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# Annexation in right-wing Israeli discourse—The case of *Ribonut*

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The one-state reality has dramatically changed the discursive landscape of the movement of Israeli settlers and their supporters who have waged a half century campaign to prevent territorial compromise as a basis for Israeli-Palestinian peace. Analysis of the discourse of the *Sovereignty* movement, as reflected in the pages of its journal, *Ribonut*, traces these changes and highlights the new challenges posed to the annexationist project by the prospect of the attainability of its goals and the necessity to confront the “Arab problem.”

## KEYWORDS

sovereignty, Israel, annexation, *Ribonut*, discourse, one-state reality, Arabs, Israeli-Palestinian conflict

## The reality of one-state

The State of Israel has dominated the West Bank<sup>1</sup> and Gaza Strip, and lives of their inhabitants, for 55 years. That is about three times longer than the period, between 1948 and 1967, during which the exercise of the state’s power was limited to the territory enclosed by the 1949 armistice lines. This simple fact means that Israel can no longer usefully be seen as inhabited by 9 million citizens, 800,000 of whom live in territory outside its borders (in communities located beyond the Green Line). Rather, Israel is a state inhabited by more than 14 million persons, only two-thirds of whom are citizens. Inhabitants of this state live in different zones, belong to different castes, enjoy different rights, and are protected or oppressed by different laws. What marks them all as inhabitants of the same state is that their property rights and life chances are mainly, if not entirely, a function of decisions made by governments of the state named Israel.

This one-state reality has arisen as a result of “*de facto* annexation,” a process of settlement, infrastructural integration, and institutional routinization, that began in the early 1970s, accelerated sharply after the rise of the Likud to power in 1977, and advanced in subsequent decades past every political “point of no return” imagined by either its

1 The term “West Bank” is the only accurate designation for the area occupied by Israel in 1967 that lies between the 1949 Armistice Lines and the Jordan River. In Israeli discourse the West Bank is usually referred to as “Judea and Samaria” even though those regions do not include the Jordan Valley (which is in the West Bank) and do include portions of the Galilee and the Negev which are not in the West Bank. For convenience sake, in this article the terms “West Bank” and “Judea and Samaria” interchangeably unless specified otherwise.

promoters or its opponents (Lustick, 1993, 2019). While many familiar arguments, such as those over the consequences of additional settlements in the West Bank, the best way to restart negotiations, or the likelihood of significant American pressure toward a peace agreement, have been rendered moot by de facto annexation, other issues have become salient as new processes, conflicts, campaigns, and disputes are set in motion. Indeed, there is hardly any domain in the complex matrix of Israeli-Palestinian relations that is not being transformed by the reconfiguration of Israel from a state that controls territories held apart from itself to a state that has incorporated them into itself.

Though palpably true, the geographical expansion of the Israeli state has not been recognized explicitly or formally in law, neither at the international level nor by the State of Israel itself. Nevertheless, whether formal recognition of this reality matters is not a legal but an empirical question. While the official designation of Israel's boundaries may matter greatly for some purposes, for most, it either may not matter at all or its status as a truth that is known, but not made official, may play a crucial role in how power is exercised within the reality of a single state. Just as many in the Middle East and in the international community prefer official ignorance of an Israeli nuclear arsenal they know exists to official Israeli membership in the nuclear weapons club, so too do many in Jerusalem, Washington, and Ramallah prefer a one-state reality that is officially, though not plausibly, deniable.

Debates over whether to declare or acknowledge Israel's incorporation of some or all of these territories have begun. On the right side of the Israeli political spectrum, but to a degree also on the left, campaigns to formally impose Israeli sovereignty over lands occupied in 1967 have intensified. Nonetheless, in part for the precise reason that the one-state reality contradicts the research programs and political objectives of most interested scholars, relatively little attention has been paid to these efforts. My purpose here is to move scholarly awareness beyond the question of whether Israel will or even can withdraw from its control of all the land between the River and the Sea and begin instead to analyze how those who are engaging with the reality of permanent Israeli rule imagine or advocate the form it should take. In this article I do so by treating the journal *Ribonut* (Sovereignty) as a window into the goals, strategies, and discourse of those (on the right) most committed to permanent and official Israeli rule of all the territories acquired in the 1967 war.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Ribonut* has appeared on average every 6 months since 2014, in both English and Hebrew versions. Almost all articles appearing in English appear also in Hebrew, and vice versa. I will be relying mostly on the English version of the journal, but will occasionally cite articles appearing in Hebrew that did not appear in English.

## The “sovereignty” campaign and journal

Israeli settlers in the West Bank, and in Gaza before their evacuation in 2005, were instruments in the hands of governments who wanted to establish practical, political, and psychological obstacles to future Israeli leaders hoping to achieve a territorial compromise with Palestinians. This population included a very high proportion of militants dedicated to expanding and entrenching the “settlement enterprise” as a heroic expression of Jewish nationalism and thereby make permanent Israeli rule of these territories (Lustick, 1988; Zertal and Eldar, 2005). The Sovereignty Movement was founded in 2011 by Women in Green and other far-right activists as a vehicle for advancing the formal imposition of Israeli sovereignty over the whole Land of Israel, but in particular over Judea and Samaria/the West Bank.

The centerpiece of the movement's campaign is the journal *Ribonut*, the first issue of which appeared in 2013. With a print run reported as 150,000 copies per issue, it currently is perhaps the most prominent vehicles for the views and aspirations of the settler movement. Much can be learned about the consequences of the one-state reality by comparing the questions *Ribonut* highlights, the objectives it promotes, and the arguments it considers worthy of serious attention to those featured in the pages of *Nekuda*, the flagship journal of the settlement movement from 1980 until its closure in 2010.

*Nekuda* appeared almost every month for three decades. Associated with both *Gush Emunim* and, subsequently, the Association of Jewish Local Councils in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza (YESHA); the journal vigorously promoted the redemptionist ideology of the disciples of Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook.<sup>3</sup> Under the founding editorial leadership of Yisrael Harel, it published a wide variety of polemical essays and in-depth analyses. The editors and writers of *Nekuda* tended to see themselves as the intellectual guides of a revolutionary movement committed to settlement of, and permanent Jewish control and Israeli sovereignty over the “whole Land of Israel” as a crucial step in the process of messianic redemption (for the religious majority of what it called “our public”) or toward the fulfillment of the demands of maximalist Zionism and the historical destiny of the Jewish people (for the non-religious minority within that public) (Dolub, 2010). Typical *Nekuda* articles were dense, elaborate, and passionate. They often assumed knowledge of the fine points of nationalist, messianic, political, or social theory. Neither the style nor the vocabulary

<sup>3</sup> Gush Emunim, “Bloc of the Faithful,” was a social movement of Jewish settlers and their supporters of extraordinary importance from the late 1970s through the 1980s. Its fundamentalist commitments gave effective political expression to the messianic and ultranationalist visions of Kook and his students at the Mercaz HaRav Yeshiva.

was designed to attract a wide audience. The main objective was to inspire, recruit, coordinate, mobilize, and leaders of the movement to prevent cession of Israeli control over any territory designated as part of the greater Land of Israel. *Nekuda* editors eventually made attempts to add popular features (including a focus on daily life in the settlements and satirical treatment of the news), but its modest subscriber list of 15,000 was mainly confined to intellectual, political, religious activists and elites along with scholars anxious to understand the Jewish fundamentalist phenomenon. Reportedly, half its subscriptions were held by readers, libraries, and researchers outside of Israel.

