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# From Federalism to Binationalism: Hannah Arendt's Shifting Zionism

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## Abstract

*The German-Jewish intellectual Hannah Arendt (1906–1975) had famously opposed the establishment of a Jewish nation state in Palestine. During the Second World War, however, Arendt also spoke out repeatedly against the establishment of a binational Arab-Jewish state. Rejecting both alternatives, Arendt advocated for the inclusion of Palestine in a multi-ethnic federation that would not consist only of Jews and Arabs. Only in 1948, in an effort to forestall partition, did Arendt revise her earlier critique and endorse a binational solution for Palestine. This article offers a new reading of the evolution of Arendt's thought on Zionism and argues that her support for federalism must be understood as part of a broader wartime debate over federalism as a solution to a variety of post-war nationality problems in Europe, the Middle East and the British Empire. By highlighting the link between debates on wartime federalism and the future of Palestine, this article also underscores the importance of examining the legacy of federalism in twentieth century Europe for a more complete understanding of the history of Zionism.*

During and in the aftermath of the Second World War, the German-Jewish intellectual Hannah Arendt (1906–1975) had advocated solving the Arab-Jewish conflict in Palestine by incorporating Palestine into a large multi-ethnic federation in which Jews and Arabs would not be the only member nations. Arendt's commitment to a federal solution in Palestine was part of her broader political commitment to federalism throughout the 1940s.<sup>1</sup> Arendt called for the creation of a federation in Europe, supported transforming the British Empire into a more inclusive

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I would like to thank Samuel Moyn, Moshe Sluhovskiy, David Biale, Ron Zweig, Nathan Kurz, Simon Taylor and the anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> Arendt's intellectual fascination with federalism predated and extended beyond the 1940s. Yet it was during and in the aftermath of the Second World War, when Arendt believed there existed a real opportunity to reshape the global political order, that her political commitment to federalism was most intense. For the centrality of federalism to Arendt's political thought, see Dirk Moses 'Das römische Gespräch in a New Key: Hannah Arendt, Genocide, and the Defense of Republican Civilization',

Commonwealth of Nations that would grant greater autonomy to its member nationalities and celebrated the United States and the Soviet Union as model federal states.<sup>2</sup> Arendt's staunch support for federalism was based on her analysis of the precariousness of minorities in an ethnic nation state dominated by a majority, an analysis that had been significantly shaped by her experience as a Jew in interwar Europe. Only a multi-ethnic federal political arrangement that would separate the concept of nationality from the state, Arendt argued, would successfully provide minorities with state protection.

Arendt's commitment to federalism and her rejection of the ethnic nation state lay at the centre of her well known opposition to the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine in the 1940s. This same critique, however, also informed Arendt's less well known wartime opposition to the establishment of a binational Arab-Jewish state, a vision advocated at the time by Judah Leon Magnes and the Ihud party.<sup>3</sup> In three different essays written during the war, Arendt decried Magnes' political vision as one of 'inherent falseness and danger' and 'suicidal' and warned that if it were to be realised, 'Palestine might become the worst Diaspora problem of all' for Jews.<sup>4</sup> In Arendt's view, a binational state, like a Jewish nation state, would inevitably replicate the failed interwar model of an ethnic nation state with a majority ruling over a minority. Just as Arabs would be a minority in a Jewish state, Arendt maintained, so

*The Journal of Modern History*, 85, 4 (2013), 867–913, as well as Douglas Klusmeyer, 'Hannah Arendt's Case for Federalism', *Publius* 40, 1 (2010), 31–58.

<sup>2</sup> In several of her wartime essays Arendt portrayed the Second World War as a battle between the principle of the ethnic nation state – represented in its extreme by Nazi Germany – and the federal political model – represented by the United States, the Soviet Union and a future more inclusive British Commonwealth of Nations. Though Arendt is famous for her later critique of the Soviet Union, particularly in her major work *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, during the war she had a more tolerant view of the Soviet state. In her 1943 essay 'The Crisis of Zionism' Arendt wrote: 'There are many problems unsolved in Soviet Russia, and I for one do not believe that even the economic problems have been resolved there, let alone the most important question of political freedom; but one thing has to be admitted: the Russian Revolution found an entirely new and – as far as we can see today – an entirely just way to deal with nationality or minorities. The new historic fact is this: that for the first time in modern history, an identification of nation and state has not even been attempted.' See Hannah Arendt, 'The Crisis of Zionism', in Jerome Kohn and Ron Feldman, eds., *The Jewish Writings* (New York: Schocken, 2007), 336, as well as Arendt, 'The Return of Russian Jewry', *ibid.* 173. For more on Arendt's wartime view of the Soviet Union see Gabriel Piterberg, 'Zion's Rebel Daughter: Hannah Arendt on Palestine and Jewish Politics', *New Left Review*, 48 (2007), 49.

<sup>3</sup> For a comprehensive study of Magnes' engagement with binationalism, see Joseph Heller, *Mi-Berit shalom le-Ihud: Yehudah Layb Magnes yeha-ma'avak li-medinah du-le'umit* (Jerusalem: Magnes University Press, 2003). The literature on Zionist binationalism, particularly on Brit Shalom, the binationalist political organisation that preceded Ihud, is voluminous and expanding. For the most recent works on the topic, see Adi Gordon, ed., *Brit shalom vehatsiyonut haduleumit: 'hasheelah haaravit' kesheelah yehudit* (Jerusalem: Carmel Press, 2008); Dimitri Schumsky, *Ben prag li-yerushalayim: Tsiyonut Prag ve-ra'ayon ha-medinah ha-du-le'umit be Erets Yisra'el* (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center, 2010) and Yfaat Weiss, 'Central European Ethnonationalism and Zionist Binationalism', *Jewish Social Studies* 11, 1 (2004), 93–117. For a recent overview and reconsideration of the scholarship on Brit Shalom and Zionist binationalism, see Steven Aschheim, *Beyond the Border: The German Jewish Legacy Abroad* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 6–44.

<sup>4</sup> Hannah Arendt, 'The Crisis of Zionism', in Kohn and Feldman, eds., *Jewish Writings*, 336; Arendt, 'New Proposals for Jewish-Arab Understanding', *ibid.* 219–21; Arendt, 'Can the Jewish Arab Question be Solved?', *ibid.* 194.

would Jews become a minority in binational state placed within the broader Arab sphere in the Middle East. In 1948, however, Arendt began to support Magnes in his efforts to promote an Arab-Jewish confederation and forestall partition. Alarmed by the danger of an all out war in Palestine, Arendt embraced the political solution she believed would most likely quell hostilities and pave the way to peace.

While scholars have recently emphasised Arendt's commitment to a federal solution in Palestine, they have not adequately distinguished, as Arendt did, between the concepts of federalism and binationalism.<sup>5</sup> Both Judith Butler and Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, for instance, portrayed Arendt's vision of federalism in Palestine as a version of Zionist binationalism, rather than a substantively different and in fact oppositional political approach.<sup>6</sup> Such a reading of Arendt as a supporter of Zionist binationalism has its origins in the late 1990s, a period marked both by the prominence of the 'post-Zionist' discourse in Israeli academia, which challenged the legitimacy of Israel's actions in the war of 1948, and the resurgence of binationalism in the discourse on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict following the failure of the Oslo peace process.<sup>7</sup> Proponents of both programmes embraced Arendt, who repeatedly warned in the 1940s against the implications of Jewish statehood for the Palestinian Arabs, as an important historical predecessor and a source of intellectual inspiration. As one noted Israeli historian put it in 1997, Arendt was an 'early post-Zionist' and her writings 'provide so-called post-Zionists with good arguments, or at least with

<sup>5</sup> The exception is Gabriel Pietersburg's review of Arendt's so-called 'Jewish Writings', a collection of essays Arendt wrote on Jewish themes published in 2007, in which he discusses the distinction Arendt drew between federalism and binationalism. See Pieterberg, 'Zion's Rebel Daughter', 39–57.

