

# 15

## JEWISH TERRITORIALISM AND ‘OTHER ZIONS’

*Laura Almagor*

In his oft-quoted short story ‘Samooborona’ (1907), the great Victorian novelist Israel Zangwill tells the story of Milovka, a remote shtetl in the Pale of Settlement that is targeted for destruction by a soon-to-arrive pogrom. The young agitator and organiser David Ben Amram travels to Milovka on behalf of the Samooborona (‘Self-Defence’ in Russian) organisation, to warn the town’s Jewish inhabitants of the impending catastrophe and to raise funds and manpower for local armed resistance. Instead, to his own growing bemused astonishment, David encounters not alarmed supporters but a plethora of Jewish political factions largely similar in ideological outlooks but nevertheless singularly at odds with one another. Blinded by these internal quarrels, every inhabitant of Milovka that David attempts to rally to the cause at hand outright dismisses his catastrophic warnings:

It seemed to him [David] as he stumbled blindly through the ill-paved alleys that a plague of doctors of philosophy had broken out over the Pale, doctrinaires spinning pure logic from their vitals, and fighting bitterly against the slightest deviation from the pattern of their webs.

Amidst the townsmen’s and women’s squabbles about who can claim ownership of the ‘unconditional historic necessity’ that legitimises their specific branch of politics, David exclaims: “There will be no Regeneration for you till you have the courage to leave Russian politics alone and to fight for yourselves.” However, David’s words are understood as simply yet another political statement: “Ah, you’re a Maximalist,” said the beadle. “No, I am only a Minimalist. I merely want the minimum – that we save our own lives.” David’s pragmatic efforts continue to fall on deaf ears and the pogrom eventually arrives with murderous zeal, leaving the town deadly silent in its wake: ‘The same unconditional historic necessity had overtaken them all.’<sup>1</sup>

Milovka's absurd political microcosm – reminiscent of the famous 'Judean People's Front' scene from Monty Python's *Life of Brian* – features most of the competing political strands and parties that made up the fabric of Eastern European Jewish life in the early twentieth century: Zionists from left to right, Mizrachi, Bundists, Territorialists, Assimilationists, Sejmists, to name just a few. As such, 'Samooborona' offers an excellent illustration of the wider political landscape of which Zionism in its various incarnations occupied just one part alongside many others. However, for the purpose of the current chapter, the story is relevant in yet another way: its author, Israel Zangwill, was not just a literary observer of the Jewish political complexities of his day but as first leader of the Jewish Territorialist Organisation (ITO), he was himself a central player in the reality he satirised.

During the long twentieth century, this multicoloured Jewish political reality became, in historian David N. Myers' words, a 'Lost Atlantis', overshadowed by the growing dominance of Zionism in the historical record.<sup>2</sup> Following the dictum that the victor defines the historical narrative, Zionism prevailed not only on the Jewish political scene, but also within the efforts to chronicle and interpret the Jewish political past. As a result of this process, only relatively recently have scholars begun to uncover the more diverse reality of Jewish politics until the mid-twentieth century. Even though doing so is no longer as controversial as it was several decades ago, a lingering tendency exists to write these non-Zionist political histories first and foremost in relation to Zionism. Even if this chapter does not entirely steer clear from a similar aim – as the 'Other Zions' of the title suggests – an equally important ambition is to not just widen our understanding of Zionist history, but also of the history of Jewish political behaviour more broadly speaking. The movements and parties under scrutiny here were for certain periods considered realistic options by a significant number of Jews. As such, if we want to learn about lived political experiences, we should take these histories seriously on their own terms, rather than teleologically treating them as footnotes to a linear Zionist narrative. That having been said, studying non-Zionist Jewish politics does help us better understand both Zionist history and the way that history has been written.

Significant scholarly work has already been done to reconstruct the rich Jewish political past. The history of the Jewish Labour Bund, or simply the Bund, has, due to its size and importance in interwar Poland, generated exciting research, including a dedicated chapter in this volume. Equally influential but less coherently analysed, are the histories of the various Diaspora Nationalist endeavours that developed between the wars. As a result, 'Diaspora Nationalism' as a project has often been presented in overly simplistic terms or as only an agenda that belonged to substrands of other movements and parties, first and foremost Zionist ones. Something similar can be observed in the case of the Jewish Territorialists, as 'Territorialism' has been taken very literally to mean any Jewish initiative that was focused on obtaining territory, again tying it directly to the Zionist endeavours. These interpretations of 'Diaspora Nationalism' and 'Territorialism' are not altogether incorrect, but they are incomplete. Part of the problem lies with the often vague or imprecise names various movements chose for themselves. The ITO was a prime example of this tendency to create name-based confusion, but also Naḥman Syrkin's Zionist-Socialist, or SS party was not exactly clear in its self-identification as Zionist, Socialist *and* Territorialist. The fact that the party emerged from the socialist autonomist group *Vozrozhdenie* only further complicates the picture. Moreover, even when attempting to create neat typologies to represent the political landscape, in reality a great amount of ideological overlap existed between various groups and organisations. For instance, the originally Bundist concept of

