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To cite this article: Jørgen Jensehaugen (2020): *Terra morata*: the West Bank in Menachem Begin's worldview, Contemporary Levant, DOI: [10.1080/20581831.2020.1710675](https://doi.org/10.1080/20581831.2020.1710675)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/20581831.2020.1710675>



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Published online: 16 Jan 2020.



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Terra morata: the West Bank in Menachem Begin's worldview

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ABSTRACT


When Menachem Begin, Israeli prime minister and founder of the Likud party, formulated Israel's claim to the West Bank, he did not utilise the classic *terra nullius* settler argument. Instead, his ideological claim was that the land was a *terra morata*, a territory which had been in a state of 'extratemporal hiatus', to borrow a term from Bakhtin. This was illustrated through his insistence on using the Biblical names Judea and Samaria to denote the West Bank. The Zionist claim to the land was thus not that it lacked a sovereign, but rather that the sovereign had returned. The Israeli occupation was thus construed as a resumption of history, while the Palestinians were placed outside history, negating their historical and contemporary claim to the land. This article analyses how Begin's worldview played out by investigating the self-rule proposal for the Palestinians which he launched in 1977. This proposal (if implemented) would have postponed any claims of sovereignty over the territory indefinitely, while ensuring that the Palestinians gained no national autonomy. In essence, Palestinian self-rule was a sleight of hand. For Begin the West Bank (and Gaza) were eternally Jewish territories, and the Palestinians mere residents *on* the land. Unlike Israeli settlers, they were not considered to be *of* the land.

KEYWORDS

Terra morata; Menachem Begin; Zionism; chronotope; West Bank; Israel; Palestine; Bakhtin

Intrinsic to both Palestinian nationalism and Zionism is the historically defined tie between the people and the land. The tragedy of the conflict stems from the fact that the land for which both these nationalisms yearn is the same, albeit with different names. For the Palestinians the land is Palestine, while for the Zionists it is Eretz Israel. The historical timeline from which the two lands emerge, and with which the two people justify their claims to them, does not overlap. In broad brush strokes, for the Zionists the relevant time is ancient Jewish history and the Israeli present, while for the Palestinians the most relevant timeline is the largely Arab and Ottoman time that took place in the centuries between these two points in history.

After the ethnic cleansing of Palestine in the 1947–49 war (Morris 2004, Pappé 2007), the clash of nationalisms over the land was largely removed from inside the state of Israel.¹ After the 1967 war, with the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, the contesting ideological claims to the land were intensified as both people came to inhabit the same territory. In Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol's first speech to the Knesset after the war, he declared: 'The prophecy has been fulfilled: "There is recompense for the work, the sons have returned to their borders."² The land, however, also had other sons and daughters: the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza contained a population of around one million Palestinians (Perlmann 2011–12). The clash of nationalisms intensified into the 1970s. On the Israeli side this was the result of the rise of the greater Israel ideology,

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leading to settlement expansion in the newly occupied territories (Zertal and Eldar 2009). Palestinian nationalism was simultaneously finding increased political expression, primarily represented by the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO).

The problem Israel faced after occupying the West Bank and Gaza in 1967 has been called the dilemma of the 'bride and the dowry' (Raz 2012). Israel wanted to keep the land (West Bank/Gaza), but did not want to give the Palestinians citizenship. The metaphor comes from a conversation between Levi Eshkol and Golda Meir in 1967. 'When I asked Eshkol: "What are we going to do with a million Arabs?" he said: "I get it. You want the dowry, but you don't like the bride!"' (Gordon 2008, p. 1)

This article investigates how Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin ideologically understood these territories, using as an example his very limited 'self-rule' proposal for the Palestinian territories, developed in late 1977. Unlike other recent studies (Anziska 2017, 2018, Jensehaugen 2018, 2019) this article does not investigate the political and diplomatic function of the proposal, but rather what it says about Begin's ideology regarding the West Bank-Gaza territory, and the Palestinian and Israeli territorial claims. The self-rule concept attempted to separate the status of the inhabitants from the status of the land, in such a way that the Palestinians were seen as being present *on* the land, but they were not considered to be *of* the land. This argument stemmed from Begin's ideological view of the relationship between the land and its history. For him the land was eternally Jewish and only temporarily Arab, and the only 'real' time was that in which the land was Jewish; all other time was essentially an intermission, an irrelevant pause in the relevant history of the land.

