

Laura Almagor

A Territory, but not a State

The Territorialists' Visions for a Jewish Future after the Shoah (1943–1960)¹

Abstract

The Jewish Territorialists, represented as of 1934 by the Freeland League for Jewish Territorial Colonisation, searched for places of settlement for Jews outside Palestine/Israel. I here argue that Territorialist ideology demonstrated both continuity and change in the post-1945 years, and continued to focus on an investment in Diaspora life, Yiddishism, anti-statism, colonial and postcolonial attitudes, and Socialist Revolutionary idealism. This article thus challenges the notion that the Shoah spelled the end of non-Zionist Jewish political activities, by demonstrating the ways in which the Freelanders, headed by the enigmatic Isaac N. Steinberg (1888–1957), imagined an alternative Jewish cultural and political future after the Shoah. By mapping the Territorialist movement's continued endeavours after 1945, this study also adds to our broader understanding of the rich spectrum of post-Shoah Jewish political ideologies.

“In a world full of ‘Real-Politiker’ and practical Shlemiels the accusation of being dreamers is perhaps not so hard to take.”

After the Shoah, the Jewish Territorialists, organised since 1934 as the Freeland League for Jewish Territorial Colonisation, continued to imagine a Jewish cultural and political future that was territorial, but not centred on a Jewish state in Palestine. The following analysis of those visions challenges the notion that the Shoah spelled the end of virtually all non-Zionist Jewish political activities.³ In doing so, this study joins a corpus of recent works dealing with non-Zionist or heterodox-Zionist Jewish political movements and groups such as the Jewish Labour Bund and several Dias-

1 This article is largely based on papers presented at the American Jewish Historical Society Biennial Scholar's Conference, New York City, 19–21 June 2016, and at the Young Scholars Workshop *Promised Lands: Israel-Diaspora Relations and Beyond*, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich, 23–25 May 2016. I thank both the organisers and participants of these events for offering me a platform on which to present my work, as well as for the helpful comments and questions I received on these occasions. For a larger study of the history of Jewish Territorialism, see: Laura Almagor, *Forgotten Alternatives. Jewish Territorialism as a Movement of Political Action and Ideology, 1905–1965* (PhD Dissertation), European University Institute, Florence 2015.

2 M. Leবাদin [Isaac N. Steinberg], *The Jewish Press On Freeland*, in: *Freeland* 8 (September–October 1954) 8, 3–4, here 4.

3 The assumption that Zionism was the only Jewish political movement to actively survive the war features strongly in studies on Jewish Displaced Persons (DPs). See for example Zeev W. Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope. The Survivors of the Holocaust in Occupied Germany*, Cambridge 2002; Anita Shapira, *The Holocaust and World War II as Elements of the Yishuv Psyche until 1948*, in: Alvin H. Rosenfeld (ed.), *Thinking About the Holocaust after Half a Century*, Indiana 1997, 61–82, here 63; Angelika Königseder/Juliane Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope. Jewish Displaced Persons in Post-World War II Germany*, Evanston 2001; Hagit Lavsky, *The Experience of the Displaced Persons in Bergen-Belsen. Unique or Typical Case?*, in: Avinoam J. Patt/Michael Berkowitz (ed.), *“We Are Here”. New Approaches to Jewish Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany*, Detroit 2010, 227–256. Other studies on Jewish DPs take a more nuanced or even critical stance. See for example Michael Brenner, *After the Holocaust. Rebuilding Jewish lives in Postwar Germany*, Princeton 1997; Margarete Myers Feinstein, *Holocaust Survivors in Postwar Germany, 1945–1957*, Cambridge 2010.

pora Nationalist trends and initiatives in Europe and the United States, thus deviating from the more established Zionism-dominated scholarship.⁴

The focus here is on the thought and activities of the most important post-war Territorialist leader, Isaac N. Steinberg (1888–1957). While acknowledging the problematic nature of zooming in on one individual's views to reflect those of a larger collective, in this case Steinberg's prolific public and personal writings do form a valid point of departure for an analysis of Territorialist thinking in the period under consideration. By this time, the Freeland League had become a fairly small organisation, and Steinberg, together with his daughter Ada Siegel and a handful of close collaborators, largely defined the movement's ideological direction.

The current exploration shows both continuity and discontinuity in the Freeland League's ideology in the post-1945 years, as compared to the pre-war era. In 1942, the Freeland League headquarters moved from London to New York City, compelling the Freelanders to start operating on the American Jewish political scene. This new context forced a redefinition of Territorialist activities. Also, as in the case of other Jewish political movements and organisations, the Shoah severely affected the Freeland League, both in terms of membership and potential for growth, and regarding the Freelanders' views for a Jewish future. Nevertheless, as the Territorialists had always anticipated some sort of catastrophe to befall the Jewish people, many of their core aims and beliefs remained in place after 1945, albeit often in changed form. Central and never-abating features of Steinberg's thinking were his Socialist Revolutionary and at the same time Jewish religious and even messianic convictions, as well as his staunch criticism of the Zionist state-building project in Palestine and the treatment of the local Arab population there. The Territorialists had been critical of the 'Arab Question' from the outset, but only under Steinberg's leadership did this issue become consolidated as one of the main elements of the growing verbal Territorialist attacks on the Zionist project. The intrinsically colonial nature of the Territorialist project also remained central after the Second World War, but changed shape by adjusting itself to the postcolonial and even anticolonial attitudes that now defined the geopolitical discourse.

The Territorialists, who were a small but nonetheless intriguing part of the Jewish political scene during the first half of the twentieth century, believed that only concentrated agro-industrial Jewish settlement outside both Europe and Palestine could solve the Jewish plight. The movement was first organised in 1905 when Anglo-Jewish writer Israel Zangwill, together with some fifty other Zionists, left the Zionist movement to form the Jewish Territorialist Organisation (ITO). This secession was the result of the Zionist rejection of the so-called Uganda-offer of the British government. Zangwill and his fellow Territorialists disagreed with the Zionists' refusal to seize the territorial opportunity presented to them, and they now dedicated themselves to finding places of settlement for Jews outside Palestine.

To this end, the ITO during the following two decades approached colonial government representatives: Zangwill sought negotiations not only with British politicians in his own country, but also with Portugal regarding Angola as a potential haven for Jewish refugees. The latter plan, on the table in 1912 and 1913, was one of

4 Recent examples of this scholarship are the works by David N. Myers, Noam Pianko, Joshua Karlip, Kenneth B. Moss, Gur Alroey, David Slucki, Kalman Weiser, James Loeffler, Dimitry Shumsky, Adam Rovner, David E. Fishman, Jeffrey Shandler, Stefan Vogt, Joshua Shanes, and Simon Rabinovitch. This scholarship is partly indebted to Jonathan Frankel's pioneering and by now classic work on Socialism and the emergence of modern Jewish politics in Russia (and Poland): *Jonathan Frankel, Prophecy and Politics. Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862–1917*, Cambridge/New York 1981.

those most seriously explored in the ITO days. Between 1907 and 1914, the ITO was also a partner in American philanthropist Jacob Schiff's Galveston Movement, which aimed to direct Jewish immigrants arriving in the United States towards the less populated parts of the country rather than to the already overflowing cities on the East Coast.⁵ During these years, the ITO set up numerous local offices within Tsarist Russia, as well as in the major Jewish centres in Western Europe, in order to screen and inform prospective Territorialist settlers. Thousands of local Jews in distress signed petitions in support of Territorialist initiatives.⁶ Despite this ostensible interest in the ITO's work amongst Russian Jewry, Zangwill disbanded the organisation in 1925 due to his own failing health, as well as because of a more generally perceived loss of interest in non-Zionist settlement after the Balfour Declaration in 1917.

