



HEBREW
FASCISM IN
PALESTINE
1922–1942

D A N T A M I R



Hebrew Fascism in Palestine, 1922–1942

Dan Tamir

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To my mother, who encouraged me.

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CONTENTS

1	Introduction: A Meeting in Beirut	1
2	Individuals Making a Movement: Short Biographies of Prominent Proponents of Hebrew Fascism	29
3	Facing an Unprecedented Disaster	41
4	The Nation Stands Above All	61
5	Tormented by Foreigners and Betrayed by Brothers	71
6	Is Spengler's Prophecy Coming True?	85
7	Nation, Unification, Consolidation	99
8	Leaders and Self-Sacrificing Prophets	119
9	"Born Amidst Blood and Fire"	143
10	The Stronger Rules: Might Is Right	169

11 Conclusion: A Hebrew Fascist Movement in Palestine	183
Bibliography	197
Index	205

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 3.1	Abba Ḥime'ir during the early 1930s. Courtesy of the Jabotinsky Institute in Israel	56
Fig. 5.1	Uri Zwi Grünberg, early 1930s. Courtesy of the Jabotinsky Institute in Israel	81
Fig. 6.1	Ze'ev Wolfgang von Weisl, early 1930s. Courtesy of the Jabotinsky Institute in Israel	96
Fig. 8.1	Vladimir Ze'ev Jabotinsky, 1936. Courtesy of the Jabotinsky Institute in Israel	136
Fig. 9.1	Abraham "Yair" Stern, 1936. Courtesy of the Jabotinsky Institute in Israel	162
Fig. 10.1	Abba Ḥime'ir next to a wall with the inscription "do not take part in the census!", January 1931. Courtesy of the Jabotinsky Institute in Israel	179
Fig. 11.1	The core of the fascist network. <i>Blue</i> persons, <i>gray</i> journals, international affiliates. <i>Straight lines</i> mark direct working contacts, <i>curved lines</i> mark remote or weak contacts	185



CHAPTER 1

Introduction: A Meeting in Beirut

Beirut, early January 1941. After an annoying wait in Ankara for the issue of a visa by the French mandate authorities, Dr. Werner Otto von Hentig, head of the Near East Department at the German Foreign Ministry, arrived in the Lebanese capital. A senior diplomat with considerable experience in both overt and clandestine activity in the region, von Hentig was there in order to inspect the local situation in the Levant and report about it to the office in Berlin. Generally, his tour was successful: within four weeks he had visited large parts of Syria and Lebanon, and received the impression that local political circles were favourable to Germany.¹

Von Hentig's attempt to keep his visit low profile, however, turned out to be less successful. The rumour that a senior German official was visiting Lebanon quickly spread; various delegations and representatives of ethnic and political groups in the region soon came to meet him: Muslims and Christians, from Kurdistan to the shores of the Mediterranean. "The most remarkable delegation came from Palestine," von Hentig recalled in his autobiography, about 20 years later. "The head [of the delegation], an impressive young man with the look of an officer, suggested working in cooperation with the National Socialists against their own people, primarily the orthodox Zionists, if Hitler would guarantee the sovereignty of Jewish Palestine."²

That young fellow was Naftali Lubenczik, and the delegation he headed consisted of members of the "National Military Organisation *in Israel*", who—led by Abraham Stern—had split from the general National Military

Organisation (NMO) about a year earlier.³ However, the initiative for collaboration between Nazi Germany and the *NMO in Israel* did not bear fruit. Lubenczik was arrested by the British police soon after his return to Tel Aviv; a year later, Stern himself was arrested and executed by the police.

To be sure, the *NMO in Israel* did not represent a mass movement. Stern's idea, that collaboration with the Axis might be beneficial, gained very limited approval among the Hebrew community in Palestine. Members of the *NMO in Israel* were actually tagged with a shower of insults and psychiatric terms borrowed from Hebrew dictionaries of the time: from "traitors", "collaborators" and "Quislings", to "snakes", "gangsters", "lunatics" and "masochists".⁴

Indeed, the idea to collaborate with Nazi Germany was an extreme one. But it was not the sporadic attempt of a disconnected group, suddenly struck by some political lunacy. Furthermore, Stern and his fellows were not seeking an ad hoc alliance, based on short-term political opportunism. The main argument of this book is that Stern's ideology, and the small yet devoted group which gathered around it, were the ultimate and most profound expression of a genuine fascist movement which had gradually evolved during the 1920s and 1930s in the Hebrew society in Palestine in general, and within the Revisionist Zionist movement in particular.

GENERIC FASCISM

A huge corpus of literature has been assembled in the past 80 years about fascism. Varied in their focal points and covering many different aspects of that phenomenon, these works include political and social analysis, economic research, psychological and literary interpretations, along with many other directions of investigation.

But what is fascism? This question may be divided into three further inter-related sub-questions: what are its roots, what are its limits and what is its place within the political sphere of the Right? Interestingly enough, for a long time fascism was viewed by many scholars as actually non-existent for its own sake, lacking any positive content and being defined by its negations: *anti-liberal*, *anti-communist* and *anti-rationalist*. Recognising the problematic of the issue, Stanley Payne politely admitted that the mere term *fascism* "proved notoriously slippery and resistant to interpretation and even to basic definition".⁵ On a similar vein, David D. Roberts agreed that fascism "seems to entail a singular combination of substance and hollowness difficult to understand in tandem".⁶

Unsurprisingly, the greatest bulk of research focused on fascism in Italy and Germany. While acknowledging the unique features of each of these regimes, it is generally agreed that Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy had many things in common, and represent two manifestations of the same political phenomenon, sometimes to the degree of referring to National-Socialism simply as “German Fascism”.⁷ The focused historical interest in the Italian and German fascisms was not only quantitative, but qualitative as well, since Germany and Italy were the only states in which fascist movements managed not only to take root and become serious political powers, but also to seize power and establish regimes which eventually collapsed in a horrible show of blood and fire.⁸

Indeed, some scholars argue that fascism was a phenomenon tightly bound to a specific political constellation and a specific moment in modern history. Ernst Nolte argued that the era of fascism was actually identical with the era of the World Wars.⁹

Zeev Sternhell argues that ideologies and movements may be discovered in their purest form before coming to power and before pressures and compromises transform them into governmental groups. “The nature of a political ideology”, he suggests, “always emerges more clearly in its aspirations than in its application”.¹⁰ Concentrating on fascism’s ideological and intellectual parts, Sternhell locates its roots in a reaction to the values of modern enlightenment, already present and well articulated in late nineteenth-century France. He traces the roots of fascism even to 1871, when Ernest Renan published his *Réforme intellectuelle et morale de la France*; the fascist ideology was simply the hardcore and the most radical variety of a far more widespread, older phenomenon: a comprehensive revision of the essential values of the humanistic and rationalistic heritage of the enlightenment.¹¹

Fascism, according to Sternhell, sought to lay a foundation of a new civilisation, a communal, anti-individualist civilisation, that alone would be capable of perpetuating the existence of a human collectivity, in which all layers and classes of society are perfectly integrated. The natural framework of such harmonious, organic collectivity was the nation.¹² Sternhell sees the essence of fascism as a synthesis of organic nationalism and anti-Marxist socialism. Fascist ideology, he claims, was a rejection of “materialism” and it aimed at bringing a total spiritual revolution; fascist activism, with its marked tendency to elitism, “favoured a strong political authority, freed from the trammels of democracy and emanating from the nation, a state that represented the whole of society, with all its different classes”.¹³

The two basic components of fascism, he argues, were tribal nationalism, based on social Darwinism, and anti-materialistic revision of Marxism.¹⁴

Sternhell argues that fascism, before becoming a political force, was a cultural phenomenon, and the crystallisation of fascist ideology preceded the buildup of fascist political power and was necessary for its development.¹⁵ All the fascist movements had the same lineage: a revolt against liberal democracy and bourgeois society, and an absolute refusal to accept the conclusions inherent in the general outlook, in the explanation of social phenomena and human relations, of all the so-called “materialist” schools of thought.¹⁶

However, one of the main arguments for deeming Sternhell’s theory as only partially adequate for explaining fascism is the fact that his historical trajectory actually ends in 1922, neglecting later developments of that stream of thought after the Fascist taking of power and the establishment of a fascist regime in Italy, when fascism became not only a theory, but a practice as well. As David D. Roberts argues, rather than seeing practice and theory as distinct from each other, one should “recognise that actors were thinking and thinkers were acting in the same field of conflicted categories”.¹⁷

Some scholars saw fascism as a unique *European* phenomenon, confining its geographical scope to that continent alone: Renzo de Felice, for example, writes that the use of the term Fascism “cannot be extended to countries outside Europe, nor to any period other than that between the wars”.¹⁸

During the first half of the twentieth century, however, similar groups and movements were active in many countries around the world beside Italy and Germany; some of those groups played central roles in their respective political arenas. Although none of those groups managed to seize full state power, some became serious contenders for it. This political phenomenon is usually referred to as *generic fascism*.

After a first “wave” of research about fascism from the 1920s to the 1940s and a second “wave” during the 1960s and 1970s, a third “wave” of comparative research of fascism emerged in the 1990s.¹⁹ This recent surge in interest in the topic, which was centred mostly in the UK and the USA, probably gained its initial momentum after the collapse of the USSR and the dismantling of the Communist bloc—a political event which aroused worries about a possible reappearance of fascist movements.²⁰

Due to fascism’s extremely nation-centred nature, nothing like a “Fascist International” or a global, self-defined standard for fascism has

been established. To paraphrase Tolstoy's famous opening sentence, we may say that every fascism is fascism in its own unique way; to take a "taxonomic" parable, fascism might be considered a *genus* rather than a *species*. All that said, the theory of *generic fascism* postulates that these diverse fascisms do belong to a common group, which can be investigated as such. Accordingly, many research works have examined parties and movements in countries other than Germany and Italy: from Norway to New South Wales, and from Japan to Brazil.²¹

Following the Second World War and the collapse of the Axis and the regimes affiliated with it, which were clearly viewed as fascist, scholars were far from agreeing about what fascism actually was.²² Historical and political scholarship saw very different definitions of fascism—either its ideology or its affiliated regimes—let alone fascist movements outside Europe. Although the approaches to fascism articulated by Nolte and Sternhell became famous within the debate among social scientists regarding the roots of fascism, these approaches were hardly applied as a conceptual tool by historians researching fascist phenomena.²³

While agreeing generally about the mere existence of generic fascism,²⁴ scholars still dispute its exact scope and definition. It was in this context that Roger Griffin began his attempts at phrasing a definition of fascism which will be both accurate and practical, aiming at what he later named "the new consensus" in the definition of fascism. "Fascism is a genus of modern, revolutionary, 'mass' politics", he writes, "which, while extremely heterogeneous in its social support and in the specific ideology promoted by its many permutations, draws its internal cohesion and driving force from a core myth that a period of perceived national decline and decadence is giving way to one of rebirth and renewal in a post-liberal new order."²⁵

In an attempt to reach a definition of a "fascist minimum",²⁶ Griffin coined the phrase that "fascism is a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a 'palingenetic' form of populist ultra-nationalism".²⁷ Nonetheless, in a volume concentrating on the connections and the reciprocal relations between fascism as a wide phenomenon and various regimes during the inter-war period, Griffin asserted that "considerable confusion" still reigns in the taxonomy of political movements and regimes" on the Right side of the political spectrum.²⁸

Roger Eatwell, in turn, described fascism as "an ideology that strives to forge social rebirth based on a *holistic-national radical Third Way*, though in practice fascism has tended to stress style, especially action and the

charismatic leader, more than a detailed programme, and to engage in a Manichean demonisation of its enemies”.²⁹ Fascism, he argues, was more a flexible strategy to achieve power than a blueprint. Furthermore, variations in both fascist theory and practice helped make fascism, especially its Italian variant, an appealing model—as relevant parts could be adapted to other national situations and traditions, with these in turn becoming models for others.³⁰

Next to finding an agreed-upon definition of fascism, further attention was given to the evolution of fascist movements and regimes. Citing Michael Mann’s five core elements of fascism—nationalism, statism, transcendence, cleansing and paramilitarism³¹—António Costa Pinto modelled a three-stage cycle of fascism: (1) creation of fascist movements; (2) their seizure of power; and (3) exercise of power.³² His definition of fascism is a combined one, based on those of Robert Paxton and Michael Mann, which stress the importance of *both* ideology *and* power organisation.

The latest methodological shift in fascism studies is probably the emphasising of dynamism rather than stability in the definition of the term. Together with Aristotle Kallis, Pinto lately proved that the complex transnational dynamic that involved inspiration, political learning, reflexive cross-fertilisation and competition perforated and muddled the boundaries between political categories and constituencies of the inter-war European Right. All these dynamic transnational entanglements generated a rich field of circulation of ideas and practices that shaped the experience of both inter-war “fascism” and “dictatorship” far more than previously assumed.³³ This dynamic existed not only between dictatorships and ruling parties, but between small and sometimes even marginal political groupings and movements of the extreme right as well; indeed, it involved diffusion of ideas and practices, cross-fertilisation, and reflexive adaptation among small political groups worldwide. Furthermore, Kallis notes that the political attraction force of fascism grew stronger during the 30s, producing a “fascistisation” in varying extents of the European Right.³⁴ The methodological frame of this work, however, is based on the model suggested by Robert O. Paxton, for several reasons which will be described in the following.

THE GENERAL PHENOMENON: PAXTON’S MODEL

In his book *The Anatomy of Fascism*,³⁵ Robert Paxton presents an elaborate description of fascism, and a model of the way in which fascist movements emerge and develop. According to Paxton, fascism, “the major political innovation of the twentieth century”, is a form of political behaviour

marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation and victimhood, together with compensatory cults of unity, energy and purity. Paxton argues that the seeds of fascism lie within all democratic systems, and are likely to sprout in troubled societies in times of national crisis. It is a social phenomenon engrained within modern mass politics, being present at some level—from quiet dormancy to a total seizure of power—in all modern nations. In contrast to classical tyrannies, military dictatorships and conservative authoritarian regimes—which usually try to put their people to sleep—fascist movements try to mobilise the masses towards internal cleansing and external expansion, while abandoning democratic liberties, competing against traditional elites and removing legal restraints.³⁶ Paxton does not try to phrase as precise and short a definition as possible, but rather provides us with a practical description of fascism. With some parallels to the criteria and definitions of Eatwell, Griffin, Schieder and other scholars,³⁷ Paxton counts nine “mobilising emotions” which together might comprise a good description of a fascist movement.³⁸ According to Paxton’s model, fascism can generally be defined as a radical nationalistic ideology which entails:

1. a sense of overwhelming crisis beyond the reach of any traditional solutions;
2. the belief in the primacy of the group, to which one has obligations superior to all rights, whether individual or universal, and the subordination of the individual to the group;
3. the belief that the group is a victim, thus justifying any action against its enemies, both internal and external;
4. dread of the group’s decline under the corrosive effects of individual liberalism, class conflict and alien influences;
5. the need for closer integration of a purer community, either by consent or by violence;
6. the need for authority of natural chiefs, culminating in one national chieftain;
7. the superiority of the leader’s instincts over abstract and universal reason;
8. the beauty of violence and the efficacy of will, when devoted to the group’s success;
9. the right of the chosen people to dominate others without restraint of any kind of human or divine law, while the sole criterion defining it is the group’s prowess within a Darwinian struggle.³⁹

A central advantage of using Paxton's definition of generic fascism for the analysis of hitherto unresearched case studies is the balance it holds between implementability and accuracy: this model does not try to look for a "minimum" or find the lowest common denominator, but at the same time it does not give an "across-the-board", all-encompassing description which makes the definition of fascism suit a large number of right-wing nationalistic movements.⁴⁰

It should be mentioned that Paxton himself is very cautious with such definitions, rejecting any attempt to fix strict "taxonomic" classifications of fascism. Some kind of a working definition, however, is necessary for examining a certain phenomenon; and these above-mentioned characteristics can still serve us for considering a political movement as fascist.

THE SPECIFIC CASE: HEBREW FASCISM

Models are instruments made for analysing and understanding phenomena. Can Paxton's model serve us in identifying and analysing political movements which have not yet been analysed as fascist? Two basic postulates form the basis for this research. The first is Paxton's postulate that fascism is an inherent part of modern politics, stepping into the political arena as modern societies with mechanisms of mass politics as these experience what they conceive as a deep political crisis.⁴¹

The second postulate is that in early twentieth-century Palestine, a small yet thriving and modern Hebrew society was undergoing a local political crisis. That society's modernisation process, which commenced at the end of the nineteenth century, gained a major boost after the First World War, when the old Ottoman regime was replaced by British mandatory rule, bringing the country closer to the European sphere of influence—politically, economically and culturally.⁴²

Every modernisation process might entail a certain feeling of crisis. But in Palestine, this feeling of crisis was boosted by two accompanying factors. The first was the Mandate regime, which was supposed to be a temporary phase on the way towards self-governance and independence, yet was unlimited in time. A second factor was the different and sometimes contradictory promises made by the British government to various parties and pressure groups, playing a game of "divide and rule" while encouraging local nationalism and promoting inter-communal tensions. For the Hebrew people and the Zionist movement, Britain's division of Palestine in 1922 was a decisive moment.⁴³

The suggested hypothesis of this work is derived from combining these two assumptions: if fascism is present in any given modern society during times of political crisis, and if a modern Hebrew society in Palestine was experiencing a deep political crisis during the 1920s and 1930s, one may expect a fascist movement to have emerged within that society at the time. But how can one trace it?

STATE OF THE RESEARCH TODAY

While there has been considerable research into the ideas and actions of most of the persons, groups and organisations of the Hebrew Right in inter-war Palestine, these research works were to a large extent carried out either by political opponents from the Zionist left, or by the Rightists' political descendants. In many cases, it seems that the academic debates among scholars regarding Revisionist Zionism's fascist tendencies run parallel to their own political inclinations today; by its very nature, this controversy literature is either polemic or apologetic. Moreover: these studies usually focus on the political thought and action of the Revisionists' leader, Ze'ev Jabotinsky.⁴⁴

In 1923, disappointed by the British government's failure to fulfil its promise to the Zionist movement regarding the establishment of a Zionist "national home" in Palestine, and appalled by what he perceived as the "docility" of the Zionist leadership (which was then headed by Dr. Haim Weizmann), Ze'ev Jabotinsky resigned from the Zionist executive and the Zionist Organisation. Jabotinsky called for a *revision* of Zionist politics—rendering it more firm and less compromising in its demands from the British government. In April 1925, Jabotinsky officially established the Union of Revisionist Zionists, which soon became the main political body within the Zionist and Hebrew right wing. Jabotinsky's preachings for non-compromising politics on the national level, combined with his excellent rhetoric capabilities and utmost personal devotion to public affairs, granted him wide support among Zionist activists, mostly youngsters from eastern and central Europe.⁴⁵

The name "fascist", however, became a word of abuse, which was commonly voiced by Labour Zionists in order to defame their right-wing political opponents from the Revisionist party. Here, too, Jabotinsky's figure played a central role: while some left-oriented scholars claimed he was a fascist,⁴⁶ his followers and political descendants emphasised the liberal parts evident in his political thought.⁴⁷

There are also very detailed reports about specific armed groups such as the “Stern Gang”⁴⁸ and the National Military Organisation.⁴⁹ Many shorter articles deal with specific events in the history of these organisations and their political activities in Palestine at the time.

While the above-mentioned studies tend to focus on specific individuals or small organisations, broader portraits of Jabotinsky’s followers and the Revisionist Movement tend to characterise it generally as “right-wing”.⁵⁰ Hitherto, however, no comprehensive research has been carried out trying to examine the possible existence of *generic Hebrew fascism* in Palestine. Those studies which indeed tried to portray a wider political scene usually referred to their research objects as “nationalists”, “rightists”, “extreme rightists” or “terrorists”.⁵¹

Furthermore, basing the research into fascism on biographies of specific persons or groups might be misleading, as people who were fascists in one phase of their lives might have changed their political tendencies later on. By the same token, fascist movements’ constituencies may grow and decline with time, as individuals either join or leave them.⁵²

Very few researches have tried to examine the fascist tendencies within the Revisionist Movement on a comparative basis. Heller writes that during the 1930s there was “an authentic fascist stream” within the Revisionist Movement. He argues that the movement was “marked by fascist elements which were characteristic of movements of integralist nationalism in inter-war Europe”.⁵³

Heller refers only briefly to a small faction within the Revisionist party, making two important reservations. First, he argues that Jabotinsky, who was the Movement’s undisputed leader from its establishment until his untimely death in 1940, did not identify absolutely with fascism, but at the most “accepted the existence of a proto-fascist faction within his movement”, adopted some of Italian Fascism’s corporatist economic principles and sought Italian support as a tactical card against Britain. Second, he points out that at the end of the 1930s, those leaders of what he calls “a proto-fascist faction” within the Revisionist Movement—explicitly mentioning Von Weisl and Aḥime’ir—forsook fascism. The only Revisionists who did not break with fascism after the beginning of the Second World War were Abraham Stern and his followers (who indeed severed their connections with the Revisionist movement in 1939).

A comprehensive review and analysis of the ideology and cultural trends prevailing among Revisionist Zionist circles between 1920 and 1937 is Eran Kaplan’s book, *The Jewish Radical Right*, published in 2005.⁵⁴

Kaplan mentions the Revisionist's admiration of force and violence, their cult of the leader, the movement's rebellion against modernism and rationalism, its opposition to socialism and the influence Futurism had over it—all blatant characteristics of fascist movements of that era.

Kaplan describes the Revisionists' ideological writing as a "process creating a radical new vision of the Hebrew national revival", an ideology "that attempted to reinvent the Hebrew nation by cultural means". "Like other radical right-wing movements in Europe", he writes, "Revisionism was a revolt against rationalism, individualism and materialism, against what Zeev Sternhell has called the heritage of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution".⁵⁵ Kaplan strictly refrains, however, from using the term *fascism* to describe the Revisionist Movement, and prefers to tag it as *radical Right*; the reason for this is what he perceives as the common linkage made between fascism and anti-Semitism. Kaplan draws on Abba Aḥime'ir, who stated that one of the Revisionist Movement's objectives was "preventing the association of fascism and anti-Semitism".⁵⁶ Aḥime'ir's regret for this failure can be easily understood, as his view of fascism was actually quite favourable—at least until 1933. But what if Aḥime'ir were right, and fascism indeed had no inherent connection to anti-Semitism? What if fascism—unlike what was widely assumed after the Second World War—was not anti-Semitic by its nature, and therefore could be easily adopted by "Semites"? Indeed, Stanley Payne asserts that although fascism generally represented an extreme form of modern European nationalism, fascist ideologies were not necessarily racist in the Nazi sense of mystical, intra-European Nordic racism, nor even were they necessarily anti-Semitic. He adds, however, that fascist nationalists were all racists in the general sense of considering blacks or non-Europeans inferior.⁵⁷

FINDING THE RESEARCH OBJECT: NETWORK

Even if we begin with the assumption that the Revisionist movement was not a fascist one, the question still remains: what might be the research aim of "Israeli fascism"? Searching for hierarchical organisations or declared fascist movements will bring us nowhere, for in Israeli history there was no movement which explicitly named itself "fascist", nor were there any hierarchical organisations bearing characteristics fully identical to those of established fascist parties in Europe at that time. But if we accept the thesis that fascist movements are not created *ex nihilo* but rather develop gradually, then we could widen our search from organisations and

institutions to non-institutionalised groups, which pre-date the establishment of an organised, institutionalised party. These non-institutionalised groups are similar to what Roger Griffin named “slime mould”;⁵⁸ they are equivalent to the first developmental phase in Robert Paxton’s model, that of the *creation* of fascist movements. In short: we are not looking for an official, regulated political construction, but an informal social network. And here we can use network-theory.⁵⁹

But where should we begin to trace this network? Kaplan’s mentioning of Aḥime’ir—and not some other prominent Revisionist activist—in referring to fascism was not coincidental. It might help us find the first part of the network. As in the old joke about the drunkard in the middle of the night, we may begin the search under the street lamp, where there is light.

After obtaining his PhD from the university of Vienna (for a work analysing certain aspects of Oswald Spengler’s *Decline of the West*),⁶⁰ Abba Aḥime’ir—a devoted Zionist—migrated to Palestine and worked a few years as a teacher and a journalist. At first active in the moderate party *Ha-Po’el ha-Tza’ir* (“The Young Worker”), he gradually became more and more distanced from socialist circles. By 1928 he had become a devoted Revisionist, and between Autumn 1928 and Winter 1929 he was writing a weekly column in the liberal newspaper *Do’ar ha-Yom*. The column’s title was “From the Notebook of a Fascist”. This is—as far as I know—the only case in Hebrew history of a person declaring himself to be a fascist. In the early 1930s he was one of the editors of *Hazit ha-‘Am*—the Revisionist newspaper Jabotinsky threatened to close, because it praised National Socialist politics.⁶¹

The second link in the network is Itamar Ben Avi, founder and editor of *Do’ar ha-Yom*. Ben Avi argued that fascism provides a good answer to the looming danger of communism. “Get used to this new name”, wrote Ben Avi in his editorial a few days after the March on Rome, “to the four syllables of Italy’s hero of the day, that young Garibaldi—as he’s called by the admirers of late Garibaldi... for this Italian will keep us busy with many more great surprises and actions...”.⁶² As Jabotinsky returned to Palestine in October 1928, after a few years abroad, Ben Avi clearly saw similarities between the two leaders.⁶³ Later, during the 1930s, he was also the chairman of the “Italian Culture Club” in Tel Aviv.

Wolfgang von Weisl had similar hopes that Jabotinsky would become a powerful national leader, and he made them explicit. The Viennese born physician took a career as a journalist; his journeys brought him to eastern Africa, where he was highly impressed by Italian colonial power.

Acknowledging the role of fascism in this prosperity, he asked Jabotinsky “to be our Führer”.⁶⁴ Jabotinsky refused to take a dictatorial position within the movement; in 1935, however, Von Weisl was trying to establish contacts with the leadership of the British Union of Fascists.⁶⁵

Joshua Yevin, a translator, columnist and publicist, wrote too in *Hazit ha-‘Am* (Hebrew for “The People’s Front”), and was—together with Aḥime’ir and Uri Zwi Grünberg—one of the founders of “Brit ha-Biryonom” militia: a small yet active and vociferous group, which had the declared aim of educating the youth to political action by violence and force, active from 1930 to 1933, leaving a significant impact on the political discourse in Palestine during the 1930s.⁶⁶

The violence of Brit ha-Biryonom was mostly rhetorical, never armed. The group’s activist spirit, however, provided the inspiration for Abraham Stern, who—in Autumn 1939, after the outbreak of the Second World War—opposed the policy of Jabotinsky and his followers in the leadership of the National Military Organisation, which he regarded as too weak and compromising. Stern used his apocalyptic visions of national renaissance through blood and fire⁶⁷ in order to mobilise some NMO activists and to found a small yet devoted and violent underground group: the *NMO in Israel*, later known as Israel’s Liberty Fighters. In his uncompromising war against the British regime he tried, in winter 1940–1941, to forge an alliance with the Axis.⁶⁸

SOME PRELIMINARY NOTES

Until now, therefore, no reference has been made to Hebrew fascism in Palestine during the 1920s and 30s as a political current distinct from “right-wing” or “anti-socialist” (terms which could apply to many liberals and moderate conservatives as well), and methodically comparable with other fascist movements around the world. But before going into its details within a comparative framework, several points should be made clear about the Hebrew case study.

First, a distinction should be made between the two terms, “Hebrew” and “Jewish”. Both have a long and at times intertwined common history. A clear example thereof is the meaning of the term *ebrei* in modern Italian: it clearly refers to a religious community. *Ebrei* can be translated into English as “Jewish”, and into German as “Jüdisch”. The origin of the term “Hebrew” is quite an ancient one, and so is the confusing usage of this term as parallel to “Jewish”.⁶⁹

However, for the sake of this research it is important to distinguish between the two in the context of Palestine in the twentieth century. This distinction is important in two dimensions, positive and negative. Positively, the term “Hebrew” is meant to describe the main characteristic of the cultural sphere in which the political movement in concern took action. In Palestine, Hebrew was a language of education, press, commerce, art, literature, politics—all aspects of everyday life. In this aspect, Hebrew was not different from many other modern languages which laid the basis for modern national societies.⁷⁰ Negatively, *Hebrew* is not *Jewish*. While the first defines an earthly, territorial, linguistic and historical social group, the latter represents a religious, ex-territorial, confessional, non-historical congregation. Although Hebrew people and Hebrew groups had connections with traits, traditions and symbols commonly perceived as “Jewish”, a clear distinction should be maintained between the two.⁷¹

These two dimensions are not unrelated. As a matter of fact, to a large extent they developed in parallel: the creation of a modern Hebrew territorial nation demanded—to a certain degree, at least—alienation towards pre-modern, non-territorial Jewish communities. As the consolidation and strengthening of “national consciousness” is frequently a central part in the practice of fascist movements, it is not surprising that protagonists of Hebrew fascism took an active part in what Uri Ram terms “a deliberate effort to be released from the ‘Jewish’ burden”, and replace it with Hebrew cultural capital.⁷²

This effort was deliberately and manifestly made both personally by Jabotinsky and by the Revisionist movement more generally during the 1920s and 1930s. Jabotinsky clearly objected to granting religion any significant role in the public realm. The belief that religion is a private affair was well rooted in his liberal views. Although some of his followers and supporters were observant and even religious Jews, they also accepted this separation between religion and nationality.⁷³

A second important point that should be remembered is that “fascism” and “fascist” are not used here as an abuse. Like many other political currents in the twentieth century, fascism gained both adversaries and enemies. Understandably, the violent defeat of fascist regimes in Europe in 1945 condemned the ideology which drove them, making “fascism”—at least officially and in its declared and blatant form—an outcast political thought. The crimes committed by fascist regimes and parties during the 1930s and 1940s have justly contributed to the revulsion that fascism inspires today.

But we should not project our understanding of fascism today on people's perception of fascism in earlier times. People who lived during the 1920s and 1930s did not have the knowledge we have now about fascism's possible—but not inevitable—consequences. In short: “fascism” is a social and political phenomenon, not an abuse.

A third point is the geographic focus of this work. Although Palestine was the object of its political efforts from a very early stage in its history, the Zionist movement was not born there; nor did it have there its operational centre, nor the greater bulk of its activists and militants. Zionism remained mostly a foreign movement, based in and oriented towards Europe and, later on, the USA. At least until 1939, the operational centre of the Zionist movement was in Europe, mainly in London; the majority of its adherents were located in central and eastern Europe. To a large extent, it was an important political string (though not the only one) connecting Palestine and Europe during the years examined in this research.

Revisionist Zionism, the ancestor of Hebrew fascism, was no exception to this. Many of the Hebrew fascists of the 1920s and 1930s were not born in Palestine; some were at a certain point in their lives members of different European Zionist political organisations and factions. “Beytar”, the revisionist youth movement, for example, was founded in Lithuania and held its conferences and congresses mainly in Poland; its naval school was in Civitavecchia, 70 km from Rome.⁷⁴

However, it is possible to differentiate between local political thought and practice and international Zionism. While acknowledging the relations and ties between the Hebrew society in Palestine and Zionist institutions around the world, this research focuses on the local politics only.

Indeed, similarly to trends in other “nativist” movements, it was precisely this focus on local activity rather than on international politics which became one of the characteristics of radical Revisionists, accelerating the radicalisation of part of the Revisionist movement, which culminated in Stern's secession from the NMO, which will be discussed in the following chapters.⁷⁵

Mentioning the toponym “Palestine” might also cause some difficulty, semantic rather than essential—even though it became the vessel for a great deal of ideological fury.⁷⁶ “Palestine” is the name which was used by the British Mandate Government when referring to the land between Aqaba in the South, Rafah and the Mediterranean shore in the west, the Sykes-Picot borders in the North, and the Iraqi desert border in the East: a territory including today's Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the State of

Israel and the Palestinian Authority. In 1922, the British government granted the parts of Palestine east of the Jordan river to Prince `Abdullah of the Hashem family; thus, Palestine was divided into Transjordan Palestine and Cisjordan Palestine. This division of the land was probably the most crucial single event which led Jabotinsky and his followers to form the Revisionist Movement, the political current from which Hebrew fascism gradually emerged.⁷⁷

Therefore, “Israel” is actually a synonym for “Palestine”. It too is divided into Israel West of the Jordan river and Israel East of it. As a matter of fact, it was only during the late 1990s that the Likud—the Israeli political party which inherited the Revisionist Movement—recognised the separation of Israel east of the river from Israel west of the river. Today too, it is not uncommon to read and hear—mostly among speakers of the right wing—the term “Western Palestine” (or Western Israel) referring to the territories currently under Israeli rule) and “Eastern Palestine” (or Eastern Israel) referring to the territories of the Hashemite Kingdom.⁷⁸ Therefore, the terms *Israel* and *Palestine* are used as exact synonyms in this work.

Another question often asked is whether fascism is possible without an independent state. The research of totalitarianism has contributed a lot to the common connotation made between fascism and a strong state apparatus. But an established state is not a precondition for fascism, for two reasons: inherent and structural.

Inherently, the strong connection between state and nation is a product of certain streams within European nationalism. Crudely, one may claim that the difference between these two streams is parallel to the egg and chicken question: does every nation “deserve” a state of its own, or do states form nations?⁷⁹ Ethnic (“chauvinist”, “primordial”) nationalisms may, therefore, precede states, and see the establishment of a national state as their goal.

The structural reason is based on Paxton’s model of stages in fascist development. Even if one assumes that the existence of a state is necessary for a fascist movement to seize power and exercise it, the state is not a necessity for the earlier stages of the fascist life cycle, that is, initial formation and taking root. It is worth mentioning that the Hebrew case is not the only one of a fascist movement active within a colonial society: other examples are the Indian fascist movement and that of New South Wales, to name just two instances of fascist movements which were active in territories that were not totally independent of the British Empire at that time.⁸⁰

Still another question regards the slight yet important difference between pro-Italian policies and genuine autochthonic fascism during the examined period. The political success of the Fascists in Italy had encouraged other political actors around the world to try and imitate it, creating various generic fascisms. However, the geo-political circumstances of the Mediterranean basin during the 1920s and 1930s have granted a double meaning to the term “pro-fascist”. During that period, Italy and Great Britain were involved in a competition over the control over the Mediterranean Sea, a rivalry which culminated in the Second World War. It is no wonder, then, that numerous local anti-British forces and movements, seeking allies in their struggle against Britain, were happy to ally with Mussolini’s Italy, for pure Realpolitik calculations, assuming that “my enemy’s enemy is my friend”. Such groups were not necessarily fascist. The borderline between autochthonic fascism based on deep political conviction and simple pro-Italianism might be blurred and not always stable. Indeed, the two tended to mix.⁸¹

Just as important is the issue mentioned by Kaplan, regarding the relation between fascism, racism and anti-Semitism. In the ongoing process of defining and understanding fascism, some attributes and components are commonly agreed upon as being integral parts of it: these include (among other things) ultra-nationalism, cult of the leader and mobilisation of the masses. However, the role of other sociological phenomena in forming the base for fascism is disputed. Racism is one such phenomenon.

As fascism won its greatest political success in Italy and Germany, Italian and German fascisms have contributed the most to the way fascism is generally perceived. Racism played an important role in both these regimes. It was a central element of Hitler’s Nazi ideology, and became a cornerstone of his regime from its very beginning. And while Mussolini’s Fascism did not reach the same scope of murderous bloodshed as that of the Nazis, it also developed racist practices and implemented them gradually, first in Africa, and later on in Italy itself.⁸²

With their inherent nationalist inclinations, fascist movements are probably more likely to adopt racist elements than other, less nationalistic political movements. But is racism an inherent component of fascism? Is racism a necessary condition for the emergence of fascism, or can a fascist movement emerge and evolve also without being racist?

Stanley Payne asserts that although fascism generally represented an extreme form of modern European nationalism, fascist ideologies were not necessarily racist in the Nazi sense of mystical, intra-European Nordic

racism, nor even were they necessarily anti-Semitic. He adds, however, that fascist nationalists were all racists in the general sense of considering blacks or non-Europeans inferior.⁸³

This can be illustrated by the Italian example. Although it harboured a host of outright racists, the Italian Fascist Party as a whole was not racist at least until the mid-1930s. The “General Directorate for Demography and Race” (“Direzione generale per la demografia e la razza”) was established only in 1938, replacing a former department within the ministry of the Interior, founded in 1937.⁸⁴ As for anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, the Italian case might be even clearer. Roberto Farinacci’s vigorous demand from Jewish Italian fascists to actively distance and differentiate themselves from their Jewish “co-fellows” in the context of the Spanish civil war in September 1936 may indicate they formed a significant part (either in numbers or symbolically) of the Fascist party’s membership.⁸⁵

This fact did not evade the eyes of contemporary supporters of fascism in Palestine. “It is clear to us, that this book would raise resentment among certain circles, which are used to see no difference between the fascist movement in Italy and the anti-Semitic movements in Europe which claim to be fascist”, wrote the editor of Mussolini’s first biography in Hebrew, published in Tel Aviv in 1936. He made clear to the readers that some “‘fascisms’ are false pretenses, just as naming the Nazis ‘socialist’ is false pretense”.⁸⁶

During the last few decades, the term “racism” has been so widely expanded that it is now often used to describe various kinds of discrimination, based upon gender, cultural preferences or religious affiliations. This inclusive definition has also been used in retrospect, for instance as some scholars claimed that Italian Fascist racism had been a “spiritual” rather than a “biological” racism.⁸⁷

But it is precisely because of the theoretical affinity between fascism and other rightist ideologies which tend to be culturally exclusive and discriminatory towards groups of “others”, that precision and accuracy are crucial when assessing the role of racism in fascist ideology and practice. Maybe the best place to begin would be what Fredrickson describes as “scientific racism”, which was common in Europe during the first half of the twentieth century, and remain within its boundaries.⁸⁸ While Payne’s first assertion reaffirms the non-necessity of racism for all fascist ideologies and movements except German Nazism, his second assertion might be refuted

by the existence of non-European fascist movements. Japanese, Chinese, Arab—all these generic fascisms may serve as a proof that the notion of European supremacy is not an inherent part of fascism.⁸⁹

Last but not least, one should note that examining Hebrew fascism in Palestine does not mean forgetting that pro-fascist sentiments among Arabic-speaking societies, as well as outright Arabist fascisms, were (and in some cases still are) active in the region. Ḥaġ ‘Amin al-Ḥusseini’s collaboration with the German S.S. and Rašid ‘Ali al-Kaylani’s German-inspired rebellion in Iraq are among the better-known cases of Arabist support of Nazism.⁹⁰ But even if they were driven by a whole-hearted admiration of the Nazi regime (and, at least in the case of Ḥaġ ‘Amin, a strong anti-Jewish sentiment), they probably reflect a political support for the enemies of Great Britain rather than an attempt to establish local national generic fascism in the Fertile Crescent.

The Ba‘th party, whose Iraqi wing was officially in power until the fall of Saddam Ḥussein, and whose Syrian wing is still—at the time of writing—officially in power in Syria, is often regarded as a fascist one. Founded in Damascus in 1940 by two Lebanese intellectuals, the Ba‘th (Arabic for “rebirth” or “resurrection”) has clearly adopted and embedded in its ideology and practices some of the era’s political fashions. But if we consider the abandonment of free institutions as one of fascism’s main aims, then no fascist regime could be established in Iraq or Syria, simply because these states did not have any such institutions. The Ba‘th regimes can therefore be regarded as authoritarian rather than fascist.⁹¹

The only “Arab” state which had free institutions at the time is Lebanon. Indeed, it is there that we can see the development of genuine local “Arab” fascism: Lebanon was the cradle of at least one fascist and one Nazi party, namely the “Falangas” [in Arabic *Kataayeb*] and the Syrian National Socialist Party, respectively.⁹² However, the existence of a fascist movement in one national community does not rule out the existence of such a movement in its neighbouring community.

The next chapter of this study presents short biographies of the main figures whose activities make up the bulk of this work. The following eight chapters are organised thematically, and correspond to Paxton’s nine mobilising emotions (with the cult of the leader and the belief that the leader has special instincts combined in one chapter): each chapter reviews and presents the ways in which the mobilising emotions were reflected in the writings and the actions of the Hebrew fascist thinkers and activists

(and occasionally others as well). The closing chapter summarises the examination whole and presents some conclusions regarding Hebrew fascism in inter-war Palestine.

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NOTES

1. Werner Otto von Hentig, *Mein Leben: eine Dienstreise* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), pp. 338–339.
2. *Ibid.* Before the war, in 1937, Von Hentig discussed with colleagues the idea of supporting the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. Officially, however, he had to agree with the head of the ministry, who claimed that a Jewish state is not in Germany's interest. See Eckart Conze, Norbert Frei, Peter Hayes & Moshe Zimmermann, *Das Amt und die Vergangenheit: deutsche Diplomaten im dritten Reich und in der Bundesrepublik* (München: Karl Blessing, 2010), p. 110 and notes 110, 111 there.
3. A copy of the suggested agreement is kept at the Jabotinsky Archive in Tel Aviv. See "Grundlage des Vorschlages der Nationalen Militärischen Organisation in Palästina (Irgun Zewai Leumi) betreffend der Lösung der jüdischen Frage Europas und der aktiven Teilnahme der N.M.O. Am Kriege an der Seite Deutschlands", JA K-5/4/1.
4. Joseph Heller, *The Stern Gang: Ideology, Politics and Terror, 1940–1949* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), "Part Two: The Stern Period", esp. pp. 66–76, 94–99.
5. Stanley G. Payne, "Historical Fascism and the Radical Right", *Journal of Contemporary History* 35 (2000), pp. 109–118.
6. David D. Roberts, *Fascist Interactions: Proposals for a New Approach to Fascism and its Era, 1919–1945* (New York: Berghahn, 2016), p. 8.
7. See for instance Wolfgang Schieder, *Faschistische Diktaturen: Studien zu Italien und Deutschland* (Göttingen; Wallstein, 2008), p. 251 onwards. While referring to the differences between the two regimes, Schieder simply describes National-Socialism as "deutsche Faschismus".
8. A comparative analysis of Mussolini's and Hitler's movements and regimes based on the sociological categories of Max Weber is Maurizio Bach and Stefan Breuer's *Faschismus als Bewegung und Regime: Italien und Deutschland in Vergleich* (Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2010).
9. Ernst Nolte, *Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche* (München: Piper & Co., 1963), p. 31.

10. Zeev Sternhell, *Neither Right nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France*. Translated from French by David Maisel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 1.
11. Sternhell, "How to Think about Fascism and its Ideology", *Constellations* 15 (2008), pp. 280–290.
12. Sternhell, *Neither Right nor Left*, p. 27. For a quite supportive discussion of this Weberian ideal type and its implications, see Roger Griffin, "Introduction" in Griffin (ed.), *International Fascism: Theories, Causes and the New Consensus* (London: Arnold, 1998), pp. 9–10.
13. Sternhell, *Neither Right nor Left*, p. 27.
14. Zeev Sternhell, Mario Sznajder and Maia Asheri, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution*. Translated from French by David Maisel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 9–13.
15. Sternhell, Sznajder and Asheri, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology*, p. 3.
16. Sternhell, *Neither Right nor Left*, pp. 27; 268–271.
17. David D. Roberts, "How Not to Think about Fascism and Ideology, Intellectual Antecedents and Historical Meaning", *Journal of Contemporary History* (35) 2000, pp. 185–211.
18. Similarly to Nolte, Renzo de Felice writes that fascism's reach is limited: geographically to Europe and temporarily to the era between the two world wars. Fascism's roots, he argues, are typically European and well anchored in the forming process of modern European society. De Felice, *Deutungen des Faschismus* (Zürich: Muster-Schmidt, 1980), p. 17.
19. Sven Reichardt, "Neue Wege der vergleichenden Faschismusforschung", *Mittelweg* 36 1/2007, pp. 9–25.
20. See Roger Griffin, Werner Loh and Andreas Umland (eds.), *Fascism Past and Present, West and East: An International Debate on Concepts and Cases in the Comparative Study of the Extreme Right* (Stuttgart: Ibidem, 2006), especially Griffin's main article "Fascism's New Faces (and New Facelessness) in the 'Post-fascist' Epoch" (pp. 29–67) and Sven Reichardt, "Faschismus—praxeologisch: Ein Kommentar zu Roger Griffin" (pp. 196–201). In this context, it is not coincidental that the front-cover picture of that volume depicts the Nazi-imitating banner of Russia's National-Bolshevik Party, while an appendix to the volume is a manifest written by Aleksander Dugin, head of that party.
21. For a collection of articles surveying a wide range of local fascisms around the world, see Stein Ugelvik Larsen (ed.), *Fascism outside Europe: The European Impulse against Domestic Conditions in the Diffusion of Global Fascism* (Boulder: Social Science Monographs, 2001).
22. Roger Griffin, "Introduction" in Griffin (ed.), *International Fascism: Theories, Causes and the New Consensus*, pp. 2–3.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
24. For reservations referring to the current use of the term, see for instance Emilio Gentile, "Der Faschismus: eine Definition zur Orientierung", *Mittelweg* 36 1/2007, S. 81–99. Gentile draws attention to the "inflationary use" of the term *generic fascism* during the last decade.
25. Griffin, "Introduction" in Griffin (ed.), *International Fascism: Theories, Causes and the New Consensus*, p. 14.
26. Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: St Martin's Press, 1991), p. 26. He later developed the model of fascism as a kind of a "palingenetic political community". See Griffin, "The Palingenetic Political Community: Rethinking the Legitimation of Totalitarian Regimes in Inter-War Europe", *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* Vol. 3 No. 3 (Winter 2002), pp. 24–43.
27. Griffin's "fascist minimum" is probably one of the strongest stimulants of controversy in the last years. See Andreas Umland, "Refining the concept of Generic Fascism", *European History Quarterly* 39, 2 (2009), pp. 298–309.
28. Griffin, "Foreword: Il ventennio parafascista? The Past and Future of a Neologism in Comparative Fascist Studies", in António Costa Pinto and Aristotle Kallis (eds.), *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. viii–xix. Griffin suggests the word "parafascism" as a useful term for designating certain regimes and political forces in inter-war Europe.
29. Roger Eatwell, "New Styles of Dictatorship and Leadership in Interwar Europe", *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* Vol. 7 No. 2 (June 2006), pp. 127–137.
30. Roger Eatwell, "The Nature of 'Generic Fascism': Complexity and Reflexive Hybridity", in Costa Pinto and Kallis (eds.), *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe*, pp. 67–86.
31. Michael Mann, *Fascists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 13.
32. António Costa Pinto, "Fascism: A 'Revolutionary Right' in Interwar Europe", in Nicholas Atkin and Michael Biddiss (eds.), *Theme is Modern European History, 1890–1945* (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 215–242.
33. António Costa Pinto and Aristotle Kallis, "Introduction", in Costa Pinto and Kallis (eds.), *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe*, pp. 1–10.
34. Aristotle Kallis, "Neither Fascist nor Authoritarian: The 4th of August Regime in Greece (1936–1941) and the Dynamics of Fascisation in 1930s Europe", *East Central Europe* 37 (2010), pp. 303–330. The title of the article clearly hints at "Neither Right nor Left", Sternhell's study cited above.

35. Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Knopf, 2004).
36. *Ibid.* Paxton also suggests an “Evolutionary Model” of fascism, with five phases: creation of a fascist movement; its taking root; getting the power; exercising power and an end phase of either radicalisation or decline. Each fascist movement can be examined and assessed according to its progress along this evolutionary line.
37. Reichardt, “Neue Wege der vergleichenden Faschismusforschung”.
38. The use of mobilisation as a characteristic of fascist politics may be referenced to Roger Griffin, who based his definition of fascism on the ‘mobilising “mythic core”’. See Griffin, “Introduction” in Griffin (ed.), *International Fascism: Theories, Causes and the New Consensus*, pp. 13–14.
39. Paxton, *ibid.*, pp. 219–220.
40. For a recent example of such an extremely broad definition of fascism, see for instance Wolfgang Wippermann, *Faschismus: eine Weltgeschichte vom 19. Jahrhundert bis heute* (Darmstadt: Primus, 2009). Wippermann builds a model combining together fascism, fundamentalism and Bonapartism (pp. 12–13), and therefore brings under his very wide fascist umbrella more or less every authoritarian ruler or fundamentalist thinker who was active during the last 200 years: from Louis Bonaparte to Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasser, and from Idi Amin to Sayyid Qutub. For an elaborate and thorough critique of the widening use of the terms *fascism* in general and *Islamofascism* particularly, see Roger Griffin, “What Fascism Is Not and Is: Thoughts on the Re-inflation of the Concept”, *Fascism 2* (2013), pp. 259–261.
41. Paxton, *ibid.*, p. 53. Paxton asserts that “every country with mass politics had a fledgling fascist movement at some point after 1918”.
42. A lively general introduction for the period is by Tom Segev, *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs under the British Mandate* (London: Abacus, 2001). An account of Tel Aviv can be found at Anat Helman, *Young Tel Aviv: A Tale of Two Cities* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2010).
43. A colourful description of British ideas, plans and policies in Palestine (and the “Middle East” in general) is that of Karl Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac, *Kingmakers: The Invention of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Norton, 2008), esp. pp. 94–225. For the history of the geographical division of Mandate Palestine see Isaiah Friedman, “How Trans-Jordan Was Severed from the Territory of the Jewish National Home”, *Journal of Israeli History* 27 (2008), pp. 65–85.
44. Ze’ev Vladimir Jabotinsky (Odessa, 1880–New York, 1940) was a journalist, a writer, a poet and a politician. His movement borrowed its name from his call to revise Zionist policies in a more active direction. Attacked by both the liberal and the socialist factors within the Zionist movement and considered a trouble maker by the British colonial government, he had to

- go into exile in the early 1930s, working in Paris, London and New York until his untimely death. There are several comprehensive and favourable biographies of Jabotinsky, written by his supporters. His first comprehensive biography is probably Joseph B. Schechtman, *Rebel and Statesman: The Vladimir Jabotinsky Story* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1956). A more recent one (originally published in Hebrew in 1993) is Shmuel Katz, *Lone Wolf: a Biography of Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky* (New York: Barricade Books, 1996).
45. Colin Shindler, *The Triumph of Military Zionism: Nationalism and the Origins of the Israeli Right* (London: Tauris, 2006), pp. 20ff.
 46. A clear example thereof is Shlomo Avineri's chapter about Jabotinsky in his book *The Making of Modern Zionism* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1981).
 47. Raphaella Bilski Ben-Hur, *Every Individual Is a King: The Social and Political Thought of Zeev Vladimir Jabotinsky* (Washington: Bnai Brith, 1993). For a brief account of Jabotinsky's sympathy or lack of sympathy towards fascism, see Colin Shindler, *The Triumph of Military Zionism: Nationalism and the Origins of the Israeli Right* (London: Tauris, 2006), pp. 12–14.
 48. Joseph Heller, *The Stern Gang: Ideology, Politics and Terror, 1940–1949* (London: Frank Cass, 1985). Heller has also examined the degree of fascist inclination among the Revisionist right in Israel, coming to the conclusion it was quite marginal: see Heller, "The failure of Fascism in Jewish Palestine 1925–1948", in Larsen (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 362–392.
 49. See for instance J. Bowyer Bell, *Terror Out of Zion: Irgun Zvai Leumi, Lehi, and the Palestine Underground, 1929–1949* (Avon: St Martin's Press, 1977).
 50. See Yaacov Shavit, *Jabotinsky and the Revisionist Movement, 1925–1948* (London: Frank Cass, 1988).
 51. See, for example, Arie Perliger and Leonard Weinberg, "Jewish Self-Defence and Terrorist Groups Prior to the Establishment of the State of Israel: Roots and Traditions", *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* Vol. 4 No. 3 (2003), pp. 91–108.
 52. The "NMO in Israel" (later called "Israel's Liberty's Fighters" and infamously named by the British law enforcement community "The Stern Gang") is a good example of it: not only did its membership fluctuate during its nine years of activity from 1940 to 1949, but its orientation shifted as well between support of fascism during the Second World War to support of Stalin and communism after it. See Heller, *The Stern Gang*, pp. 288–292.
 53. Heller, "The Failure of Fascism in Jewish Palestine, 1925–1948".
 54. Eran Kaplan, *The Jewish Radical Right: Revisionist Zionism and its Ideological Legacy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005).

