

**Statesman or Internationalist?:**  
**The Ideology of Internationalism in David Ben-Gurion's**  
**Imagined Transnational Community, 1900 – 1931**

Ari Cohen

Master's Thesis

Corcoran Department of History

University of Virginia

January 2018

*Introduction*

In 1983 Benedict Anderson wrote, “Nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time.”<sup>1</sup> His seminal book, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, contended that nationalism shaped the modern world by creating independent political units of nation-states still visible today. The nation comprised Anderson's sole unit of measure for global modern politics.

Anderson's thesis defined two generations of historians who focused on nations and their construction in the post-imperial period: ideologically, geographically, culturally, and intellectually, in minds and along borders. This historical trend produced vital explorations of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Place: Publisher, 1983), 3.

fundamental transition from empires to modern states. It accounted for the creation of modern nation-states and for the nationalist movements that reordered a broken world system.

Still, the Anderson approach was not without its critics. Many scholars challenged his stark view of nationalism as an imaginary construct of modernity, which excluded the possibility for premodern nations and national identities.<sup>2</sup> Others questioned his narrow focus on print capitalism as a key driver of the nation-formation process.<sup>3</sup> These critiques centered on the causes of nationalism and its periodization. More recently, however, a third more expansive line of critique has appeared. As recent scholarship has demonstrated, Anderson explicitly viewed nation-states as atomized units. In doing so, he obscured the international networks within which modern nation-states operate, decontextualizing them from the international community to which they belonged. Most glaringly, as recent scholarship has shown, Anderson's framework artificially separated nationalism from *internationalism*, leaving the reader with localized portraits of politics constructed only within states - from the inside out.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> In his article "Does Israel Have a Navel? Anthony Smith and Zionism," Moshe Berent writes about the Anthony Smith – Ernest Gellner debate, detailing Smith's argument that nations have "ethnies": long, often premodern heritages. Berent explains that Smith sees an ethnic core of Zionism having to do with biblical heritage and Jewish chosenness, thereby refuting Gellner's proposition that nations and nationalism are distinctly modern phenomena. Smith complicates Anderson's ideas by drawing attention to premodern processes of nation formation. For more on this, see Anthony Smith's *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*.

<sup>3</sup> In her 1994 book review of *Imagined Communities*, published in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Laurie Sears writes that "one of the... criticisms of the original edition of *Imagined Communities* was its overemphasis on the idea of print-capitalism as a determining force in the birth of national consciousness" (page 130). She points to a larger scholarly trend around Anderson's work.

<sup>4</sup> Katrina Schwartz's 2006 book, *Nature and National Identity after Communism: Globalizing the Ehtnoscape*, treats Latvian nationalism as part and parcel of a post-Communist world in the broader region. Unlike much other scholarship on Latvian identity, Schwartz's work shifts its focus from anti-Soviet activity to "globalization," helping her reader to gain "a deeper understanding of national identity as a contested negotiation of openness to the outside world" (pages 16 – 17). In other words, Latvian nationalism is constructed not only internally, but also externally. Scharzt's account emphasizes the international phenomena which can shape

In recent works, scholars have begun to restore *internationalism* to the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, proving that nationalism is also constructed from the outside in.<sup>5</sup> Glenda Sluga's book, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism*, defines internationalism as far more than just support for the creation of supra-national bodies; it denotes a set of principles having to do with cooperation among nations for common goals. Implicit within it is the idea that nations and their nationalisms operate within world systems that support their individual and collective intents. According to Sluga, the core thread that runs through internationalism, especially in its early-20<sup>th</sup>-century version, is the Enlightenment idea of civilizational progress, which is to be achieved through a peaceful union of world nations.<sup>6</sup> At its core, internationalism envisions a transnational community united by shared ideals as the pulsing center of the world order. Contra Anderson's vision of nationalisms and nationalist actors alone engendering nations, Sluga's model emphasizes how the political and conceptual development of the nation does not take place as merely the breakup of empires into atomized units, but rather as the deep integration of nations into a new world system.

By correcting what she sees as "a distortion of historical vision" featuring "nationalism in the foreground, while keeping internationalism beyond view," Sluga puts internationalism back

---

nationalism from the outside in, so to speak. Furthermore, Eric J. Hobsbawm's book *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* sees nationalism as a product of states, not the other way around (page 10). Hobsbawm sees the idea of "nation" as belonging exclusively to a recent period in history in which globalization defines the norm (page 17). For him, the nation is not an unchanging ancient entity but rather something that lies at the intersection between politics, technology and social transformation. The nation, in other words, can not be separated from questions which are international in scope.

<sup>5</sup> Sluga explains that "narratives of nationalism have become so engrained in our understanding of history, that we have forgotten the long, intimate, conceptual past shared by national and international as entangled ways of thinking about modernity, progress, and politics." Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (place: publisher, date), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Sluga, *Internationalism*, 3.

into the encapsulated, circumscribed national narratives which historians have taken for granted.<sup>7</sup> In the process she also paints a revisionist portrait of nationalism in which individuals look out from their own countries to international institutions and individuals to safeguard their national rights, as well as monitor other states' progress toward the goals they share.<sup>8</sup> Sluga explains that nationalisms are always created and negotiated in a world of international networks and projects, not in vacuums. .<sup>9</sup>

Most importantly, Sluga shows that early 20<sup>th</sup> century internationalism drew from the same pool of ideas as nationalism: it contained a “defensiveness about its realist and idealist imperatives,” notions of a future “international government,” and was “the product of the social and political modernity of the times, including new international institutions, new international forms of sociability, and the importance of... ‘human beings with the right outlook.’”<sup>10</sup> Sluga writes that nationalism and internationalism were “twinned liberal ideologies” that had the “same unresolved questions about the nature of individuals and groups” at their core, and questioned “the extent to which human beings could fashion a destiny of their choice.”<sup>11</sup> The two dogmas wrestled with the same issues; they grew up alongside one another as responses to modernity.

This is especially true in the case of Zionism, the modern Jewish nationalist movement established in 1897 which aimed to (re)-establish a Jewish state in the geographic territory of Palestine.

*The Historiography on Jewish Nationalism: Zionism and the Anderson View*

---

<sup>7</sup> Sluga, 8.

<sup>8</sup> Sluga, 8.

<sup>9</sup> Sluga, 8.

<sup>10</sup> Sluga, 2.

<sup>11</sup> Sluga, 3.

Zionism continues to attract enormous scholarly attention today. Yet few scholars of Zionism have integrated Sluga's new model of nationalism and internationalism as two sides of the same coin into their accounts. Many scholars still use the Anderson framework as their lens, zooming in on Jewish nationalism in Palestine and blurring its wider context, in the world and alongside other global nationalisms. As Sluga's scholarship has shown, Anderson's image of nationalism which obscures the international can no longer be the only avenue of inquiry into nationalisms. And yet, scholars of Zionism continue to focus on political developments internal to the Zionist movement to explain the phenomena leading up to the founding of the Jewish State of Israel in 1948.

In particular, scholars of pre-1948 Zionism habitually examine the development of Jewish nationalism in Palestine through the leadership of Zionist "statists": those with a strict focus on sovereignty as the key vehicle for establishing all nationhood and conducting all political activity.

Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, is often seen as such a statist. He is remembered today as the most important imagineer of the Jewish State, a Jewish political thinker utterly consumed with the goal of sovereignty and a single-minded focus on building a Jewish polity in isolation to the rest of the world. Despite massive attention to his political ideas and legacies, no scholars have examined him in lieu of the fact that he lived and worked in a peak moment of global internationalism. As a result, David Ben-Gurion's internationalist politics – and the larger international elements in Zionist pre-1948 ideology and political practice – remain almost entirely out of focus.

Ben-Gurion's Zionism is incomplete without an understanding of his ideas about harmonious relationships between corresponding political units. This study argues that there is

such a thing as Zionist internationalism in the pre-statehood era, and that Ben-Gurion's voice in his 1931 anthology of essays and speeches, entitled *We and Our Neighbors, Anahnu Ushkheneynu*, encapsulates much of it. His book illustrates the freedom with which Zionism flowed between the national and the international; it does not just cover Ben-Gurion's thinking vis-à-vis other nations, but rather illustrates the centrality of the international world order in Ben-Gurion's visions of the future Jewish state. By reframing David Ben-Gurion's ideology, this essay will attempt to illuminate how heavily this key Zionist thinker relied upon internationalism for his ideas about Jewish national rights, privileges, and limitations, and how internationalism contained the very pillars upon which his Zionism rested.

#### *David Ben-Gurion: A Statist?*

David Ben-Gurion was from Plonsk, Poland.<sup>12</sup> When he was eleven, his mother died in childbirth.<sup>13</sup> His father was a follower of the Haskalah movement, a “compromise between the world of Judaism and the world of Western culture,” also known as the Jewish Enlightenment.<sup>14</sup> His father was also an early member of early Zionist organizations such as Hovevei Zion (Lovers of Zion), attending its first congress as a delegate in Katowice in 1884, so Ben-Gurion himself was therefore not secluded from the contemporaneous Jewish political activism of Europe.<sup>15</sup> Ben-Gurion immigrated to Ottoman Palestine in 1906. In October 1911, he went to Salonica to

---

<sup>12</sup> Anita Shapira, *Ben-Gurion: Father of Modern Israel*, trans. Anthony Berris (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2014), page 3.

<sup>13</sup> Shapira, *Ben-Gurion: Father of Modern Israel*, page 8.

<sup>14</sup> Bar-Zohar, *Ben-Gurion: The Armed Prophet*, page 6.

<sup>15</sup> Bar-Zohar, *ibid*, page 7.

study Turkish before moving to Istanbul in August 1912 to study law.<sup>16</sup> While Ben-Gurion was spending his summer vacation in August 1914 in Jerusalem, World War I broke out.<sup>17</sup> The Ottoman authorities soon exiled Ben-Gurion from Jerusalem, declaring his Zionist political activity detrimental to an already crumbling Empire; Ben-Gurion then moved to the United States, where he lived between 1915 and 1918.<sup>18</sup> During this time Woodrow Wilson was in power as “the first conspicuously pro-Zionist president in American history” and the visionary of the post-World War I international order, the League of Nations.<sup>19</sup> At the end of World War I Ben-Gurion moved back to Palestine, which then became a British Mandate after a long Ottoman rule.

Despite his extensive political and educational experiences abroad, generations of historians of Zionism have analyzed Ben-Gurion through a strictly national framework and looked at his views of the Jewish nation in isolation from his worldview.<sup>20</sup> For example, in his article, “Negation of the Galut and the Centrality of Israel: Nahum Goldmann and David Ben-Gurion,” Yosef Gorny portrays David Ben-Gurion as uninterested in global politics, indifferent to relations with other countries, and solely focused on Jewish nationhood in Israel.<sup>21</sup> In Gorny’s account Ben-Gurion’s politics mirrored his inward personality as he was a nationalist focused on

---

<sup>16</sup> Teveth, 20.

