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Israel Studies 6.1 (2001) 34-54

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"A Question That Outweighs All Others": Yitzhak Epstein and Zionist Recognition of the Arab Issue

Alan Dowty

THE 1907 PUBLICATION OF YITZHAK EPSTEIN'S "A Hidden Question"¹ is generally regarded as the beginning of serious debate in the Zionist movement about relations with the Arab population of Palestine. Closer examination of the article—translated here into English for the first time—reveals that it is indeed remarkable in several respects: as a more sensitive analysis of Arabs in Palestine than previous Zionist writings, as a projection of the ultimate dimensions of the issue decades before these dimensions took final shape, and as a provocative statement that was instrumental in framing the debate within the movement.

Epstein was a Russian-born teacher and writer who immigrated to Palestine/Eretz Israel in 1886 and settled in Rosh Pina, the first Zionist settlement in the Upper Galilee. Most of his public activity was in the educational arena rather than in politics; he was active, in particular, in the movement to teach Hebrew in Hebrew.

Zionists of the First *Aliyah* (wave of immigration to Palestine, from 1882 to 1905), did—contrary to some claims—"see" the Arabs there, but they did not see an Arab *problem*. They also paid remarkably little attention to the Arab population, simply noting their presence as one facet of the new environment with which they contended. For their own sanity, the new settlers needed to minimize the difficulties they faced and, in the case of the Arabs, it was also ideologically crucial to avoid any suggestion that they were simply replicating the Diaspora pattern of a Jewish minority existing at the sufferance of a majority non-Jewish host population.² The first to challenge this complacent mindset was Ahad Ha'am, Zionism's most prominent internal critic, whose report on his first visit to Palestine, in 1891, included a sharp reminder of the obstacle posed by the Arab presence.³ Ahad Ha'am confuted the notion that Palestine was "empty" or "abandoned," credited the Arabs with a collective identity that others had ignored, [End Page 34] and condemned overbearing and sometimes violent Jewish behavior toward Arabs. In basic respects, however, his perception of the problem still fit the First *Aliyah* pattern: the Arabs were not a political problem, in that the success of the Zionist enterprise would in itself resolve the seeming conflict by providing the local population with the benefits of European civilization and, in the final analysis, by simply overwhelming them. Ahad Ha'am's warning—only two paragraphs of a much longer critique that focused on other issues—was essentially the exception that proves the rule.⁴

Nor did Ahad Ha'am's broaching of the issue trigger a public debate. In the storm aroused by his 1891 broadside, the mention of the Arabs was a secondary issue. Nor did Ahad Ha'am himself return to the subject in a second "Truth from Eretz Israel" published in 1893.⁵ Others who dealt at all with the Arab question during these years—Menachem Ussishkin, Leo Motzkin, Theodor Herzl (in *Altneuland*, published in 1902), Max Nordau (in attacking Ahad Ha'am for his scathing critique of *Altneuland*), Ben

Borochov—continued to rely in one version or another on the tremendous benefits that Arabs would reap from the modernization and Westernization that Jews would bring to Palestine. ⁶ (One interesting variant was an 1899 article by Eiyahu Sapir, who blamed Arab hostility toward the Zionists not on Zionist settlement, but rather on the ineludible influence of Catholic anti-Semites. ⁷)

When the Zionist movement divided in the early 1900s over the issue of pursuing a Jewish homeland outside of Palestine, those who favored such an option—the “Territorialists”—stressed the Arab presence as one of the major obstacles to building Zion in Zion itself. ⁸ This raised the issue’s visibility, but it was a 1905 speech by Yitzhak Epstein, a Zionist living in Zion, that first moved it to center stage in the movement. Epstein spoke in Basel before a meeting of the cultural association *Ivriya*, which was convening there simultaneously with the Seventh Congress of the World Zionist Organization. Epstein’s provocative presentation stirred considerable debate, and it was published two years later (in *HaShiloah*, the journal founded by Ahad Ha’am) as “A Hidden Question.”

Even though Epstein was exhorting Zionists to be more realistic about the Arab issue, his own idealism and even utopianism was at least as spectral as the Panglossian optimism of early Zionists who proclaimed there was no problem. In light of the subsequent century of bloodshed, Epstein’s proffered solution—a Jewish state and a strengthened Arab community in the same place—seems touchingly naïve. Was it ever possible, as Epstein projected, that the Zionist presence would be such a blessing to the Arabs that they would regard the day the Jews came “as a day of salvation and redemption,” [End Page 35] and that “hundreds of villagers will come to request the Jews to take over their land”? Epstein was still wedded to the notion that material benefits would win the Arabs over; he differed only in believing that this would not happen automatically, but could still happen if the thrust of the whole Zionist program were radically altered. His thinking was also permeated by paternalistic visions of Jews as carriers of Western civilization and Arabs as grateful students: Palestine “is now living in the sixteenth century,” and the task is to “prepare the inhabitants and make them ready for our community [*yishuv*].” Behind this was an assumption of moral purity that jars on modern sensibilities: “We are guileless, we have no alien thought of subjugation and of diluting the national character of our neighbors; with a pure heart we come to settle among them in order to better them in all respects.”

But whatever the phantasms in his solution, Epstein was ahead of his contemporaries in seeing that there was a problem that required a solution. He recognized, as had few others apart from Ahad Ha’am, that Arabs were not isolated and passive individuals subject to manipulation by others, but members of a common culture that was a major actor in history. Unlike Ahad Ha’am, he evinced considerable knowledge of, and even empathy toward, the actual content of this culture. Based on what must have been a searing personal experience, Epstein portrayed the eviction of the Arab tenant farmers who had lived on the land of Rosh Pina: “The lament of Arab women . . . still rings in my ears today . . . the valley was filled with their lamentation. As they went they stopped to kiss the stones and the earth.” Other lyrical passages depicted the hard life of the Arab farmers, or *fellahin*, in vivid terms. But at the same time, he saw the Arab people as a potentially formidable enemy, characterizing them as “great, resolute, and zealous,” and as loving their homeland as much as the Zionists did. Recognizing the collective dimension of Arab identity and interest, he laid down as one of his two basic principles that Zionists must respect not only individual rights, but also “national rights.” In this respect Epstein was some seventy years ahead of the Zionist consensus.

