

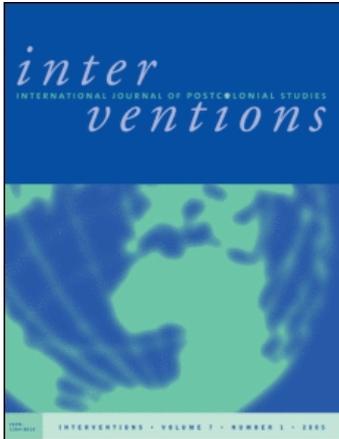
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TRAVELLING ZION

Hiking and Settler-Nationalism in pre-1948 Palestine

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Jewish

Middle East

Orientalism

Palestine

travel

Zionism

This essay considers the political import of the hike or walk (ha-tiyul; plural, tiyulim) among Jewish settlers in Palestine during the first decades of the twentieth century. Situating this travelling practice within the broader Zionist discourse of which it was a part, I will suggest that the tiyulim conducted by Jewish settlers were important technologies of settler nation-making which helped to rewrite Arab Palestine as a Jewish geography. Drawing on postcolonial arguments about imperial travel, this essay presents both a condensed history of such travelling practices and a close reading of some of the travelogues they spawned. I focus on two divergent itineraries: (a) accounts of travel within the borders of the Land of Israel (Eretz Yisrael) replete with classic colonial tropes of conquest, the empty landscape, and Palestinian-Arab culture qua ethnographic object; and (b) accounts of Jewish travel to neighbouring Arab countries (Syria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon) from which colonial tropes are frequently absent. I suggest that these postcolonial readings of Zionist travel and travelogues advance the scholarship on Zionist coloniality by suggesting the role of everyday culture within the settler-national project.

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Every free day, every Shabbat and long holiday that we had, Rachel and I [would take a friend or two] for long and short hikes [*tiyulim*] in the street of the country and around Jerusalem. These *tiyulim* on foot brought us special pleasure – Land of Israel [*Eretz Yisre'eli*] pleasure. As we left the city we were united not only with nature but with *the nature of the homeland*, such that we returned to the earlier generations, those of our fathers . . . On these trips we studied the past and the present and dreamed of the future. (Ben Zvi 1971: 7; emphasis mine)

My father's expeditions, his friendly contact with Arabs notwithstanding, were not innocent scientific excursions. He [David Benvenisti] had a clear agenda: to draw a Hebrew map of the land, a renewed land deed . . . I often reflected on the irony of the fact that my father, by taking me on trips and hoping to instill in me a love for our Hebrew homeland, had imprinted in my memory the very landscape he wished to replace. (Benvenisti 2000: 2)

In the first decades of the twentieth century, Yizhak Ben Zvi, an émigré to Palestine from the Ukraine who would later become a prominent Socialist Zionist leader and Israel's second president, wrote prolifically about his travels through Eretz Yisrael (The Land of Israel).¹ Evident in Ben Zvi's numerous travel diaries, as in the excerpt quoted above, is a passionate engagement with the *tiyul* (plural, *tiyulim*) – that is, with the hike or excursion. For Ben Zvi, as for many other Jewish settlers of these decades, excursions on foot and by donkey through Eretz Yisrael were not merely leisure activities in any limited sense. Rather, the act of walking the land and establishing personal contact with its topography was a richly ideological practice. By bringing the Jewish hiker into intimate contact with the homeland, such travelling practices were thought to foster a powerfully tactile sense of national awakening, affording the Jewish walker with first-hand knowledge of both land and homeland. In the terms of the broader Zionist pedagogy in which they played an important role, *tiyulim* were deemed a crucial means of linking nature to nation, of connecting Jewish history in Eretz Yisrael to a set of Zionist political claims in the present, therein fortifying the latter.

Borrowing an analytic framework from postcolonial analyses of imperial travel, this essay offers an abbreviated history of the *tiyul* as a practice of Jewish settler-nationalism in the decades before Israeli state formation in 1948. Most of my inquiry will focus on *tiyulim* conducted by members of the new Jewish community in Palestine (known as the Yishuv or 'new' Yishuv) through Eretz Yisrael during the 1920s and 1930s, this being a period when such hiking practices were first formally harnessed to the Zionist national project. I will argue that within the context of the larger Zionist pedagogy of which they were a part, these hikes and excursions, and the large body of travel writings that they spawned, played an integral role in the

1 See Lockman (1996) for a reading of Ben Zvi's 1921 essay 'The Arab movement', which Lockman calls 'one of the most serious and authoritative' attempts to 'come to grips with the ideological and political dilemmas that Arab . . . demands for self-determination posed for left-wing Zionism' (58).

settler-national project in Palestine by helping to refigure the (home)land as a Jewish geography. As a point of comparison, I will also consider the regional routes through the greater Middle East (Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, etc.) on which many Jewish settlers embarked during these decades, enjoying a set of itineraries that would become inaccessible to Israeli passport holders in the decades after state formation in 1948. These regional routes cannot be considered *tiyulim* in any strict ideological sense, as they exceed the biblico-national geography of Eretz Yisrael. A comparative study of these itineraries and the travelogues they spawned, narratives which often eschew classic Zionist rhetorical gestures, cast the ideological function of the *tiyul* in relief.