The organisation was reinstated in 1934 in Warsaw as the Freeland League for Jewish Territorial Colonisation, in reaction to growing antisemitism throughout Europe, especially following Hitler's rise to power one year earlier. Because of increasing difficulties for Jewish organisations to function in Central and Eastern Europe, the Freeland League soon moved its headquarters to London. Until the outbreak of the Second World War, the Freelanders negotiated with the British government regarding British Guiana, and with the French government regarding French Guiana and other French colonial possessions, most notably Madagascar. This latter destination was to go down in history as arguably the most infamous option discussed for Jewish settlement. Multiple actors simultaneously explored the idea, but with very different motivations, some of which were openly antisemitic: Not only the Freeland League, but also the Nazis, the Polish government, and even the leader of the World Jewish Congress Nahum Goldmann considered the island for Jewish settlement.⁷ Simultaneously, Isaac Steinberg spent the years between 1939 and 1943 in Australia, trying to lobby for the establishment of a Territorialist settlement in the Kimberley, in the northwest of the country. Steinberg's charisma and perseverance aided him in his Australian endeavours to gather influential supporters for the plan. Unfortunately for the Territorialists, the Australian federal government could not be convinced and the project was rejected in 1944.⁸

In 1942, the Freeland League headquarters were moved to New York City. Shortly thereafter, Steinberg emerged as the organisation's most important leader and ideologue. His political idealism, the result of the merging of his orthodox religious and Socialist Revolutionary convictions, defined the outlooks and approach of the move-

5 Bernard Marinbach, *Galveston, Ellis Island of the West*, Albany 1983; Gary Dean Best, *Jacob H. Schiff's Galveston Movement. An Experiment in Immigration Deflection, 1907–1914* in: *American Jewish Archives Journal* 30 (1978) 1, 43–79; Gur Alroey, *Galveston and Palestine. Immigration and Ideology in the Early Twentieth Century*, in: *American Jewish Archives Journal* 56 (2004) 1&2, 129–150.

6 Gur Alroey, *Zionism without Zion. The Jewish Territorial Organization and Its Conflict with the Zionist Organization*, Detroit 2016, 96–97, 110.

7 Eric Thomas Jennings, *Writing Madagascar Back into the Madagascar Plan*, in: *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 21, (2007), 2, 187–217, here 203–204. For an extensive study of Madagascar as a place for Jewish settlement or exile, and especially of the Nazi Madagascar plans, see: Hans Jansen, *Het Madagascar Plan. De Voorgenomen Deportatie van Europese Joden naar Madagascar [The Madagascar Plan. The Proposed Deportation of European Jews to Madagascar]*, The Hague 1996; Magnus Brechtken, *Madagaskar für die Juden. Antisemitische Idee und Politische Praxis 1885–1945*, Munich 1997. For more on the Freeland League's Madagascar plan, see Rovner's chapter, *The Lost Jewish Continent. Madagascar (1933–1942)*, in: Adam Rovner, *In the Shadow of Zion. Promised Lands before Israel*, New York 2014, 117–147.

8 For more about the Kimberley Scheme, see the relevant parts of Rovner's chapter, *New Jerusalem, Down Under. Port Davey, Tasmania (1940–1945)*, in: Rovner, *In the Shadow of Zion*, 149–159; Leon Gettler, *An Unpromised Land, South Fremantle 1993*; as well as Steinberg's own account of the project: Isaac Steinberg, *Australia. The Unpromised Land. In Search of a Home*, London 1948.

ment as a whole. Admittedly, the Freeland League had not acquired a mass following before the war, nor did it have the Eastern European infrastructure that the ITO had established in its day. The Territorialist organisation now counted only at most several hundred active members around the globe. These were nonetheless prominent and well-connected individuals, both in Jewish and non-Jewish circles, with Isaac Steinberg as their frontman. Because of his centrality to the Freeland League's post-war orientation, tracing Steinberg's political journey is essential for understanding the development of Territorialist ideology in these years.

In a eulogy written after his death in 1957, the American journalist William Zuckerman described Steinberg as a member of the "generation of Russian-Jewish intellectuals, born, as it were, on the fringe of the pre-Communist Russian Revolution, which absorbed some of the greatness, vision, spirit of rebellion, and yearning for freedom and justice which were in the very air of that period".⁹ Steinberg grew up in a prominent religious Jewish family in present-day Latvia. In 1906, when he was 18 years old, he joined the Socialist Revolutionary Party and was promptly expelled from Russia for several years, during which time he obtained a law degree from the University of Heidelberg.¹⁰ After his return to Russia, Steinberg shortly served as the People's Commissar of Justice in 1917 and 1918, as a member of the Left Socialist Revolutionary party that co-operated with Lenin's Bolsheviks until the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk moved the Left Socialist Revolutionaries to resign from the Soviet government in March 1918. After his Russian political days, Steinberg continued to believe in a Socialist-inspired universal betterment of mankind through an investment in the particular needs of a particular group of people. In Russia, this group had been the proletariat and the agrarian underclass. After his Russian political days came to an end in 1918, Steinberg held on to his belief in universalism through particularism. The only thing that changed in Steinberg's vision was a shift of focus from the Russian people to the Jews.¹¹

This shift most likely occurred during the decade that Steinberg spent in Berlin, to where he moved his family in 1923. The Steinberg home in Germany was frequented by many illustrious Jewish political figures such as Diaspora Nationalists Simon Dubnow and Elias Tcherikower, the economist Jacob Lestschinsky, and the 'heterodox' Zionist thinker Simon Rawidowicz.¹² In 1933, the Steinbergs moved to London, where Isaac became involved with Freeland League affairs shortly after the movement's foundation. Even though he had not been one of the organisation's founding members, he was elected to its propaganda committee in 1935.¹³ After the Freeland League headquarters relocated to New York during the war years, Steinberg became the movement's official leader when he himself settled there in 1943.

9 W. Zuckerman, Dr. I.N. Steinberg, in: *Freeland* 10 (January-February 1957) 1, 5-6, here 5.

10 Reports From The Press: *Jewish Chronicle* (London, 3 January 1957), in: *Freeland* 10 (January-February 1957) 1, 11.

11 Mikhail Krutikov/Isaac Nahman Steinberg, From Anti-Communist Revolutionary to Anti-Zionist Territorialist, in: *Jews in Eastern Europe* (1999) Spring-Fall, 13, 17, 21; Philippe Kellermann, Interview mit Hendrik Wallat zu Isaak Steinberg, 3 December 2013, Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, <http://www.rosalux.de/news/40063/interview-mit-hendrik-wallat-zu-isaak-steinberg.html> (22 August 2015). For Steinberg's own account of his revolutionary years, see Isaac Steinberg, *In the Workshop of the Revolution*, New York/Toronto 1953.

