

## Introduction

**T**he Zionist concept of “transfer”—a euphemism denoting the organized removal of the indigenous population of Palestine to neighboring countries—is a prickly and even explosive subject that myriad researchers and writers focusing on Palestine have avoided for obvious reasons. From the outset, however, this concept has occupied a central position in the strategic thinking of the leadership of the Zionist movements and the Yishuv (the Jewish community in Palestine) as a solution to the “Arab question” in Palestine. Indeed, the idea of transfer is as old as the early Zionist colonies in Palestine and the rise of political Zionism. It can be said to be the logical outgrowth of the ultimate goal of the Zionist movement, which was the establishment of a Jewish state through colonization and land acquisition—in other words, through a radical ethno-religious-demographic transformation of a country, the population of which had been almost entirely Arab at the start of the Zionist venture.

While the desire among Zionists to solve the “Arab question”—or baldly stated, to be rid of the native Palestinian population—remained a constant until the “miraculous simplification” of the problem during the 1948 war, the envisaged modalities of transfer changed over the years according to circumstances. Thus, the wishful belief in Zionism’s early years that the native population could be “spirited across the borders,” in the words of political Zionism’s founder Theodor Herzl, or that they would simply “fold their tents and slip away,” to use the formulation of the Anglo-Jewish writer Israel Zangwill, soon gave way to more realistic assessments. These assessments necessitated strategies

and planning that produced a series of specific plans, generally involving Transjordan, Syria, or Iraq. As of the late 1930s, they included proposals for agrarian legislation and citizenship restrictions designed to encourage the Arabs to "transfer voluntarily."

It should not be imagined that the concept of transfer was held only by maximalists or extremists within the Zionist movement. On the contrary, it was embraced by almost all shades of opinion, from the Revisionist right to the Labor left. Virtually every member of the Zionist pantheon of founding fathers and important leaders supported it and advocated it in one form or another, from Chaim Weizmann and Vladimir Jabotinsky to David Ben-Gurion and Menahem Ussishkin. Supporters of transfer included such moderates as the "Arab appeaser" Moshe Shertok and the socialist Arthur Ruppin, founder of Brit Shalom, a movement advocating equal rights for Arabs and Jews. More importantly, transfer proposals were put forward by the Jewish Agency itself, in effect the government of the Yishuv.

In light of the massive exodus of Arabs from Palestine in 1948, the issue of transfer assumes crucial importance. This study sets out to explore the historical links between Zionist adherence to the strategic goal of establishing a Jewish homeland (state) in Palestine and the advocacy of the politico-strategic concept of transfer. It will analyze the notion against the background of Zionist ideological principles and doctrines such as *'Avodah 'Iurit* (Hebrew Labor), *Adamah 'Iurit* (Hebrew Land), and *Kibbush Ha'adamah* (Land Conquest). It would appear that the intensification of efforts to implement those doctrines in the 1930s contributed to a consolidation of the transfer proposals into official Yishuv positions. The study will trace the evolution of the concept of transfer and describe a number of unpublished plans put forward in the thirties and the forties within the context of unfolding events. Finally, the book will discuss the realization of Zionist goals during the 1948 war, with special reference to the leadership's discussions of transfer rather than

to the military dimension per se.

A deterministic research approach to the subject of transfer is bound to be misleading. The Yishuv leadership's role in the 1948 Arab exodus was influenced by the war circumstances and the local balance of forces. Nonetheless, the conduct during that war of the Haganah, the Yishuv's military forces, can not adequately be comprehended within the narrow confines of military circumstances. It can only be explained against the above-mentioned historical background, particularly the transfer plans of the 1930s and 1940s. These plans, although they do not all carry the same weight and must be situated in their various contexts, show clearly the transfer intent and mind-set informing the entire Zionist Yishuv.

The work is divided into five parts. Chapter 1 deals with the Zionist transfer ideas from 1882 until 1936, with particular emphasis on the proposals of those who played a leading role in the establishment of the State of Israel. Chapter 2 discusses the partition and transfer recommendations of the Royal (Peel) Commission of 1937 and the intensive Zionist debate that surrounded these concepts, while chapter 3 outlines transfer proposals and preparations undertaken by the Jewish Agency in the wake of the Peel Commission Report. Chapter 4 focuses on the proposals that emerged during World War II and immediately thereafter. The last chapter concentrates on the Palestine exodus of 1948.

This work is largely based on declassified Israeli state and private archival material, supplemented by British archival documents and, to a lesser extent, Arabic sources, as well as a range of secondary sources that have become available in recent years. While sifting through archival material in Israel, I found that many of the official Zionist documents referring to the subject, particularly those dealing with the Palestinian exodus of 1948, are still classified. A definitive and comprehensive study regarding the extent of premeditated Zionist planning of transfer must await their opening.