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# Fitting the *Zeitgeist*: Jewish Territorialism and Geopolitics, 1934–1960

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L A U R A A L M A G O R

*This article demonstrates the connection between the ideology and activities of the Jewish Territorialist Movement and broader geopolitical trends and discourses during the late interwar and immediate post-war period. The Territorialists, active from 1934 within the Freeland League for Jewish Territorial Colonisation, were representative of such contemporary trends and discourses, especially those connected to prevailing approaches to peoplehood, territory and space. The Freelanders relied on accepted notions and practices such as colonialism and colonisation, ‘whiteness’, race, biopolitics and agro-industrial science, as well as (empty) spaces and un(der)developed territories. The Territorialists’ alignment with geopolitics makes the movement’s little studied history a relevant chapter in the larger story of Jewish political behaviour. Moreover, the continuities in Territorialism’s aspired social engineering project help to problematise the notion of 1945 as a turning point in twentieth century geopolitical thinking.*

In the popular and historical imagination the year 1945 often serves as a watershed moment, ushering in a new humanitarian era. In reality, striking continuities in geopolitical trends challenge this romantic interpretation. Many of the very institutions that shaped the notion of a Western post-war reinvention were in fact only slightly altered reconstitutions of older bodies and organisations. Jewish political movements were also part of this tendency towards continuity, which becomes clear by focusing on the history of the Jewish Territorialist movement. A deeper exploration of the Territorialists’ connection to geopolitical trends contributes to a better understanding of the larger story of Jewish political behaviour. Moreover, recognising the continuities in Territorialism’s social engineering project challenges the notion of 1945 as a turning point in twentieth century geopolitical thinking.

In 1944 a young American Jew named Lester Meyers wrote to the Freeland League for Jewish Territorial Colonisation in New York City, after having received some of the organisation’s publication materials: ‘your idea sounds slightly crackpot, or visionary, depending on the point of view. However, I believe you are sincere,

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so send me literature.’<sup>1</sup> Contrary to this assessment, the Jewish Territorialists who were active within the Freeland League from the mid-1930s onwards were neither crazy nor farsighted – neither ‘crackpot’ nor ‘visionary’ – but rather representative of contemporary geopolitical trends and discourses, especially those connected to prevailing approaches to peoplehood, territory and space. The Territorialists relied on accepted notions and practices like colonialism, ‘whiteness’, biopolitics, agro-industrial science, as well as ‘(empty) spaces’ and un(der)developed territories. Their attachment to a Realpolitik based on scientific discourse, expeditions and commissions ‘reveals how a scientific application of settlement ideas aimed to alter Jewish reality and geopolitics’.<sup>2</sup>

The case study of Territorialism helps to demonstrate the complexity of ‘geopolitics’. Ever since it was first coined at the end of the nineteenth century, ‘geopolitics’ has referred to a discourse that has been loosely shared and shaped by various geographers and politicians, and it served as a direct reaction to the looming fear of the loss of empire that defined the existing world order throughout the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> The US war involvement spurred a sudden and unprecedented mass interest in geography and global politics,<sup>4</sup> and by the close of the Second World War geopolitics had therefore lost none of its significance for scientists and policy makers concerned with the drafting of the post-war world order. The term was now ‘understood as the dynamic, ever-changing interaction between political government writ large and natural geography’.<sup>5</sup>

However, a focus on Territorialism’s history shows that twentieth century geopolitics was not only defined by natural geography but also by aspects of human geography. Territorialist ideology connected the traditional Jewish political approach of hitching one’s fate onto the wishes of stronger, colonial powers, to socialist revolutionary ideals envisaging a morally just and stateless world, as well as to post-colonial sentiments in support of non-Western liberation movements. The following analysis seeks to explain this seeming incompatibility between the Freelanders’ attachment to internationalist and universal convictions and their positive evaluation of population movements in a colonial framework to solve the plight of the European Jews. This article reveals the importance of such diverse aspects for the development of Territorialist history while also demonstrating the significance of studying a relatively small movement like the Freeland League for our understanding of geopolitics. Zooming in on the Territorialist activities also brings to the fore the geopolitical importance of individual actors and their personal and professional networks. In the

<sup>1</sup> Lester Meyers to Freeland League, 29 Oct. 1944, RG366/158, Isaac Steinberg Papers, YIVO Archives, New York City.

<sup>2</sup> Adam Rovner, *In the Shadow of Zion: Promised Lands before Israel* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 6–7.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Heffernan, ‘Fin de Siecle, Fin du Monde?’, in Klaus Dodds and David Atkinson, eds., *Geopolitical Traditions. A Century of Geopolitical Thought* (London: 2000), 27–51, here 28.

<sup>4</sup> Neil Smith, *American Empire: Roosevelt’s Geographer and the Prelude to Globalization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 274.

<sup>5</sup> Or Rosenboim, ‘Geopolitics and Empire: Visions of Regional World Order in the 1940s’, *Modern Intellectual History*, 12, 2 (2015), 353–81, here 354.

following pages Territorialism will be analysed in relation to population politics, agriculture and ‘agro-industry’, colonialism and the notion of ‘empty spaces’ and post-colonial developments. By focusing on these elements this article underwrites the relatively recent scholarly field of ‘critical geopolitics’, which has been labouring to expand the meaning of ‘geopolitics’. Applied to Jewish Territorialism this critical approach lays bare new aspects of the continuities of geopolitics before and directly following the Second World War, and it helps to defy the notion of 1945 as a ‘Year Zero’.<sup>6</sup>

### The Jewish Territorialist Movement

The organisational history of Jewish Territorialism begins in 1905. In that year British author and playwright Israel Zangwill (1864–1926) shocked the Jewish political world by leading the secession of about fifty prominent Zionists from the Zionist movement to establish the Jewish Territorial Organisation (in Yiddish: *(y)idishe territorialistishe organizatsiye*; ITO). This break away was a reaction to the Zionist rejection of British Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain’s offer of the Guas Ngishu Plateau (better-known as the Uganda Proposal), situated in modern day Kenya, for the establishment of a Jewish settlement. From that moment onwards the Jewish Territorialists searched for areas outside Palestine in which to create settlements of Jews. Zangwill disbanded the ITO in 1925, but a second ‘wave’ of organised Territorialism followed with the founding in 1934 of the Freeland League for Jewish Territorial Colonisation, in Warsaw and Paris. Soon thereafter, like the ITO before it, the new organisation established its headquarters in London. Until the outbreak of the Second World War the Freeland League most famously explored settlement options in French and British Guiana, Madagascar, New Caledonia, the New Hebrides and Australia.

Despite their shared origins, the Territorialists soon dissociated themselves from the Zionist movement. By the time the Freeland League was established in the mid-1930s, Territorialism had become diametrically opposed to Zionism in the minds of both Zionists and Territorialists. The latter termed the former utopians, imagining some future in Palestine that had no relationship with actual events and realities on the ground. The Freelanders saw themselves as pragmatists who only wished to develop their projects in geographical locations where success was likely. In practice both Zionism and Territorialism relied on modern scientific approaches to settlement. After all, the Zionist movement’s practical results on the ground in Palestine were part of its propagandistic success during these years. Because of this proximity in approach Territorialism needed to visibly differentiate itself from its ‘big brother’. The Freelanders thus stressed that their movement was of an even greater practical and non-utopian nature. The Territorialists claimed that they, more so than the

<sup>6</sup> Mark Mazower, ‘Reconstruction: The Historiographical Issues’, in Mark Mazower, Jessica Reinisch and David Feldman, eds., *Post-War Reconstruction in Europe: International Perspectives, 1945–1949* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 17–28, here 20–4.