Much of this study focuses on the travel writings and histories of two of Israel's 'founding fathers': Yitzhak Ben Zvi, the Labor Zionist leader, scholar, and journalist whose writings are introduced above, and David Benvenisti, a Sephardic émigré to Palestine from Salonika who would later become a celebrated Israeli geographer, cartographer, and textbook author with a fluency in the natural history and geography of Eretz Yisrael (Benvenisti 2007: 1–31).² Both were leaders in the field of Zionist education and avid travellers who believed in and wrote passionately about the pedagogical value of the *tiyul* as a tool of nationalism. Both were fluent in Arabic, a particularly rare trait among Ashkenazi Jews in Palestine (Lockman 1996: 59). Both were prolific writers in the travelogue genre whose writings appeared frequently in the Hebrew press of the pre-state period. As I will suggest, their travel memoirs and histories highlight an oft remarked tension at the core of the Zionist project: namely, the effort to advance a settler-national claim on the territory of Palestine in the face of perpetual contact with its indigenous Palestinian-Arab population, a population apprehended ambivalently as both a site of romantic intrigue and of threat (Eyal 2006: 33–61). The rhetorical strategies used for resolving this potential tension, for discursively producing Palestine as a Jewish geography in the face of these facts on the ground, lie at the core of my inquiry.

The intellectual precedents for this study will be clear to most readers, given the long postcolonial engagement with histories of imperial travel. Such scholarship owes its roots to the foundational work of Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978), with its consideration of the ways elite western travellers participated in the power-knowledge project of imperialism through their representational practices. Scholars working in *Orientalism*'s wake have argued that we should understand travel narratives as important instruments of colonial conquest that both enabled and were made possible by more violent projects of resource extraction, settlement and colonial governance (Greenblatt 1991; Pratt 1992; Thomas 1994). Although considerable work has been done by postcolonial scholars to consider the ways that European travel practices within the Middle East have been

2 On the complex role assigned to Sephardic Jews within the Yishuv discourse about Palestine's Arab population, see Eyal (2006). Much of my essay focuses on two collections of travel writing from the new Yishuv: Itzhak Ben Zvi's *Impressions En Route* (1971) and David Benvenisti's *The Magic Lantern* (1994), the latter compiled posthumously by his son, Meron Benvenisti. It is difficult to date David Benvenisti's writings with precision given the ways the collection was edited.

3 Exceptions include Abu El-Haj (2001) and Almog (2000). For discussion of the national implications of such travel practices, see Ben-David (1997), Katriel (1995), Naveh (2002), Zerubavel (2004).

implicated in colonial circuits and institutions during the zenith of empire (Alloula 1986; Behdad 1994; Mitchell 1988; Obenzinger 1999; Shepherd 1987), there has been much less attention to the travelling practices of the Yishuv community in the decades before Israeli state formation in 1948, and the colonial implications of such practices.³ Indeed, while the coloniality of the Zionist project has been increasingly considered by scholars in Israel and Palestine studies over the course of the last few decades, the question of the cultural terms and discursive technologies of this colonial project remains of tertiary concern within this scholarship.⁴ This study is an attempt to advance this larger project.

Early Zionist Itineraries

4 Exceptions include Abu El-Haj (2001), Lavie (1990), Shohat (1997), Eyal (2006).

5 During the 1920s the Zionist movement was also beginning to explore ways to harness its tourist industry to the national political struggle. See Cohen-Hattab (2006).

The Zionist movement's interest in the *tiyul* as a tool of nation-making began rather belatedly. For although Jewish settlers had been hiking through the country and recording their voyages since their arrival in Palestine in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Almog 2000: 164), it was only in the 1920s that the *tiyul's* national import began to be institutionalized.⁵ Institutionalization occurred in the context of a new field of Zionist education known as *Yediat ha-Aretz*, translated literally as 'knowledge of the land'. *Yediat ha-Aretz* was a body of teachings, practices and institutions that aimed to advance a secular-nationalist awareness of the geography, topography, and ethnological and biblical history of Eretz Yisrael. By the 1930s, *Yediat ha-Aretz* had been established as one of the dominant sites of Zionist pedagogy within Jewish Palestine and had spawned a field of both popular and educational literature including teachers' manuals and textbooks (including those authored by David Benvenisti) (Almog 2000; Benvenisti 2000: 57). According to its practitioners, knowledge of the (home)land was to be relayed to the Jewish pupil through both intellectual and sensorial means, the latter functioning to convert dispassionate knowledge into affective patriotism. The *tiyul* was considered among the most important of such sensorial means. Practices of walking and exploring the land were understood by Zionist educators as both instructional tools and acts of conquest that provided the means for active reclamation of the national homeland through bodily contact with the landscape and cognitive mastery of its contours (Shapira 1992: 270–1). Although the historical roots of the *tiyul* can be traced to the romantic German tradition of the *Wandervogel* in which some new Jewish immigrants had been schooled (Katz 1985: 58; Shapira 1992: 270–1), it was nonetheless positioned by Jewish educators in Palestine as an organically Zionist practice, one thought to essentially issue forth from the land (in the form of an implicit call to

explore its contours) and one which conferred indigineity on the hiker by cementing her belonging to both landscape and homeland.