<sup>6</sup> Butler discusses Arendt's commitment to federalism in the context of her engagement with Zionism as part of a work whose goal is to advance a new conception of binationalism. While Butler briefly acknowledges Arendt's critique of binationalism, overall she views binationalism and federalism as two different versions of the same political programme. Butler writes, 'By the 1940s, Arendt, Buber and Magnes argued in favor of a binational state, proposing a federation in which Jews and Arabs would maintain their respective cultural autonomy'. See Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 120, as well as Butler, 'I Merely Belong to Them', *London Review of Books*, 10 May 2007. Similarly, Raz-Krakotzkin examines Arendt's thought on federalism in the context of a paper aimed at exploring 'Arendt's political articulation of binationalism'. While he acknowledges Arendt's critique of Magnes, he argues it should be understood 'within a concrete historical situation' and not as a general rejection of the principles of binationalism which he defines as 'the principle that includes the rights of both, that takes into consideration the rights of Palestinians when we discuss the rights of the Jews and vice versa'. Such a broad definition, however, obscures our ability to better understand Arendt's views on Zionism in the 1940s, a decade in which binationalism was not a merely philosophical principle but a concrete political programme that Arendt repeatedly opposed until 1948. See Raz-Krakotzkin, 'Jewish Peoplehood, "Jewish Politics," and Political Responsibility: Arendt on Zionism and Partitions', *College Literature* 38, 1 (2011), 57–74. In an earlier essay Raz-Krakotzkin entirely ignored Arendt's commitment to federalism and her critique of Magnes and suggested she should be viewed as an intellectual who followed the line forged by Brit Shalom in the 1930s. See Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, 'Binationalism and Jewish Identity: Hannah Arendt and the Question of Palestine', in Steven Ascheim, ed., *Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem* (Berkeley: California University Press, 2001), 173.

<sup>7</sup> For the salience of post Zionism in Israeli culture in the mid-late 1990s, see Uri Ram, 'Post-Zionist Studies of Israel. The First Decade', *Israel Studies Forum*, 20, 2 (2005), 26. For recent reflections on Arendt in the context of the post-Zionist moment in the Israeli academia see Hannan Hever, 'The Post-Zionist Condition', *Critical Inquiry* 38, 3 (2012), 630–48.

a good alibi'.<sup>8</sup> For Edward Said, writing in 1999, Arendt was, alongside Magnes and Martin Buber, part of a small but significant group of Jewish thinkers whose political support for binationalism in the past should inspire political action in the future.<sup>9</sup> The entanglement of the study of Arendt with the contemporary politics of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict has distorted our understanding of Arendt's views on Zionism. Scholars retrospectively imposed the binary political categories of the 1990s (still in existence today) – a Jewish nation state versus a binational Arab–Jewish state – onto the much more fluid political reality of the 1940s. The important question to ask about Arendt's relationship to binationalism is not simply whether or not she supported it but also why she changed her views from strong opposition to binationalism during the war to an endorsement in 1948. The answer to this question requires us not only to explore the story of Arendt's personal political transformation in the 1940s but also that of the diminishing political alternatives for Palestine in that decade.

This article offers a new reading of the evolution of Arendt's thought on Zionism by placing at its centre her sustained engagement with the politics of federalism. In the past few years, scholars have begun to study what Michal Collins has described with regard to the 1950s and 1960s, but which may be equally applied to the 1940s, as 'the federal moment' – the prevalence of federative ideas and political programmes in discussions over the post-war reconstruction of Europe and the restructuring of imperial domination throughout the British and French empires.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps the period of most intense intellectual creativity in the long 'federal moment' was the Second World War. Facing the reality of destruction and the prospects for a new world order, many émigré intellectuals, governments in exile and statesmen and intellectuals in Britain and the United States laid out visions for the establishment of federations after the war. Federalist visions were also prominent in wartime discussions regarding the future of Palestine. In 1942 the British government discussed the creation of an Arab federation in the Middle East after the war; Zionist leaders spoke about a

<sup>8</sup> Moshe Zimmerman, 'Hannah Arendt, The Early "Post-Zionist"', in *Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem*, ed., Steven Aschheim (Berkeley: California University Press, 2001), 181. Zimmerman's essay was first delivered as a presentation in a 1997 Hebrew University conference titled 'Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem'. In a piece published in Oct. 2000 in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* Zimmerman referred to Arendt as the 'mother of post-Zionism'. Zimmerman's piece on Arendt in *Haaretz* was part of a broader debate on the pages of the paper on Arendt's book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, which had been translated into Hebrew for the first time earlier that year. Leora Bilsky has characterised the debate on Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* on the pages of *Haaretz* as 'a "sub-chapter" in the broader debate over on post-Zionism'. See Bilsky, 'Ke'of hahol: Arendt be-yerushalayim', *Bishvil Hazikkaron* (Alpayim), 16 (2001), 16–23. For a seminal reading of Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* from the point of view of a post-Zionist critique see Idith Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 128–63.

<sup>9</sup> Edward Said, 'The One State Solution', *New York Times*, 10 Jan. 1999.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Collins, 'Decolonization and the "Federal Moment"', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 24, 1 (2013), 21–40; Holly Case, 'The Strange Politics of Federative Ideas in East-Central Europe', *Journal of Modern History*, 85, 4 (2013), 833–866; Case, 'Reconstruction in East-Central Europe: Clearing the Rubble of Cold-War Politics', *Past and Present*, 2010 (suppl. 6) (2011), 92–4. See also Frederic Cooper, 'Reconstructing Empire in Post-War French and British Africa', *ibid.* 196–210.

post-war 'Jewish Commonwealth', rather than a state; Magnes envisioned an Arab-Jewish binational state as part of the proposed Arab federation; and many of the plans advanced after the war for the resolution of the conflict in Palestine by the British and American governments, and later by the United Nations, called for some form of a federative arrangement in Palestine. Arendt, who in 1941 fled France, the centre of the interwar debate on a European federation, to New York, the wartime centre of post-war planning, was deeply embedded in these debates. Studying her engagement with Zionism through the lens of federalism allows us to carefully chart the evolution of her thought on Zionism, as well as place the history of Zionism in the 1940s within the context of the vast wartime and post-war debates on federalism.

### **Arendt, the post-war 'Jewish Question' and the federal moment in the Second World War**

Before turning to examine Arendt's thought on Zionism in the 1940s, it is important first to establish the basic facts about Arendt's relationship to Zionism before the war. Arendt was first drawn to Zionism, the Jewish question and political concerns more generally in the late 1920s. It was then that she formed a close friendship with Kurt Blumenfeld, president of the German Zionist Federation, who exposed Arendt to the Zionist critique of Jewish assimilation.<sup>11</sup> By 1931, with the tide of anti-Semitism in Germany rising, and following a series of Nazi electoral victories, Arendt, by her own admission, adopted many of Blumenfeld's views as her own. She shared the Zionist belief in the futility of assimilation – 'it is possible to assimilate only by assimilating into antisemitism also', she wrote – and remained apprehensive about the dangers awaiting German Jews.<sup>12</sup> After Hitler's accession to power, Arendt solemnly declared that the chapter of assimilation in the history of German Jews had come to an end, and, following the burning of the Reichstag, she volunteered to carry out illegal work on behalf of the German Zionist Organisation.<sup>13</sup> Later that year, Arendt fled Germany, first to Geneva, then to Paris, where for several years she worked for a number of Zionist organisations facilitating the immigration of Jewish refugees to Palestine until her second experience of exile, as a refugee arriving at the shores of New York in May 1941.

Arendt's brand of Zionism, as it developed in the 1930s, is difficult to characterise. She was sympathetic to those Zionists who wished to migrate to Palestine – her close friend Hans Jonas would be one of them – yet never contemplated emigrating to Palestine herself and generally refrained from engaging with any of the political debates concerning Jewish settlement in Palestine. Nor did Arendt belong to the cultural strands of Zionism that emphasised the rejuvenation of Jewish culture as precondition for national revival, though she admired some of its leading

<sup>11</sup> Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For the Love of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 70.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 92.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 105.

proponents.<sup>14</sup> In this sense, she differed from the milieu of central European Zionists who are commonly associated with Brit Shalom. Arendt's Zionism was thus more the product of an emotional and intellectual conviction, resulting from the convergence of two socio-historical premises. First, there was her belief in the failure of Jewish assimilation into European society and, second, the necessarily collective character of Jewish identity as an inassimilable outcast, or pariah as Arendt would put it, in the age of the nation-state. Blumenfeld referred to this type of Zionism as 'post-assimilatory'.<sup>15</sup>

Throughout the 1930s, and primarily after her arrival in France, Arendt's espousal of Zionism meant primarily solidarity with other Jewish refugees and support for anti-fascism. After the outbreak of war, and especially following the occupation of France, Arendt began to seriously consider the form Jewish life would take after the war. Only at this point did she begin writing about the question of Palestine. It is important to emphasise that throughout the war Arendt viewed the post-war Jewish question as an essentially European question and thus considered the future of Palestine only as part of this more general question. To properly understand Arendt's wartime views on Zionism we should thus turn first to examine how she viewed the post-war Jewish question in Europe.

