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# Some Thoughts about Hebrew Fascism in Inter-war Palestine

*During the 1920s and 1930s, fascist movements and groups flourished all around the world. Relying on Robert Paxton's postulate that the emergence of a fascist movement is an inherent part of modern societies with mass politics, this article examines the probable existence of such a fascist movement in the Hebrew society in Palestine of the time. After a short introduction of concepts of generic fascism and a review of the current state of research into the subject, the article discusses some aspects and characteristics of generic fascism which are specifically significant to this case study.*

## *Generic Fascism*

A significant corpus of literature about fascism has been assembled in the past 80 years. Varied in their focal points and covering many different aspects of that phenomenon, works about fascism include political and social analysis, economic research, psychological and gender interpretations, along with many other directions of investigation.[1]

Unsurprisingly, the greatest bulk of research focused on fascism in Italy and Germany, the two countries in which fascist movements seized power during the 1920s and 1930s and established fascist regimes. 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".[2]

The focused interest in the Italian and the 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.[3] 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 is actually identical with the era of the World Wars.[4] Other scholars saw fascism as an unique *European* phenomenon, confining its geo-

[1] For a comprehensive list of updated literature about fascism, see the last chapter, "Bibliographical Essay", in Robert O. Paxton, The Anatomy of Fascism, New York 2004.

[2] See for instance Wolfgang Schieder, Faschistische Diktaturen: Studien zu Italien und Deutschland, Göttingen 2008, p. 251 onwards.

[3] A comparative analysis of Mussolini 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 2010.

[4] Ernst Nolte, Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche, München 1963, p. 31: "Im Verein mit den anderen Überlegungen und Belegen schließt es den Kreis, der die These umfassend begründet sein läßt, die Epoche der Weltkriege ist nichts anderes als die Epoche des Faschismus".

graphical 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".[5]

During the first half of the 20th century, however, similar groups and movements were active in other countries around the world; many 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.[6] This recent surge in interest in fascism, centered mostly in the UK and the USA, probably gained its initial momentum after the collapse of the USSR and the dismantling of the Communist Block – a political event which arouse worries from a possible reappearance of fascist movements.[7]

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 on 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 examined parties and movements in countries other than Germany and Italy: from Norway to New South Wales, and from Japan to Brazil.[8]

While agreeing generally about the mere existence of generic fascism,[9] scholars still dispute its exact scope and definition. In an attempt to reach a definition of a "fascist minimum",[10] Roger Griffin states that "fascism is a

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[5] "Wenn es also bei dieser Sachlage richtig ist, vom Faschismus als einem der großen historischen Phänomene unseres Jahrhunderts zu sprechen, so muß man allerdings vor allem detailliert darlegen, daß seine Reichweite auf Europa und auf die Zeit zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen beschränkt ist. Seine Wurzeln sind in der Tat typisch europäisch und im Umformungsprozeß der europäischen Gesellschaft fest verankert". Renzo de Felice, Deutungen des Faschismus, Zürich 1980, S. 17.

[6] Sven Reichardt, "Neue Wege der vergleichenden Faschismusforschung", Mittelweg 36 1/2007, pp. 9-25.

[7] See Roger Griffin/Werner Loh/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 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 coincidentally, 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.

[8] 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 2001.

[9] For recent 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.

[10] Roger Griffin, The Nature of Fascism, London 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", in Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions, vol. 3, no. 3 (Winter 2002), pp. 24-43.

genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism".[11] Roger Eatwell, in turn, elaborated that fascism is "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 demonization of its enemies".[12]

All scientific models probably contain an inherent tension between implementability and accuracy, which might complement and not only contradict each other. It is doubted whether any "pure" model – either purely implementable or purely accurate – can exist at all, especially in the social sciences. In our case, how can one find a useful working definition for fascism, such that would both be accurate on the one hand and encompass different examples of the phenomenon on the other?

*Paxton's Model*

In his book "*The Anatomy of Fascism*",[13] Robert Paxton brings 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 20th 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 lay within all democratic systems, and are likely to sprout in troubled societies in times of national crisis. It is a social phenomenon imminent 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 peoples to sleep, fascist movements try to mobilize the masses towards internal cleansing and external expansion, while abandoning democratic liberties, competing against traditional elites and removing legal restraints.[14] 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,[15] Paxton counts nine main characteristics which together might compile a good description of a fascist movement. According to Paxton's model, fascism can generally be defined as a radical nationalistic ideology with:

[11] 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", Europen History Quarterly 39, 2 (2009), pp. 298-309.