12 A. Bialistoker/Ada Steinberg-Siegel, in: *Freeland* 9 (November-December 1956) 4, 6-7; Willy Birkenmaier, *Judentum Ohne Rückkehr Nach Palästina*. Isaak Steinberg und der Territorialismus als Alternative zum Zionismus, in: *Trumah* (2010) 19, 86-101, here 93.

13 YIVO Institute for Jewish Research Archives (YIVO), RG255, Tanhum Ber Herwald Papers, Box 1, Josef Kruk to Myer Nathan, 9 August 1935; YIVO RG255, Box 1, Zalman Majzner to the Freeland Liga Polish central bureau in Warsaw, 13 September 1935; Joseph Leftwich/Yitskhok-Nakhmen Steinberg, in: *Freeland* 11 (January-March 1958) 1, 3-4; Rovner, *In the Shadow of Zion*, 157.

In the United States, the Freeland League began to actively reinvent itself as part of the American Jewish political and cultural scene. As the war drew to a close, the movement also aspired to become part of the United States-led efforts to solve the problem posed by millions of European refugees, soon to be termed Displaced Persons (DPs).¹⁴ British Freeland Jack Philips wrote to the Territorialist periodical *Freeland in 1945*:

“It is not without a little heart-ache that we have watched the centre of gravity of our movement shift to America; but this is progress, this is development, and it is appropriate that it should find its setting today within the great Jewish community of the United States. To you, now, all Jewish eyes must turn, as the eyes of all this stricken world are turned towards your great country, virile, throbbing, benevolent bastion of liberty and freedom.”¹⁵

There appeared to be fertile ground for Territorialism in the United States. The political scene showed “a rancorous intra-Jewish battle between Zionists and non-Zionists for control of the American Jewish community.”¹⁶ Before the Second World War, Zionism had not yet been a mass movement in the United States. The Balfour Declaration was received lukewarmly due to the fear of American Jews that they would be suspected of having dual loyalties.¹⁷ As Steinberg wrote in October 1945 – with disputable accuracy – the atmosphere surrounding Palestine in American Jewish political circles had even worsened during the war years, reducing the chances of success in the Middle East and rendering the work of the Freeland League more urgent than ever before.¹⁸

Indeed, the Jewish Reform movement in America and the Jewish Socialist Federation were openly against Political Zionism, and Jewish-dominated workers’ unions declared Zionism incompatible with the international class struggle. Moreover, they saw it as a threat to the rights of Arabs in Palestine.¹⁹ The Territorialists made an effort to present themselves as part of these Socialist and labour-oriented segments of the American Jewish political landscape by publishing tributes to, and studies of, other movements and organisations. This move made sense, as an important part of American and especially New York-based Jewry had liberal, left-wing, Socialist leanings.²⁰ In turn, labour organisations, often dominated by Jews, offered important financial and moral support.²¹

Even if these particular bodies were not in favour of Zionism, the Zionist movement did start to gain ground in the American Jewish community as a whole after 1945, adding even more diversity to an already large plethora of possible political affiliations for American Jews. This development left Steinberg displeased with the Jewish political situation that he encountered upon arriving to the United States. In

14 Washington Testimony, in: *Freeland* 2 (March 1946) 2, 3, 4, 12-13, here 3.

15 Letter from London, in: *Freeland* 1 (June 1945) 5, 4.

16 James Loeffler, The Conscience of America. Human Rights, Jewish Politics, and American Foreign Policy at the 1945 United Nations San Francisco Conference, in: *Journal of American History* (September 2013), 401-428, here 403-404, 406, 425.

17 James Renton, *The Zionist Masquerade. The Birth of the Anglo-Zionist Alliance 1914–1918*, New York 2007, 131; Noam Pianko, *Zionism and the Roads Not Taken*. Rawidowicz, Kaplan, Kohn, Bloomington 2010, 21.

18 YIVO, RG366, Isaac N. Steinberg Papers, Folder 210, Isaac Steinberg to Waley Cohen, 19 October 1945.

19 Renton, *The Zionist Masquerade*, 140, 143, 147.

20 For more about the Jewish leftist scene in New York see Tony Michels, *A Fire in their Hearts. Yiddish Socialists in New York*, Cambridge 2005.

21 Especially after 1948, space in *Freeland* was devoted to the activities of organisations and unions such as the International Ladies Garments Workers Union (ILGWU) and the Workmen’s Circle. For example: William Stern, The Second Generation, and David Dubinsky [president of the ILGWU] Celebrates His 60ieth Birthday, in: *Freeland* 6 (April-May 1952) 4, 6-7.

1946, he wrote of an ideological ‘hysteria’ that was raging throughout the Jewish world.²² Pre-war Territorialism had been at odds with both Zionist Palestinocentrism and with the Jewish Labour Bund’s striving for cultural rather than territorial rights for Jews in Europe. Even though some remnant of Bundism survived after the war and tried to (re-)establish its position on the American Jewish political scene,²³ in the eyes of the Territorialists it was Zionism that was responsible for the discord that was sown amongst political groups in the United States. Steinberg deplored the lack of inner solidarity in the Jewish world: All factions had “their bureaucracies, their long-established leadership, their ‘tricks of the trade’”, but the Jewish masses were excluded from decision-making processes.²⁴ The Freeland League hoped to promote a move towards more cooperation between the different Jewish political denominations. By achieving a more centralised system, obviously under Territorialist leadership, a democratisation process within American Jewish politics would come about and offer a way out of the existing chaotic situation.²⁵ As late as 1956, William Zuckerman repeated this position: nationalistic propaganda had created “[a] spiritual and psychological mess [...] in the minds and hearts of American Jews”. According to Zuckerman, Steinberg was one of the few in the United States who endeavoured to create an awareness of this process.²⁶

The new American circumstances under which the Freeland League now operated also brought other issues onto the Territorialist agenda. For one, the Freelanders recorded not only directly anti-Jewish feelings amongst and actions by non-Jewish Americans, but they also observed a general lack of tolerance for minorities such as African Americans and Mexican immigrants. Territorialists worried that American society was no safer for Jews than Europe had been and that there might not be a place for Jews in the long run: “It might surprise you [American Jews] when you find out how many organizations are devoted to your welfare – and how many more are concerned with your downfall.”²⁷ American Jewish youth should be prepared to settle on the land, as they might in due time face the same fate as their European co-religionists.²⁸

The realities of American Jewish life also increased the urgency to explicitly address religious matters. Some Freelanders saw religion as counterproductive to the establishment and preservation of Jewish culture.²⁹ At the same time, they also worried about the decrease in the religiosity of American Jews and the implications of this development for the future of Jewry in the United States, for which religion was such a binding factor.³⁰ Therefore, religious topics were discussed as aspects of, and contributing to, Jewish cultural heritage.³¹ In turn, Yiddish culture had religiously

22 Isaac Steinberg, *End the War!*, in: *Freeland 2* (November-December 1946) 6, 5-7, 14-15, here 5.

23 David Slucki, *The International Jewish Labor Bund after 1945. Toward a Global History*, New Brunswick 2012.

24 Steinberg, *Free Land and Free People* [reprinted from *Oifn Shvel*], in: *Freeland* (August 1944), 7; Steinberg, *From Our Point of View. What is the Address?*, in: *Freeland 2* (April-May 1946) 3, 4.

25 *Our Press: In the United States*, in: *Freeland 1* (December 1944) 1, 19.