<sup>17</sup> Teveth, 24.

<sup>18</sup> Gal Allon, *David Ben-Gurion’s Zionist Foreign Policy, 1938 – 48: The Democratic Factor*, page 14.

<sup>19</sup> Gal Allon, *David Ben-Gurion’s Zionist Foreign Policy, 1938 – 48: The Democratic Factor*, page 15.

<sup>20</sup> As Shabtai Teveth writes in his biography of David Ben-Gurion, “it would be hard to find another statesman whose field of operation spread over so many countries, continents, and regimes” (Teveth, *Ben-Gurion: The Burning Ground, 1886 – 1948*, xi).

<sup>21</sup> Yosef Gorny, “Negation of the Galut and the Centrality of Israel: Nahum Goldmann and David Ben-Gurion,” pages 75 – 92. *Nahum Goldmann: Statesman Without a State*, ed. Mark M. Raider, n.d., 77. Gorny writes that David Ben-Gurion was personally “an introvert and a recluse” who was “entirely rooted in one culture only – the Hebrew culture.”

the Jewish community within Palestine, or the *Yishuv*, at the expense of exploring other countries' cultures and governments.<sup>23</sup> But Gorny's account does not lend sufficient credence to Ben-Gurion's internationalism. It does not look at his views on establishing self-determination for nations abroad,<sup>24</sup> nor does it assess Ben-Gurion's views on diaspora Jewry in depth.<sup>25</sup> It further fails to explain the degree to which Ben-Gurion was inspired by the politics of other states<sup>26</sup> and even needed the support of the international community for his socialist politics.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Gorny underscores that for Ben-Gurion, in the early 1920s, the "matter of greatest urgency" was "the... centralized autonomous organization of the Jewish collective" in Palestine. He mentions only in passing how Ben-Gurion's idea of a "federative autonomy" in Palestine for Jews was imported from Eastern and Central European social democracies, in which political liberalism prevailed. He does not wrestle with what this says about Ben-Gurion's Zionism, attention to Europe, or broader interest in Israel's place in the developing world order of this era. See Yosef Gorny, *From Binational Society to Jewish State: Federal Concepts in Zionist Political Thought, 1920 - 1990, and the Jewish People*, pages 41 and 47.

<sup>24</sup> Gorny does not treat Ben-Gurion's many writings on autonomy internationally, for other nations such as India, as evidenced in *Anahnu Ushkheneynu*.

<sup>25</sup> Gorny generalizes that Ben-Gurion "negated" the Jewish diaspora – the existence and relevance of Jewish communities outside Palestine – as "a spiritual and emotional phenomenon" and urged all Jews to move to Palestine. See Gorny, "Negation of the Galut and the Centrality of Israel: Nahum Goldmann and David Ben-Gurion," in *Nahum Goldmann: Statesman Without a State*, page 79.

<sup>26</sup> Though he does write ephemerally that Ben-Gurion's national-autonomy idea originated in the "political culture of Eastern Europe," and even that Ben-Gurion studied diaspora Jewry to help him conceptualize Jewish autonomy in Palestine, Gorny emphasizes how different Ben-Gurion's notion of autonomy was from what existed on the continent of Europe. See Gorny, *From Binational Society to Jewish State: Federal Concepts in Zionist Political Thought, 1920 - 1990, and the Jewish People*, 103.

<sup>27</sup> Yosef Gorny skirts Ben-Gurion's interest in Socialism abroad, ignoring both how heavily the Zionist leader relied on international workers to create national support for the Socialist movement and how intently he looked to other nations as models of Socialist practice for the young and growing Jewish national movement in Palestine. See Yosef Gorny, "Reflections on Zeev Sternhell's Nation-Building or a New Society? The Zionist Labor Movement 1904 - 1940 and the Origins of Israel: The Historical Reality of Constructive Socialism." *Israel Studies* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 295–305. In David Ben-Gurion's 1931 anthology, *Anahnu Ushkheneynu*, Ben-Gurion writes about how the workers of the world must unite to "renew" Socialism in this time, 1900 – 1931. Ha-medynyt hahtsonyt shel ha'am ha'iyri, 2/9.



One gets the sense that Ben-Gurion's national politics in the pre-state era emerged, and remained, in a vacuum.

Similarly, Ben-Gurion's great biographer Shabtai Teveth intimates, but does not flesh out, the ways in which Ben-Gurion's international politics molded and colored his Zionism. He emphasizes Ben-Gurion's insistence that nations were entirely independent sovereign units, especially Arabs and Jews.<sup>28</sup> He argues that Ben-Gurion saw the world as units of national entities which were to control their own affairs and lead internally rather than be ruled by one party or government.<sup>29</sup> But Teveth decontextualizes Ben-Gurion's model of self-rule in Palestine and elsewhere from the context of the broader Wilsonian<sup>30</sup> moment<sup>31</sup> in which the ideal of national self-determination captured the minds and hearts of political leaders around the world.<sup>32</sup> He does

---

<sup>28</sup> Teveth points out that as early as 1906 Ben-Gurion "envisioned... agricultural settlements - ... 'Hebrew Republics' as he called them – as the seed of future [Jewish] autonomy" (Teveth, *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs: From Peace to War*, 70). This autonomy was to be "territorial and personal: areas of concentrated Jewish settlement would enjoy territorial autonomy, and Jews scattered throughout... Arab areas would enjoy the protection of personal autonomy" (Teveth, *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs: From Peace to War*, 70.). Teveth therefore emphasizes Ben-Gurion's policies geared toward protecting Jewish autonomy, but does not devote enough time to where Ben-Gurion's ideas about Jewish autonomy came from, nor to how they applied also to the Arabs in Ben-Gurion's own writings. This will be discussed below.

<sup>29</sup> Teveth mentions that by 1918 Ben-Gurion was calling for "full internal autonomy" for all the Arabs of Eretz Israel, and for a separate autonomy of Jews in the region (Teveth points out that as early as 1906 Ben-Gurion "envisioned... agricultural settlements - ... 'Hebrew Republics' as he called them – as the seed of future [Jewish] autonomy" (Teveth, *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs: From Peace to War*, 70). This autonomy was to be "territorial and personal: areas of concentrated Jewish settlement would enjoy territorial autonomy, and Jews scattered throughout... Arab areas would enjoy the protection of personal autonomy" (Teveth, *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs: From Peace to War*, 70). He illuminates Ben-Gurion's concept of the "absolute separation of inhabitants of the same country according to national affiliation" (Teveth, 71) and shows that Ben-Gurion saw the world in national, independent entities, even (and perhaps especially) where multiple nations comprised one country.

<sup>30</sup> Referring to the era of Woodrow Wilson and his 14 points, League of Nations vision, etc.

<sup>31</sup> *Erez Manela, The Wilsonian Moment : Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism. Oxford ; New York :Oxford University Press, 2007.*

<sup>32</sup> Glenda Sluga,

illuminate Ben-Gurion's conception of "full internal autonomy" for Arabs and Jews in Palestine, but in interrogating Ben-Gurion's ruminations on nations and self-rule, Teveth overlooks the ways in which Ben-Gurion envisioned a larger new world order and how autonomy related to it. Teveth allows Ben-Gurion's Zionism to be defined merely by his Jewish nationalism in Palestine when in actuality, his Zionism was powerfully reliant upon international theoretical and practical concepts.

Like Teveth, Anita Shapira slips in and out of reading Ben-Gurion's Zionist politics in isolation from international bodies. She oversimplifies his negation of the Jewish diaspora rather than wrestling with the nuances of his politics vis-à-vis Jews in the Russian empire, and elsewhere.<sup>33</sup> Shapira also implies that Ben-Gurion's Socialism emerged in a vacuum of national ideas rather than from the international community.<sup>34</sup> Like other authors on the subject, Shapira

---

<sup>33</sup> Shapira discusses Ben-Gurion's trip to Russia in 1923 for an agricultural exhibition which took place in Moscow, where Jews represented Palestine by displaying some of its produce. As a politician conducting a Socialist experiment of his own in Palestine at the time, Ben-Gurion was "excited by the chance to see with his own eyes what was happening in that amazing country where the greatest social experiment in history was taking place" (Anita Shapira, Ben-Gurion: Father of Modern Israel, 68). And yet, after three months in Russia, Ben-Gurion "left with mixed feelings." From then on, he "sought to persuade Soviet Russia to change its attitude toward Zionism, in order to ensure the safety of the Zionist-Socialist movements there, prevent international communist incitement against the labor movement in Palestine, and... facilitate the emigration of Jews who wanted to leave" (Shapira, Ben-Gurion: Father of Modern Israel, 68). His policy toward the Soviet Union after this 1923 moment favored Jewish emigration to Palestine. In Shapira's account, though Ben-Gurion went to Russia with high hopes for international cooperation, he left stronger in his conviction that Palestine had to stand on its own as a Socialist country and that all of world Jewry belonged there together – simply understood, Shapira sees him here negating the diaspora once again. His encouragement of Russian-Jewish emigration, even from a Socialist country, supposedly demonstrates that the nucleus of his politics was rooted in the Jewish nation in the Middle East, and that there should be no diaspora Jewry.

<sup>34</sup> Shapira's passing comment in the introduction to her Ben-Gurion biography that the book *Uncle Tom's Cabin* made Ben-Gurion a Socialist (Shapira, Ben-Gurion: Father of Modern Israel, 6), and not his travels or his familiarity with other Socialist countries, is perhaps telling of her overarching narrative: Shapira overlooks the many channels through which Ben-Gurion accessed the world, whether through gleaning Socialism abroad and bringing it home to Palestine,

deep into Ben-Gurion's opinions on policies for the future Jewish state and even discusses the centrality of events in Europe, such as the Russian October Revolution of 1917, to the "ideological fabric of Jewish Palestine,"<sup>35</sup> and yet, she does not explore the depth of the connection between the architecture of Ben-Gurion's projected Jewish state and the contours of the international world order as he envisioned it – and as so many other political leaders of his time envisioned it.<sup>36</sup>

To some extent, the above studies on Zionism represent an earlier generation of historiography, and new articles and books exhibit different foci.<sup>37</sup> For example, scholars such as Dmitry Shumsky have more recently begun to re-read Ben-Gurion to show that he conceived of the state as a federation of multiple nations<sup>38</sup> rather than mono-national states. Shumsky shows that Ben-Gurion's writings from the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s demonstrate that this idea of states as federations of nations applied to his Palestine. In other words, Shumsky argues that Ben-Gurion saw the Jewish state as a federation of two nations: Arab and Jewish. Ben-Gurion wrote about nations having a responsibility to help establish this model of autonomy for each nation

---

learning from the Jewish diasporic past and present about political autonomy, and helping to establish self-determination for others (perhaps so that he may do so for himself and for the Jewish people).