The institutionalization of the *tiyul* within the *Yediat ha-Aretz* context occurred in numerous forms over the course of the 1920s. During this decade, with the ascendance of Labor Zionism and the growing popularity of socialist Zionist youth movements, environmental education acquired heightened Zionist import (Almog 2000: 164). What followed was the growing import and popularity of the *tiyul* as a didactic instrument of nation-building. In this decade, the Yishuv's department of education begins to integrate hikes through Palestine's natural areas and new Jewish settlements into the national curriculum, stressing the need to introduce pupils to the primary features of the homeland and to the country's 'less-travelled interiors' (Abu El-Haj 1995: 150, 162); Yishuv residents organized the first association of Jewish scouts (The Wanderers), of which David Benvenisti was a founding member in 1927 (Benvenisti and Benvenisti 1994: 7); and the publication of guidebooks aimed at the Hebrew traveller flourished (Almog 2000: 162). The pedagogical ritual of the annual field trip was also inaugurated in the 1920s, with the aim of producing students fluent in the topography and biblical history of Eretz Yisrael (Almog 2000: 166–8; Shapira 1992: 270). During this decade, and increasing over the course of the 1930s, the Yishuv's labour union (the Histadrut) and youth movements begin to take youth on walking trips through Palestine's valleys and mountainous regions. Such trips were understood as both educational exercises and proto-military ones (Almog 2000: 173–4). For, like the broader field of *Yediat ha-Aretz*, the *tiyul* was frequently assigned a defensive value and ethos, attributed with generating intimate knowledges of the land that could be mobilized tactically in times of military crisis (Shapira 1992: 270).

Both the form and political function of *tiyulim* would fluctuate considerably during the 1930s in accordance with political events and trends in Palestine. During the Palestinian-Arab revolt of 1936–9, fears of anti-Jewish violence put a temporary stop to many *tiyulim*, particularly those arranged by school groups.⁶ Yet the *tiyul's* importance intensified in the immediate aftermath of the revolt, particularly within Zionist youth movements, conscripted into the collective Jewish response to 'Arab terror' and to the intensification of Palestinian nationalism (Shapira 1992: 270). The *tiyul* was also understood as a tool of anti-British sentiment in the latter days of the British mandate. In the summer of 1939 the British authorities declared portions of the Negev and Judean desert off-limits to hikers, citing efforts to monitor smuggling in these areas (Almog 2000: 175). In the context of growing anti-British sentiment within the Yishuv, sentiment that had grown particularly fierce in the aftermath of the 1939 White Paper which set limits on Jewish immigration to Palestine, many Jewish residents interpreted these restrictions as forms of political sanction designed to limit their political

6 Author interview with Sara Novaplansky, Jerusalem, May 2007.

claims on Palestine; as such, many chose to violate them and travel in clandestine ways (Almog 2000: 175). Debates over the partition of Palestine, initially proposed by the Peel Commission in 1937, were also raging during the late 1930s. Most Zionist youth movements vehemently opposed this proposal, and the *tiyul* was invested with the passion and urgency of their political opposition: 'How good . . . to feel that the soil we are treading is ours and the forest is ours' wrote one Jewish traveller during this period. 'Is it possible to eradicate from one's heart the sense of the homeland living within us, people of the land, within the depths of the soul? Can an imposed border split the mountain chain, sunder our fields, tear apart our forests?' (Shapira 1992: 273).

Narrative Conventions

The routes taken by Jewish settlers were various, routes that varied as did the political landscape. Yet the symbolic structure of such trips was relatively consistent, as were the catalogue of details included in their narration. Yishuv itineraries within the borders of Mandate Palestine tended to focus on ancient Jewish historical sites (such as synagogues and Jewish tombs) including, when possible, conversations with their Jewish residents. Many trips included rituals of collective Hebrew 'folk' singing and dance (notably, the hora), meant to inspire weary travellers and advance nation-making (Almog 2000: 230–7; Katz 1985: 59; Shapira 1992: 270).⁷ The Bible was a particularly crucial tool and lens for many Zionist travellers of this period (Almog 2000: 168; Eyal 2006: 54–60):

7 On the role of songs sung on such hikes, see Eliram (2000: 62).

We didn't know much about the environment through which we travelled, nor did we rush to identify the flora. The book of the Bible [*tenakh*] accompanied us on all our *tiyulim*, and what we saw on our travels we investigated and authorized in the book of books. We attempted to fill in the blanks by reading books on geography, geology, climate and others. (Thon 1979: 34)

The *tenakh* was frequently called upon to make the landscape of Eretz Yisrael and its environs legible, not as a sacred geography but as a secular one, albeit one insistently rooted in a biblical past. The texts of science were utilized primarily as secondary sources that collaborated and augmented the biblico-nationalist premise.

Scenes of danger were, in travel writing of this period, frequent. Many travelogues revelled in voyages both challenging and fearsome. One reads frequent accounts of 'heroic youthful adventures into unfamiliar (or enemy) territory, in which the protagonists overcome successive obstacles by virtue of their daring spirit and resourcefulness' (Zerubavel 1995: 121–2).

Recurrent tropes within this subgenre were those of the arduous walk, physical deprivation (long days without food or drink), hostile Arabs and difficult terrains (Thon 1979; Almog 2000: 181). The story of heroism in the face of adversity bolstered the intimate relationship between the *tiyul* and the Zionist discourse of the ‘New Hebrew’, a discourse that stressed the ways in which Jewish emigration to Eretz Yisrael would revitalize and remake the Jewish body and soul through intimate engagement with home/land. In the terms of this discourse, the Diaspora Jew was portrayed as submissive and fearful, alienated from nature and body, and speaker of a feminized Yiddish. The New Hebrew body and subject which Zionism was thought to produce was, by contrast, connected to nature through vigorous labour on the land, the speaker of a virile Hebrew, the possessor of a proud and muscular body (Boyarin 1997; Shapira 1997; Zerubavel 1995). *Tiyulim* characterized by struggle and danger were thought integral to the production of these New Hebrew bodies and subjects, both through the physicality of the hiking practice and through an overcoming of its associated challenges. Thus it was that this subgenre functioned as a powerful site of Zionist subject formation, one endowed with heightened symbolic import in the 1940s as a response to the Holocaust (Zerubavel 1995: 123).

