

People Who Count: Zionism, Demography and Democracy
in Mandate Palestine

By

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the ways in which demographic knowledge shaped Zionist attitudes towards majority rule and minority rights in Mandate Palestine (1917-1948). In 1917, Jews comprised 10% of Palestine's population; by 1947, their share of the population rose to 30%, almost entirely due to immigration from Europe. The Zionist Organization was aware of this trend and articulated its political demands in accordance with not only the current number of Jews living in Palestine, but also statistical projections of the number of Jews who would enter the country in the future.

I argue that from a demographic-political point of view, the Mandate years should be divided into two periods. Between 1917 and 1937, the Zionist leadership successfully prevented the establishment of majoritarian self-governing institutions, and espoused the principle of mutual non-domination, which dictated that Jews would not rule over Arabs and vice versa. In practice, the Zionists advocated the creation of two separate autonomous national communities under British federal rule, or complete parity between Jews and Arabs in Palestine's self-governing institutions. Although the British and the Arabs rejected both proposals, the Zionist leadership was able to prevent the creation of a joint political structure in which the Arabs would enjoy a clear majority.

The second period began when the Zionist Organization tentatively accepted the 1937 British proposal to establish a Jewish state in part of Palestine, a decision that radically changed Zionist political discourse. Given the demographic makeup of Palestine, according to the partition proposal almost half of the future Jewish state's inhabitants would have been Arab. This meant that the Zionist leadership had to jettison the principle of mutual non-domination and think seriously about the rights of the Arab minority in the Jewish state to be. The issue of mass transfer of Arabs out of the Jewish state now became an inextricable part of Zionist political discourse, since it was seen by most Zionist leaders as a measure that would consolidate the Jewish character of the state. This discourse, which revolves around the management of the Arab minority's size and rights, has persisted in Israeli politics to this day.

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Introduction

The present dissertation seeks to understand how the desire to create a Jewish majority in Palestine, and the demographic knowledge it produced, shaped Zionist thought regarding democratic rule, minority rights, and minority-majority relations during the years of British rule in Palestine (1917-1948).

By studying the link between demographic and democratic thought, I attempt to address a significant lacuna in the history of Israel/Palestine. Since the early 1990s students of Israel have debated the scope, merit, and, indeed, the very existence of Israeli democracy.¹ This debate, conducted mainly among political scientists, almost uniformly begins from the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, as if the state had sprung, Athena-like, from the forehead of Zeus, with a Jewish majority in tow. What is missing from these studies is an account of the Zionist struggle to create a Jewish majority in Palestine – the *sine qua non* of Israeli democracy – before 1948.

Nevertheless, studies of Zionist politics prior to 1948 have treated the formation of Zionist democratic practices as an exclusively intra-Jewish affair. For example, the editors of a recent volume on the history of Israeli democracy, *Ba-derekh ha-demokratit* (on the democratic way), make the claim that the origins of Israeli democracy go all the way back to the First Temple period and conclude that Israeli democracy is, ultimately, a

¹ See, for example: Sami Smooha, "Minority Status in an Ethnic Democracy: The Status of the Arab Minority in Israel", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (1990), pp. 389-413; As'ad Ghanem, Nadim Rouhana and Oren Yiftachel, "Questioning 'Ethnic Democracy': A Response to Sammy Smooha", *Israel Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (1998), pp. 253-267; Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled, "Citizenship and Stratification in an Ethnic Democracy", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (1998), pp. 408-427; Alan Dowty, "Is Israel Democratic? Substance and Semantics in the 'Ethnic Democracy' Debate", *Israel Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (1999), pp. 1-15; Ruth Gavison, "Jewish and Democratic? A Rejoinder to the 'Ethnic Democracy' Debate", *Israel Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (1999), pp. 44-72; Oren Ben-Dor, "Debating Israeli Ethnocracy and the Challenges of Secular Democracy: I. A Critique of Oren Yiftachel", *Holy Land Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2007), pp. 177-195.

“natural link” in the great chain of Jewish history.² Many of the volume’s chapters deal with pre-1948 Zionism, but none of them examine the Zionist-Arab conflict in any substantial way.

This approach is shared by many scholars of the *Yishuv* – the pre-1948 Jewish community in Palestine – who tend to study its political institutions in isolation from their Arab counterparts, usually making the case that Jewish politics were broadly democratic while Arab politics were not. The isolationist approach was given a forceful articulation in a seminal work by sociologists Moshe Lissak and Dan Horowitz, who describe Mandatory Palestine as a dual society in which two separate national communities existed with very “limited mutual relations” between them.³ The dual society hypothesis allowed Lissak and Horowitz to make an all-too-neat distinction between the *Yishuv*, which “established elected representative institutions” and the Arab community, which did not.⁴ The dichotomy between the democratic Zionist movement and the oligarchic Arab national movement, however, cannot explain why the Zionist leaders opposed the establishment of a joint parliament in Palestine in the 1930s, while the Arab leaders supported it.

Interestingly, more critical studies of the *Yishuv* share Horowitz and Lissak’s tendency to study Zionist democracy in a vacuum. In the late 1970s, sociologist Yonathan Shapiro published two studies on the formation of Israeli democracy, both of which deal extensively with the Mandate period, with almost no reference to the Zionist-Arab conflict.⁵ More recent studies, such as Ze’ev Sternhall’s examination of Labor Zionist

² Allon Gal, Gershon Bacon, Moshe Lissak and Pnina Morag-Talmon (eds.), *Ba-derekh ha-demokratit: ‘al ha-mekorot ha-historiyim shel ha-demokratyah ha-Yisra’elit* (Sde Boker: Makhon Ben-Gurion, 2012), pp. 1-2.

³ Dan Horowitz and Moshe Lissak, *Origins of the Israeli Polity: Palestine under the Mandate*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 13.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁵ Yonathan Shapiro, *The Formative Years of the Israeli Labour Party: The Organization of Power, 1919–1930*, (London: Sage, 1976); *Idem, Ha-demokratyah be-yisrael*, (Ramat-Gan: Masadah, 1977).

ideology and Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled's study of the formation of Israeli citizenship, follow the same trend.⁶ The only major scholarly work that attempts to understand the influence of the Zionist-Arab conflict on the formation of pre-1948 Zionist democratic thought is Yosef Gorny's *From Binational Society to Jewish State*, which charts the development of Zionist federative thought.⁷ Gorny's book, however, does not touch on non-federal democratic theories. The result of this scholarly trend is a curious disconnect between two massive bodies of knowledge: the history of pre-1948 Zionist-Arab conflict, on the one hand, and the formation of Israeli democracy, on the other.

The connective tissue between the pre-1948 Zionist-Arab conflict and the formation of Israeli democracy is the 1947-1949 Israeli-Arab war, during which about 700,000 Palestinian Arabs fled or were expelled from the area under Israeli rule. Thus, the creation of a Jewish majority – and of an Israeli democratic regime – was a direct consequence of the Zionist-Arab conflict. For that reason, the study of Zionist and *Yishuv* politics by themselves is not enough to fully explicate the history of Israeli democracy. Zionist and *Yishuv* institutions were, by definition, purely Jewish, and although their study is crucial to our understanding for intra-Jewish and intra-Zionist political dynamics, they do not tell us much about the road leading to the demographic revolution of 1947-1949. In order to understand this demographic revolution, and the political regime to which it gave birth, we must look at the political pressure exerted upon the Zionist leaders by Palestinian Arab notions of, and demands for, just democratic rule, and by British attempts to accommodate both communities while safeguarding Britain's imperial interests.

⁶ Ze'ev Sternhall, *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled, *Being Israeli: The Dynamics of Multiple Citizenship*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁷ Yosef Gorny, *From Binational Society to Jewish State: Federal Concepts in Zionist Political Thought, 1920-1990, and the Jewish People*, (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

The importance of outside pressure to the formation of Zionist democratic thought is compounded by the fact that the Zionist leaders did not produce a democratic theory of their own. The Zionist leadership's intellectual interests lay elsewhere – in the solution to the plight of European Jews above all else, but also in the creation of a new archetype of sturdy, self-sufficient and masculine Jews, the mobilization of Jewish youth, and the intricacies of living in communal agricultural settlements.

One of the major points I make in this dissertation is that when Zionist leaders and intellectuals thought about democracy, it was almost always in response to Arab and British pressure. As I discuss in the first three chapters of this dissertation, until the 1937 partition plan, Zionist attitudes toward democracy in Palestine were mostly expressed as a response to British attempts to establish majoritarian self-governing institutions, and to Arab demands that Palestine's regime, either as an independent state or under British rule, would be based on Arab majority rule.

After the 1937 partition proposal, the Zionist leadership mostly ceased to react to – or engage with – the Arab leadership's political demands. The British promise to establish a Jewish State, and the rending of Palestine's social fabric, brought about by the Arab Revolt (1936-1939), made relations between the two national leaderships superfluous. From 1937 on, the Zionist leadership doubled down on its efforts to convince the Western powers to establish a Jewish State in Palestine.

And yet, the more the Zionist leadership withdrew from its already flimsy engagement with the Arab leadership, the more the scientific objectification of the Arab population became paramount in the Zionist political discourse. As I show in chapters 4-6, during the late 1930s and through the 1940s, the Arab birthrate became an important factor in the debate on the viability of the Jewish State, since the high Arab birthrate threatened to

eclipse any Jewish majority that might be achieved in the future. Perhaps more interestingly, during the last decade of the Mandate, the Palestinian Arab population increasingly appeared in Zionist texts in the guise of natural metaphors: it was represented in the form of a volcano, an ocean, and a desert. All three metaphors speak to deep Zionist anxieties – the volcano symbolized the apparent unpredictability of Arab violence, and the ocean and the desert represented the overwhelming size of the Arab population in relation to the *Yishuv*. Despite the great Zionist effort to accurately count the number of Arabs in Palestine, the ocean/desert metaphor gave expression to the fear that the Arabs were so multitudinous that they were virtually uncountable, like grains of sands in a desert, or water in the ocean.

The turning of Palestinian Arabs into natural metaphors, I believe, was the result of the social and spatial separation between Jews and Arabs that was exacerbated by the 3-year-long Arab Revolt, the flight and exile of the traditional Arab leadership, with whom the Zionist leadership dealt during the 1920s and early 1930s, and the increasing scientification of Zionist thought, especially in regard to Palestinian Arabs, in the latter half of the Mandate period. Although this dissertation is not a study of Palestinian Arab politics or demography, it is a study of how Palestinian Arab demographic figures were consumed, interpreted and turned into political arguments by Zionist politicians. Without studying the anxiety that Arab demographics, and especially the Muslim birthrate, instilled in the Zionist leadership, one cannot hope to understand the formation of Israeli democracy.

Due to the dearth of programmatic Zionist writings on the subject of democracy, I have made extensive use of protocols from official Zionist institutions – the Jewish Agency, the Zionist Executive, and the *Va'ad Leumi* – and the personal correspondence and diaries of major Zionist leaders – especially Chaim Weizmann, David Ben-Gurion and Moshe

Shertok (later, Sharett) – to piece together what might be called a Zionist democratic discourse. This was a highly responsive discourse – it had emerged in response to, and was sustained by, British and Arab pressure – and was consequently intellectually agile, diffused, and lacking in immutable philosophical and moral anchors – except for one principle: the necessity of creating a Jewish majority before the establishment of independent, democratic institutions in Palestine.

Because the creation of a Jewish majority in Palestine was the only constant in the Zionist democratic discourse, Zionist thought regarding democracy focused on two intertwined aspects of democratic theory – majority rule and minority rights. One of the arguments I make in this dissertation is that until the 1937 partition proposal, Zionist politics focused on attempts to prevent, or at least restrict, Arab majority rule in Palestine’s self-governing institutions, while ensuring extensive minority rights for the Jews. The 1937 partition proposal, which suggested the establishment of a Jewish State in parts of Palestine, seemingly ensured Jewish majority rule and shifted the focus to the question of Arab minority rights in the Jewish State.

The inextricable link between democracy and demography in Zionist thought makes it a prime example of what philosopher Michel Foucault called “bio-politics”. According to Foucault, bio-politics emerged in 17th-18th century Europe as a series of governmental practices that attempted to utilize and optimize the human body for the benefit of the state.⁸ At one end of the bio-political spectrum stood the single human body, its constitution, utility, and efficiency; at the other end, the entire population of the state, its overall health, longevity, and ability to produce and reproduce.⁹ Foucault argued that the

⁸ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), pp. 139-140.

⁹ *Ibid.*

newfound governmental interest in the human body and the body politic gave birth to the disciplines of demography, public health, and public welfare.

From Theodore Herzl onward, Zionist thought have been preoccupied with both the individual Jewish body and entire Jewish populations. One might argue that the axiom at the basis of Zionist belief, that the Jews are indeed one nation, entails, at least implicitly, the conviction that world Jewry comprises a more or less cohesive and distinct population, a mass of people that can be transplanted, educated and saved. If that is the case, the emergence of Zionism was dependent not only on the adoption of theories of nationality to the Jewish context, but also on technological progress and scientific thinking. Without appropriate transportation, advanced agricultural methods, preventive medicine, and cheap and efficient housing, the transfer and settlement of millions of Jews could not have been conceived, let alone executed. Although Jews have settled in Palestine throughout the centuries in small numbers, it is the potentiality of mass settlement that made the Zionist project different from prior Jewish migrations to Palestine, and distinctly *modern*.

For Herzl, mass migration out of Europe was the only solution to the so-called Jewish Question. In his programmatic book, *The Jewish State*, Herzl made the case for a legally-sanctioned and concerted mass migration of Jews; he specifically criticized small-scale attempts to settle a few thousand Jews outside of Europe.¹⁰ In other words, Herzl's solution hinged on the transfer of an entire population. His right-hand man, Max Nordau, was probably the first Zionist leader to demand the creation of a Jewish majority in Palestine, as early as 1899.¹¹ Yet Nordau was, perhaps, most famous for his call for the

¹⁰ Benyamin Ze'ev Herzl, *Medinat ha-yehudim*, (Tel-Aviv: M. Neumann Press, 1970), p. 18.

¹¹ Michael Heymann, "Max Nordau at the Early Zionist Congresses, 1897-1905", *The Journal of Israeli History*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (1995), p. 250.

creation of “muscular Jews”. Nordau, a physician by training and the author of a popular diatribe against cultural and physical degeneration, posited that, during antiquity, the Jews had been a proud race of warriors.¹² Life in the cramped and wretched ghetto, however, weakened the body, as well as the soul, of exilic Jews.¹³ For Nordau, conditioning and hardening the individual Jewish body was a way to regenerate the entire Jewish nation and return it to its former glory. Interestingly, both Zionist thinkers used microbiological metaphors to describe the Jewish condition: Herzl argued that Jews carried antisemitism with them, as if it were a disease, wherever they went;¹⁴ Nordau was more explicit, likening Jews to microbes who, under the pressure of antisemitism, might turn into pathogens.¹⁵ Thus, Herzl and Nordau’s brand of Zionism was clearly bio-political, aimed at the management and reformation of both the Jewish body and the Jewish body politic.

Much has been written in recent years about the bio-political aspects of pre-1948 Zionism. Daniel Boyarin and Michael Gluzman both frame Herzl’s turn to Zionism as a reaction to the anti-Semitic treatment of the Jewish body as inherently weak, feminine and queer.¹⁶ Boaz Neumann has shown how young Zionist pioneers – many of whom were weaned on Herzl and Nordau’s writings – treated hard physical labor as a way to remold their own weak and dysfunctional exilic bodies into something beautiful, strong, and autochthonous.¹⁷ Sandra Sufian and Dafna Hirsch examine how the hygienic work

¹² Todd Samuel Presner, “‘Clear Heads, Solid Stomachs, and Hard Muscles’: Max Nordau and the Aesthetics of Jewish Regeneration”, *Modernism/Modernity*, Vol. 10, No. 2, p. 270.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

¹⁴ Herzl, *Medinat ha-yehudim*, p. 13.

¹⁵ Presner, “Clear Heads”, p. 280.

¹⁶ Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 271-312; Michael Gluzman, “Ha-kemiha le-heterosexualiyut: tzionut ve-miniyut be-Altneuland”, *Teoria u-bikoret*, Vol. 11 (1997), pp. 145-162.

¹⁷ Boaz Neumann, *Land and Desire in Early Zionism*, (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2011), pp. 116-149).

done by Zionist physicians, nurses and epidemiologists in Palestine aimed at curing not only individuals, but the Jewish nation itself.¹⁸

Yet the history of pre-1948 Zionism presents a methodological complication when one attempts to square it with Foucault's account of bio-politics. Foucault described the birth of bio-politics as a process taken by, and in relation to, the modern state. The Zionist movement embarked on a state-building project, but it was not, itself, a state, nor did it possess the coercive powers of a state. In Mandatory Palestine, whatever governmental functions it had were sanctioned by the Mandate Government, and they applied to Jews only. The case of Jewish immigration to Palestine is instructive in this regard: the Palestine Government divided Jewish immigrants to four categories – capitalists, students, workers, and dependents. The Jewish Agency submitted a semi-annual request for immigrant workers' visas, but the government had the last say in determining the number of visas granted – in all four categories – each year. Although the Zionist leadership espoused the ideology of “selective immigration” – prioritizing the immigration of young, hard-working, and ideologically-driven pioneers – immigration scholar Aviva Halamish argues that for most of the Mandate years selective immigration was more a slogan than a practical policy, due to the very partial control that the Zionist Organization had over immigration, and the urgent need of Polish and German Jews to escape anti-Semitic persecution.¹⁹

¹⁸ Sandra M. Sufian, *Healing the Land and the Nation: Malaria and the Zionist Project in Palestine, 1920-1947* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Dafna Hirsch, “We are here to Bring the West, not only to Ourselves: Zionist Occidentalism and the Discourse of Hygiene in Mandate Palestine”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 41 (2009), pp. 577-594; idem, “Interpreters of Occident to the Awakening Orient”: The Jewish Public Health Nurse in Mandate Palestine”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (2008), pp. 227-255.

¹⁹ Aviva Halamish, “Aliya selektivit ba-ra'ayon, ba-ma'ase u-vahistoriographia hatziyonit” in: Anita Shapira, Jehuda Reinhartz and Jacob Harris (eds.), *Idan ha-tziyonut*, (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar le-toldot Yiśra'el, 2000), pp. 196-197.

Furthermore, the *Yishuv*'s political system was largely voluntary, and its leaders expressed great anxiety regarding their inability to fully control and mobilize the Jewish community of Palestine. The first three chapters of this dissertation cite numerous complaints by *Yishuv* leaders regarding the permeability of the *Yishuv*'s political structure, which allowed Jews to vote, at least in theory, for non-Jews. To ensure that Jews would be represented in municipal and governmental bodies in proportion to their share of the population, every Jewish voter had to vote for Jewish candidates.

Accordingly, Labor Zionist politicians supported ethnic voting registers, which would have forced Jews to vote only for Jews, and attempted to make it impossible for Jews to leave the *Yishuv*'s political structure. Chapter 6 also notes attempts by *Yishuv* institutions to bolster the Jewish birthrate, attempts that failed due to lack of resources and coercive capabilities.

Because Zionist and *Yishuv* institutions had a limited ability to employ bio-political policies, the present dissertation is mostly concerned with Zionist bio-political planning and discourse. It follows the vicissitudes in the ways in which the Zionist leaders imagined the demographic – and democratic – future of Palestine. Three important bio-political decisions made by the Zionist leadership, however, should be noted: the first decision, made in 1922 by the Zionist Organization, gave the Palestinian Rabbinical courts power over the members of the Jewish community's personal affairs. This decision, which is discussed in chapter 1, applied the largely biological halakhic definition of a Jew as a person born to a Jewish mother to all members of the *Yishuv*. The bio-Halakhic definition of Jewishness would later be enshrined in the Law of Return (1950) and shape the social and legal boundaries between Israeli Jews and non-Jews – and among Israeli Jews themselves – to this very day.

The second decision, the Zionist Congress's qualified acceptance of the partition of Palestine in 1937, is discussed in chapter 4. This decision meant that for the first time, the Zionist leadership had to seriously consider how a Jewish government might rule over a substantial Arab minority. Finally, chapter 7 discusses how, in the wake of the 1948 war, the Israeli Government decided not to reach a final decision regarding the fate of the Palestinian refugees outside of Israel. *De facto*, this non-decision meant that most refugees could not and did not return to Israel. This non-decision allowed the young Jewish State to begin its life with an overwhelming Jewish majority. It would not be an exaggeration to argue that no other set of decisions – apart from the 1967 conquest of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip – has had greater influence on life in Israel/Palestine today.

I have chosen to focus on the British Mandate period because, in contrast to the mostly hostile Ottoman administration, the Mandatory regime created a legal framework for the mass migration and settlement of Jews in Palestine. The Mandate charter made provisions for the facilitation of Jewish immigration and colonization in Palestine: Article 2 of the charter charged Britain with placing Palestine under such conditions that will secure the establishment of the Jewish National Home. Article 4 instructed that a “Jewish Agency” would be established in order to advise and cooperate with Palestine’s Government in matters that may affect the establishment of the Jewish National Home. From 1922 until 1929, the Zionist Executive, the executive body of the Zionist Organization, functioned as the Jewish Agency. From 1929 on, an enlarged Jewish Agency, which included “non-Zionist” representatives, was established in order to allow Jews who were sympathetic to the Zionist project, but were not members of the Zionist Organization, to contribute to the colonization of Palestine. Article 6 charged the Palestine Government with facilitating Jewish immigration and close settlement in Palestine, without prejudicing the “rights and position” of Palestinian Arabs. Finally, Article 11 allowed the Palestine Government to

contract the Jewish Agency to perform various public works and develop the natural resources of the land.²⁰

Both the Zionist and the Palestinian Arab leaders read the Mandate charter as a *carte blanche* given by Britain to the Zionists to create a Jewish majority in Palestine and establish some sort of Jewish polity. The Palestinian Arab response was to seek the annulment of the Mandate or at least stop Jewish immigration, first through diplomatic means and later through an armed revolt. The British, perhaps surprised by Arab resistance, embarked, as early as June 1921 – before the Mandate was even ratified by the League of Nations! – on a decades-long process of re-interpreting its Palestine policy to fit Britain’s imperial needs. These cycles of re-interpretation mostly meant the restriction of Jewish immigration, first by adhering to the concept of the economic absorptive capacity of Palestine, which mandated that the size of Jewish immigration would be dictated by the demand for immigrant workers and the country’s economic capabilities, and from 1937 by setting a political limit to immigration.²¹ Consequently, the Zionist leadership spent most of the 1920s and early 1930s quibbling with the Mandate Government over immigration certificates and unemployment figures. By 1935, however, it was clear to David Ben-Gurion, then the chairman of the Jewish Agency, that Britain, preparing for war with the Fascist powers, had to court the Arab world and renege on its support for Zionism. From 1935 on, the British Government began to introduce legislation that limited Jewish colonization, the culmination of which was the 1939 White

²⁰ See: <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/2FCA2C68106F11AB05256BCF007BF3CB>.

²¹ On the economic absorptive capacity of Palestine, see: Nadav Halevi, “The Political Economy of Absorptive Capacity: Growth and Cycles in Jewish Palestine under the British Mandate”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (1983), pp. 456-469; Ilan Troen, “Calculating the “Economic Absorptive Capacity” of Palestine: A Study in the Political Uses of Scientific Research”, *Contemporary Jewry*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1989), pp. 19-38; Shalom Reichman, Yossi Katz, and Yair Paz, “The Absorptive Capacity of Palestine, 1882-1948”, in *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (1997), pp. 338-361; Aviva Halamish, *Be-merutz kaful neged ha-zman: medinyut ha-‘aliyah ha-tzionit be-shnot ha-shloshim*, (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 2006), pp. 49-67.

Paper, which proscribed a set immigration quota of 75,000 Jews over five years and severely restricted Jewish land purchases in most of Palestine. For Ben-Gurion, this set of restrictions spelled the end of Britain's pro-Zionist policy. Although the military cooperation between the *Yishuv* and the British Empire would only grow during the Second World War, it was merely a marriage of convenience; by 1939, Ben-Gurion began to look for a new patron empire, which he found in the US. After the end of the Second World War, Palestine experienced a relatively short but ugly de-colonization process that finally exploded in the 1947-1949 War. Yet, despite the strained relationship between the British Government and the Zionist leadership, the Jewish community in Palestine grew from about 60-80,000 in 1917 to 650,000 in 1948, almost all of it due to immigration from Europe. From a Zionist point of view, the Mandate was a success story.

But the Mandate charter also made provisions for the protection of the Arab community in Palestine, and for the establishment of self-governing institutions that would lead the country, eventually, to independence. The British insistence on creating quasi-democratic institutions in Palestine put the Zionist leadership in a political bind: in the face of Arab resistance, the Zionist leaders could not allow the creation of political institutions in which an Arab majority might legislate against the continuation of Jewish immigration or the sale of Arab land. On the other hand, the Zionist leadership presented Zionism as progressive ideology, a benevolent colonization movement that arrived in Palestine to usher the local *fellahin* into the 20th century. As a self-styled progressive movement, the Zionist Organization could not come out publicly against the creation of democratic self-governing institutions in Palestine. Consequently, the years 1917-1937 were characterized by Zionist attempts to quietly prevent the creation of a Legislative Council, which was intended by the British to serve as a joint Jewish-Arab-British parliament. The Zionist

struggle against the Legislative Council is the subject of the first three chapters of this dissertation.

The first chapter looks at Zionist attitudes towards democracy in Palestine from 1917 to 1924, against the backdrop of the formation of the Mandate in 1917-1922 and the failed 1923 elections for the Legislative Council. The correspondence of Chaim Weizmann, then the head of the Zionist Commission, shows that he tried to persuade the British, right from the early days of British rule in Palestine, not to erect a political system that would favor the Arab majority, since he believed that the Jews were qualitatively superior to the Arabs. Nevertheless, under unrelenting pressure from the British, and in the face of local Jewish resistance, Weizmann agreed that the *Yishuv* would participate in the 1923 elections for the Legislative Council. Most Palestinian Arabs, however, rejected the legitimacy of the Mandatory regime and consequently boycotted the elections. As a result, the Legislative Council was never established.

It was around that time that Labor Zionist intellectuals began to develop the principle of mutual non-domination, which stated that Jews should not dominate Arabs and vice versa. Labor Zionist thinkers argued in favor of creating two extensive but separate national autonomies for Jews and Arabs as an alternative to a joint legislature. Although Labor was still a minor Zionist movement in the early 1920s, the Laborite principle of mutual non-domination would become the official stance of the Zionist Organization less than a decade later.

The second chapter charts the formation of Zionist bio-political thought between 1924 and 1929. In this chapter, I show how Labor Zionist thinkers borrowed federalists ideas from *Brit Shalom*, a much-maligned leftist intellectual association, and combined them with their own autonomist agenda to suggest a federation of autonomies as a democratic

alternative to the Legislative Council. The chapter also looks at how Zionist intellectuals, encouraged by the fourth wave of Jewish immigration to Palestine (1924-1928), began to calculate the exact point in the future in which a Jewish majority would be achieved, and how these demographic calculations shaped their vision for the political future of the country. Finally, I compare the democratic theory of Moshe Beilinson, a prominent Labor Zionist intellectual, with the 1929 bi-national plan of Ben-Gurion. Beilinson, basing his theory on the uniqueness of Jewish history and a grim view of the Jewish future, opposed the creation of joint Jewish-Arab political institutions. Ben-Gurion, on the other hand, was excited about the demographic prospects of the *Yishuv* and consequently suggested the creation of a federal Palestinian State with a Jewish majority. Indeed, I make the case that around the 1929 riots, questions of time and timing began to haunt Zionist intellectuals, and, together with their understanding of the demography of Palestine, shaped their political vision.

The third chapter follows the rise and fall of the Zionist demand for political parity between Jews and Arabs in the years 1929-1936. By the mid-1920s, some Palestinian Arab leaders came to the conclusion that noncooperation with the Mandate Government was an inefficient strategy. They entered into extensive, if unofficial, negotiations with the British regarding the establishment of a Legislative Council. The Zionist leadership, which was aware of this development, searched for an effective countermeasure, which it found in parity. The idea that the Legislative Council should be based on parity between Jews and Arabs originated with Ze'ev Jabotinsky, leader of Revisionist Zionism, in 1922, but it was fleshed out during the 1920s by leftist intellectuals, most of whom were associated with *Brit Shalom*. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the idea was adopted by Ben-Gurion and Weizmann, as the practical application of the mutual non-domination principle, and as a precondition to the establishment of a Legislative Council. By 1931

parity became an official policy of *MAPAI* – the newly-formed, united Labor Zionist party – and in the summer of that year the Zionist Congress adopted mutual non-domination, but not parity, as an official policy. Although the Zionist movement never officially endorsed parity, Zionist leaders insisted that parity, and other constitutional safeguards, would be applied to the Legislative Council, to prevent the Arab majority from dominating the Jewish minority. This Zionist form of brinkmanship, which never absolutely rejected the idea of a joint parliament but presented preconditions which neither the British nor the Arabs accepted, led the British to perpetually defer the establishment of the Legislative Council until the idea was abandoned in early 1936.

By 1936, however, Ben-Gurion had concluded that Britain was preparing for war in Europe and needed to shore up its alliances in the Arab world. For the Zionist movement, this meant a restriction of Jewish immigration to Palestine, at a time when more and more Jews needed to flee Europe. Consequently, around 1935 Ben-Gurion began to reject the concepts of parity and federalism and call for the establishment of a Jewish State, which, unlike the British Government, would allow for mass Jewish immigration.

The eruption of the Arab Revolt in April 1936 effectively ended British attempts to create a joint political system in Palestine. In its stead, the Royal Commission of Inquiry, which was sent to Palestine to study the causes of the revolt, suggested the partition of Palestine. The fourth chapter examines how the Arab Revolt changed the Zionist leadership's vision for the future of Palestine. Ben-Gurion and Moshe Shertok, the head of the Jewish Agency's Political Department, viewed the Arab Revolt as part of a world-wide downward spiral towards war. They insisted that time was running out for the Zionist movement, and that the gradualist approach to the colonization of Palestine, one of the major tenets of Labor Zionism, was no longer tenable. Indeed, those Zionist leaders who accepted Ben-Gurion and Shertok's analysis were more amenable to radical solutions to

the Jewish-Arab conflict, such as a Jewish-Arab agreement to set immigration quotas for five years in advance, or the partition of Palestine. Those Zionist leaders who did not accept that time was running out suggested that the Zionist movement hunker down and stay the course until the international storm passed.

The mid-1930s, then, threw into sharp relief the extent to which the perception of time shaped the political imagination of Zionist leaders. Moreover, in July 1937, when the Royal Commission's proposed the creation of a Jewish State in parts of Palestine, the Zionist leaders began to employ bio-territorial calculations – which were aimed at determining if the area of the Jewish State was sufficient to support millions of Jewish immigrants – as an argument for and against partition. Thus, questions of time, territory and population were closely interwoven in mid-1930s Zionist political thought.

In August 1937 the Zionist Congress signalled its tentative acceptance of the partitioning of Palestine. This was a watershed moment in Zionist history. Not only did the Zionist movement officially endorse the creation of a Jewish State in Palestine – as opposed to a National Home or a Safe Haven – the acceptance of partition spelled the end of mutual non-domination as an official Zionist policy. By endorsing the establishment of a Jewish State, the Zionist leadership agreed to rule over an Arab minority – and a sizeable minority at that. The fifth chapter examines the place of the Arab minority in Zionist thought in 1937-1938, when partition was, briefly, considered a viable option. What emerges from the Zionist debates regarding the Arab minority is a deep ambivalence. On the one hand, the Zionist leadership promised that the Arab minority would enjoy full equality in the Jewish State. On the other hand, Ben-Gurion and others heavily insinuated that the rights of the Arab minority were not set in stone, and that they would be shaped by the power equilibrium in all of Palestine. If Jews were to lose the right to settle in all of Palestine, then the “position” of the Arab minority in the Jewish State would be

adjusted accordingly. Moreover, virtually all Zionist leaders supported some sort of transfer of Arabs from the Jewish State – whether forcible or voluntary, partial or complete. Indeed, it is because the Zionist leadership assumed that the number of Arabs in the Jewish State would be reduced that they were willing to grant them equality before the law and a set of civil and political rights. The scope of the Arab minority's rights would depend, first and foremost, on its demographic size.

The sixth chapter jumps ahead to 1942-1946 to look at the way that the Holocaust shaped Zionist bio-political thought in Palestine through the work of two committees. The first one, the Planning Committee, sought to convince the Allied Powers that Palestine could absorb millions of Jewish refugees after the war. The second committee, the Committee for the Problems of Natality, had a grimmer view of the future of the Jewish people. The Holocaust annihilated European Jewry, which the Zionist movement considered its demographic reserve. To add insult to injury, the Committee for the Problems of Natality argued that the birthrate in the *Yishuv* and among Western Jews was so low that even if millions of Jews immigrated to Palestine, they would not be able to keep up with the Arab Muslim birthrate. As a corrective, the Committee embarked on a campaign to increase the birthrate among Palestinian Jews through propaganda, economic incentives and a war on abortions. The Committee's work brought to the fore two marginalized groups in Zionist politics – women, who were seen as responsible for the Jewish birthrate, and Mizrahi Jews, whose birthrate was much higher than that of Ashkenazi Jews. Indeed, the Committee's campaign allows us a glimpse into the ways in which mid-level Zionist political actors understood and disseminated the imperative to create a Jewish majority, and how they sought to influence the everyday life of Palestinian Jews. In the end, however, the Committee for the Problems of Natality's plans were too expensive and far-reaching to be implemented by the meagrely-resourced *Yishuv* institutions. The Zionist

leadership favored the findings of the Planning Committee, whose much more optimistic view of the demographic future of the Jews was presented to the Anglo-American Committee in an attempt to convince it to allow mass Jewish immigration and to establish a Jewish State in all of Palestine.

Finally, the seventh chapter deals with the place of the Arab minority in Zionist planning between the UN decision to partition Palestine and establish a Jewish State in November 1947 and the first elections for the Israeli parliament in January 1949. The 1947-1949 debates were very much a continuation of the Zionist debates regarding the Arab minority from 1937-1938 – with one important difference: during the 1947-1949 war, most Arabs fled or were expelled from the area under Israeli rule. The demographic struggle between Jews and Arabs over Palestine ended with a resounding Jewish triumph. Nevertheless, the Zionist leadership, and later the Israeli Government, were ambivalent about incorporating Arabs into the state's apparatus, and even allowing them to vote. This chapter charts the Zionist debates regarding the place of Arabs in the new Israeli regime, and specifically, the Arab right to vote. This debate on the Arab right to vote was more ideological than practical. Following the flight and expulsion of about 700,000 Arabs from the area under Israeli rule, Arab political power in the young State of Israel was decimated: only about 108,000 Arab were present in the territory of the State of Israel in December 1948, and only 69,000 out of which were counted by the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (ICBS). Out of those who were counted by the ICBS, 32,000 men and women were eligible to vote, and only 26,000 actually did. Israeli democracy was born with an overwhelming Jewish majority.

Taken as a whole, the present dissertation offers an alternative – but not mutually exclusive – chronology to the one suggested by Anita Shapira in her seminal book *Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Force*. Shapira argues that until 1936, the Zionist

leadership espoused a defensive ethos, which manifested in a reluctance to use military power, the assertion that there was no national conflict between Jews and Arabs, and a belief in the gradual colonization of Palestine.²² With the eruption of the 1936 Arab Revolt, however, the Zionist defensive ethos was replaced with an offensive ethos, which called for a more active military engagement with Palestinian Arabs, acknowledged the national conflict between Jews and Arabs and ditched the gradual approach in favor of a revolutionary one.²³

I make the case that between 1917 and 1937 the Zionist approach to Jewish-Arab relations in Palestine was broadly based on the principle of mutual non-domination. Keenly aware of the small size of the Jewish community in Palestine, the Zionist Left advocated the creation of two broad but separate national autonomies for Jews and Arabs, but opposed the establishment of joint governmental institutions, in which the Arab majority would have the upper hand. By working to politically and spatially separate Jews from Arabs, the Zionist leadership hoped to engage in a gradual colonization project, without encroaching on Arab rights and without enabling Arab intervention in the colonization process.

What prompted the change in the Zionist approach was not so much the Arab Revolt, but rather the slow realization that Britain, the patron of Zionist colonization in Palestine, was headed towards war in Europe and needed to consolidate its position in the Middle East at the expense of the Zionist project. The first to recognize this trajectory was Chaim Arlosoroff, the brilliant head of the Jewish Agency's Political Department, who argued, in a famous 1932 letter to Weizmann, that time had run out for the gradualist approach to

²² Anita Shapira, *Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Force, 1881-1948*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), pp. 117, 121, 123.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 251, 276, 286.

colonization, and that a revolutionary act was needed. Ben-Gurion and Shertok, his successors, certainly agreed. The steady march towards war, together with the growing pressure on Jews to leave Central and Eastern Europe and the decolonization process in the Middle East, created a pressure-cooker situation that made the Mandatory regime unsustainable. By 1935, Ben-Gurion sought to harness this hastened pace of events to affect a revolutionary change in Palestine: massive Jewish immigration that would lead to the establishment of a Jewish State. But the Zionist leadership, headed by Weizmann, was too dependent on its relationship with the British to actively seek revolutionary changes. It was the Arab Revolt that caused the British themselves to suggest a radical solution: the partitioning of Palestine.

The acceptance of partition in 1937, qualified as it was, transformed Zionist politics. Gone was the official Zionist ambiguity regarding the desire to establish a Jewish State in Palestine. The Zionist proponents of partition had mostly despaired of British patronage by that point and argued that only Jewish statehood could effectively facilitate the colonization of Palestine and the creation of a Jewish majority. This was a complete reversal of the gradualist Zionist approach, which dictated that the creation of a Jewish majority would lead to the establishment of a Jewish State. But the most radical change occurred in the Zionist approach to the conflict with the Arabs. By accepting the partition of Palestine before a Jewish majority was created, the Zionist leadership agreed to rule a substantial number of Arabs. The 1937-1938 partition debates turned the concept of an Arab minority from a hazy Zionist fantasy into a realistic prospect. In 1937 the Zionist discourse on minority rights shifted its focus from the rights of the present Jewish minority in Palestine to the rights of the future Arab minority in the Jewish State.

The realistic prospect of a Jewish State in which almost half of the population was Arab changed the Zionist discourse on transfer. Until 1937, Zionists usually spoke, in hushed

tones, of partial or local transfer. The Royal Commission's transfer proposal emboldened Zionist leaders to fantasize about a mass exodus of Arabs from Palestine. As soon as the Zionist leadership switched from evolutionary to revolutionary politics, which meant the establishment of a Jewish State *before* the creation of a Jewish majority, transfer became an integral part of Zionist democratic thought. A closer look at the Zionist discourse on transfer reveals that compulsory expulsion was just one practice – and certainly not the preferred practice among the Zionist leadership – in a whole spectrum of transfer practices, including voluntary transfer to Arab countries, local transfer within Palestine, and economic pressure and incentivization to leave the Jewish State. The broadening of the definition of transfer makes the question of whether the Zionist leadership planned to expel the Arabs in 1947-1949 less paramount. Even if the *Nakba* had not occurred, the Zionist leadership made clear its intention to coax and cajole Arabs into leaving the Jewish State.

What can this alternative chronology tell us about the Jewish-Arab conflict? In an important article, historian Dimitry Shumsky claims that the leaders of Zionism came to prefer the nation-state solution only during World War Two.²⁴ The recent work of historians Gil Rubin and Arie Dubnov supports Shumsky's argument by showing that important Zionist actors did not necessarily envision the Jewish polity as a nation-state.²⁵ All three scholars stress the importance of interwar international politics and intellectual trends in shaping Zionist visions of the Jewish State. My own research is generally in line with Shumsky, Dubnov and Rubin's work, although I argue that the turn to the nation-state in Zionist thought happened in the mid-1930s and not during the Second World

²⁴ Dimtry Shumsky, "Tzionut ve-medinat ha-leom: ha'arakha me-hadash", *Zion*, 77 (2012), pp. 223-254.

²⁵ Arie Dubnov, "Ha-medina she-baderech' o ha-imperia makha shenit? Imperialism federativi ve-leumiyyut yehudit be-'ikvot milhemet ha-'olam ha-rishona", *Israel*, Vol. 24 (2016), pp. 5-36; Gil Rubin, "The Future of the Jews: Planning for the Postwar Jewish World, 1939-1946", (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2017).

War. Ben-Gurion and Shertok realized, years before the actual outbreak of the war, that Nazi aggression in Europe and slow decolonization in the Middle East spelled the end of the League-of-Nations-led world order, and with it, the end of the Palestine Mandate. It became a crucial Zionist goal to make sure that the Mandate was succeeded by a political regime that allowed, and even encouraged, Jewish immigration and colonization. The turn to the nation-state was not an ideological shift, but rather a realist response to international events.

More importantly, I argue that the turn to the nation-state changed Zionist democratic thought. The 1917-1937 Zionist model of democracy was confined to national autonomy and municipal politics. These were the politics of separation and deferment: democracy was to be implemented only where and when it could not affect Zionist colonization. By accepting the model of the nation-state in 1937, the Zionist leaders could no longer advocate the political separation of Jews and Arabs within the Jewish State. Although the Zionist leaders had always worried about Palestinian Arab demographics, until 1937 the politics of separation and the gradualist approach to colonization helped minimize the importance of the demographic question. Within a democratic nation-state, however, the size of the Arab minority would dictate its political power. Thus, the turn to the nation-state brought with it a new focus on the exact calibration of Arab rights and demographic size. These two parameters, in fact, became inextricably linked. Before 1937, the Zionist leaders advanced their vision of a political system in which demographic heft did not matter. After 1937, demographic heft became the main yardstick for the viability of a Jewish State and the exact character of its democratic regime.

What follows is a history of the relationship between Zionist ideology, demographic knowledge and democratic practices. This relationship was a complex balancing act

between the desire to establish a progressive democracy and the desire to secure Jewish dominance in the Jewish State to be.

Chapter I

Zionism and the Idea of a Joint Legislature, 1918-1924

The Mandate for Palestine, awarded to Britain in April 1920 and ratified by the League of Nations in July 1922, was classified as an “A” type Mandate.²⁶ This meant that, according to the League of Nations, the Palestinian population had reached a “stage of development” that put it on the verge of independent statehood, and it was the role of Britain to help Palestine cross that threshold successfully.²⁷ A few years earlier, however, the British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour pledged his country, in the famous Declaration of November 1917, to facilitate the establishment of a Jewish National Home in Palestine. Although the exact definition of this phrase was never established, most Zionists believed that a National Home was tantamount to a Jewish state.

Both of these obligations were worked into article 2 of the British Mandate, which states that “The Mandatory shall be responsible for placing the country under such political, administrative and economic conditions as will secure the establishment of the Jewish national home, as laid down in the preamble, and the development of self-governing institutions...”.²⁸ The British insisted – at least until the Royal Commission report of July 1937 – that the two obligations were not incompatible, despite the Arab leadership’s clear and sustained rejection of the Balfour Declaration and the Jewish National Home policy.²⁹ Thus, between 1922 and 1936, the Palestine Government attempted to create a

²⁶ Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 29.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/2FCA2C68106F11AB05256BCF007BF3CB>.

²⁹ Evyatar Friesel, *Ha-mediniyut ha-tsiyonit le-ahar hats'harat Balfour, 1917-1922*, (Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University Press, 1977), p. 267-268.

joint Jewish-Arab-British representative legislature – or a Legislative Council – in Palestine.

Elections for the Legislative Council were held in 1923 but were boycotted by most Arab voters after a grassroots campaign by members of the Arab Executive, the most important political body of Palestinian Arabs.³⁰ The Arab Executive argued that acceptance of the Council would amount to acceptance of the Mandate itself, and that the proposed Legislative Council would be devoid of real power.³¹ The boycott forced the Mandate Government to annul the elections and shelve the Legislative Council initiative for the rest of the 1920s.

The present chapter focuses on the road leading the 1923 elections, the elections themselves and their aftermath. The first section deals with Chaim Weizmann's unsuccessful attempts to prevent the creation of self-governing institutions in Palestine in the years 1918-1922, and the political circumstances that led to his eventual acquiescence to High Commissioner Herbert Samuel's plans to establish a Legislative Council. The second section deals with the power struggle between the Zionist Movement, the Palestine Government and the *Va'ad Leumi*, the supreme representative body of the Palestinian Jewish community, over Jewish participation in the 1923 elections. The Zionist Executive – the governing body of the Zionist Organization – and the Palestine Government pushed for Jewish participation, fearing that a boycott might lead to the collapse of the Mandatory regime. The *Va'ad* members, in contrast, tried to use Jewish participation as leverage against the administration in order to expand Jewish autonomy, which they feared would be curtailed by the Legislative Council. Finally, the third section

³⁰ Yehoshua Porath, *The Emergence of the Palestinian-Arab National Movement, 1918-1929*, (London: Frank Cass, 1974), p. 149.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 149-150.

provides a close reading of the constitutional debate within Labor Zionist circles in the wake of the failed 1923 elections. The Labor Zionists viewed a joint Jewish-Arab legislature as a major threat to Jewish autonomy. Since the Labor movement became the predominant power in the Zionist movement in the early 1930s, when the struggle against the Legislative Council was picking up steam again, an analysis of early Labor Zionist arguments against the Council is crucial to our overall understanding of how the Zionist opposition to a joint Mandatory legislature evolved.

Weizmann and the Brutality of Numbers, 1918-1922

In April 3rd, 1918, when Weizmann arrived in Palestine as the head of the Zionist Commission, the country was still a warzone, divided in half between the British and the Ottomans.³² That did not stop Weizmann from planning for the day after the war, when Britain, he hoped, would fulfil its obligation to facilitate the creation of a Jewish National home in Palestine. But his great expectations were tempered by newfound demographic anxieties; he was well-aware, as he wrote to Balfour, that in Palestine “there are five Arabs to one Jew”.³³ This demographic disparity had important political implications, since,

[T]he Englishman at the head of affairs is fair and just and in trying to regulate the relations between the two chief sections of the community he is careful to hold the balance. But his only guide is in this difficult situation

³² Bernard Wasserstein, *The British in Palestine: The Mandatory Government and the Arab-Jewish Conflict 1917-1929*, (London: Royal Historical Society, 1978), pp. 24-25. The Commission’s role was to “carry out [...] any steps required to give effect to the Government’s declaration in favour of the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people [...] to form a link between the British authorities and the Jewish population of Palestine [...] and to help in establishing friendly relations with the Arabs and other non-Jewish communities” (ibid.).

³³ Weizmann to Balfour, 30.5.1918, *The Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann*, Vol. VIII, letter no. 208, p. 201 [hereinafter: *LPCW*]. Emphasis mine.

is the *democratic principle*, which reckons with the relative numerical strength; and the brutal numbers operate against us [...].³⁴

In this early letter, written more than two years before the establishment of British civil rule in Palestine, Weizmann was already suggesting that for the Zionists, demographic anxieties were also democratic anxieties, since democracy, as he put it, reckons with numerical strength. However, Weizmann also hinted that numbers – brutal as they maybe – could not tell the whole story. He added that “This system [British rule in Palestine] does not take into account the fact that there is a *qualitative difference* between Jew and Arab.” He further insisted that:

The Turk, being himself of inferior culture, saw in the Jew a superior to himself and to the Arab, and so by virtue of his intelligence and his achievements the Jew held a position in the country perhaps out of proportion to his numerical strength. The present system tends on the contrary to level down the Jew politically to the status of a native [...].³⁵

The qualitative superiority of Jews will figure again and again in Zionist arguments for Jewish over-representation in the Legislative Council, as will the somewhat paradoxical claim that while the Jewish people might be historically native *to* Palestine, Jews, as individuals, are not to be treated as natives *in* Palestine.³⁶ Yet, this is exactly what the “democratic principle” did, according to Weizmann – it levelled the Jews down to the status of natives and robbed them of the protection that qualitative superiority afforded

³⁴ Ibid. emphasis mine.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 202. Emphasis mine.

³⁶ For other Zionist leaders rebelling against the “native” label see: Itzhak Ben-Zvi’s speech, “Ha-moshav ha-sheni, yeshiva shmini” *Doar Hayom*, 24.3.1922, p. 4; Berl Katznelson, “Le-she’elot ha-mishtar ha-medini ba-aretz”, *Kitvei Berl Katznelson*, IV, (Tel-Aviv: MAPAI Publishing, 1944) p. 166; “Ha’aretz, 22.12.1935, (skirat itonut mispar 109, 3.1.1936)”, , Central Zionist Archives [hereinafter: CZA], S25\6300.

them against the brutality of numbers.³⁷ As we shall see, during the next decade and a half the Zionists fought tooth and nail to make sure that their self-perceived qualitative superiority was translated into political terms.

Weizmann's more abstract complaints about the democratic principle, however, became much more acute after the May 1921 riots, in which Arabs killed 47 Jews. The riots had shaken Herbert Samuel, the first High Commissioner for Palestine and an ardent Zionist, to the core.³⁸ He became convinced that the current interpretation of the Balfour Declaration was too biased in favor of the Zionists and thus would lead to an eventual Arab "general uprising".³⁹ The only way to save the Zionist ship from "wreaking on the Arab rock", he wrote to Weizmann, was to come up with a policy that would balance Zionist aspirations with Arab rights.⁴⁰ With the approval of the Colonial Office, Samuel devised a more moderate interpretation of the Balfour Declaration which he presented in a speech on June 3rd, 1921. The Balfour Declaration, he insisted, had never meant the setting up of a "Jewish Government [...] to rule over the Moslem [sic] and Christian majority", but rather, that "the Jews [...] would be enabled to found here their home and that some among them, within the limits that are fixed by the numbers and interests of the present population, should come to Palestine to help by their resources and efforts to develop the country to the advantage of all its inhabitants."⁴¹ Samuel also declared that Jewish immigration would follow the economic absorptive capacity of the country and hinted at the establishment of self-governing institutions.

³⁷ For a similar argument see: Weizmann to Money, 26.1.1919, *LPCW*, Vol. IX, p. 132 [Hebrew].

³⁸ Friesel, *Ha-medinyut ha-tsiyonit*, p. 262.

³⁹ Wasserstein, *The British in Palestine*, p. 109; Friesel, *Ha-medinyut ha-tsiyonit*, p. 266.

⁴⁰ Samuel to Weizmann, 10.8.1921, p. 2, the Weizmann Archives [hereinafter: WA].

⁴¹ "Statement of the High Commissioner for Palestine, 3.6.1921", p. 3, WA.

Samuel's new interpretation of the Balfour declaration, combined with his temporary suspension of Jewish immigration, put Weizmann on the warpath.⁴² In late June 1921 Weizmann arrived in London and was able to call a meeting between the British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, Foreign Secretary Balfour, Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill, and himself. In preparation for the meeting Weizmann wrote a memorandum, addressed to Balfour, in which he laid out the Zionist complaints against the British administration in Palestine.⁴³ Although Weizmann's main concern was the new, diminished interpretation of the Balfour declaration, he did address the subject of self-governing institutions in Palestine. He reminded Balfour that Balfour himself told Louis Brandeis, the prominent American Zionist activist, that the allied powers had committed themselves to the Zionist program, thus excluding numerical self-determination in Palestine.⁴⁴ Palestine, Weizmann continued, presented a *unique* situation, since here the British were not dealing with the wishes of an existing community, "but were consciously seeking to reconstitute a new community and definitely building up a numerical [Jewish] majority in the future".⁴⁵ Moreover, Weizmann explained to Balfour that the "great majority" of Palestinian Arabs, who were under the domination of a few powerful families, were incapable of comprehending political issues and were incapable of governing themselves.⁴⁶ Thus, he concluded that:

[T]o invite the general population to send representatives to an elected assembly would merely be to create further opportunities for corruption and intrigue [...] [w]hile it is admittedly desirable that the political education of Palestine should be undertaken without delay, it is submitted

⁴² Friesel, *Ha-medinyut ha-tsiyonit*, p. 267.

⁴³ "The Situation in Palestine", 21.7.1921, WA.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* Consider, again, the paradox inherent in the phrase "to reconstitute a new community".

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14-15.

that it should begin at the bottom with elected municipal and village councils.⁴⁷

The arguments in Weizmann's letter would later reappear in numerous Zionist memos against the Legislative Council.⁴⁸ The most central argument here is the claim that Palestine was unique. Since Palestine was the only place in which the so-called Jewish Question could be solved,⁴⁹ contemporary notions of democracy – “numerical self-determination” in Weizmann's words – could not be applied there. More to the point, it was, presumably, only Arab “numerical self-determination” that could not materialize in Palestine, since in that very same paragraph Weizmann wrote of building up a Jewish majority, which would lead to Jewish numerical self-determination.⁵⁰ According to Weizmann, the Balfour Declaration created a state of exception in Palestine, where the (limited) measures of self-government awarded to the other “A” mandates in Syria, Iraq, and Trans-Jordan, were suspended until a Jewish majority was achieved.

The two other arguments in Weizmann's report are closely related to each other: because the Arabs were not ready for self-governance, they had to be initiated into democratic politics gradually, through the local government system. Local self-governance had the added value of fulfilling the British obligation to create self-governing institutions without giving the Arabs power over Jewish immigration. Moreover, the gradual

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ For example, see: “Memorandum on the Proposed Establishment of a Legislative Council in Palestine by the Executive of the Jewish Agency in Palestine”, 4.10.1934, CZA S25\4162.

⁴⁹ Aviva Halamish, “Aliya selektivit”, p. 185 ; Shabtai Teveth, *Ben-Guryon ve- 'Arviye Erets-Yisra'el: me-hashlamah le-milhamah*, (Jerusalem: Schocken Press, 1985), p. 17; Christian Wiese, “The Janus face of nationalism: the ambivalence of Zionist identity in Robert Weltsch and Hans Kohn”, *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (2006), p. 110; David Ben-Gurion, “Tshuva le-Wedgewood”, *Anahnu u-shekhenu* (Tel-Aviv: Davar, 1930), p. 135; Moshe Beilinson, “Ha-zkhuyot 'al ha-aretz”, *Davar*, 4.12.1929, p. 2.

⁵⁰ Weizmann to Balfour, “The Situation in Palestine”, 21.7.1921, p. 5, WA.

initiation process envisaged by Weizmann would allow the Jews enough time to shore up their numerical presence in Palestine.

For a while, the British leadership agreed with Weizmann. In the meeting between Weizmann, Lloyd George, Balfour and Churchill, which took place on July 22nd, 1921, Weizmann opined that the representative institutions in Iraq and Trans-Jordan were a “mere farce”,⁵¹ and told his interlocutors that setting up self-governing institutions meant “giving up Palestine”.⁵² Thereupon, the Prime Minister turned to Churchill and said: “You mustn’t give representative Government to Palestine.”⁵³ The meeting – from Weizmann’s point of view – was a success; in a special Cabinet meeting, held on August 18th, the British Government adopted a resolution that restated Britain’s commitment to the Balfour declaration and the National Home policy.⁵⁴

Weizmann may have won the battle, but he could not rest on his laurels for long. In August 1921 a Palestinian Arab delegation arrived in London with the express goal of convincing the British Government to renounce its Zionist policy.⁵⁵ Interestingly, once negotiations between the Colonial Office and the Arab delegation started, Weizmann’s stern rejection of self-governing institutions remarkably softened. It is unclear what precipitated Weizmann’s *volte face*. In fact, neither previous studies of the 1923 elections for the Legislative Council nor the recent biographies of Weizmann (or, for that matter, his autobiography) explain why Weizmann’s attitude changed rather abruptly at the end of 1921.⁵⁶ It can be surmised, however, that Weizmann’s newfound moderation was a

⁵¹ Weizmann to Wyndham Deeds, 31.7.1921, *LPCW*, X, letter no. 228, p. 235.

⁵² “Notes of conversation held at Mr. Balfour’s house on 22.7.1921”, p. 2, WA.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Friesel, *Ha-medinyut ha-tsiyonit*, p. 273.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 291-294; Porath, *The Emergence*, pp. 140-148; Sahar Huneidi, *A Broken Trust: Herbert Samuel, Zionism and the Palestinians 1920-1925*, (London: I.B. Tauris), chap. 9.

⁵⁶ Cf. Pinchas Ofer, “Hitgabshut mishtar ha-mandat ve-hanahat ha-yesodot le-bayt leumi yehudi 1922-1931” in Moshe Lissak (ed), *Toldot ha-yishuv ha-yehudi be-Eretz-yisra’el: me-az ha-‘aliyah ha-rishonah, tekufat ha-mandat ha-briti*, vol. I, pp. 224-229. Ofer only mentions that Weizmann was in favor of the Legislative Council and cites a letter from February 1923; Wasserstein, in his *The British in Palestine*,

result of his precarious political situation. The confirmation of the Mandate by the League of Nations was postponed again and again, while in Britain the conservative press attacked the Zionist colonists in Palestine for allegedly wasting British taxpayers' money; with the Mandate itself at stake – as Weizmann believed at the time – he could ill-afford to reject the Colonial Office's plan to establish self-governing institutions in Palestine. Moreover, Weizmann might have sought to gain some political points by espousing a much more moderate attitude than the Arab delegation, which insisted on the establishment of an independent national government in Palestine.

Samuel, who was bested by Weizmann in the summer of 1921, now took advantage of his erstwhile collaborator's weakness and forced the 1922 White Paper – which included a provision for the creation of a Legislative Council – on the Zionists. When Weizmann received an advanced copy of the White Paper in late May 1922, the cover letter by Sir John Shuckburgh, head of the Middle East Department at the Colonial Office, demanded that Weizmann sent back a formal acceptance of the government's new interpretation of the Balfour Declaration.⁵⁷ Weizmann had no choice but to comply.⁵⁸ From that moment until the annulment of the 1923 elections he worked in tandem with the British to establish a Legislative Council, even, as we shall see, against the wishes of the *Yishuv* leadership.

documents both Weizmann's opposition to self-governing institutions before June 1921 and his cooperation with the British administration after but does not explain his *volte-face* (pp. 112, 119); Neil Caplan, in his study of Palestinian Jewry writes that "...Zionists were forced to appreciate that, however 'premature and in some degree artificial' the Arab demands for self-government may have been, they could not be 'indefinitely resisted' [...] [t]hus, during the interval between Samuel's statement of 3rd June 1921 and the ratification of the Mandate in July 1922, Zionist leaders reluctantly accepted Samuel's determined lead on this question [...]" (*Palestine Jewry and the Arab question, 1917-1925*, [London: F. Cass, 1978] pp. 150-151) [hereinafter: Caplan, *Palestine Jewry*]. Norman Rose's *Chaim Weizmann: A Biography* (New York: Penguin, 1989) and Jehuda Reinharz's *Chaim Weizmann: the Making of a Statesman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) do not address the point at all.

⁵⁷ *Palestine - Correspondence with the Palestine Arab Delegation and the Zionist Organization*, Command Paper no. 1700, June 1922, (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1922), document no. 5, p. 17.

⁵⁸ Weizmann to Colonial Office, 18.6.1922, *LPCW*, XI, letter no. 122, p. 137.

In February 1922, the Colonial Office sent Weizmann a draft of the Palestine Constitution, which included a provision for the establishment of a Legislative Council, composed of 25 members (plus the High Commissioner), 10 of which were to be British officials and the rest “unofficial” – meaning not part of the British administration – members. Of the 15 unofficial members, 12 were to be elected, one was to be nominated by the Associated Chambers of Commerce in Palestine and two were to be nominated by the High Commissioner himself. The elected members were to be elected through a two-tier process in which primary voters elected secondary electors and those in turn elected the council members. The country was to be divided into voting areas and every 200 primary voters could elect one secondary elector. The secondary electors would be grouped into 12 electoral colleges according to the religious community to which they belonged. The number of colleges to be allotted to each religious community was to be proportionate to the number of secondary electors belonging to each community. Each college would have elected one council member.⁵⁹ It is important to note that this was the only Legislative Council proposal that did not include a guarantee for the election of at least one Jewish and one Christian council member.

Weizmann responded with a lengthy memorandum, in which he stated that, “it is neither possible nor desirable to exclude the people of Palestine from participation in the management of their own affairs. By common consent the time has arrived for measures designed to expedite the progress of Palestine, by gradual stages towards eventual self-government.”⁶⁰ However, Weizmann also suggested a few restrictions on the Legislative Council’s powers: he proposed that British officials would have a majority within the

⁵⁹ John de Vere Loder Wakehurst, *The Truth about Mesopotamia, Palestine & Syria*, (London, G. Allen & Unwin Ltd: 1923), pp. 180-181.

⁶⁰ Weizmann to Shuckburgh, 2.3.1922, p. 1, WA; a longer version of the memorandum can be found in CZA, A185\40.

Legislative Council; that ordinances that deal with the provisions of the Mandate should be “reserved” for affirmation by the British Government; that legislation which was inconsistent with the Mandate could not be passed by the Legislative Council; that the Palestine Government should not be responsible to the Legislative Council (as opposed to the British Government, which was responsible to the British Parliament); and that the council would not be able to deal with budgetary matters.⁶¹

Furthermore, Weizmann counselled against property and literacy qualifications for the right to vote, in order that the Jewish community would enjoy “the full benefit of the franchise”.⁶² His reluctance to put financial restrictions on the right to vote probably stemmed from the presence of a large section of poor Jewish workers in Palestine at the time. More importantly, Weizmann suggested that primary voters should vote by religion rather than by area. He reasoned that since most Jews (and Christians) lived in Muslim-dominated areas, and since the Jewish colonies were not populous enough to elect a secondary elector on their own, Jewish votes would be swallowed up by the majority of Muslim votes.⁶³

To ensure the election of Jewish and Christian secondary electors, Weizmann suggested the following method:

Voting-areas should be marked out as contemplated in the Order [the Draft Constitution] and the Moslem [sic] voters should elect secondary electors in the prescribed manner. On the other hand, the Jews and Christians should each vote, within each district of Palestine, as a single body entitled to a number of secondary electors corresponding, on the scale prescribed,

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 2-8.

⁶² Ibid., p. 9.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 10-11.

to their aggregate voting strength. There would, in that case, be only one list of Jewish candidates (and one list of Christian candidates) for each district.⁶⁴

In other words, Weizmann suggested that Jews could only vote for other Jews. This assertion led him to the thorny question of which body had the right to decide who is a Jew. Of the Rabbinical Courts he wrote that, “the character of the constitution of the Rabbinical Courts and the character of the law they administer are such as to make questionable whether their jurisdiction should be made obligatory on Jewish citizens in matters of such vital importance as marriage and divorce [...]”⁶⁵ Moreover, he added that “there are persons who are and consider themselves Jews by race but cannot be regarded as professing the Jewish faith in an Orthodox sense”.⁶⁶ Thus he concluded that citizens of Palestine should be free to register as members of any religious community, “subject only to the communal authorities’ right to object to such registration on showing reasonable cause”.⁶⁷

Weizmann’s liberal vision of a political system in which individuals were free to choose their communal affiliation did not materialize. In May 1922 he notified Shuckburgh that the Zionist General Council had determined that Rabbinical Courts should have jurisdiction over Palestinian Jews’ personal matters.⁶⁸ Moreover, the Labor Zionists did not share Weizmann’s belief that Palestinian citizens should be able to choose their religious affiliation. They understood that in order to maximize both the *Yishuv*’s electoral power and its ability to levy taxes, affiliation to a religious community had to be compulsory. The Labor Zionist leadership envisaged a Mandatory society in which each

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 12.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 18.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 19.

⁶⁸ Weizmann to Shuckburgh, 5.5.1922, *LPCW*, XI, letter no. 93, p. 91.

citizen had to belong a religious community and could only leave it by joining a different community. Since the Rabbinical Courts were now in charge of Jewish personal lives, the halakhic definition of Jewishness – being born to a Jewish mother – meant that Jewish communal politics became bio-politics.

A day after Weizmann sent his memorandum to Shuckburgh, the Palestine branch of the Zionist Executive (PZE) offered revisions of its own to the Draft Constitution. Menachem Ussishkin, head of the PZE and author of the letter, was worried, like Weizmann, that no Jews would be elected to the council.⁶⁹ Ussishkin predicted that the Arab voting lists would include “tens of thousands of dead Arabs” and since he thought that Jewish voters would be more active than Arab ones – if only by virtue of being alive – the Legislative Council seats should be allocated according to the number of actual voters, not the total number of eligible voters.⁷⁰ Secondly, he suggested that Jewish voting take place at a different time than Arab voting so that the Jewish votes would be registered separately and thus not be “swallowed by the great majority of the Arab votes”.⁷¹

Ze'ev Jabotinsky, then a member of the Zionist Executive, had a different solution: since the entire Jewish people had an interest in Palestine, the Zionist Congress should elect representatives to the Legislative Council in addition to the Jewish representatives elected by the *Yishuv*. He further suggested that the number of Zionist representatives should be based on a “comparison of the Zionist expenditure [in Palestine] with the Palestine Government budget since 1918”.⁷² While Weizmann vaguely spoke of the Jews’ “qualitative superiority”, Jabotinsky found a way to quantify it by suggesting that

⁶⁹ The Palestine Zionist Executive to the Zionist Executive, London, 3.3.1922, p. 1, WA.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Jabotinsky to the Zionist Executive, 15.3.1922, p. 2, CZA Z4\40526.

financial investment be translated into political power. Leonard Stein, the Zionist Executive's political secretary, rejected Jabotinsky's proposal.⁷³

But the British did incorporate some Zionist suggestions into the constitution which was promulgated as the Order-in-Council 1922, on August 10th 1922.⁷⁴ The Order-in-Council forbade the Legislative Council from passing any ordinance that was "in any way repugnant to or inconsistent with the provisions of the Mandate".⁷⁵ All ordinances had to be assented to by the High Commissioner, who could veto an ordinance or reserve it for the "signification" – that is, the approval – of the British Government.⁷⁶ When an ordinance dealt with matters concerning the provisions of the Mandate itself, the High Commissioner was required to reserve it for the signification of the British Government. Furthermore, the British Government could disallow an ordinance already approved by the High Commissioner up to a year after its approval.⁷⁷ Finally, only the High Commissioner was allowed to pass ordinances dealing with taxes or revenue.⁷⁸

As for the Legislative Council itself, it was reduced to 22 members in addition to the High Commissioner: 10 official members and 12 elected unofficial members with no additional nominated members.⁷⁹ The "Palestine Legislative Council Election Order 1922", which was promulgated on September 1st, 1922, laid down the election procedures.⁸⁰ The election process was identical to the one proscribed in the Draft Constitution, except for the new stipulation that out of the 12 electoral colleges, no less

⁷³ Stein to Jabotinsky, 21.3.1922, WA.

⁷⁴ For the Order's text see:

<http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/C7AAE196F41AA055052565F50054E656>.

⁷⁵ Ibid., article 18.

⁷⁶ Ibid., article 26.

⁷⁷ Ibid., article 27.

⁷⁸ Ibid., article 28.

⁷⁹ Ibid., articles 19-20.

⁸⁰ "The Palestine Legislative Council Election Order, 1922" CZA S25\6297; see also: <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/C7AAE196F41AA055052565F50054E656>.

than two were to be Christian and no less than two were to be Jewish.⁸¹ Assuming that only two Jewish representatives would have been elected to the Council, they, together with the 10 official members, would have had a 12-10 majority over the Arab representatives.⁸² Elections for the Legislative Council were slated for February 1923.

The *Va'ad Leumi*, the Elections and the Threat to Jewish Autonomy, June 1921-March 1923

By early 1923, Weizmann, it seems, had resigned himself to the establishment of the Legislative Council. In February 1923, he wrote to Gaston Wormser, Baron Edmond de Rothchild's secretary, that the Council "should be taken seriously, should be formed and encouraged by us and be given prestige".⁸³ However, now Weizmann had to face a new obstacle: the opposition of the *Va'ad Leumi*, the governing body of the Palestinian Jewish community, to the Legislative Council. The *Va'ad*, established in 1920, was a relatively new body and its members were busy establishing its jurisdiction vis-à-vis the Zionist Organization, the Palestine Government, and those Palestinian Jews – mostly ultra-orthodox – who refused to acknowledge it as their representative institution.⁸⁴ The main objective of the *Va'ad* at the time was to get the British Government to approve the Draft Communities Ordinance, which would have formalized the *Yishuv*'s socio-cultural autonomy. The main bone of contention between the *Va'ad* and the Colonial Office was the *Va'ad*'s demand that it would be allowed to levy compulsory taxes from members of the *Yishuv* and that it would be granted a juridical person status.⁸⁵

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, article 12.

⁸² PZE meeting, 8.6.1922, *Protocols of PZE Meetings, January 1922-September 1922*, p. 328, CZA.

⁸³ Weizmann to Wormser, February 1923, LPCW, XI, letter no. 272, p. 232.

⁸⁴ Caplan, *Palestine Jewry*, p. 156.

⁸⁵ See Ben-Zvi's speech, "Ha-moshav ha-sheni, yeshiva shminit" *Doar Ha-yom*, 24.3.1922, p. 4; *Va'ad Leumi* meeting, 11.9.1922, CZA J1\7225, p. 4; *Va'ad Leumi* meeting, 27.11.1922, CZA J1\7226, *passim*; *Va'ad Leumi* members' interview with the High Commissioner, 22.11.1922, CZA J1\76; *Va'ad Leumi* meeting, 2.1.1923, CZA J1\7226, *passim*; *Va'ad Leumi* meeting, 14.2.1923, *ibid.*, *passim*.

The *Va'ad* first discussed the proposed “representative assembly” in June 1921, soon after Samuel’s programmatic speech. Most members of the *Va'ad* opposed the establishment of a representative assembly but had differing ideas about the most effective response to this new threat. Yosef Aharonovich, a leading Labor Zionist intellectual, opined that “we cannot protest against [...] a parliament, against national representation. You can fight this idea only through political influence in London.”⁸⁶ Yitzhak Tabenkin, a more hard-line Labor Zionist, countered that “a representative council is a surrogate of representation. It would not benefit the Arab people, because only *effendis* would be elected to the Council. That is why you can fight it openly”.⁸⁷ Tabenkin’s argument, that the representative body would not be truly representative because the Arab notables could not represent the *fellahin*’s true interests, became a staple of Labor Zionist opposition to the establishment of self-governing institutions throughout the 1920s.

But not all members of the *Va'ad* were against a joint representative body. Yehoshua Redler-Feldmann (who wrote under the pseudonym Rabbi Benyamin) and Ya’akov Thon, both future members of the leftist *Brit Shalom*, voiced a cautious acceptance of the idea of representative politics in Palestine. Rabbi Benyamin hoped that the establishment of a representative body would create “political groups that would be favourable [to Zionism]” among the Arabs.⁸⁸ Thon was less enthusiastic but was willing to accept an assembly in which a third of the seats were allocated to the Jews.⁸⁹ The *Va'ad* finally reached a resolution that stated that establishing a representative assembly before the

⁸⁶ *Va'ad Leumi meeting*, 28-30.6.1921, CZA J1\7224, p. 4. All translations from *Va'ad Leumi* minutes are mine, unless otherwise noted.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

Mandate was ratified was illegal.⁹⁰ Weizmann's lobbying in London in the following weeks made sure that Samuel's plans to establish a representative body stayed, for now, on the page.

In the meantime, the *Va'ad* tried to convince Samuel to allow it to levy taxes and to recognize it as a juridical person. The High Commissioner assured the *Va'ad* that he was in favor of expanding Jewish autonomy and buttressing its authority, but it seems that the Colonial Office rejected the *Va'ad*'s demands.⁹¹ Norman Bentwich, Palestine Government's Legal Secretary, informed *Va'ad* members that their demands can only be approved by the Legislative Council.⁹²

In the eyes of the *Va'ad* members, the prospect of putting this critical decision in the hands of the Legislative Council, even with a Jewish-British majority guaranteed, turned the abstract threat of the Council into a very real one.⁹³ In a January 1923 meeting, the *Va'ad* decided to tentatively accept the draft Communities Ordinance, even without the ability to levy taxes or a juridical personal status, as long as it was approved before the establishment of the Legislative Council.⁹⁴

As the date of elections for the Council approached, however, some *Va'ad* members realized that they could use the threat of a Jewish boycott of the elections as leverage against the Palestine Government. In a February 1923 meeting, a mere week before the elections, the debate centered on two topics: whether the Jews should participate in the elections, and if so, whether the *Va'ad* was capable of enforcing the decision. The Legislative Council proved both a challenge to, and a test of, the *Va'ad*'s authority.

⁹⁰ Ibid., "resolutions", p. 2.

⁹¹ *Va'ad Leumi* meeting, 27.11.1922, CZA J\7226, p. 4.

⁹² Interview with the High Commissioner and the Legal Secretary, 22.11.1922, CZA J1\76.

⁹³ *Va'ad Leumi* meeting, 2.1.1923, CZA J1\7226, p. 2.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

Colonel Fredrick Kisch, head of the PZE's political department and Weizmann's enforcer in Palestine, attended the meeting with the clear objective of making sure that the *Va'ad* followed the Zionist Executive's directive to cooperate with the Palestine Government.⁹⁵ In other words, the challenge to the *Yishuv's* autonomy did not arise solely from the Legislative Council, but also from the Zionist Organization itself.

By this point, it was clear that some, if not most, Arab voters were going to boycott the elections.⁹⁶ This news led some of the speakers at the meeting, Menachem Ussishkin chief among them, to declare that despite their objections to the Legislative Council they had to side with the Government.⁹⁷ Some even speculated that if both Jews and Arabs boycotted the elections, Samuel would have to resign.⁹⁸ Itzhak Ben-Zvi and Yosef Sprinzak, both Labor delegates, toyed with the idea that the British might have to postpone the establishment of the Legislative Council for a while, but only Meir Dizengoff, the mayor of Tel-Aviv, was outright in favor of a boycott.⁹⁹ The Labor representatives then declared that the Labor position on the elections would be decided the next day in the *Histadrut* (the Zionist workers' union) conference that was taking place in Jaffa at the same time.¹⁰⁰ The *Va'ad*, sans the Labor delegates, then adopted a resolution to participate in the elections and to await the *Histadrut's* decision.¹⁰¹

When the *Va'ad* reconvened the following day, Ben-Zvi announced that his party, the socialist *Achdut Ha-Avoda*, would only participate in the elections if the Communities Ordinance, including the right to levy taxes, a juridical personal status, and control of immigration, were approved in advance of the establishment of the Legislative

⁹⁵ Kisch's diary, 3.2.1923, CZA S25\564\1.

⁹⁶ For the Arab boycott of the elections see, Porath, *The Emergence*, pp. 150-156.

