

## Vladimir Jabotinsky and the Emergence of Revisionist Zionism

The now politically transcendent Revisionist Zionism long existed as a relatively small component of the Jewish/Zionist spectrum. Vladimir Jabotinsky was the founder of that movement, and his clear imprint is still seen upon the doctrines and policies of Revisionism to this day. As a highly talented journalist/social critic, Jabotinsky initially built his career in Odesa which was at the time the most significant urban center for upwardly mobile Russified Jews. Odesa had been founded in 1795 by Catherine the Great shortly after her victory in the Russo-Turkish war. This city soon became Russia's largest port on the Black Sea with numerous countries establishing active shipping industry there. By a century later, Odesa had also become a major portal to the Western European intellectual world (Stanislawski, 2001, p. 122). Yet, in many ways, the city remained disconnected from the Ukrainian culture into which it had been placed. At the end of the nineteenth century, 45% of the city population was Russian, 35% Jewish, and only 10% Ukrainian, the second largest Jewish population in the Russian Empire behind Warsaw (Kleiner, 2000, p. 1).

Even by the standard of the assimilated Western European intellectual Jew, the Eastern European Jabotinsky was strikingly detached from traditional Jewish culture (Stanislawski, 2001, pp. 116-149). From early on, Jabotinsky saw his own future as a literary social critic in the world of Russian intellectual culture. As a foreign correspondent for his Odesa newspaper, Jabotinsky traveled to Bern, Switzerland and then on to Rome where he lived for three years (1898-1901), reporting back on the current Western European intellectual fashions of the day. Jabotinsky had gone to Italy infatuated with the nominally anti-political Symbolism, Decadence, Art Nouveau, and Jugendstil movements that had been dominating the avant-garde side of cosmopolitan and international culture. But the political currents within the intellectual world of Europe were shifting, and Jabotinsky would later report that he returned home a dedicated racial nationalist (Stanislawski, 2001, pp. 133-134). At that time, 'race' was widely understood to refer to any intra-breeding subpopulation of a species, as opposed to the conventional color-coded definition used today. The message of Darwinian racial nationalism hit home particularly hard in Eastern Europe where many ethnic/racial groupings were directly confronted with the challenge posed by the 'Blood and Soil' doctrine which held that if their population could not command and control their own homeland, they would have no evolutionary justification to survive.

Jabotinsky had become a dedicated racial nationalist well before he embraced the idea that he must be a Jewish racial nationalist (Stanislawski, 2001, pp. 158-159). Jabotinsky's full-fledged devotion to the cause of Jewish racial nationalism in 1903 came shortly after his aspirations for being accepted into the upper echelon of the Russian literary world had abruptly collapsed (Stanislawski, 2001, pp. 160-161). Jabotinsky's realization that he was biologically constrained to be a Jewish racial nationalist meant that he must learn to communicate with the broader Jewish society. Having lived his childhood and early adulthood within the Russian language while subsequently becoming fluent in various Western European languages, Jabotinsky then faced the challenge of teaching himself both Hebrew and Yiddish. This he accomplished in short order, enabling him to articulately address both rabbis and Jewish peasants in marketing his version of Jewish nationalism (Stanislawski, 2001, p. 218). A central message that Jabotinsky delivered to both the rabbi and the peasant was "The Jew who regards himself as a Jew by religion is quite simply wrong, for Jewishness is not a religion, but a nation; to confuse the two is not simply an error; it is a self-denying, self-deluding error" (Stanislawski, 2001, p. 175). This was assuredly a retelling of his own 'enlightenment' when he confronted the realization that his racial nationalism would have to be Jewish racial nationalism.

Jabotinsky built his own understanding of the "wrong kind of Jews" upon a variation of the Marxist concept of 'false consciousness' (Stanislawski, 2001, pp. 172-173). Since, from his racial nationalist perspective, the inclination to true Zionism must be inherent in each Jew, the issue then becomes which Jews will become fully 'awake' as he had done. For a Jew to see Zionism in different terms than what Jabotinsky espoused was to only appear to be conscious. As with the issue of Rousseau's 'General Will' more broadly, the true Zionist leader does not listen to what the 'people' have to say. Rather, for Jabotinsky, the leader must study the problem scientifically, with all the strictly objective tools of empirical observation, analysis, and conclusion in order to understand the underlying 'folk-spirit' which the 'people' unconsciously embody (Stanislawski, 2001, p. 180). Stated in other terms, Jabotinsky recruited the language of science to justify the banishment of democracy, while at the same time proclaiming himself to be a 'true' democrat. Jabotinsky embraced the Rightist rejection of Marxism, claiming that class distinctions are temporary and contingent while racial nationalist distinctions are essential and permanent (Stanislawski, 2001, p. 157). He argued that the unique 'Volkgeist' (folk-spirit) of each nation is determined by genetic and biological dispositions that cannot be changed (Stanislawski, 2001, p. 210). Jabotinsky's embrace of the classic 'Blood and Soil' doctrine of racial nationalism implied for him an ominous message for Judaism (Stanislawski, 2001, p. 180):

“It is an inarguable fact that from the first day of its Exile, the internal progress of Judaism was brought to a halt ... As soon as the Jewish people lost its land, Judaism stopped changing, developing, progressing ... In this way, Judaism died, for a being that does not develop dies”

