Religious Zionism's Shifting Views on Palestine and the Uganda Scheme

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Abstract: Up to the 19th century, the remarkable social diversity of the Jews in Palestine was due to the different religious views they held as well as to the appearance of new religious groups amongst them. With the spread of secularism in the 19th century, a new division emerged, that between the religious and the secular Jews. The same division also emerged in Zionism, an ideological and social movement that emerged in the middle of 19th century and gained mass support by its end. Zionism is usually summarized as the Jewish aspiration to establish a state in Palestine. However, the Secular Zionists who constituted the majority in the World Zionist Organization failed to mention either Palestine or Jerusalem as their prospective state's location in their writings and diaries. The pioneers of Religious Zionism, another front within Zionism, had begun to insist on Palestine long before the Secular Zionists, basing this stance on the Jewish Scriptures. Despite this, they made concessions and supported the Uganda Scheme for a while. The present study aims to examine the Religious Zionists' reasons for insisting on Palestine, the reasons for the concession they made from this position, the lessons they drew from its results, and their reactions din this context to the contemporary developments in the world.

Keywords: Religious Zionism, Palestine, Holy Land, Uganda Scheme, Zionist Congresses

Dinî Siyonizm'in Filistin ve Uganda Planı Hakkındaki Değişen Görüşleri

Özet: 19. yüzyıla kadar Filistin'deki Yahudi toplumunun kayda değer sosyal çeşitliliği Yahudilerin dine farklı bakışlarından ve aralarında yeni dinî grupların ortaya çıkmasından kaynaklanıyordu. Anılan yüzyılda ise sekülarizm düşüncesinin Yahudiler arasında yayılmasıyla beraber dindar ve seküler Yahudiler olmak üzere yeni bir bölümleme meydana çıkmıştır. Yine 19. yüzyılda doğmuş olup adını duyurması aynı yüzyılın sonlarına denk gelen bir toplumsal hareket olan Siyonizm bünyesinde de aynı bölümlemenin olduğunu söylemek mümkündür. Adını Başta Tanah olmak üzere Yahudi dini literatüründe Kudüs ve civarını anlatmak için kullanılan kelimelerden biri olan "Siyon"dan alan Siyonizm, Yahudilerin kutsal topraklarda, Filistin'de bir devlet kurma arzuları şeklinde özetlenebilir. Ancak Siyonizm fikrini savunan gruplar arasında sayıca üstün olan Seküler Siyonistler, çalışmalarında ve günlüklerinde bir süre Kudüs ve Filistin'i devlet kurulabilecek topraklar arasında zikretmemişlerdir. Siyonizm içindeki diğer bir cephe olan Dinî Siyonizm'in öncüleri ise Seküler Siyonistlerden yıllar önce Filistin konusunda ısrarcı olmuş Filistin ısrarlarını her zaman dinî bir temele oturtmuşlardır. Ancak yine de bir dönem Uganda Planını destekleyerek bu ilkelerinden tavizde bulunmuşlardır. Bu çalışmada; Dinî Siyonizm fikrini savunanların Filistin konusundaki ısrarlarının nedenleri, taviz verme sebepleri, tavizin sonuçlarından çıkarttıkları dersler ve dünyada yaşanan gelişmelere bu bağlamda gösterdikleri tepkiler incelenmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dinî Siyonizm, Filistin, Kutsal Toprak, Uganda Planı, Siyonist Kongreler

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Introduction

Concepts such as nationalism and equality that developed after the French Revolution influenced the empires with various nations in their lands. Some nations eventually succeeded in establishing nation states. The rise of anti-Semitism in Europe led Jews to a similar quest. Before the emergence of Zionism, some groups and people began to settle Jews in places like Argentina and Palestine. Baron Hirsch and Baron Edmond Rothschild were the foremost among these. Baron Hirsch[1] set up the Jewish Colonization Association and settled small groups of Jews in the land he had bought in Argentina. His aim was to get rid of the Jewish representatives who frequented his offices to request help.[2]

Baron Edmond Rothschild bought lands in Palestine and the surrounding area between 1882 and 1884, and placed Jews in these lands in small groups like Baron Hirsch. Before Baron Rothschild's intervention, Jewish groups had already begun evading the migration ban of the Ottoman Empire through bribes and infiltration. Thus, the newcomers in Palestine were forced to buy land at a very high price. This cost them much moral and material resources before they were able to establish a colony. These economic problems led Hovevey Zion (Zion Lovers) and other similar groups to apply to rich Jews to find support. One of these was Baron Edmond. Until then, Baron Edmond was the member of a wealthy and prominent family who was content with managing his assets. In supporting Jewish colonization, he expected to gain a purpose in life and acquire an honored position within his family. Another motivation of his was linked to the interests of the British Empire and France in the Eastern Mediterranean. He wanted to be in the foreground in case the owners of the region changed in the near future. His decision in 1882 to support Jewish colonization was an important turning point for Jewish history. On the organization level, however, Hovevey Zion, which was established in Tsarist Russia a year before Baron Rothschild's initiative started, was at the forefront. The arrival of the members of Hovevey Zion on 6 July 1882 at the Jaffa port, with the plan to settle in Palestine, was considered the symbol of a new start.[3]

