

Zionism: A Sui Generis Settler Colonialism

written by Samuel Farber | February 7, 2025



Settler colonialism is very much alive in the state of Israel today. Open a newspaper anywhere in the world and you are likely to see reports about Israel's genocidal war in Gaza and about Palestinians injured and killed in the West Bank, the demolitions of their homes, and the expulsion of the families who had lived there since long before the foundation of the state of Israel in 1948. Jewish settlers, mostly of the Orthodox religious persuasion, are doing everything they can, including the creation of aggressive settler militias, to expand their control of that Palestinian region with the tacit—and often explicit—approval of the Israel Defense Forces.

The origins of Israeli settler colonialism can be traced to the several waves of Zionist immigrant settlers or *aliyot* (the plural of *aliyah*, "ascent" in Hebrew) that played a critically important role in constructing Israeli society. The first three, and most important, *aliyot* took place from 1881 to 1923; but it was only the second and third *aliyot* (1904–1914 and 1919–1923 respectively) that left a model and legacy of landholding and administration for the Zionist state. As scholars Gershon Shafir¹ as well as Yoav Peled and Horit Herman Peled² have pointed out, the goal of the first *aliyah* was to settle the land through privately owned, self-sustaining farms that hired experienced and cheap Palestinian agricultural labor. But according to these authors this model failed because, at the time, the Zionist movement did not have the financial resources to acquire land for the newly arriving settlers, especially as the price of land had skyrocketed due to Zionist demand and because under both Ottoman and British laws land already owned by Jews could be legally sold to non-Jews. This problem was solved with the practice established by the second *Aliyah* to develop self-employing cooperative settlements on non-alienable, nationally owned land financed by public funds. This new approach also led to the settlers' "conquest of land" from the Palestinians and their exclusion from Jewish-owned and -controlled land. It also established the foundation for the "conquest of Jewish labor," which minimized and downgraded, when it could not eliminate, the participation of Palestinians in the economy at large, a situation somewhat like the treatment of Native Americans in the United States.

This characteristic of the Israeli case makes it different from other settler colonies, such as South Africa, where the native population was indispensable as the labor force to be exploited by the white colonialists. The Israeli settler colonialist case was also different in that a new social category of people, namely refugees, fleeing in desperation from the Nazi totalitarian system expanding in Europe after the early thirties, arrived in Palestine. Theirs was an immigration based on fear and persecution far more than economic or political reasons. These immigrants were critical in considerably enlarging the Jewish population of Palestine, with 35,000 Jewish refugees arriving there after Hitler took power in Germany in 1933 (about three times that of the previous year), over 45,000 in 1934, and more than 65,000 in 1935.³ This massive immigration to Palestine surpassed, just in those three years, the combined numbers of the first three ideological *aliyot*. Large numbers of refugees from the postwar displaced persons camps arrived in later years, particularly in the late

forties and early fifties. The establishment of the state of Israel further encouraged that immigration, with 101,828 Jews arriving in 1948; 239,954 in 1949; 170,563 in 1950; and 175,279 in 1951.⁴ While most of these people did not become settlers in the tradition of the first three *aliyot*, if they were not already, they were quickly transformed into Zionists who condoned, at least implicitly, the systematic discrimination against and repression of Palestinian Arabs.

We must keep in mind that this process of emigration to Palestine took place at a time when it was very difficult to enter the economically developed capitalist countries, as had been the case with Great Britain since 1905 and the United States since 1924 with the adoption of immigration laws that sharply restricted the entry of Eastern Europeans among other groups of foreigners. It is important to note, as Zachary Lockman did in his book *Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906-1948*, that of the approximately 2.4 million Jews who left Tsarist Russia and Eastern Europe between 1881 and 1914, 85 percent went to the United States, 12 percent went to other Western Hemisphere countries (mostly Canada and Argentina), Western Europe, and South Africa. Less than 3 percent went to Palestine, and a substantial proportion of these, did not stay there for long.⁵ Considering this, an argument could be made that absent the nativist and racist U.S. immigration legislation of the 1920s that established the quota system there might not have been a state of Israel, or at least not with the size and form it took after its foundation in 1948.

