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Rethinking Sovereignty and Autonomy: New Currents in the History of Jewish Nationalism

Abstract

This article explores the past and present of the concepts of “sovereignty” and “autonomy” in Jewish nationalism. It revisits the play of—and interplay between—the two terms in the current moment of globalizations, when old truths about state sovereignty are being questioned. In particular, it highlights a number of new trends in the historiography of Jewish nationalism that lend prominence to autonomist or diasporist currents; at the same time, it suggests the potential utility of such currents in helping to understand long-standing political conflicts today.

Keywords

Sovereignty, autonomy, Jewish nationalism, Israel, Palestine

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Our current moment in history is a propitious one to reflect on the idea of sovereignty, which finds itself at a political and intellectual crossroad. On one hand, the appetite for national self-determination in the form of state sovereignty proceeds with new vigor, as the cases of South Sudan, Catalan and the Basque region—not to mention the longstanding efforts of the Kurds, among others—suggest. On the other hand, there are powerful countervailing currents—both bottom-up and top-down—pushing against the sovereignty principle. To wit, the current conflicts in Syria and Iraq point to the structural difficulties—and perhaps terminal point—of the states created out of the Ottoman Empire in the wake of the First World War. Under-represented ethnic and religious groups smell blood at the prospect of the dismantling of these states and dream of achieving sovereignty, although their best hope may well lie in a federalist or consociational form of power-sharing. Simultaneously, the forces of economic, political and religious globalization—both Western neo-liberal and jihadi-Islamist versions—continue to wash over the fixed boundaries of states and beckon towards a ‘post-sovereignty era’.

This is the term used by political theorist Michael Keating in his book *Plurinational Democracy: Stateless Nations in a Post-Sovereignty Era* from 2001. Keating sought to perform a pair of inter-related tasks in his book. First, in the tradition of late nineteenth-century/early twentieth-century theorists such as Karl Renner, he aimed to decouple the idea of nation from state.¹ Second, he challenged the association between state and sovereignty by pointing to both sub- and supra-state competitors as well as to the growing appreciation for strong forms of cultural pluralism in places such as Quebec, Scotland and Belgium. On the basis of his analysis, Keating both described and prescribed a ‘post-sovereignty era,’ one in which there are not only *multinational* states, but also far-flung *transnational* allegiances between diaspora and homeland that complicate and weaken the link between state and sovereignty.²

To be sure, there is a middle ground between the renewed claims to statist sovereignty and the assertion of post-sovereignty. For example, in his concise introduction to the concept of globalization, Manfred Steger declares that ‘we ought to reject premature pronouncements of the impending demise of the nation-state while acknowledging its increasing difficulties in performing some of its traditional functions.’³ Steger’s declaration would seem to have particular relevance to the State of Israel, whose current political efficacy and future viability are, by many accounts, impaired as a result of its ongoing occupation of Palestinian territories.

¹ See Synopticus (aka Karl Renner), *Staat und Nation* (Vienna, 1899).

² Michael Keating, *Plurinational Democracy: Stateless Nations in a Post-Sovereignty Era*.

³ Manfred Steger, *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 64.

Before homing in on our main subject, which is an examination of the competing regimes of autonomy and sovereignty in Jewish political thought, it is important to offer two brief prefatory notes. First, the institution of sovereignty, at least in the modern sense of an identity between territory and state power, is commonly understood to be the outgrowth of the European religious wars of the seventeenth century and the ensuing treaties of Westphalia. The Westphalian model, as it is known, called for the rise of state control without external (or ecclesiastical) meddling. As such, its rise seems connected to a larger process of secularization of which Zionism can be seen—and often saw itself.⁴

Second, the modern notion of sovereignty—and the story of its modern ascent as a function of the process of secularization—are perhaps less fixed and stable than we think. We need only recall the famous insight of the infamous Carl Schmitt in *Political Theology* from 1922 that ‘all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts.’⁵ Zionism, for its part, betrays its indebtedness to earlier theological concepts in the millennial aspiration of ‘the return to Zion’ (*shivat Tsiyon*) that drove the movement or in the very idea of the sovereign, which in Hebrew (*ribon*) harks back to the traditional divine appellation, *Ribono shel `olam* (Sovereign of the Universe).

