“Zionism without Zion”? Territorialist Ideology and the Zionist Movement, 1882–1956

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Abstract

This article focuses on territorialism from its beginnings in the 1880s, through its conversion into an organized political power in the early twentieth century, and up to its decline in the 1950s. Because territorialist ideology is multilayered, this article focuses on two central pairs of issues that stand at the heart of territorialism and Jewish discourse in the first half of the twentieth century. The first is the idea of the negation of exile and the catastrophic worldview that characterized territorialist thinking. The second is the position of the territorialists toward the Land of Israel and the native Arab population already residing there. In exploring these two issues, we examine the sources of the territorialist idea and argue that they constitute a mirror image of the Zionist movement.

Key words: territorialism, Zionism, Jewish nationalism, eastern European Jewry, Jewish-Arab conflict

Territorialism and Zionism emerged simultaneously. From the moment that Leon Pinsker wrote that “the goal of our present endeavors must be not the Holy Land, but a land of our own,” there were those in Jewish society who clung to the idea of “a land of our own” and wanted to set up an independent, autonomous entity other than the Land of Israel. Nevertheless, though territorialism and Zionism coexisted, the former has been given little historiographical attention. Compared with the multitude of studies written about the Zionist movement, hardly anything has been written about territorialism.

The work of historian Michael Astour, *Die Geschichte fun di Frayland Lige*, is among those isolated studies devoted entirely to territorialism. It was written in Yiddish, appeared during the 1960s, and remains the most comprehensive piece of research on territorialist thought of the 1930s. Astour was a territorialist as was his father before him, and his book is a kind of historiographical redress and attempt to present territorialist doctrine and its place within the history of the Jewish people. In this work, Astour claims that territorialism had been concealed by the triumphalist approach of Zionist historiography: “Jewish life during the past 80 years, with all its multifaceted trends and processes, complex and full of contradictions, with its ramified and divisive spiritual world,” wrote Astour, “was reduced to the naïve and childish formula with a ‘happy end,’ the establishment of the state of Israel.”

Few studies have examined territorialist ideology or practice. The Jewish Territorial Organization (ITO) and the Frayland Lige are mentioned in scholarly literature, but mostly as a footnote. There is no doubt, therefore, that a comprehensive study of territorialist ideology from its emergence until its decline fills a gap.

The term “ideology” used in this article is based on the definition of the historian Gideon Shimoni, who has used “Zionist ideology” to denote a system of action-demanding ideas while distinguishing between fundamental and operative ideology. Fundamental ideology, Shimoni claims, is the essential determination implicit in a system of action-demanding ideas that shape the ideology and its ultimate objectives. Operative ideology is the strategy that serves the fundamental ideas. My intention is to adopt Shimoni’s definition to examine the components of territorialist ideology and to penetrate the sources of the essential determination that stood at the center of territorialist thinking. I have no intention of tracing the operative dimension of territorialism, which would mean searching for the territorialist opportunities of the Jewish people and political territorialist activities in Jewish society.

This article will focus on territorial ideology from its beginnings in the 1880s, through its conversion into an organized and political force in the Jewish world of the early twentieth century, and up to its decline in the 1950s. Because territorialist ideology is complex and multilayered, I will focus on two central pairs of issues that stand at its heart and at the core of Jewish discourse in the first half of the twentieth century. The first is the idea of negation of exile and the catastrophic worldview that characterized territorialist thinking. The second is the position of the territorialists toward the Land of Israel and the native Arab population already residing there. The importance of
understanding these two issues is that they allow us to penetrate the sources of the territorialist idea, and they constitute a challenging mirror image to Zionist ideology. In other words, territorialist ideology is the “alter ego” of the Zionist movement, not only because territorialism grew from within Zionism and was an integral part of it but primarily because, by analyzing its activities, dilemmas, debacles, and failures, we gain a better understanding of the vicissitudes of the Zionist movement.

Emergence of the Territorialist Idea

Territorialism is, in its most literal form, the call to establish an autonomous entity or state for the Jews in a land that is not the Land of Israel. This idea arose frequently in Jewish society in different periods. These were usually local initiatives that disappeared quickly and were not accompanied by any practical endeavors. From the second half of the seventeenth century until the 1880s, a variety of ideas were broached for settling Jews in Curaçao in the Caribbean Islands, Suriname, Cayenne in French Guiana, Russian territories captured from the Ottoman empire in the eighteenth century, Cyprus, and parts of North America. None of these initiatives is connected with the territorialist ideology that emerged from within the Zionist movement at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Pinsker was the first thinker to give the territorial idea significance and depth. His work “Autoemancipation!” (1882) asserted that the spiritual content of the Jewish people was more important than territory, and therefore the Jewish homeland could be established anywhere and not only in the Land of Israel. On the designated territory, Pinsker wrote: “We shall take with us the most sacred possessions which we have saved from the shipwreck of our former fatherland, the God-idea and the Bible. It is only these which have made our old fatherland the Holy Land, and not Jerusalem of the Jordan.” Since the effort to obtain territory might be complicated, he thought that it was not necessary to “attach ourselves to the place where our political life was once violently interrupted and destroyed. . . . [W]e need nothing but a large piece of land . . . which shall remain our property, from which no foreign master can expel us.” The Land of Israel was apparently unobtainable, so Pinsker was prepared to accept other territories that could give Jews a haven that was safe, undisputed, and able to sustain its owners.

Pinsker held on to this idea until the end of his life. One month after the Kattowitz Conference (1884), Yehiel Chlenov, then chairman of the
Jewish Student Union in Moscow, suggested that Pinsker change the conclusion of “Autoemancipation!” so that it would conform to the “spirit of the Zionist idea.” Moshe Leib Lilienblum, who was then serving as secretary to the Hibat Tsiyon movement, was the one who answered Chlenov in Pinsker’s name and who explained to the young student that the author did not retract his initial position of 1882:

Although the author . . . is now engaged in the matter of settlement in the Land of Israel, there is not only no change in his views on the matter of choosing a place for Jewish settlement but even now he continues to act according to the plan that he drew up for himself. But as the matter stands: since the author did not regard the question of choosing a place as subject to the authority of one person or another, he leaves it to the decision, if one may say so, of all Jewry.

According to Joseph Klausner, an early historian of the Zionist movement, in 1887—three years after the Kattowitz Conference—Z. Berman, a member of the Hovevei Tsiyon committee, requested permission from Pinsker to translate “Autoemancipation!” into Russian and to insert an amendment stating that the Land of Israel was the only acceptable land of refuge. Pinsker rejected this request. In 1892, close to the time of his death, Pinsker wrote in his will that he did not retract his opinion and that the national center for the Jewish people need not be set up in the Land of Israel. From his estate, which was estimated at 100,000 rubles, he bequeathed only 2 percent to Hibat Tsiyon, as if he viewed it as but one of many charitable organizations worthy of a token contribution. Those nearest to Pinsker, as reported by some, heard him say before his death:

We will have two “national centers,” just as we have “two Torahs” (which are one), “two Talmuds,” “two prayer versions,” and other “double” matters that will nevertheless not prevent us from being “one people.” . . . Since the Holy Land cannot be a “physical center” except for very few of our Jewish brethren, it would be far better for us to divide the work of national revival into two, with Palestine as our national (spiritual) center and Argentina as our cultural (physical) center.

Pinsker’s stipulation that the Land of Israel was not the only solution to the Jewish question paved the way for the development of a territorialist ideology. The territorialists regarded him as their spiritual founding father and frequently quoted from “Autoemancipation!” in arguments with their Zionist rivals. Pinsker’s assertions that a land of refuge was needed for the Jewish people and that one should not
concentrate only on the Land of Israel became the founding principles of territorialist ideology 20 years later.