Comparatively speaking, it is certainly true that Palestine was not the only place where new waves of immigrants joined the earlier founding settlers. This was also the case of the United States, Canada, and Australia, to name the most prominent countries where this occurred. A similar process occurred with the lesser-known case of Algeria, where the French authorities were compelled to populate Algeria with white immigrants from the Mediterranean basin (Spain, Corsica, Italy, and Malta) from the very beginning of their rule.⁶ But this immigration, like most of the immigration into the above-mentioned English-speaking countries, was overwhelmingly motivated by economic forces, sometimes reinforced by the desire to flee religious and political discrimination, while the Jewish emigration to Palestine from the early thirties to the early fifties was overwhelmingly motivated by extra-economic factors, including the immediate need for physical security and protection from the liquidationist totalitarian Nazi rule, or of its consequences, as witness the tens of thousands of Jews who ended up in displaced persons camps after the end of the war. And unlike in other cases, for these Jewish survivors, it was impossible to return to places from which they came, such as Poland, due to the waves of antisemitism and pogroms taking place there, whether during the war, as in the case of Jedwabne in 1941, or after the war, as in the cases of Krakow on August 11, 1945, and of Rzeszow and especially Kielce in 1946.⁷

It is perhaps ironic that for many decades, the Zionist movement itself was not interested in massive Jewish emigration to Palestine. The principal Zionist leaders accepted the usually limited number of immigration certificates issued by the British Palestine Mandate authorities and trained the selected Zionist volunteers who were not only able and willing to move to Palestine, but also able to contribute to the economic development and the physical defense of the Zionist settler society and polity. This selective Zionist policy was consistent with the notion expressed by David Ben-Gurion, the first prime minister of Israel, that if it came to choosing between ten thousand Jews who would be beneficial to Palestine and the “rebirth” of Israel or a million Jews who would be a burden, the ten thousand Jews should be saved.⁸

These selected certificates contradicted the criteria for membership used by the Zionist movement for which the only requirement was a monetary contribution to the Zionist organization, in the form of a “shekel” to be purchased from the organization itself. This was a passive conception of membership that did not commit the new, especially adult, members to any kind of actual involvement in political activity. This was compatible with the socioeconomic character of the

sections of the Jewish middle class (primarily based on people working in the small business and professional sectors of the economy) that constituted the bulk of at least the leadership and cadres of mainstream General Zionism. This political current led by Chaim Weizmann, a scientist and first president of Israel, was the predominant Zionist tendency from the movement's earliest years until the late nineteen twenties. General Zionism left a political and ideological legacy that continued to influence later dominant Zionist tendencies.

Zionism as a European Political and Social Movement

Perhaps the most significant feature revealing the sui generis character of Zionist settler colonialism is that it emerged from a political and social movement that, during the years preceding World War II, was in sharp competition with other Jewish political movements in Poland (the focus of this article) and the rest of East Central Europe, where European Jewry was concentrated during the interwar period. There was an intensely politicized society, particularly among the younger generation of Jews born between the last decades of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century. Most of the members of these cohorts joined one or another of the competing Jewish (and sometimes non-Jewish) political and social movements vying for their support. There were hardly any politically apathetic Jewish youth. This was facilitated by the fact that the Jewish community was far from being socially and religiously monolithic. This was certainly the case in Poland, the most important Jewish center with its approximately three million Jews (some 10 percent of the total Polish population before World War II). Jewish scholar Max Weinrich, a founding member of the culturally influential Yiddish language YIVO organization, described Polish Jewry in 1935, as culturally and socially divided into four camps: a traditional [religious] camp, a Yiddish secular camp permeated by socialist and communist influence, a Zionist-Hebraist stratum, and the assimilated environment.⁹ The Yiddish secular camp included the vital Jewish labor movement that was for the most part under the leadership of Bundist and Communist anti-Zionists.¹⁰

Contrary to what some critics of Zionism maintain, Zionism was in fact an important part of Jewish social and political life in interwar Poland and East Central Europe, particularly during what historian Ezra Mendelsohn calls Zionism's "formative years," 1915 to 1926. But as we shall see, Zionism suffered from substantial organizational ups and downs, notwithstanding its large organizational apparatus of a couple of hundred people.¹¹ If we use electoral success as an indicator, we find that mainstream General Zionism¹² ran candidates and often succeeded in the elections held under the Polish republic established after World War I. Mendelsohn notes that Zionist candidates tended to do well in parliamentary (Sejm) elections but much less so in city council and Kehile (Jewish community) elections. It is also worth noting that Zionist candidates tended to do better in the south (Galicia) and in the northeast border areas (the so-called Kresy) than in central, so-called Congress, Poland, which included Warsaw, Łódz, and other big Polish cities.¹³

