

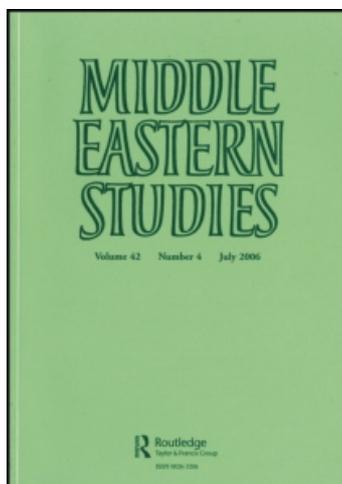
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Meir Chazan

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# The Dispute between Aharonovitch and Arlosoroff over the Zionist Stance on the ‘Arab Question’

MEIR CHAZAN

The ‘Arab question’ is a term that was commonly used by Jews in the first half of the twentieth century and subsequently in much of the historical scholarship when discussing Jewish–Arab relations in Palestine. Scholarship on the subject tends to proceed along one of two tracks. It either emphasizes the patterns of contact between the two societies in Palestine – the relations, the rupture in relations, and the outright clash – examining mainly ideological, social, economic, and cultural issues as the basis for understanding the political tension between them, or it presents the Jewish–Arab encounter as an essentially political and military conflict.<sup>1</sup>

The relationship between Zionism and colonialism is one of the main themes of current research in the history of Palestine and Israel in the twentieth century. The continuing scholarly focus on this issue is yielding insights that deepen our understanding of the Arab question by taking it out of its local context and placing it in the context of broader historical processes that occurred from the turn of the twentieth century. The desire to investigate the multifarious aspects of the encounter in Palestine between the two peoples, rather than to focus on the conflict between them, may also contribute to this trend.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, a focus on the colonial situation that may or may not have developed in Palestine due to Zionist activity sometimes distracts scholars from other important aspects of the Arab question. One of these aspects, which this article will consider, concerns the fundamental disagreements between Jewish leaders who were involved in shaping political stances and action regarding the Arab question. The desire to theorize, conceptualize, and draw comparisons with cases in other parts of the world may divert attention from the concrete options presented at that time by the people responsible for finding solutions in light of needs and constraints. These options were based on what they perceived to be realistic possibilities in the circumstances at the time. The dispute between Yosef Aharonovitch and Chaim Arlosoroff over the Zionist stance on the Arab question, which will be discussed here, demonstrates the importance of studying these options.

Aharonovitch and Arlosoroff were among the leaders of the Hapoel Hatzza’ir party, which in 1930 became Ahdut ha-Avoda’s junior (but significant) partner in Mapai (the Labor Party), the dominant political group during the British Mandate in Palestine. Their views on various political issues, including the Arab question, are

of interest because they influenced the stances of the most significant political player in the Yishuv (Jewish community in Palestine). Our discussion focuses on the attitudes of Aharonovitch and Arlosoroff toward the Arab question in the 1920s. Although Jewish–Arab relations were mostly peaceful for much of that decade, its beginning and end were marked by outbreaks of political violence. The bloodshed in 1920, 1921, and 1929 forced the Yishuv, for the first time, to define its practical stand vis-à-vis the Arabs.<sup>3</sup> The elaboration, and polarization, of Zionist ideology regarding the Arabs were among the outstanding features of the decade. The controversies no longer focused on the issue of Jewish labour and autonomy, but rather on ways of achieving Jewish sovereignty in Palestine. Against the backdrop of increasing political nationalism, the leaders of the Yishuv and the Zionist movement – Chaim Weizmann, Vladimir Jabotinsky, Arthur Ruppin, and David Ben-Gurion – articulated their political objectives, including their positions on the Arab question, proposing a variety of solutions. These included an ‘iron wall’ between the two communities (promoted by Jabotinsky and his Revisionists), a ‘binational state’ (advocated by Brit Shalom), a ‘joint organization’ between Arabs and Jews (proposed by the Ahdut ha-Avoda party in the General Federation of Jewish Labor), and ‘parity’ (an initiative of Ben-Gurion and Berl Katznelson), the notion of a federal state, with equal representation for two national autonomous entities that would run their lives separately, irrespective of the size of their respective populations then or in the future.<sup>4</sup>

As leading members of a party that tried to avoid defining a formal programme throughout its existence (1905–30), Aharonovitch and Arlosoroff refrained from associating themselves with any of these proposals, preferring to distance themselves from political solutions to the Arab question designed to resolve the dilemma of two peoples living on one piece of land. Nonetheless, they both expressed their opinions on the subject vehemently and clearly. However, Hapoel Hatza’ir, as a party, adopted neither of their differing views on the Arab question. While their dispute on the Arab question in effect neutralized their influence within their own party, it helped to accentuate the various concrete political options available to the Zionist movement and the Yishuv with respect to the Arabs of Palestine.

A few months before the founding of Hapoel Hatza’ir in 1905, a teacher by the name of Yitzhak Epstein delivered a lecture entitled ‘A Hidden Question’. The lecture was printed in the magazine *HaShiloah* in 1907, a few months after the party organ *Hapoel Hatza’ir* started appearing regularly.<sup>5</sup> The party itself never ignored the Arab question, and from its inception, the party’s journal expressed concern that the Jewish–Arab friction over particular local issues that came up from time to time was merely a forerunner of what could be expected in the future. Party spokesmen shared one of Epstein’s fundamental assertions that even if ‘there is at present no Arab movement in the national and political sense of the term in Palestine’, clashes on a national basis were inherent in the circumstances in Palestine and would ultimately be unavoidable. The objective of the Zionist enterprise was to postpone the national conflagration for as long as possible and, in the interim, to increase the Jewish presence in Palestine.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the party’s awareness of the inevitability of a national conflict, Yosef Gorny is correct in stating in his book *Zionism and the Arabs* that the issue was not

of great concern to Hapoel Hatza'ir. The party did not seek practical ways of mitigating the intensity of the conflict, such as engaging in dialogue or finding a basis for cooperation with the Arabs.<sup>7</sup> In this article I explore the incongruity of these two facts. I examine why the first party established in the Yishuv, which had been aware of the importance of the Arab question since its founding in 1905, deliberately refrained from taking a clear stand on how to contend with it. I argue that the explanation lies in a fundamental dispute within Hapoel Hatza'ir regarding the Arab question, as expressed in the contradictory approaches of Aharonovitch and Arlosoroff to the issue during the 1920s.