26 W. Zuckerman, *Where Is Our Inferiority*, in: *Freeland 9* (January-February 1956) 1, 13; W. Zuckerman, Dr. I.N. Steinberg, in: *Freeland 10* (January-February 1957) 1, 5-6, here 6.

27 M[achbi] Y. D[obkin], in: *Freeland 2* (April-May 1946) 3, 7-8, 12.

28 A. Glan[tz], *Here and Over There*, in: *Freeland 2* (September-October 1946) 5, 11-12.

29 Saul Goodman, *Territorialism, Autonomy, Nationhood*, in: *Freeland 3* (January-February 1947) 1, 9-10, here 9.

30 James G. McDonald, *A Call to Jewishness. Summary of a Speech Made At Torah Conference, Thursday, 13 December 1945*, in: *Freeland 2* (March 1946) 2, 11-12; Saul Goodman, *The Faith of a Jewish Secularist*, in: *Freeland 2* (November-December 1946) 6, 8, 18; *Twenty-Seven Per Cent [only 27 per cent of Jewish American children received a Jewish education, L.A.]*, in: *Freeland 6* (February-March 1952) 3, 1.

31 An example of such an evaluation of the Jewish religious past within a cultural framework is Rabbi Litvin’s article about the famous Lithuanian Volozhin Yeshiva: Rabbi J. Litvin, *About A Seat of Learning*, in: *Freeland 7* (November-December 1953) 5, 13-14.

moralising responsibilities, too.³² According to the Freeland League, Territorialism thus offered ‘the way’ for both deeply religious and freethinking groups.³³ In this manner, the Territorialists tried to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity. If Jewish traditional values and customs could be understood in cultural terms, then they could be appropriated for a reanimation and reinvention of Jewish life after the Shoah. For the Freelanders, eager to present their own work as perhaps the most modern Jewish political programme available, Jewish tradition therefore became a version of Jewish modernity.

This perceived compatibility between traditional religious-cultural values and the project of modernity was not a novel idea. In fact, it had been a central component of the interwar Diaspora Nationalists’ way of thinking, to which the Territorialists also subscribed. Territorialism was not Diaspora Nationalist, however. After all, its adherents did not believe in a collective Jewish future in Europe and sought territories elsewhere. Nevertheless, the Freelanders did actively support Chaim Zhitlowsky’s explicitly secular Diaspora Nationalist isolationist approach, which considered the Yiddish language a binding factor for the Jewish people, in opposition to the larger, hostile non-Jewish world. At the same time, unlike Zhitlowsky, the Freelanders did not fully reject the attachment of Simon Dubnow – the other central Diaspora Nationalist thinker of the era – to Jewish religion as fulfilling a similar connecting function.³⁴

After 1943, the Freelanders continued to consider Jewish Diaspora life of great importance. Since this Diaspora was seen as the source and protector of Jewish culture, even more so after the Shoah, the Freelanders supported its continued existence, both in Europe and the United States, but also in the aspired Territorialist settlement. The Shoah, therefore, increased rather than diminished the importance of the Diaspora in the eyes of Steinberg and his cohort, especially now that it was reduced to a tiny remnant of what it had been before. Diaspora life was to retain its right to exist, alongside the Freeland work, and even next to the Zionist project: “We are equally concerned with the Jew who insists on rebuilding his European life, the Jew who wants to create a political state in Palestine, and the Jew who will settle in a FREE LAND to continue there his Jewish heritage.”³⁵

The Jewish Diaspora experience stood out as an important part of Jewish history, and the Territorialists did not fail to utilise this fact in their endeavours to diminish the exclusive character that the Zionists ascribed to Palestine. Indeed, the holy city of Jerusalem was located there, but according to Steinberg and his disciples, *Jerusalem* carried a much broader meaning: It referred to the Diaspora as well. A dualistic or bifurcated *Jerusalem*, one version “earthly” and the other “heavenly”, had been part of Jewish traditional thought throughout the centuries of dispersion.³⁶ Without forfeiting the heavenly or spiritual Jerusalem, according to the Territorialists, Jerusalem on earth would be wherever Jewish life took shape in the Diaspora.³⁷ With the establishment of the State of Israel, a role reversal between Jerusalem and the Diaspora took place. The former now became a fixed place on earth and the capital of the new Jewish state, whereas the Diaspora came to represent all that was lost of Jewish life

32 L. Bayon, People, Education, and Morality, in: *Freeland* 8 (November–December 1955) 12, 4-6; Israel Knox, Statehood or Peoplehood, in: *Freeland* 9 (April–May 1956) 2, 4.

33 In The Freeland League, in: *Freeland* 8 (April–May 1955) 10, 10-12; A. Schwebel, We Fight for Our Future, in: *Freeland* 9 (January–February 1956) 1, 2-3.

34 David E. Fishman, *The Rise of Modern Yiddish Culture*, Pittsburgh 2005, 62-63, 67-68, 75, 101.

35 Steinberg, Free Land and Free People [reprinted from *Oifn Shvel*], in: *Freeland* (August 1944), 7.

36 Barbara E. Mann, *Space and Place in Jewish Studies*, New Brunswick 2012, 42-43.

37 Pianko, *Zionism and the Roads Not Taken*, 75.

and spirituality in the Shoah, as well as those elements of this life that might still be preserved.³⁸

The continued Territorialist appreciation for the wishes of those who decided to continue or restart their lives on the European continent did not mean that the Free-landers did not acknowledge the major impact that the Shoah had on the possibilities of a Jewish future in Europe. Jews were still “exposed to a ruthless anti-Semitism and the threat of physical extinction”.³⁹ During the war, British Territorialist Tanhum Herwald had already asked rhetorically whether Jews thought “that the antagonism to the Jew will cease when hostilities are over, and that the remnants of the persecuted Jews of Europe should help to build up a destructed Europe and be again the scapegoat of bad governments”. The answer was obviously “no”.⁴⁰ What remained of European Jewry needed to be moved quickly to a new location as a group and not through individual immigration, “for you do not drain a river by sucking at it with a straw”.⁴¹ The destination for these Jews would lie in the non-Western world, which was in many ways preferable to a Western location: Polish Territorialist M. Balberyski wrote that he would have preferred to see his family survive in the so-called uncivilised world, “rather than among ‘highly civilized’ nations, and under the technologically flawless Gestapo machine”. The future leader of the Freeland League Mordkhe Schaechter added from Vienna: “We are sick of the ‘civilized’ nations.”⁴²

After the horrific experiences of the recent genocide, Territorialism became focussed not just on the physical survival of Jews, but also on their spiritual and cultural “revival”.⁴³ Colonising “on the basis of healthy colonization principles” and thereby leaving behind the “blood-stained soil of Europe” would have a cleansing effect.⁴⁴ In 1944, Steinberg already dramatically announced the post-war aims of the Freeland League: It was to become more than just a Territorialist movement, “a healthy, fresh stream of Jewish popular strength; [...] a desire for the renaissance of the energies of the people”. The Kimberley Scheme, for instance, would not lead to Jewish assimilation into Australian society, but to the regeneration of these Jews, turning them into a new type of Australian Jews. Steinberg even imagined such a cultural process inspiring Jewish poems about kangaroos, “[y]et their [the poets] voice would be the voice of Israel, and the rhythm and the sigh of their songs would be Jewish”.⁴⁵ A regenerated and fully developed Jewish existence would also help to redeem the non-Jewish world. Territorialist sources contain many references to such a universal mission for the Jews which Territorialism could enable, paradoxically by geographically isolating groups of Jews in agro-industrial settlements. Both Zangwill and Steinberg had envisioned the Jewish return to political history as a first step on the way to the fulfilment of the ancient Jewish task of acting as a moral vanguard to the rest of humanity. Zangwill saw a ‘Mission of Israel’ for both Zionism and Territorialism by lifting the Jewish people to a higher civilisational status in a territory of its own.

