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ARTICLE

From Russia to Palestine via Poland: The Shifting Centre of Interwar Labour Zionism

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Under British rule Palestine gradually emerged as the new centre of Zionism. The Zionist centre shifted from Eastern and Central Europe to Mandatory Palestine through a combined process of mass migration and the creation of transnational institutions. By exploring the building of transnational institutions in the 1920's, this article shows how the Labour Zionist leadership in Palestine turned its communities of origin in Eastern Europe into their supporters. With the rapid decline of the former Russian centre under the communist dictatorship, independent Poland emerged as a new centre of Zionism and the labour movement outside Palestine. The two new centres were connected by a dual structure, with Poland as the demographic centre and Palestine the political-cultural one. The dual-centre structure was unique to Labour Zionism, building a mass movement between Eastern Europe and Palestine in the 1930s, and leading ultimately to the transition of power from liberal Zionism to a Labour hegemony.

Introduction

During the interwar period Labour Zionism became the leading political power in the Jewish community of Palestine (the Yishuv) as a result of mass migration and the creation of transnational institutions that shifted the Zionist centre from Eastern and Central Europe to Mandatory Palestine. This article explores how factions of Labour Zionism worked separately and, gradually, in coordination and collaboration, leaving a profound imprint on the Yishuv and on the Zionist Organization (ZO) as a whole, and continuing to dominate the politics of the State of Israel during its first three decades.[1] I explore this central process in the history of Zionism by asking how and why Labour Zionism obtained its hegemony in the Yishuv and through the Zionist movements. By reexamining a classic facet of modern Jewish political history, I offer a new transnational perspective that builds on the increasing scholarly interest on interregional interactions between interwar Europe and the Middle East and on the transnational turn in Jewish political history.[2]

I will show how Labour Zionist organisations, namely 'The Pioneer' (*Hechalutz*) movement, the Workers of Zion (*Poalei Zion*) Party and The Young Workers (*Hapoel Hatzair*) Party, formed transnational structures that successfully connected Eastern Europe and the Yishuv in Palestine, redefining

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[1] The classical works on Labour in Palestine include: Anita Shapira, *Berl: The Biography of a Socialist Zionist, Berl Katznelson, 1887–1944* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Yosef Gorni, *Ahdut Haavoda, 1919–1930* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1979); Zeev Tzahor, 'The Histadrut: From Marginal Organization to "State-in-the-Making"', in Yehuda Reinharz and Anita Shapira, eds., *Essential papers on Zionism* (New York: New York University Press, 1996) 473–508; Dan Horowitz and Moshe Lissak, *Origins of the Israeli Polity: Palestine under the Mandate* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

[2] Leading studies focused on the flow of funds, knowledge and bodies from Europe into Palestine: Jacob Metzer, *National Capital for a National Home* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 1979); Derek Penslar, *Zionism and Technocracy: The Engineering of Jewish Settlement in Palestine, 1870–1918* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 366–452; Gur Alroey, *An Unpromising Land: Jewish Migration to Palestine in the Early Twentieth Century* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2014).

the relations between them. The Labour Zionist leadership in Palestine, including second and third level activists, was deeply involved in this institution building in the first decade after the First World War. Using new sources by key activists and revisiting previous sources in a transnational context I will show how the infrastructure that Labour Zionists formed after the First World War added an important foundation from which the labour movement drew. The activity of Labour Zionists from Palestine in Europe created new paths for Zionist youth there, in ways that were institutionally novel. They formed an integrated system of connecting institutions, including a network of national chapters and regional councils, international and national conventions, publications and periodicals, pioneer training communes, immigrant communes, youth movements, activists training seminars, fundraising campaigns, political campaigns and even sports organisations. The steady flow of envoys transferred ideas, practices and resources. These transnational institutions and activities constituted a new space of Labour Zionism between Eastern Europe and Palestine that allowed for mutual operations, sometimes very intensely.[3] I will focus here on the political apparatus that controlled the network and on the immigrant organisation Hechalutz as one of its main components to demonstrate how they connected Eastern European constituencies with the leadership in Palestine.

Leaving behind the dichotomy of diaspora and Jewish state-in-the-making in British Palestine, I will highlight the ongoing interplay between Palestine and Poland in a dual-centre structure created by the socialist Zionist movement. The political opportunities and limits of Zionist activism amid the breakdown of the European imperial order during the First World War enabled the formation of new types of political agitation and channels of communication in Eastern Europe.[4] The British issuing of the Balfour Declaration enhanced the centrality of Palestine to Jewish national activism. Against the disintegration of the Russian and Ottoman empires, Labour Zionist parties made use of these favourable conditions. Skilfully using methods of political agitation and institution building, Labour Zionists maximised the coordination between the Jewish political centre emerging in Palestine and the Jewish demographic centre in Eastern Europe. This dual-centre structure allowed Labour Zionism to become a dominant political force in Jewish nationalist politics. By incorporating migrants into the labour institutions in Mandatory Palestine, and sending envoys to Eastern Europe (to the Soviet Union and then chiefly to Poland after it forbade Zionist agitation), the transnational apparatus of Labour Zionism took shape.

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[3] The new study of Jewish political internationalism and transnationalism has been largely focused on elites and international relations, or on the prewar imperial era. On internationalism see James Loeffler, 'The Famous Trinity of 1917: Zionist Internationalism in Historical Perspective', in *Simon-Dubnow-Instituts*, 15 (2016) 211–38; Loeffler, *Rooted Cosmopolitans: Jews and Human Rights in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018) 85–112, 295–301; Gil Rubin, 'From Federalism to Binationalism: Hannah Arendt's Shifting Zionism', *Contemporary European History*, 24, 3 (2015) 393–414. On the Imperial context see Tomohito Baji, 'Zionist Internationalism? Alfred Zimmern's Post-Racial Commonwealth', *Modern Intellectual History* (2016 [first view, online]), 26; Abigail Green, 'Nationalism and the "Jewish International": Religious Internationalism in Europe and the Middle East c. 1840–c. 1880', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 50, 2 (2008) 535–7; Dimitry Shumsky, *Beyond the Nation-State: The Zionist Political Imagination from Pinsker to Ben-Gurion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 62–89, 97–108; Studies on transnational communal relations with Eastern Europe are usually not political and are devoted to American Jewry: see Rebecca Kobrin, *Jewish Bialystok and its Diaspora* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010) 1–6. See also Daniel Soyer, 'Transnationalism and Mutual Influence: American and East European Jewries in the 1920s and 1930s', in Jeremy Cohen and Moshe Rosman, eds., *Rethinking European Jewish History*, 201–20.

[4] This article brings methodologically sophisticated recent studies on popular Jewish politics in interwar Poland into dialogue with transnational histories of Zionism, such as Kenneth B. Moss, 'Negotiating Jewish Nationalism in Interwar Warsaw', in Glenn Dynner and François Guesnet, eds., *Warsaw: Jewish Metropolis* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 390–434; Scott Ury, *Barricades and Banners: The Revolution of 1905 and the Transformation of Warsaw Jewry* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2012) 141–71; Kamil Kijek, 'Violence as Political Experience among Jewish Youth in Interwar Poland', in Benjamin Nathans, Kenneth Moss and Taro Tsurumi, eds., *From Europe's East to the Middle East: Israel's Russian and Polish Lineages*, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press (due 2021) 243–70; Daniel K. Heller, *Jabotinsky's Children: Polish Jews and the Rise of Right-Wing Zionism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 28–67.