In any case, Zionism's attempt to obtain hegemony in the Jewish political world was strongly resisted and contested by other Jewish political forces, such as the socialist Bund on the left and the religious anti-Zionists on the right. In fact, there were occasions when mainstream General Zionism was electorally defeated by even relatively small political groupings such as the Folkists, a nonsocialist, anti-Zionist Yiddishist formation that counted amongst its leaders the well-known Jewish historian Simon Dubnow. Symptomatically, this defeat took place in the municipal election held in Warsaw in 1916 when the Folkist candidate accused the Zionists of making unprincipled deals with the Orthodox and the assimilationist Jews as well as with antisemitic Poles.¹⁴

The Zionist movement undoubtedly got a big boost, in terms of attention by the Jewish public, from the Balfour Declaration of 1917, but as Mendelsohn explains, the great expectations the Balfour declaration created were soon replaced by bitter disillusionment. The World Zionist Organization was incapable of funding large-scale *aliyah* to take advantage of the favorable historical conjuncture,

and the British government, notwithstanding the Balfour Declaration, was not prepared to allow unlimited emigration to Palestine. However, in 1924–26, when the United States was just beginning to implement a restrictive immigration quota system, for the first time more Polish Jews emigrated to Palestine than to that country. However, this fourth *aliyah* ended in 1926, when Palestine entered a period of economic crisis that not only ended this *aliyah* but forced many Jews who had already emigrated to Palestine to return to Europe.¹⁵ As a Zionist activist cited by Mendelsohn noted, this situation led to a severe crisis and a truly unprecedented Zionist collapse by 1926.¹⁶

During the 1930s, and particularly after the death of Marshal Józef Piłsudski in 1935, the rise of extreme antisemitism in Poland combined with the British decision to substantially diminish Jewish emigration to Palestine on account of Palestinian Arab resistance as manifested in the major 1936 Revolt. These led to the decline of the relatively moderate General Zionism of the first quarter of the twentieth century and the rise of right-wing and left-wing forces. On the right, there was growth of the ostensibly more militant and militaristic Zionist revisionism, which borrowed much from the traditional militaristic Polish right and from Italian Fascism. And on the left, there was Jewish anti-Zionism principally represented by the Bund.¹⁷ According to the historian Kenneth B. Moss, while 206,000 Polish Jews voted in the international Zionist congress elections of 1935, only 116,000 did so in 1937 and 114,000 in 1939. At the same time, there was a dramatic rise in Jewish electoral support for the socialist Bund: municipal elections in December 1938 and May 1939 brought large Bundist victories among Jews in many large cities and even in some smaller places. Moss suggests that some of those who voted for the Bund in 1938–1939 were new supporters previously unfamiliar with the party's culture, program, and ideology.¹⁸ It is tragic that the rise of left anti-Zionism in Poland happened shortly before Poland was attacked by Germany from the west and the USSR from the east (as a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact) marking the beginning of World War II on September 1, 1939. These invasions ended Polish independence and placed the Jewish people in extreme danger.

The Nature of Mainstream Zionist Politics

Mainstream General Zionism demonstrated a strong proclivity to a politics of transaction focusing on the deals it could make with friends and enemies alike and stood in stark contrast with the Jewish working-class socialist Bund and other left-wing organizations (including some socialist-Zionist *youth* groups) that placed their main emphasis on mobilizing and organizing their members for political action on behalf of their goals.

Aside from its reliance on the politics of transaction, the mainstream General Zionism that predominated until the late twenties was rooted in some of the most pessimistic and conservative features of Jewish Ashkenazi political culture, particularly the idea that antisemitism is an incurable and permanent feature ingrained in every social and political organization if not the human condition itself. Consistent with this outlook, mainstream General Zionism, like many other ethnic nationalisms, by and large abstained from even trying to win over non-Jewish majorities, or at least sections of it, to fight against antisemitism. Instead, it adopted a purely transactional approach based on the notion that because they are weak, Jews should use their scarce political resources in exchange for the support of the powerful to advance the goals of Zionism, i.e., the emigration of Jews to Palestine. This outlook led mainstream General Zionism, and later the state of Israel, to make opportunistic deals with every kind of political party and force, including bloody dictatorships in Europe, Latin America, and elsewhere.¹⁹ This political attitude was shared by the leaders of the Jewish community in Palestine (the Yishuv) that led them, for example, to sign the Haavara Agreement with the Nazi government in August 1933, allowing Jews to leave for Palestine. This agreement materially benefited Germany since it greatly facilitated the takeover of Jewish commercial and residential property, although German Jews were allowed to transfer a small