38 Isaac Steinberg, Vilno and Jerusalem, in: *Freeland* 9 (April-May 1956) 2, 5-6.

39 YIVO RG682, Mordkhe Schaechter Papers, Folder 600, Leaflet Freeland League. URGENT, [1947].

40 YIVO RG255, Box 1, T.B. Herwald, Solution of the Jewish Problem (ITO Pamphlet no. 8), January 1943.

41 See *Freeland* 3 (November-December 1947) 3, back page; Why the D.P.S Can't Wait, in: *Freeland* II (May 1948) 2, 7.

42 Left-Handed Zionism, *Freeland* 4 (May-June 1948) 2, 8-12, here 11.

43 Washington Testimony, in: *Freeland* 2 (March 1946) 2, 3, 4, 12-13, here 3; Freeland League for Jewish Territorial Colonization (ed.), Statement and Discussion by Dr. I.N. Steinberg before the Anglo-American Committee on Palestine, 14 January 1946, Washington D.C., New York 1946, 2.

44 YIVO, RG366/114, Resolutions of the First Freeland Conference of the D.P. Camps held in Upper Austria on 5 October 1947.

45 Steinberg, Australia, 118-120.

Steinberg carried this line of thought even further. The disillusionment of the Russian Revolution and the birth of National Socialism had instilled in the Territorialist leader a “realization that universal brotherhood could not be achieved unless each human, group or nation acquired the possibilities for its own social and cultural development”.⁴⁶ Steinberg did not believe that antisemitism should become a driving force for Jewish political work. Instead, a positive idealistic activism should offer a free choice to Jews as to where they wished to settle, but with strong spiritual ties forged between these different parts of the world community. Jews would then be able to survive both as individuals and as a community, while maintaining their “immortal system of ideas, beliefs, actions and hopes which is enshrined in our hearts as Judaism, – Yiddishkeit”.⁴⁷ Investing in a renewed *Yiddishkeit* (also spelled *Yiddishkayt*) would benefit not only the development of Jews as a people: “A collective Yiddishkayt [...] would again best contribute to the world’s *Menschlechkayt* [humanness].”⁴⁸

Despite this optimism about the Jewish moral tasks and their fulfilment, after May 1948 Steinberg became uniformly critical of the Zionist project. He saw the State of Israel as inspiring a decline in “moral perspective” among many Jewish leaders. Exclusivity rather than universalism was a key element of Israel’s policy, as were militarism and an active denial of the European Jewish past. Steinberg considered these features to be the main reasons for growing moral defects in world Jewish leadership, as more and more of its representatives adhered in one way or another to Zionism.⁴⁹ Even more fundamentally, for Steinberg, the course that world political history had taken during the previous decades had discredited “the state” as the most desirable form of political organisation. His Socialist Revolutionary past had ideologically shaped him to actively strive for alternative structures. “All my life I have fought against the idea of a Jewish State even in Palestine”, he wrote in a private letter in 1938.⁵⁰ This fierce anti-statism was not only based on the Freeland League’s leader’s anarchist sympathies, but also on his general disappointment in the failed state-building process he had been briefly involved with in 1917 and 1918.

As early as 1891, Simon Dubnow had described statelessness as a higher stage in the Jews’ national development.⁵¹ The ITO’s stance towards statehood had been somewhat unclear: Some of the early Territorialists, including Zangwill himself, contemplated different options for obtaining not just cultural, but also political autonomy for the Territorialist settlement(s). After all, only shortly before, these “fresh” ITO members had been Zionists. Now they considered Territorialism to be the truest form of Zionism and the movement adhering most to Theodor Herzl’s true intentions.⁵² Thirty years later, with the establishment of the Freeland League, statehood had lost much of its earlier appeal. The Freelanders did not believe that “the world as it is developing today is very much in need of a new State”.⁵³ From a religious and moral point of view, Steinberg believed that Jewish statehood was undesirable:

46 YIVO, RG682/327, Draft speech Lesser Fruchtbaum, Evaluation of Dr. I.N. Steinberg, [1957].

47 Steinberg, *Australia*, 106; Isaac Steinberg, *The Three Roads*, in: *Freeland* 1 (December 1944) 1, 1-3.

48 Isaac Steinberg, *The Ignorant and the Am-Hooretz*, in: *Freeland* 6 (April-May 1952) 4, 2-3.

49 *In The Press*, in: *Freeland* 8 (November-December 1954) 9, 10.

50 YIVO, RG366/468, Steinberg to Charles Seligman, 30 November 1938.

51 Cecile Esther Kuznitz, *YIVO and the Making of Modern Jewish Culture*. Scholarship for the Yiddish Nation, Cambridge 2014, 4-5.

52 Hani A. Faris, *Israel Zangwill’s Challenge to Zionism*, in: *Journal of Palestine Studies* 4 (1975) 3, 89; David Glover, *Imperial Zion. Israel Zangwill and the English Origins of Territorialism*, in: Eitan Bar-Yosef/Nadia Valman (ed.), *The Jew in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Culture. Between the East End and East Africa*, New York 2009, 131-143, here 132-133.

53 Steinberg, *Statement and Discussion*, 4.

“It would be a tragic irony of our history if the Jewish people after generations of experience would transplant the same tribal state life into Palestine, the very place where the prophets of Israel warned us against the dangers and crimes of tribes and states.”⁵⁴

Steinberg claimed that the Russian experience should serve as a lesson for both the young Jewish state and for the Jewish people as a whole: “The change-over from a glorious spiritual path, albeit lacking political power, to a route strewn with the glittering symbols of state-power and military prestige, appears to be a hazardous one.” The Russian Revolution had been morally and intellectually prepared like no other revolution preceding it. “Yet rarely has a people, in so short a time, been so thoroughly drained of its moral capital by its new regime, as has the Russian people.” Eventually, Steinberg believed, the era of statehood would come to an end, and with non-statist Diaspora spiritualism as its guiding spirit, the Jewish people would be more than ready for this change. After all, “[i]n the midst of the Jewish people stood not the majestic throne of royalty [statehood], but the invisible glory of the Mount of Sinai [moral and divine revelation]”.⁵⁵

During the previous two millennia, Steinberg claimed, the Jewish people had witnessed but managed to stay aloof from the statism that had been so damaging to the societies in which they lived. All of this changed with the arrival of the Jewish state. Jewish statehood had led to Jews oppressing other people. The Territorialists had specific moral objections to a confrontation with the Palestinian Arabs: “Our true tragedy occurred [...] when Jews abandoned their dignity and inner security, when they suddenly adopted the role of persecutr [sic] of another minority. With this they are creating moral anguish for themselves.”⁵⁶ Jewish statehood had turned Jews all over the world from a “people of mercy” into a “people of brutality”, for whom a violent treatment of Arabs had become acceptable.⁵⁷