Though produced by the same settler movement, committed to the same long-term goals, and featuring in its pages many of the same activists, ideologues, and Rabbis who appeared in *Nekuda*,<sup>4</sup> *Ribonut* presents itself differently, reflecting the fact that opportunities to seal Israeli rule with sovereignty have now displaced threats of territorial withdrawal as the most compelling task faced by settlers and their supporters. Fifteen issues of *Ribonut*, in hard copy and online in both Hebrew and English, appeared between November 2013 and February 2022.<sup>5</sup> The *Ribonut* movement also produces a monthly “Newsletter” for supporters and maintains an active blogging site. In sharp contrast to *Nekuda*, *Ribonut* content is overwhelmingly comprised of 2–3 page interviews with or accounts of speeches with public figures—political party leaders, settler officials, legal experts, planners, architects, and supportive of the sovereignty agenda. While *Nekuda*’s pages were populated by intellectuals, writers, and theorists largely unknown to the general Israeli public, roughly half the interviews and articles in *Ribonut* feature present or former Cabinet ministers and deputy ministers, or ranking and ambitious Members of Knesset. The editors praise the prestige, brilliance, activism, and devotion of their interviewees, stress their credentials, and pose questions they believe will be on the minds of their readers. They do so in a straight-forward simple style, explicating direct quotations in non-technical language. The same style is used in a half-page “Word from the Editors” (Nadia Matar and Yehudit Katsover), which begins each issue by characterizing current events, amplifying a current slogan, and offering warm regards to readers and the entire “right-wing public.”

Virtually every article, interview, and essay in *Ribonut* focuses on the need for sovereignty in Judea and Samaria, or the whole Land of Israel, the costs of its absence, strategies for attaining it, prospects for its accomplishment, the form it should take; the pace and manner in which it should be implemented,

4 Examples include Yisrael Harel, Eliakim Haetzni, Uri Elitzur, Pinchas Wallerstein, Benny Katsover, Haim Druckman, Shlomo Aviner, and Eleazar Waldman.

5 Since 2017 the journal has been published by Bsheva, a weekly that is the most widely distributed newspaper in Israel focused on the religious sector of the Jewish population.

legislation necessary to achieve it, and its implications for the status of Arab inhabitants. Large philosophical, ideological, or theoretical issues, such as the historical destiny of the Jewish people, the status of Zionism in relationship to the enlightenment, or conflicting interpretations of how the process of Messianic redemption is to be realized, are rarely mentioned in the pages of *Ribonut*, and never dealt with in detail. The ethos of *Nekuda* was revolutionary opposition to wayward or even traitorous governments. Its writers struggled to achieve doctrinal coherence and unity so as to effectively challenge prevailing beliefs and institutions. The ethos of *Ribonut*, in contrast, is consolidation and confidence that it represents the dominant force in Israeli political life, and a commitment to enlist the vast majority of Israeli Jews under its banner.

It is not that what *Ribonut* publishes stands in opposition to or contradicts in explicit or implicit ways the beliefs and ambitions that animated contributors to *Nekuda*. Nor is the goal it pursues. The Yesha Council’s founding resolutions in 1980 include as a main objective “application of Israeli sovereignty over all regions of the Land of Israel” (Taub, 2010). What distinguishes *Ribonut* not only from *Nekuda* but from other prominent “fundamentalist” or ultranationalist journals of previous decades, such as *Artzi* and *Nativ*, is a sustained, programmatic campaign of advocacy, including direct attention to and vigorous disagreements about how to solve the most sensitive and difficult problems associated with official steps to change the legal status of the West Bank along with its Jewish Israeli and Palestinian Arab residents. This shift in discursive focus may seem technical, but in fact reflects a fundamental change in the circumstances of Israeli rule and in the substance of political conflict over the future of the country and of Israeli-Palestinian relations.

To be sure, this dramatic change of emphasis in right-wing discourse did not occur overnight. Formal annexation of Judea, Samaria, and Gaza, or legislation to impose Israeli jurisdiction and administration over settlements in those territories, were occasionally demanded by leaders of Gush Emunim, Yesha, and in the pages of *Nekuda*. And in the last years of that journal signs of a shift appeared in the prioritization of annexation and in attention to proper status of Arabs within the state whose borders were to officially expand. In July 2009 the magazine featured a “What is the Alternative?” symposium on the question of the “national camp’s” positive plan for the future—an “alternative” to the left’s hitherto discursively dominant image of a solution based on a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The very fact of the symposium indicates that the political horizon had shifted. Plans to prevent territorial compromise through settlement and infrastructure projects were of no help as the question of whether Israel would rule the territories permanently was replaced by how Israel would rule them. Specifically, that meant figuring out an “alternative,” as the title of the symposium put it, to the nightmare image of a Palestinian state west of the Jordan.

Among the contributors to the symposium was Uri Elitzur, one of the historic leaders of Gush Emunim who went on to hold a variety of high-level positions in different religious and ultranationalist parties. Elitzur served as secretary-general of Yesha, was a confidant of Benjamin Netanyahu, and edited *Nekuda* from 1995 to 2006, following which he became Deputy Editor and then Editor of *Makor Rishon*. He titled his symposium contribution: “Breaking the Taboo,” by which he meant confronting the fact that the right-wing, the settlers, and the entire “national camp,” had never been willing to discuss the impossibility of secure Israeli sovereignty over the territories without, at least eventually, granting full citizenship and political rights to Palestinian inhabitants. While acknowledging that the time for his solution—constitutional entrenchment of Israel as the state of the Jewish people, gradual annexation, heavy policing of Arab communities, and extension of full citizenship to Palestinians in Judea and Samaria—had not yet arrived, it was imperative to face the issue, including demographic realities, and advance a clear vision for what Israel would properly look like in 30 years.

*Nekuda*’s last issue appeared in 2010. Many of *Nekuda*’s writers and editors migrated to a new right-wing, nationalist newspaper—*Makor Rishon*, which offered itself, not as the voice of settlers, but as a daily newspaper for the religious nationalist camp in Israel as a whole. Indeed, Elitzur became deputy editor and then editor-in-chief at *Makor Rishon*. Again, *Ribonut* should not be seen as a successor to *Nekuda* or as a rival, in any fashion, to *Makor Rishon*, though *Ribonut* sometimes republishes articles appearing in *Makor Rishon* and profiles or interviews their authors. *Ribonut* is very much project-oriented. Its success at highlighting annexation and sovereignty as policy options to be exercised in real time and at positioning itself in the vanguard of the national camp, along with the attention it has attracted from the highest echelons of Israeli government, reflect a dramatic shift in the focus and aspirations of some of the most vigorous, energetic, and politically ambitious elements in settler community. In line with Elitzur’s injunction to confront both the necessity of and the problems associated with annexation, if not the substance of his proposal for how to do so, *Ribonut* has provided a platform for the national camp to develop, refine, and coalesce around how to implement sovereignty over all the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.

The strategic objective of the movement and the journal, repeated explicitly and in every issue, is to transform the consciousness of Israeli Jews. By advancing a paradigm for thinking about the future of Israel as resting inevitably upon the incorporation of the entire land of Israel into the psychological, cultural, economic, political, and legal fabric of the state, what is portrayed as the insane idea of dividing the land into two states can be overthrown and, eventually, driven from the agenda of argument and policy debate. Practically speaking that means that an Israeli political discourse dominated by questions of how much of the territories, acquired in 1967,

are to be relinquished in return for peace is to be replaced by one dominated by questions, within the one-state reality, about how and when to implement official annexation and sovereignty over territories that in any event will never be relinquished. Accordingly, *Ribonut* encourages vigorous debate about these questions while paying careful attention to the discursive implications of terminology.

I now turn to a more systematic analysis of *Ribonut* articles, focusing on themes and differences among contributors, focusing specifically on how sovereignty should be implemented and on how to deal with the “Arab problem.” In conclusion I will explain patterns across the evolving discursive landscape of the sovereignty movement and assess the extent to which they reflect or illuminate distinctive aspects of the one-state reality.