It is worth noting that the pioneers who brought up the idea of Zionism were clergymen. Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer (1795-1874) and Rabbi Judah Alkalai (1789-1878) developed the argument that the Jews had to migrate *en masse* to Palestine. They desired to re-apply some of the mitzvahs[4] that had fallen into disuse after the

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[1] Baron Hirsch is a familiar figure in Turkish history, as he acquired the concessions for building the Rumelian railway line starting from Istanbul and ending in Bosnia. See Mustafa Özyüksel, *The Hejaz Railway and Ottoman Empire* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 16.

[2] Derek J. Penslar, *Zionism and Technocracy* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1991), 18.

[3] Simon Schama, *İki Rothschild: İsrail Devleti'nin Kuruluşu*, trans. Belkıs Çorakçı Dişbudak (İstanbul: Alfa Tarih, 2016), 38.

[4] *Mitzvah* is a basic Jewish religious rule based on the Torah. There are 613 mitzvahs (plural *mitzvot*). Most of them are about sacrifices and offerings. Some mitzvahs were performed only in the Temple. However, after the destruction of the Temple, the related mitzvahs could not be fulfilled. The most acknowledged list of mitzvahs in traditional Judaism is that of Maimonides'.

fall of the Second Temple, and believed that the Jews could get away from the oppression of Europe only by migrating to Palestine. Rabbi Kalischer appealed to the Rothschild family in 1836 for an attempt to purchase land in Jerusalem when it was temporarily under the rule of Governor Kavalalı Mohammed Ali Pasha.[5] This was many years before the idea of Zionism was strongly voiced by Leo Pinsker and Theodor Herzl. Kalisher described his idea and initiatives in the book *Derishat Tzion*, written in 1862. [6] As for Rabbi Judah Alkalai, he argued after the Damascus Affair in 1840 that the Jews had to migrate to Palestine and establish a state there.[7] All these developments occurred about 20 to 30 years before Leo Pinsker's organization Hovevey Zion was established, and 35 years before Theodor Herzl organized the World Zionist Congress. Leo Pinsker himself, in his book *Auto-Emancipation* published in 1882, vaguely pointed out possible places for Jewish settlement, like Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt. Before his initiatives for Palestine in the Ottoman capital, Herzl in contrast had never mentioned Palestine as the prospective land of the *Jewish State* in his book with the same title or his diary. He long took a neutral stance in the debates about the Uganda Scheme, and in the eventual voting he declared support for the plan.[8]

In sum, while Leo Pinsker and Herlz had failed to declare Palestine openly as country for the prospective Jewish state, Rabbi Kalischer pointed out Palestine as a goal in his book, and Rabbi Alkalai settled in Jaffa in 1840 to set an example for other Jews.[9] Both of these figures, who contributed to the emergence of the idea of Zionism, would later also provide a source of inspiration for the practitioners of Religious Zionism.

This study examined the Religious Zionists' views of Palestine until the Second World War. Indeed a chief feature that distinguishes Judaism from other religions is the importance it attached to the phenomenon of the Holy Land. But the First World War and the ideas that affected the world interwar period also caused changes in the way that Palestine was viewed by the supporters of Religious Zionism.

The first section of this study provides information on Religious Zionism and examines the approach of Judaism and Religious Zionism to Palestine and the Holy Land. The second section dwells on the question why the Religious Zionists gave up their insistence on Palestine at a time when the prospect of returning to Jerusalem

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See Baki Adam, "Yahudilik," *Dinler Tarihi El Kitabı*, ed. Baki Adam (Ankara: Grafiker Yayınları, 2015), 51.

[5] Mim Kemal Öke, *Siyonizm ve Filistin Sorunu* (İstanbul: Kırmızı Kedi), 31.

[6] Yusuf Süha Sonuç, "Kibbutzun İsrail Siyasetine Etkisine Kısa Bir Bakış," *İsrailiyat: İsrail ve Yahudi Çalışmaları Dergisi* 1, no. 1 (2017): 131.

[7] Norman Solomon, "Zionism and Religion: the Transformation of an Idea," *The Annual of Rabbinic Judaism: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern*, vol. 3, eds. Alan Jeffery, Avery Peck, William Scott Green, and Jacob Neusner (Leiden: Brill, 2000) 154.