It is crucial to confront the full philosophical implications of Jabotinsky’s Blood and Soil doctrine of Revisionist Zionism. By this doctrine, the individual Jew in the diaspora can only fulfill his role in Judaism by returning to the Land of Israel where he can be ‘born again’ into the faith of his ancestral fathers to become a ‘real’ Jew. Yet by virtue of the fact that this is a Revisionist doctrine, it is self-evident that there are also Zionist Jews who have returned to the Land of Israel, yet have failed to become ‘reborn’. From Jabotinsky’s perspective, these are ‘assimilated’ Zionist Jews who are unwilling or unable to shake off their Gentile world view and thus can never become ‘real’ Jews. These are Jabotinsky’s ‘dead’ Jews or to use his disciple Meir Kahane’s classic expression “Hebrew-speaking *goyim*” (Magid, 2021, p. 129). From Jabotinsky’s perspective, such “Hebrew-speaking *goyim*” pose a clear and present danger to those who have become or are becoming ‘real’ Jews. This brings us to a key philosophical principle of Jabotinsky’s Revisionist Zionism. As the result of the diaspora, Judaism has died. Furthermore, it is only through the ‘reborn’ Jews that ‘real’ Judaism can be reborn. However, while it is only the ‘real’ Jews who can give life to ‘real’ Judaism, it is the obligation of all Jews to advance that process. This perspective serves to justify the policy known as ‘Cruel Zionism’. Those Jews in the diaspora who do not wish to immigrate to the Land of Israel should be compelled to do so since to willingly remain in the diaspora is to imply that one can be a ‘real’ Jew without ‘ascending’ to Israel. Furthermore, those Jews who stand in the way of the rebirth of the ‘real’ Israel must be eliminated. Finally, those Jews who are caught in the crossfire of building the ‘real’ Israel are to be honored as “sacrifices” (Heller, 2017, p. 83).

In direct response to the then conventional Positivist philosophical ‘proof’ that Aryans are the self-evidently superior race, Jabotinsky placed ‘hadar’ (Jewish pride) at the center of his Revisionist Zionism as the basis upon which the ‘right kind of Jew’ will out-Aryan the Aryans (Stanislawski, 2001, pp. 200-202). In his explicit contempt for the long perceived effeminacy of the Jewish ghetto, Jabotinsky made only a shallow pretense of invoking a biblical basis for his concept of ‘hadar’ that he transparently borrowed from the European concept of bourgeois manliness (Stanislawski, 2001, p. 221).

By the start of the First World War, it had become clear throughout the Zionist movement that the British government would offer the most promising route to potentially achieving a Jewish homeland in Palestine. During that war, Jabotinsky played an important role in convincing the British Army to accept Jewish soldiers in creating first the Zion Mule Corps (1915) and then later the Jewish Legion. Due to numerous ‘bureaucratic’ delays, the Jewish Legion did not reach Palestine to engage the Ottoman forces until June 1918, six months after the capture of Jerusalem. In his limited military action under British Division commander Edward Chaytor, Jabotinsky led members of the Jewish Legion in forays across the Jordan River (Smith, 2009).

The long established tradition of large numbers of religious pilgrims who would come to Jerusalem to celebrate the nearly contemporaneous holidays of Passover, Greek Orthodox Easter, and the Islamic Nebi Musa procession was well recognized to be a potential occasion for social tensions. In 1920, these tensions broke into riot. In addition to five Jews and four Arabs who were killed, hundreds were wounded. While charges and counter-charges went in all directions, the slowness and ineffectuality of the British police response became a major focus of anger. The arguably inadequate official Palin Commission of Inquiry into this event explicitly identified by name two active participants (Huneidi, 2001, p. 35). Then and henceforth, Amin al-Husayni and Vladimir Jabotinsky would come to be identified as the embodiment of exclusionary racial nationalism from the Arab and Jewish perspectives, respectively. Although the young Amin al-Husayni was the scion of a highly influential family within the al-Husayni clan, he had not yet otherwise made a political name for himself. That would soon change. As for Jabotinsky, during the Nebi Musa violence, he succeeded in catching public attention by insisting upon being arrested when several members of his ‘self-defense force’ were arrested. In testimony to this convoluted political world, the most senior British official in Palestine, Governor Ronald Storrs promptly came to Jabotinsky’s prison cell and arranged his transfer to a ‘more suitable’ cell with better furnishing as well as catering from a nearby hotel. Storrs then personally went to Jabotinsky’s home to help his wife pack two suitcases which Storrs then delivered to Jabotinsky’s prison cell (Segev, 2000, pp. 136-137). Such political connections notwithstanding, Jabotinsky was sentenced to fifteen year imprisonment for illegal weapons possession. A comparable sentence was imposed on Amin al-Husayni. Despite that ultimately temporary inconvenience, Jabotinsky’s political calculation paid off. In the sympathetic newspapers of London, he was lionized as “the Jewish Garibaldi” (Stanislawski, 2001, p. 208). Of more long term significance, the future Chief Rabbi of Palestine Abraham Isaac Kook publicly broke Passover religious restrictions by signing a petition in the synagogue for the release of the outspokenly secular Vladimir Jabotinsky (Segev, 2000, p. 143). A distinctly different response was offered by the soon to be President of the

Zionist Organization Chaim Weizmann, who upon hearing of a plot to forcibly free Jabotinsky from jail, lamented the potential start of a Jabotinsky dictatorship, stating that “All of this loud, adventurous, pseudo-heroic cheap demagogy is repulsive and unworthy. Behind it no doubt there lies petty, raw ambition” (Segev, 2000, p. 143).

