 139). "Geiger described himself as a theologian, not a historian, and historical analysis was, for him, a handmaiden to the theologian, a position that was not unusual in his day. In his "*Einleitung in das Studium des jüdischen Theologie*," lectures delivered in Breslau in 1849, he describes the task



of theology as tied to a historical examination of Judaism” (Heschel, 1998, 5). Therefore history appears as a measure for understanding the authentic meaning of the word for “if we desire to understand Antiquity, we must comprehend its mode of language and thought, and not measure it by our own standard” (Geiger, 1866, v).

The idea of “comprehending Antiquity’s own mode of understanding rather than measuring it by our own standard,” correlates with the practice of historicizing the text for measuring it by its own standard. The very idea of understanding the text within its own measure, in the context when it was revealed to the people has paved the way to Biblical criticism in Europe following the Protestant Reformation, as a practice that emerged in opposition to the Catholic tradition. Biblical criticism has been an important component of Abraham Geiger’s thinking and of Reform Judaism (Terry, 2000, 197). According to that approach which was developed by Protestant scholars, the text of the Bible was compiled of the writings of different authors. Therefore it is not the work of a single person, who is considered to be of Prophet Moses according to Jewish tradition, but rather it is a compilation of different authors. Surely, reception of biblical criticism by Reformist Jews led to the rise of several questions about the nature of revelation to Prophet Moses in Mount Sinai and not limited to revelation, the questions came up about other domains of religion. These questions and answers to them was rather from a historicist point of view:

While divinely inspired it was not the final word of God, whose Will was revealed not once and forever at Sinai, but gradually over the centuries. The Torah reflected the social mores and presumptions of ancient Israel; therefore, insisted the Reformers, Halakhah could and should be altered to reflect changing socio-economic circumstances and modern ideas of progress. Aspects of Jewish law which had become obsolete or which offended contemporary sensibilities could be discarded or altered. The spirit of Judaism was more important than the letter. (Meyer, 1967, 47)

In line with this end, Reform Judaism initiated a rereading of the Jewish past in compliance with “the authentic condition of Judaism”. By imagining a perfect moment of the religion in which it attained its full integrity, it provided the principles around which Judaic reform could be handled. “Not change but restoration and renewal of the true modes, the recovery of the way things were in that perfect, paradigmatic time, that age formed the model for all time -these deeply modes of appeal formed the justification for change transforming mere modification of this and that into Reform.” (Neusner, Three Formative Questions of Judaism, 2002, 11) In such a context, Geiger

asserted the idea that Judaism had to be rethought in terms of its relationship to the premodern tradition and the need for compliance with universal modern values. “As an outspoken advocate of reform, Geiger had to show that the reforms he supported did not threaten the integrity of Judaism in an effort to curry favor with the larger Christian culture. Rather, reform represented an authentic response to changing circumstances that was consistent with the essence of Judaism” (Hill, 2007, 331).

Apparently, the essence of Judaism stands as a key problematic in the thinking of Abraham Geiger. As he introduced historicism into Judaism for the sake of making it in compliance with the modern values and historical development (HaCohen, 2010, 183), he defended the idea that Judaism has always followed the path of historical change and accommodated itself to developments of different contexts. For Geiger, “historical facts, are the sources whence convictions, rules for belief and practice are derived” (Geiger, 1866, iv). The Judaic belief and practice of his day were not solely interpreted and enforced by the traditional authorities. “Instead they were the latest product of historical facts, and these historical facts were open to investigation by properly trained critical scholars—historians of talent. Geiger thus “historicized” the tradition—he interpreted it in fundamentally historical terms, despite his interest in a trans-historical Jewish religious genius” (Hill, 2007, 333-334). However there is a paradoxical aspect of “trans-historical Jewish religious genius” when we look at Judaism from a historicist perspective. If it had been changing throughout history, what has constituted Judaism’s distinctive essence so that it could remain as “Judaism”? Before providing a direct answer to that question, Geiger questions the place of religion in the modern condition and comes up with a definition of the concept of religion in his book “Judaism and Its History”: “longing after the Highest, attachment to the Whole, striving toward the Infinite despite our finiteness and limitations—that is religion” (Geiger, 1866, 18). And for him that longing after the highest was handled by Judaism at its best, compared to other religions of antiquity: “Love for God is an idea which Heathenism [Paganism] did not know, which Judaism repeatedly teaches with such sublime simplicity. . . . the expression of such a sublime relation with the Most High Being determines also the relation of men between each other, produces the loving attachment of men to each other.” (Ibid, 42–43). Understanding Judaism truly required that one see this striving after the infinite in terms of love of God and neighbor. This, then, was the center which so shaped the adaptation of Judaism in

different contexts through the centuries” (Hill, 2007, 332-333). By doing that, Geiger depicts Judaism as the historical origin of “longing after the Highest” as well as the historical predecessor of other monotheistic religions. The words of Geiger exposes his passionate search for a place for Judaism in the universal history of mankind and thus he historicizes Judaism:

A grand world-historic phenomenon not merely conveying the idea that Judaism, like many other historic phenomena, entered upon the world's stage for a certain time, and, during that time, exercised great influence; but, then, as something finite, disappeared again, and has become, or shall become, merely a subject for historical consideration -no, we may call it a world-historic phenomenon as an institution which reaches back into that age whence historical knowledge began for the world ; which has not alone existed for thousands of years, and still exists, but because it has passed, as it were, as an immortal wanderer, through history, continually accompanying history, and co-operating with it from its very first beginning even to this day ; a world-historic phenomenon, because it has given birth to kindred phenomena, Christianity and Islamism, and thrown them into history as great motive powers which exercised their reforming, vivifying effect upon vast multitudes, shaped the whole bent of their spirit, and affected the development of all conditions; and because thus Judaism itself has done all this through the medium of those two phenomena. (Geiger, 1866, 2)

The rest of the chapter will rather be reserved to an interpretation of the citation above. Here, Abraham Geiger has done two major things. First of all, as a man of religion, he placed Judaism into a historicist framework, rendered Judaism as a part of the universal history. This clearly reflects the historicist stance of Abraham Geiger and the main perspective of the Reform regarding the Judaism as a religion; Judaism is a historical entity and it is subject to historical change. Namely, it is changeable over time. Therefore it can be changed, or better say, reformed for the sake of compliance with the modern times. This is the most basic argument of the Reform Judaism and Geiger roots this argument, as it is visible above, in the idea that Judaism is part of the universal history of humankind. Before, as it was touched upon in a detailed way, the Jewish tradition had a distanced positions regarding the idea of involvement into the history. Jews themselves, in the pre-modern period- has kept a Judeo-centric memory and at the very center of it, a liturgical remembering of the events narrated in Torah resided. The writing of history in a progressive and modern sense was not that favorable; Jews had not written their histories in exile extensively up until the modern period. With modernization, they, as Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi asserts, returned to history and the modern idea of history was adopted by Jews themselves regarding the Jewish history.