⁹⁷ *Va'ad Leumi* meeting, 14-18.2.1923, CZA J1\7226, p. 4.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

Council.¹⁰² This announcement by Ben-Zvi, which was supported by Sprinzak (the representative of the other prominent Labor party, *Ha-Poel Ha-Tzair*) effectively annulled the resolution adopted the day before and raised the prospect of Labor forcing a Jewish boycott, or worse, dividing the *Yishuv* between those who participated in the elections and those who did not, exposing the *Va'ad*'s inability to mobilize a unified Jewish community.¹⁰³

An alarmed Kisch, who would later describe the meeting as a “crisis which [...] imperiled the continuation of British Mandate for Palestine [...]”,¹⁰⁴ was quick to explain that such an ultimatum might cause Samuel to resign, and that the confirmation of the Communities Ordinance would be brought before the Legislative Council only if Samuel were absolutely sure that it would pass.¹⁰⁵ Thon added that the workers’ grandstanding in the matter of Jewish autonomy created a division within the *Yishuv*, not only because some sections of the Jewish community would vote even if the *Va'ad* decided against it, but also because the Jewish colonies were against granting the *Va'ad* the authority to levy compulsory taxes.¹⁰⁶ Even if Kisch’s assessment that Labor’s gambit threatened the Mandate itself was somewhat overstated, it certainly exposed how fragile was the seeming unity of the *Yishuv*. Ben-Zvi tapped into the *Va'ad* members’ anxiety about its authority when he commented that the demand for the legalization of Jewish autonomy should come from the *Va'ad*, not just from the workers’ parties. “The question arises”, he then added, “Whether the *Va'ad* can exist as a general institution that speaks for the entire *Yishuv*. If the *Va'ad* would not stand its ground on the issue of Jewish autonomy, it would

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁰³ To make things worse, it was unclear at that point if the Jerusalemite Ultra-Orthodox community, which was not part of the Zionist *Yishuv*, would have a separate list of candidates, which only served to exacerbate the divisions among Palestinian Jews. See: *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Kisch to Stein, 18.2.1923, WA, p. 1.

¹⁰⁵ Va'ad Leumi Meeting, 14-18.2.1923, J1\7226, p. 20-21

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 23.

not have a right to exist, since it is its job to fight for our national rights and now is the most opportune time".¹⁰⁷

The *Va'ad* finally decided to send a delegation to the High Commissioner and to present him with a resolution that stated that the *Va'ad* views the approval of the Communities Ordinance as a precondition to Jewish participation in the elections.¹⁰⁸ Kisch, recounting the meeting in his diary, wryly commented that "[t]his absurd resolution was adopted at 2 PM [should be AM], which perhaps explains it".¹⁰⁹

The delegation met with Samuel and Bentwich just a few hours later.¹¹⁰ The delegates explained their resolution to the High Commissioner, with Ben-Gurion interestingly commenting that immigration and autonomy were internal Jewish affairs and should not be part of the Legislative Council's "competence" since it would be comprised of "two Jews and twenty Arabs and Brits".¹¹¹ Ben-Gurion's political arithmetic, which grouped the Arabs and the British together, explains why Labor Zionists were so worried about putting the matter of Jewish autonomy in the hands of the Legislative Council. Samuel argued that Ben-Gurion had divided the number of Council members all wrong and that it was, in fact, ten British officials and two Jews against ten Arabs.¹¹² He added that if the Jews were to boycott the elections it would have an adverse effect on the coming Parliamentary debate on Palestine and that there were many MPs who were just waiting for an excuse to "give the Arabs a majority, just like in Iraq, and be done with it".¹¹³ This thinly-veiled threat notwithstanding, the High Commissioner promised to do his best to get the Ordinance approved by The Colonial Office.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁰⁹ Kisch's diary, 15.2.1923, CZA S25\564\1.

¹¹⁰ Kisch to Stein, 18.2.1923, WA, p. 4.

¹¹¹ *Va'ad Leumi* meeting, 14-18.2.1923, J1\7226, p. 28; translation mine.

¹¹² One might note that neither man had bothered to differentiate between Christian and Muslim Arabs.

¹¹³ *Va'ad Leumi* meeting, 14-18.2.1923, J1\7226, p. 28; Translation mine.

Samuel's combination of promises and threats was enough to dissuade most of the delegation members from pursuing a Jewish boycott. Nevertheless, when the *Va'ad* reconvened again on February 18th, *Achdut Ha-Avoda* representatives made a last-ditch effort to wring some political advantage from the situation. David Remez, another delegate of the socialist party, suggested that the workers participate in the elections, but with a different list of candidates from the *Va'ad*, and if they did send a representative to the Legislative Council, their representative would sit out the Council's meetings until the Communities Ordinance was approved by the Colonial Office.¹¹⁴ Most *Va'ad* members, including *Ha-poel Ha-Tzair* representatives, declared their opposition to multiple lists and the proposal was scrapped. The *Va'ad* then adopted a resolution which stated that although the list of Jewish candidates would be determined by the local councils of the Jewish settlements and neighborhoods, the *Va'ad* was in favor of one of the Jewish representatives in the Legislative Council being a Labor Zionist.¹¹⁵

Thus, the *Va'ad* was able to prevent a split within the *Yishuv* and to consolidate its position as the community's predominant representative body. But given the initial opposition to the Legislative Council among the *Va'ad* members, it must be noted that the *Va'ad* failed to assert its autonomy vis-à-vis the Zionist Organization. Kisch, Weizmann's man on the ground, together with Samuel and Bentwich, made sure that the *Va'ad* members understood the political implications of a Jewish boycott. Nor was the *Va'ad* able to wrangle an expansion of its autonomy out of the Palestine Government. The Communities Ordinance, called the Religious Communities Ordinance in its final iteration, was promulgated only in 1928, when Samuel was no longer High Commissioner.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 30.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 34.

Interestingly, Kisch, Samuel, and Bentwich were all British Zionists – as opposed to the mostly Eastern-European *Va'ad* members – and none of them were elected representatives of the *Yishuv* or of the Jewish people. As Western Jews and liberal imperialists, however, they seemed to be worried about Zionism being labeled an anti-democratic ideology more than their Eastern European coreligionists. This cultural difference between British and Eastern European Jews led to a rather ironic scenario in which the democratically elected *Va'ad*, which opposed a joint democratically-elected representative body, was trumped by an alliance of non-elected colonial and Zionist officials who nevertheless espoused democratic measures in Palestine.

As things turned out, the power struggle between the Palestine Government, the Zionist Organization, and the *Va'ad Leumi* was rather academic. The primary elections to the Council took place between the 20th and 28th of February 1923.¹¹⁶ The Arab Executive, who feared that Arab participation in the elections would legitimate Britain's Zionist policy, sent its members to Arab towns and villages to speak against the establishment of the Legislative Council, while Muslim religious figures threatened those Arabs who would vote in the elections with ex-communication.¹¹⁷ Alongside the Arab Executive, members of the Supreme Muslim Council, the body governing the Muslim religious endowments and *Sharia* courts in Palestine, participated in the campaign against the elections. Unlike the Arab Executive, which never received formal recognition from the Palestine Government, the Supreme Muslim Council was an official governmental body. The Palestine Government's inability, or reluctance, to counter the Arab propaganda against the Legislative Council probably doomed the elections.

¹¹⁶ Command paper no. 1889, p. 7.

¹¹⁷ Porath, *The Emergence*, pp. 150-156.

The Arab Executive's campaign proved to be highly effective. Out of the possible 663 secondary Muslim electors and 59 secondary Christian electors, only 68 Muslim electors and 14 Christian electors were nominated.¹¹⁸ Out of those, 61 Muslim electors and 11 Christian electors ran unopposed – meaning that only 7 Muslims and 3 Christians were actually elected in any democratic sense.¹¹⁹ As for the Jewish electors, it seems that the *Va'ad's* anxiety about its inability to mobilize the Jewish community was premature. All potential 79 Jewish electors were either elected or ran unopposed (as were all Druze candidates).¹²⁰ Due to the poor results, the election period was extended until March 7th, which brought the total number of Arab electors to 107 Muslim electors and 19 Christian electors.¹²¹ About 50% of eligible Jewish voters actually cast their vote, as opposed to 18% of the Muslims and 5.5% of Christians.¹²² Only 1,397 votes were cast in total, 1,172 of which were Jewish.¹²³

Due to the failure of the primary elections, secondary elections never took place, nor was a Legislative Council established.¹²⁴ Instead, Samuel tried to reconvene the purely nominated Advisory Council, but the Arab Executive pressured the Arab Council members to resign.¹²⁵ The Arab Executive similarly declined Samuel's offer to establish an Arab Agency akin to the Jewish one stipulated by the Mandate, on the grounds that an Arab agency would have even less political power than a Legislative Council, the establishment of which the Arabs had already rejected.¹²⁶ By late 1923 the British had withdrawn all constitutional proposals and invested legislative authority in the High

¹¹⁸ Command paper no. 1889, p. 7.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 8.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹²⁵ Caplan, *Palestinian Jewry*, p. 160-161.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 163-164.

Commissioner and his Advisory Council, which was now comprised solely of British officials.¹²⁷

Labor Zionism, Jewish Autonomy and “Formal” versus “Real” Democracy, 1924

The Palestinian constitutional question would lie dormant until the end of the 1920s, when some members of the Arab political elite reached the conclusion that the strategy of non-cooperation with the British had failed. But even during the quiet 1920s, the Zionist debate on the constitutional future of Palestine did not die out completely. The Labor movement, which, by the early 1930s, had become the dominant political force both in the *Yishuv* and the Zionist movement, was especially sensitive to this question since Labor Zionists put such great emphasis on Jewish autonomy.¹²⁸ Most Labor Zionists regarded the idea of a joint Arab-Jewish legislature as both a threat to Jewish autonomy and as a challenge to their self-image as progressive democrats. Consequently, Labor Zionist leaders sought an alternative to the Legislative Council that would allow for uninterrupted Jewish immigration and colonization without encroaching on Palestinian Arab rights.

One of the earliest and most seminal texts in the ongoing debate on the constitution of Palestine is the minutes of the fourth annual conference of *Achdut Ha-'Avoda*, which took place in May 1924.¹²⁹ The debate was triggered by a memorandum sent by Shlomo Kaplansky, an *Achdut Ha-'Avoda* activist, to the British Labor party, which was then in power in Britain.¹³⁰ Kaplansky believed that the British public was tired of Zionist

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ On the other hand, Jabotinsky and, to a lesser extent, Weizmann emphasised the role of Britain as the executor of the Mandate charter. For that reason, both were less adamant about establishing an extensive Jewish autonomy before the creation of a Jewish state.

¹²⁹ *Ha-ve'ida ha-revi'it shel achdut ha-'avoda be-'ein harod* (Tel-Aviv: Achdut Ha-'Avoda press, 1926). The booklet is available at the Lavon Institute for Labour Movement Research, Tel-Aviv.

¹³⁰ Yosef Gorny, *From Binational Society to Jewish State: Federal Concepts in Zionist Political Thought, 1920-1990, and the Jewish People* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), p. 35 [hereinafter: Gorny, *Binational Society*].

complaints about the Palestine Administration and that a Zionist constitutional plan might improve Zionism's public image in Britain.¹³¹ He further suggested that after the Labor Government gave its consent to the Zionist constitutional plan, the Zionist Organization should engage in direct negotiations with Arab politicians.¹³² As for the future regime in Palestine, Kaplansky opposed the current "absolutist" colonial regime since he believed that most British officials were anti-Jewish.¹³³ Kaplansky also suspected that a Labor Government could not go on for long without giving the Palestinian Arabs a measure of self-rule. He rejected, however, the 1922 Legislative Council scheme because it involved a "constant [British] game of divide and conquer" between Jews and Arabs.¹³⁴ As an alternative, he suggested a constitutional regime that included both an extensive national autonomy for Jews and Arabs and a bicameral legislature. The lower house of the legislature would be elected in democratic, proportional elections, while the upper house, like the American Senate, would be divided equally between Jewish and Arab representatives.¹³⁵ It is interesting to note that around that time, Jamal Al-Husseini, the secretary of the Arab Executive, came up with a similar plan for a bicameral parliament with a British-Jewish majority in the upper house and an Arab majority in the lower house.¹³⁶ I found no indication that Kaplansky and Al-Husseini were aware of each other's plans.

Kaplansky expanded on this rather skeletal outline when his proposal was debated at the party's annual conference in 1924. First, he addressed the major socialist argument against a joint Jewish-Arab legislature, as it was voiced by Tabenkin in the *Va'ad Leumi*

¹³¹ Shlomo Kaplansky, "Tochnit shel medinyut erez-yisraelit be-shvil memshelet ha-poalim", *Chazon ve-hagshama* (Merhavia: Ha'kibbutz Ha'artzi, 1950), p. 264.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 265.

¹³⁴ Ibid., translation mine.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 266.

¹³⁶ Porath, *The Emergence*, pp. 244-245.

meetings – that the landowning *effendis* who would surely be elected to the legislature could not truly represent the interests of the *fellahin* – meaning that such a legislature would not be truly democratic. Kaplansky assured his comrades that

[He] is well aware that democracy is a political form that is borrowed from the West, which is at a completely different economic stage and has a different political education [From the Middle East]. [He] also knows that a federative senate would not be a [true] expression of the Arab people. The *fellah* would not control such a senate. It is clear that any and all forms of government would allow the *effendis* to strengthen their control over the Arab masses and [He] knows how hard it is for us [Labor Zionists] to reach an understanding with the Arab leaders who hate us as workers and as the harbingers of culture and of new ways of life [...] however, despite all the drawbacks of democratic rule, we must not forget that every national movement emerges from the ruling class, which uses its ideology to shore up its hegemony [...]. In spite of its falseness, it is clear that a great national movement is gaining strength in the East. We must make sure that the *effendis* do not appear as the liberators of the Arab people and we must reveal the truth to the Arab masses.¹³⁷

In other words, Kaplansky offered an antidote to the supposed exploitation of democracy by the *effendis* in the form of a Labor Zionist sponsorship of the *fellahin*. By ridding the *fellahin* of their false consciousness, the Zionist workers would be able to defang the joint legislature of its classist potential.

¹³⁷ *Ha- 've'ida ha- 'reviit*, pp. 21-22.

Kaplansky's plan stimulated a discussion about the relationship between Jewish autonomy and a joint legislature. Ben-Zvi's response connected Kaplansky's plan not only to the struggle of the *Yishuv* to expand its autonomy but also to the contemporary struggle of other Jewish communities, especially in the Central and Eastern European successor states, for national autonomy.¹³⁸ He explained that the Palestine Government had drawn up a new Draft Communities Ordinance, one that allowed national-religious communities to levy compulsory taxes and put great obstacles in the way of anyone who wished to leave their community. The only drawbacks to the new ordinance, Ben-Zvi continued, were that the government had bound national autonomy to the Rabbinical Courts and the fact that one could still leave one's community if one wished so.

Somewhat counterintuitively, Ben-Zvi thought that the *Yishuv* leadership should not, for the time being, try to prevent Jews from leaving the Jewish community. But unlike the more liberal-minded Weizmann, who in his response to the Draft Constitution from March 1922 suggested that the citizens of Palestine should be free to join their religious community of choice, or not join a religious community at all, Ben-Zvi had quite a different vision for Palestinian society:

In order that leaving a community would be impossible, the state has to be rebuilt on a different basis – *a federation of national autonomies*. When there will be other national communities outside of the Jewish community, with similar national authority, the individual would not be able to leave his people and be suspended in air [*le-heetalot ba-avir*] but will have to join one of the other communities (the Muslim or the Christian, if they are

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 25.

demarcated by religion, or the Arab one, if they are demarcated by language).¹³⁹

Since Ben-Zvi used the word “impossible” to describe the act of leaving the Jewish community in his scenario, we can assume that he did not believe that any Palestinian Jew would, in their right mind, choose to convert to Islam or Christianity – and being an Arab Jew was an oxymoron to Ashkenazi Zionists of that time. What Ben-Zvi’s plan was trying to achieve was the drawing of borders *inside* Mandatory Palestine. But since Zionist colonization was not widespread enough geographically, the borders Ben-Zvi thought about were not made of barbed wire but of flesh. If by law, there was no empty space of nationality, if one could not be nationless in the same way that one could not be genderless, and if moving from one nation to another was “impossible”, then the very body of Jews would constitute a bio-legal border between them and non-Jewish citizens of Palestine.

Ben-Zvi’s point of reference for his autonomy plan was the “exemplary state of nations”, the Habsburg Empire.¹⁴⁰ The concept of personal autonomy (a set of duties and rights which is invested in one’s person, as opposed to territorial autonomy, in which autonomy is anchored geographically), Ben-Zvi explained, was developed out of the fact that while most Habsburg minorities were concentrated in a specific part of the Empire, not all Czechs or Poles, for example, resided in Bohemia or Galicia. Personal autonomy ensured that those members of a minority group who did not live inside the minority’s designated territorial autonomy would enjoy the same rights and duties as those who did. Of course, Ben-Zvi added, the Jews were the only minority in the Habsburg Empire that did not

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 26. Translation mine, emphasis in the original.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. On the relations between Zionist autonomist plans and Habsburg autonomism see: Israel Bartal, “Me-eretz kodesh le-eretz historit: autonomism tzioni be-resheet ha-mea ha-esrim” in: Israel Bartal, *Kozak ve-bedui*, (Tel-Aviv: ‘Am ‘Oved, 2007), pp. 152-169.

enjoy territorial autonomy, which is precisely why Labor Zionism was striving to create Jewish territorial autonomy in Palestine.¹⁴¹ But since so many Palestinian Jews were still living as minorities in mixed towns, personal autonomy had to be maintained. Ben-Zvi finally suggested that Palestinian Zionists should strive to combine personal autonomy with territorial autonomy, and not see the former as a placeholder for the latter.¹⁴²

Ben-Zvi then critiqued Kaplansky's plan for not providing guarantees for Jewish immigration, colonization, and labor, since any representative body in which Jews were the minority would act against these three pillars of the Zionist project. Ben-Zvi would later state quite bluntly that, "we cannot put the fate of our immigration in the hands of the local inhabitants. The American Congress decides when it comes to immigration to the US, but we deny the 150,000 Bedouin, 70,000 Christians and 400,000 *fellahin* who live here this right".¹⁴³ Nevertheless, Ben Zvi was willing to support Kaplansky's plan on the basis of three preconditions: (a) a Jewish-Arab "understanding" based on a bi-national workers' alliance; (b) the inclusion of Palestinian citizens in the executive branch as well as in the legislature; and (c) Jewish control of immigration.¹⁴⁴

If Ben-Zvi put an emphasis on Jewish personal autonomy while contiguous Jewish territories were slowly being purchased and colonized by Zionist pioneers, Ben-Gurion had quite the opposite idea. He criticized *Asefat Ha-Nivhrim*, the Palestinian Jewish legislature, for settling for personal autonomy only.¹⁴⁵ Contrary to Ben-Zvi, who connected the Palestinian Jewish struggle for autonomy to the similar struggle of diaspora Jews, Ben-Gurion argued that the idea of personal autonomy as a solution for the so-called Jewish Question could only be conceived in the "sick" mind of ghetto Jews who

¹⁴¹ *Ha-ve'ida ha-revi'it*, pp. 26-27.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 52-53. Translation mine.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

lack the courage and willpower to propose the establishment of an “autonomous country”.¹⁴⁶ When Ben-Gurion was speaking of sick-minded ghetto Jews, he was referring to the Bund, a popular non-Zionist, Socialist, and Jewish party that operated mainly among Eastern European Jews. Ben-Gurion argued that the Bundists borrowed the concept of personal autonomy from the Austrian Social Democrats while ignoring the fact that personal autonomy in the Habsburg Empire was always accompanied by territorial autonomy. The basis of national liberty and the impetus for economic and cultural action, Ben-Gurion insisted, is “the land, the soil. An autonomy that is not rooted in the ground is an airy fabrication [*yetzira avririt*] that cannot satisfy, not only material economic needs, but also cultural needs. Even education, that is, the normal education of a healthy society, which is not limited to books and memorization but is manifested in work done on the soil, is not possible without control of the land”.¹⁴⁷

Personal autonomy alone, Ben-Gurion continued, denied the Zionist aspirations in Palestine. If there was “real content” to the Zionist idea, it was the state. Zionism was the will to a state of the Jews, the will to land and territorial control.¹⁴⁸ And here Ben-Gurion went on to formulate what became one of the most important tenets of Zionist diplomacy until the 1937 partition plan:

When we say: a state, territorial control, we don’t mean domination over others. We have no intention and no need to control others. When we say, ‘a state’, we mean two things: not to be controlled by others and not to be

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. His colleague Berl Locker reminded him that the idea was conceived by Karl Renner, who was not Jewish (ibid., p. 36)

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p.29. Translation mine.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 30.

ruled by anarchy – we want to rule ourselves. By a state of our own, we mean self-governance, a national-territorial autonomy [...] ¹⁴⁹

The concept of mutual non-dominance, encapsulated in various federative plans, was the Labor Zionist answer to the threat and the challenge of the Legislative Council. ¹⁵⁰ If the Arabs did not dominate the Jews through the Legislative Council, they could not limit Jewish immigration and colonization. At the same time, national autonomy would grant the Arabs some measure of control over their internal affairs, thus preserving the progressive credentials of Labor Zionists.

Next, Ben-Gurion explained how each Jewish settlement constituted an autonomous territorial unit, and how, in time, each Jewish territorial unit will be connected to other territorial units to create a continuous Jewish territorial autonomy. ¹⁵¹ This meant that buying land in and of itself was insufficient since, for a territorial unit to be both Jewish *and* autonomous, it had to contain more Jews than non-Jews. This explains why the Labor Zionists were adamant that Jews should not be able to leave the *Yishuv*: territorial autonomy necessitated not only a Jewish majority, but also that all of those Jews belong to the same political structure. ¹⁵²

Interestingly, both Ben-Zvi and Ben-Gurion invoked a dichotomy between air and earth – the nationless individual, according to Ben-Zvi, was “suspended in air”, and for Ben-Gurion, personal autonomy without territorial elements was an “airy fabrication”. The earth offered the Jews a chance to gain territorial autonomy and build a “healthy society” – one that was based on agricultural work. The air, on the other hand, suggested the sort

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. Translation mine.

¹⁵⁰ See Gorny, *Binational Society*, passim.

¹⁵¹ *Ha-ve'ida ha-revi'it*, pp. 30-31.

¹⁵² Ben-Gurion developed these ideas more fully in “Autonomia leumit ve-yakhasey shkhenim” in: *Anahnu u-shekhenu*, pp. 110-130.

of insubstantiality and disconnection that went all the way back to the derided, diasporic *Luftmensch*.

The differentiation between “formal” and “real” democracy was crucial to the Labor Zionists’ argument against the Legislative Council. Berl Katznelson, one of the founders of *Achdut Ha-‘Avoda* and the most prominent Labor Zionist intellectual, argued that: “the formal democratic form is unimportant. The content is all the same – surrendering our fate to the mercy of others.”¹⁵³ Ben-Zvi commented that: “the illusion of democracy adds nothing and only causes damage”,¹⁵⁴ while Ben-Gurion added that “we must find out for ourselves the real content of the demand for a national government that we hear from the *effendis*. It is not a demand for democratic government, for a parliamentary regime [...] they [only] want real power.”¹⁵⁵ All three differentiated between the outer “form”, or the illusion, of democracy and what they perceived to be the true “content” of Palestinian parliamentarism – an anti-Zionist and classist Arab oligarchy. At the same time, they did not offer a coherent theory of what a “real” democracy might look like. All three supported what they called municipal democracy, but this model was aimed at creating pure or, at least, overwhelmingly Jewish settlements and did not address the possibility of a mixed political system. At this point, Kaplansky’s plan was an outlier in terms of Labor Zionist constitutional thought, since it actually promoted the idea of a joint legislature.

The party line of *Ha-Poel Ha-Tzair*, the supposedly more moderate Labor Zionist party, was essentially the same. The editor of the eponymous party newspaper, Itzhak Laufbahn, wrote in 1924 that “a constitutional regime is not an absolutely right and moral form of government – it is right and moral only when it ensures real equality and the possibility of

¹⁵³ Ibid. Translation mine.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 28. Translation mine.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 33. Translation mine.

full political self-determination [...] but when it becomes a mechanical term, which allows the majority to take over the minority, then it is as bad as despotic absolutism [...]”.¹⁵⁶ Like his comrades from *Achdut Ha- 'Avoda*, he advocated Jewish territorial autonomy.

In 1924 the Zionist Labor movement was a fast-growing if still junior player in the Zionist political arena. But when the constitutional debate resurfaced in the late 1920s, Labor Zionism was a much more important component of *Yishuv* politics and the ideological leanings of its leaders played a major role in the Zionist struggle against the Legislative Council.

Between 1918 and 1924 most Zionist leaders and intellectuals were vehemently opposed to the establishment of any legislature which would give the Arabs the power to interfere with Jewish immigration and colonization. If the Palestinian Jewish community participated in the elections to the Legislative Council, it was a result of its own admission of political weakness more than any real enthusiasm for the idea of a joint legislature. Fortunately for the Zionists, Palestinian Arabs were reluctant to be part of a regime that was based on the Balfour Declaration, and the Arab boycott of the elections buried the Legislative Council initiative for the better part of a decade. Much to their chagrin, when Arab politicians and British officials attempted to revive the Legislative Council initiative at the end of the 1920s, they discovered that, in the span of a few years, the Zionist movement had become quite a formidable opponent.

¹⁵⁶ Itzhak Laubabhn, “Be’alat Ha-ov”, *Ha-Poel Ha-Tzair*, 30.5.1923, p. 4.

Chapter II

Time between Suns: Zionism and the Idea of a Joint Legislature, 1925-1929

In comparison to the first years of the Mandate and to the political whirlwind created by the 1929 riots, the years 1923-1928 were relatively uneventful in Palestine. However, during this short respite, two phenomena emerged that put the Legislative Council back on the Zionist agenda: the growing Arab demand for a representative body, and the critique of mainstream Zionism offered by *Brit Shalom*.

Despite working against the 1923 elections, the Arab Executive demanded, as early as October 1924, the establishment of a constitutional government in which Jews and Arabs would be represented in proportion to their numbers “before the application of the Zionist policy [the Balfour Declaration]”.¹⁵⁷ In the following years, the demand for a constitutional regime persisted in Arab petitions to the League of Nation and to the Palestine Government, but without the proviso that Jews would be represented according to their pre-1917 numbers.¹⁵⁸ In June 1928 the Palestinian Arab Congress convened for the first time in five years and demanded the establishment of a representative legislature, without adopting a resolution condemning the Mandate or the Balfour Declaration.¹⁵⁹ Historian Yehoshua Porath argues that this new, moderate approach was designed to decrease the Zionist opposition to the idea of a joint legislature.¹⁶⁰ In January 1929, a Palestinian Arab delegation met with the new High Commissioner, Sir John Chancellor,

¹⁵⁷ Kisch to the Zionist Executive, 15.8.1928, CZA L9\340, p. 1.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Elyakim Rubinstein, “Ha-she’elon meshnat 1928 ba-she’ela ha-arvit”, in: Yehudah Bauer, Mosheh Davis, Yisra’el Kolat (eds.), *Pirke-mehkar be-toldot ha-tsiyonut*, (Jerusalem: The Zionist Library, 1976), p. 312.

¹⁶⁰ Porath, *The Emergence*, pp. 253-254.

and demanded the establishment of a representative government in Palestine.¹⁶¹

Chancellor promised the delegation that he would discuss the matter with the Colonial Office during his summer vacation. In August 1929, when Chancellor was in Britain, riots broke out in Palestine. Jewish neighborhoods in Jerusalem, Hebron, and Safed, alongside several isolated Jewish settlements, were attacked by Arab mobs; 133 Jews and 113 Arabs were killed during the riots. It was, at the time, the worst violent outbreak in British Palestine's history. Following the riots, the British Government abandoned its attempts to establish a Legislative Council, albeit temporarily.¹⁶²

The 1929 riots turned both the British and the Zionist leadership against any constitutional reform in the near future.¹⁶³ At the same time, they forced the *Yishuv* leadership to reassess its Arab policy – or lack thereof – and its plans for the future. Thus, the years 1928-1929 saw a flurry of Zionist intellectual activity, which started as a response to the Legislative Council initiative but became much more comprehensive and urgent after the riots. This intense intellectual activity is at the center of the present chapter. I will begin by looking at *Brit Shalom*'s critique of the concepts of a Jewish majority and the Jewish state. Following Dimitry Shumsky's work on *Brit Shalom*, my analysis will emphasise the affinity, rather than the differences, between *Brit Shalom* and Labor Zionism. During the 1920s and at least until 1937, many in both political movements advocated the establishment of a "state-of-nations", based on late Habsburg politics, rather than a Jewish nation-state. I will argue, however, that it was the adherence to the same political model that also separated the two groups: for Labor Zionists, a Jewish majority was essential to the establishment of a Jewish autonomy within the state-

¹⁶¹ Rubinstein, "Ha-she'elon", p. 322.

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 339. On the 1929 riots see: Hillel Cohen, *Year Zero of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1929*, (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2015).

¹⁶³ Shmuel Dothan, *Ha-Ma'avak 'al Eretz-Yisra'el* (Tel-Aviv: Misrad ha-bitahon, ha-hotsa'ah le-or, 1981), p. 33.

of-nations. Since Labor Zionists were willing to accept less than full statist sovereignty, their focus shifted to the Jewish majority (in parts of Palestine) as the essential embodiment of self-rule. Most *Brit Shalom* members, on the other hand, advocated the vaguer concept of “many Jews” in Palestine.

The second section of the chapter examines the answers to a questionnaire which the Zionist Executive distributed among prominent Zionist activists in hopes of formulating a more coherent policy towards the Arabs in general, and the Legislative Council in particular. The most interesting aspect of the answers, however, had little to do with the Legislative Council. From the answers emerged the discursive practice of calculating the point in the future in which a Jewish majority would be achievable; in the same way that Jewish sovereignty was measured by Jewish demography, so was the future calculated according to the ratio between Jews and Arabs in Palestine. Thus, in the mind of those Zionists who envisioned the future of Palestine, demography, sovereignty and the future became inextricably bound together. This practice, while not completely new, was rather rare before 1928, and between November 1928 and November 1929 it became not only prevalent in Zionist texts but was also harnessed to give credence to political arguments. I will show how this practice embodied the ambivalence of the period, encapsulating great hope for the future but also a sense of deep anxiety.

Finally, I will compare David Ben-Gurion’s political plan of 1929 to Moshe Beilinson’s attempt to formulate a Zionist theory of democracy. Beilinson ended up rejecting the applicability of majority rule to Palestine while Ben-Gurion offered a way around it by envisioning a federative state-of-nations with a Jewish majority. Yet, more importantly, I locate the difference between the two Labor thinkers in their style of argument: Ben-Gurion showed great faith in the political power of numbers and, consequently, his politics were oriented towards a future in which a Jewish majority was achievable.

Beilinson, on the other hand, based his arguments against majority rule on the claim that the Jewish case had no parallels in history, and thus “normal” democracy, i.e., majority rule, did not apply to it. For Beilinson, the Jewish past forbade the application of democracy to Palestine; for Ben-Gurion, it was the bright Jewish future that allowed it.

Brit Shalom and the Challenge to the Jewish Majority Ideal, 1925-1929

Brit Shalom was a scholarly association that was established in 1925 to study Jewish-Arab relations.¹⁶⁴ It was a small group – no more than 80 official members – but many of its members were influential Zionist officials and intellectuals: Arthur Ruppin and Ya’akov Thon both headed the Zionist Organization’s colonization efforts in Palestine; Shmuel Hugo Bergmann, Hans Kohn, and Gershom Scholem were up-and-coming scholars with close ties to *Ha-poel Ha-Tzair*;¹⁶⁵ Robert Weltsch and Yehoshua Redler-Feldman (who wrote under the pseudonym Rabbi Benyamin) were respected journalists; and Martin Buber and Judah Magnes, although not official members, were close supporters of the association.¹⁶⁶

Ruppin, who was the driving force behind the association’s establishment, thought that the group should concentrate on studying Jewish-Arab relations and refrain from overt

¹⁶⁴ The scholarship on *Brit Shalom* far surpasses the association’s own publications both in volume and in scope. For a partial list of works see: Aharon Kedar, “Le-toldoteyha shel ‘Brit Shalom’ ba-shanim 1925-1928” in Yehudah Bauer, Mosheh Davis, Yisra’el Qolot (eds.), *Pirke-mehkar be-toldot ha-tziyonut*, pp. 224-285; Miriam Dean-Otting, “Schmuel Hugo Bergman and Brith Shalom: the spiritual roots of contemporary peace initiatives”, *Shofar*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (1989), pp. 11-22; Hagit Lavsky, “Hidat hotama shel ‘Brit Shalom’ ‘al ha-pulmus ha-tzioni be-zmana ve-ahareyha”, *Ha-tzionut*, Vol. 19 (1995), pp. 167-181; Yfaat Weiss, “Central European Ethnonationalism and Zionist Binationalism”, *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 11, no.1 (2004), pp. 93-117; Dimitry Shumsky, “Historiographia, leumiyut ve-du-leumiyut: yahadut czecho-germanit, tzioney Prague u-mekorot ha-gisha ha-du-leumit shel Hugo Bergmann”, *Zion*, vol. 69, no. 1 (2004), pp. 45-80; Zohar Maor, “Beyn anti-colonialism le-postcolonialism: bikoret ha-leumiyut ve-hahilul shel Brit Shalom”, *Teoria u-bikoret*, 30 (2007), pp. 13-38 [Hebrew]; Adi Gordon (ed.), *Brit Shalom veba-Tziyonut ha-du-le’umit : ha-She’elah ha-‘Arvit ke-she’elah Yehudit*, (Jerusalem: Merkaz Minervah le-historyah Germanit ‘al shem Rikhard Kebner, 2008); Dimitry Shumsky, “Brith Shalom’s uniqueness reconsidered: Hans Kohn and autonomist Zionism”, *Jewish History*, 25 (2011), pp. 339-353.

¹⁶⁵ Meir Chazan, *Metinut: ha-gishah ha-metunah be-Ha-Po‘el Ha-Tsa‘ir uve-Mapai, 1905-1945*, (Tel Aviv: ‘Am ‘Oved, 2009), p. 164.

¹⁶⁶ Kedar, “Le-toldoteyha”, pp. 281-283.

political agitation. The more radical members of the association, especially the “Prague Zionists” Bergmann and Kohn, however, used the association’s organ, *Sheifoteynu*, to mount a comprehensive critique of mainstream Zionism and its three tenets: a Jewish majority, a Jewish state, and to a lesser extent, Jewish labor.

For example, Rabbi Benyamin argued that the Zionist preoccupation with creating a Jewish majority in Palestine began only after Britain issued the Balfour Declaration, during

The eclipse of a great hope; its parents [were] despair and self-doubt. Since instead of a Jewish State came a Jewish National Home; and this Home is one of two National Homes [in Palestine, the other being the Arab National Home]; and the establishment of this National Home has been greatly delayed; and it has become clear that Palestine could not solve the Jewish Question; when despair and self-doubt have started to eat away at the soul and it was emptied of all its desires and aspirations – then, in this time between suns [*sh’at beyn ha-shemashot*, or dusk, a time associated with ambiguity in Judaism] there emerged the new credo of “majority and minority”.¹⁶⁷

But, Rabbi Benyamin continued, for someone to become the majority, someone else had to become a minority. Because Arabs wished to remain the majority as much as Jews wished to become one, the result was a “never-ending competition”.¹⁶⁸ To avoid this endless demographic struggle, Rabbi Benyamin suggested total equality, not only between Jews and Arabs as individuals, but between the two nations.¹⁶⁹ By reconfiguring

¹⁶⁷ Rabbi Benyamin, “Misaviv la-nekuda”, *Sheifoteynu*, compilation no. 2, (Jerusalem: Brit Shalom Press, 1928), pp. 21-22. Translation mine.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

each nation as a single body, Rabbi Benyamin offered a way to cut the demographic gordian knot: if there were only two nations in Palestine, rather than a multiplicity of individuals with complex religious and ethnic affiliations, the terms “majority” and “minority” would lose their political meaning. Instead of thinking in terms of “majority” (*rov*), Rabbi Benyamin wanted Zionists to think about bringing “many” (*rabim*) Jews to Palestine. These “many” Jews might outnumber the Palestinian Arabs, but in Rabbi Benyamin’s political vision the numerical strength of Jews and Arabs would play no political part.¹⁷⁰ He concluded succinctly: “the move from 49% to 51% [of the population] doesn’t have the *mystical value* you [majoritarian Zionists] attach to it”.¹⁷¹

Another attack on the primacy of a Jewish majority came from Shmuel Hugo Bergmann, who argued that since the Jewish people was the “classic minority people”, it had a historic mission to fight against the very concept of the nation-state.¹⁷² The nation-state, according to Bergmann, was a political system in which only one nation had “ownership” of the state, while all other minorities were merely “guests” in the country.¹⁷³ Thus, in the many states in which more than one ethnicity resided, the question of majority became a struggle for the very ownership of the state. This world-view, Bergmann wrote “is borrowed from a declining Europe”, in which the inequality inherent to the nation-state system was justified by the “sacred egotism of the state”.¹⁷⁴ While Rabbi Benyamin limited his political vision to Palestine, Bergmann, who shared the same belief in a political system that would do away with majorities and minorities, thought that the Jews

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 29-30.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 30. Translation and emphasis mine.

¹⁷² Shmuel Hugo Bergmann, “Le-she’elat ha-rov”, in: *ibid.*, compilation no. 3, (Jerusalem: Brit Shalom Press, 1929), p. 25. Translation mine.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

of Palestine should export their utopia to the rest of the world, a veritable light unto the nations.¹⁷⁵

Although both Rabbi Benyamin and Bergmann drew a general picture of the future regime of Palestine, it was Hans Kohn, then a Zionist official and later a major theoretician of nationalism, who offered *Brit Shalom*'s most comprehensive political vision for Palestine. Kohn's plan, "Le-dmoota ha-politit shel erez-yisrael" (on the political character of Eretz-Israel), was first published in *Ha-Poel Ha-Tzair* in July 1926, and later reprinted in *Sheifoteynu*.¹⁷⁶

The first rhetorical maneuver in Kohn's plan, and one that was adopted by other members of *Brit Shalom*, was to reject the Zionist claim that the predicament of Jews in general, and of Palestinian Jews in particular, was simply incomparable to that of other nations.¹⁷⁷

The uniqueness of the Jewish case was used by Chaim Weizmann and others to explain why Palestinian Arabs could not enjoy the same measures of self-rule as their neighbors

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 25-26.

¹⁷⁶ Hans Kohn, "Le-dmoota ha-politit shel erez-israel", *ibid.*, compilation no. 1, (Jerusalem: Brit Shalom Press, 1927), pp. 28-39.

¹⁷⁷ For examples of this claim see: Itzhak Herzog to the editor of *The Irish Times*, no date, CZA S25\6298; Itzhak Laubach, "Ba'alat ha-ov", *Ha-Poel Ha-Tzair*, 30.5.1923, p. 4; Eder's response to the Zionist Organization's questionnaire, March 1929, CZA S24\4161\2, p. 3; Bulletin no. 2, the joint secretariat of *Achdut Ha-'Avoda* and *Ha-Poel Ha-Tzair*, 1.11.1929, Labour Party Archives [LPA], 2-001-1929-2, p. 8; *Achdut Ha-'Avoda* and *Ha-Poel Hatzair* joint meeting, 24-25.11.1929, LPA 2-001-1929-2, p. 12; report of meeting of the British members of the Jewish Agency, 8.12.1929, WA, p. 2; Moshe Beilinson, "Sheifoteynu, kovetz bet", *Davar*, 25.7.1929; idem, "Mikhtav McMahan ve-teharat ha-democratia", *ibid.*, 3.12.1929, p. 2; idem, "Mi-lemata le-ma'ala", *ibid.*, 8.12.1929, p. 2; Idem, "Ha-hashlaya ha-politit", *ibid.*, 10.12.1929, p. 2; interview between Dr. Weizmann and Sir John Shuckburgh, 27.2.1930, WA, p. 1; Weizmann to Shuckburgh, 5.3.1930, *LPCW*, XIV, letter no. 212, p. 240; Weizmann to Warburg, 26.6.1930, *LPCW*, XIV, letter no. 328, p. 348; Leo Kohn, "Memorandum on the proposed legislative council", 14.12.1930, CZA S25\4161, p. 5; Ben-Gurion's speech, the third annual conference of *MAPAI*, 5-8.2.1931, LPA 2-022-1931-5, p. 141; minutes of a meeting between Emanuel Neumann and William Rappard, 17.8.1931, WA, p. 1; minutes of an interview between Ben-Gurion and His Excellency the High Commissioner, 29-30.7.1934, CZA S25\4162, p. 1; minutes of Mr. Ben-Gurion's interview with the High Commissioner, 21.8.1934, CZA A185\86\1, p. 6; Leo Kohn, "The Proposed Establishment of a Legislative Council", 31.8.1934, CZA A185\86\1, p. 3; Leo Kohn, "Memorandum on the Establishment of a Legislative Council in Palestine by the Executive of the Jewish Agency in Palestine", 4.10.1934, CZA S25\4162, p. 1; Brodetsky to the administrative committee of the Jewish Agency, 23.10.1934, CZA S25\4162, p. 2; Wauchope's meeting with Ben-Gurion and Moshe Shertok, 19.7.1935, CZA S25\6298, p. 8; unknown author, "The Development of Self-Governing Institutions in Palestine", 2.3.1936, CZA A185\86\2, p.23; Ben-Gurion, "Autonomia leumit ve-yahasei shkhenim", *anahnu u-shekhenenu*, p. 110; Ben-Gurion, "Tshuva le-Wedgewood", *ibid.*, p. 134..

in Iraq, Syria, and Trans-Jordan, and why common notions of democracy were not applicable to Palestine.¹⁷⁸ Kohn's plan was not radically different from Shlomo Kaplansky's 1924 plan,¹⁷⁹ or from Ben-Gurion's 1929 plan.¹⁸⁰ What was radical about Kohn's plan was the act of comparison itself, which rendered the Jewish case just one instance of minority nationalism among others, and negated the claim that Jews should be treated differently than other nations. And compare Palestine he did: the "Palestine problem", he wrote, was relevant not only to European countries like Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Romania, but also to the situation in Syria and India.¹⁸¹ The inhabitants of Palestine, on the other hand, could learn something from binational states like Switzerland, Canada, Belgium, Finland, and to some extent from South-Africa and the USSR.¹⁸²

Kohn's plan began with the assumption that as long as Britain controlled Palestine, neither Jews nor Arabs would enjoy full sovereignty.¹⁸³ For this reason, and much like the *Achdut Ha-'Avoda* ideologues, he favoured extensive municipal autonomy coupled with a limited central government. Like the Labor Zionists, Kohn realized that most rural settlements, and many of Palestine's cities, were either overwhelmingly Jewish or overwhelmingly Arab, a demographic trend that lent itself to the formation of national-territorial autonomies.¹⁸⁴ He advocated universal municipal franchise since municipal politics would be where Arabs (and Mizrahi Jews, but not the supposedly enlightened European Jews) would cut their political teeth.¹⁸⁵ The municipalities would be joined

¹⁷⁸ "The situation in Palestine", 21.7.1921, WA, p. 5.

¹⁷⁹ See chapter 1, p. 25ff.

¹⁸⁰ See below, pp. 34ff.

¹⁸¹ Kohn, "Le-dmoota", p. 29.

¹⁸² Ibid.; a more in-depth comparison can be found in Yosef Laurie, "Ha-zkhooyot ha-leumiyot be-shwayeetz, be-finland u-be-eretz-yisrael", *Sheifoteynu*, compilation no. 3, pp. 10-24.

¹⁸³ Kohn, "Le-dmoota", p. 30.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 31-32.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 32.

together into districts or cantons, many of which would have either a Jewish or an Arab majority. Besides municipal-territorial autonomy, each nation would enjoy extensive national (i.e., socio-cultural) autonomy, the governance of which would be entrusted to a national legislature, like *Asefat Ha-Nivharim*, the *Yishuv*'s representative body.¹⁸⁶ The national legislature's jurisdiction would be both territorial – in areas with a clear ethnic majority – and personal – in mixed cities. Kohn's inspiration for this mixture of personal and territorial autonomy, like that of Kaplansky and Itzhak Ben-Zvi's, was late Habsburg Austro-Hungary.¹⁸⁷

As for the central government, Kohn suggested that the High Commissioner would share power with a joint legislature that would be limited to dealing solely with legal and economic matters.¹⁸⁸ Kohn believed that Jews and Arabs shared economic and legal interests that went beyond their national affiliation, and that the joint legislature would provide a common ground for Jews and Arabs to cooperate in such matters.

Kohn then set out to solve the problem of majority-minority relations in the joint legislature. He proposed a few "safety measures" to prevent the majority from dominating the minority: the first was international oversight by both Britain and the League of Nations.¹⁸⁹ He argued that:

As long as there are borders between states and as long as different national characters create political antagonism, we see it as a welcome progress that the antagonistic relations between nationalities within one territory will be removed or ameliorated by the authority of the League of Nations and the Mandate power. This is one of the most important ways to solve the

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 32-33.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 33; Kohn mentioned Moravia and Bukovina specifically.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 35.

greatest political-legal problem of our time: the restriction or abolishment of total state sovereignty in deference to the League of Nations (a necessary step, if the League of Nations wishes to fulfil its main mission) and the protection of the cultural, political and social equality [...] of different nationalities which reside in the same territory.¹⁹⁰

For that reason, all three Palestinian legislatures – the joint parliament and both of the national assemblies – should base their constitutions on the League of Nations-approved Mandate text.¹⁹¹

The second safety measure offered by Kohn was a restriction of the right to vote for the joint legislature to literate citizens only (while the municipal franchise would be universal).¹⁹² Although Kohn did not say so explicitly, it can be surmised that this qualification would greatly reduce the number of eligible Arab voters, creating a more ethnically-balanced legislature. It would be the role of the Palestine Government, or even a special League of Nation official, to ensure that no law contradicting the Mandate passed in the parliament. In addition, Kohn suggested a measure that was included in the Hindu-Muslim accord signed in India,¹⁹³ that any law which applies to both communities – as most laws must – could only pass if 75% of the representatives of *each* community voted in its favor.¹⁹⁴

A third measure, reminiscent of Kaplansky's plan, was the delegation system. By this Kohn meant that two national delegations – each composed of 20 representatives – would

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. Translation mine.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 35-36.

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁹³ Kohn was probably referring to the Lucknow Pact, signed in 1916.

¹⁹⁴ Kohn, "Le-dmoota", p. 36.

meet a few times a year to serve as an upper house, or a senate, to the parliament. He did not explain what the upper house's responsibilities and powers would be.¹⁹⁵

In two recent articles, Dimitry Shumsky has argued that Zionist historiography tends to ignore the ubiquity of the binational idea in pre-state Zionist thought. According to Shumsky, most Zionist historians read history backwards from the establishment of the State of Israel and thus see the autonomist phase in Zionism as a historical aberration.¹⁹⁶

When pressed to explain the erstwhile adherence of Ben-Gurion, Katznelson, Weizmann and Jabotinsky to the principles of bi-nationalism, the “old historians” claim it was a tactical artifice (*takhsis*) deployed to facilitate the establishment of a Jewish nation-state. Shumsky, on the other hand, believes that Zionist bi-nationalism was genuine, the logical result of the linkage that many Zionists made between the Jewish struggle for national autonomy in the diaspora and in Palestine – since they fought for national autonomy in the diaspora, they could not deprive the Arabs national autonomy in Palestine.

Whether Zionist bi-nationalism was genuine or tactical, the striking similarity between Kaplansky and Kohn's plans (and later between these early plans and Ben-Gurion and Katznelson's plans) cannot be ignored. Furthermore, both the “Prague Zionists” and *Achdut Ha-'Avoda* leaders used Habsburg politics and Austro-Marxist thought as their point of reference when discussing the future regime of Palestine. Indeed, Kohn and Bergmann were born in Prague and Kaplansky spent a decade in Vienna before immigrating to Palestine. Ben-Gurion, Ben-Zvi, Jabotinsky, and Katznelson, however, were all born and raised in the Russian Empire, and the influence of Austro-Marxist

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Dimitry Shumsky, “Brith Shalom's Uniqueness Reconsidered: Hans Kohn and Autonomist Zionism”, *Jewish History*, 25 (2011), pp. 339-353; idem, “Tzionut ve-medinat ha-leom: ha'arakha me-hadash”, in *Zion*, Vol. 77 (2012), pp. 223-254.

thought on their autonomist thinking has yet to be adequately addressed by scholars of Zionism.¹⁹⁷

It is quite possible that the growing rift between the Labor movement and *Brit Shalom* after the 1929 riots obscured the ideological affinity between the two groups. Consider this editorial from Moshe Beilinson, a leading Labor pundit, who in January 1926 was willing to accept a Legislative Council, as long as the Council could not intervene in matters of cultural autonomy, colonization, and immigration.¹⁹⁸ Beilinson defended the restriction of the Legislative Council's powers with the following argument:

Let it not be said that this restriction is undemocratic. The better part of European and American political thought has already relinquished the dogma of the complete sovereignty of nations, even in their own territories: if there exists an international treaty for the protection of workers, if after the last war all the new states have undertaken to grant their minorities national and religious rights, it means nothing short of the diminution of the sovereign right of nations to do as they please in their territory; if there is any point to the League of Nations, it is to limit the sovereign right of one people to do as it pleases with its neighbor [...].¹⁹⁹

In other words, Beilinson and Kohn used an almost identical argument in favor of international intervention in state politics in order to defend minorities. The only difference between the two arguments is that while Kohn advocated international supervision to make sure that equality between Jews and Arabs was maintained regardless

¹⁹⁷ Jabotinsky remarked in 1931 that “we, Eastern-European Jews, have been weaned on the doctrines of [Karl] Renner and [Otto] Bauer”. Quoted in: Aryeh Naor, “Ha-mitve ha-hukati shel Ze’ev Jabotinsky le-medina yehudit be-eret-z-yisrael”, in: Avi Bareli and Phinhas Ginosar (eds.), *Ish be-sa’ar*, (Sde Boker: the Ben-Gurion Institute, 2003), p. 54.

¹⁹⁸ Moshe Beilinson, “Le-she’elat ha-mo’atza ha-mehokeket”, *Davar*, 8.1.1926, p. 2.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.* Translation mine.

of their relative size, Beilinson demanded that the League of Nations would specifically protect the Jewish minority and its right to build a National Home in Palestine.

Kohn and Beilinson were hardly the only Zionist thinkers to accept the limitation of state sovereignty. More than a decade earlier, in 1915, Ben-Gurion wrote that “The unification of the nation and the land is the fundamental core of Zionism, and its shell could be a sovereign shell, or an autonomist shell, or a federal one.”²⁰⁰ He supported the establishment of some sort of Jewish-Arab federation or confederation, at least until the mid 1930s. Even Jabotinsky famously questioned the primacy of the state by quipping that Kentucky, New South Wales, and France were all “states”.²⁰¹ Like his Leftist adversaries, he was in favor of extensive national autonomy, believing that the League of Nations will inevitably attenuate the sovereignty of the nation-state.²⁰²

Kohn, Ben-Gurion, Jabotinsky, and Beilinson all came to terms with what they understood to be a new, post-war reality in which international organizations, on the one hand, and national autonomies, on the other, chip away at the state’s sovereignty from above and below. The most crucial point in Shumsky’s revisionist reading is that although most Zionists, including some *Brit Shalom* members, wanted to achieve Jewish sovereignty at some point, this sovereignty did not necessarily have to be embodied in a nation-state.²⁰³ Shumsky then locates the ideological shift in Zionism from the state-of-nations model to the nation-state model during World War II and the Holocaust, which robbed Zionism of its demographic reserve.²⁰⁴ In chapter III I will argue that this shift occurred earlier, when the British proposed the establishment of a Jewish state in July

²⁰⁰ Ben-Gurion, “Lee-krat ha-‘atid”, *Anahnu ve-shkhenenu*, p. 4. Translation mine.

²⁰¹ Naor, “Ha-mitve ha-hukati”, p. 54.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 52-55.

²⁰³ Shumsky, “Zionism and the Nation-State”, p. 224 and *passim*.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

1937, and after the massive fifth wave of Jewish immigration almost doubled Palestine's Jewish population.²⁰⁵

What separated *Brit Shalom* from the rest of the Zionist movement, then, was its willingness to replace a quantifiable Jewish majority with the much fuzzier term “many Jews”. Yet the concept of “many Jews” was not enough to secure territorial autonomy, which, in Palestine, was dependent on Jews outnumbering non-Jews in a given area. Indeed, it might be argued that in a nation-state, in which the ethnic identity of the state could be secured through legislation, an ethnic majority is less important than in a multi-ethnic state-of-nations, in which territorial autonomy is mostly dependent on the creation of local ethnic majorities. Thus, quite ironically, it was the common adherence of Labor Zionism and *Brit Shalom* to the state-of-nations model that also separated them. For the many Zionists who, prior to 1937, understood Jewish sovereignty in demographic terms, replacing the Jewish majority with “many Jews” was simply unacceptable. Ben-Gurion himself declared as much in a *Brit Shalom* meeting in 1925:

The Jewish people want to be an independent and free nation in its homeland: this means a Jewish state. But there are different kinds of states: one can aspire to establish a Prussian state, a Tsarist state, or a Socialist state. We, the workers, aspire to establish a non-repressive Socialist state in which one people cannot dominate another [...] we aim for self-rule in a national-territorial autonomy, without ruling over other people [...] we want a state of justice and socialist morals, but we also want a state with a

²⁰⁵ Dothan, *Ha-ma'avak*, p. 99.

Jewish majority, in which most of the Jewish people, if not all of them, would live.²⁰⁶

The 1928 “Arab Questionnaire” and the Emergence of a Calculable Future

The dual challenge from the Arab Executive and *Brit Shalom* re-opened the debate among the Zionist leadership on its stance towards the Legislative Council and the Arab Question. As a preliminary step, the Zionist Executive decided in September 1928 to send a questionnaire regarding the Arab Question to seven Zionist intellectuals and politicians: Eliezer Siegfried Hoofien, the director of the Anglo-Palestinian Company (the main financial institution of the *Yishuv*); David Yellin, formerly the president of the *Va'ad Leumi*; Itzhak Ben-Zvi, one of the leaders of *Achdut Ha-'Avoda* and its senior representative in the *Va'ad Leumi*; Haim Arlosoroff, an *Ha-Poel Ha-Tzair* politician and a rising star in the Zionist Labor movement; Haim Kalvarisky, formerly head of the Arab Department of the Zionist Executive and a prominent land agent; Shmuel Hugo Bergmann, a philosopher and *Brit Shalom* member; and David Eder, formerly a member of the Palestine Zionist Executive.

The questionnaire was divided between general questions dealing with the political situation in the Middle East and questions dealing specifically with the Legislative Council.²⁰⁷ Although Frederick Kisch and Jabotinsky did not answer the questionnaire, they each produced a memorandum regarding the Legislative Council in mid-1928.²⁰⁸ Together, these texts provide us with a good cross-section of Zionist attitudes towards a joint legislature around 1928-1929.

²⁰⁶ Ben-Gurion, “Mitokh ha-vikuah (be-asefat shenikrea ‘al-yedey brit shalom)”, *Anahnu ve-shkhenenu*, pp. 82-83.

²⁰⁷ For the full text of the questionnaire, see: the Zionist Executive to Kisch, 24.10.1928, CZA S25\4165.

²⁰⁸ Kisch, “Memorandum”, 15.8.1928, CZA L9\340; Jabotinsky to H.M.G., 25.4.1928, A1-1/18/2, Jabotinsky Institute Archives (JA); Jabotinsky to Ormsby-Gore, 6.6.1928, *ibid*; Jabotinsky, “Memorandum on the Proposed Formation of a Representative Assembly in Palestine”, June 1928, CZA S25\4165.

Of those who answered the questionnaire, only Bergmann was positively in favor of establishing a Legislative Council. Hoofien, Eder, Yellin, and Jabotinsky were categorically against it, while Ben-Zvi's opposition was apparent but more reserved. Arlosoroff, Kalvarisky, and Kisch were willing to accept a joint legislature under certain conditions.²⁰⁹

Those who opposed the Legislative Council based their opposition on a deep mistrust and a rather low opinion of the Arabs. The Arab nationalists argued Hoofien, "[...] are a shallow people with shallow minds and shallow sentiments".²¹⁰ There was no way to make the Arabs accept Zionist colonization, he asserted, which meant that the Jews depended on British protection.²¹¹ Thus any diminution of British sovereignty in Palestine was bad for the Jews. A toothless Legislative Council would only incense the Arabs, while an effective one would constitute "suicide" on the part of the *Yishuv*.²¹²

Yellin demonstrated a similarly low opinion of Arab nationalism, arguing that the inhabitants of Palestine were not ready for autonomy. The Police Force, he wrote, "is still in a very low state of civilization and the Arab policeman is far from being just, diligent and a gentleman".²¹³ Moreover, the Arab judges were corrupt and the Arab leaders "absolutely unscrupulous when it concerns the Jews".²¹⁴ Since the Arabs were not fit to rule the country, Yellin opposed the establishment of a Legislative Council in which they would form a majority. He suggested instead developing local autonomy and concluded, "The Jewish National Home will have no chance of development if the Arabs are given

²⁰⁹ Rubinstein, "Ha-she'elon", pp. 336-337.

²¹⁰ Hoofien's answer to the questionnaire, 28.11.1928, CZA L9\340, p. 1.

²¹¹ Ibid., p. 2.

²¹² Ibid., p. 5.

²¹³ Yellin's answer to the questionnaire, 8.4.1929, CZA S25\4164\2, p. 2.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

right of government, but the country can be developed even without a legislative body”.²¹⁵

Eder claimed that the Legislative Council would not pacify the Arabs and would only cause unrest among the Jews.²¹⁶ Like Hoofien, he did not think highly of parliamentary experiments in other Mandate countries: the Tran-Jordanian parliament was a “sham” and the political developments in Syria and Iraq were “unsubstantial in the democratic form”.²¹⁷ Although Eder was adamant that the Jewish claim to Palestine was incomparable, he was happy to draw an implicit connection between “sham” parliamentarism in the Middle East and the collapse of parliamentarism in Europe: “There is a good case to be made”, he wrote, “[...] in view of recent developments in Italy, Poland, Spain, Persia [and] Turkey, that parliamentary government does not lead to democratic government in all peoples.”²¹⁸ Britain, he concluded, should “boldly” announce that there will be no constitutional government in Palestine for a great number of years.²¹⁹

Jabotinsky repeated his arguments against the Legislative Council from 1923: The British Government’s obligation to support the establishment of a Jewish National Home trumped its obligation to establish self-governing institutions, should the latter harm the former.²²⁰ There was no aspect of Palestine’s politics or economics that did not influence the establishment of the National Home, and so any and all constitutional “safety measures” would be useless.²²¹ Finally, world Jewry was financing the development of

²¹⁵ Ibid., p. 3.

²¹⁶ Eder’s answer to the questionnaire, March 1929, CZA S25\4164\2, p. 1.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 2.

²¹⁸ Ibid., p. 3.

²¹⁹ Ibid., p. 4.

²²⁰ Jabotinsky, “Memorandum on the Proposed Formation of a Representative Assembly in Palestine”, June 1928, CZA S25\4165, p. 2.

²²¹ Ibid., p. 4.

Palestine, which made diaspora Jews “virtually, taxpayers in the Holy Land” with a right to be heard on the question of Palestine’s future; the establishment of a Legislative Council would make many of these Jewish taxpayers reluctant to make further investments in Palestine.²²²

Ben-Zvi, perhaps due to his socialist leanings, did not come out unequivocally against the Council, but, citing the *Histadrut*’s official stance, argued in favor of the continuation of the present regime and a gradual development of local self-governing institutions.²²³ He concluded that:

The short period of 40-50 years of Jewish colonisation in Palestine showed the vast change that took place thanks to Jewish colonisation, both [sic] in agriculture, industry and in cultural development. Every change or so-called progress in the modus of the political Government of the country which will [sic] leave out the Jewish factor (as the Jewish population is still a minority in the country) [is] bound to have a detrimental effect, not only on the Jewish interests, but also on the general development of the country.²²⁴

Kalvarisky too was wary of the Legislative Council. He believed that the British were not especially enthusiastic about the prospect of a Palestinian legislature, but because parliamentary bodies had been established in other Arab countries, the British Government would not be able to ignore local Arab demands for ever.²²⁵ For pragmatic reasons, he suggested that the Advisory Council would be opened up to local representatives and argued that the Jews should accept a limited Legislative Council, but

²²² Ibid., p. 6.

²²³ Ben-Zvi’s answer to the questionnaire, CZA S25\4164\1, p. 5.

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 7.

²²⁵ Kalvarisky’s answer to the questionnaire, 10.5.1929, CZA S25\4164\2, pp. 4-5.

only if it was forced upon them by the British, and as long as it could not hurt Jewish immigration and colonization.²²⁶

Kisch called unequivocal opposition to the Legislative Council “un-Jewish” but argued that the Zionist Executive should ensure the inclusion of safety measures to protect the National Home.²²⁷ He reminded his readers that the British had been known to tailor constitutions to the needs of white settlers in the colonies:

The British Government has experience enough in drafting and introducing constitutions, so framed and so applied as to afford British colonialists full facilities for entering and developing the countries in question, and for establishing their homes in such countries. The democratic vote – if accorded at all to the native population – is so restricted as not to preclude the rights reserved by H.M.G. for British colonialists [...] [t]he Jews returning on the basis of historical rights to Palestine as their national home [...] are entitled to at least as much protection from the possibilities of obstruction and opposition on the part of a native population, which is in the main backward and illiterate.²²⁸

Kisch, however, also believed that such safety measures would be rejected by the Arab leadership, thus giving the Zionist Executive a solid reason to oppose the Legislative Council.²²⁹ If the Arabs did accept the kind of safety measures that the Zionists espoused, these measures would in all probability prove to be useless and the Legislative Council

²²⁶ Ibid., pp. 6, 11.

²²⁷ Kisch to the Zionist Executive, 15.8.1928, CZA L9\340, p. 3.

²²⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

²²⁹ Ibid., pp. 3-4.

would be dismantled.²³⁰ In other words, Kisch was in favor of establishing a Legislative Council because he did not think it would last.

Even Bergmann, who came out in support of the Legislative Council before receiving the questionnaire, provided a cautious answer, arguing that Zionist opposition to the establishment of Palestinian self-governing institutions would only exacerbate the Jewish-Arab conflict and diminish Zionism's standings in the eyes of Europe.²³¹ In order to ensure the establishment of a joint legislature that would be acceptable to both Jews and Arabs he was willing to contemplate various proposals, such as a bicameral parliament, the opening up of the Advisory Council to Jewish and Arab representatives, an educational criterion (denying the vote to illiterate citizens) and a severe restriction of the Legislative Council's powers.²³²

While most of those who answered the questionnaire rehashed old arguments for and against the Legislative Council, Arlosoroff submitted to the Zionist Executive the most comprehensive and thoughtful analysis of Palestine's political situation. He began with the premise that the establishment of a Legislative Council would be bad for Zionism: he reasoned that the Arabs were untrustworthy, the contact between Jews and Arabs in the joint legislature would only exacerbate ethnic tensions and a big Arab majority in the Council would accentuate, to "the outside world", the Jews' relative minority, allowing the Arabs to "speak as the representative section of the country".²³³ But the question, for Arlosoroff, was not whether the Zionist movement *should* oppose the Legislative Council, but whether it *could*. The reason that the Palestinian-Arab demand for self-rule did not receive wide support in international circles was due, according to Arlosoroff, to

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Bergmann's answer to the questionnaire, CZA L9\340, p. 2, 4.

²³² Ibid., p. 5.

²³³ Arlosoroff's answer to the questionnaire, CZA S25\4164\1, p. 5.

the democratic and constitutional crisis raging through Europe.²³⁴ But he predicted that in the near future the Colonial Question, including the question of native rights and democracy in Mandate countries, would become a central issue in international politics.²³⁵ Moreover, Arlosoroff believed that public opinion in Britain, especially under Labor rule, was squarely in favor of establishing self-governing institutions in Palestine.²³⁶ A Labor Government would be inclined to institute self-rule in Palestine “not so much because of the actual will on their part to uphold the sacredness of parliamentary doctrine, as because of the lack of any adequate argument [...] to resist pressure in this direction”.²³⁷

The Zionist leadership, Arlosoroff claimed, would not be able to prevent the establishment of the Legislative Council, and would turn international public opinion, and the Arabs in particular, against Zionism.²³⁸ For that reason, it would be better to come to terms with the Legislative Council before its establishment, while the Zionist Executive could still influence its character, rather than afterwards.²³⁹ Like Kisch, Arlosoroff was sure that Britain would tailor Palestine’s constitution to the needs of the Jewish settlers.²⁴⁰ Arlosoroff suggested adopting the 1922 British Legislative Council proposal with further safety measures: the Mandate Government would not answer to the Legislative Council (but rather to the Colonial Office), the Legislative Council would have no say in budgetary matters and all laws dealing with the provisions of the Mandate would have to be approved by the Colonial Office.²⁴¹

²³⁴ Ibid., p. 17.

²³⁵ Ibid., p. 19.

²³⁶ Ibid., p. 22.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid., p. 26.

²³⁹ Ibid., p. 27-28.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 32.

²⁴¹ Ibid., p. 34.

At this point Arlosoroff embarked on an extensive survey of colonial constitutions, comparing Palestine's constitution to those of Rhodesia, India, Malta, Jamaica, Ceylon, Mauritius, New South Wales and East Africa.²⁴² Arlosoroff's approach to the constitutional question was similar to the comparative approach employed by *Brit Shalom* intellectuals like Hans Kohn and Yosef Laurie, who authored a survey of national rights in Switzerland, Finland, and Palestine,²⁴³ and to a lesser extent, to Frederick Kisch's answer to the questionnaire, which discussed Palestine's constitution within the framework of British colonialism.²⁴⁴ There was a clear link between the willingness of Zionist intellectuals to compare Palestine's situation to other countries and their willingness to accept some measure of self-rule in Palestine. The Zionist intellectuals' politics of comparison was a reliable indicator of their actual stance regarding Palestine's regime.

Following examples from other colonies, Arlosoroff suggested that, like in India and Malta, the Legislative Council should not be allowed to deal with "imperial matters" (that is, security and foreign relations).²⁴⁵ Secondly, he suggested that, like in the Caribbean colonies, Mauritius, East Africa and Indonesia, the franchise would be severely limited by a "civilizational criterion", which would favor the Jews.²⁴⁶

Finally, Arlosoroff offered a federative plan of his own – one that assumed that the British would continue to control Palestine for the foreseeable future. He did not share most Labor Zionists' mistrust of the British, and like his mentor Weizmann (and like Jabotinsky) he believed that it was the role of the British to usher in the establishment of

²⁴² Ibid., pp. 35-43

²⁴³ Yosef Laurie, "Ha-zkhooyot ha-leumiyot be-shwayetz, be-finland u-be-eretz-yisrael", *Sheifoteynu*, compilation no. 3, pp. 10-24. Yosef Laurie was a Zionist official, journalist, educator, and a member of *Brit Shalom*

²⁴⁴ See above, p. 19.

²⁴⁵ Arlosoroff's answer, pp. 37-38.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 40-42.

the National Home, and the role of the Zionists was to ensure that the British stood by their obligations.²⁴⁷ Hence his federative plan never discussed the issue of independence – which he relegated to the distant future – nor did it espouse sweeping decentralization.

Arlosoroff proposed that provincial councils would be established, which would be responsible for local governance and would send representatives to a joint legislature.²⁴⁸

He suggested that the country would be divided into six provinces – Jaffa, Jerusalem, Haifa, Jenin-Nablus, the Galilee and the South.²⁴⁹ In Haifa, Jaffa, and Jerusalem there would be a Jewish majority, the Galilee would have the same number of Jews and Arabs, and Jenin-Nablus and the South would have an Arab majority.²⁵⁰ Each province would send to the Legislative Council 3 representatives, who would be elected in proportional elections to insure that minorities were represented in the Council.²⁵¹ Arlosoroff predicted that in 12 years the Southern and Jenin-Nablus provinces would send 3 Arab representatives each, the Galilee 2 Arab representatives and one Jewish representative, and Jaffa, Jerusalem, and Haifa would send 2 Jewish representatives and one Arab representative each. The Legislative Council would thus be composed of 11 Arabs, 7 Jews, and 7 British officials, giving the Jews and the British a clear majority over the Arabs.

Arlosoroff, unlike his comrades from *Achdut Ha-'Avoda*, opposed ethnically-divided electorates.²⁵² Ethnic electorates, he claimed, exacerbated ethnic segregation, led to the

²⁴⁷ Ya'akov Goldstein, *Ba-derekh le-hegemonyah: Mapai - hitgabshut mediniyutah (1930-1936)*, (Tel-Aviv: 'Am 'Oved, 1980), pp. 84-86 ; Arlosoroff, "Nisayon le-sakhem: ha-gorem ha-angli", *Ha-Poel Ha-Tzair*, 29.11.1929, p. 10.

²⁴⁸ Arlosoroff's answer, p. 43.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 48.

election of nationalist extremists and, in the case of Palestine, would not enlarge the number of Jewish seats in the council.²⁵³

Moreover, unlike virtually all other proponents of Zionist federalism, Arlosoroff opposed national autonomy. He argued that the kind of national autonomy that was applied in Central and Eastern Europe was ill-suited to minorities who wished to become a sovereign majority.²⁵⁴ State-building was to be achieved, according to Arlosoroff, through better integration with the British administration, while the creation of autonomous institutions would achieve the exact opposite – an *imperium in imperio*. Furthermore, national autonomy would be detrimental to the more “developed” community, i.e., the *Yishuv*, since the central government would focus on the problems of the less developed community.²⁵⁵

As we shall see, Arlosoroff’s statist approach was never widely accepted in Labor Zionist circles. His more pedestrian recommendations, however, that the Zionist Executive would not categorically oppose self-governing institutions while at the same time working to delay the establishment of the Legislative Council, became the de-facto *modus operandi* of the Zionist Organization in regard to Palestine’s constitutional question until 1937.²⁵⁶

The more interesting intellectual trends to emerge from the questionnaire were not limited to the question of the Legislative Council but were concerned with the future of Palestine as a whole. The first trend was a reconfiguration of the relationship between demography and political power. Hoofien wrote that:

²⁵³ Ibid., p. 48-50.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 51.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 52.

²⁵⁶ Arlosoroff’s answer, p. 33.

It may be an open question whether the Jews will, within the next thirty or forty years, form a majority in Palestine. But if anything like a reasonable measure of immigration can be restored they may well expect after one generation to dominate in commerce, industry and the liberal professions and altogether to have judaised town life in a considerable degree [...] [a]ltogether one may confidently hope that, although Palestine cannot be an entirely Jewish country, the Jews will economically be the dominant factor.²⁵⁷

Eder similarly argued that,

In the next twenty years my estimate is that the Jewish population will amount to 500,000 or 600,000 and the Arab population to a million. That will give the Jews cultural and economic control over Palestine. This should lead eventually to real co-citizenship – a Jewish-Arab citizenship and State under Great Britain. (Seventh Dominion might be possible).²⁵⁸

Finally, Arlosoroff offered the following calculation:

Let us figure on the medium estimates of twenty years and consult immigration statistics and economic data of the past decade. On this basis it will certainly not be thought too conservative to assume an average immigration of fifteen thousand Jews per annum [...] [a]dding to this the number of Jews at present living in the country (about 165,000) and the natural increase represented by the surplus of births over deaths, we shall arrive at a grand total of approximately 500,000 Jews in 1949. The Arab

²⁵⁷ Hoofein's answer to the questionnaire, 28.11.1928, CZA L9\340, p. 2.

²⁵⁸ Eder's answer to the questionnaire, March 1929, CZA S25\4164\2, p. 5.

population of the country will at that time, using the same basis of calculation, reach the number of approximately 1,100,000. This would mean the increase in percentage of proportions between the two groups from 18% to 20% at present to about 40% to 45% in 1949 [and] in percentage of population from ca. 16.5% to about 30%. If we shall be able to reach this mark within the next twenty years [...] such a ratio of numbers would render the actual predominance, economic social and cultural a settled matter, long before a statistical Jewish majority were reached.²⁵⁹

All three writers argued that power – what they termed “dominance” – could be measured by standards other than the purely demographic. Although none of the three considered giving up the demand for a Jewish majority, they did show a certain disenchantment with what Rabbi Benyamin called “the mystical value” of becoming a majority. This line of thinking was not unrelated to Weizmann’s insistence on Jewish “qualitative superiority”.²⁶⁰ Weizmann, however, saw this qualitative superiority as an inherent trait of the Jews, while for Hoofien, Eder, and Arlosoroff, Jewish superiority was to be achieved through immigration. Secondly, Weizmann looked to the past – to Ottoman times – in order to prove the Jews’ qualitative superiority. Hoofien, Eder, and Arlosoroff, on the other hand, located Jewish superiority in the future.

Yet the three writers did not agree on the political implications of the future Jewish dominance. For Hoofien and Eder, the prospect of economic and cultural Jewish dominance was reason enough to oppose the establishment of a Legislative Council, in which an Arab majority would cancel out cultural-economic Jewish dominance.²⁶¹

²⁵⁹ Arlosoroff’s answer to the questionnaire, 15.4.1929, CZA S25\4164\1, pp. 24-25.

²⁶⁰ See my discussion of the concept in chapter one; Weizmann to Balfour, 30.5.1918, *LPCW*, Vol. VIII, letter no. 208, pp. 201-202.

²⁶¹ Hoofien’s answer, p. 5; Eder’s answer, p. 1.

Arlosoroff, on the other hand, emphasised the limits of non-demographic power in a parliamentary regime:

Yet, unfortunately, it is exactly with regard to the establishment of representative institutions, the system of franchise, the allocation of seats, etc., that statistical ratios play the most significant part. Votes, as is well known, are not weighed, they are counted.²⁶²

As we have seen, despite Arlosoroff's insistence that votes are counted rather than weighed, he did not categorically oppose the establishment of a Legislative Council. His reasoning was pragmatic rather than ideological: he did not think that the Zionist Executive could postpone the Legislative Council's establishment indefinitely.²⁶³

A third demographic calculation appeared in Kalvarisky's answer to the questionnaire. Kalvarisky assumed that in 1928 there were 160,000 Jews and 740,000 Arabs in Palestine. He argued that Jewish population growth stemmed almost entirely from immigration, amounting to an average annual growth of 10,000. The Arab natural population growth, in contrast, was about 15,000 per annum. Based on these assumptions, Kalvarisky calculated that in 25 years Palestine's Arab population will be about 1.3 million, while the Jewish population will be about 570,000.²⁶⁴

Kalvarisky then continued to calculate the respective growth rate of Jews and Arabs until 2029(!). According to his calculations the Jewish population would become 50% of the population only in 2003.²⁶⁵ By that time, Kavarisky argued, the absorptive capacity of the country would be almost depleted. Based on the claim that Jews would not become a

²⁶² Arlosoroff's answer, pp. 25-26; see also: Arlosoroff, "Nisayon le-sakhem – ha-gorem ha-angli", *Ha-Poel Ha-Tzair*, 29.11.1929, p. 10.

²⁶³ Arlosoroff's answer, p. 26.