Zionists, sought to accomplish their aims through methods that were in line with contemporary trends in thinking about space and settlement.

While Territorialism's self-proclaimed practicality was an important tool for the movement's public relation's strategy until the outbreak of war, this explicit alignment with international policy developments, combined with the Freelanders' growing pessimism regarding a European future for Jews, became even stronger after 1945. Many of the pre-war continental European Territorialists had perished during the Shoah, and the Freeland League's seat moved from London to New York City during the war years. At this point, the organisation, which had never acquired a mass following before the war, counted only several hundred active members around the globe. This number soon increased to a few thousand when branches were organised in the different displaced persons (DP) camps, mainly in Austria, but also outside the DP-structure, in Romania and Poland.<sup>7</sup>

Despite this moderate growth in membership, the future looked foggy for the Freeland organisation, as it did for international politics more generally. In the summer of 1944, new Freeland League-leader Isaac N. Steinberg (1888–1957) predicted the challenges that the unclear post-war world order would pose to both Jews and non-Jews: 'it is useless to deny that the clearer the light of peace appears on the dark horizon, the more obscure becomes the shape of the new world'.<sup>8</sup> In this new world order the Freelanders continued to believe in the Territorialist cause: Jewish life, of infinite value to the betterment of humankind, could only be truly rebuilt outside Europe, where anti-Semitism had not yet polluted the general public opinion. This new life would work in a relatively unpopulated area, through concentrated colonisation with cooperative methods, but without achieving statehood.<sup>9</sup>

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. The failures of state-building that he had encountered in his own socialist revolutionary past in Russia as the People's Commissar of Justice in 1917 and 1918 had ideologically shaped him to actively strive for alternative structures.<sup>10</sup> This rejection of 'the state' puts the Freeland League at odds with leading political convictions. The notion of national sovereignty makes it difficult to imagine other forms of political organisation. After all, statehood is understood to resolve the question of political identity.<sup>11</sup> The Territorialists were amongst those who challenged

<sup>7</sup> Minutes Freeland Youth Organisation, 10 July 1947, YIVO RG366/65; 'Excerpts from letters from Europe', letter from Łódź, 27 Apr. 1947, YIVO RG366/143; Saul Goodman to Boris Raptshinsky, 15 Apr. 1947, YIVO RG366/107; 'Facts of Freeland League', 1 Oct. 1947, YIVO RG366/515; *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Stronnictwa Demokratycznego w Łodzi*, nr. 14, 10 July 1947, YIVO RG682/378, Mordkhe Schaechter Papers, YIVO, New York City.

<sup>8</sup> Isaac Steinberg, 'Free Land and Free People [reprinted from *Ojfn Shvel*]', *Freeland* (Aug. 1944), 7.

<sup>9</sup> Isaac Steinberg, 'Colonization versus Migration', *Freeland*, 1, 3 (Apr. 1945), 3–4; Ada Siegel, 'For a Jewish Cooperative Settlement in the United States', *Freeland*, 1, 3 (Apr. 1945), 5–6.

<sup>10</sup> For an analysis of Steinberg's Territorialist ideology, see Laura Almagor, 'A Territory, but not a State: the Territorialists' Visions for a Jewish Future after the Holocaust (1943–1960)', *S.I.M.O.N. – Shoah: Intervention. Methods, Documentation* 4, 1 (2017), 93–108.

<sup>11</sup> Klaus Dodds, *Geopolitics in a Changing World* (Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), 28.

this claim early in the era of modern statehood by proposing a different form of ethnic, religious and cultural community that would exist within state structures, but without constituting a state itself. The Freelanders sought to resolve the challenges presented by the absence of statism in their ideology by relying on a settler colonial framework, as well as by an almost obsessive interest in developments in the field of ‘population politics’.

### Population Politics

The continued interest in the Territorialist project after the Holocaust was partly due to the movement’s pragmatic concurrence with the geopolitical *Zeitgeist*. Scientific approaches to population movements were common practice during the interwar years and continued to be so after 1945 for Jewish and non-Jewish policy makers alike.<sup>12</sup> Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann advocated a transfer of populations to secure Jewish identity in Palestine,<sup>13</sup> and the Zionist Jewish Agency set up a controversial Population Transfer Committee in 1937.<sup>14</sup> In 1948 Israeli prime minister Ben-Gurion may have considered the notion that Palestinian Arabs were ‘transferred’ to other areas a counterargument to the charge that Zionists were ‘dispossessing’ those Arabs: dispossession was seen as a bad thing but transfer was not.<sup>15</sup>

Trendy as organised transfer was becoming, its broader context of population politics had already been at least half a century in the making by the 1930s. During the nineteenth century states increasingly decided that people could be scientifically managed like ‘natural resources’. State leaders developed ways to motivate their ‘undesirable’ or ‘surplus’ subjects to emigrate. Tara Zahra has demonstrated how the Eastern European invention of population transfer eventually ‘trickled up’ to the level of international diplomacy.<sup>16</sup> As a result of the ongoing disintegration of the Ottoman empire, millions of people were moved from and between Bulgaria, Thrace and Western Anatolia between roughly 1875 and 1925, a development leading to Lord Curzon’s referring to the ‘unmixing of peoples’ as a crucial factor in the creation of modern nation states. Curzon uttered these words at the 1923 Lausanne Conference, which famously authorised the transfer of the Turkish population of Greece as the concluding phase of a large-scale Turkish–Greek exchange, to which the Anatolian Greeks had already

<sup>12</sup> Derek Penslar, *Israel in History: The Jewish State in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 142–3; Joshua Karlip, *The Tragedy of a Generation: The Rise and Fall of Jewish Nationalism in Eastern Europe* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2013), 255, 262–3.

<sup>13</sup> Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 44–5, 48, 51–2; Shabtai Teveth, *The Evolution of ‘Transfer’ in Zionist Thinking* (Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Shiloah Institute, 1989), 35, 49.

<sup>14</sup> Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 134.

<sup>15</sup> Teveth, *The Evolution*, 24–6.

<sup>16</sup> Tara Zahra, *The Great Departure: Mass Migration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World* (New York/London: W.W. Norton, 2016), 6, 10, 144–5.

violently fallen victim the year before.<sup>17</sup> As a result of all these developments, ‘forced migrations [became] a hallmark of European history between the beginning of the Balkan Wars in 1912 and Stalin’s death in 1953’,<sup>18</sup> if not already before.