If Arabs were recognized as a nation, then conflicts with them had to be worked out on the national level. This ran against the grain of previous thinking, which dealt with Arab claims only on the individual or local level, and thereby reduced the issue to another in the long list of environmental obstacles to be overcome. Arab hostility was a hardship like ~~aridity or malaria~~, not a political problem pitting one people against another. For Zionists the address for political problems was Constantinople (later they turned to other outside parties, the Hashemite dynasty or Great Britain). [End Page 36] This will not work, said Epstein; Zionists would have to deal directly with the Arabs of Palestine: “Up to now we had the wrong address . . . we negotiated with all the in-laws, but forgot about the groom himself.”

Istanbul

How could Zionists for so long have failed to recognize a problem that “outweighs all the others”? Epstein charitably attributes this obliviousness not to intentional avoidance, but to lack of knowledge about the country and its inhabitants (even among those settled in Palestine), and to a certain lack of political and human sensitivity. He does not address the pressing need in early Zionism to present a

positive portrait of the land and to minimize all problems in promoting what was, by any objective standard, a daunting struggle against heavy odds. The need to believe was too strong and the full truth too threatening for most in the movement, as the earlier reaction to Ahad Ha'am's essay had shown.

Epstein squarely identified the core of the problem: conflict over land. Purchases of large tracts of cultivated land, while perfectly legal ("we are completely righteous"), usually led to the eviction of tenant farmers who had often cultivated it for generations. This was not only morally dubious, but also undermined Zionism's future by unnecessarily making this mighty people into an implacable foe. In illustration, Epstein dwelt in some detail on the purchase of Metullah, his neighboring village in the Upper Galilee, and the extraordinary difficulties and bitterness involved in removing its Druze inhabitants.

Recognition of this core conflict brought Epstein to the basic and unprecedented conclusion that success in the Zionist program, as then formulated and implemented, would not in itself resolve tensions with the Arab population. Implicitly, this forced the Zionist movement to choose between two courses of action: either to revise its settlement policies radically in order to obtain Arab consent to sharing the land, or to impose its will on the Arabs by force. Epstein never considered the second option. Jews were "a people without an army and without warships," while Arabs in Palestine were part of a people that dominated the entire region. Again, Epstein's apprehension of an Arab world united against Zionism was remarkably ahead of its time; he is thankful that "no Arab movement in the national and political sense" had yet emerged, but argued that no movement was needed, because the Arab people had never ceased to exist. In any event, he warned, "we must not provoke the sleeping lion!"

The use of force being unimaginable, Epstein argued for an historic compromise with Arabs that would so enlarge the benefits to them, while eliminating the sources of friction, that they would not only accept, but even welcome, the Jewish presence. Epstein did not question the validity of [End Page 37] Jewish claims in Palestine, but as the Arabs also had rights there, he felt that "our historical claims may not avail us." He posited as a guideline that no one should be worse off because of Zionist settlement; consequently new settlement would have to focus on previously uncultivated and uninhabited areas, except where improved farming methods (a key Zionist bargaining chip) could create room without the dispossession of tenants. The feasibility of such an approach was sharply challenged by Epstein's critics, while its breathtaking altruism was beyond everybody's frame of reference.

But if Epstein had no influence on policy, his landmark essay was critical in setting the terms of debate for "the Arab question" in decades to come. As Yosef Gorny notes, "A Hidden Question" was the first full elaboration of the "integrative" approach, based upon the assumption that the success of Zionism depended upon Arab consent and thus required negotiated compromise and institutionalized cooperation.⁹ Epstein advocated an historic covenant [*brit*] with the Arabs of Palestine, written, not on paper, but on hearts and minds, and actualized, not only in the sharing of land, but also in the opening of all Zionist institutions, from schools and hospitals to banks and theaters, to Arab participation. Nor was this entirely one-way paternalism; Jews would also become better acquainted with Arab culture, language, and daily life.

Epstein's forthright advocacy of an historic compromise helped to polarize the debate by galvanizing those who believed such a compromise to be either heresy or fantasy, or both. Opposite Epstein's integrative pole soon appeared fuller formulations of the separatist or confrontational pole, which argued that Zionism must maintain its distance from alien cultures in order to achieve its historic vision, and that, in any event, a clash of interests with the local population was inevitable. Joseph Klausner, the successor to Ahad Ha'am as editor of *HaShiloah*, wrote shortly afterwards that "we Jews, who have lived two thousand years and more among cultured peoples, cannot and must not descend again to the cultural level of the semi-savage peoples."¹⁰ Others in the movement—most visibly, Vladimir Jabotinsky—soon argued that if the vigorous pursuit of Zionism did indeed inevitably create conflict with the Arabs, then the preferred response was not dilution of Zionist activity but the gathering of strength in order to overcome resistance—if necessary by force.¹¹

While Epstein's contribution may have helped to frame the issue, however, the importance of the

debate in the years immediately following should not be exaggerated. In publishing Epstein's speech, Klausner added dismissively in an editor's note that the topic "is not outdated even now" (i.e., after two years), and further noting his disagreement with it, promised [End Page 38] a response. This was duly published a few months later, in the form of a three-page article by the writer Nehama Pukhachewsky, who attacked every single one of Epstein's premises.¹² In the year following Epstein's article, this was the only direct response in the journal where it had appeared. Epstein did make the Arab issue more visible, but few agreed at the time that it was "a question that outweighs all others."