<sup>35</sup> Shapira, *Labour Zionism and the October Revolution*, 623.

<sup>36</sup> Sluga, 2.

<sup>37</sup> For example, Arie Dubnov's 2016 article "Notes on the Zionist Passage to India, Or: The Analogical Imagination and Its Boundaries," looks at the early-statehood Israeli orientational move toward the Occident and away from the Orient. He argues that the state structured itself according to Occidental values, governmental structures, and organizations, and away from identifying as a "Middle Eastern" or "Oriental" state (page 181). Dubnov positions his argument broadly, outside the scope of local nationalism and toward a concept this paper will label "Zionist Internationalism."

<sup>38</sup> Shumsky, "Zionism and the Nation-State: A Reappraisal," (Hebrew), *Zion* (2012), 223-254.

across global space.<sup>39</sup> Still, even Shumsky's innovative work minimizes a key dimension: Ben-Gurion's federation idea informed his own international politics, relating to nations beyond Jews and Arabs in the Middle East. Shumsky focuses on Ben-Gurion's ideas about Palestine but ignores his other writings about the multinational state in relation to India and elsewhere.

David Myers' 2015 article, "Rethinking Sovereignty and Autonomy: New Currents in the History of Jewish Nationalism," evaluates and contributes to new research in Zionist conceptions of the international arena, and the projected relationship of the Jewish state to it. Like Shumsky, Myers complicates the notion of sovereignty by drawing the concept of "autonomy" into focus, which he defines as "the right of a nation to control its cultural, educational and linguistic affairs within an existing sovereign state."<sup>40</sup> Myers also underscores that David Ben-Gurion supported cultural autonomy in the diaspora, disrupting the more typical view of Ben-Gurion as a statesman focused on the national Jewish arena in Palestine.<sup>41</sup> Still, Myers does not look deeply at what Ben-Gurion wrote about the international world, nor does he flesh out what Ben-Gurion's cultural autonomy scheme looked like for non-Jews; indeed, Ben-Gurion wrote about this extensively, and this paper will evaluate those writings.

*Moving Beyond the "Nationalist": Ben-Gurion's Zionist Internationalism*

---

<sup>39</sup> In his *Anaḥnu Ushkheneynu*, Ben-Gurion's chapter Mizraḥ ye-ma'aray discusses India at length, remarking that Zionists have a responsibility to help other countries such as India develop internal "liberation" for all nations within them.

<sup>40</sup> David Myers, "Rethinking Sovereignty and Autonomy: New Currents in the History of Jewish Nationalism." De Gruyter, Open Access, Volume 13, Issue 1, pages 44 – 51. March 2015. Accessed February 15, 2017.

[http://www.davidmyers.com/uploads/2/3/0/7/23074672/rethinking\\_sovereignty.pdf](http://www.davidmyers.com/uploads/2/3/0/7/23074672/rethinking_sovereignty.pdf)

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, page 46.

The above scholarship has contributed immensely to our understandings of Zionism and Jewish nationalism more broadly. It has also paved the way for new explorations of not only Zionism's conceptions of the Jewish state with an Arab context and neighbors, but also its international focus on communities seemingly unrelated to the Jewish state.

Ben-Gurion's internationalism, and the particular strain of Jewish nationalism that was born from it, is best exemplified by four topics about which he opined in *Anaḥnu Ushkheneynu*: Jewish Palestine's unique role, identity and geographical place in the international order (including its borders); the international-political privileges and responsibilities accorded all nation-states including the future Israel; international socialism (including the connections between socialism in the Jewish Home and abroad); and Arab citizenship and rights in the future Jewish State.

David Ben-Gurion's anthology, *Anaḥnu Ushkheneynu*, was published in Israel in June 1931 but authored over the course of several decades. Within the book are 38 essays in which Ben-Gurion addresses, among other topics, his own views on the Jewish and Zionist relationship with Arabs living in Palestine, with other neighbors outside of the region, and with the rest of the world. *Anaḥnu Ushkheneynu* is no mere compilation of Ben-Gurion's essays; it also includes speeches from a range of occasions delivered to a variety of audiences. Scholars acknowledge the book in their writings on David Ben-Gurion. One of the key biographies on him even mention the anthology as a turning point in his career.<sup>42</sup> However, scholars have not yet evaluated the text as a whole or asked, what does it bring to bear on Ben-Gurion's Zionist internationalism? In English-language sources especially, Ben-Gurion's anthology has yet to be

---

<sup>42</sup> Shabtai Tevet's iconic biography on David Ben-Gurion, *The Burning Ground*, points out that the book "became a best seller" in a time when Ben-Gurion was in tremendous financial debt (page 385).

wrestled with in general. An English translation of the entirety of the anthology is difficult to come by. In this essay, Ben-Gurion's *Anahnu Ushkheneynu* is the core primary source which illuminates Ben-Gurion's Zionist-internationalist vision for the future Jewish home of Palestine. As one of the first articles to tackle the anthology head-on in English, this essay will attempt to uncover Ben-Gurion's international politics through his eyes in his 1920s, 1920s and 1930s essays and speeches.

### *Zionism on the World Stage: The Jewish Home's Place in the World*

Perhaps the most important component of David Ben-Gurion's internationalist politics were devoted to defining the future Jewish State's role within an imagined international order – and the international community's reciprocal duty to it. For example, in *Anahnu Ushkheneynu*, Ben-Gurion repeatedly relates the geography of Jewish Palestine to its function in intercontinental society. In a chapter entitled “Our Borders,” he points out that Palestine's physical location can be a foundation for its character. Located as it is in a liminal space between the worlds of Asia and Africa<sup>43</sup> and positioned therefore as a Westernized channel to the East, the future state of Israel would be a “bridge between two worlds.”<sup>44</sup> Ben-Gurion hoped the future Jewish state would become a key player in international politics, helping nations to understand one another and piecing together a divided world. For Ben-Gurion Jewish Palestine is firmly embedded in its physical landscape and surrounding lands; its position betwixt and between worlds is a mirror for its function in an imagined global society.

---

<sup>43</sup>Gyulei artseinu v'adamata, 3/11.

<sup>44</sup>Gyulei artseinu v'adamata, 3/11.

In his writings David Ben-Gurion grounded not just the projected Jewish physical landscape, but also Zionist ideology, in both the “East” and the “West.” Ben-Gurion writes, “The fulfillment of Zionism means not only returning our ‘center of gravity’ to Israel, but also means tying our fate with the fate of Asia and its residents.”<sup>45</sup> For Ben-Gurion, Asia is the non-Occident; in other words, the Orient, broadly conceived. This includes, for him, “Asia” as we know it as well as the Middle East. A literal grounding in the “East” was therefore a fundamental tenet of Zionism even where many immigrants, and also many fundamental ideas, were imported from Europe or North America<sup>46</sup> (the West). Ben-Gurion knew that Jewish settlement in Israel would require even those Western immigrants to become versed in the vernaculars of the Eretz Israeli landscape and its environs, for only then could Jews root themselves in the land: “If we truly want to become Am Yisrael, we must be glued to our new surroundings geographically and ethnographically so that within our land we can return and settle.”<sup>47</sup> Despite its ancient Jewish roots, modern Eretz Israel was a foreign entity. Ben-Gurion is cognizant of this as he addresses the idea that Jews must acclimate to a new setting.

Even as David Ben-Gurion foresees a future Israel anchored at the intersection between Asia and Africa, entrenched in the Middle East, he also cautions Jews against losing themselves to the land. He writes, “In Israel we must beware of assimilation, for we do not want this to

---

<sup>45</sup> Ha-medynyt hahtsonyt shel ha’am ha’iyri, 3/9.

<sup>46</sup> As Gal Allon shows in his article, “David Ben-Gurion's Zionist Foreign Policy, 1938 - 48: The Democratic Factor,” Ben-Gurion’s time living in the United States left its mark on his politics. Ben-Gurion spent three years there in political exile, from May 1915 to May 1918, during which time he often went to the New York Public Library and read voraciously about “American history and politics, American parties and democracy” (page 14). Allon also writes that Ben-Gurion was distinctly Western in his orientation, arguing that “Ben-Gurion - thoroughly democratic in his philosophy and an enthusiastic admirer of Western civilization - viewed the English-speaking peoples as the best carriers of this classic world legacy” (page 16).

<sup>47</sup> Ha-medynyt hahtsonyt shel ha’am ha’iyri, 3/9.

become another diaspora land in which we become absorbed; for in that case, the splendor of our nation will dissipate.”<sup>48</sup> He spends much time in his writings and speeches denouncing the Jewish diaspora, proclaiming that Jews within it are losing their Jewishness and blending in with their surroundings.<sup>49</sup> He thus fears that Jews in his future Israel will, similarly, blend too seamlessly into their environment, absorbing elements from surrounding countries and becoming invisible as Jews. In *Anahnu Ushkheneynu* he emphasizes how important it is for Jews to retain their national Jewish qualities in the face of pressure to conform to Middle Eastern customs, but also encourages Jews to embrace the new Middle Eastern locale. He walks the line between drawing boundaries around Jewish identity and also making it permeable in the future Jewish land of Palestine.

While Ben-Gurion is concerned with the question of building borders around Jewish identity in Israel, he is also preoccupied with demarcating borders around the land itself. In his writing, he evaluates the geography of the Land of Israel and invokes physical markers such as mountain ranges, deserts, and bodies of water as potential geopolitical boundaries.<sup>50</sup> He also evaluates and enumerates Jewish history in considering hypothetical future borders for Israel. In a chapter entitled “The Borders of Our Land and its Earth,” Ben-Gurion reveals pieces of ancient Jewish history, explaining which territories were significant to the Jews both religiously and historically. Ben-Gurion considers natural resources such as water and arable land in deciding

---

<sup>48</sup> Ha-medynyut hahtsonyt shel ha’am ha’ivri, 3/9.

<sup>49</sup> As Michael Barnett writes, Ben-Gurion only allowed the Jewish diaspora to play a “subservient role” in the “spectacular national attainment” of Israel as a Jewish state because he saw it as weak and powerless (Gabriel Sheffer, “Israeli-Diaspora Relations in Comparative Perspective,” in Michael Barnett’s anthology *Israel in Comparative Perspective: Challenging the Conventional Wisdom*, page 64). He “blatantly denounced diasporic existence, denigrated the World Zionist Organization, and proclaimed that first and foremost Zionists must immigrate to Israel” (Barnett, 67).