Another major thing, the references to Judaism as the origin of two other succeeding monotheistic religions; Christianity and Islam, constitutes the another aspect of placing Judaism into the universal history of humankind. By telling that, Abraham Geiger subtly asserts that Judaism is at the very origin of the world history. It has given birth to Islam and Christianity, according to him and actually, they are more perfected forms of Judaism. Namely, Judaism kept changing and took other religious forms. Particularly Geiger's approach to Judaism is interesting due to the fact that, on the one hand, he seems to be paving the theological ground of Jewish integration to the larger Christian societies and on the other hand, he had given a message to the European societies, in particular to the German society, that Jews contributed to their cultures and religions. He has extensively written and spoken on his thesis that Jesus was a Pharisee Jew. This thesis will be elaborated further in the coming pages together with other assertions of Geiger within the framework of Jewish integration to the German society.

#### **4.6. Geiger, Christianity, and Islam**

In one way, Abraham Geiger presents Judaism as the origin of that universal history, by historically drawing the courses of action of two other monotheistic religions which are Islam and Christianity. Both of these religions hold a curious position for Geiger. As Susannah Heschel points out, "Geiger formulated the fundamental intellectual problem that occupied him throughout his career: the relationship between Judaism and Islam and between Judaism and Christianity. At stake was his effort to redefine the position of Judaism on the map of Western civilization, from a despised deviant to the source and generator of two other religions." (Heschel, 1998, 82)

One of Geiger's most well-known works bears the title of *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* (What Did Muhammad Borrow from Judaism?). In this book Geiger presents a historical reading of "the origins of Koran" as well as the relationship between Judaic and Islamic doctrines. By doing that, he "exposes" that "Muhammad in his Quran has borrowed much from Judaism as it presented itself to him in his time" (Geiger, Judaism and Islam, 1970, 1) and places Islam as one of the consequents of Judaism. What is more curious for our discussion here is the way Geiger constructs the relationship between Judaism and Christianity for such a relationship reflects the main reason why Reform Judaism exists. "Some Jews desiring

to become part of mainstream society sought to define “Judaism” in terms of the dominant culture rather than according to the traditional Jewish framework. In this milieu, the Reform movement introduced universal ethical monotheism as a conceptual basis for Judaism.” (Kwall, 2015, 87) In his book titled “Das Judentum und seine Geschichte von der Zerstörung des zweiten Tempels bis zum Ende des zwölften Jahrhunderts” and translated as “Judaism and Its History”, Geiger examines “the Judaic roots of Christianity” where he also presents a history account of Judaism since the very beginning and Islam’s relationship to Judaism. The main purpose of Geiger as the manifestation of Judaism as a source of universal human history is quite apparent. “Like other geniuses, historians of genius could see in some particular phenomenon the spirit that animated the whole, the true essence of Judaism as it was manifest in history. In Judaism and Its History, Geiger emphasized this essence as he surveyed the history of Judaism.” (Hill, 2007, 332) Therefore Geiger’s reading of Christianity’s Judaic roots deserves close attention for exposing the relationship between Judaism as a modern religion and the society in which such an idea flourished.

There are overlapping codes in depicting Judaism as the origin of universal history, making Judaism safe for modernity and rendering Judaism a religion. As discussed earlier, the Jewish willingness to be part of the world history was reflected through the adoption of historicist thinking by Wissenschaft des Judentums and its impact on Jewish religious realm. The common wisdom on Wissenschaft des Judentums and Abraham Geiger usually focuses on “the assimilationist and apologetic motivations” of these figures. By adopting a modern historicist stance, in this regard, they had been a part of the modernity project and have written Jewish history from an assimilationist perspective. By doing that, so the story goes, they paved the way for the fading away of Jewish identity. However a close examination of Wissenschaft des Judentums and Abraham Geiger overturns the picture. According to Sussannah Heschel, neither Wissenschaft historians like Leopold Zunz, nor Reformist Jews like Abraham Geiger intended to abandon Jewishness. Rather, they “sought to demolish the standard portrayal of Western history by looking at the Christian West from the perspective of Jewish experience.” (Heschel, 1998, 2) With reference to David Sorkin, Heschel adds that “German Jews were neither fleeing nor seeking assimilation into a secular society but shaping their Jewishness out of a constant, creative tension with the surrounding society. The tension reached an intellectual peak as Jewish historians began to define

both Christianity and Judaism.” (Ibid, 2-3) In the case of Abraham Geiger, Islam was also included within the borders of Judaism. Therefore Abraham Geiger, who had a *wissenschaftliche* (scientific) approach to Judaism, constructed a history for Judaism by locating it at the very origin of the universal history:

(...) we may call it [Judaism] a world-historic phenomenon, as an institution which reaches back into that age whence historical knowledge began for the world; which has not alone existed for thousands of years, and still exists, but because it has passed, as it were, as an immortal wanderer, through history, continually accompanying history, and cooperating with it from the very first beginning even to this day; -a world historic phenomenon, because it has given birth to kindred phenomena, Christianity and Islamism, and thrown them into history as great motive powers which exercised their reforming, vivifying effect upon vast multitudes, shaped the whole bent of their spirit, and affected the development of all conditions; and because thus Judaism itself has done all this through the medium of those two phenomena. (Geiger, 1-2)

