



PART 1

A Problem and Its Roots

- But do you know what a nation means? Says John Wyse.
- Yes, says Bloom.
- What is it? says John Wyse
- A nation? says Bloom. A nation is the same people living in the same place.

James Joyce, *Ulysses*





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Assorted Misconceptions

The utopian and ideological elements with which [Herzl] injected the new Jewish will to political action are only too likely to lead the Jews out of reality once more—and out of the sphere of political action.

Hannah Arendt

It is generally agreed that the Zionist movement has never had anything even approaching a coherent “Arab doctrine.” However, three persistent theses are discernible in all Zionist discourse on the subject, scanty and half-baked as this has always been. These theses clearly run through all attempts made by the leaders of the Zionist movement in the past and by official Israeli spokesmen since 1948, to envision the precise conditions in which Jews and Arabs can live together in peace and amity in the Middle East. Briefly, these theses are:

1. The national aspirations of the Arabs (their wish to see their civilization revived and themselves “reunited” in a single political entity) stand in no opposition to the national aspirations of the Jews.
2. When the Arabs finally manage to get rid of all foreign influence and interests, become technologically and culturally “advanced,” and attain all their national aspirations, they will be far more inclined to accept the presence of Israel in their midst. As one observer, writing in 1965, put it: “Perhaps rapprochement will become a reality after the Arab states achieve their own political maturity, expand their own educational patterns, liberalize their entire social structure, and realize that a progressive Israel, as a neighbour, can be a boon to their own national destiny.”¹
3. The Arabs will reconcile themselves to Israel’s existence only when they become finally and conclusively convinced that they stand no chance of defeating Israel by force.



Today, fifty years after the proclamation of the state of Israel and thirty years after the Six-Day War, the fallacious and rather dangerous nature of these assumptions has become fairly evident. The Six-Day War itself, with the resounding military victory it gave Israel, served finally to shatter the illusion (so fondly nurtured by many Israelis in high places) that force alone and “new facts” would convince the Arabs that it is in their own best interest to accept Israel and reconcile themselves to the existence of another non-Arab state in the Middle East.

Zionism’s “Arab Doctrine”

If a show of sufficient force and the creation of new facts were—as Israelis tended to believe over the years—capable of carrying the day with the Arabs, Israelis long ago would have attained the peace they all wish to see prevail. By the early 1970s, Israel already had managed to create as many “new facts” as it was either possible or advisable for it to do—facts that were impressive, visible, and awe-inspiring. And yet, as Israel’s then defense minister Moshe Dayan was to realize, these facts did not help. “What greater ‘creation of facts’ could there be,” Dayan asked rhetorically in an address he gave in the summer of 1968, “than the establishment of the state, the concentration of 2.5 [million] Jews there, and the victories in three wars?” Despite this rather intensive “creation of facts,” he added, the Arabs persisted in their refusal to sign a peace agreement with Israel. “The facts have been created,” he lamented, “but the tension is no less than it was before.”²

An American observer who visited Israel some two years after the Six-Day War described the situation in even more striking and perceptive terms. Writing from Jerusalem in March 1969, he observed:

Israel won the war in 1967 and surrendered immediately to a myth. Originally the line of Ben-Gurion, the myth held that once the Arabs have been truly defeated—not just thrown back as in 1948, not just penetrated briefly “with foreign help” as in 1956—but once they had had their cultural and technological vulnerabilities thrust upon them in an utterly painful and total way—then, only then, but finally then would the Arabs abandon their dream of undoing the existence of Israel, and instead make peace.

When Dayan announced, a day or two after the cease-fire in June 1967, that he was “waiting for a telephone to ring” and for leaders of the defeated Arab countries to invite themselves to the negotiating table, he expressed

(according to the American journalist) “the belief and confidence of a nation convinced that its travail was nearing an end.” “After all,” he explained, “was not General Dayan the man most respected among Israelis for his special knowledge of the Arabs? Did not ample Biblical tradition and historical precedent and contemporary analysis all point to the conclusion that out of victory would come peace? Did not the Israelis deserve such a result?”³

However, not only did Dayan’s telephone fail to ring. Shortly after his statement, Arab kings and heads of state convened in a summit meeting in Khartoum (August 29 to September 1, 1967) to decide on their three famous “no’s”: no peace with Israel, no negotiations with Israel, and no recognition of Israel. With their largest and best-equipped military machines in ruins, with some of their best territories occupied, with the Suez Canal closed, with Egypt’s oil installations and industrial complex west of the canal partly destroyed and exposed to a more thorough destruction by Israeli forces stationed nearby, and with the danger of rendering up to 1 million Canal Zone inhabitants homeless, the Khartoum conferees coolly chose defiance as the only available alternative to what they perceived as capitulation. This earned the Arabs the reputation of being “irrational.” The Israeli argument was that, by refusing to join (or at least make peace with) those whom they had failed to “lick,” the Arabs had shown themselves to be impervious to reason and logic.