Soon after arriving in Palestine, Commissioner Herbert Samuel pardoned both Vladimir Jabotinsky and Amin al-Husayni. While the actions for which Jabotinsky had been convicted were arguably overblown, that seems less likely to be the case for Amin al-Husayni (Elpeleg, 2007, pp. 2-3,6-7). Furthermore, by this time Amin al-Husayni had come to be seen as a vocal advocate of terror attacks against Zionism (Segev, 2000, p. 186). It was with those facts in hand that Herbert Samuel would make the most impactful decision in his role as Commissioner. During the height of the Arab-Jewish violence in Jaffa (1921), Samuel appointed Amin al-Husayni to be Mufti (chief Muslim cleric) of Jerusalem. Traditionally, the lifetime appointment as Mufti of Jerusalem was carried out by a council of Islamic clerics. However, Commissioner of Palestine Herbert Samuel chose to put aside the election results of that council and instead appointed Amin al-Husayni who had finished last in the voting (Morris, 2011, p. 111ff). Indeed, Commissioner Samuel not only appointed him as the leading Muslim cleric of Jerusalem but soon thereafter appointed him to the newly created position of Grand Mufti for all of Palestine. Commissioner Samuel would then establish the Supreme Muslim Council to which Amin al-Husayni was made President.

On one hand, Amin al-Husayni did come from a substantial line of Muftis within his family. Yet despite that fact, he had been decisively voted down. Perhaps the explanation for Samuel’s action lies in the fact that the then more powerful (and more moderate) Nashashibi clan already controlled the position of mayor in Jerusalem, and one of theirs would have become Mufti if the council of Islamic clerics decision had been accepted (Khalidi, 2020, pp. 42-43). Given the standard colonial formula of divide and rule, splitting these two most influential positions between the two major clans might have seemed to be the safest option. While on paper, the Nashashibi clan might have appeared to hold the upper hand, Commissioner Samuel’s policies helped reverse that political dynamic. As he worked to advance the efforts of the Zionist Organization and its associated Jewish Agency to form a Jewish state government-in-waiting, in parallel, his efforts helped insure the absence of a comparable shadow Palestinian Arab state apparatus. While Commissioner Samuel did include a substantial number of Arab Christians within his administration, Arab Muslims were largely excluded (Segev, 2000, pp. 166-167). The traditional authority of Arab cities to elect their own mayors had been terminated at the beginning of the British Mandate, a policy that would continue through most of Samuel’s administration (Segev, 2000, p. 165). Since the urban/commercial-based Nashashibi clan projected its influence predominantly through secular offices, the resultant effect of political impotence fell heavily upon them. In contrast, the less structurally orchestrated largely rural-based Islamic religious authority which provided the power base for the al-Husayni clan continued to be actively supported by the British mandate government from the time of Commissioner Samuel until the beginning of the Arab Revolts in 1936 (Khalidi, 2001).

Soon after being released from prison, Jabotinsky dramatically undercut his political standing by formally offering to join with the Ukrainian nationalist Simon Petliura in organizing a military revolt against the occupying Soviet forces. Given the violent anti-Jewish pogroms that had characterized Petliura’s first revolt against the Russian forces a few years before, Jabotinsky’s attempted collaboration was met with widespread condemnation among Jews. In response to the intense animosity from the rest of the Zionist Executive Committee, Jabotinsky resigned his membership. To provide cover for this politically embarrassing controversy, Jabotinsky proclaimed that his resignation had been in protest of the committee’s failure to reject the recently proclaimed League of Nations mandate for Palestine and the awarding of Transjordan to the Hashemite Arabs (Stanislowski, 2001, p. 209). Following his resignation from the Zionist Executive Committee in 1922, it would take three years until Jabotinsky could successfully recruit a satisfactory number of Zionist leaders to join with him to formally create the Revisionist movement. From the start, the problem facing this organization was that many of those leaders took the title of their movement seriously in terms of hoping to convince the Zionist Organization to readjust their priorities and approaches for convincing the British government to move forward on their desired goals. From Jabotinsky’s perspective, the rest of Revisionist leadership was to serve as political cover for his intended coup against the Zionist Organization.

Rather than remaining in London where the Revisionist Executive Committee was based, its President Vladimir Jabotinsky spent most of his time from 1923 to 1927 as editor and lead journalist at his own Revisionist newspaper, first in Berlin and subsequently in Paris. During this time period, Jabotinsky advanced his political agenda on two different fronts. One line of attack was to apply his considerable rhetorical skills, both on paper and on the speaker’s platform, to inspire young Jewish men to embrace his call to forceful action. In parallel, Jabotinsky laid forth his skills in intellectual debate to expound upon the conceptual

superiority of scientific nationalism based upon the Leader principle as it related to the Zionist movement. By that point in time, the dramatic political success of Benito Mussolini had inspired a wide range of imitators who likewise wished to ride the current of enthusiasm for scientific nationalism that was then sweeping over most of Europe. In 1924, when Jabotinsky traveled to Riga, Latvia, he found that a local group of Jewish youth had banded together to form an imitation of the Blackshirts of the Italian fascists for which they wished to pledge political allegiance to Jabotinsky as their Leader (Heller, 2017, pp. 34-35).

