Having been accused of indifference toward Jews and Judaism following the publication of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963), it is remarkable to discover that for more than two decades Hannah Arendt was engaged with aspects of Jewish thought and culture that would not be unfamiliar to Jewish Studies today. 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 she 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, which she titled *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. She was an editor for arguably the most important Judaic publisher, Salman Schocken, and contributed to the publication in English of major figures in modern Jewish culture, including Gershom Scholem, Franz Kafka, Bernard Lazare, and Walter Benjamin. The publication of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* launched her academic career in the United States but 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 for failing to resolve the Arab question. The second was the reception of her book

2 This position was articulated by Gershom Scholem in a letter to Arendt as early as 1946, complaining bitterly about her article “Zionism Reconsidered” and being unable to imagine “was Sie für ein Credo Ihrerseits vorgestellt haben, als Sie diesen Artikel schrieben. Ihr Artikel ist keine Frage an den Zionismus, sondern eine muntere Neuauflage kommunistischer Kritik strikt antizionistische Charakters, versetzt mit einem diffus bleibenden Golus-Nationalismus” Scholem an Arendt 28.1.46 Hannah Arendt, Gershom Scholem, *Der Briefwechsel*, Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 2010, p. 92. (Henceforth ASBriefe)
3 By 1948, the Schocken Library in New York had also published other important Jewish authors in English translation including Nahum Glatzer, Yitzhak Baer, S.D. Goitein,
Eichmann in Jerusalem. 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 dedicated to Zionism in no small measure. With passionate rhetoric, her ideas come across as highly resolute and yet upon closer review her arguments reveal considerable nuance, as one might expect in a period of tremendous upheaval in Jewish history and culture. This period was decisive in the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. It also had a considerable effect on the prospects for a resolution of the Arab–Jewish conflict. Arendt’s activities on behalf of the French Zionist youth movement have been well documented. Yet the course of her development, from advocate of Jewish emigration to Palestine to deepening despair with the movement, remains obscure. The period began with a rallying cry for the establishment of an independent Jewish army to fight Nazism, which she understood as the birth of Jewish politics in response to the extermination campaign. In the failure of the Jewish world to mobilize an independent marshal force of its own (with Jews enlisting instead in the armed forces of the Allies), her attention turned to Zionism, the Zionist movement, the developments in Palestine and the congresses which took place in and around New York City at the time. She became an advocate of the idea of a binational solution to the conflict in Palestine: a single political entity with two national identities, Jewish and Arab, that would exist in a federation with other countries in the region. With the ascendancy of the idea of a solely Jewish homeland, the subsequent communal violence, the failure of the partition plan and the assassination of UN representative Folke Bernadotte, Arendt became increasingly despondent about the prospects for a resolution of the Arab–Jewish conflict as well the one of the key premises of Zionism: the establishment of a Jewish state as a solution to Antisemitism. Scholars have noted that her ideas on Jews and Judaism provided the underlying framework for her mature work on politics and morality, and the evidence of a compelling interest on her part is now undeniable through the most

Heinrich Heine, Solomon Maimon, Martin Buber, and S.Y. Agnon.
recent publications. The transition from Zionist activist to critic of its central tenants is the focus of this chapter.

**The Advent of Jewish Politics**

Arendt left Berlin in 1934 after her arrest and brief imprisonment. She had been working on a mission from 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. From 1934–1940, she was the chair of the French Youth Aliyah Committee, helping young Jews 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). 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.

To Hannah 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

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7 EYB, p. 107.


Jews as a people at a loss for power, always at the mercy of powerful forces, never the makers of their own destiny. Her position clashes with the Hegelian view of history, or Franz Rosenzweig’s quixotic reply that places the Jews outside of history, or even Walter Benjamin’s vision of the generations and epochs to come that shapes his understanding of time. For Arendt, European Jewish life and culture was bereft of politics and barren of the means to engage with the world. Jewish politics and thus Zionism meant to Arendt a political response to the powerlessness of Jewish history. Her appeal to develop such a politics in Judaism was an attempt to orient herself to the issues of her day: Antisemitism, tolerance, assimilation, and national self-determination or Zionism. Arendt’s Zionism here is not what one might expect and her approach does not follow the dominant tendencies of Central European Jews in her time. It is perhaps partly for this reason that her position becomes untenable and she moves closer to an argument which would later be called anti-Zionist.

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 (lit. “one of the people”), the pen name of Asher Ginsberg (1856–1927) whose Hebrew prose inspired scores of German-speaking Jewish intellectuals in the early twentieth century. 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 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.

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11 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.’ VA, p. 35.
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. She was in this sense a Political Zionist. Yet, 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.