From a different angle, recent scholars, for example, those included in the 2009 volume *The State of Sovereignty*, question the fixity of the meaning of sovereignty in the modern sense by noting its unmistakably relational quality. ‘Sovereignty,’ the volume’s editors, Douglas Howland and Luise White, declare, ‘is contested because it is continually negotiated on the ground—over what a state does, to whom, and where.’ These relations alter and vary the way in which sovereignty operates, a principle that would certainly seem to apply to the State of Israel and the Palestinians.⁶

Mindful of this last impulse, I’d like to investigate and complicate the concept of sovereignty in the history of Jewish nationalism, in part by juxtaposing it to another regime of political thought, autonomy, which does not possess the status and visibility that sovereignty has in international law.⁷ Autonomy here refers not to the right of a *state* to full self-determination in all realms of life, but to the right of a *nation* to control its cultural, educational and linguistic affairs within an existing sovereign state. The two concepts, sovereignty and autonomy, were contestants in a heated ideological battle among Jewish nationalists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In order to understand these terms and their historical resonances, I propose to undertake three tasks in this brief essay. First, I will introduce the crowded marketplace of ideas in which the concepts of Jewish sovereignty and autonomy initially arose in the early twentieth century before the rise to dominance of the sovereignty model in the second and third quarters of the twentieth century. Second, I will identify a trend in recent scholarship on the history of Jewish nationalism that seeks to recover the discourse of autonomy from beneath the shadow cast by sovereignty’s ascent. And third, I will ask in conclusion whether our reconsideration of the past of sovereignty may help us think about the future of the concept and its operation.

To launch our subject directly, I will contrast two important early figures in Jewish nationalism. As the leading early proponent of the idea of sovereignty in the history of Jewish nationalism, we turn to Theodor Herzl (1860–1904),

⁴ As against this claim, Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin insists that we understand Zionism’s adoption of a Protestant theological paradigm of redemption from the fall from grace, cast here as Exile. See his “Exile, History, and the Nationalization of Jewish Memory: Some Reflections on the Zionist Notion of History and Return,” *Journal of Levantine Studies* 3 (Winter 2013), 43ff.

⁵ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 36.

⁶ Douglas Howland and Luise S. White, eds. *The State of Sovereignty: Territories, Laws, Populations (21st Century Studies)* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), 2.

⁷ See Hurst Hannum and Robert B. Lillich note that ‘(a)utonomy’ is not a term of art or concept that has a generally accepted definition in international law. See Hannum and Lillich, “The Concept of Autonomy in International Law,” *The American Journal of International Law* 74 (October 1980), 858.

the founding father of political Zionism. Herzl's focus on a Jewish territory, statehood and the instrumentalities required to create it (e.g. the 'Jewish Society' and 'Jewish Company') bespoke a clear desire: 'Let sovereignty be granted us,' he wrote in his programmatic pamphlet, *Der Judenstaat*, in 1896, 'over a portion of the globe large enough to satisfy the rightful requirements of a nation; the rest we shall manage for ourselves.'⁸ And for simplicity's sake, let us turn to Simon Dubnow (1860–1941), the Russian-Jewish historian and activist, who was the leading early proponent of the idea of autonomy. Dubnow's commitment to national cultural autonomy emerged out of a strong sense of realism: that, under the present circumstances, the best that could be gained for the largest number of Jews in the world was autonomy.

What exactly did this entail? Dubnow explained in 1901 that autonomy meant that 'I have the right to speak my language, to use it in all my social institutions...to order my internal life in my communities...to join in the common activities with my brethren...in all countries of the world and to participate in all the organizations which serve to further the needs of the Jewish nationality and to defend them everywhere.'⁹ Already at this point, we can sense that the spectrum of Jewish nationalist expression was not limited to Zionism, but in fact stretched between the poles of a statist Zionism and a non-statist Diasporism focused on autonomy.

