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ABSTRACT

This article offers a new understanding of the thought of Theodor Herzl (1860–1904) by reading it as political theology. It does so by identifying a neglected connection between two seemingly disparate themes: the Jewish Question and imperial visions of islands. Using these tropes to read Herzl's utopian novel *Altneuland*, I identify three pillars of Herzl's political theology: redemption through technology, the centrality of Zion, and active messianism. Herzl believed in the power of technology to transform social conditions. The second pillar, the centrality of Zion, shows the founding of an ideal society cannot occur on the island but only in Palestine. Finally, Herzk offers a vision of active messianism combining Christian-imperial epistemology with the Jewish precedence of the seventeenth-century false messiah Shabbtai Zvi.

KEYWORDS

Theodor Herzl; Zionism; Jewish thought; utopia; Palestine

There is an old joke about a shipwrecked Jew, alone on a desert island for many years. When he was finally found, his rescuers discover that he had built a life for himself. He had shelter, plenty of food, and two synagogues. "Hey! Why'd you built two synagogues?" one of the sailors asked him. "This," the man pointed to one: "is my synagogue. And the other one there is the one I would never set foot in!"[1]

Jews and islands are no joking matter. Both are objects of imperial projection with real-life manifestation; they are crucial in the way many empires define themselves vis-à-vis an Other. The so-called Jewish Question was about the civil and political rights of Jews in the modern polity.[2] It occupies a special position in European thought because Jews have long been conceived as the theological other of Christianity. Conceptions of the place of Jews in society were not just legal (granting or denying rights), but also geographical (the physical space to which and in which Jews belonged), and theological (the role of the Jew in redemption).[3]

The Jewish Question is a societal question whose borders extend beyond the homogeneity of the nation-state to imperial perception of otherness.[4] Similarly, islands function in imperial imaginaries as symbols of this expansion in space and time. They are a

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[1]Singer, "The 10 Best, Most Classic Jewish Jokes."
[2]Toury, "'The Jewish Question'"; Sorkin, *Jewish Emancipation*.
[3]Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*; Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism*; Baker, *Jew*.
[4]Feller, *The Jewish Imperial Imagination*; Case, *The Age of Questions*; Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony*.

not-yet conquered territory where wild people live, while at the same time they are spaces acquired, conquered, exploited or civilized.[5] The Roman empire, the model-empire for subsequent European attempts, defined the civilized world in terms of its borders. Beyond the empire are the barbarians. Similarly, empires seek to expand in time and survive into perpetuity. Drawing on 2. Thessalonians 2:6 and Eusebius, Carl Schmitt suggested that an empire can serve as a *katechon*, that which holds the antichrist at bay. Empires do all in their power to survive, while their potential downfall is already implied.[6] This idea is expressed in views of Judaism as the predecessor of Christianity and Jews as ancient people, as it is present in the idea of the island as a pristine place untouched by time.

While attention has been given to both tropes, the Jew and the island are rarely discussed together. This article offers a reading of the motif of the island in relation to the Jewish settlement in Palestine in Theodor Herzl's utopian novel *Altneuland* (Old-New Land). *Altneuland* tells the story of Friedrich Löwenberg, a Viennese Jew traumatized by the loss of two close friends and brokenhearted when the woman he loves gets engaged. Löwenberg replies to a newspaper announcement seeking an "educated, desperate, young man" (I.1).[7] The ad was published by an outwardly misanthropic but gentle Americanized Prussian aristocrat named Kingscourt. Kingscourt had made a fortune and after years of traveling on a private yacht, he purchased a "a rocky little nest in the Cook's Archipelago" (I.4) to which he and Löwenberg would retire, leaving behind European society and all its malaises. Before departing for the island, however, Löwenberg gives a large sum of money to David Littwak, a poor Jewish boy he met on the streets of Vienna. Later in the novel, Löwenberg reencounters Littwak as a leading figure in the New Society formed in Palestine while he and Kingscourt were on the island.

I contend that the present–absent island in the novel serves as a cipher for Herzl's political theology. That Herzl himself was not an observant Jew, and that his project was that a modern secular one, does not detract from the possibility of finding its theological underpinning. On the contrary, it calls for it.[8] Accordingly, this article is structured around what I identify as the three pillars of Herzl's political theology that are central to *Altneuland*'s juxtaposition of the island and Palestine: redemption through technology, the centrality of Zion as an idea and place, and active messianism. The first section explains Herzl's faith in technology's redemptive quality. The comparison with the island shows that technology is a necessary but insufficient condition for ideal living. The second section is dedicated to the centrality of Zion in Herzl's political theology. Given Herzl's willingness to explore alternative locations for a Jewish polity such as Argentina or British Uganda, this somewhat surprising conclusion draws on deep Jewish and Christian visions of the place of the Jew in the world. The final section explores the need for action rather than messianic waiting in order to realize this utopia. A central figure underlying Herzl's political theology on this issue, I show, is the seventeenth-century CE messianic figure of Shabbtai Zvi.