With German unification a political process, a relationship established between German national identity and Christianity. The relationship of Judaism to Christianity, to its origins has been an important point for the status of Judaism and therefore of Jews in the German society. If Jews were to be accepted as equal members of the German society, the premodern hierarchy based on the superiority of Christianity to Judaism had to be renegotiated. Therefore “In the era of Jewish emancipation and German unification, as German and Jewish nationhood and identity were passionately debated and the relations between the nation and its inhabitants and between Christians and Jews were freshly negotiated, the political culture of the era also found expression in the categories of theological scholarship.” (Ibid, 66) The discussions initiated by Abraham Geiger regarding the origins of Christianity and the Jewishness of Jesus can be evaluated basing on that point. The process can be seen as a restructuration of the ontological difference between the Jew and the Christian rather than a direct asimilatory stance. As Susannah Heschel states, the definition of the borders between Christianity and Judaism by historians has been at the peak of the intellectual tension. This definition of borders can be seen as a reconfiguration of the Judaic existence within the modern condition. In the case of such a need, Judaism was defined as a religion. Therefore the stance of Abraham Geiger on Christianity should be viewed in terms of his universalist reading of Judaism and making it the basis of two succeeding monotheistic religions.

#### 4.7. Abraham and Jesus

The publication of Geiger's book *Das Judentum und seine Geschichte* (Judaism and Its History) in 1865 erupted debates in Germany for he defined Jesus as a Pharisee Jew and added that his Christianization was an ultimate act of paganization. That had been a definite betrayal to his Judaic message (Heschel, 1998, 1, emphasis added). Already, up until that time, Judaism was subjected to historical analysis with the advent of Biblical criticism. However this has been the first time that a Jew reversed the dominant position of Protestant Biblical scholarship from a Jewish perspective by stating that Christianity distorted the message of Jewish Jesus. In traditional terms, Jesus was not seen as a positive historical figure and discredited in several ways. However in the modern Jewish texts, we began to see a positive reception of Jesus as in the case of Abraham Geiger. His stance in *Judaism and Its History* is in line with the idea that Jesus brought a clear message but it was corrupted afterwards and took its final shape in the form of today's Christianity. That revolutionary stance obviously provides a window to the state of the German Jewry in the nineteenth century.

That reversal not only provides a different perspective on Reform Judaism which stood for the idea of integration to the German society. Considering the relationship of Geiger to *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, that reversal also challenges to the consideration that Jewish adoption of European historicist idea was for the sake of a direct integration. In his book, Abraham Geiger wrote the history of Christianity from a Jewish perspective. Curiously, the writing of Christian history also involves the act of writing the history of Judaism and this very act exposes the dialectics of Jewish integration to the German society. In this regard, we will look at where Judaism is located in this dialectical relationship and thus, how it is defined in this novel context. What needs to be kept in mind is that the discussions on Jewish history in the modern period was initiated by Protestant scholars who were having discussions around historical Jesus (Brenner & Rendall, 2010, 18-19). Therefore the Jewish history in the time of Jesus had been a matter of discussion for the Protestant scholars while they were in search of origins of Christianity. A certain argument was the corrupted state of Judaism at that time and Christianity's savior status. Obviously, these discussions can not be thought as immune from the political context of Prussia in which Jews were accorded the status of citizenship. Christian Wilhelm Dohm who wrote the first book in favor of the civil improvement of European Jewry stated that biblical Judaism was

already a corrupted religion and Jews need to return to the rational religion of their forefathers that exists in the Bible (Brenner & Rendall, 2010, 21). Therefore Geiger's reversal of Protestant reading of Jewish history appears as a defense of Judaism vis-a-vis Protestantism. However beyond defending Judaism in the book lines, Geiger thought that the reform was necessary for setting the ideal theological position of Judaism by rejecting particular aspects of it for making the distinction with premodern Judaism and early Christianity (Heschel, 1998, 4). Therefore reform was intended not only against a Judaism that is not in compliance with the ethos of modern society but also against Christianity. That is apparently an act of clarifying the borders of Judaism as a religion, both in the Jewish and Christian societies.

The very act of clarifying the borders between religions -evoking the distinction between the secular and the religious- appears as a modern issue for it was necessitated by an urge to constitute separate realms of religion. That is very much consistent with the liberal demand of the modern times that religion be kept out of other spheres of life (Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 1993, 38). The very tension created by modernity can be observed in the life of Abraham Geiger and sheds light on the emergence of Judaism as a modern religion. Born into an orthodox family, Geiger's entry into historical scholarship was succeeded by questions directed at the Jewish tradition. "Even as Jesus emerged as a contested figure on the boundary between Judaism and Christianity in the debates between Geiger and Protestant theologians, Geiger's own life can be viewed as an existence on the boundaries. The most important areas of his life were the problematic boundaries between Orthodox and Reform, and between Judaism and Christianity." (Heschel, 1998, 24) Curiously, those boundaries between Judaism and Christianity rendering them as totally distinct religions in the modern sense of the term can be problematized, as Susannah Heschel points out. The construction of distinct spheres for different religions at the expense of one another has appeared as a modern phenomenon. This act of drawing boundaries between them can be seen as a process of religion-making for it meant attributing a distinct sphere to the structures that were once embedded in all spheres of societal life, institutions and processes in the form of traditional integrity.

Geiger defined the borders between Christianity and Judaism and thus, supported his idea that historically Judaism is the origin of Christianity through a new reading of the



early history of Christianity; the context of the Second Temple in which Jesus came as a prophet. By doing that, Geiger constructed an inevitable relationship between Judaism and Christianity; namely between the religion of Jews and the religion of the society which Jews were getting integrated into. Furthermore, for Geiger, Christianity is ultimately dependent on Judaism to make an authentic sense of its origins. “To achieve this claim, however, Geiger undertakes a kenosis [theologically emptying] of the Christian myth and a reconstitution of it that is intertwined with his myth of Judaism: Jesus was a Pharisee who taught Pharisaic Judaism, and the Pharisees were liberal democratizers of Judaism of their day” (Heschl, 1998, 7).

