

Beyond the Boundaries of “The Land of the Deer”

R. Binyamin between Jewish and Arab Geographies, and the Critique of the Zionist-Colonial Connection

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Abstract

In an article published in June 1930, Muhammad Roshan Akhtar, the editor of the English edition of the Palestinian newspaper *Filastin*, called for the establishment of an Arab federation, considering Jews to be an integral part of a political community whose territory sprawled “from Basra to Jaffa.” Akhtar’s article met with an enthusiastic response from Jewish author and essayist Yehoshua Radler-Feldman (also known as R. Binyamin). RB considered the large space between Basra and Jaffa – intended to serve as the basis for the anti-colonial unification of the Arab lands – as a basis for a different thinking about Jewish existence in Palestine particularly and in the Middle East generally. He foresaw an existence of Jewish masses dispersed throughout the whole region, where the old Middle Eastern Jewish communities would play an important role. This article focuses on the crystallization of RB’s spatial perception in the period of the British Mandate, the importance he saw in the identification with the anti-colonial struggle, and the affinities between this orientation and the attitudes held by Palestinians intellectuals and political activists. It also examines the theological perception of Eretz Yisrael and the “lands that are adjacent to it” that lay at the foundations of the spatial logic RB developed.

Keywords

Binationalism; anti-colonialism; Istiqlal; Palestinian Press; Zionism; Brit-Shalom; the Syrian Revolt; Orientalism; Political Theology; British Colonialism.

In July 1925, an essay published in *Haaretz* newspaper criticized members of the Yishuv¹ for permitting *avoda zara*, a term for idolatry, but here meaning literally “foreign labor,” as long as it did not compete directly with Hebrew labor.² The use of the term in its literal sense reflected a broader secularization and nationalization of traditional Jewish terms and practices within Zionist discourse. The religious prohibition of idolatry was reconstructed as a foundational national term for the development of an ethnically distinct Hebrew economy that rejected any form of Arab labor. This reflected the construction of the national economy as a sanctified space, where “foreign” (that is, non-Jewish) engagement – understood in a nationalized and secularized manner – was prohibited. The writer of the essay, who rejected the distinctly national economic logic, pointed to this political-theology by using the pseudonym *Min* (heretic, in Hebrew).

“Min” was Yehoshua Radler-Feldman, an observant Jew, author, and essayist also known as Reb Binyomin (1880–1957, hereinafter RB). RB was born in Zborow in Habsburg Galicia in 1880. He left Galicia in 1900 and moved to Berlin, where he studied at the Agricultural University of Berlin (Königlichen Landwirtschaftlichen Hochschule zu Berlin). In 1906, he moved to London and migrated to Palestine the next year. Growing up in the multinational Habsburg Empire, where national identifications coincided with local and imperial loyalties, RB seems to have gravitated toward understandings of local civic partnership as a basis for identification in Ottoman Palestine during this period. These notions emphasized Ottoman citizenship, alongside other local and collective attachments, as a shared point of identification for Ottoman Muslims, Christians, and Jews. This was especially useful for those Ottoman Palestinian Jews, both Ashkenazi and Sephardi, who self-identified as “children of the land” (*bnei Haaretz* or *abna’ al-balad*).³ This conception of belonging was consistent with a spatial imagination distinct from the separatist model promoted by the Zionist leadership.

The Zionist Yishuv in Ottoman Palestine sought to create for itself – especially after the foundation of the Palestine Office in 1908 – a distinct Jewish space. Settler-colonial spatial and economic policies, widely known as the “Conquest of Land” and “Conquest of Labor,” worked to create a distinct and “pure” sphere within Palestine that could then distinguish itself culturally and linguistically from its Arab and indigenous Jewish surroundings.⁴ Despite serving as an official in the Palestine Office, RB was a fierce critic of these policies. Hegemonic Zionist settler-colonial efforts attempted to implant a largely European Jewish community and establish it as “indigenous,” primarily through land purchase and expulsion of Arab peasants, construction of a segregated economy, and defense of the “purity” of the Hebrew language. However, RB set forth a different notion of Jewish belonging in Palestine: his conception rested upon a vision of restoring connections with relatives, and thus emphasized Jewish–Arab cultural and Jewish–Muslim religious affinities. He thus criticized the hegemonic Zionist negation of both the local Palestinian and Jewish exilic (non-sovereign, traditional, and religious) existence.⁵

World War I, the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, and the establishment of the British Mandate created new conditions for the Zionist Yishuv. While the mandate

supported the Zionist movement and allowed the foundation of separate Jewish national institutions in Palestine, it negated any possibility of creating local political institutions manifesting Palestinian political and national aspirations. Accordingly, the British Mandate government promoted colonial policies that increasingly subordinated Palestinian Arabs to Zionist-Jewish settlers.⁶ The British commitment to the Balfour Declaration, which supported establishing a “national home” for the Jews in Palestine, meant denying the national aspirations of Palestinian Arabs. The Zionist movement’s status shifted from that of a separatist group seeking accommodation with the Ottoman state and holding somewhat ambiguous ties to various European colonial powers, to an ally of the colonial regime in direct control of Palestine.

After the Great War, and inspired by Rabindranath Tagore’s and Mohandes Kremchand Gandhi’s anti-colonial writings, RB criticized Zionist cooperation with colonial regimes and its strive for sovereignty. In his July 1925 essay in *Haaretz*, RB called upon “those whose spirit is as our spirit” in what became the first proclamation of the binational movement of Brit-Shalom – to join the new group. RB cited Hugo Bergmann – one of his future companions in Brit-Shalom – who criticized Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann’s supplication to David Lloyd-George, asking the British statesman to help establish Jewish-Arab relations in Palestine. One month earlier, in June 1925, Bergmann had described Weizmann’s invitation in *Davar* newspaper:

This is evidence that Weizmann, from his perch in London, is unable to fathom that which is coming into being in the East Speak today with Palestinian Arabs and hear the pride in which they speak of ‘Abd al-Karim and his campaign against France, and comprehend the hope they invest in the National Movement in India, on the leadership of the Ali brothers and of Gandhi. The Land of Israel is becoming an integral part of the entire East through the shared hopes and the aspirations of all Arabs.⁷

To both RB and Bergmann, Zionism’s reliance on European imperialism testified to a fundamental error in Zionism’s relations with the Arabs in their entirety, a misunderstanding of the historical implications of the political tremors crisscrossing the Middle East and Asia, and a failure to recognize the potency of the anti-imperialist struggle’s call to arms. The anti-colonial struggle’s political diagnoses and remedies, Bergmann pointed out, precluded the notion that Palestine was a unique and ultimately separate arena. In participating in the global uprising against the West, it would become “part of the East.”

The decision to position Bergmann’s words so prominently in the public call to join what would become Brit-Shalom testifies to the importance RB ascribed to the imagination of an alternative geography in which anti-colonial struggle formed a common basis for viable cooperation between Jews and Arabs in Palestine. To close the essay in *Haaretz*, he wrote: “The great East is awakening, opening its eyes and looking to us, too . . . opinion leaders are about to make their determinations about us.

They have but one question: Are you with us or against us?”⁸ This was the moment, he claimed, when Zionism’s loyalty to the region where it wished to strike root would be decided.