The pamphlet *The Jewish State* by Theodor Herzl, published 14 years after Pinsker’s death, was seen at least in retrospect as another stage in the consolidation of territorialist ideology and the strengthening of the developing Zionist view that the Land of Israel was an option but not a requirement for the realization of its aspirations. Like “Autoemancipation!”, *The Jewish State* did not decide the territorial issue; instead of “our land” and “our Holy Land,” Herzl wavered between the Land of Israel and Argentina. His dilemma is striking because, unlike Pinsker, Herzl was writing after 14 years of Zionist endeavor, when there were already 20 new Jewish settlements in the Land of Israel and fifteen thousand Jews in Jaffa. Yet, despite the achievements of the settlers and the changes that occurred in the Hibat Tsiyon movement, some members of the movement did not perceive the Land of Israel as the sole solution for the existential crises afflicting the Jewish people. Herzl further sharpened the issue when he tried to make diplomacy precede settlement, precluding any possibility of preemptive and unplanned settlement in the Land of Israel:

> Should the powers show themselves willing to grant us sovereignty over a neutral land, then the Society will enter into negotiations for the possession of this land. Here two regions come to mind: Palestine and Argentina. Significant experiments in colonization have been made in both countries, though on the mistaken principle of gradual infiltration of Jews. Infiltration is bound to end badly.\(^\text{12}\)

The resonance of Herzl’s book and his magnetic power over those around him made the question of territory a focus of fierce argument in the Zionist camp. Herzl had raised the Jewish question and created a real revolution in the organization of the movement, but he was also the champion of the controversial Uganda proposal that led to a split in the Zionist camp and the establishment of the ITO at the Seventh Zionist Congress. *The Jewish State* became a formative document. The Zionist movement hailed Herzl as a visionary prophet and its founding father. When the state of Israel was established, Herzl’s bones were disinterred and brought for burial atop the mountain that bears his name. However, the territorialists as well perceived Herzl as their father and themselves as continuing on his path.

No final judgment can be made on the question of Herzl’s loyalty to the Land of Israel. He died before the decision concerning the British
The offer of territory in East Africa was made. A study of his letters, diaries, and public statements reveals many remarks in favor of the Land of Israel, but alongside them are also expressions of despair about the possibilities for diplomatic achievement, anxiety over the welfare of the Jewish people, and support for various territorialist initiatives in El Arish, Cyprus, and Mozambique. Zionist historiography has sidelined the significance of Herzl’s territorialist arguments, interpreting his initiatives as an attempt to find a temporary solution, the Land of Israel remaining the final destination. Although coming from the opposite direction, the territorialists, like the Zionists, chose to stress every statement and idea of Herzl’s that contained a spark of their own ideology.

The idea of settling Jews outside the Land of Israel as a comprehensive solution for the Jewish problem was therefore a part of the political Zionist movement from the time of Pinsker until Herzl’s death. Many Zionists did not see any contradiction between their membership in the Zionist movement and their aspiration to establish a state for the Jews outside the Land of Israel. The El Arish plan (1902) and the settlement project in East Africa (1903) testify to the fact that the Basel program was mutable and that many Zionists were prepared to sacrifice the Land of Israel in favor of a more immediate solution for the Jewish people. Herzl died at the height of the crisis, before the question of territory was clarified and a decision was made about the final location of the Jewish state. His passing left not only a leadership vacuum but also an ideological rift that led to a schism in the Zionist movement and the establishment of the ITO.

The Establishment of the ITO

The Uganda plan, which Herzl brought to the Sixth Zionist Congress, was the main cause of the establishment of the ITO in August 1905. The plan sharpened the differences within the Zionist Organization between political Zionists who supported Herzl and those who were loyal to the Land of Israel. For two years, supporters and opponents of the plan argued with each other. Zionist meetings were full of tension, the Jewish press published scores of articles for and against the plan, and open and clandestine struggles occurred as to whether to advance or obstruct Herzl’s plan. After delegates at the Seventh Zionist Congress rejected the British proposal, some members of the Zionist Organization resigned and set up the ITO as an alternative.

The ITO’s first conference was held from July 30 to August 1, 1905, in a hall at the Safran Hotel in Basel. During the conference, delegates
decided on a plan of action and a fundamental position vis-à-vis the Zionist movement. The delegates were not uniform in their views, however. Among them were political Zionists who supported Herzl, members of the Zionist-Socialists (S.S.) led by Nahman Syrkin, and Zionists who did not belong to any faction. Common to all, however, was an adamant and aggressive opposition to the policy of the Zionist Organization and its decisions, especially to the resolution passed at the Seventh Congress, which prohibited future discussion of any settlement plan that did not involve the Land of Israel or adjacent territories.

Historians attribute the idea of resigning from the Zionist Organization and setting up the ITO to Israel Zangwill. However, an examination of the protocol of the first conference and of the memoirs of its participants reveals that Zangwill was actually dragged in by those who resigned, was not in full accord with their resignation, and was undecided about accepting the role of president in the new organization. The discussion regarding whether to remain in the Zionist Organization was conducted in Zangwill’s absence, during which important decisions were reached that guided the ITO until it disbanded in 1925.

Not all items on the agenda for the first conference were raised, but it was clear to most participants that it was necessary to create a new organization. Its leader was Yehuda (Judah) Hazan of Warsaw, who claimed that “it is impossible to remain in the old organization” and that “it is necessary to establish a new organization that will aspire to create a haven for the Jews who could not or did not want to remain in their places of residence.” His proposal was accepted by most of those present, and thus ended the first day of the new organization. Hazan’s proposal was the territorialist equivalent of the Basel program; indeed, the language of the two was not fundamentally different, although the territorialists did not mention the Land of Israel as the Jewish people’s final destination. The name of the new organization was the Juden-Territorial Volks-Organization (JTVO). It defined its aims as follows:

– JTVO’s objective is to acquire territory on an autonomous basis for those among the Jews who cannot or will not remain in the countries in which they reside at present.
– In order to achieve the objective defined above, the organization wishes to unite all those Jews who agree with the aims of the organization; to conduct negotiations with governments, and with various public and private organizations; and to establish the financial institutions and information offices necessary for this objective.
On August 1, 1905, Zangwill arrived for the closing session of the conference. He delivered a spirited speech in favor of the territorialist idea, though he was reluctant to accept the presidency. He asked to present the participants with the main elements of his plan, which, if found acceptable, could be a basis for cooperation with the Zionists. At first, Zangwill tried to forbid the elimination of the Land of Israel from the territorialist program: if offered the Land of Israel, Jews should accept it with alacrity. However, the Zionist Congress was wrong to reject the British offer of territory in East Africa. In addition, Zangwill suggested deleting the word “folk” (volks-) from the organization’s name, as it smacked of populism and seemed to exclude wealthy and assimilated Jews. Thus, it was eventually decided that the new organization would be called the Jewish Territorial Organization, or ITO.

Despite their withdrawal from the Zionist Organization to establish a rival institution, the secessionists continued to regard themselves, as they stated, as Zionists continuing the work laid down by Pinsker and Herzl. They believed that the Seventh Congress had deviated from the official Herzlian line. In a circular published shortly after their withdrawal, the territorialists explained that the congress had “imposed a kind of inquisition over the thoughts of each member of the movement while [it] denied the right of the freshest and most vibrant part of the movement to defend its views.” In addition, the territorialists claimed that supporters of the Uganda plan “felt themselves to be within an atmosphere of pressure and oppression, and that they were given to understand that there was no longer any place for them within the Zionist Organization.”

In spite of these suspicions and disagreements, the secessionists did not oppose double membership in both the Zionist Organization and the ITO, leaving the decision in the hands of the local territorialist branches: “The new organization did not determine for itself any position vis-à-vis the Zionist Organization. Every member as well as every group has the authority to clarify their position with regard to Zionism.” This statement expressed an ambivalent (and perhaps even a tolerant) attitude toward the Zionist Organization and testifies to the close ideological positions of the two.

Territorialist Ideology

A short while after the ITO was founded, the territorialist platform and plan of action were formulated. Adhering to language from the
JTVO’s founding conference, the aim of the territorialist organization was “[t]o obtain territory on an autonomous basis for those among the Jews who could not or would not remain in the countries in which they were living.”18 In order to achieve its goals, the organization aspired to unite all Jews who supported its aims, to come into contact with governments and institutions, and eventually to found the financial and other institutions necessary for realizing its aims.19 The term “autonomous basis” was defined as an obtainable territory in which the Jews would form the majority of the population.