[12] Roger Eatwell, "New Styles of Dictatorship and Leadership in Interwar Europe", in Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions, vol. 7, no. 2 (June 2006), pp. 127-137.

[13] Paxton, Anatomy.

[14] Ibid., Paxton, also suggests an "Evolutionary Model" of fascism, with 5 phases: creation of a fascist movement; its taking root; getting the power; exercising power and an end phase of either radicalization or decline. Each fascist movement can be examined and assessed according to its progress along this evolutionary line.

[15] Reichardt, "Neue Wege der vergleichenden Faschismusforschung".

- a sense of overwhelming crisis beyond the reach of any traditional solutions;
- the primacy of the group, toward which one has duties superior to every right, whether individual or universal, and the subordination of the individual to it;
- the belief that the group is a victim, thus justifying any action against its enemies, both internal and external;
- dread of the group's decline under the corrosive effects of individual liberalism, class conflict and alien influences;
- the need for closer integration of a purer community, either by consent or by violence;
- the need for authority of natural chiefs, culminating in a national chieftain;
- the superiority of the leader's instincts over abstract and universal reason;
- the beauty of violence and the efficacy of will, when devoted to the group's success;
- the right of the chosen people to dominate others without restraint from any kind of human or divine law, while the sole criterion defining it is the group's prowess within a Darwinian struggle.[16]

A central advantage of Paxton's definition of generic fascism 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.[17]

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; these above-mentioned characteristics are still deemed crucial for considering a political movement as fascist.

*Hebrew Fascism*

Models are instruments made for analysing and understanding phenomena. Can Paxton's model serve us in identifying and analysing political movements which haven't 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 socie-

[16] Paxton, Anatomy, pp. 219-220.

[17] 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 2009. Wippermann builds a model combining together fascism, fundementalism and bonapartism (pp. 12-13), and therefore brings under his very wide fascist-umbrella more or less every authoritarian ruler or fundementalist thinker who was active during the last 200 years: from Louis Bonaparte to Gamal Abd al-Nasser, and from Idi Amin to Sayyid Qutb (!).

ties, with mechanisms of mass politics, experience what they conceive as a deep political crisis.[18]

The second postulate is that in early 20th century Palestine, a small yet thriving and modern Hebrew society was undergoing a local political crisis. That society's modernisation process, which had already commenced at the end of the 19th 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.

While every modernisation process entails a high level of that feeling, modernisation in Palestine was accompanied by two other factors which boosted it. The first factor 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 contradicting 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.[19]

The suggested hypothesis of this article 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 was there really a fascist movement in Palestine back then?

*Local Supporters of Fascism*

Like in many other parts of the world, pro-fascist trends were not uncommon in the "Middle East" at the time between the rise of Italian Fascism and the defeat of the Axis at the end of the Second World War, among Hebrew and Arabic speakers alike. Within the Hebrew society, prominent politicians, journalists and columnists, mainly supporters of Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the founder and the leader of the Zionist "Revisionist Party", expressed overt appreciation to Italian nationalism.

Itamar Ben-Abi, founder and editor of the journals *Dror* (Heb.: "liberty") and *Do'ar ha-Yom (Heb.: "Daily Mail")*, used his papers in order to promote the view that fascism provides a good answer to the looming danger of communism. "Get used to this new name", wrote Ben-Abi in his editorial a few days after the March on Rome, "to the four syllables of Italy's hero of the day, that

[18] Paxton, Anatomy., p. 53, asserts that "every country with mass politics had a fledgling fascist movement at some point after 1918".

[19] A lively description of British ideas, plans and policies in Palestine (and the "Middle East" in general) is brought by Karl Meyer/Shareen Blair Brysac, Kingmakers: The Invention of the Modern Middle East, New York, 2008 (especially pp. 94-225). For the history of the division of Mandate Palestine into West- and East, 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.