This article will focus on the institution building mechanisms that enabled this geopolitical shift of Zionism.[5] In so doing, I challenge the historiography that tends to see this shift as deriving from external developments, namely the Balfour Declaration, with London becoming the imperial centre of gravity for Zionist aspirations and from mass migration to Mandatory Palestine in the 1930's. Shifting the focus from external factors, such as the British occupation of Palestine, the economic and political crisis in Europe and the rise of Nazism, to internal ones, I explore how Labour Zionists anticipated and responded to these developments by forming a network of organisations under which their mobilisation gained an advantageous position for political growth compared with the movement's ideological rivals ad how it could create an innovative institutional apparatus in the 1920s that was more elaborate and sophisticated than its competitors.[6]

Relying on new archival material and memoirs in Hebrew and Yiddish written by Labour Zionist activists in Poland and Palestine,[7] I reconstruct and analyse the organisations that they formed, competing visions and the strategies that eventually succeeded while other failed. The correspondence, protocols, memoirs, collected documents and periodicals that I use are incomplete and dispersed in various collections, reflecting the fluid and complex nature of the subject of study, as well as the upheavals of history with which they cope. Still, these fragmentary sources and personal accounts allow us to map the network and its leading activists, and to unveil the transformation that they ushered, which was kept largely hidden and self-evident in previous historiography. The methodology of this research is to expose the social composition of the networks of activists, which have been thus far treated as local actors reflecting internal developments. By showing that they were in fact envoys, external agents of change, reveals the relations between organisations in Russia, Poland, Palestine and Germany.

I also rely on classic historical literature pertaining to Labour Zionism, especially in Russia and Germany. I reinterpret these studies from a transnational perspective and integrate them with the wider transnational network that I uncover.

The rapid construction of a thriving political transnational movement after the First World War, which connected Russia, Poland and Palestine, as well as other countries, demonstrates the opportunities that were opened up in post imperial spaces of Eastern Europe and the Middle East, as well as their limits.

Zionism Between the Russian Empire and Ottoman Palestine

On the eve of Zionist migration to Palestine in 1880 there were only about 25,000 Jews living in it, whereas about 70 per cent of the global Jewish population estimated at 7.66 million was concentrated in Eastern Europe (52 per cent in the Russian Empire, 9 per cent in Austro-Hungarian Galicia and 4.6 per cent in Hungary).[8] The Jews of the former Polish Commonwealth, living mostly in small towns, served as a centre of Jewish religious observance and rabbinic studies in Europe, while enlightenment and modern education spread slowly beyond elites and in Jewish schools.[9] When the Zionist

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[5] I borrow this term from the essential volume edited by Martin H Geyer and Johannes Paulmann, *The Mechanics of Internationalism: Culture, Society, and Politics from the 1840s to the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1–26, which I extend to the interwar years.

[6] Rona Yona, 'Jewish Politics Without Borders: How Mapai Won the 1933 Elections to the Zionist Congress', *POLIN*, 35 (forthcoming 2021).

[7] Namely the Israel Labour Party Archive, Beit Berl (ILPA), Yad Tabenkin, Hakibbutz Hame'uhad Archives (YTA), Pinhas Lavon Institute for Labour Movement Research (Labour Archive), Ghetto Fighters' House Archive (GFHA), Ben Gurion Archive (BGA), published memoirs and periodicals.

[8] Another 10 per cent lived in the German speaking world, 6.5 per cent in the Muslim world, 4.4 per cent in Western Europe and 3 per cent in the Americas. I included only the Orthodox Hungarian community in 'Eastern Europe'. Calculations are mine based on Jakob Lestschinsky 'Die Umsiedlung und Umschichtung des jüdischen Volkes im Laufe des letzten Jahrhunderts', *Weltwirtschaftliches Archiv*, 30 (1929), 132.

[9] Gershon David Hundert, *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century: A Genealogy of Modernity* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 1–31. Vilnius was known as the 'Jerusalem of Lithuania', Ben Zion Dinur, 'Yerushalayim delita' in Leyzer Ran, ed., *Jerusalem of Lithuania, Illustrated and Documented*, Volume 1 (New York: Vilna Album Committee, 1974). On the marginality of Russian and Russian Jewish modernisation, see Benjamin Nathans,

Organization was established in 1897 by Theodore Herzl and a small group of German-speaking Jews from Austro-Hungary and Germany, tensions were immediately felt between the demographic centre and the main incubators of Jewish modernity (Eastern vs. Central-Western Europe), although the division line was not strictly regional. Most Zionists living in Russia were unable to form political institutions freely and had to rely on their more politically progressive and experienced counterparts from central Europe, while focusing on culture and the development of modern Hebrew.[10]

The death of the charismatic Herzl in 1904 and the dramatic events of the 1905 Russian Revolution ushered in a new phase of Zionism with the birth of modern Jewish political parties following a constitutional reform in Russia.[11] On their margin were small groups of socialist Zionist youth, from which the future Zionist leadership in Palestine would emerge. The socialist Zionist youth comprised of two parties, Workers of Zion (*Poalei Zion*), a Marxist party, formally established in 1906 in Poltava Ukraine, and The Young Worker (*Hapoel Hatzair*), a non-Marxist organisation, founded in Ottoman Palestine in 1905 by recent migrants from Russia.[12] In the decade before the First World War members of Poalei Zion who emigrated from Russia set up chapters in Palestine, the United States and other destinations of Eastern European Jewish migration. They created offshoots, or what might be called a diaspora of their ideological breeding ground, carrying their radical ethos to their new homes.[13] The most famous example is David Ben-Gurion (1886–1973) who migrated to Palestine in 1906, and who would become the first prime minister of the State of Israel in 1948. Born and raised in a small town in Congress Poland (Płońsk), his Zionist and Socialist identity was forged by the Russian political and cultural context, making him a 'Russian' rather than a 'Polish' Jew.[14] In Palestine, the migrants of both groups, numbering a few hundred agricultural workers, created Labour Zionists institutions.

In 1907 Poalei Zion formed a world union, a transnational infrastructure of a unified political party that operated within the Zionist Organisation, itself a transnational framework.[15] Most Zionists were 'general', meaning non-factional and liberal leaning 'respectable' middle-class and middle-aged men. While the Zionist membership included diverse Jewish communities, Labour Zionism was mostly composed of Eastern Europeans and Eastern European migrants elsewhere.[16]

The First World War: Falling Empires, New Borders

The Great War was a turning point for Jews in Eastern Europe and the Ottoman Empire. Three major developments had a direct impact on Zionism. First, liberalisation in the Russian Empire enabled unprecedented political activity, beginning in Congress Poland in 1915 under German occupation, and more fully in Russia after February 1917 and in independent Poland in 1918. Zionist activity in Russia boomed, claiming 300,000 members in 1,200 branches in 1917 and more than two thirds of the votes to Jewish parties in the elections to the Russian Constituent Assembly.[17] In Poland, the

Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 303–12. On modern schooling in Hebrew, Yiddish and Russian see Mordechai Zalkin, *Modernizing Jewish Education in Nineteenth Century Eastern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 41–62; Nathans, *Beyond the Pale* 201–56; Shimon Frost, *Schooling as a Socio-Political Expression* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1998), 27–69.

[10] Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet*, ch. 4; Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800–1923* (Chicago: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), 80–100.

[11] Mendelsohn, *On Modern Jewish Politics*, 3–36.

[12] Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, 329–94.

[13] Ibid., 366–547. The American section numbered 5,000 at its peak in 1918. See Rachel Rojanski, *Conflicting Identities: Poalei Zion in America, 1905–1930* (Hebrew), 72–88; Mark Raider, *The Emergence of American Zionism* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 202–15.