For Begin, Palestine was not a *terra nullius*, but rather a *terra morata*, a land that had been waiting for the return of its rightful owner.³ Gabriel Piterberg describes this notion of return as one of the fundamental myths of Zionism. He argues that within Zionist mythology, 'the land too, was condemned to exile as long as there was no Jewish sovereignty over it: it lacked any meaningful or authentic history, awaiting its own redemption with the return of the Jews' (Piterberg 2008, p. 94). Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin (2013, p. 58) also shows how this view was prevalent amongst Zionist writers, and that within this view Zionism was about making a 'return of the land to history'. This understanding of the land as having been in exile is particularly accurate regarding Begin, for whom the land was ancient and Jewish, having merely been frozen in time during the Jewish exile.

In Begin's ideological understanding of Eretz Israel, the totality of the land itself—from the river to the sea—is a *major* chronotope, 'a unifying ground for the competing local chronotopes in one and the same narrative text' (Bemong and Borghart 2010, p. 7). Within this framework, the West Bank and Gaza must be understood as a *minor* chronotope. The narrative endpoint of Likud history is the total reclamation of the land. Placing the West Bank in a state of postponement, by not annexing it—creating a second pause—does not alter the main narrative of history, it only delays it. It is within this analytical framework that one can understand the (seemingly) open-ended internal logic of Begin's plan to have the land as a non-sovereign territory.

As we will see, Begin argued that a distinction could be made between the status of the people and the land through the self-rule concept, by placing sovereignty over the land in limbo. Both Israelis and Palestinians could claim sovereignty, Begin would argue, but neither could have it. By temporarily removing any claim to sovereignty as a concept based on the presence of a population, which is the basis for self-determination, self-rule allowed ancient Jewish history and Zionist ideology to take precedence over contemporary demographic reality and recent Arab history. Begin's solution sought to realise a chronotopic view of the land in which the Palestinians have an inessential place in the overall organisation of historical time and therefore a merely incidental relation to the land. Put differently: in Jewish time the land and the people are synchronised, in Arab time there is no such synchronisation. This article thus engages with the self-rule proposal by using chronotopic analysis as an ideological critique that focuses on narration's spatiotemporal infrastructure (see Parslow in this issue).

The (mis)use of history is a common legitimising tool in nation-building (Hobsbawm 2007, p. 76, Khoury 2016, pp. 467–468), and settler projects are no exception. In his study of settler colonialism, Lorenzo Veracini (2010) calls this phenomenon a 'narrative transfer.' This takes place when two claims

of indigenusness are made to the land. On the one hand the argument is made that the ‘settlers are also indigenous peoples.’ Such a claim thus argues that there is a historical ‘settler continuity.’ On the other hand, and simultaneously, the claim is made that the ‘indigenous people are also settlers’ (ibid., p. 42). A narrative transfer is thus one in which the history of the indigenous people is delegitimised by arguing that they are newcomers with no real historical legitimacy, and moreover that the newcomers/settlers have an ancient claim, so that the newness of their settlement is in fact a mere re-establishment of the (eternal) nation. This is what I term *terra morata*, the idea that the land has been frozen in time, an intermission, awaiting the return of its people, and thus the resumption of history.

Translated into Begin’s view of the West Bank, this logic suggests that Jews are indigenous to Judea and Samaria, while the Palestinians residing there came later—as settlers with no legitimate claim. Exemplary of this view is Begin’s insistence that ‘Palestine’ was not a correct term to use for the land, because this was ‘a Roman name intended to embarrass the Jews at the time’ (Hurwitz 2004, p. 112). Begin’s argument was essentially that ever since the Jewish exodus the land had been in a state of *terra morata* that was settled by strangers who did not belong to the land. With the establishment of Israel, and later the creation of settlements on the West Bank and Gaza, the land was returned to its natural state. Time could restart.

The self-rule proposal for the Palestinians in the occupied territories was an attempt by Begin to manufacture a solution to the ‘bride and the dowry’ problem. If self-rule was accepted by the United States and some of the Arab states, Israel would be able to retain all the land without making the Palestinians part of the Israeli *demos*. Self-rule was a technical and open-ended solution to the ideological dilemma inherent in the greater Israel ideology. It was not a permanent solution, but it aimed at postponing such a solution indefinitely, ensuring that the territory remain Israeli.