RB’s and Bergmann’s insistence on widening the spatial scope, their shared perception of Palestine as a part of a larger Arab geographical entirety, and their demand that the Zionist movement identify with regional anti-colonial struggles, reveals the role of anti-imperialism in crystallizing Brit-Shalom’s criticism of the hegemony of contemporary Zionist leadership. Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin has showed the centrality of anti-colonial attitudes and the demand to stand “on the right side of the barricades” in Gershom Scholem’s treatises on binationalism, identifying an “indefatigable excoriation of the values of colonialism . . . which had enabled the removal of the Jews from Europe.”⁹ Zohar Maor similarly points out anti-colonial criticism in the writings of Hans Kohn, Hugo Bergmann, and Gershom Scholem and the ways it served as an infrastructure for their critiques of the secular European model of the nation state.¹⁰ Repudiating any reliance on imperial power was, to them, a critical precursor for creating an alternative political model for Palestine’s Jews. This non-imperialist model would also reject contemporary premises of the nation-state and its modalities of power and formulate a different, transnational political construct that, in the case of Jews in Palestine, for instance, could be pan-Asian, as Hans Kohn suggested. Many of these articulations, however, maintained a clear distinction between a romaniticization of the supposed wealth of Far East cultures and philosophies and an unstudied contempt for Arabs and Islam.¹¹

Revisiting the writings of RB and rereading the critiques of Brit-Shalom from such a perspective may help trace a missing link between the nation-state and pan-Asian frameworks: the spatial imagination of Arab unity. These writings must be understood against the broader contemporary political context of the Arab anti-colonial struggles and the Arab campaign to reunite the space dismembered by colonial mapmakers. An attempt to reread the movement’s history from RB’s perspective sheds light on the differences between his own attitude and that of other members of the movement, revealing important aspects of the activities of Brit-Shalom – and other binational movements that were founded afterward, such as Kedma-Mizraha, the League for Jewish-Arab Rapprochement, and Ihud – that have been generally overlooked. These aspects, namely, the emphasis of the spatial Arab unity and the critique of Zionist-colonial cooperation, challenge the existing frameworks of analysis regarding their role in the political and intellectual history of Israel/Palestine.

Jewish-Arab partnership, an affinity for Palestine’s indigenous Jewish communities, and a “maximalist” view of Jewish migration from Europe to the Arab lands were the bedrock of RB’s call for Zionism to imagine Jewish integration into a larger Muslim – rather than merely “Asian” – spatial framework, and to find common cause with Arabs who opposed the dissection of the Arab lands by colonial boundaries after World War I. Already in his early writings, RB recognized the religious and cultural affinities between Judaism and Islam as a central argument for, and resource in, forging Jewish-Arab partnership.¹² He also shared a spatial imagination with Palestine’s indigenous

Jews who rejected hegemonic Zionist separatism. (As Abigail Jacobson and Moshe Naor claim, some Middle Eastern Jews maintained this critical approach to the policies of the Zionist leadership during the mandate period as well.¹³ Others, however, as will be discussed below, adopted the Zionist spatial approach.) RB also had a “maximalist” vision of Zionism, which regarded Palestine as too limited a space to accommodate all European Jews who were persecuted in their homelands, and therefore, there was need for the Arab lands in their entirety to serve as a migration destination for these Jews.

Writing as early as 1923, a mere five years after the British occupation ended centuries of Ottoman rule, RB diagnosed that the most acute challenge facing the Zionist movement “concern[ed] the East. That is to say: not withdrawing into the boundaries of the Land of the Deer [*Eretz Hatzvi*].”¹⁴ RB’s criticism of a narrow spatial frame of reference, his conceptualization of a united Muslim-Arab realm, and his call for Zionism to realign itself with anti-colonial struggles requires a synthesis with contemporary Palestinian writing and an analysis of how a future Palestine/Eretz Israel was imagined in such a post-imperial framework. Such a recontextualization illuminates RB’s turn toward breaching the conceptual and spatial boundaries imposed by European colonialism and replacing them with alternative regional frameworks that conceptualize Arab-Islamic space as a single continuum, in which myriad local demands for liberation co-reside.

Zionism as a Watchword for English Rule

Two weeks after his July 1925 *Haaretz* op-ed mentioned above, RB published another short article in the Zionist daily *Hed Lita* based in Kaunas, Lithuania.¹⁵ In this article, RB claimed that the Treaty of Versailles, espousing the “right of self-determination,” had indeed extended political rights to many European peoples, but had withheld them, through the mandate system, from the peoples of the East. The newly established League of Nations thus interpolated the peoples of the East as “second-grade peoples, in need of the Western peoples’ guardianship.” RB also claimed that one could not avoid the feeling that “there is here something of the Christian relation to Islam” in these outcomes. This understanding of global postwar politics led the peoples of the East to an understanding that “the whole West looks upon the East as an object for exploitation” and that “the role of the East in the near future is to liberate itself from the West’s burden.” That is why, according to RB, “the resistance of the East turns [its sights] first and foremost toward England,” an empire standing “at the head of the mandatory system.”¹⁶

In this regard, RB claimed, his position reflected contemporary attitudes in the Arab lands, “the whole of this region that is unified in its Arab tongue,” which “is being thought and felt as one piece. Cultural uniformity unifies all these tribes. They all share the aspiration for liberation and resistance to the West. Especially to the English.” RB understood Arab and Muslim resentment of Zionism against this

backdrop. Arab and Muslim political leaders opposed Zionism not based on “a hidden hatred for the Jews,” which “did not strike deep roots [in the East] . . . as it had in the West,” but due to the fact that “Zionism emerged as a watchword for English rule – specifically at the moment when anger against the English is growing.”¹⁷

The essential trouble of the Zionist movement was, according to RB, its reliance on British colonial power. This reliance led to the identification of Zionism as Britain’s long arm, thereby anathema to anti-colonial liberation. Foreign colonial powers dissected the region and ruled its fragments, and cultivated the Zionist movement as an accomplice, lending it power to pursue its own purposes, which in turn made Zionism an object of resentment. RB emphasized time and again that Zionist integration demanded an identification with liberation movements:

The East faces the people of Israel with the question: Are you one of us or of our enemies? In other words: the Jew who goes to the land of Israel must determine his relationships and his place . . . whether he belongs either to the West or to the East. By choosing the former, of course, he becomes entwined with fate of the West, and he must forfeit the chance to enjoy a desirable relationship with the East.¹⁸

Zionism, RB claimed, could not afford to continue its indecisiveness: it must throw its lot with one of the two warring sides, aligning itself either with the peoples of the East struggling for liberation or with their colonial oppressors. The Zionist movement’s attempt to sit on the fence, simultaneously presenting itself as a movement of Jewish restoration in the East, while continuing to cling to the hem of the West’s robes, must make way for a clear decision.

Zionism in Light of Arab Anticolonial Resistance: Correspondence with Bulus Shehadeh

RB’s vision of the commitment to worldwide anticolonial struggles as a basis for a Jewish-Arab cooperation in Palestine can be found in a series of public exchanges with Bulus Shehadeh (1882–1943), the editor of the Palestinian newspaper *Mir’at al-Sharq*, in November 1925.¹⁹ RB was intimately familiar with the Arabic-language Palestinian press, having in the final years of Ottoman rule presided over the Palestine Office press bureau’s Arabic press department, founded in 1910. The defined role of the department was to follow discussion of the Yishuv in the Palestinian press and, in various instances, to engage in these discussions in favor of Zionist colonization.²⁰ For RB, the department offered him his first chance to become aware of the political and cultural orientations that were crystallizing among Palestinians.²¹ In his critical writings on Zionist settler-colonial policies, he often included translations from the Palestinian press, including critiques of Ottoman government officials who were blamed for abandoning the local Palestinian peasants, while Zionist institutions

purchased lands and expelled the local inhabitants. By serving as an “echo” of the Arabic press, RB sought to open what he regarded as the closed ears of the Zionist Yishuv to Palestinian perceptions of Zionism.²²

