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For British Jews in the 1940s, the Holocaust was both immediate and distant. As news of Nazi horrors passed unfiltered over the English Channel in real time, Britain's Jews lived behind Allied lines, powerless to stop the atrocities unfolding on the Continent. Anglo-Jewry was precariously perched on the edge of Nazi-controlled Europe, witnessing the Holocaust as bystanders trapped between awareness and helplessness. This proximity brought urgency, compelling Britain's Zionists to face the reality of the extermination of European Jewry, while this distance created the physical and intellectual space for Nazism and the Holocaust to be considered at an ideological level.

Nazi oppression and genocide generated critical questions for British Zionists. How should Jewish persecution of this scale be understood? Where does the Holocaust fit in Zionism's ideological schema? Does the Holocaust transform the case for a Jewish national homeland, or merely add urgency to Zionism's central theses? This essay examines how British Zionists answered these questions and, in doing so, traces the ideological shifts in British Zionism caused by the news of Nazi persecution and the Holocaust in Europe between 1939 and 1949.

Most works that cover British Jewry, Zionism, and Nazi persecution in this period have left the permutations of Anglo-Zionist ideology largely unstudied. Anglo-Jewish histories such as those by Bolchover, Rubinstein, Alderman, Cesarani, Shimoni, Cohen, and Endelman examine Zionism through the prism of changes in the Anglo-Jewish community, exploring the increase in the popularity of Zionism and the reasons behind this.¹ The

1 Richard Bolchover, *British Jewry and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); W. D. Rubinstein, *A History of the Jews in the English-Speaking World: Great Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996); Geoffrey Alderman, *Modern British Jewry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); David Cesarani, ed., *The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990); Gideon Shimoni, "Selig Brodetsky and the Ascendancy of Zionism in Anglo-Jewry, 1939–1945", *Jewish Journal of Sociology*, 22, no. 2 (1980): 125–62; Stuart

only major work to interrogate Anglo-Zionist ideology on its own terms is Stephan Wendehorst's *British Jewry, Zionism, and the Jewish State, 1936–1956*.²

The conceptual framework deployed by these histories has created a historiographical blindspot when it comes to analysing the impact of Nazism on Anglo-Zionist ideology. These studies, including Wendehorst's, all use a broad-brush conception of Zionist ideology as the reframing of Jewish identity in national terms and support for the establishment of the Jewish national home in Palestine. Such a conception, while correct in the general sense, pushes analysis away from the specific arguments and claims made by British Zionists in the 1940s and towards only a vague understanding of how British Zionists understood the Holocaust. The subtleties of Anglo-Zionist thought and the multiplicity of arguments Zionists employed in this period are ignored, and British Zionism is seen as simplistic and unchanging. Thus even Wendehorst's otherwise excellent study deals with the impact of the Holocaust only briefly, integrating Nazi persecution into a nationalist theory of the "other", as the nuances of British Zionism's conceptual schema are overlooked in favour of a homogenizing nationalist framework.

This study, therefore, seeks to fill this historiographical gap. It does not reject the nationalist approach to Zionism but seeks to dig deeper, examining how the specific arguments, critiques, and ideological claims made by British Zionists changed in response to Nazi policy on the Continent. It is based on the writings and speeches of the leading figures of British Zionism, the records of the annual conferences of the Zionist Federation of Great Britain (ZF) and the Jewish and Zionist press. The period 1939–49 is covered in detail, beginning on the eve of the Second World War and ending after the establishment of the state of Israel ten years later.

This paper argues that this was a period of radical change in Anglo-Zionist ideology. Over the course of a decade, Nazi persecution and the Holocaust shifted British Zionism from being primarily a critique of the Anglo-Jewish experience of emancipation and an appeal to universal rights, to a particularist response to the Holocaust and the plight of Europe's postwar Jewish refugees.

Cohen, "Selig Brodetsky and the Ascendancy of Zionism in Anglo-Jewry: Another View of his Role and Achievements", *Jewish Journal of Sociology*, 24, no. 1 (1982): 25–38; Todd Endelman, *The Jews of Britain, 1656–2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

2 Stephan Wendehorst, *British Jewry, Zionism, and the Jewish State, 1936–1956* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

British Jews had developed their own particular brand of Zionism by 1939. The refashioning of Jewish identity in national terms was not only held as a self-evident truth but was also an explicit critique of the conditions of Jewish emancipation in liberal Britain. British Zionists saw emancipation as predicated on assimilation, where Jews gained civic equality on the basis of becoming merely “Englishmen of the Jewish faith”, shedding any claim to particularity.³ This liberal assimilation, the Zionists argued, was no solution to the Jewish question and no true form of emancipation. British Zionists saw the Anglo-Jewish experience of assimilationist emancipation as a dangerous path towards Jewish extinction. In 1940 Selig Brodetsky, the President of the Board of Deputies and Vice-President of the Zionist Federation, wrote to a leading Jewish liberal, Anthony de Rothschild, outlining this view:

assimilation as a policy aims at the disappearance of the Jewish people . . . and of its role as a distinctive force in civilisation. . . . [It is a] question of whether Judaism is to be a museum remnant of the past, decaying into complete extinction, or whether Judaism, interpreted in its widest sense as a faith, a basis of conduct, a consciousness of historical continuity, and a contribution to human civilisation, is to be the ideal and aspiration of millions of Jews . . .⁴