The story of the dangerous *tiyul* was famously rehearsed on screen in *Oded the Wanderer* (Oded ha-Noded) (1932), lauded as the first full-length feature film produced exclusively within the Yishuv (Shohat 1987: 27–38; Tryster 1995: 160–5). *Oded* tells the story of an organized school excursion from a rural Jewish settlement into the Palestinian countryside, of the young student (Oded) who strays from the group and gets lost, of the delirious wanderings and search efforts mounted by his community. In the film, the *tiyul* as cinematic subject enables the camera to traverse a Palestinian land remade by Hebrew agriculture, technology and labour. Drawing on a set of canonical images from the prevailing Zionist visual archive, *Oded* featured images of fertile plains dotted with new Jewish settlements, expansive vistas seen from the hiker’s promontory, happy and healthy Jewish farmers working the land. That the first Hebrew feature film would coalesce around this spatial practice, that of hiking and wandering, suggests something about the *tiyul*’s importance and legibility within Zionist popular imaginations of the moment.

Representing Arabs

When David Benvenisti and Yitzhak Ben Zvi hiked through the rural landscape of Eretz Yisrael during the first decades of the twentieth century, they frequently passed through Palestinian Arab places, and often areas of relatively dense Arab settlement (e.g. Hebron, Jericho and Nazareth).

Encounters with the Palestinian Arab community were unavoidable due to the size and geographic spread of the population alone; in the early 1920s they represented some 90 per cent of the population of Palestine, living primarily in rural areas (Lockman 1996: 62). Indeed, by the early 1920s, at the time that *tiyulim* were being first conscripted into a Zionist pedagogic project, such encounters occurred in the context of a Zionist movement that was also well aware of the existence of a growing Palestinian Arab national movement with an explicitly anti-Zionist agenda (Lockman 1996: 61). The travel diaries and essays of Benvenisti and Ben Zvi frequently describe scenes of encounter in the Palestinian landscape, as well as in the more intimate interiors of villages, mosques, schools and tents. Such scenes are particularly detailed in the writings of Benvenisti, a professional traveller (as a geographer and cartographer, *tiyulim* were both pleasurable and professionally integral) who embarked upon his hikes with a working knowledge of Arabic and an ethnographer's interest in Bedouin cultural practices. In his writings one learns of meetings with Bedouin in the Negev and Judean Desert; of 'easy, flowing conversation' with *fellahin* (peasants) in Hebron; of the particular cultural challenges posed by travelling with a female hiker from the Yishuv, given the frequency of his encounters with Palestine's Arab population. In keeping with the pedagogical nature of the *Yediat ha-Aretz* genre, Benvenisti's writings often adopt an instructional tone, guiding the Jewish reader-traveller through recommended ways to meet and greet the Palestinian population – this instructional mode suggesting not only the recurrence of such meetings, but their popularity within the Yishuv community. Benvenisti instructs his readers on the proper way of entering the tent and greeting the sheikh, how and when to drink the ceremonial coffee, what to discuss in fireside conversations, and how to distinguish friendly from hostile tribes on the basis of visible signs alone (Benvenisti and Benvenisti 1994: 18).⁸ Like Ben Zvi, Benvenisti was often led on his travels by Palestinian Arab guides, valued for their geographical and cultural literacy, and discussions and photographs of these guides decorate his writings.⁹

The writings of Benvenisti and Ben Zvi, both committed Zionist educators, manifest something of an ideological tension where such encounters are concerned – a tension born at the interface between such encounters, often illustrated as extremely pleasurable ones, and the Zionist pedagogical imperative to fashion Palestine as a Jewish geography.¹⁰ The rhetorical strategies for resolving this seeming tension were various. As within the broader sphere of concurrent Zionist discourse, textual erasure was one rhetorical option, whereby Palestinian persons and places would be expunged from the representation or rendered textually peripheral. Benvenisti's educational writings favour this strategy. In his popular three-volume textbook *Our Land* (1946), a staple of *Yediat ha-Aretz* education within the

8 Ben Zvi (1971: 275) adopts a similar instructional tone in a 1936 discussion of the Bedouin of the Dead Sea region, originally published in the Hebrew newspaper *Davar*.

9 In Ben Zvi's travel diaries, see discussions of his trip to Jericho in 1921 (1971: 173–83).

10 A parallel challenge existed for Labor Zionists within the political sphere, that of 'demonstrate[ing] explicitly that there was no contradiction between Zionism and the object interests of the indigenous Palestinian people'. See Lockman (1996: 60).

11 On the ideology of early Zionist textbooks, see Almog (2000: 26–9).

12 Ben Zvi tells a similar story about the Palestinian landscape in his discussion of a visit to Tel Arad in 1921. See Ben Zvi (1971: 185–91).

13 Israeli archaeologists have used a parallel strategy. See Abu El-Haj (2001).

14 For a detailed discussion of the Committee for the Designation of Place Names in the Negev Region (NNC), see Benvenisti (2000: 11–54). There is some disagreement among scholars as to the initial date of this cartographic project. Benvenisti argues that although the NNC was founded in 1949, ‘as far back as 1920, two [members of the NNC] had been appointed advisers to the British Mandatory government on all matters related to the assignment of Hebrew names’ (2000: 12). Mansur and Kassim (2003: 5) date its establishment to 1925. Also see Pappé (2004: 139).