[8] Gur Alroey, *Zionism Without Zion: The Jewish Territorial Organization and Its Conflict with the Zionist Organization* (Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2016), 32.

[9] Ronald L. Eisenberg, *The Streets of Jerusalem: Who, What, Why* (Tel Aviv: Devora Publishing, 2006), 21.

appeared so tangible after the destruction of the Second Temple. It also discusses the lessons they drew from this concession. The third and final section examines the changes in the Religious Zionists' view of Palestine after the First World War.

Religious Zionism's Approach to Concept of Holy Land

Secularism, which influenced European politics and society throughout the nineteenth century, also affected the Zionists. Although most Zionists were secular, they took advantage of Judaism to familiarize the religious Jews with the idea of Zionism.[10] However, they gave up these policies after gaining the support of Great Powers like Britain and Germany, and adopted a secular agenda. The reflection of this was the "Cultural Issue,"[11] raised for the first time by Chaim Weizmann during the Fourth Zionist Congress (1900). These initiatives provoked an outrage among the religious Jews in the congress, who believed that the Zionist movement would assume a secularist character if the Cultural Issue was accepted. In response Rabbi Yitzhak Yaakov Reines (1839-1915) established the Markaz HaRuhani (Mizrachi) organization, which had a place of its own within the World Zionist Organization. So Secular and Religious Zionism emerged as the two main divisions in the Organization.[12]

Religious Zionism is, in short, an ideology that aims to link Halacha[13] with Zionism. It strives to prevent the Secular Zionists from realizing their secular agendas or adapting Judaism so as to befit their goals. Religious Zionists also try to attract religious Jews to their own ranks by pointing out how the negative impact of the exile on the Jewish people could be removed by returning to the Holy Land, and by propagating messianic ideas.[14] Judaism is indeed unique in being identified with a sacred land of the Scriptures. While Christianity and Islam can be fully practiced everywhere, Judaism cannot. Sacrifices, many mitzvahs, and duties of the Kohen can only be carried out in the Holy Land and the Temple. The interpretations of the Jewish scholars vary however about the boundaries of the Holy Land, since the Tanah does not provide clear references to them. It is only given to understand that these lands formerly belonged to the people of Canaan.[15]

Jews were believed to have fulfilled the mitzvahs given them in the Holy Land during the reigns of David and Solomon. This only proved temporary however.

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[10] Dov Schwartz, *Faith at the Crossroads* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 10.

[11] The advocates of the "Cultural Issue" in Zionism argued that Jewishness should be regarded solely as a national identity and called for a reorganization of Jewish history, literature, language, art, and education within the framework of Jewish national identity.

[12] Schwartz, *Faith at the Crossroads*, 10-12.

[13] Halacha is the complete body of Jewish laws gathered from the Torah and the Talmud. It is based on the *mitzvot*, and as a Jewish legal system encompasses every aspect of life. See Adam, "Yahudilik," 52.

[14] Aviezer Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, trans. Michael Swirsky and Jonathan Chipman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 86-88.

[15] Adam, "Yahudilik," 59.

With the death of Solomon, the Jewish state was divided into two parts: the Kingdom of Israel in the north and the Kingdom of Judah in the south. In 722 BCE the Assyrians destroyed the former kingdom, and its population was exiled to Assyria. Then, in 587 BCE, the Babylonians destroyed the kingdom of Judah in the south, and its population was sent to exile in Babylon. Although the Jews of Judah were eventually able to return to their former land, its borders had changed. The connection of the Jews with the Holy Land was completely broken when the Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70. This event affected Judaism in a significant way, as its institutions were adapted to the conditions of exile which had rendered obsolete the mitzvahs linked to the Temple. The Messiah came to be seen as the main actor who would reconnect Jews with the former glorious days. According to the new-born "order of the exile," the destruction of the Temple and the exile were commands of God and therefore the return from the exile could only take place under the leadership of the Messiah. Once the Messiah had come, the Jews would return with Him to the Promised Land. It was "blasphemy" according to traditional Judaism to try to return *en masse* to the Holy Land before the arrival of the Messiah. On the other hand, there were no prohibitions against individual emigration to Holy Land, and the Jewish religious lawyers constantly drew attention to the fact that living individually in the Holy Land was a necessity. Maimonides (1135-1204) stated that it was forbidden for a Jew to leave the Holy Land without reason. He often spoke of the virtues of the Holy Land to encourage Jews to settle there. For example, he stated that the sins of those who lived in the Holy Land, and even of those who had died elsewhere but been buried there, would be forgiven.[16]

Just as Judaism is a religion identified with the Holy Land, it is also a religion centered on the temple.[17] Many of the rules in Judaism must be practiced in the temple. And this temple is not a local place of worship, but the famous Temple in Jerusalem, constructed by Solomon in the place chosen by God.