²⁶⁴ Kalvarisky's answer to the questionnaire, 10.5.1929, CZA S25\4164\2, pp. 15-17.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

majority in less than a century – and only if immigration were allowed to continue uninterrupted for a hundred years – Kalvarisky advocated a rapprochement with the Arabs and was willing to accept a limited Legislative Council.²⁶⁶

Eder's, Kalvarisky's and Arlosoroff's demographic predictions were part of a new, quantitative way to discuss Palestine's future. In the wake of the fourth wave of Jewish immigration – in the years 1924-1926 60,000 Jews arrived in Palestine – more and more Zionist leaders were willing to convert their abstract fantasies about a Jewish majority into political arithmetic. The euphoria of 1924-1926 was replaced, however, by economic depression in 1926-1928 and when the *Yishuv* began to recuperate from the recession, it was hit with the August 1929 riots. The late 1920s might be called, after Rabbi Benyamin, “a time between suns”, a time full of ambiguity, with the future appearing equally promising and menacing. The use of numbers allowed Zionist leaders to turn an uncertain future into a more tameable creature, defined by demographic benchmarks and predictable patterns. Demographic calculations, in other words, helped Zionist leaders to put an uncertain future in order.

The most emblematic text to combine these two trends – the multivalence of Jewish dominance and the quantification of the future – was not an answer to the questionnaire, but a text written by Ben-Gurion shortly after the 1929 riots. This text, entitled “‘Al bitahon ha-yishuv ve-tafkida shel hasokhnut ha-yehudit be-sha'a zoo” (on the security of the *Yishuv* and the role of the Jewish Agency at this time), began with the assumption that Jewish statehood (*kommemiyut mamlakhtit*) was predicated on the creation of a Jewish majority.²⁶⁷ Not only would the creation of a Jewish majority lead to a Jewish state, Ben-

²⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 19, 11.

²⁶⁷ Ben-Gurion, “‘al bitahon ha-yishuv ve-tafkida shel hasokhnut ha-yehudit be-sha'a zoo”, unknown date [probably September 1929], LPA, 2-001-1929-2, p. 1.

Gurion argued, it would also solve the “political aspect” of the Arab Question.²⁶⁸ Ben-Gurion conceded, however, that a Jewish majority was not achievable in the immediate future and that in the meantime the security of the Jewish minority in Palestine was precarious at best. He then differentiated between political exigencies and security exigencies:

In political terms, we need the number of Jews in the country to surpass that of the non-Jews. But from a security point of view, we need only that our defense force would be equivalent to that of the Arabs'. This force is not measured by the total number of people in the *Yishuv*, but by the number of men of military age (roughly from 20-year-olds to 40-year-olds).²⁶⁹

Ben-Gurion then presented his own demographic calculation. In comparison to the demographic calculations quoted above, Ben-Gurion’s calculation included a fine-grained approach to gender, age and ethnicity:

According to the government’s census, in 1922 there were 304,822 Muslims (not including women) of all ages, 53,033 of them Bedouins. The number of Christians (not including women) was 36,491. About 30% of them are 20-40-year-olds. That means that there are about 91,000 Muslims and 11,000 Christians of that age, or 103,000 combined. This number should be augmented by a few thousands due to natural increase, but a few thousands European Christians, Greek and Armenian, should be deducted because they do not they have any importance, security-wise. The number

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 2. Translation mine.

of Jews today is 155,000, no less than 55% of whom are men. The percentage of adults and the percentage of men in the Jewish population is larger than in the Arab population because the *Yishuv* is a community of immigrants, and a crucial percentage of Jewish immigrants is composed of men aged 20-40. One can safely assume that no less than 35% of Jewish males are of that age. This means that there are no less than 30,000 Jewish males aged 20-40. In order that the Jewish defense force would be equivalent to the Arab force, 45,000 Jewish men of military age have to arrive in Palestine.²⁷⁰

75,000 Jewish men of military age would suffice, according Ben-Gurion, to hold off any major Arab attack. To absorb such a large number of immigrants, however, more land was needed. Ben-Gurion calculated that out of the 45,000 prospective male immigrants, 5,000 men could be settled in private Jewish agricultural settlements, another 6,000 would be settled on irrigated land, and another 4,000 on a mix of irrigated and non-irrigated land.²⁷¹ He argued that the entire endeavor would cost around 1,200,000-1,500,000 Palestinian Liras.²⁷²

Ben-Gurion's plan offered a complex equation that wove together gendered demographic calculations, territorial acquisitions, absorption policy and national finance. By quantifying immigration, agricultural production and military strategy, Ben-Gurion created an equivalency between disparate bodies and things: a known quantity of money could buy a known quantity of land, which would support a known quantity of militiamen who could repel attacks by a known quantity of militiamen from a different ethnicity. The

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid., p. 3. The rest, presumably, would settle in cities.

²⁷² Ibid., pp. 3-4.

ability to quantify and calculate the hostile world around him seems to have given Ben-Gurion a sense of control at a time when many in the *Yishuv* experienced a crisis of faith.²⁷³

Within the span of a year – from November 1928 to November 1929 – the Zionist leadership went through what Michel Foucault called a “veritable discursive explosion”:²⁷⁴ Hoofien, Eder, Arlosoroff, Kalvarisky and Ben-Gurion all offered their version of a calculable future.²⁷⁴ To this list should be added Arthur Ruppin and Shlomo Kaplansky. Ruppin, in a meeting between members of *Brit Shalom* and leaders of the *Histadrut* in October 1929, claimed it would take an annual immigration of 30,000 Jews over 30 years to reach a demographic equilibrium between Jews and Arabs in Palestine.²⁷⁵ Since he did not think that the Jews could rely on British protection for that long, he advocated the establishment of a bi-national regime, including a Legislative Council based on parity.²⁷⁶ In that very same meeting Ben-Gurion rejected Ruppin’s calculation and offered one of his own: if every year 15,000 Jewish *couples* would enter Palestine, and every couple would have three children, a Jewish majority could be achieved within 12 years.²⁷⁷ Ben-Gurion’s comment on the size of Jewish families was perhaps the first inkling of the growing interest he would show, from the early 1940s on, in managing Jewish reproduction in Palestine.²⁷⁸

Kaplansky, in a Zionist Executive meeting in November 29th, 1929, calculated that a Jewish majority would be achieved only in the 1960s.²⁷⁹ To make things worse,

²⁷³ Yigal Elam, *Ha-sokhnut ha-yehudit: shanim rishonot, 1919-1931* (Jerusalem: Ha-Sifriyah ha-Tziyonit, 1990), p. 170.

²⁷⁴ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, p. 17.

²⁷⁵ Bulletin no. 2, the joint secretariat of *Achdut Ha-Avoda* and *Ha-Poel Ha-Tzair*, 1.11.1929, Labor Party Archives [LPA], 2-001-1929-2, p. 7.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

²⁷⁸ Lilach Rosenberg-Friedman, “David Ben-Gurion and the ‘Demographic Threat’: His Dualistic Approach to Natalism, 1936-1963”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 5 (2015), pp. 1-25.

²⁷⁹ Kaplansky, “she’elat ha-huka ve-heskem yehudi-aravi”, *Hazon ve-Hagshama*, p. 272.

Kaplansky predicted that economic exigencies would force the Jews to expand into Trans-Jordan, which meant that even after 30 years they would still not be a majority in the Greater Land of Israel.²⁸⁰

What separated Ben-Gurion, Kalvarisky, Kaplansky and Ruppin's calculations from the calculations of Eder, Hoofien and Arlosoroff was a deep sense of demographic anxiety. Ben-Gurion, Ruppin and Kaplansky offered their calculations in the wake of the 1929 riots, one of the most traumatic events in the *Yishuv's* modern history. For Hoofien, Eder and Arlosoroff, who made their predictions before the riots, calculating the future was an exercise in confidence-boosting: the coming economic Jewish mastery of Palestine was reflected in their own mastery of demographic figures. But for Kalvarisky, Kaplansky and Ruppin, demographic calculations revealed just how long Jews would have to persevere before achieving majority status in Palestine. Not surprisingly, they advocated compromise with the Arabs.²⁸¹ Ben-Gurion's thinking was located somewhere in between Hoofien's self-assuredness and Kalvarisky's hand-wringing: he realized that the Jewish majority was not achievable in the near future, but he did not lose faith in the real-life effect of numbers; a careful, *calculated*, immigration policy, he believed, could save the *Yishuv* from future attacks. As early as 1929, Ben-Gurion emerged as Zionism's foremost bio-political thinker, combining gender, sexual reproduction, age, financial investment, colonization policy and agricultural production in his holistic calculations.

Beilinson and the Jewish Past, Ben-Gurion and the Jewish Future, November 1929-
January 1930

Ben-Gurion's bio-political thinking in the 1920s culminated in a federative program, called "Hanahot le-kvi'at mishtar mamlakhti be-eretz-israel" (theses for the establishment

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Ibid., p. 268, 272-273; Kalvarisky's answer, p. 19-20.

of a statist regime in Eretz-Israel), which he presented to a joint committee of *Ha-Poel Ha-Tzair* and *Achdut Ha-'Avoda* in late November 1929, as part of an attempt to rethink Zionist policy after the riots.²⁸² This new plan was a continuation of his suggestions in 1924²⁸³ and 1926²⁸⁴ to establish two extensive national autonomies in Palestine, one Arab and one Jewish, and to devise a regime in which “a just relationship would be established between Jews and Arabs, one that is not predicated on majority-minority relations. At all times, Jews and Arabs would be allowed uninterrupted development and full national independence, in such a way that Arabs would never rule Jews and Jews would never rule Arabs”.²⁸⁵ But unlike his 1926 plan, Ben-Gurion’s 1929 plan touched on his vision for Palestine’s central government.

Ben-Gurion began his plan with an attempt to chart the future development of the Jewish National Home. He assumed that as the Jewish National Home grew in size, more and more powers would be devolved onto it (and onto the Arab autonomous institutions) from the Mandatory Government, until full independence was reached. Ben-Gurion’s yardstick for the development of the Jewish National Home and for the coming Jewish independence was demographic.²⁸⁶ He divided the pre-independence future into three phases. In the first phase, the basis for national independence would be laid down. Ben-Gurion defined this phase both in terms of time – 5 to 10 years – and more rigidly in demographic terms, as the period of time it would take the Jewish population to become 40% of Palestine’s population.²⁸⁷ The second phase was defined as the period in which

²⁸² Ben-Gurion, “hanahot le-kvi’at mishtar mamlakhti be-eretz-yisrael”, 23.11.1929, LPA 2-001-1929-2. In late 1929 the two workers’ parties were finalizing a merger that would create *MAPAI* – the labor party that would dominate *Yishuv* and Israeli politics, under different monikers, until 1977. For an analysis of the plan see: Gorny, *Binational Society*, pp. 73-77.

²⁸³ See chapter 1, p. 33ff.

²⁸⁴ Ben-Gurion, “Autonomia leumit ve-yakhasey shkhenim”, *Anahnu u-shekhenenu*, pp. 110-130

²⁸⁵ Ben-Gurion, “Hanahot le-kvi’at mishtar mamlakhti be-eretz-israel”, p. 1. Translation mine.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

the Jewish population would grow to between 40% and 50% of the population, a time in which the national home would be “fortified”. The third phase was defined as the time when the Jews would constitute 50% or more of the population and would be marked by a transition into full independence.²⁸⁸ Moreover, the Arab response to the development of the National Home would change with each phase, from revolt to acceptance and co-operation. Ben-Gurion had remarked many times that a Jewish majority would all but end Arab resistance;²⁸⁹ here he turned this assertion into a political equation.

Ben-Gurion’s autonomist thought did not change substantially between 1926 and 1929. He called for the establishment of a territorial autonomy, with villages and towns as its basic units, coupled with personal-national autonomy, which would take care of education, religious services, national law and welfare.²⁹⁰ Each national autonomy would have its own parliament and its own executive in the form of Jewish and Arab Agencies. What was new in Ben-Gurion’s 1929 plan, however, was the inclusion of a “Government Council” (*mo’atza memshaltit*) that would be in charge of civil and criminal law, federal customs and taxes, highways, public works, industry, commerce and agriculture. The Government Council would be composed of 9 members and 18 deputies, divided equally between Jewish, Arab and British representatives.²⁹¹ During the first phase the High Commissioner would nominate all members and deputies (in the case of the Jewish and Arab candidates, based on Jewish and Arab recommendations). Each British member would have a Jewish and Arab deputy, each Jewish member a British and Arab deputy

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ See for example: minutes of *MAPAI*’s central committee meeting, 2.1.1934, LPA 2-023-1934-6, p. 20; minutes of an interview between Ben-Gurion and the High Commissioner, 29-30.7.1934, CZA S25\4162, p. 6; minutes of *MAPAI*’s political committee meeting, 5.8.1934, LPA 2-023-1934-7, p. 2; minutes of *MAPAI*’s central committee meeting, 8.8.1934, LPA, 2-023-1934-7, p. 17; minutes of an interview between Ben-Gurion, Shertok and the High Commissioner, 19.7.1935, CZA S25\6298, p. 9; minutes of the 19th Zionist Congress, 20.8-6.9.1935, CZA, pp. 52, 54; Minutes of *MAPAI*’s political committee meeting, 7.4.1936, LPA 2-023-1936-12, p. 19.

²⁹⁰ Ben-Gurion, “Hanahot le-kvi’at mishtar mamlakhti be-eretz-yisrael”, p. 3.

²⁹¹ Ibid., p. 4.

and so on. Each draft law proposed by the Council would have to be submitted for review to the Jewish and Arab agencies before it was enacted. The High Commissioner would be in charge of military and foreign relations but most importantly, he would make sure that the Government Council did not infringe on Britain's obligations according to the Mandate charter.

During the second phase, the municipal autonomies would be expanded into provincial autonomies and Jewish and Arab Council members would be nominated by, respectively, the Jewish and the Arab Agencies.²⁹² In the third phase, "when the establishment of the National Home would be complete" the Mandate would be terminated.²⁹³ Any settlement with more than 25,000 inhabitants could be recognized as a canton, and each would have its own constitution. The cantons would be joined together in a federation. Personal autonomy would be maintained to provide educational, cultural and religious services; although Ben-Gurion was not clear here, one can assume that it would be the minorities in each canton that would enjoy personal autonomy. The High Commissioner would remain in the country as the representative of Britain and the League of Nations. A bicameral federal parliament would be established, composed of a "House of Nations", based on parity between Jews and Arabs, and a "House of Cantons", in which each canton would be represented according to its relative size.²⁹⁴

Ben-Gurion's plan was hardly original, borrowing heavily from Kaplansky and Kohn. Nevertheless, Ben-Gurion's adoption of his comrades' ideas is telling: neither Kaplansky nor Kohn made the Jewish majority a pre-condition to bi-nationality. Ben-Gurion attempted to eat the cake and have it too: he envisioned the creation of a regime which

²⁹² Ibid., p. 5. Translation mine.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

would not be based on majority-minority relations but would become independent *only* when a Jewish majority was achieved, and in which, presumably, the Jewish cantons would control the “House of Cantons”. As long as the Jews were not the majority, Ben-Gurion would not risk actual bi-nationalism and favored retaining the British as a stopgap intermediary. His brand of bi-nationalism, then, could be more accurately described as “majoritarian federalism”.

While Ben-Gurion and others were looking to the future, Beilinson was returning to the past. Shortly after Ben-Gurion presented his federative plan to *MAPAI*, Beilinson published a series of four articles in *Davar*, the *Histadrut* daily, in which he tried to construct a robust Labor Zionist stance towards democracy and national rights. In the first article of the series, “Mikhtav McMahan ve-teharat ha-democratia” (the McMahan letter and the purity of democracy), Beilinson offered the following axioms: the “democratic principle” is sacred, and while minority rights should be respected and protected, minority rule is unacceptable.²⁹⁵ Parliamentarism might have its ills, but they did not warrant the negation of parliamentarism itself: “You do not kill the patient in order to cure him”, Beilinson, a physician by training, explained.²⁹⁶ He even went so far as to criticize the often-used Labor Zionist argument that in “underdeveloped” people, democracy would only serve the ruling class:

Not one criterion exists which gives one people, as enlightened as it may be, the right to educate a second people, as underdeveloped as it may be, even for its own good [...] the principle of self-determination of each and

²⁹⁵ Moshe Beilinson, “Mikhtav McMahan ve-teharat ha-democratia”, *Davar*, 3.12.1929, p. 2.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.* Translation mine.

every people is sacred. Every nation has a right to a homeland of its own, and one cannot question that right.²⁹⁷

Yet, as soon as Beilinson had set up these ethical axioms, he began to qualify them. Majority rule, he argued, applies only *within* nations. To prove his point, he gave a curious example from the Great War:

[...] if there is a multitudinous people who decides to occupy the land of a smaller people, majority rule should be awarded to the attacker's side, but who is foolish enough to claim that as a triumph of democracy? When Germany occupied Belgium, the German people sided with their government – [but] the whole world revolted against [Germany] in the name of democracy [...] no people can say: I will meddle in the affairs of another people, since if we put the two populations together, I would be the majority.²⁹⁸

Although within the context of the article this example might seem rather abstract, in a meeting of *Achdut Ha-'Avoda* and *Ha-Poel Ha-Tzair*'s central committees Beilinson was very explicit about who he cast as Germany and Belgium:

We talk about the rights of the Arabs – I reject their right to rule this country, because it belongs, firstly, to my people. Belgium was occupied by Germany during the war, and there was no doubt about the Belgians' right to their land. It's the same thing with Eretz-Israel, and it doesn't matter if we were exiled not for three years but for two thousand years.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁷ Ibid. Translation mine.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Joint meeting of *Achdut Ha-'Avoda* and *Ha-Poel Ha-Tzair*'s central committees, 24-25.11.1929, LPA, 2-001-1929-2, p. 11. Translation mine.

Indeed, not only did majority rule not apply to international relations, nations, Beilinson seems to have suggested, have minority rights of their own:

Sometimes one people has to scale back to allow breathing room to a neighboring people. To allow Poland access to the sea, a piece of land had to be cut off from Germany [...] a people has to give up something that seemingly belongs to it if the vital needs of a second people absolutely depend on that something.³⁰⁰

Although Beilinson did not state so explicitly, the use of Germany, Belgium and Poland as examples suggests that it is the bigger, stronger nations that have to scale back in order to accommodate smaller nations. Finally, Beilinson argued that in the case of multi-ethnic societies, majority rule had to be qualified to protect national minorities.³⁰¹ He concluded his argument with the following instructions: “In your own home, within your own borders, do as you please, but do not harm the rights and property of others, and learn to give up some of your rights to satisfy the vital needs of others – that is the core of democracy and the self-determination of each and every nation.”³⁰²

In his second article, “Ha-zkhuyot ‘al ha-aretz” (the rights to the land), Beilinson applied the general principles he laid down in the first article to the case of Palestine. The restriction of majority rule and self-determination, opined Beilinson, was doubly justified when the very existence of a nation was at stake.³⁰³ The Palestinian Arab community (*yishuv*; notice that Beilinson did not apply the term “people” [*‘am*] or “nation” [*leum*] to Palestinian Arabs) was not the sole owner of the land. The land also belonged to the

³⁰⁰ Beilinson, “Mikhtav McMahon ve-teharat ha-democratia”, p. 2. Translation mine.

³⁰¹ Ibid. Unlike his comrades, Beilinson did not use the Habsburg Empire as an example, but rather two of its successor states: Poland and Czechoslovakia.

³⁰² Ibid. Translation mine.

³⁰³ Moshe Beilinson, “Ha-zkhuyot ‘al ha-aretz”, *Davar*, 4.12.1929, p. 2.

Jewish people (*'am*) as its homeland. It was internationally recognized as the Jewish homeland and the Jewish people would perish if they remained homeless. “These are historical and human facts, [...] the facts of a national tragedy *without parallel* in the history of humanity, and no Arab majority can change them”, Beilinson asserted.³⁰⁴

While Ben-Gurion and others were starting to think in demographic terms about the future, Beilinson posited a set of “historical facts” that mobilized the Jewish past to trump the demographic fact of an Arab majority in Palestine. By using an indisputable and incomparable past, Beilinson sought to justify the absence of democracy in Palestine: “If this is indeed the situation, if this land belongs not only to the Arab community but also to the Jewish people, then the democratic principle is inapplicable to Palestine and the question of its regime cannot be solved through voting alone”.³⁰⁵ Within the space of two articles, Beilinson zipped from the assertion that the democratic principle was sacred to the assertion that it was inapplicable to Palestine.

Beilinson then attempted to answer those who claimed that Zionism prevented Palestinian Arabs from enjoying self-rule like their brethren in neighboring countries. He argued that there was a crucial, fundamental, difference between the Palestinian Arabs and Palestinian Jews. The Palestinian Arabs, Beilinson explained to his readers, did not need Palestine. The Arab national centers were somewhere else: in Syria, Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula. The Jews, on the other hand, did not have another homeland.

Beilinson then turned to the question of self-governance in Palestine. In 1926, as we have seen, he was in favor of a Legislative Council with limited powers.³⁰⁶ After the 1929 riots, however, Beilinson claimed that self-governance under the Mandate was, by

³⁰⁴ Ibid. Translation and emphasis mine.

³⁰⁵ Ibid. Translation mine.

³⁰⁶ Beilinson, “Le-she’elat ha-moatz’a ha-mehokeket”.

definition, a sham.³⁰⁷ As long as Britain ruled Palestine, he argued, true power would rest in the hands of the High Commissioner only. Beilinson did admit that in some colonial settings the colonial power allowed the inhabitants some measure of self-rule regarding their internal affairs. In Palestine, however, there were no “internal affairs” – every social and economic issue affected the establishment of the Jewish National Home and could not be delegated from the High Commissioner’s purview to the hands of the Arab majority.

If British sovereignty was indeed scaled back and an effective legislature was established, Beilinson warned, the demographic balance in Palestine meant that the Arabs would become the real rulers of the land – even if the parliament was based on parity. “Either we give up our rights in the name of democracy”, Beilinson concluded, “or we stand by our right to a National Home and then there is no point in setting up ‘fictitious representation’”.³⁰⁸

Having run the gamut from the sanctity of the democratic principle to its abolition in Palestine, Beilinson offered an alternative to parliamentarism. In the next two articles, “Milemata le-ma’ala” (from the bottom up) and “Ha-hashlaya ha-politit” (the political illusion), Beilinson reverted to the long-held Labor Zionist position that an *effendi* ruled parliament would only worsen the *fellahin*’s abject circumstances and that the democratization of Palestine should begin at the local level.³⁰⁹ He suggested that the Zionist opposition to the Legislative Council was not un-democratic since the Council would only benefit the Arab ruling class, despite writing only days earlier: “the argument we hear from the ‘ruling’ people against the underdeveloped people, that only the upper

³⁰⁷ Beilinson, “Ha-zkhuyot ‘al ha-aretz”, p. 2.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Moshe Beilinson, “Mi-lemata le-ma’ala”, *ibid.*, 8.12.1929, p. 2; Idem, “Ha-hashlaya ha-politit”, *ibid.*, 10.12.1929, p. 2.

crust of the undeveloped people would enjoy democratic rule and the lower classes would suffer, does not hold water”.³¹⁰

At the basis of Beilinson’s thinking – and of his inability to square his democratic theory with his Zionist beliefs – lay his belief in Jewish exceptionalism and in Jewish history as a phenomenon that was “unparalleled in the history of humanity”.³¹¹ Yet Beilinson’s belief in Jewish exceptionalism was not absolute. It seems that he leaned on it only when it served his political purposes. Despite Beilinson’s claim that the Jewish case was unparalleled, he drew parallels between the Jews, the Belgians and the Poles; Poland and Belgium were occupied by Germany in the same way that Palestine was occupied by the Arabs. But when referring to the suggestion that an Arab Agency, akin to the Jewish one, would be established, Beilinson claimed that “there is no analogy” between the cases, because the Jewish situation was “unique”.³¹² Similarly, when addressing the claim that the Jewish national movement had *effendis* of its own, Beilinson authoritatively decreed that “one mustn’t compare between the two phenomena”.³¹³ Beilinson the socialist thinker used comparative history to develop a universal theory of democracy, of predatory nations and wronged people; Beilinson the Zionist thinker viewed comparison as a rhetorical maneuver that hurt the Jewish claim to Palestine. Thus, he had to closely regulate the use of historical comparison. The Jewish people had to return to history, but not to such a degree that would make them subject to the same political arrangements as non-exceptional nations.

The difference in approach between Beilinson and Ben-Gurion is instructive. Both espoused the Jewish historical right to Palestine. Beilinson’s preference for “historical

³¹⁰ Beilinson, “Mikhtav McMahan ve-teharat ha-democratia”, p. 2. Translation mine.

³¹¹ Beilinson, “Ha-zkhuyot ‘al ha-aretz”, p. 2.

³¹² Beilinson, “Mi-lemata le-ma’ala”, p. 2.

³¹³ Beilinson, “Ha-hashlaya ha-politit”, p. 2.

facts” over numbers, however, informed his opposition to self-rule in Palestine, whereas Ben-Gurion’s faith in numbers allowed him to envision a Jewish and federative state. Thus, Beilinson’s understanding of the Jewish past as exceptional and the Jewish future as catastrophic compelled him to discard, in the last analysis, the democratic ideals that he so carefully espoused in his first essay. But despite the important differences between them, Ben-Gurion and Beilinson agreed on one thing: that democracy was only applicable in the context of a robust Jewish majority. Thus, Ben-Gurion decreed that a joint democratic regime would be established only after a Jewish majority had been achieved. Beilinson, on the other hand, simply posited that majority rule applies only within nations, discarding with the majority-minority question all together. Indeed, until the late 1930s, most Zionists right of *Brit Shalom* considered a Jewish majority to be the most important aspect of Jewish sovereignty.

The years 1925-1929 saw a significant evolution in Zionist bio-political thinking, an evolution that was engendered by the rapidly changing situation in Palestine – an unprecedented wave of immigration followed by a recession and inter-communal violence – and by the emergence within the Zionist intelligentsia of a radical critique of the foundations of Zionism. The result of this evolution was the quantitative approach many Zionist leaders and thinkers adopted when discussing the future of Palestine. Some of those thinkers, like Ben-Gurion, Kalvarisky, Ruppin and Kaplansky, mobilized their demographic calculations in order to propose some sort of a democratic solution to the Jewish-Arab conflict – either by accepting a limited Legislative Council or by envisioning an independent Jewish-Arab federation. And yet, there was a significant section of the Zionist leadership, exemplified by Beilinson, that rejected – at least implicitly – this new quantitative reasoning in favor of a historical reasoning, one which emphasised the historical claim of the Jewish people to Palestine.

This evolution was put on hold when, in late 1929, the British reluctance to establish a representative body in Palestine gave way to the idea that a Legislative Council would placate the Arabs and prevent further violence.³¹⁴ The Zionist movement rejected several British proposals to establish a Legislative Council but signaled its willingness to accept a parity-based parliament (an idea that both the British and the Arabs rejected out of hand). The years 1929-1936 were thus characterised by a slow war of attrition between the Zionists, the British and, the Arabs, over the establishment of the Legislative Council. Only the British abandonment of the joint legislature idea in 1936-1937 and the subsequent partition proposal, with its promise of Jewish sovereignty and control of immigration, reignited the bio-political debate within Zionist circles. This time around, it was Ben-Gurion's quantitative reason and bio-political vision that won the day.

³¹⁴ Dothan, *Ha-ma'avak*, p. 51; Norman Rose, "Ha-vikhuah 'al ha-mo'atza ha-mehokeket ba-shanim 1929-1936", *Mehkarim be-toldot 'am-israel ve-eretz-yisrael*, Vol. 2, p. 221.

Chapter III

The Nobleman and the Bear: Zionism and the Joint Legislature, 1929-1936

The present chapter focuses on the Zionist campaign against the Legislative Council initiative in the period between the 1929 riots and the outbreak of the Arab Revolt in 1936. Its title is derived from a Jewish parable invoked by Berl Katznelson, Labor Zionism's most prominent intellectual, at the third convention of *MAPAI*'s council in February 1931.³¹⁵ The parable has many versions, but most of them involve a rabbi who, in order to save the Jews of his shtetl, wagered with the local nobleman that he could teach the nobleman's pet bear to talk within a year. When asked by his people why he took upon himself an impossible mission, the rabbi answered: "A year is a long time – maybe the bear will die, maybe the nobleman will die, or maybe the bear will learn to talk!". For Katznelson, this parable encapsulated the Zionist strategy against the Legislative Council initiative in the early and mid-1930s. There was never a principled, public, Zionist rejection of the Council as such, since a categorical rejection would have painted the Zionist movement in an undemocratic light. Instead, the Zionist leadership waged a sustained effort to postpone the establishment of the Legislative Council by positing an ever-increasing list of pre-conditions for Jewish acceptance of the Council. The point of this Zionist war of attrition was to tire the British out, make a Jewish approved Legislative Council unacceptable to the Arabs, and, if enough time had passed by, to reach a point in the future in which the *Yishuv* would be demographically robust enough to offset the dangers of a democratic assembly.

³¹⁵ "Hartza'at ha-haver Berl Katznelson be-mo'etzet mifleget poali eretz-yisrael 'al ha-nose: ha-matzav ha-medini", 6.2.1931, LPA 2-022-1931-5, p. 22.

This play for time was part and parcel of a broader Zionist philosophy of time, facets of which have been discussed in earlier chapters. This philosophy treated the Jewish past as a legal instrument that underlined the Jewish right to the land, and the future as a utopia in which Jews and Arabs would live together peacefully. For some, this future was an asymptotic horizon – always aspired to but never reached. But for David Ben-Gurion, this messianic moment was a function of demography: when there would be a certain number of Jews living in Palestine, the Arabs would come to terms with the Zionist project, *mainly, if not solely, due to its numerical strength*. This approach could best be described as *demographic determinism*: the belief that numerical facts, in and of themselves, could solve most, if not all of the political problems facing the Zionists in Palestine.³¹⁶ Ben-Gurion's strong belief in the political power of facts was given a forceful articulation in a speech from a 1936 *MAPAI* meeting:

There is one thing that everyone, Arab and non-Arab alike, has to accept: facts. This is a thing that, apart from casuists (*hovshey beit midrash*), who treat facts in a cavalier way, every person with some common sense has to accept. People fight against facts, they try to destroy them if they are inconvenient, but if one cannot destroy facts, one starts to think about how to live with them. Only after we create a *big Jewish fact* [*'uvda yehudit gedola*] in this country [...] after a force is created here that everyone can

³¹⁶ For examples of Ben-Gurion's demographic determinism see chapter 2, footnote no. 136. See also: Shertok's comments, meeting of *MAPAI*'s central committee, 3.7.1934 LPA 2-023-1934-7, p. 6; Ben-Gurion's letter, quoted in a meeting of *MAPAI*'s political committee, 4.6.1935, LPA 2-023-1935-9, p. 2; Ben-Gurion, *Zikhronot*, Vol. III, (Tel-Aviv: 'Am 'Oved, 1973), pp. 106-107, 118, 123, 165-166, 175; Locker and Goldman's comments, meeting of the administrative committee of the Jewish Agency, 2-3.9.1936, WA, pp. 15, 23; on Zionism's general demographic determinism see: Gorny, *Ha-sehe'elah ha-'arvit*, pp. 85, 165, 185, 191, 233; Shmuel Dothan, *Pulmus ha-haluka*, (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 1983), p. 155.

see is immovable, only then will the pre-condition for negotiations with the Arabs be created.³¹⁷

The Mandatory present, on the other hand, was merely a political antechamber in which Palestinian Jews had to wait until there were enough of them to burst through the door onto self-rule. Consequently, the Zionist perception of time during the British Mandate was inexorably linked to immigration figures and birthrate predictions. Zionist time was demographic time, in which the lean years and the good years were defined by the number of Jewish immigrants that entered Palestine. It is no coincidence that Zionist periodization prior to 1948 was defined by waves of immigration.³¹⁸

As a transitory period, for most Zionist leaders the Mandatory present was never quite right for rapprochement between Jews and Arabs (Ben-Gurion's talks with Arab leaders in 1934-1936 are a notable exception to this approach).³¹⁹ A subset of this argument was that the establishment of a Legislative Council would be "untimely".³²⁰ Indeed, after the British Government had pledged to establish a Legislative Council in the 1930 White Paper, one of the tactics employed by the Zionist leadership was to explain why the present was unfit for the establishment of the Council: in 1929-1930 the institution of self-rule would have been considered by the Zionists to be a "reward to the [1929]

³¹⁷ MAPAI's central committee meeting, 16.4.1936, LPA 2-023-1936-12, p. 8. Translation and emphasis mine.

³¹⁸ On Zionist historical periodization see: Hizky Shoham, "From 'Great History' to 'Small History': The Genesis of the Zionist Periodization", *Israel Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (2013), pp. 31-55.

³¹⁹ See his *My Talks with Arab Leaders*, (New York: Third Press, 1973).

³²⁰ For Zionist assertions that participation in the Legislative Council was untimely see: minutes of the Jewish Agency's political committee meeting, 11.11.1929, WA, p. 2-6; Harry Sacher, "Memorandum on the Activity of Dr. Magnes", 11.11.1929, WA, p. 2; Telegram to Felix Warburg, 12.11.1929, WA; Remez's comments, meeting of the Joint Secretariat, 12.11.1929, LPA, 2-001-1929-1, p. 2; Sokolow's comments, the Jewish Agency's political committee meeting, 13.11.1929, WA, p. 3; Aharonovich's comments, meeting of the Joint Secretariat, 24-25.11.1929, LPA 2-001-1929-2, p. 6; Arlosoroff's comments, meeting of MAPAI's Central Committee, 9.1.1930, LPA 2-023-1930-1, p. 3; Israeli's comments, *ibid.*, p. 9; Schorer's comments, meeting of MAPAI's central committee, 12.1.1930, *ibid.*, p. 2; Eliyahu's comments, *ibid.*, p. 3.

rioters”.³²¹ After the issuance of the 1930 White Paper the Zionists refused to discuss a Legislative Council on the basis of the Paper.³²² In 1932-1933 Chaim Arlosoroff insisted – and the new High Commissioner Arthur Wauchope agreed – that a thorough reform of Palestine’s municipal government was necessary before the establishment of a Legislative Council.³²³ When the reform was completed in 1934, the Zionists claimed that it was a failure and that the Arabs were still unfit for self-rule.³²⁴ Finally, in late 1935, after ‘Izz ad-Din al-Qassam, leader of the Black Hand guerrilla group, was killed in a firefight with the British police, the Zionist leadership again considered the establishment of a Legislative Council a reward to Arab guerilla fighters.³²⁵

Beyond these more circumstantial objections, the Zionist leadership presented two basic pre-conditions for its acceptance of the Legislative Council: that the Council would only be established after an understanding between Jews and Arabs had been reached, and that

³²¹ Schorer’s comments, meeting of the Joint Secretariat, 24-25.11.1929, LPA 2-001-1929-2, p. 13; Arlosoroff, “Nisayon le-sakhem – ha-gorem ha-angli”, *Ha-Poel Ha-Tzair*, 29.11.1929, p. 10; Arlosoroff’s address, the third *MAPAI* council, February 1931, LPA 2-022-1931-5, p. 16-17; Locker’s comments, meeting of *MAPAI*’s central committee, 9.6.1936, *ibid.*, 2-023-1936-13, p. 21.

³²² “Hartza’ at ha-haver C. Arlosoroff be-mo’etzet mifleget poali eretz-israel ‘al asefat ha-nivharim”, 5.2.1931, LPA 2-022-1931-5, p. 17.

³²³ Interview between Arlosoroff and Wauchope, 7.10.1932, CZA S25\6297, p. 2; Arlosoroff to Brodetsky, 22.11.1932, *ibid.*, p. 5; Arolosoroff’s comments, meeting of *MAPAI*’s central committee, 29.11.1932, LPA2-023-1932-2, pp. 9-10.

³²⁴ “Resolution of the XIXth Zionist Congress and of the Meeting of the Council of the Jewish Agency held at Lucerne on September 3rd and 6th, 1935, respectively”, CZA 25\6301, p. 1; “Neged hatza’ at ha-moa’ tza ha-mehokeket”, *Davar*, 4.9.1935, p. 7; “The Proposed Legislative Council for Palestine”, *New Judea*, December 1935, p. 34; interview between Samuel, Brodetsky, Lurie and Melchett, 3.1.1936, CZA S25\6300, p. 1; “The Development of Self-Governing Institutions”, CZA S25\6298, pp. 3-10; Brodetsky, “A Legislative Council in Palestine, the Jewish Case”, CZA S25\6300, pp. 12-13; “Memorandum Presented to His Majesty’s Secretary of State of the Colonies by a Deputation of Anglo-Jewry”, 20.1.1936, CZA A185\86\1, p. 4; interview between Thomas and a deputation of Anglo-Jewry, 31.1.1936, CZA S25\6300, p. 2; Transcription of House of Lords debate in *New Judea*, Vol. XIII, No. 5., February 1936, *passim*; “The Development of Self-Governing Institutions in Palestine”, 2.3.1936, CZA A185\86\2, p. 1; Melchett to Thomas, 10.3.1936, CZA A185\86\1, p. 2; “A Parliament for Palestine”, 30.3.1936, CZA A185\86\2, p. 4; “The Legislative Council Debate in the House of Commons”, *Palestine Post*, 5.4.1936, CZA S25\10087, *passim*; “Municipal Law and Election System in Palestine”, September 1936, CZA S25\10500, p. 10; “Self-Governing Institutions”, no date, CZA S25\4162; “The Problem of Self-Governing Institutions in Palestine”, no date, *The Zionist Review*, CZA A185\86\2, p. 163.

³²⁵ Weizmann to Marks, 1.12.1935, *LPCW*, XVII, letter no. 85, p. 75; Weizmann to Marks, 15.12.1935, CZA S25\6298, p. 1; telegram from Laurie, 16.12.1935, *ibid.*; Weizmann to Lugard, 22.12.1935, *LPCW*, XVII, letter no. 109, p. 99; excerpt from *Davar*, 22.12.1935, quoted in press survey no. 109, 3.1.1936, CZA S25\6300, p. 3; Weizmann to Wauchope, 22.2.1936, WA, p.1.

the Council would be based on parity between Jews and Arabs. In the late 1920s, the Labor Zionists began to adopt parity as the practical application of the principle of mutual non-domination, which stated that Jews should not rule over Arabs and vice versa. Parity was not part of Labor Zionism's political vocabulary in the 1920s, since Labor Zionists did not concern themselves with the creation of joint Jewish-Arab political institutions in which parity would be applied. The idea to apply parity to the Legislative Council came from *Brit Shalom*, and when the threat of the Legislative Council became urgent in the late 1920s, it was borrowed and legitimized by Ben-Gurion. By 1931, both *MAPAI* and the Zionist Organization officially endorsed the principle of mutual non-domination, although parity never became an official Zionist policy. Nevertheless, the demand for parity became one of the most important and often used tools in the Zionist struggle against the Legislative Council.

The first section of this chapter details the initial Zionist response to the Legislative Council initiative after the 1929 riots, with particular attention to *MAPAI*'s rejection of Ben-Gurion's 1929 bi-national plan. Although the plan was rejected, the concept of parity, which until that point was mostly used by *Brit Shalom*, now entered (or re-entered, since it was hinted at in Shlomo Kaplansky's 1924 bi-national plan) the political vocabulary of Labor Zionism.

The second section looks at the adoption of parity by Chaim Weizmann, who, in the early 1930s, was acutely aware of the demographic disparity between Jews and Arabs in Palestine. In order to work around this disparity, he developed a theory of parity that rested on the historical connection between the entire Jewish People and Palestine, a connection that made the actual number of Jews in Palestine irrelevant to the country's political regime. Since the entire Jewish people had a stake in Palestine, they constituted, at least in theory, a majority vis-à-vis the 600,000 Palestinian Arabs. Indeed, according to

Ben-Gurion, who presented the concept to the British Prime Minister James Ramsay MacDonald, parity was not a concession to the Jews, but rather a concession *by* the Jews to the Arabs in Palestine.

The third section of the chapter focuses on the acceptance of parity by *MAPAI* as an official policy in February 1931. For Berl Katznelson, who suggested the adoption of parity, the principle was not a signifier of equality between Jews and Arabs. Rather, it was a defensive measure against the influence of the *effendis* in the Legislative Council, and a way to protect the Jewish National Home as well as women's and workers' rights. Thus, both Weizmann and Katznelson wished to utilize parity in order to protect the Jewish minority by creating legal and political artifices that ignored, or even concealed, the Jews' minority status in Palestine.

The fourth section of the chapter examines the debate over the final aims of Zionism at the 17th Zionist Congress (1931). Weizmann and the Labor Zionists, who now supported parity (supposedly without regard to the demographic makeup of Palestine) could not publicly admit that they desired the creation of a Jewish majority. Jabotinsky, on the other hand, called for the Zionist movement to publicly announce its desire to create a Jewish majority and establish a Jewish State in Palestine. The Labor Zionists were able to defeat the Revisionist motion and the Congress adopted a resolution supporting mutual non-dominance. Thus, in 1931 the Zionist movement as whole adopted Labor Zionism's political stance towards the Arab Question, which sought to foreground the demand for political equality and to sideline the Zionist goal of creating a Jewish majority in Palestine.

The fifth section charts Ben-Gurion's departure from the principles established in the 1931 Zionist Congress as a result of the mass immigration of Jews to Palestine in 1933-1935. Viewing the Jewish majority as more achievable than ever, in 1935 Ben-Gurion not

only re-stated his opposition to the Legislative Council in general, but also rejected parity. Instead, he suggested using the precarious state of international politics and the worsening conditions of German Jews as a leverage for his “Big Zionism” initiative. Ben-Gurion hoped to facilitate the immigration of one million Jews to Palestine, a mass migration that would quickly lead to the establishment of a Jewish state. And so, by 1935, when Ben-Gurion was elected as chairman of the Jewish Agency, official Zionism had begun to move away from parity and the principle of mutual non-domination; Ben-Gurion, who in 1931 shied away from disclosing Zionism’s goals, now spoke openly of a Jewish majority and a Jewish state.

This section will also look at the defeat of the Legislative Council proposal in the British Parliament in early 1936, a defeat that signaled the end of British attempts to create a joint legislature in Palestine, helped bring about the Arab Revolt and, consequently, the 1937 partition plan.

The Crystallisation of the Zionist Stance against the Legislative Council, November 1929-January 1930

In the wake of the 1929 riots, the British Government embarked on a thorough re-assessment of its Palestine policy, a re-assessment that culminated in the White Paper of October 1930.³²⁶ This process was driven, at least in its early stages, by High Commissioner John Chancellor, who became convinced that only a new interpretation of

³²⁶ On the road leading to the publication of the 1930 White Paper, see: Camillo Dresner, “Introduction”, in *LPCW*, XIV, pp. xiii-xxxi; Michael Cohen, *Britain's Moment in Palestine: Retrospect and Perspectives, 1917-48*, (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 218-228; Pinhas Ofer, “The Commission on the Palestine Disturbances of August 1929: Appointment, Terms of Reference, Procedure and Report”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (1985), pp. 349-361; Avraham Sela, “‘The Wailing Wall’ Riots (1929) as a Watershed in the Palestine Conflict”, *The Muslim World*, Vol. 84, No. 1-2 (1994), pp. 71-92; Gabriel Sheffer, “Intentions and Results of British Policy in Palestine: Passfield’s White Paper”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (1973), p. 43-60 [Hereinafter: Sheffer, “Intentions and Results”]; Charles Townshend “Going to the Wall: The Failure of British Rule in Palestine, 1928-1931”, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (2002), pp. 25-52.

the Mandate, one that would be more agreeable to the Arabs, could prevent further riots.³²⁷ In September 1929 Chancellor requested that the British Government send a Commission of Inquiry to Palestine to study the causes of the disturbances.³²⁸ In January 1930, after the Shaw Commission had finished its inquiry in Palestine, Chancellor sent a memorandum to the Colonial Office in which he proposed drastic changes in British policy in Palestine.³²⁹ He concluded that Britain's current policy could only be carried out through the use of military force, an option he emphatically rejected. Instead, Chancellor proposed the amendment of the Mandate charter by removing all Jewish privileges, limiting Jewish immigration and land purchases, and granting the Arabs "self-government".³³⁰ The Colonial Office rejected most of Chancellor's recommendations on the grounds that the withdrawal of Britain's Zionist policy would severely hurt its claim to rule Palestine.³³¹

Nevertheless, the Shaw Commission commented that "the absence of any measure of self-government is greatly aggravating the difficulties of the [Palestine] Administration".³³² This comment was reflected in the White Paper issued in October 1930, in which Lord Passfield, the Colonial Secretary, announced his Government's intention to establish a Legislative Council in Palestine.³³³ Although the February 1931 Macdonald Letter rescinded most of the policy outlined in the Passfield White Paper, it did not annul the British Government's decision to establish a Legislative Council in Palestine.³³⁴ Thus, the spectre of the Legislative Council loomed large over Zionist-

³²⁷ Dothan, *Ha-ma'avak*, p. 33.

³²⁸ Sheffer, "Intentions and Results", pp. 43-44.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*

³³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

³³² *Report of the Commission on the Palestine Disturbances of August 1929* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1930), p. 166.

³³³ *Palestine, Statement of Policy by His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom*, Cmd. 3692, (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1930), p. 14.

³³⁴ Shertok to Szold, 20.9.1934, CZA J1\1671, p. 1.

British relations from early 1930 until the publication of the Peel Commission report in July 1937, which abandoned the prospect of a joint, quasi-democratic regime in favour of the partition of Palestine.

The official Zionist stance towards the Legislative Council was one of studied, cautious opposition. In November 1929, rumors spread that the British Government was considering a revival of the Legislative Council initiative.³³⁵ At the same time, Judah Magnes, chancellor of the Hebrew University, together with Harry St. John Philby, a British orientalist, attempted to secure an understanding with Arabs notables that included the establishment of a joint legislature.³³⁶ In response, the Palestine Zionist Executive (PZE) issued a resolution that declared that although constitutional changes may be inevitable in the “not distant future”, every effort should be made to prevent the implementation of those changes in the present.³³⁷ The PZE was willing to accept the participation of Jewish and Arab representatives in the Advisory Council on the condition that the August 1929 rioters were punished, law and order were restored and a program for the promotion of the establishment of the Jewish National Home was introduced. If the British Government insisted on further constitutional measures beyond the re-constitution of the Advisory Council, the PZE was not willing to accept anything going beyond the 1922 Legislative Council plan.³³⁸

³³⁵ Kisch to the Zionist Executive, 10.11.1929, CZA S25\4165, p. 1.

³³⁶ On the Magnes-Philby negotiations, see: Eli Shaltiel, *Pinhas Rutenberg*, I, (Tel-Aviv: ‘Am ‘Oved, 1990), pp. 216-222; Dothan, *Ha-ma'avak*, p. 62; Elam, *Ha-sokhnut ha-yehudit*, pp. 162-172; minutes of the Jewish Agency's Political Committee meeting, 11.11.1929, WA; Harry Sacher, “Memorandum on the activity of Dr. Magnes”, 11.11.1929, WA; telegram to Felix Warburg, 12.11.1929, WA; meeting of the Joint Secretariat, 12.11.1929, LPA, 2-001-1929-1; Weizmann to Blumenfeld, 13.11.1929, *LPCW*, XIV, letter no. 84, pp. 67-68; the Jewish Agency's Executive meeting, 19.11.1929, WA; Weizmann to Warburg, 22.11.1929, *LPCW*, XIV, letter no. 102, pp. 98-99; Weizmann to Ben-Avi, 25.11.1929, *LPCW*, XIV, letter no. 106, p. 105; Weltsch to Weizmann, 29.11.1929, WA; meeting of the Joint Secretariat, 1.12.1929, LPA 2-001-1929-2; Zionist Executive Meeting, 16.12.1929, WA, p. 4.

³³⁷ "Resolution Adopted by the PZE", 29.11.1929, CZA S25\4161, p. 1.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

The PZE's implied acceptance of a Legislative Council under certain circumstances did not last long. In February 1930 Weizmann told Sir John Shuckburgh, of the Colonial Office, that the Zionist Organization as a whole was "opposed to any constitutional changes *at this time* [and] that [Weizmann] would consider it as betrayal of the trust if [he] were to agree to all these immature projects a[t] present".³³⁹ From that moment on, the official Zionist stance was a qualified rejection of the Legislative Council: the Zionist Organization was not opposed to the establishment of self-governing institutions as such, only under the present circumstances.

In the early 1930s that parity began to be accepted by mainstream Zionism as an alternative, or at least a corrective, to the Legislative Council plan. Yet it was not a new concept in Zionist thought. One of the demands that the Zionist Organization had wished to present at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 was that half of the seats in the future Palestinian legislative assembly would be reserved for Jewish representatives. The British emphatically rejected the demand.³⁴⁰ Then, in 1922, Ze'ev Jabotinsky drew up a plan for parity in the proposed Legislative Council.³⁴¹ In 1924, Shlomo Kaplansky suggested parity in the senate of his bicameral parliamentary system,³⁴² as did Hans Kohn in his 1926 plan.³⁴³ In the late 1920s, Yosef Laurie, Rabbi Binyamin and Shmuel Hugo Bergmann, all members of *Brit Shalom*, supported the creation of a regime that would not be based on majority rule but on equality between the two national groups, implicitly endorsing parity.³⁴⁴ Arthur Ruppin, the founder of *Brit Shalom*, suggested accepting a Legislative Council based on parity in a November 1929 meeting with representatives of

³³⁹ Interview between Dr. Weizmann and Sir John Shuckburgh, 27.2.1930, WA, p. 1. Emphasis mine.

³⁴⁰ General Gilbert Clayton, "Note", 12.3.1919, WA, p. 1.

³⁴¹ Susan Hattis-Rolef, "Tokhnit ha-parity shel Jabotinsky mi-shnat 1922", *Tzion*, Vol. 36, No. 3-4 (1971), pp. 222-226.

³⁴² See chapter 1.

³⁴³ See chapter 2.

³⁴⁴ Yosef Laurie, "Yahaseynu la-parliament", *Sheifoteynu*, Vol. 2, pp. 5-9; Rabbi Benyamin, "Misaviv la-nekuda", *ibid.*, pp. 21-30; Shmuel Hugo Bergmann, "Le-she'elat ha-rov", *ibid.*, Vol. 3, pp. 24-29.

the *Histadrut*.³⁴⁵ Ben-Gurion's take-down of Ruppin's suggestion was brutal: the "bi-national formula", he argued, lacked any real political substance.³⁴⁶ Ben-Gurion believed that comparing Palestine to other multi-ethnic states such as Switzerland or Canada was wrong, because in the latter two the ratio between the ethnic communities was set, while in Palestine, due to Jewish immigration, it was constantly in flux. This was yet another example of the linkage between the politics of comparison and political thought in Zionist circles. For Ben-Gurion, the most important political issue in Palestine was not Jewish-Arab relations, but rather Jewish immigration. If the members of *Brit Shalom* did not share this worldview, he told his interlocutors, they were not really Zionists, and there was no reason to debate them. The Arab Question, Ben-Gurion summed up his position, was only important to the extent that it affected Jewish immigration. As for parity, Ben-Gurion argued that the Arabs, who were the majority in Palestine, would not accept only half of the seats in the Legislative Council and the Jews would gain nothing from numerical equality, because real power would remain in British hands. Finally, Ben-Gurion argued that a parity based Legislative Council would be frozen in perpetual gridlock, since Jews and Arabs would always oppose each other when it came to the crucial issues concerning the Jewish National Home.

Despite Ben-Gurion's rejection of Ruppin's suggestion, only a few weeks later he offered his own version of parity, in his 1929 federal plan.³⁴⁷ Ben-Gurion's biographer Shabtai Teveth suggests that the Magnes-Philby initiative, mentioned above, compelled Ben-Gurion to offer a constitutional plan of his own.³⁴⁸ Yet Ben-Gurion's sudden acceptance of parity was not just a result of political expediency, but also a logical conclusion of his

³⁴⁵ Bulletin no. 2, the Joint Secretariat of *Achdut Ha-'Avoda* and *Ha-Poel Ha-Tzair*, 1.11.1929, LPA, 2-001-1929-2, p. 7.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

³⁴⁷ See chapter 2 of this dissertation.

³⁴⁸ Shabtai Teveth, *Ben-Gurion ve-'arviye eretz-yisrael: me-hashlamah le-milhamah*, (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1985), pp. 152-153.

autonomist political outlook. He was a major proponent of the principle of mutual non-domination – meaning that Jews should not rule over Arabs and vice versa – in Labor Zionism.³⁴⁹ For most of the 1920s, Ben-Gurion favored the creation of wide-ranging national autonomies that would have ensured mutual non-domination. During that time, Ben-Gurion did not concern himself with the question of Palestine’s central government. But as the pressure for constitutional reform mounted toward the end of the decade, the concept of parity seemed like a practical way to maintain the principle of mutual non-domination workable in a joint legislature or executive. Ben-Gurion might have disliked *Brit Shalom*, but he was not above borrowing important parts of its platform.

Yet Ben-Gurion’s cohorts in *MAPAI* remained sceptical about the concept of parity. *MAPAI* discussed his plan in late November 1929, as the Magnes-Philby controversy raged in Zionist circles. Arlosoroff, as was his wont, mounted a comprehensive, legalistic critique of Ben-Gurion’s plan. He argued that Ben-Gurion’s plan had no precedent in British colonial history and that the British would not erect an untested and unprecedented governmental system in Palestine. Such a quantum leap from colonial rule to a “responsible parliamentary government” in an oriental country would be an “unjustifiable act of aesthetic snobbery”.³⁵⁰ Arlosoroff was willing to accept a very limited Legislative Council on the basis of the 1922 proposal, including a restriction of the franchise based on either property or education, and a joint Jewish-Arab-British body that would serve as a comptroller to the British Administration.³⁵¹

³⁴⁹ For instances of the principle in Ben-Gurion’s writings before 1929 see: Ben-Gurion, “Zkhuyot ha-yehudim ve-zulatam”, *Anahnu ve-shkhenenu*, p. 33; idem, “Mitokh ha-vikuah (be-asefat shenikrea ‘al-yedey brit shalom)”, *ibid.*, pp. 82-83; idem, “Autonomia leumit ve-yahasei skhenim”, *ibid.*, p. 122; Ben-Gurion’s comments, *Ha-ve’ida ha-revi’it shel Ahdut Ha-’Avoda*, p. 30.

³⁵⁰ Minutes of a joint session of *Ahdut Ha-’Avoda* and *Ha-Poel Ha-Tzair*, 24-25.11.1929, p. 7.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Most other participants rejected any kind of self-rule in the present, be it in the form of Ben-Gurion's plan or in the form of a Legislative Council. Itzhak Ben-Zvi argued against Ben-Gurion's plan that the Arab Agency, which would levee "82%" of all the taxes in Palestine, would be the *de facto* ruler of the country.³⁵² As for the Legislative Council, he remarked rather acerbically that:

Any proposal for a Legislative or Advisory Council cannot stand on a solid base. This kind of council would not be the centerpiece of a fundamentally democratic structure, but, on the contrary, would constitute a fictive decoration for a structure that is anti-democratic and fundamentally rotten. The Palestinian public is made up of two unequal parts: the Jewish minority is at least imbued with a democratic spirit in his public life. This is not the case with the Arab sector, which is dependent on the subjugation of women and on the social backwardness of most of the nation, the *fellahin*, the workers, and most of the urbanites, who lack elementary education and who have been subjugated for generations to the landed notable families. This sector, the Arabs, lacks any system of regulation and oversight. This is the situation in the Muslim and Christian-Arab communities in this country. This is the source of the decay and moral degeneration in which the Arab municipalities and communities are steeped.³⁵³

Although Ben-Zvi's critique was based on the Marxist metaphor *par excellence* – the deceptively democratic superstructure that masks a rotten base – his ethnographic

³⁵² Ibid., p. 10.

³⁵³ Joint meeting of *Achdut Ha-'Avoda* and *Ha-Poel Ha-Tzair*, 24-25.11.1929, LPA 2-001-1929-2, p. 10. Translation mine.

description of Palestine's population had already begun to move away from the careful Marxist differentiation between victimized *fellahin* and bullying *effendis*. In the paragraph quoted above the main social differentiation in Palestine was between the Jewish minority and the Arab majority, whose moral degeneration was shared by exploiters and exploited alike. This slippage might have been one of the effects of the 1929 riots, during which hundreds of Arab *fellahin* and workers attacked their Jewish neighbors. Although the class argument against the Legislative Council – that the *effendis* did not represent the interests of the Arab workers – remained a mainstay of Zionist opposition to the Legislative Council, major figures within Labor Zionism had begun to question its validity.³⁵⁴ Michael Assaf, Labor Zionism's leading Arabist, said after the riots: "we cannot count on class tension between the *fellah* and the *effendi* because the national bond is stronger".³⁵⁵ Kaplansky and Moshe Shertok, a *MAPAI* activist who in the early 1930s made a name for himself in the Jewish Agency's Political Department, both noted that despite the Labor Zionist refusal to negotiate with *effendis*, the Zionist workers had no qualms about receiving funding from upper middle class Jews and cooperating with capitalist magnates in the Zionist Executive and the Jewish Agency.³⁵⁶ The classist argument against the Legislative Council was too rhetorically effective to be rid of

³⁵⁴ For examples of the argument see: Tabenkin's comments, *Va'ad Leumi* meeting, 28-30.6.1921, CZA J1\7224, p. 8; Ben-Gurion's comments, the seventh session of the *Va'ad Leumi*, 14.2.1923, CZA J1\7226, p. 11; Ben-Gurion's comments, *ha-ve'ida ha-revi'it shel Achdut Ha-'Avoda*, p. 33; Ben-Zvi's answer to the Zionist Executive's questionnaire, CZA S25\4164\1, p. 5; Ben-Zvi's comments, joint session of *Achdut Ha-'Avoda* and *Ha-Poel Ha-Tzair*, 24-25.11.1929, p. 10; Weizmann's comments, meeting of British Jewish Agency's members, 8.12.1929, WA, p. 2; Beilinson, "Milemata le-ma'ala", *Davar*, 8.12.1929, p. 2; Eliyahu's comments, *MAPAI*'s central committee meeting, 9.1.1930, LPA 2-023-1930-1, p. 4; Schorer's comments, *MAPAI*'s central committee meeting, 12.1.1930, *ibid.*, p. 2; Weizmann to James Marshall, 17.1.1930, WA, p. 4; Eliyahu Golomb, "Ve'idat ha-ihud", *Ha-Poel Ha-Tzair*, 24.1.1930, p. 8; Weizmann to Warburg, 15.5.1930, WA, p. 5; Berl Katznelson, "Le-she'elot ha-mishtar ha-medini ba-aretz", February 1931, *Kitvei Berl Katznelson*, IV, p. 157; A. Liebmann, "Ha-mo'atza ha-mehokeket", CZA S25\10166, p. 1; quote from *Die Neue Wort*, 25.12.1935, in media survey no. 109, 3.1.1936, CZA S25\6300, p. 9; "The Development of Self-Governing Institutions", CZA S25\6298, p. 30; "The Development of Self-Governing Institutions in Palestine", 2.3.1936, CZA A185\86\2, pp. 26-27.

³⁵⁵ Minutes of a meeting regarding the Arab Question, 10-11.10.1929, LPA, 2-001-1929-2, p. 5.

³⁵⁶ Kaplansky, "She'elat ha-huka ve-heskhem yehudi-arvi" *Hazon ve-hagshama*, p. 270; Shertok's comments, meeting of *MAPAI*'s central committee, 9.1.1930, LPA 2-023-1930-1, p. 7.

completely, but by 1934 Ben-Gurion had already begun to meet with representatives of the Arab ruling class in order to achieve a Jewish-Arab accord.

If Ben-Zvi based his opposition to Arab self-rule on both democratic and social grounds, Moshe Beilinson had no need for such lofty ideals; for him, opposition to self-rule was a matter of survival:

There are two points that I think make Ben-Gurion's proposal inappropriate. It contains both ideological and practical concessions that are unacceptable. A) the statement that Palestine does not belong to anyone in the world, and that is why the League of Nations, in addition to the Arabs and the Jews, is taking part in its administration. I myself cannot come to terms with the idea of relinquishing Palestine as a Jewish state. B) the practical concession regarding the makeup of the government. The present administration is bad, but officials can be replaced and then we would get the administration we want. A [Jewish-Arab-British] government would not be committed to our cause and we would not be able to demand redress from it. In practice Musa Kazim [al-Husseini] would be promoted from an intriguer to a minister [...] The Jewish people's right to exist [...] trumps the Palestinian Arabs' right to 'self-determination', and so I do not feel obligated to [support] self-rule in Palestine.³⁵⁷

This was the prevalent mood in Labor Zionist circles in late 1929 and early 1930: the survival of the Zionist project in Palestine, and of the Jewish people by extension, could not afford a disruption in the form of a Legislative Council. Parity was not acceptable in

³⁵⁷ Joint meeting of *Achdut Ha-'Avoda* and *Ha-Poel Ha-Tzair*, 24-25.11.1929, p. 11. Translation mine.

the legislative or executive branches since it would have afforded the *effendis* even more power than they had in the present. In February 1931 parity became the official policy of *MAPAI* regarding the Legislative Council, but between late 1929 and early 1931 it was Weizmann, the Zionist workers' patron, who gave credence to the parity idea in Zionist circles.

One Palestine, Incomplete: Weizmann's Theory of Parity, January-November 1930

At the same time that Beilinson was having trouble letting go of the dream of a Jewish state, Weizmann was beginning to do just that. In a 16th January 1930 letter to Felix Warburg, the most senior non-Zionist member of the Jewish Agency, Weizmann wrote that, "If a Jewish state were possible I would be strongly for it. I am not for it because I consider it unrealisable".³⁵⁸

A day later, in a letter to James Marshall, son of the Jewish-American leader Louis Marshall, Weizmann expounded upon his view of the political situation in Palestine.³⁵⁹ He began with the assertion that the facts of the situation were "unprecedented", just like the last four thousand years of Jewish history.³⁶⁰ Then he reminded Marshall that when the Balfour Declaration was issued and the Mandate was approved by the League of Nations, the Arabs constituted 90% of Palestine's population. And yet, their consent to the Declaration or the Mandate was not obtained, nor was there a need to ask for it – in view of the historical connection between the Jewish people and Palestine. The Jews, unlike aliens trying to enter the US (he pointed out to the American Marshall), were returning to Palestine by right and not by sufferance.

³⁵⁸ Weizmann to Warburg, 16.1.1930, WA, p. 8.

³⁵⁹ Weizmann to Marshall, 17.1.1930, *LPCW*, XIV, letter no. 187, p. 205-211.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

Of course, Weizmann conceded, the Balfour Declaration did provide for the civil and religious rights of non-Jews in Palestine. There was to be total equality between Jews and Arabs as *individuals* but not between Jews and Arabs as *national groups*. The authors of the Declaration, Weizmann asserted, envisioned a Jewish Commonwealth, and the local Arabs' national aspirations would have had to be fulfilled elsewhere – in Syria, Iraq, and the Hejaz.

Moreover, according to Weizmann “responsible Arab leaders” – namely, Emir Feisal – accepted the idea of the Jewish Commonwealth.³⁶¹ He then went on to reminisce that –

In those days, during the Paris Conference, we were all looking at the world in a big way, and we saw a great future before us, before the Jews in Palestine and before the Arabs in the wide surrounding countries – akin in blood, closely associated in history – working for rehabilitation of those countries of the Jordan, the Tigris, and the Euphrates, which were the cradle of civilization and which by our common efforts we could make into something very different from what they are now. Was it a dream? I do not know. I mention these facts of almost contemporary history, as history only, without wishing to put them forward, still less to press them as a postulate. Let them stand as a landmark of the ground which has been lost in these ten years and lost not for us only.³⁶²

In next paragraph Weizmann chose to fast-forward through these ten lost years, and bring the narrative into the ambiguous present:

³⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 206-207.

³⁶² Ibid.

Now we should be content with a bi-national State, provided it was truly bi-national. But once the firm ground of the Jewish State was abandoned, the picture became blurred; the idea of the Jewish State could be easily understood just as the meaning of the status quo – a cancelling of the Balfour Declaration and Mandate – would require no interpretation. But equality in rights between partners as yet very unequal, requires careful thought and constant watching. Palestine is to be shared by two nations; one is there already in full strength, while of the other so far a mere vanguard has reached it. The Arabs are the *beati possidentes* [blessed in possession], while we have to defend the rights of those *qui ont toujours tort* [always in the wrong]. The force of inertia works in favor of the Arabs, and thoughts which run in the customary grooves cut across and undermine the foundations of that thing to come, our National Home in Palestine. While we can accept the principle of equality between Jews and Arabs in the future Palestinian State, the Arabs press for having that State constituted immediately, because circumstances would enable them now to distort it into an Arab dominion from which no path would lead back to real equality.³⁶³

In these two highly pregnant paragraphs Weizmann laid out a political narrative that informed his endorsement of parity. As we have seen in chapter one, Weizmann's thinking on the future regime of Palestine was closely linked to his conception of time. And indeed, his narrative began with an evocation of the past: the brief moment around the time of the Paris Peace Conference in which a common "we" – the Jews in Palestine and the neighboring Arab countries, but not Palestinian Arabs – was possible, based in

³⁶³ Ibid.

itself on the shared Pan-Semitic history of the “cradle of civilization”. And although Weizmann claimed that this evocation of history was not a “postulate”, it was exactly that – a template for a future that could have been, a “lost” future by which the disappointing present was measured.

That the present was disappointing was made clear by Weizmann’s assertion that “[n]ow we should be content” with a bi-national state.³⁶⁴ The “we” of the second paragraph is different from the “we” of the first. The second “we” referred to Palestinian Jews and Palestinian Arabs, a reluctant partnership borne out of the failure of the first, ideal partnership between the Zionist movement and Britain’s Arab protégés. The “now” Weizmann spoke of was a time in flux, unstable and full of dangers: that is why the abandonment of the Jewish State idea required “careful thought and constant watching”. Moreover, since political inertia played into the hands of the Arabs, the establishment of self-governing institutions in the present would eventually lead to an Arab state. To prevent this eventuality, Weizmann proposed “true bi-nationalism”, or parity.³⁶⁵

Yet, at the same time that Weizmann proposed political equality between Jews and Arabs, he was acutely aware of the demographic inequality between them: The Arabs were already in Palestine “in full strength”, while most Jews were not. The phrase “in full strength” was used by Weizmann to note the current imbalance of power between the two people, but it also suggested that further Arab immigration to Palestine was undesirable. The question of Arab immigration was not dictated by Palestine’s economic absorptive capacity – after all, Weizmann himself spent much of his time fighting for the annual immigration of tens of thousands of Jews. Rather, it was a matter of right – the Jews were defined by their historical connection to Palestine, a legal umbilical cord that bound them

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

to the land whether they lived in Palestine or not. The Arabs, on the other hand, had rights in the land only by the fact of their inhabitancy. To Weizmann, any legal right the Palestinian Arabs had was derived solely from their presence in Palestine, in the same way that a plant or a bird would be labelled “Palestinian” if it was common to the land. That is why the Arabs were always already “in full strength” in Palestine, regardless of their actual numbers – because they were defined by geography, not by an essential bond to the land. Ben-Gurion expressed the same idea, when, in the preamble to his 1929 political plan, he decreed that Palestine belongs to “the Jewish People and the Arabs who reside in it”.³⁶⁶

Indeed, it was the discrepancy between the Jews’ political right and their demographic might in Palestine that worried Weizmann so. This discrepancy subjugated the Mandatory present to the future – while the gap between right and might was slowly being filled through Jewish immigration, the present had to be waited out. In his letter to Marshall, Weizmann dealt with the demographic gap in an extremely veiled language, but it is reasonable to assume that when he wrote that “circumstances would enable [the Arabs] now to distort [an independent Palestinian state] into an Arab dominion”, he meant that an Arab majority in Palestine’s representative institutions would prevent the establishment of that fragile “thing to come, our National Home in Palestine”.³⁶⁷ For that reason, it seems that Weizmann, speaking of “the principle of equality between Jews and Arabs in the future Palestinian State”, did not mean for parity to be constituted right now, but only when the National Home had already been secured through the amassment of Jews in Palestine.³⁶⁸ Like Ben-Gurion, in his 1929 bi-national plan, Weizmann

³⁶⁶ Ben-Gurion, “Hanahot le-kvi’at mishtar mamlakhti be-eretz-yisrael”, LPA 2-001-1929-2, p. 1.

³⁶⁷ Weizmann to Marshall, 17.1.1930, p. 207.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

understood the political future of Palestine in demographic terms; For both of them, the Zionist hourglass was filled not with sand, but with human bodies.

That is why, although Weizmann accepted parity in the future, he rejected self-rule in the present. He viewed the Arab demand for “democracy” as a ruse to stop the construction of the National Home in its tracks after their demand to annul the Balfour Declaration was rejected.³⁶⁹ He then went on to say:

[...] if the idea of the rights of both nations is valid, clearly that half of the future population which is on the spot and is determined to keep out the other half, must not be given a free hand to keep out the other half, must not be given a free hand, nor conceded *powers which are due to the whole population only*.³⁷⁰

In other words, self-government in the present had to be denied in order to allow for parity in the future. Interestingly, Weizmann, already thinking in terms of parity, described Jews and Arabs as two halves of the population, despite the huge disparity between their respective numbers in Palestine. Self-rule, his last sentence intimated, could only be established once Palestine’s population was whole, meaning that at least half of its inhabitants were Jews.

The notion that Palestine’s population was somehow incomplete was developed further in a letter to Sir John Shuckburgh from March 5th, 1930. Weizmann met with the Colonial Office official in February 1930 and the two discussed the prospect of constitutional changes in Palestine.³⁷¹ Weizmann came out of the meeting feeling that the British Government was “in no particular hurry” to establish a Legislative Council in

³⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 209.

³⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 210. Emphasis mine.

³⁷¹ “Interview Between Dr. Weizmann and Sir John Suckburgh”, 27.2.1930, WA.

Palestine.³⁷² Nevertheless, he became convinced that he should put into writing his “definitive attitude” towards the Legislative Council.³⁷³ In the March 5th letter, Weizmann explained that although he welcomed the gradual development of self-governing institutions, he could not accept a constitution that would obstruct the establishment of the Jewish National Home.³⁷⁴ He then went on to argue that:

The rights which the Jewish people has been adjudged in Palestine do not depend on the consent and cannot be subject to the *will of the majority* of its present inhabitants. When the international verdict was given assigning us a National Home in Palestine, the agreement of the Palestinian Arabs was not asked; in view of our historic connection with Palestine – a connection *unique* in the history of mankind – and of our present condition (which, too, is unique), it was deemed unnecessary to seek to obtain such consent [...] [i]n Palestine his Majesty’s Government and [the Zionist] Organization deal with a problem older than any state now existing, and wider than any Empire which ever existed. For its problems there are neither *precedents* nor *analogies* – they have to be judged on their own.³⁷⁵

Weizmann’s argument here is closely related to Beilinson’s theory of democracy. His argument is based on the utter uniqueness of the Jewish condition, a uniqueness that transcended majority rule: as Weizmann himself put it, the Jewish right to the land could not be subjected to the will of the majority of Palestine’s inhabitants.

Weizmann then moved on to tackle the argument that the inhabitants of Palestine, like the Iraqis and the Egyptians, should enjoy a measure of self-rule. He retorted by writing that:

³⁷² Ibid., p. 1.

³⁷³ Minutes of the meeting of the Zionist Executive, 3.3.1930, WA, p. 2.

³⁷⁴ Weizmann to Shuckburgh, 5.3.1930, *LPCW*, XIV, letter no. 212, p. 239.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 240. Emphasis mine.

The promise to us, which forms the central part of the Mandate, clearly implies that the population of Palestine as now constituted is not complete, and cannot therefore be considered owning the country in the sense in which the inhabitants of Iraq or of Egypt possess their respective countries [...] as for the Jews who now reside in Palestine, they are a mere vanguard, and we of the Jewish Agency, representing world Jewry, would at present deny them the right – were they to claim it – to represent the Jewish nation as a whole in the Palestinian State or a Palestinian Parliament.³⁷⁶

To drive this point home, Weizmann argued that Palestine was a “country *sui generis*, different and distinct from all others”, if only because of its Holy Places.³⁷⁷ Furthermore, the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate had “lifted” Palestine out of the geo-political complex of the Middle East and “linked it up with the world-wide Jewish community [...]”.³⁷⁸ Here Weizmann compounded Jewish historical exceptionalism with Palestine’s geographical exceptionalism. Thus, Palestine and the Jews were simply incomparable to other historical episodes, nor to neighboring countries, and the gradual process of establishing self-rule in Egypt, Iraq, and Trans-Jordan, could have in no way reflected on the situation in Palestine.

Weizmann stressed the peculiar condition of Palestine as a state-to-be, an incomplete political creature awaiting the arrival of the rest of world Jewry, not unlike the mythical lovers in Aristophanes’s tale in *The Symposium* – a land and a people that were once “complete” but were separated by the whims of the Gods and were now desperately trying to reunite.³⁷⁹ Palestine would reach political maturity, that is, would be considered

³⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 240-241.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 241.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ Plato, *Lysis, Symposium, Gorgias*, translated by W.R.M. Lamb, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), pp. 135-151.

owned by its inhabitants in same way Iraq or Egypt were owned by their inhabitants, only when its population became “complete”. Weizmann did not say outright what would constitute the completeness of Palestine’s population, but he did deny political significance, not only to the present Arab majority, but also to the Jewish minority in Palestine. This point was developed in his speech before the Cabinet Sub-Committee that was charged with drafting the MacDonald Letter in November 1930.

One of the main Zionist arguments against the 1930 White Paper was that it ignored the historical connection between the Jewish People *as a whole* and Palestine.³⁸⁰ Without the recognition of this connection, Weizmann explained, the Jews “have no more business in Palestine than we might have in Argentina or Brazil”.³⁸¹ He then articulated, rather tortuously, the legal-political relationship between the *Yishuv* and the Jewish-People-as-a-whole:

The White Paper ignores [...] the obligation of the Mandatory Power to the Jewish people as a whole, of which a part may go to Palestine, but only as an emanation of the whole of the Jewish People, only in virtue of the fact that the whole of the Jewish People will make it come to Palestine, by its efforts, by its money, by its intelligence [...] if the obligation of the Mandate is reduced to an obligation towards 165,000 [Jews] as against 700,000 [Arabs], a small minority in juxtaposition to a great majority, then, of course, everything else can be explained, but the obligation of the Mandatory Power is towards the Jewish People, of which the 170,000 [Jews in Palestine] are merely the vanguard. *The 170,000 have no moral status from the point of view of the Balfour Declaration unless they*

³⁸⁰ Minutes of Cabinet Sub-Committee meeting, 18.11.1930, WA, p. 18.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*

*implement it by the immigration of as many [Jews] as Palestine can absorb.*³⁸²

The mystical connotation of the word “emanation” is instructive. The *Yishuv* was, according to this theory, not a thing-in-itself, but rather an appendix of the Jewish-People-as-a-whole, an appendix whose sole purpose was to bring as many Jews to Palestine as possible. Since the *Yishuv* was not a thing-in-itself, its numerical size was irrelevant to the political regime of Palestine because the Palestinian Arabs were always already a minority compared to 15 million Jews around the world. If that was the case, by endorsing parity the Zionists were actually showing great political largesse towards the Arab minority in Palestine.