<sup>50</sup> Gyulei artseinu v’adamata, 5/11.



where to place borders. He writes, “We can’t fix our borders according to history and geography, for our ideal borders are wider than that. History is part of the equation, but it does not perfectly fit our conditions of today”<sup>51</sup> which also require land that is large enough and physically livable. In the end, in a 1919 memorandum for the international Socialist movement published in *Anahnu Ushkheneynu*, Ben-Gurion outlined a proposed list of specific Israeli borders which included Transjordan, the Galil, the Negev, parts of modern-day Syria, Egypt, Lebanon,<sup>52</sup> and more.<sup>53</sup> His chosen borders seem to weigh geography, history, and practical concerns equally.

The task of drawing potential borders around a future Israel was made all the more difficult by the fact that Palestine was not, at the time, its own sovereign state (nor had it been for thousands of years). In the centuries leading up to British colonization, the region of Palestine was not even considered its own political entity within the Ottoman Empire. When the British colonized the area, their territory consisted of Palestine as well as Transjordan (in present-day Jordan). Meanwhile, the French had taken neighboring Syria and Lebanon as their colonial possessions. As David Ben-Gurion was writing *Anahnu Ushkheneynu*, the British and the French were battling over Palestinian borders because each superpower wanted more territory for itself.

In the midst of these arguments, Ben-Gurion laments the fact that foreign superpowers still view some nations as their pawns rather than as sovereign entities; he claims that in order to intergrate “normally” into the world community, all nations must ultimately break free of the shackles of foreign-interest-turned-foreign-rule. Ben-Gurion writes, “France views the question of Israeli borders as a controversial territorial argument between its own country and Great

---

<sup>51</sup>Gyulei artseinu v’adamata, 4/11.

<sup>52</sup> One must note here the nebulous language regarding autonomy: did Ben-Gurion mean that this entire territory was meant to be Jewish, or that regions were to be autonomously controlled by Arabs? He leaves this unclear in his writing.

<sup>53</sup> ‘l gyulei erets yisra’el, 2/3.

Britain.”<sup>54</sup> He callst his “a grave mistake” on France’s part,<sup>55</sup> for it violates his principle of self-determination and undermines his efforts to appeal to the international community for appropriate borders around the projected state of Israel. Ben-Gurion also notes that as an outcome of the Conference of San Remo, France and Great Britain planned to split Palestine in two, with France obtaining the Galil (present-day Israel), Yarmouk (present-day Syria) and other areas, and Great Britain obtaining Akko, Haifa, part of the Negev, and more.<sup>56</sup> About this he writes, “It is unjust to divide the Land of Israel in this way, and it is difficult for me to imagine such a reality.”<sup>57</sup> Not only is this unjust because it represents a foreign attempt to control a faraway land (colonialism?) but also, and perhaps more importantly, because it keeps the Land of Israel from expressing its own self-determination and thereby becoming part of the international community of nations. At San Remo, Great Britain and France interfered with Ben-Gurion’s proposition that nations themselves should decide on borders to ensure that peoples could preserve the integrity of their nations according to shared history, geography, and all other “necessary” contemporaneous factors. Ben-Gurion wrote, “[Great Britain and France] want to rip apart, in an artificial and arbitrary manner, one whole national and historical unit.”<sup>58</sup> He saw a fundamental unity of the land within his drawn borders; he saw, too, an opportunity for the Land of Israel to integrate into the world of nations – but only if it could self-define rather than be defined by foreign world superpowers. Ben-Gurion’s claim to Jewish land was not only a “land grab” from foreign hands, but rather an attempt at Jewish integration into the international community as part of a world-vision of integration.

---

<sup>54</sup> ‘l gyulei erets yisra’el, 2/3.

<sup>55</sup> ‘l gyulei erets yisra’el, 2/3.

<sup>56</sup> ‘l gyulei erets yisra’el, 1/3.

<sup>57</sup> ‘l gyulei erets yisra’el, 1/3.

<sup>58</sup> ‘l gyulei erets yisra’el, 1/3.

Ben-Gurion did not wage this war for a Jewish state in vacuity; he relied deeply upon a global web of national struggles for self-determination, thereby positioning Zionist thought within contemporaneous international debates about political autonomy. Importantly, according to Ben-Gurion, Zionism supports the independent rule of all nations of the world (not only Israel). In an imperialist age of competing empires and domineering world powers, Ben-Gurion argues that the driving force behind global events is a pervasive and universal quest for one important “global right:” the right to independence in one’s homeland.<sup>59</sup> He argues, “Zionism’s moral core, the seed from which the movement grows, is the notion that all nations, no matter who or where, should be free to pursue their own goal of self-determination and should not be objects or pawns for the goals of other nations, even where those goals take foreign nations to their national soils.”<sup>60</sup> World superpowers in this construct should not and may not act upon foreign interest in natural resources or in other extraterritorial affairs.

Ben-Gurion found that the concepts of self-determination and post-colonial liberation were globally relevant in the 1920s and early 30s as international leaders<sup>61</sup> worked toward these goals; thus Ben-Gurion developed the Zionist ambition of Jewish self-determination in Palestine with one eye cast upon this global context. Yosef Gorny argues that Ben-Gurion saw Jewish nationalism as “fundamentally normal” in the grander world of emergent global nationalisms,<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> For “global right,” see *Likrat ha’atid*, 2/7. For independence in one’s homeland see *Ha-medynyt hahtsonyt shel ha’am ha’ivri*, 5/9.

<sup>60</sup> *Ha-medynyt hahtsonyt shel ha’am ha’ivri*, 5/9.

<sup>61</sup> In his book *Jewish Renaissance in the Russian Revolution*, Kenneth Moss shows that in the Wilsonian moment the Jewish leaders were convinced they needed to demonstrate their own identity in order to be considered in the emerging international system. He writes about Russia, but the sentiment is also true for David Ben-Gurion. Chapter 1, *The Time for Words has Passed*.

<sup>62</sup> Yosef Gorny, “Negation of the Galut and the Centrality of Israel: Nahum Goldmann and David Ben-Gurion,” in *Nahum Goldmann: Statesman Without a State*, ed. Mark M. Raider, n.d., 90.

and thus recognized the importance of internationalism – of invoking the will of the international community – in fomenting national self-determination for all and for Zionism. Ultimately, Ben-Gurion’s reliance upon an international system to achieve Zionism’s end goals is not one-sided; Jewish Palestine also must retain the principle of national self-determination and uphold this value, nationally and internationally.

*David Ben-Gurion’s “Global Right”: Ensuring the Right to National Self-Determination*

In *Anahnu Ushkheneynu* David Ben-Gurion repeatedly cites his invented concept of “Global Right.” The phrase is virtually absent in Hebrew-language newspapers, pamphlets or cultural output from the time and therefore appears to be the brainchild of Ben-Gurion.<sup>63</sup> He uses the term to underscore his emphatic support for the freedoms of those abroad who were either colonized by foreign rule or not granted self-determination for another reason, contending that they deserve independence just as the Jews do. He explains that “All nations who want to renew their ancient homelands must unite”<sup>64</sup> to ensure self-determination nationally and internationally, and that it must be a collective effort.

So, what does it mean that the establishment of national self-determinations must be a shared endeavor between world nations lying far apart, in geography, customs, political systems and in culture? Ben-Gurion intended with his internationalism to construct a world united in its vision of nations: entities that both deserved internal governing rights and were obligated to ensure them for others. His internationalism anticipated a universal, transnational community in

---

<sup>63</sup> This after searches in theonline Zionist Archives, Ben-Gurion Archives and through other less specialized search engines.

<sup>64</sup> *Likrat ha’atid*, 3/7.

which nations took this obligation seriously, working together to establish self-determination in all corners of the world.

Ben-Gurion explains, though, that his definition of the nation is not equivalent to ethnic or religious groups who are self-governing as states; rather, the nation in his conception is defined by its customs and internal sense of group self, and a state could and often did comprise multiple nations.<sup>65</sup> This concept of multinational states is best illuminated by Noam Pianko whom, in his article “‘The True Liberalism of Zionism’: Horace Kallen, Jewish Nationalism, and the Limits of American Pluralism,” provides his own definition of internationalism which goes beyond Glenda Sluga’s. Pianko points out that internationalism involves a “reformulation of the meaning of nationality”<sup>66</sup> by considering nations as the fundamental pieces of a state, but not the state itself. In other words, internationalism for Pianko is the idea that multiple nations make a state, and that each nation must work together, both within the state and abroad, to establish peace and autonomy for all. Because internationalism seems to value international order above state sovereignty, Pianko contends, internationalism is routinely misunderstood as a direct antithesis to nationalism or national sovereignty; however, his essay shows that in the work of the American Jewish Zionist Horace Kallen (contemporaneous with Ben-Gurion) and in others, what is often assumed to be a central binary, internationalism and nationalism, were actually two sides of the same coin. Indeed, without internationalism, nationalism would have been impossible for the world leaders of this historical period. Pianko writes about the same decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in which Ben-Gurion wrote his *Anahnu Ushkheneynu*. His definition of

---

<sup>65</sup> It is important to note here that Ben-Gurion writes and thins this before World War II only.

<sup>66</sup> Noam Pianko, ‘The True Liberalism of Zionism’: Horace Kallen, Jewish Nationalism, and the Limits of American Pluralism. *American Jewish History*, Volume 94, Number 4 (December 2008): page 322.

internationalism aptly characterizes one element of Ben-Gurion's musings within his anthology, as Ben-Gurion understood nations as sub-units within states.

Ben-Gurion also writes that each of these nations, even "nations within nations,"<sup>67</sup> deserves to be self-governing/self-administering to some degree. He urges that the Zionist movement must view nations as sub-communities of states and fight for their self-determinations even within the state framework. He writes, "we Zionists... are whole-hearted supporters of self-determination for every nation, for every limb of the nation, for every group of people."<sup>68</sup> He also addresses individual regions and explains that they must be broken into their national component parts and given according self-determination, especially in the post-colonial setting. In his discussion of India in *Mizrah ve-ma'aray*, for example, Ben-Gurion explains that the "nations" of India must obtain rights, that the territory needs to be divided into several.<sup>69</sup> Good This critical nuance of local self-determinations is unfortunately overlooked in the scholarship on Ben-Gurion, and it has led many academics to disregard his model of local autonomies while seeking and analyzing his later, more understood theory of national sovereignties. The latter did not appear in Ben-Gurion's thinking until years later, whereas the former is powerfully present in his writings in the first few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, Ben-Gurion's concept of autonomy did not come at the cost of the unity of countries; he advocated for Federations, both in Palestine with the Arabs and in places such as India. This will be discussed in detail below in the section on Arab rights in Ben-Gurion's projected Jewish state.

---

<sup>67</sup> Clermont Tonerre, an advocate of Jewish emancipation in the 1789 French Revolution, famously used the phrase "nation within a nation" to invoke the unacceptability of dual loyalties in the Jewish community. He went on to argue that the Jews should be denied everything as a people, but granted everything as individuals. Here the term is used to designate groups within countries that self-identify as groups ethnically, historically, etc.