But of course the story was even more complicated. Herzl's great Zionist critic, Ahad Ha-am (né Asher Ginzburg, 1856–1927) did not believe that the fulfillment of Zionism resided, in the first instance, in sovereignty, but rather in the creation of a spiritual center in Palestine (though that spiritual center need not preclude a later state). Concomitantly, Ahad Ha-am's friend and ideological foil, Dubnow, advocated for autonomism among Diaspora Jewish communities, but hardly at the expense of a spiritual center in Erets Yisrael (Palestine), which he acknowledged would 'be distinguished by a richer and more complete national culture' than in the Diaspora.¹⁰

The views of Ahad Ha-am and Dubnow suggest to us that the boundary lines were more porous than we sometimes remember among this early generation of Jewish nationalist leaders. Indeed, there was a dizzying mix of voices in the Golden Age of Jewish nationalism (1897–1933)—socialist Bundists, non-Zionist Territorialists and many strains of Zionists. While we often notice the sharp disagreements among them, there were also a number of key assumptions shared by the combatants, such as the belief that: 1) Jews were, in the terms of day, a nation; 2) they possessed a national culture; and 3) they deserved recognition as a nation with a national culture in the Diaspora. The point is that even Zionists, unequivocally committed from 1904 to settlement in Palestine, understood the value, if only temporarily, of supporting the project of national cultural autonomy. The All-Russian Zionist Conference in Helsingfors (Helsinki) in 1906, for example, affirmed the policy of *Gegenwartsarbeit*, present-day work, to justify investment in national cultural institutions in the here and now in the Diaspora to prepare Zionists for eventual emigration to Palestine.¹¹ Meanwhile, Dimitry Shumsky has recently shown that some of the Zionist movement's most prominent leaders such as Ahad Ha-am, David Ben-Gurion and Vladimir Jabotinsky, were supporters of the principle of cultural autonomy in the Diaspora.¹²

While Zionists may have agreed about the wisdom of supporting Diaspora cultural autonomy in the short term, they disagreed with Diasporists on other matters, including the preferred language, educational norms and the ultimate site of settlement of the Jewish nation. Indeed, the two groups inhabited a cacophonous world in which they passionately argued and labored to differentiate themselves from one other in imagining a Jewish national community. Adding to the din were members of the Orthodox Agudat Yisrael, established in 1912, who sought to regain the attention of Jewish youth by opposing the secularism of both groups, with particular focus on the Zionists.

⁸ Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State*, translated by Sylvie d'Avigdor (London, 1896), 4th edition, London, 1946, 28.

⁹ Simon Dubnow, *Nationalism and History: Essays on Old and New Judaism*, edited by Koppel S. Pinson (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1958), 136.

¹⁰ Dubnow, *Nationalism and History*, 189.

¹¹ See the Helsingfors declaration on *Gegenwartsbeit* in Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, eds. *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 555.

¹² Dimitry Shumsky, "Tsiyonut u-medinat le'om: ha` arakhah mi-hadash," *Zion* 77 (2012), 223–254.

Given the wide range of voices in this marketplace of ideas in the early twentieth century, it is interesting to ask why and when one of those views—that form of Zionism focused on sovereignty for the Jews (what we have called *statist* Zionism)—rose to a position of dominance among strains of Jewish nationalism. To be sure, by 1917, the Zionist movement achieved a significant numerical advantage over the socialist Bund.¹³ But the rise of what we consider today as the classic Zionist ideal—a Jewish state with a Jewish majority in the ancestral Jewish territory—can be traced back to the 1920s and 1930s. A number of factors contributed to the ascent of this variant of Jewish nationalism: first, the failure of what was called ‘the Versailles system,’ referring to the peace conference and treaties after the First World War that were intended to provide rights and protection to national minorities (e.g. the Jews) in newly created nation-states;¹⁴ second, the escalation in violence between Arabs and Jews in Palestine during the 1920s, culminating in the murderous riots that followed the Western Wall episode in August 1929; and third, the ascent to power of Adolf Hitler in 1933, creating the need for a place of refuge—what the early Zionist Max Nordau labeled a *Nachtsyl* (night asylum)—where the Jewish people could escape persecution. By the time of Hitler’s rise to power, Zionist leaders began to speak openly of the goal of a Jewish majority in a Jewish state, arguing that only sovereignty in its own land could provide the requisite security for a beleaguered people. Autonomism, in this view, was a dangerous delusion, as pointed out by the growing force of the new fascist currents across the continent. And yet, autonomism hardly disappeared overnight. The most influential of Diaspora nationalists, Simon Dubnow, left Berlin in 1933 for Riga, Latvia, where he hoped and planned to implement his vision of national cultural autonomy. Meanwhile, the autonomist Bund party secured significant gains in Jewish communal elections in Poland as late as 1936. One historian recently described it as ‘the dominant Jewish organization’ in Poland.¹⁵ As Ezra Mendelsohn explains, it was precisely the Bundists’ doctrine of *doikayt*—a commitment to Jewish life ‘here,’ in the Diaspora—that made them more credible foes of antisemitism than the Zionists, whose energies and sights were set on Palestine rather than on events in Europe.¹⁶

