

Colonizing Palestine

The Confluence of two Opposing Trends of a Western Question

ABSTRACT This study compiles historical information to highlight the role played by both East and West European countries in the creation of Israel since before World War I. East European countries, especially Russia, Poland, and Romania, were as effective in this regard as the West Europeans. While racial policies were paramount in East Europe, including Germany, religious and strategic policies were as effective in the West, especially in Britain. Two points can be redrawn in this regard: That the question of Palestine was a Western question on both sides of the continent; it had nothing to do with the Eastern question that engulfed the Ottoman Empire before and during World War I. Additionally while World War II did not start the process of creating Israel, it accelerated it since the United States became an active supporter of the Zionist project. The second conclusion explains why all major powers give so much latitude to Israel, regardless of its constant neglect of international law to this very day. **KEYWORDS** Zionism, Palestine, Russia, anti-Semitism, British policy in Palestine, Templars, Polish Zionists, Protestantism, Capitulations

INTRODUCTION

the twentieth century is the child of the nineteenth, and if England in the twentieth century undertook the restoration of Israel to Palestine, it is because the nineteenth was by and large religiously [and colonially] motivated [. . .]. (Tuchman 2001, 181)

Although this study brings together sundry information about the rise of Zionism in different parts of the world, its major purpose lies elsewhere. It is rather to show that the question of Palestine was largely a Western, not mainly part of the well-known Eastern, question in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was the product of two opposing trends: one in Eastern European countries where the Jewish communities were looked down upon; another in Western Europe and the United States where their

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image developed slowly to become representative of fundamentalist Christianity. It is necessary to address the long overdue importance of the East European factor in the success of Zionism. Another main purpose is to show how those different and opposing Western religio-political trends contributed to the success of Zionism. Up to this day, Israeli practices, whether political or military, regardless of their respect or disrespect for international law, can be executed with impunity because of the support of the Great Powers of the world. This study, which is akin to a review article that surveys the position of Western powers, may indirectly contribute to our understanding of the modern Zionist–Western connection.

The late Professor Alexander Schölch observed: “The Eastern question in the nineteenth century revolved around the question of how much of the Ottoman Empire had to be preserved to protect the interests of the European Powers. Palestine belonged to the core of the empire. European penetration, therefore, was not a matter of territorial control, but of influence through religio-cultural penetration and by means of a ‘religious protectorate’” (Schölch 1993, 49–50). While agreeing with him in all cases other than that of the British, I also disagree with his using the term “Eastern Question” as mentioned above. This study will show other aspects of the particular question at hand because, beginning with the nineteenth century, there were five major and general factors that caused different Western Powers to be interested in Palestine: (1) anti-Jewish ideology and practices in Russian and East European societies and states; (2, 3) the opposite pro-Jewish religious trend and ideology in Western Europe combined with the cultural–religious policies of Germany and France; (4) the blending of strategic and religious factors in British policy and its implicit calculation that Jewish immigration to Palestine could be a useful tool of the British colonial enterprise; and (5) the inability of the Ottoman Empire to exercise full sovereignty over Palestine and other Ottoman lands in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The question of Palestine as a Western Question represented the failure of Western societies to assimilate their Jewish minorities and turn them into full citizens in the nations where they lived, especially in Eastern Europe. It is this failure that pushed some European states to encourage its Jewish population to emigrate from Europe and gave other states the incentive to use their Jewish minorities as foot-soldiers for their colonial enterprises in the Arab world. This is not to say that the Zionist movement itself did not have its own nationalist motives as it interpreted them. But what prompted this line

of thought was clearly embedded in the religio-racist policies prevalent in Europe from Austria in the west to Russia in the east.

Obviously, there were numerous trends in all the countries I am going to touch upon and there was no absolute consistency throughout the period to be examined. Thus, a measure of generalization is in order, since while attention to detail is usually appreciated, one can get lost in the detail in a short study such as this.

If we take the first factor, the anti-Jewish case, or the Russian example, where the Jewish minority was persecuted, the Jews totaled about 5 million. At the beginning of 1880, only 300,000 resided close to the so-called secure “pale of settlement” (*tcherta osedlosti*). Notably, under Nicholas I (r. 1825–55), the government rescinded the laws exempting Jewish males from serving in the army, and required Jewish communities to select and present a stipulated number of males in every draft levy for a twenty-five-year military service. More seriously, however, in 1891, 20,000 Jews were expelled from Moscow and 2000 from St Petersburg.