The irony of these assertions is so deep it is almost bottomless. The Arabs are said to be “irrational” creatures who understand only one language—force. However, though it is not entirely clear whether this alleged trait really renders them irrational, it is reasonable to assume that “rational” people would understand languages and devices other than sheer force. Be that as it may, accusing the Arabs of irrationality because they *refused* to bow to force amounted to asking them to be rational through *accepting* the logic of force. In any event, the Arabs refused to do so, and this refusal was not devoid of a certain kind of rationality: for what could be more irrational than mere force?

Two further considerations may have accounted for the Arabs’ refusal to bow to the logic of events following the Six-Day War. First, Arabs may well have had concepts of realism and reality different from those accepted by Israelis. For them, it would have been equally and probably even more “unrealistic” and “irrational” to surrender their sense of honor and their dignity than it would have been to ignore willfully the logic of events when that logic contradicted those values. Second, and perhaps even more decisively, the Arabs may well have felt that the stronger Israel proved itself to

be, the more dangerous it would be for them in the long run—and therefore the more objectionable and impossible to tolerate as an independent entity in their midst.

The idea that only an utterly superior Israeli might can persuade the Arabs to accept Israel is a fallacy and was to prove counterproductive in more senses than one. For example, it is a fact of history that Egyptian president Anwar al-Sadat's 1977 peace drive came only after the Yom Kippur War of 1973—a war that the Egyptians and Arabs generally perceived as a clear victory for themselves and as conclusive proof that Israel was not invincible militarily.

So much for what can be termed the “only-through-force” thesis. The two remaining precepts of Israeli-Zionist thinking on the Arab question are best considered in unison, since they are identical in their essential thrust. Their fallacious nature, too, is now more evident than it would have been fifty, sixty, or seventy years ago.

To start with, the Arabs have now finally managed to rid themselves of all foreign dominance, and their societies are far more “advanced,” their ways of life more modern, their educated classes more numerous, and their political ideologies more “progressive.” Yet not only do they go on refusing to accept Israel on its own terms but they now accuse it of such “backward” traits as racism, capitalism and imperialism. Their own advancement—for what it was—has thus in no way helped weaken their opposition to Israel; the contrary tends to be the case.

Far from making them more inclined to accept Israel, in fact, the Arabs' educational and technological attainments are being used for, and are often themselves given impetus by, the wish to defeat Israel. As I. F. Stone once put it:

Zionist propaganda always spoke of the role that the Jews could play in helping to modernize the Arab world. Unless firm steps are now taken towards a general and generous settlement, this will become true in a sense never intended. The repercussions of the 1948 war set off seismic tremors that brought a wave of nationalist revolutions in Egypt, Syria and Iraq. The repercussions of the [June 1967] defeat will lead a new generation of Arabs to modernize and mobilize for revenge, inspired (like the Jews) by memories of past glory.⁴

It is to be noted that Stone wrote this long before the start of the so-called Islamic revival.

The same can be said about another, earlier Zionist delusion—namely, that the material benefits that Jewish settlement in Palestine would bring the Arabs were bound to make them not only accept the idea of a national home for the Jews there but also rather to welcome it. In *Altneuland* (Old-new land)—a romance that Theodor Herzl published in 1902 depicting conditions in the Holy Land twenty years hence—the founder of political Zionism envisaged no difficulties in that respect. The incoming of the Jews brought nothing but gain for the Arabs—first by their sale of unneeded land to the Jews and also by well-paid work in the draining of swamps (a work to which, by the way, they prove to be better suited than the Jews).

In addition, Herzl's Arabs learned much from the Jews by way of organization, new methods of production, and superior transportation. In one of the central passages of *Altneuland*, indeed, the Muslim-Arab Rashid Bey replies to a Christian nobleman, Mr. Kingscourt, who expresses surprise that Rashid's people do not "look upon these Jews as intruders." The Muslim notable's reply is unequivocal: "Christian! How strange your speech sounds! Would you regard those as intruders and robbers who don't take anything away from you but give you something? The Jews have enriched us, why should we be angry at them? They live with us like brothers, why should we not love them? We Muslims have always had better relations with the Jews than you Christians'."⁵

Early Murmurs of Dissent

This rosy vision of the future and the ideas on which it was based have long since collapsed completely, although early Zionist optimists continued to insist that Arab resistance to their enterprise was the result of instigation by Arab *efendis* and would-be nationalist leaders. However, as early as the mid-1940s it became abundantly clear that Herzl's idyllic picture of Muslim-Arab attitudes to the Jewish settlers had no relation to reality. "Nowhere in the world," wrote Hans Kohn about the position of the Jews in Palestine some fifty years after the publication of Herzl's blueprint, *The Jewish State*, "was a Jewish community regarded with the hostility, distrust, and fear directed at Jews in Palestine by their neighbours. Nowhere have Jews felt so exposed as in Palestine."