In contrast, Anglo-Zionism believed that it was only through nationalism that the Jewish future would be secure. Paul Goodman, the vice-president of the ZF, made this point in a 1939 speech commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the ZF, where he chastised the old Jewish establishment for a “policy of intensive anglicisation” which amounted to a “process of assimilation . . . festered by the lay and spiritual leaders”. Against this backdrop, Goodman argued, the rise of Zionism was a “revolt”. Goodman argued that Zionism arose to ensure Jewish continuity. “For the Federation, Zionism denoted a return to Judaism, in its widest sense, even before a return to the Jewish Land.”⁵

3 On “Englishmen of the Jewish faith”, see Wendehorst, *British Jewry*, 128; see also relevant sections in Rainer Liedtke and Stephan Wendehorst, eds., *The Emancipation of Catholics, Jews, and Protestants: Minorities and the Nation State in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katznelson, eds., *Paths of Emancipation: Jews, States, and Citizenship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Steven J. Zipperstein and Jonathan Frankel, eds., *Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

4 Southampton, University of Southampton Special Collections (hereafter, USSC), Papers of Selig Brodetsky, Ms. 119/AJ 3/94.

5 Jerusalem, Central Zionist Archives (hereafter, CZA), Records of the Zionist

Zionism, however, did argue for a return to the Jewish land. National identity in the Diaspora was seen as insufficient. Anglo-Zionists argued that only through the development of a national home could a Jewish national identity be properly cultivated and protected. Anglo-Zionism believed that the assimilationist pressures of the liberal state ensured that no Jewish life could be lived to its fullest if lived as a minority. Goodman's *History of the Jews*, first published in 1939, outlines this view:

It came to be recognized that however desirable political emancipation had been at one time, this had not, and could not, achieve the object that formed the *raison d'être* of the Jewish people, viz., the full and unfettered development of its own innate forces, and that a purely legal enfranchisement could afford no solution of the Jewish social and economic problems so long as the Jews were subject to the will and power of a necessarily dominant majority of the non-Jewish population . . . It was found . . . that even in free countries the Jews are subjected to intellectual and moral pressure ultimately entailing the loss of many valuable members; that the very Liberalism that stands up valiantly for the rights of the Jews hopes for the dissolution of Judaism; that this dissolution, forced by the identification of the Jewish citizens with all the aspects of the national life surrounding them, is in actual progress and a serious menace to the perpetuation of the Jewish people.⁶

British Zionism thus differed significantly from its European counterparts. Whereas Zionism on the Continent emphasized a real and deadly form of antisemitism in its justifications for a Jewish national home, the comparative safety of Anglo-Jewry meant that the Zionist critique in the United Kingdom took on a different form.⁷ Although British Jews were aware of the prevalence of violent antisemitism on the Continent, it was largely tangential to Anglo-Zionist thought, as there was no debate on whether Jewish existence in Britain was viable in absolute terms. Rather, it was accepted that Britain was a comparatively safe place to be a Jew, but even this was insufficient.⁸

In addition, British Zionists had a second argument to justify the establishment of the Jewish national home. British Zionists here echoed

Federation of Great Britain and Ireland, F13/1127.

6 Paul Goodman, *History of the Jews* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1939), 204 (original emphasis).

7 Compare Ezra Mendelsohn, *Zionism in Poland: The Formative Years, 1915–1926* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981); Hagit Lavsky, *Before Catastrophe: The Distinctive Path of German Zionism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996).

8 Wendehorst, *British Jewry*, 132.

their European counterparts in arguing that a Jewish national home would finally bring the Jewish people to a position of equality among the nations of the world. Fundamental to the Zionist position was the normalization of the collective status of the Jewish people. Aubrey Eban, the President of the Federation of Zionist Youth (FZY) in Britain and later Israel's Foreign Minister, emphasized that this argument would remain even if antisemitism were not a problem:

*Even if the world were a federation of free, democratic states devoid of the least hint of anti-Semitism, Zionists would not surrender their claim to win a national existence of the Jews. In fact, a free and egalitarian world society would throw the inferior status of the Jews into even stronger relief. [Imagine] the contrast between nations occupying vast areas of land, free to determine their own forms of political and cultural expression – and the Jews still scattered as guests in every country . . .*⁹

This argument was often phrased as an appeal to universal rights. As the individual Jew had been to his or her country, the Jewish nation was still to the world, a powerless minority, lacking the rights and recognition of their non-Jewish counterparts. The fulfilment of Jewish national rights was seen as an act of equality, raising the Jewish people to the same status as other nations. Zionism, as the national liberation movement of the Jewish people, sought to end the permanent status of Jews as guests in the lands in which they resided, where they were always an ethnic minority subject to the whims of a host nation. In the context of a world of multiple nation-states, to do so was seen as nothing less than the emancipation of the entire Jewish people.

On 3 December 1939 Britain declared war against Nazi Germany. The consequent change in Zionist rhetoric could not have been starker. The plight of European Jewry now took centre stage in Anglo-Zionist pleas. Whereas the resolutions of the ZF's thirty-ninth annual conference had given only passing mention to continental Jewry,¹⁰ the ZF's fortieth annual conference, in October 1940, was emphatic in its recognition of their suffering: "This Conference registers its horror at the flood of tragedy let loose in countries wantonly overrun by German aggression, and offers its sympathy with the Jewish communities which have been uprooted and

9 Aubrey (Abba) Eban, "Afterword", in Leon Pinsker, *Auto-Emancipation* (London: Federation of Zionist Youth, 1937), 81–2, quoted in Wendehorst, *British Jewry*, 30 (original emphasis).