[14] Anita Shapira, 'Berl, Tabenkin, and Ben-Gurion and Their Attitudes to the Russian Revolution', *Zmanim: A Historical Quarterly*, 27/28 (1988) 80–97 (Hebrew).

[15] During the Zionist Congress that convened in The Hague, Netherlands. Zvia Balshan, *The Jewish Socialist Labor Confederation Poalei Zion, 1907–1920* (Hebrew) (Sde Boker: Ben Gurion Research Institute, 2004), 53–76.

[16] For example, Balshan, *Poalei Zion*, 287–95, 303.

[17] Ziva Galili, 'The Soviet Experience of Zionism: Importing Soviet Political Culture to Palestine', *Journal of Israeli History*, 1 (2005), 4.

Zionist movement achieved unparalleled scope and influence in the Sejm from 1917 to 1923.[18] Between 1917 and 1919 tens of thousands of supporters joined Labour Zionism in Eastern Europe and its new counterpart, The Pioneer (or 'Avant-guard', *Hechalutz*), established by youth seeking immediate immigration to Palestine.[19]

The second major development was the British occupation of Palestine (1917–8) and the issue of the Balfour Declaration in November 1917. The British takeover and their support of Zionism created an opportunity to form direct political link between the Zionist heartland in Eastern Europe and British-ruled Palestine, with the ratification of the declaration and the issue of the British Mandate for Palestine by the League of Nations in 1922.

Third, the disintegration of empires, above all the Russian and the Ottoman Empires but also Austro-Hungary, broke their geopolitical spaces into some twenty new national units (nation states and mandates). New frontiers now cut across former shared spaces, requiring a reorientation of local communities. In Pinsk, for example, the capital of the marshy Polesia region situated between interior Russia and central Poland (today Belarus), 70 per cent of the population after the war was Jewish. The city was liberated from harsh martial German rule by the Soviets in January 1919. A short period of revolutionary rule followed, attracting many youngsters. When the Polish–Soviet War broke out (1919–21), thirty-five Jewish community leaders, activists and teachers were massacred by the Polish Army in 1919, including many Labour Zionists.[20] After switching hands twice more, Pinsk remained on Poland's eastern periphery, disconnected from its traditional trade routes by a new sealed border in the east. Estranged from their new state, the Labour Zionist youth of Pinsk set up their own institutions, including political parties, schools, youth movements in Hebrew and Yiddish and a pioneer organisation that produced the first group of pioneers that headed to Palestine in 1921.[21] There they formed a kibbutz (named Gvat) to commemorate their dead comrades, attracting further migrants from their hometown.[22] During the 1920s the grassroots organisations of Pinsk were gradually absorbed into the national units of Labour Zionism that were set up in the new Poland and Palestine.[23]

The political reconstruction of Eastern Europe and the new borders required national chapters for each Zionist organisation in every country. For example, Hechalutz was established in Poland in 1919, in the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1919 (a temporary entity), etc.[24] Migrants from Poland and Russia also set up local chapters along their routes to Palestine, together with locals in places such as Latvia, Vienna, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Istanbul and eventually Haifa.[25] Disintegration and movement necessitated a platform that would coordinate between the units. The transnational activity that began before the war with the creation of a world union of Poalei Zion truly flourished after it, and not just in the labour movement (see below). Between 1919 and 1921 the political upheaval and massive displacement in Eastern Europe also prompted the

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[18] Mendelsohn, *Zionism in Poland*, 1–2, 213–2.

[19] See, for example, a singular publication issued by the central committee of the Zionist Youth party (*Tseirei Tsiyon*) with instructions for pioneer immigration, *Yedies vegn Hechalutz* (Bialystok, early 1919).

[20] The victims were executed by a firing squad after they were charged with spying and supporting communism. The massacre was investigated by American-Jewish diplomat Henry Morgenthau Sr. Azriel Shohet, *The Jews of Pinsk 1881 to 1941* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 358–457.

[21] *Hershl Pinski: Leyom Hashana* (Warsaw: Hechalutz, 1936), 13–9; Aaron Yisraeli, *Jewish Workers' Parties in Pinsk* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1979), 49.

[22] Haim Gvati, *Gvat: Sources and History* (Hebrew) (Gvat, 1937), 82–6.

[23] See, for example, letter of the regional secretary of Hechalutz in Polesia about the dilemmas of the group in Palestine, including which kibbutz movement to join. Hershl Pinski to Eliyahu Golomb (secretary of Ahdut Ha'avoda), 27.10 [1924], Labour Archive, IV-104-40-3.

[24] *Yedies vegn Hechalutz* (Bialystok, early 1919); *Hechalutz* (newspaper, Yiddish, Warsaw), 26.5.1919; *Hechalutz* (circular) of the Lithuanian committee in Vilnius, Dec. 1922, Labour Archive; Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 52–65.

[25] Eliyahu Dobkin, 'Hathalat irguno ha-'olami shel he-haluts', in *Me'asef li-tnu'at he-haluts* (Warsaw: Hechalutz, 1930), 177–8.

immigration of Labour Zionists and pioneers to British-ruled Palestine, predominantly from Russia and the newly independent Poland.[26]

The Decline of Zionism in Russia and the Rise of the Polish Stage

The new border between Poland and the Soviet Union reshaped relations across the Labour Zionist sphere. The flourishing Zionist centre in Russia was severely undermined by the Bolshevik Revolution and the Russian Civil War. Under the communist dictatorship Zionism was rapidly declining and cut off from the transnational Zionist network, though it did not immediately disappear.[27] During the first half of the 1920s conflicting policies allowed for ten Soviet Zionist organisations, with some 50,000 members, to operate under limited permits or by authorities turning a blind eye, mostly towards activities with socialist leanings and those focusing on youth.[28]

In 1919 Hebrew was banned as part of the general campaign against religion, and in 1920 participants in the Russian Zionist convention in Moscow were arrested and later released, effectively banning further conventions and correspondence with Palestine and severely restricting migration. While 'bourgeois' (liberal) and 'clerical' (religious) organisations were eliminated,[29] the years of the New Economic Policy (NEP) and Jewish agricultural colonisation allowed for some activity. A new policy in Ukraine and Belarus, of co-opting national elites and integrating them into the communist parties through national-cultural autonomy, reinvigorated national discourse and marginalised Jews, unintentionally also encouraging Jewish nationalism.[30]

The Labour Zionist leadership in Palestine sought to maintain relations with its Soviet counterparts using visitors and limited underground activity, namely with the Socialist Zionist Party established in 1920 (known by its acronym TsS), the Zionist Youth Party (*Tseirei Tsiyon*, non-Marxist), Hechalutz and smaller youth movements like The Young Guard (*Hashomer Hatzair*, Jewish scouts formed around the First World War). On the other side, Soviet Zionist leaders made illegal trips abroad to take part in conferences in Europe.[31] But the restrictions on travel, communication and association gradually cut off the Russian hub from the transnational network, pushing some of the activists and leadership to emigrate or flee in order to reconnect with the Labour Zionist movement. Until the mid-1920s small-scale illegal expatriation to Palestine continued, together with permission for convicted political prisoners to leave, but the level of Russian Zionist migration rapidly declined. In 1928 the last Zionist organisation was outlawed after Joseph Stalin abandoned the NEP, with only clandestine activity continuing until 1934.[32]

Once Zionism in the Soviet Union was severely restricted, the Polish movement became the largest in the world. The Russian Zionist Organisation established in 1897, as well as earlier Zionist activity, operated under two major cultural realms of influence, Russian and Polish. The 'Russian' realm was the more prominent, including Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine in the Pale of Settlement, alongside St. Petersburg and Moscow. In Congress Poland, Zionism was relatively week, just 10 per cent of contemporary Zionists lived there despite it being home to a quarter of the Russian Jewish population (about 1.3 million). Extreme acculturation and religious orthodoxy were stronger there.[33]

[26] Baruch Ben-Avram and Henry Near, *Studies in the Third Aliyah (1919–1924): Image and Reality* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 1995), 17–46.