Obviously, Jesus appeared as a prophet in a Jewish context as Jerusalem was under the Roman rule and there was a chaotic atmosphere as the tensions between different sects was at the surface. If we use today’s terms to explain it, the first receivers of Jesus’ message were Jews and therefore the first Christians were actually Jewish converts. However in terms of that century, there are discussions on whether those people who followed Jesus can be considered as “converts to Christianity” for conversion happens between religions. At that time, apparently, Christianity was not an institutionalized religion and it was conceived rather as a sect of Judaism. In that context, Jesus was considered as claiming to be a new Jewish prophet for the conceptually today’s borders between the two religions were not existing around that time (Schoeps, 1969, 5-6). Jews were not in a condition of exile around the time Jesus came as a prophet but Jerusalem was under the sovereignty of the Roman Empire and it was governed by a Roman governor. Right before Jews faced a second expulsion in the year 70 CE, they had their Temple in Jerusalem around which particular Jewish sects were organized. At that time, there were mainly two sects that dominated the Jewish life: Sadducees and Pharisees. Geiger initiated his version of early Christian history and his figure of Jesus through a reading of these two sects and constructed the history of Second Temple Judaism around them by defining “the texture of Judaism from the Second Temple to the Mishnaic period as an ongoing conflict between Pharisees and Sadducees.” (Heschel, 1998, 5). According to Geiger, the tension between Sadducees and Pharisees shaped the Judaism of the later periods; “partly we still adhere to them, partly we contend against them; now, they are the very foundation upon which we stand, and then again, they present those barriers within which we feel ourselves confined, and which we are trying to break down” (Geiger, 170). Relying on this

tension within Judaism, the novelty he introduced was to define Jesus “as a figure within Judaism, rather than as founder of a new, separate religious movement, was presented by Geiger as evidence that Judaism was the original, true religion, from which Christianity was a deviant derivative” (Heschel, 1998, 4). Therefore he based his interpretation of Christianity and the teachings of Jesus on the tension between these two tendencies.

To make a better sense of Pharisees and Sadducees, for Abraham Geiger, there is a need to understand the Jewish encounter with Roman Empire and the Hellenic culture. That encounter began with the Roman conquest of Palestine in the late 330s BCE. Upon the conquest by Alexander the Great, Judaism had encounters with Hellenism. According to Geiger, this encounter paved the ground for new formations: “whenever two spiritual powers meet, such as Hellenism and Judaism, such as Grecian culture and Jewish Religion, when two such spiritual, world-reforming powers come into conflict with each other, that conflict must necessarily result in new formations” (Geiger, 142). Curiously, the context in which Judaism’s encounter with Hellenism as “world-reforming powers” and led to the emergence of new formations is very similar to the context in which Abraham Geiger wrote his book, in which Judaism had a direct encounter with the German culture in various domains. With regard to Judaism’s encounter with a new culture, Geiger speaks of Judaism’s capacity to adopt to new circumstances; “wherever a new culture springs up, where the mind develops itself untrammelled, a fresh nationality, a vigorous spiritual development is manifested, there the professors of Judaism soon adopt the new culture, digest it, and regard the country which offers them the highest boon of life, liberty of the spirit, spiritual advancement, as their home” (Geiger, 144). However, the Roman conquest did not bear good fruits for Judaism. According to Geiger, under the domination of Hellenic culture, Jews in Egypt whom Geiger calls as “Grecian Jews” as they have adopted Greek philosophical thinking over Judaism (Geiger, 153) have lost their religious and cultural belonging almost totally, “under the rule of a Heathen-Hellenic State” (Geiger, 156). With the extension of the Heathen-Hellenic State which is the Roman Empire from Egypt to Syria, Judaism had passed through many trials and troubles in Palestine itself. The Temple in Jerusalem was desecrated with Roman idols. Judaism was under a serious threat. Within that context, amongst a number of Jewish sects, Pharisees and

Sadducees formed the two pole of Judaic conception at the heat of threats against Judaism.

Sadducees attributed religion with themselves, by referring to their lineages as they were “the descendants of the priestly estate, with the families or rank allied to them” (Geiger, 163), they acted in a rather exclusive way and “instead of remaining the servants and ministers of Religion, they made Religion their servant” (Geiger, 162-163). The other major group, Pharisees or the Separatist as Geiger called them, distanced themselves from the surrounding nations and from the Jews who got hellenized. “The Separatists, the sound and strong heart of the citizens, regarded their priests and rulers as their representatives only in so far as they truly watched over their religious and political life; but as soon as they made their own personal interests paramount to the claims of Religion and the Commonwealth, the Separatists, the citizens at large, assumed a hostile attitude towards the Zadokites” (Geiger, 163). The main line of division between Pharisees and Sadducees was the idea, supported by the Pharisees that everyone should be regarded as priestly and holy; opposite to the idea Sadducean idea that liturgy and religious services in the Temple can be performed only by a group of priests. While Pharisees were more inclusive in terms of religion, Sadducees appeared to be rather exclusive. At the very base, the real tension between the two groups, as Abraham Geiger reflects it, had been on the idea that the individual can perform the liturgy, thus he can carry out religious responsibilities by himself. While Pharisees defended that idea, Sadducees opposed to it by saying that there is the need for a particular class of priests. Also, Geiger looks at Sadducees as a self-made noble class and even became Philhellenists who sided with the sovereign in the land and inclined towards their culture by placing themselves above their own people.