Aharonovitch moved to Palestine in 1906. He was the editor of *Hapoel Hatza'ir* from 1908 and was considered the party's leading official and spokesman, even though it insisted on portraying itself as a leaderless organization. Deported from Palestine to Egypt by the Turks in 1915 (he returned in 1919), Aharonovitch thus became the Zionist political leader who had spent the most time in an Arab country. Although it is reasonable to assume that his stay in Egypt left some impression on his views on the Arab question, he never referred explicitly to such an influence in his writings. Aharonovitch became one of the managers of Bank Hapoalim in 1923; he was also among the founders of Mapai and one of the key figures in determining the party's path until his death in 1937. Of all the labour movement leaders, Aharonovitch enjoyed the prestigious reputation of being the movement's moral voice.<sup>8</sup>

Arlosoroff, the greatest political genius produced by the Zionist movement, moved to Palestine in 1924. He served for a while as secretary of Hapoel Hatza'ir, went abroad as an emissary of the Yishuv and the General Federation of Jewish Labor to the League of Nations in Geneva, and in 1931, after the formation of Mapai, was elected head of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency. From time to time he wrote learned programmatic essays on a wide range of topics. They were marked by an original intellectual perspective and were anchored in theory that drew on a mixture of Russian revolutionary socialist thought, German idealism and culture, British imperialistic history, and the aspiration to realize the Jewish national vision in Palestine.<sup>9</sup>

Unlike Arlosoroff, Aharonovitch never saw himself as a statesman or a political leader. He was not concerned with holding public office or being involved in elaborating practical measures vis-à-vis the Arabs. He left Palestine for the last time in 1920 to participate in the annual Zionist conference in London and afterwards had no real contact with the Zionist movement abroad for health reasons. In contrast, throughout the 1920s the Zionist congresses were the forum in which Arlosoroff repeatedly achieved prominence and recognition in Zionist politics. However, it is not their positions on the Arab question that earned these two men their places in the collective historical memory. Aharonovitch is remembered primarily as the editor of *Hapoel Hatza'ir* and perhaps also as the husband of the writer Dvora Baron. Arlosoroff is remembered for his June 1932 letter to Chaim Weizmann in which he raised the possibility of overthrowing the Mandate government, and, in particular, for his assassination, which exacerbated the relations between the labour movement and the Revisionists.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, their opinions on Jewish–Arab relations in Palestine have historical significance for understanding the approaches prevailing in the Yishuv at that time.

The first instances of Jewish–Arab violence in Palestine under British occupation occurred in 1920, initially in the border region of the Galilee Panhandle in March (at Tel Hai and elsewhere) and about a month later in Jerusalem, the seat of the civil government.<sup>11</sup> Aharonovitch saw these events as evidence that ‘the Yishuv is in danger throughout the country’. This was no passing situation, he explained; it would be a constant occurrence due to the fundamental clash between a ‘civilized people’ and a naturally savage people: ‘Robbery and murder are the very culture of the inhabitant of the land and its deserts, and it will be neither easy nor quick for anyone, even an orderly government, to eradicate them’.<sup>12</sup> It should be stressed that this dichotomy – between a civilized nation that is not among the ‘warmongers and shedders of blood’ and a nation whose traits include savagery, blood vengeance, and lawlessness regarding persons and property – as a key to describing and analyzing the situation in Palestine was created by Aharonovitch back when the first victims fell in those incidents.<sup>13</sup>

From Aharonovitch’s perspective, the dichotomy was reinforced by the riots that broke out in May 1921, first in Jaffa and later in several additional areas, causing shock and a sense of insecurity in the Yishuv. ‘The truth is’, he declared, ‘that we are surrounded by a mob of half-armed savages who are ready at any moment to attack, rob, and murder.’ He admitted that his comment might not serve the Zionist political interest of encouraging increasing numbers of Jews to move to Palestine, but he felt the need to present things as they were.<sup>14</sup> Given the Yishuv’s lack of military preparedness for such events, the analogy between eastern European pogroms and the bloody riots in Palestine quickly spread. Aharonovitch, one of the leading advocates of this view, maintained that there had been ‘a murderous pogrom in Jaffa’.<sup>15</sup> Arlosoroff, who had experienced a pogrom in his native town of Romny, Ukraine, at the age of six (after which his family had moved to Germany), was among the few who considered the parallel unfounded.