[27] Ziva Galili, 'Zionism in the Early Soviet State: Between Legality and Persecution', in Zvi Gitelman and Yaacov Ro'I, eds., *Revolution, Repression, and Revival: The Soviet Jewish Experience* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers), 37–67.

[28] Ziva Galili, 'Carving out a Space for Zionism in Soviet Russia in the 1920s', *Iyunim* (2004), 480 (Hebrew); idem, 'Zionism in the Early Soviet State', 47.

[29] Benjamin Pinkus, *The Jews of the Soviet Union: The History of a National Minority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 130–2.

[30] Galili, 'Carving out a Space for Zionism'.

[31] Pinkus, *The Jews of the Soviet Union*, 134–5. From 1924 delegations of TsS and *Hechalutz* outside the Soviet Union provided information and aid to members and prisoners. *Sefer TsS* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1963), 469–74; *Hechalutz in Russia* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Hapoel Hatzair, 1932), 6.

[32] On immigration in the second half of the 1920s see Galili, 'The Soviet Experience of Zionism', 1–33.

[33] Joseph Goldstein, 'The Beginnings of the Zionist Movement in Congress Poland: The Victory of the *Hasidim* over the Zionists?' *POLIN*, 5 (1990), 114–30.

This changed drastically in the First World War, when a large and vibrant Zionist movement emerged in independent Poland. However, Polish Zionism did not assume a leading role in the ZO to match their size. Instead, its membership was gradually incorporated into the transnational networks of various Zionist parties. As the case of Labour Zionism shows, these networks continued the 'Russian' domination well into the 1920s, and were later replaced by control from Palestine.

The area between the Polish and Russian spheres of influence, or between Moscow and Warsaw – Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine – was divided between the two states. In Poland the eastern periphery, called Kresy, was the heartland of Zionism, which remained weak in central Poland and in the large urban centres (Warsaw, Lodz and Lvov). After the First World War Polish Zionism adopted a radical programme of diaspora nationalism.[34] It focused on Jewish national autonomy and securing equal rights, guaranteed by the Minorities Treaties signed in Versailles.[35]

The flow of refugees from the Soviet Union, many through Poland, included some Labour Zionist leaders. While most continued to Palestine, several dozen activists remained in Poland in the 1920s, reshaping Labour Zionism there. One example is Yisrael Marminsky of Slonim (today Belarus), who studied in Warsaw and Moscow. During the revolution he became one of the leaders of the radicalised Zionist Youth, which was influenced by the Socialist Revolutionary Party and formed a new Socialist Zionist Party (TsS).[36] Soon after, Marminsky moved to Poland and joined the leadership of the TsS and *Hechalutz* there, where he also chaired the Association of Jewish Writers and Journalists in Warsaw. He moved to Tel Aviv in 1924, becoming a mid-rank administrator responsible of immigration, and later a fundraiser in the United States, both in the labour apparatus.[37] His route maps the major hubs of interwar Labour Zionism and the dynamic of movement between them.

Nowhere was the 'Russian' influence in Poland more felt than in *Hechalutz*. As an immigration organisation it suffered a continuous loss of its leadership to Palestine, especially in the peak years of migration: 1919–20, 1924–5, 1932–5. The flow of local leaders from Poland to Palestine created a vivid connection between them on the one hand, while weakening the large Polish membership on the other. The first to fill this leadership void were the Russian *émigrés*. As early as 1921 the secretary of *Hechalutz* was a Soviet refugee, Eliyahu Dobkin from Bobruisk (Belarus), now on the Soviet side. A law student and social revolutionary, he was appalled by the brutality of the revolutionary regime and fled with his fiancé to Poland in 1920. Settling in Warsaw thanks to his mothers' ancestral connection to Bialystok (now on the Polish side of the border),[38] he resumed Zionist activity and quickly became a prominent figure among the several hundred Russian and Ukrainian pioneers who dominated the Polish movement, which had some 1,800 members.[39] By 1923 three Russian *émigrés* staffed the central committee of *Hechalutz* in Poland, which contained only one member from Warsaw, a philosophy and law student Yitzhak Szvum-Shvo. He joined Dobkin, Pinhas Rashish (the TsS leader from Odessa, born in the Polish town of Kunów), Israel Ritow (the TsS leader in Yekaterinoslav [Dnipro] and Kharkov, born near Minsk).[40] In the mid-1920s they all continued to Palestine, except Dobkin who remained in Warsaw until 1932, becoming prominent functionaries in the labour movement for decades.[41] The penetration of former Soviet activists into the Polish pioneer movement grew when five regional councils were formed in 1924, all but one of their members (who

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[34] Marcos Zilber, *Different Nationality, Equal Citizenship! The Efforts to Achieve Autonomy for Polish Jewry During the First World War* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2014).

[35] See, for example, Gershon Bacon, 'Polish Jews and the Minorities Treaties Obligations, 1925: The View from Geneva', *Gal-Ed*, 18 (2002), 145–76.

[36] Between 1921 and 1925 they operated a World Union, until they united with the *Poalei Zion* union.

[37] Yisrael Marminsky to Meir Bogdanovski, Labour Archive, VI-230-10; Alexander Manor, *Commitment and Creative Action: The Life and Work of Israel Merom (Mereminsky)* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Public Committee, 1978).

[38] Mordechai Naor, *Hahotem ha'asiri: Eliyahu Dobkin* (Mikve Yisrael: Yehuda Dekel Library, 2012), 9–45.

[39] Israel Oppenheim, *Hehalutz movement in Poland, 1917–1929* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1982), 115.

[40] *Hechalutz* (newspaper, Hebrew, Warsaw), Aug. 1923, 56.

[41] Rashish, for example, was mayor of Petah Tikva, and Ritow head of the Central Union of Cooperatives.

was from Pinsk) were from the Soviet Union.[42] Even in Volhynia, where Zionism was particularly strong, the regional council was composed of Rashish, an émigré from Soviet Ukraine, and an envoy from Palestine.[43]

The Russian leadership gave the Polish movement a clear socialist orientation.[44] They also strengthened connections to Palestine, at the expense of relations with local branches, by switching the language of the movement's periodical from Yiddish to Hebrew, the language of Zionists in Palestine. Yiddish was the undisputed language of Jewish mass politics in Poland and Warsaw was the capital of the popular Jewish press. This shift drew strong criticism from local Polish activists and members but had little effect, reflecting their alienation from the Polish political scene.[45] The Russian activists were detached from Polish politics. The facility in which they could do it demonstrates their control, which relied also on their better education. The Russian activists were often university students, while their Polish counterparts came mostly from a thin layer of gymnasium graduates, the result of ongoing repression of education in Poland under Russian rule and discriminatory policies in independent Poland.[46] The relations between the Russian leadership and the Polish membership remained tense, while the 'Russians' provided vital backbone to the new organisation and kept it from disbanding after its Polish founders emigrated to Palestine in 1919–21. But in the mid-1920s immigration wave to Palestine their pool was starting to drain. The TsS party, for example, was unable to post the position of its party secretary after he immigrated.[47] The envoys from Palestine that replaced them perpetuated these relations between the polish membership and its leadership.