To sum up Weizmann’s political theory, both the Jewish and the Arab communities in Palestine were fractions of larger nations. However, the crux of Arab nationalism was located outside of Palestine – which might explain why Weizmann was happy to suggest that some Palestinian Arabs should move to Trans-Jordan or Iraq.³⁸³ From a historical-legal point of view Palestinian Arabs had no claim to the land beyond their residence therein. Thus, their actual majority had no relevance to Palestine’s regime. The Jewish-People-as-a-whole, on the other hand, were connected to Palestine through a historical-legal link that was recognized by the League of Nations in the preamble to the Mandate. This connection rendered the actual minority of Jews in Palestine irrelevant to the country’s regime. Finally, Palestine was a geo-political island – it was not part of the Middle East, despite being *in* the Middle East – but was part of the world-wide Jewish community, and thus the political changes affecting the region were irrelevant to

³⁸² Ibid. Emphasis mine.

³⁸³ Interview between Weizmann and Drummond Shiels, 4.3.1930, WA, p. 3; Arlosoroff’s report on the Cabinet Sub-Committee meeting, 18.11.1930, *ibid.*, p. 1; Weizmann’s comments, meeting of the Zionist Executive, 16.2.1931, *ibid.*, p. 6; Weizmann’s comments, meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 27.4.1931, *ibid.*, p. 1.

Palestine's regime. Jewish Palestine was so extraordinarily extra-historical and extra-territorial that common notions of democracy did not apply to it, and only parity could do justice to its "yet very unequal" peoples.

Although Weizmann began to float the idea of parity in Zionist circles, he did not yet suggest it to the British. Instead, he posited another pre-condition to the establishment of the Legislative Council – a round table conference that would lead to a Jewish-Arab agreement. It seems that he first suggested the idea to the British Prime Minister James Ramsay Macdonald in September 1929, shortly after the riots.³⁸⁴ He again suggested the idea to Malcolm Macdonald, the Prime Minister's son and one of Weizmann's closest allies in the Labor Party, in July 1930.³⁸⁵ More importantly, after Passfield had notified Louis Namier, the political secretary of the Jewish Agency, and Selig Brodetsky, head of the Political Department of the Zionist Executive in London, that the British Government intended to establish the Legislative Council, Weizmann wrote to the Colonial Secretary and insisted on the convention of a round table conference.³⁸⁶

Weizmann's letter to Passfield was actually written by Namier, who intimated to Kisch that he believed that the old Zionist arguments against the Legislative Council would simply be "brushed aside" by the British Government, and that a "constructive counter-proposal" was needed.³⁸⁷ Namier then remarked that if the Arab leaders "behave sensibly" at the conference, a *modus vivendi* could be reached, but if they behaved like the Arab delegation had behaved "in the spring [of 1930]", while it was negotiating with the Colonial Office in London, it would prove that "sensible work" in the Legislative

³⁸⁴ Weizmann to Passfield, 20.9.1930 [should be 19.9.1930], *LPCW*, XIV, letter no. 353, p. 371.

³⁸⁵ Weizmann to Macdonald, 9.7.1930, *ibid.*, letter no. 340, p. 361.

³⁸⁶ Weizmann to Passfield, 20.9.1930.

³⁸⁷ Namier to Kisch, 16.9.1930, *WA*, p. 1.

Council would be simply impossible, and consequently, the Zionist position would improve.³⁸⁸

Weizmann's letter warned Passfield that if the Legislative Council were established while the Arab leaders persisted in their "the spirit of defiance", the Council would become a "sounding-board" for sedition.³⁸⁹ Secondly, the main task of the Legislative Council would be to assist the Palestine Government in carrying out the Mandate, and so it could not be populated with representatives who opposed the very idea of the Mandate. In order to avoid these issues Weizmann suggested the convention of a round table conference that could bring about Jewish-Arab understanding. That the conference might prove the Arabs' lack of sensibility, to use Namier's parlance, was hinted when the letter suggested that "the true spirit and intentions of both sides could be tested" at the conference.³⁹⁰

It seems that at least Namier and Kisch – Weizmann himself did not comment privately on the conference's chances of success – saw the round table conference idea as little more than a ruse. Kisch was convinced that the conference would make clear that populating the Legislative Council with Arab leaders who rejected the legitimacy of the Mandate violated the Mandate charter.³⁹¹ Arlosoroff also commented that "from a tactical point of view, it was a wonderful ruse [*takhsis*]. The [British] Parliament and the press treated the demand for a round table conference as quite understandable".³⁹²

Weizmann's protestations did not sway the Colonial Secretary. On October 21st, 1930, a new statement of policy regarding Palestine, known as the 1930 (or Passfield) White

³⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 2.

³⁸⁹ Weizmann to Passfield, 20.9.1930, p. 371.

³⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 372.

³⁹¹ Kisch to Namier, 5.10.1930, CZA S25\6297.

³⁹² Arlosoroff's comments, meeting of *MAPAI*'s central committee, 25.1.1931, LPA 2-023-1931-2, p. 1. Translation mine.

Paper, was issued by the British Government. Among other measures, the White Paper proposed that “the time has arrived” to establish a Legislative Council in Palestine on the basis of the 1922 White Paper.³⁹³

The 1930 White Paper proved to have a particularly short life-span. On the same day as the publication of the statement, Weizmann, who received a copy of the White Paper in advance, resigned from the presidency of the Zionist Organization in protest.³⁹⁴ Despite his resignation, Weizmann remained the *de facto* leader of the Zionist movement until he failed to be elected to the presidency in the 17th Zionist Congress, which took place in July 1931.³⁹⁵

Jewish demonstrations against the new British policy were organized in Palestine, South Africa, Poland and the US.³⁹⁶ In the British Parliament, both the Conservatives and the Liberals used the new policy to attack the already vulnerable Labor Government.³⁹⁷ Prime Minister Macdonald himself was worried that the Jews could spoil US-British relations at a time when the global economic crisis began to affect the British economy.³⁹⁸ All of these factors led the British Government, in early November 1930, to set up a Cabinet Sub-Committee, headed by Foreign Minister Arthur Henderson, with the aim of discussing Britain’s new Palestine policy with representatives of the Jewish Agency.³⁹⁹ The Zionist delegation was headed by Weizmann, despite his resignation. The question of the Legislative Council was not dealt with during the negotiations, although Namier told

³⁹³ *Palestine, Statement of Policy by His Majesty’s Government in the United Kingdom*, Cmd. 3692, (London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1930), p. 14.

³⁹⁴ Dresner, “Introduction”, *LPCW*, XIV, p. xxxii.

³⁹⁵ Idem, “Introduction”, *Ibid.*, XV, p. ix.

³⁹⁶ Cohen, *Britain’s Moment*, p. 229.

³⁹⁷ Carly Beckerman-Boys, “The Reversal of the Passfield White Paper 1930-1931: A Reassessment”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, (online first, 2015), p. 10.

³⁹⁸ Cohen, *Britain’s Moment*, p. 229.

³⁹⁹ Beckerman-Boys, “The Reversal”, pp. 17-18.

the Cabinet Sub-Committee that to establish a Legislative Council without first reaching an understanding between Jews and Arabs would be “dangerous”.⁴⁰⁰

The negotiations between the Jewish Agency and the British Government resulted in a February 13th, 1931 Letter from the Prime Minister to Weizmann, which purported to be the official interpretation of the White Paper. In effect, it reversed the policy outlined in the White Paper, with one notable exception: it did not renege on the British Government’s obligation to establish a Legislative Council.⁴⁰¹ It was decided that the question of the Legislative Council would be picked up in the next round of negotiations between the British Government and the Jewish Agency. With the White Paper crisis all but over, however, the second round of negotiations never materialized.

Berl Katznelson, National Autonomy and the New Ghetto, February 1931

A week before the publication of the MacDonald Letter on February 13th, 1931, Berl Katznelson returned to Palestine from London, where he took part in the negotiations with the British Government, in order to attend *MAPAI*’s third council meeting. By then it was clear that a letter revoking the White Paper was to be issued, and that it did not change the White Paper’s policy regarding the Legislative Council.⁴⁰² It seems that the negotiations with the British Government had impressed upon Katznelson the need to offer an alternative to the Legislative Council.⁴⁰³ And so, he devoted a good part of his speech before the party council to the question of the future regime in Palestine.

⁴⁰⁰ “Draft Minutes of the Fourth Meeting held in the Secretary of State’s Room at the Foreign Office, 19.12.1930, between Members of the Cabinet and Representatives of Jewish Organizations”, WA, p. 3.

⁴⁰¹ Ya’akov Goldstein, *Ba-derekh le-hegemonyah: mapai – hitgabshut mediniyutah (1930-1936)*, (Tel-Aviv: ‘Am ‘Oved, 1980), p. 24.

⁴⁰² Anita Shapira, *Berl: biographia*, (Tel-Aviv: ‘Am Oved, 2000), p. 331.

⁴⁰³ Yosef Gorny, *Ha-she’ela ha-‘arvit*, p. 287.

Katznelson began by stressing his total rejection of the Legislative Council as it was proposed by the British. The Legislative Council, he argued, would not facilitate the economic development of Palestine, nor would it improve the lives of the workers or act as a safety-valve for Arab nationalist aspirations.⁴⁰⁴ But Katznelson's main argument against the Legislative Council was a matter of principle: any Jewish willingness to accept a regime based on an Arab majority was anathema to Zionism.⁴⁰⁵

Two other aspects of the Legislative Council gave Katznelson pause. First, Katznelson was worried that the establishment of a Legislative Council with an Arab majority would force the Jews to admit that they were a minority in Palestine.⁴⁰⁶ Again, as we have seen with Weizmann, the Zionist leaders were preoccupied with the representational quality of the Legislative Council. They feared that in addition to the actual political power it would put in the hands of the Arabs, the Legislative Council would reveal the inconvenient truth of the Jews' minority status in Palestine. Not that the fact of the Jews' minority status was a secret, but the Zionist leadership understood that the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate charter had created a political fiction in Palestine, according to which the Jews were not a minority despite being fewer in numbers than the Arabs. The establishment of an Arab-led Legislative Council would have outed the Jewish minority as such, a prospect which made Labor Zionists deeply uncomfortable.

Secondly, Katznelson was worried that the establishment of a Legislative Council would eventually lead to the creation of an Arab state in Palestine.⁴⁰⁷ He then attempted to formulate a Labor Zionist vision for Palestine's future regime. Katznelson, of course,

⁴⁰⁴ "Hartza' at ha-haver Berl Katznelson be-mo'etzet mifleget poali erez-yisrael 'al ha-nose: ha-matzav ha-medini", 6.2.1931, LPA 2-022-1931-5, p. 25.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 26.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 28.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

rejected out of hand the establishment of an Arab nation-state in Palestine, but he also criticized the Revisionist Zionist demand to establish a “State of the Jews”.⁴⁰⁸ Employing a common rhetorical maneuver among Zionist thinkers, Katznelson positioned the Labor Zionists as the true successors of Theodore Herzl, the father of Political Zionism.

Katznelson told his audience that for Herzl, a State of the Jews meant “transferring a great mass of Jews to Palestine and concentrating them in one territory”.⁴⁰⁹ Herzl did not specify whether the State of the Jews should be an Ottoman province, a monarchy, or a republic, since, according to Katznelson, such definitions did not matter to him.⁴¹⁰ For *realpolitik* reasons, Herzl gave up the problematic phrase “State of the Jews” in favor of the more ambiguous “Safe Haven” (*miklat batu’ah*). Katznelson then suggested that Labor Zionists do the same, since the Revisionist Zionists, who kept clamoring for a State of the Jews, had robbed the phrase of its political usefulness.

Nevertheless, Katznelson continued, he did not subscribe to *Brit Shalom*’s bi-national concept, which included acceptance of the Legislative Council.⁴¹¹ A Legislative Council in which the Arab majority would dominate the Jewish minority, he argued, was not compatible with bi-nationalism. Bi-nationalism, according to Katznelson, could only mean total equality between the two national units in the governing institutions of the land. Only parity would be a true political application of mutual non-domination, if it is coupled with wide-ranging national autonomy for each ethnic community.

One day later Katznelson returned to the topic of the Legislative Council, after Arlosoroff suggested accepting the establishment of a Legislative Council under certain conditions,

⁴⁰⁸ It is worth noting that in his speech Katznelson mostly used the phrase State of the Jews rather than a Jewish State (*medina Yehudit*).

⁴⁰⁹ “Hartza’at ha-haver berl Katznelson”, p. 26. Translation mine.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

and argued that Katznelson's autonomist plan would entail giving up the unparalleled resources of the Mandate Government.⁴¹² To explain why his opposition to the Legislative Council was not un-democratic, Katznelson used a historical argument: in the past, workers and liberals fought for democracy because they believed it would better their lives.⁴¹³ An *effendi*-ruled Legislative Council, however, would not bring about a more just regime in Palestine, nor would it be a champion of women's and workers' rights.⁴¹⁴ Did self-rule, he asked rhetorically, advance workers' rights in Iraq?⁴¹⁵ Only parity, Katznelson concluded, could prevent the *effendis* from not only obstructing the creation of the Jewish National Home, but also encroaching on women's and workers' rights.

As for Arlosoroff's critique, that Jewish autonomy meant giving up the resources of the state, Katznelson offered a highly illuminating rebuttal, which is worth quoting in length:

If you say that [autonomy] means ghettoization [...] I must say that I disagree. *I think that the ghetto was a positive phenomenon in Jewish history.* The ghetto was bad, because it was a ghetto without land, a confined ghetto, without a past, without light and without rights. But the fact that the Jews were able to create, everywhere where they were exiled, be it in Poland or in Babylon, autonomic institutions, complete with Jewish law, a Jewish economy, or more precisely a Jewish social safety-net, all of those things have a huge importance to the survival of the nation in Jewish history [...] if you tell me that the ghetto is a derogatory term, I will answer

⁴¹² Ibid., pp. 40-49.

⁴¹³ *MAPAI* council meeting, 7.2.1931, *ibid.*, p. 20.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 20-21.

⁴¹⁵ When Michael Assaf, Labor's lead Arabist noted that the Iraqi constitution did in fact help the workers, Katznelson swiftly moved to the more hypothetical example of Egypt (*ibid.*).

that a ghetto with all the advantages of autonomy and a healthy Jewish economy [and] Jewish land might not be [the fulfilment of] Zionism yet, but it's an important step in that direction. We have a city in Eretz-Israel [Jerusalem], which is sacred both locally and internationally, where Jews and Arabs live together, and where a municipal legislative council exists [...]; and then there is the ghetto of Tel-Aviv, and in the eyes of many in the Jewish intelligentsia Tel-Aviv is provincial town, people sit in Jerusalem and say: why should we move to Tel-Aviv, Jerusalem is a cosmopolitan city. But if we examine the importance of Tel-Aviv to the Hebrew economy in comparison to Jerusalem, and the importance of Tel-Aviv in terms of Hebrew labor as compared to Jerusalem and Haifa [both of which were mixed cities], and in terms of taxes and culture and democracy and parliamentarism, I can see, from a Zionist point of view, which is the ghetto, and which is not.⁴¹⁶

This was no slip of the tongue. Katznelson had first sounded his approval of ghettoization in a *MAPAI* meeting just days beforehand.⁴¹⁷ Yet, in 1945, when Katznelson's speech was re-printed in his collected *Writings* under the title "Le-she'elot ha-mishtar ha-medini ba-aretz" (on the question of the country's political regime), the passages about the virtues of the Jewish ghetto were gone.⁴¹⁸ Instead, Katznelson included a paragraph dealing with Arab economic pressure on the *Yishuv*. Like Beilinson, Katznelson was not very optimistic about the ability of parliamentarism to pull the Arab masses out of their economic degradation.⁴¹⁹ Soon enough, he predicted, the masses in the Arab countries

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28. Emphasis and translation mine.

⁴¹⁷ Meeting of *MAPAI*'s central committee, 25.1.1930, LPA 2-023-1931-2, p. 3.

⁴¹⁸ Katznelson, "Le-she'elot ha-mishtar ha-medini ba-aretz", *Kitvei Berl Katznelson*, IV, pp. 150-167.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

would learn that independence and parliamentarism did not save them from usury, the autocracy of the *effendis*, and the ravages of capitalism, both foreign and local. When that happened, he predicted, all hell will break loose.⁴²⁰ Of course, Katzneslon reassured his readers, Zionist colonization was in no way part of the onslaught of capitalism. The Jews, he argued, were the only nation that came to the East not to dominate the locals, or to get rich at their expense, but to work the land by the sweat of their own brows.⁴²¹

Furthermore, Jewish self-sufficiency could not be realized by trying to infiltrate the “cracks” in the local economy, only by establishing modern industries and practicing intensive agriculture.⁴²² And here Katzneslon turned to a description of a Jewish economy under siege:

This new [Jewish] economy, organized by a unionized labor movement in socialist economic cells, must be built in an environment which is partly feudal and partly – Bedouin, nomadic, desert-like. This civilization surrounds our world at all times with its terrible economic pressure, its cheapness and its oppression. It has its own notions of good and bad, right and wrong, reward and punishment, property and plunder, the value of human life, honour and revenge, its own ideas about foreigners and their strengths and intentions. With its worldview and its urges, it sometimes breaks [*poretzet*] into our lives, in the same that way we, even if unintentionally, break into our neighbors’ lives, and in times of distress – hunger, draught, rumors of disturbances, incitement – it charges

⁴²⁰ Ibid., pp. 152-153.

⁴²¹ Ibid.

⁴²² Ibid.

[*mista'ert*] onto us, carried on a storm of religious resentment, chauvinistic incitement and fear of a Zionist “takeover”.⁴²³

Thus, Katznelson asserted that parliamentarism, and certainly a “fake” parliament like the Legislative Council, could not solve the real economic problems that plagued Arab society, and which led, “in times of distress”, to attacks on the *Yishuv*.⁴²⁴ Yet even in this passage, which deals with the perceived civilizational difference between the two economies – one feudal and one socialist – Katznelson’s language carried distinct military undertones, speaking of infiltrations and charges. This time around, Katznelson likened the *Yishuv* not to a ghetto, but to citadel under siege. But in both metaphors, Katznelson imagined the *Yishuv* as a walled-off, autarkic political entity. And in this worldview, parity and economic self-sufficiency were not just lofty ideals. They were defense mechanisms, the moat and bridge of the new – and improved – Jewish ghetto.

Katznelson’s constitutional plan was based on three pillars: municipal democracy, national autonomy and the participation of Palestine’s inhabitants in its government.⁴²⁵ Katznelson lamented the sorry state of municipal government in Palestine, a system beset by corruption and an appallingly limited franchise.⁴²⁶ For him, municipal government was far more important than the Legislative Council: it was through municipal democracy that the population would learn the ropes of self-rule. Furthermore, in city councils, as opposed to the Legislative Council, there was a chance of “social differentiation”: there the *fellah* and the worker would learn to tell their Jewish allies from their Arab exploiters.

⁴²³ Ibid. Translation mine.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., pp. 153-154.

⁴²⁵ Ibid. p. 162.

⁴²⁶ Ibid., pp. 162-163.

As for national autonomy, Katznelson repeated the same complaint heard in the 1924 *Achdut Ha-'Avoda* conference: *Knesset Israel*, the official legal body of Palestinian Jews, was an “open corridor” (*prosdor mefulash*); people could leave the community at will, and they did not have to join another ethnic community:

One is not obligated to be counted as part of the national unit to which one was born, and within which one lives. If one wants to leave the community [*le-frok et 'ola*; the phrase usually refers to those Jews who have stopped observing religious practices] one does not even have to join another national unit, one simply leaves and is rid of one's obligations [*patur me-mitzvot*].⁴²⁷

Katznelson's complaint is infused with religious allusions, which encapsulate the blurred lines between nationalism and religion in Zionist ideology, and bio-political concerns about the possibility of Palestinian Jews who might choose not to be part of the *Yishuv*. Here, as in the two passages quotes above, Katznelson's anxieties about the *Yishuv*'s permeability are on full display. As in the first two passages, Katznelson compared the *Yishuv* to a man-made structure – this time to a corridor that cannot be closed off, and through which Jews can leave the political purview of the Zionist institutions. The Jewish ghetto in Palestine, according to Katznelson, was not designed to just keep the Arabs out – it was also designed to keep the Jews in.

Katznelson realized, however, that national and municipal autonomies were no substitute for a central government. In order to maintain the Jewish community's socio-cultural standard and to allow the Jewish National Home to be built, a regime must be devised that would prevent one nation from dominating the other.⁴²⁸ His proposal was to form a

⁴²⁷ Ibid., p. 164. Translation mine.

⁴²⁸ Ibid., p. 165.

parity-based legislature with Jewish and Arab representatives only. Parity, Katznelson argued, would prevent the kind of political deadlock and persecution of minorities that would necessitate the intervention of British officials. In a perfectly divided Legislative Council there would be no need to “reserve” certain issues or for the High Commissioner to veto certain laws.⁴²⁹ Perfect parity meant that the only way to prevent a complete shutdown of the legislature was for the two national units to cooperate, thus eventually leading to class-based, inter-ethnic cooperation.

It is unclear why *MAPAI*, whose leadership rejected Ben-Gurion’s similar plan only fifteen months earlier, now accepted Katznelson’s skeletal proposal. The answer might lie in the fact that Katznelson, unlike Ben-Gurion, did not deign to grant the Arabs (or the Jews, for that matter) any real executive power. But circumstantial political pressure might have been more important than the actual details of the plan. When Ben-Gurion brought his plan to the party’s central committee, the prospect of the Legislative Council was more an ominous rumble on the horizon than an actual threat. In February 1931, however, Katznelson and the rest of the Zionist leadership were sure that negotiations concerning the Legislative Council would begin in earnest in April of that year. *MAPAI* had to offer some sort of positive counter-proposal to the British Legislative Council plan. The round table conference proposal was a good *takhsis*, but it assumed that the Arab leaders would boycott the conference, or that they would participate but would make fools of themselves. In case that the British refused to convene the conference, or in case the Arabs actually accepted the invitation to participate in the conference, a second line of defense was needed to prevent the establishment of an Arab-dominated Legislative Council. That second line of defense was the principle of parity.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

The 17th Zionist Congress and the Endorsement of Mutual Non-Dominance, June-July 1931

After *MAPAI* officially endorsed parity, Weizmann himself began to suggest the idea to British officials. According to a letter he wrote to the Anglo-Zionist politician Henry Mond (Baron Melchett) in 1936, Weizmann had first mentioned the idea of parity to Ramsay MacDonald in June 1931.⁴³⁰ The two discussed Britain's dual obligation to the two people of Palestine and Weizmann opined that this principle meant that Jews and Arabs should be considered as "co-equal" members of the state.⁴³¹ Although the Arabs were the majority in the present, Weizmann told the Prime Minister, tomorrow they might become the minority. Regardless of the demographic makeup of Palestine, the Jews did not want to dominate or be dominated by the Arabs. MacDonald, according to Weizmann, concurred and revealed that his sympathies "[were] rather weighted in favour of the Jews".⁴³² Weizmann then argued that the Legislative Council should be based on parity. The Prime Minister, Weizmann reported, agreed with the proposition.

Yet Weizmann's re-established cooperation with the British Government was brought to an abrupt end at the 17th Zionist Congress, which convened in Basel on the last day of June 1931. Two interwoven issues dominated the political debate at the Congress: Weizmann's leadership and the question of the final goal of Zionism.

In the eyes of the Revisionist Zionists, Weizmann's post-1929 politics veered dangerously close to *Brit Shalom's* brand of Zionism. Weizmann began to doubt the viability of a Jewish nation-state, and his endorsement of parity seemed to the Revisionists to be going against the Zionist imperative to create a Jewish majority in

⁴³⁰ Weizmann to Melchett, 17.1.1936, *LPCW*, XVII, letter no. 138, pp. 132-133.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁴³² *Ibid.*

Palestine.⁴³³ Furthermore, Jabotinsky considered Weizmann's handling of the 1929-1931 crisis a failure and sought to replace him as leader of the Zionist movement.⁴³⁴ Thus the Revisionist platform included the two demands that would shape the political debate at the Congress: to replace Weizmann and the Zionist Executive and to redefine the final goal of Zionism as the creation of a Jewish state, meaning a Jewish majority on both side of the River Jordan.⁴³⁵

The elections for the 17th Congress signaled a sea change in Zionist politics: The Revisionists won 21% of the seats with 54 delegates, while their bitter rivals, the Labor Zionists, won 29% of the seats with 75 delegates.⁴³⁶ The General Zionists, the erstwhile supporters of Weizmann, were still the biggest faction in Congress with 84 delegates, but they were split between two groups, General Zionists A and General Zionists B. The bigger group, General Zionists B, no longer backed Weizmann and was sidling up to the Revisionists.⁴³⁷ Weizmann's position within the Zionist Organization was highly precarious.

The election results also meant a move from Weizmann's politics of notables, which relied on his relationship with the Old Boys of the British Government and was often conducted through winks and nods, to mass politics, which relied on the mobilization of the Jewish masses and utilized slogans and propaganda. Thus, much of the political debate at the Congress consisted of a war of words between Weizmann and Jabotinsky, who constantly referred to and interpreted each other's declarations.

⁴³³ Goldstein, *Ba-derekh le-hegmonyah*, p. 31.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁶ Anita Shapira, "Historia medinit shel ha-yishuv, 1918-1939", in Moshe Lissak, Anita Shapira and Gabriel Cohen (eds.), *Toldot ha-yishuv ha-yehudi be-eretz-israel meaz ha-alayah ha-rishona*, II, (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 2002), p. 103 [hereinafter: Shapira, "Historia medinit"].

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 103-104.

On the first of July 1931, Weizmann addressed the Congress. Amidst Weizmann's defense of his own legacy, he found time to address the Revisionist demand for a Jewish majority and a Jewish state.⁴³⁸ In a rhetorical maneuver similar to the one executed by Katznelson in his address before *MAPAI's* council in February 1931, Weizmann positioned himself as the true successor of Herzl. Weizmann made the case that although Herzl spoke of a Jewish state in his *Der Judenstaat*, published in 1896, he did not think to establish this Jewish state in Palestine, but rather in Argentina or some other country. Then, in 1897, when Herzl accepted the idea of Palestine as the land of Jewish revival, the phrase "a Jewish State" vanished from his political program. Instead, the official program of Zionism, adopted at the first Zionist Congress in Basel, spoke of a "haven" (*miklat*) for the Jewish People. Moreover, in 1916 Max Nordau, Herzl's right-hand man, claimed that Zionists had no ambition to establish a Jewish state in Palestine, and instead demanded that every Jew who desired to immigrate to Palestine could do so without restriction. If the founding fathers of Zionism could skirt around the issue of the Jewish state, Weizmann seemed to have suggested, so could their humble successors.

On July 3rd Weizmann gave the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) an interview in which he further developed his response to the Revisionist demands.⁴³⁹ Weizmann told the JTA reporter that he had no sympathy for the demand for a Jewish majority; a Jewish majority, he said, did not guarantee the well-being of the *Yishuv*. The world, Weizmann concluded, would understand a demand for a Jewish majority as a demand to expel the Arabs. Although Weizmann did not mention it by name, it was clear he was referring to the Revisionists' agenda.

⁴³⁸ "Neum Weizmann ba-congress ha-yud-zayn", *Davar*, 6.7.1931, p. 2.

⁴³⁹ "Re'ayon la-sokhnut ha-telegraphit ha-yehudit", 3.7.1931, WA.

The interview was the straw that broke the camel's back. Weizmann was already associated with the Zionist dependence on the British, and consequently, with what many Zionists perceived as Britain's betrayal of Zionism in the past two years.⁴⁴⁰ Three days after the interview, Weizmann tried to backpedal away from the JTA gaffe by arguing that he did not have sympathy for the *demand* for a Jewish majority, but of course he himself desired a Jewish majority.⁴⁴¹ This fine differentiation between desire and its vocalization did not help Weizmann. The Congress adopted a motion of censure against Weizmann, which his biographer Norman Rose calls "a vote of non-confidence".⁴⁴² On July 14th Nahum Sokolow was elected as president of the Zionist Organization and the Jewish Agency.⁴⁴³

But before his defeat, in a last-ditch effort to save his presidency, Weizmann tried to make parity the official policy of the Zionist Organization. On the 12th of July he sent Ben-Gurion and Namier to speak with Ramsay MacDonald and get him to endorse parity. Ben-Gurion explained to the Prime Minister that parity meant that the Mandate Government's attitude towards Jews and Arabs would not be based on the ratio between a known quantity of individual Jews and a known quantity of individual Arabs, but rather on the equality between two national units.⁴⁴⁴ This equality, he added, would be relevant in both the political and the economic spheres. After all, Ben-Gurion concluded, the Jewish-People-as-a-whole had a right to Palestine, but despite the overwhelming Jewish majority in relation to the Palestinian Arabs, the Zionists were willing to settle for political equality. The Prime Minister, according to Ben-Gurion, not only agreed, but also

⁴⁴⁰ Ben-Gurion, *Zikhronot*, I, p. 467; Anita Shapira, *Ben-Gurion: Father of Modern Israel*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 90.

⁴⁴¹ "interpellatzia shel Dr. Arlosoroff ve-tshuvato shel Weizmann", 6.7.1931, WA.

⁴⁴² Rose, *Chaim Weizmann: A Biography*, p. 291.

⁴⁴³ Ben-Gurion, *Zikhronot*, I, p. 484.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 481.

commented that he favored the Jews.⁴⁴⁵ Namier then sent a telegram, stating the Prime Minister's approval, to Weizmann.⁴⁴⁶ Historian Susan Lee Hattis, however, cites a July 16th 1931 letter from MacDonald to Passfield, in which the Prime Minister recounted his own version of the meeting.⁴⁴⁷ According to MacDonald he had told Ben-Gurion and Namier that he thought that parity was a reasonable formula but he did not know exactly what parity meant and could not commit himself one way or the other. The fact that the letter to Passfield was written shortly after the meeting suggests that MacDonald had a very different impression of his conversation with the two Zionist representatives. Either the Prime Minister was playing both sides – the Colonial Office on the one hand and the Zionist Organization on the other – telling each side what they wanted to hear, or Ben-Gurion, Namier, and Weizmann had overstated the Prime Minister's support of parity. In the long run, the discrepancy between the Zionist version and the British version amounted to very little, since the British – or the Zionist Congress for that matter – never endorsed parity. Nevertheless, the meeting was not a complete wash. A few years later Weizmann was able to use the story of the Ben-Gurion-Namier-MacDonald meeting to convince the British to postpone the establishment of the Legislative Council.

At the same time that Weizmann was trying to get the Congress to endorse parity, the Revisionists argued that the Congress should announce, clearly and boldly, Zionism's final goal: a Jewish majority on both side of the River Jordan. This demand was, like much of the Zionist political discourse in the early to mid 1930s, an effect of the ideological crisis that rattled the Zionist movement after the 1929 riots.⁴⁴⁸ Jabotinsky claimed that because the Zionist movement was a voluntary one, it was dependent on the

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.; see also: "Note on a Conversation with the Prime Minister, Chequers, 12.7.1930", WA, p. 2.

⁴⁴⁶ Namier to Weizmann, 12.7.1931, CZA S25\6297.

⁴⁴⁷ Susan Lee Hattis, *The Bi-National Idea in Palestine during Mandatory Times*, (Haifa: Shikmona Press, 1970), p. 106.

⁴⁴⁸ Goldstein, *Ba-derekh le-hegmonyah*, p. 36.

enthusiasm and the nationalist fervor of the Jewish masses. This enthusiasm was now dwindling and was in desperate need of rekindling by a clear, rousing, declaration.⁴⁴⁹ Weizmann's politics, on the other hand, thrived on backroom dealings, personal charm and intentional ambiguity. For example, he instructed Harry Sacker, a member of the Zionist Executive who testified before the Shaw Commission in 1929, to say this about the Zionist desire for majority: "We desire the implementation of the Mandate with a complete liberty [for Jews] to immigrate [to Palestine] in accordance with the development of the land [...]. [I]t is impossible to determine in advance whether this process will lead to the creation of [a Jewish] majority, but whatever happens we do not want to rule or be ruled [...]."⁴⁵⁰

In his speech before the Congress, Jabotinsky offered a critique of the phrases used by Herzl and Nordau (and by Weizmann) to define the Zionist goal in Palestine: a "Jewish National Home", a "Safe Haven" and even a "State of the Jews", were legally and practically ambiguous.⁴⁵¹ France was a state, Jabotinsky reminded his audience, but so were Illinois and Kentucky. Furthermore, a state did not guarantee an ethnic majority. After all, South Africa was a Boer/British state, but had an indigenous majority.

The real nucleus of the Jewish state, argued Jabotinsky, was a Jewish majority combined with self-rule.⁴⁵² Jabotinsky understood that Sovereignty was a flexible phenomenon – the Jewish state might be fully independent or a member of an international federation – but a demographic majority was not a flexible concept. It either existed or it did not.

⁴⁴⁹ Jabotinsky, "'Al mikhtav MacDonald ve-'al matrat ha-tzionut (neum ba-congress ha-tziona ha-yud-zayn, Basel, yuli 1931)" in: *Ketvey Jabotinsky: Neumim 1927-1940*, (Jerusalem: 'Eri Jabotinsky Press, 1948), p. 127 [hereinafter: Jabotinsky, "'Al mikhtav MacDonald"].

⁴⁵⁰ Weizmann to Sacker, 5.12.1929, WA.

⁴⁵¹ Jabotinsky, "'Al mikhtav MacDonald", p. 116.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 117.

Yet at the heart of Jabotinsky's speech was an emotive appeal. He pleaded with his fellow Zionists to stop hiding their wishes, which he deemed perfectly normal and legitimate:

The truth has a purifying effect. Are we not tired, are we not sick of this constant evasiveness? Clearing the air has become a political necessity and it will be carried out by speaking the truth. Why should we allow that [our demand for the establishment of] a State of the Jews be viewed as extreme? The Albanians have their own state, and so do the Bulgarians; statehood is the normal state of every nation. If a Jewish State existed today no one would say it was an anomaly. If we wish to be a normal people, should we ourselves argue that [the desire for a Jewish State] is an extremist demand?⁴⁵³

No other piece of Zionist writing conveys the Zionist preoccupation with the Jewish majority more succinctly. Jabotinsky was able to state in a simple way why so many Zionists were willing to settle for less than full statist sovereignty but were so attached to the notion of a Jewish majority. The Zionist leadership had learned the intricacies and ambivalence of sovereignty through their fraught relationship with the British: Britain was the nominal sovereign of Palestine, and yet it allowed the *Yishuv*, and to a lesser extent, the Supreme Muslim Council, to run their internal affairs with little intervention. But a demographic majority, at least for Jabotinsky, was neither complex nor ambivalent; it possessed an appealing ontological certainty: it was simply there, or it was not. Ben-Gurion and Jabotinsky may not have seen eye to eye on many things, but they both embraced the certainty of numbers. Numbers were facts, and facts were not to be argued with.

⁴⁵³ Ibid., p. 127. Translation mine. Note that Jabotinsky uses both the phrase "State of the Jews" and the phrase "a Jewish State".

Weizmann and the Labor Zionists, in contrast, were worried that open talk about the desire for a Jewish majority would rile up the Arabs, especially after the Macdonald Letter had dashed their hopes for a reversal in British policy. And so, Weizmann, Ben-Gurion, and Arlosoroff, all used thinly-veiled euphemisms to describe their desire for a Jewish majority: Weizmann spoke of the hope that “the material foundations laid by [our] work would be sturdy enough to support the moral and spiritual construct of a self-sufficient culture”.⁴⁵⁴ Ben-Gurion talked about a “a self-sufficient great Hebrew nation”,⁴⁵⁵ and Arlosoroff mentioned a “multitudinous community (*yishuv ben-hamonim*)”.⁴⁵⁶

In his speech Jabotinsky implored the Zionist delegates to come out of what might be called the Zionist closet – the intentional ambiguity with which Weizmann and the Labor Zionists addressed their desire for a Jewish majority. For Jabotinsky, a Jewish majority was the *raison d'être* (and the *raison d'état*) of Zionism. To deny or obfuscate that desire for majority amounted to a denial of Zionist identity itself. Weizmann and the Labor Zionists, on the other hand, were worried about the ways in which the outside world might read the Zionist desire; Weizmann warned the JTA correspondent that a demand for majority might be misinterpreted as a demand for the expulsion of Arabs from Palestine and *Haganah* leader Eliyahu Golomb sent a telegram to the congress, warning that Arab riots would break out at the mere mention of a Jewish majority.⁴⁵⁷ In other words, the Jews' minority status, which gave rise to the desire for majority status, was the very reason to not vocalize that desire. The Zionist closet, like parity, was a defense

⁴⁵⁴ “Neum Weizmann ba-congress ha-yud-zayn”, *Davar*, 5.7.1931, p. 2. Translation mine.

⁴⁵⁵ Ben-Gurion, *Zikhronot*, I, p. 470. Translation mine.

⁴⁵⁶ Arlosoroff, “Neum ba-congress ha-shiv'ah-‘asar”, *Ketvey Arlosoroff*, VI, (Tel-Aviv: Schtibel Press, 1934), p. 72. Translation mine.

⁴⁵⁷ Shapira, “Historia medinit”, p. 106.

mechanism, and both were designed to buy the Zionist project time while the gap between desire and demographic reality was bridged.

One of the major objectives of the newly-elected Zionist Executive was to encourage “real, economic, political and social steps that will pave the way for peace and cooperation between Jews and Arabs with no regard to the numerical ratio between them and on the basis of the principle: to not rule others and not be ruled by them”.⁴⁵⁸ This phrasing came dangerously close to an endorsement of parity, without actually mentioning the exact term. The careful wording of the objective would allow Ben-Gurion, in 1935, to deny that the Zionist Organization ever endorsed parity. But for the time being, the Zionist Congress not only adopted mutual non-domination as an official policy, it also made the connection between the abstract principle of mutual non-domination and parity as its practical application

Even though their patron Weizmann was out of power, the 17th Zionist Congress marked a major step in the workers’ rise within the ranks of Zionist movement. Not only were they the second-largest faction at the Congress, they were able to form a coalition without their bitter rivals, the Revisionists, and to stymie most of the Revisionists’ motions. As a result, the Revisionists had begun their slow withdrawal from the Zionist movement.⁴⁵⁹

More importantly, Labor’s *wunderkind*, Chaim Arlosoroff, was elected to head the political department of the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem.

By November 1931 Chancellor was replaced by Sir Arthur Wauchope as High Commissioner for Palestine.⁴⁶⁰ Wauchope was far more sympathetic to the Zionist cause than his predecessor, and Arlosoroff and the new High Commissioner struck up a

⁴⁵⁸ “Ha-congress ha-tsioni nin’al”, *Davar*, 17.7.1931, p. 1. Translation mine.

⁴⁵⁹ Shapira, “Historia medinit”, pp. 109-110.

⁴⁶⁰ Arlosoroff, *Yoman yerushalaim*, (Tel-Aviv: MAPAI Press, 1953), p. 116.

convivial relationship.⁴⁶¹ Throughout 1932, Wauchope inquired several times about the Zionist movement's stance on the Legislative Council.⁴⁶² Arlosoroff, who was willing to accept a limited Legislative Council prior to his election by the Congress, now toed the Zionist Movement's line and announced that the Jews did not come to Palestine to be dominated by the Arabs,⁴⁶³ and that the Legislative Council could be established only after two preliminary stages: first, a Zionist-British agreement on the principles of British policy in Palestine, and second, a British-Arab-Zionist round table conference.⁴⁶⁴ At the same time, he demanded that local self-government in Palestine should be expanded, and that Jews and Arabs be included in the Executive Council.⁴⁶⁵ The establishment of the Legislative Council, Arlosoroff argued, should be the final step in a bottom-up process of democratizing self-rule in Palestine and not the other way around.⁴⁶⁶

Arlosoroff added that parity between Jews and Arabs should be considered due to the "peculiar conditions of Palestine".⁴⁶⁷ He then mentioned the failed 19th century Canadian attempt to institute political parity between Anglophones and Francophones, and added that in Palestine, unlike in Canada, the British presence would prevent parity from creating a political deadlock.⁴⁶⁸ Furthermore, Arlosoroff argued that the "economic and social weight" of Jews in Palestine far outstripped their demographic weight: they formed the majority in Jerusalem, Tel-Aviv and Tiberias, owned half the orange plantations and

⁴⁶¹ Miriam Getter, *Haim Arlosoroff: biographia politit*, (Tel-Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz Ha-Meukhad, 1978), pp. 52-53.

⁴⁶² Interview between Wauchope and Arlosoroff, 25.2.1932, CZA S25\6297; Interview between Wauchope and Arlosoroff, 18.3.1932, *ibid.*; Interview between Wauchope and Arlosoroff, 7.10.1932, *ibid.*

⁴⁶³ Interview between Wauchope and Arlosoroff, 25.2.1932, p. 9.

⁴⁶⁴ Interview between Wauchope and Arlosoroff, 18.3.1932, p. 1.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁶ Arlosoroff, *Yoman yerushalaim*, p. 211.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2-3.

contributed 40% of public revenue.⁴⁶⁹ This economic precociousness, Arlosoroff implied, should justify parity between the Jewish minority and the Arab majority.

Indeed, it was around that time that economic prosperity became prevalent as a Zionist argument against the Legislative Council.⁴⁷⁰ In November 1932 the High Commissioner informed the Zionist Executive that at the next session of the Permanent Mandates Commission he was going to re-state Britain's intention to establish a Legislative Council.⁴⁷¹ Sokolow and Brodetsky tried to dissuade him by arguing that such an announcement

would have a disastrous effect on Jewish public opinion and on that confidence among Jews which was reflected in the very considerable development now taking place in the country. Jews who were coming to Palestine, or investing money there, could not be expected to continue to do so if there was any fear that such changes were in prospect in the constitution of the country as would render themselves or their property insecure.⁴⁷²

Wauchope agreed not to initiate the announcement on his own but rather to include it in an answer to a question from the Permanent Mandates Commission;⁴⁷³ Sokolow and

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 3.

⁴⁷⁰ Interview between Brodetsky and Dugdale, 19.10.1932, *ibid.*; interview between Wauchope, Brodetsky and Sokolow, 1.11.1932, *ibid.*, p. 1; interview between Cunliffe-Lister, Dugdale, Parkinson, Sokolow and Brodetsky, 2.11.1932, *ibid.*, pp. 1-2; Sokolow to Wauchope, 3.11.1932, *ibid.*, pp. 1-2; Brodetsky to Jacobson, 3.11.1932, CZA L22\57, p. 2; "Jews and Arabs Face Legislative Council in Palestine", *New York Times*, 30.11.1932, *ibid.*, p. 2; Weizmann to MacDonald, 5.7.1935, CZA S25\6298, p. 2.; Hexter to Arlosoroff, 1.12.1932, CZA S25\6297, p. 1; Weizmann to MacDonald, 5.7.1935, CZA S25\6298, p. 2; "Memorandum Presented to His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies by a Deputation of Anglo-Jewry", 20.1.1936, CZA A185\86\1, p. 1; "Resolution Protesting against Establishment of Legislative Council Adopted at Conference Held at the Hotel Astor, NYC", 26.1.1936, CZA S25\10166, p. 2; Sinclair's comments, "The Legislative Council Debate in the House of Commons", *Palestine Post*, 5.4.1936, CZA S25\10087, p. 14.

⁴⁷¹ Interview between Wauchope, Brodetsky and Sokolow, 1.11.1932, CZA S25\6297, p. 1.

⁴⁷² Ibid., p. 2.

⁴⁷³ Wauchope to Sokolow, 2.11.1932, *ibid.*

Brodetsky felt that this would be less scary to Jewish investors. Wauchope also thought that a Zionist campaign for parity would be a mistake due to the “percentage which the Jews formed of the total population of the country”.⁴⁷⁴ Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister, the new Secretary of State for the Colonies, concurred; in a meeting with Sokolow and Brodetsky he called parity “unreasonable and impossible”.⁴⁷⁵ But more importantly, the High Commissioner seemed to have accepted Arlosoroff’s vision for the expansion of self-rule in Palestine. He reassured the Zionist representatives that the Legislative Council would not be established before the new local governance ordinance, which promised to reform local government, was promulgated in 1934.⁴⁷⁶

Ben-Gurion, Big Zionism, and the Decline of Parity, 1934-1935

The local governance reform bought the Zionists two years of quiet on the Legislative Council front. The issue was raised again by Wauchope in July 1934. By then Arlosoroff, who was assassinated in June 1933, had been replaced as head of the Jewish Agency’s political department by Ben-Gurion. When Ben-Gurion spoke with Wauchope in late July 1934, he employed the argument developed by Weizmann that since the Mandate acknowledged the historical connection between the Jewish-People-as-a-whole and Palestine, any legislative body “based on the present population” of Palestine would be inconsistent with the Mandate.⁴⁷⁷ Later, when the High Commissioner reassured Ben-Gurion that the new Palestine constitution would protect the Jews’ minority rights, Ben-Gurion remarked that the Jews see themselves as a “nation”, not a minority.⁴⁷⁸ To set up a Legislative Council on the basis of the present population of Palestine, he explained to

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ Interview between Cunliffe-Lister, Dugdale, Parkinson, Sokolow and Brodetsky, 2.11.1932, p. 2.

⁴⁷⁶ Interview between Wauchope, Brodetsky and Sokolow, 1.11.1932, p. 1.

⁴⁷⁷ Interview between Wauchope and Ben-Gurion, 29-30.7.1934, CZA S25\4162, p. 3.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 12.

Wauchope, would be to “convert” the status of the Jews to that of a minority.⁴⁷⁹ Indeed, Ben-Gurion invoked the Weizmannian interpretation of the Mandate charter as a legal instrument that prevented the Jews of Palestine from being considered a minority regardless of their share of the population.

Ben-Gurion then posed two pre-conditions for any constitutional reform in Palestine: first, the establishment of safeguards that would protect Jewish immigration and colonization, the Jewish community’s share in public works and employment in the civil service, and Jewish settlement in Trans-Jordan.⁴⁸⁰ The second pre-condition was Arab-Jewish understanding, which, Ben-Gurion explained, “can only arrived at if based on solid facts”.⁴⁸¹ And by facts, Ben-Gurion meant numbers: the Arabs, he told Wauchope, will try to make peace with the Jews when the latter will “have reached the half-million mark” in three or four years.⁴⁸²

Ben-Gurion’s optimism was bolstered by the Fifth *Aliyah*. In 1933 a total of 30,327 Jews immigrated to Palestine, and by the end of 1934 another 42,359 joined them, spurred by the rise of antisemitism in Eastern Europe and Germany.⁴⁸³ A few days after his meeting with Wauchope, Ben-Gurion predicted that, given an annual immigration of 40,000 Jews, a Jewish majority would be reached by 1965.⁴⁸⁴ If the annual rate was 50,000, a Jewish majority would be achievable by 1954. Barring war or other crises, he went on, an annual figure of 80,000 was not inconceivable.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., p. 5.

⁴⁸² Ibid., p. 6.

⁴⁸³ Aviva Halamish, “Ha’im hayta shnat 1933 nekudat mifne be-medinyut ha-alayah ha-tzionit?”, Iyumin be-tkumat Israel, 3 (1993), p. 98.

⁴⁸⁴ Meeting of MAPAI’s political committee, 5.8.1934, LPA 2-023-1934-7, p. 6.

Consequently, in late 1934 Ben-Gurion began to formulate the idea of “Big Zionism” (*tsionut gedola*). He saw the massive Jewish immigration wave as a “revolutionary political factor”, which neither the British nor most Zionists could really comprehend:

Among the Zionists themselves there is a lack of recognition of the political importance of this time to Zionism [...] 1933 has been a watershed moment in the outside world’s perception of the Jewish Problem and of Palestine as the solution to this problem. Suddenly it became evident that masses of Jews were rushing to Palestine, that capital was flowing into the country, that construction was booming, and that Jews were treating Palestine not as a spiritual ideal but as a safe haven. This phenomenon was new to the English and as with anything new it was met with opposition and anxiety. Our political role is to show that the fast tempo of construction is not going to stop and [to make sure that] the English realize, through lasting facts [‘*uvdot matmidot*], and not through a sudden burst, that Zionism is not just a object of adoration but rather a matter of life and death for the Jewish masses [...]. right now there is a possibility of a different discourse with the English – about Big Zionism – and there is a need to change the entirety of Zionist politics in order to accentuate our *final goals* [...].⁴⁸⁵

Three years after the 17th Congress, Ben-Gurion’s bashfulness about the Zionist desire for a Jewish majority was gone. He was ready to step out of the Zionist closet.

By 1934, Ben-Gurion had met with several Arab politicians, and he consequently revised his 1929 political plan, which he presented to Wauchope in August 1934. Ben-Gurion

⁴⁸⁵ Meeting of *MAPAI*’s central committee, 8.8.1934, *ibid.*, pp. 16-17. Translation mine.

still supported the creation of an interim regime, based on parity between Jews and Arabs, which would last until the number of Jews in Palestine equaled that of the Arabs.⁴⁸⁶ At that point Palestine would become an independent state, but would remain part of the British Empire as a dominion, since “[e]ven when [the Jews] would be several millions [they] would still be surrounded by the desert and desert peoples [...] and as a European element [they] would be vitally interested in maintaining a close connection with the greatest empire of European Civilization.”⁴⁸⁷ In order to satisfy the Palestinian Arabs’ national aspirations, however, Palestine would also become part of a Arab Federation.⁴⁸⁸ Wauchope encouraged Ben-Gurion to continue his talks with Arab politicians, but did not alter his plans to establish the Legislative Council.

By October 1934 it was clear that Wauchope and Colonial Minister Cunliffe-Lister were intent on seeing the establishment of the Legislative Council through. It was Weizmann, once again, who saved the day. He met with the Colonial Minister on October 4th, 1934, and explained that establishing a Legislative Council at present would be inopportune, since it would interfere with the talks Ben-Gurion was having with Awni Abd al-Hadi and other Arab notables, and because it was an election year for the Zionist Congress and the Legislative Council issue would play right into the hands of the Zionist “extremists”.⁴⁸⁹ Cunliffe-Lister confided that he himself was in no hurry to establish the Council, but Britain was “pledged to the hilt” by the 1930 White Paper. Weizmann then told Cunliffe-Lister about the conversation between Ramsay MacDonald, Namier and Ben-Gurion that took place in July 1931, in which the Prime Minister seemed to have endorsed parity. The Colonial Minister was “taken aback” by Weizmann’s story and revealed he was not made

⁴⁸⁶ Interview between Wauchope and Ben-Gurion, 15.8.1934, WA, p. 4.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 5.

⁴⁸⁹ Interview between Cunliffe-Lister and Weizmann, 4.10.1934, WA, p. 1.

aware of the Prime Minister's endorsement.⁴⁹⁰ Weizmann devilishly suggested that Wauchope must have heard the story from Ben-Gurion and that he, Weizmann, was surprised that the High Commissioner did not pass that information to the Minister. Weizmann then tried to interest the Minister in his own thoughts on the justness of parity, but Cunliffe-Lister was in no mood for an "abstract discussion".⁴⁹¹ Instead, the Colonial Minister simply asked Weizmann if he was looking for postponement, and Weizmann concurred, asking that the issue would not be raised before October 1935, that is, after the 18th Zionist Congress. Even out of office, there was no replacement for Weizmann's gravitas and standings with the British political elite. Cunliffe-Lister shelved the Legislative Council until mid-1935.⁴⁹²

In May 1935 Wauchope brought up the Legislative Council issue again in a conversation with Shertok, who by then became the head of the Jewish Agency's political department. The latter tried to get the High Commissioner to postpone the commencement of talks regarding the Legislative Council until after the Zionist Congress, which was scheduled to convene in August, claiming that any announcement regarding the Legislative Council would strengthen the "extremists" and that the current Zionist Executive had no mandate to decide on the matter.⁴⁹³ In June 1935 Malcolm MacDonald replaced Cunliffe-Lister as Colonial Minister. The change of Ministers and pressure exerted by Weizmann in London brought about another postponement of an official announcement until October 1935.⁴⁹⁴ Unofficial talks, however, began in July of that year.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 2.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., p. 5.

⁴⁹² Shertok's comments, meeting of *MAPAI*'s central committee, 31.10.1934, LPA 2-023-1934-8, p. 1; interview between Wauchope and Shertok, 16.11.1934, CZA S25\4162, p. 1; Norman Rose, "Ha-vikhuach 'al ha-moatza ha-mehokeket" p. 236.

⁴⁹³ Interview between Wauchope and Shertok, 23.5.1935, CZA S25\6298, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁹⁴ Shertok to the Jewish Agency Executive, 20.6.1935, *ibid.*, p. 2; Shertok to Weizmann, 23.6.1935, *ibid.*, p. 1; interview between Wauchope and Shertok, 27.6.1935, WA, p. 1.

When preliminary talks regarding the Legislative Council began in July 1935, the first cracks in Labor Zionism's endorsement of parity appeared: on July 16th Shertok told the High Commissioner that the Jewish Agency had never "formally" proposed parity.⁴⁹⁵ It was only brought up by "individual members of the Executive" to gauge the British Government's willingness to adopt the principle.

Three days later, The High Commissioner expounded the new Legislative Council plan. According to the new British plan, the Legislative Council would be comprised of 28 members: 5 British officials, 11 Muslim representatives (8 elected and 3 nominated), 3 Christian representatives (1 elected and 2 nominated), 7 or 8 Jewish representatives (3 elected and 4 or 5 nominated), and 2 "commercial members".⁴⁹⁶ The chairman of the Legislative Council would probably be a colonial official who was not part of the Palestine Administration.⁴⁹⁷ The High Commissioner could veto any resolution made by the Legislative Council, "certify" ordinances – that is, enact draft ordinances that were rejected by the Council – and enact ordinances while the Council was on break.⁴⁹⁸ Furthermore, the Legislative Council would only convene for three months each year. Only the High Commissioner could introduce ordinances dealing with finances, and he had the power to dissolve the Legislative Council or suspend individual members.⁴⁹⁹ In fact, the High Commissioner confided in Ben-Gurion and Shertok that the underlining principle of the new Legislative Council proposal was: "wide possibilities of discussion but no power of decision".⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁵ Interview between Wauchope and Shertok, 16.7.1935, WA, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁹⁶ Interview between Wauchope, Ben-Gurion and Shertok, 19.7.1935, CZA S25\6298, p. 2.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4-5.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

In response, Ben-Gurion criticized the suggestion that the Legislative Council would be allowed to discuss immigration, and noted that if the Mandate Government would be dependent on the Jewish representatives to form a majority and pass ordinances in the Council, inter-communal tensions between Jews and Arabs would only worsen.⁵⁰¹ In addition, Ben-Gurion suggested that the powers of the Legislative Council should be defined in such a way that would preclude the Council from interfering with either community's internal affairs.⁵⁰²

Yet, despite Ben-Gurion's insistence on national autonomy, for the first time since 1929 he did not link this insistence to the principle of mutual non-domination. In fact, Ben-Gurion announced that the Jewish Agency was opposed to the whole scheme, even if it was based on parity.⁵⁰³ As long as the Arabs did not acknowledge the Mandate and the special connection between the Jewish-People-as-a-whole and Palestine, and as long as a Jewish-Arab understanding had not been concluded, there was no place for a Legislative Council in Palestine, he told Wauchope. The Jews were especially opposed to the Legislative Council now because they were persecuted in Germany and Poland.⁵⁰⁴ The only country that offered refuge to European Jews was Palestine, and, Ben-Gurion implied, the Jews could not risk giving the Arabs control over immigration. Moreover, Ben-Gurion claimed that with an annual rate of 50,000 Jewish immigrants Jewish-Arab understanding might be achievable in a few years. Thus, ironically, the more numerous the Jews became in Palestine, and hence closer to actual demographic parity with the Arabs, the less Ben-Gurion was enthusiastic about political parity.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., p. 6-7.

⁵⁰² Ibid., p. 7-8.

⁵⁰³ Ibid., p. 8.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 9.

Weizmann, unlike Ben-Gurion, was still in favor of parity. In August 1935 he was re-elected as president of the Zionist Organization and the Jewish Agency, but his second tenure was far from autocratic. Ben-Gurion was elected as chairman of the Jewish Agency, and the two continuously butted heads over matters of policy.⁵⁰⁵ And so, the Jewish Agency spoke in two voices regarding parity: Ben-Gurion rejected it, while Weizmann kept using it as an argument against an Arab-dominated Legislative Council.⁵⁰⁶

Official talks regarding the Legislative Council started in December 1935, after yet another change at the helm of the Colonial Office – Malcolm MacDonald was replaced by James Henry Thomas, who returned for a third tenure as Colonial Minister in November 1935. Attempts to pressure the Minister to postpone the announcement for the umpteenth time failed,⁵⁰⁷ and on December 21st the High Commissioner met with Arab representatives to give them an overview of the Council plan.⁵⁰⁸ The official proposal was almost identical to the outline given to Ben-Gurion and Shertok in July 1935: 5 British officials, 11 Muslim members, 7 Jewish members, 3 Christian members and two commercial representatives.⁵⁰⁹ The Arab representatives did not accept or reject the proposal and promised to give their answer to the High Commissioner by January 7th,

⁵⁰⁵ Yemima Rosenthal, “Introduction”, *LCPW*, XVII, p. x.

⁵⁰⁶ See: Weizmann to Marks, 1.12.1935, *ibid.*, letter no. 85, p. 74; “The Proposed Legislative Council for Palestine”, *New Judea*, December 1935, p. 34; Weizmann to Melchett, 17.1.1936, *LCPW*, XVII, letter no. 138, pp. 132-133; Weizmann to Namier, 22.1.1936, *ibid.*, letter no. 142, p. 140; Weizmann to Warburg, 24.1.1936, *ibid.*, letter no. 150, p. 149; Weizmann to Rappard, 26.1.1936, *WA*, p. 2; Weizmann to Graves, 28.1.1936, *LPCW*, XVII, letter no. 151, pp. 163-164; Weizmann’s comments, *Va’ad Leumi* meeting, 2.2.1936, *CZA J1\1671*, pp. 3-4; Weizmann to Vansittat, 5.2.1936, *WA*; Weizmann to Namier, 5.2.1936, *WA*; Weizmann to Wauchope 22.2.1936, *WA*;

⁵⁰⁷ Shertok to Dizengoff, 18.11.1935, *CZA S25\6298*; Ben-Gurion and Shertok to Laurie, 18.11.1935, *ibid.*; Laurie to Shertok, 28.11.1935, *ibid.*; Weizmann to Marks, 1.12.1935, *LPCW*, XVII, letter no. 85, p. 73; Thomas to Weizmann, 3.12.1935, *CZA S25\6298*; Laurie to Kohn, 5.12.1935, *ibid.*; Laurie to Kohn, 6.12.1935, *ibid.*; Laurie to Kohn, 9.12.1935, *ibid.*; Laurie to Kohn, 10.12.1935, *ibid.*; unknown author to Laurie, 12.12.1935, *ibid.*, p. 1; Weizmann to Marks, 15.12.1935, *LCPW*, XVII, letter no. 98, p. 86; Shertok to Laurie, 15.12.1935, *CZA S25\6298*; Interview between Thomas, Brodetsky and Marks, 19.12.1935, *ibid.*; Laurie to Shertok, 20.12.1935, *CZA S25\1378*.

⁵⁰⁸ Shertok’s comments, meeting of *MAPAI*’s political committee, 21.12.1935, *LPA 2-023-1935-10*, pp. 3-4.

⁵⁰⁹ “Official Communique no. 45/35, 22.12.1935”, *CZA S25\6301*, pp. 2-3.

1936.⁵¹⁰ According to political scientist Ann Mosely Lesch, most Arab parties, apart from the pan-Arabic *Istiqlal*, showed qualified support for the Legislative Council proposal.⁵¹¹

By the time some of the Arab parties publicized their support in March 1936, however, the British Parliament had already rejected the proposal.⁵¹²

A day later the High Commissioner met with a Jewish delegation, headed by Weizmann.⁵¹³ The Jewish delegates rejected the plan. Following the announcement of the Legislative Council plan, Jewish protests against the Council were carried out in Britain, South Africa, the US, Brazil, Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia.⁵¹⁴

To add insult to the Zionists' injury, in January 1936 the High Commissioner announced plans for a new ordinance that would protect the *fellahin*'s livelihood by disallowing them from selling their entire plot, and declared that he was considering raising the minimum capital needed to qualify as a "capitalist immigrant" from 1000 Palestinian Liras to 2000 Palestinian Liras.⁵¹⁵ For Shertok the revival of the Legislative Council, together with the new proposed restrictions on land purchase and immigration, signalled a new course in Britain's Palestinian policy. He understood this change as an effect of international politics: the British were worried that the Italo-Ethiopian war, which erupted in October

⁵¹⁰ Meeting of *MAPAI*'s political committee, 21.12.1935, p. 3.

⁵¹¹ Ann Mosely Lesch, *Arab Politics in Palestine 1917-1939: The Frustration of a Nationalist Movement*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), pp. 195-196.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, p. 196.

⁵¹³ Report on meeting between Wauchope and the Jewish delegation, 23.12.1935, CZA S25\6300.

⁵¹⁴ "Yehudey drom afrika mohim 'al ha-mo'atza ha-mehokeket", *Doar Ha-Yom*, 15.1.1936, p. 8; "Resolution Protesting against Establishment of Legislative Council Adopted at Conference Held at the Hotel Astor, NYC", 26.1.1936, CZA S25\10166; Deputy general secretary of the Jewish Agency to the Zionist Federation of Brazil, 6.3.1936, CZA S30\2280; Ben-Gurion to the head of the Jewish community of Warsaw, 13.1.1936, *ibid.*; "Ve'idat keren ha-yesod be-romania", *Davar*, 25.2.1936, p. 2; "Meha'at yehudey Yugoslavia neged ha-mo'atza ha-mehokeket", *Doar Ha-Yom*, 21.1.1936, p. 5.

⁵¹⁵ Interview between Wauchope and Shertok, 19.1.1936, in: Moshe Sharett (Shertok), *Yoman medini, 1936*, (Tel-Aviv: 'Am 'Oved, 1976), pp. 15-24; Weizmann to Namier, 22.1.1936, *LPCW*, XVII, letter no. 142, p. 139; Weizmann to Sieff, 22.1.1936, *ibid.*, letter no. 143, p. 140; interview between Wauchope and Shertok, 24.1.1936, *Yoman medini*, pp. 24-26; meeting of *MAPAI*'s political committee, 26.1.1936, LPA 2-023-1936-11; interview between Wauchope, Weizmann, Ruppin, Ben-Gurion and Shertok, 26.1.1936, *Yoman medini*, pp. 27-36.

1935, was a prelude to a wider international crisis.⁵¹⁶ Britain was therefore busy consolidating its position in the Middle East, a policy that in practice meant concessions to the Arabs.⁵¹⁷ The only way to fight this new policy, Shertok concluded, was to mobilize world Jewry – world-wide protests against the Legislative Council were already underway – and to appeal to British public opinion, emphasizing the plight of German Jews.

By early March 1936, Ben-Gurion had started talking openly about a “policy for [the establishment of] a Jewish State”.⁵¹⁸ He agreed with Shertok that the Legislative Council initiative, together with the proposed restrictions on immigration and land purchases were the result of a changing international arena in which the British, fearing for their hegemony in the Middle East, were trying to appease the Arabs. Moreover, Palestine and Syria were the only A-type Mandates still in existence, and Syria was already very close to gaining full independence. Once Palestine became the only A-type Mandate, Ben-Gurion predicted, the Palestinian Arabs would redouble their pressure for self-rule.⁵¹⁹ Finally, he believed that German and Polish Jews were desperate to leave their respective countries, and if the Zionist movement was not able to guarantee mass migration to Palestine, the Jewish refugees would go elsewhere, thus reducing the Zionist endeavor in Palestine to a “hobby” (*inyan shel hovevim*).

Ben-Gurion believed that the Zionist movement could leverage the plight of European Jews into a migration of a million Jews to Palestine. This might be the first articulation of his 1940s “One Million Plan”. Ben-Gurion began to think that time was running out for the Zionist project. The encroachment of Italy on British hegemony in the Middle East

⁵¹⁶ Shertok comments, meeting of MAPAI’s central committee, 29.1.1936, *Yoman medini*, p. 39.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 39-40.

⁵¹⁸ Meeting of MAPAI’s political committee, 9.3.1936, LPA 2-023-1936-12, p. 2.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2-3.

and the prospect of a war in Europe threatened to make the brittle Zionist-British alliance more brittle still. But the silver lining to the dark clouds of war was the chance to funnel masses of helpless Jewish refugees into Palestine, ditching the evolutionist approach for a demographic quantum leap that would lead to the creation of a Jewish state.

On February 12th, 1936, the Legislative Council proposal was debated in the House of Lords.⁵²⁰ The debate was not initiated by the Zionist lobby but by Labor Peers, who used the Legislative Council issue as an excuse to attack the Conservative Government.⁵²¹

Although the debate was initiated by Labor leader Henry Snell, the Legislative Council plan was viciously attacked by members of the opposition and the government alike. The opponents of the scheme quoted – at times, verbatim – Zionist arguments against the Legislative Council: they argued that the Council would hurt Jewish-Arab relations, that it would hold back the development of Palestine, and that Palestinian Arabs must first acquire political experience in local government.⁵²² The Earl of Lytton, formerly Under-Secretary of State for India and Governor of Bengal, suggested sending a Royal Commission of Inquiry to Palestine, in order to “report on the best way of developing self-government in the conditions that at present prevail in Palestine”, just as Britain had done in the case of India.⁵²³ Lytton’s suggestion might be the first germination of the Royal Commission that was set up in August 1936 to study the causes of the Arab Revolt. At any rate, the debate was considered a success by the Zionist Bureau in London.⁵²⁴ The spectre of the Legislative Council began to dissipate.

⁵²⁰ Transcription of debate in *New Judea*, Vol. XIII, No. 5., February 1936, pp. 73-86.

⁵²¹ Rose, “Ha-vikuach ‘al ha-moatza”, p. 241.

⁵²² Transcription of debate in *New Judea*, February 1936, pp. 73-74.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁵²⁴ Laurie to Weizmann, 4.3.1936, CZA Z4\31889, p. 1; See also Katznelson’s comments, meeting of *MAPAI*’s political committee, 9.3.1936, LPA 2-023-1936-12, p. 9.

On March 24th, 1936 the Legislative Council proposal was debated in the House of Commons, where the Government's defeat was even more resounding than the debacle in the House of Lords.⁵²⁵ Political scientist Norman Rose has claimed that Weizmann and the Zionist lobby in London opposed British Labor's intention to raise the issue of the Legislative Council in the House of Commons, out of fear that an all-out attack on the Government would force it to double down on its commitment to the Council plan.⁵²⁶ However, it seems that Rose did not consult Shertok's reports on the debate, in which he revealed the full scope of the Zionist lobby's involvement in the preparations to the debate: opponents of the Legislative Council proposal, including Thomas Williams, Leo Amery, Archibald Sinclair, and Winston Churchill, were briefed before the debate by Weizmann, Melchett and *MAPAI*'s man in London, Dov Hoz.⁵²⁷ During the debate the anti-Legislative Council MPs read off material supplied by the Zionist lobby.⁵²⁸ Colonial Minister Thomas's defense of the plan was weak, Melchett reported afterwards, while Churchill's attack was brilliant, and Shertok opined that the Colonial Minister's feeble defense of the plan was his way of killing the idea on the Parliament's floor.⁵²⁹ After the debate, Weizmann wrote to his wife that the Legislative Council was "dead".⁵³⁰ With the demise of the Legislative Council plan, some members of *MAPAI* now warned about the possibility of Arab riots.⁵³¹ They were soon to be proven right.

⁵²⁵ Melchett to Shertok, 27.3.1936, CZA S25\10166; "A Parliament for Palestine", 30.3.1936, CZA A185\86\2, p. 2; Brodetsky to Ben-Gurion, 3.4.1936, CZA S25\7558, "The Legislative Council Debate in the House of Commons", *Palestine Post*, 5.4.1936, CZA S25\10087;

⁵²⁶ Rose, "ha-vikuach 'al ha-moatza", pp. 242-243.

⁵²⁷ Shertok's comments, meeting of *MAPAI*'s political committee, 7.4.1936, LPA 2-023-1936-12, p. 3; Shertok's comments, meeting of *MAPAI*'s central committee, 16.4.1936, LPA 2-023-1936-12, p. 2.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

⁵²⁹ Melchett to Shertok, 27.3.1936, p. 1; Shertok's comments, meeting of *MAPAI*'s political committee, 7.4.1936, p. 2.

⁵³⁰ Weizmann to Vera Weizmann, 28.3.1936, WA, p. 1; see also: interview between Weizmann and Ettinger, 2.4.1936, WA, p. 2.

⁵³¹ Avraham Katznelson's comments, meeting of *MAPAI*'s political committee, 7.4.1936, p. 10; Golomb's comments, *ibid.*, p. 12-13.

In early April 1936 the British Cabinet decided to postpone the establishment of the Legislative Council until after another round of negotiations with an Arab delegation, which was expected to arrive in London in May of that year.⁵³² In mid-April, however, disturbances erupted in Palestine that turned into the 3-year-long Arab Revolt. By the time the Arab delegation arrived in London in June 1936, the British Government had already quietly buried the Legislative Council initiative for the last time. The Rabbi from Katznelson's parable was right: given enough time, either the nobleman or the bear will eventually die.

The unceremonious death of the Legislative Council was somewhat lost in the whirlwind of events that engulfed Palestine in 1936-1937. Yet, in many ways the demise of the Legislative Council marked an end of an era in Mandatory Palestine. Between 1922 and 1936 the British had attempted to create a joint political framework for Jews and Arabs in Palestine, to incorporate the inhabitants of the country into its government and to form a common Palestinian identity. Those efforts stopped as Britain moved to quash the Arab Revolt. In November 1936 a Royal Commission of Inquiry was sent to Palestine to study the causes of the Revolt. In July 1937, the Commission recommended the partition of Palestine into two separate nation-states and a British enclave. Indeed, the partition plan was an admission by the British that a joint Palestine political framework and a joint Palestinian identity were not viable.

For the Zionist movement this too was an end of an era. In the early 1920s the Labor Zionists developed the concept of mutual non-domination, which was supposed to quell Arab fears of a Jewish takeover and protect Jewish autonomy. The Labor Zionists envisioned Palestine as divided into two mutually-exclusive national autonomies, with

⁵³² Weizmann to Vera Weizmann, 28.3.1936, WA, p. 1.

little power to affect each other, and regulated by a central British administration. The Legislative Council threatened to upset this carefully imagined separation by giving the Arab majority legal power to meddle in Jewish affairs. As counter-measures against the prospect of an Arab-dominated Legislative Council, in February 1931 *MAPAI* adopted parity as a *sine qua non* for the establishment of the Council, and in July of the same year the Zionist Organization adopted mutual non-domination as an official policy. Parity and mutual non-domination remained the main Zionist line of defense against the Legislative Council until the summer of 1937. In August 1937 the 20th Zionist Congress agreed to negotiate a partition plan for Palestine, although it rejected the specific plan suggested by the British. The Zionist acceptance of partition signaled a retreat from the claim that Jews and Arab could live together peacefully under British rule. For the Jewish state to be born, the Legislative Council first had to die.

Yet in other ways, the Zionist acceptance of partition was not a radical ideological departure, but rather an adaptation of the guiding principles of Labor Zionism to the circumstances created by the end of the Legislative Council initiative and the outbreak of the Arab Revolt. From the early 1920s until 1937 Labor Zionists argued that Jews and Arabs could share Palestine by erecting legal, economic and cultural barriers between the two communities. Hence most Labor Zionists supported the concept of Hebrew labor in the Jewish economic sector and the creation of wide-ranging national autonomies, while opposing the right of both Jews and Arabs to leave their respective ethnic communities. Zionist separatism was reflected in Katznelson's support for Jewish ghettoization and Weizmann's depiction of Mandatory Palestine as a legal-spatial island, disconnected from both world history and its geographical surroundings. In other words, the Labor Zionists were in favor of implementing partition between Jews and Arabs long before the British had suggested it in 1937. However, the partition toward which Labor Zionists worked

was not – or not yet – territorial, but rather a social, economic and cultural partition under British rule.

If, indeed, the Labor Zionists had been working towards the partition of Palestine since the early 1920s, then partition should not be thought of as an event – either the 1937 proposal or the 1947-1949 actual partition of the land – but rather as a process, an interminable partition that had to be created and maintained through myriad cultural, economic and political practices. Of course, the Labor Zionists were not the only facilitators of partition in Palestine; each cycle of Arab violence against the *Yishuv*, and especially the Arab Revolt, led to the further dislocation of Jewish refugees from mixed cities, fueled the rise of Zionist militarism and bolstered Jewish economic self-sufficiency. Thus, the major ideological change brought about by the demise of the Legislative Council plan, the demographic growth of the *Yishuv* in 1932-1936, and the eruption of the Arab Revolt, was the move from Zionist work towards cultural, economic, and social partition within the Mandatory framework to a Zionist acceptance of territorial partition and an independent Jewish state.

But a sovereign Jewish state came at a price. When the Zionist leadership accepted the principle of partition it also accepted the fact that the Jewish state would come with a sizable Arab minority attached. Thus, the acceptance of partition meant not the complete abandonment of the principle of mutual non-domination but rather its modification: from “to not rule and not be ruled” to “rule and not be rule”. For the first time in its short history, the Zionist movement had to think in earnest and in practical terms about the place of Arabs in the Jewish state. It is to these plans and considerations that we now turn.

Chapter IV

From Parity to Partition: Zionist Reactions to the Arab Revolt, April 1936-August

1937

The present chapter examines how the Zionist leadership assessed the impact of the early stages of the Arab Revolt on the future of Palestine, and the ways in which Zionist biopolitical thought changed in response to the Arab Revolt and to the Palestine Royal Commission's inquiry.

The Arab Revolt erupted on April 15th, 1936, when a convoy was attacked on the Tulkarm-Nablus road and its Jewish passengers were shot.⁵³³ A day later, *Haganah Bet* militants attacked two Arabs near Petah Tivka.⁵³⁴ On Friday, April 17th, the burial procession of Israel Chazan, who was murdered in the April 15th attack, turned into a brawl between Jewish participants and the police.⁵³⁵ On Sunday, April 19th, Jewish attacks on Arabs and Arab attacks on Jews reached fever-pitch and the army was called in to restore order in Tel-Aviv and Jaffa. Locally-organized "national committees" declared a general strike in the Arab sector on April 20th, and on April 25th, a new political body – the Higher Arab Committee – was created in order to steer Palestinian Arab resistance.⁵³⁶

By mid-May 1936 it was clear that the "disturbances", as the British called them, were a sustained, concerted anti-British and anti-Zionist campaign. On May 18th, the British Cabinet decided to send a Royal Commission to Palestine, to study the causes of the

⁵³³ Igal Eyal, *Ha-intifida ha-rishona: dikhuy ha-mered ha-arvi 'al-yedey ha-tzava ha-briti be-eretz-israel, 1936-1939*, (Tel-Aviv: Ma'arakhot, 1998), p. 61. The non-Jewish passengers were spared.