## Implementing sovereignty: Where, when, and how

The *raison d’être* of the sovereignty movement is the achievement of formal, legal, and internationally recognized control, by Israel, of the entire “Land of Israel,” or at least that portion of it that lies west of the Jordan. The crucial role of the *Ribonut* journal in the campaign to achieve this end is to help the movement wage, and win, a Gramscian “war of position.” This mission is described, repeatedly, consistently, and explicitly in discursive terms: to first rival and then replace, what the movement’s leaders portray as a once tragically hegemonic principle in Israeli political discourse, namely that the only possible solution, or satisfying or acceptable outcome to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will be based on Israeli withdrawal from territories occupied in 1967 and the emergence of a Palestinian state in those territories. The Sovereignty movement was established, according to the journal’s editors, to sweep away what remained of this discursive reality. They portray themselves as helping to lead

an ideological movement whose objective is to put an end to the fallacious discourse regarding the ‘occupation,’ to put an end to the uncertainty surrounding the question of the rightful owners of the Land of Israel, to put an end to the Civil Administration, and to put an end to the reality that any leader who desires peace views Israel as the one who is supposed to relinquish its land. As a movement of this kind, we cannot come to terms with the very existence of a discourse regarding a foreign country in our heartland.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Ribonut* #13, June 2020, p. 9. For representative assertions of the centrality of the discursive struggle see Chikli (February 2022, p. 5); “The annexation of Judea and Samaria is not far off,” Interview with Bennett (2014, p. 5–6), Fuchs (November 2015, p. 8–9), and (Zohar, March 2017).

In late 2017, *Ribonut's* editors were ready to claim substantial success in their efforts, success defined not as sovereignty's achievement but as a change in what Israelis were arguing about.

Leadership of the political discourse has finally become the province of the majority; no longer the leadership of the left-wing minority toward the two-state disaster. The authentic representatives of the majority of Israeli citizens are initiating a new discourse in the government and the Knesset, the discourse of sovereignty. ...the discourse surrounding the nightmare two-state concept is gradually dissipating and in its place, the discussion surrounding the viability and implantation of sovereignty is intensifying (Editors, March 2017).

The practical expression of this fundamental struggle over the Israeli political agenda has been a host of political, administrative, and legal proposals for steps the government should take to implement sovereignty in lands traditionally referred to as "occupied," "disputed," or "administered." These proposals vary primarily along three dimensions: which portions of the Land of Israel should be targeted for sovereignty extension or annexation; over what time frame; and what legal or administrative formulas should be used to accomplish the objective.

At one extreme in this debate is a minority who insist on a strategy of "*sbang ve'gomarnu*,"—literally, "Bang, and we're finished," a Hebrew phrase made popular in connection with the government's rationale for launching the Lebanon War of 1982, an attack which was supposed to have ended the problem of the Palestinians, or at least the PLO, with one big, dramatic blow. In the context of debates over annexation, this is the argument that, since the Arabs and the world community will object just as strongly to Israeli annexation, no matter how much territory is involved, the right approach is to "think big about doing the maximum possible."<sup>7</sup> Avi Bell, a Professor of law at Israel's national religious Bar-Ilan University and a senior fellow at the Kohelet think tank, in 2017 advocated incorporating all of Judea and Samaria with the same legal authority and techniques used with respect to East Jerusalem and the Golan heights. No matter what, he argued, "the world has been hostile toward us and will continue to be hostile toward us in any case.... since we indeed have rights on this Land, why don't we exercise them?" (Bell, October 2014). Another version of this argument is that a historic opportunity, "an earthquake," will arise suddenly and soon that will enable Israel to implement its sovereignty comprehensively and without effective opposition,

<sup>7</sup> (Shiloh, March 2017). Shiloh is the editor of the right-wing weekly newspaper "B'Sheva," under whose auspices *Ribonut* is published.

either regionally or internationally. According to Motti Karpel, a leading ideologue associated with Moshe Feiglin's "Jewish Leadership" movement, "the epicenter of the earthquake will be in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria... it is advisable that we prepare for it so that we will know precisely what to do when the time comes, and how to implement then what we are unable to today. When the earth will quake, we will have no alternative to applying the umbrella of Israeli sovereignty up until the Jordan (Karpel, March 2019; also Glick, October 2014)." Those who take this maximalist position, also tend to advocate immediate implementation.

On the other side of the spectrum are *Ribonut* authors and interviewees who favor Israeli sovereignty's extension in principle but advise against taking explicit measures toward that objective at the current time. During President Trump's time some argued that Israel should restrain itself, work in tandem with Washington, and thereby gain American approval for extensions of Israeli sovereignty. When Joe Biden became President, those opposing formal annexation measures urged preparations to confront diplomatic initiatives and pro-Palestinian measures the new administration was expected to entertain. This meant working concretely to bolster settlements and mobilize support inside of Israel.

Associated with this cautious approach are several sub-themes. One argument against immediate changes in the official status of territories is that the support of a large majority of Israelis is necessary before Israel could expect to successfully confront the world over annexation. Despite polls advertised in *Ribonut* indicating that some sort of annexation or sovereignty extension was favored by a plurality of Israeli Jews, the Sovereignty Movement, it is argued, does not yet have sufficient public support to confront international opposition. Another theme accompanying arguments to delay annexation measures is emphasis on the challenge of increasing the density of Jewish presence in sensitive areas and combatting Arab efforts to pre-empt Jewish control of lands and territory by illegal construction.

Efraim Inbar, leader of a right-wing strategic affairs think tank, offers a rare argument (in *Ribonut*) in favor of the legislative status quo. Without questioning Israel's right to rule the entire country, Inbar contended that continued reliance on coercion-based control of the territory, which extending sovereignty might destabilize, would give Israel the most maneuvering room over the long run and the least exposure to political, military, or diplomatic challenges to its policy of "managing the conflict." This approach tends to see time as on Israel's side, implying that there is no reason to engage in confrontations or take unnecessary risks. Israel can afford to bide its time, waiting for years or even decades to change the official status of the territories it already dominates, while advocating continued investments in settlements and infrastructure and more effective measures to combat Arab

building and “land grabs.”<sup>8</sup> Inbar’s thinking, marked by the avoidance of explicit language about annexation or sovereignty, corresponds to popular views in Jewish-Israeli public opinion, but distinguishes his contribution from virtually all other opinions offered in the pages of *Ribonut* (Inbar, October 2014).

Between these extremes lie approximately eighty percent of the proposals appearing in *Ribonut* as to how and where Israel should extend its sovereignty. In 2017, the editors put forward their own plan, advocating the imposition of Israeli law on the entirety of “Judea and Samaria,” and also over the Gaza Strip, once, after a “defensive war,” conditions would make it possible for Israel to “exercise her rights...and apply Israeli sovereignty over it (Zertal and Eldar, 2005).” But unlike the *Sbang ve-gomarnu* approach, their “Sovereignty with Responsibility” plan recognized the need to offer careful consideration to how it would be implemented, especially with respect to the Arab population of annexed areas. “Sovereignty with Responsibility” emphasized that although Israel would rule as sovereign over the entire area of the West Bank, portions of the territory that were densely populated with Arabs would be granted separate autonomy statuses, “under the strict control of the State of Israel.” “Joint committees” in these “autonomous zones” would be responsible, under Israel’s supervision, to “coordinate” services for the local population.” The Palestinian Authority, along with the entire array of Oslo-based distinctions between Areas “A,” “B,” and “C” would be “canceled and dismantled.”