55. *Ibid.*, pp. xvi–xvii.
56. *Ibid.*, p. xviii.
57. Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), p. 11.
58. Griffin, “From Slime Mould to Rhizome: An Introduction to the Groupuscular Right”, *Patterns of Prejudice* 37 (2003), pp. 27–50.
59. For Network theory and its implementation, see for instance Robert A. Hanneman and Mark Riddle, *Introduction to Social Network Methods* (Riverside: University of California Press, 2005).
60. Aba Gaissinowitsch, *Bemerkungen zu Spenglers Auffassung Russlands. Inaugural-Dissertation zur Erlangung der philosophischen Doktorwürde vorgelegt der philosophischen Fakultät der Wiener Universität* (Vienna, 1924). See also his biography in the next chapter.
61. Jabotinsky’s letter to the editors of *Ḥazit ha-ʿAm*, 17.5.1933. *JA*, 2/23/1.-A1
62. Itamar Ben Avi, “Mussolini”, *Doʿar ha-Yom*, 02.11.1922.
63. Ben Avi, “Jabotinsky in our Land”, *Doʿar ha-Yom*, 7.10.1928.
64. Wolfgang von Weisl’s letter to Jabotinsky, 20.1.1927. *JA*, A1-15/3
65. Von Weisl’s letter to Raven Thomson (no exact date, sometime during 1935), *JA*, P-3/87.
66. See Abraham Cordoba, “‘Inteleqʿualim le-loʿ Pšarā ba-Ḥayim ha-Politiyim: ha-Miqre šel Brit ha-Biryonom” [Uncompromising Intellectuals in Political Life: the Case of Brit ha-Biryonom], in: Pinḥas Ginosar (ed.), *Ha-Sifrut ha-ʿIbrit v-Tnuʿat ha-ʿAboda* [“The Hebrew Literature and the Labour Movement”] (Beer Sheba: Ben Gurion University Press, 1989), pp. 224–242.
67. See for instance the NMO’s anthem, “Unknown Soldiers” [Heb.: *Ḥayalim ʿAlmonim*]: “Unknown soldiers we are, uniforms we lack, surrounded by horror and the shadow of death/we’ve all been conscripted for our entire lives, we shall be dismissed only by death... with the tears of the mothers bereaved from their sons and the blood of infants so pure/we shall stick corpses together like with cement—and so our homeland would endure...”. Stern wrote the poem already in the beginning of the 1930s, before quitting the relatively moderate National Military Organisation (NMO) and establishing the “*NMO in Israel*”. The draft agreement between the *NMO in Israel* and Italy and Germany can be found at the *JA*, K5-1/4/33. See a wider discussion about the document in the concluding chapter.
68. Copies of the proposed treaties with Italy and Germany are kept at the *JA*, K5. The draft of the contract with Italy bears the date 15.9.1940; the document discussing a possible alliance with Germany was delivered to Von Hentig or another German diplomat in January 1941 in Beirut, and arrived on 18.1.1941 to the German embassy in Ankara.

69. For the origin of the term “Hebrew”, see Nadav Na‘aman, “Habiru and Hebrews: The Transfer of a Social Term to the Literary Sphere”, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 45 (1986), pp. 271–288.
70. For a basic introduction to the subject, see Itamar Even-Zohar, “Who Is Afraid of Hebrew Culture?”, in Even Zohar (ed.), *Papers in Culture Research* (Tel Aviv: The Porter Chair of Semiotics at the Tel Aviv University, 2005), pp. 160–172; Itamar Even-Zohar, “The Emergence of a Native Hebrew Culture in Palestine: 1882–1948”, *Studies in Zionism* 4 (1981), pp. 167–184; Tamar Liebes and Zohar Kampf, “‘Hello! This is Jerusalem Calling!’: The Revival of Spoken Hebrew on the Mandatory Radio (1936–1948)”, *Journal of Israeli History* 29 (2010), pp. 137–158.
71. Furthermore, one may argue that since Judaism considers the Almighty, and not any manmade leader or social construct, as the supreme authority, a fascist cannot be Jewish and vice versa.
72. Uri Ram, “Historiosophical Foundations of the Historical Strife in Israel”, *Journal of Israeli History* 20 (2001), pp. 43–61. For the anti-religious sentiments among Labour-Zionists, see also Amos Elon, *The Israelis: Founders and Sons* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971), pp. 328–330.
73. See for instance Nadav Shelef, *Evolving Nationalism: Homeland, Identity and Religion in Israel, 1925–2005* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), pp. 122–123, and Jabotinsky’s letter to Ben Gurion from May 1935, cited there.
74. See Alberto Bianco, “Les sionistes révisionnistes et l’Italie: histoire d’une amitié très discrète (1932–1938)”, *Bulletin du centre de recherche français de Jérusalem* 13 (2003), pp. 22–45.
75. For a detailed discussion of Gurevitz’s rejection of Judaism, see Aharon Amir, “Hōron b-‘Erec h-‘Ibrim”, in *Qedem v-‘Ereb: Kna’an - Toldot ‘Erec b-‘Ibrim* [“East and West: A History of Canaan and the Land of the Hebrews”] (Tel Aviv Dbir, 2000), pp. 17–27.
76. Boas Evron sharply refers to the issue of “Holy Land versus Home Land” in *Jewish State or Israeli Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 115–132.
77. See Friedman, *op. cit.*
78. See, for instance, Moshe Arens, “Palestinian Dream of Statehood Further Away than Ever”, *Ha-Aretz*, 1.12.2009 (on the web: <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/moshe-arens-palestinian-dream-of-statehood-further-away-than-ever-1.3066>). For a review and analysis of the Revisionist movement’s evolving definition of Israel’s borders see Shelef, *ibid.*, pp. 1–7. See also Colin Shindler, “Likud and the Search for Eretz Israel: from the Bible to the Twenty-First Century”, *Israel Affairs* 8 (2001), pp. 91–117.

79. Different interpretations of nationalism can also compete within a national community. For the Israeli case, see Shelef, *ibid.*, pp. 81–106. For a review of both the global phenomenon and the specific Israeli case, see also Joseph Agassi, *Liberal Nationalism for Israel: Towards an Israeli National Identity* (Jerusalem: Gefen, 1998).
80. For a recent research about the New Guard in Australia, see Richard Evans, “‘A Menace to this Realm’: The New Guard and the New South Wales Police, 1931–1932”, *History Australia* 5 (2008), pp. 1–20.
81. A basic review of the relations between Revisionist Zionists and Fascist Italy is given by Vincenzo Pinto, “Between Imago and Res: The Revisionist-Zionist Movement’s Relationship with Fascist Italy 1922–1938”, *Israel Affairs* Vol. 10 No. 3 (Spring 2004), pp. 90–109.
82. Carlo Moos, “Der späte italienische Faschismus und die Juden. Hintergründe und Folgen einer rassenpolitischen Wende”, *Themenportal Europäische Geschichte* www.europa.clío-online.de, 22.02.2008.
83. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945*, p. 11.
84. Carlo Moos, *Ausgrenzung, Internierung, Deportation: Antisemitismus und Gewalt in späten italienischen Faschismus* (Zürich: Chronos, 2004), p. 39.
85. Roberto Farinacci’s address is cited by Moos, *ibid.*, p. 15.
86. Zvi Kolitz, *Mussolini: His Personality and Doctrine* [Mussolini: ‘Išijuto ve-Torato] (Tel Aviv: Tebel, 1936), p. 5.
87. Moos, *ibid.*, pp. 31–32.
88. George Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 3.
89. On Japanese, Chinese and Arab fascisms, see the articles of Gregory Kasza, William Kirby and Haggai Erlich in Larsen, *op. cit.*
90. Recent research about this issue includes Renate Dietrich, “Germany’s Relations with Iraq and Transjordan from the Weimar Republic to the End of the Second World War”, *Middle Eastern Studies* Vol. 41 No. 4 (July 2005), pp. 463–479. See also Klaus-Michael Mallmann und Martin Cüppers, *Halbmond und Hakenkreuz: Das Dritte Reich, die Araber und Palästina* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006).
91. See Paxton, *op. cit.*, p. 300.
92. Next to the party’s updated website (www.ssnp.com). See also Goetz Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon: The Ambivalence of the German Option, 1933–1945* (London, Routledge, 2009) and Nordbruch, “Defending the French Revolution during World War II: Raif Khoury and the Intellectual Challenge of Nazism in the Levant”, *Mediterranean Historical Review* Vol. 21 No. 2 (December 2006), pp. 219–238.



Individuals Making a Movement: Short Biographies of Prominent Proponents of Hebrew Fascism

ITAMAR BEN AVI

The first-born son of Eli'ezer Ben Yehuda came to the world in Jerusalem, in August 1885.¹ By that time his father was already a well-known—and very controversial—public figure. During the first decades after his migration to Israel he was hated, despised and even attacked by religious circles in Jerusalem. Later Zionist historiography mainly describes Eli'ezer Ben Yehuda as the resuscitator of the Hebrew language. This designation is true, but incomplete, for while he had a huge quantitative contribution to the development of the modern Hebrew *language* (in his articles, his newspapers and his dictionary), just as important was his qualitative *political* contribution: Ben Yehuda was the first who not only wrote in Hebrew, but also made it a vernacular language, binding it to a defined country and declaring it to be the cornerstone of a new Hebrew *nation*.

Itamar, therefore, grew up in a highly politicised environment; until his dying day he declared his desire to continue his father's enterprise. Apart from Hebrew, the language in which his father talked with him, he also learned Arabic and French (and probably also some Russian, from his mother). After acquiring his basic education in Jerusalem, he first studied at the pedagogical seminar in Paris, then from 1904 to 1908 in the faculty of humanities at the Humboldt University in Berlin. Upon his return to Jerusalem, before the First World War, he became co-editor, together with his father, of the newspapers *Ha-Zvi* and *Ha-'Or*. At that time he also began to contemplate writing Hebrew using the Latin alphabet.²

Ben Avi's sympathy towards France caused him trouble during the Great War. He had to leave the country; in Egypt he met Ze'ev Jabotinsky, who was then organising the Hebrew battalions to take part in the war as part of the British army. The friendship between the two journalists lasted more than a decade; in 1928 Jabotinsky became the editor of *Do'ar ha-Yom*. In 1917 Ben Avi took part in the "Congress of Oppressed Peoples" organised by Masaryk in Philadelphia; in 1919 he was a member of the Zionist delegation to Versailles and the liaison person between Arab dignitaries and the Zionist leadership. The same year he established *Do'ar ha-Yom* (which he also edited until 1933). *Do'ar ha-Yom* was not the first Hebrew daily newspaper, but probably the first commercial Hebrew daily; some would say "the first Hebrew tabloid". At the same time, Ben Avi was writing for the British *Daily Mail* and *The Times of London*.

From 1924 on Ben Avi was the editor of the *Palestine Weekly*, an English weekly which was published in Jerusalem. In 1928 and 1934 he tried to publish two newspapers in Latin script; both attempts failed.³ During those years Ben Avi was president of the Hebrew-Italian Club⁴ and maintained close relations with Italian officials.

The failures of his Latin newspapers brought him to bankruptcy, and in 1939 he had to abandon his journalistic work. He took the job offered to him as a delegate of the Zionist "Jewish National Fund" in North America, where he died after a severe heart attack in 1943.

WOLFGANG VON WEISL

"I came to this world 75 years ago, on 27 March, 1896, at 03:00 o'clock in the morning, in Breitegasse, on the 7th district of Vienna"—so described Wolfgang Benjamin Ze'ev Von Weisl the exact beginning of his life.⁵ His father, Ernst, was not only the deputy military attorney general, but also a devoted Zionist activist, personally acquainted with Theodor Herzl.

In high school, young Von Weisl was apparently "a lazy student", who did not want to study Hebrew, English or French. This did not prevent him, however, from learning all these languages by himself. He soon entered the faculty of medicine at the University of Vienna, but with the outbreak of the First World War Von Weisl left his studies and joined the army. He was assigned to be a medical aide. "But I wanted to fight", he writes; soon he was assigned to the field artillery regiment Graf von Geldern-Egmont Nr. 2, in which he fought on the Russian and Italian fronts.

Von Weisl graduated in 1921, and then began travelling. "In July 1922 I landed in Jaffa", he recalled in his memoirs. Traversing the country on foot, he did not work as a physician but as a correspondent for German newspapers, a teacher and an accountant (at a hospital in Jerusalem, where he did not tell the director what his true academic training was).

In 1923 Von Weisl became chief instructor of the Hagana's first officers' course, in Tel Yosef. At that time Von Weisl was a member of the "Mizrahi", a moderate bourgeois religious Zionist faction. In 1925, however, he joined Ze'ev Jabotinsky, and became one of the founding members of the Revisionist movement.

The riots of August 1929 caught Von Weisl in Jerusalem; as he approached one of the leaders of the riots with the aim of interviewing him, he was stabbed by a person from the crowd. Although severely injured, he soon recovered and was able to give a long and detailed testimony to the British investigation committee. Apart from supplying articles and reports to the German press, Von Weisl was one of the editors of *Do'ar ha-Yom*; after the Revisionists got into a bitter dispute with Ben Avi, however, he was one of the founders of the Revisionist daily newspaper *Ha-'Am*, in 1930. For the following 17 years Von Weisl was a senior editor, reporter and columnist in *Ha-'Am*, *Ha-Yarden* and *Ha-Masqif*.

In Autumn 1931 Von Weisl returned to Vienna, in order to organise and strengthen the Revisionist party in Europe. In 1935, again as a close associate of Jabotinsky, he was one of the founders of the New Zionist Organisation. In March 1938—already married and with two children—he fled Vienna for Paris, where he continued his Zionist activity. He left France and came back to Palestine with his wife and children in June 1940. After the death of Jabotinsky that year, Von Weisl became *de facto* head of Revisionist institutions; in this capacity he was a clear advocate for a halt to the actions against the British mandate during the Second World War.

After the war ended, however, he was arrested together with many other prominent Zionist leaders in June 1946 (in "Operation Agatha", also known as "Black Saturday"). In protest, Von Weisl declared a 28-day hunger strike. Stubborn as a mule, he continued the strike for the entire period planned, even after he was released from detention.

After the 1948 war (in which he fought again as an artillery officer, this time on the Egyptian front) Von Weisl began to move away from political activity within the Revisionist movement, which was by then unequivocally dominated by Menahem Begin. He approached liberal circles and concentrated on his work as a physician. He died on 24 February 1974.

Von Weisl was a prolific writer: in addition to a dozen books he published hundreds of articles and reports in German and Hebrew in various fields: politics, economics, medicine, psychology and religion. His letters and manuscripts are stored today at the Jabotinsky Archive and with his family.

ABBA AḤIME'IR

Abba Gaissinowitsch was born in November 1897 in the village of Dolhi, near the city of Bobruisk, in White Russia, to which he moved with his family eight years later. As a child, he had a private teacher who taught him both religious texts and Hebrew; in Bobruisk he studied in a modern religious elementary school. At the age of 10 he entered the Russian high school in town, and in 1912, aged 15, he was sent—by himself—to Palestine, to study at the Hebrew Gymnasium in Tel Aviv.⁶

The First World War, which broke out during his summer vacation in 1914, prevented him from returning to Palestine. He stayed in White Russia and joined a local Zionist organisation. In 1918 he graduated from the local Russian gymnasium in a town near Bobruisk (“I was weak in mathematics, but excellent in history, geography and Russian literature”, he told his children later). In the Autumn of that year he was arrested for the first time, after he got into a quarrel with the commander of the local Soviet police force. A few months later he entered the University of Kiev. Parallel to his academic studies, he worked as a reporter for the local Soviet newspaper, “Izvestia”.

In April 1919, his young brother, Me'ir, fell in action while serving as a Red Army officer in the battle of Lida, against the Polish army. Gaissinowitsch then changed his name to Aḥime'ir, literally: “Me'ir's Brother”.⁷

In 1920 Aḥime'ir fled Russia and travelled to Belgium. He enrolled at the University of Liège. In 1921 he moved to Vienna, and continued his studies there. He became close to the socialist circles of the town; it is there that he first met Ze'ev Jabotinsky. In 1924 he submitted his PhD thesis: a critique of Oswald Spengler's perception of Russian history in his book *Decline of the West*.⁸ He then returned to Palestine.

In Palestine, Aḥime'ir joined the “Young Worker” party. Using his journalistic experience, he began writing in Hebrew for the party's newspaper (also called “The Young Worker”, *Ha-Po'el ha-Tza'ir*), the socialist newspaper *Dabar* and the liberal *Ha-'Aretz*. He also worked as a labourer in Zikron Ya'aqob, Kabara, Nahalal and Geba`.

The ideological shift in Aḥime'ir's views was probably gradual—a process of disappointment which began by witnessing Bolshevik violence, and continued through his close encounter with socialist circles in Palestine. That way or another, in 1928 he joined Jabotinsky's Revisionist movement. He soon became a central activist in the movement.

In 1930 Aḥime'ir founded—together with Joshua Yevin and Uri Zwi Grünberg—the movement called “Brit ha-Biryonim” (in English: “The Zealots’ Alliance”), which is often considered as the first anti-British movement in Palestine.

From that year on, Aḥime'ir became a target of the British police. In October 1930 he was jailed after organising a demonstration in Tel Aviv against the visit of Drummond Shiels, the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies; in July 1931 he was arrested for inciting public opposition to the population census; in February 1932 he was arrested again during the violent protest against *Brit Šalom* and the “Chair for International Peace” at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. At the same time he was one of the editors of *Hazit ha-ʿAm*.

As a “usual suspect”, Aḥime'ir was arrested again in August 1933: the police suggested that he was involved in the murder of the socialist leader (and ex-companion of Aḥime'ir in *Ha-Po'el Ha-Tza'ir*) Ḥayim Arlosoroff. In May 1934 he was acquitted of all charges, but in June the same year he was tried for leading an “illegal organisation”, *Brit ha-Biryonim*. Aḥime'ir was found guilty and sentenced to 21 months imprisonment. He was released in August 1935.

After his release, Aḥime'ir wrote mostly for *Ha-Mašqif*, the official newspaper of the Revisionist movement. In 1938, however, after the first violent actions of the National Military Organisation, Aḥime'ir was arrested again, and stayed in prison for three months. Upon his release he moved to Lebanon, and then to Greece and Poland; he returned to Israel only after the outbreak of the Second World War. Aḥime'ir stayed in Palestine during the war; both his parents were murdered by the Nazis.

In 1946 Aḥime'ir published his first book, “A Report by a Sitting Person”, describing his experiences during the months he spent in jail.⁹ In 1951 he became a member of the editorial board of the *Hebrew Encyclopaedia*. He published two more books: *With the Rooster's Cry* (1957), containing historical and political essays, and *Judaica* (1960), which is a collection of articles and essays on Jewish issues. Aḥime'ir died in Tel Aviv in June 1962, after a sudden heart attack, at the age of 65.¹⁰

JOSHUA YEVIN

Joshua Heschel Yevin was born in 1891 in Winnyzja, a city in Podolia (today a part of Ukraine).¹¹ His parents died when he was four and he then moved to live with his grandmother. Yevin first received a traditional religious education and then went to the Hebrew gymnasium in Vilnius.¹² He continued his education at the University of Moscow, where he studied medicine. During the First World War Yevin was recruited to the Russian army, where he served as a military physician. The horrors he witnessed in the front resonated later in his writings.

After the war, in 1919, he returned to Vilnius and in 1922 he migrated to Berlin. By that time he had ceased to work as a physician and concentrated on journalistic writing and translations of literary and philosophical writings into Hebrew. In Berlin he also got married; a year after his arrival there his first son was born. The family came to Palestine in 1924; like Aḥime'ir, he was affiliated with the worker's party and worked as a teacher in the Galilee and the Yizra'el valley. His second son was born in 1926; in 1928, however, his disappointment with socialist Zionism (and maybe also with the difficult economic situation in Palestine) made him leave the country and return to Berlin.

In 1930 Yevin returned to Tel Aviv and became a member of the editorial board of *Ha-'Am*. Together with Grünberg and Aḥime'ir he founded the anti-British organisation *Brit ha-Biryonom* (the three remained close friends all their lives).

The murder of Arlosoroff in June 1933 provided a good excuse for the British authorities to commence a legitimate assault on that organisation. While Grünberg was abroad and Aḥime'ir charged with murder (a charge from which he was fully acquitted), Yevin was sentenced to four months in prison for taking part in an "illegal organisation" (Aḥime'ir was incarcerated for about a year for leading the organisation).

Upon his release from prison, in 1934, Yevin joined the board of *Ha-Yarden*, *Ḥazit ha-'Am*'s heir. *Brit ha-Biryonom* ceased to exist, but the trio Yevin-Grünberg-Aḥime'ir continued to act politically within the Revisionist movement under the name "Faction of Accusation and Faith" [*Si'at ha-Qiṭrug v-ha-'Emuna*], which regarded itself as the extremist activist marker within the Revisionist movement.

During the following decades Yevin continued to translate literature and write for various Revisionist newspapers and periodicals. He passed away in April 1970 in Tel Aviv, aged 79.

URI ZWI GRÜNBERG

Grünberg was born in 1896 in East Galicia, to a religious Ḥassidic family. His family moved to Lemberg when he was a child. He received both a religious and general education. In Lemberg, he also began to write poems—both in Hebrew and in Yiddish. Being an Austrian subject, he was recruited to the imperial army at the age of 18, and with the outbreak of the First World War was sent to the front in the Balkans. In the aftermath of the war, a pogrom was made on the Jews in Lemberg; while his close family was not hurt, the event probably traumatised the young poet deeply. In 1920, Grünberg moved to Warsaw; some poems in which he blamed Christianity for crimes committed against Jews made him *persona non grata* there; he left for Berlin in 1922.¹³

Grünberg migrated to Palestine in December 1923. At first he was close to socialist circles, where his poems about rural national revival were admired by agricultural Zionist pioneers. Soon, however, he began to criticise what he saw as too mild politics of the Zionist leadership vis-à-vis the attacks of Arab nationalists. In January 1928 he left “Ha-Po’el ha-Tza’ir”, like Aḥime’ir, and joined the revisionist Zionist movement, writing in its newspapers—first *Do‘ar ha-Yom*, and then *Ha-‘Am* and *Ḥazit ha-‘Am*. During the 1920s and 1930s he was also an active member of the revisionist movement, holding various posts in its institutions.

In October 1931, in response to the 1929 massacres and the 1931 “White Paper”, Grünberg joined Aḥime’ir and Yevin in founding Brit ha-Biryonim; Grünberg gave it its name. During the first years after the dispersion of the organisation, Grünberg returned to Warsaw as an official delegate of the revisionist movement, with the task of recruiting activists and collecting funds for its activities. He managed to escape Poland shortly after the outbreak of the Second World War. His parents and siblings were murdered by the Nazis.

Between 1939 and 1945 he did not publish any new works. However, his earlier poems of blood and fire, calling for political action, gave the inspiration for many people—the best-known among them is probably Abraham Stern. After the war, Grünberg returned to writing and took an active part in politics: he was a member of the Knesset and regularly published both poems and prose in various newspapers and periodicals. He died in May 1981, and was buried in Jerusalem.

ABRAHAM STERN (“YA’IR”)

“His height is less than average—172 cm; his eyes: sunk and brown; his nose: long; his forehead is high, his ears are large and his hair is black”. This was the description of Abraham Stern by the Palestine Police, in an ad published in local newspapers on 30 January 1942. A reward of £1000 was promised to anyone who could “provide information which will lead to his arrest”¹⁴ (an average daily wage of an industry worker in Palestine at the time was about £0.46).¹⁵

Abraham Stern was born in December 1907 in Suwalki, in northeast-ern Poland. His father was a dentist; his mother was a midwife.¹⁶

Soon after the beginning of the Great War the area was conquered by the German army; the family moved to live with relatives on the Russian side of the front. In 1917 he went to a Russian high school, but in 1921 he returned to Suwalki, where he continued his studies in a Hebrew school. In 1926 Stern migrated to Palestine, and the following year he graduated from the Hebrew Gymnasium in Jerusalem.

Stern began his academic studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, in Autumn 1927; he studied literature, history, Greek and Latin. He graduated in 1932 and passed the final exams “brilliantly”,¹⁷ after receiving several prizes (in the total sum of £67) for his academic achievements.¹⁸ He then travelled to Florence, where he studied at the local university during the academic year 1933–34 “con assiduità e diligenza”.¹⁹

In Jerusalem, Stern also joined the *Hagana*, the Hebrew armed force. He took part in the fighting during the riots in August 1929, together with David Razie’l, under the command of Abraham Tehomi.

At the Hebrew University he also began his political career. In 1930 he established the “Hulda” students club.²⁰ Disappointed by what he perceived as a compromising attitude of the official Zionist leadership towards Arab attacks, he was one of the young students who, led by Abraham Tehomi, seceded from the general *Hagana* military organisation and founded the *National Military Organisation* (NMO) that same year.

But Italy was not the land of classics only. Italy was also the land of *risorgimento*, of Mazzini and Garibaldi. After about a year of studies at the University of Florence, in 1933, Stern decided to quit university and devote himself to political activity. He then adopted the underground name “Ya’ir”, a tribute to El’azar Ben Ya’ir, the uncompromising leader of the zealots who fought to the death during the Hebrew rebellion against

the Roman Empire during the first century CE.²¹ He then became the purchasing agent of the NMO, buying weapons (first in Italy and then in Poland) and smuggling them to his comrades in Palestine.

Stern's political involvement developed in two parallel paths. On the practical military path, he became a member of the NMO's leadership, together with Abraham Tehomi, Ḥanok Qal'i, David Razi'el and Benjamin Zer'oni. Ideologically, he became closer to two prominent poets: Grünberg—whose poems he admired—and Uri'el Halperin. While the poems of the first influenced Stern's style of writing, his acquaintance with the latter played an important role in shaping his political world view: through Halperin, Stern became familiar with the ideas of Adolf Gurevicz, who preached the abandonment of Judaism for the sake of founding a new Hebrew nation.

In 1937, after the outbreak of the Arab Rebellion, while serving as the staff secretary of the NMO, Stern (who meanwhile became married) opposed the attempt to reunify the Organisation with the Hagana. He maintained that the NMO should stay independent and retaliate with violence rather than acquiesce with the official Zionist policy of "self-restraint".²²

This activist, non-compromising trend continued and acquired even stronger momentum two years later, with the breakout of the Second World War. The High Command of the NMO decided to suspend its armed struggle and declared an armistice with the British government in order to help the war effort against Nazi Germany. Stern, on the other hand, was already convinced that the war against the British mandate regime was crucial. This time, however, Stern found himself leading only a minority of NMO members.²³

The new secessionist group claimed to be the "real" NMO, naming itself the "National Military Organisation *in Israel*" (later, after Stern's murder, it adopted the name "Israel's Freedom Fighters"). The small group began a series of attacks on British military forces and officers. To finance their activities (i.e. buying weapons and ammunition and sustaining the activists who had to go underground) it collected donations and became engaged in "cash confiscations"—a polite name for robberies of banks and shops. For recruiting more activists and delivering its messages it published leaflets and also operated a small radio station in the centre of Tel Aviv.

However, although Stern enjoyed great popularity among his followers, his isolation within the Hebrew community, together with economic difficulties and the constant inspection by the British police weakened his leadership. Members of the *NMO in Israel* began to contest it. After a few

successful assassinations of British officers, the British police managed to eliminate or arrest most of its commanders during 1941. Stern himself managed to hide for a few more months under a false identity, until on 12 February 1942 he was tracked down to an apartment in southern Tel Aviv. Stern, who was not armed, was arrested; a few minutes later he was shot, allegedly because he was trying to escape. His funeral was held the same evening. His son, named Ya'ir after his father, was born four months later.²⁴

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NOTES

1. Itamar Ben-Avi, *Im Shahar Atzmautenu* ["In the Dawn of our Independence"]: *Memoirs of the First Hebrew Child* (Jerusalem: The Public Committee for the Publishing of Itamar Ben Avi's Writings, 1961), p. 6.
2. Although his memoirs should be taken with a grain of salt, it is not improbable that Ben Avi indeed met Mustafa Kemal when the latter was stationed as an Ottoman officer in Jerusalem, before the War. In his autobiography, he tries to show how "great minds think alike", hinting that his idea to write Hebrew in Latin letters inspired the Ottoman officer to do the same in Turkey about 15 years later. For a lively description of this Araq saturated conversation see *ibid.*, pp. 213–218.
3. For a recent comparative study of the Latinisation attempts of Turkish and Hebrew (a success in the former and the failure—so far—of the latter), see İlker Aytürk, "Script Charisma in Hebrew and Turkish: A Comparative Framework for Explaining Success and Failure of Romanization", *Journal of World History* Vol. 21 No. 1 (2001), pp. 97–130.
4. Ben-Avi, *Im Shahar Atzmautenu.*, pp. 500–504.
5. Editorial, "Das war Wolfgang von Weisl", *Schalom: Zeitschrift der österreichisch-israelischen Gesellschaft*, April 1974, pp. 4–7. The journal published a few excerpts from Von Weisl's unpublished autobiography a few weeks after his death.
6. The details in Aḥime'ir's biography are taken from his papers at the Jabotinsky Archive, JA P-5/1/1.
7. Aḥime'ir continued to use his old family name occasionally, in official matters, until his return to Israel in 1924.
8. Abba Gaissinowitsch, *Bemerkungen zu Spenglers Auffassung Russlands. Inaugural-Dissertation zur Erlangung der philosophischen Doktorwürde vorgelegt der philosophischen Fakultät der Wiener Universität* (Vienna, 1924). A copy of the Dissertation is kept at "Beyt Abba" in Ramat Gan. I would like to thank his son, Yossi Aḥime'ir, for allowing me to search through the family's private archive.

9. The Hebrew name ["הבישי רוחב לש הזטרופר"] makes a witty joke: "Baḥur Yešiba"—literally "a man of sitting"—is the common nickname for a student in a rabbinical religious seminar.
10. Biography of Abba Aḥime'ir, *JA* P-5/1/1.
11. Joseph Aḥime'ir and Shmuel Shatzky, *Brit Ha-Biryoniim: The First Anti-British Organisation. Documents and Evidences* (Tel Aviv: Nicanim, 1978), p. 40.
12. Yevin knew large parts of the Bible by heart, and regularly used biblical citations and idioms in his articles. In 1959, aged 68, he won the National Bible Contest.
13. Joseph Aḥime'ir and Shmuel Shatzky, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
14. The ads of the police were published in several daily newspapers. See for instance *Ha-Bog'er*, 30.1.1942. Copies of the ads are kept at CZA A549\14-3.
15. J. Shaw *et al.*, "Basic Daily Wage Rates for Jewish Labourers in Certain Selected Industrial Occupations", *A Survey of Palestine: Prepared in December 1945 and January 1946 for the Information of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry* (Jerusalem: Government Printer, 1946), p. 736.
16. Israel Eldad, "Preface: The Poem of his Life", in *In My Blood, Forever Live! Poems, Articles, Letters* (Tel Aviv: Ya'ir, 2002), p. 7. The book's name is taken from one of Stern's poems (which is itself a paraphrase on *Ezekiel* 16, 6: "And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live!"). Eldad was the Supreme Commander of the ILF after Stern's murder.
17. A letter from Dr D. Tscherikover to the University of Florence, 5.1.1934. CZA A549\16-6.
18. Certificate of the Registrar's Office of the Hebrew University, 14.5.1933. CZA A549\16-12.
19. Certificato No. 18775, Università degli studi di Firenze, facoltà di lettere e filosofia, Florence, 19.6.1934. CZA A549\16.
20. The club was named after a Hebrew village in the Judean hills, whose inhabitants fought against the Bedouins who attacked them in August 1929. Stern himself was stationed in Jerusalem during the riots. See his Biography, *JA* K5-7/1.
21. Eldad, *ibid.*, p. 8.
22. About a third of the NMO activists indeed rejoined the Hagana. Both the reasons for the founding of the NMO in 1930 and the first split among its ranks in 1937 became later a matter of dispute between the founders: Tehomi—who initiated the reunion—on the one hand, and Rosenberg

and Halperin on the other. JA K4-1/11. It is clear, however, that Stern led the uncompromising line.

23. For a detailed description of the process which led to the second split of the NMO and the ideological and practical disputes between Stern and the NMO's leader David Razi'el, see Joseph Heller, *The Stern Gang* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), pp. 61–64.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 95–100.



CHAPTER 3

Facing an Unprecedented Disaster

In his portrait of Mussolini, published a few days after the Fascist seizure of power, Itamar Ben Avi saw the new Italian government as the one which could pave Italy's way out of a deep political crisis. According to Ben Avi, what Mussolini wanted in those days was "to impose upon Italy an iron discipline and a central authority, so it could march towards its glamorous future without any internal turmoil". He asserted that "the fact that in Rome, Florence, Milano, Turin, Naples and all other Italian cities Mussolini and his soldiers [sic!] were greeted as liberators and saviors in time of crisis, is probably the best evidence for the necessity of the 'fascist' movement in Italy at this very moment".¹

Ben Avi also explained to his readers what the roots of that crisis were. He remarked that Mussolini's first supporters were those "disappointed by the Italian extreme communism and Bolshevism", the latter having already "raised its dragon-head all over Italy". Confronted with this dragon, Mussolini "had a real aim—rescuing young Italy from the turmoil of war and the misdeeds of extreme Bolshevism". Pointing exactly to what he sees as a possible precedent, Ben Avi explained that the state of the Italians is

not similar to that of Germany or to England. These peoples of the South are very similar to the Russians, and without a "mighty hand" among them, a civil war would erupt among them, with all its horrors and Bolshevist terror. Mussolini aims at saving it from this possibility....²

A report by Hayim Vardi, *Do'ar ha-Yom's* reporter in Rome, went in a similar vein. Vardi described Italy's internal situation as

a totally depressing one. Moscow's emissaries do in it [Italy] as if it was their own, to their heart's desire, and the frequent strikes—for the most ridiculous reasons—caused a terrible economic decline. Evidently, those were mostly the petits bourgeois who suffered from that, these poor horses who carry the whole kingdom's weight on their backs, and are beaten—both by the dukes of money and by the admirers of labour.³

It should be noted that *Do'ar ha-Yom's* and Ben Avi's animosity towards Bolshevism were evident not only in the Italian context. "The Bolsheviks rule for five years already", wrote the newspaper that same month, in an article marking the Russian revolution's fifth anniversary. Ben Avi claimed that the Bolsheviks won the battle in Russia, as they had found the secret of lasting power. They

understood that every regime is based on cruelty and coercion, on sheer force. And if such is the case in other countries, then in sinister and remote Russia all the more so. Foggy, quivering Russia has not yet discovered the splendor of human value... The strongest person dominates... The destruction of life becomes ever deeper: inwards and outwards, body and soul.⁴

Interesting, however, is the contrast between Ben Avi's enthusiasm towards the new "savior" and his disappointment of those who were similarly seen as such saviors just five years earlier. It seems that Ben Avi, the convinced liberal, was not necessarily opposing Bolshevik ideology, but was rather disappointed at the Bolsheviks' conduct, because

these people, these rulers, even these revolutionaries among them, who were breaking in and bursting out, became conservative... This is the way of the world, and this is the nature of rulers: the open eyes get blind, the beating heart becomes dumb, and they walk along the same old and winding road they had previously attacked, before they came to power.⁵

The rapidly changing stances of conservatives, liberals and socialists were clear to Abba Ahime'ir too, a few years later. "For a long time, nationalism was part and parcel of conservative thought", he wrote in 1926 (while still a member of the moderate socialist party Ha-Po'el ha-Ca'ir), whereas "liberalism—and its heir, socialism—were cosmopolitan, preaching for one humanity, undivided to nations". But the First World War

has brought a change in values. Nationalism does not belong anymore to conservatism alone. Now it is supported by Marxist socialists as well, in spite of Marx's declaration that proletariat has no homeland.

During the last generation, therefore, "values changed: ups came down, and downs went up". In Aḥime'ir's opinion too, the time was one of a deep change not only in Palestine, but all around the world.⁶

The notion of a local crisis, however, deepened within the Zionist camp following the riots and massacres of August 1929 and their political results. After the riots in August 1929 (in which Muslims and Jews were killing each other, causing a death toll of about 240 people and about 570 reported injured),⁷ the Government in London appointed a commission (known as the Hope-Simpson Commission) whose task was to investigate the causes of the violent eruption. The investigation resulted in the publication of a new statement of policy, issued on 20 October 1930, by the colonial secretary Sidney Webb (Lord Passfield), a statement soon named "The Passfield White Paper". Zionist circles viewed this paper, which suggested limiting Jewish immigration to Palestine, as a fundamental change in the former British official political guidelines (known as "The Churchill White Paper") of 1922.

This notion of crisis was expressed loud and clear upon the pages of *Ha-'Am* (Hebrew: "The People"), the first newspaper established by the Revisionist Party after a series of disputes put an end to the collaboration between the party and Ben Avi's *Do'ar Ha-Yom*. "Isn't it very high, the price we paid, are paying and shall continue to pay for the Balfour declaration?", asked Aḥime'ir. Referring to what was widely understood as a British promise to establish a "Jewish State", he concluded that "the price we are paying for what is supposed to be a present is higher than the price paid for a regular purchase".⁸ His rage was not directed only towards the British government, but towards the leadership of the Zionist Organisation in Palestine as well. Mapay's Socialists are "Philisters", hence in Palestine "Zionism is led by liars".⁹

The hostility towards what the Revisionists perceived as the ineptness of the Zionist leadership gained power. This hostility was also the main factor leading to the founding of *Ha-'Am*, following the rupture between the Revisionists and Ben Avi, the owner of *Do'ar ha-Yom*. After about a year of collaboration, in which the newspaper was edited by Jabotinsky—whom he admired—Ben Avi had to literally throw out of the editorial board's offices that group of Revisionists who took over the paper.

On the pages of the young and fresh newspaper, Joshua Yevin—a physician by profession—compared the situation of Zionism in Palestine to that of a sick person. In Yevin’s opinion, both socialists and liberals were happy to see that the Revisionists were no longer writing in *Do’ar ha-Yom*, since both liberal and socialist Zionists behave

like primitive sick patients, who break their thermometer, and then assume they are healthy, because they have no more fever... But even if all the newspapers would hail Weizmann, if all would praise *Ha-‘Aretz* and *Dabar*... even if all the thermometers in the world will be broken—the patient will still remain in a severe condition.¹⁰

Certain that the executive of the Zionist Organisation is bankrupt—financially, politically and morally—Yevin, nonetheless, also saw something positive in the political crisis. He asserted that in eastern European Jewish communities, going bankrupt was no reason for shame. Modern Jews, however, are ashamed when they go bankrupt. This, in his opinion,

proves that contemporary Jews gradually lose their ability to adapt indefinitely... this is the beginning of a different consciousness, a mental necessity, that will *finally* bring a change to the lives of the Jews, overcoming the main disaster of our life, as we’re scattered around the world: this would be *the redemption of the nation*.¹¹

And the current Zionist executive? “It will stay in its current situation: *beyond the bankruptcy*”.¹²

A day later, Wolfgang Von Weisl held a public lecture in Jerusalem, and *Ha-‘Am* brought its readers a brief summary of it. Von Weisl, however, saw a crisis in traditional Jewry, noting that “antisemitism spreads all around the world: conversions, mixed marriage and destruction of the family—all these ruin World Jewry”.¹³ In Von Weisl’s opinion, “Jewish youth is especially in danger, as religion loses its hold rapidly”. Since the crisis and the danger were imminent, Revisionist Zionism’s immediate aim in Palestine was “to have—within one generation—a Jewish majority, who will rule the land”.¹⁴

International politics also contributed to the feeling that the times were tough, as all around the region Muslim activists protested against the Italian violence in Libya: on the same day, a group of 50 Muslim dignitaries delivered to the Italian consulate in Jerusalem a petition protesting the

persecution of Muslims in Tripolitania. The newspaper reported about the demonstration at length, with a hint of joy at the fact that the demonstrators did not succeed in meeting the Italian consul, who was absent at the time of the demonstration.¹⁵

The crisis atmosphere was evident also in *Ha-Biryon*, the semi-official publication of the Maximalist group “Brit ha-Biryonim” (“Band of the Zealots” in Hebrew). This series of home-made leaflets, typewritten and copied by basic mechanical copying machines, was published once a month during the first half of 1931 by Yevin, Ahime’ir and Grünberg, who proclaimed it “did not require the permission of the Hebron government”.¹⁶ The authors of the pamphlet asserted that at first, the “New Hebrews”, upon their arrival to Palestine, “laid down their weapon of anger and fury towards their enemies” which they used to hold abroad. Instead, they began to build and cultivate the land. But now, the British government is trying to block Hebrew immigration and agricultural settlement. If the government does not stop doing so,

if it continues to block our road towards construction, we shall turn again to destruction. If these enemies do not allow us to create out of love, we shall turn to the Holy Hatred.

Furthermore: the Jewish people “is forgetful and forgiving”, but “it will not forgive England, who cheated it and deprived it of its most precious, most sacred: the soil of Zion”.¹⁷

The notion of an imminent crisis delivered by *Ha-‘Am* upon its readers in the Spring months of 1931 was not limited to the local Zionist political sphere. “Whereas the last World War was marked by terrible acts of destruction, unprecedented in previous wars, according to experts, these are nothing but ‘children toys’ compared with the horrors of that to come”, stated a report about newly developed chemical and biological weapons, titled with a warning that “entire countries shall be destroyed in the next World War”.¹⁸

Still, Passfield’s White Paper and the British policy towards Zionism were the matters most troubling the Revisionists during these months. Von Weisl claimed that the failure of negotiations between the Zionist Organisation and the British administration regarding the future British policy in Palestine is “the worst political defeat the Jewish people suffered since the days of Herzl”.¹⁹ Using a naval metaphor, he asserted that “the wrecked ship of the Jewish people” is caught between “high waves,

threatening to destroy it”, as the current leaders of the Zionist Organisation are “traitors, squanderers and incompatible, short-sighted bureaucrats”. The Revisionists, on the other hand, “are the youth, the idealists—rich with human power, like all idealists, but poor financially”.²⁰

As a trained journalist and a gifted writer, however, Von Weisl cleverly added an optimistic tone to the gloomy diagnosis, assuming that in spite of Weizmann’s attempts to keep business as usual, “this is the silence before the storm”, as it is clear that “our people is getting out of its silence”. The community in Palestine is gradually waking up, and is about to settle the score with the “false prophets” who deceived it for years—that is the socialist and liberal leadership of the Zionist Organisation. Similar attacks on the Zionist institutions and a declaration that Palestine was the only hope for the Jewish people were evident in another article by Von Weisl which was published that same day.²¹

One may assume that the approaching Zionist Congress, which was about to convene in Basel in July 1931, also contributed to the content of the articles in *Ha-Am*, as well as to their tone. In a fiery article published in mid-May 1931, Yevin addressed the “inner part” of the Revisionist movement, as rumours were circulating about an idea of “*annexing Western Palestine to Transjordan*”.²² Yevin was convinced that during the five years of its existence, members of the Revisionist movement had actually “saved Zionism from extinction”. The crisis of Zionism was not an ordinary one, as Jabotinsky (“a great leader, gifted with a talent of prophecy”) established the movement amidst “a bitter war against gigantic enemies”. As the elections for the Congress were approaching, however, Yevin too—like Von Weisl—was portraying a picture not only of crisis, but of success as well: thanks to Jabotinsky, a group of excellent national poets and a wonderful youth movement, “a new fire was ignited in the Spirit of Israel”.

Yevin used images of war, comparing the struggle of Revisionism against the withdrawal of Zionism with the French defence of the Marne, in 1914, and then turned to a clear messianic register: members of the movement, who are hated and despised all around, are the “Guardians of the Fire of Revival”. For Yevin, both the problem and the solution were clear. Altogether,

Zionism reached its hour of destruction, and then came New Zionism. The Lion of Fire reigns again on the movement’s shrine... *Zionism was saved from extinction*... And on our Shrine, amidst the poorness and disaster of our life, sits the *Lion of Fire*, the Lion of Israel’s rebirth.²³

The political battle against socialism continued. On 14 May 1931, among reports about the presidential elections in France and the flight of bishops and Jesuits from Spain, the editorial on the front page of *Ha-Am* attacked Mapay. The editorial claimed that once every few years (that is, before elections to the Zionist Congress) it “wears the suit of the opposition” against Britain, in a full contrast to its regular daily political conduct.²⁴

The editors of *Ha-Am* were not alone in their fear of a looming disaster. Like-minded parties and factions were active abroad, and the newspaper published their opinion as well. “Our ‘New Party’ is the expression of the English youth rebellion against the impotency of the old parties in dealing with the horrible economic crisis threatening the life sources of our people”, opened an article published in the newspaper two days later. “There is some fatalistic thought that everything shall become all right by itself... but although our people stands face to face with an unprecedented disaster, we do not think so”. So wrote John Strachey, whom the editors of *Ha-Am* described as “a friend and a close associate of Mosley, head of the ‘New Party’”.²⁵

The Labour Party “went bankrupt like Social-Democracy everywhere”, the article continued. However, Strachey asserted that

by no means are we an extreme left party... nor are we fascists, Hitlerists or opponents of parliamentarism... we are just a handful in parliament... but if the elections will be held in a year, we are convinced of our victory.

The editors of *Ha-Am* were sympathetic. “The things written here should be heard by us as well”, they wrote, for “this article expresses the spirit of the time—the era of Liberalism’s bankruptcy as an international resource”.²⁶

Meanwhile, the worried tone became louder and harsher, as the Zionist Congress in Basel approached. “We were warning, that the ‘bit by bit’ of the Zionist executive will lead us to a catastrophe”, wrote Von Weisl a few days later, referring to the situation in Palestine. “We said that colonisation requires rapid action, and if other methods were used and another 100,000 Jews had been brought to Palestine, we wouldn’t have reached this disaster...”²⁷

The belligerent tone of *Ha-Am* did not escape the attention of the British local government, which ordered the newspaper’s closure for two weeks, until the opening of the 17th Zionist Congress in Basel.²⁸ At that congress, the Revisionists demonstratively quit the Zionist Organisation.

Whether their act was a step planned before the congress or a spontaneous reaction to the liberal and socialist majority's refusal to crown "the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine as the main aim of Zionism", Jabotinsky—together with his colleague Revisionist delegates—demonstratively tore their Zionist Organisation's membership cards and left the congress's venue.

The Congress in Basel was the peaking point of the crisis atmosphere. "For eight years I live in Palestine, always hearing that 'dialectic of wind-mills' about Realpolitik and 'creating and building'—and we have reached a complete catastrophe", said Uri Zwi Grünberg in his speech at the congress.²⁹ "We are miserable. In the land [Palestine]—it is hell. I feel like getting out of the fire and the doom, in which our common Jerusalem stands. We are all miserable—but you don't know it" said the poet to his European audience in his famous dramatic style, stating that

in Palestine there's a mood of a pogrom and propaganda encouraging bloody animosity... we are helpless; internally we are limited and dispersed; the newspapers in Palestine are full with bad news....³⁰

Grünberg referred to what he considered as obsequiousness towards "the Arabs and the Britons", claiming that "we lost the minimal sense of dignity... 'shut up and swallow everything, because this is how it has to be'". Specifically referring to the bloodshed of August 1929, he said that

after all the slaughter, a self examination was necessary... but finally there came animosity towards brothers and love towards enemies; one began to look for lights among the murderers and for shadows among the aching brothers.