<sup>68</sup> *Ha-medynyt hahtsonyt shel ha'am ha'iyri*, 5/9.

<sup>69</sup> *Mizrah ve-ma'aray*, 2/2.

Ben-Gurion's rallying cry for self-determination for all strains of "Indian" is motivated also by his desire that Zionism become as internationally relevant as its own nationalism. In fact, he saw international activism toward self-determination as the way onto the worldstage for Zionism. Gal allon writes that Ben-Gurion thought the "Zionists should become a world-appreciated political factor, and they should – creatively, dynamically and democratically – use the opportune circumstances" of a world order interested in nationalisms to insert itself into that narrative.<sup>70</sup> Insistently, Ben-Gurion writes, "It has never been clearer than right now that the Jewish question is an international one."<sup>71</sup> For him by 1931 the process has already commenced. "Like the rest of the world," Ben-Gurion noted, "Eretz Israel stands at the threshold of a new era:" one of crumbling world empires, and in their place would form newly sovereign nations.<sup>72</sup> The Jewish state is part of a world order in which a profound unity of world leaders and visionaries could embolden national sovereignties. Contextualizing Jewish nationalism within a broader transnational framework allowed Ben-Gurion to use an existing language to describe national struggle while also offering it automatic colleagues and friends in the nationalist endeavor.

In fact, Ben-Gurion played a central role in rallying the international community to support the Jewish state by using the universal language of national self-determination. He seized a transformative moment in world politics to insert Jewish leaders (and himself) into these forums. It surely helped that Ben-Gurion spent May 1915 to May 1918 in the United States as a political exile, where he "learned the effectiveness of mass political organization in the American

---

<sup>70</sup> Allon, 24.

<sup>71</sup> Likrat ha'atid, 2/7.

<sup>72</sup> Likrat ha'atid, 7/7.

set-up.”<sup>73</sup> There he witnessed and participated in the growth of the American Jewish Congress and likely learned how to appeal to wider, non-Jewish values and entities as American Jews did.<sup>74</sup> In *Anahnu Ushkheneynu* he writes insistently, “We have the right to demand that our voices are heard by the leaders of the British Mandate for Palestine and by the League of Nations” (just as other nations had recently exercised that right).<sup>75</sup> Since Ben-Gurion was “strongly opposed to a struggle for independence based on sheer military power, without international backing,”<sup>76</sup> as Gal Allon argues, inserting Zionist claims carefully and intentionally within broader conversations about the fluctuating world order allowed him to propose his political ideas in environments that could lead to support. Ben-Gurion’s writing reveals that he perceives a radically changing global climate in which underrepresented groups now have voices, and he seeks to insert Am Yisrael into that order. He writes, “The stone has turned in the colonial politics of Great Britain.”<sup>77</sup> With purpose and an objective in mind Ben-Gurion argues that colonialism is ending in Palestine and elsewhere, and the dawn of a new age will slowly grant nations self-rule, one by one.

On this topic, he cautions that world superpowers with an interest in Palestine or elsewhere must not act upon their foreign interests lest they behave inappropriately in the midst of a new world order with new rules about conduct; rather, countries such as England and France must facilitate the founding of nations around the world in post-colonial environments by fostering the conditions necessary to do so. He points out that England, Russia, and France all have a special interest in Israel whether religious, geographic (Germany “hopes to gain access to

---

<sup>73</sup> Allon, 14.

<sup>74</sup> Allon, 14.

<sup>75</sup> *Ha-medyniyut hahtsonyt shel ha’am ha’ivri*, 2/9.

<sup>76</sup> Allon, 17.

<sup>77</sup> *Likrat ha’atid*, 1/7.



the Mediterranean”), or strategic.<sup>78</sup> He writes, though, that these world superpowers must not attempt to control Palestine. Actually, they not only must they withhold their own desires for control, but go a step further: “The British Mandate must establish the political conditions and administrative structure for the building of Jewish settlements in Israel – they owe that to us.”<sup>79</sup> After decades of foreign rule in the region, Ben-Gurion contends, the British must assist Jewish settlements as they grow, especially in the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He is careful to explain on multiple occasions within *Anaḥnu Ushkheneynu* that the British, French, and other world powers are responsible for the dysfunction of imperial politics and its repercussions. For Ben-Gurion the imperialist perpetrators, rather than the Jews or other colonized nations, are responsible for repairing a broken imperial system and restoring stability, governmentally, to these regions.

Indeed, throughout *Anaḥnu Ushkheneynu* Ben-Gurion’s language underscores what he perceives to be the underlying unity of world politics and the shared values of nations struggling for self-rule. He points out that even world superpowers have stakes in establishing self-determination, and explains that the press of Europe is deliberating fiercely over the future of the East generally, and of Israel specifically.<sup>80</sup> In his chapter on the importance of the political situation in India, *Mizraḥ ye-ma’aray*, Ben-Gurion explains that India’s internal politics is far too complicated to be understood by the average person, even by Ben-Gurion himself.<sup>81</sup> However, he writes, “there is one thing which is simple and clear: the burning desire of the nations of India to express their national and political identity and autonomy.”<sup>82</sup> Within India’s intense political

---

<sup>78</sup> *Likrat ha’atid*, 1/7.

<sup>79</sup> *Ha-medynyut haḥytsonyt shel ha’am ha’ivyri*, 8/9.

<sup>80</sup> *Likrat ha’atid*, 1/7.

<sup>81</sup> Rough translation by the author.

<sup>82</sup> *Mizraḥ ye-ma’aray*, 1/2.

intricacies Ben-Gurion unearths and sharply defines one goal: political self-rule. He believes it is incumbent upon imperialists as well as all nations of the world to assist in these struggles. In a dying imperial system, former powers must help.

As encouraged as Ben-Gurion clearly is by the visible weakening of imperialism and the increasing sense of self-determination as a goal,<sup>83</sup> he also writes that nations themselves bear the heaviest burden for creating national realities. While he seeks the formal support and assistance, monetary and otherwise, of international organizations, political parties and superpowers, he ultimately bestows the weighty responsibility of Zionism's end goal upon his fellow Jews. They must cultivate a sense of shared history in Eretz Israel because this, Ben-Gurion asserts, will be the most effective source of support for Jewish admission to the world.<sup>84</sup> Ben-Gurion illuminates, "The national right of Israel is not, by nature, automatic from an external agreement, nor is it dependent on foreign desires. It flows from the unbroken connection the Jews have with their historical homeland."<sup>85</sup> Without that basis for Jewish nationalism the Zionist movement – and the Jewish state – could not exist, and without a collective consciousness of Jewish history, rooted in the "Jewish homeland," the Jews could not be successful in establishing a Jewish state.

In fact, despite all his pontification about Jewish nation-building in the international arena (and the Jews joining the rest of the world by creating their own nation), Ben-Gurion also implies that the most natural and most productive foundation for Jewish nation-building will be, literally, physical Jewish nation-building. This not only applies to Israel but to other nations as well, for Ben-Gurion writes, "Nations aren't received, but rather conquered."<sup>86</sup> They must be

---

<sup>83</sup> Here I refer to the United States and Europe, Wilson's 14 Points, and internationally based conversations about the value of sovereignty. This is Western-centric, to be sure.

<sup>84</sup> Hanaḥot le- ḵ yya't meeshtar mamlakhty be-Am Yisrael<sup>h</sup> , 1/7.

<sup>85</sup> Hanaḥot le- ḵ yya't meeshtar mamlakhty be-Am Yisrael<sup>h</sup> , 1/7.

<sup>86</sup> Likrat ha'atid, 7/7.

slowly settled and built from the ground up if nations want self-determination, and so he writes to his Jewish constituents, “we must conquer our land by building it.”<sup>87</sup> Ironically, and despite all Ben-Gurion wrote about international relations and the Jewish state, Ben-Gurion also writes that no international body can give Israel to the Jews. They must take it through building: “Diplomacy and rights given to us by others cannot establish... [the Jewish state of] Israel; only hard work can. Legal rights to this land are not compulsory; they will be outcomes of our work.”<sup>88</sup> In Ben-Gurion’s *Anahnu Ushkheneynu* there is no sense of inevitability with regard to Jewish statehood, for it is contingent upon Jewish labor. Herein lies one tension (and perhaps contradiction) in Ben-Gurion’s work: as important as it is for Jews to join the international community by self-determining in their own land, it is also crucial for them to internally build the land themselves.

As we will see below, in discussing labor in Palestine, Ben-Gurion sees all Jews (and even Arabs) as equal workers. He envisions a society in Palestine within the bounds of a Socialist framework borrowed from abroad but deeply implemented locally.

### *Labor at Home and Abroad: A Socialist-Internationalist-Zionist Vision of the World?*

Many scholars, such as Zeev Sternhell, claim that David Ben-Gurion was a Jewish nationalist first and foremost who merely used socialism as “a tool of national aims.”<sup>89</sup> Such scholars have an unbending view of Ben-Gurion’s Zionism as statist and national and dismiss his Socialism as a sham, a disguise for a pure, unadulterated Jewish nationalism. Such scholars render Ben-Gurion’s politics more facile than they are in reality, especially in his early years of

---

<sup>87</sup> Likrat ha’atid, 7/7

<sup>88</sup> Likrat ha’atid, 3/7

<sup>89</sup> Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel*, 19.

political activity (during the decades examined in this paper). They ignore or dismiss the nuances of Ben-Gurion's beliefs and look only for his uncontaminated nationalist Zionism.

Yosef Gorny counteracts this limiting view of Ben-Gurion and of other contemporaneous leaders within the movement, proposing a "flexible view" of early Zionism that does not overlook the supra-nationalist (international) elements of the movement such as its views on Socialism at home and abroad.<sup>90</sup> In his article, "Reflections on Zeev Sternhell's Nation-Building or a New Society? The Zionist Labor Movement 1904 - 1940 and the Origins of Israel: The Historical Reality of Constructive Socialism," Gorny asserts that for early Zionists the "establishment of a nationalist society... was achieved precisely because of the Socialist ethos and myth." Gorny writes that Sternhell incorrectly "contends that all this [Zionism's goal of a Jewish state] was achieved through the means of the concealed nationalist ideology of the elite leadership of the movement"<sup>91</sup> when actually, the Jewish labor movement helped bring the Jewish state to fruition. The Gorny-Sternhell debate illuminates one of the core disputes in the literature on David Ben-Gurion: was he really a socialist? A closer look at *Anahnu Ushkheneynu* reveals that he thought and wrote a great deal about Socialism, and through internationalist eyes.