Arendt's first recorded engagement with the post-war Jewish question took the form of an essay she sent her friend Erich Cohn-Bendit in the summer of 1940, entitled 'The Minority Question'. 'The Minority Question' is both an inquiry into the conditions of the exceptional weakness of Jews in the interwar years and a proposal for a solution to this problem after the war. Jews were exceptionally weak, Arendt argued, because they lacked a nation state. In the political reality that characterised interwar Europe – where nation states and ethnic minorities took the place of the former Habsburg, Romanov, and Ottoman multi-ethnic empires – only those minorities that had a homeland could enjoy protection. Jews, she claimed, were the only minority without a homeland and thus were not a minority at all. Without state protection, there were no consequences to harming them and nowhere to go once they were persecuted and became stateless.<sup>16</sup>

Arendt outlined three possible solutions to the Jewish predicament in Europe after the war. The first was assimilation, although this option was no longer viable: 'There is no longer any such thing as assimilation in Europe – nation states have

<sup>14</sup> Arendt admired Buber in the 1930s and maintained a close, though at times troubled, friendship with Gershom Scholem, two prominent members of the Brit Shalom association. For Arendt's views on Buber see Hannah Arendt, 'A Guide for Youth: Martin Buber', in Kohn and Feldman, eds., *Jewish Writings*, 31–3. For a consideration of the Arendt-Scholem relationship see Steven Aschheim, 'Between New York and Jerusalem', *Jewish Review of Books*, Winter 2011, 5–8.

<sup>15</sup> Young-Bruehl, *Arendt*, 72–3. Arendt articulated her ideas on the issue of Jewish collectivity succinctly in 1935 with regard to German Jewry, though she believed that this held true for the rest of European Jewry: 'When, almost two years ago, the German Jewish community, in its entirety, had to respond to the isolation imposed by the laws of exception, and the material and moral ruin of its collective existence, all Jews, whether they liked or not, had to become aware of themselves as Jews.' Arendt, 'A Guide for Youth', in Kohn and Feldman, eds., 31.

<sup>16</sup> Arendt, 'The Minority Question', in Kohn and Feldman, eds., *Jewish Writings*, 125–31.

grown too developed and too old', she wrote, 'the chance of assimilation during the nineteenth century . . . was based in a reorganisation of peoples that arose out of the French Revolution and in their development as nations. This process has now come to an end'.<sup>17</sup> The second solution was that of population transfers. In 1939 Hitler signed an agreement with Mussolini concerning the German minority in South Tyrol that called for their resettlement in Germany. Many intellectuals and statesmen, including some with formidable liberal credentials, viewed this agreement favourably and maintained that the resettlement of minorities in their ethnic homeland could offer a blueprint for the resolution of minority conflicts after the war.<sup>18</sup> Arendt, keenly aware of how this precedent might set an example for future policy, warned against the implications of such ideas for the Jews. 'As for the Jews', Arendt wrote, 'these newest methods are especially dangerous for them because they cannot be reimported to any motherland, to a state where they are a majority. For them it can only be a matter of deportation . . . one should never sign one's own death warrant.'<sup>19</sup>

Arendt dismissed these two solutions, as well as demands for better international guarantees for minority rights. As a prescient student of interwar minority politics, Arendt had little faith in leaving the rights of minorities in the hands of ethnic nation states. Instead, she espoused a third solution: federalism. 'Our only chance', she wrote, 'indeed, the only chance of all small peoples – lies in a new European federal system'. Arendt continued:

Our fate need not be bound up with our status as a minority . . . . Our fate can only be bound up with that of other small European peoples. The notion that nations are constituted by settlement within borders and are protected by their territory is undergoing a crucial correction . . . . There may soon come a time when the idea of belonging to a territory is replaced by the idea of belonging to a commonwealth of nations whose politics are determined solely by the commonwealth as a whole. That means European politics – while at the same time all nationalities are maintained.<sup>20</sup>

Federalism, Arendt affirmed with excitement, would offer a new and radical solution to both the minority question in general and the Jewish question in particular. Specifically, federalism would serve to detach the category of state membership from that of ethnic membership, and thus create a political community in which cultural difference would not translate into political difference. 'National liberation', Arendt wrote two years later, 'can presumably be realised this time only in a federated Europe . . . the French revolution, which brought human rights to the Jews at the price of their national emancipation, is about to take its second great step'.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 128.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, the article by international lawyer Nicolas Politis, 'Les Transfert de populations', *Politique étrangère*, 2, 5 (1940), 83–94. For a general consideration of public and official attitudes toward population transfers in the Second World War see Matthew Frank, 'Reconstructing the Nation-State: Population Transfers in Central Eastern Europe, 1944–8', in Jessica Reinisch and Elizabeth White, eds., *The Disentanglement of Populations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 27–50.

<sup>19</sup> Arendt, 'The Minority Question', 129.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 130.

<sup>21</sup> Arendt, 'A Way Toward the Reconciliation of Peoples', *ibid.* 261.



Arendt's support for federalism must be understood as part of a rich wartime political context. Indeed, federalism was a significant political movement during the first years of the war. And while the idea of a European federation dates back to the nineteenth century, the outbreak of the war and the general sense among intellectuals and statesmen that the political order in Europe had been irrecoverably shattered served as a catalyst for the emergence of various new schemes for a post-war federation, or several regional federations, in Europe and around the world. Rather than denoting a specific political programme, federalism was a loosely defined slogan that various groups drew upon to advance a wide array of differing political goals and visions for the future of Europe in the post-war period. Common to all these groups was the conviction that the excesses of ethnic nationalism and the precariousness of small states were ultimately responsible for the disintegration of the interwar political system. A more stable post-war order, they contended, must in the future be based on the renunciation of some aspects of national sovereignty and the creation of larger state units.<sup>22</sup>

More specifically, when Arendt first espoused federalism in the summer of 1940, she may have been responding to an ongoing debate in France and Britain over the prospects of a Franco-British Union as a first step toward a European federation.<sup>23</sup> During the late 1920s and 1930s, France emerged as the intellectual and political centre of support for European unity. In June 1940, in a last bid to bolster the morale of the disintegrating French army and dissuade the French government from concluding a separate armistice with Germany, the British government issued a declaration on a post-war Franco-British Union. 'The two governments declare that France and Great Britain shall no longer be two nations', the British declaration read, 'but one Franco-British Union'.<sup>24</sup> Discussions over a British-French federation petered out soon after the occupation of France, but the spirit of federalism lived on, primarily among European émigrés in London and New York and resistance movements across Europe. For them, support for a European federation was not only a call for a new kind of political post-war arrangement in Europe, but also an assertion of a new found pan-European identity based on the rejection of the Nazi 'New Order'.<sup>25</sup> In the United States, too, support for federalism was widespread during the war and intersected with debates on American leadership in the post-war world and visions for a revamped international organisation. Clarence Streit's 1939 book *Union Now*, for instance, which called for a world federation of democracies, had become one of the

<sup>22</sup> For a general discussion of wartime federalism see Walter Lippens, *A History of European Integration, Volume 1 1945–1947* (New York: Clarendon, 1982), 44–76; Case, 'Strange Politics of Federative Ideas', as well as Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent. Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York: Vintage, 1998), 197–202 and Rudolf Schlesinger, *Federalism in Central and Eastern Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945).

<sup>23</sup> For a discussion of wartime plans for a Franco-British Union, see Avi Shlaim, 'Prelude to a Downfall: the British offer of Union to France, June 1940', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 9, 3 (1974), 27–63. See also Mazower, *Dark Continent*, 199.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Shlaim, 'Prelude to Downfall', 50.