proportion of their property to British Mandatory Palestine. This took the form of emigrants selling their assets to pay for German goods sent to Palestine in their name. The agreement also violated the international boycott of Germany, and for this reason many Jews opposed it, including even the right-wing Revisionist Zionists. This transactional approach drew on old, even medieval, Jewish traditions represented by the historical figure of the *shtadlan*, the intercessor with the non-Jewish authorities on behalf of the Jews, and the vehicle through which the Jews paid ransom (or bribes) to the authorities to obtain their desired concessions. As a modern adaptation of that ancient tradition, Zionism eliminated the *shtadlan* middleman and carried out the bargaining process directly.

In contrast with the transactional politics of Polish mainstream General Zionism stood the socialist Bund's alliance with the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), whose position on Jews and antisemitism was wobbly and sometimes fearful but who on several important occasions was won over to fight and defend the Jews against the actions of Polish antisemites. Polish mainstream General Zionism did make (usually unsuccessful) proposals to other Polish minority groups for building joint political action, but when it came to try to win over at least part of the 70 percent of ethnic Poles in the country, mainstream Zionism was generally not interested. Undoubtedly, as difficult as that task would have been, the failure to try was related to the Zionist notion of the inevitable and incurable nature of antisemitism.

Possibly the most important example of mainstream General Zionist politics appealing to the powerful involved its dealings with Scottish-born white supremacist and antisemite Arthur Balfour, who, as British prime minister in 1905, had presided over the parliamentary approval of the Aliens Act primarily aimed at stopping Jewish immigration to Britain. On November 2, 1917, Foreign Secretary Lord Balfour issued on behalf of the British government the so-called Balfour Declaration supporting the creation of a "national home" for the Jewish people in Palestine. The Declaration was the product of intensive lobbying by important Jewish and non-Jewish British politicians and personalities prodded by Chaim Weizmann. In his memoirs, Lloyd George, who had become British prime minister in December 1916, stated that the Declaration was a reward for the important work that Weizmann, as a chemist, had done in the production of acetone for the Ministry of Munitions.²⁰

More generally, the mainstream Zionist transactional approach to World War I was devoid of any democratic political principles. The Zionists did not oppose both sides of the imperialist war from the perspective of the right of self-determination of all nations against colonial and imperial rule, which included the Tsarist empire's oppression of the millions of Jews under its rule. In fact, the policy of the Zionist movement, as transmitted by its emissaries who functioned as roving organizers, was to ask Jews to enlist in the armies of their respective countries to show themselves as the most loyal subjects of their respective governments, to earn the respect and gratitude of their rulers. Partly because of this policy, half a million Jewish soldiers, including Zionists, faced each other on European battlefields at the beginning of the war, with their numbers doubling as the war went on, some of them politically motivated by the rationalization that their country's victory would hasten the conversion of their Zionist dreams into reality. Similarly, right-wing Zionist leader Ze'ev Jabotinsky moved to create a national Jewish military unit to join the British army, presumably to improve the chances of obtaining Palestine as a reward from the British government. In Lwow, in eastern Galicia, Zionists raised a Jewish army at the outbreak of the war following the example of Polish nationalist followers of General Pilsudski, who supported the war against Tsarist Russia to pursue his Polish national aspirations and supported the Austrian imperial aims that Pilsudski perceived as favoring Poland's interests.²¹

Most socialist (and liberal) parties tended to support one of the contending sides in World War I; namely, the side of their own government. In doing so, the socialist parties were breaking with the antiwar policies adopted at the congresses of the Socialist International. While mainstream international Zionism officially declared its neutrality in the war, this position was entirely