Jewish community in Palestine, ‘scarcely two or three pages are devoted to the Arab communities’ of Palestine (Benvenisti 2000: 58).¹¹ Yet the genre of the travelogue frequently adopted other narrative tactics, ones which did not categorically remove the Palestinian population from the landscape, but rather mitigated Palestinian presence in ways that enabled concurrent Zionist political claims. In the writings of Ben Zvi, one sees frequent recourse to a more subtle strategy of obscuring the Arab fabric of the Palestinian landscape through recourse to a Jewish historical overlay. The following account of a 1908 voyage to Hebron is one instance of this representational practice:

The route from Solomon’s pools to Hebron is desolate and void of any Jewish settlements, but is full of rich historical memories from the days of our fathers and mothers, from the period of the judges and the days of the kings of Judea and the second temple. The names that appear before us today are early Hebrew names cloaked in Arabic . . . Halhul is remembered in the book of Joshua (9:50) and is today an Arab village. (Ben Zvi 1971: 24)

Here, the problem of Arab settlement in the pre-state period is resolved through recourse to biblical citations and ancient Hebrew place-names that effectively translated the Arab landscape into a Jewish one.¹² In this passage, ‘historical memories from the days of our fathers’ are summoned to populate the otherwise empty place. It is only belatedly, in the passage’s conclusion, that the ‘Arab village’ is tersely remarked, a reference that begrudgingly betrays the fiction of a ‘desolate’ place. Ben Zvi’s acts of remaking the landscape were enabled by a very particular temporal logic: Jewish pasts were valorized and made visible, while Arab presents are rendered invisible.¹³ It should be noted that this zeal for remapping would be put to active use by the Jewish National Fund beginning in 1949 with the establishment of a special naming committee, of which Ben Zvi was a part, tasked with ‘restoring [*sic*] biblical Hebrew place-names to the map of the country in place of the Arabic ones currently in use’ (Benvenisti 2000: 12).¹⁴ These labours of renaming did important ideological work by symbolically refiguring the Palestinian landscape in ways that accorded with the demands of Jewish nation-making (Benvenisti 2000: 12). Yet the ideological case should not be overstated. Ben Zvi’s 1908 account of seeming desolation is followed by an insistently populated Palestinian landscape: namely, by his description of the Arab hotel in which he and his wife rest on the way to Hebron; the ‘Turkish coffee’ they are served; his ‘amusing’ conversation in Arabic with a café proprietor (Ben Zvi 1971: 24). As is clearly manifest here, this text is by no means engaged in the kind of categorical erasure favoured in Benvenisti’s educational writings. Rather, Ben Zvi’s account of the

Palestinian landscape is highly flexible and, indeed, inconsistent, varying as did the perceived narrative demands of nation-making.

Typology was also employed as a means of contending with the Palestinian presence. As in much Zionist political discourse of the pre-state period, the travel writings of Benvenisti and Ben Zvi often advanced a story of a disaggregated Palestine that could be apprehended through its separate 'groups' (Eyal 2006: 42–54). The Bedouin were the most visible of such groups, a population both romanticized and feared, and the disproportionate object of Zionist discursive attention in the pre-state period. As many scholars have noted, Bedouin were not merely tolerated but also romanticized (Eyal 2006: 33–61),¹⁵ enjoyed for their Oriental allure and celebrated for their nomadism, which seemed to mount little threat to Zionist land claims. Indeed, these 'real Arabs' were also deemed figures to be emulated, particularly by members of Ha-Shomer whose imitation of Bedouin cultural and sartorial practices was conceived as a means of self-fashioning as native. Muslim Arab peasant farmers (*fellabin*) were thought to occupy a separate rung within this typology – a population hailed for their perceived similitude to the ancient Hebrews, therein providing Zionists with a model by which to imagine the biblical Hebrew past in Palestine and argue the case for Jewish autochthony (Almog 2000; Benvenisti 2000; Eyal 2006: 33–61; Peleg 2005: 75–99). Palestine's urban populations were yet another imagined grouping. Yet because Yishuv hikers favoured the rural landscapes of Eretz Yisrael, the travelogues they produced had almost no traces of these communities, conveniently occluding scenes of Arab cosmopolitanism that might challenge Zionist presumptions about Arab premodernity.¹⁶ By dividing the Palestinian-Arab population into a set of seemingly discrete units, this discourse of the disaggregate both undercut the political claims of Palestinian nationalism and mitigated the threat that Palestinians posed to Zionist land claims (Lockman 1996: 62).¹⁷

Thus, although scenes of contact with the Palestinian population frequently litter the travel writings of both Ben Zvi and Benvenisti, these scenes tend to accord with the terms of this typological discourse. It follows that Bedouin communities are granted disproportionate visibility.¹⁸ In reading Benvenisti's writings about trips conducted in the 1920s and early 1930s, often under the auspices of the Wanderers' Association, one learns about intimate meals with Bedouin communities met during the course of the journey; of aid provided to them or solicited from them in the traveller's time of need; and of the danger posed by less friendly Bedouin tribes (Benvenisti and Benvenisti 1994: 17, 19, 32–3). The large photographic archive which accompanies his writings (for Benvenisti was a passionate photographer) often favours the Bedouin subject and evidences a persistent desire for both cultural detail and intimacy (manifest, in part, through the genre of portraiture).¹⁹ In keeping with the broader rubric of *Yediat ha-Aretz* with its flexible Orientalism, Benvenisti's

15 For a discussion of the ways that men and women of *ha-Shomer* (The Guards) and *ha-Palmach* emulated Bedouin cultural practices, see Almog (2000: 187–8).