At the end they lost their favour as a group who did not care about the welfare of their people, as Geiger puts it (Geiger, 171). On the other hand, Pharisees existed as a group out of the very people they belonged to and defended the idea of equal rights for everyone by struggling against priesthood and hierarchy, “a struggle even for the truth, that outward qualities do not exclusively constitute a claim to higher worth, but that the prize belongs to inward, religious conviction” (Geiger, 172). By contrasting the Sadducean type of priestly authority and the Pharisean idea of individualistic freedom based on the religion conviction and conscience, Abraham Geiger apparently lays down the historical background of the Jewish Reform by highlighting that liberal

values were defended by a Jewish sect against another, at the very beginning of the Rabbinic Judaism. Under the banners of Sadducees and Pharisees, Geiger contrasts the traditional Judaic conception of the premodern era and the Haskalic religious ideals based on integration to the larger society and Judaism as a religion based on personal meaning (Koltun-Fromm, 2006, 1). One of the occasions, for instance, that Abraham Geiger reflects Phariseism as a rather liberal and egalitarian sect is the belief in the resurrection of the body. According to him, Pharisees believed in a future that the priesthood and all the unequal hierarchies would dissolve and “the people will be invigorated, the national life will come, and we, too, shall participate in it’. They were not satisfied with the mere hope that the future would bring to light what the hot air of the present had begotten; they themselves desired to participate in the enjoyment of the future, because they had enjoyed nothing in the present. This is the foundation of the belief in a future Resurrection of the Body” (Geiger, 178). However, on the other hand, Sadducees refused the idea of the resurrectio of the body. According to Geiger, this rejection is closely related to the fact that Sadducees were satisfied with their power and they were not wishing for a change (Geiger, 179). At the very root of the differentiation, according to him, there was the tension based on the diametrically opposite positions regarding the existence of religious hierarchies governing the Jewish life in Palestine and everything else came out of that. As Geiger points out, the tension between Sadducees and Pharisees grew hotter in terms of the civil life as well as religious affairs and further intensified in due course (Geiger, 179). At the dawn of the Roman conquest, and full control over Jerusalem; Geiger reports the ever grown contestations between Pharisees and Sadducees.

In order to figure the main criticisms of Abraham Geiger vis-a-vis Jewish tradition and traditionalism, his approach to some Jewish historical figures that lived in this atmosphere can be illustrative; especially the way he elaborates these figures in such a context of crisis. Amidst the growing tension between Sadducees and Pharisees, Geiger points out to the emergence of a figure who revived Judaism by suggesting solutions to its internal conflicts; Hillel the Elder. He has been regarded as one of the most important religious leaders in Jewish history and contributed to the formation and codification of the traditional Jewish scriptures. He was born in 110 BCE in Babylonia. He lived in Jerusalem during the time of King Herod. King Herod was the Jewish governor of Judea during the Roman rule and at time Hillel lived in Jerusalem, Romans

were politically sovereigns there. Apparently Hillel lived through all the Jewish sectarian conflicts. In the traditional sources, he was believed to be the savior of Judaism in his time: “The Torah had been forgotten, then Ezra came from Babylon and established it anew; and again the Torah came into oblivion, when Hillel arrived from Babylon and established it anew.” (Geiger, 183).

Abraham Geiger speaks of Hillel as a reconciliatory figure whose stance has been very much inclusive and tolerant vis-a-vis proselytes and non-Jews and thus he moved the principle of coexistence to a new level through commenting on the role of Hillel at the Second Temple period. Geiger refers to an anecdote that exposes the essence of Judaism according to Hillel and that reflects the stance of Hillel vis-a-vis not only Jews but all human beings. Once a non-Jew who wanted to convert to Judaism came to Hillel and asked if he could teach him the very essence of Judaism during a very brief time of standing upon one foot. Then Hillel replied: “My son, listen; the essence of Judaism is: whatever is displeasing unto thee do not do unto others; this is the foundation and root of Judaism, the rest is commentary; go and learn.” (Geiger, 188). Thus Geiger concludes that “his representation of the foundation and essence of Judaism fully discloses the sentiment of man; the essence of Judaism consists in love of man and mutual regard, in the respect for man’s dignity and equality, -this is the foundation and root, all the rest is commentary” (Geiger, 189). He did not exhibit a strict regard for the dead words at the expense of being inclusive to others. Obviously, with such a reading of Hillel, Geiger renders him as a great reformer and his framing of Judaism as a religion that fits the universalism which Reform Judaism was in pursuit of. For Geiger, Hillel’s defense of the Jewish tradition was not similar to defense of dead words; he has been “a man of living continuous development, he demands that life in its freshness should decide upon measure and form” (Geiger, 191). With reference to the Hillel’s telling of “if I work not for myself, who will work for me?”, Geiger states that man should labor in his own time to understand Judaism and question if rulings that are already beyond their own time should be binding for one’s own time as well (Geiger, 193). Thus with reference to Hillel, Geiger reflects one’s own obligation to rethink the religious dogmas of his own time, and that principle stands at the very core of Reform Judaism that tries to make Judaism in compatible with the values of modern period. For him, Hillel was already a great reformer at his time, and saved Judaism out of the sectarian conflicts via rethinking and reforming the tradition.

In rivalry between each other, Abraham Geiger put his emphasis on Pharisees whom he saw as a group embracing the liberal values. In Geiger's writings, Pharisees appear as the historical predecessors of Reform Judaism for they saved Judaism and Jews from a total destruction by shaping Judaism in an ever-reforming structure. Following the Roman conquest of Jerusalem, they were Pharisees, according to Geiger, who reformed Judaism in line with the needs of the day and saved it at a time of crisis, while other sects got involved in political struggles:

A grand world-historical event occurred, and, before we proceed, we must once more vividly place before our eyes the state of the world, especially as far as Judaism was effected by it. (...) The reformatory labors of Hillel had freed the spirits from the narrow-minded desire to clothe themselves in the garb of priesthood in their struggles against priestcraft; Phariseism had entered upon a phase of development, wherein it suffered itself to be permeated by the true spirit of Judaism, although, as is the case with all such movements toward Reform, a certain indecision still ruled the day. Priestcraft and Temple-service still retained their importance, although they were decaying; the elevation of man to free and independent religiousness had not yet reached that high point from which the eye could turn, free and untrammelled, through the wide space of the Divine-Human, creating and reforming the outward form while ruling the innermost convictions. Reform was ardently sought; still it was to be effected by closely connecting it with existing forms and views; and so far it did succeed. Continual working in this wise would certainly have carried Judaism to higher developments. Phariseism was a sound limb on the body of Judaism, and proved itself as such also at that time (Geiger, 1866, 201-202).

