

Why did Hannah Arendt Reject the Partition of Palestine?

Eric Jacobson

The political philosopher Hannah Arendt actively engaged in the problem of a Jewish homeland and the politics of Zionism in the years 1941–1948. She advocated a Binational solution to Palestine – a single political commonwealth with two national identities, Jewish and Arab, integrated in a federation with other countries in the region. In the crucial period leading up to the establishment of the State of Israel, Arendt became increasingly disillusioned with the Jewish Agency and the Zionist movement for failing to organize a Jewish response to Nazism (a Jewish Army) and rejecting the Palestinian right to a homeland.

*Gardez-vous bien, Messieurs les Sionistes, un gouvernement passe, mais un peuple reste.*¹

For more than two decades, Arendt was engaged with aspects of Jewish thought and culture which today would not be unfamiliar to Jewish Studies. Her writings from the late 1920s into the mid-1930s concerned German–Jewish intellectual history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. She worked with the Zionist movement in France to help youth immigration to Palestine in the 1930s and wrote extensively on Zionism in the 1940s. In the 1950s, her research culminated in a major work on Antisemitism and its origins in colonialism and race theory, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. She was editor of arguably the most important Judaic publisher, Salman Schocken, and contributed to the publication in English of works by Gershom Scholem, Franz Kafka,

1. Arendt (2007), p. 383. Trans: “Be very careful, Messieurs Zionists, governments come and go but a people remain”, attributed to Nasif el Khalidi, who participated in the Arab-Jewish negotiations of July 1914, Beirut. The phrase appears without citation. Arendt cites Moshe Perlmann as her source, M. Perlmann “Chapters of Arab-Jewish Diplomacy, 1918-1922” in *Jewish Social Studies*, April 1944. The same phrase is also quoted by Judah Magnes in a letter to Arendt (July 20, 1948), again without an author. See Goren (1982), p. 503. Perlmann attributes the sentence to Nasif Bey al Khalidi. Laqueur (2003) p. 226, attributes it to Nasif el Khalidi in discussion with a Dr Thon. Presumably this is Yaakov Thon, an associate of Zionist representative Arthur Ruppin. See also Medzini (1928), p. 80.

Bernard Lazare, and Walter Benjamin.² The publication of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* launched her academic career in the United States and with it came a deepening interest in political philosophy and a decline in Jewish matters. Two major disappointments contributed to this. The first was her disillusionment with Zionism, culminating in her sharp rebuke of the movement for failing to resolve the Arab question. The second was the reception of her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, a study of the trial of Adolf Eichmann, the Holocaust and the problem of moral responsibility. After 1964, her attention moved entirely to other matters and she was not to focus on Jewish questions again.

In the period 1941–1948, Arendt’s political and intellectual work was largely dedicated to Zionism. Her views on Jewish political action were as rich and nuanced as any of her later political ideas, further complicated by the fact that from 1941 to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, Jewish history was remarkably tumultuous, with many surprising turns that had a considerable impact on the prospects for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine and a resolution of the Arab–Jewish conflict. Her activities in France on behalf of Jewish emigration to Palestine are known. However, the path from passionate advocacy of Jewish politics to what became essentially a critique of Zionism remains obscure and somewhat difficult to follow. She rallied for the establishment of an independent Jewish army to fight Nazism, criticized the Zionist movement for endorsing a single Jewish commonwealth and campaigned instead for a Binational solution in Palestine – a single political entity with two national identities, Jewish and Arab, which would exist in a federation with other countries in the region. She grew increasingly skeptical of the prospects for peace and yet her ideas on Jews and Judaism provided the underlying framework for her mature work on politics and morality, as Bernstein has shown (Bernstein 1996). The following essay is a reconstruction of Arendt’s arguments from the 1940s – from the series of articles for *Aufbau*, the German language newspaper published in Manhattan, to the establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948 and her gradual disillusionment.³

Jewish Politics

Arendt left Berlin in 1934 after her arrest and brief imprisonment. She had been working on a mission by the Jewish Agency for Palestine, the organization pioneering Jewish settlement, in the National Library in Berlin to make a record of Antisemitic public statements. The work was lost but she managed to escape over the Czech border, and then onward to Paris.⁴ From 1934–1940, she was the chair of the French Youth Aliyah Committee, helping young Jews

2. By 1948, the Schocken Library in New York had published other important Jewish authors in English translation including Nahum Glatzer, Yitzhak Baer, S.D. Goitein, Heinrich Heine, Solomon Maimon, Martin Buber and S.Y. Agnon.

3. The German-language *Aufbau* articles are collected, save for two, in Arendt (2000).

4. Young-Bruehl (2004).

escape to Palestine and continued to be identified as a “special delegate of the Jewish Agency for Palestine for emigrants from Central Europe” in the author’s index of the *Menorah Journal* which published her most important article of the period, “Zionism Reconsidered” (Autumn 1945).⁵ Arendt escaped from Paris with her mother and her husband Heinrich Blüchner, in part due to the efforts of journalist Varian Fry and the Marseilles office of the Emergency Rescue Committee and arrived in New York in May 1941.⁶

To Arendt, the term Zionism meant simply Jewish politics. In the history of Antisemitism that Arendt presents as both the groundwork and the antecedent of totalitarianism in the *Origins of Totalitarianism*, she characterizes the Jews as a people at a loss for power, always at the mercy of more powerful forces, never the makers of their own destiny. Her position clashes with the Hegelian view of history, or Rosenzweig’s quixotic reply that places the Jews outside of history, or even Benjamin’s vision of the generations and epochs to come that shapes his understanding of time.⁷ For Arendt, European Jewish life and culture was bereft of politics and barren of the means to engage with the world. Jewish politics meant to Arendt a political response to the powerlessness of Jewish history and her appeal to the development of such a politics in Judaism was an attempt to orient herself to issues of her day: Antisemitism, tolerance, assimilation, and national self-determination or Zionism. Zionism here is not what one might expect in the broader history of the movement and her approach does not follow the dominant tendencies of Central European Jews in her time. She is neither a member of a German Zionist youth group, nor the cultural circles that cultivated the idea of a “rejuvenation of Judaism.” Her first engagement with Zionism began practically while in exile in Paris. As a consequence, she has no connection to the Cultural Zionism of Ahad Haam, the pen name of Asher Ginsberg (1856–1927) whose Hebrew prose inspired scores of German-speaking Jewish intellectuals in the early twentieth century.⁸ The enthusiasm engendered by Ahad Haam for a cultural renewal of Judaism was coupled with the revival of Hebrew to be read and spoken within Europe. In some instances, this cultural movement overlapped with the new social communities in Palestine and the *Kibbutz* movement. However, among the Cultural Zionists as a whole, the idea of an independent Jewish state garnered

5. Arendt (2007), pp. 343-374. It was published in the Autumn 1945 edition of the *Menorah Journal*, not in the previous year (October 1944) as per Arendt (2007), p. xxxix. For Arendt’s description in the Author’s Index, see *The Menorah Journal*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 2, October–December 1945 (Autumn 1945), p. 263.

6. The committee was first established months before, on 13 August 1940; see Brown (2000). See also Young-Bruehl (2004), p. 164.

7. On Rosenzweig, Hegel and history, see Stéphane Mosès, *The Angel of History: Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Scholem*, Stanford University Press, 2009 and my comments at Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews: <http://ndpr.nd.edu/review.cfm?id=18006/>. On Benjamin’s messianism, see Jacobson (2009).