Yitzhak Epstein
Translated by Alan Dowty

A Hidden Question

(Note from Editor of HaShiloah [Joseph Klausner]: This lecture was presented by the author at the "Ivriya" meeting during the Seventh Congress in Basel,¹³ but we think that the subject of the lecture is not outdated even now, and perhaps precisely now, as practical work in Eretz Israel¹⁴ has increased, it deserves attention. We do not agree with the honored author's opinion in several respects, and in the near future a response to many of his points will appear in HaShiloah.)

AMONG THE DIFFICULT QUESTIONS LINKED to the idea of the rebirth of our people on its land, there is one question that outweighs all the others: *the question of our attitude toward the Arabs*. This question, upon whose correct solution hangs the revival of our national hope, has not been forgotten, but has been completely *hidden* from the Zionists and in its true form is scarcely mentioned in the literature of our movement. To be sure, in recent years some fragmentary statements on the topic slipped from the mouths of a few writers; but these were the claims of the Territorialists¹⁵ intent on proving the impossibility of practical activity in Eretz Israel, or they were accounts of the Arab Movement.¹⁶ Faithful Zionists have not dealt with the question of what our attitude to the Arabs should be when we come to buy property in Eretz Israel, to found villages, and in general to settle the land. [End Page 38] The Zionists certainly did not intentionally ignore one of the main conditions of settlement; they did not recognize its reality because they did not know the country and its inhabitants—and even more, they lacked human and political sensitivity.

That it was possible to avoid such a fundamental question, and that, after thirty years of settlement activity, it must be addressed as a new inquiry—this depressing fact is sufficient demonstration of the superficiality that dominates our movement and shows that we skim over the surface of things without entering into their content or core.

From the day the national movement began, and to this moment, Zionist activists have lost interest in the procedures and laws of Eretz Yisrael, while the question of the people who dwell there—its true workers and rulers—still does not arise either in the arena of actions or in theory. We all saw the prominent splinter and did not sense the hidden beam. Governmental procedures, restrictions imposed on buying land or building houses, the prohibition of Jewish entry and other such matters strikes at all who come to Eretz Israel, while from the Arab side there are not, at first glance, many obstacles. And if our brothers in Eretz Israel did not realize the seriousness of the question, it certainly never arose among Zionists far from the scene. We pay close attention to all the affairs of our land, we discuss and debate everything, we praise and curse everything, but we forget one small detail: that there is in our beloved land an entire people that has been attached to it for hundreds of years and has never considered leaving it.

For many years we have heard that the number of inhabitants in Eretz Israel is six hundred thousand. If we assume this number is correct, and subtract the eighty thousand Jews, we find that in our land there are now more than half a million Arabs, of whom eighty percent live off the land and occupy all the areas suitable for farming without further improvement. The time has come to dismiss the discredited idea, spread among Zionists, that there is in Eretz Israel uncultivated land as a result of lack of working hands and the indifference of the inhabitants. There are no empty fields; to the contrary, every *fallah*¹⁷ tries to enlarge his plot from the land of the adjoining cistern, if it does not

require excessive labor. Near cities they also till the sloping hillsides and around the settlement of Metullah the poor *fellahin*, like those in Lebanon, plant between the rocks and do not let a cubit go fallow. And thus, when we come to occupy the land, the question at once arises: what will the *fellahin* do after we buy their fields?

We buy the lands, for the most part, from the owners of large estates; these owners, or their predecessors, acquired their land by deceit and exploitation and lease it to the *fellahin*. Sometimes we buy it from villages [End Page 40] that sell part of their property. The *fellah* who leases land is no stranger to it, but a permanent resident who stays in place, and there are *fellahin* whose grandfathers tilled the fields that they, the grandsons, are leasing. It is customary in Eretz Israel for the estate to pass from one owner to another while the tenants remain in their place. But when we buy such a property, we evict the former tillers from it. To be sure, we do not send them away empty-handed, but we pay them well for their hovels and gardens, and in general we are not stingy with money during "the dismissal." From the viewpoint of customary justice and official honesty we are completely righteous, even beyond the strict letter of the law. But, if we do not want to deceive ourselves with a conventional lie, we must admit that we have driven impoverished people from their humble abode and taken bread out of their mouths. Where will the dispossessed, with only a little money, turn? To be sure, the Hebrew settlement sometimes offers him work, at a wage higher than the pitiful income from leased land; but, first, we cannot promise that we will supply him with work permanently, and second, doing so would be a bad idea, because when we employ a *fellah* in a settlement founded on his land, we maintain his connection with the land that raised and nourished him from his birth, and he continues to regard it as his property, expropriated for the moment by foreigners. The work that we give to an Arab will never be seen, in his eyes, as indemnity for the field that was taken from him; he will take the good but not forget the bad.

In general we are making a flagrant error in human understanding toward a great, resolute, and zealous people. While we feel the love of homeland, in all its intensity, toward the land of our fathers, we forget that the people living there now also has a feeling heart and a loving soul. The Arab, like any person, is strongly attached to his homeland. Moreover, the lower his level of development and the more limited his circle of vision, the stronger will be his link to his homeland and to his neighborhood, and the harder it will be for him to leave his village and his field. He will not leave his country, he will not wander far; he is tied to his homeland with moral bonds, one of which is particularly cherished—the graves of his ancestors. In order to appreciate the depth of this feeling one must know how traditional peoples worship their dead and how often they visit their graves and include them in their lives, in their joy and in their grief. The lament of Arab women on the day that their families left Ja'uni-Rosh Pina—to go and settle on the Horan¹⁸ east of the Jordan still rings in my ears today. The men rode on donkeys and the women followed them weeping bitterly, and the valley was filled with their lamentation. As they went they stopped to kiss the stones and the earth. [End Page 41]

The question of land purchase can be a problem even when the *fellahin* themselves sell part of the village land. Indeed, in the farmer's distress, crushed by the burden of debts that have accumulated when he was forced to pay heavy taxes, he decides in a moment of desperation (and often in response to urgings of village elders who receive a decent cut) to sell his field; but this sale leaves in his heart a wound that will never heal, and he will always remember the cursed day in which his property fell into alien hands. I knew *fellahin* who, after selling their land, worked together with their wives for the Jews, and given their good wage and low expenses saved money. So long as they earned a good income they kept their silence, but the moment the work stopped they began to grumble about the Jews and to challenge the land sale.