[5]Loxley, *Problematic Shores*; Riquet, *The Aesthetics of Island Space*.
[6]Schmitt, *Political Theology II*, 92; Meuter, *Der Katechon*; Cacciari, *The Withholding Power*; Hell, *The Conquest of Ruins*.
[7]Herzl, *Altneuland: The Old-New-Land*. All references are in the main text (Book.Chapter).
[8]Zionism is often described in secular terms, see Stanislawski, *Zionism: A Very Short Introduction*, 1–10; Penslar, *Zionism: An Emotional State*, 19–36. The secular itself, however, is not a neutral category: Schmitt, *Political Theology*; Asad, *Formations of the Secular*.

Describing Herzlian thought in terms of political theology merits justification. The study of Jewish political theology mostly ignores Herzl, despite his importance in Jewish political history. There are two possible reasons for this exclusion. First, the definition of what constitutes political theology, namely whether it is "a body of thought that includes and is inspired by the writings of the Weimar jurist Carl Schmitt," or a broader field that includes a sustained engagement with the concept of sovereignty and the analogies between theological and political concepts.[9] Herzl would be precluded from the first, having died almost twenty years before Schmitt published *Political Theology*. But he could be included in the latter because of his engagement with questions of Jewish sovereignty and theological themes in a secularized form.

The second reason for the exclusion of Herzl is the highbrow canon of Jewish political theology, which includes thinkers such as Leo Strauss or Walter Benjamin. As a politician and feuilletonist, middlebrow thinker, Herzl does not fit the mold.[10] Treating Herzl as a thinker engaged in Jewish political theology calls for an expansion of the canon and methods of Jewish political theology. There are, after all, cases in which political theologies are expressed in literary accounts before they become doctrines. Susanne Zantop, for example, has shown how German colonial fantasies, long before their realization, were manifested in travelogues and tales of faraway lands.[11]

Utopian literature such as *Altneuland* is especially apt for examining political theology as the genre includes a critique of contemporary society along with a vision of a better, perfect alternative. The novel is closely aligned with other utopias, including the imagination of a better, far of place, the critique of the contemporary moment, and the physical and spiritual transformation of the protagonist. It also shares specific characteristics with contemporary Jewish utopias, for example the focus on Zion and the rebuilding of the Temple.[12] Like them, the *Altneuland* contains a political vision that is steeped in religious themes. Yet it is not a mere utopian vision. Herzl insisted that while *Altneuland*'s form is utopia, the content is realizable, as suggested by the motto of the work is "*wenn ihr wollt, ist es kein Märchen*" – and if you will it, it is no fairytale. *Altneuland* is therefore both an ideal, and a programmatic statement on how to realize it.

Redemption through technology

Herzl was fascinated with technology and modern bureaucracy, which he saw as essential to the Zionist project.[13] His political pamphlet *Der Judenstaat* (1896) offered a "modern solution to the Jewish Question" (the subtitle of the work) in the form of a state that is based on bureaucracy and technology. "The word 'impossible,'" he wrote "has ceased to exist in the vocabulary of technical science."[14] In *Altneuland*, technology exemplifies a combination of imperial idea of expansion, to the island and to Palestine.

[9]Kavka, "The Unevenness of Political Theology," 699; cf. Vatter, *Living Law: Jewish Political Theology*, 2.
[10]For example Rashkover and Kavka, *Judaism, Liberalism, and Political Theology*; on the importance of the middlebrow category, see Gordan, *Postwar Stories*.
[11]Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies*; Lloyd and True, "What Political Theology Could Be"; Lupo, "Introduction to Roundtable Discussion," 611.
[12]Eliav-Feldon, "'If You Will It, It Is No Fairy Tale'"; Bach, *Tropics of Vienna*.
[13]See, among others, Shamis, "Power and Technology," n2–4 therein; Penslar, *Zionism and Technocracy*, 41–59; Peck, *Im Labor der Utopie*.
[14]Herzl, *The Jewish State*, book IV.

Kingscourt and Löwenberg's decision to leave Europe for the island inversly relates to earlier discussion about islands as a solution to the Jewish Question. In response to Christian Wilhelm Dohm's argument that granting civil rights to Jews would allow them to become contributing members to the polity, the Protestant theologian Johann David Michaelis made clear in 1782 that he thought Mosaic law and racial features – the Jews are in his eyes an "unmixed race of a more southern people" – made Jewish emancipation on a German soil impossible. The potential usefulness of the Jews, he argued, might be found in "agriculture and manufacturing," but "[the Jews] would become even more useful, if we had sugar islands which from time to time could depopulate the European fatherland, sugar islands which, with the wealth they produce, nevertheless have an unhealthy climate." As Jonathan Hess notes, Prussia did not possess these islands at the time, making Michaelis' suggestion a twofold fantasy: sending away Jews and owning distant islands.[15] A similar suggestion that year connected Jews and islands by offering that "all European powers should designate an island in the Atlantic Sea and turn it into a deportation or relocation place for Jews."[16] The island here is the whip, emancipation is the carrot. Jews would receive civic rights, but any failure to fulfill their duties could result in deportation to a penal colony, akin to Australia or the French Devil's Island.