*Gegenwartsarbeit* (work in the present) was shared and further developed by Dubnowist Diaspora Nationalists, Territorialists and Zionists alike.

So how to make sense of this seemingly confused picture in which political groups, parties, movements, as well as the ideas they represented are not easily disentangled? The solution proposed here seeks to approach these histories through the analytical prism of the individual. In other words: rather than trying to create artificial order in the chaos, the fluidity of the history at hand is accepted and subsequently analysed by using elements of biography as a method to give significance to the many contradictions that unavoidably emerge in the story told. After all, it is not that hard to accept that no human life is linear: convictions and affiliations may change without the subject her- or himself becoming someone else altogether. This approach also helps to discuss the various political movements as not necessarily representing clear ideologies as such, which may be considered 'failures' in retrospect, but rather as representing less well-defined spectra of *ideans*.

### **Jewish Territorialism**

When broadening the picture of the history of Zionism and its political context, Jewish Territorialism forms a sound starting point because of the essential similarities between the two movements. As a result of these connections, however, Territorialism's relevance for Zionism has ironically often been neglected.

On 30 July 1905, the Seventh Zionist Congress voted against accepting British colonial secretary Joseph Chamberlain's offer of a piece of colonial territory in Kenya, mistakenly referred to as the 'Uganda proposal'. The turmoil that resulted in Territorialism's inception had begun in 1903. Theodor Herzl had been lobbying the various Great Power governments for a part of their (colonial) territories to be used for Jewish settlement. Because of its historical and spiritual significance, Palestine had featured high on Herzl's wish list from the outset. Nevertheless, Herzl explored several other options, such as El Arish in Egypt. After this area proved unattainable, Chamberlain's offer of the Guas Ngishu plateau in north-west Kenya may well have served as both compensation for this failure and as a way to potentially salvage the struggling British Uganda Railway project. Hardly naive to these pragmatic considerations, Herzl did understand the political significance of Chamberlain's subsequent offer. After all, the Zionist Movement, only officially organised since 1897, was now acknowledged by one of the world's strongest powers as the political national movement of the Jews. It could therefore be argued, as the Territorialists would eventually do, that it was not the Balfour Declaration but the Uganda proposal that was the first expression of international recognition on the road to Jewish statehood. Other leading Zionists also welcomed the plan, as it could offer the imminent solution to Jewish homelessness that Palestine at that point could not. At the very least, prominent Zionist leader Max Nordau stated in more moderate terms, Uganda could offer a temporary *Nachtsyl* (shelter for the night) for desperate Russian Jews. Therefore, the proposal was officially presented for internal consideration at the Sixth Zionist Congress in 1903.

However, not all Zionists agreed that Uganda should be considered as an option and two years of fierce infighting ensued within the movement, eventually culminating in the rejection of the offer in 1905. The outcome of the vote led to the secession from the movement of some fifty members, headed by Israel Zangwill, to form the ITO. The split was a scandal, as until then Zangwill had been one of the most prominent representatives of British Zionism. Furthermore, he had been very close to Herzl, who had died in 1904 without leaving a clear

answer to the question of Uganda. According to Zangwill, Herzl had been inclined to accept the proposal as an important first step on the road to Jewish political autonomy. Obviously, Herzl himself could no longer attest to this opinion, and Zangwill decided to go his own way with the ITO. From that moment onwards, Territorialism became devoted to finding physical places of settlement for Jews outside both (Eastern) Europe *and* Palestine.

The Uganda 'debacle' proved to be a critical moment for the Zionist Movement as not only was the ITO formed, but some of the former 'Herzlians', such as Syrkin, also left the movement. Syrkin used the occasion to establish the earlier mentioned Zionist Socialist, or Socialist Territorialist Party, which rejected the Zionist fixation on Palestine as preventing the development of a Jewish liberation movement for the Jewish masses. On the other end of the ideological spectrum, Yitzhak Yaacov Reines and his religious Mizrachi faction also supported the Uganda proposal. Reines agreed that however preferable Palestine was in the long run, it was not an attainable option at that moment, whereas Uganda could immediately alleviate the plight of the persecuted Russian Jews.