About the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, where the riots began, Grünberg claimed that moderate Zionists and religious circles "sold the utmost holiness of the Nation"³¹

The crisis atmosphere deepened. "The resolutions of the 17th congress justified the worse prophecies" read the editorial of *Ha-'Am* four days after the end of the congress.³² Jabotinsky's secession was a clear declaration that the members of the "activist" and "maximalist" faction of the Revisionist Party lost any confidence they still had in the Zionist Organisation's ability to handle the political situation. "Jabotinsky takes a 6-months Leave from his work at the Revisionist Party? The war for the

establishment of a New Zionist Organisation has Begun” read the newspaper’s front-page headline that day.³³ The report itself began first with a façade of neutrality vis-à-vis the dispute within the Revisionist camp as to whether it should try to influence the existing Zionist Organisation from within or—as the maximalist faction demanded—establish a new, alternative organisation. Officially, *Ha-‘Am* argued that Jabotinsky’s secession

by no way means that he is about to retire from his work, but on the contrary: as the official president of the Revisionist Party, he had to be non-partisan towards both streams in the movement: the one which wanted to take over the old Zionist Organisation, and the one which was advocating the founding of a new one.

The author of the article suggested nonetheless that

indeed, Jabotinsky, considering the needs of this grave hour for Zionism, had finally decided to carry out his plan and start with a firm action for the establishment of the new organisation. It is clear that everyone who’s concerned about the future of Zionism and wishes for its resurrection will join Jabotinsky in this step of his.³⁴

To use Paxton’s words, the maximalist part—headed by Aḥime’ir, Von Weisl, Yevin and Grünberg—demonstrated a notion of an overwhelming crisis beyond the reach of any traditional political solutions. For this group it was clear: the situation demands an extreme deed, breaking the old institution and forming a new one. From that point on, the Maximalists were clear in their demand and actions for the establishment of a New Zionist Organisation (which indeed was officially established four years later, in September 1935).

The feeling of crisis, however, did not cease. “We live in hell, and the government is indifferent. Isn’t it high time for a firm, comprehensive act of protest?”, asked an editorial about a week later, after a Jewish hunter was attacked and wounded near Nablus.³⁵

Within a few days, the Activists began to elaborate their stance. First was Yevin, who articulated that a national movement has to fulfil one basic condition: it has to be sovereign and independent. In his view, external obstacles are not a problem; a national movement faces a real problem only when it tries to compromise with the demands of other factors,

whatever those might be. This, he asserts, is the problem of Zionism now: “Brit Šalom” wants to compromise with the Arabs, Mapay with Socialism, and Weizmann with the British government. Yevin found that

the loss of sovereignty is the biggest disaster which occurred to Zionism. A non-sovereign movement, dependent on the will of others, is absurd... it is not a movement—but a shop, a business contractor.³⁶

Yevin argued that Zionist Revisionism in 1925 was formed with a clear intention to re-establish “a sovereign independent liberation movement, after the old one ceased to exist”. In other words, it was not established in order “to be an opposition to the old Zionism, putting a badge on its torn coat, but in order to provide it with a brand new royal garment”. In a similar vein he asserted that detaching Revisionism from Zionism will be “detaching the daughter from her old and weary mother... it now stands for itself; it is a sovereign creature. It is *the* Zionism.” The implicit messianic line of thought he expressed a few weeks earlier now became explicit, as he concluded his article by stating that the Revisionist movement had taken upon itself “the messianic destiny of the people of Israel”.³⁷

Second was Aḥime’ir. About a week after Yevin’s aforementioned article, he published a wide historical review of political Zionism. According to his account, Revisionist Zionism did not want to establish a new organisation based on the same principles of the old one, but a new organisation with new principles, “which fit the new spirit of Revisionist Zionism”.³⁸ In an epochal account, Aḥime’ir—a historian by trade—presented the deep roots of the feeling of crisis, not only in Palestine but all around the world. This crisis, he argued, had formed the basis for Revisionism. He stated that Revisionist Zionism

was born by the storm of war and revolution. The campaign of the leader for [the establishment of] the Hebrew Battalion—this is the first chapter in the history of Revisionist Zionism. Members of Revisionist Zionism spent their childhood or their youth between the bullets of the World War or the civil war [in Russia]. The tragic sign of those years is engraved on the soul and the face of each and every of us. Some lost a brother in the war; some had their father murdered by red terror, the Pteljuras, the Cossacks. One’s sister was raped; the other’s mother died from typhoid and hunger. And the war was not in vain: instead of the world views [which were prevailing] before 1.8.1914, those sweet world views, came these imbibed with the influence

of August 1914 and October 1917. The great catastrophe must be repaired; only stupidity and shallowness would argue in favour of holding to the path in which we walked before.³⁹

Aḥime'ir is fully aware of current trends in Europe, and clearly relates the crisis of Zionism to a global one:

Eight million youngsters fell in the world war, and a similar number in the storm of the Russian revolution. The youth now demands its due, “taking revenge” of the generation who was sitting at home during the years of disaster... the war between liberalism and socialism on the one hand to communism and fascism on the other is a war between fathers and sons. In Israel too, a war is waged between official Zionism—which is allied with the Agency—and young, poor, “working Palestine”, concentrated around Revisionist Zionism.

Revisionist Zionism, therefore,

has nothing to learn from [old] Zionism and Zionists: neither ideology nor tactic. We can only learn from what is happening in the world... Imperialistic appetite can be found... among the “proletarian” peoples, the peoples who lost the war, whose public ideals were not fulfilled. Those proletarian peoples are the Italian, the German, the Hungarian, the Russian and others—but the most proletarian is, of course, the people of Israel.⁴⁰

The crisis and the rupture are total and one: ideological and intergenerational at the same time.

Von Weisl (who was soon about to depart to Europe, to take care of the Revisionist movement's activities there), remained steadfast to the local notion of crisis. The same day, the physician and journalist who was wounded in a fight during the August 1929 riots, warned that the Arab population in Western Palestine is preparing for a second round of the 1929 massacres, hoarding weapons and ammunition. “The bloody conspiracy”, he assumed, is organised by the “hands of communist agents”. He firmly warned the British government that it would be responsible for any bloodshed caused.⁴¹

The 100th issue of *Ha-ʿAm* was published two days later. The issue's main article stated that the newspaper “was born in a time of tremendous crisis, shaking the Zionist organization, the community in Palestine and the whole world”. But the readers can be assured that the newspaper is

“strong in its solitude and proud for standing as an opposition against a whole world of enemies”.⁴² Indeed, “dark clouds may fill our skies and the times are dire”, but

we fasten the bands of our helmets and raise our torch up—so it would disperse the darkness of the night. And we continue to march in our path—forward, towards our liberty.⁴³

A few days later, *Ha-ʿAm* was once again closed, by an order of the High Commissioner. But the editorial board was not dispersed: it continued to publish some issues occasionally, with various changing titles, using mostly pseudonyms, thus bypassing the order to close.⁴⁴

The feeling of crisis did not disappear, but rather deepened. On the eve of the new Hebrew Year, the paper opined that the Jewish community in Palestine “meets the New Year’s Eve in a state of orphanhood and depression... ideological chaos, spiritual disappointment and political paralysis in Zionism”.⁴⁵ The new year would probably not be a good one, as “a horrible new day stares into the houses’ windows, with its leaden eyes...”.⁴⁶ So grim was the final chord of *Ha-ʿAm*. A few weeks later, however, appeared its successor, *Ḥazit ha-ʿAm*—“The People’s Front”.

ḤAZIT HA-ʿAM

Like his older brother, *Ḥazit ha-ʿAm* continued the Maximalist alarming tone—and gradually made it louder and more extreme. On 4 February 1932, the Revisionist Executive convened a press conference in its premises in London, in which it revealed that some “measures are done behind the scenes” of British politics in Palestine. According to the information the Revisionists in London received, the British government, in collaboration with—or at least without the opposition of—the Zionist Executive, is planning to hold elections for a parliament representing the inhabitants of both sides of the Jordan river, divide the country into “Jewish” and “Arab” districts (“Cantons”), make Arabic the sole official language and install an Arab king or governor.⁴⁷ “A sharp sword is lying on our neck” was *Ḥazit ha-ʿAm*’s interpretation of the situation. “This is a very grave moment”, the article claimed, referring to the “French Report”⁴⁸; it is “grave also after Arlosoroff’s denial”.⁴⁹

The danger was not only external, coming from the part of the British government, but also internally, since “at the very same time the treacherous press... has already dismissed all the great political dangers lurking for us regarding the ‘cantonal’ intrigues”. Instead of being alarmed, the general Hebrew public opinion “is excited regarding the political changes about to take place in Palestine”.⁵⁰ While “in Egypt too, one contemplates the crowning of an Arab king in Israel”, only “the heads of the Jewish Agency are quiet”. *Hazit ha-`Am* was alarmed after a question had been raised by a member of the Egyptian parliament, who was wondering whether there are any plans to install `Abbas Hilmi (the former governor of Egypt) as the ruler of an Arab state in Western Palestine. “The danger is still here”, argued *Hazit ha-`Am*, and it was not only from the politicians but also from the media, since

Palestine is still the focal point of many intrigues, all with one aim: annulling Balfour’s Declaration and making Palestine an Arab state... If the Jewish public does not embark now on a fierce political battle for rescuing us, it will be too late. Every attempt to blur the danger at this point is a crime!⁵¹

Regarding the idea to establish a general—practically Arab—parliament and divide Western Palestine (*Hazit ha-`Am* named it “the Legislative Council” and the “Cantons”),⁵² the newspaper argued that

the community must acknowledge the situation. It should all rise up and answer the undertakers of Zionism. In 1920 the whole community declared a day of fasting and repentance, as protest for the arrest of the Hero of Jerusalem. Will the community not stand up today, when extinction is decreed upon our mere existence and the existence of the entire Jewish people?⁵³

The fears were not totally without basis. The year 1931 saw a series of murders in the north of the country.⁵⁴ *Hazit ha-`Am* argued that without any doubt, “the question of security in our land is *the question*”, as “an organising hand” is directing its actions wisely, according to some plan—“to terrorize the public and subject it to an atmosphere of a constant *pogrom*”.

Jabotinsky himself also referred to what the Revisionists perceived as a critical change in British policies in Palestine. Quoting Balfour as saying that the promise of the British government to assist the Jews in building

their “national home” in Palestine created a basis for partnership, he concluded that “today, after fifteen years of experience, it seems that this ‘partnership’ is gradually collapsing”.⁵⁵ This was, he argued, mostly because of restrictions upon Jewish immigration, as “a clear spirit of anti-semitism” prevails among the British administration in Palestine. “The trust we have with English promises is fading on a daily basis”, declared an announcement by the World Executive Committee of Revisionist Zionism.⁵⁶

The notion of crisis was not a momentary one, and lasted for years. It did not cease, neither with the disbanding of Brit ha-Biryonim and the closing of *Hazit ha-ʿAm*, nor with the founding of the New Revisionist Organisation (NZO). “I find it hard to carry out any public chores, especially as it seems to me that humanity is standing face to face with a catastrophe”, wrote Aḥime’ir to Jabotinsky at the end of 1935, replying to the latter’s proposal to Aḥime’ir to take some active political duties.⁵⁷

A connection between the notion of global crisis and the assumption that fascism is a way of salvation was evident in the biography of Mussolini, written by Zwi Kolitz and published in Tel Aviv in 1936. “Next to the socialist party... the communist devil has also began dancing among the masses of the Italian people, who were confused and divided and did not know where to go”, Kolitz described the deep political crisis which destabilised the Italian state in 1919. “Hence there was a need for a decisive force to rise in the horizon of the Apennine peninsula, and put an end to this chaos”.⁵⁸

The answer to this crisis was fascism, of course. Since “Mussolini realized, that the old diplomatic methods are worthless in modern times”, only a brand new political system was capable of pulling Italy out of the dire straits into which it fell.⁵⁹

CONCLUSION

The feeling of a global crisis, which was present in Europe in the aftermath of the First World War, did not fail to get the attention of Hebrew writers and thinkers in Palestine. It was apparent in the writings of natives (like Ben Avi) and European immigrants (like Aḥime’ir, Von Weisl and Yevin). This sense of overwhelming crisis had both global and local aspects, which were intertwined.

Like many other liberals at the time, Ben Avi and his newspaper *Do'ar ha-Yom* saw a great danger in the economic crisis not because of the problems it caused per se, but to a large extent because of the political possibilities it opened for Communism. Similar was the fear of Wolfgang von Weisl, who came from a more conservative milieu. Both perceived Italian Fascism as a proper antidote for Communist influence.

Von Weisl's sense of danger, however, had another aspect. While Ben Avi was born in Palestine to an anti-religious family and was interested mostly in the local society, Von Weisl, on his part, was born in Vienna and felt affiliated to Judaism and other fellow Jews. His sense of crisis also included, therefore, a notion of danger to European Jews and Jewish communities.

A similar notion of danger for Jewish communities was apparent in the writings of Joshua Yevin and Uri Zwi Grünberg, though with a slightly different emphasis: Yevin and Grünberg concentrated their political efforts in the local Palestinian arena. The worries they voiced were mostly regarding Hebrew society in Palestine, or the Zionist movement. Both saw the crisis as a deep cultural one, not only administrative or technical.

Among the writers examined in this work, the broadest notion of crisis was probably that of Abba Aḥime'ir. In line with his tendency to analyse large and long historical processes, he observed—from the mid-1920s on—a global intergenerational crisis, in which all around the world the generation of the First World War rebelled against its parents. In the Hebrew community in Palestine, he argued, the “youth”—with which he identified—was standing against the old parties and institutions.

These last four writers (Von Weisl, Yevin, Grünberg and Aḥime'ir) were all members of the same cohort, more or less, and shared similar—even if not identical—European experiences of death and destruction during the First World War. It is no wonder, therefore, that they shared, to a large extent, their understanding of the world as a system under deep and immense change, going through a break with the “World of Yesterday”. As a matter of fact, their war experiences could be compared with that of other, neither Zionist nor Revisionist writers in central Europe, who came back from the war's “Storm of Steel”, to a world very different from the one they left at its beginning.

The sense of crisis, it should be said, was not totally unfounded. The basic elements of the crisis in Palestine during the inter-war period were more or less similar to those prevalent in other countries at the time. First

was an economic element: the technological developments in the fields of transportation and communication, together with the incorporation of Palestine into the commercial and monetary system of the British Empire, made the country ever more connected to world markets. As a consequence, it also became more vulnerable to global economic problems.

Second was the collapse of old, traditional, established regimes. Parallel to the deep change in Russia (the overthrow of the Czar and the founding of the Soviet regime) and in central Europe (the founding of new nation-states and republics on the debris of the Austro-Hungarian and German monarchies), Palestine went through a deep change from an Ottoman rule to a British mandate. The institution of British rule was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the British received their mandate to rule amid Zionist expectations for the establishment of a “Jewish national home”. On the other hand, the British government conducted a cold colonial Realpolitik which was based, among other things, on promises made to and alliances made with “Arab” political factors in the region. A sense of crisis could be just a natural outcome of such a political cognitive dissonance.

Fig. 3.1 Abba Aḥime'ir during the early 1930s. Courtesy of the Jabotinsky Institute in Israel



Last but not least was the direct confrontation with an anti-Zionist “Arab” population, which indeed took place in several rounds, beginning in 1920 and 1921, reaching its peak in the August 1929 riots and then through continuing attacks during the “Arab Revolt” of 1936–1939. The ongoing clashes with representatives of another national community perpetuated the feeling of crisis, continuously serving as a proof for the Maximalist assertion that the crisis is imminent (Fig. 3.1).

The answer the Maximalists suggested to the crisis was mainly strengthening the national community in its struggle for independence and self-determination. A nation’s strength, they argued, is dependent on the subordination of individuals and secondary groups to the nation.

* * *

NOTES

1. Itamr Ben Avi, “Mussolini”, *Do’ar Ha-Yom*, 02.11.1922.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Ḥayim Vardi, “The Victory of the Fascists” [Niḥon ha-Fašistim], *Do’ar Ha-Yom*, 12.11.1922.
4. Ha-Do’ar, “Five Years of Bolshevism”, *Do’ar ha-Yom*, 6.12.1922.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Aḥime’ir, “The Fate of Social Ideals”, *Ha-Po’el ha-Ca’ir* 20 (1926), issue 1–2.
7. Tom Segev, *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs under the British Mandate* (London: Abacus, 2001). p. 327.
8. Aḥime’ir, “Around Beaconsfield”, *Ha-’Am*, 19.4.1931. The article was written in commemoration of 50 years to the death of Benjamin Disraeli. It’s worth mentioning that Aḥime’ir opines that “in order to become a great politician (whether constructive like Disraeli, or destructive like Trotsky), one should leave Judaism”, for “what sky-reaching politics could have developed within Judaism? Petty lobbying on the one hand, and swears in the name of false Messianism in the other”.
9. *Ibid.* The derogatory term *Philister* was often used during the 1930s among the Revisionists when referring to liberal and socialist Zionists.
10. Joshua Yevin, “Beyond the Bankruptcy”, *Ha-’Am*, 22.4.1931.
11. *Ibid.*, emphasis in the original.
12. *Ibid.* The Revisionists regularly used the terms “liquidation” and “bankruptcy” to describe the politics of liberal and socialist Zionists, which they perceived as a wholesale of Zionism’s principles and achievements.

13. "Dr. Von Weisl's Lecture", *Ha-'Am*, 22.4.1931. No author's name was mentioned, but Von Weisl was the one of the editors of the newspaper at the time.
14. *Ibid.*
15. "An Unsuccessful Attempt at an Arab Demonstration in Front of the Italian Consulate", *Ha-'Am*, 23.4.1931. The item bore no author's name, but considering the colourful language it was probably written by Von Weisl.
16. Brit ha-Biryonim, *Ha-Biryon* 5 (April 1931), front page. An original is kept at the CZA. PR-3693.
17. *Ibid.*, "We Shall Learn the Sacred Hatred" (pages are not numbered).
18. "Entire Countries Shall Be Destroyed in the Next World War", *Ha-'Am*, 28.4.1931 (no author named).
19. Von Weisl, "The Silence before the Storm", *Ha-'Am*, 4.5.31.
20. *Ibid.* Compare with Paxton's remark about the "anticapitalist, antibourgeois animus" of early fascist *rhetoric*: Paxton, *op. cit.*, p. 10 (and notes 36, 37 there).
21. Von Weisl, "Renewed Zionism (g)", *Ha-'Am*, 4.5.1931. This was the seventh part of a series of articles depicting the historical background for the emergence of Revisionist Zionism. See also below, in Chap. 4.
22. Yevin, "Fire's Guardians", *Ha-'Am*, 12.5.1931 (all emphasis is original).
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ha-'Am*, 12.5.1931.
25. John Strachey, "'The New Party' in England: The Plans of the Labour's Secessionists", *Ha-'Am*, 14.5.1931. The origin of the text is not clear. It is unlikely that the piece was especially written for *Ha-'Am*; it might be a translation of an excerpt of Oswald Mosley, John Strachey, Robert Forgan, Cynthia Mosley, Oliver Baldwin and W. E. D. Allen (eds.), *Why We Left the Old Parties* (London: David Allen, 1931). For a recent research about the reasons for the establishment of the New Party and its circumstances, see Matthew Worley, "Why Fascism? Sir Oswald Mosley and the Conception of the British Union of Fascists", *History* 2010, pp. 68–83.
26. Strachey, *op. cit.* The rest of the article deals with the desired financial and monetary policy for UK.
27. Von Weisl, "'We Take Advantage of the Situation'", *Ha-'Am*, 25.5.1931.
28. A message delivered instead of the newspaper, 16.6.1931: "We hereby inform our readers and subscribers that due to the command of the High Commissioner, the printing of the newspaper *Ha-'Am* has been stopped until further notice".
29. "The full speech of U.Z. Grünberg", *Ha-'Am*, 17.7.1931. The 17th Zionist Congress convened in Basel between 30 June and 15 July 1931.
30. *Ibid.* The newspaper regularly published speeches of prominent Revisionist leaders and activists.

31. *Ibid.* Grünberg's conclusion, however, was that "in these days what we need for the community is a union of brotherhood and salvation—and we believe it is possible".
32. "After the 17th Congress", *Ha-'Am*, 19.7.1931.
33. "Jabotinsky Takes a 6-months Leave from his Work at the Revisionist Party? The War for the Establishment of a New Zionist Organisation has Begun", *Ha-'Am*, 19.7.1931. The article was not signed. It was probably written by either Yevin, Von Weisl or Aḥime'ir. All of them, however, were clear supporters of the secession.
34. *Ibid.* From that day on, *Ha-'Am* continuously criticised Grossmann, head of the moderate faction within the Revisionist party, who advocated staying a part of the old Zionist Organisation.
35. "The People's Diary" (editorial), *Ha-'Am*, 28.7.1931. Another article that day was titled "The Fantasies of *Do'ar Ha-Yom*": it was a sharp denial of the report in *Do'ar Ha-Yom* about a rift between Von Weisl and Grünberg to Jabotinsky. Clearly, there was bitter animosity prevailing between the two newspapers.
36. Yevin, "About the Responsibility of our Time", *Ha-'Am*, 31.7.1931 (original emphasis).
37. *Ibid.* (original emphasis).
38. Aḥime'ir, "The Aims of Revisionist Zionism", *Ha-'Am*, 5.8.1931.
39. *Ibid.* Aḥime'ir was writing from his own experience and from the experience of his friends: his brother was killed during the civil war; Grünberg and Von Weisl were serving in the Austro-Hungarian military and Yevin in the Russian. All of them reported in later years about horrors they witnessed.
40. *Ibid.*
41. Von Weisl, "We Warn: A Serious Warning in a Grave Hour", *Ha-'Am*, 5.8.1931.
42. People's Soldier [pseudonym], "100th Issue", *Ha-'Am*, 7.8.1931.
43. *Ibid.*
44. This state of affairs continued for a few months, until the establishment of *Hazit ha-'Am*. The occasional issues bore the names *Migdalar* ("Lighthouse") and *Mišmar ha-'Umma* ("The Nation's Guard").
45. "On the Eve of the New Year" (author unknown), *Migdalar*, 11.09.1931.
46. J. Ben-Amitay (pseudonym), "The Disaster in the Exil's Diaspora", *Migdalar*, 11.09.1931.
47. "London Raises the Ax on our Third Temple" (no author), *Hazit ha-'Am*, 16.2.1932.
48. The "French Report" was an appendix to the Hope-Simpson Report, concentrating on recommendations for a new agrarian policy in Palestine. See for instance Roza El-Eini, "The Implementation of British Agricultural Policy in Palestine in the 1930s", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 32 No. 4 (1996), pp. 211–250.

49. Yevin, "Be Awake!", *Ḥazit ha-ʿAm*, 23.2.1932. *Ḥazit ha-ʿAm* blamed Arlosoroff that he agreed to a said plan to divide Western Palestine into "Jewish" and "Arab" parts. The press usually referred to these divided territories as "Cantons".
50. "The Danger of Liquidation still Exists", *Ḥazit ha-ʿAm*, 23.2.1932.
51. *Ibid.* The main article of *Ḥazit ha-ʿAm* that day was titled "The End for the Balfour Declaration?", by Jabotinsky.
52. "New Arrests", *Ḥazit ha-ʿAm*, 4.3.1932. The article reported about the arrest of four youngsters (probably members of Brit ha-Biryonim) who were arrested four days earlier in Tel Aviv, after they were caught hanging placards defaming "The Legislative Council" and the "Cantons". The four were released on bail the next day.
53. Aleksander ʿIkkar, "The Homeland on the Verge of Extinction", *Ḥazit ha-ʿAm*, 4.3.1932 (the name may be a pseudonym of one of the editors, although it is not likely). The "Hero of Jerusalem" was Jabotinsky who, during the first round of riots that year, had organised armed defence on Jewish neighbourhoods and was arrested for it.
54. "Another Horrendous Murder in Kfar-Ḥassidim", *Ḥazit ha-ʿAm*, 8.3.1932. The newspaper counted nine dead, who were, it assumed, all murdered by Arab nationalists: three in Yaʿagur, one in Nahallal, one in Haifa, two in the southern Galilee, one in Balfouria and a recent one in Kfar-Ḥassidim.
55. Zeʿev Jabotinsky, "We Should Look with our Eyes Open", *Ḥazit ha-ʿAm*, 15.3.1932.
56. "Announcement of the World Executive Committee of Revisionist Zionism to the Hebrew Public", *Ḥazit ha-ʿAm*, 15.3.1932. Although the announcement stated that the Revisionist movement is *considering* appealing to other nations worldwide *against* England, it ends with a clear expression of a hope that the British government will change its policy.
57. Letter by Aḥimeʿir to Jabotinsky, no date (probably December 1935; it is a reply to Jabotinsky's letter dated 12.11.1935), JA P5-4/1.
58. Zvi Kolitz, *Mussolini: His Personality and Doctrine* (Tebel: Tel Aviv, 1936), pp. 21–22.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 35.



CHAPTER 4

The Nation Stands Above All

With all their animosity towards the “red” press of the socialist camp in Palestine since the late 1920s, the newspaper that the Maximalist writers despised the most was probably *Ha-’Aretz*. Established in 1919 (the same year as *Do’ar ha-Yom*), it was considered to be moderate, balanced and liberal—what its opponents shortly summed up as “gray”. Its first editor, Moše Glücksohn, was a member of the moderate Zionist faction, the “General Zionists”.

Glücksohn regularly preached in his columns for a moderate Zionist policy, which should take into consideration both the limits of the British rule and the aspirations of Arab nationalists. In October 1928 he pointed out that a moderate policy is a must, if one wishes to keep the morals of society. When Aḥime’ir received a regular column in *Do’ar ha-Yom*, he promptly replied to this. On the level of moral principles, he stated that “the morals of society—mean protecting the society’s corpus at all costs. No price is too high when it comes to defending society, since without society, ‘men would swallow each other alive’”.¹ He then applied his theory from the general imperative to the local political situation. Referring to the desired social model, Aḥime’ir used recent Russian history (which he and Glücksohn both knew personally) as an example. He rejected not only the old-fashioned monarchy and the modern Soviet regime, but any liberal aspirations as well, arguing that as Zionists intend to establish a sovereign state in Palestine, they should

found it neither on medieval piety nor on the basis of Russian “Zarism” or “Sovietism”. We should duplicate neither the social world-view of the exiled, nor that of the Russian intelligentsia. Demanding too many individual rights would cause a *Kerenshchina*, to which Glücksohn and his adherents preach. On the contrary: one should impose on the individual as many duties as possible.²

About a week later, the tenth anniversary of Czechoslovakia’s independence gave Ahime’ir an opportunity to bring an example of subordination to the nation and sacrifice for it. He described how Czech soldiers, after defecting from the Austro-Hungarian military during the First World War, joined the “Entente”. They were caught by the Habsburgs and sentenced to death, but “the Czech youngster, son of this healthy people, knew that there is no oath in the world which could stop him from serving his homeland”.³

This emphasis on the duties of the individual towards the public and on serving the homeland clearly resonated in the principles of Beytar, the Revisionist Party’s youth movement. Originally founded in Riga in 1923, it was aimed at recruiting teenagers to the Revisionist party and educating them in its spirit. Its activities included paramilitary training (not much different from that of the “Scouts”). Later, during the 1930s, it also became a vehicle for recruiting activists for the NMO (which was not officially subordinated to but ideologically affiliated with the Revisionist Party).

The youth movement’s principles were restated and enacted in a conference in Danzig, in April 1931. *Ha-Am*, the Maximalist newspaper co-edited by Ahime’ir, published these principles in full:

1. Beytar acknowledges that Zionism’s aim is to make Palestine, on both banks of the Jordan river, a Hebrew state with a Hebrew population majority.
2. Beytar’s mission is to organise and educate the Hebrew youth to be the nation’s pioneer in founding the Hebrew state in Palestine. Every member of Beytar is ready to be summoned anytime for the building of the state and for defending it, following an order of Beytar’s command.

For this cause:

Beytar educates the Hebrew youth, regardless of citizenship,⁴ sex, class or occupation, to be loyal citizens of the people of Israel, through a training of the spirit, the Hebrew language, the physical work and *the sport of defence*.

Beytar's education is aimed at *migration to Palestine*.

Beytar acknowledges that the individual's action or the benefit of the class are totally subjected, during the whole period of the construction of the Hebrew statehood in Palestine, to the benefit of this construction.

Beytar acknowledges that all Hebrew boys and girls have to prepare themselves to the protection of the Hebrew statehood and Jewish settlements in the exile.⁵

This last article is a clear example of an ideology subordinating the individual to the group.

Beytar was a youth movement, whose main base of action was in central Europe. However, although Aḥime'ir was quite fond of it, his more direct political action and involvement was through Brit ha-Biryonim. Beytar was an overt, organised and institutionalised movement, with a defined apparatus; Ze'ev Jabotinsky was its president from 1925 until his death in 1940.⁶ Brit ha-Biryonim, on the other hand, was not an official movement; it did not aim to educate through theoretical indoctrination and activities but to act physically; did not recruit children but young men and was led directly by Grünberg, Aḥime'ir and Yevin. Since the group was never officially affiliated with the Revisionist party, it did not have to report or account to anyone.

"This is no time to occupy ourselves with universal questions", the group declared in its semi-underground publication "*Ha-Biryon*". With a clear hint against the mobilisation of the youth to socialist groups and organisations, Grünberg, Yevin and Aḥime'ir stated that was not the time

to care for the improvement of this big, secure and wealthy world... if your heart was not deaf within you, you will hear the shout of your lost people—and only one love would fill your heart—love for the people and the land, which are waiting for their resurrection.⁷

Aḥime'ir was preaching for strong social cohesion and commitment not only in his regular political articles, but in his essays and literary reviews as well. Such was the case with his literary review of the genre of voyages literature (of Goethe, Gogol, Puschkin, Mickiewicz, Longflow, Chateaubriand and Swift), titled "The Liberal Utopia". The exceptional among all the famous European writers of voyage stories, Aḥime'ir opined, was Daniel Defoe, with his hero Robinson Crusoe.

Unlike other voyage stories, “Robinson Crusoe” is not a satire, but rather a prototype of man’s liberation from social bounds, of liberalism. Crusoe represents the figure of an anticlerical; therefore, this book is “the holy script of Liberalism”. Aḥime’ir, however, opposed the book’s liberal message; he argues that an individual cannot live without society. Furthermore: although Robinson Crusoe is the one and only known utopia of Liberalism, in the centuries which passed since the writing of that novel, “we entered the era of the rise of the public; Bolshevism and Fascism are the clearest expressions of the public sphere’s taking over on the private sphere”.⁸ The primacy of the group is therefore not just an ideological imperative, but a social fact.

An article in *Ha-’Am* referring to the conference of the Hebrew writers, about a month later, went in a similar vein.⁹ “Humanity is within a process of changing its values”, read the article. Europe, especially, “is turning its back to the written word, and is looking for other forms of cultural expression”. Whereas the searches for new ways of expression have only begun, and it is hard to say what form they will take:

it is already clear that the European culture before August 1914 was too selfish. The European culture which came with the war—Bolshevism, Fascism and Revisionism—turned its back to the individual.

Having placed Revisionism in one basket with what will later be termed “Totalitarianism”, the article argued that Hebrew literature has no future as long as its standard bearers continue to

confine themselves to the problems of the individual. Modern Europe takes interest in the individual just as far as it is a part of the public. Every writer should know that he is not some kind of Robinson Crusoe, living on a desert island, but a small atom in the community, in our movement and our people, who strives for the realisation of its selfish national ideal, in spite of the enemies trying to destroy us.¹⁰

Three months later, in August of that year, in his article reviewing the founding and the development of Revisionist Zionism, Aḥime’ir called for the establishment of a new organisation with new principles, “which fit the new spirit of Revisionist Zionism”, to replace the old Zionist Organisation.¹¹ Explaining what these new principles should be, he clearly referred to Lenin’s Bolshevism, which

from its very beginning, was not a party in the regular sense of the term. It was an *Orden*, whose members were tightly connected. Bolshevism did not aspire to be a majority, but rather followed the minority... it was a united movement, like Freemasonry in its beginning, in the eighteenth century.

Aḥime'ir concluded that "in such a movement... a spirit of 'we shall do and hear' prevails... there is no private life beyond the movement".¹²

HAZIT HA-'AM

The next year, the 200th birthday of George Washington was celebrated in the USA. Aḥime'ir reminded his readers that

the liberty for which Washington fought was neither human nor personal liberty, the liberty about which Jefferson, Penn, Condorcet, Mill and Michaelowski had spoken. This "Kerenski-like" liberty was alien to Washington, who fought for real liberty: the liberty of his nation. Washington's liberty is not Jefferson's liberty, the same way that Cavour's is not the one of Mazzini.¹³

The imperative of subjugation to the national group was articulated not only positively, but in the way of negation as well. Yevin, for instance, was concerned not only by the limited willingness of the youth to serve Revisionist ideas, but also by its willingness to serve its competitors. "We very much need a remedy for this Israeli mental illness: this readiness to serve each and every idea."¹⁴ Yevin claimed that all around the world, Jews support ideas other than Zionism. They promote democracy or socialism in Germany and France, adhere to Communism in the Soviet Union or support Fascism in Italy.¹⁵ This is "a very dangerous abstraction" which, in its innermost part, is actually "a total lack of self idealism, borne by the blood". National redemption can only be achieved by "anchoring oneself to one point"; therefore, "every such sub-ideal—every attempt to install and mix a socialist or pacifist or bi-national idea in the Israeli soul—is such a danger for us".¹⁶

Before the fifth conference of the Revisionists in Vienna (planned to take place there in autumn 1932), the Maximalists opened a wide front against the moderate faction within the movement. Yevin articulated the difference between the two factions from a geographic perspective: there were "the Grossmannist, Londonist direction" against "our Palestinian

direction”.¹⁷ According to Yevin, Revisionist Zionism finished its task as an opposition within the Zionist camp; it also has “no need of coalitions”. The role of Revisionism as a liberation movement, on the other hand,

has just begun. We strive towards a radical change of the Jewish soul, towards the creation of the Biryonim race, which will know how to defend its homeland and its people’s honour and which will have only one loyalty: loyalty towards the movement’s ideal.¹⁸

Appraisal of coercion by the ideological movement and subjugation to it did not cease among Revisionists after the closing of *Hazit ha-‘Am* and the disbandment of Brit ha-Biryonim. “Democracy, which was made for the masses, contradicts the psychology of the masses”, wrote Zwi Kolitz in his biography of Mussolini, in 1936. “By their genuine spirit”, he argued, the masses

cannot admire a leader who is not able “to harm a fly on the wall”, but rather the man who is head and shoulders above the crowd, whose devotion to his people does not prevent him from torturing it or other people when needed. It is not the people who should define the government’s style of regime, but the opposite: the government itself must dictate the people’s social, political and moral way of life.¹⁹

The movement or the party, however, were considered by Kolitz as a step on the way towards another political formation. The people and its leadership, Kolitz thought, should find their utmost expression in the all-encompassing State:

All actions, aspirations and interests of these people [within a state] must be directed towards one and only cause, a cause standing above all other: *the State*... the state is absolute, and each individual is relative towards it... every citizen within the state is a bone of its bones and flesh of its flesh. Each person who accepts the authority of the state upon himself has equal rights—but also equal obligations towards it.²⁰

It is interesting to note that the leader, in Kolitz’s view, as important and central as he might be, is still a part of the State, which should be “the first and absolute ruler, governing boundlessly upon all the moral, spiritual, political and economic needs of the entire nation”.²¹

The need for fusing the members of society into one solid nation was made clear by Abraham Stern too. “The national movement educates the people in the spirit of loyalty to the nation and its ideals”, he wrote after detaching his group from the NMO.²² “The Revisionist movement, which has called itself the national movement, educated the people and prepared it mentally towards the idea of a Hebrew state”, he recalled,²³ the use of the past-tense implying that the Revisionist movement was no longer doing this.

Stern did not develop the idea of total devotion and conscription for the national cause only then. Already in 1932, he had written the lyrics of the poem “Unknown Soldiers”, which became the anthem of the NMO:

Unknown soldiers we are, uniforms we lack;
Surrounded by horror and the shadow of death.
We’ve all been conscripted for our entire lives,
Dismissed we shall be only by death.²⁴

Stern met his death in February 1942, as he was arrested and shot by the police. The song remained the anthem of the *NMO in Israel* (later named “Israel’s Freedom Fighters”) until the organisation was dismantled in 1949.

CONCLUSION

The assumption that no price is too high when it comes to defending one’s society, as articulated by Abba Aḥime’ir, laid the ground for the idea of the primacy of the group. This assumption received its moral justification through the assertion that the morals of society demand protecting its corpus at all costs.

Therefore, Aḥime’ir and his companions rejected not only conservative monarchism and modern socialism, but liberalism as well. Their argument was that subordinating all individuals to the group is a prerequisite for the establishment of a sovereign state in Palestine—which they perceived as the goal of Zionism.

Both Aḥime’ir and Yevin were consistent in this aspect. Their preaching for strong social cohesion and commitment as a practical political principle was rooted in their view of human nature in general. Their sociological analysis was manifest in their literary and political commentary; its practical implementation was the creation of such a group, in Brit ha-Biryoni.

The duties of the individual towards the group were even clearer in the principles of Beytar, which was—unlike Brit ha-Biryonim—hierarchical and institutionalised. Although the youth movement was officially affiliated not to the Maximalist group but to the Revisionist movement in general, it actually had strong ties with the Maximalists, foremost with Aḥime'ir.

As in other aspects of the Maximalists' political doctrine, here too one can say that their local politics were influenced by the global *Zeitgeist*, claiming that Europe before the First World War was too selfish, whereas after the war it turned its back on the individual, and began to tend towards collective ideologies. In this context the Maximalists mentioned not only fascists, but communist and progressive groups whom they usually hated (freemasons and Bolsheviks) as precedents.

The desired primacy of the group had two levels. First was the level of the Revisionist movement: the Maximalists demanded the consolidation of all its members—including the moderate faction within it—into one political force. The second level was that of the nation, arguing for subjugation of other movements and parties—that is, socialist and liberal—for the benefit of a single Zionist cause.

The existence of such a “dual front” had been evident in Maximalist thought since the beginning of the rupture between Revisionism and mainstream Zionism after the 1929 riots (which led, after two years, to Revisionist secession from the Zionist Organisation), throughout the 1930s, and until the last underground days of Abraham Stern, who demanded complete discipline and obedience from his followers. A similar duality can be observed also in Maximalist manifestation of the third mobilising emotion, victimhood.

* * *

NOTES

1. Abba Aḥime'ir, “Current Issues (From the Notebook of a Fascist): An Answer to Mr. Glücksohn”, *Do'ar ha-Yom*, 4.11.1928. The column bore the subtitle ‘Tell the Master who Created Me’, a paraphrase on the Talmudic tale about Rabbi Elazar. See *Ta'anit* 20.2 (the other quote is from the Mishna *Abot* 3: Ḥanina', deputy of the high priest, said: “Pray always for the welfare of the government – for were it not due to their fear of it, men would have swallowed each other alive”).

2. *Ibid.* The term *Kerenshchina* was coined after Alexander Kerenski (1881–1970), the Russian politician and head of government. Aḥime'ir probably meant here a policy favouring the socialists and the liberals while disadvantaging the right nationalists. I would like to thank Marina Gershgorin for her help in explaining this term.
3. Aḥime'ir, "Current Issues (From the Notebook of a Fascist): Shallowness, or even Worse", *Do'ar ha-Yom*, 9.11.1928.
4. The majority of Beytar members at that time were in Poland, Lithuania and Latvia.
5. "The Principles of Beytar, enacted in the Danzig Conference", *Ha-'Am*, 28.4.1931. All emphases are in the original.
6. On the organisational structure of Beytar see Yaacov Shavit, *Jabotinsky and the Revisionist Movement, 1925–1948* (London: Frank Cass, 1988), pp. 48–56.
7. Brit ha-Biryoni, "We Shall Talk with You Frankly", *Ha-Biryon* 5 (April 1931). An original is kept at the CZA, file PR-3693.
8. Aḥime'ir, "The Liberal Utopia", *Ha-'Am*, 21.5.1931.
9. The People's Diary (editorial), "The Census", *Ha-'Am*, 15.6.1931. The article was probably written either by Aḥime'ir or by Joshua Yevin.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Aḥime'ir, "The Aims of Revisionist Zionism", *Ha-'Am*, 5.8.1931.
12. *Ibid.* Cf. Exodus 24.7: "faciemus et erimus oboedientes".
13. Aḥime'ir, "Washington", *Ḥazit ha-'Am*, 25.3.1932.
14. Joshua Yevin, "Our Simple Truth: Redemption of the Spirit", *Ḥazit ha-'Am*, 14.6.1932.
15. Sic. In his writing, Yevin tended to portray Fascism as an Italian phenomenon, unaware of—or, at least, keeping silent about—the similarities between his ideas and those of other generic movements.
16. *Ibid.* In the Italian case, Yevin mentions Margareta Sarfatti, "Mussolini's secretary", as an example for "the enthusiasm of Jewish fascists in Italy".
17. Yevin, "An Opposition or a Liberation Movement?", *Ḥazit ha-'Am*, 26.8.1932. At that time, Grossmann was the head of the movement's moderate faction, which did not reject cooperation with Britain.
18. *Ibid.* One should mention that the newspaper brought also other voices and opinions from within the Revisionist movement. On the same day, for instance, a long article answered Yevin's critic of Aḥad ha-'Am's national ideology, as published in one of his articles the week before. See B. Elicedeq (unknown author, may be pseudonym), "On Spiritual Zionism", *Ḥazit ha-'Am*, 26.8.1932.
19. Zvi Kolitz, *Mussolini: His Personality and Doctrine* (Tel Aviv: Tebel, 1936), pp. 45–46.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 62–63. Emphasis in the original.



Tormented by Foreigners and Betrayed by Brothers

As with other aspects of Hebrew right-wingers' national self-perception, here too Italy was a model for imitation. "In spite of the great sacrifices it made on the altar of war", wrote Ḥayim Vardi in *Do'ar ha-Yom*, "in spite of the fact that it betrayed its friends and turned to the side of France and England—Italy did not gain anything from 'that business'".¹ The image of Italy as a European nation once deprived of its right share in international politics, now getting back what has been taken from it—this image will appear more than once until the beginning of the Second World War.

The clashes and quarrels between Jews and Muslims next to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, in October 1928, raised a sense of victimhood among political activists in Palestine. "The deeds of the fathers are a model for sons", declared Abba Ḥime'ir, drawing a straight line connecting the imperial governors who resided in Jerusalem at that time with the imperial governors who ruled there 1900 years earlier:

The deeds of the Petronius and Cassius Florus are a model to Storrs, Luke and Keith-Roach. The gentile ruling us on our land hasn't changed, and you can be sure that the gentile philosopher and historian who had already justified the mischiefs brought upon us by the Romans and the Greeks 1800 years ago will now justify the mischiefs made by the British and the Arab. Momsen and Renan have already justified the misdeeds brought upon our ancestors. You can be sure that all those who now claim in their preachings that the declaration of war is a sin etc. etc.—they will justify the deeds of the British administration concerning us.²

Aḥime'ir then continued with the historical equation between Rome and Britain:

The Roman deputies who were sent to rule Judea came from African provinces, and thought that the Jews were barbarians like the inhabitants there. Britain's civil servants who now govern us were sent from that same Africa (Sudan, Sierra Leone), and are convinced that the Jews may be subjugated like desert-dwelling 'natives'. But the sons of Israel are not like Negroes,³ my dear gentlemen! ... You treat us—the most civilised public in Asia, whose culture does not fall short of that of the Romans and the British—as if we were savages living on the banks of the Nile or the Niger, but you do not treat our holy places and holy of holies the same way. Would the Keith-Roaches or Duffs have dared to touch a block of wood worshiped by the savages of some remote island in Oceania? But any ignorant and rough Brit—backed by some gentleman—can trample and crush without hesitation the Holy of Holies of the people of the book.⁴

These events, the author suggested, are “to remind us that ‘our land, strangers devour it in our presence’. The Wailing Wall should serve as a mark of Cain on the gentiles’ foreheads”.⁵

Aḥime'ir was not unique in his tendency to draw a direct line between the first and the twentieth centuries AD. A similar line was drawn also by Jacob Cohen, the poet who gave *Brit ha-Biryanim* its name. “When England embarked on carrying out the Mandate”, he argued,

two acts of injustice were immediately inflicted upon us. The first injustice—tearing the East bank of the Jordan [from Mandatory Palestine]—was like stabbing the nation in the back. We haven't suffered such a crime since the destruction of the Second Temple... The second injustice was discharging the Hebrew battalion.⁶

Such a straight line of continuing victimhood was drawn also by Grünberg, in his dramatic poetic style. For instance:

Generations long we cried unto dirt in thee, Man's kingdom,
Men and women, infants and adults;
And since the plants growing on your soil did not vanish
Due to our tear's heavy load of salt,
And neither did die your rivers' fat fish,
It means—that our warm tears accumulated, like zinc,
Into our silence; deep in our soul did it sink.

And our rage—screeching from our hearts to our teeth,
 Screeching and tightening, it sharpened to a sword of sorrow
 While no iron sword did we have—our hands were hollow—
 As the enemies in Christianity and Islam came to slaughter
 Israel's people: from old man to toddler".⁷

The August 1929 riots and massacres and—more importantly—the feeling they spurred among Revisionist activists that Britain's policy was inherently anti-Zionist and pro-Arabist, deepened after the publication of "Passfield's White Paper" in October 1930.⁸ "For the last two years, so many decrees and edicts poured upon the Community, that it became a flesh without feeling", claimed an editorial in *Ha-'Am* in June 1931. "We do not feel any more the new troubles coming our way daily".⁹ No wonder, therefore, that the government's plan to carry out a population census in Palestine was perceived as a direct attempt to show that Jews were only a small minority in Palestine, thus proving that Zionism, as understood by the Zionist Organisation at the time, had failed.

The Maximalists, however, were not just whining about the grim situation. On the contrary: the motive of victimhood and disaster became, in their view, an incentive for national action. In a relatively short and concise article published in July that year, after the secession of the Revisionists from the Zionist Organisation, Yevin ascribed to Mapay the claim that Revisionism gains its power due to British laws and the massacre of August 1929.¹⁰ He did not deny that, but rather accepted this assumption. He then added that whereas the "liquidators" of Zionism suckle on "their clerks' complacency and bureaucratic satisfaction", the Revisionist movement suckles

on the great Jewish disaster. This is the case in every national liberation movement: it nurses on the disaster of the nation and from this national disaster it strengthens the people and educates it for its resurrection. We, members of the rebellion's movement, nurse on the wormwood of our people's destiny—thus our speeches are so bitter. Our movement's cradle stood between blood and fire: the blood of the slaughtered and the fire of demolished Jewish villages; and the glow of blood and fire pour red light on our whole existence. Our words are not sweet and our heart is not mellow. Our speech echoes the death rhoncus of slaughtered Jews, the cries of Jewish mothers staying on their children's corpses, and the loss of Jewish farmhouses set on fire... Our movement was born from the people's catastrophe and from its shame, and the sign of rage is engraved on our forehead.¹¹

Consistent with the idea of a direct movement from victimhood to action, Yevin concludes that “as long as the disaster continues, we shall grow and grow further—until we shall defeat it, with our own rebellious hands, and bring salvation to the homeless people”.

Aḥime’ir, his colleague, used almost the same words in another article, two weeks later. He opened his long article arguing in favour of founding a New Zionist Organisation by reviewing the causes which led to the founding of the Revisionist Movement, six years earlier. In order to justify its claim and root it in the movement’s short but intensive history, Aḥime’ir reminded his readers that Revisionist Zionism was born

amidst the storm of war and revolution ... Revisionist Zionists spent their childhood or their youth between the bullets of the World War or the civil war. The sign of Tragedy of those years is engraved on the soul and the face of each and every of us. Some lost a brother in the war; some had their fathers murdered by red terror, the Pteljuras, the Kossacks; one’s sister was raped; the other’s mother died from typhoid and hunger. The great catastrophe must be repaired...¹²

The repair, Aḥime’ir argued, should be political. While the wealthy and rich nations of the world, the winners of the World War, are lazy and incompetent, “imperialistic appetite” can be found among the “proletarian” peoples, those who lost the war, “whose public ideals were not fulfilled”. These peoples are “the Italian, the German, the Hungarian, the Russian and others—but the most proletarian is, of course, the Israeli people”. No other people “is so deeply betrayed by its potentates as our nation...”.¹³

Here again, one can see how the national group and its interests became victims not only of external enemies, but of betrayal by internal forces within the national body. Indeed, the feeling of victimhood was not uncommon among members of Revisionist Zionism not only regarding the fate of the Hebrew or the Jewish people, but also regarding their relative position towards other parts of that society. “For years we bore the yoke of hatred and contempt”, described Wolfgang Von Weisl the attitude of non-Revisionist Zionists towards the Revisionist movement.¹⁴ Thus, in his view too, victimhood was doubled: not only was the Hebrew community in Palestine perceived as the victim of British colonialism, but the Revisionists were also perceived as the victims of “old” Zionists within the community.