Arlosoroff visited Palestine in January 1921. He was unsure where to spend the upcoming Passover holiday – whether in the home of his hosts, or with Yosef Sprinzak, or perhaps in Jerusalem, becoming ‘the first in our family [as he wrote to his mother] after two thousand years to go celebrate Passover in the holy city’. In the end he stayed in Jaffa and spent the seder with Yosef Aharonovitch. A few days later he was sent to the Neve Shalom neighbourhood on the outskirts of Jaffa to defend it in the riots, because he was one of the few people with a weapon. The young Jews, he told his mother, had displayed heroism that sometimes reached absurd proportions, ‘walking unhesitatingly with walking sticks toward the gunfire’.<sup>16</sup> Yitzhak Lufban described his appearance at the time – angry, tense, with a black beard, and ‘without the romantic glow that until then had suffused his face’, as if he had grown up all of a sudden – recalling that this was the moment when Arlosoroff was revealed as a unique political figure in the labour movement. To his colleagues abroad Arlosoroff reported: ‘There were hours when we imagined that the incidents in Jaffa were a little spark thrown into a barrel full of dynamite, that the whole country would catch fire and all our settlements were in danger of ruin and annihilation.’<sup>17</sup> On 27 May, after the riots had subsided and while the Jews of Palestine were debating their significance, Arlosoroff’s article ‘An Evaluation of the Situation’ appeared. The article was later described as being ‘in a way dissonant with the general reaction of pundits to the events in the Yishuv and in the Zionist movement’. It centred on the

argument that there was an Arab national movement in Palestine and that what had happened was a clash between two national movements.<sup>18</sup> This stance embroiled him in a fierce debate with Aharonovitch, who had previously been considered the political authority in Hapoel Hatza'ir and the articulator of the party's political positions. Like Ahdut ha-Avoda leaders Berl Katznelson, David Ben-Gurion, and Yitzhak Tabenkin, Aharonovitch believed that the riots had largely been caused by the policy of British High Commissioner Herbert Samuel and his subordinates. Aharonovitch declared that Hapoel Hatza'ir did not want to call for forcibly oppressing another nation, but had the British not mollicoddled the Arabs in the past, there would be no need for a firm hand now.<sup>19</sup>

In contrast, Arlosoroff insisted that focusing on the conduct of the British diverted attention from the main point – Jewish–Arab relations. He rejected 'perfect faith in the fist and the cannon', and the 'firm hand' approach advocated by Ahdut ha-Avoda. In his opinion, relying on Jewish or British weapons might provide 'temporary support, but not the kind that would last for decades'. The fundamental new idea presented in his article was that the Arab question was a political problem, that the Jews should stop portraying it as a sociological, economic, historical, ethnographic, or moral issue, and recognize that a clash was taking place in Palestine between the vital interests of two peoples with national movements. Arlosoroff maintained that the Jews had to seize 'the way of peace' and 'politics of mutual understanding' based on agreement and compromise. He had no illusions that such a policy would blossom overnight. It would be a long road, but it had to be followed even as more and more victims fell. When the Arabs internalized this idea, the number of victims on both sides would decrease. Preaching to the Arabs about the need for compromise would be useless. Compromise would develop over time but it was essential to start applying 'this politics of agreement between the nations'.<sup>20</sup>

Aharonovitch responded with an article that sought to demolish the notion that the violence was a national conflict. Without mentioning Arlosoroff by name, he alleged that his diagnosis had profaned the very concept of a national movement. Although the Arab masses had been incited to momentary cooperation in robbery and murder in the hope of some sort of gain, there was an enormous gulf of interests separating them from the effendis.<sup>21</sup> What prompted the 44-year-old Aharonovitch to come out so strongly against a scholarly article written by a 21-year-old newcomer to the country who had not yet even settled there permanently? He may have sensed the potential for the emergence of an alternative party leadership – drawing its strength from political ideas rather than an organizational power base – as a result of the merger between Hapoel Hatza'ir and Tze'irei Zion that had taken place in central Europe with Martin Buber's blessing. Indeed, such a leadership, headed by Yosef Sprinzak and Arlosoroff, started to emerge clearly in the wake of the riots. They both wanted to bring about a far-reaching change in Hapoel Hatza'ir's stance on the Arab question and the party's overall political outlook. Their views on these subjects had developed and been first expressed even before the first outbreaks of violence between Jews and Arabs. Like Sprinzak, who on the eve of the First World War and later, in 1919, had maintained that the Arabs in Palestine had their own national identity, Arlosoroff called on Hapoel Hatza'ir and the entire labour movement to renounce the ideology of 'conquest through labour' as the key to Jewish–Arab relations in Palestine. Arlosoroff, who had not fulfilled the most basic imperative of

the labour movement – physical labour – demanded that relations with the Arabs be based on common political interests.<sup>22</sup>

In contrast, Aharonovitch insisted that everyone wanted cooperation with the Arabs. He proposed helping them with settlement activity (building villages and schools and providing medical assistance) – the kind of cooperation Epstein had suggested in his article ‘A Hidden Question’ – with the emphasis on honesty vis-à-vis the Arabs and not political dialogue. Aharonovitch maintained that from a political standpoint attempts at dialogue with the Arabs were futile. Publicly he argued that the Arab masses – sailors and longshoremen in Jaffa, dairymen, greengrocers, poultry farmers, peasants, and merchants – were well aware of the economic benefits of Jewish immigration and that ‘they know and feel this more than all the investigations and the philosophizing about Zionism’ by effendis and inciters.<sup>23</sup> But behind closed doors Aharonovitch, a devotee of ‘conquest through labour’, asserted in the Hapoel Hatza’ir Council just before the British Mandate was ratified in 1922 that the Arabs were ‘obliged to be our enemies’ as long as the Jews were taking capital out of their hands. In other words, taking over the Arabs’ jobs, based on the ‘conquest through labour’ approach, would inevitably lead to a clash between the two peoples and the Jews should accustom themselves to living in those conditions. He believed that it would be an exaggeration to say ‘that we have here a people conscious of itself, that is coming back to life and can blow us up’. Aharonovitch vehemently objected to defining the political objectives of Zionism. The most that could be done, he claimed, was to refrain from making any proclamations about future relations between Jews and Arabs, since they were not only worthless but also superfluous. The Jews were not facing ‘an organized people of forty million, ready to swallow us up’. This was a people ‘composed of semi-civilized Bedouin who look as though they were living three thousand years ago’. Sprinzak rejected the views of those who advised, ‘Don’t worry too much about the Arabs; they’re semi-savages and will eat each other up. After all, the same sorts of things are happening in Ireland...and that’s in a nation with a tradition and culture. He insisted that a ‘savage people’ has no meaning. The Arabs have national discipline.<sup>24</sup>