At the end of the 19th century, in the course of the debates on returning to the Holy Land, the Religious Zionists began to draw upon the religious literature on the Messiah and the mitzvahs that were only practicable in the Holy Land. Although the traditional Jews repeated the view that it was forbidden to migrate collectively to the Holy Land without the Messiah, Rabbi Reines and Rabbi Abraham Kook,[18] like Rabbi Kalischer and Rabbi Alkalai before them, argued that emigration to Holy Land was both a mitzvah and an opportunity to accelerate the arrival of the Messiah. Rabbi Abraham Kook said that Zionism was a God-given method for the Jews to migrate to the Holy Land.[19] As Zionism began to be debated among Jewish

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[16] Adam, "Yahudilik," 61.

[17] Adam, "Yahudilik," 61.

[18] Rabbi Abraham Yitzhak Kook (1865-1935) was another important figure of Religious Zionism. He became the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel during the British Mandate. See Rabbi Dov Peretz Elkins, *Shepherd of Jerusalem: A Biography of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook* (Indiana: Author House, 2005), 2.

[19] Schwartz, *Faith at the Crossroads*, 33-34.

religious circles, Kook came up with a different understanding of the Messiah from that of the traditional Jews:

> As long as Jews continue to live in Europe (in exile), the Messiah will not come, and if the Jews want salvation they must migrate to Palestine and speed up the arrival of the Messiah. It is argued that all Zionists, whether secular or religious, are sacred officials appointed by God to access the Messianic age.[20]

In the World Zionist Organization, the Religious Zionists initially acted on an agenda emphasizing the importance of the Holy Land, the Temples, and the mitzvahs. Before the "Cultural Issue" debate had calmed down in 1903, however, the Sixth World Zionist Congress was shaken by the Uganda Scheme presented by the British Empire.

Uganda Scheme and the Stance of Religious Zionism

Theodor Herzl's brand of Zionism, called Political Zionism, envisaged that the Jews would be settled in Palestine after permits had been obtained through diplomatic means. Herzl noted in his diary that "the collective return to Palestine without the permission of Sultan Abdulhamid could be catastrophic for the Jews.[21] With this belief, Herzl met with many European leaders. Between 1896 and 1902 he came to Istanbul on five occasions to negotiate the establishment of a semi-independent state in Palestine, maintained contacts with the state authorities, and was accepted by Sultan Abdulhamid on 17 May 1901.[22] Herzl promised the Ottoman authorities that the Empire's debt would be paid off by the Jews and that the Armenian groups carrying out propaganda against Istanbul in Europe would be silenced. He also met with the German Emperor Wilhelm II to place pressure on Sultan Abdulhamid.[23]

Herzl eventually failed to get what he wanted from Istanbul and so turned to the British Empire. He requested Cyprus or South Africa from London, calculating that he could later transfer the Jews from these places to Palestine "after the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire."[24] In March 1903, the British proposed a plan aimed at giving the land of Uasin Gishu,[25] within the Kenyan borders today, to the

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[20] Aviezer Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, trans. Michael Swirsky and Jonathan Chipman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 86-88.

[21] Yaşar Kutluay, *Siyonizm ve Türkiye* (Ankara: Akçağ Yayınları, 1973), 32.

[22] Vahdet Engin, *Pazarlık* (İstanbul: Yeditepe Yayınları, 2015), 61-62.

[23] Kutluay, *Siyonizm ve Türkiye* 258.

[24] Kutluay, *Siyonizm ve Türkiye*, 227.

[25] The proposed land, Uasin Gishu, was a 13,000 km² area located on the Kenyan-Uganda border in what is today western Kenya. By the time it was offered for Zionist settlement, the administration of the region had just been transferred to the East African Protectorate from the Ugandan Protectorate of the British Empire (1902). This explains why a piece of land that has

Jews. Known as the "Uganda Scheme," the offer was made a few weeks after the pogroms that occurred in Chisinau on April 6-7, 1903.[26]

The proposed land had a temperate climate and clean water resources. It was also on the Uganda Railway line. The railway came from Uganda over Nairobi, and reached the Mombasa Port, Kenya's gateway to the world. Joseph Chamberlain, the British Colonial Minister, stated that if the Zionists accepted the offer, the British government would make it easier for the Jews to settle on this land.[27]