‘How do we control a million Arabs?’

The Israeli elation following the victory over the Arab states in 1967 could temporarily obfuscate the dilemma Israel faced, but it could not be ignored. In the midst of the war, on 7 June 1967, during a meeting between Israeli senior officers, Yitzhak Rabin asked the pertinent question, ‘How do we control a million Arabs?’ The response from a staff officer was a simple numerical correction: ‘One million, two hundred and fifty thousand’ (Shlaim 2001, p. 245). These were the bare facts of the bride-and-dowry conundrum.

Immediately following the Six-Day War, the Israeli cabinet was divided over how to treat the newly occupied West Bank. Between Abba Eban, who wanted to give the West Bank back to Jordan, and Menachem Begin, who wanted to annex the whole region, there was a spectrum of solutions, including some form of autonomy (Pedatzur 1995, pp. 270–273, Shlaim 2001, p. 256). This diversity of solutions resulted in a stagnant non-solution by which the area continued to be occupied by Israel, ruled as ‘administrative territories’ (Goldberg and Ben-Zadok 1986, p. 52, Pedatzur 1995, pp. 270–273). While the long-term question of what to do with the occupied Palestinian territories remained unanswered, the situation on the ground was altered.

The Israeli settlement project started slowly, but surely. The first small colonies were established during the period of elation directly following the 1967 war. The settlement endeavour gradually gained momentum, and with the establishment of *Gush Emunim* (Bloc of the Faithful) following the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, the settlement project had the support of a national religious movement (Goldberg and Ben-Zadok 1986, p. 52, 57, Shelef 2010, p. 65). By 1977 there were a total of eleven thousand Israeli settlers who lived in eighty-four small colonies (Kimmerling and Migdal 2003, p. 287). This meant that the occupied territories were increasingly perceived as Israeli, ideologically, demographically and territorially.

The May 1977 Israeli election brought Likud’s Menachem Begin to power. This was a groundbreaking event in Israeli politics, which until then had been dominated by the Labour party. Begin’s biographer calls the election an earthquake and quotes Golda Meir, who called it a catastrophe (Tessler 1986, p. 12, Hurwitz 2004, p. 85). With Begin’s electoral success, the Israeli standpoint of

what to do with the West Bank and Gaza shifted. In the words of Israeli historian Avi Shlaim (2001, p. 352), 'the Likud's ideology could be summed up in two words—Greater Israel.' The Likud party manifesto for the 1977 election spelled this out: 'The right of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel is eternal [...] Judea and Samaria shall therefore not be relinquished to foreign rule; between the sea and the Jordan, there will be Jewish sovereignty alone' (Shlaim 2001, p. 353). Begin consistently used the biblical names Judea and Samaria to denote the West Bank.

Begin was a man of both action and words. In the five years after he became prime minister the Israeli settler population grew on average by 4,400 persons per year (Goldberg and Ben-Zadok 1986, p. 52). Although Begin was a more vocal supporter of the settler project, there was a clear continuity from the preceding governments. A difference was that Begin was more intimately tied with the national religious settlement movement *Gush Emunim* (Shelef 2010, p. 79).

Likud ideology

As a political party Likud had a short history; it had been formally established in 1973 as an alliance between the Herut party, led by Menachem Begin, and the Liberal party. Herut dominated the alliance (Tessler 1986, pp. 22–25). To understand Begin's political stance as leader of Likud, it is important to look at the ideological heritage from early revisionist Zionism, from which Herut had emerged.

Begin was an adamant supporter of Vladimir Zeev Jabotinsky, the founder of revisionist Zionism (Hurwitz 2004, p. 32). This was the most right-wing strand of modern Zionism. The Revisionist party had been established in 1925 as a territorially maximalist party which 'demand[ed] that the [British] Mandate be revised to recognise Jewish rights on both sides of the Jordan' (Tessler 1986, p. 19). While this demand was considered extreme by the mainstream Zionist movement, Jabotinsky was a strong charismatic leader with many followers, Begin being one of the most zealous.