By 1927, Jabotinsky had become increasingly conscious of the operational disconnect between the two approaches that he had been pursuing. Particularly during his speaking tours of Poland, Jabotinsky became acutely aware of the fact that his audiences showed little interest in the intellectual side of his arguments while grasping onto the slogans of forceful action (Heller, 2017, p. 59). Coupled to this concern was the diminishing level of financial and political support which his Revisionist movement was facing. Jabotinsky had pulled together a formal Revisionist movement on the eve of the Zionist Congress of 1925 (Shapiro, 1991, p. 15). Their poor performance at this initial contest was repeated two years later at the Fifteenth Zionist Congress when the Revisionist Party received only 6.5% of the total vote (Heller, 2017, p. 59). Embracing the reality of his limited progress within the formal Zionist Organization as compared to the enthusiasm he had seen in the post-war country of Poland which contained the largest proportion of the *Pale of Settlement* Jewry, Jabotinsky decided to recast himself as the Leader of the Polish Jewry.

From the end of 1927, Jabotinsky focused much of his attention on promoting and expanding his Betar youth movement. Overtly modeled upon the Blackshirts of Mussolini and the increasingly prominent Hitler Brownshirts, Betar was to be the military training program for the Revisionist Jewish Army. Few contemporaries could have overlooked the fact that the brown shirts of the Betar uniform, personally designed by Jabotinsky (Shapiro, 1991, p. 31), were virtually indistinguishable from those currently in use next door in Germany (Black, 2009, p. 143). Jabotinsky successfully convinced the Pilsudski government of Poland to accept the creation of his military training program for Jews set up in parallel with the analogous training program being run for Polish Catholic youths and similarly overseen by the Polish military (Heller, 2017, p. 160). Led by the inducement that Betar would serve as a counterbalance to the Socialist Jews of Poland, the military further agreed to provide a modest degree of direct military training as well as basic infantry weaponry to the Betar cadets. As for the cadets themselves, these were sworn to an absolute military allegiance to their Betar superiors which culminated in the unconditioned authority of their Leader Vladimir Jabotinsky. To complete the social and political aura of this training program, Jabotinsky personally composed the Betar Constitution, the Betar Oath, and the Betar anthem (Shapiro, 1991, p. 29). The Betar cadets were explicitly instructed in their opposition to the socialism that had infected so much of the Jewish population of Poland. While they might be called upon to defend Poland against the attacks of others, the core reason for their existence was for creating a 'true' Jewish State of Israel. To that end, the Betar cadets were expected to immigrate to Palestine where they would join the Haganah militia force that Jabotinsky had helped found in 1920. In pursuing his mission, the Betar cadet was to understand that the socialist Jew would often prove to be their adversary rather than ally (Heller, 2017, p. 82). At minimum, the socialist Jew was to be pushed to the side as Betar confronted its challenge of violently forcing both the British and the Arabs out of Palestine.

Having solidified his political position among the youthful Rightist supporters of Zionism in Poland, the table was now set for Jabotinsky to dramatically expand his political influence within Palestine itself. Over the period of four years (1929-1933), Jabotinsky would either initiate or greatly facilitate the political transitions that have continued to shape Israel to this day. Having called upon his Betar youth to prepare themselves for military action in liberating Palestine, Jabotinsky focused upon a political objective that could be amenable to such a 'military assault'. In Jerusalem, the Temple Mount contains the Western (Wailing) Wall which is regarded to be the sacred remnants of the Second Temple. For Muslims, the Temple Mount is known as Haram al-Sharif (Noble Sanctuary) that is regarded to be the third most holy site in Islam where Muhammad is believed to have ascended into Heaven. With the exception of the time period in which the medieval Christian Crusaders occupied Jerusalem, the Temple Mount had been under Islamic control for nearly thirteen centuries.

Across the 1920s, Jewish immigration into Palestine and their purchase of land from the Arabs dramatically expanded, and tensions between Jews and Arabs rose in parallel. The heightened political sensitivities among the Arabs to the increasingly severe problem of Arabs being bought out and displaced from their long-held lands dovetailed with the longer running tensions over which religion should control the Western Wall. As a result, the symbolism of the Western Wall, and the Temple Mount more broadly, came to politically embody intense emotional significance for both the spiritual realm and the day-to-day real world. In response to such tensions, the British had solidified previous Ottoman rules that limited the courtyard before the Western Wall to exclusively religious observances and banned the introduction of any potentially permanent structures within that space.

On Yom Kippur in 1928, a British constable reported to his superior the presence of a mobile screen placed in the courtyard in front of the Wall (Segev, 2000, pp. 295-297). These officers correctly surmised that this screen was being used to separate the male and female Jewish worshippers. Nevertheless, they decided that it must be removed. When the Ashkenazi beadle at the courtyard failed to remove the screen by the next morning as he had been told, the constable called upon approximately ten armed policemen to storm the courtyard and destroy the screen. Cheered on by Arabs in the neighborhood and screamed at by the Jewish men and women in the courtyard, the police forcibly pushed the Jews aside, dragging away the screen as well as the Jewish worshipper who had refused to let go. While no one was seriously injured, the heavy-handed violation of this religious space elicited outraged protests within the Jewish community. Of particular note was the call by Chief Rabbi of Palestine Abraham Isaac Kook at the National Committee emergency meeting for a countrywide general strike on the following day. In expressing his outrage toward the violation of a revered Jewish prayer site, Rabbi Kook expressed a sense of shared interest with the secular Zionist protesters, further pointing toward a crucial sea change in the political currents that were flowing across Palestine (Segev, 2000, p. 304).