⁵³⁴ A splinter group from the *Haganah* militia, which became a predecessor of the right-wing *Irgun Tzvai Leumi* militia.

⁵³⁵ Eyal, *Ha-intifida ha-rishona*, p. 62.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

disturbances.⁵³⁷ The Commission arrived in Palestine on November 11th, 1936, and proceeded to collect evidence from British, Jewish and Arab witnesses.⁵³⁸ On July 7th, 1937, the Royal Commission's report was submitted to the British Cabinet, which adopted its recommendations. In accordance with its mission to determine the causes of the Revolt, the Royal Commission suggested the restriction of Jewish land acquisition to the plains and valleys of Palestine, and capping Jewish immigration at 12,000 per annum.⁵³⁹ Yet the Commission also argued that these measures were mere "palliatives" that could not address the root causes of the conflict.⁵⁴⁰ As an alternative, the Commission recommended a more radical solution – the termination of the Mandate and the partition of Palestine into three political entities: A Jewish nation-state that would encompass most of the Coastal Plain, the Galilee and the Northern Jordan Valley; an Arab State that would encompass Judea and Samaria and the Negev and would be connected to Transjordan; and a British Enclave that would encompass Jerusalem and its environs, the Christian cities of Bethlehem and Nazareth, the mixed cities of Haifa, Acre, Tiberias and Safed (all four of which would be located within the territory of the Jewish State but would be under British rule), and a corridor from Jerusalem to Jaffa that would include Ramle and Lydda.⁵⁴¹

The partition proposal occupied Zionist politics as early as January 1937, when the idea of partition was first raised in the Royal Commission's sessions. The prospect of a partitioned Palestine divided the Zionist movement into two camps, but its most important leaders, David Ben-Gurion, Chaim Weizmann and Moshe Shertok, were all in

⁵³⁷ Itzhak Galnoor, *The Partition of Palestine: Decision Crossroads in the Zionist Movement*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), p. 44.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁵³⁹ Great Britain and William Robert Wellesley Peel, *Palestine Royal Commission Report*, (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1937), p. 366.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 368.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 380-393.

favor of partition. In August 1937, the 20th Zionist Congress rejected the specifics of the Royal Commission's partition proposal but authorized the Jewish Agency Executive to enter talks with the British Government regarding the details of an official British partition proposal.⁵⁴²

For many Zionist leaders, the partition proposal was the culmination of a years-long process which exposed the Jewish National Home, with greater ferocity than ever, to the vicissitudes of international politics. According to Ben-Gurion and Shertok's analysis, the rise of European Fascism, the Italian challenge to Britain's Mediterranean hegemony, and the decolonization of neighboring Arab countries, drove Britain, in anticipation of an eventual large-scale conflict, to make concessions to the Arab World at the expense of Zionist colonization. Although these processes began in the early 1930s, until late 1935 they worked in favor of the Jewish National Home by pushing hundreds of thousands of German and Eastern European Jews to immigrate to Palestine. Yet when the October 1935 Italo-Ethiopian war triggered a financial crisis in Palestine, and, more acutely, when the Arab Revolt brought Jewish immigration to a screeching halt, it was clear to most Zionist leaders that the international tide had now turned against the Zionist project in Palestine.

The first section of this chapter looks at the ways in which the Zionist leadership's conception of time changed in response to the Arab Revolt and Europe's descent into war. Chaim Arlosoroff, who died in 1933, was perhaps the first major Zionist thinker to suggest that because Palestinian politics were shaped by international events, Zionism did not have an infinite amount of time to achieve its goals. Ben-Gurion and Shertok adopted this doctrine, whether wittingly or unwittingly, in late 1935, and by May 1936 more and

⁵⁴² *Ha-congress ha-tzioni ha-'esrim ve-ha-moshav ha-hamishi shel mo'etzet ha-sokhnut ha-yehudit*, (Zurich: the Zionist Organization Press, 1937), p. 360.

more Zionist leaders came to the conclusion that time was running out for the Zionist project. A new bio-political theory arose in Zionist circles, which I would like to term the bottleneck theory. This theory postulated that the growing immigration to Palestine, instead of making Zionist colonization easier, actually exacerbated Arab opposition to Zionism, and consequently caused the British to restrict immigration and land purchases. Some Zionists were willing to hunker down and wait for better times. Others, especially Ben-Gurion, began to look for a revolutionary moment that would break through the political bottleneck. Eventually, Ben-Gurion found this moment in the Royal Commission's partition proposal.

The second section of this chapter examines the debates surrounding a May 1936 proposal by five Jewish notables – The Group of Five – to fix in advance the rate of immigration in exchange for a 5-year truce with the Arabs. The main bone of contention between the supporters of the scheme and its opponents was whether a temporary peace was worth forfeiting a sacred tenet of Zionism – the right to immigrate to Palestine. Building on Anita Shapira's reading of the partition debates, which showed that differing perceptions of time were crucial in determining the Zionist leadership's support or opposition to partition, I argue that the Group of Five debate presaged the partition debate, since both were occupied with questions of tempo, timing and temporariness. Furthermore, I make the case that both the Group of Five and the partition debates should be read against the backdrop of the growing internationalization of Palestinian politics and the ways in which it molded the Zionist leadership's understanding of time.

The third section of this chapter details the final Zionist debates regarding parity. Weizmann wished to present parity as the Zionist policy regarding the Arab Question to the Royal Commission, but the idea attracted strong opposition from members of the

Jewish Agency Executive and the Zionist General Council. Although both Weizmann and Ben-Gurion endorsed parity and mutual non-domination when they appeared before the Royal Commission, it was clear that, outside *MAPAI*, there was very little support for parity in the Zionist movement. Neither parity nor mutual non-domination appeared in the resolutions of the 20th Zionist Congress and the Royal Commission rejected the idea out of hand. In fact, the Zionist Congress's agreement to discuss partition should be seen as the abandonment of mutual non-domination, since any type of partition would have brought a large Arab population under Jewish rule. Thus, ended official Zionist support for mutual non-domination, a slogan that had informed Zionist policy since 1917 – not with a bang, but a whimper.

The fourth and last section of this chapter examines the use of bio-territorial arguments – arguments that deal with a given territory's capacity to sustain a certain number of people – in the partition debates. Bio-territorial calculations had been used by Zionist experts before 1937 to assess the colonization potential of smaller plots of land in Palestine. At the same time, Zionist thinkers remained ambiguous about the exact borders of the future Jewish State. The Royal Commission's partition plan, however, gave the Jewish State defined borders, and forced both proponents and opponents of partition to use bio-territorial arguments in order to support their stance. Because the proposed Jewish State was much smaller than the one most Zionist leaders imagined, its ability to absorb mass migration became a major bone of contention between proponents and opponents of partition. By giving the future Jewish State definitive size and shape, the 1937 partition plan made bio-territorial questions a major part of the Zionist political discourse.

The first 14 months of the Arab Revolt saw a major shift in Mandatory and Zionist politics. Against the backdrop of a crumbling Wilsonian world order, some prominent

Zionist and British politicians – although certainly not all of them – began to view the Mandate as a burden. The present chapter, then, details the process through which the Zionist leadership moved from endorsing mutual non-domination under British rule to accepting, however reluctantly, the termination of the Mandate.

The Arlosoroff Doctrine, the Arab Revolt, and the Erosion of Zionist Gradualism, April-June 1936

In a 1984 article, historian Anita Shapira noted that the attitude of Zionist politicians towards the 1937 partition proposal was strongly influenced by their conception of time.⁵⁴³ As with all fateful decisions, the issue of partition forced the Zionist leaders to examine and argue about the very foundations of their worldview, including their understanding of Jewish history and the Jewish future. Shapira contrasts those who used the past, the millennia-long Jewish devotion to the Land of Israel, to argue against partition and those who used the future, the need to save the younger generation of European Jews, to argue in favor of partition.⁵⁴⁴ Many religious Zionists argued against partition out of a messianic confidence that the Jewish people would eventually overcome all obstacles, while Zionists who subscribed to a more secular conception of time believed that time was running out for Zionism, and a Jewish state was needed in order to increase the pace of Zionist colonization.⁵⁴⁵ Some Zionists argued that a revolutionary act – the establishment of a state – was needed to achieve Zionist goals, while others stuck to the gradualist approach, claiming that the state should evolve naturally from Zionist nation-building, rather than the other way around.⁵⁴⁶ Finally, proponents of partition saw it as a

⁵⁴³ Anita Shapira, “Tfisat ha-zman be-pulmus ha-haluka 1937”, in: Meir Avizohar and Yesh’ayahu Fridman (eds.), *Tyunim be-tokhniyot ha-halukah, 1937-1947*, (Sde Boker: Ben-Gurion University, 1984), pp. 21-39.

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

temporary measure, a jumping-off point for further expansion, while opponents of partition argued that international borders have a tendency to become permanent.⁵⁴⁷

The Zionist preoccupation with questions of time, however, was not born with the partition debates, only amplified by them. Shapira rightly points to the fact that Arlosoroff, in his famous letter to Weizmann from June 1932, first articulated the set of geo- and chrono-political premises that would inform Ben-Gurion and Shertok's understanding of the Palestinian situation in the mid-to-late 1930s.⁵⁴⁸ Already in 1932, Arlosoroff claimed that Zionism's gradual approach to the building of the Jewish National Home was inadequate in the face of a de-stabilized international arena and a politically tumultuous Middle East. He rightly predicted the fast erosion of the Mandates system, the rise of the Arab states and their influence on Palestinian politics, and the outbreak of a new World War (which he thought would be fought between the West and Soviet Russia). In the event of a World War, Arlosoroff prophesied, the Yishuv would be disconnected from the Jewish diaspora and an Arab revolt would erupt, or worse, a British-Arab alliance would be concluded. The evolutionist approach to Zionism could only succeed if the Zionist movement had unlimited time to develop the Jewish National Home but, as Arlosoroff attempted to show in his letter, this was not the case. Thus, Arlosoroff set a Zionist doomsday clock that marked the time towards a European catastrophe, the shockwaves of which would cause the collapse of the Jewish National Home. Consequently, he was looking for a new revolutionary approach that would secure the existence of the Jewish National Home before the catastrophe. One such revolutionary

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 25.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 22.

option, Arlosoroff suggested, would be an “organized revolutionary rule of the Jewish minority”, that would be put in place until a Jewish majority was achieved.⁵⁴⁹

Shertok was clearly influenced by Arlosoroff’s analysis. On May 21st, 1936, Shertok said that:

The attitude of [High Commissioner Wauchope towards the National Home] changed when he realized that the determining factor in the mental state – and hence the political state – of the Arab community is fear of a Jewish takeover [...] this happened about a year after the High Commissioner arrived in Palestine [that is, in 1932]. Even then there were those who drew conclusions from this development, and they came true. Arlosoroff spent the second year of the Commissioner’s tenure despairing over the trajectory of the Commissioner’s politics.⁵⁵⁰

Shertok added that the High Commissioner, despite his good relationship with the Zionists, decided to put “hard boundaries” on the tempo of Jewish colonization in Palestine in order to prevent an Arab rebellion.⁵⁵¹ Moreover, Shertok explained that the High Commissioner had reached this conclusion even before the Italo-Ethiopian War. Arlosoroff, Shertok suggested, was the first to notice the change in the High Commissioner’s politics as early as 1932. However, the rise of antisemitism in Europe and the Fifth *Aliyah* (wave of Jewish immigration) that followed it prevented Wauchope

⁵⁴⁹ Eran Kaplan and Derek Penslar (eds.), *The Origins of Israel, 1882-1948, A Documentary History* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2011), p. 236. For the Hebrew original see: Arlosoroff, *Yoman yerushalaim*, pp. 333-342.

⁵⁵⁰ Meeting of *MAPAI*’s central committee, 21.5.1936, LPA 2-023-1936-12, p. 11. Translation mine.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

from translating his intentions to curb Zionist colonization into practical politics until the Arab Revolt gave him the appropriate excuse to do so.

On May 22nd, in a Jewish Agency Executive meeting, Shertok insisted that the Mandatory Government should stand up to Arab aggression until the Jews were strong enough to defend themselves. In this context, he mentioned Arlosoroff's espousal of a "Zionist military dictatorship" – without revealing his name. It seems that Shertok had begun to question whether the British were willing – or able – to repress Arab resistance to Zionism, and whether there were alternatives to the Zionist reliance on British military power. At any rate, it is clear that in the first weeks of the Arab Revolt, as the Zionist leadership was trying to take stock of the situation, Arlosoroff was on Shertok's mind.⁵⁵²

Perhaps more importantly, Ben-Gurion's own analysis of the international arena bore a striking resemblance to that of Arlosoroff. Ben-Gurion suspected that the Royal Commission was charged with rubber-stamping a profound change in British policy that began to take shape, at the very latest, in 1935.⁵⁵³ More than ever, he posited, the fate of the National Home was dictated by international politics. According to Ben-Gurion's analysis, the Italo-Ethiopian War, which broke out in October 1935 and was a direct challenge to Britain's Mediterranean hegemony, gave the Arab leaders hope that the outbreak of a new World War would "fundamentally change the political status of the Arab countries, especially Syria, Egypt and Palestine".⁵⁵⁴ Moreover, the financial crisis

⁵⁵² Shertok, *Yoman medini*, II, p. 133.

⁵⁵³ Meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 19.5.1936, CZA, p. 2. See also Shertok's comments in MAPAI's central committee meeting, 21.5.1936, LPA 2-023-1936-12, p. 7.

⁵⁵⁴ Ben-Gurion, *Zikhronot*, III, p. 170. Translation mine. See also Shertok's comments at a meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 22.5.1936, in: *Yoman medini*, I, pp. 134-135.

that followed the breakout of the war in Ethiopia provided fertile ground for political agitation among the Palestinian Arabs.⁵⁵⁵

Meanwhile, between 1932 and 1935, some 140,000 Jews immigrated to Palestine,⁵⁵⁶ spurred on by the rise of antisemitism in Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Romania.⁵⁵⁷ In 1935 alone, 61,854 Jews arrived in Palestine.⁵⁵⁸ The Palestinian Arabs quickly realized that, given this “tempo” of immigration, Palestine would become a Jewish country within a few years.⁵⁵⁹ Accordingly, in November 1935 the Palestinian Arab leaders presented three demands to the British Government: a ban on Jewish immigration and land purchases and the establishment of an Arab national government. The High Commissioner refused to ban or limit immigration (beyond the principle of economic absorptive capacity) but planned to introduce a law that would limit land purchases by ensuring that sellers would get to keep a “lot viable”,⁵⁶⁰ and to establish a Legislative Council. None of these plans came to fruition by mid-1936, but for Ben-Gurion they signaled a dangerous new course in British policy.

In addition to the Fifth *Aliyah* and the Italian-British rivalry, disturbances in Syria and Egypt led to negotiations between the local national leadership and France and Britain, respectively, regarding both countries’ independence. Ben-Gurion was well aware, and wary, of the influence of this development on Palestinian Arabs. Some of the younger Arab activists, he reported, argued that Palestinian Arabs should follow in the footsteps of

⁵⁵⁵ Ben-Gurion, *Zikhronot*, III, p. 171.

⁵⁵⁶ According to Ben-Gurion’s estimate in *ibid.*

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

⁵⁵⁸ David Gurevich, Aaron Gertz, and Roberto Bachi, *Ha-‘aliyah, ha-yishuv, ve-ha-tenu’a ha-tiv’it shel ha-ukhlusiya be-eretz-yisrael*, (Jerusalem: the Statistical Department of the Jewish Agency, 1944), p. 13.

⁵⁵⁹ Ben-Gurion, *Zikhronot*, III, p. 171.

⁵⁶⁰ A minimal amount of dunams that would allow the seller to continue to make a living as a *fellah*.

their Syrian and Egyptian brethren and demand from the British Government a complete revision of the Palestinian regime.⁵⁶¹

Finally, the February-March 1936 Parliamentary debates on the Legislative Council, which were initially celebrated as a Zionist victory, turned out, in Ben-Gurion's analysis, to be a pyrrhic one, as they convinced the Palestinian Arab leadership that the Jews controlled the British Parliament, and nothing short of a full-on mobilization of Palestinian Arabs would stop the Jews from taking over Palestine. For Ben-Gurion, the demise of the Legislative Council scheme contributed, quite directly, to the eruption of the Arab Revolt.

Britain's precarious situation in the Mediterranean, Ben-Gurion concluded, led the British to shore up their Middle Eastern alliances. Thanks to British brokerage, he reported in his diary, pacts were signed between the Yemenite Imam and Ibn-Saud, and between Ibn-Saud and the Iraqis. It was clear to Ben-Gurion that Britain, fearing an imminent clash with Italy, was securing a Mediterranean Pax Britannica, which meant courting Palestinian Arabs at the expense of the National Home. In Ben-Gurion's mind, Britain's deteriorating relationship with Italy and Germany, its alliances in the Middle East, and the predicament of European Jews, were all closely linked to political developments in Palestine.

Thus, both Arlosoroff and Ben-Gurion emphasised the influence of broader imperial imperatives, the rise of the Arab States, and the precarious standings of European Jews, on the British attitude toward the Jewish National Home, and both searched for a

⁵⁶¹ Ben-Gurion, *Zikhronot*, III, p. 172.

revolutionary moment that would launch the Zionist endeavor into the next step in its development.

Ben-Gurion and Shertok, due to their positions as chairman of the Jewish Agency and the head of its political department, respectively, were better equipped than their colleagues to gauge the ways in which international politics were shaping the pace and prospects of Zionist colonization in Palestine. But when the full extent of the Arab Revolt became apparent in May-June 1936, the rest of the Zionist leadership caught up, quickly and painfully. Thus, the question whether time was no longer on Zionism's side became a burning issue at least a full year before the partition debates.

Indeed, in the wake of the Arab Revolt, more and more Zionist leaders began to question Zionist gradualism. In a May 19th, 1936, meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, Menachem Ussishkin warned his colleagues that if the Jewish State were not established within a decade, things would be “a hundred times worse” for the *Yishuv*.⁵⁶² “Everything has to be done in a different tempo” Ussishkin concluded.⁵⁶³ Not to be outdone, Ben-Gurion interjected by saying that the next five years were crucial. David Werner Senator, a non-Zionist member of the Executive, concurred: “Time is against us. Things will be decided within the next five years.”⁵⁶⁴

A few weeks later, in a meeting of MAPAI's central committee that dealt with potential negotiations with the Arabs, Shlomo Kaplansky complained about Zionist procrastination. “Ten years ago”, he recounted, “most comrades thought that the time had not yet come for peace negotiations, and that a peace agreement should be concluded as late as possible. Does anyone think that if we postpone peace for another decade our

⁵⁶² Meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 19.5.1936, CZA, p. 28. Translation mine.

⁵⁶³ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 42. Translation mine.

situation would be better?”⁵⁶⁵ It is true, Kaplansky told his MAPAI colleagues, that the *proportional* demographic ratio between Jews and Arabs had changed in favor of the Jews, but, thanks to Jewish capital, the Arabs were growing in number, organization, intelligence, and economic power. “Under these conditions”, he concluded gloomily, “we cannot say that time is on our side”.⁵⁶⁶

The Arab Revolt only strengthened the link between time and demography in Zionist thought. For Ben-Gurion, the Revolt was a demographic war, a war on immigration. As early as May 3rd, 1936, he argued that the Arab Revolt was aimed not at the Jews residing in Palestine, but rather at the Jews who planned on immigrating to Palestine, because the Arabs were afraid that a Jewish majority would hand control of the country to the Jews.⁵⁶⁷ Two days later, Ben-Gurion claimed that the Arabs were conducting a war against the entire Jewish people and its right to return to Palestine.⁵⁶⁸ If the Jewish people agreed to stop immigration to Palestine completely, he added, a peace agreement could be reached “tomorrow”.⁵⁶⁹ Yet a peace agreement along those lines was unacceptable to Ben-Gurion, because the only hope of survival for European Jews was mass immigration to Palestine. Accordingly, the most dangerous aspect of the Arab Revolt was not anti-Jewish violence, but rather the danger of a British decision to impose political limits on immigration. On May 15th Ben-Gurion told the Jewish Agency Executive that the cause of the Arab Revolt was the fast “tempo” of Jewish immigration, which could turn Palestine into a Jewish country within a few years.⁵⁷⁰ In other words, it was not just the *volume* of Jewish immigrants entering Palestine, but the *speed* in which they arrived, that worried the

⁵⁶⁵ Meeting of MAPAI’s central committee, 9.6.1936, LPA 2-023-1936-13, p. 23. Translation mine.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 24. Translation mine.

⁵⁶⁷ Meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 3.5.1936, CZA, pp. 7-8.

⁵⁶⁸ Ben-Gurion, *Zikhronot*, III, p. 164.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁰ Meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 15.5.1936, CZA, p. 5.

Arabs. The international arena made it so that when time was running out for European Jews, it was, inexorably and inevitably, running out for Palestinian Arabs too.

Unsurprisingly, Ben-Gurion remarked that this war between Jews and Arabs erupted “too soon”.⁵⁷¹

Suddenly, “tempo” became the Zionist watchword. In a meeting of MAPAI’s political committee on May 23rd, Avraham Katznelson calculated that, given the current “tempo” of immigration, in 20 years Palestinian Jews would number 2 million souls, but, thanks to their high natural population growth (*ribui tiv’ee*), so would the Arabs.⁵⁷² Itzhak Ben-Zvi wanted to reach an agreement with the British Government that would ensure a good “tempo of immigration” – about one million immigrants over ten years.⁵⁷³ On July 28th, Itzhak Tabenkin demanded that the Zionist witnesses tell the Royal Commission that Jews could not live alongside the Arabs as long as the “tempo” of Jewish development was slow, and hence a faster development rate was needed.⁵⁷⁴ When the Restricted Zionist General Council convened on the 13th and 14th of October to discuss the political situation, Arthur Ruppin argued that Palestine could absorb another 400,000 families, but the big question was a question of “tempo” – the number of families that the Zionist institutions could settle per year.⁵⁷⁵

Ben-Gurion and Shertok still clung to the concept of demographic determinism and argued that only an increased tempo of immigration and colonization would compel the

⁵⁷¹ Ben Gurion, *Zikhronot*, II, p. 200.

⁵⁷² Meeting of MAPAI’s political committee, 23.5.1936, LPA 2-023-1936-12, pp. 3-4. Ben-Gurion disagreed and claimed that with an immigration rate of 50,000 Jews per year, a Jewish majority will be reached in 12 years

⁵⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵⁷⁴ Meeting of MAPAI’s political committee, 28.7.1936, LPA 2-023-1936-14, p.18.

⁵⁷⁵ Meeting of the Small Zionist Council, 13-14.10.1936, CZA A24\1166, p. 43.

Arabs to halt their violent campaign against the Mandate.⁵⁷⁶ But some Zionist leaders began to question this rather straightforward thesis. On April 19th, 1936 Ussishkin noted that:

Today we are in a tough situation, and it is tough not because some Jews were injured, but because the situation is becoming more and more difficult as we are nearing our historical objective. When we were 30,000 Jews in Palestine, our situation was easy because we were far from reaching our objective. But with 400,000 Jews [in Palestine] we are very close to our objective. The question, to whom does this country belong, is approaching its resolution.⁵⁷⁷

Yosef Sprinzak, a Labour Zionist who otherwise had very little ideological affinity to Ussishkin, voiced a similar opinion: The Jewish position in Palestine was more difficult now that there were 400,000 Jews in the country than in the past, and it would become more difficult still when there were one million Jews in Palestine.⁵⁷⁸ Furthermore, the Ben-Gurionian insistence that “Jewish facts” would change the Arabs’ mind about Zionism, Sprinzak argued, ignored the reality on the ground: the Arabs were making an “astonishing” progress in creating their own facts in Palestine.⁵⁷⁹

This new approach to the role of time in Zionist colonization was clearly at odds with demographic determinism. Demographic determinism assumed that the more Jews enter Palestine, the easier it would be for Zionists to achieve their goals. Ussishkin and

⁵⁷⁶ Ben-Gurion, *Zikhronot*, III, p. 175; Shertok’s speech, 9.7.1937, the 12th MAPAI council, LPA 2-022-1937-22, p. 5. See also: Berl Katznelson’s comments, meeting of *MAPAI*’s central committee, 21.5.1936, p. 18.

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 126. Translation mine.

⁵⁷⁸ Meeting of *MAPAI*’s political committee, 4.5.1936, LPA 2-023-1936-12, p. 14.

⁵⁷⁹ Meeting of *MAPAI*’s central committee, 9.6.1936, LPA 2-023-1936-13, p. 21.

Sprinzak, on the other hand, argued that as more Jews entered Palestine the Arabs became more desperate and they, in turn, pressured the British to put limits on immigration and land purchases. In other words, mass Jewish migration created a political bottleneck effect in Palestine. The bottleneck theory was supported by a noticeable change in British attitudes and the waning of immigration and capital flow into Palestine. On June 2nd, Eliezer Kaplan, the treasurer of the Jewish Agency, reported that in May 1936 immigration numbers decreased significantly because upper middle-class Jews were too afraid to immigrate to Palestine, and without their capital, there was no money to absorb more immigrant-workers.⁵⁸⁰ A constant state of war, he warned, would completely shut down immigration. On June 29th, Shertok reported that the High Commissioner had explicitly informed him of a British decision not to allow 1935's immigration numbers to be repeated again. This change was not a result of the Arab Revolt, Shertok explained, but rather a governmental decision to slow down the growth of the National Home.⁵⁸¹

It is evident that in the first few months of the Revolt, the Zionist leadership was preoccupied with questions regarding the tempo of Zionist colonization. The Arab Revolt, coupled with the growing political instability in Europe and the Middle East, bludgeoned the Zionist leadership into the realization that the world order which gave birth to the Balfour Declaration and sustained the Mandate was dissolving fast. This realization forced many a Zionist to abandon the gradualist approach which informed mainstream Zionist ideology.

Thus, Shapira's astute reading of the partition debates should be stretched backwards in time, to the end of 1935. For Ben-Gurion the Italo-Ethiopian war was a watershed moment in contemporary Mediterranean politics. Together with the de-colonization of the

⁵⁸⁰ Meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 2.6.1936, in: Ben-Gurion, *Zikhronot*, III, p. 234.

⁵⁸¹ Meeting of *MAPAI*'s central committee, 29.6.1936, LPA 2-023-1936-13, pp. 10-11.

Middle East, the ascension of Fascism and the predicament of European Jews, it signaled the brutal shortening of Zionism's "burn rate" and forced the Zionist leadership to rethink its approach to the colonization of Palestine. It was the increasing internationalization of the Palestine Question, rather than the partition debates, that made the Zionist leadership so exceedingly preoccupied with questions of time.

As the snowball of impending war gained momentum, Ben-Gurion and his colleagues sought ways to increase the pace of Jewish immigration and colonization. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was also the exact moment in which the British found it politic to slow Zionist colonization down, in hopes of consolidate their position in the Arab World. For Ben-Gurion, at least, the search for a faster tempo of colonization was underscored by a yearning for a revolutionary moment that would somehow blaze through the drudgery, inefficiency, and slowness of Mandatory rule. In partition, Ben-Gurion seems to have found such a revolutionary moment.

The Group of Five Negotiations and the Question of Temporariness, June 1936

When a group of five Jewish notables came to the Jewish Agency with a peace proposal in late May 1936, the question of temporariness was added to the question of tempo.⁵⁸²

The main feature of the proposal was a fixed rate of immigration – 30,000 Jews per year – for 10 years, that would bring the number of Palestinian Jews, after a decade, to 800,000.⁵⁸³ At the same time, it was assumed that the Arab population would reach 1,200,000 people (the 900,000 living in Palestine in 1936 plus a natural population

⁵⁸² Shertok's comments, meeting of *MAPAI's* political committee, 23.5.1936, LPA 2-023-1936-12, pp. 9-10. The five notables were Judah L. Magnes, the chancellor of the Hebrew University, Pinhas Rutenberg, founder of the Palestine Electrical Company and a *Yishuv* politician, Moshe Smilansky, a prominent farmer and peace activist, Moshe Novomeysky, founder of the Palestine Potash Company, and Gad Frumkin, a judge in the Mandatory Supreme Court.

⁵⁸³ Shertok's comments, meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 2.6.1936, CZA, p. 2. The calculation included, alongside 300,000 immigrants, a Jewish natural population growth of 100,000 people.

growth of 300,000), so that in 1946 Jews would constitute 40% of the total population and 70% of the Arab population. The proposal was debated by the Jewish Agency Executive and by the central committee of MAPAI, where the main question was whether the prospect of peace with the Arabs was worth the restriction of immigration, even temporarily.

The Jewish Agency Executive discussed the proposal on June 2nd, 1936. The vote was split: Shertok was willing to accept an agreement based on an annual immigration of 50,000 Jews for five years and so was Ben-Zvi.⁵⁸⁴ Ruppin stated that a Jewish-Arab agreement would bring peace and quiet to the country, a prerequisite for a steady stream of immigrants, and declared that he was in favor of a temporary accord.⁵⁸⁵ Maurice Hexter, head of the Jewish Agency's colonization department, mentioned the worsening economic situation of the Yishuv and suggested that an agreement on immigration would allow Jewish capital to once again flow to Palestine and revitalize its economy.⁵⁸⁶ Finally, Kaplan stressed the temporary nature of the agreement, and argued that Arab approval of Jewish immigration would be an "immense achievement".⁵⁸⁷ "We have to buy time", he concluded.

The opponents of the proposal were worried about its implications for the Zionist movement. Ussishkin argued that immigration to Palestine was a basic right of the Jewish people and no nation was allowed to forfeit its basic rights.⁵⁸⁸ Never one to shy away from hyperbole, Ussishkin claimed that he would prefer the immigration of 300,000 Jews based on the economic absorptive capacity of Palestine over the immigration of 400,000

⁵⁸⁴ Ben-Gurion, *Zikhronot*, III, p. 228.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 231

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 234-235.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 233. Translation mine.

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

Jews based on an agreement that limited immigration. Rabbi Judah Leib Fishman said that he opposed the limitation of immigration on national as well as religious grounds. The Zionist movement, he warned the Executive, would lose all credibility if it signed off on immigration caps.⁵⁸⁹ Itzhak Gruenbaum, head of the Jewish Agency's absorption and labour department, went a step further: the diaspora, he told his colleagues, would view such an agreement as treason.⁵⁹⁰ Finally, Ephraim Rotenstreich, head of the Jewish Agency's trade and industry department, argued that the implication of such an agreement was that the Jews agreed to remain a minority in Palestine for at least another 15 years. Consequently, diaspora Jews would lose faith in Zionism, and the Arabs would understand such an agreement as a Jewish abdication of the right to become the majority in Palestine.⁵⁹¹

The proponents and opponents of the proposal of seemed to have spoken two distinct political languages: the proponents based their support for the scheme on calculation, either demographic or economic, while the opponents' arguments mostly eschewed calculations and were concerned with Jewish rights and the effect of their abdication on the Jewish people. Instructive here is Ussishkin's claim that he would rather have fewer Jews immigrate to Palestine according to the economic absorptive capacity of the country than have more Jews immigrate on the basis of an agreed limitation of immigration.⁵⁹²

MAPAI's central committee, which discussed the matter on the 3rd and 4th of June, was also split on the proposal. Berl Katznelson prefaced his support for the proposal by saying

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 232.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 231.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid., p. 234.

⁵⁹² Later Ussishkin changed his mind and agreed to negotiate a fixed rate of immigration, based on 1935 immigration numbers, if the Arabs would first concede the Jewish right to immigrate in accordance with Palestine's economic absorptive capacity. Gruenbaum too was willing to hear Arab suggestion for a fixed rate of immigration. See: meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 14.6.1936, CZA, pp. 9-10.

that he did not believe in negotiations with Palestinian Arabs, but the international situation compelled him to seek a temporary agreement with them:

Our moral weight in the court of public opinion has grown, and in that sense, we are better off than we were in 1929. But then there was no Hitler, and Italy was not against us, and Egypt was not in the state in which it is currently, and neither was Syria. I see these complications and I am worried sick. For that reason, and even though I know the only way is to speed up the *tempo* of immigration and development, I would agree to a 5-year truce based on the current [1935] rate of immigration.⁵⁹³

Katznelson admitted that there was no way to know in advance how many Jews might immigrate to Palestine in the next five years, but by agreeing to an annual immigration of 60,000 Jews, the Zionist movement would ensure a consistent stream of immigrants.⁵⁹⁴

Levi Shkolnik (later, Eshkol), another proponent of a temporary restriction of immigration, argued that the economic absorptive capacity principle, which was laid down in the 1922 White Paper, was a “fiction” (*fiktsia*) since the Mandate Government had always granted the Jewish Agency only a third or a half of the immigration certificates that the Agency demanded.⁵⁹⁵ Since Shkolnik did not expect that Jewish immigration would continue in 1935 numbers, he was in favor of a temporary Jewish-Arab agreement that would allow for a steady, if not record-breaking, tempo of

⁵⁹³ Meeting of *MAPAI*'s central committee, 3.6.1936, LPA 2-023-1936-13, p. 20. Translation and emphasis mine.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁵⁹⁵ Meeting of *MAPAI*'s central committee, 4.6.1936, *ibid.*, p. 6.

immigration. Sprinzak argued that a *Yishuv* that was 40% of Palestine's population constituted, for all intents and purposes, a Jewish majority.⁵⁹⁶

Eliyahu Golomb, Shmuel Dayan and Shmuel Yavnieli all opposed the proposal on practical grounds. Dayan and Yavnieli argued that either the negotiations were a hoax, or, if they were real, that the Arabs would never agree to an annual immigration of 60,000 Jews.⁵⁹⁷ Yavnieli even said he preferred territorial partition over an immigration cap.⁵⁹⁸ Golomb had a different argument: since no one could assess in advance the dynamic economic absorptive capacity of Palestine, it made no sense to agree, *a priori*, to fixed immigration quotas that might be lower than the actual economic absorptive capacity of the country.⁵⁹⁹

The most persistent and vocal opponent of the proposal in MAPAI was Itzhak Tabenkin, who presented an entire set of practical arguments against the restriction of immigration. Jewish immigration to Palestine, he explained to his colleagues, moved in ebbs and flows.⁶⁰⁰ Even the High Commissioner who, Tabenkin implied, did not support mass Jewish immigration to Palestine, could not stand in the way of the Fifth *Aliyah*, which was so forcefully propelled by the "tragedy of German Jews". For that reason, Tabenkin believed that it would be a "historical mistake" to try and limit immigration in advance.

Secondly, Tabenkin, unlike Hexter, did not foresee a slump in Palestine's economic development in the next few years. Given the possibility of a new World War and the strategic importance of Palestine to the British Empire, Tabenkin assumed that many

⁵⁹⁶ Meeting of *MAPAI*'s central committee, 9.6.1936, p. 22.

⁵⁹⁷ Meeting of *MAPAI*'s central committee, 4.6.1936, pp. 1, 4.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵⁹⁹ Meeting of *MAPAI*'s central committee, 3.6.1936, p. 26.

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

more immigrant-workers would be brought to the country.⁶⁰¹ If Jews did not immigrate to Palestine, he warned, non-Jews would come in their stead. The fast tempo of Arab natural population growth, coupled with non-Jewish immigration, might deepen the demographic gap between Jews and Arabs in a way that would prevent Palestine from ever becoming a Jewish country. Tabenkin was uncertain whether 1935's immigration rate could be repeated but given the tempo of Arab natural population growth and the desperate need of German Jews to leave their country, he argued that the Zionist leadership could not afford to limit immigration in advance.

When MAPAI's central committee convened again on June 9th, Tabenkin's arguments became emphatically more doctrinal. A Zionist agreement to limit immigration, he claimed, meant that the Jews agreed to remain a minority in Palestine (at this point, it might be interesting to remember that Sprinzak thought that the same agreement would basically bring about a Jewish majority).⁶⁰² No Zionist, Tabenkin instructed his comrades, could sign such an agreement. "After that", he declared dramatically, "there is no Zionism". It seems that, perhaps momentarily, Tabenkin forgot that the proposed agreement would be temporary. Or rather, he felt that such a betrayal of the Zionist credo could never be just a temporary act. A Jewish assent to the restriction of immigration was not, in Tabenkin's eyes, just an ill-advised tactical move. It negated the very essence of his Zionist belief:

The obligation to remain a minority – and this is how the Arabs will present the agreement – is exile, and Zionism is first and foremost a leaving behind of exile. The difference between the Land of Israel and exile is not just

⁶⁰¹ Ibid., p. 15. Tabekin was almost right: during the Second World War Palestine's economy flourished, but not due to immigration.

⁶⁰² Meeting of *MAPAI*'s central committee, 9.6.1936, LPA 2-023-1936-13, p. 26.

geographic. In exile, we are compelled to remain a minority forever, *to be a percentage in relation to someone else*. This is the root of the Jewish malaise [...].⁶⁰³

In this short paragraph, Tabenkin formulated a powerful definition of Zionism – if indeed Zionism was an exodus out of exile, and exile was a demographic state and not just a geographical location, then the Land of Israel, in and of itself, was not inherently non-exilic. If exile was the obligation or compulsion to remain a minority, then the Land of Israel was non-exilic only if the Jews have an opportunity to become the majority in the country. And how did Tabenkin define a majority? *As the group in relation to which someone else is the percentage*. Thus, Zionism was the process of making someone else the percentage in relation to the Jews in Palestine.

Although Labour Zionism touted Jewish self-sufficiency and autonomy, Tabenkin's concern over the way in which the Arabs would present a Jewish-Arab agreement, and his own admission that a minority was defined by a relation to a majority, revealed the extent to which his Zionist identity was locked into an Hegelian dependency with the Arab majority. Tabenkin was sensitive enough to understand that his identity as a Zionist was bound up in his relationship with the Arabs, but his utter horror at the thought that Jewish immigration – the process of making the Arabs the percentage in relation to the Jews – would have to be sanctioned by the Arabs themselves suggests that he simply could not come to terms with this relationship.

But perhaps the most important texts regarding the negotiations were two letters sent by Ben-Gurion, who was in London at the time, to his party's central committee. In the first letter, dated June 9th, Ben-Gurion conceded that an agreement with the Arabs might not

⁶⁰³ Ibid., p. 29. Translation and emphasis mine.

be a realistic prospect due to the fact that immigration was at the heart of the political conflict between Jews and Arabs.⁶⁰⁴ And yet, an agreement with the Arabs, he insisted, was something that the Jews needed. Not for the sake of peace, Ben-Gurion reassured his readers, although peace was important, since one could not build a country permanently at war. Rather, peace was a means to an end, not an end in itself. The end was “the utter and complete realization of Zionism to its maximal potential”.⁶⁰⁵ Peace, and an understanding with the Arabs, were needed *only* for that purpose. The Jewish people could not and would not sign off on any agreement that was not aimed at the complete realization of Zionism. A full, all-encompassing agreement with the Arabs, Ben-Gurion stressed for the umpteenth time, would be possible only after they had come to terms with a “Jewish Palestine”. But that did not mean that a temporary agreement was out of the realm of possibility.

The Arabs, Ben-Gurion told his colleagues, were terrified of the Jews and their so-called legendary influence on the British. This fear, he argued, could be used as an incentive to reach a Jewish-Arab agreement. Ben-Gurion then offered two arguments in favor of a temporary agreement: First, the Jewish National Home was dependent on Britain, and Britain was interested in placating the Arab world.⁶⁰⁶ By reducing Arab opposition to Zionism, the Zionists would exponentially improve their position vis-a-vis the British. After all, Ben-Gurion argued, Jewish immigration in the fifteen years before 1934 was “negligible”, and the real battle for immigration still lay in the future. An agreement with the Arabs, he concluded, would make this battle immensely easier. Secondly, the Arab Revolt threatened to destroy the Jewish economy in Palestine. The Arabs could survive

⁶⁰⁴ Ben-Gurion, *Zikhronot*, III, p. 254-255. Translation mine.

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

without the Jewish market, but the Jewish economic sector needed the Syrian and Egyptian markets.⁶⁰⁷

If a temporary agreement were to be signed, Ben-Gurion postulated, it should be limited to five years only. The Jews could not agree in advance that in ten years they would constitute only 40% of the population. On the contrary, the aim of the Zionist movement was to double the size of the Yishuv in five years.⁶⁰⁸ This feat required that the annual immigration rate for the duration of the agreement would be *at least* 62,000 people, the number of Jewish immigrants who legally entered Palestine in 1935. Ben-Gurion dismissed out of hand the argument that the 1935 immigration rate was an outlier. “I reject any kind of scientific expertise”, he asserted, “that purports to assign limits to the absorptive capacity of the country. The absorptive capacity of Palestine is dependent – outside of political circumstances – [only] on us: on the capital, initiative, creativity and pioneering efforts that we will put into the country.”⁶⁰⁹

Ben-Gurion insisted yet again, in his second letter, which was sent on June 18th, that the Jews had to seek an agreement with the Arabs.⁶¹⁰ He argued that the Royal Commission of Inquiry, the creation of which was announced in May 1936, was not going to ignore Arab opposition to Jewish immigration and would probably recommend some restriction of immigration. Even if the British did not impose limits on land purchases, the Arabs, now more nationalistically animated than ever, might simply refuse to sell their lots to the Jews. In other words, Ben-Gurion acknowledged that Zionist colonization was stuck in a political bottleneck, and a Jewish-Arab understanding was a possible way out of it.

⁶⁰⁷ Soon after, however, Ben-Gurion realized that the Arab boycott on Jewish businesses would only bolster Jewish economic self-sufficiency. For example, when Arab porters shut down the Jaffa port in the early days of the revolt, the Zionist leadership received permission from the Mandate Government to establish an all-Jewish port in Tel-Aviv.

⁶⁰⁸ Ben-Gurion, *Zikhronot*, III , p. 256-257.

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 257. Translation mine.

⁶¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

Although Ben-Gurion opposed in principle any permanent limits on immigration, he did concede that the Mandatory immigration department imposed semi-annual quotas on Jewish immigration. Why not, he asked rhetorically, set in advance immigration quotas for five years?

As for the minimum annual number of immigrants to which the Zionists could agree, Ben-Gurion argued that the Arab natural population growth was 30,000 people a year, and hence the minimum number of Jewish immigrants had to be bigger than that.⁶¹¹

Because 62,000 legal Jewish immigrants were absorbed in Palestine in 1935, on top of both Jewish and Arab illegal immigration, the immigration rate of 1935 – the highest rate recorded during the Mandate years – was the *minimal* rate of immigration to which the Jews could agree. In fact, Ben-Gurion suggest that the Arabs might agree to a minimal number of immigrants that was higher than 62,000.⁶¹²

Why did Ben-Gurion, a supposedly stone-cold realist and someone who prided himself on being intimately acquainted with the Arab leadership, choose an immigration rate that would have been unacceptable to the Arabs? If, by Ben-Gurion's own account, the Arabs waged a demographic war against the Jews, why would they accept as the minimal annual rate of immigration the highest recorded number of Jewish immigrants to Palestine? The answer to this question, I would argue, goes back to the premise of the June 9th letter: that peace is never an end in itself, but rather a means to facilitate the building of the Jewish National Home. Ben-Gurion calculated that in order to create a majority, annual Jewish immigration had to be larger than 30,000 people. But he was not willing to settle for an annual immigration of 40,000 or 50,000 Jews. Ben-Gurion was a fan of facts, and since the 1935 immigration of 62,000 Jews was a fact, it was incumbent upon the Arabs to

⁶¹¹ Ibid., p. 280.

⁶¹² Ibid., p. 268.

accept it. Ben-Gurion's reasoning was rigorously logical and utterly un-pragmatic. Shertok suggested that much by questioning whether the Arabs would see an annual immigration of 62,000 Jews as a "Zionist concession".⁶¹³ Perhaps Ben-Gurion allowed himself to be so rigid since he did not think there was a real possibility of an agreement anyway. But his approach here, and in the matter of parity and other schemes that he supported until 1937, illustrates a major stumbling block in the way of Jewish-Arab rapprochement during the 1930s: Ben-Gurion was so monomaniacal in his pursuit, a dogged sea-captain chasing down the whale of Jewish self-rule at all costs, that he could never offer the Arabs an immigration rate to which they could actually agree.

In the end, the negotiations fizzled out. Shertok was not willing to let the reviled Dr. Magnes and his partners negotiate on behalf of the Jewish people.⁶¹⁴ Shertok himself met with the group's Arab interlocutor, Musa al-'Alami, the private secretary of High Commissioner Wauchope and a close associate of the Palestinian-Arab leader Hajj Amin Al-Husseini. Al-'Alami told Shertok that his initial understanding with the Group of Five was his alone and not the official stance of the Palestinian-Arab national movement. Shertok asked Al-'Alami to get official authorization from Al-Husseini to continue the talks, but Al-'Alami never returned to the negotiating table.⁶¹⁵

Yet the importance of the June 1936 debates lies in the way in which they presaged the 1937 partition debates: both were concerned with question of timing, tempo and temporariness. The debate on the Group of Five proposal, then, shows how the concerns

⁶¹³ Shertok to Ben-Gurion, 14.6.1936, *ibid.*, p. 259.

⁶¹⁴ Shertok's comments, meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 7.6.1936, *ibid.*, p. 246; Shertok comments, meeting of MAPAI's central committee, 9.6.1936, p. 14; Shertok, *Yoman medini*, I, p. 168; Avraham Katznelson and Shertok's comments, meeting of MAPAI's political committee, 21.6.1936, LPA 2-023-1936-13, p. 11, 14-21; Shertok comments, meeting of MAPAI's central committee, 23.6.1936, *ibid.*, p. 3; Shertok to Ben-Gurion, 29.6.1936, in: Ben-Gurion, *Zikhronot*, III, pp. 303-304.

⁶¹⁵ Gershon Shafir, "Capitalist Binationalism in Mandatory Palestine", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 43 (2011), pp. 627-628.

that animated the partition debates were not created by the partition proposal. They were borne out of the processes described in the first section of this chapter: the growing exposure of Palestine to the turbulence of international politics, and the subsequent impression, among the more pragmatically-minded Zionist leaders, that the Mandatory regime itself was facing a major revision, if not a total collapse. In July 1937 the bottleneck theory was given an official stamp of approval: describing the situation as a “deadlock”, the Royal Commission recommended not a radical revision of the Mandate, but its termination.⁶¹⁶ Before we move on to discuss the partition debates, however, let us first look at the Zionist attempt to offer parity as a solution to the Arab Question to the Royal Commission, and the reasons for its failure.

The Royal Commission and the Demise of Parity, July 1936-July 1937

The political future of Palestine, which was dominated from late 1929 until early 1936 by the question of the Legislative Council, was blown wide open by the eruption of the Arab Revolt in April 1936. On May 4th, 1936, Ben-Gurion reported that the Higher Arab Committee refused to send an Arab delegation to London to negotiate the terms for the establishment of a Legislative Council with the Government.⁶¹⁷ By that time it was also apparent that a Royal Commission would be sent to Palestine to re-examine Britain’s Mandatory policy.⁶¹⁸ A few days later Ben-Gurion noted in his diary that the Legislative Council “was no longer relevant”.⁶¹⁹

Yet, despite the changing political climate in Palestine and its environs, the principle of mutual non-domination remained the official Zionist stance towards the Arab Question

⁶¹⁶ *Palestine Royal Commission Report*, p. 380.

⁶¹⁷ Meeting of MAPAI’s political committee, 4.5.1936, LPA 2-023-1936-12, p. 3.

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶¹⁹ “‘Al ha-matzav, 7.5.1936” in: Ben-Gurion, *Zikhronot*, III, p. 174. See also Ben-Gurion’s comments in MAPAI’s political committee meeting, 23.5.1936, LPA 2-023-1936-12, p. 2.

until August 1937, when the 20th Zionist Congress authorized the Jewish Agency to negotiate with the British Government the terms for the establishment of a Jewish state. Accordingly, the concept of parity – which many, but certainly not all, Zionists considered to be the practical application of mutual non-domination – came up again and again in numerous abortive attempts to reach a Jewish-Arab understanding between April and December 1936. Most of these negotiations, however, were conducted by non-official Jewish and Arab notables with little actual political power, and they all came to naught.⁶²⁰

The last serious Zionist debate on parity took place in October-November 1936, in anticipation of the arrival of the Royal Commission. On September 30th, 1936, Weizmann's people in the London Zionist bureau sent Ben-Gurion a telegram asking for a public declaration in support of parity. Ben-Gurion rejected the idea since it would have angered both the Arabs and the Zionist hardliners.⁶²¹ Weizmann and Ben-Gurion could not come to an understanding and the issue was referred to the Restricted Zionist General Council, an executive body of the Zionist Organization that was tasked with monitoring Zionist politics in between Zionist Congresses.

The Restricted Zionist General Council met on the 13th and the 14th of October to discuss the matter, and at that meeting the very notion of parity encountered strong opposition from representatives of the centrist General Zionists, the religious *Mizrachi*, the Revisionist Jewish State Party, and even the ultra-leftist *Ha-Shomer Ha-Tzair*.⁶²²

Menachem Ussishkin argued that parity was an anti-democratic concept since it curtailed the rights of the majority. The Jews did not return to Palestine, he stated, to give up half

⁶²⁰ See the second section of the present chapter.

⁶²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 448.

⁶²² Minutes of the Restricted Zionist General Council, 13-14.10.1936, CZA A24\1166.

of their rights.⁶²³ Meir Grossman, head of the Revisionist Jewish State Party, claimed that a declaration of support for parity would plunge the Jewish people into despair.⁶²⁴

Yehoshua Heshel Farbstein from the *Mizrachi* said that the Arabs would view Jewish support for parity as “suicide”.⁶²⁵ Note how similar the arguments of the opponents of parity were to the arguments of those who rejected the Group of Five proposal.

Ben-Gurion pushed back. He argued that parity was not the end-goal of Zionism, but rather a *temporary* solution for the duration of British rule in Palestine. Nor was parity undemocratic, because the British Mandate for Palestine was a unique political regime and thus regular notions of democracy did not apply to it. For Ben-Gurion, the most important task of the Zionist movement at the time was to keep the British from stopping Jewish immigration to Palestine. He believed that a public declaration in support of parity would allay Arabs fears of a Jewish takeover, thus allowing for the continuation of Jewish immigration.⁶²⁶ The Restricted Zionist General Council decided not to decide on the matter and postponed the vote until its next meeting. The debate, however, revealed the unpopularity of parity outside of Labor circles.

A few weeks later, on November 22nd, the Jewish Agency Executive met with Weizmann to discuss his testimony before the Royal Commission. Ben-Gurion presented the following formula in order to satisfy all wings of the Zionist leadership: Weizmann would read the resolution adopted by the 17th Congress regarding mutual non-domination but would refrain from announcing the Zionist movement’s support of parity, even though the Zionists would know, in their hearts, that the meaning of that resolution was, indeed,

⁶²³ Ibid., p. 24.

⁶²⁴ Ibid., p. 26.

⁶²⁵ Ibid., p. 31.

⁶²⁶ Ben-Gurion, *Zikhronot*, III, p. 467-472.

parity.⁶²⁷ Ben-Gurion again assured his colleagues that parity was decidedly *not* Zionism's end-goal and that he opposed an announcement in favor of parity since it might hurt the chances of parity being accepted by the Arabs – although if the British Government were to suggest parity, the Zionists should accept it. Nevertheless, the non-Labor members of the Executive found it hard to endorse parity.

For example, Itzhak Gruenbaum, a former leader of Poland's Jewish minority, disagreed with Ben-Gurion that the 17th Congress resolution necessarily meant parity.⁶²⁸ A people, he argued, is capable of not dominating another people without resorting to political parity. The Jews, Gruenbaum contended, who were a minority everywhere in the world, would never rule over another minority, even if they could.⁶²⁹ However, the Jews also yearned for majority status and wished to rule their homeland. If the Executive watered this yearning down by supporting parity, it would weaken the Jews' enthusiasm for building Palestine up. Gruenbaum was worried that political parity would lead to numerical parity, that is, to the restriction of Jewish immigration so that the Jews would never be more than half of Palestine's population. At any rate, he did not quite explain how a Jewish majority might rule Palestine without ruling over an Arab minority.

Shertok, on the other hand, explained to the Executive the tactical aim of parity: there was a danger that the Royal Commission might recommend the imposition of political limits on immigration, citing an Arab fear of a Jewish takeover through immigration.⁶³⁰ By supporting parity, that is, a political system that worked around demographic ratios, the Executive could claim before the Royal Commission that this Arab fear was unfounded. Shertok then reassured the Executive that the number of Jews in Palestine, rather than

⁶²⁷ Ben-Gurion's comments, meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 22.11.1936, CZA, p. 4.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁶²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

parity or any other political formula, would decide the fate of the country. Indeed, parity was a means to increase the number of Jews in Palestine. If in 1931 Berl Katznelson had sung the praises of parity as a more just political solution than the nation-state, by the end of 1936 even its supporters in *MAPAI* saw it as little more than a tactical weapon against Arab demands.

The next day, the Executive voted in favor of Ben-Gurion's compromise – that Weizmann would read the 17th Congress declaration and would mention parity only if he were asked about it.⁶³¹ In the end this resolution amounted to very little. Weizmann spoke about the principle of mutual non-domination in his November 26th *in camera* evidence before the Royal Commission. If the Arabs were afraid of being “swamp[ed]” by the Jews, he put to the Commission, Weizmann was willing to find a political formula that would make sure that the Jews would not dominate the Arabs, nor interfere with their language, civilization or their economy.⁶³² Ignoring the Jewish Agency Executive's resolution, he mentioned to the Royal Commission that the Zionists suggested parity in the Legislative Council:

We said [...]: ‘To count noses is absurd; to weight the voice of, say, an intelligent Jewish colony against the voice of a small Arab village, is something which is not real. It is the conventional method of having what is called self-government in backward Dominions which, on the whole, has broken down. It never worked properly.’ Supposing you create something like two units and consider the Jews and Arabs as two units destined to build the country, and [the proposal of parity] was rejected,

⁶³¹ Meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 23.11.1936, CZA, p. 4.

⁶³² “The Underlying Causes of Conflict, I”, 26.11.1936, in: *LPCW*, Series B, II, p. 151.

although it was promised by the Prime Minister [Ramsey MacDonald],
and I have documents to prove it.⁶³³

Professor Reginald Coupland, the Commission member who would later push for partition, then pointed to Weizmann that in the same way that the Jews were willing to compromise provided they would not be “condemned” to be a permanent minority, so the Arabs might be willing to compromise if they were assured of remaining a permanent majority.⁶³⁴ Weizmann used the opportunity to explain to the Commission the difference between an Arab majority and a Jewish one:

The Arab majority is being used for some purpose; it is used in Iraq and Syria for a definite purpose [to persecute minorities]. I am willing to give a guarantee [...] for the next 20 years, that we do not want to make political capital out of being a majority; we do not want a majority for political purposes. We want as many Jews as can reasonably be brought into this country brought in.⁶³⁵

Coupland responded that such a declaration was not likely to convince the Arabs.

Weizmann then suggested that the British Government should enforce parity in Palestine.

The Chairman of the Commission, Lord William Robert Wellesley Peel, thought that such a policy would not be “very satisfactory”.⁶³⁶

Both Lord Peel and another Commission member, Sir Harold Morris, found it difficult to understand Weizmann’s demand for both a Jewish majority *and* parity between Jews and Arabs. Peel observed that it was a “matter of history” that a strong minority could hold its

⁶³³ Ibid., p. 152.

⁶³⁴ Ibid., p. 153.

⁶³⁵ Ibid.

⁶³⁶ Ibid.

own, even if it did not always “get its own way”.⁶³⁷ Yet in Palestine, he continued, it was always assumed that it was the majority that made a “tremendous difference”. Weizmann agreed that it had become a “fetish” due to the Arab insistent demand for a majority “which must be for some sort of purpose”. He assured the Commission that the Jews, unlike the Arabs, had no political purpose in their demand not to be a minority.

A few minutes later Morris asked: “if you do not want to dominate politically, why do you make it a *sine qua non* [that] ‘we will go slow if it does not produce for us a state of permanent minority’? The two things do not seem consistent to me.”⁶³⁸ Weizmann again stressed that the Jewish majority had no political purpose. He wanted to get as many Jews as was reasonably possible into Palestine, and if this led to a majority, then “let it be a majority”. But more importantly, Weizmann did not want the Jews to be reduced in the eyes of the world and the Arabs to the status of a permanent minority. By shifting focus from the creation of a Jewish majority, which Weizmann painted as an almost accidental effect of immigration, to the prevention of a permanent Jewish minority, he hoped to reconcile the supposed inconsistency between the demand for a Jewish majority and parity.

Sir Laurie Hammond then commented that parity was dependent on a permanent British Mandate.⁶³⁹ Weizmann answered that he had no objection to that prospect. Peel concluded the discussion by commenting: “We must go through the examination of the land and economic questions and all these other things, but I think that we thoroughly understand what the real problem is [...]”.⁶⁴⁰ When Weizmann summarized his evidence

⁶³⁷ Ibid., p. 155.

⁶³⁸ Ibid., p. 158.

⁶³⁹ Ibid., p. 159.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid.

before the Royal Commission in a December 25th meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, he reported that the Commission thought parity to be “impractical”.⁶⁴¹

The question of parity and non-domination came up again in Weizmann’s third appearance before the Royal Commission, on December 23rd. Weizmann recounted the story of Ramsey MacDonald’s supposed acceptance of parity in 1931, but the tale left no impression on the Commission.⁶⁴² Later Peel asked Weizmann whether the Jewish National Home would develop into a “Jewish National State as soon as there was a Jewish majority in Palestine, to which Weizmann answered in the negative.⁶⁴³ He argued that the National Home was not dependent on the demographic makeup of Palestine, and even if there was a Jewish majority in the country, Palestine would not become a “Jewish National State”. “For practical purposes”, Weizmann told the Commission –

I cannot see a Jewish State in Palestine and it is not the intention, at any rate of those who are at present guiding the destinies of the Zionist movement, either overly or covertly to create such a State. I imagine that the Jews and Arabs will build Palestine in common [...] I would like to see the parity principle of which I spoke with to the Prime Minister embodied in the structure of Palestine.⁶⁴⁴

Peel, rather unconvinced, asked whether there was any race in the world that would forego the rights of the majority.⁶⁴⁵ Weizmann thought that the Jews would – provided that the British stay in Palestine. And he believed, Weizmann told the Commission, that the British would stay for at least another 50 years. Yet when Coupland argued that 50

⁶⁴¹ Meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 25.12.1936, CZA, p. 1.

⁶⁴² "The Dual Obligation", 23.12.1936, in *LPCW*, series B, II, pp. 201-205.

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

years of parity under British rule might be “politically unhealthy”, Weizmann retorted that the point of parity was to ensure peace for 10-20 years, at which point the face of Palestine would change, and “we” – it is unclear whom Weizmann included in this pronoun – would be able to consider “new methods”.⁶⁴⁶ Weizmann’s resolve was not unshakeable. Under the Commission’s barrage of questions and doubt, his almost giddy insistence that no serious Zionist wanted a Jewish nation-state and that parity would reign for generations in Palestine started showing at the seams. Parity, Weizmann let slip, might only be a temporary solution, until new methods of governance became practicable.

On January 7th, 1937, Ben-Gurion appeared before the Commission. He told the Commission that the Jews did not want to dominate anyone.⁶⁴⁷ Ben-Gurion then argued that the Zionist principle of mutual non-domination was as old as the Basel Program (1897), which spoke of a “Heimstätte” – a legally-assured home *in* Palestine – as opposed to Palestine *being* a home for the Jews. For Ben-Gurion, the fact that the early Zionists demanded a home for the Jews in only a part of Palestine meant that they did not wish to dominate the Arabs. Secondly, Ben-Gurion himself envisioned the National Home less as a completely sovereign political entity and more as part of the British Commonwealth of Nations. Finally, he told the Commission that the Jews did not want to control the Christian and Muslim holy places, and that he thought that the holy places should be administered by the Mandatory or another international body.⁶⁴⁸ Later in his evidence Ben-Gurion shared with the Commission his vision for a Jewish-Arab agreement. He spoke of economic cooperation during the “interim” period, the time until the Jewish National Home was strong enough to stand on its own.⁶⁴⁹ Politically speaking, he

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 223.

⁶⁴⁷ Ben-Gurion, *Zikhronot*, IV, p. 5.

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 12.

suggested that Jews and Arabs would participate, on the basis of parity, in the Executive Council (rather than in the Legislative Council). The Commission did not see fit to comment on his suggestion.

When Weizmann met with the Commission for the last time on January 8th, 1937, the option of partitioning Palestine into two states was raised by Coupland. Weizmann was non-committal.⁶⁵⁰ Nevertheless, by February 1937 Ben-Gurion had already come up with his own partition plan, which he presented to MAPAI's central committee.⁶⁵¹ For Ben-Gurion, the alternative to partition was the continuation of the status quo, which meant the stoppage of Jewish immigration, either naturally or as a result of British restrictions, and the decline of Zionism.⁶⁵² A couple of weeks later Weizmann wrote to Leo Amery, a former Colonial Minister and an ally of the Zionist movement, that partition was the only way out of the Palestinian deadlock.⁶⁵³ Shertok was more skeptical of the viability of partition, but, generally speaking, the three most important people in the Zionist leadership leaned in favor of partition months before the Royal Commission report was published in July 1937.⁶⁵⁴ When the advisory political committee of the Jewish Agency Executive met in London to discuss the possibility of partition in March 1937, Leonard Stein asked Shertok about the Zionist movement's stance on parity. Shertok answered that the Zionist endorsement of parity applied only to the entirety of Palestine and would be abandoned if the country were partitioned. The moderate Stein was "mortified" by the answer, Shertok noted in his diary.⁶⁵⁵ More than a year later, Shmuel Yavnieli summarized the shift in Zionist political thought from parity to partition: "The Arab

⁶⁵⁰ "Palestine Royal Commission, Notes of evidence taken on Friday 8th January 1937", in WA.

⁶⁵¹ Ben-Gurion's comments, meeting of MAPAI's central committee, 5-6.2.1937, LPA 2-023-1937-16, pp. 4-10.

⁶⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁶⁵³ Weizmann to Amery, 18.2.1937, *LPCW*, XVIII, letter no. 27, p. 44.

⁶⁵⁴ Shertok's comments, "Hitya'atzut 'al ha-matzav ha-medini", 8.6.1937, LPA 2-023-1937-17a, p. 8.

⁶⁵⁵ Shertok, *Yoman Medini*, II, p. 69.

shepherd doesn't understand the concept of parity, but he might understand the concept of partition."⁶⁵⁶ The same was true, one suspects, for Jewish shepherds too.

Although partition remained a highly-contested idea within Zionist circles, it did bring about the disappearance, almost overnight, of the Zionist leadership's support for mutual non-domination, a concept that was part and parcel of Labor Zionist thought since 1917 and an official Zionist policy since 1931. But mutual non-domination appeared in mainstream Zionist thought as a way to reduce British and Arab resistance to Jewish immigration within the context of Mandatory politics. Partition promised to dismantle the Mandatory framework, and with it the need for mutual non-domination. Mutual non-domination was born with the Mandate, and it was destined to die with it.

Since the Jewish State suggested by the Royal Commission would have had a substantial Arab population, by accepting partition the Zionist leadership agreed to dominate Arabs. This was a momentous change in Zionist political thought. For the first time in its history, the Zionist elite had to think, in realistic and earnest terms, about the possibility of ruling over another people. Let us turn to the way in which the Royal Commission's partition proposal changed the Zionist discourse on the relationship between territory and demography.

Time, Bodies and Space in the Partition Debates, February-August 1937

The relationship between bodies and space – between Jewish settlers, Arab *fellahin* and the vaguely-defined confines of the Land of Israel – has continuously occupied Zionist colonization experts since at least the establishment of the Zionist Organization's Jaffa office in 1908. Until 1937 the Zionist leadership assumed that Zionist colonization would

⁶⁵⁶ Meeting of MAPAI's central committee, 10.4.1937, LPA 2-023-1937-16, p. 39. Translation mine.

eventually penetrate every corner of Palestine and even spread to Transjordan. The one-two punch of the Arab Revolt and the Royal Commission report disabused the Zionist supporters of partition of the notion that Zionist colonization could continue, uninterrupted, in all of Palestine. Even before the arrival of the Royal Commission, Weizmann discussed with British officials the prospect of cantonization, which would confine Zionist colonization to the “Jewish” parts of Palestine.⁶⁵⁷ Cantonization assumed, however, the continuation of the Mandatory regime. The Royal Commission asked Weizmann to consider an even more radical idea – that the Mandate would end and be replaced by two nation-states and a British enclave. In practical terms, this meant a severe reduction in the area in which Jewish immigrants could settle. Consequently, the relationship between bodies and space became one of the major bones of contention between supporters and opponents of partition.⁶⁵⁸ While opponents of partition claimed that the proposed Jewish state was not big enough to absorb millions of Jewish immigrants, proponents of partition tried to prove the opposite, or argue that colonization under British rule would eventually die out. If, until 1937, bio-territorial considerations were mostly the stock-in-trade of colonization experts like Arthur Ruppin or Itzhak Wilkansky, and of keen politicians like Ben-Gurion, the partition proposal forced many Zionists to consider the relationship between the depressingly finite area of the proposed Jewish State – 5 million dunams (about 1.2 million acres) – and the demographic objectives of the Zionist movement.

Unsurprisingly, the first to offer a bio-territorial analysis of partition was Ben-Gurion.

After the 1929 riots Ben-Gurion came up with a plan to bring to Palestine 45,000 Jewish

⁶⁵⁷ Weizmann to Archer Cust, 9.6.1936, *LPCW*, XVII, letter no. 241, p. 261.

⁶⁵⁸ On the way in which cartography shapes national consciousness, see Asher Kaufman, “Colonial Cartography and the making of Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria”, in: Cyrus Schayegh and Andrew Arsan (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of the History of the Middle East Mandates*, (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 225-243.

men based on a calculation of the number of dunams and the amount of capital required for their settlement. When, in February 1937, he presented his own partition plan to *MAPAI*'s central committee, it was a natural evolution of his bio-political thinking; Ben-Gurion's understanding that space and bodies were closely and symbiotically linked remained, but his sandbox became bigger.

Ben-Gurion's main concern was that the Royal Commission would recommend replacing the principle of immigration according to the economic absorptive capacity of Palestine with a political criterion, thereby condemning the Jews to remain a minority in Palestine.⁶⁵⁹ If indeed immigration was curtailed to satisfy Arab demands, Ben-Gurion believed that the Zionist movement would regress and turn into a "hobby", and that the *Yishuv* would assimilate into the Arab majority; he already found signs of assimilation among the "Sephardim and the oriental elements" of the Jewish community.⁶⁶⁰ Even if the status quo continued, immigration to Palestine would dwindle fast because of the Arab Revolt and the growing difficulty of transferring Jewish capital from Europe to Palestine.⁶⁶¹ In other words, Ben-Gurion now fully acknowledged the political bottleneck that threatened to bring about the collapse of the Zionist project in Palestine.

Accordingly, Ben-Gurion insisted that the Zionist movement had to fight for a "positive" radical solution: partition. Nevertheless, he would not accept partition at all cost – the area of the Jewish State had to allow for future expansion, and Ben-Gurion offered a calculation of the minimal area to which Zionists could agree. His February 1937 plan was strikingly similar to the one offered by the Royal Commission five months later.

⁶⁵⁹ Meeting of *MAPAI*'s central committee, 5-6.2.1937, LPA 2-023-1937-16, pp. 2-3.

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3. Translation mine.

⁶⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

According to Ben-Gurion, Zionist colonization was concentrated in eight sub-districts: Jaffa, Ramle, Tulkarm, Haifa, Nazareth, Tiberias, Beisan, and Safed. The total area of the eight sub-districts amounted to 5 million dunams, 3.3 million dunams of which were arable. Ben-Gurion calculated that 394,000 Arabs lived in these sub-districts, 234,700 of whom were villagers and 159,700 were urbanites, as opposed to 313,330 Jews, 104,330 of whom were villagers and 209,000 of whom were urbanites.⁶⁶² The distinction between the rural and urban Arab population was crucial: the Arab villagers occupied land that was needed for Zionist colonization.

Ben-Gurion thought that the Jaffa and Ramle sub-districts would not be included in the area of the Jewish State so that they could serve as a corridor between the Palestinian-Arab State and the sea, nor would Nazareth, because of its religious significance, and Tulkarm, due to its geographical position. By subtracting the 90,000 Arabs who lived in these towns, Ben-Gurion calculated that 313,000 Jews and 300,000 Arabs lived in the “Jewish” sub-districts. In other words, there was already a Jewish majority – albeit a tenuous one – in the area Ben-Gurion earmarked for the Jewish State.

The sub-districts of Acre and Gaza posed a problem for Ben-Gurion’s scheme. Only 2,250 Jews lived there, as opposed to 153,000 Arabs. But the 2 million dunam area could not be part of the Arab State, according to Ben-Gurion, because it constituted the hinterland into which Zionist colonization had to expand.⁶⁶³ Consequently, he suggested that the Jewish State should include most of the Coastal Plain, the Jezreel Valley, and the Jordan Valley north of, and including, Beisan.⁶⁶⁴ The Palestinian-Arab State would include Judea and Samaria and the Jordan Valley south of Beisan. Acre and Gaza would

⁶⁶² Ibid., p. 5.

⁶⁶³ Ibid., pp. 5-6.

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 7.

be autonomous districts in which Jews could settle, and the Negev would be split between the two states. Thus, the Palestinian-Arab State's territory would cover 12 million dunams (including 6 million dunams in the Negev) and a corridor to the sea in Jaffa, while the Jewish State's territory would cover 10.4 million dunams (including 6 million dunams in the Negev).⁶⁶⁵

Ben-Gurion argued that although his plan cut 16 million dunams from the area of Jewish sovereignty, these were areas in which Jews were not going to settle in next decade. At any rate, he believed that political independence would make up for the loss of land, in the form of control of immigration and colonization. "What would happen after 3 million Jews will immigrate to the Jewish state – we shall have to wait and see. The next generation will take care of itself. We have to take care of the current one", Ben-Gurion concluded.⁶⁶⁶ His colleagues were skeptical. Most of them did not think that the British would offer the Jews a plan that was as generous as Ben-Gurion's plan – let alone execute it.⁶⁶⁷

When *MAPAI*'s central committee returned to the question of partition in April 1937, both the opponents and proponents of partition presented fully-formed arguments that would change little when the actual proposal was published in July of that year. Berl Locker, for example, argued that restrictions on Zionist colonization that did not involve partition could be temporary, but partition would create permanent borders, which he deemed "a lamentation for generations".⁶⁶⁸ Israel Marminsky agreed and called partition a "disaster for our and coming generations".⁶⁶⁹ Thus, the Labourite opponents of partition

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 8.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid. Translation mine.

⁶⁶⁷ See Shertok's comments in *ibid.*, pp. 11-12, and Berl Katznelson's comments, *ibid.*, pp. 13-15.

⁶⁶⁸ Meeting of *MAPAI*'s central committee, 10.4.1937, LPA 2-023-1937-16, p. 20. Translation mine.

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23. Translation mine.

were worried about the effect of partition on the Jewish future. In contrast, Mordechai Namirovsky, a proponent of partition, lamented the fact that the Zionist movement was already late:

For our tardiness in building Palestine we paid with the separation of Trans-Jordan from Palestine in 1922. Now we must discuss the partition of Palestine [itself] [...] because we moved too slowly. If the next few years will be marked by unceasing revolt, immigration will decline on its own. We must not miss this opportunity.⁶⁷⁰

Shaul Meirov disagreed. “We are making headway, although not in a satisfactory tempo”, he argued.⁶⁷¹ Whatever restrictions the Royal Commission contemplated, he thought that they might be temporary and so Meirov opposed partition. Dov Hoz, a supporter of partition, had a feeling that the Mandate itself was reaching its end: “The Mandate is temporary. The Permanent Mandates Commission thinks that the lifespan of Mandates is 25 years, and 15 years have already passed. The rest of the A-type Mandates have disappeared from this world [...] are we sure that we will be the majority by the time that the Mandate ends?”⁶⁷² Finally, for Itzhak Laufbahn, a Jewish State offered a new kind of Zionist gradualism:

The area conquered by Yehoshua Bin-Nun was probably not that much bigger than the area we might get by partitioning the land. He had to create a stable, cohesive Jewish power in that conquered area before he could take over the rest of the land. In the history of national colonization (apart from colonial conquests, which are not a type of national colonization)

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 30. Translation mine.

⁶⁷¹ Ibid., p. 41. Translation mine.

⁶⁷² Ibid., pp. 49-50. Translation mine.

there is no example of a nation that conquered an entire country in one or two generations. There was always a preliminary advance that latched onto the outskirts of the country – and in that beachhead consolidation began, and in it, the expansionist capabilities of the nation were created.⁶⁷³

Thus, for Laufbahn and other proponents of partition, partition was not the end-goal of Zionism but a jumping-off point for further expansion.

Ben-Gurion gave this notion of new gradualism a programmatic sheen in his letter to *MAPAI*'s central committee from July 1st, 1937. The Jewish State, he wrote, was a *temporary* instrument aimed at achieving a specific goal – the ingathering of exiles in the Land of Israel.⁶⁷⁴ The value of the state would be measured by its ability to absorb 1.5 million Jewish immigrants in 15 years.⁶⁷⁵ These were not random numbers; Ben-Gurion calculated that, at present, there were 1.2 million Arabs and 400,000 Jews in the Land of Israel – that is, in Palestine and Trans-Jordan together. In 15 years, he assumed, the Arab population would grow to 1.5 million, due to natural population growth. If the Jewish State could absorb 1.5 million Jewish immigrants during that time, the Jews would have solid a majority in relation to the Arabs. Ben-Gurion quite clearly wrote to his colleagues that a Jewish State in part of Palestine was a political instrument, the function of which was to create a Jewish majority in the Greater Land of Israel.

Accordingly, Ben-Gurion declared that although he was not willing to relinquish any part of the land, he was willing to confine Jewish colonization to certain parts of Palestine for the time being. He explicitly rejected Locker's contention that partition would create

⁶⁷³ Ibid., p. 26. Translation mine.

⁶⁷⁴ Ben-Gurion's letter to *MAPAI*'s central committee, 1.7.1937, LPA 2-022-1937-22, p. 10.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 12.

permanent borders. “Nothing is permanent”, he wrote, “when it comes to borders”.⁶⁷⁶ In fact, the creation of a Jewish State was the only way to bring about a Jewish-Arab alliance, after which, Ben-Gurion seemed to have suggested, the borders holding back Jewish expansion would become much less permanent. He repeated this point in a July 3rd, 1937, letter to Shertok. Ben-Gurion was in favor of leaving Jewish settlements in the Palestinian-Arab State and predicted that “We will break through those borders, and not necessarily by violent means. More than ever I believe in a Jewish-Arab agreement”.⁶⁷⁷ Ben-Gurion, like other Laborite supporters of partition, understood the establishment of a Jewish State as both a revolutionary and evolutionary act – revolutionary in its ushering of a new, historic phase in Jewish history, and evolutionary as far as it was not the end-goal of Zionism but rather a stage on the way to the concentration of most Jews in the Greater Land of Israel.