The case of Vladimir Jabotinsky (1880–1940) and his ideas on the Arab question may be considered both the antithesis of and the inescapable logical conclusion to Herzl's amateur brand of Zionism, Kohn suggests.

Jabotinsky, of course, rejected Herzl's vision of the Jewish state as outlined in *Altneuland*. "He was convinced," he writes, "that the Arabs could not be reconciled to Jewish domination of Palestine. Rather, he believed that the same methods must be applied there as in other schemes of European colonization in backward lands."

Like so many of the young men in Central and Eastern Europe after World War I and after the rise of fascism, Kohn adds, Jabotinsky was impressed by the "realism" of toughness. "The old liberal world of the West seemed doomed. New forces, which scornfully rejected humanitarianism or concern for the rights of others, claimed to represent the wave of the future. National egoism alone seemed to guarantee survival in a world which gloried more in biological vitality than in ethical rationality."⁶

It was a measure of that perfect identification of toughness with realism referred to above that Jabotinsky's program and his philosophy became, as early as 1942, the Zionist movement's official policy. In the so-called Biltmore Program of that year, the Zionists called for the establishment of "a Jewish commonwealth integrated in the structure of the new democratic world." Thus, for the first time they proclaimed Zionism's goal as full Jewish statehood in the Holy Land. It was at Biltmore that, to quote Hannah Arendt's telling phrase, "the Jewish minority granted minority rights to the Arab majority."⁷

During the years that preceded the Biltmore Program, several prominent Zionist leaders and thinkers tried (unavailingly, as it happened) to effect some sort of compromise between the basic aspirations of Zionism and the rights of the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine. Ahad Ha-Am (Asher Ginzberg, 1856–1927) warned that the revival of Zion was desirable and practicable only if the Jews did not become like other peoples. He consistently opposed a settlement in Palestine based on overemphasizing the relevance of numbers, power, and speed. "He knew," writes Kohn, "that the means determine the end, and that the way in which the foundations are laid defines the strength of the structure."

Ahad Ha-Am wrote in a Zionist General Council report entitled "The Truth from Palestine," that "The main point, upon which everything depends, is not how much we do but how we do it." The report was written after a visit Ahad Ha-Am made to Palestine in 1891. During this visit, writes Kohn, he was to lay his finger on the real problem, "the problem which, for practical and ethical reasons alike, was the fundamental though neglected problem of Zionism in Palestine—the Arab problem." The trouble was that, to most Zionists, "the land of their forefathers appeared empty, waiting for

the return of the dispersed descendants, as if history had stood still for two thousand years.”⁸

In “The Truth from Palestine,” Ahad Ha-Am warned that the Jewish settlers under no circumstances must arouse the wrath of the native population by ugly actions; rather, they must meet them in a friendly spirit of respect. “Yet what do our brethren do in Palestine? Just the very opposite! Serfs they were in the lands of the Diaspora and suddenly they find themselves in freedom, and this change has awakened in them an inclination to despotism. They treat the Arabs with hostility and cruelty, deprive them of their rights, offend them without cause, and even boast of these deeds; and nobody among us opposes this despicable and dangerous inclination.”

“We think,” Ahad Ha-Am lamented, “that the Arabs are all savages who live like animals and do not understand what is happening around them.” But this was “a great error”—as later events were to prove without any doubt. Twenty years later, indeed, in a letter to a friend in Jaffa dated July 9, 1911, Ahad Ha-Am wrote: “As to the war against the Jews in Palestine, I am a spectator from afar with an aching heart, particularly because of the want of insight and understanding shown on our side to an extreme degree. As a matter of fact, it was evident 20 years ago that the day would come when the Arabs would stand up against us.”⁹

Chaim Weizmann, too, was not entirely happy about the turn events were taking—and he too found it impossible to reconcile his essentially liberal, humanist wishes with the increasingly militant tendencies shown by his followers. The difficulty was that, although officially the Zionists always emphasized that the Jews did not come to Palestine to dominate the Arabs and that no Arab should be expelled from the country, their deeds were often at variance with these assurances.