A similar point of view was evident in an article by Joshua Yevin published about a month later, addressed to members of the Revisionist movement. Yevin wished to “encourage the inner part” of the movement, at a time when talking about “*annexing Western Palestine to Transjordan*” was heard. Yevin argued that for five years, Zionism was saved from extinction only thanks to members of the Revisionist movement, who had been “hated and despised” through and through by members of other Zionist factions.¹⁵

The perception of intertwining yet complementary opposites—extreme misery on the one hand and grandeur on the other—continued in an even louder register on the pages of *Ḥazit ha-ʿAm*. “We believe in the people’s destiny and strength, we believe in the glorious future of this nation”, declared its editorial on its last January 1932 issue. This nation, though, was “bleeding between the jaws of lions all around the world”. The dichotomy was summed up in one sentence: “the rise of a new sun over poor Zion, which was abandoned—again—to desolation and jackals...”.¹⁶

Yevin and Aḥime’ir expressed the notion of victimhood not only as a phenomenon *per se*, but combined with other subjects as well. “A Chair for international peace, which is nothing but a cover for political conspiracies... has no practical importance for us, for it does not solve any critical question”, argued *Ḥazit ha-ʿAm*. The university

cannot afford such luxuries as long as it lacks the realistic basis. We are allowed to oppose this chair, for it is not we, the defenseless, lacking the right for self defense—we are not the ones who need preaching about international peace.¹⁷

The arrest of Brit ha-Biryoni activists, led by Aḥime’ir, who hampered the inauguration ceremony of the “Chair for International Peace” on 10 February 1932, made the editors of *Ḥazit ha-ʿAm* “furious and shocked”, since

in these very days of disaster to the people of Israel, while the ax is raised to cut off the root of its existence in our land—its territorial assets in the homeland—in days of victory for the representatives of the Hebronian dagger, the traitors were about to stage their ridiculous comedy of preaching peace not to the aggressors, but to the attacked, trampled and plundered.¹⁸

A few days later, after some of the protesting students were suspended from their studies for a few months, the newspaper concluded that Professor Magnes (the institution’s Chancellor at the time) did not only behave like

the Catholic Inquisition, but was also using “methods of communist Russia’s C.K.” in order to oppress his critics within the university.¹⁹

The protesters were not only victims of the treacherous Magnes, but also of the police, who were called to take care of the demonstrators. But victims were to be found within the police as well. “Three forces are scampering around within the police: the ruling English force, the basic Arab force, and the exploited Jewish force, which is not allowed to move or do anything”, wrote an unknown journalist in March 1932.²⁰ This “step child of the police” is persecuted; he is not allowed to do his job; his duty in the police is the one “of the black nigger! ‘The nigger has finished his job, the nigger can leave now’; Jewish policemen are not allowed to demonstrate their skills and wit.”

An assassination in Kfar Ḥasidim, in the vicinity of Haifa, and the inability of the police to find and arrest suspects in murdering other Hebrew citizens²¹ made Ḥime’ir hint to his readers what one should do. In his opinion, one should

put an end to the “liberal” view, which assumes that in the case of a murder there’s only one criminal: the murderer. This might be true in the stagnating, liberal, western countries. But this “liberal” western term is not compatible with the conditions of life in this country. One should first of all accustom the neighbour to the idea that Israel’s blood is not an abandoned property. The Mandate government and its double police accustomed the oriental masses in this country to other perceptions.

Sometimes, however,

the civilised public [has to] carry out the government’s task... we must remember that in the Anglo-Saxon world, the power of the public is greater than the government’s power. Overall, there’s a lot we should learn from the Anglo-Saxon world; primarily—the necessity of maintaining the nation’s dignity.²²

It might be far-fetched to assume that this specific article had a direct, immediate influence on the public. A few weeks later, however, three people found their violent death within 48 hours (one American Jewish tourist and one Arab driver were murdered in Jerusalem, and one Hebrew worker fell mysteriously from a bus and died). Another person (an Arab shepherd) was shot and slightly wounded near Jerusalem.²³ *Ḥazit ha-`Am*

argued that the country gradually becomes “a wondrous example” of a land where those who commit murderous crimes are never caught:

Palestine is the only country in the world where one sees 100% failure in catching the murderers, if one doesn't count quarrels within Arab villages. In the whole world there is only a minor percent of murderers escaping the police; here in Palestine, during the last year, about ten Jews were murdered—and the police found none of the murderers.²⁴

Editors of *Hazit ha-'Am*, “representatives of *the attacked side*”, which is the one “most interested in this country's peace and prosperity”, demanded the British authorities “to declare, clearly and unambiguously”, before the coming Muslim pilgrimage season, that the government would not allow any “riots or violent outbreaks, at which the press of *the offensive side* has already hinted”, otherwise—the responsibility for the outbreaks (and for their consequences) shall be on the mandate's government.²⁵

The perception of victimhood as a preparatory phase preceding political victory and national liberty was only implicit in the political articles published in *Hazit ha-'Am*. But in the literary parts of Maximalist writing, victimhood was clearly portrayed as a preparatory phase before the arrival of the redeemer.

Such a messianic movement from the pole of extreme victimhood towards the opposite pole of total redemption was evident in a short story by Yevin, published in *Hazit ha-'Am* in April 1932. A group is gathering in a small shack. Their leader, “Kokba”, a bit older than the others, is not intimidated by the fierce criticism, animosity and hate towards his “new movement, called after Josef Trumpeldor, marching under the blue-white flag”—an exact description of Jabotinsky (or Ahime'ir) and Beytar.²⁶ Speaking to the small group gathered in the shack, Kokba promises his audience that

redemption would come. Out of rivers of blood and the spittle of those who hate us; from the bleat of Jewish toddlers in the towns of Israel, their bellies swollen by hunger; by the quivering of bearded Jews, as the ropes are tightened on their necks in the cities of Poland; from the flames of our villages, put on fire by our haters—it is growing and emerging, the redeemer of despair and rage; it imbibes the bitterness of wormwood—and it gathers strength. It shall straighten up the hunched and give swords to weak hands—so they could fight for their place in this world.

The next paragraphs seem to be part of the biographies of the author and his good friend U.C. Grünberg. Yevin's hero says that his generation

came here from silence-stricken battlefields and shaky trenches. From barbed wires, on which the remains of cadavers were rotting. We came from hunger beaten cities, where carcasses of horses were rolling in the streets, and from Jewish towns after pogroms, where slaughtered corpses were carried, piled in crates, to be taken to mass graves—and we carry within us the terminal breath of brothers and the anxiety of Israel's towns, which were waiting for the slaughterer to arrive....²⁷

This dark valley of tears and horror has, however, a gate of hope:

He will come, the Redeemer of Israel, but much he will suffer. Carrying thousands of young bodies he will be put *in the king's jail*, and his hands will be put *in iron chains*. He will stroll across the land, persecuted and hungry, seeking shelter in caverns, like an animal. Like a man of war will he sit in the trenches, covered with mire and eaten by lice, with the gun in his hand—until a day would come and Israel shall be salvaged. Then he shall ascend the royal throne... His head is in heaven and his feet leaping across the mountains, proceeding, coming ever nearer....²⁸

Victimhood was not only a general feeling; it was embodied in the figures of specific persons as well. Jabotinsky himself, for instance, was continuously portrayed as a victim by his followers; the motif of prison and gallows regularly repeating itself. In a poem written in 1934, during the trial of the three activists accused of murdering Hājim Arlosoroff, Yevin wrote that

In days of libel I saw you—carried with your three sons to the gallows,
Together with them, in chains, to interrogation's torture and jail everyday...
Loading the iron bars on your back—but you're just flesh and blood...²⁹

The notion of victimhood was not limited to the Hebrew people. At least one more people on the shores of the Mediterranean “had been oppressed, persecuted, disintegrated and lacking self-consciousness for centuries”, and therefore naturally saw “viewed a leader like Mussolini as a divine present, a rescuer and a savior”.³⁰ This was Zwi Kolitz's simple explanation of the reasons which made the Italian Duce so popular. He added that

we should not forget that it was a few decades ago, that the people of Europe regarded the Italians not only as an unorganised, weak people—but as lesser, inferior humans as well... “We are forced”, writes Mazzini to the Italians, “to be like Israel among the nations: to satisfy the world with the fruits of our spirit, receiving nothing in return”... and there was no one to act for the benefit of the Italian diaspora.³¹

The same aforementioned dialectic mechanism of deep degradation and exalted ascension was evident in Kolitz’s analysis of recent Italian history. For him, it was clear that “after the inferiority complex which prevailed in Italy during the last century, a necessary reaction came in this century, by Mussolini’s Fascism, which raised Italy to one of the highest levels among the peoples”.³²

The notion of victimhood, one should mention, was expressed by Ze’ev Jabotinsky too. The best example thereof is probably his poem “It Is All Mine”, written in 1937:

Since the day I was called to the wonder
Of Beytar and Sinai and Zion,
To the Jail they have sent me, my brothers
Locking me out of my mother’s home.

The coast and the valley aren’t ours;
Building and harvesting in vain;
Oh my Lord—you chose us to suffer
And my brother to be the hangman.³³

This notion of victimhood was present at the basis of Abraham Stern’s political and historical analysis as well. “Since the day the British armies entered Palestine”, he asserted, the Hebrew community there was forfeited

to Arab rioters in 1920 and 1921. Trans-Jordan was torn from our homeland; certificates became mandatory; bloody clashes [broke out] in 1929; blocking the Jewish immigration; the Wailing Wall committee; the French report; hunting of illegal immigrants; the bloody clashes from 1936 to 1939 and finally the White Paper.³⁴

All these were committed either directly or indirectly by the British rulers. That situation, in his view, was nothing new, but another link in a

long chain of suffering. “The people of Israel is suffering more than all other peoples for about 1,800 years, since its temple was destroyed and it was expelled from its land. And for these 60 generations it is wandering from one country to another, persecuted up to its neck, beaten and humiliated.”³⁵

This victimhood, however, was dialectic: it paved the way for national redemption, as promised in the sixth part of the NMO anthem. While Palestine was imbued with

“The tears of the mothers bereaved from their sons,
And the blood of infants so pure—

the task of the NMO was to

Stick corpses together like with cement –
And so our homeland would endure”.³⁶

* * *

CONCLUSION

The first presentations of victimhood in the fascist context were made public in *Do'ar ha-Yom*, where Italy was described as a state which “did not gain anything” from the Great War. Already then, in the early 1920s, parallel lines were drawn between the image of Italy as a European nation deprived of its right share in international politics—and the emerging Hebrew nation.

The clashes and quarrels between Jews and Muslims next to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, in October 1928 and then in August 1929, accelerated the usage of victimisation rhetoric. It was evident in the writings of Aḥime'ir and the poems by Grünberg in 1929 at the latest.

The late 1920s and early 1930s saw the beginning of a repeating pattern: presenting contemporary Hebrew victimhood in the ahistoric context of Jewish suffering. This pattern took two directions. Aḥime'ir (together with Jacob Cohen) made an ahistorical *leap* from the first to the twentieth century AD: their group's activists, “Biryanim”, were named after the Zealots of Jerusalem during the rebellion against the Roman empire. Grünberg, on his part, portrayed an ahistorical *continuation*, putting contemporary Hebrew misery in the context of Jewish victimhood for many generations.

The Maximalists' notion of victimhood, however, took a dialectic form: from passive misery to active reaction, to the extent of full reciprocal relations. Revisionism, in Yevin's own words, "nursed on the great Jewish disaster". Soon, victimhood was portrayed as a preparatory phase before the arrival of the redeemer, as described in explicit messianic rhetoric.

The national group and its interests became victims not only of external enemies, but of the betrayal of internal forces within the national body, as Revisionists "bore the yoke of hatred and contempt" put on them by non-Revisionist Zionists, as Wolfgang Von Weisl described it. Victimhood, then, had two levels, which existed simultaneously: Zionists were the victims of the British rulers and Arab nationalists, while Revisionists were victims of other Zionist factions. This notion of victimhood was manifested not only by the Maximalists, but also by Ze'ev Jabotinsky himself (Fig. 5.1).

This idea of victimhood peaked in Abraham Stern's political and historical analysis, and in his perception of his group and himself. All aforementioned elements of victimhood can be traced in his writings:

Fig. 5.1 Uri Zwi Grünberg, early 1930s. Courtesy of the Jabotinsky Institute in Israel



contemporary victimhood as a link in a long historical chain; a return to the symbols of the war against the Roman empire; external national victimhood alongside an internal one (which, in his case was not just double but even triple, being the outcast not only of the general Zionist camp but of the Revisionist movement itself) and above all dialectic of victimhood and messianic redemption.

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NOTES

1. Ḥajim Vardi, "The Victory of the Fascists" [Niḥon ha-Fašistim], *Do'ar Ha-Yom*, 12.11.1922.
2. Abba Aḥime'ir, "Current Issues (From the Notebook of a Fascist)", *Do'ar ha-Yom*, 8.10.1928. Publius Petronius was the proconsul in Syria, who was sent in 40 AD to place a statue of the Roman emperor inside the Temple in Jerusalem; Gessius Florus was the Roman governor of Judea from 64 to 66 AD. Ronald Henry Amherst Storrs (1881–1955) was military and civil governor of Jerusalem during the 1920s; Edward Keith-Roach (1889–1954) was governor of Jerusalem and the Galilee during the 1920s and 1930s; Harry Charles Luke (1884–1969) was Chief Secretary of the Palestine Government at that time.
3. Cf. Amos 9.7: "Are ye not as children of the Ethiopians unto me, O children of Israel?"
4. *Ibid.* Douglas Duff (1901–1978) was one of the police officers in charge in Jerusalem during the Wailing Wall riots in October 1928.
5. *Ibid.*, see Isaiah 1.7. However, Aḥime'ir also suggested an alternative to this situation. See chapter 9 of this book: "Born Amidst Blood and Fire", note 2.
6. Jacob Cohen, "On the Great Danger and the Great Faith (Lecture by the Poet Jacob Cohen)", *Hazit ha-'Am*, 19.4.1932. This is a short version of his public lecture a few days earlier. The "Hebrew Legion" was the name given to five battalions, who fought in the British army during the First World War (in Sinai, Palestine and Greece). The battalions, initially established by Ze'ev Jabotinsky and Josef Trumpeltor, were gradually disassembled during the years 1920–1921.
7. Uri Zwi Grünberg, *Shield Girdle and the Speech of Blood's Son* (Jerusalem: Sadan, 1929), strophe A, p. 3; cited by Joseph Aḥime'ir and Shmuel Shatzky, *Brit Ha-Biryoniim: The First Anti-British Organisation. Documents and Evidences* (Tel Aviv: Nicanim, 1978), p. 12.
8. See for instance Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism* (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), pp. 346 ff.

9. The People's Diary (editorial), "The Census", *Ha-'Am*, 15.6.1931. The editorial was probably written by Aḥime'ir, who led (together with Yevin and Grünberg) a firm campaign against the census. This anti-census campaign became a central issue for "Brit ha-Biryonom". About this group, see Colin Shindler, *The Triumph of Military Zionism: Nationalism and the Origins of the Israeli Right* (London: Tauris, 2006), pp. 158 ff. For the intellectual background of the group see Abraham Cordoba, 'Inteleqtualim l-lo' pšarā b-ḥajim h-politijim: h-miqre šel Brit h-Biryonom [Non-Compromising Intellectuals in Political Life: The Case of "Brit ha-Biryonom"]', in: Pinḥas Ginosar (ed.), *Ha-Sifrut h-'Ibrit ve-Tnu'at h-'Aboda* ["The Hebrew Literature and the Workers' Movement"] (Beer Sheva: Ben Gurion University Press, 1989), pp. 224–242.
10. Yevin, "What Do We Suckle On?", *Ha-'Am*, 22.7.1931. Yevin uses the Russian term "*Pogrom*".
11. *Ibid.* The Revisionists used the terms "liquidation" and "bankruptcy" to describe the politics of liberal and socialist Zionists, which they perceived as a wholesale of Zionist principles and achievements.
12. Aḥime'ir, "The Aims of Revisionist Zionism", *Ha-'Am*, 5.8.1931.
13. *Ibid.* See also other parts of this programmatic article in other chapters of this work.
14. Von Weisl, "The Fear of Bravery", *Ha-'Am*, 9.4.1931. Zeev Tzahor finds some of the roots of animosity between the Revisionists and the Socialists in demographic changes which took place since the mid 1920's. See Zeev Tzahor, "The Struggle between the Revisionist Party and the Labour Movement – 1929–1933", *Modern Judaism*, vol. 8 no. 1 (February 1988), pp. 15–25.
15. Joshua Yevin, "Fire's Guardians", *Ha-'Am*, 12.5.1931. Yevin took a clear messianic approach in another part of this article.
16. "Who's to the Lord of Zion—Join Us!" (editorial), *Hazit ha-'Am*, 29.1.32 (cf. Jeremiah 10.22: "It will make the towns of Judah desolate, a haunt of jackals"). The motive of a new sun seems like a direct paraphrase on a verse from the Jewish morning prayer, "and a new light You will shed on Zion" [ואור חדש על ציון תאיר].
17. "Why do the National Students Oppose the Chair for International Peace?" (no author), *Hazit ha-'Am*, 12.2.1932. The text was also distributed as a leaflet at the Hebrew University before the demonstration on Mount Scopus against Bentwich and after it.
18. People's Diary (editorial), "We Are Furious and Shocked", *Hazit ha-'Am*, 12.2.1932. The "Hebrew College" is what will soon be known as the Hebrew University. "Hebronain Dagger" is here metonymy for the agitators of the August 1929 riots, the main massacre of which took place in Hebron.

19. "After the Riots in the College: Magnes Issues an Inquisitional Verdict against Zionists" (no author), *Hazit ha-'Am*, 16.2.1932.
20. M. A. (only initials are given), "From the Capital City: 'And They shall Scamper...'", *Hazit ha-'Am*, 8.3.1932.
21. *Hazit ha-'Am*, 15.3.1932.
22. Abba Siqra' (Aḥime'ir), "The Murder in Kfar Ḥasidim", *Hazit ha-'Am*, 15.3.1932.
23. "Official Announcement of the Government", *Hazit ha-'Am*, 5.4.1932.
24. "For the Peace of the Land", *Hazit ha-'Am*, 5.4.1932.
25. *Ibid.*, my emphasis.
26. Yevin, "Brit ha-Biryoniim", *Hazit ha-'Am*, 8.4.1932. The short passage (marked for some reason as "XV"), was the concluding part of Yevin's story "Jerusalem is Waiting", which was published in 19 parts, beginning in February 1932.
27. *Ibid.* Yevin, who was born in Ukraine, studied medicine in Moscow. During the Second World War he served as a military physician in the eastern front.
28. *Ibid.* For the clear messianic paraphrases cf. Isaiah 53.1–8 and 52.7; Cant. 2.8.
29. Yevin, "For Ze'ev Jabotinsky", *Hazit ha-'Am*, 30.3.1934. The "three sons" are Abba Aḥime'ir, Abraham Stavsky and Ze'ev Rosenblatt, who were arrested and accused of murdering Ḥajim Arlosoroff in Tel Aviv, on 16 June 1933.
30. Zwi Kolitz, *Mussolini: His Personality and Doctrine* (Tel Aviv: Tebel, 1936), p. 48.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
33. *It Is All Mine* ["Kulla Šelli"] (1937).
34. Abraham Stern, "Zionism and Great Britain", draft in his notebook, probably written during 1940 or 1941. CZA A 549\6544. In "certificates", Stern refers to immigration certificates, which were demanded by the Mandate government from any European who wanted to emigrate to Palestine. The "Committee" is the Hope-Simpson committee, which was set to investigate the reasons for the 1929 riots; the French report was an appended report to Hope-Simpson's report, which recommended a revision in agricultural policy and land distribution; the "White Paper" referred to here is the one of 1939.
35. Stern, draft in his notebook, written probably during 1941. CZA A 549\65-58.
36. Nechemia Ben-Tor, *History of the Fighters for the Freedom of Israel* (Jerusalem: Ya'ir, 2010), Vol. 1, p. 2.



CHAPTER 6

Is Spengler's Prophecy Coming True?

In 1922, as the world was trying to recover from the destruction and devastation of the Great War, there were many reasons for pessimism. Itamar Ben Avi, though, did not let the grim situation let him down. “The fate of humanity is better than it seems according to Bolshevik world view”, he argued. As a liberal activist fascinated by the opportunities the modern world has to offer, he disliked “every standstill—needless to mention a standstill derived out of evil and malice. The standstill of crude force encourages the heart to rebellion, excitement, invention and renewal.”

More than scorn or alarm, however, his main feeling towards Bolshevism was rather disappointment of the Russian revolutionaries, on whom, it seems, he pinned some hopes:

The entire world is grieving now, the dignity of mankind was humiliated, the beauty of dreams has become a laughing stock. But a day would come—it will not take long—and we shall renounce our disgrace, that dust of idol worship; then, the day of payment will come to this regime, which brutally trampled all our delicate dreams.¹

Half a decade after the October Revolution, the triumph of socialism was, in his opinion, a curse more than a blessing. But Ben Avi was never a socialist; his disappointment was one of an external viewer. Naturally, disappointment was deeper among those who once were socialists themselves—until they changed their minds. “The moderate among the socialists have become addicted, for decades, to petty politics”, revealed

Abba Aḥime'ir to his readers. "They address the masses only before elections. But what has socialism done for the cultural education of his many followers?"² Aḥime'ir, at that time still hesitating between socialist dreams and nationalist devotion, already knew that "an ideal coming true—bears the danger of disappointment and emptiness". The corrosive effects of socialism were felt not only in Europe, whence he came, but also in Palestine, where the cultural crisis "is mostly because we are set under the yoke of public affairs".

But with all its deficits, Bolshevism was only one danger. Aḥime'ir argued that the Hebrew community also faces "the American danger"—what thinkers a few years later would name "Americanism". This is the danger of America, whose inhabitants experience

life of mechanic work, instead of creativity. This mechanisation of life, this Americanisation—is the curse hovering over Europe for decades, decades of paralyzed creativity. Decades of business, sports, press, elections with disgusting propaganda. We also face this danger. But an active public, with vigour and consciousness—even small in number but of great quality—can resist this danger. We should aspire not to the American ideal, in spite of its satiation—satiation of both the stomach and the soul. We might be hungry for bread, but this bread should not extinguish our hunger for the word of the Lord!³

Two years later, Aḥime'ir had already left socialist circles, and was writing in *Do'ar ha-Yom*. Herbert Hoover's victory in the presidential elections of the USA provided him with an opportunity to write about some of the themes which interested him the most: world politics and international relations. In a relatively calm tone (for some reason, this column did not bear the regular subtitle "From the Notebook of a Fascist"), Aḥime'ir reviewed the development of the political system in the United States, and the intertwined histories of the Democrat and Republican parties. At the end of his article, however, he asserted that

Hoover's victory is the victory of the politics opposing the League of Nations, opposing the easing of immigration (of people and alcohol alike). It is the politics of higher protective tariffs... Hoover's victory is the triumph of the selfish and healthy national principle.⁴

At that point, Aḥime'ir already saw separatism and protectionism, rather than international openness, as a healthy national principle.

HA-'AM

In his article “The Renewed Zionism (B): Jewish Trouble and the Aspiration of the Jews”, Wolfgang Von Weisl explained not only what Revisionist Zionism means for him, but also why it should be that way and for what reason. First, he made clear what Revisionism means for him. Revisionism, in Von Weisl’s view, assumes that Zionism would appeal to various needs of Jews around the world—material, spiritual and social—for otherwise, Zionism “does not interest us”.⁵ As for the reasons, “it is not the troubles of Jews as individuals, but the danger which faces the whole race [which interests us]: the danger of extinction, the destruction as a Nation”. Von Weisl feared a decline of the Jewish people as a whole, as among Jewish communities in Europe and North America there were then more deaths than births, and—everywhere possible—Jews were leaving religion and abandoning their local communities.⁶

While Von Weisl sought in Revisionism a remedy for the decline of the Jewish people worldwide, members of Brit ha-Biryoniim—under the leadership of Ahime’ir, Grünberg and Yevin—were more concerned about the decline of the Hebrew community in Palestine, primarily its younger generation. “The daily press fattens you, Palestinian youngster, with the sweet honey of hope for good news about salvation and comfort”, argued their call for the Hebrew youth. The small nationalist group, in contrast, is about to feed the youth “with bitter stuff. We shall feed you with that healthy food, which fits a strong, manly soul.”⁷ The authors promised to tell the youngsters everything about “the treachery of the government, the shame of the leadership and the rupture of the people”, in the hope of convincing them to join the Revisionist camp in its battle against both the British colonial regime and the Zionist establishments.

Von Weisl continued his argument in the next part of the article (published five days after the first)—and this time found some reasons for optimism. Referring to the high birthrate among “Jews” in Palestine, he came to the conclusion that “Judaism, doomed to degeneration in Europe, came back to life as it touched its native soil”.⁸ This is not only a national revival, but even a biological one, as “the height, weight, chest width and breathing abilities of the children born here are better than those of European Jewish and even [sic!] non-Jewish schoolchildren—from Lithuania to France”. The Jewish race, which was considered to be dying in Europe, sprouts new, healthy twigs in Palestine. “This is an antithesis to the diminishing of the Jews in Europe... there—degeneration, as a necessary

outcome of the environment; here—renaissance and nationalism: not incidentally, but as a normal response to known *local conditions*".⁹

As for the Jewish community in Palestine, Von Weisl argued that "the greatest danger to our existence—mingling and mixed marriages—could, under certain conditions, be found in Palestine too, but it is precisely the hostility of the neighbours preventing it".¹⁰ Furthermore: the problems inherent in the process of bringing together Jews from very different countries and classes and making one Hebrew race out of them were also pushed aside by the fact that all these immigrant Jews are equally hated by the Arabs.

Von Weisl asserted that the hatred of the nations towards the Jews has always raised a kind of "Jewish anti-Semitism" among some of them—an idea deeply rooted in the soul of some Jews. However, next to the looming danger of a decrease in the world's Jewish population due to assimilation, Von Weisl does not miss the opportunity to punch his political adversaries, declaring that

a much larger number of Jews does not turn spiritually to the enemy's side, but rather adapts, evades, tries to hide and disguise its race as much as possible, thus hoping to escape inconveniences or economic damage. These are the Jews who had become Liberals five years ago, socialists thirty years ago and Communists fifteen years ago; they became the standard bearers of new ideologies... hoping that their Jewishness will thus be forgiven.

Von Weisl made the connection between Zionism and anti-Semitism by asserting that anti-Semitism is what drove Jews from all over the world to Palestine, as they were looking for a place where they can be treated equally, like all others, without being discriminated against.¹¹ The aim of Revisionist Zionism, therefore, is to create in Palestine a Jewish majority, not a Jewish minority. This is, in Von Weisl's view, a precondition for safeguarding against anti-Semitism. But petty Zionist leaders (a hint to General Zionists) prefer to stay in Europe and engage in European politics, instead of coming to Israel. They either gave up the idea of a Jewish state (again, hinting to Liberals), or argue that settlement in Israel is for members of a "New Society", not for "old fashioned" walks of life (hinting to Zionist socialists).¹² Later that year, Von Weisl would also argue that communism poses not only a direct but also an indirect danger to Jews: while it directly attracts many Jewish youngsters, it indirectly makes non-Communist public opinion believe that Jews are responsible for Communism. In Von Weisl's

words, “in various countries in central Europe fascism is associated with fierce antisemitic activity due to a distorted fusion of the terms ‘Judaism’ and ‘Marxism’”.¹³

The elections for the Zionist Congress gave the editors of *Ha-`Am* the opportunity to position themselves as the young guardians, saving the nation from degradation. “It turns out that in Palestine there are only two parties: Brit Šalom and the Left on the one hand, versus the nationalist on the right wing, the Revisionist Zionism and the national element among the Mizrahi, while in between—the ‘Altersheim’...” stated an editorial summarising the elections.¹⁴ “The leftists” fight for funds and for the possibility

to surrender and compromise endlessly with all kinds of Zionists and non-Zionists, whereas the Revisionists want to revive Herzl’s Zionism and establish it as a barricade against the danger set by socialist terror... this was the last time that the leeches had the budget, the money and the possibility to make their delegates stand on their feet. Their end has come. The elections in January buried the center; the elections of May sealed its grave. But the elections of May also defeated Mapay, and the congress will dig their pit.¹⁵

The editorial ends with the declaration that “the bankrupts are gone. Long live the Revisionist Zionism!”

A more elaborated literary report about the decline was the one by Uri Zwi Grünberg, published a few days later. Interestingly connecting the corruption of the liberal executive with the dangerous emergence of communism, he described how a friend of his, who had also emigrated to Palestine, became a communist, because “the idea for which he came has gone void, broken, boring and corrupt in the hands of his class leaders, and executives measuring everything with money”, while “no other content exists” for the society in Palestine.¹⁶

“The orphanhood of the Wailing Wall is crying”, Grünberg concluded, “the shame of orphanhood of the nation’s utmost holies in Jerusalem, the cruel, impure, criminal negligence of the Wailing Wall by all the religious Jews and their rabbis is crying.” It is a matter of degradation and humiliation, as “Israel’s honour is gone”. While Von Weisl was concerned about Jewish assimilation in Europe, Grünberg has another opinion. He asserts that Jews in Palestine are

more miserable than those assimilating among the gentiles: no religion, no colonisation. No flag. No feeling. On our secular agenda is the budget, for keeping what we already have, without any chance to grow, no *esprit* nor lust for something else

The decline, in Grünberg's view, is not only of the political leadership, but the religious leadership as well. Since the only thing about which the religious circles revolt is the fact that one plays football on Saturday, Grünberg turns his back "to this self-righteous, dishonoured Jerusalem", for "because of the rabbis' disciples, God has left that city". His operative message, however, is clear. In what will become his identifying mark in Hebrew political literature, he now turns "to these few, who carry the religion of the Siqriqi in their blood, only *they* are the believers, and the Holy Spirit of the Lord—is within *them*".¹⁷

As evident from both Von Weisl's and Grünberg's articles, the dangers posed by liberal ideas (such as Brit Šalom's in Palestine or other liberal tendencies abroad) did not lessen the fear of communism; liberal and communist dangers seem to have completed and intensified one another. That Spring, the Revisionist newspaper dedicated a long report (almost an entire page, including the testimonies of both prosecution and defence witnesses) to the trial of two communist activists, members of the PKP (one from Jerusalem, the other from Jaffa), who were accused of agitation against the authorities and spreading of communist propaganda.¹⁸ The subtitle was also unusually detailed: "leader of 600 workers who met none of them—a salary from Moscow—Komintern clerks take care of farmers—a First Class voyage to Moscow—1200 students from 80 countries—Marxism and bombs—150 Million inhabitants of Russia starving—letters written with lemon juice—Nebi Musa and the Komintern". The two were sentenced to 24 years imprisonment. The interesting point, however, was the newspaper's attempt to connect the nationalist Arabist danger to the communist one: the newspaper highlighted the assumption that the minor riots in Nebi Musa the year before were not religiously motivated, but actually the product of "communist agitation".

It is worth mentioning that Von Weisl did not see Arabism as a danger *per se*, but only as far as it collided with Zionist aspirations in Palestine proper. In his book *Allah ist Gross*,¹⁹ which was written in Vienna in 1935, he even contemplated the establishment of a Jewish state as part of a Muslim-Arab caliphate—the best constellation in his view to form a strong wall to protect Europe against the danger of communism.

The “Red Danger” preoccupied Von Weisl since the beginning of the 1930s at the latest. Already in 1931, in an introduction to an interview with Cidqi Paša, Egypt’s ruler, Von Weisl praised him for passing a “Revisionist Budget” for Egypt, cutting the government’s expenses.²⁰

After Cidqi Paša asserted that communism does not pose any danger to Egypt, Von Weisl asked him whether it is “possible that a clandestine communist act was responsible for instigating political unrest”. To support the assumption that it is actually Moscow navigating the political agitation throughout the Middle East, Cidqi Paša is quoted as saying that the Egyptian authorities “know there are connections between Communist centers and members of the Wafd party” (in a direct hint to the British colonial rule in the region, Von Weisl emphasised Cidqi’s declaration that the “Egyptian government must gradually abolish the capitulations”, as these are “an injury and insult for the honour of every state”).²¹

Back in Tel Aviv, the notion of a danger of decline was not limited to the political communist or liberal danger, but was a part of a greater feeling of cultural-national decline. “It’s a fact: Habimma declined from these high summits on which it stood during its first years—to the plain”, wrote Joshua Yevin, *Ha-’Am*’s theatre critic, about the national Hebrew theatre. He admitted, though, that “it is still a very good theatre ...”²²

According to Yevin, Habimma used to have something else, that was absent from all other theatres in the world; something which does not necessarily have much to do with theatre, but rather with additional feeling. Habimma’s decline, in his view, is actually a projection of the national decline, for

if we would have had the fortune of seeing our liberation movement burning in the hearts with the same fire and heat it had in its beginning—then *Habimma* would have certainly remained the stage of vision and the holy spirit of our liberation movement. But we did not have this fortune. The [national] movement is not like that; the hearts are not such. Habimma moves from the summit to the plain.²³

While Yevin thought that Habimma was still a good theatre—and, when the time comes, might again open its gates for the national vision—he was also very critical regarding the message which resonated from the specific play he saw that week, Somerset Maugham’s *The Sacred Flame*.²⁴ Yevin interpreted the play as a symbol of *moral* decline, certain that

only an incurably shallow and superficial era, an era which turned its back to the religious point of view—the point of view which sees suffering as an integral, important and divine part of human existence, just as integral and important as humans' few moments of happiness—only such a shallow era sees suffering as a mere stumbling block, which can be easily moved away from one's life.²⁵

Yevin understood Somerset Maugham's justification for the killing of sick and invalid people—and criticised its motives rather than its ends. Yevin's anger was not due to the killing itself, but due to Maugham's *hypocrisy*. The ancient Spartans, Yevin argued, also killed their invalid babies, but were not trying to claim they were doing it for the benefit of the children, but rather for the benefit of society:

It involved cruelty and barbarism—but at least it was honest and frank. It was a clear expression of the *bestial instinct of healthy humans*: to “remove” the weak creatures who disturb him.²⁶

In Maugham's play, on the contrary, the killing is hypocrisy, since it is claimed to be committed in order to “free one from his own suffering”.

Another example of humanity's decline was also presented as evident in a review of Oswald Spengler's *Der Mensch und die Technik* published in *Ha-'Am* that month.²⁷ The review claimed that the basic danger for humanity is the danger of the machine, and a mechanical way of thinking, as opposed to an ideal one. “Salvation would come from the return to an ideal way of thinking; one should turn the back upon the technical way of thinking”. While the review's author does not write it explicitly, it is assumed that rationality is something to be saved from, preferably through idealism.²⁸

Altogether, that Hebrew year (which ended in September 1931) was a year of decline in the eyes of *Ha-'Am*'s editors. “A blow followed a blow, defeat followed defeat—all fell this year on Zionism and the community in Palestine”. So deep were these defeats, that they “destroyed the people's belief in its future here in this country”.²⁹

Such a dread of decline was shouted from the pages *Hazit ha-'Am* as well. “The City's Council sold the Tel Aviv Police; A disgraceful agreement between the city's council and the government”, described a headline the subordination of the municipal police to the governmental one, and the incorporation of the local police force within the country-wide apparatus.³⁰

The academy too was corrupt. "The gang of traitors, concentrated within the Hebrew College, which systematically destroyed and is still destroying, for years, the hope of tortured Israel, was about to celebrate its victory" was *Hazit ha-'Am*'s description of the initiative to establish a "Chair for International Peace" within the faculty of social sciences.³¹

The entire construct was rotten from its base. The house of "*ancien regime*" of Zionism was so unstable, that

it's enough to shake one brick in it in order to make the whole building collapse. And the people of the old regime in Zionism feel it all too well, and this is why—due to their basic instinct of survival—they make sure, so meticulously, that no single brick of this building is shaken.³²

Prosperous urban life was regarded by *Hazit ha-'Am* as decadence. All these things which make a routine life of a modern society—"the sixteen lists in the elections for Tel Aviv's municipality, the annual carnival, the exhibition, the sports games, the great construction works"—all these together are no reason to rejoice. "There is something dangerous" in this Tel Aviv, which became a symbol of *bon vivants*. First, in Tel Aviv "a Jew might sometimes forget that there is still Palestine which is not Jewish". Secondly, "there is something frivolous in this Tel Aviv", which should be "the city of Jewish revolution", and therefore "is no place for carnivals". The article called its readers "not to remain silent! Jews, do not forget the situation, the grave situation you are in!"³³

That same month, the United States celebrated George Washington's 200th birthday. But America was experiencing a total social decline, since

American Puritanism degenerated through the hypocrisy of the "prohibition". The pilgrim was succeeded by the all-rightist, whose good material status was eaten by the Golden Calf, whose temple is in Wall Street... a people occupied with business and sports has no future—this is man's act of masturbation... in the days of Washington and even of Lincoln one did not spend time on sports and records. The Americans of today, from the depths in which they are sunken, praise Washington—like diaspora Judaism which liked, more than anything else, to mention the personality of David, king of Israel.³⁴

Indeed, one can differ between two attitudes towards historical personalities. One is "a futile, Tolstoyan one" (as demonstrated in *War and Peace*) and the other is like Carlyle's (as in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*). An individual

may behold a historical hero from Tolstoy's point of view. But miserable is the nation which holds such a perception of heroes. Such a nation is dangerously ill, such a nation is covered with rust. A healthy nation, and even a part thereof, beholds its hero only from Carlyle's point of view.³⁵

Altogether, it seemed that "Spengler's prophecy about the decline of the West, due to the degeneration of the liberal and socialist world views, is coming true", Ahime'ir summarised his ideas in a letter he wrote from prison in Jerusalem, where he was arrested after obstructing the event on Mount Scopus. "But a great national movement is emerging in Central Europe. It saved Europe from the parliamentary sandbank of the chatters, and more important: national dictatorship saved the peoples of central Europe from the C.K., civil wars and Marxist utopias".³⁶ In 1932, National Socialism could be seen as an antidote to social decline.

A similar notion of social decline and failure of the official leadership could be traced in the propaganda of the NMO under Stern's command. "Hebrew Youth!", called its first official leaflets which were secretly distributed in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, "these very days the world is burning in the fire of war, and the world Jewry is sinking in a sea of blood". At the same time,

the Hebrew society sinks in the mire of flattery and commerce, in the mire of shame and prostitution. The Hellenised leaders of the people bow and kneel in front of the foreign ruler.³⁷

Stern's group targeted its critic at the "Quislings of the Jewish Agency and the Revisionist party", thus making them all part and parcel of the same declining leadership.³⁸

About a week later, the party's newspaper published the "wanted" ad of the police, asking for information on the whereabouts of Stern and five other NMO soldiers.³⁹ The political rupture between the "*NMO in Israel*" and the Revisionist party—and the personal break between Stern and the other leaders, including Yevin and Ahime'ir—was full and complete.

CONCLUSION

The dread of decline had three distinct levels among members of the examined group. First was the global level, seeing a comprehensive cultural decline of modern civilisation, especially in Europe. Second was the

fear of assimilation of Jewish communities around the world, which could cause the decline of the whole Jewish people. A third level was the fear of social decline within the Hebrew society in Palestine.

Itamar Ben Avi, son of the father of Hebrew nationalism, did not see any local decline. He was grieving “the dignity of mankind” which had been humiliated by Bolshevism. The triumph of communism was, in his opinion, a curse more than a blessing; his disappointment in the Russian revolution was the one of a liberal, who saw one tyrannical regime replaced by another, instead of a liberal one.

Aḥime’ir’s hatred towards socialism since the end of the 1920s was fiercer, as one might expect from a convert. Both Ben Avi and Aḥime’ir, however, shared a common feeling of general global cultural decline, national decline being a part of it; that was a feeling that the entire European civilisation—to which they felt strongly affiliated—was declining. The seeds of this idea were sown in Aḥime’ir in 1924 at the latest, when he was writing his PhD thesis, about Oswald Spengler’s *Decline of the West*.

Wolfgang Von Weisl, in his turn, was more concerned about what he perceived as a decline of the Jewish people. The corrosive effects of liberalism, secularism and socialism, he argued, were destroying Jewish communities, hence putting all their members in danger. Zionism—and in his view during the 1930s, only Revisionist Zionism was real Zionism—should provide an answer to this particular national decline. Still, the decline which worried Von Weisl, though observed among certain diaspora people, was taking place all around the world. In Palestine, on the contrary, he saw Hebrew renaissance and Zionist nationalism.

Brit ha-Biryonim—under the leadership of Aḥime’ir, Grünberg and Yevin—was more geographically focused. Its rhetoric concentrated on the decline of the Hebrew community in Palestine, whose ideas, in Grünberg’s words, became “void, broken, boring and corrupt”. The whole Hebrew society, as Yevin asserted, “moves from the summit to the plain”.

The “Red Danger” was perceived as a common threat at all levels. While Ben Avi saw it as a danger to modern spirit in general, Von Weisl saw it as a danger to Jewish youth around the world (and, interestingly, to Arab societies as well), and members of Brit ha-Biryonim as a danger to Hebrew youth in Palestine (Fig. 6.1).

Consequently, Abraham Stern collected all the aforementioned threats—liberal cosmopolitanism, a satisfied *bourgeoisie* unwilling to fight, inept leadership unable to mobilise the people—and incorporated them in

Fig. 6.1 Ze'ev Wolfgang von Weisl, early 1930s. Courtesy of the Jabotinsky Institute in Israel



his world view. The idea that the only answer to social decline was reinvigoration of the nation through violent mobilisation would be tested with the outbreak of the Second World War. One may assume, therefore, that the aim of his attempt to collaborate with Germany and Italy was not only to get rid of the British rulers, but to provide the right answer to social decline: social integration.

* * *

NOTES

1. Ha-Do'ar, "Five Years of Bolshevism", *Do'ar ha-Yom*, 06.12.1922.
2. Aḥime'ir, "The Fate of Social Ideals", *Ha-Po'el ha-Tza'ir* 20 (1926), issue 1–2.
3. *Ibid.* The last words should probably be taken in their broad sense: "hunger for cultural deepness".

4. Abba Ahime'ir, "Current Issues: The Elections in America", *Do'ar ha-Yom*, 15.11.1928.
5. Wolfgang von Weisl, "The Renewed Zionism (B): Jewish Trouble and the Aspiration of the Jews", *Ha-'Am*, 21.4.1931.
6. *Ibid.* The fear of Jews "disappearing" due to social assimilation in non-Jewish societies was not unique to Von Weisl at the time.
7. Brit ha-Biryoniim, "We Shall Talk with You Frankly", *Ha-Biryon* 5 (April 1931). An original is kept at the CZA. PR-3693.
8. Wolfgang von Weisl, "The Renewed Zionism (C)", *Ha-'Am*, 26.4.1931.
9. *Ibid.*, original emphasis. Von Weisl's nation of reference at that time was mainly Jewish, not Hebrew; this is clear and understandable, if we remember that he himself was born in Vienna, and was in constant communication with Revisionists in Europe, responsible for political mobilisation there.
10. Von Weisl, "The Renewed Zionism (D)", *Ha-'Am*, 27.4.1931. Von Weisl puts his argument explicitly against the hopes and assertions of Brit Šalom, which he despised. At that time, members of Brit Šalom were arguing in favour of Jewish assimilation within the non-Jewish population in Palestine. On Brit Šalom's ideas of ethnicity at the time see also Yfaat Weiss, "Central European Ethnonationalism and Zionist Binationalism", *Jewish Social Studies*, Volume 11 Number 1 (2004), pp. 93–117.
11. Von Weisl, "The Renewed Zionism (E)", *Ha-'Am*, 29.4.1931.
12. Von Weisl, "The Renewed Zionism (F)", *Ha-'Am*, 30.4.1931.
13. Von Weisl, "The Global Economic Crisis and Zionism", *Lighthouse*, 11.09.1931.
14. Ḥayal ha-'Am (Soldier of the People), "The Elections to the Congress: Victory of the Revisionists", *Ha-'Am*, 27–28.5.1931 (the article was published in two parts).
15. *Ibid.*
16. Uri Zwi Grünberg, "And after the King hath Spoken...", *Ha-'Am*, 11.6.1931.
17. *Ibid.*
18. "Trial of Arab Communists", *Ha-'Am*, 15.5.1931.
19. Essad Bey and Wolfgang von Weisl, *Allah ist gross: Niedergang und Aufstieg der islamischen Welt von Abdul Hamid bis Ibn Saud* (Leipzig: Passer, 1936).
20. Von Weisl, "An Interview with Cidqi Paša", *Ha-'Am*, 3–5.6.1931.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Joshua Yevin, "Ha-Bimma on the Plain of Life", *Ha-'Am*, 26.7.1931.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Somerset Maugham's play, "The Sacred Flame", was written and first staged in Britain in 1928.

25. Yevin, *ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*, my emphasis.
27. Oswald Spengler, *Der Mensch und die Technik: Beitrag zu einer Philosophie des Lebens* (München: Beck, 1931).
28. "Spengler's New Book", *Ha-'Am*, 30.7.1931. The review bore no author's name, but it is likely Aḥime'ir, whose PhD thesis, submitted to the University of Vienna in 1924, was an analysis of Spengler's *Decline of the West*. Compare with Zeev Strenhell, Mario Sznajder and Maia Asheri, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 255–257.
29. Von Weisl, "The Global Economic Crisis and Zionism", *Migdalor*, 11.09.1931.
30. *Hazit ha-'Am*, 29.1.32.
31. People's Diary (editorial), "We Are Furious and Shocked", *Hazit ha-'Am*, 12.2.1932. The "Hebrew College" is what will soon be known as the Hebrew University.
32. Yevin, "The Fear of Revision", *Hazit ha-'Am*, 11.3.1932.
33. Stam Maqšan (pseudonym), "And a Desert within the Heart...", *Hazit ha-'Am*, 15.3.1932. The exhibition is the "Oriental Fair"; the sports games are the Maccabi games which were held that month in Tel Aviv.
34. Aḥime'ir, "Washington", *Hazit ha-'Am*, 18.3.1932.
35. *Ibid.* Aḥime'ir refers here to Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1872). The book was translated into Hebrew in Warsaw, in 1920.
36. Aḥime'ir, "Letter to the Youth", *Hazit ha-'Am*, 29.3.1932. The article was written in the central prison in Jerusalem, on 17.3.1932.
37. *Leaflet of the NMO in Israel* No. 7 (December 1941), JA K5–1/2.
38. *Leaflet of the NMO in Israel* No. 9 (January 1942), JA K5–1/2.
39. *Ha-Masqif*, 3.2.1942.



Nation, Unification, Consolidation

It was two weeks after the Fascist seizure of power. In a report titled “The Victory of the ‘Fascists’”, Ḥayim Vardi—a “special reporter in Rome” of the daily newspaper *Do’ar ha-Yom*—wrote that Mussolini “was able to prove to the government that the fascist forces are huge, and that the majority of the people pursues this great ideal: a strong Patria, with glory and fame”.¹ Naturally, not everybody was happy with the new political deal. “The leftists”, Vardi wrote,

mourn the fact that Italy is now in the hands of the black forces, and are afraid of the beginning of a horrible period of reaction. But their fear is useless. It was neither the sinister forces nor the *Black Shirts* who took over, and “a horrible reaction” will never take place in Italy... In fact, it is the “proletariat” which adheres to Fascism. It is worth noting that many socialists and even anarchists turned to the winning camp after their parties were destroyed by their opponents.

Vardi had no doubt that “this internal war should not be regarded as the war of reaction against free opinion”. He explained his political diagnose by arguing that

for the last three years there were eight crises in Italy, and the government could not govern well, due to fear, favoritism and negligence. In one of his excellent speeches, Mussolini said that Italy had enough with a government which obeys the various parties; what Italy needs now is a government able

to force the prevailing anarchy to obey it... There was a considerable need for a strong and confident government, a stable and frugal control. This is the reason why the fascists conquered Rome without using their weapons and armed warriors.²

In Vardi's view, fascism was the political method which provided a cure for social disintegration and political division. It was a social and political tool enabling the Italian government to rule effectively.

A few years later, in September 1928, Abba Aḥime'ir began to write a weekly column in *Do'ar ha-Yom*; the column bore the title "From the Notebook of a Fascist". Ze'ev Jabotinsky, head of the Revisionist Zionist movement, was about to arrive in Palestine, and the Mandate authorities were willing to grant him an entry visa under certain conditions. Aḥime'ir—a sceptical socialist a few years earlier and a devoted nationalist by that time—sharply criticised the opinion expressed in the liberal newspaper *Ha-Aretz* and its socialist companion *Dabar*: both claimed that Jabotinsky (who was already perceived as their political opponent from the right wing) should be granted an entry visa—exactly as communists activists (their opponents from the left) should.

Aḥime'ir, it seems, took this syllogism as a personal insult. "The 'gentlemanhood' of M.G. from *Ha-Aretz* and M.B. from *Dabar*",³ he wrote,

...is the same vegetarian gentlemanhood which played a central role in the Bolsheviks' ascension to the throne in Russia... the same public vegetarianism which allowed Trotsky to enter Russia, and opposed sentencing Lenin and Trotsky the way Luxemburg and Liebknecht were sentenced in Germany.⁴

Communists were clearly outcasts for Aḥime'ir. Making an important distinction between religion and political affiliation, he declared that he does

not support the free entrance of Jews to our land, but only the free entrance of Zionists. Zionists are the only ones we need here.

Happy to see that the British authorities put obstacles not only before Zionists but in the way of immigrants suspected of taking part in communist activities, Aḥime'ir—in a rare expression of approval of anything done by the Mandate regime—actually praised the British authorities

for the process of disinfecting our country of that bacteria carrying the social illness known as “communism”, scientifically called *morbus russotum*, “The Russian Malady”.