<sup>25</sup> Walter Lippens, 'European Federation in the Political Thought of Resistance Movements during World War II', *Central European History*, 1, 1 (1968), 5–19, as well as Mazower, *Dark Continent*, 201.



greatest wartime bestsellers in the United States and the inspiration for a grassroots movement with thousands of members across the country.<sup>26</sup> In the British Empire, the question of federalism was central during the war as well. Facing growing demands from colonial subjects for national self-determination, British imperialists had begun to formulate new ideas seeking to reinvigorate the British Empire through granting greater autonomy to its subjects. One of the most well known spokeswomen of this vision was South African Prime Minister Jan Smuts, who called for the transformation of the British Empire into a more inclusive, federalist Commonwealth of Nations.<sup>27</sup>

The most elaborate wartime discussions and planning on federalism centred on the future of east-central Europe. As a region of small and weak states lying between Germany and Russia, the question of federalism appeared to be most pertinent there.<sup>28</sup> In numerous pamphlets and émigré newspapers, such as *New Europe* and *Austria's Voice*, east-central European intellectuals and politicians agitated for a post-war federation in the region. In their analysis, the political void created by the collapse of the Habsburg Empire was responsible for the instability of the interwar order in the first place. The federalist plans they thus advocated were motivated by the attempt to restore the political balance of the region before the First World War in one form or another. Beginning in 1941, such plans had begun to receive British, and to a lesser extent also American, political backing. With British support, the exiled governments of Poland and Czechoslovakia in London negotiated a plan for the establishment of a post-war confederation, reaching agreement in 1942. At the same time, the exiled governments of Greece and Yugoslavia worked on a plan for a post-war Balkan Union, which was signed in London that same year.<sup>29</sup> None of these plans involved a commitment by either side to renounce its sovereignty in any significant way. In fact, and rather ironically, east-central European governments in exile promoted federalist plans for the region as they worked to create more ethnically homogenous states by advocating the transfer of Germans and other minorities they deemed disloyal after the war. Their support for federalism, however, should not be considered merely as lip service to the liberal public and governments. It reflected a genuine fear over German and Soviet dominance in the region and underscored the realisation that eastern European states had to cooperate, as well as tie Britain and the United States more firmly to the region, in order to preserve their political independence after the war.

<sup>26</sup> Clarence Streit, *Union Now: A Proposal for a Union of the Democracies of the North Atlantic* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939).

<sup>27</sup> Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace. The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 54–63.

<sup>28</sup> For Arendt's analysis of wartime federalist plans for east-central Europe see Arendt, 'Foreign Affairs in the Foreign Language Press', in Jerome Kohn, ed., *Essays in Understanding: 1930–1954* (New York: Schocken, 1994), 81–105. On federalism in east-central Europe see also Case, 'Strange Politics of Federative Ideas', as well as Case, 'Reconstruction in East-Central Europe'.

<sup>29</sup> For accounts on the subject written by contemporaries, see Eduard Taborsky, 'A Polish-Czechoslovak Confederation, A Story of the First Soviet Veto', *Journal of Central European Affairs*, 9, 4 (1950), 379–95, as well as Piotr Wandycz, *Czechoslovak-Polish Confederation and the Great Powers 1940–43* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1956).

Arendt's support for federalism was thus part of a much larger wartime debate on the subject. Yet she did not base her support for federalism only on post-war plans, but also on her original analysis of her contemporary political reality. Indeed, by the end of 1941, Arendt would make the case that the war was being waged between the principles of the racial state and the multi-ethnic federal political community. The three major allies, the United States, Great Britain and the Soviet Union, all professed forms of federal political organisation and served as viable models for Arendt's vision of federalism. The United States, to which Arendt fled in 1941, was the first country that succeeded, in her words, in creating a federal structure and overcoming the 'majority-minority' problem – thus offering a viable solution to the Jewish question.<sup>30</sup> Excited by the wartime discussions regarding a post-war British Commonwealth of Nations, Arendt believed that after the war, the British Empire would have to reform itself into a more inclusive federation. And the Soviet Union, she maintained, was a federal organisation that solved its nationalities problem by creating 'a union of nationalities, each with equal rights regardless of size',<sup>31</sup> thereby becoming the first political structure in which Jews were both 'legally and socially "emancipated"', that is, recognized and liberated as a nationality'.<sup>32</sup>

Arendt's celebration of the United States, the British Empire and the Soviet Union as exemplary models of federalism is rife with intellectual blind spots. In the United States, racial minorities, particularly African-Americans, were still subject to tremendous legal and social discrimination. Despite liberal imperialist talk of a Commonwealth of Nations, Britain affirmed a commitment to the preservation of its empire the 1944 Imperial Conference.<sup>33</sup> And Arendt's reading of both the nationalities policy and the status of Jews in the Soviet Union was at once misguided and optimistic, as some of her contemporaries pointed out.<sup>34</sup> Despite the shortcomings of these models, however, they demonstrated for Arendt that federalism was not an exceptional and utopian vision in the West during the war, but a viable contender to the model of the ethnic nation state that drew its inspiration from existing political models.

### **Arendt, Zionism and the Arab Federation, 1942–1945**

Arendt's preoccupation with the federalism question in Europe had significant implications for her vision for Palestine during and after the war. Yet it was only in late 1942, and mainly in response to two major developments, that Arendt began to engage with the question of the political status of Palestine. The first of these developments was the espousal of the Biltmore programme in May 1942 by a wide coalition of major American Zionist groups and Zionist delegates from Europe and

<sup>30</sup> Arendt, 'Can the Jewish Arab Question be Solved?', in Kohn and Feldman, eds., *Jewish Writings*, 196.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Arendt, 'The Return of Russian Jewry', *ibid.* 173.

<sup>33</sup> Arendt, 'The End of Rumor', *ibid.* 206.

<sup>34</sup> See, for instance, Koppel S. Pinson, 'Antisemitism in the Postwar World', *Jewish Social Studies*, 7, 2 (1945), 112.

Palestine. This programme called for the establishment of a Jewish commonwealth in Palestine after the war and for the unlimited immigration of Jewish refugees to Palestine to be fully regulated by the Jewish Agency. The second was the subsequent establishment of the Ihud association by Judah Leon Magnes. The Magnes group fiercely rejected the Biltmore programme and advocated the creation of an Arab-Jewish binational state in Palestine that would be incorporated into a larger Arab federation in the Middle East. Arendt rejected both programmes and based her rejection of them on her commitment to federalism. To fully understand why Arendt rejected both programmes and the sense in which she considered federalism distinct from them it is important first to carefully examine the programmes.

In scholarship on the history of Zionism the adoption of the Biltmore programme is generally portrayed as a watershed moment, reflecting a shift from a decades-long policy of deliberate obscurity concerning the ultimate goal of the Zionist movement to an espousal of a political programme aimed at the creation of a state. This major policy shift, scholars agree, was a result of two factors: first, the attempt of Zionist leaders to counter the British White Paper policy by formulating a clear alternative for the future of Palestine; and second, a growing realisation among Zionist leaders, particularly after mid-1941, of the enormous scale of the post-war Jewish refugee problem in Europe and an understanding among them that only a Jewish state could facilitate the migration of millions of Jewish refugees to Palestine after the war.<sup>35</sup>

The scholarship on the Biltmore programme has overlooked the rich federalist context in which the programme emerged and to which it responded.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the influence of federalism on the Biltmore programme is evident from the fact that Zionist leaders entirely avoided employing the term 'state' in the Biltmore resolution and instead called for the establishment of a 'Jewish Commonwealth as part of the structure of the postwar democratic world'.<sup>37</sup> While American and Zionist leaders already used the term 'Jewish commonwealth' during the First World War and occasionally during the 1920s, it resurfaced during the Second World War in direct relationship to the federalist discourse. Some wartime observers noted and criticised the deliberate ambiguity of the term 'Jewish commonwealth'. International lawyer Natan Feinberg, for example, chided Zionist leaders for not clearly articulating their demands, arguing that a 'commonwealth' was in no way a sovereign state but either 'a part of a federal state . . . the federal states itself, or the unique structure of the

<sup>35</sup> See Evyatar Friesel, 'On the Myth of the Connection between the Holocaust and the Creation of Israel', *Israel Affairs*, 14, 3 (2008), 449–50, as well as Monty Noam Penkower, *The Holocaust and Israel Reborn: From Catastrophe to Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 32–60.

<sup>36</sup> The exception is David Sphiro's account of the Biltmore programme that traces the deliberately ambiguous way in which both Ben-Gurion and Weizmann employed the term 'Jewish Commonwealth' during the war. Sphiro's account, however, generally overlooks the broader political debates over the question of federalism and more specifically the subject of an Arab federation. See David H. Sphiro, *From Philanthropy to Activism: The Political Transformation of American Zionism in the Holocaust Years 1933–1945* (New York: Pergamon, 1994), 71–101.