16 See Khalidi (2004), Sakakini (1987) and Tamari (2005) for such a portrait.

17 For a discussion of Ben Zvi's political writings to this effect within the larger context of Labor Zionist ideology of the 1920s, see Lockman (1996: 58–101). On the political role of this typology within the post-1948 state, see Lustick (1980).

18 The subject of Bedouins is frequent in Ben Zvi's travel writings. See, for example, his extended essay on the subject entitled 'Bedouin in Eretz Yisrael' (Ben Zvi 1971: 236–46), originally published in *Ha-Olam* (1932).

19 On Benvenisti as a photographer, see Benvenisti and Benvenisti (1994: 8, 15).

20 On *ha-Maḥanot ha-Olim*'s history of tiyulim, see Almog (2000: 174).

21 In keeping with the typology explored above, Druze and Bedouin were typically exempt from this category of 'bad Arab'. In the Druze case this was due to their status as potential allies of the Zionist movement. Since the early 1930s, the Zionist leadership aimed to cultivate good relations with the Druze in Palestine in an effort to undercut the Palestinian national movement – efforts that depended on the exploitation of communal tensions between Muslims and Druze in Palestine. As Kais Firro (2001: 41) has noted, Yitzhak Ben Zvi himself spoke of his desire to "acquire the friendship of this community" in the emerging struggle between Palestinian Arabs and Jews'.

discussion of Bedouins was ambivalent and sometimes contradictory, a population apprehended with both 'disgust and fascination, attraction and rejection' (Eyal 2006: 36). The tenor of the valuation vacillated as did the political landscape, tending towards the pole of rejection in times of mounting political conflict with Palestine's Arabs (Almog 2000: 192).

These twin representational poles of allure and threat recur frequently in Yishuv travelogues where representations of Palestinians are concerned. Consider, as one additional example, Rafi Thon's *We Walked to Hermon and Got to Damascus* – a retrospective account of a 1932 summer trek conducted by the Zionist youth movement *ha-Maḥanot ha-Olim* (The Camp of the Immigrants) to Syria via northern Palestine.²⁰ Here, allure often takes the form of an ethnographic idiom, manifest in detailed accounts of local clothing styles, women's customs, and agricultural practices – an idiom whose focus on the cultural attempts to obscure the political valences of the Palestinian presence (Thon 1979: 15–16). The trope of Arab hospitality, by which the Zionist encounter with Palestinian Arabs is reconfigured as a relation between guests and hosts, is also prevalent through stories of Jewish hikers welcomed by Arab locals 'with cries and shouts of joy'; of generous gifts offered to the weary travellers by villagers; of Arabic greetings exchanged between the parties (Thon 1979: 35). Yet, Palestinian Arab places and persons are also configured as sites of danger:

When you cross through an Arab village, they stone you with rocks. There were 'good' villages and there were 'bad' villages, and the experience of the stoning was always an unavoidable experience of the trip [*ha-tiyul*]. (Thon 1979: 32–3)

In this passage, as in others, one learns of the 'bad Arab' who carries an inexplicable grudge against the Jewish travellers. The fact that Palestinian Arabs were increasingly mobilizing against the Zionist movement during the early 1930s (Khalidi 1997), mobilization that would crystallize in the revolt of 1936–9 (Swedenburg 1995: 13–15), is nowhere in evidence in this text. Here, as in the Hebrew press of the period, the 'bad Arab' was presented as an essential category, a by-product of culture rather than of uneven relations of power in Palestine.²¹

Regional Routes

The routes taken by Jewish hikers of this period varied considerably. Itineraries within the territory of Eretz Yisrael, which most early Zionists deemed isomorphic with that of Mandate Palestine, were the most logistically feasible and ideologically resonate within the context of *Yediat ha-Aretz*. Of

these, hikes through the Judean Desert and around the Dead Sea, the latter frequently interrupted with swimming and boating, were the most popular and frequent. Because there were no paved roads to Masada during this period, the steep trek to its summit was infrequently attempted by Jewish hikers in the 1920s and 1930s; when attempted, it required considerable labour and perseverance (Almog 2000: 174–5). The ascent to Masada's summit would only acquire its status as a nationalist rite in the 1940s (Zerubavel 1995: 121).

Yet Yishuv travellers also ventured beyond Palestine's borders during this period, despite the attendant logistical constraints. As one learns from reading David Benvenisti's travel diaries, such ventures often explicitly violated the restrictions imposed by the British Mandate authorities (Benvenisti and Benvenisti 1994), and as such, required considerable planning and coordination. Syria and Lebanon were under French control and thus required a visa from the French consulate in Jerusalem – a process both lengthy and frequently unsuccessful. Jewish travellers from Palestine were also required to negotiate their passage into neighbouring Arab territories with border guards and police, and were frequently denied entry, often without explanation, even after appropriate visas had been procured. In the face of these difficulties, some Jewish travellers opted to sneak into Syria or Jordan at unofficial crossings despite the associated risks (including British prison or even death; Almog 2000: 181), a practice of defiance thought to bolster a New Hebrew persona.