After the Royal Commission’s report was published on July 7th, 1937, *MAPAI*’s council held an emergency meeting on July 9th-10th to discuss the implications of the report. By that time, it was clear that the proposed Jewish State would include the Coastal Plain north of Gaza, the Galilee and the Northern Jordan Valley – about 5 million dunams.⁶⁷⁸ It was also reported that there would be 225,000 Arabs living in the area of the Jewish State – not including the Arab inhabitants of Haifa, Acre, Tiberias and Safed, who would stay under Mandatory rule for an unspecified period of time.⁶⁷⁹ Shertok, who gave a speech in support of partition, argued that time and demographic trends worked against the Jews:

[...] I want to emphasize that every year counts. Every year in which we lag in our growth – by which I mean the sum of immigration and births

⁶⁷⁶ Ben-Gurion’s letter to *MAPAI*’s central committee, 1.7.1937, p. 14. Translation mine.

⁶⁷⁷ Ben-Gurion to Shertok, 3.7.1937, in: Ben-Gurion, *Zikhronot*, IV, p. 276. Translation mine.

⁶⁷⁸ Shertok’s comments, meeting of *MAPAI*’s central committee, 5.7.1937, LPA 2-023-1937-17a, p. 6.

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

minus deaths – in relation to the Arabs – makes it harder for us to achieve our political objectives [...] I have here before me the table prepared by [Eric] Mills [head of the Mandatory Department of Immigration] regarding the creation of a Jewish majority: given a [Jewish annual demographic] surplus of 10,000 – a Jewish majority would never be achieved; given a surplus of 20,000 – the tipping point is so far in the future that he does not give an actual date; given a surplus of 30,000 – we will reach 50% of the population in 1960; given a surplus of 40,000 – 1954; given a surplus of 50,000 – 1950; given a surplus of 60,000 – 1947. These are the chances of us reaching 50% of the population if immigration continues in steady, uninterrupted rate.⁶⁸⁰

As we have seen in Ben-Gurion's letter regarding the Group of Five negotiations, in the mid-1930s the question of Arab natural population growth became a major political consideration for the Zionist leadership.⁶⁸¹ Arab population growth was not mentioned by name in Shertok's speech, but it did serve as a yardstick against which the political efficacy of Jewish immigration was measured. Shertok posited that only an annual demographic surplus of 30,000 Jews – or more – would allow the Jews to become 50% of the population in the foreseeable future. Thus, only a surplus of 30,000 Jews or more had political meaning. For both Ben-Gurion and Shertok the figure of 30,000 Jewish immigrants per year became a political threshold, the minimal basis for any political plan. It became more and more apparent to them that the Mandatory regime could not guarantee that minimal number of immigrants per annum.

⁶⁸⁰ Shertok's speech, the 12th meeting of *MAPAI's* council, 9-10.7.1937, LPA 2-022-1937-22, pp. 17-18. Translation mine.

⁶⁸¹ See this chapter, p. 25.

Shertok and Ben-Gurion were not the only Zionist politicians to fret about Arab natural population growth. During *MAPAI*'s July 1937 council meeting, Avraham Katznelson offered the following argument in favor of partition: according to the Jewish Agency's Institute for Economic Research, in July 1937 the number of Palestinian Arabs reached one million people.⁶⁸² Furthermore, the annual natural population growth of Palestinian Arabs was 32,000 people. This meant that the Arab population of Palestine would double itself in 22 years – without taking into account Arab immigration. Palestinian Arab natural population growth, Katznelson told his audience, was an unprecedented “biological phenomenon”: an extremely high number of births coupled with a low mortality rate, thanks to Jewish influence. It was twice as high as that of Egypt, and thrice that of India and Japan. The cause of this phenomenon was Zionist colonization: the Zionists, Katznelson declared, were not the type of colonizers who introduced the natives to alcohol, syphilis, opium, and cocaine and ruined their health. On the contrary, Katznelson believed that Zionist colonization “strengthened” the Arabs.⁶⁸³ And since the Mandate Government took care of the Arabs at the expense of the Jews, he predicted that the Arab mortality rate would continue to drop, and the Arab birthrate would continue to rise.

This demographic-economic argument was further developed by another *MAPAI* politician, Shlomo Lavie. In the last 20 years – during which so much money and effort was invested by Zionists in immigration – only 300,000 Jews immigrated to Palestine, Lavie told his colleagues.⁶⁸⁴ At the same time, the Arab population increased by 400,000 people, almost all of them due to natural population growth. Not only did the Arabs have to invest little effort in this kind of growth, Jewish immigration actually made them

⁶⁸² Evening session, 10.7.1937, *MAPAI*'s council, 9-10.7.1937, p. 20.

⁶⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁶⁸⁴ Afternoon session, 10.7.1937, *ibid.*, p. 4.

richer. “We”, Lavie announced, “created the power against which we are fighting”.⁶⁸⁵ Most of the Jewish capital, he claimed, ended up in Arab pockets; the Arabs got rich and the Jews remained poor.⁶⁸⁶ It seems that Lavie yearned for a Jewish State in which Jewish capital would be kept in Jewish pockets. Thus, both Lavie and Katznelson pointed to the bottleneck effect created by Jewish immigration: the more Jewish capital flowed to Palestine, the stronger the Arabs got, and hence the harder it was for Jews to immigrate to Palestine.

Lavie, a strong supporter of partition, expanded this bottleneck argument to the realm of land purchases. In ten years, he calculated, the Arabs would be 1.2 million strong.⁶⁸⁷ Assuming that the Mandate remained intact, this meant that the Arab population would need more land, and since the number of dunams in Mandatory Palestine was finite, there would be fewer dunams available for Jewish colonization.

Supporters of partition were not the only ones to use bio-territorial arguments. Berl Katznelson, who rejected the Peel proposal, offered the following argument: the area of the proposed Jewish State was 5 million dunams, 1.2 million of which were already in Jewish hands.⁶⁸⁸ The other 3.8 million dunams were populated by Arabs, and their ownership of the land prevented mass Jewish immigration, since without land there was no way to settle immigrants.

Avaraham Herzfeld, a proponent of partition, disagreed. He presented to his colleagues a far more detailed analysis of the bio-territorial potential of the proposed Jewish State.

According to Herzfeld, out of the 3.8 million dunams that were to be included in the

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid. Translation mine.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 5.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

⁶⁸⁸ Evening session, 10.7.1937, *ibid.*, p. 17.

Jewish state but were not owned by Jews yet, about 2 million dunams could be settled without transferring their Arab inhabitants.⁶⁸⁹ He further added that an area of one million dunams could support between 850,000 and 1,000,000 additional Jews. These figures, Herzfeld claimed, were far beyond what could be achieved by the current pace of Zionist colonization: In 20 years of Mandatory rule, only 640,000 dunams had been acquired by Jews. Herzfeld also put the maximal number of dunams that could be bought under British rule, in addition to what was already in Jewish hands, at 2 million. Furthermore, most of those 2 million dunams were already located within the proposed borders of the Jewish State. In other words, Herzfeld suggested that the number of dunams on which the Jews could settle in the proposed Jewish State was not significantly smaller than the number of dunams available for Jewish settlement in *all* of Mandatory Palestine. Like most proponents of partition, his bio-territorial calculations were done out of a sense of urgency. He warned his colleagues that, “We have reached a new stage, in which our neighbors are making great strides while we are being neglectful, while we dilly-dally. Two years from now we will not be able to do what we can do today. This not a matter of years and decades, but of few hours”.⁶⁹⁰

Ben-Gurion, who was stationed in London at the time, was concerned with similar calculations. He was wondering whether the Zionist leadership should demand the inclusion of the Negev and the Dead Sea in the Jewish State in return for *not* transferring the Jewish State’s Arab population.⁶⁹¹ Ben-Gurion was not sure that the British would actually follow through on the forcible expulsion of Arabs from the Jewish State, but if they did, he wrote in his diary, it would give the Jews an “immense advantage”. Ben-Gurion noted that there were 85,000 Arab villagers, or 17,000 families, in the proposed

⁶⁸⁹ Herzfeld’s speech, *ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4-5. Translation mine.

⁶⁹¹ Diary entry, 11.7.1937, in: Ben-Gurion, *Zikhronot*, IV, p. 297.

Jewish State's Coastal Plain. Because Jewish agriculture was more advanced, four Jewish farmers could be settled for every Arab *fellah* – about 340,000 Jews or 68,000 Jewish families. Ben-Gurion assumed that for every agricultural household, another, non-agricultural household could be settled – bringing the potential number of additional Jewish settlers on the coast to 700,000. In the Acre district, Jezreel Valley, Huleh Valley, and the Jordan Valley, he added, there were 1.1 million dunams. If the Arab inhabitants of those areas were removed, and assuming that a Jewish agricultural household needed a 50 dunam lot to subsist, 230,000 Jews could be settled in their stead, half of whom would be farmers. All in all, Ben-Gurion suggested, if the Arabs were expelled from Palestine's plains and valleys, almost a million Jews could take their place. He was undecided whether the Negev was important enough to trump the opportunity of settling a million Jews on evacuated Arab land. But, Ben-Gurion concluded, if the government would reject the Royal Commission's compulsory population exchange proposal, it would give the Jews another reason to demand that the Negev would be included in the Jewish State. Moreover, if indeed compulsory population exchange was rejected, it was important to keep the Jewish settlements east of the Jordan River intact, since they might serve as a beachhead for future Zionist colonization in Transjordan. This diary entry is a clear example of the way Ben-Gurion in which thought about bodies and land as not only interchangeable, but also exchangeable.

By the time the World Organization of *Po'alei Zion*, the 20th Zionist Congress, and the Jewish Agency Council convened in succession, from late July to mid August 1937, to debate the Peel partition proposal, most of the arguments for and against partition had already been articulated many times over. Yet the fact that now both sides had a concrete proposal over which to argue drove both opponents and proponents of partition to

consider whether the proposed Jewish State could fulfil the colonization objectives of the Zionist movement.

During the Congress debates, the opponents of partition often used the same statistics as the proponents of partition to argue that the proposed Jewish State would not be viable. Shlomo Kaplansky, for example, posited that 3.5 million dunams (about 70%) of the area of the proposed Jewish state were arable.⁶⁹² He also assumed that each Jewish family needed 50 dunams for subsistence. This meant a maximum agricultural population – both Jewish and Arab – of 350,000 people. Furthermore, Kaplansky assumed that for every rural family, four or five families could settle in the cities, bringing the maximum population of the Jewish State to about 1.4-1.75 million people. As of 1937, 650,000 Jews and Arabs were already living in the area of the proposed Jewish State. Assuming a total natural population growth of 200,000 over 15-20 years, Kaplansky calculated that the Jewish State could absorb, during that time period, between 500,000 and 1,000,000 Jews. This feat required peaceful relations with the neighboring countries that would allow for uninterrupted economic development and would result in a population density that was higher than that of England and Belgium. But more importantly, after 20 years the absorptive capacity of the Jewish state would be completely depleted, thus depriving Zionism of its *raison d'etre*.

Feivush Bendori and Itzhak Tabenkin, both opponents of partition, added legal and economic dimensions to the bio-territorial debate by questioned the ability of the Jewish State to repurpose Arab land for Jewish needs. Bendori argued that the Jewish State would be beholden to Minority Treaties that would make it hard to expropriate Arab

⁶⁹²Ihud Po'ali Tsion, *'Al darkhey medinyuteynu*, (Tel-Aviv: Central Bureau of Poali-Zion-Hit'achadut Union, 1938), p. 88.

land,⁶⁹³ while Tabenkin argued that due to land scarcity in the Jewish State, the price of land would rise and make Jewish colonization impossible.⁶⁹⁴

Bio-territorial calculations were some of the most important arguments in favor of partition. Their importance lay not in proving the viability of the Jewish State as it was proposed by the Royal Commission – a scheme rejected by proponents and opponents of partition alike – but in showing that the colonization objectives of the Zionist movement could not be achieved under Mandatory rule. The argument that the Zionist project in Palestine was bound to collapse under the Mandate allowed proponents of partition to hold the paradoxical position of opposing partition in principle while advocating for the actual partition of Palestine. For example, during the Congress Ben-Gurion declared that he “opposed partition and viewed any partition as an unjust decree [*gzera*]”.⁶⁹⁵ Likewise, Kaplansky argued that the proponents of partition were not in favor of (the principle of) partition in the same way that its opponents were not opposed to the establishment of a Jewish State.⁶⁹⁶ The rhetorical function of the supporters’ bio-political calculations was to hold the argument together: the supporters did not want to give up any part of the Greater Land of Israel, but bio-territorial calculations showed that Zionist colonization could not continue under the Mandate, and partition was the pound of flesh necessary for the establishment of an independent Jewish State. Moreover, many supporters of partition justified their acceptance of partition by arguing that the Jewish State would serve as a stepping-stone for future expansion.⁶⁹⁷ By combining the supposed mathematical

⁶⁹³ *‘Al darkhey medinyuteynu*, p. 160.

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁶⁹⁵ Ben-Gurion, *Zikhronot*, IV, p. 419. Translation mine.

⁶⁹⁶ Seventh session, 11.8.1937, *Ha-congress ha-tzioni*, pp. 202-203.

⁶⁹⁷ Namirovsky’s comments, meeting of *MAPAI*’s central committee, 10.4.1937, pp. 30-31; Aharonovich’s comments, meeting of *MAPAI*’s central committee, 15.4.1937, p. 6; Ben-Zvi’s comments, *ibid.*, p. 10; Dugale’s comments in: Ben-Gurion, *Zikhronot*, IV, p. 225; Shertok to Wauchope, 21.6.1937, in: Shertok, *Yoman medini*, II, p. 221; Remez’s comment’s, third session, 10.7.1937, 12th *MAPAI* council, LPA 2-022-1937-22, p. 11; Dayan’s comments, evening session, 10.7.1937, *ibid.*, p. 248; Ben-Gurion’s comments, third session, 29.7.1937, *‘Al darkhey medinyuteynu*, p. 77; Hoffmann’s comments, sixth session,

necessity of establishing a Jewish State in the present with a promise to gradually expand Zionist colonization beyond the borders of the state, supporters of partition were able to advocate for partition as a stopgap solution while maintaining their Zionist credentials. Thus, there is a good case for arguing that the 20th Zionist Congress rejected partition in principle – that is, as a permanent solution – but allowed the Jewish Agency to seek out a partition plan as a temporary tactic.

It seems that bio-territorial calculations were less germane when it came to the opposition to partition. Although opponents of partition used bio-territorial arguments, these were directed specifically at the Peel proposal, which was rejected by most proponents of partition anyway. For the most part, the opposition to partition was a result of a deep ideological and religious commitment to the Greater Land of Israel. Nevertheless, the Royal Commission's report compelled large swaths of the Zionist elite to adopt a bio-territorial discourse by offering a more or less concrete and specific blueprint for a state. If, until 1937, considerations of space and bodies exercised a small number of colonization experts and politicians, by the time that the 20th Zionist Congress adjourned, this style of argument was taken up by opponents and proponents of partition alike. Bio-territorial considerations remained an important part of the Zionist movement and Israel's political discourse. For example, after Israel had occupied the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 1967, Prime Minister Levi Eshkol famously quipped that Israel was interested in the “dowry” – the newly-occupied territories – but not in the “bride” – the Palestinian Arabs – who came with it.⁶⁹⁸

31.7.1937, *ibid.*, p. 109; Glantz's comments, eighth session, 31.7.1937, *ibid.*, p. 137; Hemlin's comments, ninth session, 1.8.1937, *ibid.*, p. 139; Reis's comments, *ibid.*, p. 151; Laufbahn's comments, tenth session, 1.8.1937, *ibid.*, p. 156; Ruppin's comments, meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 1.8.1937, CZA, p. 7; Weizmann's comments, second session, 4.8.1937, *Ha-congress ha-tzioni*, pp. 32-33; Kleinbaum's comments, first session as a political committee, 5.8.1937, *ibid.*, p. 54.

⁶⁹⁸ Avi Raz, *The Bride and the Dowry: Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinians in the Aftermath of the June 1967 War*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 3.

The Royal Commission's proposal partitioned Palestine in such a way that Arabs constituted close to half of the population of the Jewish State. Although the Zionist leadership rejected the Royal Commission's proposal, it was clear that any kind of partition will inevitably leave a large number of Arabs under Jewish rule. The next chapter examines how the Zionist leadership imagined the place of the Arab minority in the Jewish State.

Chapter V

The Arithmetic of Rights: Zionist Intellectuals Imagining the Arab Minority

January 1937-July 1938

In July 1937, the British Government adopted the Royal Commission's recommendation to terminate the Mandate and partition Palestine. Nevertheless, during the second half of 1937 the British Foreign Office consistently argued that the partitioning of Palestine would hurt Britain's relations with the Arab world.⁶⁹⁹ The dispute between the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office, which still supported the Royal Commission's plan, led Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain to decide, in December 1937, to send a "technical commission" to Palestine to examine the viability of partition. Chamberlain wished to suspend any final decision regarding the execution of the Royal Commission's plan until the commission published its report and instructed that the commission should be allowed to conclude that partition was impractical, thereby maintaining the possibility that Britain would renege on its commitment to partition.⁷⁰⁰ The new commission, officially called the Palestine Partition Commission, was appointed in March 1938.⁷⁰¹ It arrived in Palestine in April 1938, returned to London in August 1938 and published its report in November 1938.⁷⁰² Although the members of the Partition Commission rejected the Royal Commission's partition plan, they failed to agree on an alternative scheme. Together with the Commission's report, the British Government published a statement in which it announced that partition was impractical and invited Arab and Zionist

⁶⁹⁹ Nathaniel Katzburg, *Me-halukah la-sefer ha-lavan: mediniyut brittanyah be-erets Yissrael 1936-1940*, (Jerusalem: Yad Yitshak Ben Zvi, 1974), p. 39.

⁷⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁷⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁷⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 55.

representatives to a roundtable conference in London.⁷⁰³ For all intents and purposes, partition was now dead in the water.

The Zionist leadership spent much of early 1938 preparing for the arrival of the Partition Commission, in spite of rumors that the British Government planned to withdraw its support for partition.⁷⁰⁴ In May 1938 Moshe Shertok reported to the Jewish Agency Executive that six preparatory committees had been established to gather material for the Zionist evidence before the Partition Commission: a Borders Committee, a Population Committee – which dealt with the possibility of population exchange – a Financial Committee, a Security Committee, and two committees devoted to the future of Haifa and Jerusalem.⁷⁰⁵ Despite Shertok's estimation that 296,000 Arabs would live in the Jewish State alongside 319,000 Jews, no committee was appointed to deal exclusively with the question of the Arab minority in the Jewish State.

The Jewish Agency established a Minorities Committee in June 1938, only *after* the Zionist leaders first appeared before the Partition Commission, and the Committee met only once.⁷⁰⁶ By comparison, the Population Exchange Committee was active from November 1937 until June 1938 and was engaged in a mammoth – albeit unfinished – project of gathering statistical data on all 400 Arab villages in the area of the proposed Jewish State.⁷⁰⁷

Indeed, the Zionist leadership had very little reason to dwell on the question of the Arab minority before the British Government adopted partition in July 1937. In 1937, the

⁷⁰³ Ibid., pp. 55-56.

⁷⁰⁴ Ben-Gurion, *Zikhronot*, V, pp. 1, 90, 113; Ben-Gurion's comments, meeting of *MAPAI*'s central committee, 5.1.1938, LPA 2-023-1938-18, p. 2.

⁷⁰⁵ Shertok, *Yoman medini*, III, p. 106.

⁷⁰⁶ Meeting of the Minorities Committee, 23.6.1938, CZA S25\5131.

⁷⁰⁷ Yossi Katz, "Diyunei ve'adat ha-sokhnut le-ha'avarat ukhlusin, 1937-1938", *Zion*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (1988), p. 170.

prospect of an Arab minority in Palestine was sheer fantasy: numbering around 900,000 souls, Arabs comprised about 70% of Palestine's population.⁷⁰⁸ The Jewish population – about 400,000 souls – was less than half of the size of the Arab population.

Yet there was a more profound reason for the lack of Zionist thought on the question of the Arab minority: from 1931 until August 1937 the official policy of the Zionist Organization regarding the political future of Palestine was mutual non-domination – the idea that Jews should not dominate Arabs and vice versa. This slogan, which permeated Labor Zionist thought since at least 1917, excluded, by definition, any scenario in which an Arab minority would be ruled by a Jewish majority, and thus no serious planning for the place of an Arab minority in a Jewish State had been conducted by the Zionist leadership until July 1937.

The tentative acceptance of partition and the consequent establishment of a Jewish State by the 20th Zionist Congress signalled the end of mutual non-domination as an official Zionist policy. It meant that the Zionist leadership publicly accepted that Jews should, and could, rule over Arabs. This was, indeed, a decisive moment in the history of Zionism.

When it became clear there might not be a Jewish majority in the Jewish State, the first instinct of the Zionist leadership – at least those among it who supported partition – was to double down on the Royal Commission's espousal of population transfer. Zionist attitudes towards transfer in 1937-1938 have received ample scholarly attention, as they are seen as a precursor to the actual expulsion of Palestinian Arabs in the 1948.⁷⁰⁹ Nur

⁷⁰⁸ "Estimates of Statistical Summary to Three Proposed Area", CZA S25\5126.

⁷⁰⁹ See: Katz, "Diyunei ve'adat ha-sokhnut le-ha'avarat ukhlusin, 1937-1938"; Shabtai Teveth, *The Evolution of "Transfer" in Zionist Thinking*, (Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Shiloah Institute, Tel Aviv University, 1989); Nur Masalha, *Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of "Transfer" in Zionist Political Thought, 1882-1948*, (Washington, D.C.: Institute for

Masalha and Benny Morris argue that the 1937-1938 Zionist debates about transfer were a continuation of a long tradition in Zionist thinking that supported the expulsion of Arabs from Palestine.⁷¹⁰ Shabtai Teveth and Efraim Karsh, on the other hand, argue that the Zionist leadership only discussed transfer as a result of the Royal Commission's recommendations.⁷¹¹ Despite their differences, Morris, Masalha and Teveth mostly ignore the fact that the 1938 debates on transfer were part of a larger debate on the place of the Arab minority in the Jewish State. Karsh does note that the June 1938 Jewish Agency Executive debates touched on the question of minority rights in the Jewish State. He writes that Ben-Gurion offered to raise the Arab standard of living in the Jewish State, and for that reason he could not have supported mass transfer of Arabs from the Jewish State.⁷¹²

Karsh, however, misread the June 1938 debates. It was only *because* Ben-Gurion assumed an Arab exodus from the Jewish State – through voluntary transfer and other means – that he was willing to grant those Arabs who would have remained in the Jewish State equal rights and better economic circumstances. Thus, Masalha, Morris and Karsh all share the same zero-sum logic: Masalha and Morris largely ignore the Arab minority debate in order to prove that the Zionist leadership was intent on transferring most, if not all, Arabs from the Jewish State, while Karsh believes that the promise of equal rights excluded the possibility of transfer. I, however, will offer a more nuanced reading of the

Palastine Studies, 1992), pp. 56-119; Benny Morris, “‘Ve-sfarim ve-gvilim be-zikna regilim’: mabat hadash ‘al mismakhim tsioni’im merkhazi’im”, *Alpa'im*, Vol. 12 (1996), pp. 73-103; Efraim Karsh, “Siluf me-tokh pikhahon? siluf me-tokh ‘ivaron? Benny Morris ‘al sugiyat ‘ha-transfer’”, *Alpa'im*, Vol. 13, pp. 212-232; Elhanan Oren, “Me-hatsa’at ha-transfer, 1937-1938, el ‘transfer be-di’avad’, 1947-1948” *Iyunim be-tkumat yisrael*, Vol. 7 (1997), pp. 75-85; Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) pp. 41-60; Efraim Karsh, “Resurrecting the Myth: Benny Morris, the Zionist Movement, and the ‘Transfer’ Idea”, *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (2005), pp. 469-490.

⁷¹⁰ Masalha, *Expulsion of the Palestinians*, pp. 49-50; Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, p. 59.

⁷¹¹ Teveth, *The Evolution of "Transfer" in Zionist Thinking*, p. 2; Karsh, “Siluf me-tokh pikhahon?”, p. 214.

⁷¹² Karsh, “Siluf me-tokh pikhahon?”, p. 217.

minority/transfer debate: transfer – whether forcible or voluntary – was seen by the Zionist leadership as a *precondition* to the granting of equal rights to the Arab minority, and indeed, to the very democratic nature of the Jewish State.⁷¹³

The present chapter, then, focuses on the debates among the Zionist leadership regarding the political, economic and social place of the Arab minority in the Jewish State between January 1937 and June 1938. Although the report of the Partition Commission rendered these debates completely academic, since it rejected the viability of partition, they are highly revealing as a snapshot of Zionist thinking about democracy, minority rights and ethnic relations in the late 1930s.

The first section of the present chapter examines initial Zionist responses to the idea of a large Arab minority under Jewish rule, from January 1937 until the convention of the 20th Zionist Congress in August 1937. The Zionist responses, by both opponents and proponents of partition, were unanimously negative. A large Arab minority was seen by most Zionist leaders as a threat: some thought of it mainly as a security threat, a fifth column that would rebel against the Jewish State and abet the Arab states. Others viewed it a threat to Jewish sovereignty, since they argued that either Britain or the Arab states would try to intervene in the Jewish State's affairs on behalf of its Arab citizens. Finally, some Zionist leaders saw in the Arab minority an economic threat, chiefly because cheap Arab labor posed a direct threat to more expensive Jewish workers and commodities.

These responses, however, were sporadic and much more energy was spent, in the period between January 1937 and May 1938, on the question of the transfer of Arabs from the

⁷¹³ The only other scholar to study both the transfer and the minority debate is political geographer Yossi Katz, in his book, *Medina ba-derekh: ha-tokhniyot ha-tzioniot le-halukat ha-aretz ve-le-hakamat medina Yehudit* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2000). Katz's treatment of the subject, however, is mostly descriptive and he does not reach the conclusions that I present in this chapter.

Jewish State. But when the Zionist leadership gave evidence before the Partition Commission in May 1938, it discovered, much to its chagrin, that the Commission was mainly interested in the legal and economic status of the Arab minority in the Jewish State. The second section of this chapter provides a close reading of the Zionist evidence before the Partition Commission, which reveals a profound ambiguity towards the Arab minority. On the one hand, the Zionist leaders promised to grant the Arab citizens equal rights and raise the Arab standard of living to that of the Jews. On the other hand, the Zionist leaders heavily implied that the “position” – a problematic and ill-defined term – of the Arab minority *inside* the Jewish State would be determined by the perceived loss of Jewish rights in Palestine *outside* of the Jewish State. This differentiation between formal rights and position was not a negligible piece of legal sophistry. It intimated a legal philosophy that did not conceive of rights as inherent and intrinsic to an individual or a people. Rather, these rights changed in tandem with the shifts in the delicate equilibrium of power in all of Palestine.

The third and last section of this chapter examines the Zionist debates following the May 1938 evidence before the Partition Commission. During June 1938, the Jewish Agency Executive debated the place of the Arab minority in the Jewish State to an unprecedented extent. The most important aspects of this debate included the scope and character of the Arab exodus from the Jewish State, the transition into a democratic Jewish State and its relation to the number of Arabs in the Jewish State, the land question in the Jewish State and the cost of raising the Arab standard of living. Although the Executive members did not agree on all accounts, a consensus emerged regarding a few subjects: (a) all Executive members were in favor of some sort of transfer of Arabs from the Jewish State; (b) all Executive members agreed that the Jewish State should be a parliamentary democracy; and (c) all Executive members agreed that a parliamentary regime should not be

established before a Jewish majority had been achieved. These debates clearly show that the Zionist leadership specifically conditioned the establishment of a parliamentary regime on the existence of a Jewish majority. If the Jewish State were to be democratic, it was only because, and only after, it became a Jewish State.

The Arab Minority as a Threat: First Responses to the Idea of an Arab Minority, January 1937-November 1937

The initial Zionist reactions to the idea of an Arab minority under Jewish rule were negative. With the Arab Revolt raging in the background of the partition debates, many Zionist leaders viewed an Arab minority in the Jewish State as a security concern.

When Ben-Gurion presented his partition plan to *MAPAI*'s central committee on February 5th, 1937, he predicted an Arab revolt against Jewish rule, but was certain that Britain would put the revolt down.⁷¹⁴ Shertok disagreed with Ben-Gurion's assessment. . He believed that a compulsory transfer of Arabs from the Jewish State would lead to a bloodbath, "in comparison to which the present [Arab] Revolt would pale".⁷¹⁵ A month later, Shertok and Weizmann met with High Commissioner Wauchope. Wauchope asked Weizmann what would happen if Arab violence continued after the establishment of the Jewish State.⁷¹⁶ Weizmann defiantly announced that the rebels "would be hanged", but he immediately attempted to backtrack when the High Commissioner appeared to be taken aback by his announcement. Nevertheless, Shertok told Wauchope that during the transition into Jewish statehood there were bound to be Arab "troubles" and that Britain would have to be forceful in its execution of partition.⁷¹⁷

⁷¹⁴ Meeting of *MAPAI*'s central committee, 5-6.2.1937, p. 9.

⁷¹⁵ Ibid.

⁷¹⁶ Shertok, *Yoman medini*, II, p. 66.

⁷¹⁷ Ibid. Translation mine.

The Arab minority was not seen just as a security threat. Some Zionist leaders thought that the supposed need to protect the rights of the Arab minority would create an excuse for Britain and the Palestinian-Arab State to intervene in the Jewish State's affairs. For example, in a May 30th, 1937 diary entry, Ben-Gurion questioned whether the British would allow the Jews to rule over hundreds of thousands of Arabs without insisting on their right to intervene on the Arabs' behalf.⁷¹⁸

On June 17th 1937, Shertok wrote to Ben-Gurion that partition would force the Jews to “dominate many Arabs and take over territories that are inhabited solely by Arabs. This kind of takeover cannot happen without active and intensive British help. [Yet] helping the Jews to forcibly take over Arab territories is completely against Britain's oriental policy since the World War.”⁷¹⁹ Consequently, Shertok believed that Britain would reserve the right to intervene in the internal affairs of the Jewish state in order to protect the Arab minority.

In addition to being a threat to the Jewish State's security and sovereignty, some Zionist leaders considered the Arab minority to be a threat to Hebrew labor and economic self-sufficiency. In July 1937, Dr. Hilde Oppenheimer, a German-born economist, authored what might be the first official Zionist memorandum to address the position of the Arab minority in the Jewish State. In the memorandum, titled “The Economic Position of the Arab Minority in the Proposed Jewish State”, Oppenheimer posited that the “adjustment of the economic position of the Arab minority” was vital to the creation of a viable Jewish State.⁷²⁰ She also identified, however, two major threats to the viability of the Jewish State that arose from the presence of a large Arab minority within it: Firstly, the fact that

⁷¹⁸ Ben-Gurion, *Zikhronot*, IV, p. 196.

⁷¹⁹ Shertok, *Yoman medini*, II, p. 203. Translation mine.

⁷²⁰ Dr. H. Oppenheimer, “The Economic Position of the Arab Minority in the Proposed Jewish State”, July 1937, CZA S25\10058, p. 1.

the State would barely have a Jewish majority – the Jewish Agency estimated the number of Jews living in the area of the Jewish state at 319,000 as opposed to 292,000 Arabs – and secondly, the difference in the standard of living between Jews and Arabs in Palestine.

Oppenheimer then noted that the solution offered by the Royal Commission to these issues was the “evacuation” – Oppenheimer’s word – of most of the Arabs living in the area of the Jewish state. At the same time, Royal Commission demanded that the treaty between the Jewish State and the Palestinian-Arab State would protect their respective minorities. Oppenheimer tried to reconcile these two seemingly contradictory suggestions by arguing that:

In order to reconcile these two apparently conflicting demands, it will be necessary to distinguish between two periods of the future settlement: Firstly, the Transition Period, i.e., the time between the commencement and the completion of the evacuation [of the Arabs] when the methods of protecting the minorities have to be adapted to the requirement of the evacuation scheme and, secondly, the time after completion of the evacuation, when the minority will have to enjoy full protection of their rights.⁷²¹

In other words, Oppenheimer attempted to solve the contradiction between transfer and the protection of minority rights by assuming that the Arabs would enjoy equal rights *after* most of them had been “evacuated”. Zionist thinking about the transition into statehood relied on a pre-democratic transition period, during which the lack of Arab rights would enable the Jewish State to emerge with a robust Jewish majority and a liberal

⁷²¹ Ibid., pp. 1-2. Emphasis in the original.

democratic regime. Oppenheimer made a direct link between the demographic size of the Arabs and their right to have rights, and implicitly, between the liberal character of the Jewish State and its demographic makeup.

Oppenheimer did not believe, however, that evacuation would solve the problems arising from the economic gap between the Jews and the Arabs who would remain in the Jewish State. Accordingly, she offered measures to protect the Jewish market from Arab competition. In offering those measures, Oppenheimer again differentiated between the transition period and the post-independence period. The first measure that she suggested was the fixing of minimum wage and the limitation of working hours in all trades in which Jews and Arabs worked together.⁷²² Oppenheimer was of two minds, however, regarding social legislation that might improve the living conditions of Arab laborers, since any improvement in the Arabs' lot might deter them from leaving the Jewish State.⁷²³ Moreover, Oppenheimer feared that the institution of minimum wage might not create enough of an incentive for Jewish employers to hire Jewish labor, since, all things being equal, Arab workers "display greater efficiency and are in any case easier to handle [...]".⁷²⁴ In order to combat this issue, Oppenheimer suggested a restriction of the Arabs' right to work, "inofficial [sic] pressure", and labor exchange between the Jewish State and the Palestinian-Arab State.

Oppenheimer then tied the Arabs' right to work directly to the evacuation scheme. She suggested that after the number of Arabs to be evacuated annually was calculated, a work-card would be issued to all Arab workers. Assuming a three-year evacuation scheme, a third of all Arab workers would be issued a card valid for three years, and the

⁷²² Ibid., p. 2.

⁷²³ Ibid., p. 3.

⁷²⁴ Ibid.

rest a card valid for two years. Oppenheimer argued that “[t]he turn of various groups to be evacuated must be determined in accordance with the requirements of Jewish economy. It would be desirable to evacuate in the first place those groups which are apt to compete most seriously with Jewish labour in Jewish enterprises.”⁷²⁵ Furthermore, in order to prevent Arab workers from migrating to the four cities under Mandatory rule in the Jewish state⁷²⁶ – where they would still compete with Jewish workers – the Jewish Agency had to demand that these towns will be closed to Arab immigration during the transition period.

Oppenheimer also suggested that in order to prevent the flooding of the Jewish market with cheap Arab produce, a state-controlled marketing organization would sell Arab produce at a price that was below the price offered by Jewish farmers but would still be profitable for the Arab farmers.⁷²⁷ Although Arab farmers would be paid less than Jewish farmers, their net income would be about the same as that of Jewish farmers, because the cost of production was higher in the Jewish agricultural sector. As for the industrial sector, since Arab factories would have to pay the same taxes as Jewish factories their cost of production would rise and they will lose their competitive edge.⁷²⁸ Moreover, the evacuation would siphon away the Arab industrial workforce, thereby forcing most Arab industrialists to shut down their enterprises.

In the post-transition period, Oppenheimer concluded, when the Arab population would have been reduced by about two thirds, all restrictions on Arab labor would be removed, although minimum wage, the limitation of working hours, and the work-card system (for both Jews and Arabs) would remain in place. She also recommended that the creation of

⁷²⁵ Ibid.

⁷²⁶ Haifa, Safed, Tiberias and Acre.

⁷²⁷ Oppenheimer, “The Economic Position of the Arab Minority in the Proposed Jewish State”, p. 5.

⁷²⁸ Ibid., p. 7.

joint Arab-Jewish businesses be encouraged, since they would prevent the Arab minority from becoming a “factor of constant strife and hostility [...]”⁷²⁹

Oppenheimer’s memorandum considered the Arab minority to be a major economic threat to the Jewish economy. Accordingly, she viewed population transfer as just one measure in an entire spectrum of economic and social measures intended to reduce the competitiveness of Arab workers.

Two documents from 1937 attempted to provide a more programmatic consideration of the place of the Arab minority in the Jewish State. In an August 26th, 1937, diary entry, Ben-Gurion recorded his opinion that “we are on the cusp of establishing a Jewish State”.⁷³⁰ Ben-Gurion opined that all the inhabitants of the Jewish State should enjoy freedom of conscience and that the Jewish State should not recognize an official religion. Jews and Arabs alike would be citizens of the State and enjoy complete equality. He then asked: what would make the Jewish State Jewish?

Imbuing the State with a liberal character, Ben-Gurion answered, was not enough to make it a Jewish State. He envisioned a state with a Jewish purpose: to absorb Jewish immigrants and thereby solve the so-called Jewish Question.⁷³¹ Consequently, the majority of the Jewish State’s citizens would be Jewish, and they would mold the State in their image. The Jewish State’s policy would not be determined by this or another political regime, but by its historical purpose. The structure of the Jewish State, its constitution, government, internal and external policies would all be directed by one goal: mass Jewish immigration to the Land of Israel.

⁷²⁹ Ibid.

⁷³⁰ Ben-Gurion, *Zikhronot*, IV, p. 425. Translation mine.

⁷³¹ Ibid., pp. 425-426.

Ben-Gurion then formulated a more detailed blueprint for the Jewish State's treatment of its Arab citizens.⁷³² The Arabs, he solemnly swore, would be treated as if they were Jews. All children, Jewish as well as Arab, would be guaranteed an education. The state would oversee this education in order to ensure a "minimum standard" of hygiene, training and knowledge. Jewish HMOs would expand into the Arab sector, and health stations would be established in every district, with "hygienic instruction" offered to all mothers. Candidates for governmental jobs would be measured only by their credentials, and if they were hired, by their loyalty to the state. Racial incitement would be illegal. Governmental posts would have unified pay-grades and minimum wage would be enacted in the private sector.

Yet Ben-Gurion's liberalism had its limits. No Arab immigration would be allowed into the Jewish State, and "foreign" – e.g., non-Jewish – immigrants would be deported. By forbidding Arab immigration and bridging the gap between the Arab and Jewish standards of living, Ben-Gurion hoped to protect Hebrew labor without overtly discriminating between Jewish and Arab citizens.⁷³³ He then added:

During the transition period, there would still be a need to protect Hebrew labor in the construction and agricultural sectors, and, furthermore, for a yet undetermined period of time we would have to take into account our security needs. Stultified dogmas have no place in politics. Until life in the state is stabilized, emergency measures will be enacted from time to time, but the general rule of our Arab policy is clear in my mind: we will treat the Arabs in our State as if they were Jews.⁷³⁴

⁷³² Ibid., p. 426.

⁷³³ Ibid., pp. 426-427.

⁷³⁴ Ibid., p. 427. Translation mine.

Ben-Gurion concluded by arguing that the Arab minority would serve as a “lever” by which the Jewish State’s relations with its Arab neighbors would be normalized, but he also declared that the State would have to display its authority and power over the Arab minority, when needed, otherwise there will be no prospect for a “long-term [Jewish-Arab] relationship”.

There was a marked duality in Ben-Gurion’s approach to the Arab minority: He saw it as both a social project, to be improved and tamed, and as a security risk – so much so, in fact, that he implied that during a transition period of unspecified length, the Jewish State would be ruled by emergency measures. When the Zionist leadership planned the transition to statehood, this transition period was viewed as exactly that time-period during which a Jewish majority will be created, and during which the regime of the Jewish State will be non-democratic.

In November 1937, the Zionist jurist Leonard Stein composed a memorandum entitled “Notes on Treaty and Constitution”, in which he mulled over the issue of the transfer of power from the Mandatory Government to a Jewish Government.⁷³⁵ It is quite possibly the first Zionist document that attempted to imagine the actual mechanics of a Jewish Government. Stein proposed the setting up of a Provisional Jewish Government that would ease the transition from a British Administration to a Jewish one. Initially, Stein linked the timing of the establishment of the Jewish State to the number of Arabs in the State. If indeed the Royal Commission idea of population exchange was practical, he wrote that:

the establishment of a Provisional Government would be delayed until the transfer operations have made substantial progress. It is obvious that the

⁷³⁵ Leonard Stein, “Notes on Treaty and Constitution”, 22.11.1937, CZA, S25\5147.

problems connected with the constitution of the Provisional Government will be complicated by the existence of a large Arab minority and will be materially simplified by its reduction.⁷³⁶

Stein did admit, however, that the transfer scheme envisioned by the Royal Commission could turn out to be a long and complicated process, and that the establishment of a Provisional Government could not be delayed until transfer operations were completed.⁷³⁷ He then added that the constitution of the Provisional Government “should be considered in the light of the probability that the Arab percentage of the population will be approximately what it is at present [...].”⁷³⁸

With this in mind, Stein found fault with the possibility that the Provisional Government would be elected solely by Jews.⁷³⁹ He suggested three options for the makeup of the Provisional Government: A government comprised of elected Jewish representatives and Arab representatives that would be nominated by the Mandatory power; an all-Jewish government in which minority protection would be relegated to the Mandatory power; and the creation of a representative assembly, for which every adult in the area of the proposed Jewish State could vote, and which would, in turn, select government members.⁷⁴⁰

Stein found the second option to be the “less unsatisfactory” of the three, especially if it were coupled with a strong local government. Stein called the third option a “subterfuge”, since he thought that such an election would result in the creation of a all-Jewish government. It is unclear why Stein argued that in the proposed Jewish State, in which

⁷³⁶ Ibid., p. 6.

⁷³⁷ Ibid., pp. 6-7.

⁷³⁸ Ibid., p. 7.

⁷³⁹ Ibid., p. 8.

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 8-9.

almost half of the inhabitants would be Arab, an all-Jewish government would be elected. Even more curiously, Stein did not provide any argument against the first option that he proposed – an elected Jewish government coupled with nominated Arab representatives. Nor did he explain why a government with no Arab representatives would be better than a government with some Arab representation. In fact, despite having just suggested that a Provisional Government with no Arab representatives was the least harmful, Stein conceded that “there is no getting away from the fact that a section of the inhabitants, possibly amounting at the outset to as much as two-fifths of the whole [population], would be relegated, purely on the ground of race, to the status of second-class citizens, or of natives expected to accept paternal government by their superiors.”⁷⁴¹

The ambivalence of the Zionist leadership towards the prospect of an Arab minority in the Jewish State was already on full display in 1937. Many Zionist leaders viewed the Arab minority as an economic, political and security threat. Only Ben-Gurion presented a somewhat positive vision of the Arab minority, as a facilitator of good relations between the Jewish State and the Arab states. Nevertheless, it was clear that the Arab minority would have to be granted equal rights in the Jewish State, not only because otherwise the League of Nations would not approve the establishment of a Jewish State, but also because of Zionism’s self-perception as a democratic movement. This very same perception now became a snare: there was no question of the Jewish State being democratic, but how could the State be both Jewish and democratic if half of its inhabitants were Arab? To reconcile the tension between the threat supposedly posed by the Arab minority and the liberal democratic character of the future state, Ben-Gurion, Oppenheimer and Stein clung to the transition period as a legal and political twilight zone

⁷⁴¹ Ibid., p. 9.

in which the Arab inhabitants of the territory of the Jewish State would be subject to an entire spectrum of illiberal measures – from emergency laws to “evacuation” – that would create not only a Jewish majority but also a small and unthreatening Arab minority.

The Omelette and the Eggs: The Zionist Evidence before the Partition Commission, May 1938

In preparation for the arrival of the Partition Commission in Palestine in April 1938, the Jewish Agency gathered material on the preferred borders of the Jewish State, transfer of Arabs, and the status of Haifa and Jerusalem, but not on the issue of the Arab minority. Little wonder, then, that when Weizmann, Shertok, Ben-Gurion and Bernard Joseph, the legal advisor of the Jewish Agency Executive, met with the Partition Commission on May 23rd, 1938, they were surprised to find out that most of the inquiry dealt with the status of Arabs in the Jewish State.⁷⁴²

The Chairman of the Commission, Sir John Woodhead, asked Weizmann what form the constitution of the Jewish State would take, to which Weizmann tentatively answered that it would be a parliamentary regime.⁷⁴³ Weizmann admitted that he was surprised by the question and was not ready to answer it, but he suggested that the franchise would be as wide as possible, for both Jews and Arabs. The Chairman asked Weizmann about Arab representation in the Cabinet, to which he answered that the Arabs would enjoy proportional representation.⁷⁴⁴

Next, Sir Thomas Reid, another Commission member, asked the Zionist representatives how they were going to deal with the fact that about half of the inhabitants of the Jewish

⁷⁴² “Palestine Partition Commission, Minutes of Proceedings of Fifth Meeting”, 23.5.1938, WA.

⁷⁴³ Ibid., pp. 17-18.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 19.

State would be Arab. Ben-Gurion answered that the demographic balance in the Jewish State would change “very rapidly” due to mass Jewish immigration.⁷⁴⁵ He added that the Arab citizens of the Jewish State would not only be equal in rights to the Jews, but that the Jewish State would endeavor to equalize their economic and cultural status because the lower Arab standard of living meant that Arab labor was cheaper than Jewish labor – and hence more competitive.

The Chairman then noted that if the borders of the Jewish State were expanded to accommodate Zionist demands, there might be an Arab majority in the Jewish State.⁷⁴⁶ He asked Ben-Gurion how a democratic Jewish State would operate with an Arab majority. Ben-Gurion explained that the Jewish State would be built gradually. During the transition period, Britain would still rule Palestine but would relegate control of Jewish immigration to the area of the Jewish State to the Jewish Agency. Within a year after this partial transfer of power, Ben-Gurion estimated that 50,000 Jews would have immigrated to the area of the Jewish State, creating a Jewish majority therein. Weizmann added that the transition stage would last three or four years.⁷⁴⁷ Both Zionist leaders admitted that the transition stage might be fraught with “difficulties”, a euphemism for Arab resistance, and that is why Britain would still be in charge of law and order in the Jewish State’s area during this stage. Nevertheless, Weizmann suggested that once partition was implemented and it became clear that the Jewish State could not be destroyed, many moderate Arabs would seek an understanding with the Jews.⁷⁴⁸ The Chairman asked Weizmann if the transition stage would end only after a substantial Jewish majority was achieved.

Weizmann answered that an annual immigration of 100,000 Jews was not out of the

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 20.

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 22.

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 23.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 23-24.

question, and that a Jewish majority could be achieved easily.⁷⁴⁹ In other words, Ben-Gurion and Weizmann imagined the transition period as a continuation – if not the perfection – of the Mandate: the Jewish Agency would control, for all intents and purposes, its share of Palestine, while Britain protected it from Arab resistance.

The Commission found the idea of a Jewish *imporium in imperio*, and especially an “autocratic” one, to be quite problematic.⁷⁵⁰ Ben-Gurion insisted that a transition stage in which a limited, Jewish and autocratic government would operate was necessary. He argued that the “Jewish State will begin only when a Jewish State is in existence, not before that. Before that they will have some sort of autocratic government.”⁷⁵¹ Let us consider the tautology of the Ben-Gurion’s argument: how can a thing – in this case, the Jewish State – exist before it begins? The second sentence of the argument seems to offer an answer: for the Jewish State to begin its life as a parliamentary democracy, it first had to have a Jewish majority. In order that the Jewish state begin with a Jewish majority, an autocratic “Jewish State”, cocooned within the still-operational Mandatory Government, would control immigration and ensure the creation of a Jewish majority. Thus a “Jewish State” would exist, but not begin – that is, become a sovereign democratic state – before a Jewish majority was achieved.

The Chairman then asked whether all the Arab inhabitants of the Jewish State would become citizens of the State.⁷⁵² Weizmann answered that those who did not want to become citizens would not be forced to accept the citizenship of the Jewish State.

Weizmann also assumed that those who chose not to become citizens of the Jewish State would eventually immigrate someplace else and that is why “[voluntary] transfer will be

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 24-25.

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 27.

⁷⁵¹ Ibid.

⁷⁵² “Palestine Partition Commission, Minutes of Proceedings of Fifth Meeting”, p. 28.

an easier matter than we imagine today.”⁷⁵³ Ben-Gurion then suggested that the Arab inhabitants of the Jewish State would have a period of 3 to 5 years in which they would have to choose between accepting the citizenship of the state and leaving.

Unfortunately, the next – and probably crucial – three pages of the minutes are missing. The debate resumed with the question whether, in light of the British reluctance to forcibly remove Arabs from the Jewish State, Jewish immigration to the tiny state would displace *fellahin*.⁷⁵⁴ The answer – probably by Ben-Gurion – was that the Jewish State would strive to protect all agriculturalists, Jews and Arab alike. On the other hand, the state would also make sure that all arable land was cultivated and that all cultivated land was cultivated using intensive methods. This would allow the *fellahin* to live off 70 dunam plots rather than 100 dunam plots and would consequently free land for Jewish colonization. Weizmann argued that if the *fellahin* sell part of their land to the Jews and use the money earned to modernize their remaining plot, they would maximize their earnings and could pay off their debtors.⁷⁵⁵

Later in the session, the discussion shifted to the issue of Palestinian Arab natural population growth. When the Chairman asked Weizmann about the impact of the Arab natural population growth on the absorptive capacity of the hill country in central Palestine, Weizmann exclaimed that “Palestine was partitioned everyday!” – that is, that the Arab population, due to its natural growth, required more and more land, thus preventing the expansion of Zionist colonization and creating a *de facto* border between “Jewish” and “Arab” areas.⁷⁵⁶ The Chairman then asked Weizmann if he expected the

⁷⁵³ Ibid., p. 28.

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 32.

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 32-33. On Arab peasant economy in Mandatory Palestine see: Amos Nadan, “Merchants and Peasants in the Nazareth Region, 1922-47”, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 1, (2007), pp. 51-68.

⁷⁵⁶ “Palestine Partition Commission, Minutes of Proceedings of Fifth Meeting”, p. 37.

Arabs to “do better” in the Jewish State, to which Weizmann replied that in the Jewish State the Arabs would assimilate culturally and economically, and consequently that their birthrate would decrease.

Right before the meeting adjourned Weizmann presented the Commission with his vision of transfer: he imagined that a tract of land would be bought in Trans-Jordan for the transferees, to be developed by an international committee.⁷⁵⁷ The committee would then offer the Palestinian *fellahin* 10 dunams in Trans-Jordan in exchange for every 5 dunams that they owned in the Jewish State. Weizmann noted that he would not be surprised if many *fellahin* took up on this offer. He told the commission about his Arab neighbor in Rehovot, a large landowner who wished to sell his land and move to Cairo. Weizmann ensured the Commission that there were many *effendis* in the same situation.

The Commission met again with the Zionist representatives on May 26th. The Chairman asked Weizmann whether the Jewish State would protect its minorities in the spirit of the Balfour Declaration, which states that “nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine”, and article 6 of the Mandate, which states that “The Administration of Palestine, while ensuring that the rights and position of other sections of the population are not prejudiced, shall facilitate Jewish immigration.”⁷⁵⁸ Weizmann answered by noting that those phrases had received a “great deal of interpretation”. At the very least, Weizmann took them to mean that the Arabs should not fare worse than before the beginning of Zionist immigration to Palestine. He added that he believed that the situation of the Arabs had in fact improved because of Jewish immigration and would continue to improve under Jewish rule.

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 38.

⁷⁵⁸ “Palestine Partition Commission, Minutes of Proceedings of Sixth Meeting”, 26.5.1938, WA, p. 2.

At this point, however, Ben-Gurion interjected that in the Jewish State minorities would not be protected in accordance with article 6 of the Mandate charter, but in accordance with the principle of equality of rights.⁷⁵⁹ He added that if the second part of article 6 of the charter, which referred to the facilitation of Jewish immigration, was no longer applicable to all of Palestine, then the first part of article 6, which referred to the protection of minority rights, was no longer applicable to the Jewish State.

The Chairman took this infelicitous phrasing to mean that unless Jewish immigration to the Palestinian-Arab State was permitted, the Jewish State would not protect the rights of the Arab minority. Ben-Gurion quickly corrected his answer and said that the rights of the Arab minority would be protected, but not in accordance with the Mandate.

Weizmann, perhaps sensing that Ben-Gurion's argument displeased the Commission, stepped in to say that the Arabs would fare better in the Jewish State than under Mandatory rule, because under British rule the Arabs benefited indirectly from Jewish presence, while in the Jewish State they would benefit from it directly.⁷⁶⁰

The Chairman pressed the question of protecting the "rights and position" – the phrase was a direct quote from Article 6 of the Mandate charter – of the Arab minority. He asked whether Arab agricultural tenants would be protected, to which Weizmann replied that all tenants, Arab and Jews alike, would be protected.

Curiously, despite Weizmann's attempt to put the Commission's mind at ease regarding the rights and position of the Arab minority, Bernard Joseph returned to Ben-Gurion's point about the inapplicability of the obligations made in the Balfour Declaration and Article 6 of the Mandate charter regarding the protection of the Arab minority. He told

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 3.

the Commission that some Arab politicians tried to argue that Jewish immigration infringed on the rights and position of Palestinian Arabs.⁷⁶¹ After the Chairman reassured Joseph that he did not subscribe to this interpretation, Joseph went on to say that:

It seems to me, with all due respect, that the position [of the Arab minority] cannot be regarded as the same if there is a Jewish State in a part of Palestine as it was when His Majesty's Government thought of the establishment of the Jewish National Home in the whole of the country. *If we are being asked to give up certain rights, and the Arabs are also being given something which they did not have before – sovereignty in a part of the country – the position cannot be quite the same*; and, as Dr. Weizmann said, we are anxious that the Commission should appreciate that we want to protect minorities in any possible Jewish State, and we want the Commission to be certain that everyone living in the State will have equal rights; but the Arab community as such, it seems, is not in the same position as it was when the Mandate was written, and when it was interpreted.⁷⁶²

Ben-Gurion drove the point home by claiming that while he accepted the need to protect the rights of the Arab minority, he was unclear as to the meaning of the “position” of the Arab minority.

Why were Ben-Gurion and Joseph so anxious to make clear that the position of the Arabs could change in the Jewish State? A possible answer might be found in Ben-Gurion's reply to a question about the protection of small landowners in the Jewish State.⁷⁶³ Ben-

⁷⁶¹ Ibid., p. 4.

⁷⁶² Ibid. Emphasis mine.

⁷⁶³ Ibid., p. 13.

Gurion explained that the Jewish State would have to enact an agrarian reform that would produce some radical changes, although the state certainly intended to protect farmers.

Ben-Gurion explained that beside the normal functions of all states, the Jewish State would have two additional functions: to encourage Jewish immigration to Palestine, and to encourage agricultural development.⁷⁶⁴ The state would have to “impose” a better cultivation of the land – on Jews and Arabs alike – through legislation and financial aid. For example, the state would loan money to the cultivators so that they could modernize their agricultural practices, and they could repay this loan with land rather than with money. This would improve the living conditions of the cultivators themselves, but, perhaps more importantly, it would free up land for settlement by Jewish immigrants.

Sir Alexander Percival Waterfield, a Commission member, asked what would happen to those who could not rise up to the agricultural standard required by the Jewish State. Ben-Gurion answered that the whole process would be done gradually, but then Weizmann interjected forcefully:

You do expect us, Sir, to put a premium on somebody who cannot be educated. Intervention may be a good thing or a bad thing; it is a big question which we cannot discuss right now; but I think it is in the interest of the Jewish State, or of any State for that matter, that there should be no big difference of three or four centuries, anyhow [between the standard of living of its inhabitants]. You must bridge over this gulf. The bridging over is a mighty difficult task, no doubt. I would like to be perfectly frank with the Commission: we are not public benefactors; if I posed as that it would have a ring of insincerity. The aim of the State is to make all its citizens

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 14.

contented, to give them the maximum of happiness. The aim of the State is to have no discrimination between any category of citizens; but it may be that Arab citizens and Jewish citizens will not be able to keep pace. They will fall out; some will fall by the roadside; and what happens to citizens of that category in England or in America? We are not going to be better than anybody else – not officially, anyhow. It would be insincere if I were to plead that. We cannot make an omelette without breaking a few eggs; the desideratum is to break the minimum amount of eggs, and for that I claim that you must give us confidence, and credit us with being just as interested in it as England is interested in having its citizens in the best possible way.⁷⁶⁵

In other words, Ben-Gurion and Joseph envisioned a radical agrarian reform in the Jewish State, the main purpose of which would be to free land for the settlement of Jewish immigrants. Even Weizmann, who took it upon himself to present a rose-colored picture of Arab life in the Jewish State, admitted that some eggs might be broken in the process. Ben-Gurion and Joseph attempted to avoid committing the Jewish Agency to any legal language that might later interfere with the realization of this major agrarian reform. In order to ensure that the Partition Commission recommended the establishment of a Jewish State, the Zionist representatives agreed to grant the Arab minority formal equal rights, but the term “position” was far more nebulous and susceptible to different interpretations.

What is clear, however, is that both Ben-Gurion and Joseph linked the position of the Arabs in the Jewish State to their rights as a nation. Joseph interpreted the “position” of the Arab minority after partition as an equation based on Arab gains – who would have

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 15.

been given a sovereign state – and the Jewish loss of a large part of Palestine.⁷⁶⁶ Ben-Gurion implied at a similar calculation when he argued that if Article 6 no longer allowed for Jewish immigration to the Arab State, then it could no longer protect the Arab minority in the Jewish State.⁷⁶⁷ For both Ben-Gurion and Joseph, rights were not inherent and inalienable. They were the dynamic result of a zero-sum equation in which any addition to Arab rights subtracted from Jewish rights and vice versa. Accordingly, since the Arabs would have gained a state as a result of partition, the position of the Arab minority in the Jewish State would be improved, *regardless of its treatment by the State*, and thus the minority might not receive the kind of protection which the British envisioned – and which might hamper the execution of a comprehensive agrarian reform.

Weizmann returned to the question of voluntary transfer when he was asked about the absorptive capacity of the Jewish State. He presented the following calculation: there were 2.5 million dunams of irrigable land in the area allocated to the proposed Jewish State.⁷⁶⁸ Assuming that 1.25 million dunams could be bought on the “open market”, and assuming that the minimum amount of land needed by an agricultural household was 20 dunams, Weizmann calculated that about 60,000 families could be settled in that area. For each family that settled on the land, three non-agricultural households could be absorbed – 240,000 families in total. Weizmann assumed that each family would consist of 4 or 5 members, that is, about 1.2 million immigrants who could be absorbed by the Jewish State without displacing Arab *fellahin*.

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 2.

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 30.

The Chairman asked Weizmann whether the same calculation held true for Palestinian Arabs and the latter explained that Arabs need more land than Jews.⁷⁶⁹ He then intimated that the Arab inhabitants of the Jewish State might leave in search of bigger plots:

The Arab has quite a different point of view [from the Jews]. He has the whole Arab world open to him. Why is it expected that an Englishman should leave London and go to Canada? We encourage him to do it. He does not do it because he likes London, but we all want him to go.

[The Chairman]: Canada does not want him to go to Canada though!

[Weizmann]: Well, it will not always remain like that; but Canada doesn't not want him as much as it doesn't want me; but it is no hardship for an Arab to go to from Nablus to Transjordan, particularly for an Arab who says "All Arabia is mine, from the Euphrates to the Indian Ocean". Not that I shall compel him to go, but the natural process of immigration does not involve the slightest hardship for him or his children. British children can go to Australia. If he finds too little land in Palestine, there is Transjordan waiting for him. There is Iraq waiting for him. Iraq suffers from a lack of population. We have not got this opportunity.⁷⁷⁰

Woodhead then asked Weizmann his opinion regarding voluntary transfer. Weizmann announced that he was opposed to compulsory transfer.⁷⁷¹ He believed that after partition, if an offer was presented by the League of Nations for resettlement in Transjordan, many Arabs from the Jewish State would take up on it. The Chairman asked him if the Jewish

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 31.

⁷⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 31-32. Emphasis in the original.

⁷⁷¹ Ibid., p. 32.

Agency would help finance the resettlement, to which Weizmann replied in the affirmative, suggesting that the Jewish Agency would buy two dunams for resettlement in Transjordan for every dunam sold to Jews in the Jewish State. He explained that from a “purely business and materialistic point of view”, three Jews could settle in the place of every Arab that leaves. Weizmann suggested that a “public utility company” would oversee the transfer, and that the Jewish State might shoulder some of the financial burden of resettlement. Ben-Gurion added that Syria was also a suitable destination for Arab resettlement, since it needed to boost the Arab population in the disputed provinces bordering Turkey.⁷⁷²

The Zionist evidence before the Partition Commission embodied the ambivalence of the Zionist stance towards the proposed Arab minority: on the one hand, the Zionist leaders reassured the Commission that the Arabs would enjoy formal equal rights in the Jewish State. On the other, Ben-Gurion and Joseph implied that the “position” of the Arabs in the Jewish State was dynamic, and that this position was influenced by the equilibrium of rights in all of Palestine: partition would infringe on the rights of Jews in Palestine and would grant the Arabs rights that they did not have before. It was implied that because of that loss of Jewish rights, the protection of the position of Arabs in the Jewish State could not be as stringent as the British expected. Ben-Gurion and Joseph did not understand rights to be intrinsic and inherent to individuals, but rather an ever-changing quality that was subjected to a complicated political calculation.

Moreover, the Zionist witnesses made clear that they viewed the Arab minority as an economic problem, occupying, as it did, land and jobs that should rightfully belong to Jewish immigrants. It was clear that despite their equal rights, more Arab eggs would be

⁷⁷² Ibid., p. 33.

broken during the building of the State – to use Weizmann’s parlance – exactly because the State would be geared towards absorbing Jewish immigrants.

The Zionist evidence before the Partition Commission also exemplified the Zionist leadership’s complicated attitude towards democracy and minority rights. “The Jews” Ben-Gurion boasted before the Commission, “are a very democratic people”, and hence there was no question of the Jewish State being anything other than a parliamentary democracy.⁷⁷³ However, a democracy in which half of the citizens were Arab would probably not invest itself in the absorption of many thousands of Jewish immigrants. Accordingly, in order for the State to be both Jewish and democratic, Ben-Gurion suggested the creation of a temporary political twilight zone in which an autocratic Jewish Government would control the territory of the Jewish State. This autocratic Jewish Government would facilitate Jewish immigration – and perhaps an Arab exodus – in order to reach a Jewish majority. Only after a Jewish majority had been ensured a Jewish State would be officially established despite already existing, for all intents and purposes, for a few years. In other words, in Ben-Gurion’s vision for the Jewish State, democracy was absolutely conditioned by the existence of a Jewish majority.

The June 1938 Jewish Agency Executive Debates and the Minority Memorandum

June 1938 marked the height of the Jewish Agency’s preoccupation with the Arab minority question. After giving evidence in May 1938, the Zionist witnesses were scheduled to appear again before the Partition Commission, probably on June 10th.⁷⁷⁴ In preparation for the evidence, the Jewish Agency Executive met on June 7th and June 9th, and the political committee of *MAPAI* met on June 8th. The Jewish Agency Executive

⁷⁷³ “Palestine Partition Commission, Minutes of Proceedings of Fifth Meeting”, p. 19.

⁷⁷⁴ Meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 7.6.1938, CZA, p. 11

discussed the aftermath of the Zionist evidence before the Partition Commission on June 12th, together with representatives of the Restricted Zionist General Council, and on June 23rd the Minority Committee of the Jewish Agency met for the first and only time.

Finally, on July 31st the Jewish Agency submitted its memorandum on the treatment of minorities in the Jewish State to the Partition Commission.

David Werner Senator initiated the debate on the status of the Arabs in the Jewish State in the June 7th meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive. For Senator, the Jews' own minority status all over the world was reason enough for the Jewish State to give the Arabs, as a nation, the same rights as the Jews.⁷⁷⁵ The exact meaning of Senator's suggestion is unclear, but it seems that he was in favor of establishing the Jewish State as a bi-national state, or, at the very least, granting the Arabs a wide political autonomy. No other Jewish Agency Executive member supported this suggestion.

Next to speak was Ben-Gurion, who admitted that any discussion of the status of the Arab minority in the Jewish State at present was "inconvenient", but that the Partition Commission had forced the Zionist leadership to confront the issue.⁷⁷⁶ He also argued that as long as the territorial and political framework of the Jewish State was unknown there was no point in being dogmatic about the status of Arabs in the Jewish State. Ben-Gurion did re-assert, however, the dogma that the political form of the Jewish State will be determined by the immigration and absorption of diaspora Jews. Here, again, Ben-Gurion suggested that the rights of the Arab minority would be shaped by the demographics and the absorptive capacity of the Jewish State.

⁷⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 10.

⁷⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Ben-Gurion's approach to the question of the Arab minority was based on the assumption that the Arab minority would facilitate an agreement between the Jewish State and the Arab States that would allow for Zionist expansion beyond the Jewish State's borders.⁷⁷⁷ The minority policy of the State, he argued, must be such that would procure the good will of Arabs within and without the Jewish State.⁷⁷⁸ Although any rebellion would have to be put down by force, the "Arab policy" of the state should aim at the cultural, social and economic equalization of Arabs to the Jewish standard.

Ben-Gurion then launched into an exposition of his vision for the Jewish State: he explained that the purpose of the Jewish State would be to absorb the maximum number of Jewish immigrants and to contribute to the solution of the so-called Jewish Question.⁷⁷⁹ One of the main missions of the state would be to intensify agricultural production in order to maximize the amount of land and resources available for the absorption of immigrants. Ben-Gurion believed that the Jewish State would also negotiate with the Arab countries the terms of a voluntary transfer of Arab tenants, workers and *fellahin* from the Jewish State.

The constitution of the Jewish State, Ben-Gurion thought, would be based on universal adult franchise, parliamentary representation and responsible government.⁷⁸⁰ Until the standard of living between the two ethnic groups was equalized, Ben-Gurion suggested, the Arabs would be guaranteed a certain proportion of all governmental positions. A certain proportion of Arab representatives in the parliament would also be secured.⁷⁸¹ However – and herein lay the rub – Ben-Gurion also argued that "this constitution will be

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 11.

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 12.

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 14.

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 15.

⁷⁸¹ Ibid., p. 16.

enacted only after peace and public security have been ensured".⁷⁸² Until then, Ben-Gurion decreed, control of the state would be in the hands of the Jewish Agency.

Ben-Gurion also suggested that after the Jewish State had been established, all citizens of Mandatory Palestine who resided in the state would have a period of three years to decide whether they wanted to accept the citizenship of the Jewish State.⁷⁸³ If they chose not to accept the citizenship, they would have to leave.

According to Ben-Gurion, the Jewish State would maintain the religious and national rights of its minorities and would prevent discrimination on the basis of race, creed, sex and class. The State's endorsement of a voluntary Arab exodus, and the facilitation of Jewish immigration, however, did not constitute a form of discrimination, Ben-Gurion argued.

Finally, Ben-Gurion decreed that the Jewish State would endeavour to raise the Arab standard of living to that of the Jews and would enact mandatory schooling, establish health services, and facilitate the protection and unionization of workers and farmers. Ben-Gurion presented the same program to MAPAI's political committee a day later, and it was also debated by the Jewish Agency Executive on June 9th and June 12th.

All members of the Jewish Agency Executive and the Restricted Zionist General Council, who participated in the June 12th meeting, were in favor of voluntary transfer. Yet some questions arose regarding the definition of voluntary transfer. Itzhak Ben-Zvi commented that it was impractical to secure the consent of every Arab transferee, and that voluntary transfer should mean a transfer based on an agreement between the Jewish State and the

⁷⁸² Ibid.

⁷⁸³ Ibid., p. 16.

Arab countries.⁷⁸⁴ Berl Katznelson did not accept the view that a transfer that was based on an agreement between the Jewish State and the Arab State was “voluntary”.⁷⁸⁵ For Katznelson, any transfer of a large number of Arabs would be forcible by nature, and such a transfer could only be carried out by the British and in agreement with the Palestinian-Arab State. Katznelson believed that transfer was needed in order to clear the frontiers of the Jewish State of Arab villages, which he saw as a major security threat. Ben-Gurion reminded his colleagues that since January 1938 the British Government had made it clear that forcible transfer was out of the question.⁷⁸⁶ He did not rule out, however, a voluntary exodus of Arabs; for Ben-Gurion, unlike Berl Katznelson, a voluntary transfer had to be based on the individual consent of the transferees *and* the Palestinian-Arab State.⁷⁸⁷

For others, transfer was needed in order to prevent a replication of the Sudetenland crisis in the Jewish State. Efraim Rotenstreich a Jewish Agency Executive member, sent his colleagues a letter in which he connected the question of the Arab minority in the Jewish State to the issue of the German minority in Czechoslovakia.⁷⁸⁸ He argued that there was nothing to be gained from proposing a minority policy and acknowledging the Arabs as a second “state-nation” in the Jewish State while the minority issue was still being debated in the international arena, and while Britain’s position in the matter was unknown. As long as the rights of the Jewish majority were not well-defined, he added, there was no point in discussing the rights of the Arab minority. If the Partition Commission rejected transfer as a solution, the Zionist answer must be that the status of the Arab minority would be determined only after it was known how many Arabs would stay in the Jewish

⁷⁸⁴ Meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 9.6.1938, CZA, p. 3.

⁷⁸⁵ Meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 12.6.1938, CZA, p. 32.

⁷⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9a.

⁷⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 9a-10a.

⁷⁸⁸ Meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 9.6.1938, CZA, p. 1.

State and opt for citizenship. In other words, Rotenstreich understood the rights of the Arab minority not as inherent and unalienable, but rather as a function of demography. Similarly, Yehoshua Suparsky, a member the Restricted Zionist General Council, warned against the creation in Palestine of a “new Czechoslovakia”. It was incumbent upon the Executive, he declared, to make sure that through “mass Jewish immigration and a gradual exodus of part of the Arabs we will become an overwhelming majority, so that the minority question [in the Jewish State] will be like that of the Poles, and not the Germans, in Czechoslovakia.”⁷⁸⁹

Ussishkin reminded his colleagues that the ethnic Germans in the Sudetenland were only 23% of Czechoslovakia’s population, while the Arab minority would comprise almost half of the Jewish State’s population, hinting that the relatively larger Arab minority would be at least as disruptive.⁷⁹⁰ He noted, moreover, that the Arabs owned 75% of the land in the Jewish State’s territory, a fact that would make Jewish colonization difficult to execute. Ussishkin thought little of the plans suggested by Ben-Gurion in regard to the betterment of Arab life in the Jewish State: despite benefitting directly from Jewish immigration, he told his colleagues, Palestinian Arabs still robbed and murdered Jews, and they would continue to do so under Jewish rule. It did not matter, Ussishkin continued, if there was a Jewish majority in the parliament; a small Arab minority could still disrupt parliamentary procedure. Even if 60,000 Jews immigrated to the Jewish State per annum, there would be no land on which to settle them.⁷⁹¹ No Jewish policeman, Ussishkin prophesied, would dare to evict an Arab family off its land. Furthermore, since the economic position of the Arabs would improve under Jewish rule, they would have no incentive to sell their land. For all those reasons, Ussishkin wished to inform Britain that

⁷⁸⁹ Meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 12.6.1938, CZA, p. 22. Translation mine.

⁷⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁷⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

the Jews would not accept partition unless the British transfer the largest number of Arabs possible and make their land available for Jewish settlement *before* the Jewish Provisional Government was established.

Finally, many Zionist leaders supported other ways beside transfer to facilitate an Arab exodus from the Jewish State. Eliezer Kaplan expressed his support for an organized transfer of Arabs, but hinted that there were other ways to induce them to leave the Jewish State.⁷⁹² He explained that the major problems inflicting Palestinian Arab society – landlessness and poverty – would not be easily solved by the fledgling Jewish State and hinted that this state of affairs would entice some Arabs to leave – at which point Eliyahu Berligne, a member of the *Va'ad Leumi*, interjected by suggesting that high taxes would drive the Arabs out from the Jewish State.⁷⁹³ In addition, Ben-Gurion, Shertok, and Ben-Zvi assumed that those Arabs who did not wish to become citizens of the Jewish State would leave the country.⁷⁹⁴

Ben-Gurion's suggestion that an autocratic Jewish Government would rule the Jewish State for an unspecified period of time received a fair amount of criticism from his colleagues. Shertok, Golomb, and Kaplan thought that the transition period should be limited in advance to a certain number of years, otherwise the Jewish Agency would come under heavy international criticism.⁷⁹⁵

David Remez and Ben-Zvi, for their part, wished to extend the transition period. Remez suggested simplifying the transition between Mandatory and Jewish rule: he thought that

⁷⁹² Meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 12.6.1938, p. 4a.

⁷⁹³ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁴ Ben-Gurion's comments, meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 7.6.1938, p. 16; Ben-Zvi's comments, meeting of MAPAI's political committee, 8.6.1938, LPA 2-023-1938-19, p.5; Shertok's comments, meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 9.6.1938, CZA, p. 9;

⁷⁹⁵ Shertok and Golomb's comments, meeting of MAPAI's political committee, 8.6.1938, pp. 6-7; Kaplan's comments, meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 9.6.1938, p. 5.

the transition period should consist of a single stage that would last 8 to 10 years, during which the Jewish Agency would rule the territory allocated to the Jewish State.⁷⁹⁶ Remez wanted to do away with Ben-Gurion's first stage, in which the Jewish Agency would be in charge only of immigration and argued that it was impossible to control immigration without also being in charge of the absorption of immigrants, which meant control of the budget, settlement policy and defense. Ben-Zvi thought that any mass transfer of Arabs would take years, and consequently he was in favor of extending the transition period until a Jewish majority had been achieved.⁷⁹⁷

Pinhas Lubianker (later, Lavon) was in favor of establishing a Provisional Government that would represent both the inhabitants of the Jewish State and the Jewish people, but he did not think that the British would accept such a configuration.⁷⁹⁸ Instead, Lubianker suggested that British officials represent the Arab minority in the Provisional Government. Golomb had a similar idea: even after the establishment of the Jewish State, the Government would be elected by the state's citizens *and* the Jewish Agency.⁷⁹⁹ Leonard Stein went even further: in a memorandum on the treatment of minorities he argued that a parliamentary democratic regime in the early years of the Jewish State would lead either to a very large Arab bloc in the parliament, or to Jewish attempts to "jerrymander" the electoral system.⁸⁰⁰ It should be seriously considered, Stein advised, whether the Jewish State should start out as a parliamentary democracy, although even in a non-democratic regime some form of Arab representation should be guaranteed.

⁷⁹⁶ Meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 12.6.1938, p. 29.

⁷⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁷⁹⁸ Meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 9.6.1938, p. 8.

⁷⁹⁹ meeting of *MAPAI*'s political committee, 8.6.1938, p. 7.

⁸⁰⁰ Leonard Stein, "Notes on Minority Policy", 23.6.1938, CZA S25\5102, p. 11.