At the meeting of the Zionist General Council in Berlin in August 1930, Weizmann declared that a transformation of Palestine into a Jewish state was impossible “because we could not and would not expel the Arabs.” “Moreover,” he said, “the Arabs were as good Zionists as we are; they also love their country and they could not be persuaded to hand it over to someone else. Their national awakening has made considerable progress. These were facts which Zionism couldn’t afford to ignore.” Again, on the eve of the Seventeenth Zionist Congress, which convened in Basle in 1931, Weizmann opposed proclaiming a Jewish state as the aim of Zionism. “The world will construe this demand only in one sense, that we want to acquire a majority in order to drive out the Arabs,” he explained.¹⁰

Robert Weltsch has called Weizmann one of the last proponents of a

Zionism based on the assumption “that the reborn Jewish nation would avoid all those national excesses from which Jews had so much to suffer among other nations.” Explaining what he termed “humanist Zionism,” Weltsch continued:

Intolerant, brutal, egotistical nationalism would be unacceptable to Jews who had learned to know what it means. The Jewish people which has recovered its national self-consciousness and pride would be sympathetic to other peoples in similar conditions who are striving to recover their national freedom, and from this attitude a mutual understanding could arise which would enable different nationalities to live together and to cooperate for the sake of the well-being of all.¹¹

According to Hans Kohn, however, the climate of strident nationalism and fascism after World War I changed the outlook of many Zionists. Kohn quotes a passage from Weizmann’s autobiography in which the man who was to become the first president of the state of Israel describes the atmosphere he found prevailing in Palestine in 1944:

Here and there a relaxation of the old traditional Zionist puritan ethics, a touch of militarization, and a weakness for its trappings; here and there something worse—the tragic, futile, un-Jewish resort to terrorism . . . and worst of all, in certain circles, a readiness to compound with the evil, to play politics with it, to condemn and not to condemn it, to treat it not as the thing it was, namely an unmitigated curse to the National Home, but as a phenomenon which might have its advantages.

The “evil,” Kohn comments, “was not only ‘here and there’; it was rapidly taking root and growing.” Military victory, he explains, “created the new state; and, like Sparta or Prussia, on military virtue it remained based. The militarization of life and mind represented not only a break with humanist Zionism, but with the long history of Judaism. The *Zeitgeist*, or at least the *Zeitgeist* of twentieth century Central and Eastern Europe, had won out over the Jewish tradition.”¹²

It will be noted, however, that while both Ahad Ha-Am and Weizmann were sincerely and deeply concerned about the situation, while both implied that a revival of Zion was desirable only if the Jews did not become “like other peoples,” neither of these two Zionist luminaries could actually offer a practical formula for the revival of Zion *without the Jews’ becoming like other peoples*.

This problem, it must be added, led several early Zionist thinkers to change their minds and hearts. In 1919, Hugo Bergmann, a young Jewish philosopher from Prague who was thereafter to settle in Palestine, wrote in a book called *Yavne and Jerusalem* that Palestine might become a Jewish state and yet be an entirely un-Jewish land—un-Jewish to such a degree that the smallest traditional Jewish school in a far-off Polish village would mean more for Judaism than all the new national institutions.

“The trial by fire of the truly Jewish character of our settlement in Palestine will be our relationship to the Arabs,” Bergmann wrote. “An agreement with the inhabitants of the land is much more important for us than declarations of all the governments of the world could be. Unfortunately, Zionist public opinion has not yet become conscious of it.”¹³

In the same year, Martin Buber, another German-educated Jewish philosopher, demanded that the Zionists should abstain from all political activities except those calculated to create and to maintain an enduring and solid agreement with the Arabs, “an encompassing brotherly solidarity.”¹⁴

Judah L. Magnes, the American rabbi and thinker and president of the Hebrew University, expressed as late as 1947 fears that a Jewish state could be established and maintained, against Arab opposition, only by force of arms. He called for a binational state because, he said, “the Jewish genius for government can be given full play” through such a state. “The day we lick the Arabs,” he warned, “that is the day, I think, when we shall be sowing the seeds of an eternal hatred of such dimensions that Jews will not be able to live in that part of the world for centuries to come. . . . We cannot maintain a Jewish state or a bi-national state or a Yishuv in Palestine if the whole surrounding world be our enemies.”¹⁵

Arthur Ruppin and Rabbi Binyamin

However paradoxical it may sound, the fact remains that though the Zionist movement as a whole refrained consistently from facing the Arab question squarely, this problem remained at the center of all serious heart-searchings and gropings that exercised the minds of certain intellectual adherents of Zionism. However, all those in the Zionist movement who ever seriously pondered the Arab question in the end found themselves either standing in permanent isolation from or in opposition to the movement, or giving up any hope of reconciling their ethical and humanistic sentiments with the demands of building a national home.

Few, at any rate, had the stamina both to articulate this moral conflict and to draw clear and final conclusions from their findings. The majority were either insensitive to the problem or chose to ignore its existence. It must be added here, however, that neither the lack of sensitivity to nor the refusal to acknowledge the significance of the Arab question was accidental; both were due in no small measure to the oversimplified appraisal of the general Jewish situation which Zionism had always offered. This appraisal depicts the Jews everywhere and at all times, actually or potentially, as surrounded by enemies.