In the interwar period the League of Nations may have preferred to solve minority issues through minority protection treaties, but it also explicitly toyed with the idea of transfer.<sup>19</sup> This growing popularity of population transfers was closely connected to the abandonment of the belief in the assimilation of peoples for a more sharply racially segregated political outlook and practice.<sup>20</sup> Even though at Lausanne religious rather than ethno-linguistic factors had defined the transfer discussion,<sup>21</sup> the general tendency was to focus on ethnicity and race, adding a scientific ‘air’ to population politics. Concomitantly, demography became an ‘imperial’ science and was less focused on population growth due to birth and death rate developments than on the (forced) movement of populations. In fact, it would not be until well into the post-1945 period that mortality management and birth control replaced spatial concerns as the most dominant factors in population politics.<sup>22</sup>

The ‘huge social dislocation of the 1940s’ added a certain urgency to the question of population politics. Matthew Frank argues that, within the reality of the immediate post-war period, transfers of populations offered a way of solving the minority issues without resorting to violent expulsions and physical extermination. This method, recommended by Western government agencies, was therefore perceived as peaceful in comparison to the recent experiences of war and genocide.<sup>23</sup> Theory and practice did not align, however, and the ‘resettlement’ of reportedly twelve million ethnic Germans, officially sanctioned at the Potsdam Conference in the summer of 1945, turned out to be violent expulsions causing many individuals to lose their homes and even their lives.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 152–5.

<sup>18</sup> Antonio Ferrara, ‘Eugene Kulisher, Joseph Schechtman and the Historiography of European Forced Migration’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 46, 4 (2011), 715–40, here 716.

<sup>19</sup> Zahra, *The Great Departure*, 110.

<sup>20</sup> Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*, 32–4, 13, 17.

<sup>21</sup> Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, 153.

<sup>22</sup> Alison Bashford, ‘Nation, Empire, Globe: The Spaces of Population Debate in the Interwar Years’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 49, 1 (2007), 170–201, here 185; Alison Bashford, *Global Population: History, Geopolitics, and Life on Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 18, 317.

<sup>23</sup> Matthew Frank, *Expelling the Germans: British Opinion and Post-1945 Population Transfer in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 8–9. See also Matthew Frank, ‘Reconstructing the Nation-State: Population Transfer in Central and Eastern Europe, 1944–8’, in Jessica Reinisch and Elizabeth White, eds., *The Disentanglement of Populations. Migration, Expulsion and Displacement in Post-War Europe, 1944–9* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 27–47, here 27, 34, 41–2; Tara Zahra, *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe’s Families after World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 147, 120; Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900–1948* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2008), 253–4; R.M. Douglas, *Orderly and Humane: The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 23.

<sup>24</sup> Alfred-Maurice de Zayas, *A Terrible Revenge: The Ethnic Cleansing of the East European Germans* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 2; Andrew Demshuk, *The Lost German East: Forced Migration and the*

These experiences notwithstanding, ‘population transfer’ overwhelmingly retained its positive connotations. Even some of the ethnic German expellees themselves appreciated the political perks of border alterations and the accompanying population movements.<sup>25</sup> The International Refugee Organisation (IRO) explicitly shifted its focus from ‘repatriation’ to ‘resettlement’ in 1947.<sup>26</sup> In sum, in the post-war period population management through population movement remained a tool for national security, social policy and economic development in a way that was strikingly similar to its function under Nazi rule.<sup>27</sup>

Global population politics became increasingly connected to internationalist thought.<sup>28</sup> This connection, together with its territorial focus, made population politics an excellent fit with Territorialism. Moreover, ever more rigid immigration policies around the world referred to ‘surplus’ or ‘excess’ peoples, a vocabulary Jews also internalised.<sup>29</sup> Still, the Territorialists did not unequivocally embrace population transfers under all circumstances, especially not in relation to the question of the Arabs in Palestine. Even though several notorious statements in the 1910s and 1920s had gained ITO-leader Zangwill the reputation of an advocate of Arab transfer, he did not actually believe that such a transfer was a realistic possibility.<sup>30</sup> Later, the Freelanders were even less charmed by the notion of the forcible removal of the Palestinian Arabs, and this issue became an important element in their critique of Zionism.

Such a critical attitude did not mean that land redistribution and transfer as such were off limits *outside* Palestine. The Territorialists saw the horrors of the war years as creating a geopolitical situation that offered new opportunities for Territorialism and by extension for Jewish politics more generally. Freelanders T.B. Herwald already anticipated this in 1943: ‘a united Jewish front can only be achieved when a solution to the Jewish Problem is found, and that is the resettlement of the Jewish people on a large empty territory which the nations of the world must reserve for us when the redistribution of land takes place’.<sup>31</sup> In other words a Territorialist solution would usher in a new era in which all Jews could successfully work together.

*Politics of Memory, 1945–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 55; Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 91–2; Gregor Thum, *Uprooted: How Breslau became Wrocław during the Century of Expulsions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 62–5.

<sup>25</sup> Demshuk, *The Lost German East*, 25.

<sup>26</sup> Anna Holian, *Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism: Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 45.

<sup>27</sup> Zahra, *The Lost Children*, 175.

<sup>28</sup> Bashford, *Global Population*, 9.

<sup>29</sup> Kenneth Moss, ‘Thinking with Restriction: Immigration Restriction and Polish Jewish Accounts of the Post-Liberal State, Empire, Race, and Political Reason 1926–39’, *East European Jewish Affairs*, 44, 2–3 (2014), 205–24, here 208; Gennady Estraiikh, ‘Jacob Lestschinsky: A Yiddishist Dreamer and a Social Scientist’, *Science in Context*, 20, 2 (2007), 215–37, here 229.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Gur Alroey, ‘“Zionism without Zion”? Territorialist Ideology and the Zionist Movement, 1882–1956’, *Jewish Social Studies*, 18, 1 (Fall 2011), 1–32, here 16.

<sup>31</sup> T.B. Herwald, *Solution of the Jewish Problem*, ITO Pamphlet no. 8 (Jan. 1943), RG255, Tanhum Ber Herwald Papers, YIVO, New York City, Box 1.



For most Territorialists the international examples of ‘successful’ population movements strengthened the conviction that their wished-for approach, involving the movement of large groups of Jews, was indeed possible.<sup>32</sup> Freelanders repeatedly invoked the Greek–Turkish population exchange of the early 1920s.<sup>33</sup> One Territorialist commentator also referred to the Chinese trek in the 1920s to Manchuria, Singapore and the Malaysian archipelago, where local tribes on Malakka, Java, Sumatra and Borneo were bought out and replaced by Chinese colonists: ‘this is how we want to colonise’, the author wrote.<sup>34</sup>

The Freeland League also actively employed pro-transfer arguments to gain external support.<sup>35</sup> In early 1946, while testifying before the so-called Anglo-American Committee on Palestine (which was investigating the Jewish refugee question in Europe in relation to the Zionist demands in the Middle East), Freeland-leader Steinberg asked the committee members: ‘At this crucial moment of history . . . isn’t it possible to bring them together, – the countries which are in search of population and the populations that are in search of land?’<sup>36</sup> The Freelanders’ pleas did not fall on deaf ears. American politician and diplomat Sumner Welles, who actively propagated boundary alterations and population transfers in Europe during and after the Second World War, officially endorsed the Freeland work.<sup>37</sup> British Labour politician, journalist and Nobel Peace Prize recipient Norman Angell represented the Labour Party’s support for transfer of European minorities<sup>38</sup> and pointed out that a Territorialist solution would also benefit the non-Jewish world: such a settlement would offer counterweight to the rise of non-Western powers like China, Japan, India and the Soviet Union.<sup>39</sup>

In addition to seeking support from politicians, the Freeland League also forged connections with newly established transnational organisations, mainly those connected to the United Nations.<sup>40</sup> The Territorialists also relied on studies and opinions of geographers, demographers, sociologists and other scientists who played

<sup>32</sup> ‘Protocol Meeting of the Political Commission of the Freeland League’, 18 May 1943, YIVO RG366/516.