In pamphlets distributed throughout the Pale of Settlement, the territorialists amplified their explanation of the ITO’s goals beyond what was in the platform. One pamphlet, entitled Our Aims and Objects, formulated the main principles of territorial ideology. Under the heading “What is it that we desire?,” the territorialists wrote “that our people have suffered quite enough already in their two thousand years of aimless wandering” and that they aspired to finally provide a solution to the Jewish question: “We cannot continue to see Jewish blood poured out like water. . . . Hundreds of thousands of our kith and kin are hurled forth from exile to exile, aimless, hopeless, knocking at every gate for admission and begging for the mere right to live.”20 Under the heading “How is this possible?” appeared the territorialist plan of action: “We must have a land of our own, and in that land we must possess autonomy, to make our own laws . . . where we shall be protected, free and able to develop our culture, our literature, our national existence.” Furthermore, the pamphlet stated that “the root of all the evil is that we are ‘aliens,’ beggars everywhere; the sooner this servile condition is ended, the better.”21

The territorialists clarified that their resignation from the Zionist Organization was motivated not by opposition to Zionist ideals so much as by fear that the Zionist movement did not have sufficient time to establish a state for the Jews in the Land of Israel. The ITO began its activities during a fateful period for the Jews in the Russian empire. In the years 1905–6, 657 pogroms took place in the Pale of Settlement, in the course of which 3,000 Jews were killed and the number of Jewish emigrants increased exponentially.22 These events convinced the territorialists that it was necessary to move quickly and obtain territory on an autonomous basis:

The Seventh Zionist Congress having refused to identify itself in any way with an immediate solution of this burning question of our people’s well-being, resolving to restrict its activity to Palestine only. We say that the most important matter, under present circumstances, is the saving
and revivifying of our people and our culture, and that a land exists for people and not a people for a land. It would be a sin to let our people in the meanwhile go to the dogs whilst we shout “Palestine and Palestine only.” If, as it appears, we shall be unable to obtain Palestine for generations, we have no right to fold our hands and do nothing.23

In a December 1907 speech in Manchester, England, Zangwill explained that “territory” did not mean a negation of the Land of Israel: “The ITO has always declared its readiness to co-operate in developing Palestine if the Zionists could guarantee the political safeguards.” But since the Zionists could not provide suitable guarantees, the ITO was not prepared to bind the fate of the Jewish people to one single territory, the acquisition of which was not assured. This would betray the Jewish people currently suffering from economic distress and persecution where they resided. “But if ‘Territory’ does not exclude Palestine,” Zangwill claimed, “there are other countries it does exclude—England for example.” The destined strip of land must be uninhabited and undeveloped, there must be no roads, railways, dockyards, houses, and streets, and it must be large enough to absorb tens of thousands of Jews every year. “It would not be a Jewish ghetto such as New York, with 400,000 sickly souls in one square mile, but a state in which the population was scattered over thousands of square miles.”24 When they arrived in their new land, the Jews would create the necessary infrastructure.

“Territory on an autonomous basis,” as specified in the ITO platform, was one of the basic and most important principles in territorialist thinking. The ITO wanted to continue Herzlian Zionism (as they interpreted it) and create an autonomous Jewish government under the patronage of one of the Great Powers. For this reason, the territorialists warned against Jewish settlement in areas of dense population where they would continue to live as a persecuted minority.

The territorialists maintained the Herzlian view that settlement without formal political authorization was dangerous and always ended badly. In his 1909 article “Be Fruitful and Multiply,” Zangwill noted that the Jewish people needed “territory without insidious colonization.” Territorialists believed that, for any land, a charter should precede practical settlement. For this reason, they also opposed the settlement project proposed by the Jewish Colonization Association (ICA) for the plains of Argentina, which could not ensure autonomy for the Jewish settlers. “We cannot play with toy-colonies like the Jewish Colonization Association hitherto,” said Zangwill. “Either the Turks are willing to see a publicly-recognized, legally-assured home for the
Jews grow up under their flag, or they are not. If they are, we can talk business. If they are not, let us know it before we waste our time and our money."\textsuperscript{25}

For Zangwill, the Jewish connection to territory was not solely dependent on geographical location. If Jews were given a strip of land where they could conduct their lives freely, the new territory could become their beloved homeland. The Land of Israel was indeed the place in which the spiritual identity of the Jewish people had been shaped and was the wellspring of yearning for many Jews, but from Zangwill’s viewpoint (and that of the territorialists in general) a sense of belonging could exist in any territory:

Let the Jews, with their genius for righteousness, establish a Jewish State in which justice shall be better done than any existing State, in which morality stands higher and crime lower, in which social problems are better solved, in which woman’s rights are equal to man’s, in which poverty and wealth are not so terribly divided, in which the simple life is a universal ideal; let them light this beacon fire of theirs upon Zion’s hill, or East Africa’s plateau, and they will do more for the Jewish mission than in twenty centuries of pulpit talking.\textsuperscript{26}

Zangwill’s vision did not differ from the Zionist vision in so far as it focused on a model society to be established in the new Jewish state. The understanding of Zionism as a form of territorialism, of the bonds as well as the differences between them, accounts for the heavily charged and complex system of relationships between the territorialists and the Zionists. Both the ITO and the Zionist Organization agreed that territory was a necessary condition for solving the Jewish problem in eastern Europe, but they disagreed about the territory’s location and the unification of the nation.

The territorialists asserted that the “new Jew” could be created in any territory and that an immediate bond could be fostered between the settlers and their land. The territorialists also regarded the pioneer Zionist settlers as a central factor in developing the Land of Israel. Zangwill, for example, recognized the importance of farming as a central means for absorbing Jewish refugees. In his lecture “Colonization and Emigration” at the second conference of the ITO in London, Zangwill noted the formation of groups of territorialist pioneers in Russia whose sole aim was to build up a new, undeveloped homeland for the good of the Jewish people as a whole. They wanted to migrate at their own initiative—to live by the toil of their hands—and they thought that “any settlement enterprise that expected philanthropic aid would be doomed
Zangwill’s claim about territorialist pioneering in Russia was well-founded. In his work as the president of the ITO, Zangwill received letters from members of territorialist associations throughout the Pale of Settlement expressing their readiness to be pioneers. Zangwill’s diplomatic endeavors inspired hope among Jewish communities, and his followers embraced his dictum “Zionists without Zion.” For example, territorialists from Bendery in Bessarabia wrote to Zangwill: “Two years ago we sent to Paris a representative of most of our community, Rabbi Shlomo Wertheim, to persuade on our behalf the leaders of the ICA to give us a small estate in Palestine.” After an initial positive response, their proposal was rejected and they were offered settlement in Argentina. In the meantime, their situation worsened, and they concluded:

In vain we believed that our strength could bear more suffering; the fist that strikes from behind is so hard and bitter . . . and we said let us try and ask our brother, the leader of the ITO, perhaps he will find us a small piece of land in some country that he will select to work and take hold of it. We decided in our minds to be the first in this matter and to be an example for our brothers standing opposite the ITO, and we shall deliver our money up to the last agora to your honorable self and our strength and abilities we shall devote to working our land. We are all industrious farmers, vintners, tobacco growers, and the rabbis of our community can testify to our abilities and our honesty. . . . We lay our request before your honor to answer us yea or nay.28

Based on this appeal, it appears that it was the ICA’s rejection of their immigration to the Land of Israel that prevented them from becoming pioneers of the Second Aliyah. The territorialists, like the Zionists, thus recognized the importance of the pioneers as a motivating force in laying the groundwork for the absorption of the Jewish masses. The “new Jew” could be born in any territory given to the Jews, not only in the Land of Israel. Paradoxically, though, this worldview did not embrace the belief that calamity was imminent for the Jewish people. The dependence on pioneers implied a slow process of land development that did not imply any urgency.

The territorialists wished to base the necessity of territory on the immediate interests of one of the European states. Their main source of hope was their reliance on colonialism and imperialist powers. Yehuda Hazan claimed, in an argument with Nahum Sokolow, that “the territorialists regarded various possibilities of acquiring a free territory for
the Jewish people in colonies owned by those governments that had only economic interests." Since these governments were not capable of settling all of the areas under their control, they might be interested in “attracting migrants from other nations to their colonies” and thus there was “a good basis for the hope of achieving territory for our people from those governments whose lands are very poorly settled and who are making efforts to attract settlers to their vacant lands by all kinds of exemptions and privileges, including rights of freedom such as self-determination to a great extent.”