8. She makes a passing remark, if somewhat negative, which is presumably about Ahad Haam, lit. “einer aus dem Volk” – “one of the people,” a literal translation of the pen name ‘Ahad Haam.’ Arendt (2000), p. 35.

little to no support, as did the imperial politics of Theodor Herzl (1860–1904), the founder of Political Zionism. Arendt’s Zionism falls on neither side of this cultural and political divide. On the one hand, she shows no interest in Ahad Haam with Hebrew never becoming native to her despite her predilection for classical languages and mastery of many modern European ones. On the other hand, she repudiated Herzl’s colonial approach and the central tenants of his ideology. Although her Jewish politics were practical rather than cultural, she shared no affinity with an imperial politics of a bygone age, as she wrote in 1942:

Jewish politics, to the extent that it exists at all, is run by people who have likewise grown up – without ever growing powerful! – worshipping power and opportunistic success. Their abhorrence for principles, their fear of betting on the wrong horse, their admiration of those who hold power on this earth, and their reluctance to mobilize the energies of their own people have cost us the deployment of a Jewish army.⁹

The absence of politics in Jewish history speaks to the operative distinction in Arendt’s early work between two character types, the pariah and the parvenu. The first category pertains to the Jewish gadflies of Western culture whose experience of the Enlightenment imbued them with a certain degree of skepticism toward the promises of nationhood and tolerance of liberalism. They had earlier been led into the promises of Enlightenment and away from Jewish particularity, seeking a place for Judaism in the adoption of true common values and identities. Arendt’s foremost example of the pariah is the French socialist Bernard Lazare. The second category pertains to the parvenu who has learned the same history but derived the opposite lesson. The only salvation for the Jew, not as “one of the people” but clearly as a liberal individual entity, is to make oneself available to the forces of power and to avail oneself of them. Her chief parvenu is Benjamin Disraeli who appears in the first part of the *Origins of Totalitarianism* asserting the rule and expansion of the British Empire.¹⁰ Though the pariah–parvenu motif appeared first in an essay published in April 1944,¹¹ it can be shown to be an underlying concern in her study of the intellectual salons of nineteenth-century Berlin through the eyes of Rahel Varnhagen (1771–1883), the subject of Arendt’s intellectual biography (1957). These questions continued to occupy Arendt for most of the Jewish Studies period, and although it functions clearly as a rudimentary historiography, these political-philosophical observations became the framework for her later thoughts on politics and the *vita activa*, a life which is formed by an engagement with the world.¹² In the passage above, the emphasis is on

9. “Jewish Politics”, unpublished fragment, 1942, Arendt (2007), p. 242.

10. See “The Potent Wizard” from Chapter 3 “The Jews and Society” in Arendt (1951).

11. “The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition” in Arendt (2007), pp. 275-297.

12. *Vita activa* is the original and ultimately German title of Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958; *Vita activa oder Vom tätigen Leben*, München: Piper Verlag, 2002.

the longing of a people who were denied any realm of public autonomy and were so accustomed to standing in the shadows of history that they no longer knew what it meant to be acting in the world. In contrast, politics suggests an engagement with the world under conditions that present themselves, not the wished-for longings of pristine circumstances to come but practical action within time itself.

The Politics of a Jewish Army

Beyond any practical Zionist activity in the 1930s in support of emigration from Europe, Arendt's desire for a Jewish politics began with her advocacy of a Jewish army. The idea of establishing an independent Jewish martial force to oppose Hitler first appeared in the pages of the *Aufbau* and is entwined with her notion of Jewish politics.¹³ In November 1941, she wrote that Jewish history had placed a premium on *Dasein* (existence) over national and religious aims, and it was for this very reason that a Jewish army was necessary. No one can help the Jews if they do not help themselves and they can only learn to defend themselves by responding to that which actually threatens them. What followed was Arendt's claim that a Jew can only defend herself as a Jew, not as an Englishman or Frenchman – a consistent but somewhat troublesome argument that remained her position throughout her life.¹⁴ What constitutes a Jewish *Dasein* was the politics of a reply, not on wishful terms, but on the terms that have been given. Yet how the politics of a reply can be reduced to the terms of her opponent, the Antisemite, is somewhat puzzling and resembles the problem of contingency in Sartre's *Antisemite and Jew*.¹⁵ Since it has been proven time and again that is not necessary for a Jew to be present in a particular place for there to be Antisemitism, it is clear that Antisemitism cannot be dependent on the Jews. Moreover, in a conventional and juridical sense, rights are not defended on the terms by which they are denied but on pre-existing principles. It is fortunate that it is so, for it is just as difficult to dispel a falsehood regarding persons and prejudices as it is to prove a negative. It is not possible, for example, to argue that because the water-wells of Europe are not poisoned, the Jews are not as hateful as Luther claimed.¹⁶ Arendt's argument is however neither existential nor performative. It concerns the absence of the subject as a participant in her own history. This is else-

13. It is also undeniably intertwined with Heidegger, a topic which exceeds the framework for discussion here. See Villa (1996).

14. Arendt (1994) pp. 1-23.

15. Sartre (1948).

16. Martin Luther, *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen*, 1543.

where expressed as *Philosophie ohne Geländer* – a political philosophy informed by the conditions as given to us in the world. The “existence of a people” (Existenz) is too important to be left to the whims of a few rich and powerful men. It must be had by the people themselves, old and young, men and women, in one collective form of resistance. Stateless people stand outside of the law, she writes in November 1941, and their fundamental illegitimacy (Rechtlosigkeit) cannot be repaired by naturalization: “The question is different for us Jews without nationalities from Europe, as we are merely tolerated everywhere as refugees and exist nowhere with rights and powers.”¹⁷ Her position on the necessity of a Jewish politics emerged from her search for a Jewish character or characteristics that animates her *Habilitationsschrift* on Rahel Varnhagen. Despite her defence of a Jewish army based on the need to establish a Jewish politics on the actual *Geländer* or ‘stair-landings’ of the twentieth century, she was not persuaded by the argument that the absence of a politics suggests the lack of existence, existence being the conditionality of *Dasein* or “being somewhere.” The Jew is not the invention of the Antisemite or the product of economic conditions.¹⁸ The idea that the moon is the only place free of Antisemitism lends Zionism an element of lunacy, she argued, for there is no solution to the “Jewish problem in one country, also not in Palestine.”¹⁹ Already percolating here is the view that Antisemitism is a political idea, not merely a cultural or biological theory. For this reason, it will require more than a territorial solution. The Jews need to “be somewhere” to fight European fascism. As exiles, they are everywhere but present nowhere. That “somewhere” is not a landmass but a unified and collective resistance to Hitler, a Jewish Army. In her series on *Die Krise des Zionismus*, written in German from October to November 1942 and serialized in three parts for *Aufbau*, Arendt calls for a “Gleichberechtigte Beteiligung am Krieg,” an “equal participation in the war” or an equality in war that was yet to be afforded to the Jews in peacetime.²⁰ An independent Jewish army was that much more necessary, she wrote, as the formal structures of political Zionism collapsed.

The failure to attract support for a Jewish army is also the focus of “The Crisis in Zionism,” an unpublished English text from February 1943, not to be confused with the German articles with the same title.²¹ “The Crisis of Zionism” is noticeably different from the German version and is a good indication how rapidly her thinking was changing during the fateful years of 1942–1943 at the height of the Nazi extermination campaign and crucial years for the Zionist

17. Arendt (2000), p. 25; “Anders steht die Frage für uns jüdische Staaenlosen aus Europa, da wir flüchtlinge überall nur als Duldung und nirgends kraft rechts leben.” Arendt (2000), p. 36.