Can we really rely on this way of acquiring land? Will it succeed, and does it suit our purpose? One hundred times no. The children of a people that first decreed the principle that "the land will never be sold," and limited the rights of the buyer in favor of the cultivator, need not and cannot themselves expropriate their land from cultivators who were innocently settled on it. They cannot uproot from it people who, with their ancestors, devoted to it their utmost vigor and their best labor. If there are farmers who water their fields with their own sweat and their own mother's milk, it is the Arabs. Who can appreciate the toil of a *fellah* plowing in torrential rains, harvesting on a summer day in our country, loading and transporting the produce? And what does he get for his labor? A ramshackle house, lowly and dingy, which serves as a general shelter for his family, his ox, and his donkey, the bread of poverty, a worn-out shirt and cloak—these are his clothes, day and night. And his wife and children—how meager is their portion! From her youth until her final days the Arab woman never stops

silently bearing her yoke of heavy labor; she draws the water and sometimes also hews the wood, a beast of burden. With a nursing baby on her shoulders, a bundle in her robe, and a jug of water on her head she goes to the sheering and to the gleaning and from morning to evening she works bent under the heat of the blazing sun, and upon her return home, with the sun soon to return, immersed in smoke she bakes the humble bread and boils the thin broth. Yet these we will dispossess, these we will harm, their poverty we will increase?

But let us leave aside for a moment justice and sentimentality and look at the question from the viewpoint of practicality alone. Let us assume for now that in the land of our fathers we need not be concerned with others and that we are permitted—or even also obligated—to buy any land that comes into our hands. Can such a way of buying land last for long? Will [End Page 42] those evicted really hold their peace and calmly accept what was done to them? Will they not in the end rise up to take back with their fists what was taken from them by the power of gold? Will they not press their case against the foreigners who drove them from their land? And who knows, if they will not then be both the prosecutors and the judges . . . And they are brave, all armed, wonderful marksmen, excellent horsemen, devoted to their nation and in particular to their religion. And this people, as yet untouched by the Enlightenment that enervates men's strength, is only a small part of the great nation that occupies all the surrounding areas: Syria, Mesopotamia, Arabia, and Egypt . . .

It is easy to dismiss these words and see them as a betrayal of our ancient and eternal national ideal; but if we weigh the matter soberly, we will have to admit that it would be folly not to ascertain in advance with whom we are dealing, and not bring into account from the outset our own power and the power against us. God forbid that we should close our eyes to what is happening, which is perhaps more imminent than we imagine. It can be said with certainty, *that at the very least there is for now no Arab movement in the national and political sense of that term*. But in truth this people needs no movement; it is mighty and numerous and needs no rebirth, because it never died and never ceased existing for a moment. Physically it is superior to all the European peoples. Being partly vegetarian and drinking water, it is stronger in body than those who eat meat and drink alcohol. We must not ignore its rights, and above all we must not exploit to its disadvantage the evil of the oppressors within its own ranks. We must not provoke the sleeping lion! We must not count on the ash that covers the glowing ember; let one spark escape, and the conflagration will be uncontrollable.

I am averse to the idea that in our land we need to grovel and submit to the inhabitants, but with courage and strength we can gain their respect and dwell securely in our settlements; and in the land of the sun we can gather strength, renew our blood, and awaken. But we will sin against ourselves and our future if we thoughtlessly cast away our best weapon: the justice of our action and the innocence of our ways. So long as we cling to these we are heroes and will fear no one, but if we discard them—our power and heroism are worth nothing.

We must not buy land every time the official owners want to sell it—this the short history of the new *yishuv*¹⁹ has clearly shown. Let me offer some relevant facts from the chronicles of the upper Galilee.

In 1887-1898 the purchase of the Druze village Metullah, in the Iyun valley on our northern border, was completed, and the large, well-known [End Page 43] settlement of that name—the crown jewel of the *yishuv*—was founded. Metullah excels in its climate, its land, its water, and its vistas, and it has a great future. The Druze tribe, the mightiest of Arab tribes, is known for its courage, its heroism, its physical strength and beauty, and also for many spiritual qualities. As a mystical Moslem sect it is hated by the [other] Arabs and by the government, but its courage has prevailed and it is free in the land of slavery, because to this day it has never ceased fighting for its freedom. Every Druze rebellion costs the government considerable money and casualties, and so it tries to come to terms with these strong-willed people. On the Druze mountain, in Horan, government officials are sometimes afraid to enter the villages to collect taxes, as it is worth their lives.