<sup>37</sup> The text of the resolution is reprinted in *ibid.* 99–101.

nations and states united in the British Empire.’<sup>38</sup> Yet it would be wrong to assume that Zionist leaders merely used the term ‘commonwealth’ in order to conceal a demand for a state in the federalist vocabulary of the day. Throughout the war, both Chaim Weizmann and David Ben-Gurion repeatedly suggested that the post-war Jewish commonwealth would be part of the future British Commonwealth of Nations or placed under some other form of international oversight.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, it must be kept in mind that the only post-war constellation that could be conducive to Zionist goals was based on British victory in the war and continued British hegemony in the Middle East. Regardless of how fiercely Zionist leaders opposed the White Paper Policy, they thus still had to think about a future arrangement for Palestine that reconciled Zionist goals with British imperial interests in the region.<sup>40</sup> Writing to political confidante and friend Blanche Dugdale in January 1943, Weizmann explained the choice of the term commonwealth much along these lines:

The word ‘commonwealth’ was introduced because (a) it is more popular in America than the word ‘state’, and (b) it is considered more flexible. Whether it should be a commonwealth attached to the British Empire or under the trusteeship of the United Nations is, I think, immaterial to people here, and either opinion would largely depend upon the form which the whole political structure in the Middle East will take.<sup>41</sup>

More importantly, the centrality of federalism to understanding the Biltmore programme can be discerned from the fact that the very call for a Jewish state in Palestine in late 1942 was aimed to counter an alternative vision for the Middle East that gained currency during the war, namely the establishment of a post-war Arab federation. While the idea of an Arab federation originated in attempts to redesign the Middle East political order following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War, it had become a widely discussed political vision and a major political trend in the early years of the Second. As Britain had become increasingly reliant on Arab support for its war effort in the Middle East, Arab leaders believed they could extract far-reaching concessions for the cause of Arab independence and

<sup>38</sup> Natan Feinberg, ‘Hamasag Ke’hiliya’, A306/100, Papers of Natan Feinberg, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

<sup>39</sup> In a memorandum drafted by Weizmann and Ben-Gurion on 9 September 1941 it was stated that ‘considering the strategic and economic importance of Palestine, the inclusion of the Jewish state in the British Commonwealth would be to the interest of both; but we should also be ready, if necessary, to consider joining, under proper safeguards, in a Federation with Arab states’. See Chaim Weizmann to Harry Sacher, 25 Sept. 1941, in Michael J. Cohen, ed., *The Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann*, Vol. XX (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1979), 203. Weizmann repeated these views in a January 1942 article for *Foreign Affairs*, see Chaim Weizmann, ‘Palestine’s Role in the Solution of the Jewish Problem’, *Foreign Affairs*, 20, 2 (Jan. 1942), 338. Ben-Gurion, too, stated on several occasions that the Jewish Commonwealth would be part of the British Empire or a Mid-East Federation. See Shpiro *From Philanthropy to Activism*, 75.

<sup>40</sup> Historians of Zionism are now increasingly examining the ways in which Zionist leaders conceived of a Jewish Palestine as part of a British imperial framework. See, for example, Arie M. Dubnov, ‘The Dream of the Seventh Dominion: Liberal Imperialism and the Palestine Question’, presented at the Ninth International Seminar on Decolonization, National History Center, Washington DC, 2014. I wish to thank Arie Dubnov for sharing the paper with me.

<sup>41</sup> Chaim Weizmann to Blanche Dugdale, 8 Jan. 1943, in Cohen, *Chaim Weizmann*, Vol XX, 386.

advanced visions for pan-Arab political unity. In the summer of 1941 Britain had publicly announced its support for the cause of Arab unity in a speech delivered by Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden. And while British support for an Arab federation was intended primarily as a way to galvanise Arab public opinion in favour of the Allied invasion of Syria, discussions over an Arab federation proliferated in Arab political circles and in the press in Britain and the United States.<sup>42</sup>

Zionist leaders like Weizmann and Ben-Gurion were deeply alarmed by the British support for an Arab federation. Some two months after Eden's speech, Weizmann sent a heartfelt letter to Smuts protesting Eden's position, in which he laid out, likely for the first time outside Zionist circles, the demand for the establishment of a Jewish state after the war.<sup>43</sup> Ben-Gurion, too, was prompted to publicly express his support for a Jewish state only in the summer of 1941, as it appeared to him that British post-war policy in the region was taking shape without regard to the Zionist position.<sup>44</sup> Ben-Gurion and Weizmann, it is important to note, did not categorically oppose an Arab federation. In fact, throughout the 1930s and early in the war they supported plans that called for the incorporation of Palestine as an autonomous Jewish region into an Arab federation, hoping that such a solution would offset Arab fears over a Jewish majority in Palestine.<sup>45</sup> Yet by late 1941 it appeared to them that any plan for Jewish autonomy in Palestine was off the table and that Britain was firmly committed to the cause of Arab nationalism.

Though Arendt did not comment specifically on the term of 'commonwealth', her criticism of the Biltmore programme was based to a large extent on what she perceived was the programme's inherent anachronism. In Arendt's view the Biltmore programme called for the establishment of a Jewish state at a time in which nation state nationalism had become intellectually discredited and politically irrelevant. 'If among Zionists leaders many progressives know and talk about the end of small nations and the end of nationalism in the old narrow European sense', Arendt wrote in a 1943 essay entitled 'The Crisis of Zionism', 'no official document or programme expresses these ideas'. This was because, Arendt argued,

The foundations of Zionism were laid during a time when nobody could imagine any other solution of minority or nationality problems than the autonomous national state with homogenous population. Zionists are afraid that the whole building might crack if they abandon their old ideas.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>42</sup> For more on the wartime discussions on an Arab federation, see Yehoshua Porath, *In Search of Arab Unity 1930–1945* (London: Routledge, 1986), primarily 106–48 and 257–66, as well as Ron Zweig, *Britain and Palestine during the Second World War* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1986), 89–115 and Michael Thornhill, 'Britain and the Politics of the Arab League, 1943–1950', in Michael J. Cohen and Marin Kolinsky, eds., *Demise of the British Empire in the Middle East: Britain's Responses to Nationalist Movements 1943–55* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), 41–63.

<sup>43</sup> Chaim Weizmann to Jan Smuts, 15 Aug. 1941, Cohen, *Chaim Weizmann, Vol XX*, 181–7.

<sup>44</sup> Shpiro, *From Philanthropy to Activism*, 77.

<sup>45</sup> In particular, Zionist leaders were hoping to win the support of the British and Saudi leadership for the creation of a Jewish autonomous region in Palestine that would be part of an envisioned Arab federation led by King Ibn-Saud. See Porath, *In Search of Arab Unity*, 80–106.

<sup>46</sup> Arendt, 'The Crisis of Zionism', in Kohn and Feldman, eds., *Jewish Writings*, 335–6.

In Arendt's view, nation-state Zionism had become politically irrelevant because the solution it proposed for the post-war Jewish question, the large-scale immigration of millions of Jewish refugees from Europe to Palestine, was out of line with contemporary political developments. As a careful observer of the British Empire, she maintained that the British espousal of an Arab federation should be seen as part of a general attempt to form a British-Muslim alliance across the Middle East and Asia, a point she became increasingly convinced of after the British crushed the Indian rebellion in late 1942 and worked closely with Muhammad Ali Jinnah's Muslim League to restore order in India. Such an alliance would preclude not only the possibility of creating a Jewish state, but also of any other form of large-scale post-war migration of Jews to Palestine. More fundamentally, Arendt argued that nation-state Zionism had become intellectually discredited because the basic Zionist contention 'that the Jewish question as a whole can be solved only by the reconstruction of Palestine, that the building up of the country will eradicate antisemitism', had been disproved by the advent of federalism.<sup>47</sup> Reiterating her support for the Soviet Union and the United States as exemplary federal states, Arendt argued that by divorcing the principle of ethnicity from political membership, federal states succeed in offering genuine emancipation to their minorities. A full solution to the post-war Jewish question could thus be found, in Arendt's analysis, only within the framework of a post-war federation.