Indeed, in *Anahnu Ushkheneynu* Ben-Gurion examines the universality of the international Socialist "worker" at length, showing that Socialism can bring the world closer together if workers identify with one another. Ben-Gurion also points out that the freedom of the "worker" and the nation – especially the Jewish nation – go hand in hand,<sup>92</sup> and that Socialists can work to ensure self-determination. He writes that the world's "workers" must offer their

---

<sup>90</sup> Yosef Gorny, Reflections on Zeev Sternhell's Nation-Building or a New Society? The Zionist Labor Movement 1904 - 1940 and the Origins of Israel: The Historical Reality of Constructive Socialism, 297.

<sup>91</sup> Gorny, 299.

<sup>92</sup> Mizrah yē-ma'aray, 2/2.

assistance and empathy to the non-sovereign nations of India in particular, for all “workers” (meaning Socialist workers) can identify with the “Indian worker” and his vulnerability to oppressors. Ben-Gurion locates in Socialism a shared linguistic for national struggles of self-determination and attempts to forge a critical, worldwide Socialist mass in support of national self-determination. He emphasizes that “working” citizens around the world can toil jointly with the common goals of eradicating imperialism and establishing their political autonomies.<sup>93</sup> He writes, “there is only one foundation upon which to organize workers of two different nations, and that is the connection they both have to notions of equality and autonomy.” Ben-Gurion continues: “The relationship between the workers of two nations must be based on the equality of both entities and their internal freedom and independence.”<sup>94</sup> Ben-Gurion implies that nations must be regarded as equals in order to start a dialogue, and that the Socialist worker can be the starting point for this equality. In this paradigm the national entities and their workers must be both separate and together; they must maintain their national characteristics, or their “internal freedom and independence,” while also coalescing as equal partners on a conjoined, politically oriented, internationalist mission: creating and sustaining self-determination.

David Ben-Gurion also argues for a united, global Socialist drive toward Jewish independent rule in Palestine, writing, “Together with all workers now we expect to renew Socialism.”<sup>95</sup> His proposed Socialism for Palestine, after all, is based on broader international Socialist values and borrows heavily from the ideologies and practices of other Socialist countries. Anita Shapira notes that for Ben-Gurion, especially in his early years, Vladimir Lenin

---

<sup>93</sup> Yesodot ha-'irgun ha-beyn leumi, 1/4.

<sup>94</sup> Yesodot ha-'irgun ha-beyn leumi, 1/4.

<sup>95</sup> Ha-medynuyt haḥytsonyt shel ha'am ha'iyri, 2/9.

“symbolized... the ideal qualities of the leader of a nation in crisis and at times of revolution.”<sup>96</sup>

By looking externally out from Palestine for his Socialism, Ben-Gurion hoped to unite Zionism with the geographically broader Socialist community and working toward establishing Socialism at home and around the world. He figured that Socialist party could advance its own objectives and Am Yisrael’s concurrently if it implemented Socialism in Palestine. In his *Anahnu Ushkheneynu* chapter ‘l gyulei erets yisra’el (“On the Borders of Eretz Israel”), Ben-Gurion mentions, in passing, a 1919 memorandum in which Zionists appealed to the International Socialist Movement to demand certain borders.<sup>97</sup> To Ben-Gurion, unity with the larger Socialist world was one important way in which Zionism could strengthen its own movement, so he speaks directly to the Socialists in this memorandum about his own ideas for potential Israeli borders to enlist their help.

Ben-Gurion also describes the failing Socialism of other countries, and implies that Zionists could provide the world with an example of a thriving Socialist society. As Anita Shapira puts it, Ben-Gurion had “hoped that Western and Eastern Europe would become federations of democratic and socialist states,” giving him more Socialist allies, so he was sorely disappointed when this failed.<sup>98</sup> In 1925, when Poland changed its currency laws and led thousands of Jews hoping to immigrate to Palestine into bankruptcy, Ben-Gurion travelled to a Jewish workers’ assembly there to speak about “the primacy of the worker in the realization of Zionism” and to excite young Jewish Socialists, making these workers feel important and relevant, wanted and needed, in Palestine.<sup>99</sup> Ben-Gurion rallied the Jewish Socialists of Poland

---

<sup>96</sup> Shapira, 71.

<sup>97</sup> ‘l gyulei erets yisra’el, 2/3.

<sup>98</sup> Shapira, 244.

<sup>99</sup> Shapira, 74.

because there, Socialism was not the basis of society at the time; the Socialist party there was not hegemonic. Ben-Gurion also describes the disappointment of the Socialist experiment in other countries when he writes, the Socialists of the world “depended [or hung] on the Socialism of Germany and Russia, and we were all disappointed.”<sup>100</sup> In those places, Socialism did not achieve equality amongst workers, a new ethos of collectivity, or the other goals of the movement as Ben-Gurion saw it.

In Ben-Gurion’s view, the ultimate unity of Socialist individuals should be mirrored in Palestine’s multinational society: Arab and Jewish workers should join forces. He writes at length about how Zionists interested in building their Jewish homeland must connect with the Arabs who are already living and working in Palestine. He sees in Arabs an opportunity to foster a mutual desire for a fertile, thriving Eretz Israeli future. He articulates a compelling hope by crafting a joint vision of Arab-Jewish labor in the Land of Israel, expressing that Arabs and Jews are “equal partners” in the shared goal of labor in the land and that Arabs and Jews must come “shoulder to shoulder” to ensure a productive future nation.<sup>101</sup> Ben-Gurion’s insistence upon the equality of citizens or, more accurately, workers, within Israel and within each nation is striking. It is also resonant of Ben-Gurion’s other musings on the universality of the “worker of the world”: just as international workers must come to the aid of Indian workers still shackled by colonialism, so must Arab and Jewish labors find mutual understanding in order to most productively work together.

Ben-Gurion even addresses the disunifying issue of language here as he acknowledges that the Jews arriving in Palestine speak numerous languages whereas most of the Arabs speak

---

<sup>100</sup> Ha-medynyt hahtsonyt shel ha’am ha’iyri, 2/9.

<sup>101</sup> Ha-medynyt hahtsonyt shel ha’am ha’iyri, 9/9

Arabic. He explains that one of the chief challenges of the labor movement in Palestine will be “to ensure that everyone can understand Hebrew” because if Jews continued to speak Yiddish, German, and other languages in Israel, and if Arabs continued to only speak Arabic, then they would not be able to work efficiently as one unit.<sup>102</sup> He writes, “Arab workers who can [now understand Hebrew] are far better off than those who can’t.”<sup>103</sup> Ben-Gurion also writes of the Jewish and Arab workers of Palestine, “together they will rise, or together they will fall.”<sup>104</sup> With a shared fate they must comprehend that only communal work can best yield a productive future for the collective. This notion relates to Ben-Gurion’s ideas about Arab “national” rights, privileges, and responsibilities, which will be discussed below.

*Ben-Gurion’s Arabs: The Rights of a (Subsumed) National Community*

In the above-cited portion of *Anahnu Ushkheneynu*, Ben-Gurion implies that Arabs must learn Hebrew to attain jobs and be productive in the workforce. This amounts to a subsuming of the national culture of the Arabs, which was based in Arabic dialects and distinctive customs.

However, Ben-Gurion also sees the Arabs as equals and recognizes that his views on self-determination for all nations, explored earlier in this paper, must include Arabs by default. He proposes that Arabs and Jews have equal citizenship status in the future Jewish state: “every person who resides in Israel will have rights to citizenship *without differences between their citizenship statuses*.”<sup>105</sup> There is an apparent tension within his Zionist (and internationalist) vision vis-à-vis the Arabs: they are to be part of a *Jewish* state, and yet, they are to be equals

---

<sup>102</sup> Yesodot ha-’irgun ha-beyn leumi, 2/4.

<sup>103</sup> Yesodot ha-’irgun ha-beyn leumi, 2/4.

<sup>104</sup> She’elat ha-myshtar ve-yahašey sheynym, 2/3.

<sup>105</sup> Hanaḥot le- k vya’t meeshtar mamlakhty be-Am Yisrael, 2/7.



within this state. Ben-Gurion hopes to achieve this equality by granting the Arabs autonomy in several spheres, clarifying, “We must promise internal autonomy in relevant cultural, economic and social issues to all national-religious groups who inhabit Israel.”<sup>106</sup> Ben-Gurion also wrote, “we must be responsible for the fate of all those who live in Israel,”<sup>107</sup> and that to deny Palestine’s inhabitants the rights to some degree of self-determination would be to create an Israeli fate of inequality and restrictions. And yet, they must learn Hebrew and be members of a Jewish state. Ben-Gurion does not resolve this tension, and in many ways the tension remains as yet unresolved in contemporary Israel.

Ben-Gurion also acknowledged that Jewish rule, or even Arab rule, of the entirety of Palestine could not work in the contemporaneous international or national context, nor in the future. He deemed it “entirely inappropriate”<sup>108</sup> for the Jews to rule over the whole land of Palestine or to even attempt to constitute a majority there. He at once “recognized the Arabs’ rights to complete national and political equality”<sup>109</sup> and rejected the Arab “claim to exclusive possession of the country” just as he rejected Jewish hegemony over all the land.<sup>110</sup> Lest Ben-Gurion ignore the *zehoot olamit* he spends pages discussing in *Anahnu Ushkheneynu*, or the universal/“global right”<sup>111</sup> to self-determination, he was careful to recognize the rights of the Arabs in many of the chapters of *Anahnu Ushkheneynu*, but not at the cost of Jewish autonomy in Palestine (alongside Arab autonomy).

---

<sup>106</sup> Zekhuyot ha-yehudi ve-zulatam be’am Yisrael, 2/3.

<sup>107</sup> Ha-medynyt hahtsonyt shel ha’am ha’iyri, 2/9.

<sup>108</sup> Anita Shapira, *Ben-Gurion: Father of Modern Israel*, trans. Anthony Berris (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2014), 85.

<sup>109</sup> Anita Shapira, *Ben-Gurion: Father of Modern Israel*, trans. Anthony Berris (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2014), 85.

<sup>110</sup> Anita Shapira, *Ben-Gurion: Father of Modern Israel*, trans. Anthony Berris (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2014), 85.

<sup>111</sup> Likrat ha’atid, 2/7.