Both Benvenisti and Ben Zvi travelled through Lebanon, Syria and Egypt in the decades before state formation, as did numerous elite travellers from the Yishuv. Their routes included conventional tourist destinations alongside secular pilgrimages to sites of Jewish importance; in Ben Zvi's writings, for example, one reads about both visits to museums and open markets and about conversations with Jewish communities in Damascus, Beirut, Baghdad and Cairo.²² Benvenisti's regional travel writings are illustrated with numerous photographs, including those of the markets of Damascus, the streets of Sidon, and the pastoral valleys of rural Lebanon (Benvenisti and Benvenisti 1994). Although Petra had not yet become the object of collective Israeli longing as it would in the Israel of the 1950s (Stein 2008a), many Yishuv travellers visited during this period. As early as the spring of 1929, despite concern generated by the previous year's rioting by Arabs in Palestine, a group of some 150 pupils and teachers from the Gymnasium Herziliya of Tel Aviv, joined by the celebrated Tel Aviv photographer Avraham Soskin, made the trip by motor convoy via Jericho (Silver-Brody 1998). Benvenisti travelled to Petra with 100 members of the Wanderers' Association in 1933, as did Ben Zvi later that decade, on a voyage that generated considerable geographic surprise: 'How close we are to the Jordan crossing', he noted, following a 55-minute voyage from Jerusalem by car.

22 In his 1935 writings about Baghdad, Ben Zvi cites the imperial travels of Gertrude Bell as a precedent, noting that 'it's not enough to read the diaries of Gertrude Bell ... you need personal experience' (1971: 256).

‘But, nonetheless, the land of Amir Abdullah is so far from us, so different and strange’ (Ben Zvi 1971: 281). This trope of the ‘surprising near’ was frequently rehearsed in Yishuv accounts of regional travel, as in Thon’s *We Walked to Hermon and Got to Damascus*. As the title suggests, this trip culminated in an unplanned visit to the Syrian capital. As the Yishuv travellers stood at the summit of Mount Hermon, in a scene that rehearsed the classic gestures of colonial promontory vision (Pratt 1992), Damascus came suddenly into view:

We heard the cries ‘Damascus! Damascus!’ ... I ran to the place from which they stood, in disbelief. Damascus was there, below us. I extended an arm ... So close! Like a shining pearl in the horizon ... We were overcome by emotion. ‘What? So close? Friends! Let’s go there!’ we cried together. (Thon 1979)

The trope of startling proximity, one that would recur during the Israeli rush to Petra in 1994 (Stein 2008a), suggests how geographical realities within the Middle East had been overwritten by the prevailing Zionist geographical imagination within the Yishuv, an imagination predicated on the fiction of a Jewish national territory that was neither in nor of the surrounding Arab-Middle East in either cultural or geographic terms.

It should be stressed that in the context of *Yediat ha-Aretz*, these travels cannot be considered *tiyulim* in any strict sense. As routes beyond the borders of Eretz Yisrael, these trips were not engaged in the production of a national geography; as such, they were not imbued with equivalent Zionist import. Equally consequential were the political leanings of the Jewish communities encountered during the course of such trips. The Yishuv travellers who ventured into neighbouring Arab territories in the 1920s and 1930s encountered Jewish populations with few political ties to or sympathy for the project of political Zionism (Beinin 1998; Stillman 1987, 1991). Travelling to Lebanon and Syria in 1933, for example, Ben Zvi dialogues with rabbis who vocally oppose the establishment of Zionist youth movements in their communities (ostensibly for reasons of gender mixing) (Ben Zvi 1971: 251). The same is true of Ben Zvi’s voyage to Cairo in the same year. There, he endeavours to explain the poor relations between Arabs and Jews in Palestine to a prominent Egyptian Jew. His interlocutor confesses confusion, as the Egyptian case offered no clear analogue (‘It’s hard for him to understand why we don’t conduct relations with the Arabs’) (Ben Zvi 1971: 248). The prevailing Zionist fiction of an antonymy between Arab and Jew could not easily be extended beyond the borders of Eretz Yisrael, and Ben Zvi’s writings illustrate this clearly.²³

23 On the notion of the antonym in this context, see Shohat (1997).

Read in the context of Ben Zvi’s regional travels, Thon’s *We Walked to Hermon and Got to Damascus* was rather exceptional – exceptional, that is, given the manifestly Zionist lens through which its narrative is filtered. As

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24 For a brief discussion of the Zionist youth movement *ha-Halutz* in Damascus, see Zenner (2000: 83–4). Concurrently, vocal elements within the leadership of the Syrian Jewish community were actively distancing themselves from the Zionist project, proclaiming their ‘total loyalty to the Arab cause with anti-Zionist demonstrations and public statements’. See Stillman (1987: 356–7).

25 Translated literally, the text reads: ‘cries out . . . to your *arms* and your souls’ – the former referring to the labour imperative of Zionist socialism.

26 Marches differed from the institution of the *tiyul* in destination, duration and associated ardour.

noted above, the text recounts an unplanned visit to Damascus by Yishuv travellers in 1932, culminating in their joyful welcome by members of the Syrian Jewish community; their enthusiastic *hora* in the Jewish quarter; their pleasure in the city’s celebrated sites ‘about which we have heard so much’; their struggle to avoid detection by Syrian authorities as they lacked proper permits; and eventual return to Palestine by bus. The scenes of arrival and celebration in Damascus are noteworthy for what they withhold. In contrast to the ethnographic detail provided in the text’s prior discussions of Arab people and places, Thon’s account of the Syrian Jewish community is relatively sparse, save discussion of the warm welcome it provides to the weary travellers (‘who doesn’t remember that *halva!*’). In the place of such details, this retrospective travelogue (written in 1972) detours into historical narrative and interview format, providing testimonials from former members of the Damascus community now residing in Israel who recall their memories of the visit and recount the community’s efforts to establish a Zionist movement (*ha-Halutz ha-Tsair*) in the 1920s. These *post facto* interviews, conducted from Israeli soil, are crucial; they perform ideological work that a travelogue authored in 1932 could not as easily perform – at least, not one true to the complexities of the Syrian Jewish political landscape of the period, in which Zionist activism in one sector was coupled with manifest antipathy for the Zionist project.²⁴ The final lines of Thon’s travelogue, which quote from a 1933 letter written to the Syrian Jewish community from the Yishuv travellers after their return to Palestine, articulates the text’s nationalist yearnings clearly: ‘Dear friends . . . we await your emigration; the land [*ha-Aretz*] cries out to you, to your bodies and your souls.’²⁵