And in the village of Metullah were more than a hundred Druze families on leased land that had changed ownership several times. The last owner was a certain pasha who loathed his tenants because he could neither evict them nor collect payment; several times the government was forced to lay siege to the village and wage war upon it in order to extract the tithe. The pasha tried to sell the estate, but found no buyer, because no one wanted to take on or to expel by force such tenants who had grown old on the land (they dwelled there some ninety years). And behold the purchase was

proposed to the *pekidot*.²⁰ I recall that when I went with a settlement official to see the village land for the first time, the young Druze men gathered in the courtyard of their prayer-house and called to us: "if you dare to buy Metullah we will slaughter you!" The *pekidot* was then at the peak of its power, while the local government and the Arabs looked upon it as a mighty force that could sweep all obstacles aside. But in Metullah it was very difficult to overcome the obstacles; it was impossible to remove the Druze. The negotiations continued for four years, and perhaps even then would not have concluded except for an extraordinary event. In the year 1895-1896 the last Druze rebellion broke out; it lasted for a year, the tribal chiefs were exiled to Constantinople—and the *pekidot* made use of the emergency to complete the purchase. The village elders received substantial rewards, and in the circumstances violent resistance was not possible. Nevertheless many of the villagers refused to leave their homes and rejected even the most generous offers for their houses and gardens. And the day came to pass when the settlement official came to Metullah with a bag of gold coins in his carriage, and as though by chance there also appeared an army officer with troops, who came to arrest those evading military service—there are many of these among the Druze and the government does not pursue them diligently—and they were ready to command the hold-outs to sign the bills of sale. All of them of course signed, and within a few days more than six [End Page 44] hundred souls left the village of their birth. . . . and within a week some sixty Jewish farmers, the pick of settlement workers, gathered there and occupied the Druze houses. So long as the government was pursuing the Druze and their leaders were forced into hiding—the settlement was at peace. But at the end of a year the government released the tribal chiefs from exile and issued a general amnesty for the tribe. Within a few months the Druze of Metullah submitted a protest against the *pekidot* for occupying their homes and their vineyards, which they had not sold to it. Among the claimants were also the village elders who had received a lavish price for all they had. In discussions with the settlers, they demanded that they be allowed to build houses on a plot of land next to the village, and they complained that they were not offered work or appointed as guards. Privately they warned the Jews that the settlement would come to a bitter end if its inhabitants did not take pity on their wives and children and leave.

Admittedly the Druze of Metullah are totally destitute and when they were expelled from the village, even though each received a few hundred francs, they were suddenly put in a terrible situation. In addition: after they left their village with its pleasant and healthy climate, they found temporary shelter in a Druze village in the Hula Valley, north of Mel-Marom, where marsh fever is prevalent. Thus many of them were stricken and suffered from malaria. In no way could these people come to terms with the idea that they must forget Metullah, and therefore they continued to besiege the settlement and to threaten it and also fired into one of the houses. Once at night they fell upon a Jew who was sleeping on his threshing floor and killed him. And once in broad daylight they robbed a farmer plowing his field of his yoke of oxen. Many times rumors spread that on a certain day the Druze would assault the settlement and destroy it, and the fear of death would seize all the settlers. The men would arm themselves and not get undressed, and when shots would be heard at night around the settlement they would run in panic to the spot where they expected to find the evildoers—and they would find no one. Hundreds of nights like this passed on Metullah, and it could be said that for five straight years the settlement was permeated with terror and hysteria.

The *pekidot* did what it could: it employed excellent lawyers, proved the fairness of the purchase, tried to compromise with the Druze through their tribal chiefs, scattered considerable money in every direction, and all to no effect. Sometimes they thought the disputes were finally at an end: the central government sent a vigorous order to defend the settlement, the local authority threatened the malcontents and arrested the main instigators, the tribal chief advised the protesters to accept conciliatory payments and to [End Page 45] leave the Jews alone, and the Druze took his advice—and received a goodly sum. But a few months later some of them announced that they would not be appeased, since they were not after money but rather their land.

In any case, the Druze challenge brought another sorrow upon the settlement. The purchase of Metullah was concluded with the help of the chief of the Mutawalis, a Shi'ite Moslem sect that sucks the blood of its *fellahin* brothers. These robbers received a mediator's fee befitting their station, and in doing so found a good opportunity to get rid of assertive and free-spirited neighbors in exchange for a Jewish settlement that could conveniently be subjugated and milked. And, indeed, they spread their wings over the Jewish community and undertook to guard the settlement, and at the same time never stopped looking for pretexts to pursue pay-offs. The *pekidot* grew weary of bearing such "protection" and tried to remove it from their necks, and then these despots informed on the settlement, instigated villagers subject to their control against it, and allowed them to steal and plunder the Jews' crops.

During one summer, Metullah's neighbors turned their animals free in the standing grain and at harvest time came to the fields with their donkeys and loaded on them, before the eyes of the owners, the wheat and the barley, the beans and the peas, and returned peacefully home. And when Druze threats increased, the *pekidut* was forced to ask for help from these informers and instigators, and for a high price they were again the defenders of the settlement. . . .

At last, after legal tangles, threats, and intensive effort from all sides, the *pekidut* managed to compromise with the Druze and to conciliate them with an enormous sum, and Metullah became calm, if it is possible to be calm under the necessary protection of the gang of murderers that dominates this district.

It was ordained and ordered to buy Metullah, this charmed spot, but not in this way (we shall return to this issue), that brought upon us two calamities: It aroused against us the animosity of a mighty tribe, of whose hostility we not only have to be cautious but whose trust and friendship we need, and it saddled us in this region with overlords—from the scum of the earth (this is not rhetoric, but a plain fact). Generally the Metullah affair revealed our impotence and made us an object of scorn and ridicule throughout the Galilee.

In the Iyun Valley we contended with strong opponents who do not concede one hairsbreadth of their rights, while in other settlements we are at odds with the powerless, who submit to their village elders, while the fear of authority and jail forces them to conquer their anger. But their hatred is stored deep in their hearts; they see us as sworn enemies and take their [End Page 46] revenge on us whenever they can. Around Tiberias, the *fellahin* challenged several purchases and claimed that the sellers had falsely registered land in their own name by deceit and forgery. For some time the appellants did not allow the Jews to plow the land, and they even began to work it themselves, until the *pekidut* evicted them with the help of armed soldiers.