disregarded by Zionist national sections on both sides of the conflict. This was like the behavior of most socialist parties except for the important difference that the Zionist national sections were acting in conformity with the long-held Zionist policy of supporting their own governments. Thus, at the outset of World War I, German Zionists in Berlin—at the time the center of world Zionist political activities—joined in support of the war effort and even discontinued publication of *Die Welt*, the politically important international Zionist organ. Shortly after, German Zionists managed to become officials of the German occupation in the Ober Est region, which comprised present-day Lithuania, Latvia, Belarus, and Courland (western Latvia). German General Erich Ludendorff, the head of that German-occupied zone, even permitted collections for the Zionist controlled Jewish National Fund in the areas under his control. Zionists such as Franz Oppenheimer, a medical doctor turned social scientist, who played an important role as a theoretician of the early Zionist settlements in Palestine, went so far as to maintain that only under Prussian discipline would Jews be able to develop normally.²² Nevertheless, it is doubtful that a victorious Germany would have been interested in supporting Jewish settlements in Palestine, since unlike the British who wanted to have a friendly ally to make the route to its important Indian colony more secure, Germany had no such equivalent interest, aside from the fact that it was actually allied in the war with the Ottoman empire, then ruling Palestine.

On the domestic front, mainstream Zionist commitment to transactional politics was perhaps even more devoid of any politically principled basis including a willingness to do business with declared antisemites and other enemies of Jewish interests. Thus, for example, in January 1919, Zionist members of the Sejm supported the right-wing candidate Wojciech Trampczynski for marshal of that parliamentary body, in return for which they were given seats on various parliamentary committees. Although in the following year, the mainstream Zionist parliamentary group changed its policies to vote with the left on matters of general interest while remaining wholly independent on matters of specific relevance to Jews, it never veered away from its transactional politics with its deeply ingrained opportunistic political roots.²³ Thus, several years later, in 1925, the Polish government reached the so-called Ugoda agreement with the mainstream Zionist parliamentary deputies who were supposed to gain from the agreement several concessions to improve the living conditions of Polish Jews. But partly under the pressure of the Polish far right, the government reneged on its promises on living conditions and did not even bother to publish the text of the agreement. As historian Ezra Mendelsohn put it, “the Ugoda was now seen more and more as a shameful episode in modern Zionist history.”²⁴ It is clear in this instance that the Polish government did not have much to fear from the predictable lack of militancy and even gullibility of the Zionist parliamentarians.

It is true that mainstream General Zionism sometimes acted to better the conditions of the Polish and East Central European Jewries where they lived and to defend them from antisemitism. In an important sense, this was a predictable byproduct of the Zionist aspiration to hegemony over Jews in Europe in order to enhance its bargaining power vis-à-vis the gentile authorities to pursue the Zionist’s ultimate goal of emigrating to Palestine.²⁵ That is why Zionists ran for political office and demanded national rights and autonomy for the Jewish community in its dealings with the various governments of the Polish Republic established after World War I. That is also why Zionists were sometimes willing to and, in a sense, had no choice but to engage in self-defense struggles against pogroms and other forms of antisemitic attacks. Historian Jan Rybak cites several instances of such defense struggles organized by Zionists including their response to the pogrom that took place in Kazimierz, the Jewish section of Cracow, in 1918. As described by Rybak, about 100 Jews that included Zionist activists and members of Poale Zion and its youth group—i.e., the most politically active Zionist sectors in contrast with the middle-class mainstream General Zionists who usually did not participate in self-defense activities—armed themselves with sticks and iron rods among other weapons to confront the pogromists while several thousand Jews gathered to protect their neighborhood.²⁶

The Ups and Downs of European Jewish Interest in Palestine

Among the numerous Jews in Poland and East Central Europe there was very little interest in emigrating to Palestine based on historical or religious reasons such as the mythical restoration of the long-lost Jewish homeland. The great majority of Orthodox religious Jews, led by their party Agudat Yisrael, thought of Zionism as sacrilegious since only the Messiah could restore Jews to their "ancient home." Only a relatively small minority of Orthodox Jews belonging to the Mizrachi organization supported and were part of the Zionist movement. Basing himself on the accounts of Zionist emissaries (roving organizers) in Poland, historian Kenneth B. Moss writes that these emissaries encountered very little "full-fledged investment in socialist-Zionist ideology or any kind of myth-infused relationship to the Yishuv [Palestinian Jewish community] and its achievements...." The Zionist "idealists" among the local Zionist youth that emissaries visited across the length and breadth of Poland seem to have been substantially outnumbered by a large group of young people driven by a raw desire to leave Poland and by a smaller but far from negligible subset of searchers pulled towards critical enquiry regarding the realities and potentialities of the Yishuv and Poland alike.²⁷