The Freelanders saw the adoption of the UN Partition Plan for Palestine on 27 November 1947 as the beginning of more violent encounters between Jews and the Arab world: “It cannot be supposed that great numbers of dispossessed Arabs would agree to renounce their claim to their homes and lands which are as dear to them as Palestine is to the Jews.”⁵⁸ The Territorialists deplored the ensuing instances of anti-Arab violence, such as the Deir Yassin Massacre of 9 April 1948, and the Qibya Massacre of 14 October 1953. The Israeli Nationality Law of 14 July 1952 was deemed discriminatory, as it required only the Arabs in Israel to provide proof of their presence during the mandate period in order to obtain citizenship. For similar reasons, the Territorialists criticised the 1953 Land Acquisition Act.⁵⁹

In numerous public addresses and publications, the Freelanders pointed to the fact that the creation of a Jewish state, in the face of persistent Arab hostility towards it, would lead to the undesirable militarisation of Jewish life. This life had

54 YIVO, RG366/519, Steinberg, reply to article [Joseph] Steigrad, Is Palestine the only Solution for the Jewish Problem? [1943].

55 Isaac N. Steinberg, Yavneh or Jerusalem?, in: *Judaism* 4 (1955) 3, reprinted in Willy Birkenmaier (ed.), *Isaak Steinberg in London und New York*, in: *Russica Palatina* 40, Heidelberg 2002, 94-101, here 94-99, 101.

56 On the Mental Health of the Jewish People. A talk between Dr. Erich Fromm and Dr. I.N. Steinberg, in: *Freeland* 6 (June-July 1952) 5, 2-4, here 3.

57 Gleanings from The Press, in: *Freeland* 7 (March-April 1953) 2, 12-13.

58 The Palestine Decision, in: *Freeland* 3 (November-December 1947) 2, 3, 15, here 3; YIVO, RG366/337, Handwritten note Steinberg, 14 December 1947; YIVO, RG682/480, S. Stedman, *The Shpaltung Fun a Folk*, 1950.

59 Deir Yassin, in: *Freeland* 4 (May-June 1948) 2, 4; Isaac Steinberg, *The Jubilee Of An Idea*, in: *Freeland* 7 (November-December 1953) 5, 2-3; Letter Rabbi Benyamin [Reb Benyomin] to annual Freeland League Banquet 1954, in: *Freeland* 8 (March-April 1954) 6, 18; Gleanings From The Press. *The Nationality Act In Israel*, in: *Freeland* 6 (June-July 1952) 5, 15; Gleanings From The Press, in: *Freeland* 7 (April-May 1953) 3, 15.

so far, Steinberg wrote, always “kept aloof from Etatism, Chauvenism [sic], Militarism”.⁶⁰ Now, in the eyes of the world, and especially in the eyes of the Arabs, Jews had become political fighters. “It is no good for people”, Steinberg told the Anglo-American Committee of Enquiry on Palestine in 1946, “to emerge from the hell of Europe and immediately to plunge into new political troubles.”⁶¹ The Jewish state had become “the focal point of a thousand conflicting and irreconcilable religious, economic, political, military and social interests. It is burdened with a thousand lies and prejudices and hates. It is a battleground and a highway to battlegrounds.”⁶²

Freeland complained that the Irgun’s leader, Menachem Begin, was falsely considered a hero, including by American Jews. “Have they all been hit with the blindness of vulgar chauvinism?” Begin, who was likened to French President Charles de Gaulle, represented a harmful nationalism that was willing to sacrifice freedom and development to forge the people into an instrument of the state.⁶³ In summary, the land had become more important to the Zionists than the people: Potential immigrants were actively solicited, even though the Jewish state was not capable of absorbing them. This large influx of people led to a segregation between members of the *Yishuv* (the established Jewish community in Palestine), the ‘haves’, and the new arrivals, the ‘have nots’. In order for the new state to function in the long run, the immigration rate had to be slowed down and the Diaspora sustained for a longer period of time. The homelessness this might entail for a part of this Diaspora could be solved by a Territorialist project.⁶⁴ As Steinberg phrased it:

“Zionism will now mostly care for the upbuilding [sic] of a Jewish political nation, while the Freeland League has in mind the interests of the Jewish people as a whole, i.e. of every individual within the people. It is evident that this difference of conceptions causes also a deep difference in their next practical work. The Fr. League emerges out of this crisis with an even greater responsibility [sic] for the existence of our wandering masses and for the creation for them of a new sound and politically secure home.”⁶⁵

In other words, the Zionist conception of the Jewish nation included only a limited part of the Jewish people, namely those instrumental to the creation of a state, whereas the Territorialists cared for everybody, seeking to provide them with a ‘home’. *Freeland* stated it in much harsher terms: As long as the Zionists held on to their rigid position regarding Palestine, it was no longer only ‘Hitlerism’ that was to blame for the Jewish plight.⁶⁶

All in all, the Freelanders did not support the establishment of the Jewish state, but they were nonetheless concerned with its wellbeing. After 1948, they established warm contacts with known Zionist pacifists such as Nathan Chofshi (Nathan

60 YIVO, RG366/337, Handwritten note Steinberg, 14 December 1947; YIVO, RG366/519, In search of a Jewish Freeland, [1947/1948]; Isaac Steinberg, ‘The Way Of Freeland’, in: *Freeland* 6 (September-October 1951) 1, 2-4; Fruchtbaum, ‘An Evaluation Of Territorialism’, in: *Freeland* 8 (September-October 1954) 8, 5-6.

61 Steinberg, ‘Now is the Time’, in: *Freeland* 2 (February 1946) 2, 4-5, 19, here 5; Steinberg, ‘Statement and Discussion’, 5.

62 YIVO RG366/584, Samuel J. Stoll, ‘An Appeal to Jewish Reason’, attached to letter to Steinberg, 24 March 1944.

63 ‘Degradation and Blasphemy’, in: *Freeland* 5 (January-February 1949) 1, 2-3.

64 YIVO, RG682/298, Isaac Steinberg, ‘Free Israel and “Freeland”’, in: *Freeland Bulletin* (December 1949).

65 YIVO, RG366/337, Handwritten note Isaac Steinberg, 14 December 1947.

66 ‘From Our Point of View. The Crisis in Palestine’, in: *Freeland* 2 (June-July 1946) 4, 3-4.

Fraenkl) and Rabbi Benyamin (Yehoshua Radler-Feldmann),⁶⁷ as well as with Martin Buber, Judah L. Magnes, and Hans Kohn, prominent former members of the binationalist movement Brit Shalom and now central figures in Ihud (Unity), Brit Shalom's successor organisation.⁶⁸ Steinberg praised Ihud, which "stood up against the tendencies in Israel to national arrogance, to state glory, to military self-confidence, to every manner of moral assimilation".⁶⁹

Despite the support of its famous adherents, Ihud was small and not very influential in Israeli politics. The movement's existence notwithstanding, according to the Territorialists, the new Jewish State seemed to be willingly ignoring potential moral scruples. Apart from the Zionist treatment of the Palestinian Arabs, another example of such behaviour that the Freelanders deplored was the rapprochement between Israel and Germany in the 1950s.⁷⁰ Still, the 'Arab Question' remained central. As late as 1962, Freeland Judah Zelitch pointed out that the creation of the Jewish state had caused major tensions with the larger Arab world. The Zionist project, led by Ben-Gurion, had only worked because of the removal of 700,000 Arabs from Palestine. As long as the Palestinian refugee issue remained unsolved, Israel would find no peace.⁷¹

Their growing critique of the Jewish state made it clearer than ever that the Territorialists were not after statehood but, by contrast to other non-Zionist movements such as the Folkist and Bundist movements, they did seek concrete territories. To obtain these pieces of land, the Freelanders tied their fate to a still existing colonial world system: The ITO negotiated with the British and the Portuguese, and the Freeland League approached the British, French, and Dutch governments regarding several of their overseas colonial possessions. This is perhaps not surprising for the ITO days, which ended in the mid-1920s, but it is striking that colonial thinking continued to be part of Territorialism in the Freeland League era both before and after the Shoah.