The dispute between Aharonovitch and Arlosoroff was whether the Jews in Palestine were confronting an Arab nation or an Arab population with no national identity. Formally, they agreed in principle on the need for dialogue with the Arabs. The course of action recommended by Arlosoroff, with Sprinzak’s full backing, meant attempting to reach a long-term political agreement between the two peoples regarding their coexistence in Palestine. However, neither Arlosoroff nor Sprinzak specified the exact political nature of such a compromise in terms of system of government, territory, numbers, and so on. Both merely made general remarks about the desire to cultivate an agreement in the future.<sup>25</sup> The dilemma, which turned out to be purely theoretical – whether to actively seek effective political contact immediately or to postpone all such efforts – resolved itself. Circumstances encouraged waiting rather than expediting dialogue. After all, reaching a compromise required finding an influential figure on the Arab side who was willing to discuss the fate of the land with the Jews, and no such person existed – neither then nor in the future.

Another subject on which Aharonovitch and Arlosoroff agreed was the need to eradicate hatred of the Arabs, especially among the youth. But their agreement was

based on opposite goals. Whereas for Arlosoroff the eradication of hatred was a necessary condition for laying the groundwork for dialogue, for Aharonovitch it was merely an instrument for preventing friction between the two communities that might divert attention and resources from developing the ideal of Jewish labour. Hapoel Hatza'ir was fundamentally opposed to all manifestations of hostility toward the Arabs in accordance with its general abhorrence of the use of force and violence in social and political relations. But this did not necessarily mean that efforts should be made to achieve political understanding. Two of the most prominent leaders of Hapoel Hatza'ir, Isaac Wilkansky (Elazari-Volcani) and Eliezer Shohat, advocated a basically similar approach to that of Aharonovitch. Under their influence, Hapoel Hatza'ir made no formal decisions about political contacts with the Arabs. Their position was succinctly articulated by Aharonovitch as 'a passive tactic that we have to follow strictly'. This principle coexisted with the rejection of violence within the Jewish community and of the resort to force in deciding issues in the life of the Yishuv.<sup>26</sup> Aharonovitch expressed this attitude in a sharply critical review of Jacob Poleskin's book *Dreamers and Fighters*, dedicated to outstanding figures of the Zionist movement and the Yishuv, including those who had fallen in clashes with the Arabs:

We don't want our children to be raised to assume a pose and prepare to take part in an exhibition of heroes of Palestine. Nor do we want their concepts of heroism to be those found in the book *Dreamers and Fighters*, just as we would not want them – by the way – to express all their patriotism in soccer matches and to regard these victories as their national triumph.<sup>27</sup>

Arlosoroff described Vladimir Jabotinsky's views in a similar vein. He accused Jabotinsky, whom he described as combining 'nationalism with militarism', of distancing Jewish youth from Zionism. He was ruining the 'beginnings of healthy political thought among the Jews, which it is so hard to create among such an immature and politically uneducated people'. Arlosoroff acknowledged the difficulty of engaging the interest of audiences at public meetings in pioneering, railways, and settlement; people (especially women) did not find these things as captivating as Jabotinsky's 'intrepid, valiant fighter putting on heroic airs'.<sup>28</sup> In addition to sharing an aversion to the unnecessary use of force, both Aharonovitch and Arlosoroff came across as elitist and arrogant. This impression was one of the factors that sometimes made it difficult for Hapoel Hatza'ir to attract new adherents.

Aharonovitch and his wife Dvora Baron, the literary editor of *Hapoel Hatza'ir*, announced their resignation from the journal in December 1922. Their reason is not known. Six weeks earlier, Arlosoroff had declared at the annual Zionist conference, 'There is no other way but to build a shared national home for the Jews and the Arabs with equal rights'. He called for a reassessment of Zionist slogans, including 'the adage about the Jewish majority in Palestine. We must not recite the slogan about a Jewish majority in the Arabs' ears ten times a day if we want to reach a compromise with them'.<sup>29</sup> *Hapoel Hatza'ir* brought this speech to its readers' attention, praising it for being 'perhaps the only *political* speech at the conference' and for having left a 'powerful impression' on the audience. It is therefore surprising that the passage relating to the Jewish majority was omitted from the version

published in *Hapoel Hatza'ir*.<sup>30</sup> Presumably, the tendentious editing was done by the editor, Aharonovitch, as a way of expressing his objection to concealing the demand for a Jewish majority, which since 1908 had been a basic element in the party's political ideology. Moreover, according to several sources, it was Aharonovitch who had been the first to use the term 'Jewish majority'.<sup>31</sup>

It is not clear whether it was the editorial board that suddenly decided that Aharonovitch was no longer qualified to continue as editor. There is no proof that the tendentious editing of Arlosoroff's speech expedited the crisis. From his home in Berlin, Arlosoroff opined that the resignation was 'a genuine *catastrophe* for the journal'. To solve the problem of an editor for *Hapoel Hatza'ir*, he was asked to move to Palestine immediately. Arlosoroff, who had recently finished writing his dissertation in Berlin on Karl Marx's theory of class warfare, indeed wanted to move to Palestine but was having trouble financing the voyage for his wife and daughter. He wrote to his colleagues in Palestine that unless they solved the financial issue, 'I am doomed to end my days as an infant held captive among the nations'.<sup>32</sup> It took another year before Arlosoroff could move to Palestine.