Responding to his colleagues' criticism, Ben-Gurion argued that the first stage – in which the Jewish Agency would only be in charge of immigration – had to be as short as possible, since during that time the British Government could still renounce partition, or implement partition without actually establishing a Jewish State.⁸⁰¹ He agreed, however, that the second stage – in which a Jewish Provisional Government would rule the territory of the Jewish State – could be longer, although, following the criticism of his colleagues, Ben-Gurion admitted that this period, in which Arabs would not participate in government, had to be limited in advance.⁸⁰²

Ben-Gurion's declaration that the Jewish State would work to elevate the financial circumstances of the Arab minority also came under heavy criticism. Kaplan argued that the state might not be able to finance the equalization of the Arab standard of living, as Ben-Gurion suggested.⁸⁰³ The Treasurer of the Jewish Agency warned that Arab education would cost the Jewish State additional hundreds of thousands of Liras. "I want equality between the two people", Kaplan announced, "not privileges for the minority".⁸⁰⁴

Shertok agreed: the social and economic equalization of Jews and Arabs should happen gradually and there was no point in encumbering the Treasury of the nascent Jewish State.⁸⁰⁵ The state would provide basic services: security, civil services, education, and sanitation, while the Zionist institutions would shoulder the cost of immigration and absorption. As for the Arabs, there was no way to financially ensure universal primary education in the first years after independence; it would have to be introduced gradually.

⁸⁰¹ Meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 12.6.1938, p. 12a.

⁸⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 13a.

⁸⁰³ Meeting of *MAPAI*'s political committee, 8.6.1938, p. 5.

⁸⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5-6.

Many of the Zionist leaders were in favor of a comprehensive agrarian reform: Yehuda Leib Fishman said that it was difficult for him to discuss the restriction of minority rights in the Jewish State, *but* he was not sure that Arabs should be allowed to purchase land from Jews, because that might lead to a situation in which most of the land was in Arab hands.⁸⁰⁶ Ben-Gurion replied that the Arabs would not pay exorbitant prices for land in the Jewish State. He added that there should be a state monopoly on land, implying, perhaps, that the state would prevent Arab landowners from taking over the bulk of the country's land.

Suprasky argue that the new state should carve up the big Arab *latifundia* into smaller plots, thus preventing the Arabs from amassing a large amount of land.⁸⁰⁷ Remez too was in favor of granting the state the legal power to expropriate land – from both Arabs and Jews.⁸⁰⁸ Without the power to expropriate land, Remez contented, there would be no available land for the settlement of hundreds of thousands of immigrants.

Ben-Zvi disagreed with Ussishkin's analysis of the land market in the Jewish State.⁸⁰⁹ Although he conceded that only 25% of the land in the area of the Jewish State were in Jewish hands in 1938, Ben-Zvi pointed out that 750,000 dunams out of the 75% not in Jewish hands were considered state lands and would automatically come under Jewish control when the Jewish State was established. Like his colleagues, Ben-Zvi was in favor of expropriating some Arab land, and he was sure that land sales would become infinitely easier under Jewish rule, when there would be no British officials and Arab terrorists to interfere with land deals. Nevertheless, he espoused strict state regulation of the land

⁸⁰⁶ Meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 9.6.1938, p. 7.

⁸⁰⁷ Meeting the Jewish Agency Executive, 12.6.1938, pp. 22-23.

⁸⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁸⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

market: any land that had not been tilled for three years would be expropriated by the state, and land prices would be kept in check in order to prevent speculation.⁸¹⁰

On June 23rd, the first and only meeting of the Jewish Agency's Minorities Committee took place.⁸¹¹ The Committee did not discuss policy, but rather outlined the issues to be studied by the Committee: the constitution of the Jewish State, the linguistic, religious and educational rights of the minority, and the scope of the minority's autonomy.⁸¹² Only one memorandum was produced by a Committee member, Nathan Feinberg, on the international protection of minorities and its application to the Jewish State.⁸¹³ It is unclear why the Minorities Committee's work was cut short, but one possible answer is that by July 1938 Malcolm McDonald, the new Colonial Minister, had floated some alternatives to partition in a conversation with Weizmann.⁸¹⁴ One alternative was an Arab-Jewish agreement to fix Jewish immigration for 5-10 years, at the end of which the Jewish population would amount to 40% of the population. Weizmann rejected the plan, but it became increasingly clear, even before the Partition Commission had finished its inquiry in Palestine, that the British Government was seeking a way out of partition. It is possible that the Jewish Agency had simply decided not to invest time and money preparing for a plan that was unlikely to be realized.

Nevertheless, on July 31st the Jewish Agency submitted its "Memorandum on the Treatment of Minorities", which was authored by Stein, to the Partition Commission.⁸¹⁵ Interestingly memorandum began with an assertion that the Jewish Agency did not

⁸¹⁰ Ibid., p. 35.

⁸¹¹ The members of the Committee were Ben-Gurion, Shertok, Senator, Joseph, Leo Kohn, a Zionist Jurist, Georg Landauer, a German-Jewish leader, Leo Herrmann, the general secretary of *Keren Ha-Yesod*, the Zionist fundraising organ, and Matityahu Lazersohn and Nathan Feinberg, both legal scholars.

⁸¹² Ibid, p. 1.

⁸¹³ Nathan Feinberg, "Regarding the International Protection of the Minorities in the Event of the Establishment of a Jewish State", CZA S25\5131.

⁸¹⁴ "Note on a Conversation between 'B' and 'W'", 4.7.1938, WA.

⁸¹⁵ Katz, *Medina ba-derekh*, pp. 99-100.

consider the Arab population of the Jewish State to be a minority, strictly speaking.⁸¹⁶ The term “minorities”, Stein wrote, referred to religious and racial minorities. According to this definition, several minorities would exist in the Jewish State: non-Arab groups, such as the Druze and the Bahá'ís, and religious minorities such as the Christian Arabs. In regard to those groups, “minority questions of the ordinary” would arise. Yet the Arab population as a whole was not truly a minority, perhaps because it would “constitute a considerable proportion of [the Jewish State’s] citizens”.⁸¹⁷ It is unclear why Stein made the distinction between the Arab population as a whole and smaller non-Jewish communities, or what political goals he hoped to achieve by making this distinction.

The first issue tackled by the memorandum was the applicability of the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate charter to the protection of minorities in the Jewish State.⁸¹⁸ Stein argued that the wording in both documents was extremely ambiguous and that it had been construed by opponents of Zionism to mean that Jewish immigration to Palestine constituted an infringement of Palestinian Arabs’ rights.⁸¹⁹ He then noted that both the Royal Commission and the British Government considered Jewish control of Jewish immigration to be one of the major advantages of partition, and thus Jewish immigration to the Jewish State could not be interpreted as an infringement of Arab rights. Stein conceded, however, that the Jewish State would respect the civil and religious rights of its non-Jewish citizens and would safeguard and improve their position.

Stein then articulated the basic principles that would govern the relationship between the Jewish State and its non-Jewish citizens. The first principle was the principle of non-

⁸¹⁶ Leonard Stein, “Memorandum on the Treatment of Minorities”, 31.7.1938, CZA 25\5131, p. 1.

⁸¹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2. This issue was raised during the Zionist evidence before the Partition Commission. See above, pp. 21-24.

⁸¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

discrimination on racial and religious grounds. The second principle was that the Jewish State would not be satisfied with formal equality and would endeavour to equalize the Arab standard of living with that of the Jews.⁸²⁰

Regarding the franchise, Stein reassured the Partition Commission that all adult citizens of the Jewish State would have the right to vote, with no literary or pecuniary test to qualify this right. The Jewish Agency viewed favourably, although it did not commit itself to adopting, a proportional representation of Arabs in the legislature. Arabs would also be represented in the executive branch, Stein claimed, but the nature of their representation could not be discussed in advance of the formation of the State's "constitutional machinery".⁸²¹

When it came to citizenship, Stein wrote that the Jewish Agency had agreed that Palestinian citizens could decline the citizenship of the Jewish State but would then have to leave the State.⁸²² This measure was based on the precedent of the Treaty of Lausanne, in which it was resolved that the inhabitants of the Alexandretta Province who did not wish become Turkish citizens had to leave the territory. The Jewish Agency did not consider the exodus of non-citizens from the Jewish State to be an example of compulsory transfer. Stein also wrote that the Jewish Agency was willing to consider a period of two years in which every Palestinian citizen could decide whether they wished to accept the citizenship of the Jewish State, and those who decided against it would have to leave.⁸²³ At the end of this period, any inhabitant who did not elect to decline the citizenship would automatically become a citizen of the Jewish State. Moreover, the

⁸²⁰ Ibid., pp. 3-4.

⁸²¹ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

⁸²² Ibid., p. 6.

⁸²³ Ibid., pp. 6-7.

Jewish Agency was in favor of applying the same process to the inhabitants of the mixed cities that would remain under Mandatory rule (Haifa, Acre, Tiberias and Safed).

Regarding state employment, the Jewish Agency was committed to ensuring that its Arab citizens would have a “fair share” of employment in the public sector, although Stein was not willing to define, at this point in time, the exact meaning of “fair share”.⁸²⁴

Stein also reassured the Partition Commission that the Jewish State would not coerce cultivators, be they Arab or Jewish, to adopt more advanced cultivation method and would instead persuade them to intensify their agricultural production.⁸²⁵ This did not mean, however, that the Jewish State would refrain from intervening when it saw fit – for example in parceling the shared holding system of land that was common in Arab villages. The intensification of agriculture, Stein explained, would free (Arab) land for Jewish settlement, while leaving the *fellahin* enough dunams for their own subsistence. Stein made clear that this did not mean a wholesale expropriation of land, but rather an encouragement of the *fellah* to sell land in the free market – although the state would reserve the right to expropriate land for the general public’s good.⁸²⁶ The Jewish Agency also committed itself to protecting cultivating tenants in the spirit – if not the exact wording – of the Mandatory Protection of Cultivators Ordinance. Finally, the memorandum did not preclude a future agrarian reform, if it was demanded by the majority of the population, and after the racial division between Jews and Arabs had been bridged to an extent.⁸²⁷

⁸²⁴ Ibid., p. 8.

⁸²⁵ Ibid., pp. 9-10.

⁸²⁶ Ibid., p. 11.

⁸²⁷ Ibid., p. 12.

The memorandum then turned to the question of labor. Stein argued that a fundamental goal of the Jewish State would be to close the economic gap between the Jews and the Arabs. Interestingly, Stein did not commit the Jewish Agency, in the memorandum, to enacting minimum wage, although he did commit to “enforcing the minimum standard of working conditions [...]”⁸²⁸

Unsurprisingly, the official Jewish Agency memorandum on the minority question was tamer than the actual ideas propagated in the Jewish Agency Executive meetings. For example, the memorandum did not discuss transfer and assumed that the Jewish State would start out as a parliamentary democracy. Despite the support of many Zionist leaders for land expropriation, the memorandum was ambiguous about the Jewish State’s right to expropriate land and suggested that a major agrarian reform would be enacted only after the majority of citizens agreed to it, a notion that did not come up at all in the Jewish Agency Executive debates. Furthermore, the memorandum repeated Ben-Gurion’s assertion that the Arab standard of living should be equalized to that of the Jews without mentioning the growing consensus in the Jewish Agency Executive that this process could not begin at the establishment of the State and would probably unfold very gradually.

What emerges from the May 1938 evidence before the Partition Commission and the June 1938 debates is an extremely ambivalent Zionist view of the Arab minority. The fact that the Arab minority in the Jewish State should enjoy equal civil rights was never questioned by the Zionist leadership. At the very least, it was clear that Britain and the League of Nations would not approve the establishment of a Jewish State that did not grant its minorities equal rights.

⁸²⁸ Ibid., p. 13.

Nevertheless, Ben-Gurion and his colleagues envisioned a Jewish State with a purpose: to absorb tens of thousands of Jewish immigrants every year. The size of Jewish State that was offered to the Zionists, however, was only 5 million dunams and most of its land was owned by Arabs. Furthermore, the Arab minority debates unfolded against the backdrop of the violent Arab Revolt. And so, despite the need to grant the Arab minority equal rights, the Arabs were also seen as a security threat and an economic problem. Many Zionists wished for a British-executed compulsory transfer of Arabs from the Jewish State that would have solved this issue by reducing the number of Arabs in the Jewish State and freeing land for Jewish use. Yet compulsory transfer, despite receiving much scholarly attention, was just one option in a whole spectrum of practices – voluntary transfer, economic pressure to leave, economic enticement to leave, legal obligation to leave, expropriation of land, intensification of agriculture and so on – that were aimed at reducing the number of Arabs in the Jewish State and freeing land for Jewish use before, and sometimes after, the Arab minority would have been granted equal rights.

Once the debate regarding transfer is expanded to include a discussion of the rights of the Arab minority, a far more interesting, and perhaps more relevant, picture is revealed: the Jewish State was envisioned, first and foremost, not as a state in which Jews were a majority, but rather a state into which the Zionist goal of absorbing Jewish immigrants and solving the so-called Jewish Question was encoded. A parliamentary democratic regime, on the other hand, was not encoded into the DNA of the Jewish State in the same way. Ben-Gurion considered postponing the establishment of a democratic regime indefinitely, Stein suggested that the Jewish State might not start as a parliamentary democracy, and Lubianker and Golomb suggested that the Jewish Agency, as a representative of diaspora Jews, would still be part of the government after the establishment of a parliamentary democracy. Virtually all the members of the Jewish

Agency Executive agreed that the transition period between the end of the Mandate and the establishment of the Jewish State should last until a Jewish majority had been achieved, even if during this time a Jewish government ruled the territory of the Jewish State – meaning that an unestablished Jewish State would be operative for all intents and purposes. The Zionist willingness to postpone the establishment of the Jewish State until a Jewish majority was created indicates that democracy was important to the Zionist leadership, but only if it was a *Jewish* democracy.

In Ben-Gurion's vision for a Jewish State, the Arabs were almost by definition second-class citizens, since the State was dedicated to relocating resources from the Arab minority to the Jewish immigrants. Accordingly, the Zionist leadership had to devise ways in which this transfer of resources could work around the Arab minority's equal rights – hence the Ben-Gurionian insistence that the position of the Arab minority was susceptible to changes in the equilibrium of power between Jews and Arabs in all of Palestine. And so, it seems that beyond a batch of unalienable rights – mostly cultural and religious – some Arab rights, especially the right to own property and the right to vote, were indeed conceived by some Zionist leaders to be contingent: not completely absent but depended on a political calculation that took into account the territory of the Jewish State, its demographic makeup and its relations with the Arab State.

Chapter VI

A Tale of Two Committees: Zionist Demographic Thought During the Second World War, 1942-1946

The present chapter examines Zionist demographic thought between the adoption of the Biltmore Program in May 1942 and the publication of the Anglo-American Committee's report in April 1946. Anglo-Zionist relations in this period were strained by the publication, in May 1939, of a White Paper that replaced the principle of immigration in accordance with Palestine's economic absorptive capacity with a fixed quota of 75,000 immigrants for five years, restricted Jewish land purchases, and prescribed the eventual establishment of an independent Palestinian State.⁸²⁹ For Ben-Gurion, the 1939 White Paper was cause enough to seek the replacement of the Mandatory regime with a Jewish State.⁸³⁰ Accordingly, in 1942 the Zionist movement adopted the Biltmore Program, which called for the transference of control of immigration and colonization to the Jewish Agency and the establishment of Palestine as a Jewish Commonwealth.⁸³¹

Throughout the early stages of the Second World War, reports by Jewish emissaries, stationed across Europe, informed the *Yishuv* leaders of the deportation, ghettoization, and mass murder of Jews under Nazi rule.⁸³² Until late 1942, however, it was not entirely clear that the suffering inflicted upon European Jews was part of a systematic Nazi campaign to annihilate the Jewish people.⁸³³ In early 1942, Ben-Gurion still assumed that

⁸²⁹ Dov Hoz's comments, meeting of *MAPAI's* central committee, 2.5.1939, LPA 2-023-1939-24, pp. 6-7.

⁸³⁰ Meeting of *MAPAI's* central committee, 28.5.1939, *ibid.*, pp. 24-26.

⁸³¹ Ben-Gurion's speech, the Biltmore Convention, 10.5.1942, in: Ariel Feldstein, Meir Avizohar, Shifra Kollat (eds.), *Biltmor: tokhnit medinit: zikhronot min he-'izavon: yuni 1941-september 1942*, (Sde Boker: Ben-Gurion University Press, 2012), p. 439.

⁸³² Tuvia Friling, *Arrows in the Dark: David Ben-Gurion, the Yishuv Leadership and Rescue Attempts during the Holocaust*, Vol. I, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), pp. 33-34.

⁸³³ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

2-3 million Jewish refugees would immigrate to Palestine after the war.⁸³⁴ As the war wore on and the full scope of the Nazi genocide was gradually revealed, the immigration of those Jews who would survive the war to Palestine became a paramount goal of the Zionist movement.⁸³⁵

After the end of the Second World War, about 150,000 Jewish displaced persons (DPs) were housed in camps – which were often converted Nazi concentration and labor camps – across Germany, especially in the American zone of occupation.⁸³⁶ The fate of the DPs became yet another bone of contention between Britain and the Zionist movement. The British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin wanted the DPs to return to their countries of origin, while the Zionist leadership insisted that they should be allowed to immigrate to Palestine.⁸³⁷ By the end of the war, however, the US had become a fully-pledged actor in the Middle East and President Harry Truman, egged by the American-Jewish lobby, supported the immigration of 100,000 Jewish DPs to Palestine.⁸³⁸ The British rejected the idea but suggested the creation of a joint Anglo-American Committee that would examine both the Jewish refugee problem and the Palestine Question. The Committee was active from January to April 1946. The publication of the Committee's report marks the end of the period covered in this chapter.

The combination of the restrictions laid down by the 1939 White Paper and the difficulties of leaving war-torn Europe led to a decline in Jewish immigration to Palestine

⁸³⁴ Ibid., p. 53.

⁸³⁵ Meir Avizohar, "Mavoh", in: Meir Avizohar and Ariel Feldstein (eds.), *Metif tziyoni: zikhronot min ha-'izavon, may 1940 – yuni 1941*, (Sde Boker: the Ben-Gurion Institute, 2008), p. 1.

⁸³⁶ Judith Tydor Baumel, "DPs, Mothers and Pioneers: Women in the She'erit Hapletah", *Jewish History*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (1997), p. 99.

⁸³⁷ Meir Avizohar, "Mavoh", in Meir Avizohar (ed.), *Li-krat ketz ha-mandat: zikhronot min ha-'izavon, 29 be-yuni 1946 – mertz 1947*, (Tel-Aviv: 'Am 'Oved and the Ben-Gurion Institute, 1993), p. 20.

⁸³⁸ Amikam Nachmani, *Great power discord in Palestine: the Anglo-American committee of inquiry into the problems of European Jewry and Palestine, 1945-1946*, (London: Frank Cass: 1987), p. 1.

during the war years.⁸³⁹ The decrease in immigration, the lifeblood of the Jewish National home, led the Zionist leadership to divert its intellectual energy towards two bio-political ideas: First, the notion that a mass of Jews – estimates ranged from one to three million – would have to be transferred to Palestine, in the speediest of manners, after the war. This massive Jewish transfer required a Jewish State, or, the very least, Jewish control of immigration to Palestine. Accordingly, the Jewish Agency's Planning Committee, headed by Ben-Gurion himself, was occupied from 1943 to 1946 with calculating the absorptive capacity of Palestine and imagining a Jewish State that would be capable of absorbing millions of Jewish refugees.

While the Jewish Agency's economists were busy planning the future, a group of Zionist demographers, social workers, and physicians attempted to change the reproductive habits of the *Yishuv*. Their reasoning was simple: with the ongoing destruction of European Jewry, the *Yishuv* was losing its demographic reserve. Jewish immigration, at least from Europe, could no longer be counted on to create a Jewish majority in Palestine. Moreover, Roberto Bachi, the demographer who headed this group, explained that the Jewish birthrate was so low, compared to the Palestinian Arab one, that even if a Jewish majority were to be created, it would dissipate after a few generations.

This was a new wrinkle in Zionist bio-political thought. The creation of a Jewish majority was no longer enough; the Jewish population of Palestine, overwhelmingly middle class and Western in its sexual practices, simply did not produce enough children to maintain its size, not to mention competing with the Arab birthrate. Bachi and his colleagues at the Committee for the Problems of Natality, which was affiliated with the *Va'ad Leumi*, came

⁸³⁹ For immigration numbers, see: Nadav Halevi, "The Political Economy of Absorptive Capacity: Growth and Cycles in Jewish Palestine under the British Mandate", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (1983), p. 458.

up with what they called “demographic politics” – a comprehensive program that was intended to bring the Jewish birthrate up to a minimum of three children per family through sexual education, financial incentives and a war on abortions.

The work of the two committees serves as two opposing approaches to bio-politics. The Committee for the Problems of Natalivity delved into the nitty-gritty details of the *Yishuv*'s sexual life: the number of births and abortions, the average period between marriage and conception and between each pregnancy, the average age at marriage, the share of unmarried people in the population and so on. Moreover, the work of the Committee for the Problems of Natalivity linked sexual practices with ethnicity and socio-economic status, differentiating not only between Jews and Arabs, but also between Christian and Muslim Arabs and between Ashkenazi, Mizrahi, and Sephardic Jews. As sociologist Anat Leibler argues, no other pre-state Zionist body contributed more to the scientification of the perceived differences between Jews and Arabs, and between Jews themselves.⁸⁴⁰ The Committee for the Problems of Natalivity also brought to the fore of the Zionist project two hitherto marginalized groups: Jewish women and Mizrahi Jews. Since women were seen as responsible for the reproduction of the nation, and Mizrahi Jews had, on average, more children than Ashkenazi Jews, the Committee for the Problems of Natalivity concerned itself with regulating, educating and reforming these two groups.

The Planning Committee, on the other hand, was spectacularly uninterested in studying humans. Since it was concerned with proving the economic absorptive capacity of Palestine, it was far more interested in categorizing, cataloguing and studying agricultural methods, soil types, rainfall and hydro-electrical power, and the economic potential of several industrial ventures. Despite working on a plan to facilitate the immigration of one

⁸⁴⁰ Anat Leibler, “Disciplining ethnicity: Social Sorting Intersects with Political Demography in Israel's Pre-State Period”, *Social studies of science*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (2014), p. 283.

million Jews to Palestine, the Committee did not pay much attention to diaspora Jews. That is, perhaps, understandable: no one knew how many Jews would survive the war.

In the end, the Planning Committee had a more immediate impact, as its work was presented to the Anglo-American Committee, while the Committee for the Problems of Natality could not convince the Zionist leadership to implement its demographic politics. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the different bio-political narratives provided by the two committees, the reasons for the Zionist leadership's preference for the Planning Committee's narrative, and immediate and long-term impact of the two committees on Zionist politics.

The Committee for the Problems of Natality

In recent years, several historians have examined the sexual mores of Palestinian Jews in the 1930s and 1940s. Liat Kozma has charted the rise and decline of sexual education practices in 1930s' Tel-Aviv, arguing that the Arab Revolt and especially the Holocaust turned public opinion against family planning.⁸⁴¹ At the same time, historian Lilach Rosenberg-Friedman points out that more and more concerned physicians sounded the alarm regarding the prevalence of abortions among Jewish women, which they saw as a threat to the ability of the *Yishuv* to maintain its demographic size.⁸⁴² It was against this backdrop of demographic anxieties and the growing interest in the sexual practices of Palestinian Jews, that the Committee for the Problems of Natality was established in May

⁸⁴¹ Liat Kozma, "Sexology in the Yishuv: The Rise and Decline of Sexual Consultation in Tel-Aviv, 1930-1939", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 42, no. 2 (2010), p. 244.

⁸⁴² Lilach Rosenberg-Friedman, "Hapalot melakhutiyot: bavu'a le-dyokano ha-ravgoni shel ha-yishuv", *Iyunim be-tekumat israel*, vol. 42 (2014), pp. 220-257.

1943.⁸⁴³ The goal of the Committee was to raise awareness among Palestinian Jews to their lagging birthrate and to suggest ways to enhance it.⁸⁴⁴

The scientific undergirding of this campaign was provided by Roberto Bachi, an Italian-born demographer who headed Hadassah's Statistical Department.⁸⁴⁵ Bachi found that Palestinian Ashkenazi women (not including ultra-orthodox women) had an average of 1.7 children, while the minimal average number of children needed to maintain the size of the population was 2.⁸⁴⁶ Half of all Ashkenazi mothers had a single child, and only a third of Ashkenazi mothers had two children.⁸⁴⁷ The Palestinian Ashkenazi population, Bachi concluded, lost 25% of its demographic size each generation.⁸⁴⁸

In contrast, Bachi found that Mizrahi Jews married earlier and had 4-5 children on average.⁸⁴⁹ The average period between marriage and the last birth among Mizrahi women was 11.7 years, almost twice as long as the average for Ashkenazi women – 5.18.⁸⁵⁰ Interestingly, Bachi noted that while occupation had little effect on family size among Ashkenazi Jews, it did affect Mizrahi Jews – the better their socio-economic position was, the fewer children they had.⁸⁵¹ For Bachi, this was a sign that upwardly mobile Mizrahi Jews were assimilating into Ashkenazi society. Finally, he positioned

⁸⁴³ “Zikharon devarim me-hitya'atzut be-she'elat ha-politika ha-demographit ba-aretz”, 23.5.1943, Ben-Gurion Archives, Science Division, Roberto Bachi's Papers [hereinafter: BGA, SV, RBP], folder 67.

⁸⁴⁴ Bachi to the Hadassah Executive, 25.5.1943, *ibid.*, folder 86.

⁸⁴⁵ Hadassah is the name of the Women's Zionist Organization of America, which was established in 1912. The organization did extensive medical work among Palestinian Jews, including the establishment of several medical centers.

⁸⁴⁶ Bachi, “ha-nohag ba-nisu'in u-va-yeluda bekerev ha-shkhavot ha-shonot shel ha-yishuv ve-hashpa'ato 'al 'atideynu”, *ibid.*, folder 49, p. 235.

⁸⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 236. Bachi defined a demographic generation as the average age of mothers in a specific group.

⁸⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

⁸⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

Sephardic Jews somewhere between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jews – with an average of 3 children per woman, their population grew by 30% each generation.⁸⁵²

The consequences of these demographic trends, warned Bachi, were dire. The average number of children per Jewish woman was 2.27, while the “natural” number of children that an adult woman could have was 5.9.⁸⁵³ This meant, according to Bachi, that every year the *Yishuv* was losing 60% of its reproductive potential. In 1940, Bachi calculated, the *Yishuv* showed an 11% demographic deficit per generation. Moreover, the *Yishuv*, as a community of immigrants, was abnormally young.⁸⁵⁴ As the *Yishuv* grew older, its already low birthrate would become lower still.

To add insult to injury, the birthrate of Palestinian Muslim women was the highest in the world.⁸⁵⁵ The number of births in the Muslim community was 4 times that of the *Yishuv*, despite the fact that the Muslim community was only twice as big as the *Yishuv*.⁸⁵⁶ The Muslim population of Palestine, Bachi calculated, could double its size from one generation to the next.⁸⁵⁷

Consequently, Bachi made the point that mass immigration was no panacea for the *Yishuv*'s minority woes. In one of his memoranda, Bachi presented two demographic scenarios: the “pessimistic” one assumed that the Jewish and Arab birthrates would remain as they were in 1938-1942, while the “optimistic” one assumed that the average number of children per Jewish family would increase to 3 while the average number for

⁸⁵² Interestingly, Bachi never defined the differences between Ashkenazi, Sephardic, and Mizrahi Jews, beyond their reproductive differences. It seems that he generally treated European (outside the Balkans) and American Jews as Ashkenazi, Middle Eastern and North African Jews as Mizrahi, and Turkish, Balkan and veteran Palestinian Jews (outside the Ashkenazi ultra-orthodox community) as Sephardic.

⁸⁵³ Bachi, “Ha-nohag ba-nisu'in u-va-yeluda bekerev ha-shkhavot ha-shonot shel ha-yishuv ve-hashpa'ato 'al 'atideynu”, p. 243.

⁸⁵⁴ Roberto Bachi, “Ha-ribuy ha-tiv'i be-eretz-israel ve-'utido shel ha-yishuv”, April 1943, CZA J1\3717\1, p. 13.

⁸⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 18.

⁸⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 13.

⁸⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 18.

Arab families would decrease from 7 to 6.⁸⁵⁸ Assuming no immigration to Palestine, in the pessimistic scenario the share of Jews in Palestine's population would continue to decrease until it reached a nadir of 8.8% in 2001, while the absolute number of Palestinian Jews would start to decrease by 1981. In the optimistic scenario, the absolute number of Palestinian Jews would continuously increase, but their share in the population would decrease, dropping from 31% in 1941 to 16% in 2001.

Bachi then charted the *Yishuv*'s demographic trajectory, assuming an immigration of one million Jews to Palestine during the next five years. According to the pessimistic scenario, the Jews would become a majority by 1951 but would become a minority again by 1956(!).⁸⁵⁹ According to the optimistic scenario, the Jewish majority would be squandered by 1966. Moreover, by the end of the century Ashkenazi Jews would constitute only 40% of the Jewish population, with the majority consisting of Mizrahi and Sephardic Jews.⁸⁶⁰

For Bachi Mizrahi Jews constituted both a demographic solution and a social problem: in his study of Jerusalemite Mizrahi Jews Bachi noted that, thanks to the efforts of Hadassah, child mortality among Mizrahi Jews had greatly declined, leading to a spike in their natural reproduction rate.⁸⁶¹ The larger number of living children weighed heavily on the family budget, and so Mizrahi daughters were married off early and Mizrahi sons were sent off to work without receiving a proper education or vocational training. According to Bachi, the Mizrahi Jews' "natural indolence" and their traditionalism led

⁸⁵⁸ Bachi, "maskanot politiyot me-tokh hakirotai 'al ha-hitpathut ha-demographit shel ha-yehudim ve-ha-'arvim be-eretz-yisrael", CZA J1\3717\1, p. 2.

⁸⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 4.

⁸⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 3.

⁸⁶¹ Bachi, "On the Problem of the Oriental Communities in Jerusalem", BGA, SD, RBP, folder 69, p. 2.

them to stay in the same neighborhoods and in the same line of work as their forefathers. The result was congestion, both spatial and vocational.

Bachi made a link between the Mizrahi Jews' sorry socio-economic state and their supposed attraction to radical politics.⁸⁶² Their dependence on charity from Zionist and *Yishuv* institutions, he posited, created a sense of entitlement among Mizrahi Jews, and a hatred for (the mostly *MAPAI*-controlled) institutions that failed to give them their equal share. Bachi was not alone in making a connection between Mizrahi Jews and right-wing politics. Ben-Gurion argued that Jerusalem's disaffected youth were easy prey to Revisionist ideology and sectarian (*'adatit*) demagogy,⁸⁶³ while Pinhas Lubianker (later Lavon) opined that Revisionist recruitment succeeded among Mizrahi Jews because its simplicity and demagogic slant gelled well with a "certain oriental psychology".⁸⁶⁴

Finding a solution to the Mizrahi problem, Bachi suggested, should start with the establishment of a Jewish Agency department devoted to Mizrahi affairs.⁸⁶⁵ The department would be tasked with the yearly settlement of a few thousand Jerusalemite Mizrahi Jews in rural villages that would be, according to Bachi, more favourable to the maintenance of the Mizrahi high birthrate and lower standard of living, and to the "agricultural reconstruction" of the *Yishuv*, while at the same time relieving congestion in Jerusalem. Bachi concluded that, for political reasons, the resettlement scheme should not refer specifically to Mizrahi Jews, although it would, *de facto*, deal mainly with Mizrahi Jews.⁸⁶⁶

⁸⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁸⁶³ Ben-Gurion's comments, meeting of *MAPAI*'s secretariat, 7.4.1943, LPA 2-024-1943-5, p. 6.

⁸⁶⁴ Lubianker's comments, meeting of *MAPAI*'s central committee, 12.7.1943, LPA 2-023-1943-41, p. 14.

⁸⁶⁵ Bachi, "On the Problem of the Oriental Communities in Jerusalem", BGA, SD, RBP, folder 69, p. 4.

⁸⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

When it came to the *Yishuv* as a whole, Bachi offered a few suggestions: assuming that the Jewish birthrate remained as it was, Bachi believed that the Zionist leadership should strive to create in Palestine a regime in which majority rule was not a decisive factor.⁸⁶⁷ If the Zionist leadership insisted on achieving a Jewish majority, Bachi recommended partition and population exchange: a transfer of Arabs from the Jewish State and of Mizrahi Jews to the Jewish State. Even an insignificant Arab minority, he warned, might one day threaten the Jewish majority. At the same time, Bachi also argued in favor of a nation-wide program aimed at bringing the average number of children per Jewish family to 3 – the only surefire way, he claimed, to ensure the growth of the *Yishuv* – by subsidizing large families and reducing their expenses.⁸⁶⁸ Bachi wished to raise the birthrate among Ashkenazi families, and, perhaps more importantly, to maintain the high birthrate of Mizrahi Jews while solving what he identified as their endemic problems through education, productivisation, and transfer to agricultural settings.⁸⁶⁹

Bachi was the only demographer on the Committee for the Problems of Natality. The other members were mainly physicians and social reformers. Consequently, the Committee members had a hard time agreeing on the causes of the *Yishuv*'s low birthrate. Dr. Aryeh Sadovsky, the head of a private maternity hospital, argued that the reasons were psychological rather than economic: anxiety caused by the war, psychological immaturity on the part of young married women, and marital tensions.⁸⁷⁰ Siddy Wronsky, the doyen of social work in Palestine, implied that Sadovsky's findings were skewed: he treated middle class women, whose abortions were performed by physicians and were

⁸⁶⁷ Bachi, "political conclusions to be drawn from investigations dealing with the demographic development of Jews and Arabs in Palestine", p. 5.

⁸⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁸⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

⁸⁷⁰ Sadovsky's comments, meeting of the Committee for the Problems of Natality, 22.6.1943, *ibid.*, folder 67, p. 2.

therefore documented, while poor women had abortions that were performed, illegally, by non-physicians. Hence, there was no documentation of the number of abortions among poor women, nor the reasons leading them to have abortions. Dr. Tova Berman, a leading physician who interviewed thousands of women about their reproductive health, argued that the issue was both psychological and economic, and that there was a need for propaganda on the one hand and material help on the other. Dr. Fritz Noack, of the *Va'ad Leumi's* health department, and Avraham Levi Frankel, a mathematics professor and an amateur demographer, agreed with Dr. Sadovsky and stressed the need to combat abortions, and especially the physicians who administered them.⁸⁷¹

In the end, the Committee decided on a two-pronged approach: on the one hand, a propaganda campaign that would battle abortions and frame childbirth as a national duty, and on the other, a comprehensive socio-economic program, the purpose of which was to provide material help for large families. Among the Committee's suggestions were the creation of a fund that would supplement the income of large families; the establishment of daycares and boarding schools for the children of working mothers; legislation that would prevent discrimination against working pregnant women and mothers; subsidizing tuition according to the number of children in a family; and giving large families priority in the attainment of loans, housing, and jobs.⁸⁷² It is important to note that these suggestions were aimed at the Jewish Agency and the *Va'ad Leumi* and not the Mandatory Government, since governmental programs would have to also benefit Arab families.

⁸⁷¹ Ibid., p. 3.

⁸⁷² Ibid., p. 1.

Judging by the Committee's last report, the Yishuv leadership did not adopt any of the Committee's socio-economic recommendations.⁸⁷³ This did not stop the Committee members from diligently spreading their demographic catechism by publishing columns in newspapers, holding public lectures, and appearing on the radio. The jewel in the crown of this propaganda campaign were three mock-trials that took place in Tel-Aviv, Jerusalem and Netanya. These trials, which were at least partially scripted by Berman,⁸⁷⁴ acted as a sort of demographic morality play that was aimed at both the general public and the Zionist leadership. The accused were the fictional single-child Yahalomi family, which was played by actors, while the judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys and witnesses appeared as themselves. The husband and wife were charged with having too few children, endangering the future of the Jewish nation, endangering the future of the *Yishuv*, and hurting their child, due to his "loneliness and deficient upbringing".⁸⁷⁵ The Yahalomis, according to the script, were in their late 30s. The husband was a construction worker while the wife was a kindergarten teacher. They had one child who was seven years old and the woman had an abortion three years prior to the trial because she and her husband did not want more children.

In her opening statement, Berman, who played the prosecutor, argued that the size of the Jewish family was *not* a private issue, because it shaped the very future of the nation. The first witness was Bachi, who explained that as the share of assimilated, Central European Jews in the Jewish population of Palestine rose, the *Yishuv*'s birthrate decreased.⁸⁷⁶

Moreover, as Mizrahi and Sephardic Jews assimilated in Ashkenazi culture, their

⁸⁷³ "Din ve-heshbon 'al pe'ulot ha-ve'ada le-ba'ayot ha-yeludu be-meshekh ha-shnata'yim le-kiyuma, May 1943-April 1945", 29.4.1945, *ibid.*, folder 71.

⁸⁷⁴ Meeting of the Committee for the Problems of Natality, 22.6.1943, *ibid.*, folder 67, p. 3.

⁸⁷⁵ "Mishpat tziburi neged ha-ne'eshamim be-tzintzum ve-mi'ut ha-yeluda", Jerusalem, 1.2.1944, *ibid.*, folder 68, p. 1.

⁸⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

birthrate began to drop too.⁸⁷⁷ Bachi explained that immigration was not a solution to the Jewish demographic deficit, if the birthrate among the immigrants was similar to that of the *Yishuv*'s.⁸⁷⁸ He concluded that if the Jewish population of Palestine wanted to retain its size, each family had to have at least 3 children, and if the *Yishuv* wished to grow, each family should have at least 4 children.

The defence attorney, played by Dr. Yosef Meir, argued that the cause of the low birthrate was economic hardship.⁸⁷⁹ Bachi agreed and told the audience about the various means by which European countries attempted to raise their birthrate and which the Committee itself recommended to the Zionist leadership: helping young couples with loans and housing and supplementing parents' salaries in accordance with the number of their children.⁸⁸⁰ The defense then noted that the Jewish Agency failed to finance any measures that would encourage families to have more children. Chief Judge Tzidkiyahu Harkabi took umbrage with the defense's argument that economic hardships led to a drop in birthrate and asked Bachi whether economic factors prevented those who lived "5 minutes from Tel-Aviv", i.e. the Arabs, from having large families. Bachi diplomatically responded that while the economic situation was not a compelling reason not to have children, some economic factors could encourage a higher birthrate.

The next witness, one Dr. Brzeziński, explained that abortions were highly detrimental to women's health: in the US, one researcher estimated, 6,000 women died each year from abortion-related complications.⁸⁸¹ Even women who survived abortion, argued

⁸⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 3.

⁸⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

⁸⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 6.

⁸⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 8.

⁸⁸¹ Ibid., p. 9.

Brzeziński, could suffer from Endometritis and Salpingitis, which might lead to sterility.⁸⁸²

The prosecution then questioned Dr. Helena Kagan, a prominent pediatrician, who argued that only children were more prone to ailments and tended to be spoiled and tyrannical.⁸⁸³

Rabbi Yitzhak Berman, who spoke next, concurred, and explained how an only child was a danger to patriarchy itself: multiple children all vied for their father's affection; an only child, on the other hand, dominated his parents.⁸⁸⁴ In Germany, the Rabbi opined, there were many only children, which explained the success of the Hitler Youth movement.

The defense then question Mrs. Yahalomi, who explained that her landlord stipulated in her contract that she could only have one child, and that spacious apartments were too expensive.⁸⁸⁵ Mrs. Yahalomi shared the difficulties with which pregnant women were faced in the workplace: a pregnant woman could not be productive in a factory setting, she argued, and in an office environment she was not "aesthetically pleasing".⁸⁸⁶ Mrs. Yahalomi then told the defense that out of a monthly salary of 8 Liras, one and half Liras, "a hefty sum", covered her son's tuition.

The prosecution line, by contrast, focused on Mrs. Yahalomi's psychological state.

Berman asked Mrs. Yahalomi about her abortion. Mrs. Yahalomi answered that she already had one child for whom she had to care and that she was swamped with work and too anxious to think about a second child. Berman then asked whether work was worth giving up on a second child. In response, Mrs. Yahalomi attacked the many women who did not work and instead spent their time sitting in cafes. Berman did not relent and

⁸⁸² Ibid., pp. 9-10.

⁸⁸³ Ibid., p. 11.

⁸⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 14.

⁸⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 15.

⁸⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 16.

guided the witness towards a dialogue that encapsulated the theme of the trial: the prosecutor asked Mrs. Yahalomi whether it was permissible to send young men to battle.⁸⁸⁷ The witness concurred. She then asked Mrs. Yahalomi whether it was permissible to send young pioneers to settle in dangerous places. The witness concurred again. Berman then administered the coup de grace: if it was permissible to send young men to settle and to wage war, why was it not permissible to order young women to have more children? Mrs. Yahalomi did not respond directly and instead argued that women should not be expected to care about the future of the nation if the nation did not care about theirs.

The defense summoned two more witnesses to reinforce its socio-economic case. Dr. Bromberg, an economist, told the judges that employees of national institutions and the *Histadrut* received a salary supplement of 1 or 2 Liras per child, while employees in the private sector did not receive a supplement at all.⁸⁸⁸ Bromberg recommended the establishment of a fund to which employers, employees and national institutions would all contribute, and that would supplement the salary of working parents. He also accused the Mandatory Government and the municipalities of failing to provide land for affordable public housing.⁸⁸⁹ Bromberg added that only the *Histadrut* invested in public housing and that more than 15,000 people lived in about 3,000 *Histadrut*-funded buildings.

The last witness, Mr. Ya'acobi, a teacher, told the defense about the cramped classrooms in which he had to teach and the measly salary on which he had to subsist, which did not allow him to concentrate on the education of the nation's young. He also told the judges

⁸⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 17.

⁸⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 20.

⁸⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 22.

about the many children whose parents could not afford tuition and who received little to no education.⁸⁹⁰ The witness list, then, was designed to cover all the major points in the Committee's campaign: the prosecution dealt with the psychological and physical harm caused by abortion and single-child families, while the defense stressed the economic hardship that prevented certain families from having more children.

The defense's closing statement began with an acknowledgement of the national duty of procreation:

I know that six million Jews were annihilated [and] a third of the people is gone. Frumka, Tosia and Zivia⁸⁹¹ are dead. Who will take their place? I do not know. I know that there are people in [Kibbutz] Gesher, [Kibbutz] Ginosar, and [Kibbutz] Hulata who are sick with fever, and there is no one to replace them. I visited the Negev recently; I drove for four hours until I reached settlements like [Kibbutz] Gvulot, Abu-Zabur and 'Asluj, settlements that are surrounded by a *sea* of desert, and there you find twelve guys and four girls and no one to replace them [...] if we cannot save the people [European Jewry] we have to reconstitute the people here [in Palestine].⁸⁹²

This pregnant passage provides a sort of bio-territorial map of Zionist thinking in the mid-1940s. By 1944 the *Yishuv* was well-aware of the Holocaust – hence the use of the emblematic six million figure. Meir's choice to use the names of three female resistance fighters shows that the ghetto uprisings' ethos was already being incorporated into the

⁸⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 24-25.

⁸⁹¹ Frumka Plotnicka, Tosia Altman and Zivia Lubetkin were female resistance fighters in Nazi-occupied Poland; Lubetkin actually survived the war.

⁸⁹² "Mishpat tziburi neged ha-ne'eshamim be-tzimtzum ve-mi'ut ha-yeluda", p. 28. Translation and emphasis mine.

Zionist narrative. But Meir's choice of three *women*, in the context of a trial dealing with reproduction, suggests that the loss of the three fighters was double – not only as Jewish heroes, but also as would-be mothers. This choice also reinforces the point that although conception was, technically, a joint effort, the onus of caring for the nation's future rested on the shoulders of Jewish women. As Berman clearly stated, young men died for their nation; young women gave birth.

The passage also connects Poland with the geography of Palestine, by rhetorically leading from the three resistance fighters to the nameless pioneers laboring in the Galilee and the Negev, making them all actors in the same nation-making ethos. Let us notice the Noah-like counting of twelve men and four women in those Zionist arks in the Negev, surrounded by “a sea of desert”. It was not enough, Meir seems to have suggested, to establish those settlements – they had to be populated too. Let us also note that the last two settlements in the Negev still bore their Arabic names, that they were not yet reborn as Jewish places. The colonization of the Negev was itself still in chrysalis form.

Having substantiated his Zionist credentials, Meir pivoted to the family on trial. Why was this family singled out? He asked the judges.⁸⁹³ Why, he continued, was the eternally bored “rich lady”, with the five-room apartment and the two maids, not put on trial? Instead of lounging in cafes, explained Meir, these women should know the true bliss of breastfeeding a child. The Yahalomis, by comparison, were eking out a living and received no support from *Yishuv* institutions. And yet, concluded Meir, this was not a time for petty calculations – the nation needed more children, and he himself was willing to pay for the Yahalomis' second child's upbringing.⁸⁹⁴

⁸⁹³ Ibid., p. 29.

⁸⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 30.

Berman's closing statement rejected the economic explanation.⁸⁹⁵ If this were the case, she argued, poor families would have fewer children, but it was middle class families that did not fulfil their national duty. Berman understood this shirking of duty as an attempt to "escape life itself" and preserve one's creature comforts.⁸⁹⁶ Moreover, immigration could not change the demographic situation in Palestine: Anglo-Saxon Jews had even fewer children than Palestinian Jews, Russian Jewry's birth rate was half of that of Russian Christians and (non-Russian) European Jews were a broken vessel; even if they immigrated to Palestine they could not turn around the *Yishuv's* demographic decline. Berman then compared these statistics to the "familial situation in the *sea* of neighbours that surrounds us".⁸⁹⁷ While Meir's oceanic metaphor was geographic in nature, painting Jewish settlements as desert islands in a vast sandy sea, Berman's metaphor was demographic – the Arabs were so numerous, she implied, that they were beyond counting.

Berman was hardly alone in describing the Arab world as an ocean.⁸⁹⁸ Writing of a similarly geographic metaphor, Anita Shapira has argued that the image of Palestine as a volcano, a volatile landscape bound to erupt periodically, was part of the "psychological infrastructure" of the *Yishuv*.⁸⁹⁹ The prevalence of the volcano and ocean metaphors suggests that Zionist leaders imagined Palestine as a volcanic island, besieged on all sides by treacherous waters and at the mercy of an unpredictable seismic system. In both

⁸⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 26.

⁸⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 26-27.

⁸⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 26. Translation mine.

⁸⁹⁸ For examples of the metaphor, see: Stein to Kisch, 12.6.1923, CZA Z4\16061, p. 2; Golomb's comments, meeting of *MAPAI's* central committee, 16.4.1936, LPA 2-023-1936-12, p. 15; Kaplansky's comments, meeting of *MAPAI's* central committee, 9.6.1936, LPA 2-023-1936-13, p. 24; Weizmann's comments, meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 25.12.1936, CZA, p. 528; talk at *ha-noar ha-'oved* seminar, 4.12.1937, in: Ben-Gurion, *Zikhronot*, IV, p. 459; Shertok's comments, meeting of *MAPAI's* political committee, 3.6.1940, LPA 2-023-1940-30, p. 11; Bachi, "Ha-yeluda ve-ha-tmuta be-eret-z-yisrael ve-'atidenu", December 1942, BGA, SD, RBP, p. 10; Golda Meyerson's comments, second session of the fourth *Assefat ha-nivharim*, 4.12.1944, CZA J1\7192\2, p. 26; "Statement of Dr. Chaim Weizmann", in: the Jewish Agency for Palestine, *The Jewish Case Before the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on Palestine: Statements & Memoranda*, (Westport: Hyperion Press, 1976), p. 23.

⁸⁹⁹ Shapira, *Land and Power*, p. 79.

metaphors the Arabs were transformed into elemental features, part of the Palestinian landscape. Moreover, the description of the Arab populace as an ocean entrenched a demographic anxiety in the Zionist imagination that could not be alleviated by the creation of a Jewish majority in Palestine. Even with a solid Jewish majority, a Jewish State would still be an island, still a ghetto, still a solitary ark on choppy waters. For Zionists who wished to be like any other people but retain their national distinctiveness, this scenario straddled a fine line between nightmare and fantasy.

At the conclusion of the trial, the judges' verdict toed the Committee's line perfectly, recognizing that the *Yishuv* institutions did not do enough to help large families and at the same time chastising middle-class families for preferring comfort over the nation's future.⁹⁰⁰ Thus, the verdict spoke directly to the Committee's two most important audiences – the young women of the *Yishuv* and the old men who governed it.

The Committee's campaign did not leave an immediate impression on the *Yishuv*. Ben-Gurion and Shertok both expressed sympathy towards the Committee goals, and even spoke publicly about the *Yishuv*'s low birthrate,⁹⁰¹ but it does not seem that the Zionist leadership took any actual steps to materially help large families.⁹⁰² As the Second World War ended, the official Zionist line was that most, if not all, Holocaust survivors and Middle Eastern and North African Jews should be admitted into Palestine.⁹⁰³ With the renewed emphasis on mass immigration, the Zionist leadership had little time for the Committee for the Problems of Natality's narrative of demographic decline. This point was brought into sharp relief during the sessions of the Anglo-American Committee,

⁹⁰⁰ "Mishpat tziburi neged ha-ne'eshamim be-tzimitzum ve-mi'ut ha-yeluda", pp. 31-32.

⁹⁰¹ meeting of *MAPAI*'s central committee, 3.3.1943, LPA 2-023-1944-30, pp. 177-198; Meeting of Shertok and Bachi, 29.1.1944, BGA, SD, RBP, folder 74; Ben-Gurion to Berman, 22.5.1944, *ibid.*, folder 71;

⁹⁰² Rosenberg-Friedman, "David Ben-Gurion and the 'Demographic Threat': His Dualistic Approach to Natalism, 1936-63", p. 8.

⁹⁰³ Weizmann to Churchill, 22.5.1945, in: Yehoshua Freundlich (ed.), *Political Documents of the Jewish Agency*, vol. I, (Jerusalem: Hasifriya Hazionit, 1996), p. 5.

when the Princeton demographer Frank Notestein argued that if a Jewish majority were achieved in 1950, it would turn into a minority again by 1970, thanks to the Arab birthrate.⁹⁰⁴ Bachi himself made a similar argument in 1944.⁹⁰⁵ Yet in an April 1946 letter to Jonas Friedenwald, a prominent Jewish-American physician, Bachi criticized Notestein's conclusions, claiming that any prediction of long-term demographic trends was extremely difficult.⁹⁰⁶ Furthermore, Bachi argued that the Arab birthrate was bound to decrease (a trend he completely rejected in earlier years) while noting that the Jewish birthrate had increased since 1942. If indeed one million Jews were to immigrate to Palestine between 1946 and 1955, he wrote Friedenwald, a Jewish majority might be reached by 1960.

This line of reasoning was shared by Eliezer Kaplan, in a note supplementing his evidence before the Anglo-American Committee. The experts of the Economic Research Institute of the Jewish Agency, he told the Committee, contested any demographic projections for a period of 30 years.⁹⁰⁷ Kaplan, like Bachi, argued that the birthrate of the fast-modernizing Muslim population was about to decrease in the near future.⁹⁰⁸ Moreover, Kaplan criticized Notestein's "normalisation" of the Jewish population's age-structure. Like Bachi, Notestein took into account the fact that Jewish immigrants to Palestine were generally young and hence more fertile. Like Bachi, again, he assumed that the birthrate of the *Yishuv* would decrease as its population grew older. Kaplan, however, argued that the aging process would take much longer than Notestein had

⁹⁰⁴ Esriel Carlebach (ed.), *Va 'adat ha-hakirah ha-Anglo-Amerikanit le-'inyene eretz-yisrael*, (Tel-Aviv: Ts. Lainman, 1946), p. 169.

⁹⁰⁵ Bachi, "Maskanot politiyot me-tokh hakirotai 'al ha-hitpathut ha-demographit shel ha-yehudim ve-ha-'arvim be-eretz-yisrael", CZA J1\3717\1, pp. 2-4.

⁹⁰⁶ Bachi to Friedenwald, 3.4.1946, BGA, SD, RBP, folder 71.

⁹⁰⁷ "Supplementary Notes put in by Mr. Kaplan on Questions raised during the Jerusalem Hearings", in: *The Jewish Case Before the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on Palestine: Statements & Memoranda*, p. 158.

⁹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

assumed. He also noted that the age structure of the Jewish population would remain abnormally young in the case of mass migration to Palestine.

Finally, Kaplan expressed doubt whether the statistics regarding the Palestinian Muslim birthrate were reliable. The number of marriages among Muslims in Palestine, he argued, exceeded the number of “marriageable” Muslim women. There was a good reason to believe, Kaplan told the Anglo-American Committee, that over 20,000 Muslim women had been “imported” – Kaplan’s phrase – to Palestine since the last census (i.e., 1931). Kaplan did not explain what effect 20,000 women had on the reproductive potential of the 1,200,000-strong Arab population.

It is quite possible that by 1946 Bachi had changed his mind regarding the demographic future of the *Yishuv*. Yet there is some evidence that this was not entirely the case. In March 1946, around the time in which the Zionist leaders appeared before the Anglo-American Committee, Bachi wrote a letter to Yitzhak Kanevsky (Kanev), an erstwhile member of the Committee for the Problems of Natality and one of the founders of the Israeli welfare system. Bachi told Kanevsky that he was busy preparing demographic material for the Anglo-American Committee.⁹⁰⁹ Since Bachi was employed by both Hadassah, a Zionist organization, and the Palestine Government’s Statistical Department, it is unclear whether the material he prepared was used to support the British or the Zionist case. At any rate, in the letter Bachi discussed several allegations that surfaced in the Hebrew press regarding the Government’s Statistical Department and which hewed closely to Kaplan’s arguments.

⁹⁰⁹ Bachi to Kanevsky, 31.3.1946, BGA, SD, RBP, folder 71, p. 1.

Bachi assured Kanevsky that the Government's Statistical Department did not forge statistics in order to blow the Arab birthrate out of proportion.⁹¹⁰ Another allegation was that the *mukhtars* of the villages, who got paid for every birth and death notice, intentionally overreported births and underreported deaths. If the *mukhtars* did so out of greed, Bachi asked Kanevsky, why would they underreport deaths?

Bachi did admit that illegal Arab immigrants contributed to the Arab birthrate, yet he still insisted that the number of Palestinian Muslim women who were of "child-bearing age" was underestimated. He concluded by warning Kanevsky that the argument that the Muslim birthrate was overestimated while the Jewish birthrate was underestimated was a "dangerous illusion".⁹¹¹

It seems that Bachi's Cassandrian warnings remained unheeded by the Zionist leadership because they went against the grain of the two major Zionist demands of the time: mass Jewish immigration in the present and the establishment of a Jewish Commonwealth in the near future. Indeed, if the Arab birthrate was high enough to overturn a Jewish majority within two decades, the British would have asked themselves, what was the point in assenting to Zionist demands that would surely antagonize the Arab world?

The Zionist case before the Anglo-American Committee had to present a rosy-coloured vision of Jewish demographics to secure American and British support for Jewish mass immigration and a Jewish State. One of the Jewish Agency's Planning Committee's aims was to give scientific credence to these demands. Unlike the Committee for the Problems

⁹¹⁰ A similar allegation was made by a group of right-wing activists who, in 2006, argued that the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics overcounted the number of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. If there were fewer Palestinians than previously thought, argued the activists, there was no "demographic threat" and no need to withdraw from the Occupied Territories. See: Bennet Zimmerman, Roberta Seid, and Dr. Michael Wise, "The One Million Gap: A Critical Look at Palestinian Demography", 7.5.2006, The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies (<https://besacenter.org/perspectives-papers/the-million-person-gap-a-critical-look-at-palestinian-demography/>).

⁹¹¹ Bachi to Kanevsky, 31.3.1946, p. 2.

of Natality, which was loosely connected to the weaker *Va'ad Leumi*, the Planning Committee labored under the watchful eye of Ben-Gurion himself. In the next section, we shall explore the differences between the two committees.

The Planning Committee

Ben-Gurion considered the 1939 White Paper, which severely restricted Jewish immigration and colonization, to be the death knell of the British Mandate.⁹¹² He also assumed, until news of genocide arrived in Palestine in late 1942, that the war in Europe would displace 4-5 million Jews, who would have to immigrate to Palestine after the war.⁹¹³ Arguing that the British would never revert back to a pro-Zionist policy, Ben-Gurion concluded that the only solution to the plight of European Jews was to grant the Jewish Agency control of immigration and colonization in Palestine. Accordingly, from late 1941 Ben-Gurion incessantly lobbied for the establishment a Jewish State.⁹¹⁴ His efforts bore fruit when, in May 1942, the Zionist Organization of America adopted the Biltmore Program, which called for the establishment of a Jewish Commonwealth in all of Palestine.⁹¹⁵ By October 1942 the program had been ratified by the Jewish Agency Executive and the Zionist General Council and became the official Zionist policy until the summer of 1946, when the Jewish Agency Executive signalled its willingness to enter negotiations with the British on the basis of the “establishment of a viable Jewish State *in an adequate part of Palestine*.”⁹¹⁶

⁹¹² “Neum be-hanhalat Hadassah”, 26.11.1940, in: Avizohar and Feldestein (eds.), *Metif Tziyoni*, pp. 156-157; “Pgisha be-melono shel Ben-Gurion”, 5.12.1940, *ibid.*, pp. 162-165.

⁹¹³ Ben-Gurion’s comments, meeting the Jewish Agency Executive, 16.2.1941, *ibid.*, p. 191.

⁹¹⁴ See for example: “Be-ve’adat ha-minhalah shel ha-magbit ha-eretz-israelit ha-me’yuhedet”, *ibid.*, 172; “mivrak le-giveret Tamar Del Sola Pool”, 16.1.1941, *ibid.*, p. 175; “mikhtav el-Nahum Goldman”, *ibid.*, p. 176; meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 16.3.1941, *ibid.*, p. 290.

⁹¹⁵ Dvora Hacohen, *Tokhnit ha-million: tokhnit shel David Ben-Gurion le-’aliyah hamonit ba-shanim 1942-1945*, (Tel-Aviv: Ministry of Defense Press, 1994), p. 37. There was no discernible difference between the terms “commonwealth” and “state”, except for the fact that Ben-Gurion chose the term “commonwealth” in order to appeal to the British.

⁹¹⁶ Freundlich, “Editor’s Note”, *Political Documents of the Jewish Agency*, p. 493. Emphasis mine.

Ben-Gurion insisted that the Jewish Commonwealth was not an end in itself, but rather a fulcrum that would enable the mass migration of Jewish refugees to Palestine.⁹¹⁷ He believed that Palestine was capable of absorbing all of the European Jews who would survive the war, the number of whom he estimated, in October 1941, at 3-5 million. If the ultimate goal of Zionism was the immigration of millions of Jews to Palestine, then the Zionists had to convince the British, and, increasingly, the Americans, that the Jewish Commonwealth was not only politically viable, but that it could also support millions of immigrants. Consequently, despite the fact that the 1939 White Paper replaced the principle of immigration according to the economic absorptive capacity of Palestine with overtly political considerations, the economic absorptive capacity remained crucial to the Zionist diplomatic effort in 1945-1947.

It was against this backdrop that Ben-Gurion addressed the experts of the Jewish Agency's Economic Research Institute in November 1942.⁹¹⁸ In his address, Ben-Gurion criticized the notion that there are scientific laws that control economic transactions.⁹¹⁹ His critique was not that of a philosopher of science, but rather that of a layman politician who wanted the economic experts in his employ to do away with old notions of economic absorptive capacity.⁹²⁰ Ben-Gurion wanted his experts to come up with plausible logistic solutions to what seemed like an impossible mission – the transfer of millions of Jews to Palestine in a very short amount of time (Ben-Gurion spoke of ten days!).⁹²¹ The war, he insisted, proved that, given enough state power and resources, masses of people could be shipped across oceans.⁹²² What Ben-Gurion was looking for were revolutionary

⁹¹⁷ "Rashe'i prakim shel medinyut tsionit", 15.10.1941, in: *Biltmor: tokhnit medinit*, p. 91.

⁹¹⁸ "Kinus ha-makhon le-heker ha-kalkala", 24.11.1942, BGA, Speeches and Articles Division, November-December 1942.

⁹¹⁹ Ben-Gurion's comments, *ibid.*, p. 4.

⁹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁹²² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

economics to undergird a revolutionary political act: a speedy transfer of millions of Jews to Palestine that would solve the so-called Jewish Question in Europe and create a *fait accompli* in Palestine.⁹²³ But in order that the Jews would be given this kind of state-like authority, Ben-Gurion told his audience, the Americans (but not the British!) had to be convinced that Palestine could support millions of Jewish refugees.⁹²⁴

The question of the economic absorptive capacity of Palestine was at the heart of the Planning Committee's work, which began in October 1943. The Committee members were all heavy hitters: Ben-Gurion himself was chairman, and his colleagues were Eliezer Kaplan, the treasurer of the Jewish Agency, Eliezer Hoofien, head of the Anglo-Palestine Bank, Emil Schmorak, head of the Jewish Agency's Department of Industry and Trade, David Horowitz, head of the Jewish Agency's Economic Department, and Alfred Bonne, head of the Jewish Agency's Economic Research Institute. In the Committee's second meeting, Ben-Gurion defined its goals as the drafting of a plan for the immigration and absorption of 2 million Jews (the number was soon whittled down to one million) and a more mundane plan to ease Palestine's transition from a war economy to a peacetime one.⁹²⁵ The two goals were closely related: the British plan for the reconstruction of Palestine after the war treated Palestine as a mainly agricultural country. Ben-Gurion, on the other hand, sought to emphasise Palestine's potential as an industrial country, since he believed that an industrial country would have a better absorptive capacity than an agricultural one.⁹²⁶

⁹²³ Ibid., p. 11.

⁹²⁴ Ibid., p. 14.

⁹²⁵ Meeting of the Planning Committee, 18.10.1943, BGA, Special Committees Division, the Planning Committee [hereinafter: BGA, SCD, PC], September-October 1943, pp. 1-2.

⁹²⁶ Ari Barel and David Ohana, "'The Million Plan': Zionism, Political Theology and Scientific Utopianism", *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, Vol. 15, No.1 (2014), p. 12; Shalom Reichman, Yossi Katz and Yair Paz, "Bridging Myth and Reality: The Absorptive Capacity of Palestine, 1882-1948", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (1997), pp. 351-352; Meir Chazan, "The 1943 Reconstruction Plan for Mandatory Palestine: The Controversy within the Jewish Community", *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (2010), pp. 99-116.

The Planning Committee then invited experts to present it with a scientific assessment of Palestine's resources and economic potential. The Committee's members pored over questions of cultivable land, water resources, industrial capabilities, and finances, all in service of proving that Palestine could absorb at least one million immigrants. Water was needed in order to expand the scope of cultivable land in Palestine and reduce the minimal number of dunams that were required to support an agricultural household, thereby increasing the number of immigrants that could settle on the land. The expansion of industry, in contrast, would increase the number of immigrants that could be absorbed in the cities. Finally, the Committee had to secure enough finances to bankroll the entire venture. Estimates of the total cost ranged between 200 and 300 million pounds, a staggering amount at the time.⁹²⁷

David Horowitz presented the Committee with a new concept of economic absorptive capacity, one that was based less on agriculture and more on industry. Contemporary economists, he argued, no longer considered land to be the main determinant of absorptive capacity.⁹²⁸ It was far more important to show how Jewish immigration increased the productivity of the Palestinian economy as a whole.⁹²⁹ Horowitz pointed out that more and more industrial countries, such as Belgium and Switzerland, were not themselves rich in natural resources.⁹³⁰ In the same way, Palestine's lack of natural resources should not prevent it from becoming an industrial powerhouse. By moving to an irrigated, export-oriented agriculture and striving to become a regional economic power (Horowitz wished Palestine to become the "Denmark of the Middle East"), Palestine could overcome its supposed lack of land and resources. Horowitz summarized

⁹²⁷ Eliezer Hoffien, "Financing an Immigration of One Million", 12.2.1945, CZA S25\10873, p. 2; Kaplan's remarks, meeting of *MAPAI*'s central committee, 15.3.1945, LPA, 2-023-1945-45, p. 30.

⁹²⁸ Meeting of the Planning Committee, 14.2.1944, CZA L51\1328, p. 3.

⁹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

his approach to the issue of absorptive capacity by asserting that “economically speaking, the process of immigration acts as its own fulcrum”.⁹³¹ This was the Zionist interpretation of absorptive capacity that would be presented to the world: immigration that pulled itself by its own bootstraps.

Interestingly, in order to prove the success of economic absorption in Palestine, Horowitz compared it to other, less successful, instances of settler colonialism: the Japanese-controlled state of Manchukuo, the British in Australia, and the Italians in Libya. Horowitz also compared Jewish immigration to Palestine to the Greek-Turkish transfer, which, he claimed, was the only successful instance of interwar mass immigration, alongside the Palestinian case.⁹³² A month later he compared Palestine again, this time to the Americas, Australia and New Zealand.⁹³³ Horowitz then explained why some mass settlement processes succeeded and some did not:

Why did this thing succeed in America, Australia and New Zealand? Because theirs was an economy of growing population. We are recreating this in Palestine; we are recreating 19th-century conditions [...] why did we succeed? Because we did this [colonization] in great numbers and all at once [...] [the Japanese] did not succeed in Manchukuo because they exclusively settled army reservists. But given the kind of pressure that bears down on the Jewish people, you get all this capital of knowledge and abilities, that is, given the conditions that make the Jewish tragedy, [colonization] is possible.⁹³⁴

⁹³¹ Ibid., p. 9. Translation mine.

⁹³² Ibid., pp. 5-6.

⁹³³ Meeting of the Planning Committee, 13.3.1944, CZA S90\878, p. 18.

⁹³⁴ Ibid. Translation mine.

When Horowitz spoke of “recreating 19th-century conditions”, he was making a distinction between unsuccessful settler colonial enterprises that split the colonial economy from its metropolitan markets, and successful enterprises that “transplanted an entire economy, with its own markets” to a new colonial setting.⁹³⁵ This is probably why he emphasised the importance of incorporating Palestine into the Middle East’s economy, with the Arab states serving as Palestine’s markets.

Perhaps more interestingly, Horowitz was not the only Zionist leader to compare the *Yishuv* to other settler colonial enterprises. For example, Nahum Goldman who, in the mid to late 1940s, became the Jewish Agency’s pointman in Washington, compared the *Yishuv* to the American settlers on the eve of revolution.⁹³⁶ But even within the Planning Committee’s discussion of economic absorptive capacity, the colonial context kept coming up. In February 1945 Alfred Bonne discussed the question of the *Yishuv*’s economic relations with the neighbouring countries. One of his conclusions was that, in order to protect the Jewish economy, the Zionist movement should strive to raise the standard of living in the surrounding Arab countries.⁹³⁷ Kaplan raised the point in a March 13th meeting of the Committee, arguing that “There has to be a connection between this *island* [Palestine] and the neighbouring countries, but I do not accept that as long as we do not raise the standard of living there, we cannot develop Palestine. I’m in favour of a limited liability kind of relations.”⁹³⁸

Ben-Gurion too bristled at Bonne’s suggestion that the *Yishuv* bore any responsibility towards the Arab States. He told the committee a parable about time and space:

⁹³⁵ Meeting of the Planning Committee, 14.2.1944, p. 6.

⁹³⁶ Goldmann to Montor, 24.10.1945, in: Freundlich, *Political Documents of the Jewish Agency*, p. 176.

⁹³⁷ “Tamtzit devarav shel Dr. Bonne be-yeshivat ve’adat ha-tikhon shel hanhalat ha-sokhnut ha-yehudit”, 28.2.1944, BG, SCD, PC, February 1944, p. 1.

⁹³⁸ Meeting of the Planning Committee, 13.3.1944, p. 8. Emphasis and translation mine.

I want to challenge the concept of neighbouring countries. I don't know what a neighbouring country is, and what is a faraway country [...] in Liberia [should be Nigeria] there is a city called Lagos. It is the capital of a negro state – there are about 20 million negroes there and the capital is negro. It's very hard for a European to live there, except for the High Commissioner who has a nice villa outside the city. The first time I was there, I stayed in their best hotel for 8 days, and it was a harrowing experience. That time I was acquainted with African Lagos. The second time, I stayed in an American hotel for two hours. The distance from America to Lagos is 4000 kilometers, but there I learned that time is relative. I found myself in an American environment: the hotel was squeaky clean, air-conditioned, and the food was great – it was as if I was staying at the Savoy or the Astor in London or a good hotel in America. When it comes to the concept of neighborhood, time is no less important than space. Tel-Aviv is closer to London, Paris and New-York than it is to Jeddah [in Saudi Arabia] even though geographically Jeddah is closer. Palestine is a semi-neighboring country in the Middle East geographically, but not temporally [...] it is quite possible to have one developed country in the desert. When you go from California to New York you see oases in the desert. If the Middle East is a desert, we can build a modern oasis. The Pacific Ocean is vast, but there are two islands there that were seemingly transplanted from England, and they make up New Zealand.⁹³⁹

This is a striking piece of rhetoric. Ben-Gurion was arguing that the *Yishuv*'s European nature acted as a temporal shield against the influences of the Arab desert. Let us notice

⁹³⁹ Ibid., pp. 12-13.

that the examples that Ben-Gurion utilized are of colonial projects – the hotel\villa in Africa and the English islands in the Pacific Ocean. Let us also note the preponderance of island imagery in both Kaplan and Ben-Gurion’s comments: they spoke of islands, oases and solitary villas. This was exactly the kind of imagery used by Berman and Meir in the mock-trial discussed above. The Middle East was a desert/ocean, geographically, temporally and demographically; the *Yishuv*, a solitary island/villa/hotel. For the physicians and demographers of the Committee for the Problems of Natality, the ocean of Arab bodies threatened to engulf the Jewish island. Ben-Gurion was far more confident. That unmistakable sense of European-ness that the Jewish settlers brought with them, he believed, protected them from the ravages of the desert. This was not the only time Ben-Gurion referred to the differences between Arabs and Jews in temporal terms. In a June 1946 conversation with Colonial Secretary George Hall he argued that the *Yishuv* “was 20th century, and [the Arabs] are, some of them 17th century and some of them 12th century.”⁹⁴⁰ Ben-Gurion and Kaplan were not completely against Bonne’s and Horowitz’s recommendations, but both struggled with the conflicting images of the *Yishuv* as an impregnable fortress and as a regional economic power. This intractable conflict between openness and solitude, between the ghetto and the empire, was at the heart of Zionist self-image.

Only a small fraction of the Committee’s work was devoted to the study of diaspora Jews. Just three memoranda, all by Gershon Ciderowitz, dealt with the demography of the Jewish people.⁹⁴¹ The first memorandum provided, in painstaking detail, a numerical

⁹⁴⁰ Meeting between Ben-Gurion, Crossman and Hall, 20.6.1946, in: Freundlich, *Political Documents of the Jewish Agency*, p. 448.

⁹⁴¹ Gershon Ciderowitz, “Omdanot le-mispar ha-yehudim be-artzot ha-gola u-le-efsharuyot ‘aliyatam la-aretz”, 26.3.1944, CZA S90\880; idem, “Teur yahadut ha-gola ba-zman ha-ze lefi aratzot u-ve-tokh ha-aratzot lefi hekefa ha-mispari, tarbuta ve-herkeva ha-sotziali”, 31.7.1944, CZA L51\1326; idem, “Ha-sherutim ha-nehutzim le-million ‘olim ‘ad le-hishtarutam be-aretz”, 22.8.1944, ibid.

representation of the destruction of European Jewry. For example, the first table in the report detailed not only the number of Jews murdered in each country, but also the number of dead divided by cause of death – organized murder, starvation, disease and so on.⁹⁴² Ciderowitz estimated that by the end of 1943, 3 million Jews had died in the war, and that somewhere between 2 and 4 million had become refugees.⁹⁴³ The second memorandum focused on the socio-economic status of diaspora Jews before the war.⁹⁴⁴ The memorandum charted the embourgeoisement of European Jews during the first half of the 20th century, but given the rapid destruction of European Jewry, much of the data provided by Ciderowitz was no longer relevant when the memorandum was submitted to the Committee. Finally, the third memorandum by Ciderowitz laid out a blueprint for the immediate absorption of the immigrants: Ciderowitz recommended building absorption camps that would house about 500 to 600 people, with appropriate medical screening facilities.⁹⁴⁵ He also calculated the number of additional teachers, physicians and nurses that was needed to care for the immigrants.⁹⁴⁶

Dvora Hacoen has argued that Ciderowitz recommended the separation of Mizrahi and Ashkenazi immigrants.⁹⁴⁷ I could not find any such suggestion in Ciderowitz's memoranda nor in any other text related to the Planning Committee. Thus, Yehouda Shenhav's claim that the Planning Committee was the first to refer to Mizrahi Jews as a unified and separate category, which is based on Hacoen's argument, is unsubstantiated.⁹⁴⁸ In fact, when Ciderowitz wrote about wartime immigration to

⁹⁴² Ciderowitz, "Omdanot", p. 2.

⁹⁴³ Ibid., pp. 2, 9.

⁹⁴⁴ Ciderowitz, "Teur ha-yahadut".

⁹⁴⁵ Idem, "Ha-sherutim ha-nehutzim", pp. 3-4.

⁹⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 10-16, 26-34.

⁹⁴⁷ Hacoen, *Tokhnit ha-million*, p. 125.

⁹⁴⁸ Yehouda Shenhav, *The Arab Jews: a Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion, and Ethnicity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 31.

Palestine he divided the immigrants into Ashkenazi, Yemenite, Sephardic and “others”.⁹⁴⁹ The Zionist leadership began to see Mizrahi Jews as a somewhat unified category and as candidates for mass migration much earlier, after the *farhud*, the attack on Iraqi Jews in June 1941.⁹⁵⁰ The most striking fact in this regard is that not one of the Planning Committees’ meetings was dedicated to the status of diaspora Jews, be they Ashkenazi or Mizrahi. It seems that the Committee for the Problems of Natality was much more instrumental in codifying and entrenching the differentiation between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jews in Palestine. Not only Jewish people were absent from the Committee’s deliberations – the Arab inhabitants of Palestine rarely made an appearance themselves. The only meetings which dealt with Palestinian Arabs were, perhaps unsurprisingly, devoted to the question of agrarian reform. In May-June 1944 Yosef Weitz and Zalman Lifshitz, who were both involved in the 1937 Transfer Committee, appeared before the Planning Committee to discuss the topic of uncultivated land in Palestine. This subject was of paramount importance to the Zionist diplomatic effort in the Biltmore years: in order to argue that Palestine was capable of absorbing millions of immigrants, Zionist experts had to show that much of the country’s uncultivated land was actually cultivable and that, consequently, Arab and British claims that Palestine could not support additional immigration were false.⁹⁵¹

Ben-Gurion insisted that any agrarian reform should not displace Arab *fellahin* but rather free land for Jewish use by cultivating “uncultivable” land and by adopting intensive methods of agriculture that required less land.⁹⁵² The experts disagreed. Avraham Gravonsky (Granot), head of the Jewish National Fund, argued that an agrarian reform

⁹⁴⁹ Ciderowitz, “Ha-sherutim ha-nehutzim”, p. 8.