10 ZF, 39th Annual Conference, 13–14, 18 May 1939, CZA/F13/1127.

subjected to grim brutality.”¹¹ Brodetsky’s first major address as President of the Board of Deputies in January 1940 also demonstrates this change: “Hitler had not merely persecuted and massacred the Jews. He had uprooted, displaced, evacuated, banished and astonished their existence into an amorphous power of human agony.”¹² Such evocative language marks a significant change from Weizmann’s passing references to European Jewry’s “blackest hour” the previous year.¹³ Just eight months earlier the predicament of European Jewry had been little more than background context to the Anglo-Zionist critique, which in opposing the White Paper had chosen to articulate its position exclusively through the language of national rights.¹⁴ In the space of a few months, the suffering of European Jewry had moved from the margins to the centre of Anglo-Zionist thought.

This shift is surprising considering that neither the facts nor reporting of Jewish persecution had changed with the outbreak of war. Nazi antisemitism since 1933 had been covered in great detail by the British press. When the British government broke its silence on Nazi antisemitic violence in October 1939, publishing a White Paper containing chilling details of violence against Jews, the national press merely commented that they had been reporting on these stories for years.¹⁵ The change in Zionist rhetoric was thus not simply a response to radicalizing antisemitism. This sudden shift instead reflected the recognition of a fundamental change in the European situation. Whereas before the war the fate of European Jews had been an open-ended question, millions of Jews in the Greater Reich were now solely at Hitler’s mercy. Rubinstein emphasizes that this point is crucial in understanding Anglo-Jewish responses to Nazism. “Once war was declared”, he writes, “the Jews of Nazi-occupied Europe were, for all practical purposes, unreachable.”¹⁶ While no one at this stage ever thought their fate would be genocide, this thought alone pushed concerns about European Jewry to the forefront of the Anglo-Zionist consciousness. Europe’s Jews previously had an escape route. Now they did not.

With the suffering of European Jewry now embedded in Anglo-

11 ZF, 40th Annual Conference, 20 Oct. 1940, CZA/F13/49.

12 USSC Ms. 119/AJ 106/3, recorded in *Malta Chronicle*, 22 Jan. 1940.

13 Weizmann, ZF, 39th Annual Conference, 13–14, 18 May 1939, CZA/F13/1127.

14 ZF, 39th Annual Conference, *ibid.*

15 Andrew Sharf, *The British Press and Jews under Nazi Rule* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 86.

16 Rubinstein, *History of the Jews*, 284.

Zionist thought, justifications of Zionism began to reference the violent antisemitic persecution occurring on the Continent. As previously noted, up to 1939 British Zionism had overwhelmingly focused on the emancipated British Jew in its analysis of the Jewish problem, centring its critiques on a rejection of the liberal assimilationist position. Scant attention had been paid to overt and severe antisemitism, which while present in Central and Eastern Europe, was far less prevalent in British life.¹⁷ However, with Anglo-Zionist eyes now firmly set on the Continent, this focus began to change. A speech given by Brodetsky to the ZF's fortieth conference marks the first time that British Zionism placed the persecuted European Jew alongside the emancipated British Jew at the core of its analysis:

We look upon Zionism as the solution of the Jewish problem . . . at this moment when the fight is on for a new world order we must consider the problem of Palestine from the wider point of view of the great Jewish problem. . . . [There is] no need to recount the effect of the war on the Jews of Europe, but it [is] pertinent to recall that of the nine or ten million Jews in that region the bulk have come under the Soviet system or under Nazi tyranny. . . .¹⁸

The plight of the European Jew was integrated into the Anglo-Zionist critique along nationalist lines. British Zionists emphasized that European Jews suffered not as individuals or co-religionists, but as a nation. The suffering of European Jews was taken as further proof that the Jewish people suffered as a people, and thus their suffering required a solution that understood the Jews in national terms. Brodetsky was explicit on this point. To him, Zionism was “not merely the act of saving so many millions of Jews from perdition, but also and above all the saving of the Jewish people from perdition.”¹⁹ A national problem required a national solution. This perspective underpinned the Zionist demand that the British permit the establishment of a Jewish national army and, of course, facilitate the creation of a Jewish national home.

The Zionist determination to frame the agony of continental Jewry in national terms led Brodetsky to downplay what later became Zionism's strongest argument: that a national home would be a place of refuge and a safe haven from antisemitism. Writing just after the outbreak of war,

17 Ibid., 294; Endelman, *Jews of Britain*, 199.

18 Brodetsky, ZF, 40th Annual Conference, 20 Oct. 1940, CZA/F13/1127.

19 Brodetsky, ZF, 41st Annual Conference, 25 Jan. 1942, CZA/F13/63.

Brodetsky made clear that Zionism was about far more than basic Jewish safety, instead arguing for the development of Palestine in prewar terms of national equality: “Palestine Jewry is building something greater than a haven of refuge. They are building a National Home which will give status to the Jewish people throughout the world, raise their prestige, heighten their dignity, and normalize them.”²⁰

In the early years of the war, therefore, Anglo-Zionism reacted to the plight of European Jewry in a primarily defensive manner. In their advocacy for Zionism, British Zionists recognized a tension between their broad, universalist analysis of the inequality inherent in the homelessness of a collective Jewish nation, and the particularity of the situation of the Jews of Europe where humanitarian arguments recognized only the suffering of the individual Jew. Given that British Zionists saw in Zionism an answer to a global Jewish question which the values of liberal modern societies did not solve, an emphasis on the specific situation of the Jews of Europe seemed to reduce and simplify their cause. Thus, siding with their own prewar arguments and ideals, British Zionists downplayed the notion of Palestine-as-refuge and sought to uphold their nationalist ideas.