Menachem Begin was born in Russia in 1913 and grew up in a highly religious and Zionist family. His early years were dominated by the harsh realities of wartime Russia, and then the newly independent Poland where violent anti-Semitism was rife. By the age of nine he had joined a Zionist youth group, and by the age of sixteen he had switched membership to Betar – Jabotinsky's Zionist organisation. Within ten years he had become the commander of Betar in Poland. With the Second World War, events dramatically escalated for the worse for Begin. Not only was most of his family exterminated in the Holocaust but Begin himself was arrested by the NKVD and spent several years in Soviet imprisonment. In 1942 he was released and emigrated to Palestine. By 1943 he had become the commander of the Irgun (Peleg 1987, pp. 19–23). Begin's life story highlights and illuminates several aspects of his worldview and ideology. First, his family background steeped in religious justifications fuelled his nationalist ideology. Second, his traumatic experiences of the Holocaust and encounters with the Soviet police evolved into a deep distrust for the world around him. Third, and most relevant here, is the paradoxical fact that he was an immigrant from Europe who strongly felt that he had a more legitimate claim to the land than its indigenous inhabitants.

Begin's thinking about 'Judea and Samaria' became entrenched in his days leading the revisionist movement's paramilitary organisation, the Irgun (*Irgun HaTzvai Ha Leumi BeEretz Israel*, the National Military Organisation in the Land of Israel), during the British mandate (Tessler 1986, p. 20, Filc 2013, p. 21). Famously, the logo of the Irgun was an arm holding a rifle superimposed over a map of both Palestine and Jordan—together labelled as Eretz Israel—underscored with the words 'only thus'. This underlined both the territorial maximalism and the militarism of the movement. Starting in the mid-1950s, Begin gradually accepted that Eretz Israel did not include the East Bank, that is Jordan. The West Bank, however, was still considered the 'eternal patrimony of our ancestors' (Shelef 2004, pp. 130–32).

Terms such as the 'eternal patrimony of our ancestors' were a recurring theme in Begin's speeches. When presenting his first government, Begin made many statements containing such religious-historical references. To quote some examples: 'Our right is our parents' bequest, which goes back thousands of years'; '[w]e were granted the right to exist by the God of our ancestors';

and: 'the Jewish people bears a historic and eternal right to the land of Israel, the heritage of our ancestors' (Filc 2013, p. 22).

From cultural autonomy to self-rule

Israeli scholar Arye Naor (2005, p. 156) describes Begin's stance as 'supra-temporal', or what Bakhtin calls 'extratemporal' (Bakhtin 1981, Kindle location 1391), meaning here that he considered the normative value of the Jewish and the non-Jewish timeline of residency in Palestine in radical opposition to one another:

[P]resenting the integrity of the homeland as a concrete expression of the historical rights of the Jewish people implies that history, as a basis for the emergence of national rights, was frozen during exile, the physical disconnection of the people from its land and the history of that period. [...] It is as if historical time ceased to advance while the Jewish nation was in exile. Accordingly, everything that has happened since the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the Jews is irrelevant in determining the political future of this land. (Naor 2005, p. 156)

This ideological claim could not negate the fundamental question: What status should the Palestinians have? Jabotinsky had previously suggested that the Palestinians could have 'personal', but not 'territorial' autonomy. The distinction for Jabotinsky was 'between rights of "nationality"—autonomous national rights—and rights of "citizenship"—sovereign national rights' (Peleg 1987, p. 7). The first of these categories was of a personal character and could be granted to the Arabs as individuals but not as a collective or national entity, while the second was territorial and could not, according to Jabotinsky (*ibid.*, p. 7). It is here important to note that while Jabotinsky recognised the national character of the Palestinians (Morris 2000, p. 108, Shlaim 2001, pp. 15–16, Shindler 2015, pp. 133–136), his ideological heir refused to make that acknowledgement. Illustrative of this view is the fact that Shmuel Katz, Begin's personal advisor, consistently used quotation marks when using the term 'Palestinians' (e.g., Katz 1981, p. 118, 121, 124, 133).

Begin had always affirmed that Israel would never give up the soil of 'Judea and Samaria', because this 'was sacred to every Jew' (Sachar 2001, p. 864). When Begin came to power, Israel was in the midst of a serious peace process led by the United States. US president Jimmy Carter was pushing for a negotiated solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict that included a solution to the Palestinian question. Carter had openly called for a Palestinian 'homeland', and Begin was acutely aware that he had to provide some type of solution to the Palestinian question (Jensehaugen 2018, pp. 35–102). While this article is not a diplomatic study of the self-rule negotiations, a brief chronology is in order to lay the groundwork for an ideological analysis.