⁹⁵⁰ Libenstein’s comments, *MAPAI*’s fifth convention, first session, second meeting, 12.6.1941, LPA 2-021-1941-22, p. 13; meeting of *MAPAI*’s central committee, 9.7.1941, LPA 2-023-1941-35.

⁹⁵¹ Meeting of the Planning Committee, 4.6.1944, *ibid.*, p. 8.

⁹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

would necessitate local transfer, that is, the dislocation of Arab *fellahin* from one area of the Palestine to another and their transition to intensive agriculture. Shlomo Zemach, a colonization expert, rejected the concept of agrarian reform wholesale.⁹⁵³ Zemach understood agrarian reform as giving all cultivators a minimum amount of land. In practice, this would mean giving landless *fellahin* more land than they had, leaving less land available for Jewish settlement. Instead, he suggested giving the *fellahin* irrigated land in return for their unirrigated plots. The logic behind this proposal was that one dunam of irrigated land was worth about 4-5 dunams of unirrigated land.

Weitz was undeterred by the Committee's criticism. He argued that any development plan would involve some sort of transfer – either between countries or inside Palestine.⁹⁵⁴ But although he was a proponent of transfer, Weitz knew that the world might not approve of a development scheme that required a mass dislocation of *fellahin*, which was exactly why Lifshitz and him sought to study the amount of uncultivated land in Palestine – the two experts wished to find a way to settle as many Jewish immigrants as possible without using Arab land.

Ben-Gurion, concluding the meeting, agreed that the Zionists should not suggest the transfer of Arabs.⁹⁵⁵ He also agreed with Weitz, however, that the Zionist leadership should gather some material regarding transfer: there was some interesting material regarding northern Syria, and Iraq had vast stretches of empty land.⁹⁵⁶ Ben-Gurion did not rule out what he called “less than total transfer”, that is, transfer of select Arab

⁹⁵³ Ibid., p. 9.

⁹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 12.

⁹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 13.

⁹⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 13-14.

communities only. For example, he believed that the Druze and the Circassians might consider relocating to Lebanon and Trans-Jordan.⁹⁵⁷

The subject of transfer came up again in Weitz and Lifshitz's next meeting with the Planning Committee, in March 1945. This time around, Weitz and Lifshitz's project was far more ambitious: they attempted to provide an accurate, scientific demarcation of the different regions of Palestine.⁹⁵⁸ Weitz and Lifshitz were able to determine not only how much of each Arab village's land was uncultivated, but also its cultivability.⁹⁵⁹

Bonne asked about the possible application of the project. Lifshitz said that he and Weitz had their differences regarding its applicability. Lifshitz assumed that the Arab population would not be moved (thereby implying that Weitz did not share this assumption), and so the mapping project could predict where the intensification of agriculture would free up land for Jewish colonization and where it would not.⁹⁶⁰

Weitz then volunteered the example of the Arab village Fassuta, in the Upper Galilee. The villagers' holdings amounted to 33,000 dunams, but only 8,000 dunams were cultivated, and only 9,000 dunams were needed, according to Weitz, for the village's sustenance. Assuming that some of the uncultivated 25,000 dunams were used for grazing, Weitz argued that 13,000 dunams could be bought from the villages without harming the villagers' livelihood.

Ben-Gurion liked the idea. He suggested buying 20,000 or even 25,000 dunams. Lifshitz tried to cool Ben-Gurion's enthusiasm. He explained that most Arab plots were non-contiguous and spread across a large area, making the transition into intensive agriculture

⁹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁹⁵⁸ Meeting of the Planning Committee, 4.3.1945, BGA, SCD, PC, February-March 1945, p. 1.

⁹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

almost impossible.⁹⁶¹ Any attempt to rationalize Arab plot ownership would necessitate a resettlement of the Arab *fellahin*. Some plots of land could be reformed, Lifshitz concluded, and some simply could not.

Lifshitz's colleagues disagreed. Weitz, ever the transfer advocate, said that a "development-prone state would find a way" to rationalize Arab agricultural holdings. Ben-Gurion added that the *fellah's* hut was movable, and he would build a new home if he were offered a different plot. Ben-Gurion then summarized the discussion: in order to absorb a million Jews, 55,000 additional farmsteads were needed.⁹⁶² The Committee's task was now to locate the available areas for those 55,000 units. Weitz then asked Ben-Gurion to clarify what kind of political authority would allow them to take hold of the land. Ben-Gurion replied:

The political authority is that of the state. Assume a regime that can get the land without harming the Arabs, but one that is not obliged to leave things as they are. We should not say in advance that we can do this without moving the Arabs. If we can build 55,000 households without moving the Arabs – good; if we cannot – come up with a plan that moves them.⁹⁶³

Both meetings, then, started with a solemn oath not to move Arabs around, and then tumbled, almost comically, down the slippery slope towards local transfer.

This was hardly the only time in which Zionist leaders pondered the issue of transfer during the war years. Weizmann brought up the subject of transfer in talks with the British.⁹⁶⁴ Berl Katznelson and Enzo Sereni predicted that the war might open up the

⁹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 10.

⁹⁶² Ibid., p. 11.

⁹⁶³ Ibid. Translation mine.

⁹⁶⁴ Weizmann to Bracken, 27.10.1939, *LPCW*, XIX, letter no. 161, p. 182, no. 3; Ben-Gurion's comments, meeting of *MAPAI's* central committee, 8.12.1943, LPA 2-023-1943-12, p.14.

possibility of population exchange.⁹⁶⁵ Shertok addressed the question of transfer, both local and inter-national during a debate with representative of the leftist *Ha-Shomer Ha-Tzair* party. He reminded his opponents that Kibbutz Mishmar Ha'emek – which was part of *Ha-shomer Ha-tzair* movement – was built on the land of the Arab village Abu Shusha, whose inhabitants were moved somewhere else.⁹⁶⁶ He then asked:

the question is – why can I not discuss this in political talks? We just want to talk about it, so that the idea would be present, so people remember this solution is available [...] there are some prejudices [against transfer] we have to uproot [...] when [Oliver] Lyttleton tells me: “you are going to kick the Arabs out”, I [do not] say: “god forbid that we should touch the Arabs” but rather, my answer is: “there is a problem, it is not ideal that Jews and Arabs live together, if Palestine is to become more and more Jewish, then maybe the Arabs would wish to reunite with their brothers [across the border].”⁹⁶⁷

During the war years, the transfer question was overtly dormant, but continued to be privately discussed among the Zionist leaders and in talks with the British.⁹⁶⁸ The Planning Committee's reference to local transfer was not an isolated occurrence, but rather a continuation of the discussions Ben-Gurion, Joseph, Shertok and Weizmann had with the Partition Commission regarding agrarian reform (see chapter 5). The full

⁹⁶⁵ Katznelson's comments, meeting of *MAPAI*'s central committee, 9.1.1941, LPA 2-023-1941-34, p. 13; Sereni's comments, meeting of *MAPAI*'s central committee, 19.3.1941, *ibid.*, p. 25.

⁹⁶⁶ Meeting of the Restricted Zionist General Council, 6.1.1942, in: Moshe Sharett, *Ma'avak medini: kovets ne'umim u-mismakhim*, (Tel Aviv: Ha-Amutah Le-Moreshet Mosheh Sharett, 2009), p. 73. Translation mine.

⁹⁶⁷ *Ibid.* Translation mine.

⁹⁶⁸ For example, see: “Yerah 'iyun, April 1941” in: *Metif tziyoni*, p. 367; meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 27.7.1941, in: Sharrett, *Yoman medini*, 1940-1942, p. 27.7.1941; meeting with the leaders of British Jewry, 9.9.1941, in: *Biltmor: tokhmit medinit*, p. 69; “rashey prakim le-mediniyut tсионit” in: *ibid.*, p. 95.

spectrum of transfer practices – except for compulsory international transfer – firmly remained on the Zionist agenda.

From late 1945, the Planning Committee was busy preparing economic memoranda to be presented to the Anglo-American Committee.⁹⁶⁹ Five of the Planning Committee's members – Ben-Gurion, Hoofein, Kaplan, Horowitz and Schmorak – appeared before the Anglo-American Committee. Interestingly, Ben-Gurion blatantly argued that the concept of absorptive capacity was an artificial invention and had no real meaning.⁹⁷⁰ He hoped to convince the Anglo-American Committee that there was no economic limit to the absorptive capacity of Palestine. His colleagues, however, were handed the less provocative task of proving that Palestine was actually capable of economically absorbing mass immigration.

For example, Kaplan was in charge of proving that there was enough land in Palestine to absorb mass immigration. He argued that out of the uncultivated 8 million dunams in Palestine, 3 million dunams in the Negev alone could be cultivated.⁹⁷¹ Kaplan criticized the “government experts” who estimated that the minimal amount of land needed to sustain an agriculture household ranged between 87 and 135 dunams; 25 dunams of irrigated land were enough, he claimed, to provide for a farming family.⁹⁷² In other words, Kaplan argued that the transition to intensive agriculture would free 60 to 100 dunams, per Arab household, for Jewish settlement. According to the Jewish Agency's experts, 3 million additional dunams were suitable for irrigation, on which 85-90,000 new

⁹⁶⁹ Meeting of the Planning Committee, 25.12.1945, CZA S8\846; Meeting of the Planning Committee, 6.1.1946, *ibid.*; Meeting of the Planning Committee, 17.2.1946, *ibid.*

⁹⁷⁰ “Statement of Mr. David Ben-Gurion”, 11.3.1946, *The Jewish Case before the Anglo-American Committee*, pp. 83-84.

⁹⁷¹ “Statement of Mr. Eliezer Kaplan”, 26.3.1946, *ibid.*, p. 142.

⁹⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 145-146.

households could be established.⁹⁷³ He also suggested that the *fellah* would be obliged pay for irrigation by selling some of his land to the (Jewish) water company.⁹⁷⁴

Horowitz's presentation aimed to prove the economic sustainability of the *Yishuv*. He argued that (Jewish) unemployment decreased when Jewish immigration was at its highest.⁹⁷⁵ This was explained by the fact that each immigrant was a consumer, and that the rise in consumption led to a rise in production. Horowitz also linked the rise in Muslim life expectancy in Palestine (the highest in the Middle East) with Jewish immigration.⁹⁷⁶ To dispel the argument that the British, rather than the Jews, were responsible for the rise in Muslim life expectancy, Horowitz gave the example of Egypt and Iraq, two Muslim countries that were formerly ruled by the British, in which life expectancy was lower than that of Palestinian Muslims.⁹⁷⁷ Secondly, Horowitz argued that Palestinian Muslim infant mortality was lowest where the Jewish population's density was highest.⁹⁷⁸ A third diagram presented by Horowitz showed the decrease in malaria cases in connection with Jewish colonization.⁹⁷⁹

Although most of the arguments in Horowitz's dense presentation were purely economic, it is noteworthy that he chose to discuss the impact of Jewish colonization on the Arab population in bio-political terms, through births, deaths and disease. The statistics culled and processed by Zionist experts allowed Zionist politicians to use the quantification of Palestinian life as a diplomatic weapon against Arab political aspirations. In some ironic sense, the very lives of Palestinian Arabs were turned against them.

⁹⁷³ Ibid., p. 149.

⁹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 151.

⁹⁷⁵ "Statement of Mr. David Horowitz", 11.3.1946, *ibid.*, p. 191.

⁹⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 196-197.

⁹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 198.

⁹⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 200-202.

⁹⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 202-203.

Yet demographic knowledge was a two-edged sword. The kind of triumphant politico-epistemological mastery displayed by Horowitz and other Zionist experts was preceded and countered by catastrophic demographic reports, which arrived periodically from Nazi-ruled Europe.⁹⁸⁰ The same statistics that were presented to the Anglo-American Committee as a proof of Zionist benevolence and progress were, for the Committee for the Problems of Natality, a source of deep anxiety. The very Western-ness of the *Yishuv* was both a blessing and a curse – Ben-Gurion saw it a form of temporal protection, and Horowitz pitched it to the Anglo-American Committee as a license to colonize. But for Bachi and the Committee for the Problems of Natality Ashkenazi Jews, because they were, reproductively, the epitome of bourgeois Europe, were also a danger to the political survival of the *Yishuv*. This put Mizrahi Jews in a peculiar position – they were seen as a demographic solution, but at the same time they threatened the *Yishuv*'s European-ness; they were both necessary and less than desirable. The demographic necessity of the Mizrahi Jews, then, forced the Zionist leadership to open up its ghetto to the desert surrounding it. As a result, the equivocacy of Mizrahi identity, their Arab Jewishness, haunts Israeli society to this very day.

Zionist politics in 1942-1946 were the politics of big numbers. The one million plan and the plight of Jewish DPs in post-war Europe, the Zionist “discovery” of the Arab Jewish diaspora, and the continuous presence of transfer plans for Palestinian Arabs make the case that Zionist transfer thinking was never confined to a simple, one-way, compulsory exodus. Rather than speaking of “transfer”, one should perhaps speak of “transfers” – the complex, closely linked re-arranging of both Jews and Arabs in Europe and the Middle East. Consider, for example, the suggestion of Bachi to move Mizrahi Jews to the

⁹⁸⁰ See, for example: meeting of *MAPAI*'s secretariat, 30.3.1943, LPA 2-024-1943-5, p. 199; meeting of *MAPAI*'s central committee, 26.3.1945, LPA 2-023-1945-45, p. 115.

countryside, and the Planning Committee's discussion of local transfer of *fellahin*. Both would not have been, presumably, entirely compulsory, and both would have improved, presumably, the lot of the moved persons. And yet both were designed to create and maintain a Jewish majority – the local transfer of the Arab *fellahin* would have made more land available for Jewish settlement, and the local transfer of Mizrahi Jews to agricultural settlements would have allowed them to maintain their high birthrate while, supposedly, fixing their socio-economic problems. From its inception, but with particular vengeance after the Second World War, the Zionist project was both informed by, and structured around, major-scale displacement.

Despite the barrage of statistics, diagrams and percentages thrown at the Anglo-American Committee by the Zionist experts, it did not recommend the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine.⁹⁸¹ The Committee did recommend the admittance of 100,000 DPs to Palestine, but even this minor Zionist triumph was quashed by British Prime Minister Clement Attlee, who conditioned the admittance of DPs to Palestine on the disbandment of all “private armies” in Palestine.⁹⁸² Yet another round of British-Arab-Zionist negotiations in late 1946-early 1947 petered out, and Britain, exhausted and bloodied, put the Palestine Question in the hands of the newly formed United Nations Organization. In November 1947, the UN's General Assembly voted in favour of partitioning Palestine between a Jewish and an Arab State. The next chapter will tackle the plans that the Zionist leadership had for the Arab minority in the Jewish State, as they were formulated between November 1947 and May 1948.

⁹⁸¹ Carlebach, *Va 'adat ha-hakirah ha-Anglo-Amerikanit*, p. 703.

⁹⁸² Freundlich, “Editor's note”, *Political Documents of the Jewish Agency, May 1945-December 1946*, p. 373.

Chapter VII

Absentees: The Arab Minority and the Making of Israeli Democracy, November

1947-January 1949

On November 29th, 1947, the UN Assembly voted in favour of partitioning Palestine and establishing three political entities: A Jewish State, an Arab State, and an internationally-ruled enclave in Jerusalem and Bethlehem.⁹⁸³ About 450,000 Arabs lived in the area allotted to the Jewish State, as opposed to about half a million Jews.⁹⁸⁴ The Zionist leadership had little time to rejoice over the UN's vote or discuss the implications of the Jewish State's rule over an Arab minority comprising almost half of the state's population. The day after the vote, violence broke out between local Zionist and Arab militias. Palestine was swept into a civil war.⁹⁸⁵ By May 15th, 1948, the last British forces had left Palestine and the State of Israel was established. The war now turned into a clash between the Israeli Defense Force and Egyptian, Trans-Jordanian, Iraqi, Lebanese, and Syrian forces and the Arab League's Arab Liberation Army. On January 25th, 1949 the first elections to the Knesset, Israel's Parliament, were held. By that time, about 700,000 Palestinian Arabs fled, or were expelled, from the area under Israeli control – which now comprised about 78% of Mandatory Palestine's territory.⁹⁸⁶ The Zionist dream of creating

⁹⁸³ On the road leading to partition, see Elad Ben-Dror, *Ralph Bunche and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Mediation and the UN, 1947-1949*, (New York: Routledge, 2016), chapters 1&2.

⁹⁸⁴ Benny Morris, *1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 53.

⁹⁸⁵ On the 1948 War see: Yoav Gelber, *Palestine 1948: War, Escape and the Emergence of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, (Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2001); Eugene Rogan and Avi Shlaim (eds.), *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the history of 1948*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); David Tal, *War in Palestine, 1948: Strategy and Diplomacy* (London: Routledge, 2004); Motti Golani and Adel Manna,

Two Sides of the Coin: Independence and Nakba, 1948, (Dordrecht: Republic of Letters Publishing, 2011).

⁹⁸⁶ Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), p. 2.

a Jewish majority in Palestine, which defined Zionist-Arab-British relations since 1917, was finally achieved.

Much ink has been spilled on the consequences of the 1948 War and Israeli-Arab relations in the first years after the establishment of Israel.⁹⁸⁷ The present chapter examines a specific aspect of Zionist and Israeli-Arab relations during that time: the incorporation of the Arabs under Israeli rule into the Jewish State's electoral system. The first half of the chapter looks at the period between December 1947 and May 1948, in which the Zionist leadership planned the transition from British rule to Jewish statehood. During those months, the Zionist leadership hardly discussed the place of the sizable Arab minority in the Jewish State-to-be. That is somewhat understandable. In those six months, the Zionist leadership had to manage an escalating local war with Palestinian Arabs, prepare for the invasion of the Arab States' forces, and create the infrastructure of the Jewish State. And yet, the absence of any substantive discussions regarding the Arab minority is equally bewildering, if only because most Zionist leaders believed that the Arab minority would act as a fifth column against the Jewish State. What discussions the Zionist leaders had were mostly short, sporadic, and pointed. They were very much a continuation of the 1937-1938 Zionist discussions regarding the place of Arabs in the Jewish State, which were examined in chapter 5. In 1947-1948, as in 1937-1938, the Zionist leadership's attitude towards the prospect of an Arab minority under Jewish rule

⁹⁸⁷ On the Arab refugee problem see: Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, and Ya'akov Tovy, *'Al miftan beyta: hitgabshut medinyutah shel Israel be-sugyat ha-plitim ha-Palestinim, 1948-1956*, (Sde Boker: Ben-Gurion University Press, 2008); on the Military Administration of Israeli Arabs see: Shira Robinson, *Citizen Strangers: Palestinians and the Birth of Israel's Liberal Settler State*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); On the short-lived Minority Affairs Ministry see: Alina Koren, "Kavanot tovot: kavim le-dmuto shel misrad ha-mi'utim, 14 be-may 1948 – 1 be-yuly 1949", *Cathedra*, No. 127 (2008), pp. 113-140 and Alisa Rubin Peled, "The Other Side of 1948: The Forgotten Benevolence of Bechor Shalom Shitrit and the Ministry of Minority Affairs", *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2002), pp. 84-103.

was deeply ambivalent. The Zionist leaders declared their commitment to equality between Jews and Arabs while they were devising ways to get around that equality.

The second half of the chapter looks at the period between the establishment of Israel in May 1948 and the first elections in January 1949. Despite the flight and expulsion of Palestinian Arabs, which left about 108,000 Arabs under Israeli rule,⁹⁸⁸ the Israeli leadership was still apprehensive about allowing Arabs to vote. This section of the chapter examines the debates among the Israeli leadership regarding the Arab right to vote, and the first Israeli census, which determined who among Israel's inhabitants was recognized as a citizen and allowed to vote. The first Israeli elections proved to be the first major test of the State of Israel's commitment to democratic and liberal values. By January 1949, however, only 69,000 Arabs were registered as inhabitants of Israel, and not all of them received Israeli citizenship in time to vote. Only about 32,000 Arabs were eligible to vote in the first elections, 26,000 of whom actually exercised their right. The Zionist demographic revolution, which culminated in the Israeli Government's refusal to allow most of the Arab refugees to return to Israel, made the remaining Arabs electorally irrelevant. The demographic struggle between Zionists and Arabs in Palestine was won, not through immigration or natal policies, but through war. With the demographic struggle over, at least for a while, Israel was born as a Jewish democracy.

Transitioning into Statehood, November 1947-May 1948

The most seminal text from the period is Ben-Gurion's vision for the Jewish State, which he laid out in a December 3rd, 1947, meeting of *MAPAI's* central committee – the committee's first meeting after the UN Assembly approved UNSCOP's partition plan.

⁹⁸⁸ The figure refers to the size of the Arab population as it was estimated in December 1948. See: the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, *Shnaton statisti le-israel, 1950*, (Jerusalem: Government Press, 1950), p. 12.

Ben-Gurion calculated that 520,000 Jews and 350,000 Arabs lived in the area allocated to the Jewish State.⁹⁸⁹ He then added that, including about 100,000 Jerusalemite Jews, the Jewish State's population would reach one million people, 40% of whom would be non-Jewish.⁹⁹⁰ This demographic make-up, Ben-Gurion opined, did not make for a stable foundation for the Jewish State. There was a possibility, he warned his audience, that a Jewish parliamentary minority would join the Arab bloc in the Jewish State's parliament and form a government.⁹⁹¹ Ben-Gurion compared such a scenario to British parliamentary politics, in which the Irish MPs would often tip the scales between the Liberals and the Conservatives. He believed that even if the Arabs boycotted the elections, no Jewish State would be stable with only a 60% Jewish majority, let alone one which was only 600,000 strong.

This demographic analysis led Ben-Gurion to differentiate between the formal establishment of the Jewish State by UN institutions, which he estimated would take about ten months, and the actual establishment of a Jewish State. The Jewish State would be established, in actuality, only after 1.5 million Jewish immigrants had been absorbed to create a solid, two-million-strong, Jewish demographic bloc. This process, which Ben-Gurion termed the Jewish State's "foundational phase", would take about ten years. This was the culmination of Ben-Gurion's bio-political thinking: the Jewish State would be such only if a certain number of Jews lived within its borders, and only if a certain ratio existed between them and the non-Jewish inhabitants.

⁹⁸⁹ Meeting of *MAPAI*'s central committee, 3.12.1947, LPA 2-023-1947-48, part II, p. 7.

⁹⁹⁰ Interestingly, in order to reach the figure of one million inhabitants in the Jewish State, Ben-Gurion added the number of Jerusalemite Jews (100,000) to the number of Jews and Arabs in the Jewish State (520,000 plus 350,000) but not the number of Jerusalemite Arabs.

⁹⁹¹ Meeting of *MAPAI*'s central committee, 3.12.1947, p. 8.

The Jewish State, Ben-Gurion continued, would be predicated on “total and complete” equality between its citizens, Jewish and Arab alike.⁹⁹² Only in regards to immigration would the Jewish State privilege Jews. The facilitation of Jewish immigration would not only be the Jewish State’s main function – it would be its *raison d’être*.

Nevertheless, the Jewish State would provide both its Jewish and Arab citizens with the same level of services.⁹⁹³ Since the fledgling Jewish State might buckle under the financial burden of military expenditure and the provision of equal services to Jews and Arabs, Ben-Gurion decreed that Jewish immigration would be financed and organized by the Zionist movement. The Jewish State, according to Ben-Gurion, would enact an agrarian reform and legislate laws that would ease Jewish settlement, while the Zionist institutions would purchase land and settle Jews on it.⁹⁹⁴ However pure Ben-Gurion’s intentions may have been, we shall see below that some Zionist planners saw this division of labor as an opportunity to use the Zionist institutions to issue backdoor privileges to Jewish citizens while still keeping up a semblance of equality. Ben-Gurion also envisioned that a chief rabbinate and a supreme Muslim council, both of which would be located in Jerusalem, would serve their constituents in all of Palestine, regardless of state borders.⁹⁹⁵ Moreover, the Jewish State would allow its Arab minority some autonomy in educational matters; not only would the Jewish State refrain from attempting to Judaize its Arab citizens, it would actively help them to cultivate their national culture.

Ben-Gurion’s insistence on equality between Jews and Arabs served a political function: he believed that the animosity between the *Yishuv* and the Arab countries was “overblown and artificial”, and that the Arab minority would act as a bridge between the Jewish State

⁹⁹² Ibid., p. 11. Translation are mine.

⁹⁹³ Ibid., p. 12.

⁹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 12a.

⁹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 12.

and its neighbours.⁹⁹⁶ Moreover, the fostering of neighbourly relations between the Jewish State and the Arab states required Zionist leaders to refrain from belligerent statements about “forceful expansion” and about occupying Jerusalem.⁹⁹⁷ Ben-Gurion’s call for magnanimity did not survive the Arab invasion of May 1948. By July, Ben-Gurion and Moshe Shertok boasted about the IDF’s ability to conquer the entirety of Palestine, and even Damascus.⁹⁹⁸

Finally, Ben-Gurion laid out his vision for the coalition that would lead the Jewish State in its foundational phase. It should be a “national” coalition based on three principles: Zionism, democracy, and Jewish-Arab cooperation.⁹⁹⁹ All political organizations in the *Yishuv* that accept these three principles, Ben-Gurion insisted, were welcome to join the coalition. What is most surprising about Ben-Gurion’s vision, which was phrased in an exclusionary language that suggested that only Jews could be part of the coalition, is that Israel’s first elected coalition did include the Democratic List of Nazareth, a Arab satellite-party of *MAPAI*. Out of all the parties in Israel’s first coalition, however, the Democratic List was the only party not to be represented in the Cabinet.

One of the most urgent questions that occupied the Zionist leadership in the months leading to statehood was the formation of a Provisional Government that would serve as a transitional ruling body until general elections were held. When *MAPAI*’s secretariat mulled over the subject in an October 11th, 1947 meeting, Itzhak Ben-Zvi argued that with a 500,000 strong Arab minority, the Jewish State’s government could not be made solely of *Va’ad Leumi* and Jewish Agency members.¹⁰⁰⁰ Levi Skolnik agreed with Ben-

⁹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁹⁹⁸ Meeting of *MAPAI*’s central committee, 24.7.1948, LPA 2-023-1948-49, p. 7, 35.

⁹⁹⁹ Meeting of *MAPAI*’s central committee, 3.12.1947, LPA 2-023-1947-48, part II, pp. 16-17.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Meeting of *MAPAI*’s secretariat, 10.11.1947, LPA 2-024-1947-19a, p. 18.

Zvi, and Mordechai Namirovsky (later Namir) added that some seats in the Provisional Government should be reserved for Arabs.¹⁰⁰¹

When the secretariat returned to the subject on November 18th, however, it sang a very different tune. UNSCOP, the UN committee that recommended the partition of Palestine, mandated that by April 1st, 1948, “provisional governing councils”, a sort of shadow parliament, should be set up in both the Jewish State and the Palestinian-Arab State, to ease the transition into statehood.¹⁰⁰² David Remez, head of the *Va’ad Leumi*, posited that the Jewish provisional governing council should consist of members of *Asefat Ha-Nivharim*, the legislature of the *Yishuv*, and those members of the Jewish Agency Executive that lived in Palestine.¹⁰⁰³ But because not all sections of the *Yishuv* were represented in *Asefat Ha-Nivharim*, Remez suggested holding *Yishuv*-wide elections before April 1948, in order that *Asefat Ha-Nivharim* would become a more faithful representation of the *Yishuv*’s political map.¹⁰⁰⁴

Ben-Gurion thought that the discussion was premature, since the UN had not yet voted in favour of establishing a Jewish State.¹⁰⁰⁵ Yet before coming to this conclusion, he did make an important distinction between an ordinary parliament and a constituent assembly (*asefa mekhonenet*). Ben-Gurion argued that after the Jewish State had been established, general elections would be held to elect a parliament, in which both Jews and non-Jews would be represented. The non-elected constituent assembly, in contrast, should represent the only the Jewish people, both in Palestine and in the diaspora.¹⁰⁰⁶ Although *MAPAI*’s leaders did not agree on the matter of elections for *Asefat Ha-Nivharim*, they did agree

¹⁰⁰¹ Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁰⁰² Ben-Dror, *Ralph Bunche*, p. 34.

¹⁰⁰³ Meeting of *MAPAI*’s secretariat, 18.11.1947, LPA 2-024-1947-19a, p. 23.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 29.

that the constituent assembly should consist of *Yishuv* and Jewish Agency representatives only. Yona Kossoy (later, Kesse), explained why: in case the Arabs participated in the Jewish State's constituent assembly, they might collude with Jewish politicians – presumably the Communists or *Ha-Shomer Ha-Tzair* – to “make life difficult for us”.¹⁰⁰⁷

The constituent assembly question was broached again in a December 7th meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive. Itzhak Gruenbaum brought up the transition into Jewish statehood, and opined that if the Arabs were represented in the government and the constituent assembly, “it would complicate things”.¹⁰⁰⁸ By way of comparison, Gruenbaum, a two-term member of the Polish parliament, mentioned that the Ukrainian minority in interwar Poland boycotted the Polish constituent assembly, a fact that made the establishment of the Polish State immensely easier. *Asefat Ha-Nivharim*, he said, must provide the “Jewish bloc” that would make up, for all intents and purposes, the constituent assembly.

Ben-Gurion made another argument in favour of an all-Jewish government: it was quite possible that the establishment of a Jewish State would require the use of a Jewish military force, and a Jewish military could only operate under the guidance of a Jewish government.¹⁰⁰⁹ In the likely event of an Arab revolt against the Jewish State, he continued, there would be “no way” to hold elections in which the Arabs would participate, and so the Jewish government should have as wide support as possible among Jews.

Ben-Gurion repeated the sentiment in an April 4th, 1948 session of the Provisional State Council, the transitional body that replaced *Asfat Ha-Nivahrim* as the *Yishuv*'s

¹⁰⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 44. Translation mine.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 7.12.1947, evening session, CZA, p. 6. Translation mine.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 10.

legislature.¹⁰¹⁰ First, he commented on the flight of tens of thousand of Arabs from war-torn Palestine, saying:

There is no better sign of the Jew's inextricable connection to his country, be he in the city or the village, than this current campaign. History has now proven who is really connected to this country, and for whom it is merely a luxury [...] currently not one Jewish settlement, no matter how far-off, weak, and isolated, has been abandoned. [In contrast] Entire cities, such as Tiberias and Haifa, were abandoned so easily [by their Arab inhabitants] after the first setback, even though no danger of destruction or massacre threated the Arabs. This clearly shows which people is deeply connected to this country [and which people is not].¹⁰¹¹

Ben-Gurion then promised his audience that soon, democratic elections would be held in which both Jews and those Arabs who choose to stay in the Jewish State would participate.¹⁰¹² Until then, however, the Provisional Government and the Provisional State Council could not abide by every democratic tenet. The highest priority was the very survival of the *Yishuv*.

The Citizenship of the Arab Minority

The citizenship of Arabs in the Jewish State did not come up much in Zionist debates during this period, but the one discussion that did touch on the subject revealed the precarious position of Arab rights in the Zionist leadership's thinking. On November 2nd, 1947, the acting head of the Jewish Agency's Political Department, Golda Meyerson

¹⁰¹⁰ The Provisional State Council (*Mo'etzet Ha-'Am* and later *Mo'etzet Ha-Medina Ha-Zmanit*) served as the provisional Israeli parliament from April 1948 until February 1949.

¹⁰¹¹ Opening session of the Provisional State Council, 4.5.1948, BGA, Protocols Division, the Provisional State Council, 14.5.1948-18.5.1948, p. 3. Translation mine.

¹⁰¹² Ben-Gurion's address, part II, *ibid.*, p. 3.

(later Meir), relayed to the Jewish Agency Executive an American proposal to compel Arabs who would accept the Palestinian-Arab State's citizenship to leave the Jewish State.¹⁰¹³ The Zionist delegates to the UN, she added, were against the proposal: they did not believe that such a measure would lead to transfer, nor would it deter Arabs from accepting the Palestinian-Arab State's citizenship. Ben-Gurion agreed with the Zionist diplomats: the Arabs would not leave the Jewish State of their own accord, but if they were citizens of the Arab State they might be less involved in the affairs of the Jewish State.¹⁰¹⁴ Itzhak Gruenbaum had a different view of the matter: he thought that the presence of citizens of the Arab State in the Jewish State would be a constant source of irredentism. Gruenbaum opined that although Zionist officials could not suggest the expulsion of Arabs from the Jewish State, such a suggestion, coming from the American Government, was more than welcome. Ben-Gurion was not convinced. The Jewish State would suffer from Arab irredentism, he argued, regardless of the legal status of the Arab minority. If the Arabs had to choose between staying in the Jewish State and acquiring the Arab State's citizenship, they would choose to stay put. And therein was the rub: in case of war, Arab citizens could only be arrested, but Arabs without the Jewish State's citizenship could be deported, and "it was better to deport them than to detain them".¹⁰¹⁵ Ben-Gurion's colleagues were not won over by his argument and the Executive voted in favour of the American proposal.¹⁰¹⁶ The proposal, however, never came up again.

In October 1947, the Emergency Committee (*Ve'adat Ha-Matzav*), a Jewish Agency body that was tasked with planning the transition into statehood, began its work.¹⁰¹⁷ The

¹⁰¹³ Meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 2.11.1947, CZA, p. 3.

¹⁰¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁰¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4. Translation mine.

¹⁰¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁰¹⁷ On the Emergency Committee, see: Yonatan Fain, *Kakh nolda: hakamat ma'arekhet ha-mimshal be-yisrael, 1947-1949*, (Jerusalem: Karmel, 2009).

Committee's various sub-committees dealt with issues relating to finances, public works, prisons, health, immigration, the question of Jerusalem and even the management of the Jewish settlements in the area of the Palestinian-Arab State.¹⁰¹⁸ No sub-committee, however, dealt with the issue of the Arab minority, and references to the Arab minority were sporadic.

One such example was a November 24th 1947 meeting of the Emergency Committee, in which the subject of Christian Arab government officials who might work in the Jewish State came up. Eliezer Kaplan wished to hire as few Christian clerks as possible, so as not to increase the number of Arabs in the Jewish State.¹⁰¹⁹ Moshe Shapira, on the other hand, reminded Kaplan that the committee had already decided not to exclude Christian clerks *a-priori*.

Another example is a December 1947 memorandum on social services in the Jewish State, in which the unnamed author noted the quality gap between the social services that were available to Jews and those that were available to Arabs.¹⁰²⁰ Although the Jewish State should endeavour to minimize the gap in the level of social service between the two communities, the author recommended keeping separate services for Arabs and Jews.

The most programmatic text regarding the Arab minority submitted to the Emergency Committee was a memorandum by the economist Ludwig Gruenbaum on the job market in the Jewish State. In the memorandum, Gruenbaum sought to dispel the notion that Arab workers might "infiltrate" the Jewish job market to an extent that would make Jewish workers obsolete.¹⁰²¹ Gruenbaum argued that the expected mass immigration of

¹⁰¹⁸ Ibid., p. 57.

¹⁰¹⁹ Meeting of the Emergency Committee, 24.11.1947, BGA, Special Committees Division, the Emergency Committee, October-November 1947, p. 4.

¹⁰²⁰ No Author, "Ha-'avoda ha-sotzialit be-tekufat ha-ma'avar", BGA, Special Committees Division, Ve'adat Ha-Matzav, December 1947, p. 4.

¹⁰²¹ Ludwig Gruenbaum, "He'arot le-hesder shuk ha-'avoda ba-medina ha-yehudit", 19.1.1948, CZA J1-14442, p. 1.

millions of Jews would create such a demand for manual labour that both Arab and Jewish workers would not want for work.¹⁰²²

Nevertheless, Gruenbaum insisted that the government would have to put in place strict regulations in order to prevent the chaos that would ensue from mass migration and the infiltration of foreign Arabs into the local job market.¹⁰²³ He proposed that every unemployed citizen, whether Jew or Arab, would have to register at a governmental employment agency.¹⁰²⁴ The agency would issue each citizen a work card with details of their assigned job and their specific skills. Employers could then only hire candidates that were assigned to them. The work card system, Gruenbaum assured his readers, would prevent Arab immigrants from taking jobs from Jewish citizens.

Gruenbaum then touched on the issue of discrimination against Arabs. He argued that the work card system obviated the need for separate employment agencies for Arabs. In the first years after independence, Gruenbaum predicted, the competition between Jewish and Arab workers would be limited, since most Arabs would be employed in blue collar jobs while many Jews would have white collar jobs.¹⁰²⁵ Moreover, Gruenbaum argued that the Zionist movement should extend financial help to the Jewish State's Jewish citizens, thus helping them to compete with cheaper Arab labor in the manual labor market. Gruenbaum gave the example of the citrus industry, in which the Arab wage was almost half that of the Jewish wage. He contended that the Jewish State should indirectly increase the Jewish workers' wage by supplying them with cheap housing and subsidized goods. "Since the money that is earmarked for social subsidies comes from the donations of world Jewry", concluded Gruenbaum, "There is no reason to award Arab workers cheap housing, etc.

¹⁰²² Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁰²³ Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁰²⁴ Ibid, p. 4.

¹⁰²⁵ Ibid, p. 5.

This is not discrimination against Arabs. It is simply a way to help Jewish workers take root in agricultural work”.¹⁰²⁶

Gruenbaum then offered another way in which the governmental employment agency could help Jewish workers: by housing Jewish laborers working in a specific location in subsidized work camps and hiring Arab workers who lived in villages near the work site. Although both Jews and Arabs would be paid the same wage, the “real income” of Jewish workers would be higher, since they would have to pay less for room and board. Furthermore, Gruenbaum envisioned a job market in which Jews mostly worked for Jews and Arab mostly worked for Arabs.¹⁰²⁷ Only Arabs who had seniority working for a Jewish employer would be allowed to keep their current job.

Not all experts dealing with the economic gap between Jews and Arabs sought to maintain Jewish privileges. A January 1948 memorandum dealing with educational, health and social services stated that closing the gap between the Jewish and Arab economies might take years, but the unnamed author seemed genuinely convinced that the Jewish State should endeavour to bring the Arab standard of living close to the Jewish one.¹⁰²⁸

Little had changed in the Zionist attitude towards the Arab minority-to-be between the first and second partition proposals. The Zionist leaders imagined the Jewish State as a liberal democracy in which equal rights were enjoyed by all, but, at the same time, they were quick to chip away at Arab rights when questions of security, or even immigration

¹⁰²⁶ Ibid. Translation mine.

¹⁰²⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁰²⁸ Unknown author, “Sherutey ha-tzibur be-tkufat ha-ma’avar”, 26.1.1948, BGA, Special Committees Division, the Emergency Committee, 1948, p. 72-104.

and absorption, were at play. It seems that despite their best intentions, the Zionist leaders could not imagine a Jewish State without Jewish privileges.

The Arab Minority and the Elections for the Constituent Assembly, May 1948-January 1949

The Zionist leadership was well aware of the mass Arab flight during the first months of the war.¹⁰²⁹ In an April 6th, 1948 meeting of the Zionist General Council Ben-Gurion elliptically said:

Our victory in the present war will depend upon a fundamental change in the Jewish population's make-up and distribution. I believe that the war will also cause big changes in the Arab population's make-up, irrespective of our wishes, but it is not within my purview to discuss this right now.¹⁰³⁰

Avraham Herzfeld, head of the Agricultural Center, a joint body dedicated to the promotion of Jewish agricultural colonization, was less vague. In a May 12th meeting of *MAPAI's* central committee he argued that the Arab exodus “solves many land issues [...] as if by a miracle”.¹⁰³¹ Similarly, when Mordecai Alias, who was part of the Israeli delegation to the UN, reported to the Provisional Government on his efforts to facilitate the acceptance of Israel as a member of the UN, he mentioned that one of the obstacles

¹⁰²⁹ Ben-Gurion's comments, meeting of *MAPAI's* central committee, 8.1.1948, LPA 2-023-1948-49, p. 5; Ben-Gurion's comments, the 35th session of *MAPAI's* council, 4th meeting, 7.2.1948, LPA 2-022-1948-71, p. 4; Ben-Gurion's comments, meeting of *MAPAI's* secretariat, 4.4.1948, LPA 2-024-1948-20, p. 7; Bechor Shalom Shitrit's comments, meeting of *Minhelet Ha-'am*, 3.5.1948, BGA, Protocols Division, *Minhelet ve-Mo'etzet Ha-'am, Minhelet Ha-'am* 1948, p. 4.

¹⁰³⁰ Ben-Gurion's comments, meeting of the Zionist Executive, 6.4.1948, Israel State Archive (ISA), ISA-PMO-GovernmentSecretary-0004w27, p. 17. Translation mine.

¹⁰³¹ Herzfeld's comments, meeting of *MAPAI's* central committee, 12.5.1948, LPA 2-023-1948-49, p. 1. Translation mine.

standing in the way of the elections to the constituent assembly – the sizeable Arab minority – was all but removed.¹⁰³²

Moshe Shertok, too, spoke of the revolutionary implication of the Arab exodus. In a June 16th 1948 meeting of the Provisional Government, he said:

This is the thing that surprises me the most: the evacuation of the Arab population. In the context of the history of Palestine – it is more surprising than the establishment of the Hebrew State. [...] Suddenly and with lightning speed, an entire section of the country has been emptied of its Arab population! [...] We will have to ponder the tremendous importance of this change in terms of colonization, security, the stability of the state, and as a solution to critical social and political problems that cast a shadow on the state's future. If someone among us would have said one day that all of them [the Arabs] should be expelled, he would have sounded insane. But if the deed is done through the calamities of war, a war that the Arab people have waged upon us, and through the flight of the Arabs themselves, it is one of those revolutionary changes after which history cannot remain the same. [...] It is one of those things that man cannot will into existence; rather they are the result of a certain process.

[Moshe Shapira: an earthquake]

Yes, an earthquake.¹⁰³³

¹⁰³² Meeting of the Provisional Government, 30.6.1948, BGA, Protocols Division, Provisional Government meetings, June 1948, p. 5.

¹⁰³³ Meeting of the Provisional Government, 16.6.1948, ISA-PMO-GovernmentMeeting-0002ee9, pp. 20-21. Translation mine.

Shertok's disingenuousness regarding transfer aside – he himself repeatedly made comments in favour of transfer during the 1940s – what is interesting about this speech is its coda, in which both Shapira and Shertok compared the war to an earthquake. The Zionist leadership often thought about the Zionist-Arab conflict in geological and geographical terms. Zionist leaders saw the Arab world as an ocean or a desert, Palestine as a volcano and the *Yishuv* as an island. Here, Shertok struggled to find the right imagery to explain the Arab exodus, and with the help of Shapira he settled on the earthquake metaphor. The metaphor is revealing: in the earthquake scenario, which “man cannot will into existence”, the Zionists do not have any agency. The war was started by the Arabs, and the calamities of war, whatever they maybe, had caused the Arabs to flee. Whether or not the surprise registered by Shertok at the beginning of the passage was genuine, it seems to have played an important function in the Israeli leadership's self-perception. By expressing surprise and likening the exodus to an inevitable geological event, the Israeli leaders washed their hands of their part in the Arab flight.

Shertok did not want the Arab refugees to return.¹⁰³⁴ Nevertheless, he was willing to pay reparations for the land that the refugees had left behind. His reasoning was more mercenary than humanitarian: The Jewish State, as it was proposed by UNSCOP, with a 350,000 strong Arab minority and vast tracts of land at its disposal, would have been more resistant to the UN's attempts to hem in its borders.¹⁰³⁵ Now that the Arabs were gone and their land was expropriated by the state, Israel was far more susceptible to international meddling. By paying reparations, Shertok implied, Israel would relieve the international pressure put upon it to give up important regions such as the Negev.

¹⁰³⁴ Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁰³⁵ Ibid., p. 22.

Ben-Gurion too did not wish the refugees to return.¹⁰³⁶ This did not prevent him from declaring that in the State of Israel, an Arab could be president. He compared the US, unfavourably, to the young Israeli state:

If in America a negro or a Jew cannot be president – civil rights have no substance there. [American] Democracy notwithstanding, I know that some plots of land will not be sold to Jews, and it is completely legal. [...] If we will have created such a regime, then we will have completely missed the purpose of the Jewish State.¹⁰³⁷

What is perhaps more striking than Ben-Gurion's bold assertion, is the fact that the paragraph directly above it, which dealt with the Western Galilee, was heavily redacted. Nevertheless, by extrapolating from other, declassified, documents we can make an educated guess about the content of the redacted paragraph about the Western Galilee.

The state censor had diligently, and quite literally, covered up almost every mention of Jewish forces expelling Arabs, and Cabinet meetings from 1948 and 1949 are still heavily redacted. Yet due to some bureaucratic mishap, an uncensored protocol of a September 28th 1948 meeting has found its way to the Ben-Gurion Archives.¹⁰³⁸ In the Israel States Archives version of the protocol one paragraph is censored, but not in the Ben-Gurion Archives version. The paragraph is part of Ben-Gurion's attempt to explain why he thought that ending the second cease-fire between the IDF and the Arab armies was not necessarily a bad thing. This was his reasoning: "In the [Galilee] pocket there are at least 100,000 Arabs. In case war breaks out now, we can clean the entire Central Galilee in one

¹⁰³⁶ Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁰³⁷ Ibid., pp. 34-35. Translation mine.

¹⁰³⁸ Tom Segev was the first to mention the uncensored protocol: Segev, "Tragediyat ha-plitim nidheta le-zman ma", *Ha'arets*, 15.3.2013, quoted in Adel Manna, *Nakba ve-hisardut: sipuram shel ha-falestinim she-notru be-haifa u-va-galil, 1948-1956*, (Tel-Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-me'uhad/Van Leer Press, 2017), p. 86.

fell swoop. And if we clean the Central Galilee, this includes the [Arab] refugees too.”¹⁰³⁹

Although one cannot ascertain the subject of the censored paragraph from the June 16th meeting that referred to the Western Galilee, the uncensored paragraph from the September 28th meeting suggests that both paragraphs dealt with the expulsion of Galilean Arabs.

The question then rises, how could Ben-Gurion fantasize about the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Arabs and yet declare that an Arab president was within the realm of possibility? Based on the 1937-1938 debates regarding the Arab minority, which are discussed in chapter 5, I argue that it is *because* Ben-Gurion and the Israeli Government actively worked to minimize the number of Arabs under Israeli rule, whether through expulsions or its refusal to allow the majority of Arab refugees to return to Israel, that Ben-Gurion was willing to entertain the possibility of an Arab president. The divestment of the Arab minority of any real electoral power made an Arab president – a mostly ceremonial position with little actual political power – possible.

While Shertok and Ben-Gurion kept silent about their involvement in the expulsions, Revisionist members of the Provisional State Council called publicly for the expulsion of the remaining Israeli Arabs. In a July 29th 1948 session, Aryeh Altman, a representative of the Revisionist *Ha-Tzohar* party, declared that “we don’t want to create another Sudetenland here [...] we have to state our position clearly: transfer, rather than the resurrection of the minority problem, which had died down in the interwar period [...]”.¹⁰⁴⁰ Baruch Weinstein, another member of *Ha-Tzohar*, followed suit, saying:

¹⁰³⁹ Meeting of the Provisional Government, 28.9.1948, BGA, Protocols Division, Provisional Government Meetings, September 1948, p. 14. Translation mine.

¹⁰⁴⁰ The 12th session of The Provisional State Council, 29.7.1948, the Knesset Archives, Protocols Divisions, Assembly Sessions, The Provisional State Council, p. 13. Translation mine.

We have to let go of the illusion that there are good Arabs, in the same way that we had to let go of the illusion that there are good Germans. [...] If we take Stalin as an authority [Weinstein referred here to the members of the Israeli Communist Party, who often praised the Soviet dictator] – I am too willing to take a page out of Stalin’s book and learn from his treatment of the German minority in the Volga region. Within 24 hours the German minority problem was taken care of.¹⁰⁴¹

Thus, only two months after the establishment of the State of Israel, we already begin to see a new division of labor regarding transfer between the Zionist Right and the Zionist Left: The Left preferred not to speak about the things it had done, and the Right boasted about things it was in no position to do.

In August 1948, the Provisional Government began to plan for elections for the constituent assembly. Ben-Gurion wished to hold the elections by October 1st, since the UN Assembly was set to convene in September and the promise of democratic elections would greatly help Israel’s application for UN membership.¹⁰⁴² Shertok, the Foreign Minister, concurred, but the two seemed to be in the minority. Itzhak Gruenbaum, the Interior Minister, and Pinhas Rosenblüth (later Rosen), the Minister of Justice, explained that there was not enough time to conduct a census and issue IDs to all of Israel’s citizens by October 1st.¹⁰⁴³ To illustrate the dangers of a hasty electoral procedure, Bechor Shalom Shitrit, the Minister of Police and Minority Affairs, argued that without voter registration, Arabs who were not born in Palestine would be able to vote in the elections.¹⁰⁴⁴

¹⁰⁴¹ Ibid., p. 24. Translation mine.

¹⁰⁴² Meeting of the Provisional Government, 8.8.1948, ISA-PMO-GovernmentMeeting-0002ee9, p. 24.

¹⁰⁴³ Ibid., pp. 25-30.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 31.

The size of the Arab population and its political rights remained a constant issue for the Provisional Government. At the beginning of an August 11th Cabinet meeting, Shertok reported on his conversation with Count Folke Bernadotte, the UN mediator between Israel and the Arab States. Shertok told Bernadotte that “the reduction of the number of Arabs in Israel” was essential for peace with the Arab world.¹⁰⁴⁵ A large Arab minority would act as an excuse for the Arab States to meddle in Israel’s affairs, the Foreign Minister argued. Shertok touched on the subject again in an August 18th meeting of the Cabinet Committee for Arab Affairs. “We cannot take the position”, he told the Committee –

That there is no place for Arabs in the State of Israel. We cannot take the position that Arabs who live in Israel have a different set of rights [than Jews]. *The fact that we want to reduce the number of Arabs is another matter.* But to take the position that Arabs do not belong in Israel – that is untenable. There shall not be one statute for Jews and one for the Druze and one for the Arabs [This is Shertok’s paraphrasing of Numbers 15:15].¹⁰⁴⁶

Despite Shertok’s assertion that the reduction of the number of Arabs was not related to the question of Arab rights, it seems that attempts to reduce the number of Arabs in Israel were a direct *result* of Israel’s unwillingness, or, at the very least, inability to outright discriminate between Jews and Arabs.

The legal limbo in which Israel’s borders were situated during the war affected the conduct of the first elections. In an August 11th 1948 Cabinet meeting, Ben-Gurion

¹⁰⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 6-7. Translation mine.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Meeting of the Committee for Arab Affairs, 18.8.1948, ISA-PMO-GovernmentSecretary-000aips, p. 6. Translation and emphasis mine.

suggested that the elections would be held in “all areas under Israeli rule”.¹⁰⁴⁷ This formulation, however, meant that the Arab inhabitants of the territories that Israel occupied outside of the borders assigned to it by the November 29th 1947 UN decision would be entitled to vote in the elections. *MAPAI*’s secretariat tackled this issue on August 17th 1948. The secretariat members agreed that Israel could not allow Jews in the occupied territories to vote while at the same time denying Arabs the vote.¹⁰⁴⁸ Nevertheless, secretariat member Aryeh Bahir commented, rather elliptically, that “We can find a way around it, and act in a deliberate and intelligent way so we will not turn this issue into a debacle”.¹⁰⁴⁹ One such attempt to find a way around the Arab right to vote was suggested by Aryeh Altman, who we have already encountered as a transfer enthusiast. Altman, as a member of the parliamentary committee overseeing the elections, suggested that illiterate citizens should be denied the vote.¹⁰⁵⁰ His suggestion was sternly rebuffed by the committee. Moshe Ben-Ami, a representative of the Sephardic political movement, explained that such a measure would encroach on the rights of thousands of illiterate Jews.¹⁰⁵¹

Things were complicated when the very same committee recommended that the Jewish illegal immigrants that were incarcerated in Cyprus by the British would be allowed to vote.¹⁰⁵² Itzhak Gruenbaum immediately realized the political implications of such a resolution. On October 28th 1948 he reminded the Provisional State Council that the elections statute specifically mandated that the elections would be confined to the area under Israeli rule, of which Cyprus was clearly not a part.¹⁰⁵³ Gruenbaum explained that

¹⁰⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Meeting of *MAPAI*’s secretariat, 17.8.1948, LPA 2-024-1948-21, p. 4.

¹⁰⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5. Translation mine.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Meeting of the Elections Committee, 12.8.1948, ISA-PMO-PMO-000w93b, p. 3.

¹⁰⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁵² Resolutions of the Elections Committee, no date, *ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁰⁵³ 24th session of the Provisional State Council, 28.10.1948, the Knesset Archives, Protocols Divisions, Assembly Sessions, the Provisional State Council, p. 20.

the confinement of the right to vote to the area under Israeli rule was designed to counter the argument that the Israeli Government “wished to get rid of some of its inhabitants who should enjoy the right to vote [..]”, and that allowing the Cyprus prisoners to vote would be counterproductive.¹⁰⁵⁴ Remez, now the Minister of Transportation, concurred. “There are at least 250,000 Palestinian citizens outside of Israel. This fact forces us not to yield to our emotions [regarding the Cyprus prisoners]”.¹⁰⁵⁵

Not all Council members were impressed with the Government’s argument. Altman suggested expanding the right to vote not only to the Jews in Cyprus, but to all Jewish DPs in Europe. If the British had not prevented the DPs from immigrating, by now all of them would have already been inhabitants of Palestine, he contended.¹⁰⁵⁶ Aharon Zisling, a Cabinet member from the newly-founded Leftist *MAPAM* party, concurred with Altman: if soldiers who were posted outside the country’s borders can vote, why cannot the Cyprus prisoners? He asked.¹⁰⁵⁷ Nahum Nir-Refalkes, another *MAPAM* member, was even willing to let every non-Jew in Cyprus vote in the Israeli elections just so that the prisoners may vote.¹⁰⁵⁸ Despite the grandstanding by both opposition and coalition members, the Council voted to strike the Cyprus clause from the statute.¹⁰⁵⁹ The Council was unwilling to risk granting the right to vote to hundreds of thousands of Arab refugees just so that the 11,000 Jews in the Cyprus camps could vote.

On November 18th 1948 the newly founded Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (ICBS), which was headed by Roberto Bachi, conducted Israel’s first census.¹⁰⁶⁰ In order for

¹⁰⁵⁴ *Ibid.* Translation mine.

¹⁰⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22. Translation mine.

¹⁰⁵⁶ 25th session of the Provisional State Council, 4.11.1948, the Knesset Archives, Protocols Divisions, Assembly Sessions, the Provisional State Council, p. 10.

¹⁰⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁰⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁰⁵⁹ 26th session of the Provisional State Council, 4.11.1948, the Knesset Archives, Protocols Divisions, Assembly Sessions, the Provisional State Council, p. 10.

¹⁰⁶⁰ On the census, see: Anat Leibler, “Statisticians' Ambition: Governmentality, Modernity and National Legibility”, *Israel Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2004), pp. 121-149; idem, “Establishing Scientific Authority –

elections to be held, the ICBS had to count Israel's inhabitants, create a voting registry, and issue IDs, without which the citizens could not vote.¹⁰⁶¹ Not only did the census form have specific questions that were designed to reveal how many Arabs had left the area under Israeli rule and the scope of the property that they had left behind, not all Arabs living under Israeli rule were counted in the first census.¹⁰⁶² Most Arabs inhabitants of the Galilee and the Negev were not counted, as were some villages in the Coastal Plain, and, most importantly, the present-absentees – the Arab refugees who had fled or were driven from their homes but had remained under Israeli rule. The ICBS itself estimated in 1950 that only 63% of the Arabs who lived under Israeli rule in November 1948 were counted in the first census – about 69,000 people out of 108,000.¹⁰⁶³

It seems that the reasons for the undercounting of Arabs were mostly logistical.¹⁰⁶⁴

Historian Shira Robinson argues that the Negev Bedouins were not counted in order to facilitate their eventual expulsion.¹⁰⁶⁵ As proof of this, Robinson cites a letter from Dr. Miuzam, of the ICBS, to the Foreign Ministry. The letter, however, does not contain any mention of expulsion. Miuzam suggested that in case that the Bedouins were not counted, the ICBS should provide an estimation of their number, to prevent international criticism of Israel.¹⁰⁶⁶ Sociologist Anat Leibler, in contrast, argues that the census's main purpose regarding the Arab minority was to differentiate between those Arabs who were under Israeli rule during the census, and were deemed to have a right to stay in Israel, and those

Citizenship and Israel's First Census", *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch fuer deutsche Geschichte* (2007), p. 221-236; Anat Leibler and Daniel Breslau, "The uncounted: Citizenship and exclusion in the Israeli census of 1948", *Ethnic and racial studies*, Vol. 28, No. 5 (2009), pp. 880-992; Moshe Naor, "Mifkad ha-'ukhlusin ha-rishon: statistica ve-demographya be-tkufat milhama ve-binuy medina", in: Mordechai Bar-on and Meir Chazan (eds.), *Politika be-milhama: kovetz mehkarim 'al ha-hevra ha-ezrahit be-milhemet ha-'atzma'ut* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 2014), pp. 54-87.

¹⁰⁶¹ Naor, "Mifkad ha-'ukhlusin ha-rishon", p. 62.

¹⁰⁶² Leibler, "Establishing Scientific Authority", pp. 231-233.

¹⁰⁶³ ICBS, *Shmaton statisti le-israel, 1950*, p. 12.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Naor, "Mifkad ha-'ukhlusin ha-rishon", p. 65.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Robinson, *Citizen Strangers*, p. 73.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Miuzam to the Foreign Ministry, 24.10.1948, ISA-mfa-mfa-000lsgr.

who attempted to return after the census and whom Israel considered to be infiltrators. If the goal of the census was to differentiate between “legal residents” and “infiltrators”, Israel did not have an incentive to undercount the Arabs under its rule.¹⁰⁶⁷

At any rate, the undercounting of the Arab inhabitants did not alleviate the Government’s anxiety about the Arab right to vote. On December 20th 1948 Itzhak Gruenbaum reported to the Provisional Government that Elimelech Avner, CO of the Military Administration, wished to deny Israeli Arabs the vote.¹⁰⁶⁸ Avner’s reasoning was that “the elections campaign will draw the Arabs into our political debates, thereby hurting the prestige of the united Jewish nation [...]”.¹⁰⁶⁹ Gruenbaum told Avner that the Government cannot discriminate against its Arab citizens. Nevertheless, Gruenbaum entertained the possibility of restricting public appearances by political candidates in the Arab sector, so that the recently pacified Arab population might not be disturbed by too much political excitement.¹⁰⁷⁰ He also suggested granting freedom of movement to a select number of Government-approved Arab political activists.¹⁰⁷¹

Ben-Gurion made his position clear: the Arab right to vote was subordinate to Israel’s security needs.¹⁰⁷² Interestingly, it was Bechor Shitrit, the Minister of Minority Affairs who is usually remembered as a patron of the Arab minority, who suggested that it was illegal, according to international law, to let inhabitants of occupied territories vote in national elections.¹⁰⁷³ The cabinet rejected Shitrit’s position.¹⁰⁷⁴ Gruenbaum argued that

¹⁰⁶⁷ Leibler, “Establishing Scientific Authority”, pp. 234-235.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Meeting of the Provisional Government, 20.12.1948, ISA-PMO-GovernmentMeeting-0002ee9, p. 9.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Ibid. Translation mine.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁰⁷¹ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁰⁷² Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁰⁷³ Ibid., p. 13. On Shitrit’s supposed moderation see: Alisa Rubin Peled, “The Other Side of 1948: The Forgotten Benevolence of Bechor Shalom Shitrit and the Ministry of Minority Affairs”, *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2002), pp. 84-103.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Meeting of the Provisional Government, 20.12.1948, p. 14.

Shitrit should have raised the issue when the elections statute was debated; now, his suggestion sounded like anti-Arab discrimination.

Gruenbaum then reported that Israel's Druze allies were campaigning for the right to vote, although they were not counted in the census.¹⁰⁷⁵ The Druze, he added, were complaining that they, Israel's allies, could not vote, while their Arab neighbours could. Gruenbaum opposed making an exception for the Druze, for fear that such an exception would lead to further concessions to special interest groups. Shitrit, on the contrary, was in favour of repaying the Druze for their loyalty with the right to vote. Ben-Gurion was adamant: this is not a question of loyalty, he told Shitrit, but a question of law. The Prime Minister insisted that, for Jews and Arabs alike, those who were not present in Israel during the census could not vote. The undercounting of Israel's Arab inhabitants in the first census, however, meant that being present in Israel during the census did not guarantee, on its own, that one could vote in the 1949 elections.

Later in the meeting, when the Cabinet discussed the formation of the constituent assembly, Remez returned to Ben-Gurion's June 16th declaration about the possibility of an Arab president. It seems that Remez did not savour the possibility, saying that –

There is a difference between ordinary elections and elections in which Arabs can vote. I put great stock in planning ahead. What if the assembly elder will be an Arab and he will open the first session? I do not think we should take that risk. When Mr. Ben-Gurion said that a non-Jew can be Israel's president – I was not perturbed, even though I would have voted for a Jewish president.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 16.

[Ben-Gurion: that's another matter. You are entitled not to vote for him]

Well, you don't know the other members of the assembly and some Jews will not have an Arab inaugurate the first session, and then you instantly have a faux-pas on your hands. Do we really need this? I'm not against equality, but equality and the constitution notwithstanding, we have to prevent unnecessary things, unnecessary demonstrations, unnecessary embarrassment.¹⁰⁷⁶

Ben-Gurion then responded, wearily: "Sometimes I wonder whether we actually mean the things we say".

The elections took place on January 25th 1949. Out of the 32,980 eligible Arab voters, about 26,000 voted in the elections.¹⁰⁷⁷ Most of them voted for *MAPAI* and its satellite-parties. One of those satellite-parties, the Democratic List of Nazareth, won two parliamentary seats and became part of the new, *MAPAI*-led, coalition. Out of all the members of the coalition, however, the Democratic List of Nazareth was the only party that did not hold a ministerial position in the Government. The trend of excluding only Arab MKs from ministerial positions continued until the formation of the Fourth Coalition Government in 1952, when the religious Zionist party, *Ha-Mizrachi*, became a coalition member without a ministerial position. The first Arab minister, Raleb Majadele, was appointed in 2007, almost 50 years after the establishment of the State of Israel.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 48. Translation mine.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Orna Cohen, "Reshimot 'arvot ba-asefa ha-mekhonenet: nitzanim rishonim shel pe'ilut politit 'aravit be-hasut miflagot tzioniyot", in: Bar-On and Chazan, *Politika be-milhana*, p. 540.

Through localized expulsions, refusal to allow refugees to return to Israel, and undercounting the Arab inhabitants, the young Israeli State was able to diffuse the Arab demographic threat, and hence, the Arab democratic threat. In 1950 the ICBS published the number of Jewish and Arab births in 1949-1950: in 1949, 26,743 Jews were born in Israel, compared to only 3,443 Arabs.¹⁰⁷⁸ There is perhaps no better statistic that represents the Palestinian Arab defeat in the 1948 War. The formidable Arab birth rate, which exercised Zionist leaders and scientists for so long, was contained, for now.

The Israeli leadership was well aware of the importance of this demographic revolution. On January 2nd, 1949, Shertok reported to the Provisional Government on his talks with the UN's Conciliation Committee. "The State of Israel" he told the Committee –

Would have been very different if it had not been established during the war that the Arabs had waged against us. It would have had a large Arab minority, which would have left its mark on the character of the state, on the regime and the economy, and it would have been an organic part of the state. Now, after the Arabs had left, a different state was born, a state that is almost completely Jewish, with a miniscule Arab minority. Allowing the Arabs to return now to Israel is not the same as having them being part of the state, as if they had never left.¹⁰⁷⁹

Ben-Gurion, too, understood this. On April 4th, 1949 the constituent assembly, now renamed the First Knesset, discussed the armistice agreements with the Arab States. Following criticism from Knesset members who still dreamed of a Jewish State in all of Palestine, Ben-Gurion explained the role of atrocities like Deir Yasin in the creation of

¹⁰⁷⁸ ICBS, *Shmaton statisti le-israel*, p. 13.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Meeting of the Provisional Government, 9.2.1949, ISA-PMO-GovernmentMeeting-0002eea, pp. 17-18. Translation mine.

Israeli democracy. On April 9th, 1948, a combined force of the *Irgun Tzvai Leumi* (IZL) and *Lohamei Herut Israel* (LHI) right-wing Zionist militias conquered the Arab village of Deir Yassin, with the approval and assistance of the *Haganah*. During and after the fighting, about 100 villagers were killed, many of whom were non-combatants. At least some of them were killed while trying to flee the village or were executed after the battle. Because the Deir Yassin battle became a propaganda tool for the Zionist Labor movement against the Zionist Right, and for Palestinian nationalists against the Zionist movement as a whole, almost every aspect of the incident is still contested to this very day, including the number of dead, the extent of the involvement of the village in the 1948 war, and the nature of the war crimes committed by Zionist militants.¹⁰⁸⁰ There seems to be, however, a scholarly consensus that news – often embellished – of the atrocities committed at Deir Yassin facilitated the flight of Arabs from other parts of Palestine, thus contributing to the creation of a Jewish majority.¹⁰⁸¹ It is also important to note that Ben-Gurion's remarks were aimed at the right-wing opposition, whose members were closely associated with the IZL and LHI. This is what Ben-Gurion had to say about the connection between Deir Yassin and Israeli democracy:

[Do we want] A Jewish State or all of Eretz-Israel? And when we say all of Eretz-Israel do we mean both banks of the River Jordan or just this side? [...] well, a Jewish State in all of Eretz-Israel without Deir Yassin can only exist through the dictatorship of the minority [...] a Jewish State in Western Eretz-Israel, without Deir Yassin, cannot be democratic [...] because the number of Arabs is greater than that of the Jews.¹⁰⁸²

¹⁰⁸⁰ Benny Morris, "The Historiography of Deir Yassin", *The Journal of Israeli History*, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp. 79-107.

¹⁰⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 79, 88.

¹⁰⁸² The 20th session of the First Knesset, 4.4.1949, The Knesset Archives, Protocols Division, Assembly Sessions, The First Knesset, p. 306.

Ben-Gurion then immediately added that the Dir Yassin incident was not part of the Zionist “program”. The Prime Minister was trying to prove to the proponents of Israeli expansionism that a Jewish and democratic state could not expand without committing war crimes that would lead to Arab flight. Ben-Gurion was perhaps comfortable mentioning Deir Yassin because the battle was associated with the Zionist Right, despite the involvement of *Haganah* forces. But in his exhortation lies an admission that the creation of the Israeli State, as it stood in 1949, was already predicated on the expulsion and flight of Arabs. Deir Yassin was not part of the territory assigned to the Jewish State by the 1947 UN decision. It was conquered as part of Operation Nachshon, the goal of which was to open the road from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem, and which was conducted mostly in territory assigned to the Palestinian Arab State. Thus, Ben-Gurion himself acknowledged that beyond the November 1947 borders, there was no Israeli democracy without Deir Yassin

Conclusion

This dissertation examined the evolution of Zionist bio-political thought during the British Mandate years. Although the desire to create a Jewish majority was a constant in the Zionist ideology of the time, until 1937 the Zionist leadership advocated the creation in Palestine of a regime in which demographic ratios did not play a significant part. The Zionist espousal of non-majoritarian politics was a direct response to the small share of Jews in Palestine's population in the 1910s and 1920s. The Zionist demand for Jewish personal and territorial autonomy, as well as the Zionist opposition to the establishment of joint political institutions, were part of a gradualist approach to the colonization of Palestine. The gradualist approach advocated a slow and steady pace of Jewish immigration and colonization. It depended on the creation of a spatial and political separation between Jews and Arabs, a separation that was designed to prevent the Arab majority from imposing its will on the Jewish minority. The principle of mutual non-domination, which dictated that Arabs would not rule Jews and vice versa, was emblematic of the gradualist approach and of the *Yishuv's* minority politics.

In the mid 1930s, however, the rise of Fascism and anti-Semitism in Central and Eastern Europe created a domino effect that compelled David Ben-Gurion, and later the majority of the Zionist leadership, to adopt the nation-state model as a solution to the Jewish-Arab conflict in Palestine and the persecution of Jews in Europe. German and Italian politics during that time challenged the international order built around the waning authority of the League of Nations. Furthermore, Italian advances in North Africa seriously challenged British hegemony in the Mediterranean theatre. Finally, the persecution of Jews, especially in Germany and Poland, led to mass Jewish migration to Palestine. The result was an unprecedented growth spurt of the *Yishuv* that led some Zionist leaders to believe that the creation of a Jewish majority was at hand. In an attempt to face the

Fascist challenge in Europe and the Middle East, however, Britain shored up its alliances in the Arab World at the expense of Zionist colonization. The disappointment with British policy converted even those Zionist leaders who supported some sort of federative solution in Palestine to the notion that only a nation-state could achieve the Zionist movement's goals. This conversion was not ideologically driven, but rather the result of a realist assessment of the Zionist movement's place in international politics. Indeed, those Zionist leaders who believed that the Zionist-British pact could still be mended were willing to continue working under British rule.

Although the notion of an Arab minority was not completely new, it was not a major facet of Zionist thought until 1937, for two reasons: firstly, demographically-speaking Arabs constituted the vast majority of Palestinians, and secondly, the principle of mutual non-domination attempted to circumvent entirely the question of majority-minority relations in Palestinian politics. But the partition of Palestine was designed to create an area in which a Jewish majority existed or could be created quickly. A Jewish majority in part of Palestine became both the justification for *and* the *raison d'être* of the Jewish State. The Jewish nation-state idea, then, gave birth to the Arab minority. Of course, it was extremely difficult to carve out an area in 1937 Palestine in which a Jewish majority existed. Thus, the idea of mass transfer, and the whole discourse of minoritizing the Arabs, became an integral part of Zionist political thought as a result of the Zionist acceptance of partition.

The peculiar position of the *Yishuv*, as a minority attempting to create and maintain a majority, dictated that the scope of the rights of the Arab minority in the Jewish State would be determined according to its size. After 1937, the surveillance and regulation of the Arab minority's size/rights became a major facet of Zionist politics. In this sense, the division between pre-1948 and post-1948 politics is not exceedingly important. What

changed in 1948 was not the policy of the Zionist leadership, only its ability to implement it.

Since 1948, Israeli history is very much the story of how Arab demographics shapes Israeli politics. For example, in 1949 Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion suggested that Israel annex the Gaza Strip and allow the Palestinian refugees therein – estimated at about 100,000 – to return to their homes in Israel.¹⁰⁸³ Foreign Minister Moshe Shertok (now Sharett) opposed the idea on the grounds that the annexation would double the size of the Arab population of Israel.¹⁰⁸⁴ The plan was scrapped due to Egyptian reluctance to give up the Strip and because the Israelis discovered that the actual number of refugees in the area was closer to 200,000.¹⁰⁸⁵ When Israel temporarily occupied the Gaza Strip during the 1956 War, the Israeli Government discussed ways to control the Strip without giving its inhabitants Israeli citizenship.¹⁰⁸⁶ Although Israel had to retreat from the Gaza Strip due to American pressure, it again occupied the Gaza Strip – and the West Bank, the Golan Heights and the Sinai Peninsula – in 1967, and again Israeli policymakers attempted to find a political solution that would allow Israeli control of the occupied territories without granting their inhabitants Israeli citizenship.¹⁰⁸⁷ In 2005, Israel unilaterally withdrew its military forces from the Gaza Strip. One of the reasons for the withdrawal was Israel's attempt to maintain a Jewish majority in the territories under its control.¹⁰⁸⁸ Finally, some civil rights NGOs consider the 2014 raising of the electoral threshold – the minimum number of votes needed to earn a seat at the Knesset – to be a

¹⁰⁸³ Tovy, *Al miftan beyta*, p. 61.

¹⁰⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

¹⁰⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 62-73.

¹⁰⁸⁶ *Idem*, "Medinyut Israel klapey retsu'at azza ve-pliteyha, November 1956-March 1957", *Jama'a*, Vol. 7 (2000), p. 40.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Avi Raz, *The Bride and the Dowry*, p. 41.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Geoffrey Levin, "One Step Forward or Two Steps Back? Unilateralism and Israel's Gaza Disengagement in the Eyes of the World", *Israeli Affairs*, Vol. 20, No. 1, p. 89.

ploy to reduce the representation of minorities in the Israeli parliament.¹⁰⁸⁹ Although several studies have focused on Israeli bio-politics, they have tended to examine specific and localized interactions between the Israeli Government and the inhabitants of Israel/Palestine.¹⁰⁹⁰ A more comprehensive history of governmental attempts to socially engineer the populations under Israeli rule awaits to be written.

Moreover, although we have followed the evolution of the idea of a Jewish majority through the Mandate years, the origins of the Zionist desire for a Jewish majority lie outside the scope of the present dissertation. One may assume that the desire for majority was born out of the social and political circumstances of late 19th century and early 20th century Eastern European Jews. Further research is needed to identify the emergence of the Zionist pre-occupation with majority-making and explain how the Zionist version of majority-making differed from those of competing Jewish national movement like Territorialism and Autonomism.

Finally, what is perhaps most interesting about the pre-1948 Zionist obsession with the Jewish majority was that for the most part, it was never an end in itself. Rather, it was a means to legitimize Jewish dominance in Palestine, which in itself was a means to achieve the grandest of Zionist goals – to solve the Jewish Problem through the ingathering of exiles in Palestine. This was the purpose of the Jewish State, at least as far as Ben-Gurion was concerned. The State of Israel never achieved this lofty goal.

Sometime in the 1950s, after the mass migration from Europe, the Middle East, and North

¹⁰⁸⁹ Debbie Gild-Hayo, “Niyar ‘emda shel ha-aguda le-zkhuyot ha-ezrah be-nose h’ala’at ahuz ha-hasima”, 29.9.2013, <https://www.acri.org.il/he/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/meshilut290913.pdf>.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Shoham Melamed, “Ka’avor shanim me’atot nihiye khulanu benye ‘edot ha-mizrah”, *Teoria u-bikoret*, Vol. 25, pp. 69-96; Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh, *Birth of the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Rebecca Steinfeld, “Wars of the Wombs: Struggles Over Abortion Policies in Israel”, *Israel Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (2015), pp 1-26; Michal Kravel-Tovi, “‘National mission’: Biopolitics, non-Jewish Immigration and Jewish Conversion Policy in Contemporary Israel”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* Vol. 35 No. 4, pp. 737-756.

Africa died down, Zionist Ideology was left in a state of postpartum depression. The State of Israel was no longer an instrument of the salvation of the Jewish people. The very purpose of the Jewish State, and of the Jewish majority and its relationship with the Arab minority irrevocably changed. How and when this change occurred, and what was the result of this change, is a worthy subject for further research.

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