<sup>33</sup> [Freeland League], ‘After War. Review for Colonization and Post-war Prosperity’ ([Freeland League-plans described for English periodical], [1945], YIVO RG366/515.

<sup>34</sup> Original: ‘So wollen wir kolonisieren’: German text [no title] about the goals of Freeland, [no date], YIVO RG366/519.

<sup>35</sup> See for instance Ethel Brodsky, ‘Redistributing the World’s Populations’, [condensed from *Oifn Shvell*], *Freeland*, (Aug. 1944), 9–10; L. Glan[t]z, ‘Voice of Labor’, *Freeland*, 1, 1 (Dec. 1944), 18; Solomon F. Bloom, ‘The Future of the Small Community’, *Freeland*, 1, 3 (Apr. 1945), 9–10.

<sup>36</sup> Freeland League for Jewish Territorial Colonisation, *Statement by Dr. I.N. Steinberg and Discussion before the Anglo-American Committee on Palestine, January 14, 1946, Washington D.C.*, (New York: 1946), 6.

<sup>37</sup> Frank, *Expelling the Germans*, 75; Isaac Steinberg to judge Joseph M. Proskauer, 23 Feb. 1945, YIVO RG366/73; ‘Sumner Welles on the Future of Refugees’, *Freeland*, 1, 1 (Dec. 1944), 12.

<sup>38</sup> Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 29–31.

<sup>39</sup> Norman Angell, ‘The Future of the Jews’, *Freeland*, 1, 1 (Dec. 1944), 4–5.

<sup>40</sup> Freeland League to Trygve Lie, 16 July 1948, RG682/510; Freeland League Memorandum to the UN Economic and Social Council, 16 July 1948, YIVO RG682/600; ‘FAO Supports Freeland Project’, *Freeland Bulletin*, 2, 1 (Feb. 1948), 1; UN Information Center Geneva, Excerpts from IRO-announcements, 2 Feb. 1948, YIVO RG366/23; Memorandum to Trygve Lie, [1948], YIVO RG682/510.



a crucial role in the new ‘science of space’<sup>41</sup> and ‘demographic engineering’.<sup>42</sup> Of all these specialists, Isaiah Bowman, president of the Johns Hopkins University, was probably the most influential.<sup>43</sup> Advisor to Presidents Wilson and Roosevelt, Bowman had been at the forefront of what he himself termed the ‘science of settlement’.<sup>44</sup> Before the Second World War President Franklin D. Roosevelt had commissioned Bowman to find ‘uninhabited or sparsely inhabited good agricultural lands to which Jewish colonies might be sent’.<sup>45</sup>

Despite his racist and anti-Semitic sentiments and actions,<sup>46</sup> Bowman was reported to have spoken ‘very kindly’ of Freeland League-leader Steinberg. He expressed his willingness to form a group to investigate the option of settling Jews in the Australian Kimberley-district, a Freeland plan that was explored between 1939 and 1943. During the war years the geographer, who was later accused of prioritising slow scientific planning over finding imminent solutions for Jewish refugees, offered to ‘arrange for the financing of the expedition by his group of friends who are deeply interested in all problems of settlement and especially in your [The Freeland League’s] Scheme’.<sup>47</sup> Later, Bowman acted as an advisor to the Freeland League during the formation process of a commission of experts sent to Surinam in 1947, when the Territorialists were negotiating with the Dutch and Surinamese governments regarding settlement options in the so-called Saramacca district.<sup>48</sup> The interest the geographer showed in assisting the officially apolitical Freelanders is indeed striking, and may be explained by his unsympathetic stance towards the Zionist state-building project in Palestine. Also, he preferred to divorce resettlement questions from the actual refugee crisis that Europe and the United States were faced with, and he must have seen the Territorialists as potentially instrumental in achieving that aim.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, Bowman’s engagement with the Freeland League does lend credence to the claim that the movement was part of a larger geopolitical conversation about population politics and transfer.

<sup>41</sup> Brian W. Blouet, *Geopolitics and Globalization in the Twentieth Century* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 46–56.

<sup>42</sup> Ferrara, ‘Eugene Kulisher’, 739. The Freeland League often reprinted the findings of such specialists in their periodicals. See for instance Henri(c)k F. Infield, (director Group Farming Research Institute In., Poughkeepsie, NY), ‘The Role of Cooperation in the Surinam Settlement’, *Freeland*, 5, 1 (Jan.–Feb. 1949), 6–7. In the ITO-period the explorer J.W. Gregory had done important work for the Territorialists: Bashford, *Global Population*, 135; D.G.H., ‘Report on the Work of the Commission Sent out by the Jewish Territorial Organization to Cyrenaica by J.W. Gregory [Review]’, *The Geographical Journal*, 34, 4 (1909), 444–5.

<sup>43</sup> Isaac Steinberg to Judge Proskauer, 23 Feb. 1945, YIVO RG366/73; Isaac Steinberg to Isaiah Bowman, 11 Jan. 1944, YIVO RG366/195; Isaac Steinberg to Isaiah Bowman, 25 Jan. 1944, YIVO RG366/195.

<sup>44</sup> Lorenzo Veracini, ‘“Settler Colonialism”: Career of a Concept’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 41, 2 (2013), 313–33, here 314–5.

<sup>45</sup> Zahra, *The Great Departure*, 162.

<sup>46</sup> Smith, *American Empire*, 246–7, 309, 108–9.

<sup>47</sup> Robert Waley Cohen to Isaac Steinberg, 28 Apr. 1944, YIVO RG366/210; Smith, *American Empire*, 284–5, 297–8, 303–4, 310–11.

<sup>48</sup> Isaac Steinberg to Robert Bowman, 11 Jan. 1950, YIVO RG366/195.

<sup>49</sup> Smith, *American Empire*, 294–6, 299, 304, 307.

### Agriculture and Agro-Industry

This conversation was always in part about fertile and arable land. The geographer Friedrich Ratzel paved the way for the eventually notorious notion of ‘living space’ (*Lebensraum*) to be considered a precondition for national progress.<sup>50</sup> During the first half of the twentieth century National Socialist theorists explicitly connected *Lebensraum* to agriculture: more territorial space was needed to increase one’s agricultural activities.<sup>51</sup> Ironically, this same interpretation was influential for the Freelanders’ program as well. Jewish Diaspora Nationalist thinker Chaim Zhitlowsky, an ‘agrarian socialist’,<sup>52</sup> was also highly influential for Territorialist thought, and partly under his influence ‘agriculture’ and ‘agro-industrial’ became key words in the Territorialist discourse. Zhitlowsky’s productivist convictions supported his belief that physical, agricultural work would help to improve the Jews’s spiritual and moral health.<sup>53</sup> The Freelanders appropriated this attachment to Jewish regeneration through agriculture, which they saw as a duty to the larger, non-Jewish world of which they were part: Jews had to be re-educated to be ‘rooted in the soil’, to shed their reputation of eternal foreigners and unproductive scroungers.<sup>54</sup> ‘The Jew’, claimed Steinberg in an outburst of Tolstoyism, wanted nothing more than to return to ‘nature’ after centuries of forced city dwelling.<sup>55</sup>