Zangwill, the newly minted Territorialist leader, had already been of the pragmatic school during his time as a Zionist. Although he acknowledged the special significance of Palestine, he was more interested in finding an immediate and politically viable solution for the 'Jewish question' in Eastern Europe. When the Uganda proposal was first presented, he defended this line of reasoning: 'The soul is greater than the soil, and the Jewish soul can create its Palestine anywhere, without necessarily losing the historic aspiration for the Holy Land.'<sup>3</sup> After 1905, the ITO devoted its efforts to exploring various possible locations, preferably, but not only, in British colonial territories. The organisation considered options in Argentina, Australia, Bolivia, Brazil, British East Africa, Canada, Colombia, Nevada and Idaho (USA), Paraguay, Rhodesia, Tripoli and Mexico. Most promising, however, were locations in Cyrenaica (Libya), Mesopotamia (Iraq), and in 1912 in Angola and Honduras.

Like the Zionists, the Territorialists did not manage to make a clear choice between a diplomatic approach (trying to legally obtain a piece of land in the form of a 'charter') and a proactive approach (setting up large-scale immigration as fast as possible). What was certain was that the future Territorialist settlements needed to be concentrated, with some degree of (cultural) autonomy and potentially focused on agriculture. Perhaps ironically, one of the ITO's most successful activities (and arguably the only one producing tangible results) was on behalf of the so-called Galveston Project between 1907 and 1914. Led by the American Jewish philanthropist Jacob Schiff, this emigration scheme aimed to disperse Eastern European Jewish immigrants through the less populated parts of the United States to prevent them from crowding together in New York City. As such, the Galveston Project was designed to achieve the opposite of the Territorialist aim of concentrated settlement. Nevertheless, Zangwill hailed the eventual outcome of 10,000 resettled Russian Jews as a victory for the ITO as an organisation, even if the project's leader Schiff was openly disappointed by this number.

Despite its limited practical success, the ITO managed to garner significant celebrity support, especially amongst the Anglo-Jewish elite that was growing increasingly wary of the Zionist activities in the Middle East. Zangwill's own relationship with the Zionist Movement also quickly soured. On more than one occasion, he attacked what he saw as the flawed and dangerously counterproductive Zionist project. Once the Territorialists were organised as a separate organisation, the Zionists saw their activities as a direct threat to the Zionist agenda. The split of 1905 even led to a rule within the Zionist Movement that prevented its members

from officially suggesting non-Palestinian locations as places for Jewish settlement, to forestall any future 'Uganda debacle'.

Relations somewhat improved with the issuing of the Balfour Declaration in 1917. Zangwill initially welcomed the Declaration, not because he recognised it as Zionism's ultimate victory, but rather because the British pledge sparked some initial hope in the Englishman that his own government could indeed contribute to the solving of Jewish homelessness. Very quickly, however, Zangwill realised the limitations of Balfour's promise. He started lashing out at those who saw the declaration as grounds for celebration and at world Jewish leaders in general: in his eyes they had failed miserably in their quest to attain political rights for Jews in Palestine. Much of Zangwill's discontent with Zionism centred on the Zionist Movement's dealings with the Palestinian Arabs, and he soon started to openly criticise Zionism for its inability to solve the Arab Question. By 1919, Zangwill had become adamant that for the Jewish home in Palestine to work, the Arabs, who in his view could never fully accept a Jewish political entity, would have to leave. Zangwill even proposed to resettle the Palestinian Arabs, earning him a militant reputation; it would later even redeem him in right-wing Zionist circles – his popularisation of the phrase 'a land without a people for a people without a land' features in Zionist discourse until today. However, describing Zangwill as a pioneer of Palestinian expulsion rhetoric would be overstating the case. Indeed, he believed that only such a resettlement of the Arab population would allow for a Jewish state to be established. In an ideal world, he stated, the Arabs themselves would leave voluntarily, and the 'welfare' of those who stayed behind 'must be as dear to us as our own'.<sup>4</sup> Realistically, however, Zangwill recognised that the Arabs were not willing to leave. This fact therefore rendered Palestine an unfeasible home for the Jews, let alone the site of a Jewish state.