But the center of gravity in the views registered in *Ribonut* on how to implement the expansion of Israeli sovereignty, is occupied by approaches that are urgent, in their commitment to some kind of immediate action, but incrementalist, opportunistic, flexible, and open-ended in their approach to the overall process. This approach was epitomized in 2014 by measures taken by the Knesset’s “Land of Israel Lobby.” Representing a collection of parliamentarians strongly committed to the sovereignty movement, two of the lobby’s leaders, Yair Levin and Orit Struk, explained in *Ribonut* that a total of ten different laws had been put forward. Each contained identical language that Levin and Struk described as imposing Israeli sovereignty on small bits of territory, each heavily settled by Jews and all within “Area C.” By targeting so many particular cities, regions, or blocs (including Gush Etzion, Western Samaria, Jewish Hebron, Ariel, or Maale Adumim) with separate laws, each accompanied by emphasis

8 For this general view see also (Yishai, October 2014). This position became more prominent following the failure of hopes for sovereignty extension to be realized during the Trump Presidency, either as part of the plan or not. See, for example, multiple articles in the February 2022, issue of *Ribonut*, Beit-On (2022), Katsover (February 2022), Lion (February 2022), Ne’eman (February 2022), Yedid (February 2022) and Zilberman (February 2022).

on the particular attachments and interests associated with those places, the movement could be forearmed to take quick advantage of changes in public opinion and diplomatic circumstances. “The laws of sovereignty,” according to Struk, “are actually intended for the application of Israeli sovereignty gradually over the areas of settlement in Judea and Samaria, which is called Area C...We understand that the process is gradual and, at the moment, the process regarding Area C is logical and realistic compared with the other areas that are still far from attainable at this point (Struk, October 2014).”<sup>9</sup>

In line with this initiative individual politicians and activists promoted their own preferred target for Israel’s next sovereignty-extension move. In 2016 *Ribonut* reported on a public meeting in Ma’ale Adumim (Struk, 2016), a large settlement located midway between Jerusalem and Jericho. Endorsements for the event came from five sitting Cabinet Ministers, Uri Ariel, Haim Katz, Ayelet Shaked, Zeev Elkin, and Yariv Levin. Among those who ceremoniously signed the “Ma’ale Adumim Declaration of Sovereignty” as part of a campaign to begin the sovereignty expansion process were Benny Kashriel, Mayor of Ma’ale Adumim, Speaker of the Knesset Yuli Edelstein, and MK’s Bezalel Smotrich, Motti Yogev, Eliezer Shtern, Miki Levi, Robert Ilatov, Eli Cohen, and Shuli Mualem representing most of the center and right-wing parties with seats in the Knesset. Ma’ale Adumim was an attractive option for beginning the official annexation process since it could be portrayed as part of “Greater Jerusalem.” But other locations suggested themselves as preferable first moves in the annexation process. Among these the Jordan Valley (Haskel, 2020, p. 7), “metropolitan” Jerusalem (Katz, October 2014), and Gush Etzion (a bloc of Jewish settlements south of Bethlehem) (Editors, November 2015b, p. 11) are prominently mentioned.

By 2020, a fierce debate erupted within the Sovereignty movement, filling most of the pages of the two issues of *Ribonut* that appeared in that year. The argument was over whether to exploit the Trump-Kushner “Deal of the Century” to impose the parts of the plan that featured Israeli sovereignty, or to shun it entirely because it contains references to an eventual Palestinian state. Among those favoring exploitation of the Trump plan to get as much sovereignty recognized as possible quickly was then Minister Smotrich. Instead of focusing on implementing sovereignty just in one or two locations, he advocated imposing Israeli sovereignty over Area C, meaning those parts of the West Bank allocated to Israel under the Trump plan Smotrich, February 2020. This

9 For a similar explanation of the same gradualist and opportunistic approach to the implementation of sovereignty in area C see remarks by Yariv Levin in 2014. MK Levin was then Chairman of the Likud Party and described by *Ribonut* as “one of the most nationalist figures of the Likud (Levin, January 2014)”.

position was fully consistent with the “Stabilization Plan” that Naftali Bennett and Ayelet Shaked had put forward in 2012. Indeed, as Shaked repeatedly reminded readers of *Ribonut*, her party had been the first to lay out a schedule of legislative moves that, over a period of “stages,” would annex all Jewish settlements and then all of Area C (Shaked, February 2021).

Overall, the gradualist or piecemeal approach, in whatever specific form, was justified as smart, realistic, and, above all, most capable of advancing the long-term objective of Israeli sovereignty over all the territory between the Green Line and the Jordan River. Besides reducing the risks of confrontation with the world community or of moving too fast ahead of the center of gravity of the Israeli (Jewish) public, this approach was also advertised as attractive because of the relatively small number of Arabs living in the areas initially annexed. This would make it possible to avoid or at least postpone inconvenient questions about Arab political rights or disturb the demographic profile of Israeli society. Meanwhile demonstration of the state’s ability to limit the impact of residency or citizenship to some Arabs in annexed territory would reassure Israeli Jews against the demographic, social, and political implications of further annexations.

It is clear, therefore, that where and when sovereignty should be applied or annexation carried out are questions attracting sustained attention in *Ribonut*, with different answers offered along with distinctive justifications. But what about “how?” With all the talk of annexation and sovereignty, and with the central importance of the word “*Ribonut*” as the name of the movement and the journal, one might have imagined that the meaning of “annexation” or “sovereignty,” and what measures would be needed to achieve either or both, would be clear and obvious. But that is not the case. In Israeli political discourse these terms are seldom defined, and never clearly so. Only through careful examination of the exact wording of proposals for administrative orders or legislation can one see what is and is not meant by participants in the “sovereignty discourse” or appreciate the nuances of slight changes in the wording of proposals or legislation.

The fact is that one searches almost in vain in the pages of *Ribonut* for any discussion of what the terms “sovereignty” or “annexation” mean, or what specific legislation would achieve the changes in the status of targeted areas that are so fervently desired. For example, as noted above, the ten Knesset bills presented by the “Land of Israel Lobby” for consideration as new legislation in 2014, were described in *Ribonut* by their proud authors as “the laws of sovereignty.” Nevertheless, neither in the names given to these bills, nor in their operative language, do the words “sovereignty” or “annexation” appear. The operative article of “the Proposed Law—Ma’ale Adumim—2014” reads as follows:

The law, jurisdiction and administration of the State shall apply in the area of Ma’ale Adumim as described in the appendix (Knesset, 2014).

To be sure, in an attached justification for the bill the authors argue that their aim is to make Ma’ale Adumim an “inseparable part of the State of Israel.” They also claim that within Israel and abroad “annexation of Ma’ale Adumim to the State of Israel is widely accepted, as is the application of Israeli sovereignty there.” But as we shall see, it is much more than a technicality that the proposed law itself does not proclaim annexation or Israeli sovereignty. Nor do its sponsors explicitly claim that by passing the legislation Ma’ale Adumim would, thereby, be under Israeli sovereignty, have been annexed, or have been established as an “inseparable part of the State of Israel.”

And yet the language used in these bills is not accidental. It conforms precisely to the formula used to adjust the status of East Jerusalem and its immediate environs in June 1967 and of the Golan Heights in 1981. Indeed, the single most popular formula appearing in *Ribonut* for measures that would satisfy their demands is that the government should emulate Prime Ministers Levi Eshkol in 1967 with respect to East Jerusalem and Menachem Begin in 1981. In both these cases the government acted to apply “the law, jurisdiction, and administration of the State” in the designated area, though different mechanisms were used. In 1967 the government promulgated several technical changes in existing laws and in the border of the municipality of the Israeli city of “Yerushalayim” as a consequence of which the “law, jurisdiction, and administration of the State” was applied in 71 square kilometers of the occupied West Bank, designated by a three-page list of latitudinal and longitudinal points and which included Jordanian East Jerusalem and the lands of a number of adjacent villages. In 1981 this same state of affairs was achieved in the Golan Heights by means of passage of the Basic Law—Golan Heights, the first article of which reads “The law, jurisdiction and administration of the State shall apply to the area of the Golan Heights, as delineated in the Schedule.”

Bezalel Smotrich is typical in his conflation of “sovereignty” extension with what was done in East Jerusalem and the Golan heights. At the aforementioned meeting in Ma’ale Adumim, Smotrich, the leader in 2016 of the Knesset’s Land of Israel Lobby, and one of the most frequent contributors to *Ribonut*, defended the bill that would apply Israeli “law, jurisdiction, and administration” in Ma’ale Adumim, characterizing it as the imposition of sovereignty. Despite international opposition, he declared, “we have to bring the debate to a resolution and the starting point is to apply sovereignty over Ma’ale Adumim. The sky will not fall, just as the sky did not fall when we extended sovereignty over Jerusalem and the Golan Heights (Baruch, 2016).”

