PART FOUR

REPOSITORIES OF THE RUSSIAN JEWISH DIASPORA
The issue of large-scale Jewish emigration first emerged in its full scope in the early 1880s. Jewish pogroms raging across the southern parts of the Empire made thousands of Jews leave the country. Heated debates started among the Jewish community, and the young generation in particular, concerning not only the necessity of emigration, but also the ‘travel options’. Popular articles in contemporary Jewish press were entitled ‘What to do?’ and ‘Where to go?’.

The topical alternatives were America and Palestine. Between thirty and forty thousand Jews left Russia in 1881 and 1882. Among the advocates of the Palestine option were veteran nationalists including men of letters and journalists, such as Moses Leib Lilienblum, Leon Pinsker, Perets Smolenskin, Maks Mandelstam, and Lev Levanda. Many of them had recently been blamed for alleged assimilative tendencies, planning a religious reform and a social transformation of the whole structure of the Jewish community in Russia. Their primary opponents, who belonged to the ‘Baron Ginzburg and Poliakov circle’, were the proponents of the old Stadlan method of behind-the-scenes negotiations with the authorities.

Among the major opponents of the idea of emigration was the writer Grigorii Bogrov. The supreme authorities were also divided on the topic of Jewish emigration. Simon Dubnow, a young journalist and inexperienced historian, did not keep out of the debate and published

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2 Cf. Viktor Kel’ner, ibid.; Yaakov Poliakov (1832–1909) worked in banking and international commerce. He was a supporter of general Jewish institutions, such as the Jewish Colonization Association. Shmuel Poliakov (1837–1888) was a merchant and a contractor in road construction. He founded the ORT society. Eliezer Poliakov (1842–1914) worked in banking in Moscow.