The islands in polemical writings on the Jewish Question often went unnamed, but they were consistently conceptualized as distant and isolated locations. It was their distance from civilization that made them ideal for Jews. The most famous expression of the idea of sending Jews to remote islands was made by the late nineteenth-century antisemitic orientalist Paul de Lagarde, who prescribed expelling Jews to Madagascar as a solution to the Jewish Question. His suggestion was taken up in Nazi Germany. A memorandum by Adolf Eichmann proposes the Madagascar Plan as a solution to the Jewish Question. The plan was to resettle half a million Jews a year, over a period of four years. Madagascar would become an S.S. controlled territory to which Jews would be deported. In the Nazi worldview, Madagascar was to serve as a kind of reserve or huge ghetto for a dying species. The British blockade of the seas meant that the plan was put on hold and then abandoned with the adoption of the Final Solution.[17] Ideas of making Europe *judenrein* thus intersected at times with fantasies of islands as reserves, penal colonies, and empty spaces. The island and the Jew are imagined as complementing each other and are in line with an imperial fantasy of purity and conquest. Ideas about island Jewish settlements, it is worth noting, were not limited to antisemites. Already in the 1820s Mordecai M. Noah hoped for a Jewish settlement and place of refuge in an island north of Buffalo, New York that he called Ararat, after the mountain where his biblical namesake's ark stopped.[18]

Herzl's political theology imagines imperial expansion, but not by violent means. Kingscourt's island in *Altneuland* is privately owned by this American-Prussian.[19] The idea of expansion through purchase, or long-term lease of the land, was central also to

[15]Quoted in Hess, *Germans, Jews and the Claims of Modernity*, 82. On the agricultural discourse of Jewish farmer, see Zalkin, "Can Jews Become Farmers?"; Zirkle, "Re-Forming Professions."
[16]Quoted in Toury, "Emanzipation und Judenkolonien," 31–2.
[17]Lagarde, *Deutsche Schriften*, II.23; Brechtken, *"Madagaskar für die Juden"*, esp. 16–18; Sieg, *Germany's Prophet*, 258–78.
[18]Rovner, *In the Shadow of Zion*, 14–43.
[19]On the importance of the United States for German understandings of empire, see Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire*.

Herzl's vision for Palestine. Herzlian political theology recognizes that Jews, at least in his time, do not constitute a sovereign political unit and must rely on other means. Drawing on longstanding fantasies about the relation between Jews and money, Herzl believed that Jews could support the Ottoman Empire's deteriorating finances in exchange to the territory (IV.2).[20] As we will see in the next section, he made a similar argument regarding the acceptance of Zionism by the local Arab population because of the economic benefits brought by Zionist settlement.

The island in *Altneuland* highlights imperial expansion through technology in Herzl's political theology. In Vienna, Kingscourt describes his island: Men from nearby Rarotonga built a comfortable home, hidden by the cliff, and there are two servants, a Tahitian who Kingscourt saved from suicide, and a Black servant from his American period. They serve as a reminder that no island, even a fantasy island, is truly isolated. As Epeli Hau'ofa suggests, instead of thinking of islands, we should think about the archipelago as an intertwined network of social, economic, and geographical interconnectedness.[21] Herzl's description exposes how this tension in the island as metaphor is present already in what is otherwise a standard European discourse. The servants are the conditions that make island living possible, but they are not characters in and of themselves. We never hear from any of them, nor are they mentioned after the initial, demeaning description. Kingscourt needs Löwenberg, the former explains, so that he "shall not unlearn human speech" (I.4) and have someone with him when he dies. The servants are clearly not treated as fully human in this narrative. In the discussion of the island, Herzl expresses an imperial imagination that is aligned with the racializing logic of empire.

Herzl's description of the island draws from the genre of utopian literature starting with Thomas More. In More's *Utopia* (1516), the ideal life on the island is described as achieved through an engineering feat, the incision of the land in a way that creates the island and completely detaches it from civilization.[22] Following the Age of Exploration, the idea of getting stranded on an island captivated the European imagination. The genre known as Robinsonades or "cast away" novels included more than five hundred works produced between 1788 and 1918. Among the common tropes are the idea of a lonely white European man on a seemingly desolate island, the making of the island habitable for said man, as well as the encounter with the local natives of the island and attempts to civilize them. This "cast away" literature created a shared common understanding among the reading public of the island as a place that is either dangerous because it is uncivilized (stories with instances of cannibalism are prevalent), and a place of where new forms of governance and control could be imagined. Island narratives helped create and perpetuate a justification for empire by distinguishing civilized and uncivilized and stressing paradoxically the remoteness and isolation of the island while also showing the potential for being tamed and economically developed.[23]

Kingscourt's island incorporates several strands of this imperial epistemology that are central to Herzl's political theology: imperial expansion, technological supremacy, and, through the presence of Löwenberg and the context of the novel, the Jewish Question.

[20]Herzl, *The Jewish State*, II; on Jews and money, see Rosenthal and Volovici, *Jews, Money, Myth*.
[21]Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands"; Pugh, "Island Movements."
[22]Rokem, "Making Use of Prose," 209; Jameson, "Morus: The Generic Window," 447.
[23]DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots*, 12; Weaver-Hightower, *Empire Islands*, ix.