And yet, even in explaining the Zionist duty to protect the autonomy of the Arabs, he clearly sees the Jews as superior leaders in this land. He writes, “the autonomy which we demand, we also demand for the Arabs,” but he qualifies this with: “but we do not acknowledge their right to control the [Eretz Israeli] land inasmuch as it hasn’t, of yet, been built by their hands, and Israel is lacking development as a result.”<sup>112</sup> He calls the Arab workers ignorant<sup>113</sup> and primitive, criticizing their work ethic and their inability to cultivate Eretz Israeli land to its fullest potential. He minimizes their efforts by claiming, “The few Arabs there are in Israel are not capable of reviving and resuscitating Israel and its land.”<sup>114</sup> Ben-Gurion clarifies that this Arab incompetence is not only due to the small size of the Arab population relative to the physical expansiveness of Eretz Israeli land, but rather is because Arab workers are incapable and unqualified to do the kind of work that the Jews plan to, and allegedly can, do in Eretz Israel. Anita Shapira echoes this sentiment, arguing that for Ben-Gurion, one major goal of the Jewish workers’ movement “was to enhance the standing and progress of the Arab worker” because Jewish labor party members considered the Arabs to be insufficiently organized and indolent.<sup>115</sup> In the 1920s, as the then-leader of the *Histadrut* (Jewish labor movement), Ben-Gurion could prioritize organizing the Arab worker, and he did.<sup>116</sup> He saw it as a Jewish duty to improve the Arabs and his policies reflect that view.<sup>117</sup> He considered it a Jewish mission to help “raise” Arab workers’ “standards of living” which were apparently not up to par.<sup>118</sup>

---

<sup>112</sup>She’elat ha-myshtar ve-yahašey sheynym, 2/3.

<sup>113</sup> She’elat ha-myshtar ve-yahašey sheynym, 2/3.

<sup>114</sup> Likrat ha’atid, 4/7.

<sup>115</sup> Shapira, 83.

<sup>116</sup> Shapira, 84.

<sup>117</sup> Shapira, 84.

<sup>118</sup> Ha-medynyut hahtsonyt shel ha’am ha’iyri, 8/9.

Ben-Gurion's language is especially regnant of the sentiment conveyed in Edward Said's book *Orientalism*<sup>119</sup> when he writes about bettering Arab culture. Said is known for defining the cultural representations that the West produces of the East: patronizing, condescending and essentialist portraits of culture. Ben-Gurion at times appears to be a "Westerner" looking in on the Arab "East," and molding it to his fancy and patronizing it beneath his own Zionists. He writes, "Our goal is not expressly to oppose the Arabs, but rather to resuscitate the Holy Land, increase economic opportunities there, *to raise the standard of culture there.*"<sup>120</sup> In that regard the Arabs were supposedly ideologically malleable just like the economic and physical landscape of Eretz Israel. In fact, Ben-Gurion literally saw Arabs as "part of the land itself,"<sup>121</sup> and just as the Jews could shape the land, so too they could shape its inhabitants. Ben-Gurion's Zionism frames Arabs through a lens of patronizing improvement: "Zionism's real and truest aspiration is not to conquer the land, but rather to strengthen the areas that the inhabitants do not live in and that they don't have the strength to build up."<sup>122</sup>

It is no surprise that visual art from this period which attests to the same sentiment: Reuven Rubin's painting "First Fruits" (1923) comes to mind, in which the Arabs are relegated to the side panels and laze on the ground while the Jews of the central panel plot and plant land that sprouts with greenery and bursts with watermelons and oranges.<sup>123</sup> The Arabs of this painting are certainly "part of the land"<sup>124</sup> as Ben-Gurion described, seeming to blend in with the

---

<sup>119</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, New York: Random House/Pantheon Books, 1978).

<sup>120</sup> Likrat ha'atid, 5/7.

<sup>121</sup> She'elat ha-myshtar ve-yahašey sheynym, 2/3.

<sup>122</sup> Zekhuyot ha-yehudi ve-zulatam be'am Yisrael, 2/3.

<sup>123</sup> [http://www.museumsinrael.gov.il/en/items/Pages/ItemCard.aspx?IdItem=ICMS\\_IMJ\\_40345](http://www.museumsinrael.gov.il/en/items/Pages/ItemCard.aspx?IdItem=ICMS_IMJ_40345)  
2. Accessed 3 April 2017.

<sup>124</sup> She'elat ha-myshtar ve-yahašey sheynym, 2/3.

landscape itself.<sup>125</sup> One of them even plays a flute to the left of a camel's bottom. The two figures are different shades of the same color; the flute player's clothing blends in with the mountain behind him and appears as an extension of the ass of a camel. When Ben-Gurion writes, "I believe that we have an important history of lifting the Arab worker up,"<sup>126</sup> perhaps he is thinking of paintings such as these and their portrayal of the Zionist reality.

Yet for all his condescension, Ben-Gurion still explains that nothing could be forced upon the Arabs. He writes, "We must not try to build a society 'better than' the Arabs; people who want this kind of 'world peace' lock the door on mutual understanding between us and the Arabs."<sup>127</sup> He concedes here that the Jews could not render a "better" version of Israel compulsory for the Arabs, for this will not promote amity between the groups. He also is quite clear that the future Zionist state is not to be physically oppressive: "In no circumstance should we harm or strike any of Israel's inhabitants... Where it seems or feels like we have that right, we are not to exercise it."<sup>128</sup>

Perhaps the tension of Ben-Gurion's writings on Arabs is most tangible when he details the specific ideas he has about Arab autonomy. Anita Shapira points out that Ben-Gurion hoped to skirt the issue almost completely by ensuring a "Jewish settlement in Palestine" that was on contiguous territory<sup>129</sup> so that it could most easily be self-governing. She writes, "Jews tended to settle in separate rural or urban settlements, and Ben-Gurion hoped that this spontaneous process would lead to the creation of contiguous Jewish areas" rather than "mixed-population cities."<sup>130</sup>

---

<sup>125</sup> Dalia Manor, *Art in Zion: The Genesis of Modern National Art in Jewish Palestine*, 95.

<sup>126</sup> *She'elat ha-myshtar ve-yahašey sheynym*, 2/3.

<sup>127</sup> *Ha-medynyut haḥytsonyt shel ha'am ha'iyri*, 4/9.

<sup>128</sup> *Zekhuyot ha-yehudi ve-zulatam be'am Yisrael*, 2/3.

<sup>129</sup> Shapira, 84.

<sup>130</sup> Shapira, 84.

Ben-Gurion apparently hoped that the Arab territories would be contiguous and could therefore be autonomous as well, and that the two nations would not interfere in each others' affairs.

Contiguity aside, though, Ben-Gurion devoted much time to thinking about what Arab autonomy in Palestine might look like.<sup>131</sup> It is clear from the above-mentioned section on Socialism that Ben-Gurion hoped Jewish and Arab workers would work side by side to build the land, but he also hoped that Arabs would learn Hebrew (rather than Jews learning Arabic). This does not, though, indicate that Ben-Gurion lent no agency (or autonomy) to Arab workers organizing themselves. For example, he wanted Arab and Jewish organizations to *jointly* manage workers' medical needs because "Israel owes all its workers medical care."<sup>132</sup> In discussing workers in Eretz Israel Ben-Gurion also writes, "It is not my place to speak for Arab workers and what they want and need to do. They should speak for themselves."<sup>133</sup> Speaking for them in an international (or even national) setting might violate their self-representation and their autonomy.

### *Conclusion: David Ben-Gurion's "Imagined Community"*

In his book title, *Imagined Communities*, Anderson refers to *nations* as communities that are imagined. But David Ben-Gurion *imagined* an *International Community* in much the same

---

<sup>131</sup> In his article "Zionism and the Nation-State: A Reappraisal," Dmitry Shumsky recovers the autonomy concept from David Ben-Gurion's intellectual arsenal (Shumsky, 6). He shows that Ben-Gurion called for both Jewish and Arab autonomous regions in Palestine because one body of law simply could not suit all of Palestine's inhabitants (Shumsky, 6). Shumsky's research underscores the ways in which Ben-Gurion's early political thought on Arabs and Jews in Palestine related more tightly to his more international notions of self-determination than scholars previously thought, and that Ben-Gurion viewed Arabs and Jews as a sort of "federation" rather than two separate states or one unified Jewish state.

<sup>132</sup>Yahasei 'al shkheineinu, 2/2.

<sup>133</sup> Yesodot ha-'irgun ha-beyn leumi, 2/4.

way that Anderson claims peoples imagined nations into being: he was an *internationalist* who saw nation and world order as inseparable twins, born together and unable to survive without one another.

This essay has attempted to recover David Ben-Gurion's forgotten worldview and his neglected internationalism. It establishes that much of the scholarship on Ben-Gurion focuses on the parts of his early Zionism having to do with the Jewish state's projected internal politics: the kind of state it would be politically, economically, legally, and culturally. Such scholarship is vital to an understanding of early Zionism's goals and aspirations as well as the course of events that led to the founding of the Jewish state of Israel in 1948. The genealogy of Ben-Gurion's "statist" ideas vis-à-vis Israel have filled in crucial gaps in the history of Zionism while Dmitry Shumsky's revisionist work has demonstrated that not all Ben-Gurion's ideas were "statist," that he perhaps cared more about autonomy than sovereignty. Still, even Shumsky's work does not contextualize Ben-Gurion's political ideas into the broader world history of ideas, nor does it relate them to his own international politics. Furthermore, Shumsky's work is the only English-language scholarship to wrestle deeply with *Anahnu Ushkheneynu*, which has itself never been fully translated into English.<sup>134</sup> By rescuing this primary source from virtual oblivion, at least in English-language secondary sources, this essay seeks to illuminate the broad scope of Ben-Gurion's politics – the ways in which he imagined Israel would relate to the rest of the world and its nations.

For Ben-Gurion, and for the world in this pre-World War II moment, a lot hinged on the concept of internationalism. It provided a unique model of what the world was going to be, how

---

<sup>134</sup> Other works, such as Anita Shapira's and Shabtai Teveth's biographies, mention *Anahnu Ushkheneynu* in passing but do not spend time analyze the contents anthology.

much sovereignty nations needed, and how nations operated in the world. In Ben-Gurion's time world leaders were hopeful that national rights could be safeguarded at the international level, and that the global community would work together to establish harmony and peace. But by the time World War II ended, everything changed; no longer did leaders in the international community imagine a world in which nations of the world could amicably ensure "minority rights" or peace in their own land. In October 1945 the United Nations was formed, ending the era of colonialism and beginning the eon of self-determination. So perhaps it is true that the multinational state idea ended in Zionist internationalism; but it is also true that Zionism could anchor itself in a new kind of world order, continuing the legacy of Zionist Internationalism we have found in David Ben-Gurion's early years.

Still, in order to fully grasp David Ben-Gurion's Zionism, we must contextualize his early writings within the emerging world order of the Wilsonian Moment. His internationalist politics are tied tightly to his nationalist politics, and many of his ideas about the Jewish nation depended on ideas outside of this entity completely. Without that context we risk seeing his Jewish nationalism in a vacuum and missing its relationship with concepts far broader than the Jewish nation.