Contrary to the generally accepted view in scholarship, Arendt's rejection of the Biltmore programme did not lead her to espouse Magnes' Ihud vision. Magnes established Ihud in August 1942 in response to the adoption of the Biltmore programme. His programme must also be understood in the context of wartime federalism. When Magnes publically articulated the Ihud programme in a January 1943 article in *Foreign Affairs*, he called not simply for the creation of a binational state in Palestine but rather for constitutional parity between Jews and Arabs in Palestine and for the incorporation of Palestine into the envisaged post-war Arab federation, as well as the inclusion of this Arab federation within a broader post-war Anglo-American union.<sup>48</sup> In other words, if the Biltmore programme was in part a rejection the vision of an Arab federation, the Ihud programme must be understood as an endorsement of it. Indeed, Magnes first publicly laid out some of the main tenets of the Ihud programme in a pamphlet published just three weeks after Eden's speech. Entitled 'Palestine and the Arab Union', Magnes' pamphlet welcomed the British support for an Arab federation and called for the inclusion of Palestine as a binational state within it.<sup>49</sup>

Arendt vehemently rejected Magnes' programme, telling, for the same reasons she rejected the Biltmore programme. Both programmes, Arendt maintained in a series of 1943 essays, 'use the same mode of political thinking'. Whereas advocates

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 334.

<sup>48</sup> Judah Leon Magnes, 'Toward Peace in Palestine', *Foreign Affairs*, 21, 2 (1943), 239–49.

<sup>49</sup> Judah Leon Magnes, 'Palestine and the Arab Union', Herbert H. Lehman Papers, Special Correspondence Files, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library, accessed on 30 Jan. 2014 [http://lehman.cul.columbia.edu/ldpd\\_leh\\_0577\\_0010](http://lehman.cul.columbia.edu/ldpd_leh_0577_0010).

of a Jewish Commonwealth were prepared to grant minority rights to Arabs, 'the existence of a binational state within an Arab federation would mean instead that it would be the Jews who have minority status'.<sup>50</sup> In Arendt's view, Magnes' vision of binationalism was a false form of federalism because it simply replaced the Biltmore vision of Jewish dominance in Palestine with that of Arab dominance. In 'The Crisis of Zionism', Arendt elaborated her critique of Magnes along the same lines:

Even the Magnes plan betrays the fact that it is built up entirely at our expense: a binational state protected by an Arab federation is nothing else than minority status within an Arab empire . . . Magnes, too, thinks along the old line of national states, only he has given another name to the old baby; he calls it 'federation.' This use of the term 'federation' kills its new and creative meaning in the germ; it kills the idea that a federation is – in contrast to a nation – made up of different peoples with equal rights. In other words, within a federation the old minority problem ceases to exist. The Magnes proposal if realized would make out of Palestine one of our worst *Galuth* countries.<sup>51</sup>

Rejecting both the Biltmore programme and Magnes' binationalism, Arendt asserted in 1943 that the only way Palestine could be saved as the national homeland of the Jews was if it were integrated into a federation. 'It has become rather fashionable to use the term "federation" for almost any combination of nation states . . .', Arendt argued, 'a genuine federation is made up of different, clearly identifiable nationalities . . . . National conflicts can be solved within such a federation only because the unsolvable majority-minority question had ceased to exist'.<sup>52</sup>

Arendt had two specific visions for such a federation in mind. The first would entail incorporating Palestine into a post-war British Commonwealth of Nations and granting Jews, as well as Arabs, a status of member nations of the commonwealth. The second would entail incorporating Palestine into 'a kind of Mediterranean federation' that would include the countries of the Middle East and North Africa and, in some way which Arendt does not fully explain, also Spain, Italy and France. Eventually, she argued, such a federation should expand into a federation of European countries.<sup>53</sup> What ultimately separated Arendt's vision from that of Magnes was her emphasis on Palestine as part of a multi-ethnic federation in which Jews and Arabs would exist alongside other nations. Any alternative, in her view, would consign the Jews to minority status.

While Arendt had clearly articulated her critique of both nation-state Zionism and Zionist binationalism, the alternative vision she proposed remained vague. She did not explain in detail how the post-war federation in which she hoped Palestine would be included should be politically organised, how the pressing issue of Jewish immigration should be handled or whether she believed such a federation was an achievable political goal. Arendt's only outline for the structure of a federation appeared in a 1944 essay entitled 'Concerning Minorities'.<sup>54</sup> In this essay she argued that 'the real solution to the nationality and minority problem of our time' lay in adopting

<sup>50</sup> Arendt, 'Can the Jewish Arab Question be Solved?', in Kohn and Feldman, eds., *Jewish Writings*, 194.

<sup>51</sup> Arendt, 'The Crisis of Zionism', in *ibid.*, 336.

<sup>52</sup> Arendt, 'Can the Jewish Arab Question be Solved?', *ibid.* 195.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* 195.

<sup>54</sup> Hannah Arendt, 'Concerning Minorities', *Contemporary Jewish Record*, 7, 4 (1944), 366.



Karl Renner and Otto Bauer's vision of personal cultural autonomy.<sup>55</sup> This early twentieth-century vision emerged from thinkers deeply engaged with the debates over the political organisation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Renner and Bauer, among others, called for the transformation of the Habsburg Empire into a state of multiple nationalities based on a principle of non-territorial personal cultural autonomy whereby individuals could freely associate themselves with a national group that would enjoy full autonomy in all matters pertaining to culture.

Attending to Arendt's espousal of the Bauer-Renner model allows us to better understand her vision of federalism. Arendt's commitment to federalism did not emerge from a liberal universalist point of view that seeks to overcome all forms of nationalism but rather from a commitment to the idea that the federal state should facilitate national pluralism. In this sense, Arendt's view is in line with a longer tradition of Jewish critique of ethnic nationalism and support for a multi-ethnic federation. Indeed, from the late nineteenth century onward, Bundists, diaspora nationalists and Zionists in east-central Europe had called for the transformation of the Habsburg and Romanov Empires into multi-ethnic federations that would grant extensive cultural autonomy to its nationalities. Unlike these groups, Arendt did not base her support for federalism on her commitment to Jewish national culture and the concern that Jews would assimilate into the dominant culture but rather on the fear that Jews would be excluded from a political community dominated by a majority ethnic group, as political events in the 1930s, as well as her own experience as a stateless refugee, had confirmed. In other words, it was the danger of statelessness, not assimilation, that animated Arendt's support for federalism.

In supporting federalism on the basis of the fear of the political exclusion of Jews, Arendt's position was strikingly similar to that advocated by preeminent Jewish historian Salo Baron. Like Arendt, Baron's political worldview was shaped to a large extent by his experience as a stateless refugee: he was expelled from Galicia during the First World War by the advancing Russian army and settled in Vienna, where he continued his studies without legal status.<sup>56</sup> Highlighting the deep affinities between Arendt and Baron's views is useful in demonstrating the extent to which Arendt's position on Zionism and support for federalism emerged out of a deep concern with the Jewish question. While the two had espoused federalism independently from each other, there is reason to believe that they influenced one another during the war. Arendt and Baron first met in New York in November 1941 and developed a close professional and personal relationship that lasted throughout Arendt's life. Baron published Arendt's first scholarly article in the United States and later appointed Arendt as research director of the Commission for European Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, which he headed from 1946.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 366.

<sup>56</sup> See David Engel, 'Crisis and Lachrymosity: On Salo Baron, Neobaronianism and the Study of Modern European Jewish History', *Jewish History*, 20, 3/4 (2006), 259.