In addition to Zhitlowsky’s influence, during the interwar period agricultural settler colonial ideologies and a Jewish-focused settler (*halutz*) ideology grew in popularity amongst Jews of Zionist, Territorialist and other political persuasions, partly inspired by the works of A.D. Gordon and Leo Tolstoy. Thanks to scientific progress, certain areas in the world that before had been considered inhospitable now became more interesting for settlement projects.<sup>56</sup> Jewish agricultural settlements were *en vogue*: several non-Territorialist initiatives of this kind attest to this, most notably Joseph Rosen’s Agro-Joint (American Jewish Joint Agricultural Corporation), active in Ukraine and the Crimea between 1924 and 1938. The Agro-Joint’s Crimean endeavours had demonstrated the willingness of especially American Jews to donate large amounts of money to non-Zionist settlement projects. The Crimean settlements turned out relatively successful; their eventual demise was mostly due to Soviet

<sup>50</sup> Franco Farinelli, ‘Friedrich Ratzel and the Nature of (Political) Geography’, *Political Geography*, 19 (2000), 943–55, here 943, 948; Matus Halas, ‘Searching for the Perfect Footnote: Friedrich Ratzel and the Others at the Roots of Lebensraum’, *Geopolitics*, 19, 1 (2014), 1–18, here 3–4.

<sup>51</sup> Halas, ‘Searching’, 9.

<sup>52</sup> Simon Rabinovitch, *Jews and Diaspora Nationalism: Writings on Jewish Peoplehood in Europe and the United States* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2012), 82.

<sup>53</sup> Jonathan Dekel-Chen, *Farming the Red Land: Jewish Agricultural Colonization and Local Soviet Power, 1924–1941* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 26, 224 fn. 60.

<sup>54</sup> ‘Report of the First Freeland Conference (Held in New York City on November 23rd and 24th, 1946)’, *Freeland*, 3, 1 (Jan.–Feb. 1947), 13–15, here 14; A. Schwebel, ‘We Fight For Our Future’, *Freeland*, 9, 1 (Jan.–Feb. 1956), 2–3.

<sup>55</sup> Isaac Steinberg, *Australia: The Unpromised Land* (London: V. Gollancz, 1948), 113–4.

<sup>56</sup> [Unknown author] and Leo Segal, ‘Productieve Loesung des Juedischen Problemes’, addressed to Isaac Steinberg, Dr. Cohn and Dr. Pines, 28 Sept. 1935, YIVO RG366/586; Isaac Steinberg to Will Lather (UK delegation to the UN), 25 Nov. 1946, YIVO RG682/496; Bashford, *Global Population*, 14–5.

oppressive policies during the 1930s, rather than to the quality of the settlements themselves.<sup>57</sup> Other non-Zionist agricultural projects also served as inspiration for the Freelanders, such as the Soviet Birobidzhan scheme and several projects in the United States.<sup>58</sup> As late as 1954 one Territorialist author referred to the Jewish Colonisation Association's (ICA) settlement activities in Argentina as a prime example of spiritual renaissance through physical renaissance.<sup>59</sup> Arguments in favour of the qualities of Jews as farmers were reiterated throughout the Freeland League's publications, often relying on statements by non-Jewish authorities in the field.

But the settler-colonial impulse was not backward-looking and nostalgic. On the contrary it constituted a global movement that was arguably foundational to the twentieth century project of modernity.<sup>60</sup> In that spirit, a Freeland settlement was to become more than just a farming endeavour: it would be a modern project, aimed at the creation of a cooperative 'agro-industrial' settlement, possibly even with exporting ambitions.<sup>61</sup> Some suggestions that were made for industries were the production of leather goods, dried and canned fruits, several types of oil and – surprisingly for a Jewish settlement – pork products.<sup>62</sup> At the same time, pure industrialisation was a 'world craze'.<sup>63</sup> In sum, an *agro-industrial* scheme would provide settlers with a choice, even if the settlement would initially limit their freedom of movement through provisions for 'territorial stability'.<sup>64</sup>

However, the expected wild enthusiasm amongst Jews to settle on the land was more wishful thinking than reality: 45 per cent of the circa 150,000 Jewish settlers in the Agro-Joint's Crimean and Ukrainian settlements never sold their original homes in the shtetls they originated from and many retained businesses there.<sup>65</sup> In this sense the Zionist project offered a more hopeful example for the Territorialists. Even though the Freelanders were critical of Zionist policies, the settlement project in Palestine did demonstrate an abundance of suitable and available Jewish settlers.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, the remarkable achievements of the *yishuv*, the Jewish population of Palestine, had convinced also the non-Jewish world of the Jews's agricultural merits.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Penslar, *Israel in History*, 152, 140, 145–6; Dekel-Chen, *Farming the Red Land*.

<sup>58</sup> 'The Other Voice Of Israel: Man And Agriculture', *Freeland*, 6, 6 (Sept.–Oct. 1952), 7–8; Theodore Norman [Managing Director of the Jewish Agricultural Society], 'New Vitality In American Jewish Farming', *Freeland*, 8, 6 (Mar.–Apr. 1954), 7–8.

<sup>59</sup> J.G., 'A Word From The Argentine', *Freeland*, 8, 8 (Sept.–Oct. 1954), 12.

<sup>60</sup> Patrick Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native', *Journal of Genocide Research*, 8, 4 (2006), 387–409, here 394.

<sup>61</sup> Isaac Steinberg to French Minister of Overseas Territories, [1] Oct. 1946, YIVO RG366/583.

<sup>62</sup> Freeland League for Jewish Territorial Colonisation, 'Report on the Kimberleys', [submitted to the Western Australian government] (1939), 10; Freeland League for Jewish Territorial Colonisation, *Financial Estimates for Jewish Settlement in Surinam* [1948], 5.

<sup>63</sup> 'In The Freeland League', *Freeland*, 7, 1 (Jan.–Feb. 1953), 16.

<sup>64</sup> 'The Freeland League Memorandum to President Truman's Com[m]ission on Immigration', *Freeland*, 7, 1 (Jan.–Feb. 1953), 11–12.

<sup>65</sup> Dekel-Chen, *Farming the Red Land*, 57, 111.

<sup>66</sup> T.B. Herwald to Arthur Creech Jones, 18 Dec. 1935, YIVO RG255, Box 2; Gabriel Haus, 'Jews and the Post-War World [Pamphlet]', Freeland League, ed., (London, 1941), 13.

<sup>67</sup> Rovner, *In the Shadow of Zion*, 186.