18. Arendt (2000), p. 30.

19. Op cit.

20. Op cit.

21. “Die Krise des Zionismus” appeared in the column “This Means You” of *Aufbau* on 22 October, 6 November, and 20 November, 1942; reprinted in Arendt (2000), pp. 94-104.

movement with regard to the Arab–Jewish conflict. The crisis to which she referred was nothing less than a “crisis of Judaism,” a “catastrophe of the last years [that] was accompanied by a deep and dangerous crisis of Jewish politics.”²² Her characteristically forceful and, at times, sardonic comments emerged from what she understood to be the failure of the world Jewish community to support the formation of an independent Jewish fighting force and respond to the conflict in Palestine. The inability to create an autonomous force to oppose Nazism, the historical weakness in Judaism for which the Jewish Agency, the institutional representation of the Jewish community, was particularly to blame. The Jewish Agency failed to back an independent Jewish resistance to National Socialism and was equally feeble in its response to the European refugee program. Instead, it endorsed the formation of a Jewish Brigade within the ranks of the British Armed Forces. This lack of Jewish politics, Arendt argued, reflected the inability of the Jewish people to respond. Without the capacity to anticipate the years to come, she saw these failures of leadership as “a considerable blow to the idea of a Jewish homeland.” The Jewish Agency, which served as the “only representative of the Jewish people,” appeared largely unconcerned with the necessity of its own defense.²³ A Jewish army, and not merely a brigade of a colonial power, was “the only guarantee” that what was established “during the war” would help provide for “our demands after the war.” “If the promises of governments in exile are problematic, the future protection of Jewish rights in Palestine is equally problematic.”²⁴

The charge to found a Jewish army had been a firm position of Arendt’s thinking since November 1941 and by February 1943, she had watched the idea be progressively eviscerated. It was a considerable blow to Arendt that the call was poorly received by Jewish leadership. More disconcerting was the fact that in the absence of leadership by the Jewish Agency, the idea had been commandeered by the revisionist wing of the Zionist movement, the followers of Ze’ev Jabotinsky (1880–1940). While the mainstream Zionist movement stalled, the revisionist wing had taken over the “Committee for a Jewish Army for Palestinian and Stateless Jews” which had originally formed at the start of 1942 with the support of like-minded liberal thinkers. By February 1943, it had become an organ of the revisionist movement, the supporters of the *Irgun*, the Jewish underground army in Palestine noted for its anti-Arab stance – a “fascist organization,” wrote Arendt, and a few years later qualified as “a terrorist, right-wing, chauvinist organization” in an open letter to the *New York Times*.²⁵ As the idea of a Jewish Army offered no meaningful resistance to Hitler and became merely a mirror of the politics of Palestine, her attention

22. “The Crisis of Judaism” in Arendt (2007), p. 330.

23. Arendt (2007), p. 331.

24. Arendt (2007), p. 332.

25. Arendt (2000), p. 38. See also her “New Palestine Party. Visit of Menachem Begin and Aims of Political Movement Discussed”, *New York Times*, 4 December, 1948. The open letter was co-signed by Albert Einstein, Seymour Melman, Sidney Hook and Rabbi Jessurun Cardozo.

turned progressively to what she deemed as the crisis within the ideology of Zionism.

Biltmore and the Crisis of Zionism

In May 1942, an international Zionist congress was held at the Biltmore Hotel, once located above Grand Central Station at 42nd Street in New York City. The conference resolutions, known as the Biltmore Program, sounded the death-knell for a Jewish army as well as Jewish–Arab reconciliation. “The Crisis of Zionism” (February 1943), she wrote rather programmatically,

means that Herzl’s vision is urgently in need of revision; that we stand before the task of reformulating our right to Palestine; that our relations with Britain must be formulated anew; that our hopeless attachment to the Balfour Declaration and mandate system, which no longer exists, leads nowhere politically and that we are not even capable of mumbling in the language of the common man ...²⁶

The conflict that was to emerge from the resolutions of the conference helped to unravel the ideological state of Zionism to Arendt: Zionism clings to the past with regard to Herzl’s appeal to the imperial powers with the aim of achieving a Jewish homeland.²⁷ The same principle is at work with regard to the British Mandate power, which no longer operated from the principles of the Balfour Declaration (1917) that once awarded the territory of Palestine to the Jews. The conference revealed to Arendt the degree to which Zionism operates as the politics of plutocrats who have nothing to say to the common man. The two most contentious resolutions from the Biltmore Program were Article 6, which rejected the British White Paper of 1939 and any limit to Jewish emigration to Palestine, and Article 8, which resolved for the first time in any Zionist congress, “that Palestine be established as a Jewish Commonwealth” without any corresponding reference to the Arab Palestinians.²⁸ These resolutions introduced a division into the movement, she argued, rupturing the general consensus among Jewry worldwide regarding the principle of territorial compromise and regional cooperation in Palestine. It threw the principle of international Jewish solidarity – “Ganz Israel bürgte füreinander,” as she wrote, “All Israel is responsible for one another” – into question, presenting a radical divide within the Zionist movement.²⁹ The rejection of the program by

26. Arendt (2000), pp. 97-98; translation modified from Arendt (2007), p. 180.

27. See also “The Jewish State: Fifty Years After, Where have Herzl’s Politics Led?” in Arendt (2007), pp. 375-387.

28. The Biltmore Program, “Declaration adopted by the Extraordinary Zionist Conference at the Biltmore Hotel of New York City, 11 May 1942”.

29. The title of her article published in *Aufbau* on 24 April 1942, a few weeks before the Biltmore Conference, suggesting that the question of solidarity was already on her mind. See Arendt (2000), p. 51; Arendt (2007), p. 154, although the translation is modified.

some American Zionists, in particular the American Jewish Committee, served as the grounds of her remaining optimism.³⁰ Arendt staked great hope in the Jews of America and with the enthusiastic ring of a recent immigrant, she praised her American counterparts for their freedom from the class hierarchies of Europe. Underlying this hope in the classlessness of American society is Arendt's persistent view that there is a primary conflict between the Jewish national movement and its leadership. It was this perceived aversion to centralization in American Jewry to which Arendt staked claim.³¹

In Palestine, opposition to the Biltmore Program was also the basis upon which several new groups were formed. The *Ihud* (Unity) movement, founded in 1942 by the American rabbi and founding rector of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Judah Magnes,³² was made up predominantly of academics who had been working for reconciliation and understanding since the foundation of the university, and the first binationalist organization, *Brit Shalom* (Covenant of Peace) in 1923–1925. *Brit Shalom* which began in 1923 and had largely dissipated by the early 1930s, served as a precursor to *Ihud* (Heller 2003). The turn of policy at Biltmore in favor of a single Jewish state in Palestine, previously the domain of the extremists in the Zionist movement, took many in this circle by surprise. Magnes, for one, suggests he knew nothing of the resolutions until "Mr Ben-Gurion brought them in his pocket upon his return to Palestine in November [1942]."³³ *Ihud* fiercely opposed the unilateral declaration of a single Jewish commonwealth, which it saw as "equivalent, in effect, to a declaration of war by the Jews on the Arabs."³⁴ *Ihud* supported a single Arab–Jewish state with communal organizations and local associations in which Jewish emigration, in the first instance, would be matched to equal the Arab population. The aim would be to represent two equal parts in a binational political confederation.³⁵ By 6 October 1942, Magnes and the *Ihud* circle began to feature in Arendt's articles for *Aufbau*.³⁶ In December 1943 she penned a two-part article

30. The American Jewish Committee, a civil rights organization, formed in 1906 by German-Jewish immigrants, opposed the resolutions at Biltmore and as a result, left the American Jewish Conference in 1943.

31. Arendt (2000), p. 99.

32. A short bibliography of *Ihud* includes: Magnes, *Like all the Nations?* Jerusalem: Weiss Press (Herod's Gate), 1930; Judah L. Magnes and Martin Buber, *The Bond: Pamphlets of the Group 'The Bond'*, Jerusalem Vol. 1, Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, April 1939; Magnes, *Jewish Arab Co-Operation in Palestine* [Union Pamphlets No. 3 October 1945] Jerusalem: Ihud (Union) Association, 1945, (p. 16); M. Buber, J.L. Magnes, E. Simon, ed., (1947) *Toward Union in Palestine: Essays on Zionism and Jewish-Arab Cooperation*, Jerusalem: Ihud (Union) Association, 1947, (p. 96).

33. Magnes, Letter to Alexander Dushkin, January 7, 1943, published in Goren (1982). See also Daniel (2010) and Heller (2003, p. 31).

34. Magnes, "America Must Impose a Compromise", from a journal entry from August 30, 1942, published in Goren (1982), p. 382.

35. Magnes (1947), pp. 19–20: "I am hoping that with the developments of the next six months, before the Zionist Congress takes place, there will be a greater measure of calm and understanding. But if we simply keep reaffirming what the Biltmore programme began, and simply shake our fists and say to Great Britain, You are our enemy, and say to the Arabs, You are our enemy – that is what we are saying to them at the present time – ... why then of course the situation will go from bad to worse."

