

Laura Almagor, *Beyond Zion: The Jewish Territorialist Movement* (London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2022), pp. 286.

by *Stefan Vogt*

The Jewish Territorialist movement has always been a stepchild of both Zionism and the historiography of Jewish national movements. Only a handful of studies have addressed Jewish Territorialism in any comprehensive way. Laura Almagor's book is therefore a very welcome addition to an otherwise quite small body of scholarship. But it is also much more than this. The book is the first to study the Territorialist movement over its whole lifetime, from the beginning of the 20th century all the way to the 1960s, rather than focusing on its early incarnation until 1925. And it looks at the movement from a new perspective, placing it in the double context of Jewish politics in the 20th century broadly speaking, and of the processes of colonialism and decolonization, rather than seeing it only as an offshoot of, and thus in relation to, Zionism.

The Jewish Territorialism movement was founded in the aftermath of debate about the Uganda Scheme, in which the British government had offered territory in its Eastern African colony for Jewish settlement. When the proposal was turned down after much turmoil at the Seventh Zionist Congress in 1905, a small faction split from the Zionist Organization and formed the Jewish Territorialist Organization (ITO) under the leadership of the prominent British Zionist Israel Zangwill. Without much success, the ITO advocated Jewish settlement schemes outside of Palestine and disbanded in 1925. Territorialism reemerged in the 1930s throughout Germany and Eastern Europe in various initiatives. 1935 saw the foundation of the Freiland League for Jewish Territorial Colonization (*Frayland-lige far Yidisher Teritoryalistisher Kolonizatsye*), under which name it existed until 1979, although having abandoned its Territorialist agenda already by the early 1960s. The League, which was led during much of its Territorialist phase by the Jewish Socialist Revolutionary Isaac Nachman Steinberg, was particularly active in the years after the Second World War.

Almagor devotes the first two chapters of her book to a thorough and insightful reconstruction of the two phases of Territorialist history. In the first chapter on

the ITO phase from 1905 to 1925, she makes it clear that Territorialism was by no means an esoteric aberration from the Zionist mainstream, but rather a serious alternative to the Zionist orientation towards Palestine alone. There were supporters and sympathizers not only among non-Zionists, but also among dissident European Zionists and even members of the Yishuv. The second chapter analyzes the history of the Freeland League from the 1930s onwards. This is an especially important piece of scholarship, as it is the first comprehensive study of the League's history. It establishes the League as a distinct player within the field of Jewish national politics, especially in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, when the Jewish refugee crisis was particularly acute. As such, it was meanwhile far removed from its roots as a Zionist faction. The chapter is also important because it emphasizes the previously almost ignored role played in the movement by Ada Siegel, Isaac Nachman Sternberg's daughter. Most importantly, however, it lays the groundwork for the study's main achievements which can be found in the third and fourth chapters.

Chapter three not only discusses in great depth the strained relationship between Territorialism and Zionism, from the beginning all the way to the postwar era. In doing so, it also brings to light important new aspects of the Jewish political landscape both before and after the Second World War and the Holocaust. For instance, it shows how the DP camps, where Zionists and Territorialists competed for support, became extremely important locations for the struggles about the future course of Jewish politics, rather than being Zionist strongholds from the outset. Even if Almagor at times is a bit too quick to trust her (almost exclusively) Territorialist sources and might therefore see a little too much cunning in the Zionists' actions when they were merely being guided by pragmatism, she nevertheless gives a much more complete picture of Jewish politics in the DP camps than had previously been available. Her analysis of the relationship between Territorialists and Zionists also sheds new light on the latter, for example when she demonstrates that the bi-nationalist ideas of Brit Shalom and Ihud had a level of support that went beyond the few and mostly Central European members of these circles. This and other findings give a lot of additional credibility to the tendency in recent scholarship to question the long-assumed absolute predominance of Zionism in immediate postwar Jewish politics.

The last chapter, finally, represents the most innovative part of the study as it places Jewish Territorialism in the context of colonialism and decolonization or, as Almagor puts it, “Geopolitics”. She analyzes the Territorialist schemes to organize settlements of Jewish refugees and DPs in various parts of the non-European world, such as Madagascar, Australia and, most importantly, the soon-to-be-independent Dutch colony of Suriname. This allows her to discuss how Territorialism related to this context and addressed issues such as space, race and population politics. Her employment of “Geopolitics” as a theoretical concept to understand this remains rather sparsely elaborated and somehow superfluous. Nevertheless, Almagor expertly shows the tension built into the Territorialist movement between participating in the European colonialist discourses (and at times politics) and seeing itself as a protagonist in the establishment of a post-colonial world. Here, she identifies a tendency within the Territorialist movement increasingly to identify with the decolonizing forces. It remains unclear whether this tendency was always based on conviction, how unambiguous it was, and whether this really constituted a clear difference to Zionism, as she claims. Almagor’s conclusion that “the Territorialists eventually positioned themselves in opposition to the traditionally Western hegemonic character of the non-Jewish world” (242) seems to be, in any case, too strong. Yet she convincingly shows that the history of post-war Territorialism, just as the history of the Jewish Holocaust survivors (and, incidentally, the history of post-war Zionism) needs to be seen as part of the larger story of post-war decolonization, migration and displacement. Especially in this sense, her book is an important and path breaking contribution to the ongoing “colonial turn” in Jewish history.

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How to quote this article:

Stefan Vogt, review of *Beyond Zion: The Jewish Territorialist Movement* by Laura Almagor, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC* 24, no. 2 (2023), DOI: [10.48248/issn.2037-741X/14323](https://doi.org/10.48248/issn.2037-741X/14323)