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 German language Aufbau newspaper, published in Manhattan, and entwined with her notion of Jewish politics, agency and self-determination.\(^\text{12}\) 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. Arendt’s argument is however neither existential nor performative. It concerns the subject as a participant in her own history, elsewhere expressed as a Denken 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, male and female, in one collective form of resistance. Stateless people stand outside of the law, she suggested 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

\(^{12}\) It is also undeniably intertwined with Heidegger, a topic which exceeds the framework for discussion here. See Dana R. Villa, Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996.
Despite her defense 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. It is also not a problem of nationhood, for as she writes, there is no solution to “Jewish problem in one country, also not in Palestine.” Already percolating here is the view that Antisemitism is a political idea, not solely a cultural or biological theory and, for this reason, 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. However, that “somewhere” is not a landmass but a unified and collective resistance to Hitler, a Jewish Army.

The idea of a Jewish army can be seen as a turning point in Arendt’s Zionism:

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 by the absence of a reasonable Jewish position.

It was a considerable blow to Arendt that the call was poorly received by Jewish leadership. More disconcerting was the fact 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

13 VA, p. 25; “Anders steht die Frage für uns jüdische Staatlosen aus Europa, da wir flüchtlinge überall nur als Duldung und nirgends kraft rechts leben.” VA, p. 36.
14 VA, p. 30.
15 VA, p. 31.
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 on December 4, 1948 signed by Albert Einstein and many others prominent. The occasion was the arrival in New York of one of its leader, a man by the name of as Menachem Begin, who 30 years later would become Prime Minister of Israel.  

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 turned progressively to what she deemed as the crisis within 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 for Jewish-Arab reconciliation.

The conflict which was to emerge from the resolutions of 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. The same principle is at work with regard to the British Mandate, 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 what degree Zionism was as the politics of the 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. These resolutions introduced a

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17 See also “The Jewish State: Fifty Years After, Where have Herzl’s Politics Led?” in JW, p. 375-387.

18 The Biltmore Program, “Declaration adopted by the Extraordinary Zionist
division into movement, rupturing the general consensus among Jewry worldwide regarding the principle of territorial compromise and regional cooperation in Palestine. It threw the principle of the international Jewish solidarity into question.

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, was made up predominantly of academics who had been working for reconciliation and understanding since the foundation of the university in 1923–1925, and the first binationalist organization, *Brit Shalom* (Covenant of Peace). *Brit Shalom* which began in 1923, had largely dissipated by the early 1930s. 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, was the impetus. It 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. By October 6, 1942, Magnes and the *Ihud* circle began to feature in Arendt’s articles for *Aufbau*. In December 1943 she penned a two-part article on whether the Jewish–Arab Conference at the Biltmore Hotel of New York City, May 11, 1942”

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22 Judah Magnes, “A Solution Through Force” in M. Buber, J.L. Magnes, E. Simon, ed., *Toward Union in Palestine: Essays on Zionism and Jewish-Arab Cooperation*, Jerusalem: Ihud (Union) Association, 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
question could be solved with the *Ihud* proposal for regional federation at the center of discussion.\textsuperscript{23} 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.\textsuperscript{24} 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, at the heart of the Second World War, 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.”\textsuperscript{25} 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. “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.”\textsuperscript{26} 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

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item 24 Her familiarity with the Ihud circle would have now been roughly a year.
\item 25 JW, p. 195.
\item 26 JW, p. 206.
\end{itemize}}
presently a minority, they will become a majority, was obviously a sham. It set up an unsolvable conflict, as she wrote in August 1944.\textsuperscript{27}

**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.\textsuperscript{28} 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 neighbouring countries” which would “guarantee 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.”\textsuperscript{29} 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

\textsuperscript{27} VA, p. 158; JW, p. 220.
\textsuperscript{28} “Ichud Party Issues Declaration; Not Anti-zionist but Opposes Jewish State.” Jewish Telegraphic Agency, October 6, 1942.
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.\textsuperscript{30}

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, 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.

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 with the Arab inhabitants of Palestine, 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 \textit{[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.\textsuperscript{31}

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 \textit{The Right of Nations to Self-Determination} in which “the self-determination of nations means the political separation of these nations from alien

\textsuperscript{31} JW, p. 334.
national bodies, and the formation of an independent national state,” 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. There was something clearly desirable in a non-state solution for Palestine, she argued, for the link between nationhood and state in her prognosis 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.” 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 to not 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. However, the


33 JW, p. 335.

34 JW, p. 335.

35 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 July 20, 1948 in Goren, ed., *Dissenter in Zion*, p. 503.
imperative of Jewish emigration from Europe, which met with strong opposition from the Arabs, was to be the Achilles heel of Ihud. Arendt:

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.36

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.