An unusually detailed justification for using the “Jerusalem model” to advance “sovereignty” over Judea and Samaria was offered in the 2017 issue of *Ribonut* by one of its main financial backers, Robert Wolfe. “What would happen,” he asked,

if the model of Israeli rule in Jerusalem were to be applied to the whole of Judea and Samaria? All the Arabs living there would receive permanent resident status along with the attendant social benefits... At the same time Israeli sovereignty would be proclaimed over the whole land of Israel and all competing versions of sovereignty rendered null and void (Wolfe, November 2017).<sup>10</sup>

To support his claim that the Palestinian population of Area C would actually welcome annexation and Israeli sovereignty, Yohai Dimri, Mayor of the Mt. Hebron Regional Council, reported conversations with unnamed Arab interlocutors that they “don’t trust the Palestinian authority and would rather be residents of Israel, without voting rights, like the residents of East Jerusalem (Dimri, May 2018).”

Of particular note is the explicit appearance of the “East Jerusalem model” in the wording of a question asked of Israeli Jews opposed to territorial compromise in one of many surveys of public opinion commissioned and published by *Ribonut*. Three substantive options were offered for how to proceed toward sovereignty: “the application of sovereignty over Jewish settlement only” favored by 45.1%; “over Area C, which includes some 80,000 Arabs,” favored by 18.7%; and “over all of Judea and Samaria and granting residency to the Arabs of the region as in East Jerusalem” (favored by 21.3%) (Geocartographia, March 2019).

What is crucial to note is that Israel’s legal and administrative actions in June 1967 to apply the “law, jurisdiction, and administration of the State of Israel” in expanded East Jerusalem did not make the 65,000 people who lived there after the June War citizens, or give them opportunities to adopt Israeli citizenship. Instead they were assigned identification cards listing their status as “permanent residents.” As such, they were considered citizens of the municipality of Jerusalem, whose borders had expanded to include them, but *not* citizens of the State of Israel, since the borders of the State, *per se*, had *not* been expanded. Without Israeli citizenship, East Jerusalem Arabs had no right to participate in Knesset elections, though they did (and still do) have the right to vote in Jerusalem municipal elections.

<sup>10</sup> Wolfe’s comments include two standard misrepresentations: (1) that what was done in East Jerusalem entailed the official extension of Israeli sovereignty; and (2) that Arabs in the eastern portions of the city have the right to opt for Israeli citizenship. For relatively detailed promotion of the same model, but drawing on the Golan Heights rather than East Jerusalem, see Yehuda Harel’s discussion of the advantages and the limits of applying the legal formula used in both cases (Harel, March 2017).

The Syrian Druse who remained on the Golan Heights after the war were treated similarly, eventually being assigned identification cards listing them as permanent residents, not as citizens, with rights to vote in local elections, but not parliamentary elections.

The key point is that is that Arabs in areas within the 1949 armistice lines, areas that had been designated as “occupied territory” when they came under Israeli military control in 1948 (such as the western and central Galilee), were treated as living within the borders of the State of Israel and were given both Israeli citizenship and the right to vote in national/parliamentary elections. In the pages of *Ribonut*, the attractiveness of the East Jerusalem model is that a dramatic act that most Israelis and most observers abroad would treat as annexation, or as the extension of sovereignty, would not officially be so in the Israeli legal context, and so would not entail a significant expansion of the Arab electorate in Israel—something all *Ribonut* writers and interviewees oppose, and which most, but not all, refuse to tolerate.

## Sovereignty and Arabs

Disputes over how, when, and where to advance the sovereignty movement’s objectives are intense and detailed. Differences often reflect deeper divides and uncertainties about what is certainly the most aggravating problem it faces: what to do about the Arabs—practically, politically, and demographically. It is the problem most often characterized as the movement’s biggest challenge, referred to either explicitly or as the equivalent of the “elephant in the room.” In 2015 a reader’s letter appeared in *Ribonut* (one of very few that are published and one of the only ones to which the editors have published a response) asking why the journal did not devote more attention to the “burning question about the Arab population in Judea and Samaria. What would we do with the extra million and a half Arabs (sic), who would change Israel’s demographics and character? This is the central question that we must find a solution for.” The editors answered that within the movement “there are a number of approaches that relate to this important matter,” offering five examples of how *Ribonut* acts as a platform for their discussion (Editors, November 2015a). Indeed, the question the editors most regularly ask is how interviewees propose to address concerns posed by large Arab populations in areas targeted for sovereignty.

All agree with the comment of an icon of Israel’s extreme right, Geula Cohen: “there is no doubt that the demographic problem is a headache, but if a person has a headache he does not cut off his head (Stav, May 2018, p. 11).” At one end of the spectrum of opinion about how to deal with this “headache,” *Ribonut* has featured those, such as Reuven Rivlin, Tzipi Hotoveley, Avi Bell, and Uri Elitzur, who favor or accept



as inevitable the eventual extension of equal citizenship to all who live within the borders of sovereign Israel, which they envision as including all the western Land of Israel. Expressions of this position even go so far as to view a “binational” Israel with equanimity based on faith in Jewish solidarity, high rates of Jewish immigration and natural increase, and constitutional entrenchments of the Jewish character of the state. In a major speech to settlers reported in detail in *Ribonut*, then President Rivlin insisted on both sovereignty over the whole land and equal citizenship for all.

I say again, and especially to myself, as one who believes that all of Zion is ours, that sovereignty of the State of Israel must be in every single location with all that this entails. And sovereignty that is applied in any territory grants citizenship to all who live in the territory. There is no easy way out. . . Sovereignty of the State of Israel must exist in all of Zion, for all of its residents. One law for all (Rivlin, March 2017).<sup>11</sup>

Tzipi Hotoveley makes the same argument, but for different reasons. The better problem to have in the long run is an Arab population integrated into the state. Speaking to the Jewish public about the problem of “controlling the Arab population” the then deputy Minister for Transportation posed what she said was a “simple question:” What is better for you, the Gaza model or the Sakhnin model (Hotoveley, January 2014)?<sup>12</sup>

However, the dominant positions expressed on “the Arab problem” in *Ribonut* are considerably less generous. Martin Sherman is an academic and a veteran of the Israeli secular hard right who was a frequent contributor, in its day, to the journal *Nativ*. Sherman’s is one of the only voices to be heard in *Ribonut* arguing for the wholesale transfer of the “Arab population in Judea-Samaria.” Describing his approach as “humanitarian” because of “the generous relocation grants” to be provided, Sherman warns that with a forty per cent Muslim minority it will “not be possible to forge a coherent cohesive society, especially not one with a predominantly Jewish nature. . . (It would be) a certain recipe for the “Lebanonization” of Israeli society and an inevitable erosion of the Jewish component in it.” After closing down the Palestinian authority, mass evacuation can

11 Rivlin also endorses the East Jerusalem and Golan models, but offers a confused account of the situation there, claiming “sovereignty was applied,” and that the laws treat “both Israelis and non-Israelis,” equally, even as he acknowledges that the “non-Israelis” were granted “residency,” without mentioning their lack of citizenship. Along the same lines, advocating binational democracy as a price worth paying to secure Israeli sovereignty over the whole country, see Hotoveley (January 2014), Elitzur (October 2014), and Glick (November 2017).

12 Sakhnin is a large Arab municipality in central Galilee. Palestinian residents of Sakhnin have Israeli citizenship, and voting rights. Residents of Gaza do not.

be achieved “gradually (by) reduc(ing)—and eventually totally terminat(ing)—the provision of all merchandise and services to the Arab population in Judea-Samaria, including water, electricity, fuel, port services and tax collection (Sherman, March 2017, p. 22).”<sup>13</sup>

A somewhat less drastic approach to the future of the Arab inhabitants evokes Joshua’s ultimatum to the conquered Canaanites. Bezalel Smotrich offered the “Joshua bin Nun plan.” Arabs could either fight (and die), leave in peace, or accept subjection to Jewish rule as individuals prepared to display due deference to their rulers. The key was to forbid any “Arab collective with national aspirations (Smotrich, November 2017, p. 14).”<sup>14</sup> When asked “as we apply sovereignty, what status can we give to the Arabs who live here?” Rabbi Shlomo Aviner’s response was similar.