For Geiger, the staunchly hierarchical position of Sadducees appeared to be a serious obstacle to the liberation of the Jewish individual in terms of religious practice and inner belief. This had also been one of the biggest challenges standing before Pharisees who were the Jewish reformists of the day. However the priestly authority of Sadducees were already in decay and in the political atmosphere of the day, reform was being sought by everyone. Abraham Geiger announces the coming of Phariseism onto the stage of history but he does not limit this development merely to Phariseism, as it is apparent in the coming pages of his writings, he rather depicts it as a factor triggering a further revolutionary development.

Prior to telling his view of the emergence of Christianity; Abraham Geiger provides a detailed account of the situation in Palestine, the interdenominational clashes and disruptions. In his account, the main problem between different Jewish sects was mainly about the response that should be given to the Roman conquest of Judea; the territory of which Jerusalem was a part;

Again, a still more powerful enemy pressed upon Israel with far more effective oppression; again it was intended to break not only the national power of the Jews – nay, this was already broken- but also their inner, spiritual life was to be extinguished. It was intended again to render the worship of images and idols a home-institution in Judaism; the Emperors were to be adored as gods, as Divi, their statues set up in the national Temple (Geiger, 1866, 208).

How should be the response to conquest of Jerusalem, and of the Holy Temple that was being turned into a pagan space of worship? There were those who say that there had to be a military challenge and revolt against Romans and there were those who say the eternal and the everlasting kingdom was in the heavens and the world was already a ruined and unholy place; “when the power of the country, the God-believing power is broken, and bows before heathen unbelief, then is the world moved from its foundation; it must go to ruin. It is our duty not to yield to this worldly power” (Geiger, 1866, 205). The atmosphere was dominated by a loss of hope about the worldly power; it was the Heavenly Kingdom, the kingdom of God that had to come. This world and its power would vanish anyhow. One had to be for the kingdom of God, the ideal state that would come with the coming of Messiah. Therefore running after the worldly power is of no use for Jews, following the Roman conquest of Jerusalem. Abraham Geiger points out to an important point here, about being obedient to the worldly law for things to continue as they are and for the unjust fall till the beginning of the Kingdom of Heaven:

Only the Law, the faithful observance of the religious statutes [laws], shall and must rule, and when the Law rules, the whole artificial political structure will fall; all those organizations that keep the political life together, unless religion prescribes them, are superfluous, and shall vanish; but as soon as you shake off the yoke of the Law, the easy, sweet yoke, then you must bear the whole pressure of the heavy yoke of this world. (Geiger, 1866, 209)

Here Abraham Geiger depicts the Judaic thinking following the loss of political and religious authority in Jerusalem in a most precise way. The sovereignty was lost and Jews, as a holy people who had been promised with Jerusalem and the lands in its environs, confronted with the necessities of the ungodly world, and its politics. The ideal religious system organized around the Holy Temple in Jerusalem was almost destroyed and Jews were divided into sects warring with each other. The main idea at that time among Jews themselves, according to Abraham Geiger, has been to stick to the Jewish law and live according to that. As he indicated in the citation, the artificial political systems of this world will fall anyway. As a very important point to keep in mind, here Abraham Geiger depicts the way Jews began to think of a “Law” as

independent of the worldly political structures; a holy law that should be kept above the worldly politics and its laws. Therefore, according to Abraham Geiger, religious law and the profane law got divorced from each other, as the religious law of Judaism belonged to the “Kingdom of Heaven”. Curiously, this idea is underlying the stance of Reform Judaism: religion as an autonomous category in itself and as a distinct category from other domains of social life such as politics. While Geiger does not directly relate this to the issue of reform, he points out that this had been the stance of Pharisees who handled reforming Judaism in their times according to the needs of the day.

The appearance of Jesus had occurred in such a chaotic time for Jews. For Abraham Geiger, his first message was quite a Jewish one; “My kingdom does not begin in this world; but this world will soon have tumbled into ruins, and then the future world shall appear, actually and tangibly, and then my kingdom shall commence” (Geiger, 1866, 215). It was a Jewish messianic belief and enthusiasm “that animated the first author of Christianity. He was a Jew, a Pharisean Jew with Galilean coloring – a man who joined in the hopes of his time, and who believed that these hopes were fulfilled in him. He did by no means utter a new thought; nor did he break down the barriers of nationality. . . . He was a Pharisee who walked in the way of Hillel” (Ibid). According to Abraham Geiger, Christianity was born out of reformist pursuits in Judaism and Jesus rose to a high eminence which was not given to him in the normal conditions: “He interfered with the religious convictions of his time; raised himself to a high eminence which was not accorded to him; represented the hope of the future as fulfilled and embodied in himself; pronounced a complete reform of all political conditions, and ignored the whole civil society of his time, though he stirred up no actual revolution” (Geiger, 1866, 223). However all in all, according to Geiger, Christianity was born as a Jewish sect and the main motivation was to seek for a reform at a chaotic time. That sect arose on the soil of Pharisean Judaism that was suitable for a reformist move such as the coming of Messiah. As Susannah Heschel points out; “according to Geiger, Jesus neither said nor did anything unique or original; all his teaching could be found within the standard Pharisaic literature produced by the rabbis of his day” (1998, 6-7).

The belief that Jesus was the Messiah who came to redeem the Kingdom of Heaven was already there. Following the death of Jesus, as Geiger asserts, the belief appeared that the Messiah has already appeared, and he had died, and he had risen to Heavens and he would reappear again “to complete the establishment of the new world, to force the whole human race into existence, even outside of the present civil laws, rent asunder and corrupted in themselves. It was a new sect which, standing within the pale of Judaism, and, this too, completely on the foundation of Jewish Phariseism, now arose” (Geiger, 1866, 226). Geiger’s depictions regarding the emergence of Christianity set the religious ground for Jewish modernization on the soil of a Christian land. From the Reformist outlook, this narrative has eroded the thick boundaries



between Judaism and Christianity and it has also been quite favorable to liberal Jewish thinkers. If Christianity was born out of Judaism, the issue of modernization and assimilation into a Christian society could be discussed in a more comfortable atmosphere (Heschel, 1998, 6). As another important point, a reformed Judaism would be more compliant with the values and practices of a larger Christian society and the reform would not mean a compromise from Judaism, considering the scope of relationship between Judaism and Christianity that reaches beyond conventional thinking.