Her vision of federalism however meant political units of regional and ethnic autonomy working in a cooperative framework, avoiding minority status or isolationism. This would be the politics of suicide, she once wrote to the Zionist leader and intimate friend Kurt Blumenthal.37

Zionism Reconsidered

By the end of 1943, Arendt’s Zionism had been shaped considerably by the events of the previous three years following her arrival in New York.

The turning point for Arendt was 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.”38 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.”39

38 JW, p. 343.
39 Op cit.
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.\(^{40}\)

With a certain degree of foresight, 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.” In reality this mean the displacement of the Palestinian Arabs.\(^{41}\) 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, she argued. The framework for Jewish politics had been replaced by a nationalism that in many ways continues to have direct relevance for the politics of Israel today.

Revisionism was founded not only on the demand for independence of the Jews but also on the exclusive right of the Jewish people to Palestine.\(^{42}\) For these views, they were deemed fascist not only by Arendt but also by the mainstream Zionist leadership of the 1930s and 1940s.\(^{43}\) The Revisionist 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.”\(^{44}\)

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

\(^{40}\) Op cit.
\(^{41}\) JW, p. 343.
\(^{42}\) This is an opportunity to correct a spurious claim that Arendt supported Meir Kahana’s Jewish Defense League, originally made in error by Arendt’s biographer (EYB, p. 456, first edition) and repeated by Edward Said, *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination, 1969-1994*, London: Vintage, 1995, p. 89. It has since been corrected in the second edition of the biography (EYB, p. xxxv, note 1, 2\(^{nd}\) ed.), but alas, after Said’s death. The matter has been resolved without question: Arendt never supported Kahana or the JDL.
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 Jewish community of Palestine, or yishuv.45 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 national homeland, and least of all among its aristocracy, the so-called Kibutzniks.”46 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. Yet it was their lack of political action that was the cause of her criticism. 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.”47 The term aristocracy is obviously polemical, but at the same time

44 JW, pp. 346–347.
45 JW, p. 349.
reveals an 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. But it contributed remarkably little by way of politics. Expressed in Arendt’s lifelong commitment to the principle of the *via activa* — politics as a necessary human faculty engaged with the world — she condemned the very cultural and political movements that were the closest to her politically, not least of which her commitment to Binationalism. 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.48 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.”49 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.

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.50

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. Thought “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 World War and the

48 JW, p. 351.
49 Op cit.
establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Zionism, for Arendt, was a European ideology, which began in the European *Kulturkampf* of the nineteenth century and at the crossroads of nationalism and socialism. Herzl’s ideology of the eternality 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 to which they had a natural alliance. In place of sharing common ground with other national identities, Zionism advance 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.”\(^51\) 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.\(^52\)

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,\(^53\) though certainly not the only possible course for Zionism. 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.”\(^54\)

It is surprising in retrospect how unpopular the anti-imperialist cause was

\(^{50}\) JW, p. 351–352.  
\(^{51}\) JW, p. 363.  
\(^{53}\) JW, p. 363.
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 readily able 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.”\textsuperscript{55} 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.”\textsuperscript{56} Zionism, in her estimation, was doomed to failure if it sought national self-determination under the wings of an imperial power.

Conclusion

Why was Zionism unable conceive of natural allies and sought instead partnerships with the imperial nations? 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” was missing from the Zionist idea.\textsuperscript{57} 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, or finally the British

\textsuperscript{54} Op cit.
\textsuperscript{55} JW, p. 364.
\textsuperscript{56} Op cit.
\textsuperscript{57} JW, p. 367.
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, together with other small peoples, a reasonably fair chance for survival.” In summing up her critique of the politics of imperialism, she wrote 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” was an appeal to the Zionist movement, as much of her writing is from the period. Arendt debated the merits of cultural and political Zionism and its contribution to Jewish politics, in that 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. 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

58 Op cit.
60 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. Pierre Bouretz, “Hannah Arendt et le sionism: Cassandre aux pieds d’argile” in Raisons politiques, No. 16 (Nov 2004), p. 138.
refugee problem, a reality.\textsuperscript{61} 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 judgement and moral responsibility in the wake of the Holocaust.

\textsuperscript{61} Anticipating these views, Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin argued that Arendt’s ideas on Zionism became unrealistic at the very moment when reality proved her observations and predictions to be “correct and precise,” that she “became irrelevant when what she foresaw came to be real.” Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, “Binationalism and Jewish Identity” in Steven E. Aschheim, ed. \textit{Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem}, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, p. 169; See also Moshe Zimmermann and Richard J. Bernstein in this volume.