They have their own states. If they want sovereignty, they should go to one of (them)..Anyone who wants to live as a minority can live here as a minority. We can provide them with individual rights, but not national rights. . . Not autonomy either. . . When the Americans give autonomy to the Indians, then we can talk. . . what nonsense.<sup>15</sup>

Using the concept “*ger toshav*” (resident alien) the Chief Rabbi of Safed said the only Arabs who would be allowed to stay were those with no political ambition, who obey the seven “Noachide commandments” (incumbent upon gentiles to prove their suitability for living in human societies), and who accept “the sovereignty of the People of Israel in its Land.”<sup>16</sup>

As noted above, a not insignificant portion of *Ribonut* contributors are ready to live with the “headache” of a large increase in the size of Israel’s Arab citizenry in order to secure international recognition and permanence for Israeli sovereignty. A greater number, however, are emphatically opposed to that prospect, even while abjuring transfer. Eliyakim Haetzni, a veteran settler, former Member of Knesset, and one of the ideological leaders of Gush Emunim, admits he is frightened by the demographic problem and would prefer even a Palestinian state to “bi-nationalism. . . because at least we are left with one small state (Haetzni, May 2014, p. 16).” Haetzni, and those who share his fear of Palestinian demography, but shrink from transfer, offer two strategies, either separately or in combination: citizenship elsewhere and/or some form of

13 When interviewed Zion was Director of the Center for Law and Communications at Ariel University.

14 See also Moshe Feiglin’s detailed plan to operationalize the Joshua principles (Editors, November 2017a, p. 16).

15 “The Interconnectedness of Ethics, Bible and Policy,” *Ribonut*, #8, March 2017, p. 8.

16 “Sovereignty: The Fulfillment of the Positive Commandment to ‘Inherit the land,’” *Ribonut*, #9, November 2017, p. 8.

depoliticized “autonomy,” but only after Israeli sovereignty is officially imposed.

The solution for national voting rights for the Arabs of Judea and Samaria is being permitted to vote for the Parliament in Amman, a vote that should be carried out in voting booths in Nablus, Ramallah and the rest of the cities and would be sent by mail to Amman, just as votes of citizens living abroad are sent from one country to another (Haetzni, May 2014, p. 17).

Attached to this idea is the formula that “Jordan is Palestine,” a slogan popular on the Israeli right in the 1980s. Although it had lost its prominence in subsequent decades, the formula has been given a new lease on life in the sovereignty discourse. Former MK Ayooob Kara advocates that even after applying Israeli law over all areas containing Jewish settlement, military rule should continue over the balance of the West Bank. What he favors is going “back to the plan where all of the Arab residents in Judea and Samaria will be Jordanian residents. Jordan is actually Palestine. Jordan was intended to be a Palestinian state and the king himself is Palestinian (sic) (Kara, October 2014, p. 14–15).”<sup>17</sup>

In principle the Gaza Strip is regarded as an integral part of the Land of Israel. In maps used in *Ribonut* to depict the country’s true and eventual borders, Gaza is clearly included. Nevertheless, a notable aspect of the *Ribonut* discourse is the paucity of explicit discussion of Gaza and its two million Palestinian inhabitants. To be sure, a small number of contributors advocate a forcible return of Israeli rule, and some mention Egypt as the appropriate venue for Arabs in the Gaza Strip to seek political representation. But in *Ribonut* I have found no sustained discussion or treatment of the future of Gaza.

In this context a suggestion made in 2017 for dealing with problems of Arab citizenship and representation, by then Equality of Social Rights Minister Gila Gamliel, is unusual for the prominence given to what is standardly referred to in the Israeli media as the “coastal enclave.” She explained that transfer was not necessary; “the Arabs of Judea and Samaria can remain where they are if they so desire.” But she acknowledged that “the matter of citizenship... has cast a shadow over us as a democratic state.” Her solution was “regional,” to enlist Egypt and other countries in the creation of a Palestinian state based in Sinai with links to the Gaza Strip.

They will not have citizenship of Israel, but of the entity in Gaza and Sinai... I do not see any reason for establishing another dictatorial state in the Middle East. But if I am

17 An extended argument in favor of this approach is offered by one of *Ribonut*’s most regularly featured contributors—Aryeh Eldad. See Eldad, 2021, March 2019. King Hussein was not Palestinian, but he did have a Palestinian wife.

forced to address the problem... then it is better and more appropriate to move it to another place and not in parts of the State of Israel (Gamliel, November 2017).<sup>18</sup>

However, there are voices in *Ribonut* that reject the idea that Jordan (or Egypt) would actually ever cooperate in this way (Glick, March 2019), but for *Ribonut* contributors this is fairly unimportant. None of those who advance extraterritorial proposals make any attempt to explain why and how Arab countries would open their political arenas to millions of Palestinians living outside their territory. This disinterest in how their proposals could be implemented highlights their purpose as not to meet Palestinian political requirements, but to offer an image of what in principle could be done so as to deflect criticism that a purportedly democratic Israel would be imposing permanent disenfranchisement on a large population within the country’s borders.

Still, questions about what legal status sovereign Israel would assign to the Arab populations of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and under what political and administrative conditions they would be governed, cannot and are not completely ignored. Debate centers on whether Arab non-citizens, as permanent or temporary residents, should be allowed some form of administrative autonomy, and if so, how much and at what level. Yoav Kish, co-chair of the Knesset’s Land of Israel Lobby in 2016, suggests autonomy, not as a new regime, but as a new name for the current reality: a fragmented and largely impotent Palestinian authority, acting under the effective supervision of the Israel Defense Forces.

I will never give the Arabs of Judea and Samaria Israeli citizenship. I will not allow them to vote for the Israeli Knesset. The correct and desirable solution is autonomy, and the model for this already exists, more or less, in the field. The realization of national rights will not happen in Judea and Samaria (Kish, August 2016).<sup>19</sup>

Haetzni also sees the PA as a rough model for the Arab autonomy he imagines as long as its legal status as subordinate to the sovereign state of Israel is established and accepted (Haetzni, May 2014). Similarly, Naftali Bennett “Stabilization Plan” included an autonomy not very different from the situation as it was when he was interviewed by *Ribonut* in 2014. For the Arabs of Areas A and B the plan envisions what he later described as “autonomy Plus” (as a phase prior to eventual annexation of those areas as well). This is an

18 In general, very little attention is devoted to Gaza in the pages of *Ribonut*. This is a rare occasion in which a future for Gaza is mentioned that will not be subject to Israeli sovereignty.

19 For other examples of invocations in the pages of *Ribonut* of a “Jordanian solution” to the political status and citizenship of Palestinians see Bennett (2015), Bechor (May 2014), and Kahana (February 2021).

autonomy that does not include security control. . . . I do not want the Israeli civil administration to return to conduct life for the Palestinian residents of Judea and Samaria. I have no interest in deciding where Arab children will go to school and I am not interested in collecting taxes from them and controlling their daily lives. I believe that the present situation is alright (Bennett, 2014, 2015).

For Yoav Ben-Tsur, a Shas Party Knesset Deputy, the correct course is to implement sovereignty over Jewish settlements only (i.e. not over Area C per se), leaving the “Arab population of Judea and Samaria” in “enclaves” but as an “integral part of the State of Israel.” Negotiations could then eventually establish (for Arabs) an “autonomous entity that will be subject to Israeli sovereignty (Ben-Tsur, 2017).”

None of these schemes detail the powers and responsibilities attached to autonomous zones (for example, with respect to land registration, control of aquifers, or crimes committed by Israelis) or to the legal status of their inhabitants, though respect for the “civil” and “property rights” of Arab individuals is often mentioned. As we have seen, Arabs living in areas of Jewish settlement to which Israeli law is to be applied are usually seen by *Ribonut* contributors as “residents” of Israel (temporary or permanent) but not as citizens. In these various proposals, however, whether Arabs classified as living under “autonomy” would have Israeli identity cards, would have a recognized residency status, and would be able to travel, are questions left almost entirely unaddressed, though a distinction is sometimes made between granting Israeli residency to Arabs living outside of autonomous communities, but not to Arabs living inside them (Kara, October 2014).