Additionally, under Nicholas I, conversions to Christianity were seldom spontaneous, and there were forced baptisms. Peasants and the government treated Jews, to a certain extent, as parasites. The end of the nineteenth century witnessed riots in Odessa between Greeks and Jews, and the multiplication of pogroms in Ukraine and Bessarabia. Anti-Semitic literature continued to be spread abundantly with the consent of the ecclesiastical authorities. Most notorious were the trials where Jews were accused of ritual murders to drain blood for the baking of matza (Mayer *et al.* 1995).¹

Leaders of the Hovevi Zion movement called for migration to Palestine both to find refuge and to revive Jewish culture devoid of a political goal (Mandaville 2010).² In 1882–83, during and after the Russian and Polish pogroms, about 30,000 Jews, mostly from Russia, landed in Palestine in an immigration wave known as *aliya* (ascent), but “their survival largely depended on financial support provided by wealthy Jewish patrons in Western Europe, such as Baron Edmond de Rothschild” (Chaichian 2014, 251).

FROM INFERIORITY TO SUPERIORITY

This persecuted minority in Russia and other Eastern European countries, which had an “inferior” status there and were encouraged to emigrate,

1. For anti-Semitic literature in the Russian Imperial Army, see Petrovsky-Shtern (2002).

2. For some differences in the approach of Eastern and Western Zionists, see Tsurumi (2008).

enjoyed a “superior” and privileged status the minute it set foot in Palestine because of the system of capitulations that provided rights of extra-territoriality for Western citizens in the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, Lawrence Oliphant observed during a visit to the Holy land in 1882–85: “Curiously enough, the Russian policy on this interesting question [Jewish immigration to Palestine] appears to be undergoing a change. The Russian government seems disposed to espouse in Turkey the cause of the race which it oppresses so unmercifully at home” (Oliphant 1976, 60). More pointedly, in 1881–82, Hibat, or the Hovevey Tziyon Russian Jewish Movement, was formed as a reaction to the anti-Jewish pogroms taking place in Russia. This was a development that prompted a new wave of emigration to Palestine. When the Ottoman government prohibited such immigration, the Russian ambassador in Istanbul was the first to protest to the authorities. In 1882, “Giers, the Russian Foreign Minister, was reported to have assured a Hovevey Tzion leader of his interest and support” (Friedman 1986, 286). So important was the question of the capitulations in the Ottoman Empire that it may be true, as the Turkish writer and intellectual, Halidé Edib, said after World War I: “There is not the slightest doubt that, had the Allies consented to modify the supreme symbol of Turkish humiliation, the capitulations, twenty Enver Pashas would not have sufficed to drag Turkey into the general lunacy of the war” (Howard 1931, 138).

The system of capitulations practically exempted foreign Europeans, whether Christians or Jews, from taxation and Ottoman law, and bestowed on them and their protégés tremendous privileges (Anderson 1966, xii). No wonder, then, that the Ottomans suspected that the European governments were deliberately inducing the Jews to emigrate to Palestine to prepare the ground for annexing it (Friedman 1986, 286).

As for the second and third factors, or the pro-Jewish factor in Western Europe and the cultural–religious policies of Germany and France (that were not anti-Jewish by any means) in the nineteenth century, one can point out that many European powers were intent on building up and expanding their presence in Palestine through religious–cultural penetration. This included protection of religious immigrant minorities (Schölch 1993, 48). German Evangelical Templars³ were among the first Europeans to establish colonies there, but without having a political program in mind. A consular telegram dispatched in 1880 reported that: “The German American [*sic*] Colony at

3. For a short piece on the Templars, see Carmel (1975).

Haifa is still struggling for existence. It is composed of about 200 colonists. They are very good and industrious people. [...] They have good clean houses[,] streets, carefully cultivated fields and vineyards, good schools, one a boarding school for girls.”⁴ The Templars, on the one hand, and the local Palestinian Muslim and Christian Arabs, on the other, developed mutual hatreds and attitudes of disrespect from the beginning of the Templar’s colonial activities in 1858. The Templars did not differentiate between local Muslim and Christian Arabs and felt that all were their inferiors (Carmel 1975). Moreover, this colonial activity did not have a benign effect on Palestinian society itself. On 3 July 1880, for example, the British Acting Consul in Beirut, John Dickson, reported disturbances that took place in Haifa between Christians and Muslims. The Muslims, in turn, did not differentiate between local and foreign Christians. The reasons for this need further investigation. Dickson reported that: “[t]he cause of this disturbance appears to be a feeling of jealousy on the part of the Moslem inhabitants at the prosperous and peaceable condition of the Christians, and especially of the German Colony, which has been established at Caiffa [*sic*] for some years, and exhibits a marked contrast to the wretched state of the Moslem inhabitants. This feeling seems at last to have displayed itself in an outbreak of Moslem fanaticism.”⁵ At the end of his dispatch and in line with what had become conventional behavior of the British colonial policy of the time, the acting consul informed his superior of the action he had actually taken: “I trust that your Excellency will approve my proceeding in having sent a ship of war to the scene of the disturbance.”⁶