The island in *Altneuland* is dependent upon Western technology while being contrasted with Europe as a place of refuge from civilization. This is evident in another story which shows the ties Herzl saw between the idea of the island and technology. In the "The Steerable Airship" (1896) we once again have a story of someone who decides to desert society, after being ridiculed and initially spurned by a woman. The protagonist of this narrative, however, is a scientist who invented a new flying vehicle on an isolated island. At the end of the story, he sinks his machine, not wanting it to be used by the society who rejected him.[24]

Europe is one counterpart to the island; Palestine is the other. On the way to the island, Kingscourt and Löwenberg stop in the port of Jaffa in Palestine, then under Ottoman rule. Its "alleys were dirty, neglected, full of vile odors." Significantly, it is described through an Orientalist gaze as a crowded, multi-ethnic space, "everywhere misery in bright Oriental rags. Poor Turks, dirty Arabs, timid Jews lounged about – indolent, beggarly, hopeless" (I.6). Palestine is dirty, the island is pristine; Palestine is full of people from various ethnicities and religions, the island is empty; Palestine is backward technologically, the island is full of modern amenities.

Some positive developments, such as new Jewish agrarian colonies, are noted in 1903, but the protagonists seem happy to leave Palestine for the island. This image of Palestine is very different than what Kingscourt and Löwenberg discover twenty years later, when they revisit the land on a stop on the way back to Europe. What they find is a fulfillment of Herzl's Zionist vision. Since they last visited Palestine, the New Society for the Colonization of Palestine leased the right to settle in the land from the Ottoman Empire and turned it into a model society. New, modern settlements have sprung and historical cities such as Tiberias and Jerusalem have been thoroughly modernized. Haifa took over the Suez Canal as the main connector between Europe and Asia. Economically, the New Society is run by shared cooperatives of shareholders and workers. It produces plentiful electricity, has a canal connecting to the Mediterranean and Dead Seas, and a modernized agricultural industry whose cheeses rival France and Switzerland, and its tobacco is on par with that of Havana (III.1, III.5).

The Palestine of 1903 in the novel was contrasted negatively with the island. The latter signified solitude and comfort based on European advancement. The former was loud, crowded, dirty, and backwards. By contrast, the transformed Palestine of 1923 shares a central feature with Kingscourt's island. The settlement project succeeds according to Herzl's political theology, because of a sophisticated mechanism of raising capital, organizing settlements, and technological and bureaucratic efficiency.[25]

Technology is in this sense not just a utilitarian means to an end, but an essential component of the redemptive-utopian vision. To explain this connection between technology, expansion, and theology, a contemporary parallel is helpful. Mary-Jane Rubenstein has shown that the Corporate Space Race, whose two main protagonists are Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos, combines belief in technology with a vision of settlement and expansion that draws on Christian and imperial interpretations of biblical books such as Genesis and Joshua.[26] Nowadays as in Herzl's times, there is a connection between technology and a messianic vision.

[24]Herzl, "Das lenkbare Luftschiff (1896)"; Penslar, *Theodor Herzl*, 112–13.
[25]Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History*, 338–50.

The theological background is further manifested in a scene in *Altneuland* that takes place during the Passover. After the seder, briefly described, the participants listen to the story of the Jewish emigration from Europe on a gramophone, that is to say, another technological device. The history is told by the otherwise absent Joseph Levy, "the man who carried through the new Jewish national project" (IV.1). Neither a politician nor an inventor, Levy is an organizational focal point. He finds the best technologies and their utilizations and sends scientific and technological emissaries to acquire them. The New Society is thus not based on the invention of new technology ex nihilo but on utilizing existing options (IV.3). Placing this vision within the Passover seder gives this techno-optimism a redemptive underpinning. The narrative in Book IV mirrors the retelling of the story of the biblical Exodus story recited in a traditional Passover seder. The retelling delivers a secularized second coming of the Jews to the Promised Land. It is thanks to technology and efficient bureaucracy, not God, that the modern exodus and redemption of the Jews is made possible – this time not from Egypt but from Europe.

The centrality of Zion

Both the island and Palestine are transformed to fit the modern sensibilities and tastes of Kingscourt and Löwenberg using European technology and the flow of capital. In this, they share the promise of the redemptive power of technology. Technology, however, is a necessary but insufficient condition in Herzl's political theology when it comes to the transformation of the social conditions of the Jews, and humanity. Where technology is being applied matters, and Palestine as a Promised Land serves a special role in *Altneuland*.