This black-and-white version of the Jewish situation, by implicitly obviating all moral or even empirical efforts and scruples, made the realization of Zionism a rather easy proposition. As Hannah Arendt, writing on Herzl's general outlook, puts it:

His notion of reality as an eternal, unchanging hostile structure—all *goyim* [gentiles] everlastingly against all Jews—made the identification of hard-boiledness with realism plausible because it rendered any empirical analysis of actual political factors seemingly superfluous. All one had to do was to use the “propelling force of antisemitism” which, like “the wave of the future,” would bring the Jews into the promised land. . . . If we actually are faced with open or concealed enemies on every side, if the whole world is ultimately against us, then we are lost.¹⁶

Lost—but simultaneously also redeemed! Living in a world so full of enemies bent on your undoing tends to give you license to act in almost any way you choose in order to defend yourself.

When Arthur Ruppin (1876–1943), one of the best-known and respected of the Zionist leaders of his generation, was appointed director of the Zionist Executive's colonization department in 1919, he was immediately struck by the lack of interest in “the Arab question” shown by his fellow Zionists. After many years of intensive intellectual probing, he decided that it would be extremely difficult “to put Zionism into effect while adhering continuously to the precepts of ordinary ethics.”

However, instead of giving up on an enterprise he considered unethical in favor of “ordinary ethics,” Ruppin consciously chose to go on with the enterprise. “The Arabs,” he wrote rather resignedly during the riots of 1936, “do not agree to our venture. If we want to continue our work in Palestine against their desires, there is no alternative but that lives could be lost. It is our destiny to be in a state of continued warfare with the Arabs. This situation may well be undesirable, but such is the reality.”

Thus not only ethical considerations but peace and physical safety, too, were to be sacrificed in order to make it possible “to continue our work in Palestine against the Arabs’ desires.”¹⁷ Clearly, the rationale for Ruppin’s drastic decision must be sought in the conviction that Jewish settlement in Palestine was an act of sheer self-preservation and self-defense against the ever-hostile gentile. The question as to whether this gentile happened to be the Christian anti-Semite of Central and Eastern Europe or the Muslim-Arab inhabitants of the Holy Land was apparently of no consequence.

Ruppin was one of the few early Zionists who had the courage both to look reality in the face and to draw practical personal conclusions from what he saw. A man who was equally intensively exercised by the Arab question—but who drew rather different conclusions—was Yehoshua Radler-Feldman (1880–1957), better known by the pen name Rabbi Binyamin. Rabbi Binyamin came to Palestine from Galicia in 1907 and was very active in Zionist circles, especially in journalism, authorship, and editing. Even before his settling in Palestine, however, he became aware of the scope and seriousness of the Arab problem. Both before and after the establishment of the state he was associated with the Ihud society and for many years was editor of the group’s monthly, *Ner*:

In 1953, four years before his death, Rabbi Binyamin wrote an article entitled “For the Sake of the Survival,” in which he gave vent to his deep disillusionment and his misgivings about the future:

After the State of Israel was established, I began receiving news about the terrible things perpetrated both during and after the Israeli-Arab war. I did not recognize my own people for the changes which had occurred in their spirit. The acts of brutality were not the worst because those might be explained somehow or other as accidental, or an expression of hysteria, or the sadism of individuals. Far more terrible was the benevolent attitude toward these acts on the part of public opinion. I had never imagined that such could be the spiritual and moral countenance of Israel.

“What separates us from the mass of our people?” asked Rabbi Binyamin, addressing himself to Ihud members. He answered: “It is our attitude toward the Arabs. They consider the Arab as an enemy, some even say an eternal enemy. So speak the candid among them. The less candid speak supposedly about peace, but these are only words. They want a peace of submission, which the Arabs cannot possibly accept. . . . We, however, do not see the Arab as an enemy, not in the past and not today.” Rabbi Binyamin continued:

It is a mistake to think that we are dreamers and do not understand reality. No. . . . We are realistic with the Ten Commandments, and they are the wise men without the Ten Commandments. . . . War gave us a state, and war gave the Arabs, beside military defeat and the loss of territory, the problem of refugees. At the same time it also gave them the concern that, when the State of Israel feels strengthened economically and population-wise through immigration, it will attempt sooner or later to invade the neighboring Arab countries. There is a very simple calculation: If the small army of Israel, which had to be developed underground and which hardly possessed any arms, was able to defeat all the Arab armies, then a large organized and disciplined Israeli army, which has now taken women too into its ranks, would surely be able to do it in the future.