Although the Templars failed in their overall efforts regarding religious colonization, later in the nineteenth century (Carmel 1975) the German state and German orientalist acquiesced, instead, with Jewish colonization that they thought would spread German culture in the Holy Land. The Germans held a notion, not very dissimilar to the French mission of *civilisatrice*, that they had been entrusted with a special mission to bring *kultur* to the unenlightened Asians (Marchand 2003, 191). At the end of the nineteenth century, German language and influence was greater than that of any other

4. “Annual Commercial Report for the year ending Sep[tember] 30th 1880.” From American Consul Elgar (Beirut) to Charles Payson, Third Assistant Secretary of State (Washington, DC), Beirut, October 15, 1880, T-367, vol. 14, no. 190.

5. FO 195/1306/48. From Acting Consul John Dickson (Beyrout to George Goshen, M. P. Constantinople.

6. *Ibid.*

European power. This development occurred not only through German settlements but also through Jewish settlements. In the latter case, Hans Rhode maintained that: “in addition to the German settlements, Jewish settlement in Palestine was able to advance German language and culture, and should be granted appropriate attention. Germany’s ties with Zionism, he added, are for Germany’s benefit” (Eliav 1975, 439). Martin Hartmann, a German journalist–orientalist, who visited Palestine, at the time, wrote from Haifa in 1913:

Germanness moves in the Orient in its quiet silent way; it neither pretends to have a monopoly on the education and the instruction of the oriental people, nor does it want to create conditions which could serve in the carrying out of chauvinistic plans. When people have said: from Belgrade up to Baghdad the Jews are a bridge for German language and German culture, maybe that is somewhat too farfetched. But the large Jewish movement, which has established itself in Palestine, could very well create material, which works in every sense. We may trust the leading men that besides the Jewish national endeavors in Palestine—which for them are their priority—the German concerns will be promoted. The government of the Empire and the German public will have an eye *Delete Note* on the activities of the institutions which according to their management and the teachers working there will have German character. (Hartmann 1913, 7)

During World War I, “Germany exempted the German Zionist representatives in Berlin, Istanbul and Jaffa from military service; non-German Zionists, including Russian Zionists, enjoyed German support in Europe and in the Ottoman Empire” (Kieser 2018, 310).

FROM NATION TO RELIGION

The French case was somewhat similar to the German one up to World War II, but the Jewish component was not as significant there as it was in Germany.

The French Revolution of 1789 made a shift in the status of Judaism from “a nation” to a “religion.” The happy ending of the Dreyfus Affair came to strengthen the Jewish community in its rejection of Herzl’s speech on the failure of emancipation, and led it to refuse the calls that recommended its members to leave. A French paper noted in 1906 that “the Dreyfus Affair and its solution have destroyed anti-Semitism in France” (Polonsky 1997, 21). However, the Dreyfus Affair convinced the Austrian journalist,

Theodore Herzl, and a few Jewish French intellectuals, such as Bernard Lazare, in the 1890s, that the solution for the Jewish problem resided in Zionism. Since 1896, Lazare was friends with Herzl, and he adhered to Zionism and became a member of the Zionist Action Committee. Yet, taken in its totality, although Zionism managed to settle in France, it remained foreign to both community leaders and for the mass of Jews (Brownfield 2006, 62–63). For the overwhelming majority, the issue of a Jewish state still had no sense. Assimilation, uninterrupted since the revolution, continued to be strong in spite and because of the Dreyfus Affair, not only among the Jews of old French descent but also among the Jews of Yiddish culture, who continued to arrive regularly from Eastern Europe (Kassir and Mardam-Bey 1992, 29).

French Catholics, like the Protestant German Templars and the German authorities, did not return to the ideas of launching another religio-political crusade along medieval lines, but adopted the idea of a “Peaceful Crusade” in the Holy Land, stressing the need to fortify the protection of the Christian minorities there and hoping to slowly blend its interests, as a state, with the interests of the Catholic Church (Schölch 1993, 66–70). However, although some Catholic colonization projects were planned, no Catholic immigration movement of any importance came to fruition in Palestine in the nineteenth century. Because of this, Gershon Greenberg’s assessment is confined to America and should not be taken into consideration in France. Greenberg states that: “Catholic concern for political aspects of the Holy Land during the twentieth century reverberated with nineteenth-century theological motifs: protection of holy places; antipathy for the Jews, whose ancestors murdered Jesus; and belief in Palestine as Christ Land, never to be controlled by Muslim or Jew” (Greenberg 1994, 426–27).