On the other side of this political controversy, Mufti Amin al-Husayni leaped upon the issue of the Western Wall. At the time, he was in dire need of a political distraction. As his political power had risen vis-à-vis the Nashashibi clan, public frustrations over the lack of any significant progress toward an independent Arab state had increasingly fallen upon him. These complaints were sharpened by accusations of his despotism and corruption (Segev, 2000, pp. 303-304). In the resulting political debacle, the Mufti's camp had split, and a number of his followers had switched to the Nashashibi camp. To rebuild his image as the leader of Arab nationalism, Amin al-Husayni aggressively embraced his role as chief defender of the Haram al-Sharif (Temple Mount). He decried a Jewish plot to take over the Temple Mount and build the Third Temple in prelude to seizing control of the entire country and driving out the Arab population. The political ground was now set for what came to be called Year Zero of the Jewish-Arab conflict (Cohen, 2015).

As historian Tom Segev summarized the political impact of the screen seizure debacle on Jabotinsky, "the wall affair was good for him, just as it was good for the mufti" (Segev, 2000, p. 305). Jabotinsky surely realized that the screen seizure debacle had given him a golden opportunity to gain control of the political dynamic in Palestine. The key stumbling block to power for both Jabotinsky and Amin al-Husayni was the population of Jews and Arabs who still rejected the racial nationalist solution of mass extermination and expulsion for either one side or the other. At that time, no one could seriously compete with the Mufti in terms of his capability to drive both Jews and Arabs into the racial nationalist camp. In his historical role as Jabotinsky's political alter ego, Amin al-Husayni embraced a Revisionist Arab nationalism that melded a Almohad-style rejection of traditional Islamic millet tolerance for the 'protected people' of the Abrahamic tradition with the Darwinian racial science nationalism of the day. Given the threat that Amin al-Husayni's was then facing for his own claim to authority and his resultant embrace of the Temple Mount issue, a major political embarrassment on that issue might succeed in prodding the Mufti to take the political battle to the next level.

Soon after the Western Wall screen seizure debacle, Jabotinsky moved to Palestine where he took over direct control of the Revisionist newspaper *Doar HaYom* whose previous editor Itamar Ben-Avi willingly stepped aside for the leader of their movement (Brown, 2018). Jabotinsky promptly fired the entire newspaper staff, with the notable exception of Abba Achimeir, and then hired a set of other party members, including Yehoshua Heshel Yevin and Uri Zvi Greenberg. Achimeir, Yevin, and Greenberg would soon come to form the notorious Brit Ha-Biryonim ('Alliance of Thugs'). At the newspaper, Achimeir and Yevin were primarily responsible for developing the integration of Jabotinsky's mix of political philosophy and militant rhetoric with the sensationalist journalism style that Itamar Ben-Avi had previously developed at *Doar HaYom* (Elyada, 2019). Jabotinsky had seemingly already selected the target date for his 'assault' upon the Wailing Wall. *Tisha B'Av* (August 15 in 1929) is a Jewish fast day that marks the traditional date on which the Romans destroyed the Second Temple. An additional practical benefit for that date was the fact that the biennial Zionist Congress would be in session at that time, insuring that most all of the senior members of the Zionist Organization and Jewish Agency in Palestine would be in Zurich. Of particular value, his own attendance at this Congress meant that Jabotinsky himself would have a built-in alibi regarding his absence from the scene of the crime. In addition, the British High Commissioner Sir John Chancellor and various other senior British officials would have returned to Europe to escape the summer heat of Palestine (Segev, 2000, p. 310). As a result, when the deadly rioting broke out, the senior management of both the British and the mainstream Zionists in Palestine would be in disarray. Across the beginning months of 1929, Jabotinsky orchestrated an array of allies to help coordinate a political buildup to the main event. Then just as he left for Europe, his *Doar HaYom* newspaper unleashed a barrage of articles to stoke up the political tensions surrounding the Wailing Wall. The evening before, 6,000 protesters attended the pretendedly independent Central Committee for the Western Wall-

sponsored meeting in Tel Aviv that was addressed by both Revisionist leaders and representatives of the Chief Rabbi Kook-supported Mizrahi, a religious Zionist organization (Shindler, 2006, p. 99).

On Thursday August 15, in direct defiance of British orders limiting the use of the Wailing Wall to strictly Jewish religious observances, a large band of Betar members entered into the courtyard accompanied by members of the 'Battalion of the Defenders of the Language', advocates for a Hebrew-only society in which the Chief Rabbi's son Zvi Kook was a prominent member (Segev, 2000, p. 264). In this decidedly non-religious political protest, the Betar militia members waved the Zionist flag in symbolic claim to their ownership of this sacred prayer site (Heller, 2017, p. 83), singing the Zionist national anthem *Hatikvah*, and chanting the slogan "The Wall is Ours" (Laqueur, 2003, pp. 168-169). In response, following Friday services in the mosques and again the following afternoon, a number of Muslim worshippers entered the Western Wall courtyard in counter-protest (Segev, 2000, p. 310). Later that afternoon, Jabotinsky's newspaper *Doar HaYom* whipped off a special edition claiming that these Arabs had brutalized Jews at the Western Wall courtyard (Elyada, 2019). It would not be until the next morning that the mainstream Jewish newspaper *Ha'aretz* could rebut the exaggerated claims of antisemitic violence made in that special edition of *Doar HaYom*. The editors of *Ha'aretz* then proceeded to address the broader political implications of the Revisionist Western Wall campaign in this article entitled "*He who Sows the Wind shall Reap the Whirlwind*" (*Report of the Commission on the Palestine Disturbances of August, 1929, 1930*):