Despite Zangwill's vocal objections to Zionist activities and his enduring efforts to prove the necessity of a Territorialist alternative, after the Balfour Declaration the ITO started to lose its already limited support base. Moreover, Zangwill himself suffered from worsening health issues. As a result, the movement was dissolved in June 1925, whilst officially the option for a future revival was kept open. The organisation was subsequently reinstated in 1934 in Warsaw as the Freeland League for Jewish Territorial Colonisation, in reaction to growing anti-Semitism in Europe, especially following Adolf Hitler's rise to power one year earlier. Because of the increasing difficulties for Jewish organisations to function in Central and Eastern Europe, the Freeland League soon moved its headquarters to London.

From there, the Freelanders negotiated settlement options with the British and French governments, proposing a number of these countries' colonial possessions as locations for Jewish migration, as well as parts of Alaska, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Papua, Peru, Somaliland, and Venezuela. French Guiana, British Guiana, and Ecuador were the most frequently mentioned in Freeland League plans during the late 1930s, as was – infamously – Madagascar. Cynically, shortly after the Freelanders had openly considered this French-owned African island, the Polish government, as well as several British fascists, took great interest in its potential as a Jewish settlement, in their case driven by anti-Semitic sentiments. Eventually, between 1940 and the Wannsee Conference in January 1942, even some members of the Nazi leadership suggested evacuating all of Germany's Jews to Madagascar, turning the idea into an anti-Semitic answer to the 'Jewish question', before that answer became the 'Final Solution'.

In its second incarnation, the Territorialist leadership no longer consisted mainly of British Jews. Now, for the first time, Territorialist leaders, and not just their followers, resided also

in Central and Eastern Europe, experiencing the urgency of an imminent solution for themselves. In 1942, the Freeland League headquarters were moved once again, this time to New York City. It was in this context of repeated geographical and ideological reinvention that Isaac N. Steinberg (1888–1957) emerged as the new main Territorialist figurehead. The former Russian revolutionary spent the years between 1939 and 1943 in Australia, lobbying for the establishment of a Territorialist settlement in the Kimberley, in the north-west of the country. As soon as Steinberg arrived in the US in 1943, he established himself as the organisation's most important leader and ideologue. As a young man, Steinberg had briefly served in Russia as the People's Commissar of Justice in 1917 and 1918, as a member of the Left Socialist Revolutionary party, which cooperated with Vladimir Lenin's Bolsheviks. Disillusioned by what he considered to have been the failure of the true Socialist Revolutionary ideals, Steinberg continued to believe in a socialist-inspired universal betterment of mankind. His Russian experiences would remain important for his views vis-à-vis statehood, communism, and militarism, and therefore for the Territorialist Movement as a whole.

It was under Steinberg's leadership that the Freeland League undertook its most promising endeavour: the Saramacca project. This plan to settle a group of Eastern European Jewish displaced persons (DPs) in the Dutch Latin American colony of Suriname (Dutch Guiana) surfaced around the same time that the Freeland League was officially reinstated in New York in April 1946. On 28 January 1947, the governor of Suriname presented the Freeland League proposal to the Staten van Suriname, the Surinamese legislative body. Subsequently, a three-man Freeland League delegation, headed by Steinberg, travelled to Paramaribo in April 1947, followed by a joint statement of the Freeland League and a Surinamese governmental advisory committee announcing the intention to create a Jewish settlement. The Freeland League's proposal for the initial colonisation of 30,000 Jews was eventually accepted 'in principle' by the Staten van Suriname and a 'commission of experts' was sent to Suriname in late 1947 to work out the details.

Despite all these efforts, on 14 August 1948, the Staten van Suriname decided to suspend negotiations. This decision was officially taken because of turbulent international developments: the creation of the State of Israel in May 1948 and the onset of what was soon to be termed the Cold War. The Dutch, influential behind the scenes, were also reluctant to antagonise both the Zionist Movement and Muslims around the world. After all, the Netherlands were occupied with 'police actions' in the Dutch East Indies (in reality a colonial guerrilla war), which had the largest Muslim population in the world. Finally, not insignificant was the very active American Zionist agitation that had turned the mood in Suriname against the Freelanders.

This episode exemplifies how the separation between Zionism and Territorialism that had commenced during the ITO days continued with the establishment of the Freeland League. The occasional Territorialist praise for Zionist work notwithstanding, the Freelanders believed that the Zionist project was inherently flawed in its execution. Steinberg thus became one of the most vocal critics of Zionism. For their part, the Zionists still saw the modest-sized Freeland League as potentially harmful to their cause. As a result, the Zionists actively opposed the Freeland League activities in the post-war European DP camps, especially in Austria, where the organisation was garnering some significant support. Later Zionist attacks show that even after the establishment of the State of Israel, Zionists still perceived Territorialism as a threat.