This attitude soon hardened. British Zionists were so adamant in their rejection of the simplification of Zionism to a simple safe haven idea that Brodetsky came to reject completely any Zionist analysis based on Nazi persecution of European Jewry. Speaking in January 1942, Britain’s leading Zionist was making the case for a Zionism that existed in a historical and conceptual world entirely apart from the ghettos of Warsaw, Lodz, and Krakow:

The idea behind Palestine . . . is the emancipation of the Jewish people from what has been the greatest discrimination in history. I am not referring now to what is happening to the Jewish people in Europe; I am not referring to Nazi policy against the Jews; I am not referring to antisemitism; I am referring to the fact that for centuries the Jews have been condemned to be the victims of world policy and not the participants in world policy . . . Let us not allow our Zionism to become merely a reflex of some temporary event – the most disastrous event in Jewish history, but a temporary event in Jewish history. Let us realise and declare that our Zionism consists fundamentally in the emancipation of the Jewish people from that position of inferiority which excluded it from the counsels of the world and made it only the recipient of the kindnesses or the wickednesses of the world.²¹

20 Brodetsky, cutting from *The Testimony* (n.d., late 1939), USSC Ms. 119/AJ 106/4.

21 Brodetsky, ZF, 41st Annual Conference, 25 Jan. 1942, CZA/F13/63.

As late as January 1942, the leaders of the Zionist Federation remained committed to the idea that the establishment of the Jewish national home was best justified as the application of universal rights to the Jewish people. Anglo-Zionists would not, in their eyes, be blinded by Nazi persecution and compromise their holistic analysis and its appeal to universal values by reducing their arguments to a reactive appeal on behalf of the particular suffering of European Jewry. Anglo-Zionism continued to make the case for the eternal, rather than specific, justice of Jewish national equality.

While these arguments were undoubtedly ones of conviction, the emphasis on Jewish national rights was also part of a reframing of the Anglo-Zionist cause in the terminology of the Allied war effort. The usual Zionist rhetoric of rights, equality, and justice was repositioned as part of a wider global battle between liberal morality and barbaric evil. Tapping in to the British zeitgeist, Zionists argued that their cause and the Allied cause were two sides of the same coin, claiming both were part of a wider fight for liberalism against fascism. This logic underpinned Brodetsky's view that "the attack upon the Jews of Germany was not only an attack upon the Jews of the world but an attack upon the whole of civilisation".²² It was a point also made in the opening to the ZF's Fortieth Annual Report, published in October 1940, which posited a dichotomy between Jewish-Liberal values and Nazism:

[This is] a fateful hour in the history of humanity. The cause of freedom and justice has been challenged by a barbarous tyranny which has ruthlessly trampled under foot the rights of men and of nations. The Jewish people was first among the victims of this tyranny and the Nazi philosophy was born of a revolt against the traditional spiritual values which the Western World received from Judaism.²³

The synthesis of the Zionist and Allied cause, though undoubtedly ideological, was also strategic. First, in the context of the looming threat of a Nazi invasion, British Jews could not be seen making particular claims that in any way diverted from or ran contrary to the war effort. Not only would such claims be rejected out of hand but British Jews also feared any potential antisemitic backlash that would result.²⁴ Second, this reframing of Jewish national rights sought to strengthen the Zionist cause by piggybacking on the moral imperative of Allied anti-Nazi resistance. This

22 Brodetsky, ZF, 40th Annual Conference, 20 Oct. 1940, CZA/F13/1127.

23 ZF, 40th Annual Report, Oct. 1940, CZA/F13/49.

24 Tony Kushner, *The Persistence of Prejudice: Antisemitism in British Society during the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989); Endelman, *Jews of Britain*, 225; Bolchover, *British Jewry*, 31–53.

was particularly important in the long term. By tying the fate of Zionism to the outcome of the Allied war effort, British Zionists sought to make the establishment of the Jewish national home an inevitable outcome of an Allied victory. Such predictions were made as early as 1940, and were expressed by both the ZF and by pro-Zionist MPs: “[The ZF] . . . expresses its confidence that with Britain’s victory a new order in the world will emerge, in which the rights of Jews in all countries will be safeguarded and the Jewish nation will be re-established in a Jewish Commonwealth in Palestine.”²⁵ “I trust that one of the results of the War will be the establishment on the firmest foundations of a National Home for the Jews in Palestine; this was our pledge which must be carried out in the letter and in the spirit.”²⁶

Thus the early years of the war marked a significant change in the focus and direction of Anglo-Zionist ideology. The closing of the doors of Europe pushed the suffering of European Jewry to the forefront of the Anglo-Zionist mind, reshaping Anglo-Zionist perceptions of the Jewish problem, as the tirades against the liberal assimilationists of England faded away. However, as late as early 1942 Anglo-Zionism still staunchly held on to its prewar convictions of the timeless and universal justice of Jewish nationalism. Zionists continued to argue in terms of Jewish collective rights, justifying the Jewish national home through the language of natural justice and equality, rejecting the more specific, simplistic, and immediate safe haven idea. This was all reframed within the wider context of the Allied cause: the fight for liberalism, morality, and justice, against fascism, barbarism, and evil.