As a religious–cultural project, the immigration of Jews to Palestine did not preclude the cooperation of two or more European powers. This was evident in 1841, when Protestant Prussia and Anglican Britain joined hands and jointly financed a bishopric in Jerusalem. It was administered by a bishop alternatively appointed by the British and Prussian governments who was subordinate to the Archbishop of Canterbury. This arrangement, however, was nullified in the 1880s, when the bishopric became exclusively Anglican (Eliav 1975, 426–27). The distinction between the German and the French approaches, on the one hand, and the British one, on the other, was that the former concentrated on gradually disassociating themselves from political Zionism, although still providing educational and humanitarian assistance

to the Jewish presence in Palestine, while the latter identified itself more and more with political Zionism (440–41).

POLITICAL ZIONISM

The fourth factor is the most important and instrumental case in bringing political Zionism to triumph is that of Great Britain. Note that the perception of the Jew had been clearly negative in William Shakespeare's England of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As Peter Holland maintains: "[...] Jews were, by definition, a group representing that was not English, the difficulty of excluding them and the difficulty of recognizing them drew attention to the limitations of the concept of Englishness against which the concept of Jews was counterposed" (Holland 1997, 53).

In 1655, there was much debate about readmitting the Jews into England and the necessary step of converting Jews to Anglican Christianity.⁷ This debate: "made some people fear that there would be a large influx of Jews and that, while there might be an opportunity to convert Jews into Christians, there was also a risk that the result would be that Christians became Jews. As Ralph Josselin, the vicar of an Essex parish, noted in his diary: 'The Lord hasten their conversion and keep us from turning aside from Christ to Moses, of whom I am very heartily afraid'" (Holland 1997, 51–52).

However, this situation gradually changed. A major component of the British interest in Palestine was rooted in Britain's intellectual history. Although the roots of Christian Zionism in America and other European Protestant countries goes back most probably to the second half of the seventeenth century, it became prevalent among spiritually minded and enthusiastic Protestants in the nineteenth century (Schoeni 2005).⁸ Additionally, at that point, the concept of the "restoration of the Jews" was developed by Anglican messianism and evangelism (Schölch 1993, 61).⁹ Between 1832 and 1847, Benjamin Disraeli (1804–81), the Jewish British Conservative politician and Prime Minister, "constructed and accomplished a theory of races in which the Jews occupy the most prominent place" (Rāhib 1985, 46). However, other British politicians were only conscious of their

7. For this point, see Katz (1982).

8. For the similar survey about the same phenomenon in America, see Greenberg (1994).

9. The early and comprehensive study on the subject is Sharif (1983). For a critique of the Zionist basic assumption regarding the re-establishment of the Jews in Palestine, see Guillaume (1954).

country's strategic interests and openly expressed that the Eastern European Jews should not enter England. Joseph Chamberlain, Colonial Secretary (1895–1903), “was very much in favour of restricting Jewish immigration created by the pogroms in Eastern Europe. His major fear was that of cheap labour competition and other social problems created by the huge number of Jews immigrating” (Sharif 1976, 136). Arthur Balfour, then Prime Minister (1902–05), “introduced and fought for the passage of the Alien Bill which restricted Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe to England, because of the ‘undoubted evils that had fallen upon the country from an immigration which was largely Jewish’” (140).

As for colonial and strategic British interests, in 1840, Lord Henry Palmerston (1784–1865), the famous British Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, “preferred a weak Ottoman Empire to a strong Egypt” (Biger 2004, 24) and shared a naval military operation with Russians, Austrians, and Ottomans to oust the ruler of Egypt, Muhammad ‘Ali Pasha, from geographical Syria (24). Also, under the influence of Lord Shaftesbury (1801–85),¹⁰ who was an ardent believer in the restoration of the Jews to Palestine for political and religious reasons, Prime Minister Palmerston: “tried to win the [Ottoman] sultan over to the idea of a ‘return’ of the Jews, arguing that they should be encouraged to settle in Palestine. On the one hand, the sultan and the empire would profit from the riches that ‘a great number of wealthy capitalists’ would give to Palestine. On the other hand, the Jews there would form a barrier against any future ambitions of Muhammad ‘Ali” (Schölch 1993, 54). This blending of British strategic interests and the goal of the restoration of the Jews kept rearing its head in the days of the crisis of 1881–82 and the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, as well as later during World War I (54).