The Hebrew Bible and Jewish liturgy are replete with the hope of a Jewish restoration in Zion, expressed, for example, in the traditional rendition of the daily prayer with its longing for a return to Jerusalem and sacrifices in the Temple. At the same time, these prayers and corresponding Biblical verses were deferred to messianic times, because exile was seen not only as a spatial condition but also an existential one.[27] Reflecting on Israeli identity, Zali Gurevtich and Gideon Aran described it as the tension between living in a place like all others and living in relation to the theological meaning of Place (*makom* in Hebrew is both a locale and a name of the divine).[28] Accusations of dual loyalty, which led to the idea of sending Jews to remote islands, played on this idea. If Jews were praying for the return to Palestine, critics of emancipation argued, they cannot be loyal citizens of the fatherland. In the nineteenth century, Jewish religious reformers took pains to remove or amend prayers calling for the restoration of Jerusalem or the ingathering of the exiled, and several leading thinkers reinterpreted Zion to become an idea rather than a physical place.[29]

The messianic hope for a Jewish return to Zion was not limited to Jews. Especially among millenarian Christian groups, the belief was that a Jewish return to the land would be part of the unfolding of the apocalypse and Parousia. This view – known as

[26]Rubenstein, *Astrotopia: The Dangerous Religion*.
[27]Baer, *Galut*; Eisen, *Galut: Modern Jewish Reflection*; Myers, *Re-Inventing the Jewish Past*.
[28]Gurevitch and Aran, "Al Ha-Makom."
[29]Kohler, "Die Wiederentdeckung des Messianismus."

Christian Zionism – was popular in England beginning in the seventeenth century and accompanied by the idea that Jews had a divine right to the land.[30] In 1853, watching the waning power of the Ottoman Empire, Lord Shaftsbury was seized by the idea of a Jewish return. Thinking about the general area of Syria, he wrote it was "a country without a nation" that needed to be matched with "a nation without a country." "Is there such a thing?," he asked rhetorically: "To be sure there is, the ancient and rightful lords of the soil, the Jews!."[31] This sentence was then taken up by the early Zionist writer Israel Zangwill, who claimed in 1901 that "Palestine is a country without a people. The Jews are a people without a country. The regeneration of the soil would bring the regeneration of the people."[32] This sentence has since become a staple of early Zionist ideology, and many who quote it – affirmatively or in order to critique Zionism – often misattribute it, thereby glossing its Christian-imperial epistemology.

The New Society in *Altneuland* reflects a broader vision of redemption of humanity, a secularized version of Isaiah's prophecy that the people will go up the Mount of GOD and learn God's ways, "For the teaching shall come forth from Zion, The word of GOD from Jerusalem" (Is. 2:2–3). My claim that Palestine was central to Herzl's political theology can be contested on the grounds that Herzl's political Zionism searched for a solution to the Jewish Question wherever it could be found. In *Der Judenstaat*, for example, he considered not only Palestine but also Argentina as a viable option.[33] Seen in light of the theological concept of a Jewish mission to the nations, however, the centrality of this theme emerges.

The comparison with the island is once more helpful to elaborate this point. Whereas both places need to be transformed, the island's central characteristic is its isolation. It is significant that no scene takes place on the island proper. We only get a pre-departure description by Kingscourt and an after the fact account. The island is in this sense utopia; the land on which the New Society is founded a specific, historical place.[34] The island offers not only a different spatial configuration but also a different vision of redemption. Serving as a place of refuge only for Löwenberg and Kingscourt, it is an individual solution, as opposed to the vision of the New Society as a collective enterprise of redemption, which is not limited to the Jews.

The New Society is a multicultural, liberal society, especially from a fin de siècle perspective. Arabs and women are granted full legal rights under this model, which Herzl likely drew from Austro-Hungary as a multiethnic empire. It is Vienna minus the antisemitism and bigotry; it is what the empire should have been.[35] The support of the local population is explained in the novel in line with Herzl's political theology of redemption through technology. The Arabs would have no reason to reject the Jewish settlers because they would benefit from the improvement in trade and better and more profitable yields. This attitude is voiced by the character of Rashid Bey, a German educated, wealthy local Arab whose father cooperated with the early Zionist and made a fortune. He symbolizes the rhetoric of civilizing mission under which colonization was often done. Bey is a

[30]Clark, *Allies for Armageddon*; Ariel, *An Unusual Relationship*; Bar-Yosef, *The Holy Land in English Culture*.
[31]Quoted in Garfinkle, "On the Origin, Meaning, Use," 543.
[32]Quoted in Ibid., 540.
[33]Herzl, *The Jewish State*, II.
[34]Eliav-Feldon, "'If You Will It It Is No Fairy Tale,'" 92; Hadomi, "Altneuland: Ein utopischer Roman."
[35]Bach, *Tropics of Vienna*, 84–110; Shumsky, "'This Ship Is Zion!'."

counterpoint to Jewish assimilation. But whereas Bey's assimilation is celebrated, Löwenberg's is presented as a cause of distress. Löwenberg could go to the island or Palestine. For Rashid Bey – the native of Palestine – the only possibility in the novel is to get on board the Jewish modernizing settlement train. What is given to the Jews in Herzl's political theology is not presented as a viable option for the local Arab population.

Rashid Bey's one-dimensional character is tantamount to a silencing of the local population and its potential opposition to Jewish settlement. Yusuf Diya al-Din Pasha al-Khalidi warned Herzl in 1899 that whatever the merits of Zionism might be, "Palestine is an integral part of the Ottoman Empire, and more gravely, it is inhabited by others … in the name of God, let Palestine be left alone." Herzl, however, dismissed Khalidi's worries, and emphasized his belief that a return of Jews to the land would lead to societal improvements also for the Arabs.[36] The idealized Arab Rashid Bey stands in sharp contrast to real-world concerns.