Because the territorialists wanted to establish the Jewish state in a territory under the protection and support of one of the European powers, they considered their chances of success greater than the Zionists’. From their viewpoint, the territorialist endeavor was based securely on international diplomatic activity, whereas the Zionists were spellbound by a romantic worldview, divorced from reality, whose “point of departure was not the desire to resolve the dire distress of the Jews but the emotional aspiration and yearnings of its members for Palestine.” The Zionists used the same arguments against their territorialist rivals, accusing them of “floating in the air.”

On January 11, 1905, Sokolow published an article entitled “To Return Zionism to Its Stability: Against the Territorialists” that denigrated the territorialist idea, calling it “the absolute opposite” both of Zionism and “of its own name.” Sokolow countered the territorialists’ self-identification as realists with the argument that the Zionists’ recognition of anticipated obstacles had given them the tools and the ability to remove those obstacles. Territorialists, in contrast, had only vague claims that land would somehow be found.

Hazan responded to Sokolow’s arguments in his book *Jewish Writers and Territorialism*. He claimed there was no truth in the Zionist argument that the territorialists had a weak hold on reality. Furthermore, he argued that it was only during the present period of colonialism, when the Great Powers sought economic development for their territories abroad, that it had become possible to obtain territory for the settlement of Jews. Hillel Zeitlin (1871–1942), a fervent supporter of political and Herzlian Zionism who joined the ITO, expressed a similar view when he noted that both Zionism and territorialism were optimistic movements but that there was a clear and essential difference between them: whereas the territorialists were optimistic that a land could be found, Zionists were optimistic about the specific land in which the Jews should settle.

The territorialists stressed the factor of time as a vital component in the choice of territory. Their main claim was that Jewish distress
was increasing geometrically while Zionist endeavors increased arithmetically, and therefore the Zionists did not have enough time to set up a Jewish state in the Land of Israel. This led to a pessimistic territorialism that viewed Jewish life both in the diaspora and in the Land of Israel as impossible. The novelist Yosef (Joseph) Haim Brenner, who for a brief period held territorialist views, expressed this pessimism in his “Letter to Russia,” written after he had lost his close friend Haya Wolfson in the Bialystok pogrom of 1905:

Land! Any land that can be obtained, any land that one can begin to build our home within; a land not for today which has already been lost to us, but a land for tomorrow, for the generations to come, for the Nemirov orphans in twenty years’ time, in fifty years, in a hundred years.35

The catastrophic worldview that characterized the territorialists parallels the idea of “negating the diaspora” in Zionist ideology and is central to the understanding of territorialism. The territorialists—like the Zionists—rejected life in the diaspora in its territorial sense and regarded the Land of Israel as a possible but not an exclusive solution. Persecution, economic hardship, and the suffering of Jewish immigrants to the west demanded a swift solution. Since, from the territorialist viewpoint, the situation could only worsen and the Land of Israel could not be guaranteed to provide a solution, territorialists thought that an alternative territory should be found as soon as possible.

In contrast, the Zionists, after the Seventh Congress, adopted a course of action that disregarded the territorialists’ dark predictions and began to promote national activity in the diaspora, mainly in eastern Europe. The practical expression of this decision was the idea of “present-day work” (Gegenwartsarbeit) adopted by the Russian Zionist Conference at its November 1906 meeting in Helsinki. The resolutions accepted at the conference meant that the Zionist movement recognized Jewish existence in the diaspora. The starting point of the conference was that political and social reforms in Russia after the 1905 Revolution would improve the status of Russian Jewry. Therefore, Zionists should act energetically within Jewish communities to enhance their status and protect their rights until the realization of the Basel program.36 This long-term, national, post-Herzlian approach was a synthesis of practical work in the Land of Israel and cultural and political work in the diaspora and stood in opposition to the catastrophic “here and now” Zionism of the ITO.

Amnon Raz-Korkotzkin has noted changes of meaning in the phrase “negation of the diaspora” in Zionist thought over time.37 In
the initial period, that of Pinsker and Herzl, negation of the diaspora entailed a belief that the diaspora’s continued existence in Europe was doubtful given the grave physical dangers that faced the Jews. Yet in the years following the Seventh Congress, the Zionist movement gradually moved beyond issues of physical survival to a cultural critique, negating any legitimacy for Jewish existence outside of the Land of Israel and beyond the sphere of Zionist ideology. In territorialist ideology, however, “negation of the diaspora” did not undergo any change and remained as it had for Pinsker and Herzl—the call for a safe haven. Whereas Zionists continued into a new, post-Uganda period, the territorialists continued to espouse the traditional and well-known Zionist ideology that had held up until 1903. In their search for a land of refuge, the territorialists negated the East European diaspora and any other in which Jews faced existential danger. From their point of view, as long as Jews could conduct their lives in an independent territory—even if it was not in the Land of Israel—the diaspora would cease to exist. This was not a total negation of Jewish existence outside the Land of Israel but an agreement in principle that political aspirations could be realized in any territory.

For this reason, the resolutions of the Seventh Congress to reject the British proposal and to prevent discussion of similar proposals in the future was a formative event in the history of the Zionist movement, the territorialist movement, and the Jewish people in general. Shabtai Bet-Zvi, for example, in his self-consciously controversial book *Post-Uganda Zionism in the Holocaust Crisis*, compared the conduct of the Zionists in the Sixth and Seventh Congresses with their conduct during the Holocaust. He noted the disavowal of Jewish distress and the disinclination to help Russian Jewry, which had already begun during the Uganda controversy. Bet-Zvi called this an egocentric and deeply rooted trait in Zionism and linked the Uganda controversy and the rejection of the British plan to the murder of six million Jews during World War II. He claimed that in both cases the Zionists turned their backs on the Jewish people and never saw the rescue of Jews as the primary goal of the Zionist movement or of the Yishuv.

The position of the territorialists toward the Arab population was a central component of the territorial ideology. One of the main obstacles for the Zionist movement, according to Zangwill, was the Arab population of the Land of Israel, which would make it difficult for the Jews to attain a numerical majority and which might prove openly hostile. The Jews would in time have either to drive them out or to somehow find a way to live alongside them. In addition, wrote Zangwill, Arabs owned almost all of Palestine’s land, and those lands owned by the Ottoman
sultan, which might be acquired through negotiations, were largely undesirable.  

Zeitlin also addressed the issue of the Arab population in the Land of Israel. At one time a supporter of political and Herzlian Zionism who even served as a delegate for the Homel Zionists at the Fifth Zionist Congress in 1901, Zeitlin resigned in frustration from the Zionist Organization in the wake of the Uganda affair and joined the ITO. In 1905, he was appointed editor of the newspaper Ha-zman, which in those years was the main mouthpiece of the territorialists.  

In that newspaper, Zeitlin expressed his anxiety about the Jewish people after the resolutions passed at the Fifth Congress: “I am not concerned about the division, nor am I concerned about the split, nor am I concerned about the ban, but it is about the destruction of the people that I am concerned.” The cause of his anxiety was the Zionist position that regarded the Land of Israel as the exclusive territorial solution for the Jewish problem. One of his main arguments that testified to the failure in Zionist ideological thought was the Arab question and the illegitimacy of the Zionist claim to the land.  

Even in later years, when the Zionist movement received the longed-for charter in the form of the Balfour Declaration and many were optimistic about its success, Zangwill tried to cool the enthusiasm of the Zionists. During World War I, he repeated his earlier claim—although he formulated it differently—that only the expulsion of the Arabs from the Land of Israel during the war would allow the Jews to set up a state: “It seems to me that if logic and good will cannot find a solution—and certainly it is necessary, first of all, to try and make use of them—a single act of enforcement would be better for both sides than eternal friction; just like the extraction of a bad tooth would be better than a toothache that never ends.” Zangwill regarded the Land of Israel as the historical land of the Jewish people and recognized the rights of Jews to settle yet refrained from a similar recognition of Arab rights. Large parts of the land, Zangwill wrote, were neglected and unfit for settlement as a result of the action of “the Arabs and Turks who took the trouble together to lay waste this country.” Since the Arab population was to blame, it had no right to the Land of Israel. Nevertheless, the sheer numbers of Arabs in the Land of Israel was a fact that had to be taken into account.  