True Zionist that he still considered himself to be, Rabbi Binyamin concluded, with apparent anguish:

The Jewish state is dear to us because it could turn into a treasure for its inhabitants and for Jews all over the world. . . . But the first condition for its continued existence is a true peace with the Arab states. What we failed to do before the war we must do now. . . . I am not so foolish as to believe that these words would have any influence on today's rulers of Israel. I have not written this for the sake of polemics either. I wrote it because I believe that it is my duty to say what I think."¹⁸

It is a measure both of the prophetic character of Rabbi Binyamin's warnings and of the utter ungainliness of the whole situation that his words should sound as topical in 1998 as they did in 1953—while the gist of his appeals and entreaties has rather gained more in urgency by the passage of the years.

“Arabs” and “Palestinians”

There is a sense in which the core of the Zionists' “Arab doctrine” lay in their very understanding of the term “Arab.” For them, all Arabs constitute one great nation, bound sooner or later to attain its legitimate dream of being “reunited” in one single pan-Arab state. It may well be argued now that this “pan-” vision of the Arab situation had been adopted by the early Zionists merely because it seemed rather convenient for them politically at the time—especially where the subject of “room” was concerned.

Yet the Zionists' pan-Arab vision was depicted throughout on the highest and most authoritative of levels. In a speech delivered following the riots in Jerusalem in 1920, Weizmann asserted, "The Arabs are not suffering from lack of room. The centers of Arab culture are Damascus, Baghdad and Mecca—and I hope that there a great and flourishing nation will again rise. But Palestine will be the national home of the Jews."

Returning to this same theme a decade later, Weizmann became rather more specific in his prognosis. "We say to the Arabs," he declared, "that they must distinguish between their 'national home' and their rights in Palestine. The 'national home' of the Arabs is in Damascus and Baghdad, and in the religious sense, perhaps, in Mecca and Medina, those great centres of Arab life in which a mighty Arab culture flourished. It flourished in Baghdad and Damascus, not in Jerusalem."¹⁹

Right from the beginning, then, even before the Arabs themselves could have conceived of so clear and so appealing a pan-Arab vision, the spokesmen of the Zionist movement found themselves stressing the Arab nationalist theme with growing conviction. There was, to be sure, no lack of ambiguity and confusion on this point in the Arab camp, either. Indeed, the obvious discrepancy between the claims of Palestinian Arabs to their native land on one hand, and the generalized claims to Palestine by the Arabs as Arabs on the other, resulted in confusion not only for outsiders but for the Arabs of Palestine themselves. In the end, this confusion was to play a significant role in their subsequent sufferings and undoing.

Yet the impact of outside concepts and actions was to prove crucial in this respect. Common misconceptions concerning the nature of Arab nationality and Arab nationalism became mixed up, quite early in the proceedings, with the general eagerness to find a solution to the Palestine problem. Lord Samuel, who in 1920 to 1925 served as high commissioner for Palestine and whose Zionist sympathies and involvement dated at least from the outbreak of World War I, suggested in 1922 a confederation of Arab states to include Hijaz, Syria, Palestine, Trans-Jordan, Iraq, and possibly Najd. In a letter to the U.S. secretary of state dated December 12, Samuel envisaged the establishment of a council to look after the federation's common interests, such as communications, customs, extradition, culture, and religion.

"More important, however, than any specific functions of the council," Samuel wrote, "would be the fact of its existence. This in itself would give satisfaction to Arab national aspirations. The confederation would be a visible embodiment of Arab unity, and a center round which the movement for Arab revival—which is a very real thing—could rally; it would give leader-

ship and direction to that movement.” The Zionists, Samuel added, would welcome such a scheme, as they “would regard the advantage of satisfying the reasonable national aspiration of the Arabs and of securing the cessation of open and persistent Arab opposition to Jewish expansion in Palestine, as far outweighing the possible future risks that would be involved in Palestine becoming a member of a distinctively Arab polity.”²⁰ Nevertheless, Lord Samuel’s proposal was rejected. Less than sixteen years later, the British government was to extend official de facto recognition to the thesis that Palestine “is not merely a local question,” and that “just as it interests Zionists all over the world, so also it interests Arabs outside Palestine wherever they may be, and particularly in the contiguous countries,” as Lord Samuel himself so clearly explained in a speech in the House of Lords on December 8, 1938. He was, of course, welcoming Britain’s decision to convene the Round Table Conference on Palestine, which was to start its deliberations in London in the following month and in which, for the first time in the history of the Palestine problem, the Arab states were recognized officially as parties to the dispute. The Round Table Conference, indeed, marked the beginning of the pan-Arabization of the Palestine question—a process which was to culminate in the establishment of the League of Arab States in 1945 and, ultimately, the ruin of the Palestinians.