The Territorialists were not alone in their continued interest in colonial projects. Colonial concepts continued to shape global political debates, albeit in changed forms and with altered content. The Freelanders were apt followers of these developing trends. In the Zangwill days, the ITO had appealed directly to colonial powers to ask them to grant the Territorialists parts of some overseas territories, whilst largely ignoring the rights or even the existence of indigenous peoples. After 1945, following Steinberg's lead, the Territorialists became ever more aware that contemporary decolonisation trends demanded good relationships with the indigenous inhabitants of the territories where they aspired to create Jewish settlements. Steinberg even saw a direct link between his own Russian experiences of 1917 and 1918 and the post-war 'awakening' of colonial subjects. The latter should draw lessons from the past by understanding that Bolshevism was not the only and surely not the best alternative to

67 See e.g. The Other Voice Of Israel. Man And Agriculture, in: *Freeland* 6 (September-October 1952) 6, 7-8; Aaron Staff, Contrasts In Personalities, in: *Freeland* 7 (November-December 1953) 5, 4-6; Rabbi Benyamin [Yehoshua Radler-Feldmann], For The Sake Of Survival, in: *Freeland* 7 (November-December 1953) 5, 9-10; Letters Nathan Chofshi and Rabbi Benyamin [Reb Benyomin] to annual Freeland League Banquet 1954, in: *Freeland* 8 (March-April 1954) 6, 18; Greetings To The Freeland Banquet [letters from Benyamin and Chofshi], in: *Freeland* 9 (April-May 1956) 2, 8-9.

68 Judah L. Magnes, Responsibility, in: *Freeland* 5 (January-February 1949) 1, 11-13; Hans Kohn, In Memory Of Two Great Teachers, in: *Freeland* 6 (February-March 1952) 3, 3-4. Steinberg knew Martin Buber personally, and the latter even contributed to the Steinberg memorial book that was published in 1961: Benjamin Jacob Bialostotzky/Melech Ravitch, Yitshok Nahmen Shteynberg, 1961, 159-166.

69 Steinberg, On the Tenth Anniversary of the "Yikhud" in Israel, in: *Freeland* 7 (March-April 1953) 2, 4. See also Aaron Staff, Impressions from Israel, in: *Freeland* 7 (May-June 1953) 3, 2-3.

70 On the Cultural Front, in: *Freeland* 7 (November-December 1953) 5, 15-16.

71 Judah Zelitch, To the International Community – Jewish Migration is also Your Problem, in: *Freeland* XV (December 1962) 3. See also Leo Heiman, Israel's Occupation Problem [Reprinted from Bnai Brith's The National Jewish Monthly], in: *Freeland* 21 (December 1968) 2, 9-10.

the capitalist system of their former oppressors.⁷² Decolonisation also became a frame for the Freelanders' critique of the Zionist dealings with the Palestinian Arabs. The Arab demands were to be reckoned with: "Highly civilized peoples have been whipped into rage directed against an element alien to their lives. Then why not the Arabs?" The Palestinian Arabs felt strengthened by the contemporary colonial developments and they might even receive support from the Soviets. The only way forward lay in an alliance between Jews and Arabs as part of the peoples' resistance against the colonial powers.⁷³

For the Territorialists' purposes, a postcolonial approach to territorial colonisation was therefore considered desirable.⁷⁴ This was evident during negotiations regarding a settlement in the Saramacca District in Suriname between 1946 and 1948, when the Freelanders communicated with both the Dutch and Surinamese governments. After all, the 'Surinamers' were in the process of gaining more political independence, which rendered the explicit recognition of this new and fragile local autonomy of the utmost importance. A Freeland League delegation headed by Steinberg himself even travelled to Paramaribo to convince local politicians and people's representatives of the Territorialist plans, and to show the Freelanders' willingness to recognise the nascent Surinamese authority.⁷⁵

Several years later, in 1955, the first Afro-Asian Conference was held in Bandung, Indonesia. Attended exclusively by non-Western countries, the conference reinforced Steinberg's heightened awareness of the new world order: This was the moment for Jews to forge relationships with the Muslim and postcolonial worlds. Unfortunately, he concluded, the "chauvinistic" and "militaristic" State of Israel was unsuited for this task. That was why other Jews should take it upon themselves to make peace with these non-Western forces, for the good of all mankind: "Bandung' is not merely a fact; it is a challenge to us, to our sense of justice and to our understanding."⁷⁶ As a result of Bandung, "the well known critical Zionist"⁷⁷ Robert Weltsch published an address in the Israeli press to Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, one of the 'stars' of Bandung. Weltsch implored Nasser to not only turn to the powerful capitals of the West and the East, namely Washington and Moscow, but also to find co-operation much closer to home, namely in Jerusalem.⁷⁸ Steinberg further developed Weltsch's thought experiment in what was to be his last published article. He set out to show that a new world order had arrived, represented by China, the Soviet Union – despite its "sins" and problematic past still the locale of the "social-revolutionary uprising of humanity" – and Jawaharlal Nehru's India. The Jewish people and Jewish morality, in one word "Jerusalem", were part of this new order as well.⁷⁹

This Jerusalem, a concept rather than the actual geographical place, still had an important moral role to play in the world. It was in this forging of a non-violent tra-

72 Steinberg, *In the Workshop*, x.

73 Ada Siegel, *Palestine. The Problem*, in: *Freeland* 2 (June-July 1946) 4, 10, 14, here 10.

74 In the *Freeland League*, *Freeland* 7 (January-February 1953) 1, 16.

75 For more about the Saramacca plan, see Almagor, *Forgotten Alternatives*, 194-196; Laura Almagor, *Een Vergeten Alternatief. Het Freeland League Plan voor Joodse Kolonisatie in Suriname* [A Forgotten Alternative. The Plan of the Freeland League for a Jewish Colonisation in Suriname], (MA thesis), Utrecht 2007; Alexander Heldring, *Het Saramacca Project. Een Plan van Joodse Kolonisatie in Suriname* [The Saramacca Project. A Plan for a Jewish Colonisation in Suriname], Hilversum 2011.

76 Steinberg, *Jews in Asia*, in: *Freeland* 8 (June-July 1955) 11, 5-6.

77 Isaac Steinberg, *The Mountain Peaks*, in: *Freeland* 9 (November-December 1956) 4, 9-11.

78 Robert Weltsch, *What I Would Say to Nasser of Egypt* [reprinted from *Haaretz*, 1 June 1956], in: *Freeland* 9 (June-July-August 1956) 3, 4-6.