As Nazi plans turned more dire, especially after the outbreak of World War II in 1939, the logic of *statist* Zionism, with its demand for sovereignty, became even clearer. The boldest expression came at the Extraordinary Zionist Conference held at the Biltmore Hotel in New York in May 1942. The Biltmore Conference, as it was known, was the moment at which Zionists and erstwhile non-Zionist foes alike committed to the creation of a ‘Jewish commonwealth’ in Palestine. They believed that the creation of a commonwealth was not only a matter of political and moral urgency, but also of historical justice, as the conference declaration concluded: ‘Then and only then will the age old wrong to the Jewish people be righted.’¹⁷

Following the Holocaust, even fierce opponents of Zionism such as the Bundists (though not some traditionalist Orthodox groups) overcame their former opposition to embrace the establishment of a Jewish state.¹⁸ The coalescence of Jewish support throughout the world reached a peak with the actual creation of the new state of Israel on May 14, 1948. This event not only marked the restoration of Jewish sovereignty after two millennia, but significantly, for our purposes, the mobilisation of the new state’s resources to the task of promulgating an historical narrative charting the triumph of *statist* Zionism. Even before the state’s creation, veteran Zionist scholars such as Benzion Dinur and Zalman Shazar played a key role in crafting curricular materials and popular historical accounts to convey the story of Zionism’s ascent.¹⁹ After the state’s creation, Dinur and Shazar served as

¹³ Estimates are that the rolls of Zionist membership reached 320,000 in America alone in 1917, whereas the Bund counted 40,000 members in the same year. For the Zionist estimate, see the British government materials related to the Balfour Declaration in the Balfour Project at <http://www.balfourproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/War-cabinet-minutes-Oct-1917.pdf>. Meanwhile, See Moshe Mishkinsky’s estimate of the Bund numbers at http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0004_0_03730.html. Accessed on 25 November 2014.

¹⁴ Jacob Robinson, Oscar Karbach, Max M. Laserson, Nehemiah Robinson, and Mark Vichniak, *Were the Minorities Treaties a Failure?* (New York, 1943), and Oscar Janowsky, *The Jews and Minority Rights (1898-1918)* (New York, 1933).

¹⁵ See Daniel Blatman, “Bund,” *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Bund>. Accessed on 25 November 2014.

¹⁶ Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1983), 75.

¹⁷ Biltmore Program, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/biltmore.html>. Accessed on 12 November 2014.

¹⁸ See David Slucki, *The International Jewish Labor Bund after 1945: Toward a Global History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012), and Yosef Gorny, *The State of Israel in Jewish Public Thought: The Quest for Collective Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 1994).

¹⁹ For the pre-state era, see David N. Myers, *Re-Inventing the Jewish Past: European Jewish Intellectuals and the Zionist Return to History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