The Uganda Scheme was first brought to the attention of the Sixth Zionist Congress (1903). Herzl did not object to the Uganda Scheme because of his final disappointment in Istanbul and also because of the urgent need of temporary residence for Jews in the wake of the pogroms that had taken place in Chisinau.[28] Rothschild welcomed the scheme as well, concerned as he was about the arrival of a large Jewish population in Palestine. Such an event could well result in the collapse of the colonial system he had built in Palestine. In the Congress, it was decided by a vote of 295 against 178 to send an "investigatory commission" to examine the territory proposed to see if it was suitable for the settlement of Jews. Although some Secular Zionist delegates voted against the proposal, almost all of the Religious Zionist delegates voted in its favor. [29]

So why did the Religious Zionists, who had brought forward Palestine as the land of return and settlement at a time when the Secular Zionist were still hesitant to insist on Palestine for fear of potential criticism support the Uganda Scheme?

The idea of establishing a state in Palestine had long been crucial for Religious Zionism. This was both a political and a religious necessity for the Religious Zionists. Beside the sincere personal alliance between Rabbi Reines and Herzl, the Religious Zionists' reasons for supporting the Uganda Scheme may be divided into two as political and theological.

In politics, to begin with, the Religious Zionists opposed the Secular Zionists at every opportunity because of the "Cultural Issue." In the talks preceding the vote on the Uganda Scheme, the feasibility of the Scheme became a matter of discussion among the Secular Zionists,[30] so the Religious Zionists supported the Uganda Scheme to exacerbate this disagreement. [31] The proposal came moreover from the British Empire, one of the Great Powers of the time, and the Religious Zionists

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never been within the borders of the present Uganda is known as the "Uganda Scheme" in the history of Zionism.

[26] Naomi E. Pasachoff and Robert J. Littman, *A Concise History of the Jewish People* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 242.

[27] Adam Rovner, *In the Shadow of Zion* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 52.

[28] Alroey, *Zionism Without Zion*, 32.

[29] Reuven Firestone, *Holy War in Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 157.

[30] Yusuf Besalel, *Yahudilik Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 2 (İstanbul: Gözlem Gazetecilik, 2001), 631. In the run-up to the Seventh Zionist Congress, the opposing party was organized by Chaim Weizmann. See Öke, *Siyonizm ve Filistin Sorunu*, 57.

[31] Alroey, *Zionism Without Zion*, 32.

considered that rejecting this proposal could harm the Zionist movement in general, and the Mizrachi organization in particular.

The Religious Zionists' theological reasons for supporting the Uganda Scheme were particularly striking. It was quite unexpected that a group who aspired to migrate *en masse* to Palestine and establish a Jewish state there would lend its support to the Uganda Scheme. But the Religious Zionists themselves saw the land proposed in the Uganda Scheme as a "spiritual refuge area" that would help get rid of the negative effects of the exile. For they were concerned that ideas and habits incompatible with Judaism, acquired during the exile, could ruin the spirituality of the Holy Land.[32] The establishment of a Jewish state in Uganda, according to Religious Zionists, would provide an opportunity to imbue the Secular Zionist with a religious sensibility, as well as the chance to flee from the anti-Semitism in Europe.[33] In addition, settlement in the proposed land in the Uganda Scheme would not change the existing way of worship and they would continue to pray for return to Zion. In fact, as the Holy Land was approached one step closer, the enthusiasm of this worship would be further increased.

Although the Religious Zionist leaders were able for a while to keep together the Mizrachi delegates and their followers with this theological arguments, reactions began to develop from inside the movement. While most Religious Zionists in the Sixth Zionist Congress supported the Uganda Scheme for the reasons above, some regarded the acceptance of the Scheme as a betrayal of the Palestinian cause. During the vote, some Secular Zionists had rejected the Uganda Scheme, and a group of Religious Zionists pointed out that the existence of Secular Zionists who opposed the Uganda Scheme served to illustrate the lasting strong bonds between Judaism and Palestine. The Mizrachi insisted that Palestine was the only place where the Secularists could re-establish ties with their past. As a result of these considerations, the Religious Zionist delegates decided to vote against the Uganda Scheme in the Seventh Zionist Congress.[34]

The adoption of the Uganda Scheme had echoes in Istanbul as well. The Ottoman rulers told the Herzl's representatives who were on a visit to Istanbul that it would be a correct decision for the Jews to go to Africa. After a while, however, Herzl was invited to Istanbul for the re-examination of the proposal for the Ottoman administration.[35] The invitation caused excitement among the Zionists, but Herzl returned empty-handed from Istanbul.[36] His death a short time later in 1904 changed the balances within the World Zionist Organization. The group under Chaim Weizmann's leadership acquired a notable clout in the World Zionist Congress.

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[32] Firestone, *Holy War in Judaism*, 157.

[33] Rafael Medoff and Chaim I. Waxman, *The A to Z of Zionism* (Maryland: Scarecrow Press Inc, 2009), 153.