Among those who advocate rapid and complete imposition of Israeli sovereignty over the whole of the West Bank, a very common suggestion is that administrative autonomy be implemented, not for the Arab population of Judea and Samaria as a whole or for all those in Oslo Areas A and B, but individually for separate towns and villages. Sovereign Israel, it is said, either through civilian or military authorities, would draw up individual autonomy agreements with “local bosses,” working directly with local “clan,” “tribal,” or “traditional” elites (Zohar, March 2017; Glick, March 2019; Solomon, March 2019; Shvut, February 2020).

This is in fact the solution to the “Arab problem” advanced by the editors of *Ribonut* themselves, at least in the “Sovereignty with Responsibility” Plan that they presented, with great fanfare (see Figure 1), in 2017.

A summary of the plan was published in *Ribonut* (Editors, January 2014).<sup>20</sup> It is the most detailed explication available

<sup>20</sup> I was unable to secure a copy of the plan. The editors of *Ribonut* have informed me that it is “unavailable at this time” and that the “Tama” Plan issued in 2019 is “more up to date.” (Personal communication from Yehudit Katsover and Nadia Matar, email, February 1, 2022).

of how the leaders of the *Ribonut* movement believe the large Arab population to be added to Israel’s population can and should be governed, or, at least, how in 2017 they publicly described their thoughts on the matter. The “main principle” of the plan is “the application of Israeli sovereignty over all of Judea and Samaria.” The “second principle” is the creation of “tribally” administered Arab autonomies subject to the rule of the Israeli sovereign, in densely populated Arab areas of Judea and Samaria.” In these “autonomies,” to be

established after abolition of the Palestinian Authority, the day to day lives and the welfare of the Arab population will be administered by tribal leaders. The security and national umbrella of the autonomous areas will be under the strict control of the State of Israel. Each autonomous area [will have] its own agreement with the State of Israel attesting to its establishment and agreed cooperation.

The plan for sovereignty and Arab autonomies is to apply also to the Gaza Strip, as an “organic part of the Western Land of Israel,” but only after it is taken over “in a defensive war.”

The plan goes on to promise freedom of movement “between the autonomies and the State of Israel” but only given “calm security conditions.” Although under Israeli sovereignty, these areas and their populations are referred to, implicitly at least, as different from non-autonomous areas and their Arab populations. The latter would be classified as “permanent residents” with rights to Israeli social services as well as “freedom of movement in Israel, the freedom to work in Israel, freedom to vote in municipal elections, but not for Knesset.” The plan also provides for refugee resettlement outside of Palestine, a rigorous land survey registration process over all areas claimed by or potentially claimed by Arabs, full control of all holy sites by Israel’s Ministry of Religious Affairs and special circumstances under which a “fairly negligible number” of Arab residents might qualify for citizenship.

What is most intriguing about the “Sovereignty with Responsibility Plan,” however, is that its provisions for solving the “Arab problem” disappeared entirely from the longer and now “official” Sovereignty Movement plan for annexation—the “National Outline Plan, TAMA 100.” With work begun in 2018 by a team based in Ariel University (Shiloh, May 2018), the plan was produced under the auspices of the Sovereignty Movement. The editors of *Ribonut*, Yehudit Katsover and Nadia Matar, are described as its “Initiators.” Officially released in 2019, TAMA 100 is an elaborate document describing what Israel would look like 100 years from its founding if the plan’s provisions for sovereignty over the entire western Land of Israel are implemented. While the 2017 plan detailed the status of Arab inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and in particular the role of tribally administered “autonomies” and

the different rules that would apply to Arabs living either inside or outside those zones, the 2019 plan drops all mention of Arab autonomy schemes. While insisting that implementing sovereignty will produce “no change in the status of the Arabs,” the authors envision an Israel in 2048 containing “a solid Jewish majority and an Arab minority loyal to the state.” Elsewhere, reference is made to a “non-Jewish minority loyal to the State with resident status, with the option to apply for citizenship in the future.” But the absence of an actual plan for dealing with the political status of Arabs is indicated in another sentence, simply promising, eventually, “a clear policy regarding citizenship/residency status (Ginsburg, March 2019, p. 9).”

What accounts for this drastic change in *Ribonut*'s plan for addressing the future of West Bank and Gaza Arabs? From the range of opinions expressed in the journal on this most sensitive of all issues it appears that the “autonomies” approach offered in 2014 proved to be divisive and controversial within the movement. A significant number of *Ribonut* contributors refuse to envision any Arab administrative structures or rights to permanent residency. At the same time, a significant portion of the movement advocates, at least in principle, opportunities for equal citizenship for Arabs and are likely to have found the 2014 plan's explicit reliance on governance by “tribal” and “clan” leaders as naïve, impractical, distasteful, and, perhaps, even embarrassing.

Two things are clear, however. First, the one-state reality has forced the settler project to confront the problem large Arab populations pose to an expanded Israel that aspires to be seen as democratic. Second, the leaders of that project know they have not figured out how to solve it.

## Conclusion

In the last decades of the twentieth century, when prospects for a two-state solution were promising (or dangerous, depending on one's political preferences), a key feature of debate was the perception that a one-state outcome—either Jewish/Israeli or Arab/Palestinian—was at least theoretically possible. In parallel fashion, even though as a practical matter the two-state solution has become unattainable, the theoretical possibility that it could be implemented remains a feature of debate, certainly on the left, but also on the right. As we have seen, the editors and most contributors to *Ribonut*, self-consciously and determinedly, advance arguments, proposals, and plans as part of a war of position strategy to rival and then supplant the two-state solution discourse as the prevalent, if no longer hegemonic frame of reference for public discussion of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Yet even while seeking to eliminate discussion of the two-state solution, occasions arise (such as the debate over the Trump Plan) forcing at least some participants to conjure and warn of the “nightmare” of its realization.

The community's inability to act and talk as if the two-state solution is *entirely* irrelevant is a weakness in *Ribonut*'s war of position campaign. On the other hand, justifications for imposing sovereignty based on appeals to the normative positions of the Sovereignty Movement's traditional opponents (Western liberal democrats or cosmopolitan Israeli liberals) indicate just how fundamentally its agenda for action has shifted as a function of the one-state reality. From extravagant ideological appeals to hardcore supporters, frantic settlement construction, and wars of maneuver, including illegal and violent opposition to territorial compromise, all designed to bloc negotiation and implementation of a two-state solution, the vanguard of the settler movement is now promoting its own goals as reasonable and deserving of consideration, even by those who might not agree with them. Accordingly, instead of delegitimizing their opponents as anti-Zionist, not authentically Jewish, traitorous, or silly, they regularly appeal to their opponents' liberal-democratic values, reflecting an ambition to naturalize permanent and official Israeli rule of the whole country, even for those who do not embrace the movement leadership's ultranationalist or religious justifications for doing so.