## Colonialism and 'Empty Spaces'

In order for a Territorialist agro-industrial settlement project to materialise land was needed. In contrast to Zionism, the Territorialists did not aspire to achieve statehood, and this enabled them to hitch their fate onto a changing, but still existing colonial world system. This connection between Territorialism and colonial thinking was apparent ever since the movement's inception. The incentive for Zangwill and his cohort to leave the Zionist movement had been their disillusionment with the Zionist rejection of a purely colonial solution to the Jewish problem: the Uganda Proposal. After its formation the ITO's initial ambition was to procure a territory in one of the British overseas colonies. It was this aspiration that also got some prominent English Jews on board, such as British journalist and ITO-supporter Lucien Wolf.<sup>68</sup>

By the 1930s and into the 1940s, the Territorialist rhetoric had changed very little: the French Freelanders still explicitly connected to British imperialism what they considered to be at the core of Territorialism. They would not be Territorialists, 'if we disregard the immense colonial possessions of the British Empire'.<sup>69</sup> In turn, it would be in the interest of the responsible governments to settle Jews on their overseas territories. These Jews could form an outpost for the colonial power in question, to forge a stronger connection between the colony and the metropole. The Freelanders used the argument that 'the Jewish migrant can, in these cases, be the most desirable element, as behind him stands no foreign power which might present political problems in the future'.<sup>70</sup>

There was also a general sense of urgency, as less empty land remained. The Western conviction was that leaving spaces 'empty' was wasteful and should be counteracted.<sup>71</sup> For the Zionists, too, it was politically and ideologically useful to see Palestine as an 'abandoned land' (*eretz azuva*). Palestine, as well as other parts of the non-Western world, were wastelands, waiting for Jews to inhabit and cultivate them.<sup>72</sup> It might seem incomprehensible to us now that educated and self-proclaimed liberals such as the Territorialists could be so attached to the 'empty space' concept in connection to their own colonisation, whilst stressing time and again that the 'emptiness' of Palestine in the Zionist imagining was a myth. This seeming anomaly in the Freelanders' thinking may be explained by Klaus Dodd's 'catholic approach to Geopolitics': in this critical understanding of the term, geopolitics is explained as 'embodied' and 'experiential'. Rather than focusing on geographical facts, critical geopolitics talks about sites and places as seen from the subjective vantage points of

<sup>68</sup> Jewish Territorial Organisation, *Ito Pamphlet No. 1: Manifesto and Correspondence* (London, 1905), 7–8, 12.

<sup>69</sup> Originally: 'wenn wir den immensen Kolonialbesitz des Britischen Reiches ausser Acht liessen': Ligue Territorialiste Juive to Freeland League London, 18 May 1937, YIVO RG366/31.

<sup>70</sup> Freeland League to all paying members (in English and Yiddish), [1945], YIVO RG255, Box 2.

<sup>71</sup> Bashford, *Global Population*, 9.

<sup>72</sup> Gabriel Piterberg, *The Returns of Zionism: Myths, Politics and Scholarship in Israel* (London: Verso, 2008), 65, 94; Gur Alroey, 'Mesopotamia – "The Promised Land": The Jewish Territorial Organization Project in the *Bilād Al-Rāfidayn* and the Question of Palestine, 1899–1917', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 50, 6 (2014), 911–35, here 930.

the historical actors. This approach renders critical geopolitics at odds with the late nineteenth century interpretation of ‘geopolitics’ as based on the belief that one is able to observe the entire world order from one objective perspective.

To acknowledge that geopolitics is constructed culturally, but subsequently sustained on the political level, means to also recognise that the interaction between these different levels of creation (cultural) and maintenance (political) creates a changeable meaning of geopolitical concerns. This fluidity renders individual agents of great importance on all levels of geopolitics.<sup>73</sup> Territorialist geopolitics, critically understood, goes beyond the rigid notion of natural geography as a defining factor. When taking other factors into consideration it is possible to imagine how the Freelanders could conceptualise empty spaces in a more relative sense, influenced by several, potentially conflicting geopolitical trends.

This fluidity of geopolitics thus explains why the socialist revolutionary, anti-colonial Isaac Steinberg could think according to the ‘empty space’ logic. When flying over Australia in 1939, on his way to explore the Kimberley district, Steinberg viewed the lands below as empty. It had been an accepted notion for years that Australia needed a larger population.<sup>74</sup> Its emptiness constituted a problem that Steinberg sought to solve: in the absence of people to populate it, the ‘empty land’ was ‘slumbering’.<sup>75</sup> It was assumed that people had a responsibility and even a right to settle land, also because geographers and politicians were convinced that a better division of people would prevent future warfare.<sup>76</sup> Norman Angell partly explained his endorsement of the Territorialist schemes by underlining that there was enough space in the British Empire, while people around the globe were being persecuted: ‘we cannot continue to sit on that lid without ultimate explosion’.<sup>77</sup> Polish Territorialist Gabriel Haus reiterated this opinion: certain parts of the world, he argued, especially in Eastern Europe, were too densely populated. This led to unemployment, crisis and war, while other areas remained underdeveloped and empty. A more equal distribution would create a healthier economic situation. Moreover, due to scientific progress, especially in the field of transportation, different parts of the world were becoming more interdependent. Haus also gave a special wartime inspired twist to his argumentation: the Germans, Italians and Japanese might see the British laxness regarding their abundant colonies as decadent. They could use this fact against the British in their propaganda efforts. Also, the Kimberley scheme would be instrumental in fighting off a Japanese invasion.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>73</sup> For a concise overview of the genesis and meaning of the field of critical geopolitics, see Dodds, *Geopolitics in a Changing World*, 6, 31, 33–4, 38–45. See also Klaus Dodds, *Geopolitics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 16–7; Klaus Dodds and David Atkinson, ‘Geopolitical Traditions: A Century of Geopolitical Thought’, in Klaus Dodds and David Atkinson, *Geopolitical Traditions. A Century of Geopolitical Thought* (London/New York: 2000), 1–24, here 9–10.

<sup>74</sup> S. Stedman, ‘A Jewish Settlement in Australia’, brochure [1941].

<sup>75</sup> Steinberg, *Australia: The Unpromised Land*, 16, 22.

<sup>76</sup> Bashford, *Global Population*, 6, 138.

<sup>77</sup> Draft speech enclosed in letter Freeland League London branch to Norman Angell, 21 Aug. 1939, YIVO RG366/389.

<sup>78</sup> Haus, ‘Jews and the Post-War World’, 3–9.

However, the Freelanders were not blind followers of the ‘empty space’ logic. They did realise that the ‘emptiness’ of potential settler territories was a relative concept. Every suitable piece of land most probably already had at least some inhabitants, and it was in the Territorialists’s interest to downplay their presence. In the official scientific report about the Kimberleys, ‘the inhabitants’ were mentioned in passing, but their ethnic background or exact numbers did not form part of the survey.<sup>79</sup> Steinberg spoke of a handful of white settlers and a few hundred ‘colored natives’ in the East Kimberleys, an area more or less the size of Belgium.<sup>80</sup> Numbers featured more prominently in the different publications regarding the Surinam scheme between 1946 and 1948. According to the Freeland League’s own report, the Saramacca district, which was to contain the prospected settlement, had 12,648 inhabitants. This made it indeed one of the lesser-populated districts of the colony, with most of the people living outside of the proposed area for Jewish colonisation.<sup>81</sup> Still, since the claim that the district was ‘empty’ did not hold true, what was crucial was to stress the ‘sparseness’ of the population.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, in the dominant discourse of the day ‘emptiness’ was not defined by the number of inhabitants of a certain area but by its level of cultivation.<sup>83</sup>

Strikingly, in acknowledging the presence of indigenous peoples, the Freelanders saw no problem in relying on racialist and even outrightly racist discourse. This discourse, combined with their earlier mentioned focus on agriculture, betrays the Territorialist alignment with a more generally felt disdain for the often nomadic traditions of indigenous peoples.<sup>84</sup> According to the Territorialists, the Jews constituted a ‘civilised population’, so desperately needed in the British and non-British colonies,<sup>85</sup> where there was not yet a ‘very numerous white population’, and this also applied to the French overseas territories.<sup>86</sup> As one Freeland League supporter described it in the late 1930s, the real racial struggle in the world was not between Jews and non-Jews but between black and white. Jewish settlements on black colonial lands were therefore needed.<sup>87</sup> This imagined struggle was first and foremost of an ideological and cultural nature, as nowhere did the Territorialists argue for aggression towards or any form of dispossession of indigenous peoples. Of course, a critical assessment of the practical meaning of ‘settler colonialism’ leaves

<sup>79</sup> Freeland League, ‘Report on the Kimberleys’, 2, 3.