Free of the restrictions that had bound him when he was editor of *Hapoel Hatza'ir*, Aharonovitch published an article after his resignation in the literary-cultural journal *Hedim*, attacking those who spoke about an 'Arab question' since, as far as Zionism was concerned, there was only a Jewish question. The Jewish people, he explained, was sending its best sons and daughters to Palestine not for the sake of all the inhabitants of the land, since it had no interest in them, but to build the national home. 'We do not have to prove we are a nation that wants to live in peace with the "people of the land." We never made war on them, never plundered them, never murdered, never stole, never robbed them, and never harmed them, whether alone or in public.' Aharonovitch asserted that the territorial element of Zionism meant becoming a numerically large force that would be self-sufficient in defence matters. The time for peace talks with the Arabs would come only when 'they see us as a force that must not be provoked'.<sup>33</sup>

During the conflict between Aharonovitch and Arlosoroff in 1921–23, the two opposing views – advocacy for an attempt at dialogue (deriving from a view of political life as aspiring to harmony) versus the belief that a violent confrontation was inevitable (and therefore that the Jews should adapt to a constant state of struggle) were clearly brought into the open. From then on, the head-on clash between these two views of the situation and the resultant implications for Zionism would be part of the debate in the labour movement over political and security issues throughout the Mandate period.

The Arab question was placed on a back burner in the years that followed. The eight years between the riots of 1921 and the riots of 1929 were the most peaceful that the country has known in the past 100 years. Regarding the relations with the Arabs, the main issue on the agenda at the time was the desire to create a 'joint organization' within the General Federation of Jewish Labor to promote cooperation between Arab and Jewish workers. *Hapoel Hatza'ir* rejected Ahdut ha-Avoda's proposal for such an organization out of hand; Arlosoroff explained that due to the different socioeconomic conditions of Jewish and Arab workers and the special needs of the

Jewish immigrants and settlers, there was no organizational basis for cooperation. Over time, he had come to accept the assumption Hapoel Hatza'ir had held from its inception that even without these conflicts 'it would be impossible to prevent a clash resulting from competition between the workers of the two nations'. But Arlosoroff's main concern seems to have been that the focus on the 'joint organization' was moving the discussion of the Arab question from the political to the socioeconomic level. He warned that the efforts to develop Jewish-Arab agreement through the 'joint organization' were liable to intensify the national differences because the inevitable failure of such a policy would exacerbate relations between the two peoples instead of laying the foundation for rapprochement.<sup>34</sup>

During this interim period, there was another clash between Aharonovitch and Arlosoroff, arising from the dispute over a possible merger with Ahdut Ha-Avoda that spilled over into a personal power struggle. Aharonovitch (backed by Sprinzak) was the main advocate of the merger in Hapoel Hatza'ir, whereas Arlosoroff was one of the leading opponents. Against this backdrop, Arlosoroff worked to prevent Sprinzak from becoming a member of the Zionist Executive in 1927, while seeking a political appointment for himself as head of the economic department in the London branch of the Zionist Executive.<sup>35</sup> In response, Aharonovitch accused Arlosoroff of megalomania and careerism and claimed that 'the moral principle in Hapoel Hatza'ir is that we have no Einsteins among us but only very ordinary people'.<sup>36</sup>

The debate between Aharonovitch and Arlosoroff over the Arab question flared up again in the wake of the 1929 riots. Aharonovitch took advantage of the last political discussions held in the framework of Hapoel Hatza'ir, which took place in September 1929, just before its merger with Ahdut Ha-Avoda to form Mapai, to sum up his political approach, which was based on his conviction that the Arab question was insoluble. If a solution ever came, he predicted, it would come from people for whom Zionism was not a movement of bleeding hearts (i.e., Brit Shalom) but a matter of life or death. Aharonovitch declared:

If I were an Arab I would be opposed to Zionism just like they are... We wanted to conquer *the Land of Israel*, not to bring 200,000 Jews here. Of course, there's no need to announce the purchase of every hundred dunams of land, but we shouldn't proclaim that we don't want a majority. We want a Jewish state of millions, and we are going to conquer Palestine with gifts [i.e. development], prayer, and war. Among our topics for discussion are the arming of the Jews, gifts, and warfare. True, we have abandoned the way of the gift and we have to find it. But if Brit Shalom [literally, Covenant of Peace] is looking for a way for us to blur our identity, we don't want that peace. I don't believe there can be true peace until the Arabs ask to make peace with us.<sup>37</sup>

This was an unprecedentedly frank remark about the role of force in making Palestine Jewish. As stated at the beginning of this article, this had essentially been Hapoel Hatza'ir's approach to the Arab question from as early as 1907-8. The opinion expressed by Aharonovitch in September 1929 reflected a basic viewpoint that prevailed in Hapoel Hatza'ir throughout the party's existence. Although Nachum Twersky, a leader of Hapoel Hatza'ir whose views were close to those of Brit Shalom, dismissed Aharonovitch's remarks as being better suited to those of the

most important religious leader in the Yishuv at that time, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Hacoen Kook, his opinions on the Arab question seem to have been acceptable to much of the party's rank and file.