The British press reported that Nazi persecution of the Jews of Europe had become a systematically planned genocide by mid-1942.²⁷ On the 9 June, a BBC broadcast stated that “The Jewish population in Poland is doomed to annihilation in accordance with the maxim ‘slaughter all the Jews regardless of how the war will end.’”²⁸ On 20 September a despatch from the Jewish Telegraphic Agency ended with the statement: “The Nazis have begun the extermination of Polish Jews. Save us.”²⁹ The 11 December issue of the *Jewish Chronicle*, published with a black border and collating earlier reports, included the headlines “TWO MILLION JEWS SLAUGHTERED”,

25 ZF, 40th Annual Conference, 20 Oct. 1940, CZA/F13/49.

26 Messages to the ZF, 40th Annual Conference, 20 Oct. 1940, CZA/F13/49.

27 Bolchover, *British Jewry*, 9.

28 Quoted in *ibid.*, 8.

29 Quoted in *ibid.*, 10.

“Most Terrible Massacre of All Time”, and “HIMMLER’S MURDER SQUADS”.³⁰ On 17 December, the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, gave a speech recognizing the Jewish Holocaust on behalf of eleven Allied governments and the French National Committee, followed by an unprompted two-minute silence.³¹

The immediate and most urgent Zionist reaction to the Holocaust was a humanitarian plea. The ZF demanded “that practical steps should be taken immediately to stop the further annihilation of Jews and to save as many as possible from Nazi controlled countries.”³² The sheer scale of the Holocaust overwhelmed any Zionist predisposition only to send Jewish refugees to Palestine. In one notable change from previous conferences, British Zionists urged “all free countries to open their frontiers to Jews who can escape from Axis terror”, before making the usual request “that the gates of Palestine should be opened to Jewish refugees”.³³ Nor were British Zionists happy with the Allied response. Both the *Zionist Review* and the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* noted Brodetsky’s stinging criticism of the inaction of Allied governments, in particular their refusal to exchange German prisoners of war for Jews. “There was nothing at which civilised Government should stop in order to save human lives”, argued Brodetsky, as he made the point that the British government was yet to respond to policy requests submitted by the Board of Deputies.³⁴ Nor were these appeals an afterthought, as Anglo-Zionist concerns for European Jews had been in 1939. The ZF’s desperate appeal on behalf of European Jewry was the 1943 conference’s first resolution, and it dominated subsequent press reports. It is an aspect of the Anglo-Zionist response to the Holocaust that must be placed at the centre rather than the margins of this history.

Tensions in Anglo-Zionist thought were brought into sharper focus by the escalation of Nazi persecution into a fully fledged Holocaust. While as late as January 1942 British Zionists explicitly rejected integrating Nazi persecution into the Zionist critique, so as to not compromise their broader analysis on a transnational Jewish question and consequent appeal to universal values, news of the Holocaust made this dismissiveness untenable. There was ultimately a bitter acknowledgment that the

30 *Jewish Chronicle* (hereafter, JC), 11 December 1942, 1.

31 Bernard Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe* (London: Leicester University Press, 1999), 155–6.

32 ZF, 42nd Annual Conference, 16–17 January 1943, CZA/F13/395.

33 *Ibid.*

34 Brodetsky, quoted in *Zionist Review*, 22 Jan. 1943, 5; *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, 18 Jan. 1943, CZA/F13/395.

Holocaust stood as proof of the Zionist argument. “How can anybody reading reports of the Jewish persecution, still be opposed to Jews leading their own national existence?” exclaimed Brodetsky.³⁵ In his essay on the Balfour Declaration, he expanded on this view:

If the Zionist conviction about the nature of the Jewish problem has ever needed confirmation, then the events of today make any further confirmation unnecessary. Millions of Jews are exposed to cold-blooded, calculated murder, and the civilized world looks on, unable to take any step to stop the process . . . When civilization is fighting, in the words of the American President, in order to establish the freedoms of thought, of religion, from fear, and from want, the Jewish people is alone with the tragic problem of fighting for its freedom to live. When a people is reduced to this situation, it becomes childish for it to discuss whether it prefers to live under its own responsibility, and if necessary to fight for its own safety or whether it wants to depend for ever upon the kindnesses of those peoples whose treatment of Jewry has eventuated in the unimaginable disaster of to-day.³⁶

Although Anglo-Zionist ideology could no longer dismiss the particular horrors of the Nazi Holocaust from its ideological schema, in early 1943 British Zionists nonetheless clung to the idea of its wider and more universal justifications. The humanitarian case for Zionism sat alongside, but secondary to, the broader injustice of Jewish national inequality. In the very same essay on the Balfour Declaration, Selig Brodetsky emphasized the distinction between the horrors in Europe and what he considered the core of the Zionist argument:

But Zionism was not created by such tragedy as faces our people to-day; and in considering the place of the Balfour Declaration in Jewish history, and its function in dealing with the political objectives of Jewish life, we should transfer our thoughts to the Jewish problem as it existed in the minds of those who laid the foundations of Zionism seventy or eighty years ago, namely the political, economic, and spiritual salvation of the Jewish nation.

If we Zionists have . . . considered only the immediate tragedy of today, it is because we . . . are prepared to accept anything that will enable Jews to achieve immediate safety. But the aim of the Balfour Declaration is to save the Jews as a people.³⁷

35 Ibid., *Zionist Review*, 22 Jan. 1943, 5, CZA/F13/395.

36 Selig Brodetsky, “The Balfour Declaration: Its Political Significance”, in Paul Goodman, ed., *The Jewish National Home: The Second November 1917–1942* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1943), 254–5.