<sup>80</sup> Isaac Steinberg, *A Jewish Settlement in Australia* [1943], [unnumbered pages].

<sup>81</sup> *Preliminary Report on the Possibilities of Jewish Colonization in Surinam by the Commission of Experts Appointed by the Freeland League* (Feb. 1948), 14–15, 58.

<sup>82</sup> Boris Rapschinsky, ‘The Guianas Are The Territory’, *Freeland*, 2, 5 (Sept.–Oct. 1946), 5–7, 19, here 5–6; *Preliminary Report*, 13.

<sup>83</sup> Bashford, *Global Population*, 144.

<sup>84</sup> Wolfe, ‘Settler Colonialism’, 396.

<sup>85</sup> Zangwill to Rothschild, 24 Oct. 1912, A120/69, Israel Zangwill Papers, Central Zionist Archives Jerusalem, 18–9.

<sup>86</sup> ‘New Caledonia from the viewpoint of Jewish colonisation (report), [1937]’, A330/14, Joseph Leftwich Papers, Central Zionist Archives.

<sup>87</sup> R.N. Coudenhove-Kalergi, ‘“Judenhass”: Jüdische Siedlung in Afrika?’ [excerpt], [1937], YIVO RG366/31.

no doubt as to the inevitability of some form of violence, as also acknowledged by internationalist anti-colonial theorists like Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi, but also by Zionist Revisionist leader Vladimir Jabotinsky.<sup>88</sup>

The Freelanders never intended violence, as they never claimed to have primordial rights to certain territories, nor did they aim to dispossess these areas' indigenous populations. Nevertheless, they did subscribe to the presupposition that Jews, as 'white men', were better capable of settling and using colonial lands.<sup>89</sup> Kenneth Moss has shown how 'Jewish "whitening"' was on the larger Jewish political agenda, especially in interwar Poland.<sup>90</sup> For the Freelanders, racist rhetoric was indeed a method of showing that whichever 'colour' Jews had in their different dwellings in the Diaspora, on non-white lands they would become indisputably white. Such a transformation might then even reinforce the status of Jews in the United States as fully white Americans. However, if Jews were indeed white then they became a subject within the on-going discussion of whether white people could settle on tropical colonial lands.<sup>91</sup> Since the Freelanders considered the Jews's whiteness a given, they focused their energies on proving the suitability of their prospective settlement areas for white settlers.

### Decolonisation and Anti-Colonialism

Despite the continued existence of a racially defined colonial system into the post-war period, colonial and racial realities were changing as colonies entered a period of transition towards independence. Steinberg, in any case a lifelong anti-statist, was aware that an explicit demand for political autonomy would spell the immediate end of the Territorialist endeavours. This was not only due to colonial powers' anxieties about Jews creating a state within a state but also had to be understood within a post-colonial context: 'in the World at large the peoples in the Colonies have risen against the old rule'. These peoples would never agree to a Jewish, politically autonomous settlement on their newly independent lands, and colonial powers such as The Netherlands, France and the United Kingdom were aware of this.<sup>92</sup> These contemporary decolonisation trends thus demanded good relations with indigenous peoples, especially if these peoples had acquired some form of political agency. Also from a moral point of view a post-colonial attitude towards territorial colonisation in the colonies was desirable.<sup>93</sup> In this spirit, the official Freeland League report on the Surinam scheme mentioned the non-Western ethnic diversity of the country as

<sup>88</sup> A. Dirk Moses, 'Empire, Colony, Genocide: Keywords and the Philosophy of History', in A. Dirk Moses, ed., *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation, and Subaltern Resistance in World History* (New York: Berghahn, 2008), 3–54, here 30–3; Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism', 393.

<sup>89</sup> Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism', 387, 389–90.

<sup>90</sup> Moss, 'Thinking with Restriction', 216.

<sup>91</sup> Zahra, *The Great Departure*, 9, 163; Bashford, *Global Population*, 146–53.

<sup>92</sup> Isaac Steinberg, 'Political Negotiations and Prospects', *Freeland*, 3, 1 (Jan.–Feb. 1947), 4, 16, here 4.

<sup>93</sup> Lesser Fruchtbach, 'Evaluation of Dr. I.N. Steinberg', [1957], YIVO RG682/327.



a positive factor, allowing for potentially more religious tolerance for the prospective Jewish settlers.<sup>94</sup>

In this context of decolonisation it could be argued that the Territorialist reliance on a colonial world system made the movement's approach contradict rather than align with geopolitical trends. However, even with regards to colonialism, global post-war trends showed striking continuities. Colonial thinking did not end overnight but instead transformed gradually, even when former colonies were rapidly gaining independence. The Territorialists did not see themselves as belonging to a colonial era that was quickly nearing its end but as flexible actors forming part of the vanguard of changing political realities. Rather than considering the altered colonial situation as an indication that Territorialism had missed the colonial boat, the Freelanders actually believed their movement to be perfectly suited for the new realities.

The Territorialists' political flexibility, a manifestation of the earlier mentioned flexible meaning of geopolitics, is also reflected in the fact that their attachment to 'empty spaces' in a colonial setting did not contradict with their movement's internationalist convictions. Similar to the Zionists,<sup>95</sup> and in line with existing notions of internationalism and humanitarianism,<sup>96</sup> Steinberg in particular combined the seeming extremes of internationalism and anti-colonial discourse with imperial thinking. Although increasingly critical of the treatment of marginalised peoples – not in the last place in Palestine – the Freelanders relied both on existing colonial and newly formed postcolonial power structures to realise their goals. This is not entirely surprising, as Alison Bashford has demonstrated that the development of twentieth century population politics was connected to internationalism, pacifism and the idealistic notion of One World policies governing world politics.<sup>97</sup>

The 1955 Bandung Conference, hosted by Indonesian president Sukarno, served to reinforce Steinberg's heightened awareness of the new world order. The fact that the conference was organised and attended exclusively by non-Western countries – formerly colonised peoples and now relative newcomers to the geopolitical stage – heightened the symbolic meaning and novelty of this event. It was this revolutionary character of the conference, 'defy[ing] geopolitical borders', and its seeming non-partisanship (in the traditional sense of a political division between Left and Right)<sup>98</sup> that caught Steinberg's attention and made him hail it as a major historical turning point. The Territorialist leader's enthusiastic embrace of the significance of Bandung was not an idiosyncratic interpretation of events – it was corroborated by later scholarly analyses of the conference's perceived meaning for the promotion of human

<sup>94</sup> *Preliminary Report*, 13–5.

<sup>95</sup> Penslar, *Israel in History*, 6, 91.

<sup>96</sup> Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 3, 296–7; Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (London: Penguin, 2012), xvi.

<sup>97</sup> Bashford, *Global Population*, 64.