From the Freelanders' point of view, the issue with Zionism was not just of a practical but also of a moral nature. Steinberg and his circle saw as the main culprit of what they

considered both a moral and practical failure, the Zionist obsession with statehood. Part of the basis for this fierce rejection of Jewish statehood should be sought in Steinberg's ideological trauma of the transformation of the revolutionary ideals of his youth into an oppressive Soviet state, which he saw reproduced in the Zionist state-building activities. Moreover, 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 unwanted militarisation of Jewish life. The Zionist underground movements, the Irgun and the Stern Group (later Lehi), were therefore prime targets of Territorialist criticism.

This tense relationship between Territorialism and Zionism did not mean that the Freelanders cut all ties to their Zionist origins. After 1945, the Freeland League even further aligned itself with Zionist Movements functioning on the 'ideological periphery' of the Yishuv. The most important of these movements was Ihud (Unity), the successor organisation to the bi-nationalist Brit Shalom Movement that had operated in the interwar period. Steinberg corresponded most extensively with Ihud's pacifist leaders Nathan Chofshi (Nathan Fraenkl; 1889–1980) and Rav Benyamin (Yehoshua Radler-Feldmann, also known as Yehoshua Hatalmi, 1880–1957).

This explicit engagement with Jewish politics, even after the Territorialists ceased to be politically relevant themselves after 1948, mostly ended with Steinberg's death in 1957. His successor as head of the movement, Mordkhe Schaechter, was largely responsible for the Yiddishist direction the movement continued to take from that moment onwards. During the late interwar period Territorialism had already become increasingly invested in Yiddish language and culture. Steinberg's initial lukewarm commitment to Yiddishism did strengthen after 1945, when Territorialism's political ambitions became less attainable. Territorialism became part of a burgeoning transnational Yiddishist circle, especially after its operational centre had moved to New York, incidentally also the new home of YIVO, the Yiddishist Movement's headquarters. In honouring the rich diaspora past whilst shaping its future, the post-war Freelanders decided that Yiddish language and culture were to have a central place in any Territorialist settlement. This focus on Yiddish eventually paved the way for the movement's final break with political work when the Freeland League became the League for Yiddish in 1979.

### **Diaspora Nationalism**

Territorialism's eventual turn to Yiddishism places the movement within a longer history of Jewish politics, especially in Eastern Europe. At their most active during the interwar period, Bundists, Yiddishists, Autonomists, Folkists, and Territorialists relied on shared political discourses, which focused on the preservation of Jewish life in the Diaspora as expressed through Yiddish language and culture. Even the Zionists increasingly embraced the value of *Gegenwartsarbeit* (work in the present) based on the (originally Bundist) concept of *doikeyt* (hereness). All of these efforts could be labelled 'diaspora nationalist', even though an agreed-upon definition of 'diaspora nationalism' is lacking: does the term refer to an ideology, practical activities, or an organised movement? And were these efforts an outgrowth of the century-long Jewish experience of *galut* (exile) imbued with religious significance, or was Diaspora Nationalism strictly speaking a product of modernity and the Haskalah (the Jewish Enlightenment)?

The main thread tying together the various modern Diaspora Nationalist narratives was formed by the Yiddish language and culture, or, in short, 'Yiddishkayt'. In 1925, 11 million

people, or three-quarters of all Jews in the world, had Yiddish as their native tongue.<sup>5</sup> Many of these Jews lived within the declining Russian or Habsburg imperial contexts, which nurtured the development of various forms of Jewish minority consciousness, mirroring and influencing similar initiatives of other minority groups such as Poles and Ukrainians. In the wake of Jewish Emancipation and minority enfranchisement, options presented themselves for Jews to be represented on the central political levels. The high number of Yiddish speakers combined with this growing interest in Jewish minority politics helps highlight the significance of the various interwar efforts to create a secular movement on behalf of Yiddish language and culture. The 1908 Czernowitz Yiddish Language Conference brought together diverse parties that shared this investment. Czernowitz also offered a platform for criticism of Hebraist Zionists. Bundist Esther Frumkin, for instance, openly stated her belief that Yiddish should be declared the national language of the Jewish people. Yiddish thus became an important part of the ever more turbulent reality of Jewish politics in which Yiddishists and Hebraists found themselves pitted against each other.