Outspoken Zionist leaders and ideologues were ready to agree and emphasize this dual goal of establishing a national homeland for the Jews in Palestine and serving British colonial interests. This was best expressed later by Max Nordau when he addressed a meeting of the Poale Zion, the Zionist Labor Party. Two of his statements are noteworthy: “To the believing Englishman, Zionism meant the return of the Chosen People to the Promised Land, that is to say, the fulfillment of one of the most striking prophecies of the Holy Writ, awakening the deepest religious emotions” (Nordau and Nordau 1943, 283). And:

10. For a lengthy biography on Shaftesbury, see Hodder (1887).

England could not afford to allow her situation at the Suez Canal to be imperilled. She was strong enough to hold her own. Still, she should not disdain having a trustee there, and if Great Britain would allow it, a sufficiently strong watch. The Jews desired nothing better than to be her sentries on the long and dangerous road through the Near and Middle East up to the frontiers of India. The only thing that they begged of her was that she might allow them to become as strong as they could be, for themselves in the first place [...] they too are politicians [...] but ultimately strong for her [Great Britain] [...]. (284)

In a sense the Balfour Declaration in 1917 was not the starting point for the Zionist project in Palestine, but almost the end result of all the active support it had received for a long time (Crome 2018, 265). Nevertheless, in 1897, and for years after, Herzl's idea generated intense zeal among certain Jews, but they were a fairly small minority. Many Jews rejected Zionism actively or passively. Orthodox rabbis were almost unanimously hostile about the "strangers" who had "arisen among us," as one rabbi put it, teaching that "the people of Israel should be clothed in secular nationalism, a nation like other nations. [...] May the Lord rebuke these evil men and may He who chooseth Jerusalem seal their mouths" (Wheatcroft 1997, 15).

With the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 and the end of World War I, British strategic interests gained precedence over the restoration factor. Interestingly, "at the time [Winston] Churchill believed that Communism and the Russian Revolution were of Jewish inspiration, even giving credence (as did *The London Times*) to the Protocols of Zion forgery. While Churchill was bitterly hostile to revolutionary Jews, however, he was at the same time a staunch supporter of Zionism, which he regarded as a valuable client and ally of British imperialism in the Middle East" (Newsinger 1995, 59–60). Lord Arthur Balfour himself, whose name is supremely associated with the Zionist cause, said, on the eve of his retirement as Foreign Secretary, in August 1919: "so far as Palestine is concerned, the Powers have made no statement of fact which is not admittedly wrong, and no declaration of policy which, at least in the letter, they have not always intended to violate" (Hurwitz 1989, vii).

The last word in this matter should go to Knox (1981), who perceives a transformation in the nature of the "Eastern Question" from the whole defunct Ottoman Empire to the more focused "Question of Palestine" at the end of World War I. He advances the thesis that British policy was very clear from the start: it centered on the creation of a Jewish state as a defender of

the route to India. It sidestepped the objections of some British officials in Cairo, Jerusalem, and London and insisted on this as its upper strategy. Knox rejects the arguments that British policy in this regard was hesitant towards or reconciliatory between Arabs and Jews. This can be considered as a plausible assessment proved by the insistence of London on appointing Sir Herbert Samuel (1870–1963), a Jewish Zionist, as the first High Commissioner in Palestine immediately after the war.

The fifth factor that centered on the feebleness of the Ottoman Empire can be discussed as follows:

Local Sephardic Jews enjoyed generally good relations with the Ottoman authorities and the local Arab population in Palestine. Although they were not generally active in the Zionist movement at the start, they were not averse to the European Jewish colonization of Palestine (see the Appendix).

The Ashkenazi Jews who were immigrating to Palestine were considered Europeans and citizens of European countries. Numerous studies are concerned with the failure of the Ottoman authorities to stop different waves of Jewish immigration and the buying of land in Palestine under both the reign of Sultan ‘Abdulhamid II (r. 1876–1908) and the Young Turks (1908–18) (e.g., Mandel 1974; Landau 1993). In both periods, the overriding reason behind this failure was the system of capitulations that European citizens and the protégés of Western consulates enjoyed in the Ottoman Empire. A European citizen in Ottoman lands was practically untouchable from a legal point of view. The corruption of Ottoman officials also played a role. Ironically, although Turkish Jews remained committed to the policy of centralization and Ottomanism, and remained loyal to the empire after the Balkan wars in 1912–13 (Ahmad 2002, 227), the Western Powers did not cease pressuring Istanbul to allow more Jewish emigration to Palestine from outside Ottoman lands. At the same time, before World War I, the ruling Turkish leaders of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) “observed and recognized that the Zionist colonies were a factor contributing to the development of Palestine and hence to the increase in tax revenues” (Ortayli 1994). One CUP leader, Dr. Nazim, welcomed, in early 1909, “the immigration of millions of European Jews though only a fraction of them to Palestine, because, if too concentrated there they would constitute ‘a danger’ for the Ottoman government” (Kieser 2018, 303). At the beginning of the war, any Turkish restrictions to Zionist immigration were lifted on condition that the Jewish settlers become Ottoman subjects (Ortayli 1994, 535), a condition that, of course, was never met.