Although he saw transfer as a commonsense solution, Zangwill thought that no one would adopt it. Since Jews and Arabs were fated to live side by side, Zangwill maintained that the relationship between the majority (Arab) and the minority (Jewish) would influence Jewish society in the Land of Israel and might seriously alter Zionism
itself. Even relationships that developed between Jewish employers and Arab employees would most likely create unforeseen problems. Zangwill also noted that a Jewish minority could not rule over an Arab majority and thus the English would most likely wind up ruling over both peoples, treating them as they did those in other colonies under their control.47

In 1925, the ITO disbanded, and most of its members returned to the ranks of the Zionist movement. The outbreak of World War I, the Balfour Declaration, mass immigration to the Land of Israel during the 1920s, and the strengthening of ties between the Zionist movement and the British government weakened the ITO and made it irrelevant to the new era’s agenda. However, the very causes that led to the disbanding of the ITO gave greater weight to the reasons for its establishment. For Zionists, the first half of the 1920s was characterized by much more optimism than the first decade of that century had been. The gates of the Land of Israel were open to immigration and Britain appeared determined to carry out the terms of the Balfour Declaration. The League of Nations confirmed the British Mandate for Palestine and recognized the historical link of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel. New settlements were built in the country, and it seemed as though the establishment of the national home was only a matter of time. In such circumstances, there was no longer any need for the territorialist idea and the Zionist-territorialist solution in the Land of Israel seemed ensured.

When the skies began to darken at the end of the 1920s and into the 1930s, voices could again be heard doubting the ability of the Land of Israel to absorb thousands of future immigrants. The rise of the Nazis to power, the deterioration of world order, the Jewish-Arab conflict, and Britain’s retreat from the Balfour Declaration all led to the revival of old territorialist ideas.

The Frayland Lige

During the first half of the 1930s, the territorialist idea was reconstituted in a new movement based on the ITO. As had occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century, territorialism emerged in reaction to the worsening of the situation of European Jews, in addition to the Jewish-Arab conflict in the Land of Israel in the 1930s. The optimism that had prevailed at the Paris peace conference in 1919 and the desire to create a new world order were exchanged for pessimism and the feeling that political realities in Europe not only remained unchanged but
had even worsened. With the British showing signs of retreating from the Balfour Declaration, the Jewish-Arab conflict escalating into prolonged violence, and Jewish life in Europe becoming restricted, a new territorialist alternative began to take shape.

The core members of the new territorialist movement were Jewish socialists, disappointed by the failure of the Bolshevik revolution, who watched the burgeoning antisemitism in Europe with anxiety. They no longer believed in the possibility of integration and refused to consider Zionism the solution. During the 1930s, local territorialist associations arose in Europe, each in its own way challenging the possibility of continued Jewish existence in Europe and proposing territorial solutions outside the Land of Israel.48

The creation of local territorialist associations led quickly to the development of a unified movement. Yosef (Joseph) Kruk (1885–1972), one of the founders of the Frayland Lige, stressed that “the new movement must be a free association of people with different views who are united around one aim: autonomous and centralized settlement.”49 On July 29, 1935, the first conference of the territorialist associations was held at the Russell Hotel in London, ending with the founding of the Frayland Lige (Freeland League). Nearly all the speakers at the conference focused on the position of the newly founded league toward the Zionist movement. As was the case in territorialist arguments at the beginning of the twentieth century, Zionism in the 1930s was considered not an enemy but rather an inadequate solution for the problem at hand. The establishment of the Frayland Lige was regarded by the territorialists as the direct continuation of the ITO. For them, Zangwill was a model and, during the conference, participants even visited his grave. Delegates created an organizational apparatus to address matters of planning, politics, propaganda, economics, fundraising, and youth within the movement.50 The center for activities was to be in London, and a newspaper—called Frayland—would be published as an organ for territorialist ideas.51

They also wrote a platform that called for “a home in a free unpopulated country for those millions of Jews who are forced to seek a place of refuge, as well as for those Jews who strive toward an autonomous national life in their own home.”52 There was a certain similarity between the platforms of the Frayland Lige and of the ITO, but the aim of the Frayland Lige was far more modest: a land in which the Jews could be culturally autonomous without political aspirations. The Jewish settlement would not have the characteristics of an independent political community, whereas the ITO had sought national and political autonomy for the Jews.
Another similarity between the Frayland Lige and the ITO was a tolerant attitude toward Zionism. The territorialists of the early twentieth century did not invalidate Zionism in principle but thought that the Land of Israel could not absorb Jewish migrants on a large scale. The land’s economic opportunities were limited and 600,000 Arabs already lived there. Members of the Frayland Lige in the 1930s had similar arguments: the needs of the hour were many, the power of the Zionist movement was limited, and therefore it was necessary that another body take charge. The new territorialists, like the old ones, were pessimistic about the Arab-Jewish conflict and the size of the Arab population already in the land.

Isaac Nahman Steinberg was one of the most outstanding figures of the “new territorialists.” Born in 1888 in Latvia, as a youth he was active in the Socialist Revolutionary Party (SR). In 1907, he was arrested and exiled to Siberia, escaping and arriving that same year in Zurich. In 1910, he completed his doctoral studies in law at the University of Heidelberg and returned to Moscow. After the October Revolution of 1917 Steinberg—as a representative of the leftist SR—became a member of the coalition government under Lenin and served as the People’s Commissar of Justice. Since he did not countenance the acts of violence that accompanied the revolution, regarding them as a betrayal of the socialist ideal, he was arrested and imprisoned. In 1923, he managed to leave Russia and settled in Berlin. From 1933 to 1939, Steinberg lived in London and devoted all of his time and energy to advancing the territorial idea. He spent the years of World War II in Australia, attempting to carry out a settlement plan in Kimberley. In 1943, he arrived in New York, where he died on January 2, 1957.

Steinberg clearly articulated the league’s goals in an article published in November 1937. He began by noting two key facts that should be taken into account in seeking to establish a Jewish home in a territory controlled by the British empire. The first was the sparseness of population: “Whereas there are 468 people to a square mile in Great Britain, there are only two a square mile in Australia, three in Canada, and fifteen in New Zealand.” The second was that uninhabited regions did not serve the interests of the British; settlement by immigrants would only strengthen the control of the empire over them. Alongside these facts stood the problem of Jews wanting to leave Europe. It was only natural, therefore, that Jewish masses should migrate to one of the empty territories under British control. The Land of Israel, according to Steinberg, was one solution but definitely not an adequate one, and thus the Jews should turn their gaze elsewhere in the empire.
Steinberg believed Australia or New Zealand would be most suitable for settlement. But the transition from Europe to the destined territory had to be a mass movement, not a gradual one. Steinberg opposed the principle of absorbing Jewish immigrants as individuals into their land of destination, fearing that those few who arrived would be assimilated into the majority and would not lay the groundwork for those who followed. Only settlement on a grand scale would bring about a solution to the Jewish problem: the Jews must colonize rather than infiltrate and assimilate.57 This principle was similar to the assertions of Herzl or Zangwill. As soon as the Jewish immigrants arrived, they would have to start developing large-scale, mechanized agriculture. They would have to be healthy, strong, and capable of coping with difficult living conditions. Steinberg also wanted to reduce the antisemitism that was liable to emerge from the absorption of immigrants, and he adamantly opposed philanthropy, regarding his plan strictly as a business enterprise.58

However, the areas of similarity between the Herzlian plan and Steinberg’s also indicate an internal and inherent contradiction within the territorialist ideology of the 1930s and 1940s. On the one hand, the new territorialists sought a strip of land that would resolve the distress of the Jews and provide a rapid response to current problems. On the other hand, Steinberg—like the Zionists and the old territorialists—understood that unselective mass migration to the land would end in failure and therefore proposed that the young and healthy be sent to lay the groundwork first. This plan was therefore a gradual one, just like that of the Zionists. It was perhaps even more selective and could not be a rapid solution to the immediate problems of the Jewish people. Moreover, Steinberg was writing at the height of a major migration to the Land of Israel, when scores of thousands of Jews were leaving their homes in Europe (mainly in Poland and Germany) to go to Palestine. The social composition of this wave of immigration, mostly families with children, raised doubts as to whether those entering Palestine met the territorialist criteria formulated by Steinberg.