Since their establishment after the renewal of the Ottoman constitution in 1908 – and especially from the end of 1910 and the beginning of 1911 – Palestinian periodicals played an important role in leading Palestinian opposition to Zionist colonization.²³ Newspapers such as Najib Nassar’s *al-Karmil* reported daily on Zionist land purchases and the expulsions of the peasants and warned of the dangers posed by the Zionist policy of the conquest of land. The newspaper *Filastin* – founded by the cousins ‘Isa al-‘Isa and Yusuf al-‘Isa in 1911 – took a more ambivalent approach toward Zionist colonization in the first year of its publication, entertaining its potential benefits as a force for “modernization” in rural areas and giving space to Zionist authors to respond to critical analyses of Zionist colonization. However, *Filastin*, too, became more critical of Zionist threats to the political and economic future of Palestinian Arabs and, especially after a deadly clash in 1913 between Jewish colonists in Rehovot and the neighboring village of Zarnuqa, eventually became a main outlet for Palestinian opposition to Zionist colonization.²⁴

During World War I, Ottoman authorities shut down Palestinian periodicals, but by the 1920s the press had recuperated from its wartime paralysis, and emerged as the main textual site of Palestinian political expression. During this period, Bulus Shehadeh’s *Mir’at al-Sharq* played an important role. *Mir’at al-Sharq* launched in September 1919, and served as a chief organ of the political faction associated with the Nashashibi family, also known as the opposition (*al-mu‘arida*) to the Husaynis and the Supreme Muslim Council, which enjoyed colonial patronage. Although the newspaper generally adopted a reconciliatory position with British colonial authorities, it was also “often critical of British policies” and, alongside other Palestinian periodicals took an oppositional line concerning the issue of Zionism.²⁵ While opposition to Zionism in the late Ottoman period focused mainly on land purchases and the expulsion of *fellahin*, the emergence of the British Mandate led to Zionism becoming identified with colonial power. The Balfour Declaration in particular became a symbol of the connection between Zionism and the colonial powers.²⁶

In 1925, the Great Syrian Revolt emerged as a symbol of organized Arab anti-colonial resistance, shared in by rural peasants, urban tradesmen, and army officers, and breaching the borders imposed by colonial policies of “divide and rule.”²⁷ The Syrian demand for liberation from the French colonial burden, and its aspiration to reassert the independence of the entire Bilad al-Sham region (divided into French and British mandate territories) as a singular geopolitical and socioeconomic whole, occupied a major place in the Palestinian Arab press. *Mir’at al-Sharq* covered the revolt on a weekly basis and, as Foster claimed – “took every opportunity to praise the Syrian rebels.”²⁸

In a November 1925 open letter titled “To the Hebrew Press,” Shehadeh decried Hebrew-language Palestinian newspapers’ depictions of the popular uprisings in Jabal al-Druze and Damascus against the French colonial regime, and the revolt led by ‘Abd

al-Karim al-Khattabi against the French and the Spanish in the Rif region of Morocco. While Zionist public figures often spoke of their own aspiration to achieve a reciprocal understanding between Jews and Arabs, emphasizing the Semitic connection shared by the two groups, Shehadeh explained that they undercut that very possibility by siding with the Arabs' oppressors against legitimate aspirations for liberation:

We saw you in the Rif war, when you stood alongside France and Spain . . . and you have forgotten what the latter have done to you . . . and you did not show any empathy for the Rifians. We saw you during the Druze revolt when you stood beside France and showed no sympathy for the Druze and the Syrians in their struggle, forgetting that the Druze and the Syrians are Semites like you. You forgot the neighborly relations you are bound to, you forgot that your existence is one of a small island in the middle of a vast Arab ocean. You forgot that you are not connected in any matter to France, either nationally, linguistically or religiously: you forgot that by doing so [aligning yourself with France] you undercut the claims you make over and over again.²⁹

Shehadeh's critique of the pro-colonial attitude of the Hebrew press constructed its coverage in terms of forgetting – forgetting the relations between the European regimes and the Jews throughout history, forgetting the historic identification of Jews with oppressed peoples, and denying the way in which Zionism introduced itself to the Arabs. The attitude of the Hebrew press toward these struggles reflected, according to Shehadeh, Zionism's attempt to erase Jewish history, which should place Jews firmly on the side of the Arabs rebelling against their Western colonial overlords.

Shehadeh's figurative articulation of the Zionist Yishuv as "a small island in the middle of a vast Arab ocean" evoked a spatial imagination that refused to reconcile itself to emerging colonial geography. The activities of Zionist Jews in Mandatory Palestine should be assessed not only according to this limited geographical unit, Shehadeh claimed, but according to how they regarded liberation movements erupting throughout the "vast Arab ocean." In allying itself with the French and the Spanish, Zionists betrayed their desires to recreate the Yishuv as a distinctively European space by construing an opposition between themselves and their Middle Eastern geographical, cultural, and political surroundings.

The following issue of *Mir 'at al-Sharq* published excerpts of a rebuttal from RB, who argued that Shehadeh relied on the editorials of two newspapers – *Do'ar Hayom* and *Palestine Weekly* – that were indeed hostile to the anti-colonial uprisings and were known to stand alongside the colonial powers. *Do'ar Hayom*'s reports on the Syrian revolt revealed a deep anxiety about the possibility of the uprisings spreading to Mandate Palestine – a territory that, according to the paper, had "just now achieved some peace and serenity" thanks to British rule. The newspaper pinned its hopes on "the French authorities and their power to quell the revolt before it would expand and spill over across the border."³⁰ However, RB claimed, a large majority of Jews

objected to these opinions and even sought to censor them.

RB raised *Haaretz* and *Davar* as counterexamples of a different attitude, more sympathetic to the struggles and more representative of actual public opinion among Palestine's Jews.³¹ *Haaretz* and *Davar* relied on the Arab press for their reportage, and acknowledged the great destruction and the numerous casualties caused by French aerial attacks on Damascus in October, even ascribing the revolt to "the bitter experience the Druze had . . . under the despotic rule of Carbillet, the [French-appointed] governor of the mountain."³² The Arabic press thereafter distinguished the "pro-French coverage" of *Do'ar Hayom* and the more reserved line taken by *Haaretz*, hailing the latter as a newspaper with the basic decency to report the "evident truth."³³ RB's implication that the majority of the Jewish Yishuv were empathetic to the Druze cause was exaggerated, however. Except for its publication of essays by Hugo Bergmann and RB himself, it is impossible to argue that *Haaretz* effectively sympathized with the revolt and its professed objectives.

Shehadeh, for his part, sought to expose RB's claims as wishful thinking. He characterized RB as "one of the orthodox Jews . . . whose aspirations are totally different from those of the Zionists."³⁴ By cementing the schematic distinction between Zionists and Orthodox Jews, and ascribing RB's views to his belonging to the latter group, Shehadeh communicated to his readers the limited context in which they should take RB's words. Shehadeh also claimed that, throughout their history, Jews never aspired to be politically independent, but rather sought religious autonomy and economic independence within political entities ruled by non-Jews. This was precisely how Zionist Jews in Palestine differed from their counterparts: theirs was a political program for "Jewish sovereignty [*mamlaka*]," a goal that would be attained only when they achieved total domination over a region. In Palestine, therefore, Zionists will settle for nothing less than a political reality in which Arabs lack meaningful political power. That was why, Shehadeh argued, Zionists "will be happy with any tragedy [*nakba*] or trouble" that would befall the Arabs, and also explained their support for the colonial powers – who had promised foundation of a Jewish state.³⁵

Shehadeh's distinction between Zionists and Orthodox Jewry, which lay in the former's goal of total sovereignty manifested in a Jewish state, is reminiscent of, but not equivalent to, European distinction between religion and nation. As opposed to the European depiction of Judaism as a religion and thus as apolitical by nature, Shehadeh's distinction between Orthodox Jews and Zionists focused on the different political frameworks within which they sought collective autonomy – either within a larger political framework or in the form of a separate sovereign Jewish state, relying on the colonial powers. Shehadeh thus saw RB's politics as so far beyond the pale of Zionism that he understood him as "Orthodox." The readiness to identify with the Syrian rebels could never be characterized as "Zionist" since, in Shehadeh's reading, at its core Zionism's fate was bound up with imperialism and the movement was therefore anxious about any scenario that included foreign powers' departure from the region. As far as Shehadeh was concerned, RB was an observant Jew who never shared Zionist political aspirations for sovereignty, and was therefore able to sympathize

with, perhaps even share, the Eastern understanding of the rebels' objectives in the Rif and in Syria and empathize with them.