The dilemma Begin faced was how to provide a solution for the Palestinians without giving up the land. Begin's original idea was to offer a vague 'cultural autonomy', another Jabotinsky concept. The Americans, however, considered the suggestion inadequate (Bar-Siman-Tov 1994, pp. 64–65, Naor 2005, p. 166).⁴ Realising that 'cultural autonomy' was insufficient, Begin amended the autonomy idea, and on 16 December 1977 offered President Carter his 'home rule' proposal for the Palestinians in 'Judea, Samaria, and Gaza.' According to this proposal, Israel would retain responsibility for public order and security in the West Bank and Gaza, while granting the Palestinians personal autonomy. What Begin suggested was essentially a judicial separation of the people from the land.⁵

Begin and his team maintained that issues such as land expropriation and immigration would be under Israel's jurisdiction, and that the Israeli military government could revoke the powers it had delegated to the Palestinian Administrative Council.⁶ From the outset, self-rule was conceptualised as a very limited autonomy. Israel would man the borders and rule the land, while the Palestinians could administer their own culture. This was vague, to say the least. Although Begin told the Americans that sovereignty would only extend to the 1967 lines, in practice it extended to the river.

Shortly thereafter, Begin amended his proposal. According to this revised version, the residents of 'Judea, Samaria and the Gaza District' could elect an administrative council for four-year terms. The

administration would cover civilian affairs, while security, foreign policy, and public order would remain Israeli responsibilities. The question of sovereignty was still left open.⁷

Watering down autonomy

After December 1977 the self-rule proposal was repeatedly amended by Israeli officials, watering down the amount of authority that would be given to the Palestinians. For instance, the Israeli military government was mandated to decide which of the Palestinian administrative council's actions were acceptable (Heller 1979, pp. 118–119). The Israeli army would not even withdraw *out* of the autonomous area, but rather to 'specific areas *in* the regions under autonomy' (*Journal of Palestine Studies* 1979, p. 142, my emphasis). Furthermore, while the proposal stated that Israelis could buy land in the autonomous areas, the inhabitants of the autonomous areas could only buy land in Israel if they became citizens of Israel.⁸ This again was limited by the provision that Palestinians seeking Israeli citizenship were limited by Israeli citizenship laws.

Negotiations continued over the temporality of self-rule. In the version that was attached to the 1978 Camp David Accords, self-rule was to be implemented over a five-year period (Newman and Falah 1997, p. 123). To ensure that self-rule did not develop into statehood, Begin also stated that Israel would arrest any Palestinians who attempted to declare a Palestinian state (Heller 1979, p. 117).

As the signing of the 1979 peace treaty between Israel and Egypt indicates, both Carter and Sadat caved in to Begin's demands that the Palestinians be kept out of the agreement. They were present in theory only, through the vague notion of self-rule which was never implemented. The talks concerning the implementation of self-rule broke down in November 1980. Thereafter Begin published the proposal titled: 'A Model Proposal for Full Autonomy for the Arabs of the Land of Israel—Inhabitants of Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip' (*Journal of Palestine Studies* 1980, p. 159). As illustrated by the title, the land was to be undivided—the Land of Israel. Begin made no attempt to conceal his view:

There are some things that have to be said with full clarity, and this applies to Israel's right to sovereignty over Judea and Samaria, her right to settle there and her refusal ever to allow the establishment of a Palestinian state there. (*Journal of Palestine Studies* 1979, p. 143)

Placing sovereignty in limbo was a political sleight of hand.

This was the Begin line. As he had declared during the election in 1977, '[t]he right of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel is eternal and inalienable [...] Between the sea and the Jordan, there will be Jewish sovereignty alone' (quoted in Sachar 2001, p. 836). For Begin the potential Jewish settler had a greater claim to the land than the Palestinians who lived on it. The settlers, both present *and* future, had a national claim, while the Palestinians had a mere personal and temporary presence.