37 Ibid.

Here we see the tensions at the heart of the Holocaust-era Anglo-Zionist critique. British Zionists argued that the Holocaust unquestionably proved the Zionist critique, and yet at the same time argued that the case for Zionism existed beyond it, and that Zionism should not appeal to the Holocaust to prove its worth, while accepting that Zionists should make Holocaust-related arguments if they would help save European Jews. Although British Zionists clearly still clung to the idea of universality, the Holocaust weighed too heavily on the Anglo-Zionist mind to claim that Zionism could reject its significance, as Brodetsky had done previously. This represents a significant shift in the place of European Jewish suffering in the Anglo-Zionist critique. Anglo-Zionism now found itself making two arguments in tension with each other: that the case for Zionism was fundamental and timeless, and that the case for Zionism was particular and specific, based on the ongoing Holocaust.

The tension between these two positions permeates much of Anglo-Zionist thought in this period. Given that Zionists could no longer dismiss or ignore the Holocaust, attempts to resolve this tension either emphasized that the particularism of the Holocaust and the holistic claims of British Zionism need not be in contradiction with each other, or that concerns about this tension were petty given the scale of the Jewish tragedy unfolding on the Continent. Barnett Janner argued the former. At the 1943 ZF conference, the Labour MP and ZF chair referred to this tension when rebuffing some Zionists who argued that Zionism should not “exploit” the “tragic position” of European Jewry. He argued that highlighting the Holocaust as a particular event did not undermine Zionism’s universalist claim:

They say we must be careful not to exploit the position. It is not a question of Zionists exploiting the position. We did not come into existence two or three years ago and suddenly emerge with an exploiting policy in so far as a tragic position of this description is concerned. We are not an ad hoc body. We are the present representatives of those who year in and year out have tried to explain to our fellow Jews and to those outside our community that it is by establishing the Jewish National Home that there can be a home for the Jewish people. The position exploited the weakness of the Jewish people . . . Our Jewish people must at long last learn the necessity of a Jewish homeland.³⁸

In contrast, Moshe Shertok, later Israel’s second Prime Minister, falls into the second category. Addressing the conference, he similarly rejected

38 Janner, ZF, 42nd Annual Conference, 16–17 Jan. 1943, CZA/F13/400.

the idea that Zionism should not include the Holocaust in its purview, but did so by arguing that any other concerns, ideological or otherwise, were trivial in the face of such an overwhelming tragedy where Zionism offered the only meaningful solution. He argued that ignoring the Holocaust would be “criminal unpardonable shallowness”:

Referring to the advice of some friends given to Zionists not to raise the Zionist question in connection with the refugee problem, [Shertok said] they could not rest content with palliative measures without going to the root of the matter, no more than a doctor would apply palliatives when the disease asked for a radical cure. It would be much more serious being accused by posterity of criminal unpardonable shallowness in this grave hour for not stressing the only solution of the problem.³⁹

As the war entered its final years, Shertok’s view became predominant. The tension between the particular impact of the Holocaust and Zionism’s universalist claim to national rights was resolved through a shift in the relative weighting of these arguments in the Zionist critique. The sheer scale of the Holocaust came to dominate the Anglo-Zionist mind, as the argument for timeless national rights was sidelined. It was simply no longer possible for Anglo-Zionist leaders to claim that their Zionism existed outside the biggest tragedy ever to have hit the Jewish people. The change was one of emphasis. It was not that British Zionists no longer believed that Zionism was a necessary rejoinder to assimilation, or that the establishment of a Jewish national home was no longer justified in the universalist terms of national rights, justice, and equality. In longer expositions of Zionist ideology, these points were still made. However, they were simply overshadowed. In the Anglo-Zionist mind, immediate suffering took precedence over abstract principle, and British Zionism’s central argument came to be that the genocide of the Jews of Europe was the central justification for the establishment of a Jewish homeland.

This sidelining of Zionism’s more holistic analyses of global Jewry was also caused by a recognition of the scale of the Holocaust itself. This rendered implausible, or at the very least distasteful, claims that a Jewish problem existed both in the death camps of Europe and in the Jewish world beyond it. Brodetsky himself had begun to acknowledge this in 1943. Having previously claimed in January 1942 that Zionism should not “become merely a reflex of some temporary event”, he wrote in April 1943 that the Jewish problem had been fundamentally changed by the

39 Shertok (Sharett), *ibid.*

Holocaust. Noting that two million Jews had been murdered already, he warned against “the mistake of thinking of the Jews in Central and West Europe as being impoverished Whitechapel or Bayswater Jews.” These Jews, he said, “have been dragged into the dust and mud in a way that history will perhaps never be able to describe.”⁴⁰

It was Nahum Goldmann, however, addressing the ZF’s January 1944 conference as a guest speaker, who made the point most explicitly. As the Jewish question had changed, he argued, so must the Zionist argument:

Zionism was always an urgent answer to an urgent question, and in so far as the actual situation of Jews was changing, the character of the Zionist answer must be changed. If Zionism was the only logical answer to the Jewish problem in the days of Herzl and Pinsker, it was a hundred times more so today, since the Jewish future was much more endangered. Something would have to be done immediately with the uprooted Jews in Europe . . . There was no other country but Palestine to provide a home for the Jewish people . . .

The new Jewish position must mark the start of a new Zionist policy.⁴¹

The impact of the Holocaust was thus a dramatic one. While Jewish suffering had entered the Anglo-Zionist critique in the early years of the war, British Zionists downplayed Nazi persecution as a justification for the Jewish national home because Anglo-Zionism preferred to make its arguments in universalist and nationalist terms. As the news of the Holocaust reached Britain, the tensions between the particularism of emphasizing European Jewish suffering and the universalism of claims for Jewish national rights reached boiling point. Swiftly, however, concerns over universalism were essentially overwhelmed by the sheer scale of the Holocaust. Zionist concerns about the universality of the Zionist argument no longer appeared valid in the face of the extermination of European Jewry. Thus in the context of Anglo-Zionism, the ultimate effect of the Holocaust was to decrease the focus on the universal rights of the Jewish nation, and to reframe the Anglo-Zionist case as an answer to the suffering of European Jewry.