The subsequent issue of *Mir'at al-Sharq* included another letter from RB in which he rejected Shehadeh's notion that Zionists and Orthodox Jews were in binary opposition in their attitudes toward Arabs. RB again mentioned *Haaretz* and *Davar*, and again emphasized that those were Zionist newspapers and that "unexpectedly, they regard the Arabs in general and the question of the Rifian and the Druze with respect and sympathy."³⁶ He concluded:

The true Zionist loves his own people, and also respects and cherishes the other peoples, especially ones struggling for their liberation. The true Zionist knows that the happiness of the world depends on the liberty of all peoples and their independent development.³⁷

RB thus sought to reclaim the term "Zionism" from the pro-imperialist politics with which it had come to be associated. According to RB, patriotic sentiment did not come at the expense of solidarity with other national struggles. On the contrary: the "true Zionist" identified "especially" with colonized peoples fighting for their liberation. This understanding of "true Zionism" as an identification with the Arab anticolonial struggle was manifested in RB's activities as a member of Brit-Shalom.

Brit-Shalom, British-Zionist Cooperation, and the "Great Arab Nation"

RB served as Brit-Shalom's secretary and a co-editor, together with Hans Kohn and Hugo Bergmann, of its principal organ, *She'ifotenu*. In a 1928 article in *She'ifotenu*, RB argued against Zionist policies designed to achieve a Jewish majority in Palestine, which he saw as a crudely concealed aspiration to dominate the Palestinian Arabs, confined to minoritarian status within a Jewish-majority polity, and thus a catalyst for war and struggle.³⁸ A Jewish majority, RB went on, was the wrong political objective because it negated any cooperative approach and construed the two groups as having opposed and mutually exclusive interests. The shift toward ensuring a Jewish majority in Mandate Palestine, he claimed, went against Zionism's original political agenda of seeking "a radical solution to the Jewish question" through "the removal of millions – during one generation's time." The new political context required a recalculation of the price that Zionists should pay to "solve the Jewish question":

The first question: to whom? An answer (and I speak only on my own behalf): to the great Arab nation. A second question: What is the essence of the price? My answer: A real outstretched hand, forging a brotherhood, not of declarative poetics but in actual reality, a recognition of the Semitic brotherhood as a great factor, forming a public [*minyán*],

creating a great and joint political construct, a building whose roof will shelter two large peoples and resolve the question of the Jews under its roof, under which neither of the two peoples will ask who is in the front and who has the “majority” . . . It is here that Herzl’s vision will be resurrected in a different hue.³⁹

RB’s vision of national space was not limited to the boundaries of “the land of the deer,” but was home to the “great Arab nation” as a whole. RB departed from the limiting boundaries of the post-war political arrangements that allocated Palestine as the territory to serve as a Jewish homeland, and instead envisaged the grand space posited by the advocates of Arab unity as an alternative geography.⁴⁰ Those who would seriously contemplate the radical solution of removing millions of Jews from Europe should not sentence them to be concentrated in a territory limited by the mandate system, but should instead allow them to be dispersed throughout the lands of the “great Arab nation.” RB saw Semitic brotherhood as a main catalyst in this political framework, abrogating the aspiration for Jewish sovereignty based on national majority, which he understood to be the root cause of never-ending strife. Thus RB wished to adopt Herzl’s initiative to solve the “Jewish question,” while transforming the political framework that would be the vehicle for its realization – not “a portion of a rampart of Europe against Asia” as Herzl envisaged, but integration into a non-European political framework.⁴¹

RB therefore considered British rule a foreign imposition on the region, which could not serve as an arbitrator between Jews and Arabs, as Weizmann had requested of Lloyd George. On the contrary: RB’s attitude toward colonial authorities was rooted in his view of Jews and Arabs as natural partners in the struggle against the British Empire. From this perspective, RB points out both Jews’ and Arabs’ need for British “help and support,” while emphasizing the imperative to struggle jointly against its “mistakes, defects and damages.” This approach parted from dominant Zionist attitudes toward the British as the power that had not only the might but also the right to shape the future of Palestine, and thereby manage relations between Zionists and Palestine’s Arabs.

RB understood Zionists’ affinity for Britain to be based in temporal political calculations rather than long-term vision or principle. Later in the 1928 *She’ifotenu* article, RB sharply rebuked Avraham Elmaleh, a prominent Sephardi Jew who during the Ottoman period had been one of the most vociferous critics of European Zionism and its neglect of the question of Jewish-Arab relations – but whose views in the late 1920s reflected the same axioms of hegemonic Zionist policies RB so adamantly criticized.⁴² Elmaleh’s change of heart signaled an alarming shift on the part of Middle Eastern Jews (and not only European Jews) toward the Arabs following the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and a decade of British occupation of Palestine. Elmaleh articulated a spatial perception diametrically opposite to that of RB, one in which the Yishuv prospered “within our own little corner, with no connection with any other neighboring states,” based on the view that Jewish and Arab national aspirations

were irreconcilable and mutually exclusive: “Anything that the Arabs consider good for themselves, is an elixir of death to us.”⁴³

It is clear, RB charged, that although Elmaleh did not explicitly so state, his shift in attitudes toward the Arabs derived from the change of government in Palestine.⁴⁴ His former promotion of mutual understanding between Jews and Arabs was not due to political principle and persuasion, but to the cold calculations of political expediency.⁴⁵ The relative weakness of the Jews and the accumulating power of the Arabs during the late Ottoman period had meant that maintaining cordial relations was a Zionist priority. The shift in political circumstances now meant that the efforts to cultivate good relations became unnecessary, having never stemmed, for Elmaleh, from a belief that both peoples were partners in a joint political framework, but rather that they were adversaries in competition. To RB, Elmaleh’s transformation illustrated the important meaning that the change of government carried. The preoccupation of the Zionist movement with the political covenant of the region’s new imperial powers, and the British colonial government in Palestine in particular, came at the expense of integration with, and cultivating ties among, the one and only stable factor in the region – the Arabs. In RB’s eyes, the Arabs must be made allies of Jews if there was to be any hope for realizing Zionism’s goals.

Pinning hopes on government support rather than integration with local Arabs, RB claimed, was not, however, entirely new for the Zionist leadership in Palestine. It was a pattern also throughout the Ottoman period. As an example, RB recalled an assembly of Jewish and Arab politicians scheduled to take place in Brummana, Lebanon, in 1914. This meeting, organized by the Zionist official Hayyim Margalioth-Kalvarisky, had been scheduled as a follow-up to another meeting that had taken place in Damascus, at the home of Muhammad Kurd ‘Ali. The Brummana assembly, however, was cancelled after the Jews who were invited to take part in it claimed, “There is no need for assemblies with the Arabs, since the government is on our side.” Nasif al-Khalidi’s alleged response to this cancellation seemed to encapsulate what RB saw as the moral of the story: “Be careful, Zionist gentlemen, governments come and go, but peoples remain.”⁴⁶

The divergence between the hegemonic Zionist approach to privileging the relationship with state power over that with the Arab masses and the views espoused by RB and, more generally, by Brit-Shalom became particularly acute in the wake of the violent confrontations of August 1929 – “year zero” of the Arab-Israeli conflict, in Hillel Cohen’s coinage.⁴⁷ Brit-Shalom criticized the Zionist appeals to power and national honor that preceded and followed the events, seeing them as evidence of the Yishuv’s ongoing disregard for Arabs and collaboration with the British. The hegemonic Zionist narrative emphasized the need for “national discipline,” while the members of Brit-Shalom saw the violent outburst as cause for a reassessment of Zionist policies and cooperation with colonial authorities.⁴⁸ The Zionist leadership viewed these attitudes as betrayal, and censored them. According to Berl Katznelson, a Zionist leader and editor of *Davar*, the Yishuv was “struggling for its life,” and in such a state of emergency could not permit publication of such critique.⁴⁹