ministers of education (and Shazar later as the country's president), in which function they were able to promote a historical narrative according to which Jewish history and, certainly, the history of Jewish nationalism, became synonymous with the history of Zionism *tout court*.²⁰ In particular, the millennial allure of the land of Israel and the modern Zionist return to it were placed at the foreground of popular historical memory. Dinur, for his part, also taught at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, whose department of Jewish history was an important center of research into the history of Zionism; the other universities that were created after the establishment of the state (Bar-Ilan in 1955, Tel Aviv in 1956, Haifa, in 1963 and Ben-Gurion in 1969) followed the model of establishing self-standing departments of Jewish history in which the local national history was especially prominent.²¹ Out of this major institutional investment emerged a vast body of scholarship—histories, biographies, source collections, archival repositories, journals and so on—devoted to chronicling the history of Zionism from its inception to its ultimate fulfilment in the form of a state. A long line of well-known, university-based researchers in Israel including Dinur, Shmuel Ettinger, Yisrael Kolatt, Shmuel Almog, Moshe Davis, Shlomo Avineri, Mattiyahu Mintz, David Vital, Yosef Gorny, Anita Shapira, Ya'akov Shavit, Dina Porat, Yoav Gelber, Aviva Halamish and Orit Rozin have participated in this scholarly project. This aggregation of scholars not only provided legitimacy and stability to the study of Zionist history, but also paved the way towards the development in the last two decades or so of the sub-discipline the sub-discipline of Israel studies, focused on the history of the sovereign state. Both in Israel and the United States, Israel studies journals, chairs and programs have sprung to life, bringing together the disciplines of history, sociology, political science and literary studies, among others, to explore Israel from 1948 to the present. By stark contrast, research into other tributaries of Jewish nationalism has been, over the past half century, much more limited.²²

II

The tide, however, is turning. There is a noticeable trend in scholarship over the last 10 to 15 years to recover that which was excluded in prior accounts, what we might refer to with more than a hint of drama as the 'lost Atlantis' of Jewish nationalism. A new generation of researchers is recovering a more complex picture of the early twentieth century that defies the narrative arc marked by statist Zionism's triumph. In particular, this research has trained new attention on Autonomists, Bundists and Territorialists, all of whom possessed a non-statist vision of Jewish nationalism. For the sake of clarity, we might divide this new body of work into three overlapping categories of intellectual labor.

The first and largest cluster is engaged in the work of **excavation**. Scholars in this category are bestowing new attention on Jewish nationalist activities, movements and thinkers that have been relatively understudied such as:

- Territorialism and its leading figure, Israel Zangwill: Gur Alroey, 'Territorialist Ideology and the Zionist Movement,' *Modern Judaism* (2001), Meri-Jane Rochelson, *A Jew in the Public Arena: The Career of Israel Zangwill* (2008), Adam Rovner, *In the Shadow of Zion* (2014).
- Autonomism and Simon Dubnow: Anke Hilbrenner, *Diaspora-Nationalismus: Zur Geschichtskonstruktion Simon Dubnows* (2007), Viktor Kelner, *Simon Dubnow: Eine Biografie* (2010), Simon Rabinovitch, *Jewish Rights, National Rites: Nationalism and Autonomy in Late Imperial and Revolutionary Russia* (2014), Marcos Silber, *Le'umiyut shonah, ezrahut shavah (Different Nationality, Equal Citizenship)*, 2014).
- Russian Jewish Nationalism, including autonomist currents: Brian Horowitz, *Empire Jews: Jewish Nationalism and Acculturation in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century* (2009), Kenneth Moss, *Jewish Renaissance in the Russian Revolution* (2009).

²⁰ See the sources, for example, under the heading "The Historian and the State" in the collection edited by Arielle Rein, *Benzion Dinur: Ketavim hadashim gam yeshanim* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Dinur and Merkaz Shazar, 2009), 357-386.

²¹ On the history of Israeli universities, see the four volumes to date on the Hebrew University, *Toldot ha-universitah ha-`Ivrit bi-Yerushalayim*, edited by Hagit Lavsky and others, as well as Uri Cohen, *Ha-har v'eha-giv'ah : ha-Universitah ha-`Ivrit bi-Yerushalayim bi-tekuvat terom ha-'atsma'ut ye-reshit ha-medinah* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2006). On Tel Aviv University, see now Uri Cohen, *Akademyah be-Tel Aviv* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2014). On Bar-Ilan University, see Menachem Klein, *Bar-Ilan : akademyah, dat ve-politikah* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1998).