"The poison of propaganda was dripping from its columns daily until it poisoned the atmosphere and brought about the Thursday demonstration. And this demonstration, which was the result of the poisonous activity of the "Doar Hayom" and its followers, served as a pretext to the wild demonstration of the Arabs. Let us not carry on the ostrich policy...we ought to have chosen carefully our way and not to have given opportunity for the provocation on the part of others who were waiting for such an opportunity"

As tensions in Jerusalem continued to build, Acting British High Commissioner, Sir Henry Charles Luke called a meeting of senior representatives of both the Arab and Jewish populations for the purpose of agreeing to a joint statement aimed at defusing the current political tensions (Segev, 2000, pp. 311-312). By all signs, Mufti Amin al-Husayni had arranged that his emissaries would insure the failure of that meeting so as to create a green light for more aggressive action. Early the next morning, thousands of rural Arabs began pouring into Jerusalem armed with sticks and knives (Segev, 2000, pp. 314-315,320). At roughly 11:00 AM a few dozen shots were fired near the Temple Mount, and a short time later the Mufti addressed the Arab crowd to arouse them to fury. Fortunately, this orchestrated slow motion pogrom had provided the Jewish population time to prepare for defending themselves. In the end the results were not strongly disproportionate with eight Jews and five Arabs dead and fifteen Jews and nine Arabs injured.

On the next day (August 24), the casualty statistics in Hebron would be far more lopsided (Segev, 2000, pp. 320-326). The night before, several local Muslim leaders reported to the newly arrived British superintendent Raymond Cafferata that Mufti Amin al-Husayni was demanding that the Arabs there take action against the Jews or else face punishment. The next morning the pogrom began. Of the sixty-seven Jews killed, most would be Ashkenazi men along with a dozen women and three children under the age of five. Given that there was a substantial population of Sephardic Jews in Hebron, this pattern of attack clearly highlighted the emphasis on targeting the Jews who were seen as European-sponsored colonists. Significantly, at least 435 Hebron Jews survived this pogrom by being hidden from the attackers in the houses of their Arab neighbors. Over the next week smaller scale attacks would be carried out in other parts of Palestine. In the end, a total of 133 Jews and 116 Muslims were killed (Heller, 2017, p. 83). Many of the Muslim casualties were the result of the late-arriving heavy-handed British police response.

The official Revisionist version of these events has long been that this pogrom was the result of the mainstream Jews and the British having ignored the efforts of Jabotinsky's Revisionists to head off the killing. Fortunately, that blatant lie has more recently been put to rest by the evidence of a letter that Vladimir Jabotinsky wrote to his fellow Revisionist Alexander Poliakov four days after the Hebron massacre while he sat calmly in Zurich far removed from the events (Heller, 2017, p. 83):

"[w]ith the exception of the massacre of yeshiva students in Hebron, the number of sacrifices is small ... All of this will be useful to us from a political point of view, so relax, but to the outside we need to show shock."

Jabotinsky's word choice in this letter is deeply revealing. He pointedly refers to the Jewish casualties not as murder victims but as "sacrifices", that is to say, expendable 'collateral damage' in the cause to promote an uncompromising hatred between Jews and Arabs.

Jabotinsky's orchestration of the Wailing Wall Riots proved to be dramatically successful in enhancing recruitment for Betar. By the following summer, its membership had risen nearly three-fold (Heller, 2017, p.

85). In addition, the British response to this political debacle achieved another major goal for Jabotinsky by helping bring down Chaim Weizmann from his role as President of the Zionist Organization and chief political emissary to the British government. With that political neutralization of Weizmann, the split of the Zionist movement between the Labor Zionist Left and the racial nationalist Right was significantly sharpened.

Over the next three years, Jabotinsky played a political balancing act between his role as President of the Revisionist Zionist movement whose Executive Committee members were comparatively moderate and his role as Supreme Leader of the increasingly radicalized Betar youth movement. As European fascist movements inspired by the success of Mussolini became increasingly more radical, culminating in Hitler's rise to power in January 1933, two months afterwards Jabotinsky embraced the demand of his radical followers. Jabotinsky deposed the Revisionist Executive Committee and declared himself the Supreme Leader of Revisionism. Jabotinsky's pressing political problem at that time was dealing with the considerable enthusiasm with which much of the Polish Betar youth had greeted Hitler's appointment (Shapiro, 1991, pp. 26,39,59-60). Befitting their imitation Nazi uniforms, these Betar cadets were inspired by this radical racial nationalist political outsider who had seized the reins of power from the hated 'establishment' to bring into force the power of the 'people'. For two months, Jabotinsky skirted around the problem of how to dampen down the politically embarrassing Betar enthusiasm for Hitler without alienating what had become his crucial base of support. Then word came out that the mainstream Zionist Organization was engaged in secret negotiations with Hitler's government to scuttle a highly popular anti-Nazi international economic boycott that had recently been formed. This provided Jabotinsky with an ideal opportunity to change the political stripes of Betar and his newly consolidated Revisionist movement. Jabotinsky promptly declared himself and the Revisionist movement to be at the forefront of the pro-boycott movement and leading the charge against the collaborationist Zionist Organization (Black, 2009, pp. 143-144). The news coverage for this issue was intensely negative as many Jews were dumbfounded by the idea that Zionist leaders would engage in such negotiations. Numerous death threats were made in both Palestine and Europe against Chaim Arlosoroff, the Zionist official in charge of those negotiations. The 60,000 German and Eastern European Jews who would reach Palestine under the program that Arlosoroff negotiated would not come to be recognized until long after his political assassination (Black, 2009, p. 380).