After Hans Cohen, one of the leaders of Brit Shalom and later a prominent historian, wrote an article contesting British Prime Minister Ramsey MacDonald's claim that the 1929 violence was nothing more than riots and not a war of national liberation,<sup>38</sup> Aharonovitch angrily accused *Hapoel Hatza'ir* of disgracing itself by printing Cohen's article. In a veiled barb aimed at Arlosoroff, alluding to his well-known 1921 article and their debate, Aharonovitch scoffed, 'No one will be angry if someone less superficial devotes an article to the Arab problem and says there is a national movement or the kernel of one and this is how to explore the issue.'<sup>39</sup> It might have been this barb that spurred Arlosoroff, after the 1929 riots, to write his comprehensive series of articles that appeared in *Hapoel Hatza'ir* under the title 'An Attempt to Sum Up'.<sup>40</sup>

Even though 133 Jews were killed in the 1929 riots, this time – unlike in the 1921 riots when 47 Jews were killed – Arlosoroff did not believe the Yishuv was in danger of annihilation and dismissed all the talk about a supposedly imminent 'St. Bartholomew's Day'. He based his opinion not only on the growth in the Yishuv population, which now numbered 170,000 Jews (as opposed to 60,000 in 1921), but also on the fact that only a few dozen of the 930 Arab villages had taken an active part in the riots and only a few thousand of the 750,000 Arabs had been involved in the bloodshed. Arlosoroff therefore denied that there had been a systematically planned and organized 'national revolt' in August 1929. He agreed that the reason for the fundamental conflict between Jews and Arabs in Palestine was a 'question of power', which could be resolved only when the Jews were a majority in the country. Indeed he often evoked the need for power in his appeals to the workers – to be attained through immigration, settlement, and the like. In the aforementioned discussion in *Hapoel Hatza'ir*, in his series of articles in *Hapoel Hatza'ir*, and in the talks between Ahdut ha-Avoda and *Hapoel Hatza'ir* in preparation for their merger to form Mapai, Arlosoroff laid out the basic principles that would guide his political activity until he was assassinated. First, in the present circumstances, it was impossible to devise a plan for a detailed agreement with the Arabs. Second, it was essential to buy time in order to reinforce the Zionist enterprise. Third, there must be dialogue with the British and the Arabs in order to gradually establish a governmental system in which all sides would work together as part of a legislative council, eventually developing a common interest and strengthening the groups that wanted to foster political coexistence between Arabs and Jews – provided that this cooperation did not undermine the continued growth of the Jewish national home. Aharonovitch, however, along with Katznelson, Tabenkin, Moshe Beilinson, and others, was vehemently opposed to any talk about giving the Arabs self-government or a part in running the country's affairs, and it was their view that predominated in Mapai until the end of the Mandate.<sup>41</sup>

*Hapoel Hatza'ir's* view on the Arab question has been perceived, both by historians and in Israeli collective memory, as a moderate attitude that refused to let the slightest chance of compromise and dialogue pass by, recognized the existence of an

Arab national movement, and believed that the Arabs of Palestine had justifiable claims that made it necessary to seek every opportunity for reconciliation, understanding, and compromise – even if such a compromise were costly. This is how the party's approach was later described by Amos Oz.<sup>42</sup> However, the discussion here shows that there is a large gap between perception and reality, and that like other political organizations within the Zionist movement, Hapoel Hatza'ir was deeply divided over the Arab question.<sup>43</sup>

The dispute between Aharonovitch and Arlosoroff over the Zionist stance on the Arab question was almost entirely ideological. Their approach was far removed from the two main trends in current historical research on the 'Arab question' in the Mandate period – one that considers the relative importance of various aspects of the 'Arab question' (the pre-eminence of political-military considerations vs. social, economic and cultural factors), and the other that perceives Zionism as a colonial movement. They did not differentiate between the diverse components of the 'Arab question', approaching it as a systemic whole, and viewed Zionism as an effective means of ensuring the survival of the Jewish people, and not as an act of domination. The two agreed on the importance of equitable and just relations with their Arab neighbours, and both believed that the modernization of Arab society was a necessary condition for ensuring peaceful coexistence in Palestine. But these were the only aspects of Epstein's views, as presented in 'A Hidden Question', that Aharonovitch accepted. Arlosoroff, by contrast, tried to impart to his party, to the labour movement, and to the Zionist movement in general an additional aspect of those views: the recognition that the Zionist enterprise was fostering and expediting the formation of an Arab national movement in Palestine and that dialogue with the Palestinian Arabs based on recognition of their national rights was essential for achieving the aims of Zionism.<sup>44</sup> Neither man held a position of practical importance at the time, and each had only a marginal influence on the decision-making echelon. Their protracted debate had an impact mainly within Hapoel Hatza'ir. Its chief importance from a historical perspective concerns its contribution to elucidating the basic practical options that the Zionist movement, and especially the labour movement, regarded as viable when assessing the possibilities of dialogue with the Arabs in Mandate Palestine.

## Notes

1. For these two trends, see B. Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881–2001* (London: J. Murray, 1999), p.xiii; A. Halamish, 'Mandatory Palestine: A Dual Society or Colonial Reality', *Zmanim*, No.92 (Autumn 2005), pp.16–25 (in Hebrew). For examples of the first trend, see: D. Horowitz and M. Lissak, *Origins of the Israeli Polity: Palestine Under the Mandate* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp.16–36; Y. Gorny, *Zionism and the Arabs, 1882–1948: A Study of Ideology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); J. Metzger, *The Divided Economy of Mandatory Palestine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); I. Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). For examples of the second trend, see: N. Caplan, *Palestine Jewry and the Arab Question 1917–1925* (London: Frank Cass, 1978); M.J. Cohen, *Palestine: Retreat from the Mandate* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1978); S. Teveth, *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs: From Peace to War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); Morris, *Righteous Victims*; A. Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000); A. Dowty, *Israel/Palestine* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005).