²² Over the past half-century, a scattered number of important works of scholarship have been produced on the Bund, Autonomism, and Territorialism including by Henry Tobias, Nora Levin, Robert Seltzer, and David Weinberg. In addition, a number of Israeli scholars, most of whom work on Zionism, have written on non-statist forms of Zionism such as Yosef Gorny, Israel Bartal, Ezra Mendelsohn, and, of course, Jonathan Frankel in his magisterial *Prophecy and Politics* (1981).

- The Bundist Movement: Daniel Blatman, *For Our Freedom and Yours: The Jewish Labour Bund in Poland, 1939–1949* (2003), Roni Gechtman, 'Conceptualizing National-Cultural Autonomy: From the Austro-Marxists to the Jewish Labor Bund,' *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts* (2005), Jack Jacobs, ed. *Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe: The Bund at 100* (2001), Gertrud Pickhan, *Gegen den Strom: Der Allgemeine Jüdische Arbeiterbund "Bund" in Polen, 1918–1939* (2001), Joshua Zimmerman, *Poles, Jews, and the Politics of Nationality: The Bund and the Polish Socialist Party in Late Czarist Russia* (2004).
- Yiddish Nationalism: Joshua Karlip, *The Tragedy of a Generation* (2013), Cecile Kuznitz, *YIVO and the Making of Modern Jewish Culture* (2014), Barry Trachtenberg, *The Revolutionary Roots of Modern Yiddish* (2008), Keith Weiser, *Jewish People, Yiddish Nation: Noah Prylucki and the Folkists in Poland* (2011).
- Non-Statist Nationalist Thought: David N. Myers, *Between Jew and Arab: The Lost Voice of Simon Rawidowicz* (2008), Jess Olson, *Nathan Birnbaum and Jewish Modernity: Architect of Zionism, Yiddishism, and Orthodoxy* (2013), Noam Pianko, *Zionism and the Roads Not Taken* (2010).
- American Jewish Nationalism: James Loeffler, 'Between Zionism and Liberalism: Oscar Janowsky and Diaspora Nationalism in America,' *Association for Jewish Studies Review* (2010).

A second category of scholarship is engaged in work of **boundary complication**. I have in mind those who suggest that the distinction between Zionism and Diaspora Nationalism was not always articulated nor especially meaningful for Jews used to negotiating between various identities, especially in multinational imperial settings such as the Russian or Austro-Hungarian. This is a point made recently by Joshua Shanes in his book on Orthodox Jewish nationalists in the Galician context, *Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish Identity in Habsburg Galicia* (2012). Shane's claim is that there was a real sense of national belonging among East and East-Central European Jews in the first three decades of the twentieth century, but that Diasporism and Zionism were seen less as a zero sum proposition than as intersecting and even compatible alternatives. The thrust of this work invites us to step away from the criterion of declared ideological purity and intentionality towards a more complex and contingent view of nationalist affiliation based on shifting motivations, lived experiences and social interactions.

The third category of work that I'd like to mention is work of **subversion** that upends our received wisdom. I'd point here to the provocative research of Dimitry Shumsky on key Zionist thinkers —Ahad Ha-am, Ben-Gurion, Jabotinsky—who, he claims, remained deeply committed not only to Zionism, but to a) the project of national autonomy for Jews in the Diaspora and Arabs in Palestine; and b) the idea of a multinational Jewish state rather than a mono-ethnic Jewish state. Shumsky reads against the grain of the statist Zionist paradigm by recasting its main flag-bearers as principled and long-standing autonomists (alongside their Statism). On this reading then, sovereignty and autonomy appear not so much as diametric opposites than as interlocking parts, reminding us of the relational quality that recent scholars of sovereignty have pointed to in their analysis.²³

These various clusters of research do not yield a single unified picture. But a number of key features that alter and expand our view of Jewish nationalism can be noted. First, this new research pays heed not only or principally to Zionist efforts to create a national center in Palestine, but also to a host of other movements and activities that sought to create national cultural autonomy in the Diaspora. Accordingly, this new perspective shifts the focus from a unipolar view to a multipolar view of Jewish nationalism. Second, this new research emphasis tends to be at least as interested, if not more, in culture than in politics as the primary preoccupation of the collective, consistent with the understanding of Jews as constituting, in the language of Friedrich Meinecke, a 'cultural nation' (*Kulturnation*).²⁴ Third, there is a new awareness, as we have noted, that the boundary lines between Zionism and Diasporism may not have been as hermetically sealed as was previously thought.