While walking along the Tel Aviv beach on the evening of 16 June 1933, Chaim Arlosoroff was shot while standing beside his wife Sima by two individuals that they had recognized to be European Jews. On the basis of Sima's description, the British police soon arrested Abraham Stavsky in the apartment of the 'Alliance of Thugs' leader Abba Achimeir, and she then positively identified Stavsky in a lineup. The other accomplice Zvi Rosenblatt would not be captured for another month. Six days after Arlosoroff's murder, while sitting far away in Warsaw, Jabotinsky published the essay *Cool and Still* in which he claimed that the Labor Zionists were falsely accusing the Revisionists for the killing in hopes of improving their odds at the upcoming Eighteenth Zionist Congress in August (Jabotinsky, 1933). Six days later, Jabotinsky would further increase the political ante by claiming that it was the Arabs who had murdered Arlosoroff (Molchadsky, 2015, p. 177). While Jabotinsky's initial essay had raised the specter of 'Blood Libel', it was not until his later accusation against the Arabs that the 'real' criminal was identified. Given Jabotinsky's broad literary knowledge, there is little reason to doubt that he understood how precisely correct he had been in declaring this to be a 'Blood Libel' as the logic of his fabrication closely followed that of the murder of the 12-year apprentice tanner named William who was found brutally murdered in Norwich, England in 1144 which then gave rise to the infamous accusation that Jews kidnap and murder Christian children to use their blood in making matzos bread.

While it is plausible that Jabotinsky had no foreknowledge of the plot to kill Arlosoroff engineered by his radical underlings, his guilt in fabricating a patently false and ultimately quite deadly alibi is unambiguous. At that moment, Jabotinsky was at the pinnacle of his political influence, and he was putting that influence and his ultimate legacy on the line. Essentially the entire membership of the Revisionists would be expected to knowingly assert a specious claim of Arab guilt for the seemingly self-evident purpose of allowing two Revisionist operatives to escape murder charges for killing a leading Jewish Agency official. Equally important, it would become essential that other political allies of the Revisionists also be willing to blame 'the Arab'. As there clearly would be no identifiable Arab suspect that could plausibly be convicted by a British court of law, this accusation would readily be transformed an accusation of collective guilt for the Palestinian Arabs as a whole who 'got away with murder'. When one reflects upon why Jabotinsky's Revisionist Blood Libel gambit paid off, without serious question the most important reason was his earlier political success in the Revisionist Wailing Wall Riots. As his letter quoted above explicitly indicates, Jabotinsky clearly anticipated that those 133 Jewish "sacrifices" would help promote the desire for 'payback' within the Jewish population, regardless of the legal propriety of the circumstances. The self-anointed absolute Leader of Revisionism had proposed a political pardon for the killers of Arlosoroff which created the unambiguous imperative to the Revisionist membership that they must accept and embrace the transparent farce of this

innocence claim or else face the potential collapse of their cause. In return, this lethal dehumanization of the ‘wrong kind of Jew’ would become directly coupled to a moral blank check of Arab guilt. Henceforth, not only would all Palestine Arabs be held collectively responsible for the acts of specific Arab extremists, when suitable, they could also be held collectively responsible for the terrorist acts carried out by the ‘right kind of Jews’. This Revisionist Arab Blood Libel would not only become integrated into the political language of the Revisionist movement, but the claim of collective Arab guilt would come to be exploited more broadly across the political spectrum of Zionism.

In large part due to the peculiarities of British colonial law discussed below, only Abraham Stavsky would be convicted of murder in the initial trial. The judicial appeal of Stavsky’s conviction would offer a last window of opportunity for the Revisionists to save their comrade. During the time between the two trials, an important player in the initial marketing of the Arab Blood Libel would be Benzion Mileikowsky. Benzion was an ardent young Revisionist acolyte of Abba Achimeir who would take on the name Netanyahu (Hebrew for ‘given by God’). Benzion gained his first major appearance on the political stage as editor of the newspaper *Hayarden* which was primarily dedicated to stories denouncing the Jewish Agency and its allies for having committed ‘Blood Libel’ against Stavsky and the Revisionists in claiming their responsibility for the murder (Levinson, 2012). His general premise was that the Labor Zionists were providing political cover for the Arab murderers by blaming the innocent Revisionists as one aspect in their own broader program of destructive Jewish self-hatred (Armon, 2021):

“As the Arab savages would hunt Jews fleeing Spain on the rocks of Algiers, so are those fleeing the inferno of the diaspora being hunted at the gates of the homeland.”