Indeed, the Jewish *yishuv* has already bestowed considerable bounty on the country's inhabitants: the condition of the cities and villages near the settlements has improved, hundreds of craftsmen—masons, builders, painters, [and] donkey and camel drivers—and thousands of workers find employment in the settlements, commerce has grown, and the demand for dairy products and garden produce has increased. But all of this will not compensate for what we have subverted. Our name is not inscribed on the good, but it is engraved on the bad, the memory of which will not perish. It is hard to attract lovers, but how easy it is to gain enemies among the simple *fellahin*. How strong is the envy of people who have been swept off their land. . . .

It is time to open our eyes regarding our course. If we do not want to undermine our actions, we need to consider each step that we take in our land, and to solve the question of our attitude toward the Arabs soon before it creates a Jewish question there. We have gone too far to be content with the current situation! We dare not divert our attention for a moment from reality, from the future! Every time that the imagined national advantage impinges on human justice, then this advantage also becomes a national sin that has no atonement. Our vision is so elevated, that it is not in vain that our youth aspire to realize the social ideals that move humankind in our days. But if so, then we need "to refrain from ugly deeds and their like"; that is to say, from every ugly enterprise, from every suspect step and from every action that has a tinge of injustice.

But—they will tell us—while you philosophize about every purchase and whether it is acceptable by standards of fairness, the Germans ²¹ will acquire it without philosophy.

I will respond to this question in a moment. But generally we do not want to resemble the Germans. They do not see the future of their people in our land, and they do not need (and who does, if they do not?) to think about the distant future and to rise above conventional honesty. Moreover, there is much we need to learn from the Germans: science, hard work, perseverance, but not the standards of fairness. The study of justice they learned from us and for some time to come they will need our instruction.

When we enter our land we must rid ourselves of all thoughts of conquest and uprooting. Our watchword must be: live and let live! God [End Page 47] forbid that we should harm any people, much

less a great people whose hatred is most dangerous to us.

What follows from all this is that, when we come to buy lands in Eretz Israel, we must thoroughly check whose land it is, who works it, and what the rights of the latter are, and we must not complete the purchase until we are certain that no one will be worse off. In this way we will have to forswear most cultivated land. What is left for us, therefore, in our land? Here we reach the critical question to which all the other important questions are secondary: how can we establish ourselves in Eretz Israel without sinning against justice and without harming anyone?

An answer to this question of questions can be found in a basic principle that we must place before ourselves in everything as a guideline for our undertakings in Eretz Israel: we come to our land to take possession of what is not already possessed by others, to find what others have not found, to reveal for our benefit and for the happiness of all the inhabitants the hidden wealth under its soil and the concealed blessing in its skies and sun. Regarding settlement, we will try first of all to acquire all the land that is not being cultivated because it requires improvement that is more or less difficult and expensive. This part of our land is perhaps more extensive than the part that is cultivated, since it includes most of the hills and mountains and also many valleys and ravines. A small percentage of this land will never be of use, but the greater part is suitable for trees or vines and especially figs, olives, and grapes, and a considerable part will be suitable, after clearing and deep plowing, for crops as well, and where irrigation is possible—even for intensive cultivation. . . . 22

The hills, which are for the most part uncultivated, we need to acquire for ourselves. But, while we will take hold of the uncultivated land, we will not wash our hands of the cultivated lands. We will also buy them, not in order to evict the tenants, but instead with the explicit precondition of leaving them on the estate and bettering their condition by instituting improved agricultural methods. In the new, intensive agriculture, when the property is improved and worked scientifically, its land will support Jewish settlers as well as the *fellahin*. As enlightened owners we will devote a certain sum to the betterment of the tenants, because what is good for them is good for us. Wherever we turn we will bring some profit to the residents, but not by giving covert bribes and payoffs to be rid of them. We will bring them a true and lasting profit, material and spiritual. Our agronomists will advise them and instruct them in agricultural science, raising livestock, and selective breeding, and will also show scientific methods of fighting diseases among livestock and poultry, as well as in the field, vineyard, and garden. At [End Page 48] a low cost, they will obtain from us medicines for the diseases prevalent in Eretz Israel, and, in time of need, the Jewish doctor will be available to them. Their children will be accepted in our schools, and when we manage to reduce the tithe to the government, it will also be reduced for them.

To be sure, at first they will regard us suspiciously and will not believe in the new developments and even less in the developers, but, over time, our good intentions will become clear and they will realize the sincerity of our aspirations and the usefulness of the improvements: it is useful to know that the *fellah* is ahead of farmers of many lands in his cleverness and his practical wisdom. And then our Arab tenants will recognize us as their benefactors and comforters and will not curse the day when the Jews came to settle on their land, but will remember it as a day of salvation and redemption.

We would also use this approach when we buy part of the *fellahin* land. Every new corner of which we take hold in our land should be a ray of light and abundance to its environs and a source of benefit to its primary workers. 23 And above all doubt, after we have made efforts like these in various districts of our land, hundreds of villagers will come to request the Jews to take over their land, and other land buyers in Eretz Israel will not be able to compete with us. Then the government as well will see the great benefit that we have brought to the country's inhabitants, and even our opponents—and they are many—will have to admit that our settling in Eretz Israel brings only benefit.

This approach is not an imaginary dream. It is difficult, but it is easy, reliable, and productive compared to the approaches tried up to now. If instead of dispossessing the Druze of Metullah, we had divided the land with them, then we would not have spent on them even half of what we spent on bribes to scoundrels, on the expulsion of poor families, on legal proceedings and lawyers and on unworkable deals, we would not be in thrall to murderers, and we would surely be living with our neighbors and working our land in peace. The Druze love and respect education and would send their sons and daughters to our schools, and in coming generations we would find them not only honest neighbors, but also loyal friends. And this applies to the rest of the settlements. We wasted much capital in order to create energetic enemies when we could have spent less—but let it be even more—and gained allies,

enlarging our reputation, and sanctifying the name of Israel, and bringing us nearer to our goal—opening to us the gates of hearts, which are much more important than the gates of the shore.