Pan-Arabization and After

In the history of the Zionist-Arab dispute, utter confusion always reigned supreme, as between the pan-Arab claim to Palestine as “an integral part of the Arab homeland” and the specific claims of the Palestinians (as the indigenous inhabitants of the land) to their own homeland. Strange as it may sound, this confusion seems to have suited all parties concerned, and no serious attempt was ever made—either by Arab nationalist, Jewish settler, or British administrator—to disentangle this particular knot.

As far as the Zionists were concerned, this is what one observer has to say:

The shifting reference point of Arabdom, from the intolerably intense preoccupation with the arena of Palestine to the endlessly broad sweep of “the Arab people,” from Persia to Morocco, in many ways was made to order for Zionist polemics, since it could be said, with obvious legitimacy, that the Zionists were claiming only a small speck of the “Arab” area, and thus were not affecting the Arabs as such, whatever might then have been said about the just claims of Palestinian Arabs themselves.²¹

Whether or not the Zionists took conscious advantage of this state of affairs may now be of only academic interest. There is, however, sufficient evidence to indicate that the Zionists' obvious tendency to espouse the pan-Arab nationalist thesis had deeper roots in their own ideology and way of thinking. For, in addition to the sheer convenience of dealing with a hypothetical "Arab" world in which "there is plenty of room, plenty of water, plenty of air for us all" (as Dr. Weizmann once put it), there was also the understandable attraction for the Zionists of an Arab nationalist movement made roughly in the image of their own ideology and worldview.

Some most striking illustrations of this attitude are to be found in the way the Zionist movement dealt with what was to become its thorniest problem—namely, its relations with the indigenous population. It was Israel Zangwill who first coined the phrase "the land without a people for the people without a land." He was, of course, referring to Palestine, and the people to whom he advocated allotting the empty land were the persecuted, virtually stateless Jews of the Pale of Settlement in Eastern Europe.

However, ever since they discovered that Palestine was not the desolate place that Zangwill depicted, Zionist leaders and ideologues have been trying desperately to convince themselves and the world that there existed no such national, cultural, geographical or legal entity as "the Palestinians"—though, to be sure, there happen to be "Arabs" who live in Palestine. When Weizmann said in Cologne in 1931 that the Arabs' "national home" was in Damascus and Baghdad but not in Jerusalem, he obviously was using a terminology that was entirely unintelligible to the Palestinians.

Hardly anything, in fact, could have been as remote from the thoughts of the Arab inhabitants of Palestine of 1931 as the novel idea of a "national home" for the Arabs. Rightly or wrongly, what these people and their leaders thought they were engaged in was nothing more complicated than defending their own homeland and birthplace—their scant worldly possessions and their plots of land—against what they perceived as systematic, efficient colonization by foreigners and strangers.

Be that as it may, the Zionists' apparent determination to pan-Arabize the Palestine issue continued unabated. David Ben-Gurion, a man whose part in shaping Zionist policies and tactics was to become decisive, has given what must be the most eloquent formulation to this trend. In his book of reminiscences, *Talks with Arab Leaders*, he gives an account of a meeting he had in Jerusalem with George Antonius, the historian of the Arab nationalist movement, himself a native of Palestine. In this meeting, which took place one day in April 1936, Ben-Gurion sought to pursue his efforts at finding a *modus vivendi* with the Arab nationalist leadership of the day. As

was to be expected, Antonius's point of departure in these discussions with Ben-Gurion was that the question at issue was one that concerned the Arabs of Palestine and the Jewish settlers there, and that if a rapprochement was to be reached, both sides would have to make concessions.

Ben-Gurion would have none of this. He told Antonius:

As a point of departure, the proposition must be accepted that the issue is not one between the Jews of Palestine and the Arabs of Palestine. Within this limited area the conflict is indeed difficult to resolve. Instead, we have to view the Jews as a single world entity, and the Arabs as a single world entity. I sincerely believe that between the national aspirations of the Jewish people and the national aspirations of the Arab people—which latter may not yet be clear and crystallized but which will no doubt become so in due course—there is no inevitable opposition. For we are interested only and solely in this country, while the Arabs are not interested only in this country—so that no matter what happens in this country it will not affect the world status of the Arab people.²²

During the decades of conflict and turmoil which have elapsed since Ben-Gurion propounded these fervent pan-Arab hopes and sentiments before Antonius, there were times when it looked as though the pan-Arabization of the Palestine issue had become an accomplished fact. In the Israeli press, following the armistice agreements in 1949, the terms "Palestine" and "Palestinians" were safely closeted in quotation marks. Arab nationalists appeared at last to be heeding Weizmann's old advice and began to distinguish between their "national home" and their rights in Palestine. The drive toward the revival of a great and flourishing "Arab nation" seemed to be making considerable headway—though its center was to be neither in Damascus nor in Baghdad, nor even in Mecca or Medina. Those parts of Palestine that remained in Arab hands came to be known as the "West Bank" and the "Gaza Strip" and fell to Jordanian and Egyptian rule, respectively. Furthermore, senior foreign-ministry officials in Jerusalem started adducing historical evidence to show that no such thing as "Palestine" had ever really existed.