36. On Magnes, see Brinner and Rischin (1987).

on the question of whether the Jewish–Arab question could be solved with the *Ihud* proposal for regional federation. While the main Zionist congress afforded the current majority – the Arabs – minority rights, the *Ihud* group wanted to preserve the rights of a Jewish minority in a greater Arab commonwealth. Not quite satisfied with this aspect of minority-majority politics, she began with criticism of *Ihud*. The experience of Europe had shown that national problems cannot be solved by national politics, she wrote, and the First World War did nothing to solve Europe’s national questions. European minorities still continued to harbor irredentist claims, with little change since 1918. With a certain degree of political clairvoyance, she concluded in the winter of 1943, that the only solution to Europe’s ethnic conflicts would be a federated system in which the self-determination of national groups would be separated from the idea of the state. A future federated Europe would also provide the groundwork for a resolution of Europe’s Jewish question with a formal recognition of Jewish nationality independent of statehood. The model for ethnic and regional federation advocated by *Ihud* was not very far from this. According to *Ihud*, the only possible means to ensure a Jewish homeland would be within an Arab federation of the Middle East, federation being the watchword of their political commonality in contrast to the currents expressed at Biltmore. A federation may offer some political autonomy for a Jewish homeland, said Arendt, whereas the discourse of majority and minority rights was destined to dissipate into a politics of communalism and calls for “population transfers” which would “never work without fascist organizations.”³⁷ A genuine federal solution to the Arab–Jewish conflict – a model in which clearly identifiable national identities are bound together in a state – would be possible because the majority–minority problems, insolvable in themselves, would be set aside and replaced by a federated politics such as in the United States of America. “The only realistic position,” she wrote in May 1944, “would be a policy of alliances with other Mediterranean peoples, which would strengthen the Jewish status in Palestine and secure the active sympathies of our neighbors.”³⁸ The position of the mainstream Zionist congress – that the Arabs of Palestine have numerous countries to which they could be resettled, in which they constitute a majority, while the Jews would have one country, in which, though presently a minority, they will become a majority – was obviously a sham. It set up an unsolvable conflict, as she wrote in August 1944.³⁹

There are moments in her critique of Palestine politics that are difficult to understand today, particularly where she is critical of allies that are otherwise nearest to her positions. One of these instances is her critical comments regarding how removed *Ihud* remained from the mainstream Jewish workers and cooperative movement in Palestine, a position that she understood to be politically suicidal. She favored instead the *League for Jewish-Arab*

37. Arendt (2007), p. 195.

38. Arendt (2007), p. 206.

39. Arendt (2000), p. 158; Arendt (2007), p. 220.

Rapprochement and Understanding, which had built a base of support among workers and intellectuals in *Hashomer Hazair*, *Kedmah Mizrahah*, the *Mapai* party and the general Zionist movement, whereas *Ihud* was backed by the private money of “plantation owners.”⁴⁰ The strength of the *League* was found in their own newspaper, *Mishmar*, which attempted to propagate a conviction in Binationalism despite the resistance to reconciliation in the *yishuv* (the Jewish community of Palestine) following the outbreak of the Arab Riots of 1936–1939.

Her criticism, however, was ill-informed, as the *League* and *Ihud* were part of the same Binationalist movement and made up of many of the same individuals including Gad Frumkin, Pinhas Rutenberg, Moshe Novomeysky, Henrietta Szold, Joseph Moshe Valero, Martin Buber, Ernst Simon, Haim Margolis-Kalvaryski, and Moshe Smilansky, presumably the unnamed “plantation owner” who had been in Palestine since the 1890s.⁴¹ It was the same circle, generally speaking, with a common orientation. All of these individuals and organizations supported a Binationalist solution to the Jewish–Arab conflict in Palestine. Like Arendt, they were incensed by the resolutions at Biltmore and did not wish to see the Jewish homeland become a colonial project or an arm of an imperial power. Although clearly active in different sectors of society, they all envisioned a confederated and regional solution to the conflict.

Federation and Jewish–Arab Binationalism

The idea of a Binational Palestine meant for Arendt a “Jewish national home,” rather than a Jewish national state, and this difference is revealing. Despite her endorsement of a common politics, a territorial anchor and a means of martial force, she advocated no centralized framework of state power. This corresponds to the views expressed in what she refers to as the “Magnes declaration,” presumably the founding document of *Ihud*, a response to the resolutions at Biltmore, which was drawn up in August–September 1942 and released to the press in October.⁴² The *Ihud* declaration sought a new, independent government in Palestine based upon “equal political rights for the two peoples,” campaigning for agreement among the “whole Jewish people to a Federative Union of Palestine and neighboring countries” which would “guarantee

40. Arendt (2007), p. 221. See Heller (2003).

41. Sofer (1998) presents *Ihud* and the Binational movement as unrealistic. This, he argues, history has proven. But any approach to Jewish history that even remotely intimates “what is rational is actual and what is actual is rational” deserves our skepticism.

42. “Ichud Party Issues Declaration; Not Anti-zionist but Opposes Jewish State.” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, 6 October 1942.

the national rights of all the peoples within it,” and to be part of a union with England and America, a “Union of the free peoples” which would “bear the ultimate responsibility for the establishment and stability of international relations in the New World after the war.”⁴³ Later, by 1944–1945, in a pamphlet entitled *Jewish Arab Co-Operation in Palestine*, Magnes narrowed *Ihud*’s program to two key points:

- (1) That the basis for policy in Palestine be the creation of a bi-national Palestine, in which both peoples, Jews and Arabs, are to have equal rights and duties. Conversely this means that there is to be no Jewish State and no Arab State of Palestine.
- (2) That the international background of Palestine be emphasized and reinforced, and that to this end Great Britain declare its readiness, under suitable conditions, to bring Palestine under the Trusteeship System of the United Nations, and that Palestine thus become a Trust Territory instead of a Mandated Territory.⁴⁴

The trusteeship that Magnes envisioned would be a greater regional federation entrusted with establishing a ruling policy for Palestine and guaranteeing its security under Article 76 of the Charter of the United Nations. Under the auspices of the UN, the trusteeship would include Great Britain, the Arab League, and the Jewish Agency for Palestine: “Great Britain represents the Christian world, the Arab League represents the Arab world, and the Jewish Agency the Jewish world, at least in reference to Palestine.”⁴⁵ Great Britain, wrote Magnes, would be designated under Article 81 of the UN Charter as an Administering Authority, not a colonial power but a coordinating body which would include Jewish and Arab high officers. Palestine would be included in an Arab federation and in that capacity form part of an Anglo-American alliance.

Ihud’s rejection of the Biltmore program and endorsement of a Binational state appeared to Arendt as a “direct challenge to the Jewish Agency,” as was another organization by the name of *Aliyah Hadashah* (New Emigration).⁴⁶ *Aliyah Hadashah*, like *Ihud*, was also formed in 1942 in response to the Biltmore resolution for a single Jewish state in Palestine. *Aliyah Hadashah*, under the leadership of Georg Landauer and Pinchas Rosen (Felix Rosenblueth), represented a voice for the German-speaking emigrants from central Europe who

43. Op cit. Founding document of *Ihud*. See Mendes-Flohr (1983). The document is dated August 11, 1942, and this appears to be the date of the first meeting of *Ihud*, attended by roughly a hundred Jewish intellectuals. See Kotzin (2010), p. 282. However, before the Anglo-American commission of 1947, Magnes testified that “The *Ihud* (Union) Association was formed in September 1942.” (16 September 1942). See Magnes and Buber (1947), p. 10.