The Allied Victory against Nazi Germany in April 1945 marked a new chapter in European and Zionist history. The end of the war revealed the full extent of Nazi horrors. Although British Jews had full knowledge

40 Selig Brodetsky, “The Jewish Problem”, *The New Commonwealth Quarterly*, 8/9, no. 8.4 (April 1943): 128–9.

41 Nahum Goldmann, ZF, 43rd Annual Conference, 29–31 Jan. 1944, CZA/F13/73.

of the facts of the Nazi Holocaust as it occurred, the eyewitness reports and photographs broadcast from the Continent generated a new wave of trauma for British Jews. As Rubinstein writes, “it was only when credible Western eye-witnesses and reporters, armed with cameras, entered the liberated concentration camps that the full extent of the horror could even be remotely grasped.”⁴² Such an experience was harrowing. As the British public was celebrating victory, British Jews mourned.⁴³

The pusillanimous response of the Allied governments to the extermination of European Jewry now stood out starkly in the Anglo-Jewish mind. British Jews felt betrayed by a country which they had always considered staunch defenders of their interests. Israel Sieff proclaimed that the “unprecedented crime of Nazidom has been amplified by the sinful indifference and the heartless passivity of the free nations of the world”.⁴⁴ The refusal to bomb Auschwitz, the failures of the Evian and Bermuda conferences, the Struma disaster, and the treatment of Jewish refugees who were refused entry to Palestine by the British and were relocated to Mauritius, all became permanent fixtures in British Jewish memory.⁴⁵ The Anglo-Jewish faith in British liberalism had been shattered by their government’s timid response to Jewish extermination.

The inadequacy of the Allied response, combined with the trauma of British Jewry’s postwar internalization of the Holocaust, led to the final end of the Zionist argument based on an appeal to universal rights. The liberal argument of national equality, liberty, and justice for the Jews seemed worthless when the supposed embodiment of these causes had stood idly by while European Jewry suffocated in the gas chambers. Brodetsky, speaking in 1947, described the Anglo-Jewish wartime experience as “a period in which we looked to the world, at any rate to that part of the world which was fighting for justice and liberty, to do something to prevent, even if only in a small way, the Nazi assassination of Jewry, and [we] looked in vain”.⁴⁶ Britain’s failure to live up to the ideals it was supposedly fighting for led to a postwar Zionist embitterment towards liberal values. As Walter Laqueur has written:

42 Rubinstein, *History of the Jews*, 351.

43 See *Zionist Review*, 2 Feb. 1945, 8, CZA/F13/65.

44 Sieff, ZF, 48th Annual Conference, 26–28 March 1949, CZA/F13/1125.

45 On British inaction regarding the Holocaust, see Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe*, 164–98; on the Anglo-Jewish response to this inaction see Wendehorst, *British Jewry*, 33.

46 Brodetsky, ZF, 46th Annual Conference, 1–3 Feb. 1947, CZA/F13/1123.

The psychological background to this mood was the profound horror caused by the murder of millions of Jews in Europe, and the absence of any effective reaction on the part of the civilised world. The liberal element in Zionism, the faith in humanity, suffered a blow from which it was not fully to recover. The appeals to fraternal help, to human solidarity, to which a former generation of Zionists was accustomed, no longer found a ready response.⁴⁷

Proclamations of universal national rights and liberty had been the centrepiece of Anglo-Zionist rhetoric in opposing the White Paper in 1939, and took precedence over the suffering of European Jewry as late as 1942. Whereas Zionism's universalism had been marginalized by the impact of the Holocaust during the war, in the postwar period these arguments were abandoned completely.

The rejection of liberal universalism did not mean that Zionism no longer saw itself as a moral cause. Zionism still believed that it was entirely just and right, a belief enhanced by the horrors of the Holocaust. Rather, the rejection of universalism was a change in the Zionist perception of the morality of the Western world order. British Zionism no longer associated itself with the moral code of the liberal states which had betrayed their own values in their failure even to attempt to alleviate the Holocaust. Anglo-Zionist responses to Jewish terrorism in Mandate Palestine show the extent of Anglo-Zionism's alienation from British liberal values. Berl Locker, a member of the London Executive of the Jewish Agency and later a member of the Knesset for the Mapai party, argued that such terrorism was a "dastardly deed", but that the British had no right to preach morality to the Jews:

No man has the right to sit in judgement over the Jewish people as some of the British Press are trying to do. If the world were to be divided into accusers and accused, he said, he was doubtful who would have to be chosen as the accused . . . He wanted to remind [the audience] what had happened during the war, on December 17th 1942, when after the Foreign Secretary had reported what he had learned concerning Europe under Nazi domination, a Labour member – a backbencher – made a very simple suggestion: "Let us rise for a minute or two as an expression of sympathy for the Jewish people". This was a great hour, said Mr. Locker, and it was some consolation to the Jewish people. But we expected something to be done following that tribute. [The Jews] were not saved, because no one wanted to do anything to help them.⁴⁸

47 Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism* (New York: Schocken, 2003), 559.