These actions of the government, however, were not enough. Therefore, Aḥime’ir argued,

we should do something about the fact that not all communists were deported, and some of them still walk around here, among us. We should firmly demand the deportation of each and every communist, and not as the consequence of a legal “procedure”: a communist should be sent out of our country not by a legal decree, but by the administrative authority of the clerkship. The war against each and every communist is not enough: one should fight against communists and communism alike.⁵

To avoid any doubt, he clarified that not only communism, but all foreign and non-nationalist ideologies should be uprooted from Palestine. The Hebrew society

shall also be allowed to harbour that indulgences named “liberalism, human rights and socialism” in their Brussels version in a hundred years, when our stable state is established. Liberalism—in its wider sense, not necessarily that of the party—is possible in Great Britain; human rights are the privilege of France, more than a century after its revolution; socialism’s nice gestures have their place in organised Belgium, with its dense population and developed industry... But at the outset of our war for statehood, we cannot afford ourselves such “luxuries”.⁶

The desired integration was not only in the sphere of political parties and organisations, but in the realm of culture and language as well. Two days after Jabotinsky’s arrival in Jaffa, members of the Tel-Aviv club of the Marxist-socialist party “Po’aley Zion” held a public meeting, headed by the party’s chairman, Jacob Zrubabel. This meeting was not only a socialist event, but was also planned to be conducted in Yiddish. A squad of Beytar activists tried to break into the socialist club and hamper the event; 13 people were injured in the violent quarrel which broke out between Beytar activists and socialist Yiddish-speaking militants.⁷

Ignoring the inconvenient fact that these were Hebrew Beytar activists who stormed the socialist Yiddish club and not vice versa, Itamar Ben Avi lamented the fact that “some thugs came in defence of the jargon

[i.e. Yiddish]... especially these days, when common unity is needed—a sacred unity in front of the common enemy [i.e. Muslims and Arab nationalists]”.⁸

In the spring of 1931, the question of national unity surfaced in regard to agricultural labour. Landowners in Kfar Saba were looking for seasonal workers; as the “Federation of Hebrew Workers in Palestine” (commonly known as “The Federation”, in Hebrew: *Ha-Histadrut*) could not mobilise enough workers, some members of the Revisionist party and the Beytar movement went to work there, in order to prevent the farmers from hiring “Arab” workers. While the “socialist” inclination of the Federation was usually subdued to its nationalist practice (i.e. building Hebrew institutions and supporting “Hebrew” workers in their competition against “Arab” workers), the mobilisation and employment of Beytar workers without the socialist Federation’s mediation led to a heated debate between it and the Revisionists. “We fully acknowledge the great obstacles lying on the way towards the economic integration of Hebrew immigrants in Palestine”, wrote Abba Aḥime’ir in a letter to the heads of the Federation. He stressed, however, that “not only the workers, but other pioneers of Hebrew settlement as well must overcome huge difficulties”—hinting, in line with the fascist corporatist theory, that not only manual labourers are pioneers. Calling for social cohesion, Aḥime’ir stated that

any attempt to violate the Hebrew front’s unity in this war strikes a severe blow to the Zionist project. It is precisely our clear recognition of the necessary superiority of the nation’s cause which makes us believe that the unity of the professional movement in Palestine is highly desired, and that it is necessary to block any factor which may lead to the emergence of parallel trade unions.⁹

That said, Aḥime’ir reminded his addressees that “we should not ignore the fact that in other countries... one may find examples for different professional unions which exist one next to the other, without harming the cause of the workers”. As an example for such unions he mentioned the *freie Gewerkschaften* in Germany. In other words: unity is desired, as long as it goes in one line with the Revisionist’s political agenda, and under their dominance.

Aḥime’ir then referred to the desired organisation of the national labour force. He quotes *Bustenaj*, the official newspaper of the farmer’s union, where farmers declared they “demand a neutral employment

office... while all the economic disputes should be settled through arbitration". This clear adaptation of corporatism was necessary for the sake of national cohesion, in Ahime'ir's opinion, since

the "Federation" educates its members by the principles of class struggle, and carries out a series of strikes... severely harming the young and fragile Hebrew economy, which has not yet taken roots... the "Federation" sticks to these principles against the will of many of the workers who think—like all the national-political minded Zionist public—that in the time of the construction of the Hebrew statehood, any kind of active class struggle is a national crime.¹⁰

Furthermore, "the Federation created, at the expense of the general Zionist budget, a whole network of schools, which stands parallel to the general national schools—a thing that many people regard as an intolerable insult to Hebrew education's unity".¹¹

This dispute over the organisation of the labour force was just the beginning of a wider and deeper conflict between the Revisionists and the Labour stream within the Zionist movement. This conflict culminated in the Revisionists' withdrawal from the Zionist Organisation in 1931, and the inauguration of a parallel organisation (the New Zionist Organisation) in 1935.

Finding the balance between the desire for national integration and the need to maintain a proud, uncompromising policy was not an easy task. "We shall use all our means in order to promote Israel's unity in Palestine", wrote Wolfgang von Weisl after the Revisionists boycotted the elections to the Jewish "national committee" of the Zionist organisation in Palestine, "but we shall not take part in this game of agreed-upon lies, just for the sake of satisfying our opponents, letting them hold the reins in the future as well".¹²

National integration was not just a matter of technical electoral consolidation, but of cultural means as well. That same month (amid the usual sharp criticism of Weizmann and the "General Zionists"), an editorial in *Ha-'Am* heaped compliments on two Hebrew journals abroad. "We, the extreme Hebrews [sic], who see the issue of language from an extreme point of view... gained some pleasure this week", opened the editorial. The author was happy to learn that two Hebrew journals (*Ha-Tzfi'a* in Eastern Europe and *Ha-'Olam* in Western Europe) would continue to be published regularly.¹³ The publishing of *Ha-Tzfi'a* was a "double joy",

since that journal was Hebrew, Zionist *and* non-partisan, that is, neither pro-liberal nor socialist. The editorial expressed its joy for the publishing of *Ha-'Olam* as well, in spite of the fact that the Revisionists (or, to use the editor's words, "the extreme Hebrews"), had "a bitter dispute with this weekly, which serves as the voice of Great Russell Street and all its experiments". But *Ha-'Am* cordially greeted "every platform which helps expressing the Hebrew language and the Hebrew spirit around the world".¹⁴ In a more ironic tone a few weeks later, the editor of *Ha-'Am* was happy to inform his readers that *Ha-'Aretz*, *Dabar* and *Ha-Po'el ha-Tza'ir* all joined *Ha-'Am*'s call on the government to supply Zionist settlements with guns, after the attack on Yagur a few weeks earlier.¹⁵

Naturally, the writers of *Ha-'Am* were aware of the fact that public debates between different opinions are a part of modern mass politics. "We are a people like all other peoples, with both revolutionaries and conservatives", wrote Aḥime'ir in an article commemorating 50 years since the death of Benjamin Disraeli, reflecting on Beaconsfield's conservatism.¹⁶ More often than not, however, the tone was not so friendly. "In this journal... we shall call the things by their names. We shall call the traitors—traitors" promised the Biryonim to their readers,¹⁷ summoning them not only for war "against the hostile British rulers" but against "the traitors from within", these "agents of the rulers, among the 'Zionist' leadership" as well.¹⁸

As preparations for the Zionist Congress entered high gear, the Revisionist party did the best it could to mobilise its supporters. "Zionist! Arm yourself with the Šeqel!", read an ad in the paper in April that year. The aim was to "turn the 'round table' upside down; drive the representatives of the rich men away from the national institutions; eradicate the reign of the Red International upon our institutions".¹⁹ Thus, the revisionists tried to portray themselves both as anti-bourgeois and as protectors of the workers, and, at the same time, as anti-communists, thus appealing to a wide constituency.

Although the preparations for the Zionist congress required considerable investment of time and energy by the small Revisionist group, it did not forget its cultural obligations. "The poet Šaul Tschernichowski came to Palestine yesterday", read the title in *Ha-'Am* one of those days; the newspaper expressed its hope that "this time he will stay with us". Clearly, he was not the first Hebrew modern poet, but one of the most important among them. His contribution to the building of a unifying myth was, in the view of *Ha-'Am*, invaluable. He was the one who

“created the world-view of the renewed national Judaism, with its ancient biblical heroes. Renewed Zionism is imbued with primordial romantic of ancient Israel”.

A physician by trade (graduate of the University of Lausanne), Tschernichowski was responsible for the “national renaissance” in Hebrew culture. Thanks to his romantic poems, “the lovers of culture had risen, removing the literary pile of ashes which had covered the pearls of the nation’s youth, thus revealing its national epic”.²⁰

* * *

The day of elections to the Zionist Organisation’s assembly arrived. The opponents’ way was one of deception and blurring; it injected “poison, heresy and despair into our systems”, Joshua Yevin claimed. “The list of Ze’ev Jabotinsky”, on the other hand,

is not a list of a party; it is not just one Zionist stream among others, but the list of Zionism—Zionism, standing up and resurrecting everywhere.²¹

The same claim was repeated two days later, as the results of the elections began to pour in. “It turns out that in Palestine there are only two parties: Brit Šalom and the Left on the one hand, versus the Revisionist Zionism and the national element among the Mizraḥi” on the other. Probably contemplating a future alliance with its representatives in the Congress, *Ha-’Am* promised the Mizraḥi—a faction of religious Zionists—that “the new, revised Zionism *views the whole people of Israel as one unit, without exception*, knowing to appreciate the full value of Hebrew religion and ritual...”.²² From that point on, the editorial asserted, the road was paved for purging the Zionist Organisation of those undesired elements, since

this was the last time that the leeches had the budget, the money and the possibility to keep their delegates standing on their feet. Their end has come. The elections in January buried the center; the elections of May sealed its grave. But the elections of May also defeated Mapay, and the congress will dig their pit. The bankrupts are gone. Long live Revisionist Zionism!²³

The Revisionist press was cheerful. The prospects for a new era, free from annoying political opponents, seemed promising. A few days later, in an introduction to his interview with Cidqi Paša, Egypt’s ruler, Wolfgang

Von Weisl was also very amicable towards Cidqi when quoting him as saying that “the Wafd was ruling for years in a one-party dictatorship”.²⁴ From the tone of the paragraph it is clear that Von Weisl did not oppose such a political system.

But the Spring of joy was short: the newspaper was closed, by decree of the British authorities, during the Zionist Congress in Basel. “We hereby inform our readers and subscribers that due to the command of the High Commissioner, the printing of *Ha-ʿAm* has been stopped until further notice”, announced the newspaper in a leaflet signed by its editorial board and managing committee.²⁵ The timing of the closure, one may assume, was not incidental: even if the British authorities did not deliberately try to influence the proceedings of the Congress in Basel (they actually did not have the ability to do that), they probably did not want to have a vociferous “trouble maker” in the form of a Revisionist newspaper during the tense days of the Zionist meeting.

The closure, however, was not too long. “For two weeks, the blue-white paper was not published”, stated an editorial after a fortnight. “The people did not feel satisfied with the other three papers, since one of them is red, the second is gray and the third—yellow”.²⁶ For two weeks, *Ha-ʿAm*’s editorial argued, there was

an “idyll”: the clerks could be sure that no one will provide the public with new details about the corruption and the waste of funds—because the emissaries of the socialist [sic!] government shut the mouth of Zionism... but now the Zionist word of Herzl-Jabotinsky lives again! The Zionist heart and consciousness beat again!

But even if Revisionism had won that battle, the war was not over yet, since “the sword of closure is still hanging above the newspaper, for many wish to see it shut down”. This array of enemies was great and varied. It included Arabist nationalists, the British government, socialist and liberal Zionists. “Many people addressed us and asked when will the newspaper be printed again”, the article informed the readers, finding also the reason for that:

for *Ha-ʿAm* is more than just a party paper, more than a one-stream newspaper. *Ha-ʿAm* delivers the voice of the whole community in Palestine.

In other words: Revisionist Zionism is the only political truth, to which all other ideological factions and groups should adapt.

The Congress in Basel was the peaking point of crisis atmosphere. “For eight years I have been living in Palestine, and I always hear that ‘dialectic of windmills’ about Realpolitik and ‘creating and building’—and we have reached a complete catastrophe”, said Uri Zwi Grünberg in his speech at the congress.²⁷ His clear conclusion was that “in these days what we need for the community is a union of brotherhood and salvation—and we believe it is possible”.²⁸

The Revisionist secession from the Zionist Organisation, at that Congress, paved the road for the establishment of an independent Revisionist organisation, long aspired to and preached for by the activist wing within the movement. Aḥime’ir found this was the right time for a long, detailed historical review of political Zionism whose most authentic bearer, in his view, was Revisionism. Aḥime’ir did not want to establish a new organisation based on the same principles of the old one, but rather a new organisation with new principles, “which fit the new spirit of Revisionist Zionism”.

This extreme political move forced him to refer to the evident contradiction between the movement’s declared aspiration to unify the nation on the one hand, and the practical political act of breaking the lines on the other. Aḥime’ir argued that “not every union is a sign of power, and not every splitting is a sign of weakness”. Aḥimeir’s explanation was that the political struggle within Zionism (and all around the world) is a generational one, and therefore unavoidable: the social change was essential and qualitative, disintegrating the basic fabric of modern societies. After millions of young people lost their lives in the Great War and the Russian revolution,

generations replaced classes. The youth now demands its due, “taking revenge” of the generation which was sitting at home during the years of disaster... the war between liberalism and socialism on the one hand to communism and fascism on the other is a war between fathers and sons. In Israel too, a war is waged between official Zionism—which is allied with the Agency—and young, poor, “working Palestine”, concentrated around Revisionist Zionism. This is a fathers-sons war as well. Revisionist Zionism has nothing to learn from Zionism and Zionists: neither ideology nor tactic.²⁹

That deep change affected the national consciousness. While “before the war, nationalism belonged to the bourgeoisie, whereas the hungry cared for cosmopolitan ideals”, after the war came

Italian fascism, raising the prestige of the youth—whose bones are scattered over all the battlefields, in Europe and beyond it. A synthesis was created between class and nation, a national revolutionary movement and a proletarian revolutionary movement. And if this is the case among other nations, then even more in Israel, for by no other nation or tongue is the national idea so revolutionary and popular as in the Israeli nation; no other nation is so deeply betrayed by its magnates as our nation....³⁰

The political struggle, in other words, was not between different parts within the nation, but between those who care for the nation and fight for it—and those who betrayed it.³¹

This became the clear new line of Revisionist activists. From now on, their desire for national integration was juxtaposed against the fragmented tendencies of other political parties. “Revisionist Zionism in Palestine—like all around world—is not the movement of the wealthy”, because it unifies “the youth, the worker, the artisan and the Zionist intelligentsia”.³² From that moment on, Revisionist Zionism was not, in the eyes of the activists, a Zionist party any more—but an alternative to the entire Zionist organisation as a whole.

In this line of thought it is no wonder, therefore, that those who opposed Revisionist views were perceived as betraying the nation. The best-known example thereof were probably members of *Brit Šalom*—foremost J.L. Magnes, the Chancellor of the Hebrew University at that time: members of his group were simply marked as “traitors”.³³

The attempt by Magnes to name the chair for international relations, held by Professor Norman Bentwich, “The Chair for International Peace”, triggered furious protest among the Maximalists. Analysing the speech delivered by Bentwich at the Chair’s inauguration ceremony, in which he differentiated between divine Jerusalem and earthly Jerusalem (praising the former), Aḥime’ir claimed that Bentwich is “not only an extreme assimilationist... but also a Christian missionary, objectively”.³⁴

Bentwich’s was the most famous, but not the only case in which *Hazit ha-ʿAm* warned its readership about “the damage caused by the infiltration of internationalist ideas”. Such was the danger among the “Jewish” farmers in Palestine, who preferred employing “Arab” rather than “Jewish” workers. *Hazit ha-ʿAm* argued that these farmers were thus establishing “a kind of a ‘Fourth International’, whose goals are harmful and dangerous for Zionism, because they create unemployment and cause hunger among the pioneers, while the hands of foreigners are full of work”.

The desired situation was the employment of “Jews” (i.e. Zionists) only. The newspaper declared one should fight against this “Fourth International” at least as one should fight against the Second and the Third Internationals, “for one has to put an end to this alienation among many farmers in our country towards the Jewish pioneer”.³⁵

In Yevin’s view, the problem was not Magnes and the pacifist members of *Brit Šalom*—who were “very consequent and true” with their beliefs—but with the Zionist leaders who cooperate with them and let them control the University, and the Revisionists who let this happen:

If after these things there will be no purging on Mount Scopus; if we do not act now and finally remove off the stage this *Stab*, which is stabbing his dagger in the back of this tortured and persecuted people; if we don’t shut down this branch of Yevsektiya on Mount Scopus—then *we* shall be considered as criminals, not Magnes.³⁶

The people, hence, is in a war of last resort, for life and death. In such a situation,

the presence among us of these traitors, who are willing to shake the bloody hands of Hebron’s murderers on our behalf—this presence does not only put us in danger; it renders the war lost in advance.³⁷

Considering this great danger, Yevin stressed that this time he does not want to address neither the Revisionists nor members of various socialist or liberal parties, but just

Jews! Yes, simple Jews—all of you... if you still have time to prepare—be very awake! Do not fall asleep before the great thunder! We have some more time, so let’s take advantage of it, and purify our camp from these traitors.³⁸

Hazit ha-`Am continued using the hostility towards Magnes and Bentwich as a vehicle for mobilising the public in a campaign for political integration. “The national-Zionist commandment commits us to fight, without any concession or compromise, for the purging of the Mount Scopus college from betrayal and denial”, stated an editorial in the newspaper. “It is high time that the younger generation would take the flag of *Hebrew community* from those who hold it with their dirty hands, for it is high time to purify the land of all the impurity and filth in our *Hebrew-Missionary* institutions”.³⁹

Reminding the socialist Zionist parties how their leaders had acted 20 years earlier in national debates,⁴⁰ the editor of *Hazit ha-'Am* declared that

today as well, dire present needs oblige us *to purify the hall of impurity* on Mount Scopus. Because in this moment of great danger to our existence, sevenfold dangerous are the blows which pour on us from within... indeed, if these people would now read what they wrote themselves then, and see what came out of them now... then they should be frightened by their deep decline, which has no precedent in the history of any other liberation movement in the world.⁴¹

Considering the indifference of the socialists and the liberals towards the danger, Revisionist Zionism is fighting the war of the entire people. "We, people of rebellious Zionism, fighting the war of the youth who stands underneath our flag, against all Zionism's enemies, are simultaneously representing the entire people", wrote Yevin. It is the entire people's war that the Revisionists are waging, both against its external enemies "and those depriving it of its rights internally".⁴²

Aḥime'ir made the same point clear in his speech in the Revisionist world conference in Vienna, at the beginning of September that year. "Democracy has been defeated everywhere... more than that: it has gone bankrupt. What other proof do you need?", he asked his audience. Altogether, he concluded that after the Great War, "this century is the century of youth and dictatorship... what I bring you is a new social form, free of principles and party".⁴³

And indeed, this notion of the creation of a new social form was taking roots in the Hebrew society. "The objective historian would see the Italian fascism as the most important phenomenon of the 20th century", wrote in Tel Aviv in 1936 the editor of the first biography of Benito Mussolini to be published in Hebrew. In his opinion, no objective historian will deny that Italian Fascism "has the abundant treasure of national vigour, which brought a failed, subjected and suppressed people towards great deeds—deeds which made Italy one of the strongest superpowers in the world".⁴⁴ But the publication of that book was not only for the sake of learned academic analysis. On the practical level, the editor was convinced that

there is a lesson to be taken from this Italy. Especially we, the Jews, who haven't yet learned how to elevate the national idea to the degree of a

monotheistic belief, which is the only criterion for measuring our life—must learn the wonders that the fascist movement has created, mostly in the national sphere.⁴⁵

This biography of Mussolini was written by Zwi Kolitz. Born in Lithuania in 1912, he migrated with his family to Palestine at a young age. During the 1930s he studied at the University of Florence and at the Naval School in Civitavecchia. Upon his return to Palestine he became a member of the National Military Organisation.⁴⁶

Kolitz's admiration of Mussolini and the way he strengthened Italian nationality was blatant. "Already during his 'leftist' period, Mussolini was not impressed by the idea of elections and decisive majority", he wrote. "For him, elections are just a mean, while the aim was different: the nation, its unification, consolidation, welfare and strength".⁴⁷ Referring to the first laws of corporations (enacted in January 1927), Kolitz opined that

strikes and closures are a *national crime*, and become impossible and unnecessary according to these laws... the state—and only the state—is the sole organiser, manager and commander of all walks of life within it... there are no classes within the people! The entire people is one class, one movement, one aspiration and one aim.⁴⁸

Kolitz concluded that "the worker and the employer, the soldier and the General—all are *producers*. Each and every citizen—if he's just within it, accepting its authority—plays a role of production as a part of the gigantic machine of Mussolini's state".⁴⁹ Kolitz, however, did not explain how it is possible to live in Italy *without* the state which is omnipresent, integrating all citizens into one organic society.

The traditions and conditions of Italian society were different from those of the Hebrew one, and accordingly also the measures to be taken in order to integrate them. But the ideal was the same nonetheless. "Another question coming up all the more forcefully and of greater importance these perturbed days is the question of national unity", wrote Abraham Stern in one of the notebooks which were found in his apartment after his death. The official leaders of the Hebrew community, who "talk about unity dawn and dusk" are lying, he concluded: "they speak about unity, but think about separation". The *NMO in Israel*, on the other hand, aims towards "a national unity around the flag of the movement for Hebrew liberty. Unity of the hearts, unity of acts, unity of the target and unity of means."⁵⁰

Stern clearly saw a process of generating the Hebrew people out of the Jewish one. In his writings (and the publications of the *NMO in Israel*, until his murder), the distinction was clear between “Jews” around the world and Hebrews in Palestine. In his view,

the evacuation of the Jewish masses out of Europe is a precondition for solving the Jewish question, which may become possible only by the resettlement of these masses back in the homeland of the Jewish people, in Palestine, and by establishing the State of the Jews within its historical borders.⁵¹

This way of “solving the Jewish problem” while “liberating the Jewish people once and for all” was “the aim of the political activity and the years old battle of the Israelite liberty movement”.

The process of national integration was, to a large extent, a process of change, from “Jews” into “Hebrews”.⁵² “It is no coincidence that the Nazi movement, which had until now shown a great talent for seeing things, saw the Hebrew people [world Jewry] as a force aiming to take over the world”, he wrote. “One cannot rule out the possibility that if all the astounding talents of the world’s Jews, their conquering vigor, their outstanding stubbornness and their universal knowledge all concentrated in one channel and aimed at taking the power—the people of Israel would have been one of the greatest peoples in the world.”⁵³

Whatever the desired social processes were, they should be all encompassing. Stern’s conclusion was that if one wishes to “redeem the whole public, the people, one cannot redeem only one party or class”.⁵⁴

Still, in political practice Stern found there is “no place for an artificial unity in the format of adding a representative [to a unified national leadership]. Despite the desired unity, the *NMO in Israel* should keep its independence”.⁵⁵ In this, he faced the same dilemma as Aḥime’ir and Yevin faced about a decade earlier: a dilemma between the wish to integrate the whole society on the one hand, and the refusal to make any compromise on the other.

For Stern, “Unity and Unification” were “not something external, mechanical, the joining of humans, a technical thing—but organic, natural unity; maintaining one single idea”.⁵⁶ His basic vision seems like a Hebrew translation of Mussolini’s platform. “When we have the reins of power”, he promised “the whole people, including its soldiers and workers, will live life of dignity and liberty in the free homeland.”

An interesting point here, however, is the make-up of the people—especially in light of his referring to “Jews” as the basis of that people. Stern already declared there that “our Hebrew government shall do great works for the benefit of the Land *and its inhabitants*”—not only “the Jewish people”.⁵⁷

Stern, though, did not even try to conceal what his political role models are. The NMO, he asserted, believed that “a community of interests may be established between the attempt to enact a new order in Europe according to the German concept, and the real national aspirations of the Jewish people, which are represented by the NMO”. Hence “a cooperation between New Germany and a renewed, popular-national Hebrewness would be possible”. His movement, therefore, offered “active participation in the war on the German side”, with the aim of “establishing the historical State of the Jews on national and totalitarian principles”.⁵⁸

We can conclude, therefore, that the desired social integration, in Stern’s view at that time, had two aspects. First was the transformation of the Jewish diaspora into a local Hebrew one. The second aspect was integrating all inhabitants of Palestine, not only the “Jews”, into a part of this society—which should be a totalitarian one.⁵⁹

CONCLUSION

The need for close integration of a purer national community was expressed in the writings of all the members of the examined group. Already in 1922, the Fascist seizure of power and the Fascists’ intention to solidify Italian society were perceived by the liberal writers of *Do’ar ha-Yom* as the right answer to the political threat posed by Communism.

In 1928, the newspaper began to take a more nationalist direction. Abba Ahime’ir saw the liberals’ becoming accustomed to communist activity as a part of the threat. He preached, therefore, for combat against all the political streams which were not nationalist enough—liberals, socialists and communists alike. Ben Avi, on his part, concentrated his appeal for integration in the cultural sphere, admonishing the usage of foreign languages.

However, even the riots of 1929 and the White Paper of 1930 did not create the “union of brotherhood and salvation” preached for by Grünberg. The secession from the Zionist Organisation in 1931 proved actually to be a step in the opposite direction. Yevin’s call for “simple

Jews” to join them did not help much: the Maximalists remained a small minority.

Just as unsuccessful was Stern’s call for “national unity of the hearts, unity of acts, unity of the target and unity of means”. Furthermore, his group remained marginal even within the Revisionist camp. His vision of integration remained secluded within his group’s messianic-futuristic manifesto (“The 18 Principles of Renaissance”). It was far-reaching—envisioning not only an integration of an existing people but actually the creation of a new one—but it bore no practical fruits.

Two main tensions continuously accompanied the idea of integration preached by the members of the group. Although the severity of these tensions increased and decreased alternately during the 1920s and 1930s, they remained unsolved.

The first tension was between the Maximalists’ desire to integrate the Hebrew society in Palestine into one—by violence, if needed—and Revisionist liberal tendencies, which were also supported by the leader they admired. In April 1931, for example, Aḥime’ir, as a representative of Brit ha-Biryoniim, preached in favour of uncompromising national integration, while writing that very same week—as a columnist in *Ha-’Am*—an article commemorating the parliamentary politics of Disraeli.

The second tension was between the wish to integrate society and the unwillingness to make compromises—even tactical ones—to bring about that aim. Finding the balance between the desire for national integration and the need to maintain a proud, uncompromising policy was not an easy task for the Maximalists; “Promoting Israel’s unity in Palestine”, as Wolfgang von Weisl defined it, required taking part in a “game of agreed-upon lies”—a thing they refused to do.

Despite continuous appraisal of strong integration and contempt towards unwanted liberal and socialist elements, the majority of the public was not convinced. The Maximalist cow wanted to provide more than the Hebrew calf was willing to drink.

The political process perceived necessary to solve this problem had two phases. The first phase was a move from being a political party within society to providing a political alternative to all other political parties. The second imagined phase was a move from this polarised zero sum game into providing an alternative to the political game altogether. The process, however, never actually took place, and remained theoretical—at least until 1948.

NOTES

1. Hayim Vardi, "Victory of the Fascists" [Niḥon ha-Fašistim], *Do'ar ha-Yom*, 12.11.1922.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Moše Josef Glücksohn (1878–1939) was the chief editor of *Ha-ʿAretz* at that time. "M.B." probably refers to Moše Beilinson (1889–1936), one of the senior journalists and editors of the socialist daily newspaper *Dabar*.
4. Abba Aḥime'ir, "On the Issue of the Visa for Jabotinsky (From the Notebook of a Fascist)", *Do'ar ha-Yom*, 21.09.1928.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. Zohar Šabit, "Tel Avivian, Speak Hebrew!: The Partial Success of the Hebrew Revolution" [Tel Abibi, Daber `Ibrit! `Al ha-Haqlaḥa ha-Ḥelqit šel Mahapekat ha-`Ibrit], *Panim* 45 (2008), pp. 50–65.
8. Ben Avi, "The War among Brothers in Tel Aviv" [Milḥemet ha-ʿAḥim b-Tel Abib], *Do'ar ha-Yom*, 8.10.1928.
9. A letter by Aḥime'ir to the Federation of the Hebrew Workers in Palestine, 2.6.1931. *JA*, P-5/1/3.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. Wolfgang Von Weisl, "The Agreed-Upon Lies of the National Committee", *Ha-ʿAm*, 25.3.1931.
13. Editorial, "'The Siren' and 'The World'", *Ha-ʿAm*, 31.3.1931.
14. *Ibid.* "Great Russel Street" was a general code for the British colonial policy. The same day, a headline on the front page announced that "Hitler wins in Austria too: 64 NS representatives elected at State Elections in Salzburg". Another headline read "Dictatorship for the Sake of Parliamentarism": news agencies reported that Germany entered a "State of Siege", after the German government issued a decree aimed at "opposing hooliganism", in response to "the recent clashes between the 'National Socialists' and the Communists". *Ha-ʿAm* (and later *Ḥazit ha-ʿAm*) kept using a relatively balanced tone in reports about NS activities in Germany, at least until 1933.
15. Editorial, "We're all United!", *Ha-ʿAm*, 21.4.1931.
16. Aḥime'ir, "Around Beaconsfield", *Ha-ʿAm*, 19.4.1931.
17. Brit ha-Biryoni, "We Shall Talk with You Frankly", *Ha-Biryon* 5 (April 1931). An original is kept at the CZA. PR-3693.
18. Brit ha-Biryoni, "Jews! Zionists!", *Ha-Biryon* 5 (April 1931). An original is kept at the CZA. PR-3693.

19. An ad in *Ha-`Am*, 30.4.1931. The “Šeqel” was the membership fee, which gave its owner the right to vote in the elections for the Zionist Organisation’s assembly.
20. “Šeul Tschernichowski: Poet of Israeli Renaissance” (no author), *Ha-`Am*, 19.5.1931.
21. Yevin, “The Day of Judgment”, *Ha-`Am*, 25.5.1931.
22. The People’s Soldier [“Ḥayal ha-`Am”] (editorial), “The Elections to the Congress: Victory of the Revisionists”, *Ha-`Am*, 27–28.5.1931, original emphasis. “Mizraḥi” was a party of religious Zionists. For the recent analysis of the political history of this party, see Nadav Shelef, *Evolving Nationalism: Homeland, Identity and Religion in Israel, 1925–2005* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), chaps. 2 and 4.
23. *Ha-`Am*, *ibid.*
24. Von Weisl “An Interview with Cidqi Paša”, *Ha-`Am*, 3–5.6.1931.
25. Message (in the format of the front page), 16.6.1931.
26. The People’s Diary (editorial), “Ha-`Am is again in Print”, *Ha-`Am*, 2.7.1931. The “red” is *Dabar*, Mapay’s official daily newspaper; the “gray” is *Ha-`Aretz*, the liberal newspaper which was seen as affiliated to the “General Zionists”; the “yellow” was *Do’ar ha-Yom*, Itamar Ben Avi’s private newspaper, which was perceived as a cheap tabloid.
27. “The full speech of U.C. Grünberg”, *Ha-`Am*, 17.7.1931. The 17th Zionist Congress convened in Basel between June 30 and July 15, 1931.
28. *Ibid.* See also footnotes 30–32 to chapter 3 in this book.
29. Aḥime’ir, “The Aims of Revisionist Zionism”, *Ha-`Am*, 5.8.1931.
30. *Ibid.*
31. The debate within the Revisionist movement in favour of the secession and against it made a whole distinct episode. One should note, however, that Jabotinsky, as the leader of the Revisionist party, continuously and consistently denied the possibility of taking the power by force or using any violent methods within the Zionist organisation. Jabotinsky made it clear a few weeks later in his article “Independence or Extinction”, *Migdalor* [“Lighthouse”], 11.09.1931. This double refusal—both to compromise and to use violent methods in order to take over the Zionist organisation—was probably an important factor in his decision to secede.
32. “The Adventures of the Revisionist Newspaper in Palestine” (no author), *Migdalor* [“Lighthouse”], 11.09.1931.
33. “After the Troubles at the College: The Burst of Anger in Tel Aviv Regarding the Scandal on Mount Traitors”, *Ḥazit ha-`Am*, 16.2.1932.
34. Abba Siqra’ (Aḥime’ir), “Bentwich the Assimilationist—and the Missionary”, *Ḥazit ha-`Am*, 19.2.1932.

35. *Ibid.* The article specifically criticises Smilansky, the editor of *Bustenaj*, the farmers' association's journal.
36. Joshua Yevin, "Be Awake!", *Hazit ha-'Am*, 23.2.1932. Yevin used the German word *Stab* in his original Hebrew article.
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.* Yevin paraphrases on Deuteronomy 23.9–14.
39. "How Did They once Fight against the Sanbalats of Culture?" (signed by the "Editorial Board"), *Hazit ha-'Am*, 15.3.1932.
40. The article brought quotes from the socialist press of 1913–1914 which demonstrated how the socialist parties had vehemently opposed then the initiative to institute German as the official teaching language at the Polytechnic School in Haifa, showing that the same can be said in 1932 against Magnes and Bentwich in Jerusalem. About the "Language War" of 1913–1914 see Arie Bruce Saposnik, *Becoming Hebrew: The Creation of a Jewish National Culture in Ottoman Palestine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), Chap. 10: "Language Wars and Other Wars" (esp. pp. 223–232). For the longer context within Hebrew education, see Bernard Spolsky and Elana Shohamy, "Language in Israeli Society and Education", *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 137 (1999), pp. 93–114.
41. *Ibid.*
42. Yevin, "We Fight the People's War", *Hazit ha-'Am*, 29.7.1932. The article was aimed against liberal and socialist Zionist leaders. Specifically, Yevin mentions Robert Weltsch and Kurt Blumenfeld. Weltsch (1891–1982) was chief editor of the *Jüdische Rundschau* in Berlin. Blumenfeld (1884–1963) was at the time head of the "Zionistischen Vereinigung für Deutschland".
43. Ahime'ir, "The Speech of Ahime'ir", *Hazit ha-'Am*, 13.9.1932.
44. Zvi Kolitz, *Mussolini: His Personality and Doctrine* (Tel Aviv: Tebel, 1936), p. 6.
45. *Ibid.*
46. During the division of the NMO Kolitz did not follow Abraham Stern, but rather went with David Razi'el and served in the British Army during the Second World War. After the war Kolitz migrated to North America and turned to a career as a film and theatre producer. He died in America in 2002.
47. Kolitz, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 65; all emphases are in the original.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
50. Abraham Stern, draft in his notebook, probably written during 1940 or 1941. CZA A 549\65–44.
51. *Grundlage des Vorschlages der Nationalen Militärischen Organisation in Palästina (Irgun Zewai Leumi) betreffend der Lösung der jüdischen Frage*

Europas und der aktiven Teilnahme der N.M.O. Am Kriege an der Seite Deutschlands, JA K-5/4/1.

52. In this issue, Stern was a disciple of Adolf Gurevicz. See the concluding chapter of this work.
53. Stern, draft in his notebook, probably written during 1940 or 1941. CZA A 549\65–44.
54. Stern, draft in his notebook, probably written during 1940 or 1941. CZA A 549\65–75.
55. Stern, draft in his notebook, probably written during 1940 or 1941. CZA A 549\65–44.
56. *Ibid.*, CZA A 549\65–83. Next to this sentence, however, he writes that “full unity will not be” due to “polarity of the people”, mentioning Parussis and Cadoqians, the 12 spies in the times of Joshua, Hassidics and Litvaks and Zionists versus assimilationists.
57. Stern, draft in his notebook, probably written during 1941. CZA A 549\65–55. The emphasis is mine.
58. *Grundlage des Vorschlages der Nationalen Militärischen Organisation in Palästina (Irgun Zewai Leumi) betreffend der Lösung der jüdischen Frage Europas und der aktiven Teilnahme der N.M.O. Am Kriege an der Seite Deutschlands, JA K-5/4/1.*
59. These two aspects cohabited later in “Israel’s Liberty’s Fighters”, under Nathan Yellin-Mor and Israel Eldad. See Joseph Heller, *The Stern Gang: Ideology, Politics and Terror, 1940–1949* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), pp. 111–122.



CHAPTER 8

Leaders and Self-Sacrificing Prophets

In Autumn 1922, the telegraph lines between Europe and Palestine already worked well. Less than four days after Benito Mussolini was charged by Italy's king with the task of forming a cabinet, *Do'ar ha-Yom* already gave its readers a detailed portrait of the new prime minister. "Such a musical name, so Italian in its syllables, a name which has a magical influence on those who pronounce it in Italy—and today he is the Prime Minister", Itamar Ben Avi, the newspaper's editor, wrote in his description of the young Italian politician. With a pinch of professional collegiality he noted that just a few days earlier Mussolini was only "the editor of a semi-communist newspaper", although he had been a wonderful orator for a long time before, as

thousands were thronging to listen to his speeches, which were dismantling mountains. But if anybody would have presaged that this fiery speaker could soon become head of the Italian government, all hearers would have laughed...".¹

Ben Avi then described his first personal encounter with Mussolini, in 1919, on a visit to Rome. He recalled that

a large crowd had gathered next to the monument of Vittorio Emanuele II to watch an exceptional vision, unseen in Italy before: about 400 youngsters, dressed in black, stood at that piazza, bearing Italian flags in their hands. They were singing national anthems and war songs, and every now

and then were shouting loud: “Mus-so-li-ni!”... Then, out of a nearby Café, came a hairy man, not very tall, with olive-like complexion. His two eyes were large, round and glowing in their Italian darkness. A smile of happiness could be seen on his thin lips, for finally his great dream had come true: being the leader of his own independent faction. The speech he delivered was short, but roiling like a mountain brook. He spoke about everything, but in my ears, those of the foreign Hebrew, its last words resonated: ‘Italy should either be Rome once again, or not be at all!’²

A few days later, the newspaper’s correspondent in Rome described Italy’s new prime minister as “a volcanic orator, a strong and uncompromising character, who knows how to enrapture the masses in the flow of his speech and revive dry bones”.³

With his sharp journalistic senses, Ben Avi took notice of some tendencies that would later be considered as the basis of Italian Fascism’s electorate. He noted that the “weird movement which Mussolini named ‘fascio’... was first joined by bourgeois youngsters and national workers, those enthusiastic literati and artists, who were disappointed by extreme communism and Italian Bolshevism ...”. Aware of his readership’s need for good stories, Ben Avi clearly described Mussolini as an underdog who won against all odds, after communist circles “denounced him as a ‘traitor’ and ‘hooligan’... and even the calm bourgeoisie was convinced that his only aim is to reach greatness, authority and power”. But Mussolini prevailed, because his aim was “rescuing young Italy”.

Ben Avi’s sympathy towards Mussolini was obvious. “Neither laughter nor scorn are heard in Italy referring to Mussolini and his national army, but hatred on the one hand, from the side of the extreme socialists, and admiration and even enthusiasm from the ranks of young, invigorated Italy.” Ben Avi encouraged his readers to get used to Mussolini’s name,

to the four syllables of Italy’s hero of the day, that young Garibaldi—as he’s called by the admirers of late Garibaldi... because this Italian will keep us busy with many more of his great surprises and actions.⁴

This admiration of the Italian leader did not pass unnoticed: not necessarily because of Mussolini’s dictatorial tendencies, but rather due to some “Jewish Zionist” apprehensions. Two months later, in an article titled “Fascism’s Attitude towards Zionism”, Hayim Vardi (here a “special correspondent” for *Do’ar ha-Yom*) replied to critics by stating that in his

former article he was trying to be “free of any prejudice, beholding the issue from the viewpoint of Italy’s interests, for this is the only way to analyse and assess any political phenomenon, wherever it takes place”.⁵ Referring to the Jewish-Zionist perspective, Vardi added that

most of the Jewish newspapers see Mussolini as a Jew-hater, a clerical fanatic and so on. This is wrong. Mussolini is nothing but a statesman who measures everything according to his Italian criteria, neither opposing nor supporting us due to any personal fondness or hatred.⁶

However, Mussolini and Italian Fascism did not enchant all their future admirers immediately, as sober assessments of the leader and his movement continued to appear on a regular basis. In 1926, in a review of a book by Robert Michels which was published a year earlier,⁷ the young journalist Abba Aḥime’ir—at that time still a member of *Ha-Po’el ha-Tza’ir*—saw it favourably as an interesting phenomenon, yet not without precedents. In his opinion, the fascist world view

is a Carlyle-like world view: an extreme belief in the value of the hero. Michels indicates Mussolini’s positive characteristics: an intuition, telling what is possible and achievable; a recognition of one’s own value; an extraordinary ability to influence the masses, brave yet not hasty politics... Michels does not want to judge Fascism. The verdict should be left to history alone... on a public movement which is hard to be referred to objectively.⁸

Aḥime’ir’s fascination with Mussolini would soon develop; he was not the only one who saw the Duce as a political model. And so, when Ze’ev Jabotinsky arrived at the port of Jaffa in October 1928, next to a report about his arrival at the port (“Jabotinsky in our Land” was the title of a quarter-page box which appeared in *Do’ar ha-Yom*) Itamar Ben Avi wrote a short editorial titled “Welcome, Brave Soldier!” This greeting was not the newspaper’s alone, but an “echo to the voice of invigorated, living, dreaming, courageous Palestine as a whole”, he argued.⁹ Precisely because obstacles were put in the leader’s way, he wrote,

we were longing for you... precisely because we felt we lack a leader—we called you.... we prayed for your return, oh Man of Acre! And now you are with us again... for many days, years—maybe forever! Civilian and military leader, a politician and a hero, upon whose speech the exile shall obey and upon whose roar foreign lands will fear, despite the anger and the fury of his

enemies... for the happiness and the pride of your lovers, in their thousands. And for the joy of the entire country—which admires you endlessly—for your honesty, pride, action and consequence. Indeed, this is a great day for Palestine, our dear brother.¹⁰

The drawing accompanying the article, titled “Garibaldi is Back in our Land”, depicted Jabotinsky riding a horse, like a General commanding a march.¹¹

But the moment of euphoria was short. The next day, in an article titled “The War Among Brothers in Tel Aviv”, Ben Avi referred to “a marginal and sudden event, blurring the glare” of the Hebrew revival: a fist fight between Beytar activists and members of the socialist party “Po’aley Tziyon”.¹² Oddly, the brave declaration of the previous day turned into a sentimental request:

Would a leader arise? Would a Hebrew Garibaldi or Mussolini stand up and call “stop!” to all this internal madness, considering the external danger surrounding us?¹³

Abba Aḥime’ir was decisive in this issue. In his column *Current Issues (From the Notebook of a Fascist)* which was subtitled “Regarding the Arrival of our Duce”, he stated that it is a necessity

to admire not only a prophet who lived and died ages ago, but also to admire fully and totally the living hero who walks among us, that hero whose body might get cold and “catch the flu”. Because the greatness of a leader is not an “objective” measure, an outcome of God’s gift. Next to this “objective” measure there is also the “subjective” measure: the outcome of recognition and admiration.¹⁴

Aḥime’ir then brought Mustafa Kemal as an example of a hero without whom his people could never have risen from decades of desolation. “The gospel tells us that Jesus is able to perform miracles only if one believes in him, while in our case, the wonder of statehood will come true only thanks to the faith we have in the bearer of that wonder”, he wrote, adding that “we, who are already at his command, should say to him: ‘we shall do and be obedient!’”.¹⁵ Aḥime’ir concluded his article by addressing the members of Beytar:

Trumpeldors, take very good care of your “Duce” [sic]! Safeguard him as the apple of your eye! Because numerous and powerful are the adversaries of the idea of statehood among us, and the enemies of that great man who aims at realising it in your lifetime”.¹⁶

In a footnote, Aḥime’ir added that “Duce” means “a leader” in Italian, and that the Italians “like to call Mussolini by that name”.¹⁷

About four years later, Aḥime’ir named some leaders who became symbols at the time, foremost Gandhi and De Valera. One should learn from them, he suggested, embrace and adopt such national leaders. Interestingly, Aḥime’ir saw Gandhi as the most special one, because he was “not a politician—he is what I called (rightly or wrongly) ‘a prophet’”.¹⁸

The way Aḥime’ir admired Jabotinsky and Mussolini is revealed in his personal correspondence as well. “When I addressed him in my first letter by the title ‘Leader’”, Aḥime’ir opened his letter to Jabotinsky that month, “it was not an attempt to please him, but simply an expression of my feeling. I want some high ranking person to stand on my back and show me the way”.¹⁹ Aḥime’ir’s appreciation of autocratic rulers was not personal, restricted to Jabotinsky alone; the Revisionists, he argued, should take a lesson from Mussolini, Kemal, Pilsudski and Voldemaras, “abandon the high politics” and concentrate on educating the public. “Why does he [Jabotinsky] consult us so much?” Aḥime’ir asked rhetorically. While Ben Avi greeted Jabotinsky as a brother, Aḥime’ir argued that Jabotinsky should

dictate more, for we should obey His orders! He should contact us for information, but never let anyone else make the final decision in any issue. My Lord should distinguish between his personal inclinations and his [political] stance. It might well be that privately He wishes to be a member among other members; but destiny has chosen him to lead—and He should not evade this duty.²⁰

The fondness for strong leaders among the Maximalists was not limited to Aḥime’ir alone. In April 1931, in an article about Egyptian politics, Wolfgang Von Weisl found that although the Egyptians were about to elect representatives for parliament, Cidqi Pasha ruled as a dictator. Von Weisl was fine with elections, since “some democracy cannot harm, and even Mussolini does not oppose having a Parliament, as long as it does not disturb him”.²¹

As the elections for the Zionist Congress approached, Von Weisl argued a month later that “already at the Zionist Congress in Basel in 1927, Jabotinsky was the only person who was still speaking about Zionism’s final victory”.²² Political achievements, Von Weisl argued, could be reached only by a person

who knows what he wants and has firmly decided to do it. In other words: someone who has a clear political plan and who works diligently towards its realization.

By this, Von Weisl most probably thought of Jabotinsky. For Von Weisl, the ideological disputes between Revisionists and Liberal Zionists were also incarnate in the leaders of the two rival parties. Re-electing Weizmann to be the head of the Zionist executive, Von Weisl opined, would harm the Zionist Organisation both financially and politically. The election of Jabotinsky, on the other hand, could mark the “revival of the Zionist Organisation”, because young people “will run to join the organisation under the blue-white flag” and Palestine “shall attract the best and most active parts of the youth”, because “only Jabotinsky is capable of saving the youngsters from the Communist danger threatening it”.²³

Naturally, the Maximalists did not see every leader as a good one, since leadership should be examined not only by its achievements, but by its style and ideology as well. Stalin and Mussolini reigned by the crude force of their men, “be they Black or Red”, whereas J.L. Magnes was perceived as controlling the Hebrew University in 1931 by the grace of his rich supporters.²⁴ Magnes “was not the leader of the Hebrew University, but its ‘Proprietor’: the one who has the money”, because he had “the luck to be in close contact with the Jewish millionaires and receive from them money for the University”.²⁵

Marking the Revisionist movement as a clear opposition to Magnes and his circles (in an article meant to “encourage the inner part” of the movement) Yevin assured his readers that, after five years of political activity, the Revisionist movement had actually saved Zionism from extinction. The head of the movement, Jabotinsky, is “a great leader, gifted with a talent of prophecy, who established the movement amidst a bitter war with gigantic enemies”. Thanks to him, “a new fire was ignited in the Spirit of Israel”.²⁶ Members of the movement, hated and despised by their brethren, are considered as the Guardians of the Fire of Revival. And “on their Shrine, amidst the poverty and disaster of our life, dwells the Lion of Fire,

the Lion of Israel's rebirth".²⁷ The singularity of this mention of the word "prophecy", however, may lead us to assume that it was used as a metaphor for Jabotinsky's political wit and should not be taken literally.

About a year later, Yevin referred again to instincts and their supremacy over rationality, though not the instincts of the leader personally. "Jews", he wrote after a Zionist sport festival,

believe in the voice *of your blood*, which spoke inside you in these days of March 1932; for the voice of your blood is very true... You should know that this voice of your blood, demanding the complete redemption—is the one originating from all the persecutions, pyres and tribulations you and your ancestors have suffered. Therefore *this* is the true voice and you should listen to *it* only.²⁸

To be sure, mystical appearances of blood and fire appeared already in U.Z. Grünberg's poetry during the late 1920s: "The blood of the Siqarians woke up in our sheep-like flesh / and the prophets' Pillar of Fire stands on our doorstep".²⁹ His mysticism then, though, was not focused on a specific person, but on the nation as a whole.

However, Von Weisl, Yevin, Aḥime'ir and their associates were much more enthusiastic in their leader cult than their prospective leader himself. Referring to the question of the presidency of the Zionist Organisation, Jabotinsky reminded his adherents

that the custom among the enlightened nations of our world is to look at the programme rather than at the personality, and this is a good and healthy habit. And on the contrary: the habit of preferring personality over programme is a sign for a lack of political culture.³⁰

The Maximalists, on their part, were not impressed by their leader's humble comment. Following the relative success of the Revisionists in the elections for the Zionist institutions that year, Von Weisl declared that Jabotinsky "took the role of Hercules": he didn't only give his private property to the party, but also worked relentlessly on turning the Zionist Organisation into a Revisionist one, putting aside both his professional or his family life.³¹ Therefore, in a historical account of political Zionism he published the following month, Aḥime'ir argued in favour of establishing a new organisation with new principles, "which fit the new spirit" of Revisionist Zionism. "In such a movement", Aḥime'ir suggested,

the leader's authority is supreme. The cult of the leader is not written on paper, but engraved in the mind and spirit of every soldier within the movement. A spirit of "we shall do and hear" prevails.³²

Little should one wonder, therefore, that before leaving to Vienna in order to lay the foundations for the New Zionist Organisation, Von Weisl chose to conclude his farewell article by asserting that Revisionist Zionism "will have to complete many tasks levied upon it by Jabotinsky".³³

The fifth world conference of the Revisionist Movement was about to convene in Vienna during the last week of August 1932. The secession from the Zionist organisation in June 1931 did not end the firm debate within the movement, between moderates and Maximalists. "What are the practical demands with which we go to the world conference?", asked the "proclamation of Maximalist Zionism" at the beginning of that month. The first demand was clear: "exalting the prestige of the leader to the level of dictator".³⁴ The third demand was "relocating the political department to the leader's place of residence".³⁵

Aḥime'ir made his way from Jaffa to the Revisionist conference in Vienna by ship and train, via Cyprus and Trieste, where "the weather is as hot as in our country". Mussolini's portrait, he noticed, was presented "in every public institution, beginning at the customs office. In every public place there are two portraits: 'il Rei' and the 'Duce'. The king makes a miserable impression; the main figure is the rural blacksmith's son."³⁶

As expected, the August 1932 Vienna Conference became a stage for the conflict between the Maximalist faction and the moderate faction. The question of leadership was one of the main bones of contention. "We have among us a leader who is loyal to the decisions made here", said Me'ir Grossmann, one of the key figures of the moderate group. "He might have the privilege to do as he pleases, but he is a responsible man... you may choose new people; there are no people without substitute—".