In sum, in the 1920s Poland became the new demographic centre of Zionism, and of Labour Zionism for that matter, providing both the largest membership to the ZO and most of the migrants to Palestine. The separation of Polish Jewry from the Russian Jewish centre coincided with the influx of experienced activists, generating a complex relationship between the declining Russian stage and the rising centres in Poland and Palestine. It reflected the old Russian-Polish conundrum, dating back to the early days of Zionism, when Polish Zionists were trying to break loose from Russian Zionist domination. While Poland was liberated from Russian dominance, Russian Zionists settled in it. The leading liberal current of Zionism in Poland indeed became autonomous from Russian Zionists, forming a separate Polish Zionist Federation in 1916 this time under German Jewish influence, becoming immersed in domestic Polish politics in the 1920s.[48] Its small labour movement, however, was weaved into a transnational network, and from there would return to take a leading position in Polish Zionism in the 1930s.

Forming the New Dominant Centre in Palestine

Following the Balfour Declaration and the British occupation of Palestine, prospects for large scale immigration grew. Thus, the Labour Zionist leadership there began to reshape relations with the diaspora. With fifteen years of experience in Palestine behind them, they began to articulate their sense of centrality and claim to authority with greater confidence. In spite of its small size, with only a few thousand members, the leadership of the labour movement in Palestine believed it was destined to lead the nation. They argued that theoretical preconceptions shaped in the diaspora had little to do with the realities of Palestine.[49] They demanded that the movements around the world be subject

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[42] Yosef Bankover, *Sipurim mi-derekh arukah* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1975), 18–26; Zalman Yoeli, *Pinhas Rashish* (Tel Aviv: Federation of Local Authorities, 1981), 47–53.

[43] Eliezer Leoni-Tsuperfain, ed., *Sefer Kovel*, Tel Aviv 1956, 282–4.

[44] See, for example, the dense socialist economic discussions in the renewed organ they published, which was edited by Ritow, *Hechalutz* (newspaper, Hebrew, Warsaw), Mar. 1923.

[45] Rona Yona, 'Yiddish Speaking Hebrews: Language and Distribution in Hechalutz Press in Interwar Poland', *Gal-Ed*, 25 (2017) 110–7 (Hebrew).

[46] Gershon Bacon, 'National Revival, Ongoing Acculturation: Jewish Education in Interwar Poland', *Yearbook of the Simon Dubnow Institute*, 1 (2002) 71–92.

[47] Pinski to Golomb, 27.10 [1924], Labour Archive, IV-104-40-3.

[48] Zilber, *Different Nationality, Equal Citizenship*, 9.

[49] Shapira, *Berl*, 87.

to their experience and institutions, which they called 'the needs of the Land of Israel' they claimed to represent. They saw Labour Zionism in Eastern Europe as a reserve of the movement in Palestine, ascribing it a more passive role of rank and file. As one leader phrased it, they 'did not bring a new theory, the brought a new will … that was missing'.[50]

The leadership in Palestine exerted its authority over counterparts in Eastern Europe in two main ways: by incorporating new migrants into local institutions, and by sending envoys back to Eastern Europe to form direct links and influence. These methods were accompanied by a gradual concentration of activists in Palestine, as well as political realignment and the formation of institutions designed to incorporate the Labour Zionist movements in Eastern Europe. I will show how they gradually reshaped relations during the 1920s, firmly establishing their authority by 1930.

The concentration of activists in Palestine was a natural outcome of migration, which redefined it as the new centre of the network. The flow of migration and activists from Eastern Europe to Palestine intertwined these spaces. Following the dramatic events of the First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution, the Poalei Zion party split in 1920, resonant of the 1905 moment. Most members in Eastern Europe left the 'bourgeois' ZO and the Palestine project to focus on local socialism or communism, and founded a Yiddishist party called Left Poalei Zion that was strong in Poland.[51] The right wing of the party was restructured under the leadership of the Palestine section and began consolidating cohorts abroad.

Immediately after the war the leadership in Palestine reached out to the new expanded movement in the diaspora in two ways. First, they established a unified framework in Palestine, designed to absorb new immigrants, which was headed by the two wings of the veteran labour movement – the local *Hapoel Hatzair* and the members of the global *Poalei Zion*. Together with the first arrivals of the younger members of the new pioneer movement from Eastern Europe, they founded the General Federation of Hebrew Workers in the Land of Israel (the *Histadrut*) in 1920. It was designed to incorporate the arriving pioneers and workers into the labour camp in Palestine and to accommodate them in their new home. This was a key moment in which the *Histadrut* assumed the role of the local chapter of 'Hechalutz in the Land of Israel', which had been formed a few months earlier by the new arrivals and took responsibility for the immigrants.[52] In spite of the generational gap and tensions between the migrants of 1905 and the migrants of the Great War, the veterans succeeded in consolidating the two groups, as well as future arrivals, under their leadership.[53] Consequently, the *Histadrut* soon became the largest and one of the strongest Zionist organisations in Palestine.

Once a unified Labour Zionist framework operated in Mandatory Palestine, the leadership began seeking ways to connect with its diaspora counterparts and to take a leading role. They regularly toured Europe (and the United States), in order to reconnect with old colleagues and new supporters. For example, in 1923 they sent a delegation to the international agricultural exhibition in Moscow, headed by Ben Gurion, Meir Rotberg and Yehuda Kopelevich – representing the three main factions of Labour Zionism in Russia and Palestine – the Marxist, the non-Marxist and the pioneering. The delegation met with the major movements there, encouraging their unification.[54] The delegation's participation was facilitated by Avraham Bragin, a former Zionist Youth member in Yekaterinoslav (Dnipro) and now one of the organisers of the exhibition and an advocate for a Jewish republic in the Soviet Union.[55] His involvement shows that influence and ideas did not only flow from Eastern Europe to Palestine. An inverted path also existed through former Zionists who were now high-ranking Soviet officials, allowing Labour Zionist ideas shaped in Palestine to flow back and gain access

[50] Moshe Beilinson, 'Hateuda omedet be'eyna', *Davar*, 2.3.1928.

[51] Balshan, *Poalei Zion*, 291–2.

[52] Dobkin, 'Hathalat irguno ha-'olami', 177–8. Haim Golan, 'The Hechalutz Committee in Eretz Israel in 1920', *Cathedra*, 77 (1995) 66–99 (Hebrew).

[53] One exception was the Work Battalion (*Gdud Ha'avoda*), who returned to the Soviet Union in the late 1920s. Anita Shapira, 'Gedud ha-Avodah: A Dream That Failed', *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 30 (1984), 62–76.

[54] Pinkus, *The Jews of the Soviet Union*, 134–5.

[55] Ibid., 71.

to Soviet authorities, occasionally with success.[56] This inverted path to Russia was closed in 1924 when the temporary toleration and prosperity of Soviet Labour Zionism ended and a massive crackdown began.

In addition to official visits, visitors from Palestine also arrived in the Soviet Union illegally. The last was in 1927, when former leader of the illegal pioneer movement, who was allowed to leave after several arrests in 1926, returned with another expatriate. They were soon arrested and disappeared or perished in the penal camps.

A more important development was the departure of the first permanent envoy from Palestine to Europe in 1921, Meir Bogdanovski. He was sent by the *Histadrut* to coordinate immigration from Eastern Europe, eventually staying for five years.[57] His mission marks the institutionalisation of relations with Eastern Europe. Born in a small Lithuanian town near Volozhyn, he attended yeshiva and came to Palestine in 1912 to study at the Hebrew teachers' seminary. When the war broke out he was recruited to the Ottoman military, and after it joined *Poalei Zion* in Jerusalem, then renamed Labour Unity (*Ahdut Ha'avoda*).