#### **4.8. Conclusion**

One of the direct consequences of Jewish modernization has been the emergence of Jewish denominations, as Reform Judaism being the chief of them. The emergence of Reform Judaism, the first modern denomination, has its roots in the efforts of Jewish intellectuals towards Jewish integration to the larger societies in Europe that Jews joined afterwards. With the joining of Jews to the European societies, they encountered with the fact that there is a need to locate Judaism into a rather private sphere for it could not be observed in all domains of social life anymore. Some of the European Jews who wanted to observe their religion, as they suggested, needed some changes in the religious practice. Those Jews who turned into non-believers still wanted to retain their Jewishness as a category free from belief. In both cases, the doxastic side of Jewishness turned into a problem for a certain number of European Jews. Reform Judaism came up with this idea of making Judaism a religion by regulating the domains of observance and it opened space for a Jewishness of which Judaism as a religion has been only one part. By doing that, Reform Judaism has written the religious grammar of Jewish existence in the same space with the non-Jewish larger societies and thus provided Jews a path to be both German and Jew; while becoming a subject of the German state, one could be Jew in terms of religious practice.

Locating Judaism into a universalist framework and making it the historical origin of two other monotheistic religions; Christianity and Islam on the one hand and tearing down the thick borders between Judaism and Christianity and thus making Judaism harmonious with the religion of the larger European societies were the main motivations of Abraham Geiger, the founding father of Reform Judaism. As an unexpected act from a rabbi, he developed a historicist reading of Judaism. In his

books, from which two of them were analyzed in this work, he tried to expose that Judaism, since the beginning of its history, had a shaping role over the world history and became the origin of Christianity and Islam. Therefore he defended that Judaism has historically been a universal religion and compatible with the Christian values as it has been the origin. As it is obvious in the case of Abraham Geiger that the adoption of modern historicist thinking by Jews had a particular influence on the religious realm and, as it is visible in the case of Reform Judaism, the making of Judaism a solid category entailed its historicization, eventually.



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

Lately, there has been numerous discussions on the relationship between religions and modern politics. Mainly, one of the common points of these discussions has been the problematic role of religion in the secular political systems. The issue of religious resurgence turned into a popular academic topic and decades after modernization theory has declared that religions would be extinguished in the modern times with the expansion of modernization, religion began to occupy the agendas of social scientists. With the assertion that religion would not exist in the modern world, the issue of secularity came to be seen as part of a natural process of secularization that would follow the tide of modernization immediately. Therefore categories of the modern and the secular came to be seen as equivalent to each other and in this regard, the secular was used to predicate a context in which religion would have no significance for the political and social life in the modern. On the one hand, having been a problematic for the modern social sciences, categories of religion and the religious have been the objects of social scientific inquiry. On the other hand, while religion has been a common object of inquiry for the social sciences, secularity was not considered to be a phenomenon that should be problematized and made an object of social inquiry. However in the recent decades, there has been objections to that kind of a conception of secularity. The category of the secular has turned into an object of social, particularly anthropological, inquiry and the ways in which the secular has been articulated began to be questioned and contextualized.

In terms of objectifying the secular within an anthropological framework and furthermore, restructuring the mutually constructed relationship between the secular and the religious in the modern condition, Talal Asad has appeared to be a pioneering figure. Asad has taken the approaches to the modern definition of religion in its connection to the liberal demand that it be kept out of the politics, law and science (Asad, 1993, 28) and that it is actually imagined category which exists as transhistorical and transcultural in the social sciences literature. Talal Asad delivered discussions on various aspects of Christian and Muslim encounters with modernity and secularity in his books *Formations of the Secular* and *Genealogies of Religion*.

However curiously enough, he has said very few things on the modern Jewish condition and its encounter with secularity. Therefore, relying on the framework Asad already put forward, I tried to deliver a historical perspective on the modern Jewish condition and the emergence of Judaism as a religion in this modern condition.

Secularity stands as a critical issue in the modern Jewish context, especially regarding the discussions in Israel which are covered in a more detailed way in the first chapter. Considering the current discussions in Israel and also discussions on Jewish modernization in Europe, it is not possible to deliver a straightforward perspective on Jewish secularism as inspired by the modernization theory. Quite to the contrary, discussing Jewish secularism necessitates a discussion on what was there before the claims to Jewish secularism came into existence; namely the Jewish tradition and religion in the premodern period. Namely, understanding the Jewish secularists requires to see what they reject and thus reify which is Judaism, as David Biale brilliantly illustrates in his book; *Not in the Heavens*. However, the idea of understanding the modern conception of Judaism only by looking at the thinking of Jewish secularists who refused to be part of it and rather reified it in conjunction with their *liberal demands* does not seem to be an adequate approach. Rather, I believe, in order to see the mutually constitutive relationship of the secular and the religious in the modern Jewish case, we need to have a holistic approach to secularization as a social process. A holistic approach to Jewish secularization entails a consideration of all portions of Jewish population in Europe, even the most religious communities or factions, in one way or another, were influenced by secularization; not only those who adopted secularism as an alternative to Judaism as a religion. In this regard it becomes possible to state that, while Jewish secularists adopted secularism in an attitude against the Jewish religion, religious Jews positioned themselves against secularity. While the secular Jews put forward a particular conception of Judaism of which they were against, the religious Jews also conceptualized a Judaism which is modern. That is to say that with modernization and secularization, the religious conception has changed and Judaism has been turned into a reified category either by secular Jews or by religious ones.