So, what does all of this matter? Does Ben-Gurion's internationalism represent merely a road not taken? In 1936 Arab riots stretched across Palestine as armed insurrectionists demanded that the British Mandate stop Jewish immigration. By the 1940s, Ben-Gurion began to see how attached the Arabs were to the land of Palestine, and he began to doubt that Jews and Arabs could peacefully coexist there. His views toward the Arabs turned increasingly militant, and Benny Morris even argues that Ben-Gurion "covered up for... officers" who were responsible

for massacres of Arab people in the year of Israeli independence.<sup>135</sup> In 1939 Hitler began marching across Europe, wiping out the Jews in his wake until the Allied defeat of Germany in 1945. In 1948, Israel became a *Jewish* state, not a federation of Arabs and Jews as Ben-Gurion had envisioned; Arabs were not given the autonomy Ben-Gurion wrote about in *Anahnu Ushkheneynu*, nor might they have wanted it under the rule of a Jewish state. In the late 1940s India and Pakistan experienced extreme violence with their partition and new postcolonial order, and the many nations in these two countries were not all granted self-determination or autonomy in the breakup of the world's empires as Ben-Gurion had hoped. Indeed, many nations of the world did not find themselves with new sovereign statuses, and Ben-Gurion's conception of autonomy became a thing of the past, both for him and for the rest of the world.

Still, David Ben-Gurion's international politics lived, and live, on in many ways. As the first Prime Minister of the State of Israel and Minister of Defense, Ben-Gurion built state institutions and national projects by working closely with other countries, especially North America. A cornerstone of his foreign policy was the Reparations Agreement between Israel and West Germany in which Germans provided restitutions for Nazi Germany's looting Jewish property during the Holocaust. In March 1957 Ben-Gurion was on the cover of the American weekly publication *Time Magazine*.<sup>136</sup> The centerpiece article of the issue, entitled "Israel: The Watchman of Zion,"<sup>137</sup> begins by describing the "huge map" which hangs on the wall of "his unpretentious office" in Jerusalem, where Ben-Gurion frequently reminds himself of "how small

---

<sup>135</sup> "Survival of the Fittest," by Ari Shavit. Interview with Benny Morris. January 8, 2004. Haaretz. <https://www.haaretz.com/1.5262454>

<sup>136</sup> Time Magazine, Volume LXIX, No. 10. March 11, 1957. Accessed 11 February 2018. <http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19570311,00.html>

<sup>137</sup> "Israel: The Watchman of Zion." Time Magazine, Volume LXIX, No. 10. March 11, 1957. Accessed 11 February 2018. <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,824717,00.html>



we are” as a Jewish nation relative to the surrounding Muslim world. Perhaps Time Magazine opens with Ben-Gurion’s international perspective not by coincidence but because in the late 1950s his international perspective still guided his national and internal policy-making.

Beyond Ben-Gurion’s life, internationalism lives on in Israeli foreign policy even today. One need only consult the New York Times to see the most recent iterations of Israeli internationalism and the distinctively Israeli way conducting international relations, as well as the perceived Israeli ethical duty to help other nations in need and to interfere in other countries’ affairs when they seem to violate some international ethical code. In 2010 Israel lent its aid to Haiti in the midst of a devastating earthquake, flying into the country with relief teams of doctors and other aid workers.<sup>138</sup> In 2017 the New York Times wrote that Israel had been “quietly” whisking sick Syrian children and families into Israel for treatment and delivering truckloads of supplies to Syrian villages through a constructed security fence.<sup>139</sup> In February 2018 the Polish Senate passed legislation that makes it “illegal to blame Poles for crimes committed by Nazi Germany” and Israel quickly stepped in to protest, as Benjamin Netanyahu equated the new law to denying the Holocaust and the Israeli Foreign Ministry “postpone[d] a planned visit by a top Polish national security official.”<sup>140</sup>

Perhaps traces of Ben-Gurion’s internationalism are still evident today. Perhaps it didn’t die completely though Woodrow Wilson’s 14 Points, and that strain of internationalism, largely

---

<sup>138</sup> Bronner, Ethan. “For Israelis, Mixed Feelings on Aid Effort.” *New York Times*, January 21, 2010. Accessed 10 February 2018.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/22/world/middleeast/22israel.html>

<sup>139</sup> Kershner, Isabel. “Israeli Aid Gives an Unexpected ‘Glimmer of Home’ for Syrians.” *New York Times*, July 20, 2017. Accessed 11 February 2018.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/20/world/middleeast/israel-syria-humanitarian-aid.html>

<sup>140</sup> Marc Santora and Joanna Berendt. “Poland Tries to Curb Holocaust Speech, and Israel Puts Up a Fight.” *New York Times*, February 1, 2018. Accessed 11 February 2018.

did. And perhaps just as David Ben-Gurion's internationalism brings his nationalism to life, giving us a deeper understanding of it, so does Israeli foreign policy help to contextualize the national policies of Zionism more broadly.

## Bibliography

"Israel: The Watchman of Zion." *Time Magazine*, Volume LXIX, No. 10. March 11, 1957.

Accessed 11 February 2018.

<http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,824717,00.html>

Allon, Gal. "David Ben-Gurion's Zionist Foreign Policy, 1938 - 48: The Democratic Factor."

*Israel Affairs* 10, no. 1/2 (Autumn/Winter 2004): 13–28.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of*

Nationalism. London: Verso, 2006.

Aronson, Shlomo. *David Ben-Gurion and the Jewish Renaissance*. New York, New York:

Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Barnett, Michael N. *Israel in Comparative Perspective: Challenging the Conventional Wisdom*.

New York: State University of New York Press, 1996.

Bar-Zohar, Michael. *Ben-Gurion: A Biography*. Translated by Peretz Kidron, Delacorte Press,

1978.

Ben-Gurion, David. *Anahnu Ushkheneynu*. Davar, Tel Aviv, 1931. Online version:

[http://benyehuda.org/ben\\_gurion/](http://benyehuda.org/ben_gurion/). Accessed 15 November 2016.

Berent, Moshe. "Does Israel Have a Navel? Anthony Smith and Zionism." *Israel Studies*

Review, Volume 30, Issue 2, Winter 2015: 28–49. Association for Israel Studies. doi:

10.3167/isr.2015.300203

- Brenner, Michael. Translated by Shelley L. Frisch. *Zionism: A Brief History*. Princeton, New Jersey: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2003.
- Cohen, Mitchell. *Zion and State: Nation, Class, and the Shaping of Modern Israel*. Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1987.
- Dubnov, Arie M. "Notes on the Zionist Passage to India, or: The Analogical Imagination and Its Boundaries." *Journal of Israeli History* 35, no. 2 (2016): 177–214.  
doi:10.1080/13531042.2016.1244040.
- Gorny, Yosef. *From Binational Society to Jewish State: Federal Concepts in Zionist Political Thought, 1920 - 1990, and the Jewish People*. Brill, 2006.
- Gorny, Yosef. "Negation of the Galut and the Centrality of Israel: Nahum Goldmann and David Ben-Gurion," pages 75 – 92. In *Nahum Goldmann: Statesman Without a State*. Edited by Mark M. Raider. New York: SUNY Press and Tel Aviv University, 2009.
- Gorny, Yosef. "Reflections on Zeev Sternhell's Nation-Building or a New Society? The Zionist Labor Movement 1904 - 1940 and the Origins of Israel: The Historical Reality of Constructive Socialism." *Israel Studies* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 295–305.  
doi:<http://www.jstor.org/stable/30245482>.
- Halpern, Ben. *Zionism and the Creation of a New Society*. Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Kedar, Nir. "Ben-Gurion's Mamlakhtiyut: Etymological and Theoretical Roots." *Israel Studies* 7, no. 3 (Fall 2002): 117–30.
- Loeffler, James. "Becoming Cleopatra: the forgotten Zionism of Raphael Lemkin," *Journal of Genocide Research* 19:3 (July 2017): 340-360.
- Loeffler, James. *Rooted Cosmopolitans: Jews and Human Rights in the Twentieth Century* (Yale University Press, 2018).

- Manela, Erez. *The Wilsonian Moment : Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism*. Oxford ; New York :Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Manor, Dalia. *Art in Zion: The Genesis of Modern National Art in Jewish Palestine*. New York, New York: Routledge Curzon, 2005.
- Myers, David. “Rethinking Sovereignty and Autonomy: New Currents in the History of Jewish Nationalism.” *Open Access, De Gruyter* 13, no. 1 (March 2015): 44–51. doi:10.1515/tra-2015-0006.
- Pianko, Noam. “‘The True Liberalism of Zionism’: Horace Kallen, Jewish Nationalism, and the Limits of American Pluralism. *American Jewish History*, Volume 94, Number 4 (December 2008): 299 – 329. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1353/ajh.0.0093>.
- Penslar, Derek, and Kaplan Eran, editors. *The Origins of Israel, 1882 - 1948: A Documentary History*. The University of Wisconsin Press, 2011.
- Schwartz, Katrina. *Nature and National Identity after Communism: Globalizing the Ethnoscape*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York, New York: Random House/Pantheon Books, 1978.
- Segev, Tom. *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs Under the British Mandate*. Holt Paperbacks, Henry Hold and Company, LLC, 2000.
- Sears, Laurie. Book Review. Reviewed Work: “Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism by Benedict Anderson.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. Volume 114, No. 1 (Jan. – Mar., 1994), pp. 129 – 130, accessed March 25, 2018. doi: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/604991>

- Shapira, Anita. "Ben-Gurion and the Bible: The Forging of an Historical Narrative?" *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 33, no. 4, Oct. 1997, pp. 645–74, doi:<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4283903>.
- Shapira, Anita. *Ben-Gurion: Father of Modern Israel*. Translated by Anthony Berris. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2014.
- Shapira, Anita. "Labour Zionism and the October Revolution." *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 24, no. 4, Oct. 1989, pp. 623–56, doi:<http://www.jstor.org/stable/260882>.
- Shapira, Anita. "The Zionist Labor Movement and the Hebrew University." *Judaism*, vol. 45, no. 2, Spring 1996, pp. 183–98.
- Shavit, Ari. "Survival of the Fittest." January 8, 2004. Haaretz. Accessed 11 February 2018. <https://www.haaretz.com/1.5262454>
- Shimoni, Gideon. *The Zionist Ideology*. Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 1995.
- Shumsky, Dimitry. "Zionism and the Nation-State: A Reappraisal," (Hebrew), *Zion* (2012), 223–254.
- Sluga, Glenda. *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.
- Sternhell, Zeev. *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State*. Translated by David Maisel. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998.
- Tal, David. "David Ben-Gurion's Teleological Westernism." *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 10, no. 3 (November 2011): 351–64.

Teveth, Shabtai. *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs: From Peace to War*. Oxford University Press, 1985.

Teveth, Shabtai. *Ben-Gurion: The Burning Ground, 1886 - 1948*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987.

Vital, David. *The Origins of Zionism*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1975.

Waxman, Dov, and Scott Lasensky. "Jewish Foreign Policy: Israel, World Jewry and the Defence of 'Jewish Interests.'" *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 12, no. 2 (July 2013): 232–52. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14725886.2013.796153>.