[34] Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism: From the French Revolution to the Establishment of the State of Israel* (New York: Schocken Books, 2009), 128; Firestone, *Holy War in Judaism*, 163.

[35] Medoff and Waxman, *A to Z of Zionism*, 155.

[36] Kutluay, *Siyonizm ve Türkiye*, 350.

Owing to Herzl's recent visit to Istanbul and the influence of the group under the leadership of Weizmann, it was decided to reject the Uganda Scheme in the Seventh Zionist Congress (1905). Many Religious Zionists supported the cancellation of the Uganda Scheme despite having initially accepted it. [37]

This inconsistent attitude of the Mizrachi led to the formation of an opposition within the organization, and debates within finally led to the emergence of new Religious Zionist organizations. One of these, Agudat Israel, even abandoned Zionism altogether. But the interlocutors in the debates between the Religious and Secular Zionists had also changed in the meanwhile. After Herzl's death political Zionism lost power and fell behind Practical Zionism, which preferred to concentrate its efforts on the actual settlement of Palestine rather than on political initiatives. Finally "Synthetic Zionism" would emerge, advocating the synthesis of Political and Practical Zionism. [38]

Following the congresses in which the Uganda Scheme was discussed, the Religious Zionists tried to keep Mizrachi in the background while the debates among the Secular Zionists were going on. They also organized initiatives to gather supporters in Europe. A year before the Tenth World Zionist Congress (1912), however, a group from the Mizrachi gathered around Rabbi Jacob Rosenheim and explained that they were leaving the organization. All these developments caused the Religious Zionists to lose power within the World Zionist Organization and fall behind the Secularists. [39]

Religious Zionist's Stance during the Inter-War Period

Due to Mizrachi's support for the Uganda Scheme, the fracture among the Religious Zionists continued. About ten years after the discussion of the Uganda Scheme, the First World War broke out. This war, which for the first time in history occurred on more than one continent and used weapons with unprecedented destructive power, was interpreted as a harbinger of the arrival of the Messiah. Owing to the fact that Messianism was the backbone of Religious Zionism, the war became a life-saver for the Religious Zionists who had been much weakened in the meanwhile. The Religious Zionist leaders' heated discourse on the war rendered Religious Zionism attractive for traditionalist Jews. After what they had experienced, the Religious Zionist would never return to their initial position in the Uganda Scheme and indeed emerged as the most radical supporters of the return to the Holy Land.

After the death of Rabbi Reines, the founder of Mizrachi in August 1915, Rabbi Abraham Kook emerged as the leader of the Religious Zionist ideology. In an article he published during the war, he emphasized that the arrival of the Messiah was

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[37] Medoff and Waxman, A to Z of Zionism, 155-156

[38] Kutluay, *Siyonizm ve Türkiye*, 382.

[39] Firestone, *Holy War in Judaism*, 158.

imminent.[40] After the Ottomans lost Palestine in December 1917 and the region came under British rule, Rabbi Kook called on the Zionists to increase violence against the Arabs so as to take over the Holy Land and encourage further Jewish settlement. He sent letters to the Jews in Europe and leaders of the congregations there to remind them that it was time to return to the Holy Land. Rabbi Kook's energetic personality and harsh discourse were welcomed in the old and new Yishuv.[41] They also paved the way to his election to the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbinate of Israel, established in 1921.[42]

In June 1920, with the appointment of the High Commissioner Herbert Louis Samuel to the British Mandate for Palestine, proposals for the division of Palestine began to be discussed by the Jews and Arabs. Rabbi Kook, considered by this time as an important figure by the Religious Zionists as well as by all Jewish religious leaders, was against all sorts of division.[43] Behind this attitude was the memory of the past experience with the Uganda Scheme. Following Kook, the Religious Zionists continued to oppose all partition plans. Rabbi Yitzhak Herzog, elected to Kook's position in 1935 as the Second Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel, officially opposed the "MacDonald White Book" presented by the British Mandate for Palestine.[44] As the Religious Zionists' domination of both the Ashkenazi and Sephardic wings of the Chief Rabbinate continued, their influence on Jewish policy also increased. Owing to this influence, the Religious Zionists produced some of the most important political figures on the eve of the establishment of the Israeli state.