In general, the Polish and East European Jews of the interwar years wanted to know if Palestine was a viable place for them in terms of its size and economic prospects, as they were considering fleeing the increasing antisemitism that was taking place in Poland, particularly in the 1930s. Marshal Pilsudski's Sanacja government, which ruled Poland from 1926 to 1935, was relatively tolerant of the Jews, but when he died in 1935, and under the pressure of the rabidly antisemitic Endecja party led by Roman Dmowski (and with Hitler in power in neighboring Germany), Poland became increasingly oppressive of its Jewry, especially under the military-led OZON (Camp of National Unity) regime that succeeded Pilsudski. Included among the highly oppressive new measures implemented in the 1930s were quotas sharply limiting Jewish entry into Polish universities, and the segregationist practice of allowing Jews to sit only in certain parts of school classrooms. In addition, there were organized boycotts of Jewish businesses, which were generally small, but that quickly worsened the economic situation of the Jews. Physical attacks on Jews by right-wing thugs in Polish streets also became part of the Jewish reality.

It could be said that as a general tendency, it was the Jewish defeats and pessimism about their condition and the lack of alternatives perceived as realistic and actionable that constituted the basis for Jewish attraction to Zionism in Poland and East Central Europe in the interwar years. But this must be qualified by those factors that made emigration to Palestine a practical impossibility. Even though such emigration became more feasible under British than Ottoman rule (before World War I) the British allowed only a certain number of Jews to emigrate to Palestine and this became even more limited after the Arab revolt that began in 1936. This situation led in turn to the British White Paper of 1939 that stipulated that only seventy-five thousand Jews would be allowed to emigrate to Palestine during the following five years. This was part of a British effort to limit the Jewish population to no more than a third of the total number of Palestine's inhabitants. Restrictions were now placed on the transfer of Arab land to Jewish ownership.²⁸ One result of the White Paper was a decline in Jewish interest in emigrating to Palestine except as a last resort and often via an illegal escape route. During this new period, the Balfour Declaration became in many ways a dead letter, although this had little practical effect during the World War II years when the international maritime transport of civilians entirely ceased in Europe. In sum, British imperialism had many different interests, and it is doubtful that loyalty to the Zionists and the Balfour Declaration ranked high among its commitments.

It is worth noting, as historian Jan Rybak has pointed out, that political enthusiasm in response to the revolutions in Russia and elsewhere often replaced Zionism. Rybak writes that towards the end of 1919 and first half of 1920, an increased number of radicalized Jewish activists began to rethink

their relationship to Palestine as a national homeland and destination for Jewish emigration. "Why do we need Zionism if we have real socialism," exclaimed one activist.²⁹

European Zionist Knowledge of the Situation of Palestinian Arabs

Living in a European context that regarded Palestinian Arabs as socially and culturally alien, if not inferior, mainstream Zionist thought not only avoided discussing them, but even tended to negate their existence by talking about Palestine as an empty land, after Israel Zangwill's motto, "Palestine is a country without a people; the Jews are a people without a country," an example of what social psychologist Leon Festinger called "cognitive dissonance," which is an attempt to seek internal consistency by negating or distorting a reality that may create dissonance. Other Zionists were willing to acknowledge the realities of a Palestine occupied by Palestinian Arabs, and in a relatively more benevolent and patronizing way, preferred to think of Zionist activity, particularly in the economic field, as a general good to be shared by Jews as well as by Arabs, thereby eliminating in their view the structural basis for conflict.

Opposed to those views, the Jewish socialist Bund, in the context of their ideological and political struggle against Zionism, emphasized the serious conflicts that Zionist entry into Palestine would generate with the Palestinian Arabs who had lived and worked on that land for centuries. Some left-wing Zionists seem to have shared some of the concerns that troubled the Bund. Historian Kenneth B. Moss cites the example of Zionist emissary Miriam Shlimovits, in her report about her visit with members of the group HeHalutz (which trained young Jews for agricultural settlement in Palestine) in the town of Kolki in 1933 to 1934. Shlimovits mentions critical questions that members of HeHalutz had raised regarding Jewish Zionist activity in Palestine, which included "doubts about the socialist *kosherness* of the struggle for Hebrew labor." Moss clarified that this occurred in the context of ideological disputes that these members were having with other Zionists, among them the right-wing revisionists (as well as, one would assume, other Zionist groups directly benefiting from the exclusion of Palestinian Arabs).³⁰ Of course, the Arab revolts of 1929 and especially the one that broke out in 1936 and was widely reported on in the international media could not but make Jews in Poland and elsewhere aware of the Palestinian Arab opposition to Jewish immigration.