The multiple aspects of modernization process of the European Jewry that took place from the 18th century on is quite illuminating in order to understand Jewish secularism

and Judaism in a relational framework. As it was touched upon in numerous parts of the work, upon the demands of the newly-born modern state, and the Jewish attraction to the life outside the ghetto, European Jews left their segregated spaces of life and began to be integrated into the larger societies surrounding them. This brought about major changes in the Jewish life. The Jewish integration to the larger societies involved changes in the various domains of communal and individual life. The most significant of these changes has been the extinction of the Jewish communal life centered around the traditional authority and Jews' turning into citizens of European states. One of the characteristics of the Jewish life in the segregated spaces in terms of religion had been the public nature of Judaism. Since the segregated Jewish life did not involve the existence of non-Jews, religious norms could be directly functioning as the regulative norms. Therefore, there was no notion of a secular law which is in equal distance to all religions. However in the European public sphere, this could not be the case and Jewish internal autonomy that existed in the premodern times was not recognized by the modern state and even, Jews were urged to be citizens. Judaism lost its normativeness in terms of worldly affairs. This has probably been the biggest factor behind Judaism's becoming a religion in the modern sense of the term. Because as a result of the loss of normativeness in the Jewish public life, Judaism turned into a separable category from Jewishness. In this regard, Jewishness has appeared as a category that better suited to the Jewish existence in the European public sphere for it became separable from Judaism.

Curiously enough, the emergence of a conception of Jewishness that can be thought as separate from Judaism has necessitated a secular historical ground on which it could ground itself; a Jewish history that is not embedded in the Judaic theology. The attitude of rooting the Jewishness within history paved the path for one of the biggest steps of Jewish modernization which was the reception of historicist thinking. That had been a revolutionary moment for the European Jewry for the Jewish attitude towards past was totally different from that of the European societies. As it was discussed in the third chapter in detail, the premodern Jewish conceptions towards the past was mainly shaped by the Jewish exilic conception which was based on the principle of being alien to the world space and time. Exile stood as a regulative principle in the premodern Jewish life and involved the idea that, after the exile of Jews from Palestine, they have been doomed to live in exilic conditions by God himself until the messiah comes and

restores the Jewish commonwealth in Palestine, rebuilds the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. As it was already in the previous pages, as a manifestation of exilic principle, Jews stood at a distance to the “Christian notion of history” and rather favored keeping a cyclical memory regarding the past by taking the cyclical and liturgic time of Torah into centre. Therefore before modernity, they kept themselves out of the histories of larger societies as well as their cities and public spheres.

As Jews began to get integrated into the larger societies in Europe, so did their sense of past. As Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi reflects the process of change regarding that sense in his book *Zakhor*, the modernization led to the reception of the modern historical thinking by Jews. Out of the exilic time and space, Jews returned to the histories of the nations, considering themselves a nation amongst others in Europe. History turned into the mere measure of truthfulness in terms of theological authenticity. Combined with the biblical criticism in Europe beginning from the 17th century, the Old Testament namely the Jewish Torah was subjected to historical criticism via judging the religious text through the lenses of historical truthfulness and contextualism. Baruch Spinoza has been the precursor of the Jewish intellectual who subjected Torah to historical criticism. He mainly refuted the religious authenticity of the Jewish Bible and pointed out the context in which it was revealed to Jewish prophets and was compiled. He claimed that the validity of the commandments in Torah has already expired and it can be merely read as a book of history. The period of Haskalah brought about more questions on the authenticity of the Judaic texts and penetrated the impact of the historicist thinking further on the traditional conceptions of Jewish religion. An intellectual movement that emerged in the early 19th century defended the idea that Jewish history can and should be scientifically and objectively analyzed as independent of religious dogmas and superstitious beliefs. This has been the peak of Jewish historicism where the history and the religion were thought as absolutely identifiable as separate from each other as they asserted that Jewish history could be conceived as totally independent of Judaism. That ultimately paved the way for the historicist readings of the sacred scriptures of Judaism, as a tendency that began with Spinoza. Thus, in that process Torah began to be read as a book of history in the modern context. The crucial question here is whether a historicist reading of Torah can ultimately be considered as a mere sign of secularism in the sense that such a reading definitely purifies the book from the superstitious reading or it paves the way for a

reading that is “religious” in the modern sense of the term? This is the actual question that I tried to provide an answer by looking into the case of Reform Judaism and Abraham Geiger’s historicist reading of Jewish religion.

It is apparent in the historical records that Abraham Geiger has been a proponent of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. He developed his historicist understanding in the circles of *Wissenschaft* and involved in religious practice at the same time, as a rabbi as well as in intellectual activity. In his works, *Judaism and Its History* and *Judaism and Islam*, Abraham Geiger basically handles the idea that Judaism has always been a universal religion that goes through an ever-continuous reformation and gave birth to Christianity and Islam in the historical process. That position of Abraham Geiger openly reveals the modernization of the religious conception in Judaism. As it was touched upon in greater detail in the previous chapter, Geiger has done two major things here: first, he has placed Judaism into a historical framework and second, he has constructed the relationship between three monotheistic religions which are Judaism, Christianity and Islam. By adopting a historicist stance, he pointed out the particular tendencies and actors of Jewish history that he interpreted as the precursors of the modern Jewish reform. In this work, I looked at how he viewed Pharisees as historically the first liberal reformers of Judaism and made it safe for the future times and his depiction of Jesus as a Pharisee and Christianity as a sect of Judaism in its earliest periods. By doing that, Abraham Geiger apparently constructed both a necessity and a historical ground for reform in Judaism. His attitude of pointing out to the necessity of reform in Judaism on historical grounds confirms the idea that history has been a measure of truthfulness in the modern condition. Considering the fact that modernization has paved the way for the adoption of modern historical thinking in the case of European Jewry, it did not simply lead to the evanescence of Judaism. Rather, as we see in the case of Reform, Judaism emerged as a modern religion that took up a new form in the face of its encounter with modern history. Thus, the religious and the secular involved in a dialectic in the modern Jewish condition.

In a framework in which the dialectics of the religious and the secular are illustrated, the unidimensional approaches to secularization or to religion lose their significance to a great extent. This has been my ultimate purpose of my study from the very start. Relying on the framework that was provided by Talal Asad, I wanted to present my

approach to the issue of secularity in the modern Jewish condition. As a person living in a dynamic region –which is the Middle East- in terms of the predicament of the religious and the secular, I can say that the early modern Jewish experience, in terms of encounters with modernity, has a lot to say about figuring out the paths of modernization in a state of ultimate turmoil in social, political and religious terms. Therefore, I want to state that the epistemological framework of this work through which the dialectics of the secular and the religious were exposed and elaborated.





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