Bogdanovski was sent to Vienna to join the initial World Centre of *Hechalutz* founded in 1921. He arrived while the Eastern European leadership was leading the formation of national committees and provisory transnational networks. Vienna was a momentary hub of Zionist and pioneer activity as hundreds of pioneers from Eastern Europe passed through the former imperial capital, improvising their way to Palestine at great risk, often undocumented and without means, mostly through Trieste and the Black Sea.[58] Once borders stabilised, they also connected with migrants in Mandatory Palestine, the United States, Central and Western Europe, Latin America and elsewhere.

Hechalutz exemplifies the increasing influence of the Palestine centre, as well as the dynamics of forming national chapters and transnational umbrella organisations during and immediately after the war. As an organisation created in the midst of imperial disintegration and the influx of migration, the leadership of *Hechalutz* in Eastern Europe was simultaneously promoting the formation of national centres in every state and a common regional or supra-national framework. Their practical aim was to provide information and assistance for migrants and to obtain support from the ZO. They first formed a temporary executive of '*Hechalutz* Organisations in Eastern Europe' in Warsaw in September 1919, just after a Central Committee of *Hechalutz* in Poland was formed there. The temporary executive connected the regional centres that were popping up: two in Poland (Warsaw for Central Poland and Lvov for eastern Galicia), three in Russia (Petrograd for 'Russia proper', Minsk for Belarus, Kharkov for Ukraine) and more in Crimea, Georgia, Vilnius, Romania and Austria.[59]

The temporary executive represented the interests of *Hechalutz* members in the ZO, which opposed the spontaneous immigration of pioneers to Palestine in the midst of diplomatic uncertainty and political chaos. The pioneers pressured the ZO to support the demand for immediate immigration.[60] They relied on the ZO for funds and documents during the risky journey to Palestine. The temporary executive also sent a representative to set up a branch in Palestine, which soon merged with the *Histadrut*.[61] The executive moved to Vienna with the outbreak of the Polish–Soviet War in 1920, and in 1921 the World Centre of *Hechalutz* was formally established in preparation for the first Zionist Congress since the war.[62] However, the World Centre closed in 1922 after just one year due

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[56] On anti-British and pro-Arab Soviet foreign policy in Palestine see Benjamin Pinkus, 'Communism and Zionism: The Relations Between the Bolshevik Movement and the Soviet Union and the Zionist Movement and the Yishuv, 1903–1930' (Hebrew) *Shvut*, 12 (2004–5), 71–81.

[57] See its founding charter, *Hapoel Hatzair*, 17.12.1920, 4–5.

[58] Migration from Eastern Europe to Palestine extended across Eurasia from the Netherlands to China. See personal accounts and letters in *Me'asef*, 31–95.

[59] Ibid., 178.

[60] Oppenheim, *Hehalutz Movement in Poland*, 10.

[61] *Hapoel Hatzair*, 17.12.1920, 16.

[62] D-N, E. [Dobkin Eliyahu], 'Hamisrad haolami', *Hechalutz* (Warsaw), Mar. 1923, 10–4.

to the decline of immigration and Zionism.[63] In 1923 it was successfully reopened in Berlin by Bogdanovski and a representative of *Hapoel Hatzair*, who emigrated from Russia[64] and finally settled in Warsaw in 1925 (see below). By 1935, the peak year in Jewish migration to Palestine, Hechalutz had some 90,000 members in twenty-five countries, mostly in Eastern Europe and its diaspora, with very small German and Arabic speaking peripheries.[65]

The World Centre re-established in 1923 towards the convening of the next Zionist congress.[66] This time Berlin served as a temporary hub of Zionist activity and a convenient crossing point between the large movements in Eastern Europe and the Zionist Executive, now situated in London, the British Empire's capital. Bogdanovski became secretary of the World Organisation of *Hechalutz* on behalf of Labour Zionism in Palestine and secured the former's existence. The central committee of the newly formed World Organisation of *Hechalutz* reveals the power relations between the three centres, and the vital role of the one in Palestine. It was comprised of four envoys from Palestine (including Bogdanovski), two Russian *émigrés* and none from Poland which had the largest membership.[67] The decision to move the World Centre to Warsaw in 1925 acknowledged the central role it served, while Palestine continued to direct it using envoys.[68]

Placing the World Centre in Warsaw and controlling it from Palestine created a dual-centre structure that balanced between the two places. Poland served as the hub of the movement in the diaspora, a demographic centre of potential migrants and director of activity in Eastern and Central Europe. This was a practical choice, considering that letters and newspapers took about ten days to travel between Poland and Palestine. The Polish membership was large enough to support a permanent executive, even if it was staffed by 'outsiders', and could provide services to the wider movement, such as publishing the official periodical from 1924.[69] Policy, however, was shaped in Palestine.

The dual-centre structure, in Palestine and Poland, was unique to Labour Zionism, giving it greater integrity over its ideological competitors in the Zionist movement. Liberal Zionists only formed a formal party in 1932, when they were already losing power in the ZO. Religious Zionist pioneers operated a World Centre from Palestine from the late 1920s, which was inefficient because of its physical distance from the Zionist heartland in Eastern Europe. And the new revisionist right had a strong movement in Poland, with only a small and defiant section in Palestine. The dual-centre structure allowed the Labour Zionist leadership in Palestine to keep close relations with large constituencies in Eastern Europe more effectively, and was perpetuated by its other transnational organisations like the league of *Histadrut* supporters in the diaspora established in 1923, and the World Union (*Ichud*) of Labour Zionism that was founded in 1932 after the united Labour Party, Workers' Party of the Land of Israel (*Mapai*) was formed in Palestine in 1930. They also operated from Warsaw and were headed by envoys from Palestine.[70] None of the other strands had a similar structure.

The involvement of envoys from Palestine continued beyond the World Centre and into the local organisations as well. In 1923 envoys were sent to the national chapters of *Hechalutz* in Poland, Germany, Russia and elsewhere to recover the waning movement. The first three envoys to specific countries were Eliyahu Golomb, secretary of *Ahdut Ha'avoda* and architect of the Jewish underground

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[63] Ben Gurion to Dobkin, 12.7.1922, BGA.

[64] Uriel Friedland to Dobkin, 26.5 [1923], ILPA, 4-14-1923-11.

[65] Countries by size: Poland, Galicia (separately organised), Romania, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Netherland, Belgium, France, England, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, South Africa, United States, Argentina, Brazil and Cuba. In 1935 only 70 per cent were in Eastern Europe due to a sharp increase in Germany; usually it was higher, with 85 per cent in 1933 for example. Moshe Basok, ed., *Sefer he-Halutz*, 415.

[66] Friedland to Dobkin, 26.5 [1923], ILPA, 4-14-1923-11.

[67] Bogdanovski to Dobkin, [end of Sept. 1923], ILPA, 4-14-1923-11.

[68] Except Dobkin, who replaced Bogdanovski between 1926 and 1932. Trained by Bogdanovski and meeting regularly with the Palestine leadership during their visits in Europe and his trip to Tel Aviv in 1925, he became their supporter. Naor, *Hahotem ha'asiri*, 30–41.

[69] The Polish movement's newspaper assumed this role in 1924. See *Hechalutz*, 17.3.1924. Replaced by *Heatid* in 1925.