It is important to reiterate that the scholars who belong to this new research trend are *not* the first to engage in the study of non-statist Jewish nationalism. But as a whole, they offer us a different vocabulary, set of tools and guiding image of Jewish nationalism than what we previously possessed. The focus, we have observed, is not on the upward arc of Statism, but rather on a big tent of loud and often internally conflicted nationalists advocating

²³ See, for example, Dimitry Shumsky, "Zionism and the Nation-State: A Reconsideration" (Hebrew), *Zion* (2012), 223-254.

²⁴ See Friedrich Meinecke, *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat; Studien zur Genesis des deutschen Nationalstaates* (Munich and Berlin: R. Oldenbourg, 1911), 2ff.

for sovereignty and autonomy alternately (and at times simultaneously). The world they represented may or may not be a lost Atlantis, but it does speak to a far wider range of Jewish nationalist expressions, ideas and possibilities than Zionist-inspired accounts have typically provided.

III

Where might this new historiographical focus lead us? In the first instance, it is important to recall that it emerges at a particular moment in history—in an age of globalization in which transnational links compete with more territorially confined state-based identities. That competition has engendered new perspectives on the idea of sovereignty itself, prompting some to declare, as we noted at the outset, a ‚post-sovereignty era.’

For our more limited purposes, this scholarly emphasis on non-statist forms of Jewish nationalism calls out for a spate of new bibliographical resources. A promising and important step in this direction is the collection of 14 documents edited by Simon Rabinovitch under the title *Jews and Diaspora Nationalism* (2012). Many more key primary sources, in the original languages and in translation, remain to be collected and published; some will appear in the major multivolume project being undertaken by Dan Diner and the Saxon Academy of Sciences under the rubric *Archiv jüdischer Geschichte und Kultur*. Meanwhile, Jess Olsen’s study of Nathan Birnbaum, the distinctive Jewish nationalist who followed a tortuous path from Zionism to Yiddishism to Orthodox activism, augurs a new interest in the biographies of leading nationalist thinkers and activists alongside those of canonical Zionist figures such as Herzl, Ahad Ha-am, Ben-Gurion, Katznelson and Jabotinsky.

A second effect of the new scholarly emphasis may be to reorder our conceptual framing such that Jewish nationalism is the broader category under which Zionism is subsumed, not the other way around. The import of that reordering could inspire further excavation of the field of Jewish nationalist activity consistent with literary scholar Michael André Bernstein’s call in *Foregone Conclusions* for ‚sideshadowing.’

‚Sideshadowing’ resists the impulse towards historical inevitability and ‚the tyranny of all synthetic master-schemes,’ privileging instead ‚the contingencies and multiple paths leading from each concrete moment of lived experience.’²⁵ Notwithstanding the fact that autonomism did not achieve the degree of durability or institutional success that Zionism did, it is important to recall its oft-forgotten forms and personalities in order to round out the historical record. Doing so reminds us that there was a larger, if highly fractious, world of Jewish nationalism of which Zionism was part.

That observation is important as a reflection of the historian’s methodological commitment to draw as rich and complete a portrait of the past as possible. But there is another benefit to recovering wayward paths that fail to register in a linear master scheme. History is not just a record of the past. It is a repository of ideas and ideals to be drawn from for the future. It is possible that in our globalized world in which nation-state boundaries are easily and often traversed, sovereignty may cede some of its sway to federated, consociational, or autonomist ideas. The recent example of Scotland, which voted in September 2014 to reject sovereignty and was subsequently promised greater autonomy by the British, is an intriguing case in point. In a case closer to the heart of this essay, it may well be that alternative forms of political organization including autonomism may assume new prominence in the very terrain where Jewish sovereignty reigns today. This proposition comes into play when one entertains the prospect that there may be no further progress to be made in negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis towards a two-state solution. If that option were to fall by the wayside, then the territory between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River would revert to the control of a single state power without any additional effort or ability to divide it into two. In one such scenario (which is not far from today’s condition on the ground), that territory would fall entirely under Israeli control, as a number of Israeli right-wing politicians, including President Reuven Rivlin, want to formalize. In another, more distant scenario, the territory would come under the control of Palestinians, who, in all likelihood, will represent a considerable majority in it in a matter of decades. In either scenario, the non-sovereign people would not likely favor, nor be afforded the possibility