Steinberg was concerned with both Jewish and non-Jewish issues. He tried to persuade his readers that antisemitism was not the problem of the Jews alone but of all peace seekers in Europe. He therefore called for a comprehensive and immediate solution to the Jewish problem. He wanted to stress that the new movement did not compete with Zionism but actually complemented it and that the Land of Israel was only one of a number of possible territorial solutions. Steinberg ended his article with the observation that the territorialist plan
would alleviate some of the pressure on the Land of Israel to absorb increasingly large numbers of immigrants, at the same time providing a new home for those desperately seeking one.\textsuperscript{59}

The main point of controversy between the Frayland Lige and the Zionist movement was the question of the final goal. The Frayland Lige repudiated the Zionist claim that the establishment of a Jewish state in the Land of Israel was the only satisfactory solution for the Jewish people, emphasizing cultural autonomy instead. The new territorialists asserted that the Jewish state in Zionist thought was not only the movement’s highest aspiration but also a potential source of national tragedy for the Jewish people. “Indeed, ‘all nations’ possess States; and World War I gave rise to a number of new ones,” Steinberg admitted, “but have men become happier as a result?” The aspiration for statehood, Steinberg argued, was undergirded by patriotism, which led to hatred and conflict between fortress states with uncompromising positions. It was thus not at all certain that the establishment of a state for the Jewish people would improve their situation. The more appropriate solution was therefore settlement without political aspirations.\textsuperscript{60}

This goal was manifested in Steinberg’s negotiations with the Australian government over Kimberley. Politically, the settlement in Kimberley would be an inseparable part of the Australian state. There would be no barriers or borderlines between Australia and Jewish Kimberley, and all of the settlers would be devoted entirely to building the new Jewish entity. Children’s education would be in the Australian spirit, with an emphasis on Jewish culture. English and possibly Yiddish would be the languages of instruction. Since the settlement in Kimberley would not need to exhaust itself in existential justification and power struggles vis-à-vis state authority, the society, Steinberg argued, would be healthy and stable, with friendly relationships among the settlers themselves and with their neighbors.

There is no doubt the European type of Jew would undergo certain changes in Kimberley. For one thing, he would be affected by the new landscape and Nature. It is impossible for a man’s body and imagination to remain unchanged in a land of kangaroos, crocodiles and cockatoos, of bottle-trees, man-high grass and fiery sun.\textsuperscript{61}

When the state of Israel was established, the Frayland Lige reached the same crossroads that the ITO had after the Balfour Declaration. However, unlike the decision to disband the ITO and return to Zionist activity, Steinberg and his territorialist colleagues argued that the Frayland Lige should not be dismantled and that the territorialist idea was
relevant more than ever. At their conference in October 1948, the Frayland Lige resolved that the state of Israel could not be the only solution for the Jewish people.\textsuperscript{62} The ingathering of exiles was regarded as impractical and, from the territorialist point of view, the state of Israel could not handle the huge number of Jewish refugees. The new state, Frayland Lige members claimed, “is situated in a sea of Arab states which can hardly tolerate the Jews and the displacement of 750,000 Arab refugees from Palestine. As soon as the Middle and Near East become militarized, Israel might be the victim of attack.” In addition, the territorialists asserted that the natural resources in Israel were few, “and except for salt, it was devoid of metals, minerals or forests. . . . The agriculture of the land cannot support its inhabitants.”\textsuperscript{63}

Culturally, territorialists opposed the enforcement of Hebrew language and culture on the Jews of the diaspora, most of whom preferred Yiddish. The concentration of Jews in one small and vulnerable territory was regarded as a mistake of the highest degree, placing the entire Jewish population in danger. They claimed that the idea of the “ingathering of the exiles” was a complete contradiction of the past two thousand years of Jewish history: “The very dispersion of the Jewish people helped to preserve the continuity of its national entity,” because “annihilation of Jews in one part of the world spared their bulk in other places.” The strength of the Jewish people lay precisely in its dispersion.\textsuperscript{64}

A contradiction lay within the territorialist criticism of the state of Israel and the ingathering of the exiles. The territorialists—like the Zionists—believed that an autonomous Jewish center was the appropriate answer to the Jewish question, and they found it difficult to explain why the concentration of Jews in the Land of Israel was a bad idea whereas their concentration in any other land would be good. Another contradiction, and one far more essential to Frayland Lige ideology after the establishment of the state of Israel, was the attempt to justify the Jewish dispersion by regarding it as the main factor in the preservation of the Jewish people. This claim stands in stark contrast to the territorialist ideology that had seen the solution to the Jewish problem in the concentration of the Jews in a territory—in the Land of Israel or in any other place granted to the Jews.

Here, in fact, lies the great difference between the old territorialism of Zangwill and the ITO and the new territorialism of Steinberg and the Frayland Lige. The members of the ITO were, or at least saw themselves as, an integral part of the Zionist movement and, from the moment they understood that obtaining a territory outside the Land of Israel was impossible, they returned to the Zionist Organization and continued their national activities. Members of the Frayland Lige, in
contrast, did not draw closer to Zionist ideology after the establishment of the state of Israel and in fact became its most bitter critics. The tolerant positions expressed during the early years of the Frayland Lige no longer represented the beliefs of its members, and territorialist ideology fell into obscurity in the Jewish public agenda.

In May 1948, a few days after Israel's declaration of statehood, Steinberg expressed his fears that, surrounded by enemies, Israel would become increasingly militarized and national identity would be focused only on defense. The Frayland Lige was opposed to the Zionist attempt to create a “new Jew” in the Land of Israel, regarding it as a betrayal of Jewish historical and spiritual identity. Criticism of the state of Israel intensified in the 1950s in reaction to the state's aggressive policies, border wars, and especially the Qibya incident of 1953, all of which suggested that—from the territorialist viewpoint—Israel's existence did not protect the Jewish people in Israel and even endangered the Jewish diaspora. Moreover, Israel's policy reminded Steinberg of the Bolshevik regime after the October Revolution. In both cases, the ideal was betrayed in action:

The bloody event of October 14 of this year, on the border between Israel and Jordan, is therefore a symbol and a warning to the conscience of our people. The fact that Jews—be they soldiers or citizens at large—could in cold calculation murder dozens of innocent men, women, and children in the Arab village of Qibya, is in itself a hair-raising crime. But far worse is the indifferent or satisfied reaction to this event on the part of the Jewish population in Israel and almost everywhere else in the world. It has been made “kosher” by all possible strategic, political, sentimental arguments—and the moral issue has been completely ignored.

Steinberg claimed that Israeli statements of regret that nevertheless placed blame for the incident on the Arabs were eroding the moral sensitivity of the Jewish people. Steinberg's article “The Jubilee of an Idea,” published in Oyfen Shvel, constitutes a severe indictment of the state of Israel. The state's aggressive policy, the territorialists claimed, transformed Jews from persecuted victims into violent figures. Therefore, the main aim of the Frayland Lige was no longer merely a search for a land for Jewish immigrants but also the preservation of the morality of the Jewish people. “Fifty years ago,” Steinberg said, “our Zionist and territorialist forebears did not have worries of this kind. Although they saw the poverty of Jewish society, they had no doubt of its spiritual and ethical richness.” By contrast, Steinberg's generation was “destined to gaze into the abyss of the Jewish soul and as a result to think deeply” about the future.
When Steinberg died in 1957, no leader emerged who could help the Frayland Lige adapt to the new reality. The major territorialist movement of the early twentieth century became the cause of a few rather obscure intellectuals who criticized Zionism but were unable to propose a territorial alternative to the state of Israel. Fifty years after the Uganda controversy that transformed territorialism from an abstract idea into a political movement, the Frayland Lige died out, and with it went the territorialist idea.