Der Judenstaat, as its name makes clear, advocates for a state of the Jews. This state would be dependent upon Europe and is described as part of an imperial European expansion into the Middle East. The state would serve, Herzl claimed, as a "rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism. We should as a neutral State remain in contact with all Europe, which would have to guarantee our existence."[37] By contrast, the New Society in *Altneuland* is not a sovereign state. The Jews in the novel lease the territory from the Ottoman Empire and in return be granted independent economical, religious, cultural, and legislative institutions, but no army (II.3).[38] Legally, the New Society is a voluntary association with broad autonomy under Ottoman rule. On biographical terms, this might reflect Herzl's changing understanding of the Jewish condition once he felt he reached a diplomatic dead-end regarding Palestine. As a statement of political theology, it implies that the Jewish mission to the world, and the transformation of Jewish life are grounded in the age-old idea of a return to the Promised Land, but that such a dramatic political change need not be based on the prevalent model of a sovereign nation-state.

The new society Herzl envisioned enables Jews to contribute to the betterment of humanity. Such an idea draws on a twin inspiration: the imperial discourse of civilizing mission to the improvement of the natives and a modern translation of the theological ideas of Jewish election and prophetic future as promoting good in the world.[39] The settlement in Palestine as a modern solution to the Jewish Question, Herzl argued, would also benefit those Jews left in Europe, as well as Europe as a whole. In the twenty years in which Kingscourt and Löwenberg were on the island, they are told, increasing persecutions and growing antisemitism led to organized mass Jewish emigration. Once it began, it opened opportunities for Jews, as well as to Christians, who did not have to economically compete with them. This led in turn to true emancipation also for the Jews who decided not to emigrate, and they are now truly welcomed as equal citizens (II.2, III.6).

Herzl fantasizes on a truly global scale. In *Altneuland*, the bacteriologist Steineck desires to find a cure for malaria so that the "opening of Africa" might be achieved

[36]Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine*, 6–9; see also Said, "Zionism from the Standpoint."
[37]Herzl, *The Jewish State*, II.
[38]Shumsky, *Beyond the Nation-State*, 50–89.
[39]Feller, *The Jewish Imperial Imagination*, 26–41; Sutcliffe, *What Are Jews For?*

and a mass emigration of "the surplus populations of Europe" made possible. Curing malaria would not only help European, but also the local population. "Now that I have lived to see the restoration of the Jews," Steineck says, "I should like to pave the way for the restoration of the Negroes" (III.5).[40] For Steineck the two problems are connected: the Jewish solution is applicable to Blacks as well. Because the New Society succeeded, one may hope for other similar achievements. The New Society thus stands as a model for the world, and Löwenberg explicitly notes in the end of the novel that the New Society is possible elsewhere (VI.6). This corresponds to the idea that technological redemption is grounded on existing innovations, and that societies can progress beyond their current state of bigotry.

Herzl's political theology exemplifies a dialectic between the particular and universal in a messianic vision of a Jewish return. Alongside suggesting the New Society as a model, *Altneuland* implies that there is something singular about the Jewish settlement in the land. This uniqueness is tied to the characteristics of the land. The novel shows a constant emphasis on the need to terraform Palestine, for example by drainage of swamps, as well as on the reliance on the properties of that very same land, for example the Dead Sea, in the process of redemption. Although these two tendencies seem to stand in tension, they both highlight that it is the land itself – when combined with technological redemption – that makes the enterprise successful. Furthermore, the economic success of the New Society is based also in its location as a crossroad between continents (II.1). This cartography of Palestine contrasts it with the island. Palestine is not an isolated, closed island, but a thriving trade hub.

One final feature of the New Society that is of note for Herzl's political theology is its religious pluralism. The Passover seder in the novel includes German, Russian, and English Christian clergymen. The Reverend Mr. Hopkins, "reminded his colleagues of the Easter riots in the old days, and rejoiced that those old quarrels had been resolved into new harmonies." Another priest replies: "He has risen indeed" (IV.1). This Christian statement in the seder shows that religious differences are preserved while losing their vitriolic tension. The two competing visions of redemption in Easter and Passover are still practiced, but they are no longer a cause for enmity between Jews and Christians.[41]

In a scathing review, Ahad Ha'am lambasted the novel's lack of specifically Jewish content. Herzl, he argued, universalizes the Jewish ideal society to such an extent that the same book could have been written with only minor changes by proponents of a Black return to Africa. Ahad Ha'am was also highly critical of Herzl's description of the rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem, which is in line with the aforementioned prayers. He drew attention to the fact that the Dome of the Rock and Al Aqsa Mosque now stand at the same historical space, and Herzl does not reflect on the exact location of the Temple.[42] This important critique is in line with Herzl's dismissal of the concern expressed by Khalidi. The space occupied by the native does not prefigure into his colonial framework.

[40]On the intersection of these questions, see Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 187–224; Bornstein, *The Colors of Zion*.
[41]Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 56–90.
[42]Ahad Ha'am, "Altneuland."