[70] See, for example, the prolific correspondence of Melech Neustadt/Najsztat-Noi (1895–1959) who headed both organisations in different years, Labour Archive, IV-104-89-142 to 166.

militia, the *Hagana*, originally from Belarus; Yehuda Kopelevich from Lithuania, a leader of *Hechalutz* in Russia and one of the founders of the kibbutz movement in Palestine; and Moshe Shapira, a kibbutz member originally from Lodz. In a letter to Dobkin, Bogdanovski explained their mission. Golomb and Shapira were sent to Warsaw to coordinate the work of the national committee – Golomb in Poland, Galicia (which had separate Zionist organisations) and Romania and Shapira in Czechoslovakia, Austria, Germany and Lithuania. Kopelevich went to Russia. Golomb and Shapira were in charge of the 'East' and the 'West', 'and if Yehuda [Kopelevich] would also succeed [in the Soviet Union], (where Ben-Gurion[71] … would help him), then we will have conquered the world', concluded Bogdanovski enthusiastically. While the mission to Russia failed, in Poland and Germany this policy was very successful, especially when German Jewish migration to Palestine peaked after the rise of Nazism in 1933 (see below).

Two of the 1923 envoys were from the pre-war generation (Bogdanovski and Golomb), and two were from the post-war generation, who had matured during the wars and revolutions of 1914 to 1920 in Eastern Europe. Each couple represented the institutions that their generations had established in Palestine. The pre-war generation was more political, forming parties and newspapers in the Russian tradition of 1905, while the younger envoys brought back to Poland new ideas from Palestine, which were inspired by the Bolshevik revolution, namely the kibbutz movement's radical programme of a general workers' commune. Their mission in Eastern and Central Europe was to recruit members to their fledgling kibbutz movements, which relied on pioneers from Eastern Europe. They were compelled to reach out by the growing political competition between different groups within the labour movement in Palestine, first between the kibbutz movement and the *Histadrut* and later between the different kibbutz movements that were created in the 1920s. In 1924 the two competing kibbutz movements decided 'to create a reserve of people abroad that will continually renew itself, and will give [us] the required strength needed for the systematic and constant expansion of the constructive commune'.[72] They established 'foreign affairs' committees to form relations with potential members in Eastern Europe and Germany.[73] Their competition and mutual suspicion was kept by the Labour Zionist leadership from the public eye.[74]

Between 1919 and 1927 the geographic spheres of domination within Labour Zionism were in constant flux, until a new order formed. Power shifted mainly during immigration waves, with the flow of people and ideas. The wave of 1919 to 1921 brought the 'Russians' to dominate the Polish movement, and the wave of 1924 to 1926 replaced them with the 'Israelites'.[75] The involvement of envoys from Palestine grew in the mid-1920s, when most Soviet *émigrés* left Poland. In 1925 envoys replaced the *émigrés* even in regional councils of *Hechalutz*,[76] and by 1926 the secretary of *Hechalutz* in Poland was an envoy of the kibbutz movement in Palestine, Aharon Zisling, originally from the Minsk region.[77] The 'Israelites' takeover of the large Polish movement was complete. Unlike Russia, where it was blocked by the regime, the inverted path from Palestine to Poland secured the flow of Labour Zionist ideas shaped in Palestine back to Eastern Europe.

The composition of the activists' network shows that they relied on the pre-war imperial spaces of Eastern Europe, especially the former Russian Empire. Actors from the Lithuanian, Belarusian and

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[71]   He was showcasing the Histadrut pavilion at the Agricultural Exhibition.

[72]   Anita Shapira, *A Dream that Failed: The Political Development of Gdud Haavoda, 1920–1927* (Hebrew) (MA thesis, Tel Aviv University, 1963), 56.

[73]   The Work Battalion and the United Kibbutz Movement (*Hakibbutz Hameuchad*, also known as *Ein Harod*) split in 1923. Future kibbutz movements operated similarly (*Hashomer Hatzair* formed in 1927 and *Hever Hakvutzot* founded in 1929). Ein Harod, Secretariat Protocol, 26.11.1924, YTA, 1-2/1/1B.

[74]   See, for example, Bogdanovski's letters from Nov. 1924, ILPA, 4-14-1923-11; Ein Harod, Secretariat Protocol, 17.2.1925, YTA, 1-2/1/1B.

[75]   *Eretz-yisraelim* (ארצישראלים) in contemporary discourse, from the Hebrew name of Mandatory Palestine (Land of Israel).

[76]   Such as Abraham Tarshish of Ein Harod in the Vilnius region and Eliezer Joffe of Nahalal in central Poland. Oppenheim, *Hehalutz Movement in Poland*, 438.

[77]   He replaced Dobkin who became secretary of the World Centre. Haim Dan, ed., *Sefer Klosova* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1978), 114.

Ukrainian regions of the Pale of Settlement, together with their diaspora in Palestine (and elsewhere), made up the social core of the transnational network of Labour Zionism. Other Jewries, like those from the former Ottoman or even the German speaking realms, were hardly involved.

In the decade after the First World War the Labour Zionist leadership in Palestine created a complex network of transnational institutions, with additional ones to those mentioned above. I have focused here mainly on the pioneers and the political parties in order to outline the major developments, without getting into all the details of the political splits of Labour Zionism in Palestine and Eastern Europe. It is worth mentioning, though, that from 1920 until 1932 there were several Labour Zionist parties, each operating its own world union. Most of them united in 1932 under the leadership of *Mapai* established in Palestine in 1930, which dominated Israeli politics until 1977. Another type of organisation was the league of *Histadrut* supporters in the diaspora established in 1923, intended to build a large camp of supporters for Labour Zionism.[78] A more successful one was the fundraising apparatus of the *Histadrut* in the United States. Beginning in 1924 it conducted large annual campaigns via a non-Zionist Jewish workers' union, raising substantial funds from workers of Eastern European descent.[79] The last type of transnational networks were the world unions of youth movements, formed in the late 1920s similarly to *Hechalutz*, the largest being *Hashomer Hatzair* which operates till today. They too were controlled by the kibbutz movements that their graduates founded in Mandatory Palestine.

The elaborate transnational network of institutions created by the Labour Zionists in Palestine in the 1920s consolidated their control of the movement. It formed a bridge between the emerging national centre and its supporters living mostly in Eastern Europe. This link was a vital component in the advancement of Jewish nationalism, considering that 99 per cent of the Jewish population in 1931 was in the diaspora.[80]

Training Local Activists

The final stage in forming the hegemony of Palestine-based Labour Zionism in Eastern Europe occurred in 1926, with the opening of the first seminary of *Hechalutz* in Warsaw, by now the undisputed centre of the pioneer movement in the diaspora. The seminar was led by the charismatic Yitzhak Tabenkin, leader of the largest kibbutz movement in Palestine, born in Bobruisk and raised in Warsaw. Tabenkin headed the first '*Histadrut* delegation to the diaspora' (meaning Eastern and Central Europe), with twelve envoys from all the Labour Zionist organisations in Palestine that were recruited by Bogdanovski due to the departure of the activist core to Palestine in the immigration wave of the mid-1920s.[81] Following the immigration wave of the mid-1920s, *Hechalutz* and other diaspora Labour Zionist organisations were again drained of their leadership and on the verge of collapse. In addition to passing resolutions in regional councils to endorse his kibbutz movement,[82] Tabenkin met with the last Soviet activists in *Hechalutz*, recruiting them to his kibbutz movement in Palestine.[83] Together they opened the first seminar for local activists, with some forty young participants, mostly seventeen to eighteen year olds.[84]

The seminars, conducted every few years (1926, 1930, 1933, etc.), created a new structure that stabilised the hierarchic relations between Palestine and Eastern Europe in the 1930s. They consolidated the control of the kibbutz movement over *Hechalutz* and the Labour Zionist youth movements, training Polish and other activists who identified with the kibbutz movements in Palestine and acted on

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[78] The League for Labour Palestine (*Histadrut Eretz Yisrael Haovedet*).