<sup>57</sup> For the early relationship between Arendt and Baron, see the following letters: Hannah Arendt to Salo Baron 28 Oct. 1941; 13 Nov. 1941; 18 Nov. 1941; 4 Jul. 1942; 28 Jul., 1942; 2 Oct., 1943, Mo580,

Baron's support for federalism must be understood as an integral part of the broader vision of Jewish political history he started to develop during the First World War. As David Engel has shown, Baron regarded the modern period as the most politically volatile and precarious in Jewish history because the rise of nationalism shattered the millennia-old pattern of Jewish existence as a protected minority in a multi-confessional or multi-ethnic political community.<sup>58</sup> 'Nationalism', wrote Baron in 1941, 'has become the greatest danger to the survival of the Jew'.<sup>59</sup> Unlike other major Jewish thinkers who warned against nationalism because they feared it would lead to Jewish assimilation and the loss of Jewish cultural identity, Baron was critical of nationalism primarily because he feared it would lead to the exclusion of the Jew from the political community, and thus from any form of state protection. Speaking in May 1940, probably just a few weeks before Arendt penned her letter to Cohn-Bendit, Baron espoused federalism as the most 'desirable solution – as far as Jews are concerned' for the post-war period.<sup>60</sup> 'If a state of multiple nationality had always proved to be the most hospitable of states for Jewry-in-Exile', he argued, 'a confederation of free and equal states and nationalities would be the very epitome of a tolerant and multifarious entity'.<sup>61</sup>

Like Arendt, Baron's support for a federal solution in Europe went hand in hand with support for a federal solution in Palestine. Speaking in Chicago in June 1942, just one month after the Biltmore conference, Baron implicitly criticised both Biltmore Zionism and Zionist binationalism and laid out his vision for the future of Palestine: 'A Palestinian state or states constituting a part of a larger commonwealth of nations would offer the best solution for some of the major difficulties inherent in the geographic and social makeup of the country', he argued.<sup>62</sup> In Baron's view Palestine's future would be most secure for Jews and Arabs alike if it were integrated into some form of a large post-war federation like a greatly expanded Arab federation that would become a dominion of the British Commonwealth of Nations or as part of a revamped post-war international organisation under American and British leadership.

box 11, Salo W. Baron Papers, Stanford University Libraries, Department of Special Collections and University Archives. For more on the relationship between Arendt and Baron see Natan Sznajder, *Jewish Memory and the Cosmopolitan Order: Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Condition* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 47–9, as well as Elisabeth Gallas, 'Das Leichenhaus der Bücher': Kulturrestitution und jüdisches Geschichtsdenken nach 1945 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2013), primarily 234–44.

<sup>58</sup> Engel, 'Crisis and Lachrymosity', 255.

<sup>59</sup> Salo Baron, 'Israel's Present', Address to the Union of American Jewish Congregations, New York, 1941, Mo580, box 386, Salo W. Baron Papers.

<sup>60</sup> Salo Baron, 'Reflections on the Future of the Jews of Europe', *Contemporary Jewish Record*, 3, 4 (1940), 362. This address was first delivered to the joint session of the National Conference of Jewish Social Welfare meeting, Pittsburgh, 25 May 1940. While Baron's support for federalism had been strengthened during the Second World War, his support for a European federation should be traced back to the interwar period and is found prominently in his *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937). See also Engel, 'Crisis and Lachrymosity', 255.

<sup>61</sup> Baron, 'Reflections on the Future', 362.

<sup>62</sup> Salo Baron, 'Prospects of Peace in Palestine', public lecture, University of Chicago, 28 June 1942. Reprinted in Phillip W. Ireland, ed., *The Near East: Problems and Prospects* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1942), 130.

Like Arendt, Baron rejected the idea of establishing a Jewish nation state because he believed nation state nationalism had become politically outdated and that a small state would be militarily and economically precarious, though he did acknowledge that if a federal solution in Palestine failed, ‘one still may some day have to erect side by side a Jewish and an Arab state such as was originally proposed by the Royal Commission’.<sup>63</sup> And similarly to Arendt, Baron distinguished between a binational state and a federal solution. Only within a large commonwealth of nations could a ‘genuinely binational state emerge’, Baron argued, because ‘an international or federal guarantee would blunt the edge of the majority versus minority problems . . .’.<sup>64</sup> In other words, and similarly to Arendt, it would create a multi-ethnic political framework in which Jews and Arabs are not the only member nations.

### Arendt and Magnes, 1948

In the first years after the war, Arendt generally refrained from publicly commenting on the question of Palestine. There seems to be no clear reason why Arendt suddenly disengaged from public debates on the topic, which proliferated as the British contemplated the future of the Palestine mandate against a backdrop of escalating violence between Jews, Arabs and the British. It was only in May 1948, shortly before the declaration of independence by the State of Israel, and in the midst of civil war between Arabs and Jews in Palestine, that Arendt returned to publicly discuss the question of the political status of Palestine in an essay entitled ‘To Save the Jewish Homeland: There is Still Time’, published in the pages of *Commentary* magazine.

‘To Save the Jewish Homeland’, the most heartfelt and moving of Arendt’s writings on Zionism, is a critical and scintillating indictment of Zionist politics, particularly as they evolved during and after the war. Arendt argued that since the adoption of the Biltmore programme, all opposition within the Zionist ranks had steadily disappeared and that all Zionists groups were now committed to the establishment of a nation state, with any opposition being considered treason. Arendt suggested that this shift was a result of a transformation in the ‘Jewish national character’ in the wake of the European catastrophe into one that fears that ‘everybody is against us’.<sup>65</sup> ‘After two thousand years of “Galut mentality”’, Arendt wrote, ‘the Jewish people have suddenly ceased to believe in survival as an ultimate good in itself and have gone to the opposite extreme. Now Jews believe in fighting at any price and feel that “going down” is a sensible method of politics’.<sup>66</sup>

Indeed, it is this fear of ‘going down’ that animates Arendt’s article. ‘To Save the Jewish Homeland’ was not written to break away from the Zionist ranks – in fact, the article’s abstract refers to Arendt as a ‘Zionist of many years standing’ – or to press for a specific and more just alternative to the question of Palestine but rather

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 133.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. 133.

<sup>65</sup> Hannah Arendt, ‘To Save the Jewish Homeland: There is Still Time’, *Commentary*, 5 May 1948, 400.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. 400.

in order to warn Jews against the grave dangers that faced the Yishuv if it continued to press for a nation state in the existing political realities. With the memory of the European catastrophe still fresh in mind, Arendt warned that declaring independence would lead to an all-out war with the Arabs which could – indeed, Arendt feared it would – result in the destruction of the Yishuv, and as a consequence the possible dissolution of the Jewish people as a whole. The most moving lines in her piece are those in which she introduces this possibility:

Palestine and the building of a Jewish homeland constitute today the great hope and the great pride of Jews all over the world. What would happen to Jews, individually and collectively, if this hope and this pride were to be extinguished in another catastrophe is almost beyond imagination. But it is certain that this would become the beginning of the self-dissolution of the Jewish people. There is no Jew in the world whose whole outlook on life and the world would not be radically changed by such a tragedy.<sup>67</sup>

As Arendt would write later in the piece with a terrifying irony, ‘this is, certainly, no time for final solutions’.<sup>68</sup> The leadership of the Yishuv should thus refrain, she argued, from taking any steps that are ‘final’ – and by this Arendt meant partition – and adopt any programme which could lead to pacification and which could help avert war.

Arendt argued in her article that the best way to avert war was to establish an international trusteeship over Palestine. In March 1948 the United States reversed its support for the partition of Palestine it had first voiced ahead of the November 1947 vote on the United Nations Partition Plan and called instead for the establishment a United Nations Trusteeship over Palestine. The main thrust of this rather vague political programme was to prevent a political vacuum in Palestine by attempting to maintain the status quo even after the termination of the mandate and the departure of the British.<sup>69</sup> Arendt regarded a trusteeship as an interim solution that would help quell hostilities and lay the ground for future Arab-Jewish cooperation. She commended Magnes for espousing the trusteeship plan, portraying him as the only voice of reason among Jews in Palestine who otherwise beat the drums of war.<sup>70</sup> Once order was restored, she further argued, a federated state such as proposed by Magnes should be established in Palestine. ‘Despite the fact that it [a federated state] establishes a common government for two different peoples’, Arendt now argued, ‘it avoids the troublesome majority–minority constellations, which is insoluble by definition’.<sup>71</sup> It is not fully clear why Arendt suddenly reversed her earlier critique of Magnes and maintained that his programme would overcome the majority–minority problem she had repeatedly insisted it would inevitably create. Most strikingly, Arendt now referred to Magnes’ plan as federal even though in her wartime writings she

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. 402.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 405.

<sup>69</sup> Michael J. Cohen, ‘Truman and the State Department: The Palestine Trusteeship Proposal, Mar. 1948’, *Jewish Social Studies*, 43 2 (1981), 165–78, as well as John B. Judis, *Genesis: Truman, American Jews, and the Origins of the Arab/Israeli Conflict* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014), 301–11.