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...".[20] As Jabotinsky returned to Palestine in October 1928, after a few years abroad, Ben-Abi clearly made a parallel between the two leaders.[21]

After earning his Ph.D. from the University of Vienna in 1924 for a dissertation examining (and criticising) Oswald Spengler's analysis of Russia in *Decline of the West*,[22] Abba Aḥime'ir came to Palestine and worked as a teacher and a columnist. His short period of political activity in "The Young Worker's Party" ended with a sharp turn towards anti-socialism and Zionist Revisionism. During the late 1920s he wrote in *Do'ar ha-Yom* a column titled "From the Notebook of a Fascist", in which he sharply criticized the "vegetarian" opinions of the liberals and the universalism and internationalism of the socialists.[23] On the occasion of Jabotinsky's arrival in 1928, his column was simply titled "Regarding the Arrival of our Duce".[24]

Joshua Yevin, a columnist and publicist, wrote too in *Do'ar ha-Yom* and *Ḥazit ha-'Am* (Hebrew for "The People's Front"), and was – together with Aḥime'ir and Uri Zvi Grünberg – one of the founders of the "Brit ha-Biryonim" militia. This small group, which had the declared aim of educating the youth to political action by violence and force, was active only from 1930 to 1933, but had a deep and long influence on the political discourse in Palestine, until the break of the Second World War in 1939, at least.[25]

Wolfgang von Weisl, the editor of *Ḥazit ha-'Am*, was a physician, an artillery officer, a journalist and one of Ze'ev Jabotinsky's deputies. His direct personal call for Jabotinsky to be "our Leader" (in a letter from January 1927) is only one example of his ideas about the implementability of Fascism in Palestine.[26] Six years later, Jabotinsky had to threaten von Weisl that he would close *Ḥazit ha-'Am*, if the newspaper does not cease expressing its praise to the politics of the NSDAP.[27] The newspaper indeed stopped supporting Nazi politics; in 1935, however, von Weisl examined the possibility of establishing an

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[20] Itamar Ben-Abi, "Mussolini", Do'ar ha-Yom, 2. 11. 1922.

[21] Ben-Abi, "Jabotinsky in our Land", Do'ar ha-Yom, 7. 10. 1928.

[22] Aba Gaissinowitsch, Bemerkungen zu Spenglers Auffassung Russlands. Inaugural-Dissertation zur Erlangung der philosophischen Doktorwürde vorgelegt der philosophischen Fakultät der Wiener Universität. Gaissinowitsch was Aḥime'ir's first family name. He changed his name to "Aḥime'ir" (in Hebrew: "Meir's Brother") in memory of his brother, who was killed during the Russian civil war. 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.

[23] See for instance Do'ar ha-Yom, 14. 10. 1928 and 4. 11. 1928.

[24] Abba Aḥime'ir, "Current Issues (From the Notebook of a Fascist): Regarding the Arrival of our Duce", Doa'r ha-Yom, 8. 10. 1928.

[25] See Abraham Cordoba, 'Inteleqtualim l-loʿ pšarä b-ḥayim h-politiyim: h-miqre šel Brit h-Biryonim [Uncompromising Intellectuals in Political Life: the Case of Brit ha-Biryonim], in: Pinḥas Ginosar (ed.), h-Sfrut h-'ibrit v-tnu'at h-'abodä ["The Hebrew Literature and the Labour Movement"], Beer Sheba 1989, pp. 224-242.

[26] The letter was sent from Cairo to Jabotinsky's address in Paris. Writing in German, von Weisl used the German term "Führer". Jabotinsky Archive, A1-15/3.

[27] Letter from Jabotinsky to Ḥazit ha-'Am, 17.5.1933, Jabotinsky Archive, A1-2/23/1.

alliance between the Revisionist Party in Palestine and the British Union of Fascists; this attempt, however, did not bear fruit.[28]

A more serious attempt to collaborate with fascist powers in Europe was made a few years later by Abraham "Ya'ir" Stern. A poet, an essayist and a political activist, he headed the "Israel Freedom Fighters" group, also known as the "Stern Gang". Next to his visions of national rebirth through blood and fire, his group tried to sign a treaty of military alliance with Italy and Germany, in 1940.[29]

This list names 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. While most of these fascist proponents ceased expressing their support for fascism after the inaction of racist legislation in Italy in 1938, some (like Stern) still continued to support fascism also later on, during the Second World War.