Conclusion

The East Africa settlement plan that caused such upheaval in the Zionist movement and led to the establishment of the ITO has become a historical anecdote. Only a few are aware of its effect on the Zionist movement and the Jewish people. But the Uganda controversy was formative to the history of the Zionist movement and the Jewish people. It highlighted the urgent need of a solution for East European Jewry. The argument between the territorialists and the Zionists turned not only on questions of land but also on how much time the Jews had to set up a state. The territorialists advocated speed, even at the cost of forgoing the Land of Israel. The Zionists, in contrast, would only accept a state in the Land of Israel.

The main factor in the conversion of the territorialist idea into a compelling ideology and a mass movement in the early twentieth century was the physical and economic distress of the Jews in eastern Europe. Poverty, the pogroms of 1903–5, and mass migration from Europe led some Zionists to the realization that they could no longer wait for the Land of Israel; a solution was required without further delay. Their withdrawal from the Zionist Organization in August 1905 was the result not of a belief in the illegitimacy of Zionism but of a different sense of the direction or priorities the movement should take.

Unlike the opponents of Zionism—Bundists, Communists, Autonomists, and many Orthodox as well as Reform Jews—the territorialists did not initially want to propose an alternative ideology to Zionism, and their criticism of the Zionists stemmed from their deep identification with Jewish suffering. For this reason, their search for an alternative territory should be seen not as a renunciation of the dream of settling in the biblical Land of Israel but merely as a frantic search for a suitable strip of land for mass and immediate settlement. The source of this understanding is the recognition that the territorialists and the Zionists had a shared parentage and that the territorialists were continuing on
the historical path of Pinsker and Herzl. True Zionism, from their viewpoint, accepted autoemancipation and a Jewish state. In contrast, Zionists were far less tolerant toward territorialism, thinking that it endangered the existence of the Zionist movement. Therefore the Seventh Zionist Congress, which had removed the Uganda proposal from the Zionist agenda, accepted an additional resolution that forbade the submission of similar proposals in the future.

Territorialism was an ideology that sought to interpret the realities of the time and therefore searched for a rapid solution. The territorialist rejection of the need for a politically autonomous homeland is liable to cast territorialism as a utopian ideology detached from reality and from the life of the Jewish people. But in the early twentieth century Zionism was no less utopian. The Land of Israel—like the strip of land territorialists were trying to find—was as difficult to obtain as any other territory. Until 1917, no world power stood behind the Zionist movement or advanced the cause of the Jews. In this respect, the similarities between the two rival movements were greater than their differences. Both recognized the problems facing the Jews of eastern Europe, both believed that a territorial solution was best, and both faced serious obstacles to achieving their goals.

Yet, if the territorialists and Zionists agreed on the diagnosis, they were certainly divided on the prognosis. The territorialists were pessimistic about the economic and existential future of the Jews in eastern Europe. They feared that the countries absorbing the migrants would close their gates and Jews would find themselves without a suitable alternative. Persecution, suffering, and economic distress would be their lot and they would sink into a prolonged depression without the chance of rescue. It was therefore necessary to find a land of refuge, the earlier the better. The Zionists, on the other hand, after the Seventh Congress, discarded the “catastrophic Zionism” that characterized the period of Pinsker and Herzl. Contrary to the territorialists, who thought that current realities would only worsen the situation of the Jews, Zionists were convinced that expected political changes would benefit East European Jewry. For this reason, at the Helsingfors Conference of 1906, they adopted the idea of “present-day work” (Gegenwartsarbeit). The conference’s resolutions, and with them international organized Zionism, recognized Jewish existence in the diaspora, aspired to improve the status of the dispersed Jewish communities, and tried to ensure the rights of the Jews in the various countries where they had settled.

This was the essential difference between the Zionist movement and the ITO. The territorialists saw themselves above all as a rescue movement (in the physical and the existential sense) and therefore
opposed the idea that any solution could be found in the diaspora, searching instead for a territory for immediate and mass settlement. The Zionists, for their part—at least in the years leading up to World War I and the first decade of the British Mandate—regarded themselves primarily as a national movement in which the Land of Israel stood as the center, not as a land of refuge for Jewish masses seeking relief for their distress.

Whereas the worldview of the territorialists was catastrophic, the Zionist movement—at least in the first decades of its activity—refused to recognize the panic of the territorialists and preferred gradual and prudent national endeavors that conformed to the fragile economic realities in the Land of Israel. However, the forecasts of both the territorialists and the Zionists turned out to be wrong. The catastrophe that the territorialists had warned against failed to occur in the early twentieth century. And after the issuing of the Balfour Declaration, they discarded the catastrophic ideology and joined hands with the Zionist movement, taking part in the national endeavor in the Land of Israel. In the Zionist movement, the very opposite occurred. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Zionists were those who had discarded the catastrophic prognosis and the pessimistic interpretation of events; but they adopted them in later years. When it became clear that imminent national disaster threatened the Jewish people, Zionists began to regard the realities in Europe in the same way the territorialists had understood them in the years after the Seventh Congress. It was only in the 1930s (and in the years following the Holocaust)—when the Zionist movement realized the extreme distress of the Jews in Europe for the first time, making it necessary to find a swift solution in the Land of Israel—that the Zionist movement began to use terms taken from territorialist ideology of the early twentieth century.

The withdrawal of the territorialists from the Zionist Organization over the question of time not only sharpened the differences between the two ideologies but also prevented the Zionist movement from falsely claiming that care for the Jewish people and their existence in Europe was a central component in Zionist ideology from the very outset. Zionist rhetoric about rescue and the negation of the diaspora concealed more than it revealed. This was a retroactive attempt by the Zionists to claim that they had recognized the existential dangers that lay in wait for the Jews of Europe early on and that, from the start, it had made efforts to set up a land of refuge for the Jewish masses.

The Arab population of the Land of Israel was another important factor in disagreements between the early territorialists and the Zionists. The territorialists recognized this problem before the Zionists
did and showed a sensitivity to the Arab issue, drawing their rivals’ attention to the fact that the Land of Israel at the fin de siècle was home to over half a million Arabs already and that, in the existing demographic reality, an insoluble bloody conflict between the two peoples was bound to occur should Jews settle there in large numbers. The Zionist leadership minimized the importance of the Arab question, which in time would become one of the most central, problematic, and intractable issues facing the Zionist movement. In order to avoid friction between the Jewish immigrants and the native inhabitants, Zangwill searched for places he believed to be relatively uninhabited, such as East Africa or Kimberley, Australia.

In spite of their diagnosis of the Jewish problem and their sensitivity to Jewish suffering, the political achievements of the territorialists were few. Years of searching for territory did not lead to any practical results. Four main factors led to the decline of the territorialist ideology.

First, the territorialist idea took root in Jewish society at times of crisis and despair. After the pogroms of 1881–82, Pinsker published his “Autoemancipation!” The Uganda plan was discussed in the Zionist movement against the background of the Kishinev pogrom. Negotiations conducted by the ITO were held against the background of mass emigration. The rise of the Nazis to power and the persecution of Jews in the 1930s led to the revival of territorialism and the founding of the Frayland Lige. During years of tranquility and optimism, territorialism lost its hold over Jewish society and territorialist activists began to find other political frameworks. The Balfour Declaration and the first years of the British Mandate in the Land of Israel were years of hope and soon territorialism became marginal at best.

Second, the ITO’s main objective was “to acquire territory on an autonomous basis for those who cannot or will not remain in the countries in which they reside at present.” For this purpose, Zangwill began to search for suitable territories with sparse populations capable of absorbing a massive number of Jews. The ITO’s international diplomatic efforts involved the careful examination of virtually every strip of land on the planet. In some cases official diplomatic contacts were made between the ITO and sovereign governments. All of the negotiating governments agreed to accept Jews as individuals but never as a people and rejected any possibility of establishing Jewish autonomy in a territory under their control. In the absence of land, the ITO could not carry out its one and only objective and thus lost the right to exist. Territorialist diplomacy was also problematic. Territorialists like Zangwill relied on colonialist European governments, especially the English, and wanted to exploit their interests in the
territories under their control. World War I put an end to the colonialist era, however, and Zangwill no longer had any chance of finding a common interest between the ITO and the European powers.