The last Egyptian Khedive, 'Abbas Hilmi II (1874–1944), was made to understand, no doubt by British officials in Cairo, that his help and assistance (whether financial or political—it was unclear), would apparently be solicited for the establishment of a Jewish entity in Palestine. This information, related by the US envoy, William Yale, seems to confirm the unpublished statement made by General Gilbert Clayton, Director of British Intelligence in Egypt during the war, to the Syrian (National) Committee in Cairo, after the war that “previous to the war, the Young Turks had agreed to give the Zionists a free hand in Palestine.”¹¹ The fact that 'Abbas Hilmi II was deposed by the British in December 1914, at the beginning of World War I, may corroborate Clayton's statement. The fact that Ottoman policy took a different turn during World War I and the Turkish commander, Jamal Pasha, pursued an anti-Zionist policy during his governorship of Syria (Çiçek 2014, 79–87), does not change the opposite state of affairs before and after World War I.

The confluence of all five factors discussed above contributed to the success of the Zionist project. This success, however, came at a price. It was the double price of solving a European problem at the expense of non-European Palestinian Arabs, in particular, and the security of other Arabs, in general, together with turning a blind eye to anti-Semitism and anti-assimilation policies of Europe itself. In this sense, it may also be considered a Western Question. This interpretation was reflected by a minor Jewish trend that expressed itself in the nineteenth century, even in places that did not necessarily witness prejudice against the Jews at that time. For, at a high point of the British endeavor to encourage Jewish immigration to Palestine, the Jewish anti-immigration trend at the time was fiercely opposed to this British policy. However, the most influential Zionist leaders succeeded in having the Balfour Declaration adopted in November 1917. In London, the only Jew in the Cabinet, Edwin Montagu, fought the Declaration to the end, insinuating that the government wanted to send the Jews away from England for sinister purposes. He bitterly “asked his colleagues why they wanted to send him off to an ‘Oriental ghetto.’” At the same time, two leading figures of English Jewry wrote to *The Times* of London deploring “the establishment of a Jewish nationality in Palestine,” which “must have the Jews as strangers in

11. William Yale, Report #10: “Notes on the Zionist Question.” From William Yale (Cairo) to Mr. Leland Harrison (Washington, DC), December 31, 1917. Records of the US Department of State Relating to World War I and its Termination, 1914–1929, 763.72119/1715.

their [English] native lands, and of undermining their hard-won position as citizens and nationals of those lands” (Wheatcroft 1997, 15).

The policy of encouraging the slow transfer of Jews from Europe to Palestine was not confined to Britain. In Russia, in 1903, Viachesslav Plevé, Minister of the Interior, seems to have reached an understanding with Theodore Herzl to “channel Jewish energies toward Zionism and emigration” in return for Herzl’s aid to stop the revolutionary and socialist activities of the Jewish “Bund” socialist organization in Russia (Lambroza 1984, 123–24). However, the most under-researched area regarding this subject is the role of Central European countries, especially Hungary and Poland, even after the British gained its mandate over Palestine. Both countries stressed that Palestine should have “maximum capacity of absorption” (Pedersen 2015, 374). The Polish representative at the League of Nations, Titus Komarnichi, so anxious to get rid of the Jews of his country, suggested that Poland should take over the Palestine mandate from Britain (374).

It is noteworthy that the Polish revisionist Zionist Vladimir Jabotinsky formed the paramilitary Irgun New Zionist Organization in 1931, “which was committed to bringing one million Jews to Palestine within ten years in 1939, the timeframe was cut to two years in view of the worsening situation of Europe’s Jews) and to a Jewish state on both banks of the Jordan” (Pedersen 2015, 359). By 1939 this organization was practically in a “marriage of convenience” with the Polish government (385). Polish officers trained the right-wing extremist Jewish organizations, Irgun and Stern, to draw young Jews away from communism and establish their own state far from Europe (Snyder 2015, 67–70). It is no accident that the leaders of the right-wing parties in Israel, such as Isaak Shamir and Manheim Begin, who were prominent in the Irgun, and Avraham Stern, who founded a similar organization (the Stern Gang) after his name, came originally from Poland. In 1942, a British report stated that “[t]he German and Austrian settlers disapprove of the domination of the Yishuv by Eastern European Jews and have formed their own party, which is increasingly influential [*sic*] in commercial affairs. There is a latent conflict between the socialists and ‘big business.’”¹²

German Orientalists tried, before and during World War I, to expand German influence in Palestine by working through Jewish settlers who spoke Yiddish and tended to be anti-Russian (Marchand 2009, 460). During the

12. British Foreign Office, “Report on Middle East Nationalisms,” FO 195/387/87, 5 November 1942.

war, German propaganda spoke for Polish Jews who were fleeing their lands. Yet: “[b]acking the Zionist movement also played well among anti-Semites at home, who were eager to reduce the population of impoverished Jews in territories the Reich was quickly conquering and to close the borders to potential immigrants. Even Western Jews, [. . .] were sometimes tempted to take this line, hoping to distance themselves from the uncivilized, poor and it was often bruited, disease-carrying Ostjuden” (Marchand 2009, 460).