[79] Led by the United Hebrew Trades, Rojanski, *Conflicting Identities*, 72–88, 223–31, 257–62, 310–47, esp. 370–2, 393–408.

[80] *Davar*, 1.3.1932, 1.

[81] Protocol of the meeting of the secretariat of Hakibbutz Hame'uhad with Bogdanovski, 28 July 1925, YTA, 1-2/1/1B.

[82] Protocol of the general convention of the Volhynia immigrant commune members, Równe 12–13.4.1926, GFHA, file 24362.

[83] They were members of a small movement called Freedom (*Dror*) who escaped Soviet Ukraine. See, for example, Bankover, *Sipurim mi-derekh arukah*, 18–29.

[84] Rona Yona, 'A Kibbutz in the Diaspora', *Journal of Israeli History*, 31, 1 (2012), 16–20.

their behalf.[85] These activists transformed the Polish movement into an extension of the kibbutz movements in Palestine and radicalised it by adopting their utopian communal vision. Their success led to a dramatic increase in kibbutz movement members in the 1930s, from 900 in 1928 to 8,700 in 1939 in one case.[86] These numbers reveal the mutual co-dependence between the leadership in Palestine and the membership in Poland. While the Polish membership was increasingly dependent on the leadership in Palestine, the leadership depended just as much on the Polish membership for its growth and the execution of its policies.

While similar patterns can be found in every Eastern European country (Romania, Lithuania, Latvia, etc.), it is interesting to find them also in Central Europe. In 1933 Germany became the second largest source of migrants to Palestine after Poland. Since the early 1920s envoys from Palestine had courted Jewish youth movements such as 'Blue-White' (*Blau Weiss*) and the Young Jewish Hiking Organisation (*Jung-jüdische Wanderbund*; JJWB), which were inspired by the German youth movement 'Wandering Bird' (*Wandervogel*) before the First World War and were not initially Zionist or socialist.[87] These envoys were of Eastern European and German origin. They were successful with JJWB while *Blau Weiss* retained independence. In 1922 the World Centre of *Hechalutz* formed a local chapter in Germany, exporting Eastern European ideas to the 'West'. By 1925 a Labour Zionist pioneer movement in the Eastern European model was formed under the guidance of envoys, mostly for Eastern European migrants in Germany. At the end of 1926 a seminar for local activists was held near Berlin, and pioneer training was reorganised into communes to prepare members for kibbutz life in Palestine. And by 1927 envoys from the kibbutz movements and loyal local activists headed the pioneer movement in Germany, just as in Poland. This parallel development demonstrates that they were not local but rather initiated from Palestine successfully.[88]

The relations between Labour Zionism in Eastern Europe and Palestine were now fully reversed. The leadership in Palestine dictated the policy of its counterparts in Eastern and Central Europe and shaped its ideology and practices. Oppositional groups were replaced by compliant organisations. The strongest opposition came from the veteran party leadership in Poland (both *Poalei Zion* and the *Hapoel Hatzair* affiliated *Hitahdut*), who refused to unite and join the united transnational party headed by *Mapai* in 1932. The following year, during the decisive election campaign to the Zionist Congress when Labour Zionists took power from the liberal Zionists, head of *Mapai* Ben Gurion led the campaign from Poland while completely disregarding the local parties. He created ad-hoc lists of Labour Zionists which were under his direct control through the dual-centre structure by relying on *Hechalutz* and the youth movements, and achieved a landslide victory.[89] He was able to build the largest political coalition in Poland in just two months and to exert his leadership effectively thanks to the firmly established organisational infrastructure that was constructed during the 1920s, as depicted here.

Conclusion

By tracing the connections between Poland and Palestine after the First World War, which enabled Labour Zionism to achieve hegemonic status in the *Yishuv* and in the ZO, this article has taken a new transnational approach to Zionist historiography. It presents a specific Eastern European Jewish political transnationalism which entailed forming institutions that connected communities of Eastern European Jews across their diaspora through popular political activity. This approach can be applied to the study of other movements as well, nationalist, socialist and more.

After the First World War the Zionist centre did not simply move to Palestine together with the Zionist migrants. It was consciously and carefully constructed by the Labour Zionist leadership in

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[85] See a local activist parroting the rhetoric of Tabenkin after the seminar in August 1927, *Sefer Klosova*, 121–2.

[86] Data for Hakibbutz Hameuchad. Henry Near, *The Kibbutz Movement: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[87] *Blau-Weiß Bund für Jüdisches Jugendwandern in Deutschland*; *Jung-judischer Wanderbund*.

[88] Weiner Hannah, *Youth in Ferment Within a Complacent Community: The Zionist Youth Movements and Hechalutz in Germany* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Yad Tabenkin, 1996), 276, 415–8.

[89] *Ben Gurion Diary*, 11.4-18.5.1933, BGA. Yona, 'Jewish Politics without Borders'.

Palestine which gradually established its authority over their counterparts in Eastern European by forming a sub-centre in Poland that they operated and controlled. This network linked the emerging leadership in Palestine with constituencies in Eastern Europe and elsewhere.

Why was being transnational so important? Simply put, if Jewish nationalism relied on transnational institutions, being more transnational meant more power. So that when mobilising supporters across locations became increasingly significant in the party politics of the Zionist Congress in the interwar years, Labour Zionists could inspire and build a transnational political community better than others. This is not to say that their leadership rested only on organisational skill, but that they could channel it through these institutions.

The democratisation of political life in former Russian territories and the *Yishuv* after the First World War marked a new era of opportunities. The forming of labour 'hegemony' in the ZO was a complex process, which involved the transition of the Eastern European leadership to Palestine, together with the rise of Labour Zionism to leadership. This shift was accompanied by a realignment of the Eastern European arena with the separation of Poland from Russia, the decline of the Russian stage and the consolidation of the largest membership in Poland.

The growth of Labour Zionism was the result of a dynamic movement that went back and forth between Eastern Europe and Palestine. Scholars have noted the influence and ideas that flowed from eastern Europe to Palestine in the pre-war era. I show that after the First World War the emerging Labour Zionist centre in Palestine formed an inverted path. I also suggest the mechanism in which Labour Zionists could assume power in the whole Zionist movement in the 1930s. Before the Great War, the influence of 'Russian' elements were strong both in Poland and Palestine. After the collapse of the Russian Empire, the demographic centre of the Zionist movement shifted to Poland, while the labour movement's leadership moved to Palestine as the Zionist community there continued to grow. By building sophisticated institutions during the 1920s this leadership achieved dominance over its counterparts abroad which strengthened Labour Zionism both in Palestine and in Poland.

The Labour Zionist movement spearheaded the transformation of relations between the new Jewish community in Palestine and the old centre of Jewish nationalism in Eastern Europe. Its transnational network of activists served as a conduit between native communities in Eastern Europe and immigrant concentrations in Palestine, the United States, Western Europe and elsewhere. They maintained the connections between the communities of the former Russian imperial space, including political parties, pioneer organisations, youth movements and fundraising campaigns. Envoys from Mandatory Palestine secured the stability of these institutions and steered them. Finally, they trained local activists in Europe that were ideologically committed to the organisations in Palestine and became an integral part of them abroad, disseminating their ideas in the local constituencies. This structure laid the foundation for the rise of Labour Zionism to power in the ZO in the 1930s. It increased its ability to draw future migrants and to mobilise political support during elections to the Zionist Congresses not only in Palestine but also in Eastern Europe and across its migrant communities, more than any other Zionist political camp. The institutional networks described here continued to be active for decades, well after the Holocaust and into the creation of the State of Israel, securing an ongoing connection between the emerging national centre and large parts of the Jewish diaspora.