After the First World War, the process of Jewish settlement in Palestine accelerated, and the need for labor was strongly felt. Socialism, widely influential around the world at this time, also affected the Zionists, both secular and religious. The Secular Zionists founded the General Workers' Federation (Histadrut) [45] in December 1920 to deal with the problems of the workers. The Religious Zionists wanted to set up a similar organization to defend the rights of religious workers, and in 1921 they were organized under the name "Palestine Youth Federation Linked to the Mizrachi" (Histadrut ha-Tsa'ir ha-Eretz Israeli she-al-yad ha-Mizrachi).[46] In 1922 the organization received the name HaPoel HaMizrachi. [47]

Although socialism had an anti-religious stance in the USSR, Hapoel HaMizrachi was a religion-based organization. It avoided international labor movements to

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[40] Lawrence J. Kaplan and David Shatz, *Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook and Jewish Spirituality* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 121.

[41] Yosi Avneri, *Rabbi Kook's Vision: Timely or Premature?* (New York: Jewish Action, 2004), 30.

[42] Elkins, *Shepherd of Jerusalem*, 33.

[43] Elkins, *Shepherd of Jerusalem*, 71.

[44] Dov Schwartz, *Religious Zionism* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2009), 39-40.

[45] Histadrut, meaning federation in English, was a brief form of the name of the organization HaHistadrut Hakalalit Shel Ha-Ovedim Be-Eretz Israel (General Workers' Federation in Israel). Between 1921 and 1935, David Ben Gurion served as General Secretary of the Federation established in December 1920. See Medoff and Waxman, *A to Z of Zionism*, 111.

[46] Firestone, *Holy War in Judaism*, 193.

[47] Schwartz, *Religious Zionism*, 42.

evade this paradox and show that it was not anti-religious. [48] Instead, it based its tenets on Tanah. According to the supporters of Hapoel HaMizrahi, there were solutions for all kinds of social, political and economic problems in the Scriptures.[49] In this connection the Religious Zionists also stated that the Jews in Palestine would be able to fulfill mitzvahs like cultivating the Holy Land and doing public works, which would enable them to supersede the passivity of the exiles and become productive.[50]

The Religious Zionists also began to voice their objections to the planning and lifestyle of the Jewish settlements. Synagogues were rare in the settlement areas established by the Secular Zionists, and some workplaces were open on Shabbat. The Jewish National Fund, responsible for financing the establishment of new settlements, failed to respond to such religious demands of the Religious Zionists. The latter then turned to the Jews in Palestine and Europe and placed pressure on the World Zionist Organization by referring to the mitzvahs in Tanah.[51]

The political situation in Europe was undergoing important changes around this time. In Germany, Adolf Hitler was appointed Chancellor in January 1933, and in August 1934 he became the "German Führer" by combining the Chancellor's Office with the Presidency. From that date onwards, the German efforts at re-armament led to the possibility of a new war.[52] While Britain sought to preserve the peace by appeasing Adolf Hitler, it also tried to resolve the Arab-Jewish conflict in Palestine which reached a peak around this time. In 1936, the Arab leaders came together to establish the Arab High Commission with the aim of fighting against Jewish settlement. The Arabs then went on a general strike in October 1936, and the clashes between Arabs and Jews intensified. In response the London administration founded the British Royal Commission led by Earl Peel. In the "Peel Commission" report issued on July 8, 1937, the Galilee, the coastal strip and the region of Sharon were proposed to the Jews, the region between Tel Aviv-Jaffa and Jerusalem to the Mandate, and the rest to the Arabs. The report was discussed at the Twentieth Zionist Congress (1937). The group under the leadership of David Ben Gurion, the general secretary of Histadrut, supported its findings and conclusions. The group led by Chaim Weizmann also welcomed the report, with the thought that the territories given to the Mandate would remain to the Jews in the future. [53]

However, the Religious Zionists adopted a negative stance against the partition plan in the Peel Commission Report. They pointed out that the partition would mean making territorial concessions from the Holy Land, which they said was

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[48] Colin Shindler, *A History of Modern Israel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), xiv; Sol Scharfstein, *Understanding Israel* (Jersey City: Ktav Publishing House, 1994), 58.

[49] As'ad Ghanem, *Ethnic Politics in Israel: the Margins and the Ashkenazi Centre* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 93.

[50] Ghanem, *Ethnic Politics in Israel*, 93.

[51] Firestone, *Holy War in Judaism*, 159; Schwartz, *Religious Zionism*, 50-51.

[52] Fahir Armaoğlu, *20. Yüzyıl Siyasi Tarihi* (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Yayınları, 1992), 287-304.