Our approach to land purchase must be a direct expression of our general attitude to the Arab people. The principles that must guide our actions when we settle amidst or near this people are: [End Page 49]

A. The Hebrew people, first and foremost among all peoples in the teaching of justice and law, absolute equality, and human brotherhood, respects not only the individual rights of every person, but also the national rights of every people and tribe.

B. The people Israel, as it aspires to rebirth, is a partner in thought and in deed to all the peoples who are stirring to life; it honors and respects their aspirations, and when it comes in contact with them, it cultivates their national recognition.

These two principles must be the basis of our attitude toward the Arabs—this mighty people that excels in its physical traits and in its intelligence. From the moment we come into contact, we must respect its rights. It has been attached to our land for more than 20 jubilees, ²⁴ settling there throughout in concentration until there was no room for others, and now our historical claims may not avail us. But, fortunately, this nation occupies such a broad swath of territory that it can allow us, an ancient people so close to it in blood, language, and many spiritual traits, to occupy that part of the land of our fathers that it does not yet occupy. And it not only can, but also must for its own good, let the Jews into their country, because it is powerless to lift itself up alone and to end its poverty and ignorance, but with us alone it can overcome its deficiencies. These two peoples, the Hebrew and the Arab, can supply each other's deficiency, because what we can give to the Arabs they can get from no other people. Every nation that comes to Syria in the guise of an economic savior will seek to conquer, to subjugate, and to assimilate, which is not the case with us, the people without an army and without warships: we are guileless, we have no alien thought of subjugation and of diluting the national character of our neighbors; with a pure heart we come to settle among them in order to better them in all respects. The principle of "Do not do unto others that which is hateful to yourself" ²⁵ we will observe positively: "Do unto others that which is pleasing to yourself"; and while we try to establish our nation, we will also support the revival of the inhabitants and will reinforce their national feeling in the best sense of the term.

We must, therefore, enter into a covenant with the Arabs and conclude an agreement that will be of great value to both sides and to all humankind. We will certainly agree to such a covenant, but the agreement of the other side is also necessary; this we will obtain gradually by means of practical action that benefits the land, us, and the Arabs. In this practical way our neighbors will little by little understand the great blessing that they can derive from the partnership between the Jewish people and the Arab people. Every new factory and every settlement that we found, every public institution [End Page 50] that we establish, if we but share the benefit with the residents of Eretz Israel, bring us closer to our goal. Achievement of this living charter, which needs to be inscribed, not on paper or on parchment, but on the heart and mind of an entire people, is an immense undertaking that has no like in the chronicles of humankind's progress and liberation, because its outcome is the rebirth of two ancient Semitic peoples, talented and full of potential, who complement each other. It must be admitted that up to now we had the "wrong address"; in order to acquire our land, we turned to all the powers that had some link to it, we negotiated with all the in-laws but forgot about the groom himself: we ignored the true masters of the land. Without belittling all those who have an interest in our land and particularly in its government, we must deal mostly with the Arab people, and among them mostly with the *fellahin* faction, which is more straightforward and more numerous than the other factions. The most important thing we can do in this regard is to improve the condition of the tenants and the *fellahin* who live on the lands that we buy. The more we continue to buy land and to benefit those who work it, the more numerous will be those wanting to sell their land to us, the more influential we will be in Eretz Israel, and the more recognition there will be of our beneficence and indispensability.

But also in the cities there we have broad scope for action. Let us open our public institutions wide to residents of Eretz Israel: hospitals, pharmacies, libraries, reading rooms, inexpensive restaurants, savings and loan funds; let us arrange popular lectures, plays, and musical performances to their taste and in their language; let us give an important place to the Arabic language in our schools and willingly

enroll Arab children in them; let us open our kindergartens to their younger children and in so doing bring great benefit to poor families: an economic, hygienic, but more importantly, spiritual and moral benefit. And through the children we will exercise an enormous influence on the adults. The time has come for us to understand that education is a great political force to which we must devote our best public effort. Indeed, others have already beat us to it, and in the large cities the Jesuits, the English, and the Americans have set up the middle and upper level educational institutions; but if we completely understood the importance of conquest of education ²⁵ in our land and the great value that a higher scientific institute has as a general influence, we could compete with the French and the Anglo-Americans. For to all of them, science and education are only means to a religious and hegemonic end; we are teaching "torah for its own sake" and prescribe complete freedom of opinion and belief in our schools. If we were wise enough to conquer the scientific and educational institutions and to raise them to a high level so that they would [End Page 51] be renowned throughout the lands of antiquity, thousands of students from Egypt, Syria, Mesopotamia and Turkey would stream to our schools, and they could also serve as a source of great material resources for Eretz Israel. Every decent educational institution that we found there is one small, but important, word in the charter and is worth thousands of cash payoffs.