As for the Labor Zionists, they are “the distorters of Zionism” who bring about destruction and “a politics of Zionist liquidation.”

“The only criterion for the moral validity of Zionism is, to them, the degree of benefit it brought to the Arab masses.”

“It is a neat ending that is being prepared for you here – and this ending is called: An Arab state in the Land of Israel.”

Netanyahu’s political approach begs the obvious question, why would the socialist Labor Zionists want to empower domination by the Arabs? His response would define the course of his future academic career. His *HaYarden* editorials turned to the issue of Jewish converts to Christianity in medieval Spain and their alleged intense passion of self-hatred (Armon, 2021):

“the destructive drive that awoke in them was so strong, that, in the end, it brought them to destroy themselves. This was a kind of suicide out of a crazed fervor of hatred.”

These converted Jews incited attacks against the Jews. “We should always remember that the converts legitimized the great persecutions both ideologically and practically.”

The present day socialist Labor Zionist was to be understood as nothing more than an updated version of this allegedly self-hating medieval converted Jew.

Benzion Netanyahu clearly recognized that the promotion of the Revisionist Blood Libel by him and his party associates would not be sufficient to save Stavsky from execution. They needed to gain the ear of the British Mandate government. Given the previously demonstrated willingness of Chief Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook to provide valuable political support for the ardent secularist Vladimir Jabotinsky during both the Nebi Musa Riots and Wailing Wall Riots, he represented the most obvious influential political emissary to the British government. Being himself an ardent secularist, Benzion thought it prudent to turn to his father Rabbi Nathan to intercede with Rabbi Kook (Netanyahu, 2012). While the details of the sales pitch that Rabbi Nathan used with Rabbi Kook may remain unknown, that argument was surely underwritten by the implicit threat of a bloody civil war between the Revisionists and the Labor Zionists if the Revisionists were held responsible for Arlosoroff’s murder. Whatever his logic, Rabbi Kook did embrace Rabbi Nathan’s claim, and he forcefully lobbied the British Mandate government to set aside Stavsky’s conviction (Medoff, 2002, p. 48; Nachmani). When that effort proved to be politically successful, Vladimir Jabotinsky then wrote to Benzion Netanyahu’s father Rabbi Nathan to profusely thank him for his efforts (Armon, 2021):

“You are being accused of instigating the rabbis’ protest ... you cannot understand how justified your action was ... Overnight, the name of Rabbi K. [Abraham Isaac Kook] has become a divine symbol cherished in countless hearts.”



The Supreme Court, sitting as a Court of Criminal Appeal found that there was no reason to challenge the findings of the lower court. Indeed, the Justices stated that in England itself the conviction would rightly have been upheld. However, the Court then observed that, under the British colonial law code imposed upon Palestine, the testimony of a single individual, that is to say a 'native', could not be considered as sufficiently reliable to sustain a charge of murder without independent corroboration. Furthermore, the Court had determined that the circumstantial material evidence which had been presented against Abraham Stavsky was insufficient to sustain that charge (Maoz, 2000). While the Supreme Court made no effort to hide their own discomfiture with the decision that they had rendered, they did not provide insight into how discussions within the British Mandate government might have impacted their decision to reverse the conviction by the lower court. The net result was the fact of Sima Arlosoroff having witnessed the murder of her own husband, as was explicitly accepted by the Court, was nevertheless found to be legally irrelevant. The contempt for their colonial subjects that the British government had incorporated into their colonial law code had come back to bite them. This seminal collaboration between the ardently secular Revisionists and still formally apolitical Orthodox rabbinical hierarchy regarding the Arlosorff murder trial drew the wrath of the Labor Zionist press which decried their role in providing cover for the guilty Revisionists (Armon, 2021). More significantly, the murder of Chaim Arlosoroff would play a central role in securing the long-running Revisionist-rabbinical collaboration that has come to shape the political history of Israel.

Arguably, Jabotinsky soon became a victim of his own success as the internal challenges to his authority from within Betar and the radicalized Revisionist movement increasingly reduced him to a celebrated figurehead. With the beginning of the Second World War, Jabotinsky moved to the United States with the intent of rebuilding his movement there. However, he died soon thereafter. Benzion Netanyahu re-emerged upon the political scene in becoming the Executive Director of Jabotinsky's New Zionist Organization in America (NZOA) where he came to see himself as the torchbearer for the cause. However, Menachem Begin would prove to be a far more successful claimant to the title of Jabotinsky's political heir having risen to the role of operational commander for Betar in 1939, head of the Irgun militia in Palestine in 1943, and leader of the Herut Party and then the Likud Party following the founding of the State of Israel. After twenty-nine years of uninterrupted rule by the Mapai/Labor Party, their incompetence in economic policy and the mishandling of the Yom Kippur War in 1973 helped bring Begin into the role of Prime Minister. Benzion Netanyahu's political arc in carrying forward the mantle of Jabotinsky was decidedly less dramatic. Failing to establish either a political or academic career in Israel during the years immediately following independence, Benzion moved his family back to the United States where he pursued an academic career rewriting the history of medieval Spain to match the political fairytale he had published years before in his *HaYarden* editorials. Of far greater consequence, Benzion would instill into his son Benjamin a sense of personal mission to bring Jabotinsky's racial nationalist vision to fulfillment.

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