44. Magnes (1945), section 5, p. 6.

45. Op cit.

46. Arendt (2007), p. 333.

were new to Palestine. Like *Ihud*, it saw itself, in the words of Georg Landauer's founding document, to be "a movement and not a party, certainly not a party in a traditional Zionist sense."⁴⁷ There were indeed many similarities between *Aliyah Hadashah* and Arendt's views. The organization stood for the "fight for a Jewish army, for Jewish units and Jewish symbols," which it took to be an entirely just cause.⁴⁸ Like Arendt, Landauer saw the turn at Biltmore as an endorsement of a "politics of suicide," seeing Arab–Jewish conflict in Palestine as "a multifaceted national problem that must be carefully managed and similarly solved with international forces. *Aliyah Hadashah* is therefore opposed to the prevailing Zionist isolationism..."⁴⁹ Markedly vague in its call with regard to "respecting the Arab people," Landauer stressed the lack of desire on the part of a German-speaking Jewish emigrant to colonize the Arabs of Palestine: "Our goal is not the political domination of the Arabs but rather the great colonization of the Jews." To this effect, *Aliyah Hadashah* proposed: "That we do not want to oppress any Arab farmer or worker, nor do we want to limit Arab autonomy. On the contrary, our aim is to create new and additional economic positions and to seek rights to the land that we have worked ourselves."⁵⁰ Gerda Luft, the widow of the assassinated libertarian socialist leader of the Jewish Agency, Chaim Arlosoroff, who was a member of its executive committee, wrote the following description of the movement:

Mid-way between the working-class parties and the bourgeois groups comes the "Aliyah Hadasha". Though founded but a few years ago, it emerged the second strongest party in the Yishuv from the 1944 elections for the Assefat Ha-Nivharim, whilst in the Zionist congress elections, held in October 1946, Aliyah Hadasha proved the strongest central party. In recent years, it attracted attention and hostility, mainly because of its unequivocal repudiation of the use of force in politics. Despite the antagonism and threatened position resulting from this attitude, there was no deviation from this stand. The political aims of the Aliyah Hadasha are: the safeguarding of sufficient immigration; the abolition of the existing land-laws and the securing of the necessary possibilities for the development of the Zionist colonisation work, in addition to a strengthening of Jewish autonomy in the country. The party has fought the Biltmore programme as being illusory and politically harmful. Whilst proclaiming Jewish-Arab understanding as one of the most important aims of Zionist policy, it has

47. "eine Bewegung, aber *keine Partei*, jedenfalls keine Partei im Traditionellen zionistischen Sinne." Georg Landauer, "Alija Chadascha. Eine neue politische Formation", first published in der *Schriftenreihe der Alija Chadascha* (Nr. 1, Tel Aviv 1944), reprinted in *Der Zionismus im Waldel dreier Jahrzehnte*, hg. Max Kreuzberger, Tel Aviv: Bitan Verlag, 1957, p. 127.

48. Op. cit, p. 130.

49. "Selbstmörderische Politik", "ein vielfältig national Problem und muß gleichfalls mit internationalen Machtmitteln sorgfältig behandelt und schließlich gelöst werden. Die Aliya Chadascha. ist daher gegen den vielfach – resigniert, oder allzu selbstbewußt – herrschenden zionistischen Isolationismus." Op. cit, pp. 131-132.

50. "die Respektierung des arabischen Volkes"; "Nicht politische Herrschaft über Araber, sondern größte Kolonisation von Juden ist unser Ziel"; "daß wir keinen arabischen Bauer und keinen arabischen Arbeiter verdrängen und nicht die arabische Autonomie einschränken wollen, sondern daß es unser Ziel ist, neue und zusätzliche Wirtschaftspositionen zu schaffen und unsere Rechte *für uns auf den von uns erschossenen Böden zu suchen.*" Op. cit, p. 134.

been indefatigable in its side effects to prevent an irreparably widening breach with England, since it maintains that in the long run, Anglo-Jewish cooperation is inevitable. As far as the home policy is concerned, Aliyah Hadasha has formulated a progressive programme and has proposed a series of internal reforms in the Yishuv.⁵¹

Landauer was concerned about a growing "Zionist Totalitarianism" by autumn 1946 and by the spring of 1947, the organization continued to oppose the partition of Palestine in favor of a federated Binationalist solution.⁵² Later that year, the organization split into two factions. Landauer represented the minority position that advocated a single federated Palestine and Pinchas Rosen led the majority to endorse partition, presumably two states and "federal ties with the future Arab state."⁵³ In the first communal elections after the declaration of an independent State of Israel, *Aliyah Hadashah* decided against fielding candidates and by December 1948, Landauer called for the organization to dissolve.⁵⁴

Arendt's attitude to *Aliyah Hadashah* was decidedly negative, although their views were remarkably close on a number of key points. It was the first time, she argued, that the Zionist movement had produced an organization based on "tribal differences, which have split the unity of the Jewish people for more than 150 years."⁵⁵ The lessons of the previous ten years, 1934–1944, taught that "the fate of the Jewish people is one and indivisible."⁵⁶ With an awareness of the Irish emigration to New York, she argued that a German-Jewish faction in Palestine was as sensible as forming an Irish party to represent its separate interests in the United States. All of these trends – the failure to endorse the Jewish army and its subsequent polarization to the right, the Biltmore program with its rejection of compromise and the organization of Zionism along ethnic lines (a trend that was to continue well into the future) – precipitated a "weakening of the authority of the Jewish Agency." Arendt concluded:

The challenges to the authority of our supreme governing body come from very different quarters – the Magnes [*Ihud*] declaration and the Jewish Army Committee [the Revisionists] might be regarded as their most extreme poles. It is significant, however, that both break rank with the official Zionist organization; both by different means try to address the Jewish people over the heads of Jewish officials, and neither tries to fight its battles within the established administration.⁵⁷

51. (Luft 1994), pp. 22-32. See also (Avineri 1991).

52. "zionistischen Totalitarismus"; Landauer in *Mitteilungsblatt*, Tel Aviv, 25 October 1946.

53. Sasson (1998), p. 284.

54. Landauer in *Mitteilungsblatt*, Tel Aviv, 10 November 1948.

55. Arendt (2007), p. 333.

56. Op cit.

57. Arendt (2007), p. 334.

The alternative to the national question, she suggested in a rather odd passage, was the model of ethnic political autonomy in the Russian Revolution. Yet in direct contrast to Lenin's doctrine of *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination* in which "the self-determination of nations means the political separation of these nations from alien national bodies, and the formation of an independent national state,"⁵⁸ Arendt wrote that "for the first time in modern history, an identification of nation and state has not even been attempted" in the Russian Revolution. It was a strange position for Arendt to take, since only three years later she would begin work on the *Origins of Totalitarianism* with its formidable critique of Bolshevism. For Arendt, the promise of a "federation of peoples and nationalities, all of them having their own, if very restricted rights, none of them privileged and none of them dominated," seemed to be an answer to the pending problem of partition and the creation of two tiny warring states.⁵⁹ There was something clearly desirable in a non-state solution for Palestine, she maintained, for the link between nationhood and state was outdated. Europe was in the process of shedding the concept of nationhood as determined by the possession of the apparatus of the state, she argued, the mode with which the self-determination of peoples was indelibly linked in the nineteenth century. Rather prophetically, in the midst of arguably the most racial and nationally informed war Europe had known, she wrote that a "federated Europe" was already on the horizon. All progressive peoples, whether European or otherwise, "know that many problems could be solved with a federal government and with a constitution giving equal rights to each and every nationality on the continent."⁶⁰ The reason that Jewish autonomous political life was associated with the nation-state was, she argued, due to the fact that Zionism was born with the concept of nationhood in the previous century where freedom, in the guise of self-determination, was linked to definitive boundaries, cultural and ethnic homogeneity, and majoritarian identity. The weakness of Zionism in the twentieth century was not to have realized the obsolescence of its ideology and its resulting inability to change. Arendt concluded that it was precisely the changing nature of the concept of ethnic and political freedom that *Ihud*, under Magnes' leadership, had correctly understood and that despite any immediate obstacles constituted a chapter out of the political formulas of the future.⁶¹ The imperative of Jewish emigration from Europe, which met with strong opposition from the Arabs, was to be the Achille's heel of *Ihud*. Arendt:

58. Lenin (1972)

59. Arendt (2007), p. 335.

60. Arendt (2007), p. 335.

61. A few years later, in a letter from Magnes to Arendt, it is evident that they share a common regard for the Federalist papers, the founding documents of the American Revolution, from which a "great deal can be learned both as to substance and as to terminology from a reading of the Articles of Confederation of 1777." See Magnes to Arendt, Letter 133, from 20 July 1948 in Goren (1982), p. 503.