For example, a common call in *Ribonut* is to “end the occupation.” Reference is not only to Arab and Muslim occupation of Jewish land, but to rule by military officers that tramples on democratic freedoms and enforces discrimination and hardship on Israeli Jews (Eldad, March 2019). The occupation must end, some insist, not only so that “Arabs of the area can integrate into the life of the country,” thereby qualifying for mortgages with deeds recognized by the state, but also so Israeli citizens wherever they happen to reside can enjoy equal rights (Bar-Tal, May 2014). Since “the State of Israel, together with Judea, Samaria and the Jordan Valley, without the Gaza Strip, already constitutes one state today, in actuality,” there is no role for a military administration that subjects both “Palestinian...and Jewish residents of Judea and Samaria” to confinement to enclaves and oppressive restrictions (Glick, November 2017). Israeli policies that limit Jewish opportunities to build and expand their homes and communities are protested as “apartheid” (King, May 2014, p. 18). Because of its policies of oppression of women and minorities, accusations of apartheid also appear as an argument for abolishing the Palestinian Authority (Zion, October 2014). An argument appearing regularly in *Ribonut* is that international law, including human rights law, far from contradicting or preventing Israeli rule of the whole western Land of Israel, actually requires it (Cohen, March 2015; Shochetman, March 2015; Fuchs, November 2015). Palestinian condemnations of Israel for dispossessing and displacing Palestinians find their counterpart in *Ribonut* protests against Jewish orchards being “uprooted...with the claim that their very presence on the ground is a disturbance” (Levin, November 2015). Instead of “decolonization” as the solution to Israel's domination of Arabs,

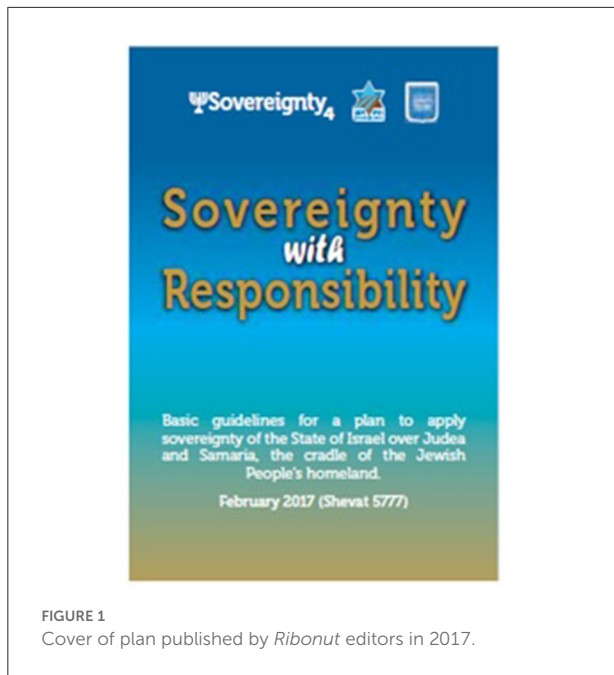


FIGURE 1  
Cover of plan published by *Ribonut* editors in 2017.

*Ribonut* contributors portray Israel and Zionism as “resisting” the “soft manipulative imperialism” of foreign powers (Soffer, August 2016).

Analysis of the discursive landscape of *Ribonut* also reveals how the one-state reality, and engagement with the mechanics of implementing their preferred future prompted by that reality, lead contributors to expose their own ambivalence about sovereignty. On the one hand, imposition of sovereignty over lands and populations Israel has so far officially designated as only temporarily under its control is the banner under which the entire movement marches. On the other hand, equality before the law of all inhabitants subjected to the same state’s sovereign authority, a norm historically and popularly, if not logically, associated with state sovereignty, directly contradicts the real meaning of “*ribonut*” for both the movement’s leadership and its rank and file.

In Wittgensteinian terms “Israeli state sovereignty” over all the (western) Land of Israel is what the *Ribonut* movement advocates “grammatically:” that is how its demands are formally and officially presented. But the natural, authentic, and commonsense meaning of the term, is very different. Reflected in the “ordinary language” of commentary, argument, and desire, is not the sovereignty of “*Medinat Yisrael*” (the state of Israel) but of rule of “*Am Yisrael*” (the people of Israel). The object of the movement’s struggle, and the test of its success, is not establishment of the unappealable authority of the state over life and property within it, but of Jewish supremacy—the mastery of Jews over the land and of its non-Jewish inhabitants.

The word used in Hebrew and translated as “sovereignty,” “*ribonut*,” comes from the verb meaning “to become great.”

The most common usage in Jewish liturgy of this term is in reference to God as “*Ribono shel olam*”—usually translated as “Master of the Universe.” So while the term “sovereignty” in English connotes recognition of a state’s claim to superordinate authority in a territory, the term “*Ribonut*” in Hebrew much more strongly connotes, and clearly communicates, domination, rule, or mastery by a living being of and over a territory and its inhabitants.

The extent to which the enforcement of Jewish supremacy is what *Ribonut*’s editors and contributors cherish, and not the legal imposition of Israeli state sovereignty, is evident from the casual and almost entirely unexamined way in which the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem models are advanced as legal formulas. As noted above, neither territory has been officially annexed or been the subject of an official extension of the sovereignty of the state of Israel. That is of relatively little moment to the writers and interviewees whose views appear in *Ribonut*. What is of real consequence is whether or not Jews have the power to determine what will and will not be done, and by whom, within the territories targeted for “sovereignty,” and whether Jews *feel* themselves to have and to be exercising that power.

Sovereignty as domination by Jews is apparent in the point made often by *Ribonut* interviewees, essayists, and activists, that “sovereignty” in the Galilee or the Negev has been lost, is being lost, or is threatened, by increasing Arab presence in those areas, by lack of full Jewish control over land and other resources, or by Arab behavior in those areas that suggests or projects security and self-confidence. “Sovereignty,” explains Shlomo Ne’eman, head of the Gush Etzion Council, south of Jerusalem, “is two processes. One is the legal-statutory process... (but) the official decision is not always enough.” In the West Bank, he declares, “a half million Jews make de facto sovereignty.” In the Golan Heights, on the other hand, “there is sovereignty (meaning an official declaration), but where are the Jews?” And, he continues, “in Shuafat and the eastern neighborhoods of (Jerusalem), you don’t feel that you are the sovereign (Ne’eman, February 2022).” The “dismal reality” in the Negev and the Galilee, wrote the *Ribonut* editors, “does not assure our full possession of the Land (Elitzur, October 2014).” Indeed, constant use of the pronouns “we,” “us”, and to “our” to refer to that which either does, or does not, have or exercise sovereignty, is a clear indication that it is Jews as a group, or the “people of Israel,” who are to be in positions of mastery, not the state (to which are attached both Jewish and non-Jewish citizens). The fact that Arab landownership, even if within the sovereign state of Israel, is taken as evidence of sovereignty’s absence or incompleteness indicates clearly that what is aspired to is not state sovereignty, per se, but Jewish mastery over people, land, and resources. In his interview with *Ribonut* Shlomo Riskin called for establishing “Sovereignty facts on the ground,” while not taking land that is provably Arab owned. But most lands, he said, are “state lands” and “over that territory, the state must proclaim Sovereignty. It belongs to us and we will

live here with all the connotations of our right to live here. Although the Master of the universe gave us everything, we are also commanded not to rob private land. Robbing gentiles is prohibited (Riskin, March 2019, p. 25).

The point is also made explicitly. “We must take care,” according to Rabbi Haim Druckman, among the most influential and politically successful of Gush Emunim’s leaders, “that the Land will be under the control of the Jewish people and not only that we should be here. This is sovereignty... (Druckman, May 2014).” Condemning a government of Israel which contains Arabs and therefore “is fundamentally not of the People of Israel,” Orit Struk asks “What is the idea of sovereignty?” And answers: “That the People of Israel will go forward to apply sovereignty over more and more parts of its Land (Struk, February 2022).

The one-state reality confronts annexationists with a real problem. They are generally loath to see the regime they favor as apartheid, i.e. systematic and explicit discrimination based on ascriptive characteristics. But without systematic and explicit discrimination against Arabs, and without a plan for mass expulsion or transfer, they cannot achieve and sustain the Jewish supremacy that is their overriding objective. What to do with Arabs in a one-state reality when what they want is Jewish supremacy, not a sovereign state of equal citizens. Knowing that annexationists want sovereignty over the entire country, but not equality within it, and knowing that they have no plan for how to succeed, helps map the future of Israeli politics as a struggle, not over where the state should be and whether it should be sovereign, but over what sovereignty means in the multinational society that now exists. Will the regime that evolves produce governments acting as

weapons of a privileged caste or as protectors and sustainers of citizens and communities sharing in the fruits of competition and cooperation?

## Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

## Author contributions

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

## Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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