At that moment, according to the protocol published in *Hazit ha-ʿAm*, Von Weisl burst into the speech. "Mr. Jabotinsky!" he shouted. Jabotinsky, on his part, tried to calm both of them down. "Neither am I [without substitute]", he said.³⁷

Von Weisl wasn't convinced. "The magnetic force of Jabotinsky, this miraculous man, shall have great influence", he said when it was his turn to speak. "We need strict uniformity within the leadership", he said, maintaining that

the leadership should be solely in the hands of Jabotinsky. One should cancel—for two years at least—the title of “vice president”; secretaries will do the job. The path will be marked by Jabotinsky alone.³⁸

Von Weisl had a detailed administrative plan for the movement, which granted its president total authority. But the cult of heroes and the aspiration to have a strong leader among the maximalists were wider and deeper than a mere technical amendment. “Who is the creator of history?” Aḥime’ir discussed this question a few weeks after the Conference in Vienna, providing a detailed answer, connecting Jewish tradition with contemporary politics:

This question was answered at the time by the French and Russian intelligentsia as follows: history is created by the circumstances, by the abstract external conditions, by humanity, the people, the masses—but not the person. German and Italian intelligentsia, by contrast, reply: heroes create history—not the opposite. And this is the reply of Judaism [as well], which cannot even be imagined without the term “Redeemer”. Western and eastern Europe are saturated with hatred towards heroes; the central European world view is saturated by a cult of heroes.³⁹

Back then in 1932, Aḥime’ir saw a clear connection and a similarity between Italian Fascists and German National Socialists, and between their longing for strong, efficient leaders and the same longing among another people:

Fascism took upon itself the task of restoring Rome’s ancient status; Nazism took upon itself the fulfillment of racial theory. But these doctrines were there before Mussolini and Hitler. Rome was the dream of Rienzi and Petrarch in the 14th century; Rome is for Italy what Jerusalem is for Israel... Mussolini sees in his eyes the image of Julius Caesar; and in Israel the same thing: there is an organic linkage between the Redeemer and King David. Modern Israel considers the brave Judges, the Maccabeans and the zealots as the most important thing.⁴⁰

The leader’s cult was far from its end; Jabotinsky, however, remained reluctant. “I would not have even referred to this ‘Leader’ issue”, he said in his speech at the Revisionist Movement’s Fifth World Conference,

but you, my friends... are using a miserable term, which has already caused lots of troubles... Today, this word is a synonym for something you do not want. I do not want to believe that humanity has hierarchy. I shall never work together with people who are willing to subjugate their opinion to mine. I created for myself the illusion that the world is made of princes, and I do not want to ruin my belief in this idea. I'm afraid that the matter of dictatorship is not even bound with a certain personality, but is a part of a stream, spreading around the world. I am sorry to observe that this thing became a political doctrine worldwide. I come from the 19th century, when the prevailing view in the world was that every human being, even if he is bad and filthy, would be good and wise—given the proper education. This is my view... I would rather disappear and pass away from this world, than agree with the view asserting that my son and the son of my fellow are not equal human beings, that my son and the shoemaker are not equal..."⁴¹

Jabotinsky's rejection of dictatorship, not only the one offered to him, but the idea in general, was crystal clear then. But the fact that he had to say it and repeat it in order to convince his followers may show us how deep the cult of the leader was rooted among members of his movement.

Still, the longing for a strong leader did not vanish even after this speech. In March 1934, at the peak of the Arlosoroff affair and the trial of Brit ha-Biryoniim, Yevin published a poem in *Hazit ha-'Am*:

I saw you, the Leader, under your heavy destiny's yoke;
Always moving from ship to ship, wagon to wagon,
Beating on Jews' hearts, as a blacksmith on his anvil,
Poor and homeless, except the home of Israel,
To which—four decades already—you say: "redeem yourself!"⁴²

And so the poem continued:

I saw you gathering your soldiers, sons of Israel, in days of war,
In inhuman labour, like collecting stalks of grain from land of waste...

and so on and so forth. This extremely unconventional line of the newspaper did not always find favour with Jabotinsky. The clearest case of such deep disagreement between him and the editors was probably in May 1933, when *Hazit ha-'Am* published a series of articles supporting Hitler's militancy and anti-socialist measures, to the extent of praising parts of national-socialist politics. While the Maximalists were enchanted by Nazism's anti-socialism and national vigour, Jabotinsky was deeply concerned by Nazis' extreme anti-Jewish line.

This was not a mere difference in accentuation or theoretical interpretation: practically, *Hazit ha-`Am*'s fondness of Nazism stood in clear contrast to Jabotinsky's attempts to organise a trade boycott on Germany. "Very honoured colleagues", Jabotinsky wrote in an official letter to the editorial board, "the articles and reports about Hitler and Hitlerism in *Hazit ha-`Am* are like a dagger stabbed in my own back and in our common back."⁴³ In an unequivocal tone, he ordered the editorial board

to cease this abomination totally. This point of view, finding signs of a "national liberation" movement in Hitlerism, is ignorance—which suits the young students of 1903. In our current situation, this babbling is a disgrace to my work, to the degree of paralyzing it. I demand that this filthy hysteria disappear from the pages of *Hazit ha-`Am*, leaving no trace. I demand that the newspaper, fully and unconditionally, will join our campaign against Hitler's Germany and for the eradication of Hitlerism, in the fullest sense of this word. If *Hazit ha-`Am* publishes even one more sentence which may be interpreted as a new attempt of Jew-boys to please a boastful gentile who accidentally managed to get into power, I shall demand that all members of the editorial board be expelled from the ranks of the party, and shall sever my personal contacts with the people who could make me fail, by such a cheap and rude arrogance.⁴⁴

Fig. 8.1 Vladimir Ze'ev Jabotinsky, 1936. Courtesy of the Jabotinsky Institute in Israel



In another, personal letter sent the same day to a colleague in Tel Aviv, Jabotinsky used even harsher language when referring to his recalcitrant disciples. The editorial board of *Hazit ha-'Am*, he complained,

write nonsense, almost praising Hitler. They see this rough and cheap imitation called “Hitlerism” as a national liberation movement; they thus hamper and injure me in my tough war... I did not rebel against people who have been together with me since 1915 in order to be publicly disgraced by youngsters who natter and chatter about a phenomenon they don’t understand.⁴⁵

This time, the message was well understood. A few days later, a group of young members of Brit ha-Biryonim, organised and led by Aḥime’ir, removed the swastika-flag from the German consulate in Jerusalem, in an act of protest against Nazi policy.⁴⁶

However, while the sympathy towards Hitlerism was cut short already in 1933, Mussolini continued to attract very positive attention among the Revisionists throughout the 1930s. “The Hebrew reader is hardly acquainted with Italian Fascism, and its creator and initiator”, assumed the publisher’s preface to Mussolini’s first Hebrew biography, titled *Mussolini: His Personality and Doctrine*. “Short-sighted newspapers and journalists”, the editor added, have put the Fascist movement

under a very weird light, distorting its essence. Despite the sympathy many Jews have towards allegedly liberal and democratic states, one cannot deny the fact that modern Italy is the only state where Jews enjoy complete equality, without being persecuted because of their origin. We know that this book could raise resentment among certain circles, which are used to see no difference between the fascist movement in Italy and antisemitic movements in Europe, which claim to be fascist—although their “fascisms” are false pretenses, just as naming the Nazis “socialist” is a false pretence.⁴⁷

The biography’s author, Zwi Kolitz,⁴⁸ described the leader of Italian Fascism as a strong personality “with total consistency and an exceptional willpower”, a man

who knows what he wants, and wants the favour and the future of Italy to the best of his belief. He placed himself to preside over his people. Since the day he came to power until this very day, he shows himself to his people as the complete personality, the stable man, who makes an example of devotion and self sacrifice before calling others to do the same.⁴⁹

Remarkably, the only other example Kolitz brought for a national leader gifted with such complete devotion and accountability was Gandhi.⁵⁰ Convinced that “an idea without a leader—is like a corpse without a soul”, Kolitz came to the conclusion that

strong ideas are dependent on strong personalities. Italian Fascism is today the most significant idea in Europe, since the personality representing it is mighty and complete.⁵¹

Throughout the book, the admiration of Mussolini expressed by Kolitz usually remained reasonable—or earthly, at least. Now and then, however, the author “slipped” towards a transcendental evaluation of the leader. “No force in this world”, Kolitz declares,

will influence him and make him believe that not he, but other factors—human or superhuman—may determine his fate. Mussolini is the only leader who fully stands for *himself*... he does not see himself dependent on any superhuman fate, and even less the fate of the people around him... he is the only leader who’s not led, whose personality is whole and strong, inspiring by its might and splendor on all [people], near and far.⁵²

Further on, Kolitz states that “Mussolini is *a power of nature*, with a huge will for creation, gifted with a unique constructive imagination, which knows no twists or faults and is not dependent upon moods”.⁵³

The deification of Mussolini gradually becomes explicit in Kolitz’s writing, when he refers to Mussolini’s past. As a journalist, he adheres

to the rule of “*vox populi vox dei*” and—by way of wonder!—can himself believe that the voice of the people, which is equivalent to the voice of God, does not want to follow this “*voce dei*”, but *to call* unto the people with the voice of a single person, to follow and to obey.⁵⁴

Hence the deification is comprehensive: the fascist leader is both the bearer of a divine message and its initiator—and the founder of a new religion. Kolitz does not try to conceal this mystification, but rather make it blatant, claiming that “Mussolini not only changed the set of mind and thought in Italy, but also created around him a certain frame of *National Mysticism*”.⁵⁵

Kolitz’s description of Mussolini impressed at least some of his readers. “A man of iron who knew how to overcome the difficulties of life; a man

who knows only one thing: forward!”, Šalom Rosenfeld described the Italian dictator in his review of the book.⁵⁶ Rosenfeld argued that the nineteenth century was one of liberalism, individualism and fraternity, whereas the twentieth century was one of nationalism, authority and—last but not least—great personalities. “Difficulties, objective conditions, circumstances—all these are nonexistent for him. He knows only one thing: the power of the will.”⁵⁷

It is not surprising that a combination of the power of the will of the people with the personality of the leader as its personification was evident in the political philosophy of one of Kolitz’s fellow Hebrew students in Firenze of the 1930s. In a paragraph from the early 1940s titled “Leader—a kind of a preface”, Abraham Stern wrote that “the people”—without explaining whether it is the people of Palestine or a generic one—are expecting

a redeemer who will embody the people’s wish to be redeemed, who will guide it with a strong hand, who will command... who will be great in his willingness to sacrifice, in his victories as well as in his defeats... who will guide it towards combats, conquest, life; who will provide bread and liberty, who will illuminate the darkness of the present and the abyss of the future. But first—the idea. At the beginning was the idea...⁵⁸

Stern then evoked a biblical scene:

Rejoice greatly, Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.⁵⁹

The messianic idea in Judaic thought, Stern asserted, “was not born in the diaspora”. The same way that Britain ruled the country not *de jure* but *de facto*, Stern suggested that the idea of a redeemer was present “in the people’s brain” in the time of the Roman empire; it began with “the brutal interference of the Romans in the internal political life of Palestine”. By this comparison, Stern argued that “the coming of Jesus was a living protest against the people’s leaders, who discarded the people’s will”.⁶⁰ Naming several Jewish Messiahs—Bar-Kokba, Issac Obadaia, Menaḥem Elro’i, Abraham Abulafia, David ha-Re’ubeni and Šabtai Zwi—Stern opined that the failure of Šabtaism was not the fault of the people, but of the leader, for the people were

ready to sacrifice, like today. One only needs a leader who knows how to excite and show the way.⁶¹

Considering the context of his sayings and writings and the position he held in the NMO (both before and after the secession), one may reasonably assume that Stern saw himself as a personification of the anticipated leader.

That way or another, Stern's deification clearly came into force after his death. "For us, his soldiers and disciples", wrote the leading committee of his organisation after he was murdered, "his life did not cease". Although on 10 February 1942,

his *body* had been taken from us, it was not the end of his earthly existence. His personality crystallized within us: it has been accompanying us since then, guiding and demanding. He appeared before our eyes every day, not as a spirit alone but as a living reality... his voice reaches us loud and clear. He lives and acts among us as one great person...⁶²

Both the Hebrew press "and his murderers" (i.e. the British authorities) thought that it was Stern's ambition to become a leader. But both were wrong, since they

judged Ya'ir as one judges *mortals*, while he was *unique*. He was not one of those who live and die, like other human beings. He was *Prometheus*, who appears once in many generations, bringing *fire* to humans ... he ignites *a flame in the hearts*... Those who support darkness may *murder* him, but the fire shall *never be extinguished* again.⁶³

Stern, his disciples argued, "had sacrificed everything", and this is why "his soldiers admired him" and were willing to follow him "in fire and water, where ever he sent them". They drew their force and inspiration

from him, in order to resist the waves of hatred. He revived their spirits. He *ruled* us because we *wanted* his rule.⁶⁴

Indeed, "your word revives us and by your word we are ready to die!", his followers recalled telling him before he was murdered. But Stern knew he was not going to stay forever in this world, and prepared his soldiers for the occasion of his death. "He spoke about this possibility *quietly*", they wrote after his death, for

it seemed as if he clearly knew *when* it would happen. He foresaw the *circumstances*. Months before that day he said, by the way: how will they treat me if they catch me? Oh, simply: they will shoot me and announce that I was shot while attempting to escape.

This was, apparently, a clear and precise prophecy. But Stern's glorification took its form not only within a Christian tradition, being the *Agnus Dei* of his time, totally aware of the fact he was about to be sacrificed. His deification also fitted a much earlier Egyptian cult, of Amun. The police bullets

could not harm his idea. It shines like the sun ascending above the hills of Judea: red, sanguine. Is there any force in the world which can prevent the sun from ascending high, in its orbit?⁶⁵

The new leaders of the *NMO in Israel* were aware of the importance of presenting a rational political image. "Politicians understood Ya'ir and believed him. Initially, he approached them in the name of reason alone", they wrote. But even this reason

had the wings of vision and was paved by faith. The force he talked about and the program he suggested were "music of the future", because they did not see the force and he—did not demonstrate its existence.⁶⁶

Some reference to supernatural authority was evident in the writings of Stern himself. "At times when peoples confront each other and collapse, at times of wars and the eve of revolutions—the collectives seek after the individual and the masses—after the leader", he contemplated before his death, adding that

the longing hearts, the hoping eyes, all lean towards the great unknown person, bearer of the idea of liberty. With the loss of hope for *collective* rule, as the trust in the people's might collapses—then the ancient instinct, buried deep in man's heart, is reborn: full surrender to the law, blindly following the *first person*.⁶⁷

It is also worth mentioning that the admiration of Stern as a very special person, to say the least, was not a short, unique event in the stormy social and geopolitical weather of the Second World War. This admiration did

not cease neither at the end of the war nor after the establishment of the state of Israel. According to one of his junior followers, Stern

did not dedicate his best years and his whole life to the underground due to cold political calculations alone. He had, it seems, what men of mystery call revelation.⁶⁸

These sentences were written as a memoir, during the 1960s.

CONCLUSION

The need for authority of natural chiefs was expressed in two main ways in the political agenda of the Maximalists. The first was general, by depicting firm personal leadership as a desired political regime and praising strong leaders and rulers around the world, mainly—but not only—Mussolini. The second was particular, crowning a specific person—explicitly Jabotinsky, and later also implicitly Stern—as the designated leader—and sometimes even divine redeemer—of the Hebrew nation.

From an early stage during the 1920s, Itamar Ben Avi clearly expressed his admiration towards Mussolini and later Jabotinsky. The fact that this admiration was criticised by his political and journalistic adversaries from other parts of Hebrew society, liberals and socialists alike, did not change much; on the contrary: it probably contributed to his image as a flamboyant, non-conformist public figure. Ben Avi regarded Mussolini and Jabotinsky not only as bulwarks against communist trends, but as drivers of national resurrection (a context in which he compared Jabotinsky to Garibaldi, too).

Abba Aḥime'ir's admiration of Jabotinsky also developed gradually: in 1926 he still showed apprehension towards strong leadership; his increasing admiration towards strong leaders seems to be a part of his alienation process towards the socialist circles of which he was a member and the socialist and liberal newspapers in which he used to write. By October 1928, as Jabotinsky arrived in Palestine, the change in his stance was complete. Aḥime'ir's admiration towards leadership was not restricted to Mussolini and Jabotinsky: he also viewed Jesus, Mustafa Kemal, Pilsudski—and even political enemies like Stalin—as appropriate role models for a strong leadership.

While the Maximalists' fascination of the political possibilities presented by Hitler's seizure of power was short and ended already in 1933, Mussolini continued to attract favourable attention throughout the 1930s. The biography by Kolitz and the positive critique it received in *Ha-Masqif* are only two examples of that positive attention.

Altogether, the actual cult of the leader among the Revisionists was undoubtedly focused on the personality of Jabotinsky. Aḥime'ir asked him to order more and consult less; Von Weisl compared him with Hercules; Yevin claimed that his task was a part of a comprehensive redemption process. Jabotinsky, on his part, seemed reluctant towards such a personal leader cult.

Stern, in turn, demonstrated a somewhat different combination of the people's general will and the leader as its personification. Like Aḥime'ir, he also thought that the messianic idea is a part of Judaic thought; like Yevin, he also looked for a leader who would command and guide the masses as a mystical redeemer.

Mysticism was manifest in U.Z. Grünberg's poems and Joshua Yevin's articles from the late 1920s. At that time, however, these instincts were perceived as a collective national attribute, and were not yet embodied in a specific person.

A belief in the superiority of a specific leader's instincts over abstract and universal reason could first be traced to some of the writings of Abba Aḥime'ir. Choosing Gandhi and De Valera as symbols of particular national leaders (in contrast to universal ideological ones) may seem weird, unless we remember that both were politically active against British colonial rule.

The absence of expressions of admiration for the Jabotinsky's instincts was probably not due to lack of willingness among his adherers to do so, but due to his refusal to cooperate with their cult. Jabotinsky's rejection of dictatorship and his refusal to take upon himself the role designated for him by his supporters gradually led them to stop crowning him as a redeemer, and to concentrate on supporting him as a beloved yet "normal" political leader instead. Still, a belief in a leader's instincts could be traced in the admiration of Mussolini (as late as 1936) and in the writings of Abraham Stern (Fig. 8.1).

Stern's disciples and followers demonstrated complete admiration towards him personally. Posthumously, this admiration took the form of worship, raising the murdered leader to the degree of a prophet and—in some cases—almost to deity. This adoration and worship became possible only after the *NMO in Israel* broke away from the central core of the

Revisionist movement. Once separated from the Revisionist movement, Stern's followers could crown him as their only leader. The reason for this secession was Stern's rejection of any compromise with the British government after the break of the Second World War, and his refusal to suspend the NMO's violent actions—even for the sake of fighting against the Axis. The history of violence and its perception among Hebrew fascists are the subject of the next chapter.

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NOTES

1. Itamar Ben Avi, "Mussolini", *Do'ar Ha-Yom*, 2.11.1922.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Hayim Vardi, "The Victory of the Fascists" [Niḥon ha-Fašistim], *Do'ar ha-Yom*, 12.11.1922.
4. Ben Avi, *op. cit.*
5. Hayim Vardi, "Fascism's Attitude towards Zionism" [Jaḥas ha-Fašistijut la-Cijonijut], *Do'ar ha-Yom*, 11.1.1922.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Robert Michels, *Sozialismus und Fascismus als politische Strömungen in Italien: historische Studien* (München: Meyer & Jessen, 1925).
8. Abba Aḥime'ir, "Socialism and Fascism", *Ha-Po'el ha-Tza'ir* 20 (1926), issue 9.
9. Ben Avi, "Jabotinsky in our Land" [Jabotinsky b-'Arcenu], *Do'ar ha-Yom*, 7.10.1928.
10. *Ibid.* In "Man of Acre" Ben Avi hints to the time Jabotinsky was doing in the prison in Acre in 1920–1921, after being accused and convicted in the organisation of local self-defence units in Jerusalem. He was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment, but his sentence was mitigated to 12 months, after which he was sent to exile by the British authorities. The *speech* and the *roar* are paraphrases on Amos 3.8; *anger* and *fury* are based on Nahum 1.6.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Ben Avi, "The War among Brothers in Tel Aviv" [Milḥemet ha-'Aḥim be-Tel Aviv], *Do'ar ha-Yom*, 8.10.1928.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Abba Aḥime'ir, "Current Issues (From the Notebook of a Fascist): Regarding the Arrival of our Duce", *Do'ar ha-Yom*, 8.10.1928.
15. *Ibid.* The ending phrase is taken from Exodus 24.7.

16. "Trumpeldors" was the nickname he gave the activists of *Beytar*, an abbreviation of "**B**erit **Y**oseph **T**Rumpeldor". Joseph Trumpeldor (1880–1920) was a decorated Russian army officer, a Zionist activist and a colleague of Ze'ev Jabotinsky in establishing the British Hebrew Battalions during the First World War. His death in a skirmish in the Galilee in 1920 became a Zionist myth; the Revisionist youth movement was called after him.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Aḥime'ir, "What Should One Learn from Gandhi?", *Hazit ha-'Am*, 9.12.1932.
19. Letter by Aḥime'ir to Jabotinsky, 25.10.1928, JA P5–4/1.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Wolfgang von Weisl, "New Elections in Egypt", *Ha-'Am*, 10.4.1931.
22. Von Weisl, "Four Ways Facing the Congress: The New Executive—a Rescue-Mission Leadership", *Ha-'Am*, 6.5.1931. In what regards global geopolitics, Von Weisl held the opinion that although the prospects of Zionism are grim, it might have a chance "if a new enemy would rise against England from the East—the Soviets, for example—for then not only England but the whole of Europe will call us, the Jews, for help—as it did in 1916...".
23. *Ibid.*
24. Dr Judah Leon Magnes (1877–1948) was a reformed rabbi, a pacifist writer, and a supporter of "Brit Šalom". He was one of the founders of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and headed it from 1925 to 1935. The Maximalists saw his support of making Palestine a "Bi-National" state as a deep betrayal of Zionism.
25. "An American Newspaper about Magnes's Betrayal", *Ha-'Am*, 13.5.1931. The article is a translation of an article by Wartsmann from the American newspaper *Brooklyner Jiddische Stimme*.
26. Joshua Yevin, "Fire's Guardians", *Ha-'Am*, 12.5.1931.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Yevin, "Jews—Remember the Maccabia!", *Hazit ha-'Am*, 5.4.1932. The first Maccabi Games took place in Tel Aviv from 28 March to 6 April 1932. A concise history of Hebrew and Jewish sports at the time (in English) is by Haim Kaufman, "Jewish Sports in the Diaspora, Yishuv, and Israel: Between Nationalism and Politics", *Israel Studies* 10 (2005), pp. 147–167.
29. Grünberg, *Shield Girdle and the Speech of Blood's Son* (Jerusalem: Sadan, 1929), strophe B, p. 4; cited by Joseph Aḥime'ir and Shmuel Shatzky, *Brit Ha-Biryonim: The First Anti-British Organisation. Documents and Evidences* (Tel Aviv: Nicanim, 1978), p. 13.

30. Jabotinsky, "The 'Question' of Presidency", *Ha-'Am*, 3.6.1931.
31. Von Weisl, "The Psychosis of Victory", *Ha-'Am*, 14.6.1931.
32. Aḥime'ir, "The Aims of Revisionist Zionism", *Ha-'Am*, 5.8.1931.
33. Von Weisl, "A Farewell Letter of Dr. Von Weisl", *Migdalor* ["Lighthouse"], 11.9.1931.
34. "Proclamation of Maximalist Revisionist Zionism", *Hazit ha-'Am*, 9.8.1932. The proclamation was published on the front page, right under the headline.
35. *Ibid.* Jabotinsky was in Paris at the time, while the central office of the Revisionist movement was in London. The other demands were an independent Zionist organisation, a war against the old Zionist funds, a direct (i.e. physical) war against antisemitism (rather than just a political one).
36. A.A. (Abba Aḥime'ir), "On the Eve of the World Conference: From the Diary of a Delegate", *Hazit ha-'Am*, 6.9.1932. The report about the conference itself was quite short and succinct, probably because the Maximalists had only modest success there.
37. Grossmann's speech was printed under the title "Grossmann's Speech on Matters of Organisation", *Hazit ha-'Am*, 13.9.1932.
38. Von Weisl, "The Speech of Dr. Von Weisl", *Hazit ha-'Am*, 13.9.1932.
39. Aḥime'ir, "Romantic Realism or Realistic Romance", *Hazit ha-'Am*, 30.9.1932.
40. *Ibid.* In "Rienzi", Aḥime'ir probably referred to Cola di Rienzo, the Roman "tribune".
41. Janotinsky's speech at the Fifth World Conference of Revisionist Zionism, 1932. Quoted by Baruk Ben Abram, *Parties and Political Streams during the Time of the National Home, 1918–1948* ["Miflagot v-Zramim Politijim b-Tqufat h-Bajit h-Le'umi, 1918–1948"] (Jerusalem: The Israeli Historic Society, 1978), pp. 225–226.
42. Joshua Yevin, "For Ze'ev Jabotinsky", *Hazit ha-'Am*, 30.3.1934.
43. The letter was sent from Tschernowicz, where Jabotinsky was on tour, on 17.5.1933. It was originally written in Russian, a language Aḥime'ir and Yevin knew well. *JA* 2/23/1-A1.
44. *Ibid.* The text brought here was translated from the Hebrew version, made available by the Jabotinsky Institute.
45. A letter from Jabotinsky to Moše Cohen, 17.5.1933, *JA* 2/23/1-A1. The letter was sent from Tschernowicz, where Jabotinsky was on tour. In "people who have been together with me since 1915" Jabotinsky hints at fellow Zionist leaders, whom he hoped to convince to join his boycott initiative. The letter was originally written in Russian, translated by the Jabotinsky Institute.

46. Biography of Abba Ḥime'ir, written by the Jabotinsky Institute. *JA* P-5/1/1.
47. Zwi Kolitz, *Mussolini: His Personality and Doctrine* (Tel Aviv: Tebel, 1936), p. 5.
48. Kolitz wrote the biography after spending a few years at the University of Florence and the Naval School in Civitavecchia.
49. Kolitz, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 33. Cf. with Ḥime'ir's referral to the Indian leader in note 19 above.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 27; emphasis in the original. Compare with Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 12, 7: "*There is, then, something which is always moved with an unceasing motion, which is motion in a circle; and this is plain not in theory only but in fact. Therefore the first heaven must be eternal. There is therefore also something which moves it. And since that which moves and is moved is intermediate, there is something which moves without being moved, being eternal, substance, and actuality*".
53. Kolitz, *op. cit.*, p. 37.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 39; emphasis in the original.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 50; emphasis in the original.
56. Šalom Rosenfeld, "Mussolini—With the Publication of the Book by Zwi Kolitz", *Ha-Yarden*, 20.11.1936.
57. *Ibid.* Rosenfeld was born in 1914, in Poland. A member of Beytar in his youth, he migrated to Palestine in 1934 and remained active with the Revisionist movement. See further analysis of his review in the concluding chapter of this work.
58. Stern, draft in his notebook, written during 1940 or 1941. *CZA A 549\65-76*. The whole fragment was erased by a big X across the page. This probably does not mean that Stern didn't think so, but that he had another version for this text, since in other places he meticulously and thoroughly erased words and entire sentences he did not find suitable.
59. Zechariah 9.9.
60. Stern, draft in a notebook, written during 1940 or 1941. *CZA A 549\18-18*.
61. *Ibid.* Stern compares Elro'i to Aharon Aharonson, claiming that both were handed over to the authorities by members of their community, who objected to their political actions.
62. "Yā'ir" (an underground leaflet written and distributed by the *NMO in Israel*, Tel Aviv, 1943), p. 10. Original kept at *JA K5-1/7*.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
67. Abraham Stern, "The Leader". Cited in "Ya'ir": an underground leaflet written and distributed by the NMO in Palestine (Tel Aviv, 1943), p. 42.
68. Ja'aqob Ornštein, *In Chains: Memoires of a Warrior* [in Hebrew: "B-Kbalim: m-Zikronotajv šel Loḥem"] (Tel Aviv: Ḥug Yedidim, 1973), p. 156.



CHAPTER 9

“Born Amidst Blood and Fire”

“There are some things, gentlemen, which should not be bought”, wrote Abba Aḥime’ir to his readers after the Wailing Wall riots in October 1928. “If we still cannot get it through the means by which little Serbia became Great Yugoslavia”, he argued, then “we should get the Wailing Wall due to our political force”,¹ concluding by saying that “when one has to hit with one’s fists on the desks of the Keith-Roaches and the Lukes, should we say to our leaders: ‘go for it!’—for in such issues, gentlemanhood and lobbying are not only of no use, but harmful as well”.²

A more violent tone echoed in Aḥime’ir’s column the next week. This time, after a violent brawl between Revisionists and communists, the target for violent action were the communist activists. Aḥime’ir—who was, a few years earlier, a socialist activist—justified the violence. “Why were Jews excited?”, he ridiculed the general public opinion, noting that indeed,

some commies were beaten. Didn’t you know, you “vegetarians”, that we, the national youth, are in a state of war with those commies and their kind? That we wage a war upon the Red Jewry until its defeat? They were the ones who started it, they were the ones who cursed our language, they were the ones who sent [people] to the Arctic circle for [struggling for] our nation.³

While the physical target of the Beytar activists (whom Aḥime’ir names “national youth”) were local Communists, Aḥime’ir’s angry article was directed mostly against the liberal public. “You vegetarians”, he continued,

who call for peace and peace but there is no peace; you weaken the hands of our youth, making our twenty-year-olds look like fifty! And we, the national youth, we were too long enchanted, thinking that you are right. But finally, we stood up... we are ready for battle, we, the national youth who espouses the idea of statehood, against all those commies. And you, “halting between two opinions”, going to Berlin and Brussels, “call to Egypt, go to Assyria”—you, who are trying to have your cake and eat it at the same time—move aside! Indeed, people get wounded. Have you thought that our war against the commies is the war of M.B. and M.G., or some session at the magistrate’s court? No, gentlemen. A war is a war. And we could not care less what the herd, led by your boring articles, has to say. We do not care about the opinion of the “Pontius Pilates”, who now wash their hands.⁴

Aḥime’ir ends his article with a paragraph which later became a symbol of militaristic Israeli nationalism:

The breeding ground of the nation is not on your premises. Our nation is not a wretched one... and our redeemer will come not in the image of a poor man riding an ass. Our redeemer, like all redeemers, will arrive riding a tank, carrying his speech upon the people.⁵

Two weeks later, Aḥime’ir made his violent enmity towards Marxism and Marxists clear again, stating that

with Bundists, metamorphosed into Commis [sic], Yebsejkists or Poaley-Zion, we have no common language. For them we have one answer, neither spoken nor written, but by the means of the last festival’s night. The “Comrade” Zrubabel did not dare to deliver his speech in Yiddish not because he or his people lack the cheek for it, but rather because the lesson they received that night and the lesson taught to “comrade” Żitlowski 15 years ago bore fruits.⁶

Further in his article, however, Aḥime’ir hinted that Liberals are no less dangerous than Communists, arguing that one “should not fear neither the commis nor the Po’aley Zion, who act candidly, but rather from the ‘Gog-Magog’ and his like, who hiss like an adder...”.⁷

Naturally, violence was not limited to life in Palestine; it was an attribute of politics worldwide. “Each and every one of us would like revolutions and wars to cease and disappear from our world”, Aḥime’ir wrote on 9 November, referring to the tenth anniversary of Czechoslovakia’s independence.⁸ But what can one do, if

the Lord—or the blind forces of life—created this world with other calculations?... it would be shallow to think that the Czech revolution was made peacefully, without bloodshed or even breaking some windows... there was never such a revolution, in which “no window was broken”. Every revolution demands human lives and “windows” to be sacrificed. Blood is the oil on the wheels of revolution.⁹

The fierce public debate between Aḥime’ir to liberal journalists did not cease. His principal opponent was Moše Glücksohn, the editor of *Ha-‘Aretz*, who preached for moderate and tempered politics, acquiescence and long-term cooperation with the Mandate government. Aḥime’ir chose to open his next column,¹⁰ at the beginning of November, with two quotations of Otto von Bismarck. The first was quoted precisely:

Prussia has to coalesce and concentrate its power for the opportune moment, which has already been missed several times... it is not by speeches and majority resolutions that the great issues of the time are determined.

The second quotation was brought with a slight distortion of the origin: “I just think, that solving the German question requires soldiers, rather than speeches”.¹¹ Aḥime’ir then turned to other metaphors. “The science of physics differentiates between kinetic energy and potential energy”, he wrote, and

sociology too tells us there are both kinetic and potential energies held within the human society. Glücksohn thinks that our people has neither kinetic nor potential energy, that we should create our statehood here by the same means with which we lived during the years of exile: lobbying, adaptation, flexibility and joyful kindness towards our enemies. On the other hand, we—political Zionists—clearly declare that the political energy of our people has already been transformed from potential energy into a political force.

This is why, Aḥime’ir argued, that members of the national youth are “robbers”, “rioters” and “pogromists”, according to the proclamations of “Po`aley Zion”; it is no coincidence that the articles in the socialist press “preach in favour of ‘gentlemanhood’ in social interaction, while we aspire to teach the children of Judah the use of the bow...”.¹² On the practical level, Aḥime’ir asserted that

if we have only had 6000 rather than 600 Trumpeldors, and if the public opinion in Palestine hadn't been conducted by the current "National Committee"—then the Keith-Roaches would not have dared molesting us with the matter of the Wailing Wall, as they currently do. 6000 Trumpeldors could have been enough in order to save our dignity. We wouldn't have declared war, but simply parade across the Old City; that would have sufficed. One Jewish "Nabi Mussa" would have been of more use and would have influenced His Majesty's government far more than all the editorial articles of *Ha-Aretz* and all the speeches in the plenum of the National Committee.¹³

Then, in a clear and direct violation of all rabbinical traditions, Ahime'ir found the key to Jewish historical existence not in Jewish abstention from political involvement, but in its proximity to historical activity—and a very specific kind thereof. "The secret of Israel's eternity", he wrote,

has to do with the fact that our people lives among peoples who "shed blood", that is among young peoples, that is to say: people who live healthy, non-emasculated political lives... it is no coincidence that we were preserved in young Europe—vigorous, creative and belligerent Europe.

He then turns from the global analysis to his personal preferences. "Will a day come, in which humanity would cease of fighting?", he asks, immediately replying that

if such a day would come, I hereby declare that I'm happy for not living long enough to see that day. This is my "should come and I shall not witness it".¹⁴ I feel a need for a stormy humaneness, the humaneness of the age of 20 or 30, not the humaneness of old people, a powerless, emasculated humaneness. Doesn't Mr. Glücksohn see that it's precisely Europe, the choicest of humanity, who tends to fight much more than the peoples of Asia, who are sunk in their oriental slumber?¹⁵

In this article, Ahime'ir presented his entire admiration for agitation and activity, notwithstanding of the violent kind. During the next years he constantly projected these general ideals on specific cases and events. Although "the events of Simḥat Tora were forgotten", he wrote two weeks later, it was important to recall them, "since not every day such a miracle occurs, when Ybsekians (in one guise or the other) get some punches from Hebrews".¹⁶ Having read that members of a Yiddish speaking socialist

group had sent to their colleagues in Vilnius some of the stones which were thrown on them, together with their blood-stained shirts, Aḥime'ir joyfully promised them that

if they continue to spread here their Ashdodian language, then the empty museum of "Culture for the Wearies" in Vilnius will soon be filled with shirts and stones from our country. And if they continue importing Yiddish to our country, then they will also find themselves exporting more shirts, stones, shards of glass and broken skulls....¹⁷

But this was not the end of it. Aḥime'ir promised his readers that

we, the national youth, are willing to help all these commies become martyrs, in order to make sure that no communist dog would dare to slot his tongue here. We shall make all of them into martyrs, providing that the national flag of the USSR will not wave here, and that the languages of the USSR will not be heard here—in public occasions, at least... in exile we were proud of our martyrs, and now we should start being ashamed of them. A people living on his own land, a dominant people, should not boast with martyrs, but with heroes. How splendid it is, that here in our country, the commies are the martyrs.¹⁸

Although he had the full backing of his editor, Itamar Ben Avi, in 1928 Aḥime'ir acted as a lonely warrior. This situation changed in 1931, with the establishing of *Ha-'Am*. From that year on, the Maximalist faction within the Revisionist movement had its own independent platform. Aḥime'ir was not alone anymore: he was joined by Grünberg, Yevin and Von Weisl.

The violent tendencies took a more institutionalised path, accordingly. "The current leadership in Palestine" of the New Zionist Organisation (i.e. Von Weisl himself), "supported by nine tenths of the party, has took the reign with one aim only: to guarantee the victory of a strong radicalism, loyal to its cause".¹⁹ This claim, that certain causes may justify all means, was voiced more than once. In the first part of a series of articles titled "The Renewed Zionism", among some other clear political postulations,²⁰ Von Weisl quoted Jabotinsky as saying that Revisionists should "ally even with the Devil", adding that

there are devils also out of the League of Nations, which might sometime be worthy for us. Revisionism has only one goal: a Jewish statehood, whatever the price is.²¹

While Von Weisl, the experienced journalist, was preaching for firm yet legal political action, Brit ha-Biryonim called for physical action. “Not by means of pleas for the Mandate government and the Agency’s potbellied clerks would salvation come”, the group asserted, “but only thanks to the flame burning in your own heart, thanks to your vigour and bravery”.²² The Biryonim called the youth

clearly and blatantly: *to fight*. Practically, to fight, like all oppressed peoples had fought for the liberty of their homeland... This tough job we lay on you, Hebrew youngster. But since when does youth resent tough jobs? You must be a soldier, a truthful soldier, fighting for the honour of your people.²³

The use of force was perceived as a common political act in inner-Zionist disputes as well. “We are ‘happy’ to inform our readers that the press chamber of the Agency had sent us an item which we publish today”, thus ending “the boycott it imposed last week on the Political Zionism’s newspaper”.²⁴ The boycott, according to *Ha-’Am*, “turned out to be a rusty tool”, which was broken “because *Ha-’Am* answered the Agency’s boycott by boycotting the press releases of Qeren ha-Yesod”. The lesson was clear: “even with Zionism’s internal enemies one should fight with Revisionist means, by means of pressure”.

Von Weisl was decisive that day. “Now the other newspapers also agree with what we said a few years ago: that Weizmann is an instrument in England’s service”. Since the British administration and parliament oppose Zionism, and in light of the August 1929 riots and massacres and—even more seriously—Passfield’s White Paper, what Zionism needs is

not a “Round Table” conference—which shall not take place—but *a political attack* in London, Geneva, Hague, Rome, Paris, Warsaw and Berlin... this is the ABC of Revisionism.²⁵

The politics of the Zionist Executive vis-à-vis the British administration, Von Weisl asserted, “resemble the saying of that Persian Commander who said: ‘how bravely the Persians would have fought, if they only knew there is no death...’”. But the real bravery, he argued, “is not to be afraid of death, and the task of a Zionist statesman should be realizing his plans despite the plans of Palestine’s government”.

About a week later, in an article titled “Four Ways Facing the Congress”, Von Weisl detailed the various alternatives in which the Zionist Organisation can proceed: presidency of Weizmann, presidency of Jabotinsky, a unification of the parties or a secession. In this last case, the Revisionists shall not cooperate with moderate politicians,²⁶ but

leave Weizmann and let him to pay the debts he ran into, while we take the youth; we leave him those Hebrew newspapers he supports, and take the wide-visioned national poets and the national fire. We shall leave Weizmann with the offices, the typing machines, the cash boxes, the telephones—and take with us the living people, the future; we leave him with the clerks and take with us the pioneers, the Beytar activists, the workers, the industrialists, the students. We shall establish the new Organization, and leave Weizmann, so he could meanwhile dismantle the old Organisation peacefully.

Thus, the revisionists shall establish the *Independent Zionist Organization*.²⁷

Von Weisl, by that time a well-trained politician and executive, had already started to plan the practical details of the secession. Joshua Yevin, the newspaper’s cultural and literary critic, embarked upon the task of mobilising the political forces needed for this new political constellation among the movement’s constituency. In an article addressed to Jabotinsky’s supporters, aimed at “encouraging the inner part” of the movement, at a time when one speaks about “*annexing Western Palestine to Transjordan*”, he claimed that “for five years already”, members of the Revisionist movement have actually been those who “saved Zionism from extinction”.²⁸ The political debates he portrayed as a great war: Jabotinsky, “a great leader gifted with a talent of prophecy”, had established the movement “amidst a bitter war with gigantic enemies”. This war was not over yet, since the Revisionists’ current battle against the withdrawal of Zionism (i.e. the politics of the Zionist Organisation’s leadership, presided over by Weizmann), is equivalent to “the French defence on the Marne”, in 1914. “A new fire was ignited in the Spirit of Israel”, Yevin declared, distinguishing the members of the Revisionist movement, who were “hated and despised all over”, as “the Guardians of Fire” of the nation’s revival. “And on our Shrine”, Yevin concluded, “amidst the poorness and disaster of our life, dwells the *Lion of Fire*, the Lion of Israel’s rebirth”.²⁹

About two weeks later, Uri Zwi Grünberg held a speech in an elections gathering in Jerusalem, where he was greeted with “great Applause” by the audience. “The public becomes *stupid* if it does not retaliate for the blood”, he said, referring to the August 1929 massacre.³⁰ According to Grünberg, that public had two options: the first was “to choose the ongoing exile in Canaan, and vote for the failed, the little shopkeepers, who are petty talentless wheeler-dealers”. The second—“if they do not want this exile”—was to “vote for the Zionist truth”. The choice was very clear.

On that day, the day of elections to the Zionist Organisation’s Assembly, Yevin was just as decisive. The opponents’ way was one of deception and blurring; it injected “poison, heresy and despair into our systems”.³¹ The Hebrew community in Palestine now had

only two ways, not three. One way is the way of peace with the English statesmen and with the neighbours—the way of giving up the Jewish majority, giving up the growth and the expansion of the community, including the thousands-of-years-old hope for revival in Zion; the way of alienation towards all the sacrifices we made for the last fifty years, forgetting those hundreds of pioneers who gave their lives for Zion... the way of alienation towards all these sacrifices we made ourselves and all the years that we, living in the deserts of Zion, have burned—the way of subservience, the way of ‘Brit-Šalomic’ *obliteration*.

The second way, however,

is that of *comprehensive Zionism*: clearly declaring our aim in the ears of the entire world, embarking on a decisive war for the realization of Zionism, for which all the vigour and enthusiasm of the people of Israel will be mobilised, on both sides of the ocean; the way which does not try to justify Zionism by the consent of any external factor—be it Arab or English—but by the belief that Palestine is *ours* by blood, and we must act with all means in order to make it ours in fact... Only by this way shall the system change, the resurrection of Zionism arrive and its flag rise again on the hills of Zion and all the Jewish streets around the world, as in the days of Balfour’s Declaration and San Remo. Only by this way... will the Second Congress of Basel become, like Herzl’s first Congress of Basel, the founding congress of the great national movement and the beginning of Israel’s salvation.³²

Support of violence was not a unique event or a provocative statement for public relations purposes. Grünberg’s speech in favour of an eye-for-an-eye policy was not mere election rhetoric; he maintained this line of argumentation also after the elections. “There is no blood which should not be

revenged with blood", he declared after the British government decided to forbid Jewish prayer next to the Wailing Wall in June 1931. "No shame shall not be rewarded by shame."³³ In his view, the British government was an evil one, like the Roman Empire at the time; and like during the first century AD, there are those "Sanbalats" who collaborate with it. Therefore, "one could give up and say: Israel has no redeemer; no redeemer shall gain success among us, for the [spirit of] Exile has eaten us". But Grünberg concluded his article by saying that

since there is an awakening and revelation, and the Jewish people is strong both in its spirit and its flesh, and it has the strength, like every young nation, to live a life of statehood—I do not give up, but rather fight against the dignitaries.³⁴

After the Zionist Congress in Basel, in June that year, the secession was a *fait accompli*. "The revisionist faction has finally left the Congress", stated an editorial in mid-July without hiding its Maximalist editors' satisfaction. "This leaving actually means leaving the 'Zionist' Organisation... which was sold two years ago free of charge to some lords; an organisation in which Zionism is constantly pushed to the corner, succeeded by totally different ideologies"—namely liberalism and socialism.³⁵ The frontier lines became clear: on one side was the "Zionism of Fifty-Fifty" (either socialist or liberal), and on the other side "a Zionist organisation with a strong quality, whose Zionism is monist, which knows no fifty-fifty, neither with Warburg nor with Otto Bauer".³⁶ The article then presented the group's vision for an "independent Zionist organisation", which would be

revolutionary-spiritual by its essence... our Zionist organisation kicked the professional wheelers-dealers goodbye... the fire of Zionism will not be cooled by gold's glimmer, and the spirit of Zionism shall not be burdened by gold's weight. Only revolutionary Zionism will be strong enough to save the Israeli [sic] youth from falling into the maw of communism.

The reason for this was clear, for

a movement, which does not require sacrifices from its members, making them perceive it only as a source for jobs and titles, without final goals... such a movement deals with common bagatelles. But a revolutionary movement, which demands sacrifices from its members—such a movement has to tell its people what their final goal is, what are its soldiers asked to sacrifice themselves for.³⁷

The article compared the Revisionist secessionists with the Russian revolutionaries of 1905, the Serbs in their battles in Albania in 1916 and the French fighting in Verdun in 1917. “We’re still waiting for our 1917”, claimed the article—a clear call for revolutionary spirit. Naturally, the final goal of the “Independent Zionist Organisation”—a state for Jews on both banks of the Jordan, salvation of millions of the Sons of Israel—is the goal of the whole people of Israel.³⁸

In addition to such articles and declarations dealing with local politics, the editors of *Ha-ʿAm* also brought from time to time foreign evidence to support their social ideas: either by providing a foreign or a global perspective on the political events in Palestine and the Middle East, or by presenting the readers with foreign political role models.

The abstract of a report by the Jerusalem correspondent of the *Corriere della Sera* is an example of this first kind of translated foreign article. In the short introduction to the article, the editor of *Ha-ʿAm* wrote that it is an important reading, because “it reflects the public opinion of one of the important superpowers interested in the near East”.³⁹

The translated article supported *Ha-ʿAm*’s claims that Zionism was initially a success story as long as Britain was favourable to it; but since 1922 the British government became hostile, maintaining its military and administrative presence in Palestine only for its own interest. The article argued further that most of the British administration in Palestine is anti-Zionist and that the division among the Jewish parties is due to a considerable gap between political theory and political practice. “A political colonial regime cannot reach anything through political charity”, the article concluded; the policy of the old Zionist organisation could “ruin the great reputation of the people of Israel as a smart, witty people”.⁴⁰

The second kind of translated articles did not refer directly to Palestine or Zionism, but brought examples of political action worth imitating. Next to Strachey’s article about the roots of British fascism, *Ha-ʿAm* also presented its readers the ideas of an even more successful fascist leader. “To Live Means to Fight” was the title of an article by Benito Mussolini published in July 1931.⁴¹ “Life means work and battle”, Mussolini asserted. A clear advocate of anti-Stoicism, he ruled that “the philosophy of the Stoics and the Epicureans about rest and leisure does not suit a dynamic people”. Leisure was more suitable to “the nature of the peoples of the Orient, by whom it was influenced”, implicitly defining the appropriate place for Italy (and for his followers in Palestine) in the Occident. In order to succeed in life, “one should be well disciplined”, Mussolini wrote,

while praising healthy nutrition and plenty of sports. While “a healthy body is a fighting one”, constant movement and activity, physical and spiritual dynamism—all are necessary not only for the body, but for the soul as well. The whole passage, published in the inner part of the paper, seems like a collection of excerpts from several sources. “*Force creates Force*” concluded the Italian leader’s article.⁴²

In his long, detailed historical review of political Zionism published a month later, in August 1931, Aḥime’ir made clear that a new Zionist Organisation cannot be based on the same principles as the old one, such as “charity”. A new organisation must have new principles, “which fit the new spirit of Revisionist Zionism”.⁴³

The reason for that, in Aḥime’ir’s opinion, was grounded in the short yet burdened history of Revisionist Zionism, which “was born by the storm of war and revolution”. The first chapter in the history of Revisionist Zionism, he argued, had been Jabotinsky’s campaign for the establishment of the Hebrew Battalions during the First World War, while members of Revisionist Zionism “spent their childhood or their youth between the bullets of the World War or the civil war”.⁴⁴ The wars, however, did not end—but changed their phase and quality. The world was, during the early 1930s, in the midst of an ideological-generational war. “The world views which appeared after the catastrophes are marked by the recognition of the great worth of the youth”, Aḥime’ir argued, since

generations replaced the classes. Eight million youngsters lost their lives in the World War, and a similar number in the storm of the Russian Revolution. The youth now demands its due, “taking revenge” of the generation who was sitting at home during the years of disaster... the war between liberalism and socialism on the one hand to communism and fascism on the other is a war between fathers and sons. In Israel too, a war is waged between official Zionism—which is allied with the Agency—and young, poor, “working Palestine”, concentrated in Revisionist Zionism. This is a fathers-sons war as well. Revisionist Zionism has nothing to learn from Zionism and Zionists: neither ideology nor tactic.