RB edited the issue of *She'ifotenu* published, following the censorship imposed by “national discipline,” eight months after the events of 1929. In his editorial, RB criticized the Zionist understanding of the events as an inevitable confrontation led by the Arabs:

There were times that they [the Arabs] reached out for peace and their hand was waving in the air. . . . Weizmann . . . who does not find his hands and legs regarding the Arab question . . . says that he won't negotiate with the Arabs unless they recognize our rights and stop the violence. . . . This is the situation, actually, when they are calm . . . we ignore them, look upon them, and swell as turkeys, and when they are awakened by natural, elementary feelings, we do the same thing again. This is not the way.⁵⁰

While the Zionist leadership understood the event as an outburst that should, through alliance with colonial power, be controlled and restrained, RB understood it as an issue requiring reflection. The political Zionist approach that preceded the events served as a basis for the Zionist denial of the Arabs and their national aspiration, and to this “swelling” of national pride, which saw the turn toward Arabs as a manifestation of exilic Judaism. The violent moment should have served, RB claimed, as evidence that this Zionist approach was in need of revision.

“From Basra to Jaffa”

The demand to stand against the British colonial regime and to break beyond the boundaries it set should be examined in relation to similar approaches that emerged during these years within the Palestinian national movement itself. The British administration used methods of ruling and supervision based on a “reliance on indigenous elites, and sometimes other social strata, to participate in structures of indirect rule.”⁵¹ In Mandate Palestine, this pattern appeared in the repackaging of the former institution of the Mufti of Jerusalem as the “Grand Mufti of Palestine,” and in appointing Hajj Amin al-Husayni to this newly powerful post. At the same time, the British refused to recognize the Arab Executive of the Palestine Arab Congress, a popularly established political body that demanded national rights for the Arab majority in Palestine, an agenda that challenged the ultimate authority of the British.⁵² By the early 1930s, the failure of either approach to yield results for Palestinian Arabs led to the emergence of political forces that did not stake their power on British recognition, but rather on an emerging educated and professional class, youth movements, and other bases of support within Palestinian society. The Istiqlal (Independence) party, established in 1932 and whose main seat of power was in Nablus (rather than Jerusalem, whose elite families dominated both the officially recognized leadership associated with the Supreme Muslim Council and its opposition,

al-mu'arida), was among the most evident manifestations of this trend, articulating a clear anticolonial platform.

The Istiqlal party's agenda of non-cooperation with the British authorities differed from that of RB and other members of Brit-Shalom. While the former were part of the majority group in the country whose national demands British authorities unequivocally and uniformly rejected, the latter were part of a national movement reliant, to a large extent, on the goodwill and cooperation of the colonial overlords. However, several points of overlap can be discerned between the two parties. Such a comparative synthesis could help achieve a better understanding of what standing against the British rule meant to different actors and how their respective positionalities affected their articulations of a non-colonial spatial imagination.

Weldon Matthews claims that Palestinian public figures associated with the Istiqlal party concentrated primarily on the issue of resisting cooperation between the Palestinian leadership and British rule. They considered the anti-imperial resistance led in India by the Indian Congress Party headed by Gandhi and in Egypt by the Wafd Party under the leadership of Sa'd Zaghlul to be powerful models of effective and popular struggle against British colonialism. The officially recognized Palestinian leadership, however, had proved unable to lead an oppositional, anti-cooperative movement à la Gandhi.⁵³ The Istiqlalists also rejected the geographically limited Palestinian framework championed by the official leadership, viewing acquiescence to a colonially-ordained brand of a local nationalism to be unacceptable cooperation with the British regime.⁵⁴

Hamdi al-Husayni, a scion of one of the most influential families in Gaza, was one of the major figures in the Istiqlal. As editor of *Sawt al-Haq* newspaper, Husayni publicly promoted the agenda of noncooperation. He was also a member of the Berlin-based League to Combat Imperialism, which supported various anticolonial liberation movements throughout the world. In 1929, Husayni was nominated to the position of the league's secretary for all the Arab lands.⁵⁵ In July 1929, a congress of the league was held in Frankfurt, where a resolution was adopted that, according to Moshe Belinson's description in *Davar*, called Zionism "a dangerous manifestation," one in league with "British imperialism against the Arab people, since the idea of a national home for the Jews is nothing but a pretext to bring the European worker to Palestine in order to create a workers' aristocracy against the exploited Arab worker."⁵⁶ Belinson's report described the congress as subordinate to the Soviet Union's political ambitions in the region, and described the league delegates' statements on the mandate system as "exaggerations."

Following the reports in *Davar*, the league's secretariat for the Arab lands, headed by Husayni, sent RB a manifesto in Hebrew. The manifesto attempted to clarify that the attitude of the league was "far removed from any religious or national chauvinism," and that its resolution derived from its unwavering commitment to ensure that the "elementary right" of self-determination be extended to "the populations of Palestine or Transjordan," a right unjustly denied by the British.⁵⁷ The league's objective was the "creation of an independent covenant of Arab Republics, which includes all of the

countries whose majorities are part of the Arab people . . . [and] the cancellation of all the mandates and guardianship of the imperialist kingdoms of these countries.” With regard to the Zionist movement, the manifesto read:

The reason for the struggle of the League and its Arab and Jewish members against Zionism is the fact that Zionism is an instrument for the cancellation of the just aspirations of the Arab masses for independence – as “the Balfour Declaration” is what the British Mandate relies on, it stands in contradiction to the realization of the right of “self-determination” by the land’s populations. The reason is also that Zionism does indeed enrich a small part of the natives of the land – the big landlords . . . [and] is diminishing and demolishing the place of the majority of the Arab natives of the land. . . . [T]he loathing and national hatred brought to the country by designating an already settled country by one people to the “national home” of another, without the permission of the country’s residents by foreign force, is disturbing the peace of the land and the stability of its development. Therefore, the League sees the struggle against Zionism as a struggle against imperialism, and recognizes the possibility of a covenant of all the Jewish and Arab masses, to which it aspires with all its might, rooted in this joint struggle. However, the League opposes the notion that the cancellation of “the Balfour Declaration” is possible while the Mandatory system and British imperialism remain installed in power. “Palestine to the Palestinians!” “The Arab countries – to the Arabs” are its slogans.⁵⁸

According to this manifesto, Zionism was little more than a clever instrument used by the callous British to drive a wedge between the Jewish and Arab national aspirations and thus ferment confrontation between them – in the hopes this would enable them to prolong, perhaps indefinitely, their ostensibly temporary mandate in Palestine. The struggle against Zionism was, therefore, a struggle against the “divide and rule” cynicism of the colonial regime. The manifesto, published after the violent confrontations of August 1929, also decried Husayni’s arrest after he “turned unequivocally and bravely against this incitement, and declared the need to mobilize to the struggle to the full independence of the land.”⁵⁹ Husayni saw the erupting confrontations between Jews and Arabs as a departure from the central objectives of the struggle, which was the eviction of the British colonial regime from Palestine.