Even the Magnes plan betrays the fact that it is built up entirely at our expense: a binational state protected by an Arab federation is nothing less than minority status within an Arab empire, and this empire is to be protected by an Anglo-American alliance which, to safeguard the way to India, has to deal with and to respect the majority – the Arabs – and not so tiny a minority as the Jews. Magnes, too, thinks along the old lines of national states ... [as his] federation is – in contrast to a nation – made up of different peoples with equal rights ... [but if] realized would make out of Palestine one of our worst Galuth [exile] countries.⁶²

It is notable here that Arendt is never truly at home, even among what must be considered her closest political allies in a moment of Zionist radicalization by her own reckoning. But it is also, from another view, an indication of her constantly developing position, particularly with regard to the “Arab question.” Admittedly, she expressed some skepticism toward a federated solution as early as October 1942, citing the American Zionist leader Emanuel Neumann (1893–1980) who voiced the argument at Biltmore that federalism was a British imperial campaign entirely suited to Pan-Arab nationalism, itself an “invention of British power politics.”⁶³ She essentially argued that there were two forms of federalism: a colonial system of mutual animosity managed by the British, later an Anglo–American alliance, and a truer form of federalism which could maintain ethnic and cultural differences as units of political self-organization without succumbing to either isolationism, Balkanization or the politics of the majority. The politics of Herzl, which was focused on a Jewish national home in a Jewish nation-state, needed to give way to a new federal structure that was able to take into account the troublesome nature of European national identity politics. The identity politics of Europe continued to inform the current war. It was also the impetus behind the impending collapse of British mandate Palestine – the weight of an imperial empire about to buckle under the centrifugal force of ethnic self-determination. Implicitly commenting on the position of *Ihud*, which called for a “union of the free peoples” of Palestine and Britain, she wrote that no one could know if the British commonwealth would be capable of accepting people of non-British origin into its political ranks. The outcome could be a state of exile no greater than the states in which the Jews already existed as a minority, beholden to the greater powers under which they lived. Federation in Palestine actually meant neither the Leninist federation of ethnic nation-states with the force of “Mother Russia” as its guide, nor the British franchise of imperial power. It meant neither partition, with weak independent states in Balkanized isolation, nor federation under pan-Arab nationalism where the Jews would remain a minority. Her vision of federalism meant political units of regional and ethnic autonomy working in a cooperative framework, avoiding minority rights or isolationism. That would be the politics of suicide, she once wrote to the Zionist leader and intimate friend Kurt Blumenfeld.⁶⁴

62. Arendt (2007), p. 336.

63. Arendt (2000), p. 102; Arendt (2007), p. 179.

64. Arendt to Blumenfeld on January 14, 1946 in Arendt and Blumenfeld (1995), p. 39.

Zionism Reconsidered

By 1944, Arendt's Zionism had been shaped considerably by the events of the previous three years following her arrival in New York. In many respects, it was a period of political setbacks, disappointments, and outright worries. First, the Jewish Agency's failure to back an independent Jewish army, the idea taken over by the revisionist wing of the Zionist movement; second, the rejection of Arab concerns and the explicit turn toward a single Jewish state at Biltmore in May 1942; thirdly, the resistance to partition by *Ihud*, which risked a Jewish minority in a federated Palestine under Arab-British control, and by *Aliyah Hadashah*, which organized itself as a central European minority culture within the *yishuv* and thus opened up the possibility of ethno-political fracturing. In the period 1944–1946, Arendt entered a very intensive writing phase, which included "extra-honorariums" from Jewish and "non-Jewish journals" to make her observations on Zionism known and to "propagate the cause," as she suggested in a letter to Kurt Blumenfeld.⁶⁵ In October 1944, she began work on an article which later appeared in the Jewish humanist *Menorah Journal* under the title "Zionism Reconsidered" (Autumn 1945). This is one of the most extensive of her writings on Zionism, and it demonstrates the vibrant, changing nature of her thinking on Jewish politics at the time.⁶⁶

The turning point for Arendt was first Biltmore, but then the reiteration of the same demands by the World Zionist Organization at a conference in Atlantic City in October 1944: the "whole of Palestine, undivided and undiminished."⁶⁷ From May 1942 to October 1944, the Arabs no longer featured in its resolutions, leaving them arbitrarily "the choice between voluntary emigration or second-class citizenship."⁶⁸ In these two fateful years, the Jewish Agency and the majority of the Zionist movement had assumed a position that was "identical with those of the extremists," a terrible blow to "those Jewish parties in Palestine" who had tirelessly campaigned for Jewish–Arab understanding.⁶⁹ With a certain degree of foresight and premonition concerning the terms of what would eventually become the Arab–Israeli conflict, she predicted that the Zionist movement would have to resort to the use of violence in the creation of a Jewish state, having done its best to create the conditions of a "tragic conflict" that can only be solved by "cutting the Gordian knot:" the displacement of the Palestinian Arabs.⁷⁰ This descent of Zionism into the politics of population transfer signaled the decline of the self-determination movement of the Jewish people as an independent force and the grounds of a new Jewish politics. The framework for Jewish politics had been replaced by a

65. Arendt to Blumenfeld, op cit., p. 36.

66. See the particularly thoughtful presentation in Chapter 5 of Richard J. Bernstein (1996).

67. Arendt (2007), p. 343.

68. Op cit.

69. Op cit.

70. Op cit.

nationalism that in many ways continues to have direct relevance for the politics of Israel today. As she wrote then:

Nationalism is bad enough when it trusts in nothing but the rude force of the nation. A nationalism that ... depends on the force of a foreign nation is certainly worse. This is the threatened fate of the Jewish nationalism and of the proposed Jewish state, surrounded inevitably by Arab states and Arab peoples. Even a Jewish majority in Palestine – nay, even a transfer of all Palestine Arabs, which is openly demanded by the Revisionists – would not substantially change a situation in which Jews must either ask protection from an outside power against their neighbors or come to a working agreement with their neighbors.⁷¹

Revisionism was founded not only on the demand for independence – they were the only ones, Arendt noted, willing to raise a Jewish army – but also on the exclusive right of the Jewish people to Palestine.⁷² For these views, the revisionist movement was deemed fascist not only by Arendt but also by the mainstream Zionist leadership of the 1930s and 1940s.⁷³ They were the first to claim “the whole of Palestine and Transjordan” and to “advocate the transfer of Palestine Arabs to Iraq,” and yet with the turn of the wider Zionist movement toward the nation-state and away from the idea of a national homeland, the Revisionists had “proven victorious.”⁷⁴ The victory of Revisionism could be traced back to the origins of Zionism in two parallel European political ideologies of the nineteenth century: socialism and nationalism. The socialist element in Zionism was prevalent among the first Jewish pioneers and represented a large contingent among the first waves of emigration, or *Aliyah*, from the 1880s to 1923. The movement had strong “Tolstoyan” affinities, she wrote, offering presumably a more palatable word for “anarchism” or “libertarian socialism” to the largely American readers of the *Menorah Journal*. The *Chalutz* or pioneer movement was deeply interwoven with the agrarian cooperatives, or *Kibbutzim*, as an integral part of the development of a Jewish homeland. But the curious aspect of this movement was their belief in what she termed “a kind of personal salvation through work,” and thus an anti-political orientation to the questions facing the *yishuv*.⁷⁵ When the Jewish Agency, “against the natural impulses of the whole Jewish people,” decided to “flood the Palestine market with German products and thus make a mockery of the boycott against German-made goods, they found little opposition in the Jewish

71. Arendt (2007), p. 344.

72. Originally made in error by Young-Bruehl (1982, 1st ed., p. 456) and repeated by Said (1995). It has since been corrected by Young-Bruehl in the second edition (2004, 2nd ed., p. xxxv, note 1) but alas, after Said’s death. The matter has been resolved without question. Arendt never supported Meir Kahana or his JDF. This is an opportunity to correct a spurious claim that Arendt supported Meir Kahana’s Jewish Defense Force, originally made in error.