79 Isaac Steinberg, *The Mountain Peaks*, in: *Freeland* 9 (November-December 1956) 4, 9-11.

ditional connection between politics and morality that the Jewish people had been unique, and not in its modern technological and military accomplishments. This fact had become obscured by the transformation of Israel into a state like any other.⁸⁰ Strikingly, in all of his writings, Steinberg used “the Jewish people” and “the Freeland League” or “the Territorialists” interchangeably. By suggesting that the work of the Territorialists was in fact the work for and by all Jews, the Freeland League became part of a larger moral mission: “The Jewish people [or: the Freeland League] will continue these efforts in the knowledge that solving the problem of its homeless goes hand in hand with the problem of humanity as a whole.”⁸¹

Conclusion

The history of Territorialism does not challenge the centrality of the Shoah in twentieth-century Jewish history. It does, however, contribute to a burgeoning body of scholarly works problematising the claim that the Shoah made all non-Zionist political behaviour obsolete. It also demonstrates that these events, even if hugely influential, did not change all aims and ideologies of every Jewish political movement. In the case of the Territorialists, even though the Shoah helped to define their post-war aims and approaches, it also served as an extreme confirmation of what the ITO and later the Freeland League had been arguing all along, namely that an imminent territorial solution for persecuted Jews needed to be found in a sparsely populated region in the world.

The war in Europe did force the Territorialists to move their headquarters to New York, and they lost numerous European members to the Nazi genocide. In all likelihood, the Shoah contributed to the movement’s inability to attain a mass following: The Freeland League never managed to attract more than several thousand active supporters around the world, mainly in the European DP camps. The refugee crisis that followed the war’s conclusion was therefore of great importance, as the Freelanders now explicitly engaged with the DPs. The DP issue altered their approach and rhetoric and provided the Freeland League with a new rationale for its continued existence. American Jewish politics and culture also strongly determined the nature of the issues on the Territorialist agenda, by introducing a focus on Jewish communal affairs in the United States.

Simultaneously, the Shoah intensified the Territorialists’ already existing pre-war engagement with Jewish Diaspora life. It confirmed the Diaspora’s symbolic and practical value for the preservation of Jewish culture, religion and language, first and foremost of Yiddish. The Territorialists deplored the Zionist anti-Yiddish language policies, partly because many Freelanders were themselves active in Yiddish literary circles. Investing in the Yiddish language and in *Yiddishkayt* more generally speaking also served to offer a counterweight to the Zionist state-building project in Palestine, which, in the eyes of Steinberg and his cohort, posed a moral threat to the Jewish future. The Freelanders increasingly felt that the realities of the militarising Israeli society were at odds with essential Jewish traditional and moral values. They rejected the Zionist preoccupation with statehood as un-Jewish and as potentially detrimental to a truly Jewish future. Territorialism, they claimed, offered a non-statist addition or alternative to Zionism, one that was better capable of dealing with postcolo-

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Steinberg, Australia, 8.

nial realities. Still, despite Zionist accusations to the contrary, Territorialism was never explicitly anti-Zionist. Even though Steinberg and other Territorialists criticised the realities on the ground in Palestine, they were never opposed to an organised Jewish presence in Palestine. The movement even directly related to the inner diversity of the Zionist movement, by aligning itself with heterodox Zionist movements such as Ihud. The Territorialists simply did not believe that Zionism was able to offer a full solution to the problem of Jewish homelessness; in its current militaristic form it was even counterproductive to the furthering of such an aim. In order for a wholesome Jewish future to be realised, both a Territorialist solution and a continuation of European Diaspora life needed to exist alongside an improved version of Zionism.

For Steinberg in particular, Jewish politics meant a continuation of his Russian Socialist Revolutionary career, even if by the 1950s he did not himself explicitly connect these two incarnations of his political existence.⁸² Territorialism was to be a tool to improve both the state of Judaism and the human condition in general. The Shoah had demonstrated to the Freelanders the need for a redefinition of Jewish sovereignty, without it translating into a state-focussed approach. By believing in such a predominantly cultural and collective notion of sovereignty, they opposed the geopolitical move towards a focus on individual rights rather than on ethnically defined collective group rights. After all, the Territorialists underlined, during the Shoah Jews had been singled out as Jews and not as individuals. In effect, in the post-war world they needed their rights as Jews protected rather than their rights as individuals.⁸³

Unfortunately for Steinberg, his anti-statism did not fit a post-war reality in which the role of the state had increased rather than subsided.⁸⁴ Internationalism and cosmopolitanism were at times valued, but also regarded with suspicion in the West, especially as they gained Communist connotations in a context dominated by Cold War anxieties. After the short-lived popularity of the idea of a world government in the 1940s, international politics and the new discipline of international relations turned against internationalist idealism.⁸⁵ The mismatch between Steinberg's ideals and political realities thus contributed to Territorialism's failure to have any of its plans materialise.

This failure to achieve practical results did not render Territorialism as such irrelevant, at least not in the eyes of all. In 1956, American Jewish philosopher Israel Knox reflected on Territorialism's continued relevance. A practical Territorialist settlement might never be created,

“[b]ut to some one like me, a student of Jewish organizations and philosophies, it does not matter, because to me the great significance of a group like the *Freeland League* would be this: it is a group with a *regulative* ideal which serves as a corrective to the actuality in Jewish life. Its very existence is a criticism of *what is* on behalf of *what ought to be*.”⁸⁶

82 In his own account of his Russian political career, Steinberg hardly mentioned Jews or Jewish matters. Steinberg, *In the Workshop*, 99.

83 Ada Siegel, *The International Bill of Rights*, in: *Freeland*, 1 (February 1945) 2, 5-6.

84 Mark Mazower, *Reconstruction. The Historiographical Issues*, in: Mark Mazower/Jessica Reinisch/David Feldman (ed.), *Post-War Reconstruction in Europe. International Perspectives, 1945-1949*, Oxford 2011, 17-28, here 24.

85 Mark Mazower, *Governing the World. The History of an Idea*, London 2012, 231; Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace. The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations*, Princeton 2009, 9.

86 Israel Knox, *Statehood or Peoplehood*, in: *Freeland* 9 (April-May 1956) 2, 4.

Laura Almagor
Historian, Center for Jewish History, New York City
laura.almagor@gmail.com

Quotation: Laura Almagor, A Territory, but not a State. The Territorialists' Visions for a Jewish Future after the Shoah (1943–1960), in: S:I.M.O.N. – Shoah: Intervention. Methods, Documentation 4 (2017) 1, 93-108.

http://simon.vwi.ac.at/images/Documents/Articles/2017-1/2017-1_Articles_Almagor/Articles_Almagor02.pdf

Article

Copy Editor: Tim Corbett

S:I.M.O.N. – Shoah: Intervention. Methods. DocumentatiON.
ISSN 2408-9192

Board of Editors of VWI's International Academic Advisory Board:
Peter Black/Gustavo Corn/Irina Sherbakova

Editors: Éva Kovács/Béla Rásky
Web-Editor: Sandro Fasching
Webmaster: Bálint Kovács
Layout of PDF: Hans Ljung

S:I.M.O.N. is the semi-annual e-journal of the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies (VWI) published in English and German.