During the war, the German Gotthold Weil described Zionism as beneficial to both Jewish and German interests. “It would forestall total assimilation—which neither Jews nor non-Germans wanted [. . .].” However, the German speaking Jews were of “the very greatest significance for furthering of German Kultur and German trade in the Near East” (460).

This love–hate relationship, that is, loving what the Jews stood for in the religious fundamentalist scheme of things and hating them for their Semitic race, reached a turning point between World War I and World War II. The primary goal of Nazi policy in the 1930s, before the outbreak of World War II, was to force a rapid dissimilation and emigration of Jews from Germany.¹³ “The German Zionist Movement and Palestine played a key role in the pursuit of that goal during the six years preceding the outbreak of World War II” (Nicosia 1985, xi). In the words of Dominique Vidal: “Few historians still see a straight line leading from Mein Kampf to Auschwitz. True, once in power the Nazis lost no time in attacking the Jews. But until the outbreak of war, the stated objective was the expulsion of Jews to any countries that would have them. This included emigration to Palestine, which was the subject of an agreement with the Jewish Agency in August 1933” (Vidal 1998: 10).

Vidal refers to another source that holds that: “from 1933 to 1939, 52,000 German Jews were [. . .] enabled to immigrate to Palestine with part of their savings. The total amount of 140 million reichmarks made up 18 percent of all private capital imported to Palestine” (Bauer 1994, 2).

Exporting a European problem to Arab or Asiatic lands would have been perceived with shock and disbelief by Arab and non-Arab intellectuals and regarded as a fulfillment of the literary critic Paul de Man’s anti-Semitic vision, when he wrote, in an article during World War II: “One can [. . .] see that a solution to the creation of a Jewish colony isolated from Europe would not have, for the literary life of the West, regrettable consequences. It would lose, in all, some personalities of mediocre worth and would continue,

13. On this subject, see Brenner (1983).

as in the past, to develop according to its higher laws of evolution” (Bauer 1994: 2).

On the other hand, the German Jewish intellectual Victor Klemperer’s anti-Zionist stances were described as an intense resentment toward those who took Jewishness as a prime element in personal identity. He blamed Adolf Hitler for the creation of the “Jewish problem,” believing that before the Nazis came along to fetishize the concept of blood and race, there was no separate Jewish identity. It is for this reason that Klemperer is given to rage against Zionism, comparing it more than once with Hitlerism. Like Nazism, he says, Zionism turns the Jews into a separate racial category, and this violates his powerful belief in assimilation, his undying conviction that he is German (Bernstein 1998).

Ironically, on the eve of World War I, the Arab national movement was involved in another conflict with the ruling Young Turks. It was bitterly complaining that the socioeconomic situation in the Asiatic Arab Ottoman provinces got to such a low point that Arab young men, especially in geographical Syria, were seeking emigration to both North and South America. The Egyptian newspaper *Al-Abram* observed that its readers may have been struck by a curious phenomenon: the Arabic newspapers of the period were engaged in a heated debate over the concessions on immigration that the Zionists were able to extract from the central government in Istanbul, which, at that time, was under European pressure. In other words, as the Ashkenazi Jews were being allowed into Ottoman lands, the Arabs were getting out (Rizk 1998).

World War I did not change this general political and legal framework established by the European Powers before 1914. The victory of the Allies, the granting of the international mandate of Palestine to Britain, and the appointing no other than the Zionist politician Herbert Samuel (1870–1963) as the first High Commissioner for Palestine in 1920¹⁴ gave this framework a decisive military edge. Britain then assumed an exclusive sovereignty that shared its internationally sanctioned bayonets with the emboldened Zionist organizations in Palestine.

In the end, one may feel that too many conflicting policies were transformed instead into one confluent trend that contributed to the success of the Zionist project in Palestine. Eastern and Western European decision-makers did not collude, but their treatment of the Jewish question, both religiously and

14. For a fresh treatment of his policies in Palestine during his tenure in office (1920–25), see Huneidi (2015).

strategically, casts a long shadow on their modern secular presumptions at home and especially abroad. ■

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APPENDIX: LAWRENCE OLIPHANT'S VISIT TO PALESTINE IN 1879

While Laurence Oliphant's *Haifa, or Life in Modern Palestine, 1882–1885* (1887) describes his visit to Palestine between November 1882 and November 1885, the following document/dispatch from the British Consul in Beirut in May 1879 points to the fact that the British government was interested in establishing a Jewish entity in Palestine before its occupation of Egypt in 1882. It also highlights that Midhat Pasha, the well-known Ottoman reformer, who was Governor-General of Syria at the time, welcomed such prospect, supposedly for its economic implications. He and other Ottoman officials, and possibly some Arab intellectuals (e.g., al-Shalabi 2016), were unconscious of its political implications at that early stage.