Recalibrated Routes

Both the geography and political function of the *tiyul* as a Zionist institution would shift after Israeli state formation in 1948. In the subsequent two decades, the trek or ‘march’ up Masada would crystallize as a national rite of passage, one understood as a monument to Jewish heroism and defiance and therein an antidote to Holocaust victimhood (Ben-Yehuda 1995; Zerubavel 1995).²⁶ Highly publicized mass marches to Masada’s summit, like the March of the Thousand in 1950, were celebrated as spectacular demonstrations of the ‘strength and vitality’ of the new state (Almog 2000: 175). The geography of the *tiyul* would shift dramatically following the 1967 war and subsequent Israeli occupation of the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), Gaza Strip, Sinai Peninsula and Golan Heights. In the war’s immediate aftermath, excursions through the newly occupied territories would dominate the Israeli hiking agenda (Stein 2008a). Given that occupation meant the ability to return to portions of Eretz Yisrael that many Israelis had enjoyed prior to 1948, the

travel narratives that such hikes generated often echoed *tiyul* discourses from the pre-state period. Many of these narratives, particularly those penned by Israeli supporters of the military occupation, proponents of a so-called Greater Israel, borrowed canonical tropes of conquest from the archive of colonial travelogues (Stein 2008a).

That the *tiyul* remained an important Israeli cultural practice in subsequent decades, persisting into the present, is hardly remarkable. But what does merit note is the endurance of the particular discursive and ideological coordinates that have been associated with the *tiyul* since the early decades of state formation, albeit with certain modifications befitting the altered political landscape in the Middle East. A forceful example occurred in 1988. In the winter of that year, a young Israeli woman was killed during a hike through the West Bank in the immediate aftermath of the outbreak of the first Palestinian uprising (Intifada); young Palestinian men were targeted as her killers. This event, which represented one of the first politically inflected Israeli killings of the Intifada, was sensationally mourned on the front pages of Israeli newspapers and extensive Israeli commentary followed (Byta 1988). In interviews published in the Hebrew language media, many Israelis condemned the incident and spoke reverentially about the threat it posed to the *tiyul*, a seemingly sacred nationalist institution that was now under attack. Israeli Education Minister Yitzhak Navon argued that ‘*tiyulim* in the streets of *ha-Aretz* are among the building blocks of the Israeli educational system and should not be stopped’ (Byta 1988). In response to the event, leaders of the settlement movement called for ‘ten million on every *tiyul*’ in the Israeli occupied territories to affirm the Jewish hold on Greater Israel (Byta 1988). ‘This event should strengthen the people’, the victim’s father argued. ‘I’m in favour of continuing the *tiyul* . . . we should travel everywhere’ (Tirza’s father doesn’t cry 1988). Photographs of MP Ariel Sharon, shaking hands with the hiking companions of the murdered woman, were prominently displayed on the front page of a popular Israeli newspaper (Byta 1988). What this discursive excess suggests is not only the endurance of the *tiyul* as an Israeli national institution, but also its continued import as a tool of settler-nationalism within the post-1967 Israeli landscape. Although spectacular in form, the discourse surrounding this event was not usual. In the decades after 1967, continuing through the present, the *tiyul* would be frequently called upon to advance Israeli political claims in its occupied territories.

As the preceding analysis suggests, the intellectual and political stakes in this inquiry greatly exceed this abbreviated history of the *tiyul*. Rather, this essay joins a growing body of interdisciplinary scholarship that argues for a greater understanding of the colonial roots and dimensions of the Zionist project, historically (Eyal 2006; Kimmerling 1983; Lockman 1996; Shafir and Peled 2002).²⁷ Among other things, this scholarship has insisted that many strands

27 Elsewhere, I have cautioned about the ways that the postcolonial rubric fails to adequately address the historical particulars of the Israeli case; see Stein (2005).

of early Zionist thought and practice borrowed heavily from contemporaneous colonial movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, sharing settlement tactics, forms of land acquisition, economic structures, notions of proper governance, discourses of western superiority; indeed, much of this scholarship has contended that many of these colonial institutions persist in the Israeli present, although in altered forms. This charge of colonialism, once tantamount to career suicide within the US academy, is now by no means novel. Rather, in the last two decades, such lines of argumentation have been increasingly advanced by scholars in various national and disciplinary locations (Silberstein 1999). Yet what remains underexplored within this growing scholarship, save notable exceptions (Abu El-Haj 2001; Shohat 1987, 2006; Eyal 2006), is the role of discourse and cultural practice within the Zionist colonial project, both in the pre- and post-state decades. As I have suggested elsewhere, the relative marginality of cultural and discursive inquiries within the progressive scholarly literature on Israel and Palestine is often deemed a necessary response to the exigencies of the ongoing Israeli occupation (Stein and Swedenburg 2005), stemming from the need to attend to more urgent matters, to what are considered more properly political domains. Taking my cue from postcolonial scholars, this essay takes issue with such lines of argument, telling a very different story about where politics lies.

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