The league’s choice to send RB the manifesto implies that he was considered a potential partner in resisting Zionist cooperation with the British Mandate and, more broadly, in the anti-colonial struggle. This expectation, however, suffered a setback in light of his correspondence, published in *Davar*. RB chose not to focus on the claims that Zionism was a colonial instrument nor on its call for the cancellation of the mandate system and the foundation of a general Arab covenant, but rather on the slogan that signed the end of the letter – “Palestine for the Palestinians.” This is

illustrative of the boundaries of RB's attitude, which fell short of a clear identification with the Palestinians in their struggle against the British. RB claimed that despite his basic approval of the slogan, he wished to challenge the understanding of the word "Palestinian" as one that is used only in relation to the Arabs that lived within the boundaries of Palestine, and called for it to be broadened to include Jews who did not reside in Palestine at the time:

The meaning of the slogan "Palestine for the Palestinians" could be understood in a broad, comprehensive, and detailed sense (and this understanding indeed faces us with hard questions that bother me and I am trying to find just solutions to them). But it might also be narrowly understood, like it is understood by the muftists [followers of Hajj Amin al-Husayni], who consider only the passport . . . the one who negates my right (and that of other Jews like myself) to a homeland in this Palestine, which to me is the Land of Israel, [and in doing so] are plotting to make us miserable, robbing us of a central term of our lives.⁶⁰

The manifesto had distinguished between Zionist aspirations and those of the natives of the land; it also presented a call for "a covenant of all the Jewish and Arab masses" in the struggle against imperialism. Considering this context, RB's choice to emphasize the Jews as an integral part of those who identify themselves as "Palestinians" is not so clear. It seems, however, that RB – who held a notion of Herzlian Zionism that saw its prime objective as promoting the migration of the Jewish masses eastward – wanted to emphasize the fact that these Jews as well, though only potentially "Palestinian," have a stake in the identity in question. RB focused on the question of what he saw as the Jews' "right to a homeland," and therefore on the question of the legitimacy of the continued migration of Jews to Palestine. He presented this question as one upon which his affiliation to the league hinged. He also admitted, parenthetically, to the "hard questions" that arise due to the broadly inclusive conceptualization he suggested to the term "Palestinian," and the need to solve them. This admission can be seen as acknowledging the claims raised in the manifesto – claims that RB himself asserted elsewhere more than once. He still insisted, however, that denial of "Palestinianness" to Jews was a death sentence to those millions of Jews rejected and expelled by Europe.

RB's contestation of the term "Palestinian" and his call that it be transformed to include Jews as well – whether or not these Jews would have understood themselves as such – also suggested a different possible identity to his readers. The definition of Jews as "Palestinians" equally challenged the pillars on which the Zionist Yishuv construed itself as a distinct national unit. RB was not alone among Zionists in seeking to adopt a Palestinianness that included Jews within it as a potential identity. Itamar Ben-Avi, a son of first Aliyah immigrants, saw it as a basis for a joint Jewish-Arab political framework, as opposed to the Zionist aspiration for "Jewish sovereignty," which he imagined, in contrast to RB, within the colonial boundaries of Palestine

– “this new state created by Balfour’s brilliance.”⁶¹ Efraim Hayyim Ben-Nahum, a companion of RB in Brit-Shalom and religious Zionist circles who was born in Kirkuk, Iraq, also used it as an alternative locus of national identification.⁶² Though differing in their political scopes, these various adoptions of “Palestinianness” as marking a local identification for Jews each challenged the hegemonic Zionist discourse.

Of course, initiatives to build a broad alliance between Jews and Arabs did not only exist on the fringes of Zionist thought. In an article published on June 1930, Muhammad Roshan Akhtar, a Muslim Indian and the editor of the English edition of the Palestinian newspaper *Filastin*, called for an establishment of an Arab federation, claiming Jews were an integral part of a political community spanning “from Basra to Jaffa.”⁶³ Akhtar rejected notions that the two peoples had conflicting interests and that the British regime could behave as an arbitrator. Akhtar, who, like RB, viewed Jews and Arabs as partners claimed that such a federation would also serve as a destination for Europe’s Jews, where they would be recognized as equal citizens. This article ended with the urgent words, “we are waiting for an answer.” RB responded enthusiastically, having “dedicated ten years of his literary activities for the promotion of this idea,” and considered Akhtar’s essay greatly important, anticipating that it would influence those “who are able to transcend the present moment and think of the past and the future.”⁶⁴

Several months later, Brit-Shalom invited Akhtar to speak to its members. Akhtar prefaced his talk by stating that he could not speak on behalf of the Arabs, nor even as a representative of *Filastin* – a newspaper that he insisted was a trusted representative of the Palestinian Arabs – but would instead speak as a Muslim Indian who “loves . . . the Arabs as any other of the Muslims of India.”⁶⁵ Akhtar described the arrival of the Jews in Palestine as embodying not “the spirit of the person who wanders and returns to his homeland,” but “the conquerer who has come to his conquered land.” He also discussed the Zionist movement’s limitation within the boundaries of Mandate Palestine as self-defeating, if its goal was first and foremost to rescue European Jews from persecutions and anti-Semitism:

Palestine in itself does not give you the area necessary to rescue [so many millions] from persecutions. Even the most exaggerated estimations will not reach the numbers you want. . . . Even had the Arabs not been here at all, you could not have settled here all the people who sought to escape from there. It is necessary, then, to find something larger than Palestine, that can support all these people you want to rescue from persecutions. . . . Therefore, you, Zionists, or let’s say the Jews of Palestine, made a fundamental mistake when you accepted upon yourselves the character of the Westerners, to live in the East.⁶⁶

Fulfillment of the Zionist program to rescue Jews necessitated a broader geographical region, one “larger than Palestine,” meaning that the Zionist spatial horizon must be extended eastward. This understanding required, according to Akhtar,

that the Zionist movement abandon the goal of founding an exclusively Jewish space within the area of biblical “Judea” – and its tragic enthrallment with European culture and power – and turn toward a different spatial unit, from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean, or “from Jaffa to Basra.” Akhtar juxtaposed the integration of the Jews into an Arab federation with the tendency of Western-sponsored political exclusivity and ascendancy encapsulated by the Balfour Declaration. The latter could only result in the creation of a segregated and isolated Jewish political entity in the limited space of Mandate Palestine, and therefore engender prolonged violent confrontations between Jews and Arabs.

Akhtar’s idea of Arab federation coincided with RB’s Herzlian Zionist model with regard to the necessity of forging a Jewish-Arab political partnership. In Brit-Shalom’s organ *She’ifotenu*, RB wrote of the “internal logic” of his and Akhtar’s vision. Akhtar’s talk, RB claimed, made it possible to demonstrate how the Zionist model derived from Herzl’s perception – and not that of Ahad Ha’am, who proposed creating a limited Jewish “spiritual center,” rather than a comprehensive political solution of the “Jewish question” – was indeed the one which presented a radical demand for making a political covenant between Jews and Arabs and for Zionist cooperation with the peoples of the East in their struggles. RB wrote:

The ones who think that only through the conception of Ahad Ha’am one can reach a theory of Brit-Shalom are mistaken. To the contrary. There is a place for the litigant to claim that, as a matter of fact, it might be possible that for a “spiritual center,” a mutual understanding with the East and the Arabs is not so necessary . . . but this is not the situation with a maximalist, Herzlian Zionism, interested in the migration of mass amounts . . . this is compelled to take into consideration specifically Arabia and the East . . .⁶⁷

While the minimalist Zionist approach, seeking to create a spiritual center within Mandate Palestine, would lead the movement toward segregation and isolation, the maximalist approach, by dint of the inability to resettle massive numbers of European Jews within these territorial limits, could not ignore the place to which it wishes to bring these Jews. RB, then, presented the fulfillment of the Herzlian Zionist vision not as the foundation of a distinct political entity where Jews will enjoy the privileges of a national majority, but rather as the identification of the large, heterogenous space where Zionist aspirations to rescue persecuted Jews could be fulfilled.