73. Schechtman (2007).

74. Arendt (2007), pp. 346-347.

75. Arendt (2007), p. 349.

national homeland, and least of all among its aristocracy, the so-called Kibbutzniks.”⁷⁶ Here Arendt was referring to the program to exchange goods for hard currency, an earlier phase of the Nazi program to make German Jews pay for their own rescue. It is quite evidently absurd to lay blame for the program and its moral turpitude at the doorstep of the cultural socialist movement, since neither the *Kibbutzim* nor the cultural Zionists could bear any tangible responsibility for the decisions of the Jewish Agency. Her criticism, however, was aimed at their lack of political action. In her view, the movement constituted a cultural elite that remained aloof from politics and entered into a world unaffected by the pressing issues and the emerging nation-state that it did not support but did little to stop. By rejecting politics, the broadly libertarian socialist element of the early Zionist movement ceded the sphere of politics to the Jewish Agency, which, in turn, refused the call for independent military action in Europe and abandoned Arab–Jewish reconciliation in Palestine. The arrangement under which German Jews could buy their freedom by selling German goods in Palestine is but one “instance among many of the political failure of the aristocracy of Palestine Jewry.”⁷⁷ The term aristocracy is obviously polemical but at the same time reveals a certain degree of intimacy. Though they were small in number, the libertarian cultural and socialist movement exerted a disproportional influence on the social values in Palestine. Yet it contributed remarkably little by way of politics. By failing to make good on their political ideas and by restricting themselves to the agrarian and cultural realm, the intellectual aristocracy of the Zionist movement were invariably saddled with a political organization that they held in contempt, “as they held in contempt all men who were not producing and living from the work of their hands.” Similar to their European counterparts of the socialist movement many of which “have, in the old tradition, simply refused to vote,” the anarchism of this intellectual, cultural and socialist elite rejected the political.⁷⁸ Revolutionary as they were with regard to their ideology and social experimentation, “they failed to level a single criticism at the Jewish bourgeoisie outside of Palestine or to attack the role of Jewish finance in the political structure of Jewish life.”⁷⁹ With a rising tone of desperation, she concluded:

Thus the social revolutionary Jewish national movement, which started half a century ago with ideals so lofty that it overlooked the particular realities of the Near East and the general wickedness of the world, has ended – as do most such movements – with the unequivocal support not only of national but of chauvinist claims, not against the foes of the Jewish people but against its possible friends and present neighbors.

76. Arendt (2007), p. 350.

77. Arendt (2007), p. 350.

78. Arendt (2007), p. 351.

79. Op cit.

This voluntary and, in its consequences, tragic abdication of political leadership by the vanguard of the Jewish people left the course free to the ... political Zionists. Their Zionism belongs to those nineteenth-century political movements that carried ideologies, *Weltanschauung[en]*, keys to history, in their portmanteaus.⁸⁰

The failure of the libertarian socialist wing of Zionism led Arendt to speculate on the reasons for its demise well before the establishment of a state. Though "Zionism Reconsidered" was written while the gas chambers were working at maximum capacity, it is unlikely that her perspective on the ideological origins of Zionism would have substantially changed by the end of the war and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Zionism, for Arendt, was a European ideology that began in the European *Kulturkampf* of the nineteenth century and at the crossroads of nationalism and socialism. Herzl's ideology of the eternity of Antisemitism made this crossroads particularly difficult for the Jews to cross. Neither nationalism nor socialism would offer a complete solution. Under Herzl's guidance, Zionism chose the isolation of Jewish nationalism from the national struggles of other European peoples with whom they had a natural alliance. In place of sharing common ground with other national identities, Zionism advances a route to independence for the Jews through an alliance of imperialism. Herzl was characteristically unmoved by the suffering of other small nations, thinking remarkably little about the solidarity between nations and instead sought the patronage of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires. Upon hearing of the plight of the Armenians during the uprising and massacres of 1894–1896 (the Hamidian massacres), he is reputed to have remarked: "This will be useful for me with the Sultan."⁸¹ Herzl was eager to use the Armenian crisis as an opportunity to show the devotion of the Zionist movement to the Ottoman Empire, as he testified in a letter to the Turkish ambassador in Vienna.⁸² A standard was thereby set by which no noticeable "solidarity with other peoples, whose cause ... was essentially the same," was to be expressed by the Zionist leadership, though certainly not the only possible course for Zionism.⁸³ The other road, the road not taken but perhaps more obvious, "would have meant an alliance with all progressive forces in Europe." Though morally and intellectually advantageous, such an approach would have had its risk. The "only man within the Zionist Organization known to have ever considered [an anti-imperialist alliance for the Zionist movement] was the great French Zionist Bernard Lazare ... and he had to resign from the Organization at the early date of 1899."⁸⁴

80. Arendt (2007), p. 351–352.

81. Arendt (2007), p. 363.

82. *The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl*, ed. R. Patai, vol. II, New York: Herzl Press, 1960, pp. 541-542, cited in Marwan R. Buheiry "Theodor Herzl and the Armenian Question", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Autumn, 1977), p. 95.

83. Arendt (2007), p. 363.

84. Op cit.

It is surprising in retrospect how unpopular the anti-imperialist cause was among the Zionists, since an alliance of this sort would seem rather self-evident, Zionism being the ideology of one national movement among numerous struggling national minorities of Europe. One can only speculate that with the emerging Cold War, which was already evident in the Wilson-Lenin competing doctrines of self-determination, the Jews, well acquainted with Mother Russia, would have seen through Lenin's approach as a foil for the primacy of Russian nationhood. In the course of the nineteenth century, imperialism proved to be a "nation-destroying force, and therefore for a small people, it was near suicide to attempt to become its ally or its agent."⁸⁵ Arendt's metaphors are all notably catastrophic: imperialism aids the self-determination of a people like rope aids in hanging; an alliance of lamb and lion with "disastrous consequences for the lamb."⁸⁶ Zionism, in her estimation, was doomed to failure if it sought national self-determination under the wings of an imperial power.

Conclusion

Arendt's critique of Zionism point to the question of why Zionism failed to achieve natural allies and sought instead partnerships with the lions. Its national idea, she wrote, was largely influenced by German nationalism, itself missing a vital element found in the national revolutions of France, Italy and also America: the concept of the sovereignty of the people. Zionism, under Herzl's leadership, was never bothered with notions of popular sovereignty, not having had the need to overthrow a landed aristocracy and a clerical class of priests for nearly 2000 years. Sovereignty of the *volonté générale*, which Arendt termed the "prerequisite for the formation of a nation" – and if not a nation then certainly a nation-state – was missing from the Zionist idea.⁸⁷ It was as if the Zionists would adopt elements of the European struggle for self-determination without its historical framework. "It was precisely because of this nationalist misconception," she concluded, that the Zionists ended up making "Jewish national emancipation entirely dependent upon the material interests of another nation," namely the Austrians, the Ottomans, and finally the British Empire.⁸⁸ Zionism was simply unprepared for the real questions it would face in Palestine, or for that matter anywhere in which a Jewish state was contemplated: how to form a natural, working arrangement with those peoples (of Palestine, Argentina, or Uganda) who currently resided under the force of a colonial power. To extrapolate from the ideology of Herzl, the choice of Palestine meant a choice of one or two roads: empire or federation, the former laying the groundwork for eventual conflict, the latter giving "the Jewish people,

85. Arendt (2007), p. 364.

86. Op cit.

87. Arendt (2007), p. 367.

88. Op cit.

together with other small peoples, a reasonably fair chance for survival.”⁸⁹ In summing up her critique of the politics of imperialism, she concluded that the

Jews propose to establish ... a “sphere of interest” [a colony] under the delusion of nationhood. Either a binational Palestine state or a Jewish commonwealth might conceivably have been the outcome of a working agreement with [the] Arabs and other Mediterranean peoples ... The erection of a Jewish state within an imperial sphere of interest may look like a nice solution ... [but] in the long run, there is hardly [a] course imaginable that would be more dangerous.