All that said, he then turned to the present, as

the sated “bourgeoisie” is now seeking peace, and the “bourgeois” peoples—these are the satiated peoples, like England, North America and France—are the ones convening in Geneva and Locarno, preaching for limitations on armaments. They do not need the war, for they have achieved all

they need. It is hard to disconnect their youth from the spoils in which it is sunk, and demand from it self-sacrifice for national goals and public ideals. Imperialistic appetite could be found, on the other hand, among the “proletarian” peoples, the peoples who lost the war, whose public ideals were not fulfilled. Those proletarian peoples are the Italian, the German, the Hungarian, the Russian and others—but the most proletarian is, of course, the Israeli people.

This was, implicitly, a call for war. But the editors of *Ha-`Am* used metaphors of war and combat also in other, less directly war-related contexts. “We stretch the bands of our helmets and raise our torch up... and continue to march in our path—forward, towards our liberty”, declared the editorial marking the newspaper’s 100th issue.⁴⁵

The battle was not always an armed one; it could also take the form of civil disobedience. “The dozens of young men and women who went to prison... knowing that fighting against the census they are fighting for the liberation of their people and their country—those young men and women performed a great revolutionary act”, wrote Yevin two months later, in a special issue dedicated to the population census in Palestine (more precisely, to the Maximalists’ total refusal to take part in it).⁴⁶ This civil disobedience was the first act of national rebellion, Yevin argued, after 14 years in which Zionism became “a movement of certificates under the power of Great Britain”. Zionism got used to this “legal status”, seeking the approval of other forces. “This ‘NO’”, Yevin stated, had opened “a new page in the history of new Zionism”. For Yevin (who, like Aḥime’ir, was sure that the Revisionist movement “was born amidst blood and fire”),⁴⁷ it was clear that

a great liberation movement should not dream about “satisfying the wolf while saving the sheep”, but rather make the sheep into a wolf, providing it with sharp teeth, so it could defend itself from the predator.

The way of Revisionist Zionism “*is not* the way of idyll”,⁴⁸ he summarised.

Physical action was not the only important thing; not less valuable was the power of will. More than a hundred youngsters were arrested and detained after taking part in demonstrations against the population census⁴⁹; here too, Yevin found good examples among the Hebrew youth. While Mapay “has reached *the utmost* level of bankruptcy”, Yevin asserted,

"the new pioneer youth... is not ashamed *to believe*, to believe with all the heat of its blood and its power to sacrifice, to believe *simply* in the redemption of Zion..."⁵⁰

The sharp, activist rhetoric of *Ha-'Am* caused its closure by decree of the British Mandate authorities. But its successor, *Hazit ha-'Am* ("The People's Front") was just as belligerent. "We re-establish our stage", stated the editorial in its first issue,

for war in favour of Zionism, against all those trying to diminish it—internally and externally. We are at war with the whole camp of those who try to hinder and obstruct it, with all these phenomena of degeneration and treachery—especially that ideological confusion and blurring of the mind, which is, today, an epidemic among the people "shaping public opinion", who are lost and confused themselves.

The call to the public was clear: "those who are for the Lord of Zion—join us!... everyone who is thirsty for the living words of sorrowing brothers, feeling the pain of the people and the pain of yet unredeemed Zion—should rush to a new war for the living homeland, which is—among all the catastrophes—like a bush on fire, yet not burned up!"⁵¹

If the reader had any doubt as to who these confused people "shaping public opinion" were, another headline a few pages further made it clear: "Treacherous Press Conquers the Writers' Journal; Shutting the Mouth of a Hebrew Poet by Command of *Ha-'Aretz*". A few months earlier, the newspapers *Dabar* and *Ha-'Aretz* had begun to finance "*Ma'znayim*" ["*Libra*"], the official periodical of the Hebrew Writers' Association. When the work of a certain poet (whose name is mentioned only by his initials, "J.S.") was rejected by the editors of the periodical, the editors of *Hazit ha-'Am* saw it as yet another proof of the corruptive influence of the other two newspapers on Hebrew culture and society.⁵²

The next violent clash between the Maximalists and their liberal opponents broke out at the inauguration event of the Chair for international relations at the Hebrew University, which was meant to be held by Norman Bentwich.⁵³ In line with the ideas of Judah Magnes and *Brit Šalom*, the chair was named "Chair for International Peace". The mere idea of establishing a Chair with such a name at the academic institute ("The Hebrew College", as it was named then) raised fierce criticism among the Revisionists.

The formal inauguration event of the Chair was hampered by members of Brit ha-Biryonim, led by Abba Aḥime'ir.⁵⁴ The activists distributed leaflets signed by "The Israeli National Youth", claiming that

the pursuers of peace always symbolised in Israeli history the national treason, assimilation, and self reduction... only the blind do not see that Jerusalem is not the city of peace but the crater of a volcano... We do not know any renowned university which has a chair for peace. But each and every nation has a military academy.⁵⁵

A violent quarrel broke out, and Judah Magnes, the head of the University,⁵⁶ called the police to intervene in the fight in the campus on Mount Scopus.⁵⁷ Fourteen people—Aḥime'ir among them—were arrested.

The same day, a commentary by Aḥime'ir about the Japanese war in China was published in *Hazit ha-'Am*. While older people cannot forget names like Port Arthur, Muqaden and Harbin, the name Qiqihar, he argued, "will soon be forgotten, since the conquest of this city by the Japanese was quick and swift".⁵⁸ This swift conquest was possible because for some decades the Chinese were too busy in work and commerce, instead of building a military force. If the Chinese had built a well-trained fighting force, people on the other edge of Asia would have either been learning a lot about the geography of the area, due to the long campaign, or not hear about the place at all, since the Japanese would not have dared to attack. For the socialists it is totally clear that in this war, "the Chinese are the righteous victims while the Japanese are evil", just because they lack weapons and a warring spirit. But

is the sheep always just? If this is justice, "may its throne be forever overthrown"! The new Hebrew might choose the evil of the brave rather than the justice of the sheep!

Both the Chinese and the Japanese, Aḥime'ir argued, claim they are right and just, but the Chinese will be even more just "if they learn the art of war".⁵⁹

In an inaugurating article dedicated to the issuing of the new newspaper, Jabotinsky greeted its editors, emphasising the importance of a political press. Unlike the socialist-Zionists and the liberal-Zionists, Jabotinsky argued, the Revisionist movement had no physical institutions (no banks or colonies); still,

great and mighty is an idea which—with neither mud nor brick-form nor straw, but only through the declaration of a slogan, has this power to conquer and triumph. Let us shout, a company of shouters, about the danger!⁶⁰

However, Jabotinsky (who was at that time in exile in Europe) then gave the editors of *Hazit ha-'Am* some advice. He advised them to express their views in a moderate language, and to be careful with what they write about other people, especially in matters of accusations. "But", Jabotinsky wrote, "how should I—providing advice from far away—know whether such polite expressions suit the needs of local action"? Sometimes, he maintained, "the public's ears are already half-deaf". In such case, then, "my boisterous brothers—let us shout!" Consequently, he concluded that

there is only one piece of advice which should be appropriate also from far away, which is valid under all circumstances. Our aim at this moment is to spur the public for war: primarily, an external one.⁶¹

Jabotinsky was very happy to see "the welcome reception the Zionist students prepared in honour of Mr. Bentwich"; he shall be "even happier to see Mr. Magnes descending from Mount Scopus", but

not the inner indignity, but the external betrayal, the injustice of the foreign ruler—these are the main issues. The foreign ruler... has the power, and he knows how to exercise it in order to poison our life in our country: but the public—that is a courageous public—also has the means to poison the lives of the minister and the magistrate.⁶²

Aḥime'ir disagreed with Jabotinsky on this point. In his opinion, the external factors which contributed to Zionism's crisis were only secondary. "The main source [of the crisis] should be sought in *Jewish* factors", he stated in a short article written while he was arrested in Jerusalem that month, awaiting his trial.⁶³ "Our people in general and our youth in particular have not yet become ready for the great task of establishing the kingdom of Israel... the maximal Israeli ideal was sought with minimal means; even great Herzl did not demand sacrifice". But in real life, "nothing is given for free. Everything should be conquered and fought for". While socialist Zionism did understand the need for sacrifice, it preferred

socialism over nationalism. Furthermore: the consistent socialists (these are the cooperative villages) were demanding asceticism and self-denial, thus their socialism became “a monastery of the socialist religion”. While “only few can go to a monastery”, Zionism “is for the whole people”. The best Jewish youngsters, Ahime’ir argued, joined the Bund and the Communist party because “those promised life of heroism, adherence, war, prison, gallows—not idle chatter and empty words, nor life in a monastery”.⁶⁴

The same week, the poet and the essayist Jacob Cohen came to Israel from Poland. “Welcome, the poet of the Biryonim!” he was greeted by *Ḥazit ha-’Am* a day after his arrival.⁶⁵ The newspaper described the author of Brit ha-Biryonim’s anthem as “the poet of youth, strength and national Hebrew honour”.⁶⁶

Back in Vienna, Wolfgang von Weisl (after being sent there to organise the New Zionist Organisation), also advocated in favour of preparing for the coming war. Analysing the global economic conditions, Von Weisl concluded that “a war will indubitably break out between England and its allies in Europe and America on the one hand, and Russia and its allies in Asia on the other”. This fact, he argued, “must dictate the essence of future Revisionist politics”. Therefore, Zionism has “a positive and valuable task: getting ready and preparing the Jewish youth in the Diaspora for the next war”. The same way that Hebrew battalions “took part in the 1914–1917 war, the Hebrew people would again be given a chance to ally with one of the warring sides”. Von Weisl hoped “this would be England”, but only after getting “clear and safe guarantees” for establishing an independent state after the war. In such case, the Hebrew people should be able to mobilise its military; “not a battalion—but a Hebrew army”.⁶⁷

In a similar militaristic vein, Yevin opined that the spectators of the Makkabi games held in Tel Aviv that year were excited not only to watch the high quality sports, but also to view the parades and the ceremonies accompanying them. The reason that it was exactly these parades which made the greatest impression on the public “is clear and simple: here chanted the expression of potential Hebrew force of this wonderful youth, who is able to shift mountains, while now a stupid, inept leadership is continuously wasting its time”. Yevin was delighted to witness that deep inside the Hebrew community’s heart one can still feel

the great yet very simple, very primitive longing, this longing which is vivid and beating in every persecuted and oppressed people: the longing for power, for real statehood... the longing to be not slaves but free people, not sheep to be slaughtered but on the contrary—exactly like all other peoples....⁶⁸

The issue of 9 June 1932 was a large one: it was published a few days before Pentecost, just after the Jewish second harvest festival (“*Lag b-`Omer*”), traditionally commemorating the Jewish rebellion against Rome in 132 AD. Next to a historical article by Josef Klausner⁶⁹ about Bar-Kokba’s rebellion, the issue also contained articles by Aḥime’ir and Yevin.

“Two doctrines accompanied the people of Israel during its 3000 years of existence”, Yevin argued. The first claims that Israel is a people like all others; it should live earthly life, seek earthly conquest and “hold all the attributes of a people living earthly political life”. The second preaches in favour of abandoning earthly-political activity, in order to become “a kingdom of priests” and “a theocracy bearing a spiritual mission”. The external victories of the Roman emperors Titus and Hadrian caused the internal triumph of the “spiritual” doctrine. But, in contrast to this tradition,

our slogan is: a return to Bar-Kokba’s doctrine... for the rightness of the movement and its truth are not at all measured by its temporary success... We say: Bar-Kokba’s doctrine is true; this means that the doctrine of the Flaviuses, the adapters, those who bear the standard of “objective reality’s conditions” and order us to bow our heads in front of it... this doctrine is false.⁷⁰

Aḥime’ir was more historical and less contemporary in his article. He also made a connection, however, between the Great Rebellion of 70 AD and the Bar-Kokba rebellion of 132 AD. “Bar Kokba’s rebellion [in 132 AD] and the rebellion of the Zealots [70 AD] are nothing but one event, whose name is *The Great Israeli Revolution*”, he argued. “There is no revolution without a public ideal, which the bearers of that revolution hope to fulfil during their lifetime.” As a motto for his article, Aḥime’ir brought a citation of Goethe:

Du must steigen oder sinken\Du must herrschen und gewinnen\Oder dienen und verlieren\Leiden oder triumphieren\Amboss oder Hammer sein.⁷¹

Militarism and aspiration to military power were not limited to the newspapers' articles; it was also a way of personal greeting. "To our friend Aharon Polak", read an ad signed by Ahime'ir and Yevin in June 1932, "*Congratulations on your son's birth. May you see him as a soldier in Israel's kingdom's army.*"⁷²

Admiration of the power of will was evident in Hebrew perception of Italian fascism as well. According to his first Hebrew biographer, Mussolini did not believe in fate, but rather "*in Will*". Kolitz cited him as saying that "one should know that progress is made in life only through iron-cast will, able to defeat even fate itself", concluding that "Power of the Will—this is Mussolini's motto".⁷³ Kolitz made it clear, however, that the demand for sacrifice is not a unique feature of Mussolini, but a prerequisite for every successful leader:

Louis XVI, the contemporary of Napoleon, a guzzler king, did not demand anything of his people: no fighting, no effort, no sacrifice—and still, he was hated, mocked and despised. Napoleon, on the contrary, demanded from his people the maximum: hundreds of thousands of lives; almost insane patriotic vigilance; physical, spiritual, political and financial efforts... and still, he was beloved. Not the crowds, who might be taken by changing moods, can take the steering-wheel to their hands, but an *individual*, crystallised and unified force, dictating its will. Psychology teaches us that this is *exactly* the regime people like.⁷⁴

Kolitz then quoted Mussolini's proverb saying that "it is better to live one day as a lion, than hundred days as a sheep",⁷⁵ a proverb he also follows in his life, as he (Mussolini)

remained enchanting and dynamic from his childhood until today. Now, as Fascist Italy's leader, he does not have a moment of rest. For him, *serenity is mire*.⁷⁶ Mussolini does not know any middle-way or a "Golden Path". He says that "people who stand on the same spot—are dying people". In his view, stagnation is regression—and Mussolini wiped this word out of modern Italy's political and military lexicon.⁷⁷

For Abraham Stern, who was a student in Italy at about the same time as Kolitz, the legitimacy for the use of violence went without saying. "The evil forces controlling us today", he wrote in a draft for the first publications of the *NMO in Israel*, "must be overthrown by a strong hand". This is what should be done "at a time of national revolution. This sacred task is imposed on you, the strong, fresh, Hebrew youth."⁷⁸ The youth, therefore, should

get ready for the war of liberty. Teach your hands to war, and your fingers to fight.⁷⁹ Toughen your will and be ready for whatever sacrifice for your people, Israel, and your homeland—the Land of Israel.⁸⁰

The use of force was clearly declared not only internally, for mobilising Hebrew youngsters, but externally as well. "The NMO sees fighting and sacrifice as the only true means for the conquest and the liberation of Palestine", read the communiqué submitted to Von Hentig in 1941.⁸¹ "The NMO, who embarked on acts of terrorism already in the Autumn of 1936 ... came to the fore by a successful intensification of its terror and sabotage actions against English property."⁸² This is how the organisation blatantly presented itself, declaring not only its aims, but its means as well.

CONCLUSION

"I found out that what one wishes to himself in his innermost—in a moment of real decision—may become real... if one would just live long enough to experience it", wrote Wolfgang Von Weisl decades after the events described here.⁸³ From all the nine mobilising emotions in Paxton's model, the belief in the efficacy of will was probably the strongest and most significant among the members of the examined group. Declarations about the beauty—and the necessity—of violence were omnipresent in the articles of Aḥime'ir, Yevin and Grünberg (founders of *Brit ha-Biryonim*), Von Weisl and later Stern.

While the members of the group shared the same core of ideology regarding activity and the power of will, its manifestations were different. While Von Weisl preached in favour of using political force within the Zionist institutions, Aḥime'ir was actually leading practical violent activists in the streets and the halls of the Hebrew University, whereas Yevin and Grünberg emphasised the role of violence in the moral and social revival of the nation. Altogether these different manifestations were parts of one continuous and comprehensive political discourse.

One could differentiate between three various sorts of violence perceived and discussed by the members of the Maximalist group. First was *historical* violence: the assertion that violence was, is and will remain a central part of human behaviour—a fact that cannot be changed. Second was *practical* violence: preaching for the use of violence against internal enemies (usually liberals and socialists) and external ones (such as the

British authorities). Last but not least was *essential* violence: a principle of political existence, with its own independent value.

Furthermore, beside its practical usage in everyday politics, the assumption that the Messiah would come “on a Tank” gave violence a redemptive role. Redemption, in this view, did not have the *possibility*, but the *obligation* to be achieved by force.

As with the cult of the leader, in the issue of violence too the Maximalists presented their leader with a dilemma. On the one hand, Jabotinsky regarded political activism favourably. The main reason for his departure from mainstream Zionism (first with the establishment of the revisionist movement in 1925, and later with the secession from the Zionist Organisation in 1931) was his criticism of the Zionist policy, which was too passive in his opinion. On the other hand, the Maximalists’ deeds and actions became sometimes too extreme and uncompromising. Although sometimes he praised Maximalist “Adventurism”, it would not be far-fetched to claim that Jabotinsky was very often struggling to “hold the horses” of Maximalist violence (Fig. 9.1).

Fig. 9.1 Abraham “Yair” Stern, 1936. Courtesy of the Jabotinsky Institute in Israel



It is in this context that one should see the secession of Stern and his followers from the NMO in 1940. Less than a decade before, Ahime'ir, Yevin, Grünberg and their followers not only praised uncompromising action, but were also implementing their ideas (at least until 1933, when they were imprisoned). Stern, in this aspect, simply remained consistent with this line, merely escalating the struggle from an unarmed to an armed one, as he thought was needed by changing circumstances of the Second World War. This armed struggle, he asserted, should be carried out by a small, dedicated political group.

* * *

NOTES

1. Abba Ahime'ir, "Current Issues (From the Notebook of a Fascist)", *Do'ar ha-Yom*, 8.10.1928.
2. *Ibid.* Edward Keith-Roach was governor of Jerusalem; Harry Charles Luke was then Chief Secretary of the Palestine Government.
3. Abba Ahime'ir, "Current Issues (From the Notebook of a Fascist)", *Do'ar ha-Yom*, 14.10.1928.
4. *Ibid.* For the biblical citations, cf. 1 Kings 18.21 and Hosea 7.11. "M.B." is Moše Beilinson, the editor of the socialist newspaper *Dabar*; "M.G." is Moše Glücksohn, the editor of the liberal newspaper *Ha-'Aretz*.
5. Ahime'ir, *op. cit.*
6. Ahime'ir, "Current Issues (From the Notebook of a Fascist): An Answer to the 'Comrades', the 'Members' and the 'Gentlemen'", *Do'ar ha-Yom*, 28.10.1928. The attack on the Po'aley Zion Club in Tel Aviv during Jacob Zrubabel's speech was carried out in the night after "Šimhat Tora", ending the week of Tabernacles festival. The Yebsekyists were Jewish supporters of the Communist Party in the USSR; Hayim Žitlowski experienced a similar (though less violent) protest as he was about to deliver a political lecture in Yiddish in Jaffa, in 1914. See Šabiš, "Tel Avivan, Speak Hebrew!: The Partial Success of the Hebrew Revolution", *Panim* 45 (2008), pp. 50–65.
7. *Ibid.* Cf. with Babylonian Talmud *Soṭta*, 22, 72.
8. Ahime'ir, "Current Issues (From the Notebook of a Fascist): Shallowness, or even Worse", *Do'ar ha-Yom*, 9.11.1928.
9. *Ibid.*

10. Aḥime'ir, "Current Issues (From the Notebook of a Fascist): An Answer to Mr. Glücksohn", *Do'ar ha-Yom*, 4.11.1928. The column bore the subtitle 'Tell the Master who has Created Me', a paraphrase on the Talmudic tale about Rabbi Elazar. See Babylonian Talmud *Ta'anit* 20, 2.
11. *Ibid.* The first quotation, "*Preußen muß seine Kraft zusammenfassen und zusammenhalten auf den günstigen Augenblick, der schon einige Male verpaßt ist... nicht durch Reden oder Mehrheitsbeschlüsse werden die großen Fragen der Zeit entschieden*", is taken from Bismarck's speech of "Blood and Iron", delivered on 30.9.1862. The second is probably based on Bismarck's saying that "*die deutsche Frage kann nicht in den Parlamenten, sondern nur durch Diplomatie und auf dem Schlachtfeld gelöst werden*" (my emphasis). Aḥime'ir clearly omitted the word 'diplomacy'.
12. *Ibid.* The last citation is from 2 Samuel 1.18.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Sanhedrin 92.2. Aḥime'ir uses here only the phrase itself, not necessarily in the context of redemption.
15. Aḥime'ir, *op. cit.*
16. Aḥime'ir, "Current Issues (From the Notebook of a Fascist): Echoes of Šimḥat Tora's Night", *Do'ar ha-Yom*, 19.11.1928.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. Wolfgang von Weisl, "The Fear of Bravery", *Ha-'Am*, 9.4.1931.
20. Von Weisl, "The Renewed Zionism (A)", *Ha-'Am*, 17.4.1931. He postulates that Revisionism is the only *true* Zionism; while it has nothing against the Arabs, there is no such thing as "Arab Unity". He also states that Zionism was active in Palestine before the beginning of the British mandate and will be there also after Britain's rule would come to an end.
21. *Ibid.* Von Weisl might have had the USA in mind. A decade later, however, the *NMO in Israel*, under the leadership of Abraham Stern, would contemplate signing a treaty of military alliance with Italy and Germany during the Second World War. See the concluding chapter of this work.
22. Brit ha-Biryoniim, "Speech of the Biryon", *Ha-Biryon* 5 (April 1931). An original is kept at the CZA. PR-3693.
23. Brit ha-Biryoniim, "We Shall Talk with You Frankly", *Ha-Biryon* 5 (April 1931).
24. "End to the Agency's Boycott on Ha-'Am" (no author's name; probably Aḥime'ir), *Ha-'Am*, 28.4.1931. "The Agency" was the Jewish Agency of Palestine, the executive body of the Zionist Organisation in Palestine.
25. Von Weisl, "Weizmann, the Arabs and the Fools", *Ha-'Am*, 28.4.1931. Sidney James Webb, First Baron Passfield (1859–1947), was Secretary of State for the Colonies from June 1929 to August 1931. The "Passfield White Paper", issued 1 October 1930, was a revision of the 1922 Paper,

reshaping British policy in Palestine, in what the Revisionists saw as a deterioration of the political conditions in Palestine. The fact that Webb was a well-known socialist activist probably did not contribute to his esteem in Von Weisl's eyes.

26. Von Weisl explicitly names Grünbaum and Ussischkin.
27. Von Weisl, "Four Ways Facing the Congress" (part 2), *Ha-'Am*, 7.5.1931.
28. Joshua Yevin, "Fire's Guardians", *Ha-'Am*, 12.5.1931.
29. *Ibid.*
30. "A Public Event of Revisionist Zionism in Jerusalem: Uri Zwi Grünberg Speaks about the Zionist Truth to the People of Jerusalem", *Ha-'Am*, 25.5.1931. The gathering took place the evening before, on 24 May 1931. The audience, according to *Ha-'Am*'s estimate, numbered about 2000 people. Grünberg was the second speaker, after Von Weisl, who spoke about "the failures of the bankrupt leadership" of the Zionist Organisation. An interesting detail is that he was quoted as saying that the only way to save Zionism is by "getting rid of the failed leadership and renewing the movement". Apparently, at that moment, the secession plan was not a done deal yet.
31. Yevin, "The Day of Judgment", *Ha-'Am*, 25.5.1931.
32. *Ibid.*
33. Grünberg, "Sons of Tobias and their Faction", *Ha-'Am*, 14.6.1931.
34. *Ibid.*
35. "The People's Diary", *Ha-'Am*, 14.7.1931.
36. *Ibid.* Otto Warburg was brought here a symbol of liberal, moderate European Zionism; Otto Bauer was synonym for socialism.
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.* The tentative name for the new organisation was the *Independent Zionist Organisation*; a few years later, with its official inauguration, it will be called *New Zionist Organisation*.
39. "A large Italian Newspaper about the Problem of Zionism" (no author), *Ha-'Am*, 2.8.1931.
40. *Ibid.*
41. Benito Mussolini, "To Live Means to Fight", *Ha-'Am*, 24.7.1931 (translated into Hebrew by Jichaq Abner).
42. *Ibid.*, emphasis in the original.
43. Aḥime'ir, "The Aims of Revisionist Zionism", *Ha-'Am*, 5.8.1931.
44. *Ibid.* Aḥime'ir means the Russian civil war, which he has personally experienced; he changed his family name from Geissenovicz to Aḥime'ir (meaning "Me'ir's Brother") in memory of his brother, who was killed in that war. Von Weisl was a Lieutenant in the Austrian artillery; Grünberg was an infantry soldier. Yevin served as a military physician in the Russian army.

45. People's Soldier, "100th Issue", *Ha-'Am*, 7.8.1931. The disciplined usage of helmets might indicate that the article was written by Von Weisl, the veteran officer, who used such terminology in other articles and books as well.
46. Yevin, "To the Prisoners of Zion", Special Issue: "The Community and the Census", 22.10.1931. The mobilisation of young activists against the census was one of the first actions of Brit ha-Biryoniim. See Joseph Aḥime'ir and Shmuel Shatzky, *Brit Ha-Biryoniim: The First Anti-British Organisation, Documents and Evidences* (Tel Aviv: Nicanim, 1978), pp. 236–238.
47. Yevin, "The Path of Revisionist Zionism: The Situation in 1931 and Future Prospects", *Migdalor*, 11.9.1931.
48. *Ibid.*
49. "Balance of the Activities against the Census", *Mišmar ha-'Umma* ["The Nation's Guard"], 24.12.1931. The exact number of detainees given was 123, both men and women. The main article in this special issue opined that "the whole census was a fraud", meant solely to empower the Arab population and weaken the Jewish population in Palestine.
50. Yevin, "The Blatant Bankruptcy", *Mišmar ha-'Umma*, 24.12.1931.
51. "Who's to the Lord of Zion—Join Us!" (editorial), *Ḥazit ha-'Am*, 29.1.32. The concluding metaphor is based on Exodus 3.2.
52. "The Treacherous Press Conquers the Writers' Journal" (no author), *Ḥazit ha-'Am*, 29.1.32.
53. Norman Bentwich (1883–1971), an expert of international law who was the attorney general of the British government in Palestine, held the chair only for a few weeks. He then left the university, and returned there only in 1945; until 1951 he was professor for international relations.
54. About the establishment of the Chair in the Hebrew University, see Uri Cohen, "University vs. Society in a Period of Nation Building: The Hebrew University in Pre-State Israel", *Historical Studies in Education* (2007), pp. 81–110.
55. The text of the leaflet was published under the title "To the Zionists and the Israeli Youth" in *Ḥazit ha-'Am*, 12.2.1932.
56. His title at that time was *Kanzler*—parallel, more or less, to the Rektor and the President of today.
57. The Revisionists argued that the physical quarrel began when a supporter of Brit Šalom attacked one of the protesters with bare fists. "A Brit Šalomic Clerk Starts a Fight", *Ḥazit ha-'Am*, 2.2.1932.
58. A. Medini (pseudonym of Abba Aḥime'ir), "Qiqihar (A Political Feuilliton)", *Ḥazit ha-'Am*, 12.2.1932.
59. *Ibid.*
60. Jabotinsky, "The People's Front", *Ḥazit ha-'Am*, 22.3.1932.
61. Jabotinsky, "The People's Front", *Ḥazit ha-'Am*, 22.3.1932.

62. *Ibid.* This call of Jabotinsky clarifies that in his view, the editorial board of *Ḥazit ha-ʿAm*—especially Aḥimeʿir, who led the protests against the Chair for International Justice—should concentrate their efforts against the British rather than against other Zionist factions.
63. Aḥimeʿir, "Letter to the Youth", *Ḥazit ha-ʿAm*, 29.3.1932. The article was written in the central prison in Jerusalem, on 17.3.1932. Aḥimeʿir was brought to trial on 2 May 1932, together with 11 other youngsters who were arrested on Mount Scopus. He was charged and found guilty of rioting, interrupting the work of the police and insulting a civil servant. Aḥimeʿir was sentenced to a fine of £3 or 28 days imprisonment. Like all the other activists, he preferred to go to jail; "with national hymns on their lips", the whole group went there. "A Fair End to the 'Preaching of Peace' by Magnes and Bentwich", *Ḥazit ha-ʿAm*, 6.5.1932.
64. *Ibid.*
65. "Important Guest", *Ḥazit ha-ʿAm*, 22.3.1932.
66. "Reception for Jacob Cohen", *Ḥazit ha-ʿAm*, 1.4.1932.
67. Von Weisl, "On the Eve of the New World War", *Ḥazit ha-ʿAm*, 29.3.1932.
68. Yevin, "Jews—Remember the Makkabia!", *Ḥazit ha-ʿAm*, 5.4.1932. Today, the Makkabia International Games are held every four years and are recognised and approved by the International Olympic Committee. For a detailed account of the political background of the games see Amichai Alperovich, *Israel in der olympischen Bewegung: Dissertation zur Erlangung des akademischen Grades Doktor der Sportwissenschaft* (Köln: Deutschen Sporthochschule, 2008), pp. 68–71.
69. Josef Klausner, "Thousand Eight-Hundred Years to Bar Kokba's Rebellion", *Ḥazit ha-ʿAm*, 9.6.1932.
70. Yevin, "Bar Kokba's Doctrine", *Ḥazit ha-ʿAm*, 9.6.1932. He actually paraphrases on a sentence written by Grünberg: "...and Bar Kokba's doctrine is true—also with the collapse of Beytar...".
71. Aḥimeʿir, "Chapters of the Great Revolution in Israel: The Period of Bar Kokba's Rebellion", *Ḥazit ha-ʿAm*, 9.6.1932. Goethe's verses were brought in German and in a Hebrew translation.
72. Yevin and Aḥimeʿir, add, *Ḥazit ha-ʿAm*, 24.6.1932. The ad was one inch wide, on the front page.
73. Zvi Kolitz, *Mussolini: His Personality and Doctrine* (Tel Aviv: Tebel, 1936), pp. 27–28. Emphasis in the original.
74. *Ibid.*, pp. 45–46.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
76. In Hebrew, "šeḡet hu' refeš": a famous verse from the hymn of Beytar, written by Jabotinsky in 1932.
77. Kolitz, *op. cit.*, pp. 84–85.

78. Stern, draft in his notebook, probably written during 1941. CZA A 549\65–62.
79. Cf. Psalm 144.1.
80. Stern, *op. cit.*
81. *Grundlage des Vorschlages der Nationalen Militärischen Organisation in Palästina (Irgun Zewai Leumi) betreffend der Lösung der jüdischen Frage Europas und der aktiven Teilnahme der N.M.O. Am Kriege an der Seite Deutschlands*, JA K-5/4/1.
82. The first planned and declared terror actions of the NMO actually took place on 17 August 1936, as members of the organisation ambushed a train near Jaffa, killing one person and wounding five. See Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881–1999* (London: John Murray, 2000), p. 137. The term “Terrorist” was not understood as an abuse at that time by some right wing militants in Palestine. See for instance Doris Katz, *I Was a Terrorist* (Jerusalem: Karni, 1953), in which the author tells the story of her service by the NMO, between 1945 and 1948 (the book was translated from English into Hebrew by Zwi Rin, Uri’el Halperin’s brother).
83. Editorial, “Das war Wolfgang von Weisl”, *Schalom: Zeitschrift der österreichisch-israelischen Gesellschaft*, April 1974, pp. 4–7. The journal published a few excerpts from Von Weisl’s unpublished autobiography a few weeks after his death.



CHAPTER 10

The Stronger Rules: Might Is Right

“The good press—the one called ‘left press’—already stands and declares about the crimes of fascism”, Abba Aḥime’ir wrote in *Ha-‘Aretz* during the short period in which he published his articles there, “and after the public is fed up with the issue of Mateotti—this Fascist toothpick which prevents many socialists and other vegetarians from seeing the Bolshevik log—they began signalling together an alarm about the issue of Southern Tyrol”. But Aḥime’ir had no intention to dwell on that subordinate issue. “What is good and moral and gentleman-like in relations between human beings”, he argued,

is harmful and useless in the relations between one human society to another. And if the leader of a certain human society would take its private relations as a measure for its relations as a representative of his society, it will be hazardous for his society. Miserable are the passengers of ship whose Captain navigates it according to the Kantian absolute imperative!

Indeed, Italian Fascists were trying to “Italianise” inscriptions all over Südtirol—even in cemeteries—as a part of their attempts to galvanise the national body. Indeed,

ethically, the Italianisation of tombstones in South Tyrol is not a pretty thing... but here we deal with politics, neither with ethics nor with aesthetics. These kingdoms are totally separate from each other... severe political problems are solved neither by the tip of the pen nor by the fluid of the inkstand, but by the iron of the lance and the fluid running within human veins.¹

This idea, that a small group should impose its will on others, echoed also in his solemn article welcoming Jabotinsky upon his arrival to Palestine, in October 1928. This time already in Itamar Ben-Avi's *Do'ar ha-Yom*, Aḥime'ir wrote that

our "Duce" should not be sad due to the fact that only a handful of people had gathered under his flag, for such is the way of the world: the minority shall rule the majority. Rule truly, either by the force of his arms or by the force of his faith. The "Duce" should organise here that handful of people who are able to obey him and establish the "National Guard". He should not spend time conquering the wide herd.²

Four weeks later, he used the same platform for a direct attack on the editor of his former newspaper, in a similar vein. "Mr. Glücksohn", he addressed the chief editor of *Ha-'Aretz*, "your articles find their resonance in the ears of the Philisters in our community, the majority". The political minority, however, "will not go with the Glücksohns". By "Philisters" Aḥime'ir referred to all factions and parties which did not adhere to Jabotinsky's political activism. But this wasn't actually a problem. "Please notice, Mr. Glücksohn", he wrote, "that the majority hasn't yet taken over the minority; for always, the vigorous and active minority is the one dominating the majority."³

Three years later, similar ideas were voiced in *Ha-'Am*. "For years", asserted Wolfgang von Weisl, "we carried the yoke of hatred and contempt" by other, non-Revisionist Zionists. "The current leadership [of the New Zionist Organisation] in Palestine... took the rein with one aim only: to guarantee the victory of a strong radicalism, loyal to its cause."⁴ After a brief review of the arguments and disputes within the Revisionist movement (between the Maximalists and their "moderate" opponents within the movement),⁵ Von Weisl clarifies that "we, radical Revisionists, have a secret: we do not necessarily find interest in regulations, forms and formulations, but do what suits us and what we perceive as useful for the people". When the Maximalists are convinced that the whole revisionist movement is full of enthusiasm,

we have the right—even as a minority—to pronounce: the Flag of Zion is in our camp. And neither Judas Macabeas nor Nehemia have waited for the decisions of any congress....⁶

During the same month, the Biryonim made similar assertions, and expressed them even more clearly. “In these moments of rage, throw out of your mind the modern doctrines—and remember the doctrine of the ancient legislator: eye for eye, tooth for tooth.”⁷ Von Weisl, commenting about Revisionist success in the elections for the Zionist Assembly a month later, agreed with the general idea, but preferred to see it as a new rather than an old one. “A new era has come”, he wrote, “with new ideas and new people—who carry it with them.”⁸ The same day, *Ha-`Am* published the list of Revisionist candidates for the Zionist Congress. Jabotinsky was first on the list; Grünberg was second and Von Weisl third (Aḥime’ir and Yevin were not on the list).⁹

And indeed, the Revisionists succeeded considerably in these elections to the Zionist Congress, which *Ha-`Am* portrayed as a battle of a few determined, devoted activists against the rich and mighty majority. “We had no Aparatus, no one on the payroll”, read its editorial,

all our work was done by volunteers—and this is how we managed to defeat the Red thugs. The volunteers won without money, no checks and compliments, but only with the power of their belief, bound to an idea.¹⁰

The atmosphere was that of a new beginning. “We talk to the courage, to the shining of this people’s stubbornness, which did not disappear for millennia”, he explained the rationale of Revisionist *avant-garde*. Although this is only a small glimmer, Revisionists “are here to fan this shining of stubbornness and this twinkle of rebellion into a fire... even if everybody will be ‘practical’, for compromise and liquidation—we still say ‘no!’”.¹¹ As Pentecost was approaching, Joshua Yevin asserted that the time was ripe for new laws, using a paraphrase on the giving of the Ten Commandments in Mount Sinai. The fate of Zionism, he argued, was at that historical moment

similar to that of the generation exiting Egypt. *The first Tablets of Zionism* were damaged, because the leaders of this generation bowed to a Calf, exchanging the holiness of the idea with the rite of gold. Now we, the collective Moses, make new Tablets, inscribed with the *commandments of Zionism*, instead of the *first tablets, which were broken*.

The parallel was clear: the majority among the Zionists were sinners, while Revisionists, like Moses, were the only righteous ones. The Revisionist (relative) success in the Zionist elections was parallel to the Sons of Israel’s

rejection of the Golden Calf. “From a stubborn tiny group we became the movement of the people... the people is with us, and his being with us commits us to the fate of the movement.”¹²

Aḥime’ir agreed with this notion of the emergence of a new era in Zionism. “We do not have any hatred towards these living mummies” he replied with forgiveness of the reactions of the liberals and the socialists towards the closing of the newspaper in the weeks before the Zionist Congress in Basel. “We wish them a sweet slumber, for they deserted the battle and succumbed to the indifference of old age—so let them rest.”¹³

The days of euphoria, however, did not last for long. “Revisionist Delegates Leave the Congress” read the newspaper’s headline in mid-July. “The Congress Rejects Revisionist Proposal Regarding the State of the Jews; Jabotinsky and all Revisionist Delegates Tear their Member-Cards”. The political battle between Revisionists and socialists within the Zionist Organisation escalated: Grossman suggested a resolution declaring the foundation of a Jewish state as Zionism’s final aim; Arlosoroff suggested this issue not be put to vote, and this proposal was accepted by a majority vote. “A member of the Revisionist Party, from Basel, removes the blue-white flag from the Congress’ stage, since it is no longer a Zionist one”, read the report about the congress. “Jabotinsky publicly tears his delegate card. Within much ado, the Revisionist leave the Congress’ venue”—thus breaking away from the Zionist Organisation, after the majority of delegates rejected their proposed political plan.¹⁴

In return, Yevin published an appeal for rescuing Zionism. “Six years ago, when Jabotinsky established the Revisionist movement, it numbered just a small handful of people”, he reminded his readers. And so it was also

at the end of 1929, when a small group of people gathered around the revisionist *Do’ar ha-Yom*... we were just a tiny group versus Weizmann’s presidency, with its huge Apparatus and aligned press—and still, the leaders of Weizmann-Zionism noticed, with their excellent collaborationist senses, that we posed the great danger to their mere existence.¹⁵

Yevin recalled that “there was not a single conspiracy or filthy trick” the liberal and socialist Zionists did not use against Revisionism but they had achieved a lot with their activists:

the Brit-Shalomic snake was crushed... and our movement became the teacher and the guide, the pioneer of all streams of Zionism—even of those who oppose us clearly and publicly.

The ideas and initiatives which had been “cooked” in the Revisionist laboratory, Yevin claimed, were later “stolen” by other parties.¹⁶ The leadership of the Zionist organisation at that time were “Sanbalats”: a direct parallel with those who had collaborated with the Roman rulers during the first century AD. These non-Revisionist Zionists—“masters of Jesuit tactics, the treacherous heroes of petty internal politics”—have tried to “break our movement from within”. But the Maximalists “know that ours is not the way of compromise and mitigation... no way!” Revisionists always wanted their movement to be a big one, but shall not hesitate to do as Gideon did in order to “purge our movement, whose strength is in its revolutionary *esprit*, not in tactical compromise and combinations”.¹⁷

The idealisation of a violent act of a minority was praised in *Ha-'Am* through literary means as well. In his short story about Rabbi John and “Yabne and its Wise Men”, Uri’el Halperin showed how the rabbinical method of adapting to Roman rule—which became the basis of Jewish political practice since the first century AD—actually failed, since not only the extremist warriors but the moderate Sanhedrin had to go into exile too, finally. His conclusion was that the Rabbis were not better than the Zealots, led by Abba Siqra.¹⁸

A certain kind of social Darwinism could be traced in a global context as well as in Maximalist writings. “That involved cruelty, barbarism—but at least an honest, frank one. It was a clear expression of the bestial instinct of healthy man: to ‘remove’ the weak creatures who disturb him”, Yevin wrote about Somerset Maugham’s play “Sacred Flame”.¹⁹ Yevin understood Maugham’s attitude as justifying the killing of sick and invalid people—and criticised its motives rather than its ends: while ancient Spartans were also killing their invalid babies, they were not trying to claim they are doing it for the benefit of the children, but rather of the society. In Maugham’s play, on the contrary, the killing is “hypocritical”, since it is claimed to be committed in order to “free one from his own suffering”. Yevin criticised hypocrisy, not the killing itself.²⁰

Back in the internal Hebrew political arena, Aḥime’ir took examples from political movements he despised—in order to imitate not their ideology but their methods. “Lenin’s Bolshevism, from its beginning, was not a party in the regular sense of the term”, he wrote in his long article “The Aims of Revisionist Zionism”. Bolshevism, according to Aḥime’ir, was

an “Order”, whose members were tightly connected. Bolshevism did not aspire to be a majority, but rather followed the minority... it was a united movement, like Masonry in its beginning, in the 18th century.²¹

The spirit of a small yet determined political *avant-garde* resonated also in the editorial of *Ha-`Am*’s 100th issue. “We also want to be loved, and our voice to be heard within the hatred surrounding us”, it said. “But we shall not sacrifice tomorrow’s victory for cheap popularity today. We do not ask what will the masses think, for we do not court the people but rather work in its service.”²²

Ha-`Am was closed at the end of 1931, but was soon replaced by *Hazit ha-`Am*. As 5000 dunams of lands owned by the Jewish National Fund were confiscated by the government, *Hazit ha-`Am* had no doubt: the Jewish Agency did not try to oppose the act, thus collaborating with the British against Zionism. Furthermore, the event did not receive the appropriate attention by the other newspapers. *Hazit ha-`Am* was raging, making it an issue at the end of January and the beginning of February 1932. To the claims that Zionist policy was conducted by representatives elected by members of the Zionist organisation, the newspaper replied that

Yes—we are the representatives of the people. In vain will our adversaries point to the number of votes, “only 10,000 out of so and so thousands”... for *we* are the legal representatives of the millions, even if we did not receive our mandate by the ballot or by an election campaign. Our mandate has a different genealogy, more noble and considerable: we received the mandate by the people’s tragedy, its furor and its hope; this mandate was imposed upon us by the years of blood, shame and tears—from Hebron in 1929 to the White Paper... This whole story of rage and pain is the one that gives us the right to speak in the name of the entire people, even those who deny—due to their fear—what they really think, thus speaking against us... we, the “vociferous” furious, are representing the people—not those who blur and try to tranquilize. For everybody—everybody, including those who are silent and are afraid to speak because they worry for their bread, their job, their public position—deep in their heart they are with us.²³

The article’s closing remark left no room for doubt: “We are the *only* representative of the people of Israel”.²⁴

Hazit ha-`Am claimed to be the voice of the whole community once again after the quarrel at the opening ceremony of the Chair for International Peace at the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus. The clear

demand that Magnes resign was presented as “The Community’s Demand” on the newspaper’s front-page headline.²⁵

A few weeks later, Yevin wrote that regarding the Bentwich event, the press knows “very well that ‘the savage Revisionists’ have neither an army nor a navy”, because the whole event was carried out by just 15 or 20 youngsters at the most. And still,

a handful of 15 youngsters, who insisted on protecting the people’s reputation, was so influential, that the whole anti-Zionist front, from the “Near East” to the “Jüdische Rundschau”, was shocked. Our resistance movement is very very [*sic!*] dangerous for the Sanbalats.²⁶

After Aḥime’ir was jailed for the quarrel on Mount Scopus, Jabotinsky praised him. “My aim is positive: a plea in favour of ‘Adventurism’, defending something which is hated by all serious people, something only young boys dream about”, the Revisionist leader wrote. One cannot exactly define this thing, but one may name its identifying marks, he asserted: “these marks are: first of all—an action made mostly by individuals—of a single person on his own account and responsibility”, for on a mass scale “it cannot be organised, or—at least—not often”. Secondly, it is a way of action which entails danger, “having more chances to fail than to succeed”.²⁷ This is why “all the serious people consider it always as foolish nonsense”, but Jabotinsky clearly wants “to stand up for it”. At the beginning, “these would be very few people, usually very young”, and the majority would defame them as “naughty children” and “Avanturists”. But the people in Israel “should not worry”, according to Jabotinsky, for “one by one you will join this new path”. Abba Aḥime’ir is an example of such a positive “Adventurist”. His fierce demonstrations against the census and against Bentwich, which got him into prison more than once, made Jabotinsky call him “our teacher and our master”.

Jabotinsky kept on expressing his support for the Maximalists during that month. “With some feeling of helplessness I behold the efforts of this tiny band” wrote Jabotinsky about the editorial board of *Ḥazit ha-’Am*. The public tends to ridicule it, labelling its insistence to spread the Revisionist message as “boisterous”, demanding deeds and actions rather than words. But the public, according to Jabotinsky,

forgets one thing: that speaking is also an action, maybe even more real than all other actions. Cities were ruined and shall be ruined in the future as well, but what some “boisterous” people were “shouting” in the desert thousands of years ago is still vivid and active. The universe was created by a word; by a word the world will be improved.²⁸

While cautiously refraining from supporting explicitly their physical violent acts, Jabotinsky did show his consent to the idea that Aḥime’ir and his fellows are a small *avant-garde* carrying out important work, comparable with that of ancient prophets:

A newspaper is a great thing; no job is more exalted than that of the journalist... the origins of the journalist’s trade are ancient and holy... Who were the first who taught us always to interfere in others’ matters, and judge publics and nations who never chose us to be their judges? The publicist’s work is the heritage of Israel’s prophets.²⁹

And indeed, the newspaper praised the politics of national selfishness. “Washington, who is excessively wrapped in romance, was actually a very realistic Yankee”, Aḥime’ir ruled:

People of the eighteenth century—the century of agnosticism and iconoclasm—were not familiar with the mystique of fanaticism. Realist Washington inspired future American history with the politics of national egoism, politics of “what do I care” in matters concerning another nation.³⁰

From Washington’s policy, Yevin developed one to be invoked in Palestine. “Zionism starts on the very day it begins to search for its justification within itself, not in some kind of external ‘consent’ and approval of the ‘landowner’”, he asserted. “Zionism starts in that moment it recognises itself without any need for external argumentation, by the sovereignty of its idea; because only an idea which has *a priori* a royal crown in the hearts of its bearers would ever reach a worldly, manifest, royal crown”.³¹ And Zionism, Yevin thought, should be led not by the masses but by a minority. “Isn’t it a minority, a small and well-consolidated minority, knowing what it is doing, which has carried out all the great things in world’s history?”, he asked. By parliamentary votes and majority decisions “one may levy income tax or prohibit the drinking of wine”, but “states and peoples were never created by votings in parliaments”.³²

The critique of “small landowners” and the kind of “petty politics” attributed to them was also shared by Abraham Stern. The emotions “of the small landowner or *petit bourgeois*” who spares and pities his property and “refuses to put it in danger through war” was the thing that “destroyed both German social-democracy and *petite-bourgeoise* France”, he asserted. This adherence to prosperity and a refusal to put one’s life in danger

is not the law of the Jungle. Kipling says that in the jungle there are sacred laws kept among the animals, better than the [laws] prevailing among humans. The global reality since the dawn of mankind is a reality of constant struggle between one man and his fellow, strong and weak, old and young. The stronger rules. Might is Right.³³

By “might” Stern did not refer to economic resilience. “Undoubtedly, neither settlement nor construction provide a steadfast basis for the people’s right on its land or its reign upon it”, he argued. “The Indians were sitting in north America and the Incas in its south and the Maoris in New Zealand: they didn’t only cultivate their lands, but also controlled them and established splendid civilizations.” Then, however, “foreigners arrived, took them over, burned their cities and plundered everything”. Stern’s lesson is clear, and formulated as an exact opposite to Mapay’s socialist praxis: “construction and building are justified only when they are meant for war and conquest”.³⁴

Having placed his group in opposition to the socialist and liberal majority (the one made of “constructionists” and “landowners”), Stern went another step forward, disputing the very legitimacy of that majority. Under the subtitle “present tactics” he wrote that

a movement which wishes to redeem *the people* must be free from the chains of the community’s reality. It cannot and should not be dependent upon temporary questions and [changing] location.

He further noted that one should “not aspire to seize the power in a democratic way”.³⁵ “One of two”, he concluded. “Either justice is needed, or force is needed. If justice—than what authority did ‘Amaleq have? If force—then there’s no need of justice. One has to create force.”³⁶

CONCLUSION

Both parts of the ninth mobilising emotion can be found in the writings of the Maximalists: the belief that a small, determined minority should lead the people, and that it could do so without any legal restraints such as social norms or laws. However, the degree to which this idea was implemented varied: while Wolfgang von Weisl, for example, only implied it, Abraham Stern extended it to violent underground activities.