<sup>98</sup> Quỳnh N. Phạm and Robbie Shilliam, eds., *Meanings of Bandung: Postcolonial Orders and Decolonial Visions* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 3–4, 17, 6.

rights policies and for a more general quest for the moral betterment of international society.

In the end, the conference's main goal of non-alignment with the major powers in the emerging Cold War was not achieved, nor did it deliver any other concrete results. This practical failure did not alter the romantic sense of revolution and the thrill at the prospect of a changing world order that the event inspired in people like Steinberg.<sup>99</sup> The Freeland League leader was not unique in his exultant reception of this historical moment; the interest in Bandung of especially African American intellectuals and their attempts to attend the conference have been well-documented. Lesser known is the interest of other minority group leaders, such as Steinberg himself, a representative of 'the despised, the insulted, the hurt, the dispossessed' in the West that author Richard Wright described as having looked to Bandung with hopeful eyes.<sup>100</sup> This was the moment, Steinberg argued, for Jews to forge relationships with the Muslim and post-colonial worlds, so that they would be better able to execute their moral mission. 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: "'Bandung' is not merely a fact; it is a challenge to us, to our sense of justice and to our understanding".<sup>101</sup>

### Conclusion

As this analysis has demonstrated, Territorialism was both a product and reflection of twentieth century geopolitical trends. A critical assessment also shows that these trends developed over time in a much less straightforward manner than traditional historiography has suggested. The Freelanders believed that Jewish regeneration was to be achieved through agro-industrial settlement and an investment in Jewish culture and tradition, without the corrupting influence of statehood and militarism. While opposing occupation and oppression in Palestine and supporting anti-colonial movements around the globe, the Territorialists also relied on a colonial world system and racist ideas in their quest to achieve their own territorial ambitions.

Despite the Territorialists' efforts, Jewish social engineering through mass settlement did eventually become indisputably connected to Jewish state building in Palestine.<sup>102</sup> Perhaps that 'the tools of research and scientific thought . . . [which were so central to the Territorialist approach] are not valid in a national discourse that

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 4, 6; Christopher J. Lee, 'Introduction: Between a Moment and an Era: The Origins and Afterlives of Bandung', in Christopher J. Lee, ed., *Making a World After Empire: The Bandung Moment and its Political Afterlives* (Athens, OH, 2010), 1–44, here 3, 14–5, 26–7. For a collection of articles dealing with the history of 'non-alignment', including Bandung's role in it, see Nataša Mišković, Harald Fischer-Tiné and Nada Boškocska, eds., *The Non-Aligned Movement and the Cold War: Delhi-Bandung-Belgrade* (London: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>100</sup> Phạm and Shilliam, *Meanings of Bandung*, 4, 6.

<sup>101</sup> Isaac Steinberg, 'Jews In Asia', *Freeland*, 8, 11 (June–July 1955), 5–6.

<sup>102</sup> Derek Penslar, *Shylock's Children. Economics and Jewish Identity in Modern Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 8, 223–4, 253.

is essentially mythological at heart'.<sup>103</sup> To a certain extent Steinberg agreed with this historian's assessment: 'with all our deference to science, countries are not built by dry calculations alone. There must be imagination and courage.' According to him, colonisation was first and foremost 'an enterprise of the human spirit'.<sup>104</sup> With the benefit of hindsight, a harsh judge could therefore consider this lack of mythology to have rendered Territorialist ideology a 'paradigmatic failure'.<sup>105</sup>

Without arguing against the factual conclusion that Territorialism did not manage to achieve its aims, it is a false assumption that this failure made Territorialism irrelevant either by the late 1930s, after the Shoah, or even when the state of Israel was born in 1948. Relying on the approaches and interpretations developed by the field of critical geopolitics allows us to acknowledge the continued relevance of studying Jewish Territorialism beyond these historical watershed moments. When we accept that geopolitics is defined by more than just geography and top-level political decision making, the history of the Jewish Territorialist movement suddenly becomes a gateway to understanding various dimensions of larger geopolitical trends and discourses.

The fluid analysis offered by critical geopolitics also helps to make sense of post-war geopolitical realities that were fraught with tensions between old and new approaches to government and peoplehood. The uneasy negotiation between the strong Territorialist focus on Jewish moral values on the one hand, and an alignment to the geopolitical *Zeitgeist* – with its own inherent bifurcations – on the other, at times led to apparent contradictions in the Territorialists' thinking. The most striking example is the Freelanders' attachment to the search for an 'empty' or 'sparsely populated' territory within one of the colonial empires, combined with the movement's internationalist and anti-colonial outlook.

This article has challenged traditional historiographical periodisation by arguing that even when radical political changes occurred, on closer examination such changes may have been not as all-encompassing. This was for instance the case with the departure from minority rights protection in favour of the human rights discourse. At the end of the Second World War, Ada Siegel, Steinberg's daughter and a central figure in the Freeland League, deplored this perceived focal shift. During the Shoah, she argued, 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.<sup>106</sup> Siegel's colleague Saul Goodman therefore added that the end of minority rights protection made a 'Free Land' even more urgent than ever before.<sup>107</sup> The fact that the Freelanders continued their efforts on behalf of the Jews as a collective and still managed to attract influential support demonstrates that the abandonment of minority rights protection was not a done deal in 1945.

<sup>103</sup> Alroey, "'Zionism without Zion'?", 28.

<sup>104</sup> Steinberg, *Australia: The Unpromised Land*, 128–9.

<sup>105</sup> Alroey, "'Zionism without Zion'?", 28.

<sup>106</sup> Ada Siegel, 'The International Bill of Rights', *Freeland*, 1, 2 (Feb. 1945), 5–6.

<sup>107</sup> Saul Goodman, 'Territorialism, Autonomy, Nationhood', *Freeland*, 3, 1 (Jan.–Feb. 1947), 9–10, here 9.

As world politics became further removed from the trauma of the Second World War and its direct aftermath, ‘migration’ became a key word in international political discourse, partly fuelled by the displaced persons’ presence in Europe. The Freeland League now perceived migration issues as the real Jewish problem of the post-war era<sup>108</sup> and continued to see a role for itself in the field of ‘Jewish Geopolitics’: ‘we do not, of course, think of the geo-politics that contemplates the “expansión [sic.]” of state frontiers at the expense of others in order to satisfy one’s own economic and social ambitions’, but of a science aimed at the study of still existing underdeveloped areas in the world, ‘vast empty spaces’ in ‘vital need of development’, where also Jews could settle.<sup>109</sup> Steinberg and his fellow Freelanders therefore argued that schemes such as those proposed by the Freeland League still matched the agenda of world politics: ‘as long as the migration process [understood as collective rather than individual migration] continues [the Territorialist idea] too will persist’.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>108</sup> Lesser Fruchtbaum, ‘Freeland In Action’, *Freeland*, 9, 2 (April–May 1956), 2–3.

<sup>109</sup> ‘A World On The Move’, *Freeland*, 6, 6 (Sept.–Oct. 1952), 1; Ada Siegel, ‘Trends in Migration’, *Freeland*, 6, 6 (Sept.–Oct. 1952), 4–6, here 4–5.

<sup>110</sup> Lesser Fruchtbaum, ‘50 Years Of Territorialism’, *Freeland*, 7, 5 (Nov.–Dec. 1953), 7–8, here 7.