Autonomy as concept

Begin's proposal was not the only time Israel had suggested an autonomy solution for the Palestinians (Pedatzur 1995, pp. 269–279). As David Newman and Ghazi Falah (1997, p. 115) note, "'[s]elf-determination" is a term used by the Palestinians in their quest for state, while "autonomy" is a term used by Israel in its search for a solution which can guarantee continued territorial presence and control.' Traditionally, autonomy implies that 'power is partially transferred to regional government. Such power [...] would include decisions relating to both people and territory' (*ibid.*, p. 112). In Begin's self-rule, on the other hand, there would be a clear separation of those decisions relating to the people and those relating to the land. Self-rule was unlike classical autonomy in that it only gave the Palestinians power of decisions relating to the people, but not land. It was an 'autonomy of persons' and not a territorial autonomy (Ruedy 1981, p. 46). For Begin, territorial autonomy would have been impossible because it would have implied that the territory was not solely Israeli.

Ilan Peleg (1987, pp. 136–37) points out that although cases of 'personal autonomy' have existed in the past, there was not a single existing case in 1977. A case in point here is the fact that Jabotinsky

had developed his cultural autonomy model on the Austro-Hungarian case – a multi-national empire (Shindler 2015, pp. 128–131). Israel was no multi-national empire, and Begin’s proposal was a legal anomaly. As a CIA analyst put it,

Begin’s view is that the SGA [Self-Governing Authority] should be a *solely administrative authority* regulating the affairs of the Arab inhabitants and leaving control of the territory [...] with Israel. In sum, [Begin’s] *autonomy [plan] is for people not territory* and therefore does not prejudice Israel’s territorial claim to the West Bank. (Khalidi 2013, p. 20, emphases in original)

Land was so removed from the proposal that the only mention of territory was that the self-administration would take place *on* the West Bank and Gaza (Newman and Falah 1997, p. 123).

Mark Heller points out that Begin’s self-rule was reminiscent of the Ottoman millet system. He argues that while historically it was possible to think of such types of autonomy, ‘the norm of self-determination that inextricably links nationalism to territorial autonomy, makes such a solution anachronistic’ (Heller 1979, pp. 119–20). For Begin this anachronism was exactly the point. The self-rule proposal counteracted rising Palestinian nationalism and the demand for a Palestinian state (Peleg 1987, p. 102). While territorial autonomy would have implied that the Palestinians were *of* the land, and thus acknowledged the Palestinian *national* territorial claim, personal autonomy simply accepted that they were present *on* the land, thus cutting the ties between the nation as people (Palestinians) and the nation as place (Palestine). The Palestinians were considered to exist ‘outside “history”’ (Raz-Krakotzkin 2013, p. 58). History, as Toufoul Abou-Hodeib (in this issue) points out, became synonymous with nation-state history. Falling outside the nation-state, the Palestinians, then, fell ‘in the cracks of history’. Much like Abou-Hodeib’s traders this did not render the Palestinians insignificant in their own right, but it allowed Begin to write them out of the national narrative.

Begin tried to forge a solution that did not disrupt the chronotope of the West Bank and Gaza as a *terra morata*, thus leaving the larger spatiotemporal logic of Eretz Israel intact. Leaving the issue of sovereignty for a later date allowed Israel and the settlers to forge closer bonds to the land while awaiting the moment in time when they could claim full sovereignty.

Reactions

Outside Israel the self-rule proposal triggered two opposing views. One was that the Palestinians could, and should, use this as a first step in realising their aspirations toward an independent state in the West Bank and Gaza. This view was held by, *inter alia*, Zbigniew Brzezinski. Looking back at this period of negotiations, he expressed massive disappointment in the Arabs for rejecting self-rule:

If the Arab side had an ounce of brain in its head, it would realise that the creation of autonomous institutions over a five-year period on a territory defined by the 1967 lines would make it much more difficult subsequently to have any peace settlement other than the 1967 lines. (quoted in al Madfai 2007, p. 56)

The other view, held by the Palestinians and the Arab states, was that self-rule was offered by Begin as an end in itself, and that agreeing to it would be the equivalent of lending moral support to continued Israeli occupation of the land (Heller 1979, p. 114). Begin, for once, agreed with the Palestinian view. When defending his proposal in Israel, he argued that self-rule was a proposal aimed at retaining control of the occupied areas, but disarming opposition against that control (Bar-Siman-Tov 1994, p. 76). Many Israelis were also upset at the stance Begin took regarding the West Bank. In one protest an Israeli declared, ‘We have more responsibility toward our children than toward our forefathers.’⁹ For Begin, though, those responsibilities were construed as one and the same.