²⁵ Michael André Bernstein, *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 4, 71.

of, rapid integration into the political and cultural mainstream of the ruling group. Consequently, under such conditions, it may well be that some form of autonomism, recognizing the national but non-statist status of the less powerful group, could be instituted.

In fact, at various points in recent memory, the idea of autonomism was raised as a political option. Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin advanced an ‘Autonomy Plan for the West Bank and Gaza’ in December 1977 as part of the Camp David peace process with Egypt. Begin sought to replace military rule over the occupied territories with a form of administrative autonomy that would grant Palestinians control over their domestic affairs, but reserve foreign and security affairs to Israel.²⁶

Autonomy has also been advanced since 1996 by the Arab political party Balad (National Democratic Assembly) in Israel. Former party leader Azmi Bishara was a dedicated exponent of the ideal of cultural autonomy. Although Bishara has since left Israel, Balad continues to maintain that Palestinian citizens of Israel should be recognized as a national minority and granted the right to supervise their own cultural, educational and linguistic affairs.²⁷ At the same time, they should be accorded full and equal rights as citizens. As late as 2013, the party proposed a bill in the Knesset to recognize Palestinian Israelis as a national minority.²⁸

Both Begin’s proposal and Balad’s platform hark back to, and draw inspiration from, the discourse of national minority rights that reached its peak at the end of the First World War. Azmi Bishara, for his part, was knowledgeable about the history of Jewish nationalism and knew of early twentieth-century Jewish autonomists such as Simon Dubnow. Meanwhile, Israeli journalists Judd Yadid and Carlos Strenger have recently revived the idea (raised, for example, by Meron Benvenisti) of dividing Israel into cantons (ten Jewish and two Arab units) that would exercise autonomy over educational and health affairs.²⁹ Few people revel in this prospect, for autonomism remains a far less desirable goal than sovereignty for most groups. To be sure, neither Arabs under Jewish control nor Jews under Arab control would prefer it to sovereignty. And yet, in our less than utopian age, marked by forces of globalization that erode the bounds of sovereignty, on one hand, and by intractable local conflicts such as that between Israelis and Palestinians, on the other, some form of autonomy could emerge as a compromise path—for either Jews or Arabs, or both. In such a world, sovereignty and autonomy would not be mutually exclusive poles, as, in fact, scholars now tell us they were not a century ago. Rather, they might co-exist, not in full harmony or in a state of permanence, but by affording the maximum amount of political and cultural liberty under the constraints of deep-seated ethno-religious conflict.

²⁶ Begin delivered his proposal in a speech to the Knesset on 28 December 1977; it is excerpted at <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Peace/AutonomyPlan.html>. Accessed on 25 November 2014.

²⁷ See the party’s declared goals at https://adalah.org/Public/files/English/International_Advocacy/Arab-MKs/background-tajammou-national-democratic-party.pdf. Accessed on 25 November 2014.

²⁸ In supporting this position, Balad’s current leader, Jamal Zahalka, declared: “We demand cultural autonomy so that we can decide what we learn in our schools. This means that the history taught in Arab schools would include the famous Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish and the Nakba, which are currently not mentioned in schoolbooks.” He went on to say that “I want cultural autonomy like religious Jews in Israel have, even less than that.” See “Balad pushes bill to make Arabs autonomous minority,” *Jerusalem Post*, 18 June 2013, <http://www.jpost.com/Diplomacy-and-Politics/Balad-pushes-bill-to-make-Israeli-Arabs-autonomous-minority-316881>. Accessed on 25 November 2014.

²⁹ Carlos Strenger and Judd Yadid, “How Cantonization Can Save Israel,” *Haaretz*, 7 October 2014, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/features/.premium-1.619741>. Accessed on 25 November 2014.