Furthermore, Herzl's rebuilt Temple feels like a Viennese liberal synagogue. There are no animal sacrifices and when Friedrich Löwenberg listens to the music in the rebuilt Temple, his thoughts go to Heinrich Heine's "Hebrew Melodies," and not some ancient rites (V.1).[43] Löwenberg's inner monologue in the Temple is important in showing how this Jewish mission is to be achieved. He sees in the Temple, modernized and with electric power, the restoration of the Jews, which allows them to work for humanity: "Yet a man, to be a man, must have both freedom and the feeling of community. Only when the Jews had both could they rebuild the house of the Invisible and Almighty God" (V.1). This is part of the dialectic between the different solutions to the Jewish Question as expressed in the novel. In Europe, Jews were identified as a community, and were persecuted. On the island, Löwenberg and Kingscourt were free, but did not have community. Zion symbolizes collective national restoration tied to messianic times and is the sublation of these two poles.

Active messianism

Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin argues that exile from the land was understood not only as a spatial but also as a temporal condition. Exile marked the end of Jewish history. The mere idea of a Jewish return to history – whether through historiography or through a return to the land – is already predicated on a Christian perspective, namely that the Jews have a role to play in the process of redemption.[44] Unlike views that deferred the return of the Jews to the Promised Land until the days of the messiah, Herzl believed the time is ripe.

The theological underpinning of this pillar of Herzlian political theology, which I call active messianism, is found in the figure Shabbtai Zvi, the seventeenth-century messianic figure from Izmir. While Zvi had many supporters, there was also fierce rabbinic opposition. The unrest in the Ottoman Empire led to his arrest and he was given the option to convert to Islam or die. Zvi chose the former, which led on the one hand to a radical break in messianic hopes, and on the other to the development of an esoteric theology that encouraged the breaking of the commandments as a way of hastening redemption. Most significantly for our purpose, followers of Zvi, believing that they were living in the early days of the messianic era, prepared themselves for immigration to the Holy Land.[45]

The protagonists in *Altneuland* go with their hosts to watch an opera on Shabbtai Zvi, described as a "false messiah" who "succeeded in creating a large movement among the Oriental Jews, but in the end he himself became a renegade from Judaism and ended ignominiously" (II.6). The choice of this theme for the opera within the novel exposes several facets of Herzl's political theology. First, Zvi is a signifier of heresy vis-à-vis rabbinic authorities. Herzl was neither the first nor the last to write on the false messiah. The renewed interest in Shabbtai Zvi was part of a broader trend in the Jewish world that included a re-evaluation of other heretics, such as the Talmudic sage Elisha ben Abuya (known as Aher) and Spinoza.[46] This reincorporation of heretics was meant as a rejection of rabbinic authority in favor of a new interpretation of Jewishness based on national

[43]Ibid.
[44]Raz-Krakotzkin, "Exile, History, and the Nationalization of Jewish Memory"; Raz-Krakotzkin, "Jewish Memory Between Exile and History."
[45]Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*.

belonging. Shabbtai Zvi offers a non-rabbinic Judaism, which fits Herzl's model of organized religion as non-coercive. In *Der Judenstaat*, Herzl argued that rabbis should be confined to their synagogues the same way soldiers are confined to their barracks.[47] He felt that organized religion should be put in check otherwise it might run amok. In *Altneuland*, this point is reiterated through a subplot involving a fanatic rabbi Geyer who runs for election. That the rabbi loses the election implies that in the New Society such views have no place (III.2).

Second, Shabbtai Zvi is a marker of messianic activity that rallies the Jews to the Holy Land. The same could be said, *mutatis mutandis*, on Herzl. Reflecting on the quinquagenary of Herzl's *Judenstaat*, Hannah Arendt made this point by claiming that the Sabbatian movement was the first and only time until Zionism that Jews tried to "change their conditions by direct political action." Zvi prefigures Herzl, and the latter's "lasting greatness" was his "will to action" that was "utterly revolutionary in Jewish life."[48] Arendt's is a narrow understanding of political action, depicting life in the diaspora as apolitical, but her argument highlights how the Sabbatian movement represents an almost unparalleled Jewish energy invoked by a charismatic leader.[49]

Even before Arendt, Herzl and his contemporaries sometimes compared him to Shabbtai Zvi. After a certain Mr. Friedmann reminded him of Zvi's story during a Passover seder in 1896, Herzl wondered whether this was meant to imply "that I should become such a Shabbtai. Or Did he mean, I am already one?"[50] In a diary entry from June 1900, he insisted, however, on differentiating himself: Zvi "made himself great to be like the great ones of the world, whereas I find the great just as small as I am."[51] Despite Herzl's seeming self-deprecating tone, such a statement contains a self-aggrandizing point, as it places Herzl on par with not only a significant movement in Jewish history but also with world leaders. Traces of this position are found in *Altneuland* when David Littwak notes that Zvi reflected a need and "soothed a yearning […] The longing creates the messiah" (II.6). The same can be said of Herzl, who was able to tap into the Jewish zeitgeist.