Conclusion

Begin’s proposal was geographically speaking a one-state solution, but demographically it was a two-nation non-solution and a preserver of the status quo. Israel would remain a nation-state in all of historical Palestine, while the Palestinians would remain a nation without a state. Mark Heller argues that

[T]he plan proposes communal self-rule in all of Palestine only for Jews. For Arabs, what matters still is where they are, not who they are. Metaphysical attempts to divorce their political fate from the fate of the place where they live are an exercise in futility. [...] This may be called full autonomy, but it is almost inconceivable that the verbal pyrotechnics have fooled anyone (Heller 1979, p. 120, 123).

The concept of personal rather than territorial autonomy was of particular importance to the Gush Emunim settlement movement, which strongly rejected any limitations to where Jews could settle in Eretz Israel (Bar-Siman-Tov 1994, p. 74). As one settler bluntly expressed it, the Arabs live in the land ‘through our mercy and not by right’ (Peleg 1987, p. 72). Begin did not dispel this view. One need only look at the fact that in the amended self-rule proposals, the Israeli Defence Forces would withdraw, but their occupation would not be abolished. Placing sovereignty in limbo was a purely academic exercise. For all intents and purposes, sovereignty would remain squarely in Israeli hands.

‘In order to endow any ideal with authenticity, one need only conceive of its once having existed in its “natural state” in some Golden Age’, notes Bakhtin (1981, Kindle location 2155). This is an apt description of Begin’s understanding of Judea and Samaria. He considered the Jewish ‘Golden Age’ to be the ‘natural state’ of the land. For Begin this ‘natural state’ was *recovered* in 1967, thus reconnecting the ancient past with the present. Since the Palestinians had no claim to the land in its ‘natural state’, during antiquity, Begin argued that they had no claim to it in its present state either, despite their massive contemporary and historic presence on the land. For him the difference was between Israeli ontological presence as opposed to the Palestinian temporal presence. For Begin, the creation of Israeli settlements was the very act that ended the state of *terra morata*. Through the act of settling, the land became reconnected with its rightful time.

The term *terra morata* is doubly relevant here. First, the land had been in a state of pause, a moratorium, awaiting the return of the Jewish people, and second, through the self-rule proposal, Begin placed the West Bank in a new such state, awaiting the moment when Israel could claim sovereignty over the totality of the land. This was simply a new typology of occupation. Rather than fight over the right to claim sovereign control in the present, Begin used postponement as a tool to keep Israeli sovereignty indefinitely. For obvious reasons, this chronotopic view of the land was not something the Arab states or the Palestinians accepted. While the Carter administration tried to make self-rule a temporary solution, they were unable to make Begin agree to the evolvment of a Palestinian homeland—and definitely not a state—on the West Bank and Gaza. For all intents and purposes, the occupied territories were part of Israel.

Notes

1. Approximately 20 percent of the population in Israel are Palestinians. They are largely confined to certain areas, such as Galilee.
2. Statement to the Knesset by Prime Minister Eshkol, 12 June 1967, Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs Historical Documents, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/MFADocuments/Yearbook1/Pages/23%20Statement%20to%20the%20Knesset%20by%20Prime%20Minister%20Eshkol.aspx> (accessed 20 December 2013).
3. This phrase was first used in Jensehaugen (2019) but is here developed more fully as an ideological prism for understanding Begin.
4. MemCon, 10 August 1977 (FRUS 2013, pp. 435–50).
5. Quandt to Brzezinski, 17 December 1977, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection Box 13, Middle East—Negotiations [10-77–12-77].
6. Transmission of Texts of Israeli Peace Proposal to President Sadat, 27 December 1977, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection Box 13, Middle East—Negotiations [10-77–12-77].
7. Ibid.
8. Statement to the Knesset by Prime Minister Begin presenting Israel’s peace plan, 28 December 1977 (Medzini 1981, pp. 278–279).
9. The Situation Room to Inderfruth for Brzezinski, April 1978 [date unclear], Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, NLC-4-11-2-14-8.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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