The editorial of the next issue of *She’ifotenu* discussed the Arab struggle against colonial powers and the position of the Zionist movement, which “in the war between the awakening Eastern world and Europe relies . . . on Europe.” The editorial proposed a “new orientation . . . of Zionist ideology”:

The objective is . . . the creation of a strong Jewish center in Palestine and the turning of the Jewish migration to the Near East, to the Arab lands,

and that the prerequisite for achieving this goal is the agreement of the Arab people. The achievement of this agreement, a new charter, a new “Balfour Declaration” from the Arab people by its leaders – will be the political goal of renewed Zionism.⁶⁸

This new declaration was supposed to be given by the Arabs in whose lands the Jews were to be absorbed – therefore, a totally different kind of declaration. If the original Balfour declaration was issued by an epitome of British colonial power, Lord Balfour, the proposed declaration would express the goodwill and the extended hand of thousands of Arabs.

In a following article, RB compared America and the East as migration destinations, and again criticized hegemonic Zionism’s scorn for viewing the space from Basra to Jaffa as a destination for migrating Jews. “Do we acknowledge the limited and narrow boundaries of the country [Palestine]?” he contended.⁶⁹ RB argued that the traditional Jewish spatial imagination, like the Arab spatial imagination, rejected the dissected geography imposed by colonial powers after World War I. Responding to claims that the East did not support the Zionist movement, RB turned the argument back on itself, ascribing this lack of support to Zionist policies: “The East is against you? As long as you rely on its enemies, its oppressors, the West, of course, it is.”⁷⁰ By relying on British authorities’ bayonets, Zionism blindly closed the gate on the possibility of fulfilling its own goals. “The required spaces are there, and there is an anchor for rescue,” RB proposed, but the Zionist movement shortsightedly preferred partnership with British colonial authorities over standing alongside the Arabs, a fateful choice that precluded Jewish emigration to the Arab countries.⁷¹

Epilogue: R. Binyamin and Adjacent Lands

RB’s views, shared by some other members of Brit-Shalom, identified ways in which Zionist goals could be integrated with Arab anti-colonial demands. Alongside the call to identify with this struggle, RB saw facilitating mass Jewish immigration to Palestine, and to the Arab lands in general, a central part of “ambitious” Zionism. His open letter to Hamdi al-Husayni also demonstrates the obstacles that he set for himself, placing perhaps unnecessary hurdles in the way of achieving the partnership he wished to promote. RB left Brit-Shalom at the end of 1931, seemingly in response to emerging orientations within Brit-Shalom that RB saw as limiting the radical Zionist demand for mass Jewish migration eastward. After he left Brit-Shalom, RB depicted himself as one who stood “alone inside Brit-Shalom as he was outside it.”⁷² RB’s “maximalist” approach – maximalist in both the scope of his spatial imagination and his advocacy for mass emigration – did not convince most of his companions in Brit-Shalom, especially students of Ahad Ha’am. They were oriented toward a different model of Jewish-Arab covenant, one based on the perception of the Zionist movement as a cultural-spiritual movement rather than one seeking to intervene in global demographics and politics.⁷³

RB rooted his rejection of the colonial geographies and his acceptance of expansive Arab spatial notions on theological grounds, according to which the Jewish existence in the lands adjacent to the Land of Israel is preferable to Jewish existence in Europe due to its proximity to the promised land, and thus should not be considered as an exilic existence. Jewish existence in the land, he claimed, was not dependent on their political status or the political framework to which they happened to belong. It was, rather, a “natural-religious-mystic-spiritual issue”: any Jew must “feel himself connected to the land with chains, connected in any thread of his life, in a way that his departure from the land will be considered as a departure from his life-home.”⁷⁴ This was a perception of Jewish existence in the Land of Israel as an existential demand that does not depend on shifting political sands, but is manifested in the Jewish orientation toward the land as the center, and seeing adjacent lands as manifestations of the same orientation and thus as a broader possibility of a Jewish existence in Palestine/Eretz Israel:

The pedigree of the adjacent lands is firstly in that they are “adjacent,” that they are . . . “connected to the land as to a national geographic center.” In that they enable the daily spiritual interaction with the internal life of the people of Israel in the Land of Israel. You can read the country’s newspaper on the same day or on the day after. You can visit the land in every pilgrimage festival [*regel*] . . . He who can settle in the land must settle in the land, he who cannot but can settle in one of the adjacent lands must prefer the adjacent lands over distant lands . . . the real meaning of a disrespectful and scornful relation to the adjacent lands is a relation of scattering, while a positive approach toward these lands can serve as a basis of centralization, a relation of aspiration from the distance of exile to the center.⁷⁵

While making this theological claim in favor of the adjacent lands, RB again evoked Akhtar’s phrase – “from Basra to Jaffa.” Doing so reminds us that RB connected his understanding of the theological concept of Eretz Israel to various Arab and Islamic spatial imaginations, and to Palestine’s place within them. His critique of Zionist concentration within Palestine as an attempt to create a distinctive, separate, sovereign, and pure national political entity went together with his concept of maximalist Zionism and his call for identification with the anti-colonial Arab struggle. The latter was connected to the acceptance of the Arab demand to reunify the space dissected by the colonial boundaries, which was also manifested in RB’s theological understanding of Eretz Israel as a center, and his positive regard of Jewish existence in the adjacent lands. The hegemonic Zionist spatial imagination, however, was already concentrated in a different understanding of the place, its Western-oriented gaze served as the basis for a colonized and secularized notion of Eretz Israel, inseparable from the mandate’s spatial imagination.

RB maintained this critical approach toward hegemonic Zionism following the

Palestinian Nakba and the foundation of the state of Israel in 1948. He created the journal *Ner* (candle, in Hebrew) as a stage for demanding the return of the Palestinian refugees. RB depicted his vision of the Palestinian refugees' return as the "great messianic idea," contrasted with the false messianic notion of national independence.⁷⁶ He saw the secularization of the messianic idea – manifested in the creation of the Jewish nation-state, ethnically homogenous and spatially, culturally, and linguistically distinct from the whole region of the Middle East – simply as idolatry. He saw the desacralization of the idea of the secular nation-state as a necessary shift toward a different possibility of an alternative collective Jewish existence in Palestine that would promote the return of the refugees. The desacralization of secular nationalism was, ultimately, for RB, for "Min," the heretic, the basis for the possibility of binationalism.

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Endnotes

- 1 The term used in Zionist writing to describe the Jewish community residing in Palestine before 1948.
- 2 Min, "Kol Mehatzetzim", *Haaretz*, 9 July 1925, 2.
- 3 See Michelle U. Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011); Abigail Jacobson, *From Empire to Empire: Jerusalem between Ottoman and British Rule* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2011), 31–40, 53–60; Menachem Klein, *Lives in Common: Arabs and Jews in Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Hebron* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); and Hillel Cohen, "The Life and Death of the Arab-Jew: Eretz Israel–Palestine and Beyond," in *Homelands in Exile: Otherness and Belonging in the Jewish Diaspora*, ed. Ofer Shiff (Beersheba: Ben-Gurion Research Institute, 2015), 171–200.
- 4 See Yfaat Weiss, "Central European Ethnonationalism and Zionist Binationalism," *Jewish Social Studies* 11, no. 1 (2004): 105–111; Derek J. Penslar, *Zionism and Technocracy: The Engineering of Jewish Settlement in Palestine, 1870–1918* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), 80–102; Etan Bloom, "Arthur Ruppin and the Production of Modern Hebrew Culture" (PhD diss., Tel Aviv University, 2008), 1–26; and Gershon Shafir, "The Meeting of Eastern Europe and Yemen: 'Idealistic Workers' and 'Natural Workers' in Early Zionist Settlement in Palestine," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 13, no. 2 (1990): 172–197.
- 5 Avi-ram Tzoreff, "'An Imagined Desert That Is Indeed the Core of the Yishuv': R. Binyamin and the Emergence of Zionist Settler-Colonial Policies (1908–14)," *Simon Dubnow Institut Jahrbuch* (forthcoming).
- 6 Rashid Khalidi claimed that the Palestinians were situated during the mandate period within a constitutional "iron cage" that prevented them from any of the characteristics of a political status, while at the same time ensuring that status for Jews or, more accurately, for the Zionist movement. Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007).
- 7 H.B., "Darkey Shalom," *Davar*, 23 June 1925, 2.
- 8 Min, "Kol Mehatzetzim", *Haaretz*, 9 July 1925, 2.
- 9 See Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "Ben brit shalom u-beit ha-mikdash: ha-dialektika shel ge'ula u-meshihiyut be-ikvot Gershom Scholem" [Between Brit-Shalom and the Temple: The Dialectics of Redemption and Messianism