Third, Herzl uses the figure of Shabbtai Zvi to point out the connection between what I call active messianism and the first pillar discussed above, redemption through technology. Sarah Littwak notes in *Altneuland* that Zvi "seemed to have been a dreamer originally" (II.6). This is precisely what led his movement astray. Following one's dreams and passions without an organized plan, Herzl implies, is a grave mistake. By contrast, the Herzlian vision is based on the redemptive power of technology and bureaucratic organization. It is based on a particular European imagination that functions not only vis-à-vis the local Arab population and the Ottoman Empire, but also, more implicitly, aimed toward non-European Jews, which are absent from positive descriptions of the new society.

Finally, Herzl's understanding of Zvi, as David Biale shows, is grounded in an Orientalist gaze that identifies the orient with being overly emotional and passionate, both in

[46]Biale, "Historical Heresies and Modern Jewish Identity"; Lazier, *God Interrupted*; Schwartz, *The First Modern Jew*; Feller, "From Aher to Marcion."
[47]Herzl, *The Jewish State*, 146.
[48]Arendt, "The Jewish State," 377.
[49]Cf. Cooper and Brody, "The Study of Jewish Politics," 1–8.
[50]Herzl, *Tagebücher, 1895–1904*, I.363.
[51]Ibid., II.458.

terms of sexual desires and his messianic vision.[52] Just as the messianic vision is tamed through what Herzl considered proper organized activity, so is the question of gender. Michael Gluzman identifies Herzl's main concern as a longing for Jewish masculinity that stands in contrast to descriptions of the Jewish body at fin-de-siecle Vienna.[53] The contrast between Palestine and the island further highlights the question of gender. The island is a space of implied homoeroticism between Kingscourt and Löwenberg. There are no women on the island and it is no coincidence that Kingscourt, Löwenberg, and even the servant travel to it after despairing from women. Löwenberg and Kingscourt aged well while on the island, and Löwenberg in particular is described as having transformed physically (II.1). The protagonists' physical change suggests that the island is a place of physical growth of these men. But it is not social growth, which is tied to the settlement in the New Society in Palestine. The novel ends with Löwenberg not only staying in Palestine but also marrying David Littwak's sister Miriam. As a conclusion to the novel, this marks a completion of the protagonist's transformation from a melancholic, single Viennese Jew to a masculine, heteronormative man in the New Society.

Conclusion

In 1952, Hannah Arendt warned that "The Jewish settlement in Palestine may become a very important factor in the development of the Near East, but it will always remain a comparatively small island in an Arab sea."[54] She meant it as a warning. Without adopting a strong relation to its surrounding, one of peace rather than mere armistice, the young Israeli state will likely not survive.[55] Arendt tellingly draws on the island metaphor of isolation amidst a potentially hostile sea. This view of the State of Israel as an island is still very much prevalent in contemporary political discourse. That Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East is by now a worn phrase that evokes an island of Western civilization amidst a sea of barbarism. Drawing on a different metaphor with even starker colonial imagery, Ehud Barak, at the time the Minister of Defense, called the State of Israel a "Villa in the Jungle."[56]

This article has shown that the connection between Palestine and the idea of the island has a long history in imperial epistemology and discussions of the Jewish Question. This interweaving finds its expression in the political theology of Theodor Herzl and his "modern solution to the Jewish Question." The island in *Altneuland* is ultimately rejected because it is a place of solitude and lack of messianic activity. The alternative, drawing on Jewish and Christian understandings of the place of the Jew in the world, is the settlement of the Jews in Palestine. Put differently, Herzl uses the imperial trope of the island to show the necessity of Palestine. Löwenberg and Kingscourt's decision to depart for the island represents an individual, and in this sense selfish, act. The New Society, by contrast, is based on taking collective, bureaucratically, and technologically advanced action in Palestine, the New Society manages to make use of the land and help the rest of the world.

[52]Biale, "Shabbtai Zvi and the Seductions," 94–7.
[53]Gluzman, "The Desire for Heterosexuality."
[54]Arendt, "Peace or Armistice in the Near East?" *The Jewish Writings*, 472.
[55]See also Kahanoff, "Israel: Ambivalent Levantine."
[56]Baruch, "The Minister of Defense: We are a Villa in the Jungle"; Shiffer, "Opinion: The Only Democracy."

Herzl's belief in the redemptive power of technology in Palestine is still very much part of the Israeli contemporary ethos as an economic miracle and a Start-Up Nation.[57] There is an unbridgeable gulf, however, between *Altneuland* and today. Herzl's political theology insists on the benefits of the Jewish settlement for the Jew, the local population, and humankind. In *Altneuland*, Rashid Bey exemplifies the local population's endorsement of the Zionist enterprise thanks to the technological improvements it brings. In reality, Israeli technology often serves as means of security, control and oppression, turning Herzl's utopian vision into a Palestinian dystopia.[58] Despite the motto of the novel, "and if you will it, it is no fairytale," Herzl's story lands differently today: a distant, unrealistic fairytale for some, a nightmare for others.

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[57]Senor and Singer, *Start-Up Nation*.

[58]Zureik, Lyon, and Abu-Laban, *Surveillance and Control in Israel/Palestine*; Handel and Dayan, "Multilayered Surveillance in Israel/Palestine"; on Palestinian dystopian writing, see Ghalayini, *Palestine +100*.

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