Third, the territorialist movement had no pioneer elite that had taken upon itself the preparation of a territory for the absorption of future immigrant masses. The preparation of the land and the creation of a suitable economic basis would require extensive, protracted work. The Zionist movement had brigades of pioneers to man it, spanning the period from the First Aliyah until the establishment of the state. The ITO never had a reservoir of pioneers with the high motivation and desire to self-sacrifice that the Zionist movement possessed. In the absence of a territory, no group with the qualities and values for a national movement developed that would have been able to transform the idea from theory into practice.

Fourth and finally, beyond the historical and logical factors that led to the decline of territorialism, there is another, not necessarily connected with Jewish distress or the geopolitical conditions of the early twentieth century. Territorialists analyzed reality without illusions. They regarded the persecution of the Jews as an existential danger, and their rescue was the main motivating force in territorialist activities. However, analysis alone of the problem was not sufficient to propel a national movement. The territorialists detached emotion from their national endeavor and assumed that during the years of distress the Jews would go to any territory. But it turned out that dire forebodings were insufficient to inspire hope in their followers and to harness them to a national endeavor. During periods of calm and quiet, the territorialists found it hard to continue their work. With the same speed with which Zionist activists moved from Zionism to territorialism, they abandoned it and returned to the bosom of Zionism. It was not possible to separate Zion from Zionism. The ITO’s failure to become a mass movement in quiet years demonstrates the force and power of myths in national movements. Without a formative myth, the territorialist organization remained the possession of a small group of intellectuals who, although they had analyzed the situation and saw the gloomy fate of East European Jewry, had no army to carry out their idea. In other words, territorialist ideology was a paradigmatic failure. The Zionist movement appealed to nationalist sentiment that rested on a historical-mythological foundation whereas the territorialist organization was based on a scientific, rational, and intellectual approach that was incapable of generating mass appeal. The tools of research and scientific thought (review, statistics, choice of alternatives, etc.) are not valid in a national discourse that is essentially mythological at heart. Herein lay
the secret power of the Zionist movement and a main source of the territorialists’ weakness.

Notes

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from foreign-language sources are mine.

2 Eliyahu Benyamini, Medinot la-Yehudim (Tel Aviv, 1990), is the only book in Hebrew that deals with territorialism and the attempts to set up states for Jews in 34 countries. This is pioneering research that exposed the Israeli reader to the various territorialist initiatives during the first half of the twentieth century for the first time. Benyamini reviews the plans for settling Jews in nearly every corner of the globe and tries to determine their value and the reasons for their failure. Because the book contains a large number of documents associated with territorialism, it should be regarded as an anthology. For further references to territorialism, see Yitzchak David Marmur, “Ha-masa u-matan ha-diplomati shel ha-histadrut ha-teritoryalistit ha-yehudit (ITO) u-mesi-bot kishlono,” Tsiyon 1 (1945): 109–40, and 3 (1946): 175–208. See also Haim Avni, “Ha-hityashevut ha-teritoryalistit veha-hityashevut ha-tsi-yonit,” Yahadut zemanenu 1 (1984): 69–87, and David Vital, Ha-mahepe-khah ha-tsiyonit: Shenot ha-’itsuv (Tel Aviv, 1982). The acronym ITO (rather than JTO) is a consequence of the acronym for the Yiddish name of the organization, Yiddishe Territoryalistishe Organizatsye; in Yiddish, the y (yod) is the same as the letter i.
3 See Gideon Shimoni, The Zionist Ideology (Hanover, N.H., 1995), xiv.
6 Ibid.
7 See Alter Druyanov, Ketavim le-toledot Hibat Tsiyon, vol. 1 (Odessa, 1919), 356–57. The Kattowitz Conference was the first conference of Hovevei Tsiyon associations and included representatives from a number of countries, including Romania.
8 Ibid., 373.
9 See Yosef Klauzner, Mi-Katovich ad Basel (Jerusalem, 1965), 153.
10 Ibid., 154.
12 See Theodor Herzl, The Jewish State, quoted in Hertzberg, Zionist Idea, 222.

13 Hazan was one of the prominent political-Zionist activists in Warsaw and a supporter of the Uganda plan. He was an initiator of the idea of withdrawing from the Zionist Organization and setting up the ITO. Three months after the Seventh Zionist Congress, he died of blood poisoning. His son, Ya'akov Hazan, was one of the leaders of Hashomer Hata'ir and of Mapam.


15 Ibid., 17.

16 Circular of the Warsaw District of the ITO, Sept. 1904, Central Zionist Archives (hereafter CZA), A36, file 53a, 2.

17 Ibid., 4.

18 Constitution of the ITO, Central Zionist Archives, A36, file 1, 1.

19 Ibid.

20 See Our Aims and Objects, CZA, A36, file 8, 1.

21 Ibid.

22 See D. John Klier and Shlomo Lambroza, Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History (New York, 1992), 228.

23 Our Aims and Objects, 1–2.


26 Israel Zangwill, “The East Africa Offer,” in Speeches, Articles and Letters of Israel Zangwill, ed. Maurice Simon (London, 1937), 204. This was the first occasion on which it was made clear that the ITO favored statehood—which the Zionists, at least officially, did not.

27 Israel Zangwill, Kolonizatsie un emigratsie (London, 1907), 3.

28 Letter from the Bendri group to Israel Zangwill, dated Feb. 24, 1906, CZA, A36, file 102–3. In the ITO archives, one can find similar letters in the same style. For example, see the letter of the young territorialists of Kovno to Zangwill while he was negotiating with the government of Western Australia: CZA, A36, file 53a, Jan. 18, 1911.

29 See Yehuda Hazan, Ha-soferim ha-yehudim veha-teritoriyaliyut (Warsaw, 1906), 8.

30 Ibid., 8–9.

31 Circular of the Warsaw District of the ITO, Sept. 1904, CZA, A36, file 53a, 2.


33 Hazan, Ha-soferim ha-yehudim, 8–9.

Zionism without Zion?

Gur Alroey

38 Shabtai Bet-Zvi, Ha-tsiyonut ha-post ugandit be-mashber ha-Shoah: Mehkar ’al gomrei mishgiyah shel ha-tenu’ah ha-tsiyonit ba-shanim 1930–1945 (Tel Aviv, 1977), 12, 146–58.
39 Ibid., 7.
42 On Zeitlin, see YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, 2: 2116–18.
44 Ibid., 264.
45 See Israel Zangwill, “Ha-mediniyut shel ha-hanhashah ha-yisraelit,” in Ha-derekh le-‘atsmaut, ed. Ben-Zion Netanyahu (Tel Aviv, 1938), 189.
46 Ibid., 193.
47 Ibid., 191.
48 See Astour, Die Gesichte fun di Frayland Lige, 42–63.
49 Kruk, Tahat diglan shel shalosh mahpekhot (Tel Aviv, 1970), 2: 461.
50 Ibid., 7–8.
51 See the protocols of the preparatory conference of the Frayland Lige, CZA, A330, file 13. Section 330 in the CZA belongs to Joseph Leftwich, journalist, writer, and biographer of Zangwill. Leftwich participated in the meetings and was active in the Frayland Lige, so he possessed many documents that concerned its activities. See also Kruk, Tahat diglan shel shalosh mahpekhot, 2: 447.
52 Aims and Purposes of the Freeland League (New York, n.d), 1.
55 On Isaac Steinberg, see Moshe Enav, Bi-sa’arat ha-hayim (Tel Aviv, 1967). See also Melech Ravitch, ed., Isaac N. Steinberg: Gedank Buch (New York, 1961), 12–13, and Astour, Die Gesichte fun di Frayland Lige, 42–43. After Steinberg’s death, a special publication was issued in commemoration; see Oyfen Shvel 3–4 (Mar.–May 1957). For further information about Steinberg, see Benyamini, Medinot la-Yehudim, 231, and, more recently, Sheva Zuker, “Dr. Isaac Nahman Steinberg: Revolutsyoner un natsyonaler denker,” Oyfen Shvel, 348–49 (2010): 21–31.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
61 Ibid., 119.
64 Ibid.
68 Ibid., 3.
69 Ibid.