This doubtful idyll was not to last for very long, however. For suddenly, on one summer day in 1967 (June 8, to be exact), Palestine came to life again, and the Palestinians made their appearance on the Middle Eastern stage for everyone to see. It then began slowly to emerge that, far from consenting to be submerged into that "single world entity" called the Arabs, far from seeking their "national home" in Damascus, Baghdad, Beirut, or Cairo, the

Palestinians had a sorry tale to tell about their experience of living with their “Arab brethren,” among “their own people,” and “in their own culture.”

Those who lived in the Gaza Strip wasted no love on their Egyptian overlords and protectors; the relatively highly educated, modernized Palestinians of the West Bank turned out to be full of bitter complaints about the arbitrary rule of King Hussein of Jordan and his army of “primitive Beduins.” Those who had sought refuge in Lebanon, in Iraq, in Syria, or in one of the oil-rich states of the Arabian Peninsula spoke of an experience that was thoroughly and uniformly unhappy—how they were looked down on, discriminated against, humiliated and treated far more badly than non-Arabs were treated in those lands. Above all, they spoke of their utter failure to “pass” and the ways in which the appellation “Palestinian” pursued them everywhere they went like their own shadows.

Thus, in a way for which only the irony of history and the vanity of human wishes can account, the six days of war in June 1967 brought the Israelis face to face with a state of affairs similar (identical, in fact) to that which had confronted the Jewish *Yishuv* from its earliest days of settlement to the establishment of the state of Israel. There is, indeed, a sense in which the situation had not really undergone any significant changes even after the 1949 armistice agreements and the subsequent annexation by Jordan of the areas that were partly to constitute the Palestinian Arab state provided for by the U.N. partition plan of November 1947.

However, through a variety of agreed-upon lies and make-believe stratagems, the problem of the Palestinians temporarily had been shelved fairly successfully. In fact, when Abdel Karim Qassem (then Iraq’s ruler) came out in 1959 with his idea of a “Palestinian entity,” it was not its lack of soundness and/or appeal that killed his proposal in the bud but the dismal state of inter-Arab relations, on one hand, and Jordan’s determination to hold on to the West Bank, on the other.

The re-emergence of the Palestinians as an independent political factor in the Middle Eastern situation offers only one demonstration, albeit the most striking, of the fallacy of the thesis dealt with above. The whole relatively brief history of Arab-Zionist relations seems to indicate fairly conclusively that no meaningful rapprochement is likely to be reached between the pan-Arabs and the Zionists. The pan-Arab movement, between which and the pan-Jewish movement the Zionists thought no inevitable opposition existed, proved to be the most implacable enemy of Zionist aspirations in Palestine.

The Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty signed in March 1979 was, in fact,

made possible mainly because the Egyptians under Anwar al-Sadat's leadership had finally abandoned all pretenses for Egypt to be the champion and the leading light of the pan-Arab movement. However, Sadat's painful trials with his fellow Arabs, opposition to his peace policy throughout the Arab world, the various boycotts and sanctions to which Egypt was subjected, as well as the experiences of the past five decades, all pointed to one principal moral.

The moral to be drawn is that an overall settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, when and if it comes, must have at its basis something other than Zionism's "Arab doctrine" as it was propounded nearly a century ago, and which envisaged, among other things, a unified Arab world with which a pan-Jewish state in Palestine would coexist in peace and amity. Such a vision of a future Middle East has already proved to be virtually impossible to materialize.

In truth, the Zionists and the pan-Arabs have too much in common—too great an ideological affinity with each other, the lines of their respective political development are too parallel, and their national aspirations too obviously fixed on the same object—for them to be able to come together or even accept each other's presence. In pure ideological terms, at least, they have been in agreement on almost every issue, with the crucial exception of one: the right of the other side to lead a sovereign political existence in that strip of territory that both consider their homeland, or part thereof. Moreover, in their single-minded preoccupation with their respective status as "world entities," both pan-Arabs and pan-Jews have tended to ignore the existence of the only Arab group with a legitimate claim to part of Palestine—the Palestinians themselves.

It is with these Palestinians—who regardless of their linguistic-cultural affiliation, must be recognized as Palestinians rather than a group of generalized "Arabs"—that Israel ultimately has to deal. To them Israel will have to give satisfaction. Both the pan-Arab approach and the Zionist vision, which imply an uncompromising either-I-or-you stance, are basically self-defeating and can lead only to despair and desperation.

The two positions are also entirely ahistorical. Jews and Muslim Arabs lived side by side through at least fifteen centuries of their history—and they did so in a way that no adherents of any other two faiths have ever managed to do.