<sup>70</sup> Arendt, ‘To Save the Jewish Homeland’, 405.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 405.

described it as a binational programme that masqueraded as a federal one. What seems most likely to have led Arendt to endorse Magnes' programme in 1948 was less a change in his or her views than a change in political circumstances. With the threat of an all-out war looming, Arendt felt compelled for the first time to take a specific stand and choose between the two main political alternatives, rather than propose a third way. Still, Arendt's support for an Arab-Jewish confederation did not mean that she had given up on the hope of incorporating Palestine into a larger multi-ethnic federal framework. In this and several other articles written during 1948, Arendt insisted that the creation of an Arab-Jewish confederation should be merely a first step toward its later inclusion in a larger federal structure in the Near East or the Mediterranean.<sup>72</sup>

On 14 May, just a few weeks after the publication of her article, the State of Israel declared its independence and the civil war in Palestine transformed into a larger interstate conflict between Israel and the member states of the Arab League. That same day, US President Harry Truman announced his recognition of the State of Israel. These developments signalled the end of plans for an international trusteeship over Palestine. Facing these new realities, Arendt called for the establishment of an Arab-Jewish confederation in Palestine as part of a negotiated truce, a view that had been advocated by Magnes.<sup>73</sup> In early June she became politically active in supporting Magnes and his group of followers in the United States. The two corresponded extensively, exchanging some twenty letters over the course of four months, and Arendt commented on and revised some of Magnes' drafts before their publication.<sup>74</sup> In June Magnes laid out a new proposal for a confederation that attempted to contend with the reality of Israeli independence. He called for the creation of a United States of Palestine, a union between Israel and a future Palestinian state (he was indecisive as to whether that state would include Transjordan) that would share common policy in matters relating to the economy, foreign affairs and defence. Magnes cited Austria-Hungary as an instructive historical precedent, though not as a direct political model: 'two independent entities with separate parliaments, yet . . . certain subjects [were] reserved for the council of delegations'.<sup>75</sup> In October, Arendt assisted Magnes in thoroughly editing a version of the proposal he submitted to *Commentary* magazine. At the same time, both Arendt and Magnes supported, if only 'cautiously', the first peace proposal submitted at the end of June by the United Nations mediator Count Bernadotte, which envisioned a union between Jews and Arabs in the whole of Transjordan with Jewish self-rule over the coastal plain and the Western Galilee.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 405, as well as Hannah Arendt, 'Peace or Armistice in the Middle East?', *Review of Politics*, 12, 1 (1950), 56–82. The essay was published in 1950 but was written in 1948, most probably during September or October.

<sup>73</sup> Hannah Arendt, 'The Failure of Reason: The Mission of Bernadotte', in Kohn and Feldman, eds., *Jewish Writings*, 408–13. Originally published in Oct. 1948 in the magazine *New Leader*.

<sup>74</sup> Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt*, 222–33.

<sup>75</sup> Judah Leon Magnes, 'For a Jewish-Arab Confederation', letter to the editor, *Commentary*, Oct. 1948.

Both considered the Bernadotte proposal as not materially different from the one advocated by Magnes.<sup>76</sup>

During October both Arendt and Magnes had come to realise that the prospects for a federation were falling apart. In September Jewish militants assassinated Count Bernadotte. Arendt lamented his death in an article that was published in the first week of October entitled 'The Failure of Reason: The Mission of Bernadotte'. 'During the weeks which have passed since [his] assassination', Arendt wrote, 'the situation in Palestine has deteriorated steadily'.<sup>77</sup> Arendt praised Bernadotte as a man of reason and peace, but criticised the second proposal he submitted for the resolution of the conflict, which, as she saw it, had 'granted Israel all the trimmings of sovereignty' and called for separation between Arabs and Jews in Palestine. The reason for Bernadotte's change of approach, Arendt argued, was his realisation that there was no longer a common denominator among Arabs and Jews in Palestine, and that there was no alternative but to separate the two sides.<sup>78</sup> Magnes was deeply moved by Arendt's article. On 7 October he wrote her, 'your article depressed me', and wondered 'is there really no way out?'<sup>79</sup> Three weeks later Magnes died in New York. Fighting continued, and a confederation increasingly appeared out of date in the face of the reality of a Jewish ethnic national state in Palestine.

### Conclusion

During the Second World War Arendt was an outspoken critic of both Biltmore Zionism and Magnes' vision of binationalism, arguing that both would lead to an emergence of a majority-minority state in Palestine. She believed that only a multi-ethnic federation in which Arabs and Jews would not be the only member nations would offer a just and peaceful solution to the conflict in Palestine. After the war, in the midst of fighting between the Jews, Arabs and the British in Palestine, at a time in which the future political structure of Palestine was constantly debated in Britain and the United States, Arendt refrained from commenting on the question of Palestine altogether. Only after the United Nations had voted in favour of partition, and shortly before the British mandate had been terminated and the independence of the State of Israel declared, that is, in early May 1948, did Arendt turn to support Magnes. First, she supported Magnes in his efforts to promote the establishment of an international trusteeship over Palestine, viewing the creation of a federation as a second step to be pursued after order was restored. After plans for a trusteeship fell apart in May, Arendt supported Magnes in his effort to promote an Arab-Jewish confederation as part of a negotiated truce. Throughout 1948, Arendt's support for a

<sup>76</sup> Arendt to Magnes, 14 July 1948, The Hannah Arendt Papers, Library of Congress; Arendt, 'The Failure of Reason', 409–10. See also Arendt's memo on the first Bernadotte proposal, 'Memo on the Bernadotte's Proposals for a Palestine Settlement', Aug. 1948, The Hannah Arendt Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>77</sup> Arendt, 'The Failure of Reason', in Kohn and Feldman, eds., *Jewish Writings*, 408.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* 411.

<sup>79</sup> Magnes to Arendt, 7 Oct. 1948, The Hannah Arendt Papers, Library of Congress.

confederation was based first and foremost on her conviction that the alternative was partition, political disorder and war.

Though Arendt remained committed to federalism after the Second World War, she noted how the vision of a multi-ethnic federation had failed to materialise, particularly in east-central Europe. Instead of the creation of a regional federation in eastern Europe, Arendt wrote in 1946, Europeans witnessed ‘the restoration of national states, which insist more than ever before on national homogeneity’.<sup>80</sup> Yet at the same time as she continued to criticise ethnic nationalism, Arendt also underscored the importance of a state for the protection of the ‘rights of man’ in one of the chapters of her major work she was writing at the time, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.<sup>81</sup> Revising the thesis she first articulated in the letter ‘On the Minority Question’ from 1940, Arendt criticised the concept of abstract human rights and hailed the right of citizenship in a state as the only guarantee against the loss of rights. Originally, the state Arendt believed would best protect the rights of man was a federal one, but by 1946, as Arendt herself noted, the rights of Europeans were being protected by virtue of their citizenship in their ethnic nation states. Arendt never explained why Jews were so exceptionally militant in demanding a nation state of their own in this post-war political reality, or how she reconciled her support for international trusteeship over Palestine with her concomitant criticism of abstract rights. Arendt seemed to be aware of this tension in her thought. In the summer of 1949 she noted in passing how the State of Israel restored human rights to the stateless Jews of Europe by including them in a political community.<sup>82</sup> Yet Arendt also repeatedly emphasised that while the creation of a Jewish state would solve the problem of Jewish refugees, it would inevitably create a new category of refugees, Palestinian Arabs.<sup>83</sup> The enduring complexity of Arendt’s vision of Zionism is a result of her unique attempt to try to reconcile these otherwise opposing political claims.

<sup>80</sup> Hannah Arendt, Review of Nationalities and National Minorities by Oscar Janowsky, *Jewish Social Studies*, 8, 3 (1946), 204, as well as Arendt, Review of Two Continents: A Democratic Federation of East-Central Europe by Felix Gross, *Commentary*, 1 Dec. 1945, 92–3.

<sup>81</sup> See ‘The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man’, in Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Florida: Harcourt, 1968), 267–304.

<sup>82</sup> Hannah Arendt, ‘“The Rights of Man”: What Are They?’, *Modern Review*, 3, 1 (1949), 31.

<sup>83</sup> See, for example, Arendt to Magnes, 17 Sept. 17 1948, The Hannah Arendt Papers, Library of Congress. In this letter Arendt edited a letter Magnes submitted to *Commentary* magazine and suggested a formulation that included the following sentence: ‘It is most unfortunate that the same men who for many years would point to the tragedy of Jewish Displaced Persons as the main argument for immediate mass-immigration into Palestine, are now willing, as far as the world knows, to help create a new category of Displaced Persons.’ While Magnes originally wrote these words, it seems plausible to assume that Arendt would not have carefully revised Magnes’ original formulation had she not subscribed to the same view herself.