“Zionism Reconsidered,” or perhaps more accurately “Zionism Reconsider!” was an appeal to the Zionist movement. Arendt debated the merits of cultural and political Zionism and its contribution to Jewish politics. She shaped a Zionism for herself that stood between the aloofness of the cultural and agrarian Zionism, on the one hand, and the imperialism of the political Zionism, on the other. Her Zionism was an attempt to shape a Jewish politics under the given conditions of a mortal enemy in Europe and a growing conflict with the Arab Palestinians. Pierre Bouretz has raised the question of whether Arendt’s criticism of Zionism suffered from the very distance to events on the ground that she rejected, giving her predictions a “caractère improbable” and her observations from New York an easier task.⁹⁰ Anticipating these views, Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin argued that Arendt’s ideas on Zionism became unrealistic at the very moment when reality proved her observations to be “correct and precise,” that she “became irrelevant when what she foresaw came to be real.”⁹¹ By this point in her career, as a “special delegate of the Jewish Agency for Palestine,” she appeared to have no natural constituency. With the establishment of the State of Israel and the death of Magnes in 1948, the idea of federalism appeared a wistful solution, a fair and equitable partition of Palestine remote, and war, as well as the birth of the Palestinian refugee problem, a reality. With this, her interest in Jewish politics declined and her attention was drawn to other matters in political philosophy, on the relationship between thought and action, the idea of judgment and moral responsibility in the wake of the Holocaust.

Notes on contributor

Eric Jacobson (Department of Humanities, University of Roehampton) was born in New York and received a doctorate from the Free University of Berlin. He is the author of *Metaphysics of the Profane: The Political Theology of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem* (New York: Columbia University Press), *Weiterwohlichkeit der Welt. Zur Aktualität von Hans Jonas*, hg. mit C. Wiese (Berlin: Philo Verlag) and *Das Kunstwerk und die Erinnerung: Dem Vergangenen im Bild eine Präsenz geben* (Graz: Leykam Verlag).

89. Arendt (2007), p. 372.

90. Bouretz (2004).

91. Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, “Binationalism and Jewish Identity” in Aschheim (2001), p. 169. See also Moshe Zimmerman and Richard J. Bernstein in this volume.

References

- Arendt, Hannah (1951) *Antisemitism: Part One of the Origins of Totalitarianism*, Harvest/HBJ Book, New York, NY.
- Arendt, Hannah (1957) *Rahel Varnhagen Lebensgeschichte einer deutschen Jüdin aus der Romantik*, Piper Verlag, München.
- Arendt, Hannah (1958) *The Human Condition*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.
- Arendt, Hannah (1994) *Essays in Understanding 1930–1954*, Schocken Books, New York, NY.
- Arendt, Hannah & Blumenfeld Kurt (1995) *In Keinem Besitz verwurzelt. Die Korrespondenz*. Hg. Ingeborg Nordmann und Iris Pilling, Rotbuch Verlag, Hamburg.
- Arendt, Hannah (2000) *Vor Antisemitismus ist man nur noch auf dem Monde sicher. Beiträge für die deutsch-jüdische Emigrantenzeitung "Aufbau" 1941–1945*, Piper Verlag, München.
- Arendt, Hannah (2002) *Vita activa oder Vom tätigen Leben*, Piper Verlag, München.
- Arendt, Hannah (2005) *Ich will verstehen: Selbstauskünfte zu Leben und Werk*, Piper Verlag, München.
- Arendt, Hannah (2007) *Jewish Writings*, Schocken Books, New York, NY.
- Aschheim, Steven E. (2001) *Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.
- Avineri, Shlomo (1991) *Arlosoroff*, Grove Press, New York, NY.
- Bernstein, Richard J. (1996) *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Bouretz, Pierre (November 2004) 'Hannah Arendt et le sionisme: Cassandre aux pieds d'argile' in, *Raisons Politiques*, vol. 16.
- Brinner, William M. & Rischin, Moses (1987) *Like All the Nations? The Life and Legacy of Judah L. Magnes*, State University of New York, Albany, NY.
- Brown, Nancy. (2000) Outside the Law: Conscience, Conflict and Contradiction in Marseilles 1940–1942 in *The Century of Genocide*, p. 49, from the 30th Annual Scholars Conference on the Holocaust and the Churches convened 4–7 March 2000 in Philadelphia, PA. <http://www.aschc.org/conference-archives/items/show/8> (accessed 4 July 2011).
- Buber, Martin, Magnes, J. L. & Simon, E. (eds) (1947) *Toward Union in Palestine: Essays on Zionism and Jewish-Arab Cooperation*, Ihud (Union) Association, Jerusalem.
- Buheiry, Marwan R. (1977) 'Theodor Herzl and the Armenian Question', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1.
- Goren, Arthur A. (1982) *Dissenter in Zion: From the Writing of Judah L. Magnes*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Heller, Joseph (2003) *Mi-berit shalom le-Ih ud: Yehudah Lib Magnes vehama'avak lemedinah du-leumit*, Magnes Press, Jerusalem.
- Jacobson, E. (2009) 'Locating the Messianic: In Search of Causation and Benjamin's Last Message', *Journal for Cultural Research*, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 207–223.
- Kotzin, Daniel P. (2010) *Judah L. Magnes: An American Jewish Nonconformist*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse.
- Landauer, Georg (1957) Alija Chadascha: Eine neue politische Formation in *Der Zionismus im Waldel dreier Jahrzehnte*, hg. Max Kreuzberger, Bitan Verlag, Tel Aviv.
- Laqueur, Walter (2003) *A History of Zionism*, Tauris Paperbacks, London.
- Lenin, V. I. (1972) *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination in Collected Works*, vol. 20, Progress Publishers, Moscow.
- Luft, Gerda (1947) 'Jewish Palestine Today: The Social and Political Background' in Buber, Martin, Magnes, J. L. & Simon, E. (eds.), *Towards Union in Palestine*, pp. 22–32.

- Magnes, Judah L. (1930) *Like All the Nations?*, Weiss Press [Herod's Gate], Jerusalem.
- Magnes, Judah L. (1939) *The Bond: Pamphlets of the Group 'The Bond'*, Jerusalem, vol. 1, Rubin Mass, Jerusalem.
- Magnes, Judah L. (1945) *Jewish Arab Co-Operation in Palestine* [Union Pamphlets No. 3], Ihud (Union) Association, Jerusalem.
- Magnes, Judah L. (1947) "A Solution Through Force", in Buber, M., Magnes, J. L., Simon, E. (eds.), *Toward Union in Palestine: Essays on Zionism and Jewish-Arab Cooperation*, Ihud (Union) Association, Jerusalem.
- Magnes, Judah L & Martin, Buber (1947) *Arab-Jewish Unity: Testimony before the Anglo-American Inquiry Commission for the Ihud (Union) Association*, Victor Gollancz, London.
- Medzini, M. (1928) *Esser shanim shel mediniut erez yisraelit*, Tel Aviv.
- Mendes-Flohr, Paul (1983) *A Land of Two Peoples*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Mosès, Stéphane (2009) *The Angel of History: Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Scholem*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA.
- Piterberg, Gabriel (2007) 'Zion's Rebel Daughter: Hannah Arendt on Palestine and Jewish Politics', *New Left Review* 48, Nov–Dec 2007, pp. 39–57.
- Said, Edward (1995) *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination, 1969-1994*, Vintage, London.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul (1948) *Anti-Semite and Jew*, Schocken Books, New York, NY.
- Schechtman, Joseph (2007) "Revisionists, Zionist" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. 2nd edn, Vol. 17. Detroit, Macmillan.
- Sofer, Sasson (1998) *Zionism and the Foundations of Israeli Diplomacy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Villa, Dana. R. (1996) *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.
- Yakira, Elhanan (2006) 'Hannah Arendt, the Holocaust, and Zionism: A Story of a Failure', *Israel Studies*, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 31-61.
- Young-Bruehl, Elisabeth (1982, 1st ed; 2004, 2nd ed.) *For Love of the World*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.