FO 195/1263/no. 37

From Consul General Eldridge (Beyrouth) to Lord Salisbury (Constantinople) May 14, 1879

Copy

Political

(copy to be sent to Embassy)

My Lord,

With reference to your lordship dispatch no. 3 of the 15th of February last introducing to me Mr. Lawrence Oliphant, I have the honor to inform you that that gentleman arrived in this country on the 4th of March last and at once presented to me your lordship letter of introduction and consulted me upon the best means of prosecuting the scheme which he had in contemplation. It placed him in communication with such persons as I deemed might be able to give him useful information, and after a short stay in Beyrouth for the purpose of some necessary preliminary enquiries, he started on a tour through Syria and Palestine in order to investigate the country in person and to select the most suitable field for the operations he had in view. Finding that on this side of Jordan there were no waste lands fit for colonization such as he contemplates. Mr. Oliphant proceeded to the East of that river and found in the provinces of Ajloun, Belka and Kerak a vast region of fertile country lying almost entirely waste and tenantless. The stretch of land which he has finally selected as offering the most advantages for colonization is that part of the Belka between the Jordan and the Derb al-Haj or caravan route to Mecca and bounded to the north by the river Jabuk and to the south by the Arnon. It consists of high undulating ground ranging from two to five thousand feet above the level of the sea with an exceedingly salubrious

climate, fine tracts of forest and pasture land, plentiful streams and a rich soil adopted for every form of cultivation. With the exception of the town of Salt which is a small mart frequented by the desert tribes for the barter of their produce against few articles of consumption necessary to their modest requirements, the country is inhabited only by Bedouin Arabs who are gradually abandoning their nomadic life and commencing to cultivate the land, and who would form a valuable labouring element in the colony, should they meet with sufficient encouragement and security from oppression to induce them to settle down permanently as tillers of the soil. Thus the absence of a settled population affords peculiar facility for acquiring definite possession of the land.

Having overcome this, in my eyes the main material difficulty in the way of the fulfillment of his scheme, viz that of finding an available field of action, Mr. Oliphant proceeded to Damascus and spent some time there in drawing up the draft of the conception which he proposes now to submit to the Porte. In this task he was much assisted by Midhat Pasha, who at once took great interest in his scheme and gave many valuable suggestions for presenting the plan in the form most acceptable for the Turkish government. As I learn from Mr. Oliphant, the proposed conception which is based on the Ottoman law regulating colonization in the Turkish dominions, stipulates for the sale of one million of acres of land in the above mentioned portion of the Belka, the town and territory of Salt excluded, to a company to be created and called the "Ottoman Company for Colonization in Palestine." The sovereign rights of the Sultan are carefully preserved and the district is to remain under the direct administration of the Vilayet of Syria with, however, certain privileges in regard to taxation, police and justice. Amongst the measures of public utility stipulated for in this scheme, are the creation of a land Mortgage Bank and the construction of a railway—from Caiffa [*sic*] to Tiberias and down the valley of the Jordan. Mr. Oliphant has principally in view the colonization of the Belka by means of Jewish immigration, and he assures me that many of the *leading native Jews whom he has rounded on the subject have expressed the deepest interest in the enterprise and the best wishes for its success.*¹⁵

Without either adopting all the views embodied in Mr. Oliphant's scheme or pointing out the numerous difficulties which must attend its achievement, I cannot but feel impressed with the magnitude of the advantages which not only the district under colonization, but the whole of Syria would derive

15. Added emphasis.

from the realization of such a plan. Besides opening up a rich and virgin country, it would give an impetus to industrial and agricultural activity throughout the Province. It would *increase British influence in Syria*^[16] without augmenting the responsibilities of her majesty's government, it would enrich the impoverished revenues of the Ottoman Empire and place before it a valuable example of the benefit arising from a sound economic administration and of the development of which its splendid resources are capable under proper direction. These points did naturally not escape Midhat Pasha's attention and H. H. although fearing in the present state of things to provoke at Constantinople opposition to the scheme by giving it his official support, has caused Mr. Oliphant to be furnished with valuable letters of introduction, which it is to be hoped may facilitate his negotiations with the Porte.

I myself gave Mr. Oliphant a letter to his Excellency Rustom Pasha^[17] whom he hopes to meet at Constantinople whither he proceeded by Austrian steamer on the 12th instant.

I have the honor

G. Jackson Eldridge

—

Beyrout, May 14 1879

16. Added emphasis.

17. Rustom Pasha was the Governor (*Mutassarif*) of Mount Lebanon between 1873 and 1883.