Despite it being one of the central issues on the Jewish political agenda, Yiddish did not manage to create one uniform Diaspora Nationalist platform. The main typologies of Diaspora Nationalism were represented by two prominent ideologues and politicians: Simon Dubnow and Chaim Zhitlowsky. Dubnow (1860–1941) is generally credited with having developed the most extensive and coherent Diaspora Nationalist programme, even if not all Diaspora Nationalists subscribed to it. As a journalist in Odessa in the 1890s, Dubnow made a name for himself by demonstrating the longer history of the autonomous nature of Jewish society in a multivolume history of the Jews of Eastern Europe. Dubnow openly called on Russian Jews to take the various forms of Jewish cultural and social autonomy that had existed in the past as inspiration to reconceptualise the diversity of modern Jewish life as a ‘nation’. As such, Dubnow argued, it was important that Jews should maintain their distinctiveness by claiming national rights in addition to their recently obtained civic ones, to counteract the dangers of assimilation in the wake of Emancipation. At the same time, Dubnow took issue with the Zionist solution to this conundrum which sought to leave Europe altogether, both physically and spiritually, an outlook famously summarised in the cultural Zionist Aḥad Ha’am’s concept of *shelilat ha’Galut* (negation of exile). Dubnow developed his national programme, which he referred to as ‘Autonomism’, in 15 letters between 1897 and 1906. Their collective publication in 1907 as *Letters on Old and New Jewry*, as well as Dubnow’s own political activism on behalf of his Yidishe Folkspartey (Jewish People’s Party) cemented his legacy as one of the founders of organised Diaspora Nationalism for decades to come.

Dubnow’s contemporary Chaim Zhitlowsky (1865–1943) represents the other main strand of Diaspora Nationalism, which merged diasporic Jewish national belonging with socialist ideology. Originally subscribing to the socialist dogma that Jewish particularism was anathema to universalist socialist ideals, Zhitlowsky came to observe how socialism and Jewish nationalism were developing alongside one another. Merging the two by investing in Yiddish language and culture along socialist lines, Zhitlowsky argued, would serve to morally improve Jewishness. In doing so, Zhitlowsky not only offered a non-spiritual alternative to famed author I.L. Peretz’s messianic understanding of the significance of the Jewish Diaspora, but he also went against the mainstream socialist aim of radical Jewish assimilation into socialist society. Instead, an investment in Yiddish language and culture would help co-opt Russian Jews into a preferably agrarian secular socialist future by translating socialist ideals for the Jewish masses into their own vernacular. Politically, Zhitlowsky changed



affiliations throughout his life, most notably from the Bund to the Russian Jewish socialist autonomist group *Vozrozhdenie*, which was heavily influenced by socialist revolutionary and Jewish Territorialist ideologies.

During the early interwar period, Jewish political activists became evermore swayed by Zhitlowsky's secular, Yiddishist nationalism rather than by Dubnow's more abstract and spiritual form of Jewish unity based on the early modern Jewish *kehillah* system. The promises held by the Russian Revolution in 1917 and its direct aftermath fed into the growing appeal of Zhitlowsky's socialist-Jewish nationalism. Seemingly apolitical endeavours, such as the establishment of the Kultur-Lige (Culture League) in Ukraine directly following the First World War, were manifestations of this trend. More explicitly political were the establishment in 1917 in Kiev of the United Jewish Socialist Workers' Party, or *Fareynikte*, and of Noah Prylucki's Folkist Party in Poland. What all these efforts had in common was an engagement with the notion of a Jewish renaissance through cultural or cultural-political work.

However, even if speaking Yiddish and 'living' Yiddish was the Eastern European Jewish lived reality, not all Jews were favourable to the Yiddishist project. Dubnow himself came to see Yiddishism as a narrow East European endeavour that ignored the much richer Jewish past, and as artificial and chauvinistic, negating the shared importance of Hebrew and Yiddish. Younger Diaspora nationalists increasingly lost faith in the prospects of Yiddishism after the 1920s, especially as they began to view modern Yiddish culture, in their eyes an invention of the *Haskalah*, as mere window dressing for assimilation. In addition to the tension inherent in Yiddishism between populism and elitism, its increasingly radical secularism also proved problematic in an East European Jewish reality that was still heavily determined by religion. As a result, to prevent becoming irrelevant, Yiddishism had to merge its new secular content with its religiously inspired view of Yiddish as a means of national redemption.

These tensions were resolved and, with that, Yiddishism partly salvaged by the Yiddishist Movement's growing presence in the United States. American-style Yiddishism managed to overcome the seemingly unbridgeable gap between particularistic religion and secular integration tendencies. This new American Yiddish culture in turn influenced the European scene between the wars. The specific American context did not, however, allow for the replication of the European Diaspora Nationalist ambition to achieve relatively far-reaching levels of political autonomy.