A Concluding Note

The issues analyzed here are part of the history that eventually led to the establishment of the state of Israel, to the accompanying Palestinian Nakba, and later to the extension of Zionist military rule over entirely Palestinian areas such as the West Bank. This is a tragic story because, among other reasons, Palestinian Arabs ended up paying an astronomical price for the genocidal and barbaric European antisemitism. The intense politicization of the Jewish population in Poland and East Central Europe during the two decades between the two world wars, including the rise of Jewish socialist anti-Zionism in the late thirties, was powerless and unable to stop Nazi brutality from wiping them out, notwithstanding heroic efforts such as the Warsaw Ghetto rebellion in 1943. It is also tragic because millions of Jews came to see Zionism, and the oppression of Palestinian Arabs, as the only alternative after the killing of six million Jews under Nazi rule. Even if Palestine was the only possible place for Jewish refugees to enter, that in no way justified the long history of Zionist oppressive and discriminatory practices against Palestinian Arabs who have been justified in protesting and rebelling against Zionist rule.

Notes

1. Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

2. Yoav Peled and Horit Herman Peled, *The Religionization of Israeli Society* (London: Routledge Taylor and Francis, 2019), 31-52.
3. Tom Segev, *A State at Any Cost: The Life of David Ben-Gurion*, trans. Haim Watzman (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019), 244.
4. Jewish Virtual Library, A Project by AICE, American Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, 1993.
5. Zachary Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies. Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906-1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 25.
6. Adam Shatz, *The Rebel's Clinic: The Revolutionary Lives of Frantz Fanon* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2024), 121.
7. Jan T. Gross, *The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), and Michal Borwicz, "The Orchestration of Rage," in Adam Michnik and Agnieszka Marczyk (eds.), *Against Anti-Semitism. An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Polish Writings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 78.
8. Cited by Segev, *A State at Any Cost*, 343.
9. Kenneth B. Moss, *An Unchosen People: Jewish Political Reckoning in Interwar Poland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021), 100.
10. Moss, *An Unchosen People*, 283,
11. Ezra Mendelsohn, *Zionism in Poland: The Formative Years, 1915-1926* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981), 333.
12. Mainstream Zionism (usually referred to as General Zionism after 1907) should be distinguished from left-wing Zionism and from right-wing revisionist Zionism that differed from the mainstream current in some important respects, while maintaining crucial similarities with it. There were also marginal Zionist minority currents such as the "spiritual" Zionism of Ahad Ha'am that made no territorial claims on Palestine; the at-the-time still existing Territorialist camp that preferred an emigration location other than Palestine; and Poale Zion. The latter organizationally broke with the international Zionist organization from 1909 to 1939, preferring Yiddish to Hebrew as a way of reaching the Jewish working class, and unlike mainstream Zionism, which strongly supported the war on *both sides of the conflict*, joined the Zimmerwald movement in supporting neither of the contending World War I camps.
13. Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of Central Europe Between the World Wars* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1983), 19, 22.
14. Mendelsohn, *Zionism in Poland*, 50-51.
15. Mendelsohn, *The Jews of Central Europe*, 60-61.
16. Mendelsohn, *Zionism in Poland*, 261.
17. Mendelsohn, *Zionism in Poland*, 337.
18. Moss, *An Unchosen People*, 317.
19. See, for example, Lenni Brenner, *Zionism in the Age of the Dictators* (New York: Lawrence Hill

and Co., 1983).

20. Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 187.

21. Jan Rybak, *Everyday Zionism in East-Central Europe: Nation Building in War and Revolution, 1914-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 27-59.

22. Rybak, *Everyday Zionism*, 27-59, 151-98.

23. Mendelsohn, *Zionism in Poland*, 132.

24. Mendelsohn, *Zionism in Poland*, 307.

25. We can note here some similarity to the role played by conservative Black leaders in the Civil Rights movement. Moderate Black leaders such as Roy Wilkins, leader of the NAACP, did everything he could to stop Black radicals from carrying out their action plans. But at the same time, in order to maintain his own authority and prestige as well as that of the NAACP, he had to do some things on behalf of Black people.

26. Rybak, *Everyday Zionism*, 151-98.

27. Moss, *An Unchosen People*, 218-19.

28. Segev, *A State at Any Cost*, 285.

29. Rybak, *Everyday Zionism*, 244-86.

30. Moss, *An Unchosen People*, 217.