48 Locker, ZF, 1946 Protest Meeting, 28 July 1946, CZA/F13/2048.

While Zionists did “remind all Governments that there can be no just world order without justice for the Jews as a people”, this was little more than a tactical turn of phrase, as the supposed justice of this new world order was, to British Zionists, largely vacuous.⁴⁹ Zionists had little faith in the professed justice of the Allied countries, but sought nonetheless to use the moral terminology of the Allied victory for strategic use. At the beginning of the post-Holocaust era, Zionism still saw itself as a moral cause. But Zionism’s morality stood alone, disassociated from the liberalism of the Allied countries who had deserted the Jewish people in their desperate time of need.

After the war, British Zionists reiterated their earlier arguments that the Holocaust stood as damning proof of the Zionist critique. There were no points made about assimilation, nor the Jewish problem as it stood before the war. British Zionists made the case for Jewish national aspirations, not phrased as an appeal to liberal values, but as the necessary lesson to be learned from the Holocaust. Jewish extermination, they argued, was the result of the homelessness of a nation: “The sudden collapse of the Nazis coupled with the liberation of Europe revealed in all its stark tragedy the depths of despair and suffering to which the Jewish remnant on the Continent has been reduced. It has been our duty to connect this with our National aspirations and to point the moral.”⁵⁰ “[The ZF] remembers with horror and grief the six million Jews who fell victims of German barbarism and international lawlessness. A disaster on this scale could only befall a people without a Homeland. British Zionists vow to work ceaselessly until this homelessness, which is the root cause of their people’s suffering, is ended for ever.”⁵¹

As well as the Holocaust itself, the postwar situation of European Jewry further justified the Zionist cause. Anglo-Zionist ideology from 1945 to 1948 was wedded to the continued suffering of European Jews languishing in refugee camps. When after the war the Labour government decided to prolong the 1939 White Paper, British Zionists were incensed. Weizmann, speaking to a secret emergency conference to deal with the issue, said he

wanted to speak calmly . . . but it was not easy when one had to think of what passed during the last 5 years – 6 million Jews exterminated, and the world would or could not do much in order to salvage some of these people from this catastrophe. Now just one million are left, and this million only

49 ZF, 45th Annual Conference, 28 Jan. 1946, CZA/F13/627.

50 ZF, Memorandum to the Political Committee, June 1945, CZA/F13/76.

51 ZF, 45th Annual Conference, 28 Jan. 1946, CZA/F13/627.

because Hitler could not finish his job, and if present policy goes on, this job may yet be finished.⁵²

In the postwar world, British Zionists saw Zionism's essential justification in the Holocaust and its survivors. The ZF conference of January 1946 also condemned government policy: "The Conference deeply regrets the fact that H.M. Government has allowed that act of shame and illegality, the 1939 White Paper, to survive into the postwar era, thus condemning the Jewish survivors in Europe to a life of misery and degradation upon the scene of their people's agony and death."⁵³

The establishment of the State of Israel was a momentous event for British Zionists. The ZF, usually calm and measured in its statements, was uncontained in its joy. Employing a grandiloquence that was strikingly different from Zionist rhetoric in the past, the first resolution of the ZF's 1949 annual conference contained themes of redemption, return, and freedom. It stated:

[This Conference] gives thanks and praise to the God of Israel Who in His mercy granted us the privilege of witnessing the redemption of the Jewish people after centuries of affliction and suffering. It has fallen to our generation to witness the establishment of Israel and to weld anew the links of the life of freedom that were snapped by tyrannous force nearly 1900 years ago. Having taken part in the great battles in the human spirit, having shed its blood and given its lives for the liberation of many people, the Jewish people has finally won the right to toil and labour in order to give expression to its distinct national identity and make its contribution as a free people with other free peoples to the spiritual treasure of the world.⁵⁴

Nonetheless, even this could not compensate for the European Jewish tragedy: "Even the re-birth of the State of Israel by the decision of the United Nations can hardly be said to have atoned for the destruction of six million innocent victims. While we rejoice at the realisation of our dreams, let us not forget too the horrors that our earlier hesitations and dissensions brought to our people."⁵⁵

These postwar years thus marked the final stages of the radical transformation of Anglo-Zionist ideology from 1939 to 1949. The effect of Nazi persecution and the Holocaust was to shift British Zionism from

52 ZF, Emergency Conference, 24 Sept. 1945, CZA/F13/717.

53 ZF, 45th Annual Conference, 28 Jan. 1946, CZA/F13/627.

54 ZF, 48th Annual Conference, 26–28 March 1949, CZA/F13/1125.

55 Sieff, *ibid.*

being primarily a critique of the Anglo-Jewish experience of emancipation and a universalist assertion of national rights, to a particularist response to the Holocaust and the plight of Europe's postwar Jewish refugees.

This was a shift on three fronts. First Anglo-Zionism recalibrated its understanding of the Jewish problem from the position of the assimilated British Jew to the persecuted European Jew. Second, after surmounting considerable tension, British Zionists made the case that only a homeless nation could suffer a Holocaust, and that its survivors must be granted that home. Third, Anglo-Zionism no longer made appeals to universal values of national equality and justice, after those values had failed to save six million Jews in Europe.

The net result was a British Zionism that was little more than a matter of survival: "For us," declared Berl Locker, "being in Palestine is a matter of life and death. . . . Tens of thousands of Jews, of all ages, are on the move – a whole remnant of a people is crying out in the name of God and in the name of humanity 'Do not finish Hitler's job'."⁵⁶

56 Locker, ZF, Minutes of 1946 Protest Meeting, 28 July 1946, CZA/F13/2048.