Similarly, the Soviet Jewish Autonomous Region or Oblast in Birobidzhan, established in 1928, did not constitute the form of autonomy that Diaspora Nationalists or even Territorialists aspired to. Interestingly, until this day Birobidzhan resonates more strongly in the public recollection than any of the Diaspora Nationalist or Territorialist initiatives. In reality, despite the prevalence of Yiddish in the settlement during its heyday in the 1920s and 1930s, Birobidzhan does not fit the bill of Diaspora Nationalism, as it was never a Jewish-led project aimed at some form of autonomy within the Soviet structure. Instead, it was a cynical manifestation of Josef Stalin's ethnically inspired transfer policies that exiled Russian Jews to the most far-flung parts of the Soviet empire.

### **Territorialism and Diaspora Nationalism**

Even if they formed part of the same Jewish political sphere, and shared an engagement with Yiddishism, there was still one crucial difference between Territorialism and Diaspora Nationalism: in contrast to the *Freelanders*, Diaspora Nationalists essentially believed in non-territorial Jewish autonomy. Even if there was also a 'territorial' aspect to the Diaspora

Nationalists' ideology, this was to be found in their strong attachment to the territories where Jews were already present in Europe. Despite these theoretical differences between the two movements, in practice and on the individual level of the relevant leaders, a growing rapprochement between Territorialists and Diaspora Nationalists took place. Most prominently, in 1904, after joining *Vozrozhdenie*, Zhitlowsky had openly proclaimed his newfound attachment to the idea of a separate territory as crucial for the Jewish future.

Eventually, Territorialism's appeal to disillusioned Diaspora Nationalists partly lay in the fact that it offered a middle way between the two dominant Jewish political movements of the period: Bundism and Zionism. For some, Bundism, which strove for post-national internationalist ideals, was not based enough in Jewish culture and tradition. At the other end of the spectrum, Zionism did not allow for the perpetuation of Jewish life in the Diaspora, a stance that was unacceptable to many Diaspora Nationalists. Yisroel Efroikin, co-founder of the Folkist Party with Dubnow, ventured away from Dubnowian thought towards Territorialism. He increasingly believed in the necessity of a territorial premise for the achievement of a Jewish national renaissance. His colleague at *YIVO* and *Oyfn Sheydveg* [On the threshold, the Diaspora Nationalists' main periodical], Zelig Kalmanovitch, left Diaspora Nationalism for Territorialism and even officially joined the Freeland League. Announcing the death of the Diaspora Nationalist ideals in the face of the Holocaust, Kalmanovitch claimed in 1940: 'In exile Jews can have no human rights.'<sup>6</sup>

## Conclusion

Kalmanovitch had changed his viewpoint over the years, as had many of his contemporaries, regardless of their political affiliations. Instead of labelling such changes in ideological outlooks as 'inconsistencies', we may use the trajectories of the individuals featured in this chapter to paint a more diverse and nuanced picture of Jewish politics, one that shows the significant changes that occurred during the turbulent first half of the twentieth century. The Holocaust looms large in the diverse historiographical assessments of the movements that populated the interwar Jewish political scene. A tendency exists to consider these initiatives as having been doomed to fail from the outset in the light of what came after, namely the mass destruction of European Jewry. Following this logic, the Holocaust rendered all non-Zionist political behaviour obsolete. However, without denying that Jewish political communities were decimated, and that the establishment of the State of Israel represented a major victory for the Zionist political project, these facts do not automatically mean that all other Jewish political colours ceased to exist after May 1948. More importantly, we should not fall into the teleological trap of dismissing non-Zionist Jewish politics before the Shoah as phantasmagorical or delusional. Rather, we must aim to reconstruct the history of Jewish politics on its own terms, trying to understand its diverse meanings for the individuals who created and lived those realities. The focus on the various political individuals in this chapter has been one attempt at doing analytical justice to this fascinating past.

## Notes

- 1 Zangwill, 'Samooborona'.
- 2 Myers, 'Rethinking Sovereignty and Autonomy'.
- 3 Zangwill, 'Zionism and Charitable Institutions', 180.

- 4 Zangwill, 'The Voice of Jerusalem', 110.
- 5 Whilst often also having command of, and an emotional connection to, the majority language, most notably Russian or Polish.
- 6 Quoted in: Karlip, *The Tragedy of a Generation*, 230.