- following Gershom Scholem], *Te'oria U-bikoret* 20 (2002): 105–7; and Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, *Exile and Binationalism: From Gershom Scholem and Hannah Arendt to Edward Said and Mahmoud Darwish* (Berlin: EUME, 2012), 88–109.
- 10 Zohar Maor, “Ben anti-colonialism ve-post-colonialism: bikoret ha-le’umiyut vehahilun bebrit shalom” [Between Anti-colonialism and Post-colonialism: The Critique of Nationalism and Secularism of Brit-Shalom], *Te'oria U-bikoret* 30 (2007): 13–38.
 - 11 Maor, “Between Anti-colonialism,” 30 n27.
 - 12 Hanan Harif has underscored the role of pan-Semitism in the writings of RB, and discussed the importance other contemporary “pan-” movements had in its formulation. See Hanan Harif, *Anashim ahim anahnu: ha-pniya mizraha bahagut hatziyonit* [For We Be Brethren: The Turn to the East in Zionist Thought] (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 2019), 95–210.
 - 13 Abigail Jacobson and Moshe Naor, *Oriental Neighbors: Middle Eastern Jews and Arabs in Mandatory Palestine* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2016), 16–120.
 - 14 R. Binyamin. “Mizrah U-ma’arav” [East and West] *Ha-tekufa* 21 (1923): 443.
 - 15 R. Binyamin, “Arav: Michtav me-eretz Yisrael” [Arabia: A Letter from Eretz-Yisrael], *Hed Lita* 37, no. 12 (20 July 1925): 2–3. In this article, RB recounted a number of conversations he had with Professor Josef Horovitz (1874–1931). Horovitz was a renowned Orientalist who, alongside holding a chair in the University of Frankfurt, also taught at the Muhammedan Anglo-Oriental College in Aligarh, India, between 1905 and 1917. RB’s meetings with him took place during Horovitz’s stay in Palestine for the purpose of the foundation of the Hebrew University, where he was later nominated to head the Institute for Oriental Studies. RB later described these conversations as one of the crucial moments to the foundation of Brit-Shalom. See R.B., “Mize u-mize: al tasbich ehad” [From This and From That: On One Complexity], *Bamishor* 136, 13 (November 1942): 3. On Josef Horovitz and the connections between the years he spent in Aligarh and his attitude toward the question of Jewish-Arab relations in Palestine, see Ruchama Johnston-Bloom, “‘Dieses Wirklich Westostlichen Mannes’: The German-Jewish Orientalist Josef Horovitz in Germany, India, and Palestine,” in *The Muslim Reception of European Orientalism: Reversing the Gaze*, ed. Susannah Heschel and Umar Ryad (New York: Routledge, 2019), 168–83.
 - 16 Binyamin, “Arav.”
 - 17 Binyamin, “Arav.”
 - 18 Binyamin, “Arav.”
 - 19 On Shehadeh, see Michael R. Fischbach, “Shehadeh (Family)” in *Encyclopedia of the Palestinians*, ed. Philip Mattar (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2005), 444. On *Mir’at al-Sharq*, see Zachary J. Foster, “Arabness, Turkey, and the Palestinian National Imagination in the Eyes of *Mir’at al-Sharq* (1919–26),” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 42 (2010): 61–79.
 - 20 Ya’akov Ro’i, “Nisyonotem shel hamosadot hatziyoni’im le-hashpia al ha-itonut ha-aravit be-eretz Yisrael bashanim 1908–1914” [Zionist Endeavours to Influence the Arab Press in Palestine, 1908–1914], *Zion* 32, no. 3–4 (1967): 213–25.
 - 21 R. Binyamin, “Be-ritmat h-ahava” [With a Harness of Love] *Ner* 4, no. 12 (1953): 7.
 - 22 R. Binyamin, “Bereshit” [Genesis] in *Benta'im: kovetz safruti* [Meanwhile: A Literary Collection], ed. R. Binyamin (Jaffa, 1912), 100–1.
 - 23 Ami Ayalon, *The Press in the Arab Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 50–72; Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 119–22; Emanuel Beška, “Responses of Prominent Arabs towards Zionist Aspirations and Colonization Prior to 1908,” *Asian and African Studies* 16 (2007): 22–44; Emanuel Beška, “Political Opposition to Zionism in Palestine and Greater Syria: 1910–1911 as a Turning Point,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 59 (2014): 54–67.
 - 24 Emanuel Beška, “*Filastin’s* Changing Attitude toward Zionism before World War I,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 72 (2017): 86–101; Samuel Dolbee and Shay Hazkani, “Unlikely Identities: Abu Ibrahim and the Politics of Possibility in Late Ottoman Palestine,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 63–64 (2015): 24–39.
 - 25 Foster, “Arabness,” 63–64.
 - 26 As Eli Osheroff argues, Palestinian resistance to Zionism in this period was characterized by a new understanding of Jewish nationalism as an imperial tool. Eli Osheroff, “Balfour pinat Ahad Ha’am: Tziyounut, le’umiyut ve-imperialism ba-mahshava hafalestinit

- ha-mukdemet” [On the Corner of Balfour and Ahad Ha’am: Zionism, Nationality and Imperialism in Early Palestinian Thought] *Te’oria u-bikoret* 49 (2017): 211–12.
- 27 Michael Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 1–26.
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- 38 R.B., “Misaviv la-nekuda (sirtutim)” [Around the Dot (drafts)] *She’ifotenu*, 1 February 1928, 22.
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- 40 Moshe Behar pointed to the problems that are found in historiographic writing of Jewish-Arab relations that is based on the acceptance of the “mandated imagination” that created mandated Palestine and its colonial boundaries as an axiom of the discussion. The limitation of the spatial and historic discussions prevents, Behar claims, the possibilities to identify the processes in which the Zionist movement and later also the national Arab movements imposed the crystallization of a discourse that was based on the principle of partition, as was clearly manifested in the decision of the Peel committee. Moshe Behar, “One-State, Two-States, Bi-National State: Mandated Imaginations in a Regional Void,” *Middle East Studies Online Journal* 5, no. 2 (2011): 97–136.
- 41 Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State*, trans. Sylvie D’avigdor (New York: Dover Publications, 1989), 13.
- 42 R.B., “Misaviv la-nekuda,” 24–26.
- 43 Avraham Elmaleh, “Be-sodam al tavo nafshenu (al ha-bhirot la-mo’atza hamahokeket)” [Let not Our souls be Included in Their Council (On the Elections to the Legislative Council)], *Do’ar Hayom*, 17 July 1928, 1. On Elmaleh and the Magen, see: Jacobson, *From Empire to Empire*, 106–7; and Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, 163–65.
- 44 Elmaleh wrote, for instance, that “thank god, we are not living under the mouth of Musa Kazim . . . because they are not the rulers of the country and not its higher authority . . . the years in which one could talk in the tone of a commanding ruler had passed, and, it is our pleasure, won’t return.” Avraham Elmaleh, “Parashat ha-yom: al siha ahav,” [The Matter of the Day: On One Conversation], *Do’ar Hayom*, 1 August 1928, 1.
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