2. See, for example, Morris, *Righteous Victims*, pp.676–8; G. Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); D.J. Penslar, ‘Zionism, Colonialism and Postcolonialism’, *The Journal of Israeli History*, Vol.20, No.2–3 (Summer–Autumn 2001), pp.84–98; I. Pappé, ‘Zionism as Colonialism – A Comparative View on the Mixed Colonialism in Asia and Africa’, in Y. Weitz (ed.), *From Vision to Revision: A Hundred Years of Historiography of Zionism* (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center, 1997), pp.345–65 (in Hebrew); idem, *A History of Modern Palestine*, pp.11, 72–116; B. Kimerling, *Immigrants, Settlers, Natives: The Israeli State and Society Between Cultural Pluralism and Cultural Wars* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2004), pp.76–7, 90–123 (in Hebrew).
3. B.T. Dinur (ed.-in-chief), *Book of the History of the Haganah*, Vol.1, part 2 (Tel Aviv: Ma’arakhot, 1956), pp.565–625, Vol.2, part 1 (Tel Aviv: Ma’arakhot, 1959), pp.77–109, 301–40 (in Hebrew); B. Wasserstein, *The British in Palestine: The Mandatory Government and the Arab–Jewish Conflict 1917–1929* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1991), pp.63–8, 101–8, 223–38.
4. See I. Kolatt, ‘The Zionist Movement and the Arabs’, in S. Almog (ed.), *Zionism and the Arab Question* (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center, 1983), pp.10–15; J. Heller, ‘Ben-Gurion, Weizmann and Jabotinsky on the Arab Question: A Comparison’, in A. Shapira, J. Reinhartz and J. Harris (eds.), *The Age of Zionism* (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center, 2000), pp.203–40 (in Hebrew). The discussion on the idea of ‘parity’ began after the 1929 riots and the proposal was approved by Mapai in February 1931.
5. Y. Epstein, ‘A Hidden Question’, *HaShiloah*, No.17 (September–October 1907), pp.193–206 (in Hebrew).
6. Ibid., p.196 (emphasis original); A. [Y. Aharonovitch], ‘Letters to a Friend’, *Hapoel Hatza’ir* (Iyar 5667 [April–May 1907]), No.1 (in Hebrew) (this was the first issue and was produced on a hectograph). See also [A. Turknitz], ‘The Real Work in Palestine’, *Hapoel Hatza’ir* (Heshvan 5668 [October 1907]) (in Hebrew); the article, written by one of the heads of Hapoel Hatza’ir, was placed at the beginning of the first printed issue after its wording was approved by the party’s central committee. In addition, see Anonymous, ‘Regarding the Incident in Jaffa’, *Hapoel Hatza’ir* (II Adar 5668 [March–April 1908]) (in Hebrew); the article was probably written by Zeev Smilansky, one of the party leaders and the editor of this issue.
7. Gorny, *Zionism and the Arabs*, pp.151–2.
8. On Aharonovitch, see D. Zakkai, ‘His Generations’, and Y. Lufban, ‘Introduction’, in D. Baron and E. Shohat (eds.), *The Writings of Yosef Aharonovitch* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1941), Vol.1, pp.3–44 (in Hebrew); M. Chazan, ‘Immortalizing the Implementers of Zionism according to Yosef Aharonowitz’, *Zion*, Vol.70, No.1 (2004), pp.63–93 (in Hebrew).
9. On Arlosoroff, see Y. Lufban, ‘The Days of Clandestine Immigration’, in C. Arlosoroff, *The Writings of Chaim Arlosoroff* (Tel Aviv: Shtibel, 1934), Vol.1, pp.23–68 (in Hebrew); M. Getter, *Chaim Arlosoroff: Political Biography* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1977), pp.5–27 (in Hebrew); S. Avineri, *Arlosoroff* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1989), pp.3–5. The aspects of Arlosoroff’s views on the Arab question that are discussed in this article are covered extensively and in depth in the last two sources, though not necessarily with the same emphases and in the same contexts as here.
10. A. Shapira, ‘The Debate in Mapai about the Use of Violence, 1932–1935’, *Zionism*, Vol.5 (1978), pp.141–81 (in Hebrew); Y. Goldstein and Y. Shavit, *The Agreement between D. Ben-Gurion and V. Jabotinski and its Failure (1934–1935)* (Tel Aviv: Yariv, 1979), pp.13–39 (in Hebrew).
11. See S. Avigur, ‘The Start of the Haganah’, in Dinur (ed.-in-chief), *Book of the History of the Haganah*, Vol.1, part 2, pp.565–625 (in Hebrew).
12. Temidi [Yosef Aharonovitch], ‘On Current Affairs’, *Hapoel Hatza’ir*, 11 June 1920 (in Hebrew).
13. Y. Aharonovitch, ‘Vision of the End of Days’, *Ma’abarot*, Vol.1, No.5 (February 1920), pp.471–3 (in Hebrew).
14. Y. Aharonovitch, ‘On the Riots in Jaffa’, *Hapoel Hatza’ir*, 6 May 1921 (in Hebrew).
15. Y. Aharonovitch, ‘After the Riots’, *Hapoel Hatza’ir*, 13 May 1921 (in Hebrew); A. Shapira, *Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Force, 1881–1948*, trans. W. Templar (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp.111–13.
16. Arlosoroff to his mother, 2 April 1921, 11 May 1921, in Arlosoroff, *Writings*, Vol.6, pp.162–4.
17. Arlosoroff to members of the World Federation of Hapoel Hatza’ir and Tze’rei Zion, 21 May 1921, Labor Archives, Tel Aviv, IV-104-19-1-29A; Lufban, ‘The Days of Clandestine Immigration’, p.28.
18. Ibid., pp.28–9; C. Arlosoroff, ‘An Evaluation of the Situation’, *At This Time*, n.d. [27 May 1921] (in Hebrew). This was published instead of issue No.29 of *Hapoel Hatza’ir* due to censorship