Practically, the Maximalists were twice (and, in the case of Stern, thrice) a minority: first, they believed to be a part of a small people in comparison to other peoples (“Arabs”) and to the great British Empire. Secondly, they were representing the Revisionists, a small political faction within the Hebrew political community, carrying “the yoke of hatred and contempt”, as Wolfgang von Weisl described it. Last but not least, Stern’s group became even a smaller—and persecuted—group after splitting from the Revisionist camp.

From an early stage in his career as a publicist, Ahime’ir made the distinction between moral relations among human beings and political relations between societies, arguing that “politics” should not be mixed with “ethics” or “aesthetics”. By this he made clear that political action should not be bound to ethical rules (let alone aesthetic considerations). In a similar vein, Wolfgang von Weisl worked towards guaranteeing “the victory of a strong radicalism”, without any democratic procedures or decisions accepted by any majority.

As in other aspects reviewed in this work, here too Stern was simply consistent, marching politically along the path projected by the aforementioned Maximalists. The mechanism behind his turning to active violence was the simple rule of radicalisation: the direr the straits in which the nation found itself and the wider the gap between dreams of revival and actual political conditions, the more extreme are the means taken by the political *avant-garde* which claims to remain true to the “pure” idea.

Parliamentarism and democracy were both perceived as obsolete remnants of the nineteenth century, which was one of many equal individuals, while the twentieth century was the century of masses and individual leaders; but still, during the 1930s the Maximalists always tried to remain a part of the Zionist political sphere—albeit an oppositional, rebellious one. Thus, Joshua Yevin claimed, the ideas and initiatives which had been “cooked” in the Revisionist laboratory, were later “stolen” by other parties (an assumption which actually became the basis for another claim, that the Revisionists were used by other Zionists).

What political system could suite the Hebrew nation in the Maximalists' opinion? Since the Maximalists did not get a hold of the Revisionist movement altogether, their plans were phrased and presented mainly as a part of internal Revisionist arguments and disputes, not as a wide, formal, public platform. It is possible, however, to discern some clear elements of their desired political system. First, a strong executive, headed by a leader with very wide authorities (specifically, the designated leader was Jabotinsky; after his death, some of his followers saw Stern as the anticipated leader). Second and just as important was the dissolving (or at least considerable weakening) of the legislature, while internalising any possible differences of opinion into the executive—where the aforementioned leader has the last and definitive word. The Maximalists attempted to do this within the Revisionist movement and failed: as a matter of fact, attempts to promote these two elements were thwarted by Jabotinsky himself, who refused to either become a dictator within his own movement or to abolish the Revisionists' elected bodies. Last but not least, on the economic sphere, the Maximalists favoured a corporatist national economy, where—in



Fig. 10.1 Abba Ahime'ir next to a wall with the inscription “do not take part in the census!”, January 1931. Courtesy of the Jabotinsky Institute in Israel

order to support the national cause—disputes between workers and employers should be dissolved by a central authoritative instance, not by any strikes or other measures of workers' organisation. On this issue Jabotinsky was rather cooperative, but the popularity of the workers' federation within the Hebrew community (the *Histadrut*) as well as the relative strength of socialist parties within the Zionist association hindered any such pro-corporatist achievement (Fig. 10.1).

Maximalists and activists, beginning with Aḥime'ir, continuously experienced a tension between the ideal of being a small political *avant-garde* and the desire to become a leading, ruling group. This tension was severed only by Stern, who was willing to become a total outcast and outlaw. On the literary level, there was very little difference—if any—between the Maximalists' declaration that the Revisionist movement was the legal representative of millions, although it was never elected, and Stern's assertion that a redemption movement must be free from the "chains of the community's reality". Stern was just ready, amidst the storm of the Second World War, to do what his Maximalist political predecessors were not.

* * *

NOTES

1. Abba Aḥime'ir, "Southern Tirol", *Ha-ʿAretz*, 13.12.1927. At the end of the articles, the editors added a footnote distancing from the text, stating that "this is the opinion of our sharp journalist", not the opinion of the newspaper.
2. Aḥime'ir, "Current Issues (From the Notebook of a Fascist): Regarding the Arrival of our Duce", *Do'ar ha-Yom*, 8.10.1928.
3. Aḥime'ir, "Current Issues (From the Notebook of a Fascist): An Answer to Mr. Glücksohn", *Do'ar ha-Yom*, 4.11.1928. "Philisters" is used here as a derogatory name for petit-bourgeois.
4. Von Weisl, "The Fear of Bravery", *Ha-ʿAm*, 9.4.1931
5. *Ibid.* Among the moderates Von Weisl specifically names Grossmann and Lichtheim, while calling his faction "radical". In another place in this article he refers to "evolutionary revisionism" versus "revolutionary revisionism".
6. *Ibid.*
7. Brit ha-Biryonim, "Eye for Eye, Tooth for Tooth", *Ha-Biryon* 5 (April 1931). An original is kept at the CZA. PR-3693. Cf. also Exodus 21.24.
8. Von Weisl, "The First Victories", *Ha-ʿAm*, 24.5.1931

9. "List of Revisionist Candidates for the Zionist Congress", *Ha-'Am*, 24.5.1931.
10. Ḥayal ha-'Am ("Soldier of the People"), "The Elections to the Congress: Victory of the Revisionists", *Ha-'Am*, 27.5.1931.
11. Joshua Yevin, "Like the First Tablets", *Ha-'Am*, 3.7.1931.
12. *Ibid.* All along the article, Yevin is using paraphrases to the language of the book of Exodus.
13. Bar Giora (Abba Aḥime'ir), "When *Ha-'Am* Was Closed", *Ha-'Am*, 7.7.1931.
14. All headlines and titles are from *Ha-'Am*, 14.7.1931.
15. Yevin, "For Rescuing Zionism", *Ha-'Am*, 21.7.1931.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. Uri'el Halperin, "The Scroll of the Zealots", *Ha-'Am*, 22.7.1931.
19. Yevin, "Ha-Bimma on the Plain of Life", *Ha-'Am*, 26.7.1931.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Aḥime'ir, "The Aims of Revisionist Zionism", *Ha-'Am*, 5.8.1931.
22. "People's Soldier" (editorial), "100th Issue", *Ha-'Am*, 7.8.1931.
23. Yevin, "We are the Representatives of the People", *Ḥazit ha-'Am*, 5.2.1932.
24. *Ibid.* Original emphasis.
25. "The Community's Demand: Magnes—Resign!" (no author), *Ḥazit ha-'Am*, 19.2.1932.
26. Yevin, "We Shall Take Care for Ourselves, Jews", *Ḥazit ha-'Am*, 1.3.1932.
27. Jabotinsky, "On 'Adventurism'", *Ḥazit ha-'Am*, 11.3.1932.
28. Jabotinsky, "The People's Front", *Ḥazit ha-'Am*, 22.3.1932.
29. *Ibid.* In the same issue (on the same page, actually), was published for the first time a hymn containing three strophes, which did not yet bear a name. This song soon became the youth movement's anthem. Z.J. (Ze'ev Jabotinsky), "From Beytar's Songs", *Ḥazit ha-'Am*, 22.3.1932.
30. Aḥime'ir, "Washington", *Ḥazit ha-'Am*, 22.3.1932 (this article had three parts: the first appeared on 18.3.1932 and the last on 25.3.1932).
31. Yevin, "Our Simple Truth: We Begin from A", *Ḥazit ha-'Am*, 17.6.1932.
32. Yevin, "On the Sacredness of the Minority", *Ḥazit ha-'Am*, 30.8.1932.
33. Stern, draft in his notebook (probably written during 1941). CZA A 549\65-70. Rudyard Kipling's poem "The Law of the Jungle" (from *The Jungle Book*, first published 1894) refers to laws and rules among wolves. While the comparison between men and wolves reminds of the Hobbes's usage of the phrase *homo homini lupus*, the poem also contains some sentences preaching for fairness among animals; neither does Kipling mention any "holy" laws. The last two sentences are brought in Aramaic (originally: רבג המלאך לל [sic]) and in English (originally *Might is Right*).

34. Stern, draft in his notebook (probably written during 1941). *CZA A 549\65-70*.
35. Stern, draft in his notebook (probably written during 1941). *CZA A 549\65-75*. Emphasis in the original.
36. Stern, draft in his notebook (probably written during 1941). *CZA A 549\65-77*.



Conclusion: A Hebrew Fascist Movement in Palestine

We have fully reviewed the nine mobilising emotions and those activists whom we consider as standard-bearers of these emotions among the Revisionist Zionists. We can now assess to what extent the writings of each of these activists corresponded to the mobilising emotions. Table 11.1 summarises our presentation of the mobilising emotions in the writings of the six activists.

The “cumulative sum” of their expression can give us a comprehensive portrait of the fascist tendencies of this group. We can see that all six activists shared a feeling of a looming political crisis and took part in the cult of a particular leader (be it Benito Mussolini, Ze’ev Jabotinsky or Abraham Stern, as seen by himself and some of his disciples).

Most activists expressed a fear of social decline, a feeling of victimhood and a desire for stronger social integration. Most of them glorified war and combat and supported the right of a chosen group (sometimes a nation, often their particular movement within that nation) to dominate its political sphere.

Some activists demonstrated more emotions than others. Ben Avi was the “weakest” in this sense: in his writings one could trace only four of the mobilising emotions.¹ In Abraham Stern, in contrast, one may blatantly detect—within a very short period of time—expressions of all nine emotions.

This list contains only the best-known public figures of the time who overtly expressed their support first for the Fascist regime in Italy, then for fascism as a political ideology overall and as a political system which might suit the Hebrew nation as well. Distinct from each other as they were,

Table 11.1 Nine emotions, six activists

<i>Crisis</i>	<i>Primacy of the group</i>	<i>Victimhood</i>	<i>Dread of decline</i>	<i>Integration</i>	<i>Leader's cult</i>	<i>Leader's instincts</i>	<i>Glorification of violence</i>	<i>Right of the chosen</i>
Ben Abi	✓			✓	✓			✓
Alhime'ir	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Von Weisl	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	
Grünberg	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
Yevin	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Stern	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

these figures did not live in a political void or operated alone. Although no formal fascist party was established in Palestine, these activists did create together a political-intellectual-social network. The central part of the relations and the contacts within the network is portrayed in Fig. 11.1.

Naturally, there is a quantitative and a qualitative imbalance among the various figures mentioned in this work. Quantitatively, much more material of Aḥime'ir is available than of Stern, for example—be it just because the former earned his bread as a journalist and an editor, let alone the fact that the latter's life was considerably shorter. Qualitatively, Aḥime'ir and Yevin wrote a lot of journalistic material with clear statements, and adhered to their extreme views for a longer time than did Ben Avi, for example. Others—like Grünberg and Stern—stuck to their extreme views but wrote less, or in a different genre (i.e. poetry rather than detailed newspaper articles). Still another group comprises those who wrote a great deal, but distanced themselves gradually from the clear Maximalist and pro-fascist views they held: such are Ben Avi and Von Weisl, who either moderated their political views and plans or left the Revisionist movement. All of these persons, however, contributed their part—major or minor—to the intricate web of Hebrew fascism in Palestine during the inter-war period.

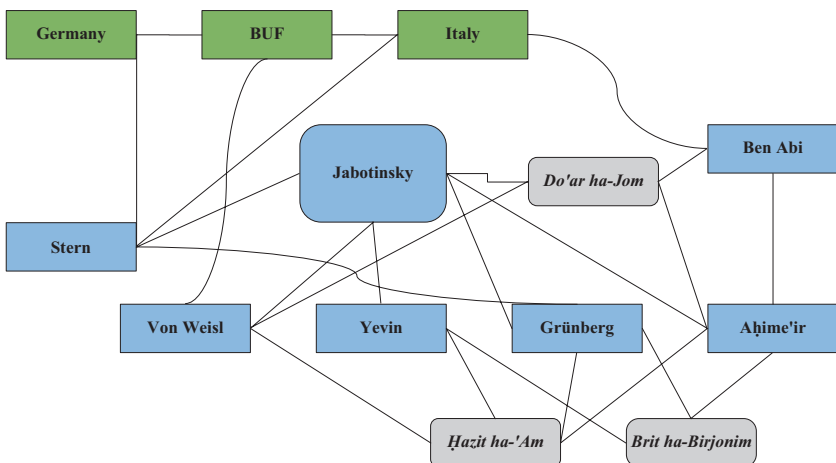


Fig. 11.1 The core of the fascist network. *Blue* persons, *gray* journals, *green* international affiliates. *Straight lines* mark direct working contacts, *curved lines* mark remote or weak contacts

A bothering question—mentioned already at the introduction to this book—is whether Maximalist Revisionists indeed supported fascism as a political ideology, or just expressed fondness towards it as a tactical method of approaching Italy, whose international interests were perceived as a possible counterweight to those of Britain. In this respect, one should remember that European fascist regimes had an influence exceeding beyond the immediate political sphere of their respective states, as they curved the space of inter-war politics around them away from liberal democracy. In other words: these regimes gave followers in other countries not only inspiration, but also a certain level of political legitimacy.²

Curiously, the difference between autochthonic, ideological fascism and anti-British and pro-Italian sentiments ran partially in parallel to the division between those Revisionists and sympathisers of Jabotinsky who emigrated to Palestine, and those who were born there or at least grew up there. To some extent these were rather the immigrants—Von Weisl, Yevin, Aḥime'ir, Yevin—who tended more towards developing genuine fascism, while native Ben Avi was more of a “practical” pro-Italianist. This should not surprise us, as the immigrants were reared in Europe and went through experiences similar to those that had formed other European contemporaries: Wolfgang von Weisl's military service during the First World War and Abba Aḥime'ir's occupation with Spengler's historiosophy are two examples of this. Those reared in Palestine, on the other hand, usually saw their main aim in the native national struggle, which made them seek Italian support in their anti-British contest: Ben Avi's admiration of Mussolini, which was a part of his admiration of Italian nationalism in general, is an example of this. Stern is a special case (and will be discussed below).

However, the tendency to emulate fascist Italy had both practical reasons and ideological motives. Practically, Italy, as a rival of Britain in the Mediterranean, was seen as a possible ally in the battle against the British mandate. Ideologically, fascism was perceived as a method to strengthen genuine national revival.

These two tendencies, one should say, were not unconditionally intertwined: Jabotinsky, for instance, saw Italy as a political ally, but objected to the fascist tendencies within his movement. Revisionist Beytar students in Civitavecchia were not severely indoctrinated by fascism. On the other hand, others, like Von Weisl and Grünberg, saw Italy as a role model but did not necessarily seek direct alliance with it.

Yet, more often than not, the search for a practical ally and the admiration of fascist ideology were tightly bound. An example of such a mixed practical and ideological admiration of Italian fascism can be found in Aḥime'ir's writings. In May 1931, he used the term "Rome and Jerusalem" in order to symbolise not a contradiction but a similarity of interests and ideologies. Seeing Jerusalem as a symbol of Judaism and Rome as one of Christianity, Aḥime'ir asserted that "modern antisemitism fights against Rome and Jerusalem alike". In his view, three cities were fighting against Jerusalem at that time: Moscow, Mecca and London. Moscow and its socialism was the most dangerous, followed by Mecca as a symbol of Islamic political ideology. The "rulers of contemporary London", however, "were educated by books full of hatred towards Jerusalem and Rome, and love towards Mecca".³ Aḥime'ir claimed that

considering our defeats and disappointments of Moscow, Mecca and London, the time has come to pay our attention to "Rome". Rome of the last ten years showed us an example for curing the illness of Socialism: it raised a banner now followed by many. One does not have to be a fascist in order to agree that the Italian Fascism succeeded in cleaning the air in the whole West from faulty social assumptions, but this is not the main point. Rome and Jerusalem symbolize two ancient peoples, that of Italy and that of Judea, the two proletarian peoples (although not equally), the two people which hang their hopes on migration, for whom migration is a question of life and death: in Italy there are a few millions of redundant Italians, and the whole people of Judea is redundant in Europe.⁴

His conclusion is that in spite of past suspicions and bad eyes between Jerusalem and Rome, one should "dissolve this fog, for our mutual benefit".

A review of Kolitz's biography of Mussolini, written by Šalom Rosenfeld and published in *Ha-Yarden*, went in a similar vein. That biography, Rosenfeld asserted, reflected not only affection towards Italy as a political opponent of Britain, but more than that: support of the person himself.⁵ Fascism became a curse, according to Rosenfeld, a filthy word of defamation. But "are we really allowed to reject just like that, single-handedly, this entire doctrine and its creator without learning and knowing it first? It has so many healthy and reasonable elements!" The reader of that book, Rosenfeld argued, will be like a child who sees a policeman in civil clothes for the first time, learning that the policeman is not a bad person but a human being. "Day and night we are fed with the idea that fascism is false

and impure, and Mussolini is ‘the policeman’—and suddenly you get closely acquainted with the policeman, in his civil clothes—like he really is—and many things become clear and understandable.” Indeed, “the author of this article had found in this book some sentences and thoughts he dislikes”, but is nonetheless happy for this opportunity to learn about a new movement. One should, Rosenfeld wrote, investigate fascism “the same way one investigates other movements”.⁶

That book was probably the first monograph about fascism to be published in Hebrew, but intellectuals and scholars in Palestine were fluent in German, Italian, French and English. They maintained constant contact with Italy and other European centres. Even if we attribute the admiration of fascism in the beginning of the 1920s to a common and natural bewilderment when encountering new and yet unknown things, the appreciation thereof in the mid-1930s was not due to any incidental surprise or temporary excitement. The Hebrew right in the 1930s already knew quite well what fascism—its Italian version, at least—was all about. By the time the book and the review were written, in 1936—14 years after the “March on Rome” and more than a decade after Mussolini took over the entire political system in Italy, and considering the close commercial, cultural and academic relations between Palestine and Italy, the Hebrew public—the educated parts thereof, at the very least—was well acquainted with fascism.

To be sure, not only Revisionists have expressed fondness of Mussolini, affinity towards Italy and—to a smaller extent—support for Italian Fascism. “Mussolini is undoubtedly the most famous personality in the world”, said Naḥum Sokolow, chairperson of the Zionist Organisation’s central committee in an interview he gave to an Italian newspaper that was translated and cited quite broadly in *Ha-Aretz* in 1927. Sokolow opined that Mussolini still hadn’t received “a proper literary appreciation by the great writers abroad”, hence everything written about him thus far was biased. Referring directly to one of Fascism’s basic characteristics, Sokolow claimed that “by his romantic emotion”, Mussolini “is the symbol of nationalism, and as such he understands the secret of Israel’s revival”.⁷

Sokolow referred not only to Mussolini, but to the Fascist movement as well, arguing that

Fascism gained bad publicity from Italian writers abroad... the Fascists didn’t do much in order to explain [themselves] and deny this [bad publicity]. The question of parliamentarism and the way it was solved by fascism, interests the entire world. I deny [the assumption] that Zionsim hates Fascism. We are only enemies of the Antisemites”.⁸

Support for fascism, hence, was not a secret—even without Italy, and purely on a comparative basis. Another clear example thereof was provided five years later by Eliyahu Cohen, Aḥime'ir's lawyer. "Had it not been for Hitler's antisemitism", he said in court in one of his client's trials, "we would not have opposed his ideology. Hitler saved Germany."⁹

Indeed, something that we nowadays more or less identify generically with fascism came to be perceived by a large number of sympathetic contemporaries as an international, epoch-defining force in the inter-war period after the consolidation of Mussolini's and Hitler's regimes. Whether the two regimes met or not the benchmarks of subsequent political definitions and models of "fascism" matters in this aspect less than what contemporary actors and observers saw or wanted to see in them. Altogether, a broad distinction was increasingly operative on the level of perception in the inter-war years, pitting Italy and National Socialist Germany against both liberal democracies and the Soviet Union—and admittedly against liberalism and communism in general.¹⁰

Another point which should be addressed is the one of change within the movement, which Paxton calls "the notorious instability of fascist membership": people who were devoted fascists at one stage of their life were not fascist any more in a later stage, and *vice versa*.¹¹ This phenomenon is just as valid for Hebrew fascism in Palestine during the examined period (from the March on Rome in 1922 to the murder of Abraham Stern in 1942). Aḥime'ir's move from moderate socialism to liberalism to fascism provides us with an example of movement in one direction; Wolfgang von Weisl, who became a moderate nationalist and later joined liberal circles can serve as an example of the opposite.

"We need strict uniformity within the leadership" which should be "solely in the hands of Jabotinsky", Von Weisl argued in September 1932.¹² At the same time, he presented himself as "a religious man, cherishing the commandments of the Bible".¹³ Three years later, however, he tried to contact the British Union of Fascists in order to forge a political alliance; in 1940, his voice was already one of the loudest calling for conscription to the British military to fighting against the Axis. Later, during the 1950s, the once uncompromising nationalist fighter left the Herut party because he supported the compensations agreement with Adenauer's Germany, an agreement Menahem Begin rejected totally. Politically involved until his last day, Von Weisl then joined the General Zionists.¹⁴ As David Roberts suggests, fascism—an uncertain open-ended dynamic with

no fixed essence—could only have been a moving object of attraction for outsiders. There was always scope for outsiders to see in fascism what they wanted to see and to take what they wanted to take from it.¹⁵

Like his fellow activists who were mentioned in this work, Von Weisl was a member of a cohort of European political activists who came of age at a specific moment of European history. This was a generation who survived the Great War just to find out it had been betrayed. Coming out of the trenches, it discovered, in the words of Emilio Gentile, that “the European man, the man of modernity, on the very moment of apotheosis of his civilisation, turned into a barbarian capable of inhumane ferocity”.¹⁶

The disappointment that followed the hopes cultivated by modernity, liberalism and progress was evident in Palestine, too. “By chance, Zionism came to the world during the blossom time of one of the shallowest ideas ever to rule the world—the idea of progressive liberalism... these ideas of progressive liberalism were part and parcel of a belief that the world is progressing: slowly and gradually, but progressing”, wrote Joshua Yevin, another war veteran, who witnessed the Great War as a physician in the Russian army. That war, then,

buried the progressive-liberal idea eternally, under the piles of its ten million casualties and the horrors of cities destroyed by fire and sword. It turned out, that the world is not at all advancing towards the prevalence of justice. The number of atrocities and acts of horror committed by the strong person upon the weaker did not decrease, but even increased with the world’s technical progress.¹⁷

Scarred, horrified and betrayed by the political establishments who had sent them to the battlefields, young people such as Yevin and Von Weisl were the building blocks of fascist movements all around Europe. Naturally, not all veterans became fascists; but most fascist movements in inter-war Europe relied significantly upon members of that generation.

* * *

Special referral should be made to Abraham Stern, who became—as shown in Table 11.1—the fullest proponent of Hebrew fascism. Although Stern was a great admirer of the founder of the Hebrew Battalions during the First World War, he never became a member either of the Revisionist party

nor of the Beytar youth movement. The main bone of contention between Stern and Jabotinsky was the attitude towards active violence. Jabotinsky supported the founding of a national armed force, but as a part of a wider political establishment, under the control and the rule of the political establishment. Stern, on the other hand, opined that in an anti-colonial war, “a fighting organisation should be the sovereign bearer of the liberation movement, determine the political path, achieve the necessary means and conduct the war—totally by itself”.

I did not find any passage proving that Stern found justification for terrorism directly in Mazzini. However, the latter’s postulation that “in order to achieve the liberation of the homeland, means which are considered as barbaric during regular wars must also be used in order to frighten and destroy the enemy”¹⁸ evidently inspired the NMO’s activities. The assertion that “the birth of every nation was always bloody”¹⁹ was omnipresent in Stern’s writings.

On the (relatively) practical level, Stern and his colleagues wrote a draft for a treaty with Italy, in September 1940. Although the draft—which received the name “The Jerusalem Treaty”—was probably never seen by any Italian representative, it shows the direction in which the *NMO in Israel* wanted to go.²⁰ According to the proposed treaty, the Italian government was to help the *NMO in Israel* establish an armed military; assist it in its campaign to defeat the British army in Palestine; help it establish a Hebrew state and eliminate the Jewish diaspora by evacuating Jews to the “Hebrew Fatherland”; ensure the support of its allies—that is, Germany (and, theoretically, Japan)—and help the *NMO in Israel* establish diplomatic relations with them. The *NMO in Israel* itself gave up any demand for building an independent navy or air force; promised to leave the city of Haifa and its harbour to be an Italian enclave, and the Old City of Jerusalem be assigned to the Vatican; obligated itself to complete submission of its foreign policy to that of Italy; promised to grant Italian companies full exclusivity on foreign investments and finally committed itself to establishing a corporatist regime in the future Hebrew state.

This planned “Jerusalem Treaty” with Italy preceded Lubenczik’s mission to Beirut (described in the Introduction) by three months; hence the proposed treaty between Stern’s group and Germany was not only an opportunistic slip: to the German authorities the group suggested “educating and organising the Jewish manpower of Europe”, with the aim of wresting Palestine from the British Empire.

As a matter of fact, the unsuccessful attempts to ally with Italy and Germany were the merging of the two streams among Hebrew sympathisers of fascism: autochthonic fascists who sought to establish an independent nation state, and the admirers of fascism as a political idea. With these proposed treaties, the merging of autochthonic Hebrew fascism and anti-British liberating nationalism was complete. The *NMO in Israel* clearly presented itself not only as an integrationalist movement, but also as one “closely related with the totalitarian movements of Europe”:

The *NMO in Israel* is closely related with the totalitarian movements of Europe in its world view and structure. The fitness of the *NMO* to fight cannot be paralysed or seriously weakened, either by the reckless defensive measures of the Arabs and the British administration nor by the Jewish socialists.²¹

Here, too, Stern was simply consistent with the line drawn before him. The outbreak of the Second World War created a political constellation in which these two streams could merge into one. In this case, it was not only long adored Mussolini’s Italy, but Nazi Germany as well who became the practical allies of Hebrew nationalist liberty fighters in their battle against the British Empire.

As mentioned before, the attempt to ally with Nazi Germany did not bear fruit.²² With Stern dead and all other leaders in prison, the *NMO in Israel* actually ceased to exist.²³ It was only about a year later, after some leaders escaped from prison in September 1942, that the group managed to reorganise, now under the name “Israel’s Liberty Fighters”. This group, headed by Nathan Yellin-Mor, Israel Eldad and Isaac Šamir, adopted Stern’s figure as a symbol; its ideology and political practice, however, took a different course.

Altogether, it is interesting to note that in his last years Stern made yet another leap not only to the extreme part of the Zionist camp, but out of it. “A huge difference lies between the Zionists’ view and the view we hold”, he wrote during his terminal years.²⁴ The important thing here is not the exact difference between the different political views (referring to the exact validity of the Mandate regime and various international charters), but rather the explicit declaration by Stern that his group was no longer a part of any Zionist political community, as demonstrated by his naming “the Zionists” on one hand and “we” on the other.²⁵

How important politically was the Hebrew fascism, which not only was far away from taking the power in Palestine, but hardly became a significant political player beyond the circles of the Revisionist movement? A comparison with France might be useful here. As Zeev Sternhell shows, the writings of Pierre Andreu and his companions in *Combat* had a form of fascism already fully developed but subtle, cultured and relatively sophisticated, manifesting an ordered, elegant intellectual quality (to a degree “which caused some authorities to doubt if this particular school of thought was authentically fascist”). But this “salon fascism” was also a fascism—of people “who do not die the violent death of street agitators, but end their days as members of the Académie Française”. Nonetheless, their political stance was certainly fascist.²⁶

Like other generic fascisms, Hebrew fascism had its unique, distinctive characteristics. To name some of them: it emerged in a society under colonial rule, its standard bearers were both native born nationalists and European immigrants, and it never went beyond the initial stage of forming a small political movement. At the same time, this Hebrew fascist movement had many similarities with other contemporary fascist movements—a fact which clearly enables us to examine and comprehend it within a comparative scientific framework.

For obvious reasons, fascism has quite a bad reputation today. Some may argue that pointing out the existence of Hebrew fascism is an attempt to use this bad reputation in order to slander and defame. Referring to such accusations, one should note three things. First, that containing Hebrew fascism within a certain political group and limiting its existence to a precise period of time, demonstrates that not all Revisionists were fascists. Furthermore: some of those Revisionist activists who embraced fascism at a certain point, also changed their opinions and attitudes later on. Future critical analysis of Zionism in general and Revisionism particularly would have to find other, more accurate and sustainable frames and contexts than the simple labelling of an entire movement as “fascist”.

Secondly, acknowledging the existence of a fascist movement within the Hebrew society of the period under review provides us with yet another proof that the Hebrew society of that time was not necessarily different from other contemporary societies in its formation and political development. Fascists can be seen as political agents looking for new modes of history making, beyond those used and practised by the liberal mainstream.²⁷ In contrast to prevailing tendencies to research it from ideological points of view (be it “pro-”, “anti-” or “post-”), Hebrew history

in Palestine should be referred to as such, just like any other local history. Such historical meticulousness should lead us to a better understanding of our political past, free—as far as possible—of ideological disruptions.

Last but not least, in the same way that they do not appear out of nowhere, political movements usually also do not just evaporate overnight. Hebrew fascism, in the form examined and described in this work, ceased to exist in 1942. But what happened to this political-ideological current? Almost two decades ago, Stanley Payne named the Middle East as one of the world's regions in which one may concentrate in order to support functional analogues for comparative research—as fascism research in this part of the world is still modest in scope.²⁸ Various political winds have been blowing in Israel during the last few years, while this work was being written. Some political analysts claim that a new wave of fascism is gaining power within Israeli society. While these claims might be true, more often than not the term “fascist” is used semi-automatically, without proper differentiation and attention. Further examination of other, younger political groups in Israel—from after the period examined in this work until nowadays—might prove a good direction for further research. Fascism's dormant legacy is still with us; does this legacy take new, active manifestations?

Dan Tamir

Tel Aviv, March 2018

NOTES

1. A more thorough survey of *all* of Ben Avi's writings might reveal more expressions of the other five emotions. However, this work focused on those of his publications which were directly related to the Revisionist party.
2. Roger Griffin, “Foreword: Il ventennio parafascista? The Past and Future of a Neologism in Comparative Fascist Studies”, in António Costa Pinto and Aristotle Kallis (eds.), *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. viii–xix. Griffin suggests the word “parafascism” as a useful term for designating certain regimes and political forces in inter-war Europe.
3. Abba Ahime'ir, “Rome and Jerusalem”, *Ha-'Am*, 8.5.1931.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Šalom Rosenfeld, “Mussolini—With the Publication of the Book by Zwi Kolitz”, *Ha-Yarden*, 20.11.1936.
6. *Ibid.*

7. Isaac Bichowski, "Sokolow on Fascism and Zionism (a Letter from Italy)", *Ha-ʿAretz*, 4.11.1927.
8. *Ibid.* The Interview was taken from an Italian newspaper mentioned only by its initials, "g.d.l".
9. "A Fair End to the 'Preaching of Peace' by Magnes and Bentwich", *Ḥazit ha-ʿAm*, 6.5.1932.
10. António Costa Pinto and Aristotle Kallis, "Introduction", in António Costa Pinto and Aristotle Kallis (eds.), *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 1–10.
11. Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Knopf, 2004), p. 210.
12. Wolfgang von Weisl, "The Speech of Dr. Von Weisl", *Ḥazit ha-ʿAm*, 13.9.1932.
13. Von Weisl, "JNF and Revisionist Zionism", *Ḥazit ha-ʿAm*, 19.8.1932.
14. Ḥabib Knaʿan, "The Physician and the Writer: A Cannon Man and a Politician", *Ha-ʿAretz*, one week after Von Weisl's death. A copy kept at CZA AK-644.
15. David D. Roberts, "Fascism and the Framework for Interactive Political Innovation during the Era of the Two World Wars", in António Costa Pinto and Aristotle Kallis (eds.), *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 42–66.
16. Emilio Gentile, *L'apocalisse della modernità: La Grande Guerra per l'uomo nuovo* (Milano: Mondadori, 2008), p. 19. Some scholars, however, see the connection between the war generation and the violent political radicalisation of Inter-war Europe as less straightforward. See Mark Roseman, "War and the People: The Social Impact of Total War", in Charles Townshend (ed.), *The Oxford History of Modern War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) pp. 280–302.
17. Joshua Yevin, "Our Simple Truth: We Begin from A", *Ḥazit ha-ʿAm*, 17.6.1932.
18. Mazzini's declaration is quoted by Eugenio di Rienzo, "Il Mazzini terrorista", *Nuova Rivista Storica*, 9.10.2010. Di Rienzo also quotes Garibaldi's bitter description of Mazzini as "a person who always talks about the people, but doesn't know it". The social and political isolation of Stern's group during his last months could imply that he also suffered from a similar failure.
19. *Ibid.*
20. "The Jerusalem Treaty 1940", *JA* K-5/4/1.
21. "Grundlage des Vorschlages der Nationalen Militärischen Organisation in Palästina (Irgun Zewai Leumi) betreffend der Lösung der jüdischen Frage Europas und der aktiven Teilnahme der N.M.O. Am Kriege an der Seite Deutschlands", *JA* K-5/4/1.

22. The NMO's emissary, Naftali Lubecznic, was caught by British intelligence, arrested and jailed in a detention camp in Western Africa, where he died a few months later from a stomach infection. See Ḥabib Kna'an, "A Meeting in Beirut" ["Pgiša be-Beirut"], *Ha-'Aretz*, 27.3.1970; Šlomo Šamgar, "When the Reich's Representative in Beirut Met a 'Jewish Terrorist from Palestine'", *Yedi'ot Aḥaronot*, 15.7.1983.
23. Joseph Heller, *The Stern Gang: Ideology, Politics and Terror, 1940–1949* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), p. 105.
24. Stern, a note in his notebook. CZA A 549\18–52.
25. Stern explained: "while *they* saw the charter as everything... we see the [Balfour] declaration and the Mandate as nothing more than a diplomatic achievement". The word "they" is underlined in the original.
26. Zeev Sternhell, *Neither Right nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France*. Translated from French by David Maisel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 8.
27. Roger Griffin and David D. Roberts, "Overtures of Reconciliation in a Forgotten Conflict", *European Journal of Political Theory* 11 (2012), pp. 354–361.
28. Stanley G. Payne, "Historical Fascism and the Radical Right", *Journal of Contemporary History* 35 (2000), pp. 109–118. The other regions Payne suggests are Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia.

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INDEX¹

A

Agassi, Joseph, 27n79

Aḥime'ir, Abba, 10–13, 32–35, 38n6,
38n7, 39n10, 42, 43, 45, 49–51,
54–56, 57n6, 57n8, 59n33,
59n38, 59n39, 60n57, 61–65,
67, 68, 68n1, 69n2, 69n3, 69n8,
69n9, 69n11, 69n13, 71, 72,
74–77, 80, 82n2, 82n5, 83n9,
83n12, 84n22, 84n29, 86, 87,
94, 95, 96n2, 97n4, 98n28,
98n34, 98n35, 98n36, 100–104,
107, 108, 110, 112–114, 115n4,
115n9, 115n16, 116n29,
116n34, 117n43, 121–123,
125–127, 129, 135, 137n8,
137n14, 138n18, 138n19,
139n32, 139n36, 139n39,
139n40, 139n43, 140n46,
140n50, 143–147, 153, 154,
156–161, 163, 163n1, 163n3,

163n5, 163n6, 164n10, 164n11,
164n14, 164n15, 164n16,
164n24, 165n44, 165n45,
166n59, 167n63, 167n64,
167n72, 167n73, 169–173, 175,
176, 178–180, 180n1, 180n2,
180n3, 181n13, 181n21,
181n30, 185–187, 189, 194n3
Aḥime'ir, Joseph, 39n11, 39n13,
82n7, 138n29, 166n47
Amir, Aharon, 26n75
Arlosoroff, Ḥayim, 33, 34, 52,
60n49, 78, 84n29,
128, 172
Asheri, Maia, 21n14, 21n15, 98n28

B

Bach, Maurizio, 20n8
Beirut, 1–20, 191
Bell, J. Bowyer, 24n49

¹Note: Page number followed by 'n' refer to notes.

Ben Abram, Baruk, 139n41
 Ben-Avi, Itamar, 12, 25n62, 25n63,
 29–38, 38n1, 38n2, 38n4,
 41–43, 54, 55, 57n1, 85, 95,
 101, 113, 115n8, 116n26,
 119–123, 134, 135, 137n1,
 137n4, 137n9, 137n12, 147,
 170, 183, 185, 186, 194n1
 Ben-Tor, Nechemia, 70n24
 Berlin, 1, 29, 34, 35, 117n42,
 144, 148
 Bey, Essad, 97n19
 Beytar, 15, 62, 63, 68, 70n24, 77,
 101, 102, 122, 140n57, 143,
 149, 186, 191
 Bilski Ben-Hur, Raphaella, 24n47
 Blair Brysac, Shareen, 23n43
 Breuer, Stefan, 20n8
 Brit ha-Biryonim, 13, 33–35, 45, 54,
 60n52, 63, 66–68, 72, 75, 83n9,
 87, 95, 97n7, 114, 115n17, 128,
 129, 148, 156, 158, 161,
 164n22, 164n23, 166n47, 180n7
Brit Šalom, 33, 50, 89, 90, 97n10,
 105, 108, 109, 138n24, 155,
 166n58

C
 Carlyle, Thomas, 93, 94, 98n35
 Communist/communism, 4, 12,
 41, 51, 54, 55, 65, 68, 76,
 88–91, 95, 100, 101, 107,
 113, 120, 124, 135, 143,
 144, 147, 151, 153, 189
 Conze, Eckart, 20n2
 Corporatist/corporatism, 10, 102,
 179, 191
 Costa Pinto, António, 6, 22n28,
 22n30, 22n32, 22n33, 194n2,
 195n10, 195n15
 Cüppers, Martin, 27n90

D
Dabar, 32, 44, 100, 104, 115n3,
 116n26, 155, 163n4
 de Felice, Renzo, 4, 21n18
 Disraeli, Benjamin, 57n8, 104, 114
Do'ar ha-Yom, 12, 30, 31, 35, 42–44,
 55, 61, 68n1, 71, 80, 82n2, 86,
 99, 100, 113, 116n26, 119–121,
 137n1, 170, 172

E
 Eatwell, Roger, 5, 7, 22n29, 22n30
 Economy/economic, 2, 32, 34, 37,
 42, 47, 55, 56, 66, 88, 102, 103,
 158, 177, 179
 Egypt, 30, 53, 91, 105, 144, 171
 Eldad, Israel, 39n16, 39n21,
 118n59, 192
 Elon, Amos, 26n72
 Even-Zohar, Itamar, 26n70
 Evron, Boas, 26n76

F
 Fredrickson, George, 18, 27n88
 Frei, Norbert, 20n2

G
 Gentile, Emilio, 22n24, 190, 195n16
 Griffin, Roger, 5, 7, 12, 21n12,
 21n20, 21n22, 22n25, 22n26,
 22n27, 22n28, 23n38, 23n40,
 25n58, 194n2, 196n27
 Grossmann, Meïr, 59n34, 69n17, 126,
 139n37, 180n5
 Grünberg, Uri Zwi, 13, 33–35, 37,
 45, 48, 49, 55, 59n31, 59n35,
 59n39, 63, 72, 80, 82n7, 83n9,
 87, 89, 90, 95, 97n16, 107, 113,
 125, 135, 138n29, 147, 150,

151, 161, 163, 165n30, 165n33,
165n45, 167n71, 171, 185, 186
Gurevitz, Adolf (Beliac, G., Horon,
A. G.), 26n75, 37, 118n52

H

Ha-ʿAm, 31, 34, 35, 43–45, 47–49,
51, 52, 58n25, 59n34, 59n35,
62, 64, 83n9, 87–94, 97n10,
98n28, 103–106, 114, 115n14,
116n19, 147, 148, 152, 154,
155, 165n30, 170, 171, 173, 174
Ha-ʿAretz, 26n78, 32, 44, 61, 100,
104, 115n3, 116n26, 145, 146,
155, 163n4, 169, 170, 188

Ha-Bimma, 91

Ha-Biryon, 45, 63

Ha-Histadrut, 102, 179

Haifa, 60n54, 76, 117n40, 191

Halperin, Uriʿel (Ratosch, Jonathan),
37, 40n22, 173, 181n18

Ha-Maʿqif, 31, 33, 98n39, 135

Ha-ʿOlam, 103, 104

Ha-Poʿel ha-Tzaʿir, 12, 32, 33, 35,
104, 121, 137n8

Ha-Tzfira, 103

Ḥayal ha-ʿAm, 97n14, 116n22,
181n10

Hayes, Peter, 20n2

Ḥazit ha-ʿAm, 12, 13, 33–35, 52–54,
60n53, 65–67, 75–77, 82n6,
83n16, 92, 93, 108–110, 126,
128, 129, 155–158, 167n63,
167n64, 167n69, 174, 175

Ha-Zwi, 29

Heller, Joseph, 10, 20n4, 24n48,
24n53, 40n23, 118n59, 196n23

Helman, Anat, 23n42

Hitler, Adolf, 1, 17, 20n8, 115n14,
127–129, 135, 189

Hope-Simpson committee, 43, 84n34
report, 59n48, 84n34

J

Jabotinsky, Zeʿev, 9, 10, 12–14, 16,
20n3, 23–24n44, 24n46, 24n47,
25n61, 26n73, 30–33, 43, 46,
48, 49, 53, 54, 59n35, 60n51,
60n53, 60n55, 60n57, 63,
70n24, 78, 79, 81, 82n6, 100,
101, 105, 116n31, 121–129,
134–136, 137n10, 138n16,
138n19, 139n30, 139n35,
139n43, 139n45, 147, 149, 153,
156, 157, 162, 166n61, 166n62,
167n63, 167n77, 170–172, 175,
176, 179, 181n27, 183, 186,
189, 191

Jerusalem, 29–31, 33, 35, 36, 39n20,
44, 48, 53, 71, 76, 80, 82n2,
82n4, 89, 90, 94, 108, 117n40,
127, 129, 132, 137n10, 138n24,
150, 152, 156, 157, 167n64,
187, 191

K

Kallis, Aristotle, 6, 22n28, 22n33,
22n34, 194n2, 195n10, 195n15

Kaplan, Eran, 10–12, 17, 24n54

Katz, Doris, 168n83

Katz, Shmuel, 24n44

Kolitz, Zwi, 27n86, 54, 60n58, 66,
69n19, 78, 79, 84n30, 111,
117n44, 117n46, 117n47, 130,
131, 135, 140n47, 140n48,
140n49, 140n53, 160, 167n74,
167n78, 187, 194n5

L

Laqueur, Walter, 82n8

Larsen, Stein Ugelvik, 21n21, 24n48,
27n89

London, 15, 43, 52, 139n35, 148, 187

Lubenczik, Naftali, 1, 2, 191

M

Magnes, Judah L., 75, 76, 108, 109,
117n40, 124, 138n24, 138n25,
155–157, 167n64, 175, 195n9
Mallmann, Klaus-Michael, 27n90
Mann, Michael, 6, 22n31
Mapay, 43, 47, 50, 73, 89, 105,
116n26, 154, 177
Ma'znayim, 155
Meyer, Karl, 23n43
Michels, Robert, 121, 137n7
Migdalor, 59n44, 59n45, 59n46,
98n29, 116n31, 116n32,
139n33, 166n48
Mišmar ha-'Umma, 59n44, 166n50,
166n51
Moos, Carlo, 27n82, 27n84, 27n85,
27n87
Morris, Benny, 168n83
Moscow, 34, 42, 84n27, 90, 91, 187
Mosley, Oswald, 47, 58n25
Mussolini, Benito, 17, 18, 20n8, 41,
54, 66, 78, 79, 99, 110–112,
119–124, 126, 127, 130, 131,
134–136, 152, 160, 165n42,
183, 186–189, 192

N

Nationalist/nationalism, 3, 4, 6, 8, 10,
11, 16–18, 27n79, 35, 42, 43,
61, 69n2, 81, 86–90, 95, 100,
102, 106, 107, 113, 131, 144,
158, 186, 188, 189, 192, 193
Nazism, national-socialism, 3, 18,
20n7, 94, 127, 129
Nolte, Ernst, 3, 5, 20n9, 21n18
Nordbruch, Goetz, 27n92

P

Paris, 24n44, 29, 31, 139n35, 148
Paxton, Robert O., 6–8, 12, 16,
19, 23n35, 23n36, 23n39,

23n41, 27n91, 49, 58n20,
161, 189, 195n11

Payne, Stanley George, 2, 11, 17,
18, 20n5, 25n57, 27n83,
194, 196n28
Po'aley Zion, 101, 144, 145,
163n6
Poland, 15, 33, 35–37, 69n4, 77,
140n57, 158

Q

Qeren ha-Yesod, 148

R

Revisionist, Association; Revisionism,
11, 50, 66, 68, 73, 87, 107, 147,
172, 193
Roberts, David D., 2, 4, 20n6, 21n17,
189, 195n15, 196n27
Rome, 12, 15, 41, 42, 72, 99, 100,
119, 120, 127, 148, 159,
187, 189
Russia, 21n20, 32, 42, 50, 56, 76,
90, 100, 158

S

Šamir, Isaac, 192
Saposnik, Arieh Bruce, 117n40
Schechtman, Joseph, 24n44
Schieder, Wolfgang, 7, 20n7
Segev, Tom, 23n42, 57n7
Shatzky, Shmuel, 39n11, 39n13,
82n7, 138n29, 166n47
Shavit, Yaacov, 24n50, 69n6
Shelef, Nadav, 26n73, 26n78, 27n79,
116n22
Shindler, Colin, 24n45, 24n47,
26n78, 83n9
Socialist/socialism, 3, 11, 12, 18,
23n44, 32–35, 42–44, 46–48, 50,
51, 57n9, 57n12, 61, 63, 65, 67,

- 68, 69n2, 85, 86, 88, 89, 94, 95,
99–102, 104, 106, 107, 109,
110, 113, 114, 115n3, 117n42,
120, 122, 130, 135, 143, 145,
146, 151, 153, 156–158, 161,
169, 172, 177, 179, 187,
189, 192
Spengler, Oswald, 12, 32,
85–96, 186
Stern, Abraham (“Yair”), 1, 2, 10, 13,
15, 25n67, 35, 36, 39n16,
39n20, 40n22, 40n23, 67, 68,
70n22, 70n24, 79, 81, 84n34,
84n35, 94, 95, 111–114,
117n46, 117n50, 118n52,
118n53, 118n54, 118n55,
118n57, 131–137, 140n58,
140n60, 141n67, 160–163,
164n21, 168n79, 168n81,
177–179, 181n33, 182n34,
182n35, 182n36, 183, 185, 186,
189–192, 195n18, 196n24,
196n25
Sternhell, Zeev, 3–5, 11, 21n10,
21n11, 21n12, 21n13, 21n14,
21n15, 21n16, 22n34, 193,
196n26
Strachey, John, 47, 58n25,
58n26, 152
Sznajder, Mario, 21n15, 98n28

T

- Tel Aviv, 2, 12, 18, 20n3, 23n42,
32–34, 37, 38, 54, 60n52,
91–94, 98n33, 101, 110, 122,
129, 138n28, 140n62, 158,
163n6
Thomson, Raven, 25n65

U

- Umland, Andreas, 21n20, 22n27

V

- Vardi, Hayim, 42, 57n3, 71, 82n1, 99,
100, 115n1, 120, 121, 137n3,
137n5
Vienna, 12, 30–32, 55, 65, 90, 97n9,
110, 126, 127, 158
Von Hentig, Werner Otto, 1, 20n1,
20n2, 25n68, 161
Von Weisl, Wolfgang Ze’ev, 10, 12,
13, 25n64, 25n65, 30–32, 38n5,
44–47, 49, 51, 54, 55, 58n13,
58n15, 58n19, 58n21, 58n27,
59n33, 59n35, 59n39, 59n41,
74, 81, 83n14, 87–91, 95, 96,
97n5, 97n6, 97n8, 97n9, 97n10,
97n11, 97n12, 97n13, 97n19,
97n20, 98n29, 103, 106, 114,
115n12, 116n24, 123–127, 135,
138n21, 138n22, 139n31,
139n33, 139n38, 147–149, 158,
161, 164n19, 164n20, 164n21,
164–165n25, 165n26, 165n27,
165n30, 165n45, 166n46,
167n68, 168n84, 170, 171, 178,
180n4, 180n5, 180n8, 185, 186,
189, 190, 195n12, 195n13

W

- White Papers (1929, 1939), 35, 79,
84n34, 113, 174

Y

- Yellin-Mor, Nathan, 118n59, 192
Yevin, Joshua, 13, 33–35, 39n12,
44–46, 49, 50, 54, 55, 57n10,
58n22, 59n33, 59n36, 59n39,
60n49, 63, 65–67, 69n9, 69n14,
69n15, 69n16, 69n17, 69n18,
73–75, 77, 78, 81, 83n9, 83n10,
83n15, 84n26, 84n27, 84n29,
87, 91, 92, 94, 95, 97n22,

98n25, 98n32, 105, 109, 110,
 112, 113, 116n21, 117n36,
 117n38, 117n42, 124, 125, 128,
 135, 138n26, 138n28, 139n42,
 139n43, 147, 149, 150, 154,
 158–161, 163, 165n28, 165n31,
 165n45, 166n47, 166n48,
 166n51, 167n69, 167n71,
 167n73, 171–173, 175, 176,
 178, 181n11, 181n12, 181n15,
 181n19, 181n23, 181n26,
 181n31, 181n32, 185, 186,
 190, 195n17

Z

Zimmermann, Moshe, 20n2
 Zionism, 9, 15, 34, 44–46,
 48–54, 57n12, 62, 64–68, 73–75,
 87–89, 92, 93, 95, 105–108,
 110, 120, 124–126, 138n22,
 148–155, 157, 158, 162,
 164n20, 165n30, 171, 172,
 174, 176, 190, 193
 Żitłowski, Haim,
 144, 163n6
 Zrubabel, Jacob,
 101, 144, 163n6