### Primary Sources

- Birkenmaier, Willy (ed.). *Isaak Steinberg in London und New York* (Heidelberg: Heidelberg University, 2002).
- Dubnow, Simon. *Nationalism and History: Essays on Old and New Judaism*, ed. Koppel S. Pinson (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1958).
- Zangwill, Israel. 'Samooborona', in id., *Ghetto Comedies* (New York: Macmillan, 1907), 429–87.
- Zangwill, Israel. 'The Voice of Jerusalem', in id., *The Voice of Jerusalem* (New York: Macmillan, 1921), 6–136.
- Zangwill, Israel. 'Zionism and Charitable Institutions', in id., *Speeches, Articles and Letters* (London: Soncino, 1937), 167–80.
- Zangwill, Israel. *Speeches, Articles and Letters of Israel Zangwill*, ed. Maurice Simon (London: Soncino, 1937).

### References and Further Reading

- Almagor, Laura. 'A Territory, But Not a State: The Territorialists' Visions for a Jewish Future after the Shoah (1943–1960)', *S:I.M.O.N. – Shoah: Intervention. Methods. Documentation*, 4/1 (2017), 93–108.
- Almagor, Laura. 'Fitting the Zeitgeist: Jewish Territorialism and Geopolitics (1943–1960)', *Contemporary European History*, 27 (2018), 351–369.
- Almagor, Laura. '“A Highway to Battlegrounds”: Jewish Territorialism and the State of Israel, 1945–1965', *Journal of Israeli History*, 37 (2019), 201–225.
- Almagor, Laura. 'Tropical Territorialism: Displaced Persons, Colonialism, and the Freeland League in Suriname (1946–1948)', in Maja Gildin Zuckerman and Jakob Egholm Feldt (eds.), *New Perspectives on Jewish Cultural History: Boundaries, Experiences, and Sensemaking* (London: Routledge, 2019), 73–95.
- Almagor, Laura. *Beyond Zion: The Jewish Territorialist Movement* (Liverpool/Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2022).
- Alroey, Gur. *Zionism without Zion: The Jewish Territorial Organization and Its Conflict with the Zionist Organization* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2016).
- Birkenmaier, Willy. 'Judentum ohne Rückkehr nach Palästina: Isaak Steinberg und der Territorialismus als Alternative zum Zionismus', *Trumah*, 19 (2010), 86–101.
- Grill, Tobias. 'Kampf für Sozialismus und Judentum auf vier Kontinenten: Isaac Nachman Steinberg's "Rooted Cosmopolitanism"', *BIOS: Zeitschrift für Biographieforschung, Oral History und Lebensverlaufsanalysen*, 28 (2015), 41–65.
- Karlip, Joshua. *The Tragedy of a Generation: The Rise and Fall of Jewish Nationalism in Eastern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).
- Krutikov, Mikhail. 'Isaac Nahman Steinberg: From Anti-Communist Revolutionary to Anti-Zionist Territorialist', *Jews in Eastern Europe*, 38–9 (1999), 5–24.
- Loeffler, James. 'Between Zionism and Liberalism: Oscar Janowsky and Diaspora Nationalism in America', *AJS Review*, 34 (2010), 289–308.
- Myers, David N. 'Rethinking Sovereignty and Autonomy: New Currents in the History of Jewish Nationalism', *Transversal*, 13 (2015), 44–51.
- Rabinovitch, Simon. *Jews and Diaspora Nationalism: Writings on Jewish Peoplehood in Europe and the United States* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2012).
- Rabinovitch, Simon. *Jewish Rights, National Rites: Nationalism and Autonomy in Late Imperial and Revolutionary Russia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).
- Rochelson, Meri-Jane. *A Jew in the Public Arena: The Career of Israel Zangwill* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008).

- Rojanski, Rachel. 'The Final Chapter in the Struggle for Cultural Autonomy: Palestine, Israel and Yiddish Writers in the Diaspora, 1946–1951', *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, 6 (2007), 185–204.
- Rovner, Adam. *In the Shadow of Zion: Promised Lands before Israel* (New York: New York University Press, 2014).
- Shanes, Joshua. *Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish Identity in Habsburg Galicia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
- Vital, David. 'Zangwill and Modern Jewish Nationalism', *Modern Judaism*, 4 (1984), 243–253.
- Wallat, Hendrik. *Oktoberrevolution oder Bolschewismus: Studien zu Leben und Werk von Isaak N. Steinberg* (Münster: Edition Assemblage, 2013).