- restrictions imposed by the British administration. The date of publication was determined on the basis of Arlosoroff's letter to his mother, 30 May 1921, in Arlosoroff, *Writings*, Vol.6, p.166.
19. Y. Aharonovitch, 'For Ourselves', *Ma'abarot*, Vol.3, No.4-5 (June 1921), pp.239-41 (in Hebrew). On the views of the Ahdut ha-Avoda leaders, see Gorny, *Zionism and the Arabs*, pp.134-6.
  20. Arlosoroff, 'An Evaluation of the Situation'. See also Caplan, *Palestine Jewry*, pp.95-6.
  21. Aharonovitch, 'For Ourselves', pp.239-41; see also Y. Aharonovitch, 'Opposites', *At This Time*, June 1921 (in Hebrew).
  22. M. Chazan, 'The Moderate View on Security and Political Issues in Hapo'el Hatza'ir and Mapai, 1905-1945' (Ph.D. dissertation, Tel Aviv University, 2005), pp.129-34 (in Hebrew); Avineri, *Arlosoroff*, pp.60-61. The slogan 'conquest through labour' meant the use of Jewish labour in the Jewish settlements (which generally was in contrast to the Arab cheap labour in those settlements and had controversial implications) and the physical and spiritual effort required of each individual worker who had to inure himself to agricultural work.
  23. Hapoel Hatza'ir Council, minutes, 12-14 June 1921, Labor Archives, IV-402-14-A; Y. Aharonovitch, 'Conclusions', *Hapoel Hatza'ir*, 11 November 1921 (in Hebrew); Epstein, 'A Hidden Question', pp.204-5.
  24. Hapoel Hatza'ir Council, minutes, 27-29 July 1922, Labor Archives, IV-402-1-16-A, IV-402-1-17.
  25. Ibid.; Arlosoroff, 'An Evaluation of the Situation'.
  26. Provisional Committee of the Jews of Palestine, minutes of the Fifth Meeting, 9-11 June 1919, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem, J1/8777; Hapoel Hatza'ir Council, minutes, 27-29 July 1922, Labor Archives, IV-402-1-16-A, IV-402-1-17.
  27. Y. Aharonovitch, 'Miscellaneous - This Is Also Literature', *Hapoel Hatza'ir*, 12 January, 1922 (in Hebrew).
  28. Arlosoroff to Simma (his future wife), 19 November 1923, in Arlosoroff, *Writings*, Vol.6, pp.170-71.
  29. Getter, *Chaim Arlosoroff*, p.72. For a slightly different Hebrew translation of Arlosoroff's speech, see Arlosoroff, *Writings*, Vol.6, pp.35-6.
  30. 'In the Movement and the Party: The Federation Faction at the Annual Conference in Carlsbad', *Hapoel Hatza'ir*, 27 October 1922 (in Hebrew).
  31. Y. Aharonovitch, 'Conquest through Labor or Conquest of Land', *Hapoel Hatza'ir* (Elul 5768 [August-September 1908]) (in Hebrew). For the assertion that Aharonovitch coined the term, see, e.g., Lufban, 'Introduction', p.35. In this context Lufban clearly disagreed: 'In the political terminology we haven't used this phrase much. We've said, "many"; we've said, "multitudes"; we've said, "masses"'. See also Y. Shapiro, *Hapoel Hatza'ir: The Idea and the Practice* (Tel Aviv: Ayanot, 1968), p.98 (in Hebrew).
  32. Arlosoroff to members of Hapoel Hatza'ir, 6 January 1923, Labor Archives, IV-104-19-1-2.
  33. Y. Aharonovitch, 'Truths and Conventions', *Hedim*, No.11-12 (September 1923), pp.25-33 (in Hebrew).
  34. C. Arlosoroff, 'On the Joint Organization', in *Writings*, Vol.3, pp.135-68 (esp. pp.137, 166); the quotation is on p.135. See also A. Shapira, 'The Politics of the Community in Palestine, 1918-1939', in M. Lissak (ed.-in-chief), *History of the Jewish Community in Eretz-Israel since 1882*, Vol.2: *The Period of the British Mandate* (Jerusalem: The Bialik Insitute, 1994), p.80 (in Hebrew); Getter, *Chaim Arlosoroff*, pp.75-8.
  35. Sprinzak to his wife Chana, 21 September 1927, Labor Archives, IV-104-127-85.
  36. Hapoel Hatza'ir central committee, minutes, 10 December 1927, Labor Archives; Getter, *Chaim Arlosoroff*, pp.133-4.
  37. Hapoel Hatza'ir central committee, minutes, 21, 25 September 1929, Labor Archives; IV-402-1-37 (emphasis original).
  38. H. Kohn, 'Great Britain and the Orient', *Hapoel Hatza'ir*, 20 September 1929 (in Hebrew).
  39. Hapoel Hatza'ir central committee, minutes, 21 September 1929, Labor Archives; IV-402-1-37.
  40. C. Arlosoroff, 'An Attempt to Sum up: The Arab Factor (I)', 18 October 1929, 'The Jewish Factor (II)', 1 November 1929; 'The English Factor (III)', *Hapoel Hatza'ir*, 29 November 1929 (in Hebrew).
  41. Ibid.; Hapoel Hatza'ir Council, minutes, 21 September 1921, 29 September 1929, Labor Archives, IV-402-1-37; 'Debates in the Joint Meetings of the Ahdut ha-Avoda and Hapoel Hatza'ir Central Committees', 24-25 November 1929, in *Mapai Central Committee Bulletin*, No.7, 23 June 1930 (in Hebrew), Labor Party Archives, Beit Berl, 2-21-1929-2; A. Shapira, *Berl: The Biography of a*

- Zionist Socialist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp.180–82; Gorny, *Zionism and the Arabs*, pp.208–26; idem, *Policy and Imagination: Federal Ideas in the Zionist Political Thought, 1917–1948* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 1993), pp.37–42, 48–52 (in Hebrew).
42. A. Oz, 'Thoughts on the Current Situation', in *Under This Blazing Light: Essays* (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Poalim, 1979), p.94 (in Hebrew).
  43. Shapira, *The Politics*, p.81.
  44. See Epstein, 'A Hidden Question', pp.203–4.