[53] Schwartz, *Religious Zionism*, 59.

unacceptable in religious terms. Accordingly they lodged protests against the British Mandate in Palestine [54] Bar Ilan, Maimon, and the Sephardic Chief Rabbi Uziel argued that such a concession had to be avoided in the final period of the construction of a Jewish state, as it would disrupt the Jewish society's morale.[55] Bar Ilan called for an intensification of the armed struggle against the British Mandate.[56] Although the proposal in the Peel Commission Report was made shortly after the death of Rabbi Abraham Kook, his followers and students drew upon his doctrines in the ensuing debates. According to Rabbi Abraham Kook, the Holy Land was imbued deeply with a divine power. Rabbi Jacob Harlap, one of his followers, elaborated on this theme, asserting that the Holy Land had a unique sanctity. Mortals could not make decisions about the Holy Land, as it was not subject to the will of mankind. So it was a great sin and heresy to give up any parts of the Promised Land. [57]

The Peel Commission Report was considered in the 20th Zionist Congress. Although leaders like David Ben Gurion and Chaim Weizmann supported the partition plan it proposed, it was finally rejected because of the opposition of the Religious Zionists as well as of some Secular Zionists. The Arabs did not accept the plan either, declaring that that no part of Palestine would be left to the Jews. Approximately six months after the Peel Commission's report, Germany annexed Austria in March 1938, and the Second World War broke out in September 1939. The 21st and last Zionist Congress was convened in Geneva a few days before the war. It began with a debate on the Peel Commission Report as well as on London's proposal regarding the restriction of Jewish immigration to Palestine. No decision was reached however at the end of the Congress.[58]

Conclusion

At the basis Zionism is lies the concept of the "Holy Land" in Judaism. Without the Holy Land and the Temple at its center, Judaic religious practices could not be carried out fully. In this context, Rabbi Kalischer and Rabbi Alkalai had called for a return to the Holy Land long before the efforts of Baron Hirsch, Baron Rothschild, Hovevey Zion, and Herzl himself. In so doing, they offered a new religious discourse and new references instead of the traditional ones, according to which mass emigration to the Holy Land before Messiah's arrival was forbidden. Rabbi Kalischer and Rabbi Alkalai argued that through a return *en masse* to the Holy Land, the coming of the Messiah would be accelerated, and the mitzvahs related to the Holy Land and the Temple would become practicable again. These ideas later came

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[54] Schwartz, *Religious Zionism*, 60.

[55] Medoff and Waxman, *A to Z of Zionism*, 142.

[56] Medoff and Waxman, *A to Z of Zionism*, 143.

[57] Schwartz, *Religious Zionism*, 58.

[58] Schwartz, *Faith at the Crossroads*, 8.

to be called Religious Zionism, and Rabbi Alkalai and Rabbi Kalischer were accepted as its forerunners.

In line with the fundamental tenets set down by Alkalai and Kalischer, Religious Zionists looked upon Palestine as Jewish homeland. Surprisingly, however, most of them abandoned this position during the years that witnessed the debates about the Uganda Scheme. In fact the support they gave to the Scheme was also contingent on their plans for returning to the Holy Land: In Europe, they said, the Jews' morals had been badly influenced by exile, and they had moved away from Judaism. If they directly reached the Holy Land now, there was the chance that they would contaminate it. So Uganda would be used as a kind of purgatory where the Secular Zionists, waiting for the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the final move to Palestine, could rediscover in the meanwhile their traditional roots in Judaism and be cleansed of the evil influences of the exile. Politically, they also wanted to preserve the Zionist movement's good relations with the British Empire, proposer of the Scheme, as well as to contribute to the split among the Secular Zionists regarding the Scheme, since they were at a loggerheads with the latter on the "Cultural Issue." The result, however, was a deep internal rift among their own ranks and an ensuing loss of ground vis-à-vis the Secular Zionists. So much so that even a decade after the debates, they had still not recovered fully.

In an effort to prevent further power loss and regain their following, the Religious Zionists increased their calls for the establishment of new Jewish settlements and eventually a Jewish State in Palestine. They also rejected the Peel Comission's proposal for the partition of Palestine, which was supported by Secular Zionist leaders like Ben Gurion and Chaim Weizmann. Going further, they also called for an intensification of armed struggle against the Arabs and the British Mandate Administration. In the meanwhile the "Messianic" aspect of their discourse was accentuated as well. Through these means, the Religious Zionists rallied support among the religious Jews and increased their clout in the World Zionist Organization, an originally secular body which they had joined despite the reactions of the traditionalist Jews.

Thus while the Religious Zionists tried to change the traditional ideas about the return to the Holy Land, they also strove to counterbalance the secular Zionists' non-religious agenda. After the episode of the Uganda Scheme, they refused to make and concessions about Jewish settlement in the Holy Land, and learned to gain political power through the rhetoric of the Messiah, the Holy Land, and the Jewish state. After the Second World War, the Religious Zionists increased their support for the establishment of the State of Israel, and were also present in the declaration of the foundation of the state. The idea of "Greater Israel," which would surface in the context of the wars between Israel and Arab states was also a product of the Religious Zionists' conception of the "Holy Land."

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