And in our schools, as in all our institutions, let us stay away from short-sighted and small-minded nationalism that regards only itself. Let us endow it generously with sciences, crafts, labor, and physical education. Our intention is not to Judaize the Arabs, but to prepare them for a fuller life, to refine them, to develop them, to free them from their narrow vision, so that, in the course of time, they will become loyal allies, friends, and brothers. Let us prepare the inhabitants of the land and make them ready for our *yishuv*, let us be the light of science in our land and let us clear the path for law and justice. Let us do battle with the prejudices of the various nationalists who detest each other. *And all this we can do in the purity of our aspirations and our ideas, we alone and no others.*

And when we come to educate our ally and to deal with him, let us not forget another principle. As a teacher must know his student's inner soul and inclinations, so it is not enough for us to pose the final goal, but we have a duty to become properly acquainted with the Arab people, their attributes, their inclinations, their aspirations, their language, their literature, and especially to gain a deep understanding of their life, their customs, their sufferings and their torments. Let us not make the mistake that has inflicted endless damage on children's education. For thousands of years educators have seen their pupils as short adults; that is to say, they saw childhood in the body but not in the spirit, which, when it confronted the material, was—in the opinion of educators of old—already sufficiently formed, ready and prepared and armed with all the skills to understand, to be educated, and to feel. We are entering an environment that is now living in the sixteenth century, and we must take into account in all our actions the spiritual condition of this people at the moment. If we want to lead a person to a known place, we must take him from where he is now; otherwise he cannot follow us. We need, therefore, to study the psyche of our neighbors and to understand its differences. It is a disgrace that, to date, *nothing whatsoever has been done in this regard*, that so far not even one Jew has devoted himself to this topic, so that we are *complete illiterates in anything concerning the Arabs*, and all of our knowledge about them is folk wisdom. It is time to get smart!

Every item in our program needs to be clarified and systematized, while this lecture touches lightly on the broad outline of our work and shows the necessity of understanding how things really stand, while there is time. [End Page 52]

It is possible to reject the arguments in this lecture on various grounds, but the lecturer ventures to rule on one of them: these words were said in the spirit of our nation, in the spirit of universal justice, which left its imprint on our people from the day that it became a nation.

The prophet of exile, when he came to speak on the division of the land, said: "You shall allot it as a heritage for yourselves and for the strangers who reside among you, who have begotten children among you. You shall treat them as Israelite citizens; they will receive allotments along with you among the tribes of Israel. You shall give the stranger an allotment within the tribe where he resides" (Ezekiel 47:22-23). And the great prophet from Anatot [Jeremiah], who came before Ezekiel, when he came to prophesy bad tidings for the evil neighbors who were encroaching on Israel's heritage, said at the end: "I will restore them each to his own inheritance and his own land. And if they learn the ways of my people . . . then they shall be built up in the midst of my people" (Jeremiah 12:15-16).

Let us teach them the good ways, let us build them—and we will also be built.

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Notes

*This work was carried out under the auspices of the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies. I would like to thank Michael Signer, Aharon Shemesh, and Gail Dowty for their assistance. Readers may contact me at dowty.1@nd.edu.

1. *HaShiloah* (Odessa), 17 (July-December, 1907) 193-206.
2. The perceptions of the Arabs among *First Aliyah* settlers is the subject of a larger work in progress.
3. Ahad Ha'am [Asher Ginzberg], "Emet m'eretz yisrael" [Truth from Eretz Israel], *HaMelitz* (St. Petersburg), 19-30 June 1891.
4. See the commentary, accompanying the first full English translation of the article, in the previous issue of this journal: Alan Dowty, "Much Ado about Little: Ahad Ha'am's 'Truth from Eretz Yisrael,' Zionism, and the Arabs," *Israel Studies*, 5.1 (Fall, 2000) 154-81
5. *HaMelitz*, 15-17 August 1893.
6. See the summaries in Yosef Gorny, *Zionism and the Arabs, 1882-1948* (Oxford, UK, 1987) 29-39, and Anita Shapira, *Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Force, 1881-1948* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 40-52.
7. Eliyahu Sepir, "Hasina l'yisrael basifrut ha'aravit" [Hatred of Jews in Arabic Literature], *HaShiloah*, 6 (July-December, 1899) 222-32.
8. The most prominent expression of this viewpoint is an article by Hillel Zeitlin, a leading Territorialist, "HaMashber" [The Crisis], *HaZman*, 3 (July-September, 1905).
9. Gorny, *Zionism and the Arabs*, 42-3.
10. Klausner, "Hashash" [Foreboding], *HaShiloah*, 17 (July-December, 1907) 575.
11. See Shapira, *Land and Power*. . . , 47-8.
12. Nehama Pukhachewsky, "She'etot geluyot" [Open Questions], *HaShiloah*, 18 (January-June, 1908) 67-9.
13. The Seventh Congress of the World Zionist Organization, in 1905. "Ivriya" was a Hebrew cultural association that met in Basel simultaneously with the Congress.
14. The Land of Israel, the equivalent in Hebrew of "Palestine" as a geographic term.

15. Zionists who supported establishment of a Jewish state in a location other than Palestine.
16. Arab nationalism, which was emerging as a visible movement in the early 1900s.
17. Arab farmer (pl: *fellahin*).
18. The Golan Heights.
19. "Settlement," meaning the Jewish community in Palestine. The "new" *yishuv*, Zionists who began settling in 1882, was distinguished from the "old" *yishuv*, the pre-existing Jewish population.
20. Loosely, "administration" or "officialdom"; from *pakid*, official or clerk. In this context, *pekidut* is a specific reference to the administrative structure of officials and clerks imposed by Baron Edmond de Rothschild of Paris on the Jewish settlements that he supported. Since this accounted for most of the early settlements, the role of the *pekidut* in settlement and in new land purchases was central.
21. The German Templars, founders of several colonies in Palestine, who were sometimes competitors for available land.
22. At this point, a lengthy discussion on improving water use has been deleted.
23. A play on words in Hebrew; "corner" and "ray" are the same word [*keren*].
24. In other words, for over 1000 years (a jubilee is 50 years).
25. Rabbi Hillel, in the Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 31a.
26. A play on "conquest of labor," in which new settlers in Eretz Yisrael (primarily from the Second *Aliyah*, beginning in 1905) rallied for the employment of Jewish workers in Jewish settlements.

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