*State of the Research*

There has been a 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, however, were to a large extent carried out either by political opponents from the Zionist left, who used the tag "fascist" to defame the Right, or by the Rightists' political descendants who tried to remove this tagging. In many cases, it seems that the academic debates among scholars regarding Reviosionist 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 researches usually focus on the political thought and action of the revisionists' leader, Ze'ev Jabotinsky. There are some comprehensive and favourable biographies of him written by his supporters.[30] While some scholars claimed he was a fascist,[31] others emphasised the liberal parts evident in his political thought.[32]

[28] Letter from von Weisl to Raven Thomson (no exact date, during 1935), Jabotinsky Archive, P-3/87.

[29] See for instance the IFF's hymn, "Unknown Soldiers" [heb.: *Ḥayalim 'Almonim"]*: "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 1930's, before the IFF separated from the relatively moderate National Military Organisation (NMO). The draft agreement between the IFF to Italy and Germany can be found at the Jabotinsky Archive, file K5-1/433

[30] Jabotinsky's first comprehensive biography is probably Joseph B. Schechtman, Rebel and Statesman: The Vladimir Jabotinsky Story, New York 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 1996.

[31] A clear example thereof is Shlomo Avineri's chapter about Jabotinsky in his book The Making of Modern Zionism, New York 1981.

[32] Raphaella Bilski Ben-Hur, Every Individual is a King: The social and Political Thought of Zeev (Vladimir) Jabotinsky, Tel Aviv 1988. For a brief account over 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 2006, pp. 12-14.

There are also very detailed reports about specific armed groups such as the "Stern Gang"[33] and the National Military Organization.[34] 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 organizations, wider portraits of Jabotinsky's followers and the Revisionist Movement tend to characterise it generally as "right-wing".[35] Hitherto, however, no comprehensive research has been carried out trying to examine the possible existence of generic Hebrew fascism in Palestine. While the word "fascist" has been – and still is – commonly used as a term of abuse in Israeli politics, those studies which indeed tried to portray a wider political scene usually referred to their research objects as "nationalists", "rightists", "extreme rightists" or "terrorists".[36]

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.[37]

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".[38]

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 since its founding 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 the Italian Fascism's corporatist economic principles and sought after 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 Revi-

[33] Joseph Heller, The Stern Gang: Ideology, Politics and Terror, 1940-1949, London, 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.), Fascism, pp. 362-392.

[34] See for instance J. Bowyer Bell, Terror Out of Zion: Irgun Zvai Leumi, Lehi, and the Palestine Underground, 1929-1949, Avon 1977.

[35] See Yaacov Shavit, Jabotinsky and the Revisionist Movement, 1925-1948, London 1988.

[36] See, for example, Arie Perliger/Leonard Weinberg, "Jewish Self-Defence and Terrorist Groups Prior to the Establishment of the State of Israel: Roots and Traditions", in: Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions, vol. 4, no. 3 (2003), pp. 91-108.

[37] The IFF (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 also shifted between support of fascism before and during the Second World War to support of Stalin and communism after it. See Heller, Stern Gang.

[38] Heller, "The Failure of Fascism in Jewish Palestine, 1925-1948", in: Larsen (ed.), Fascism, pp. 362-392.

sionist Movement – explicitly mentioning von Weisl and Aḥime'ir – forsook fascism. The only Revisionists who did not break with fascism also after the beginning of the Second World War were Abraham Stern and his followers (who indeed withdrew from the Revisionist movement in 1939).[39]

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.[40] 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 at 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 Ze'ev Sternhell has called the heritage of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution."[41]

However, Kaplan strictly refrains 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".[42] Aḥime'ir's sorrow for this failure can be easily understood, as his view of fascism was actually quite favorable – at least until 1933. But what if Aḥime'ir was 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"? The connection between fascism and racism (and the non-necessity "of" any permanent linkage between them) will be discussed following.

Until now, therefore, no reference has been made to Hebrew fascism in Palestine during the 1920s and 1930s 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. The following points are an attempt to begin with such a reference. Unloading various assumptions regarding any uniqueness of the Hebrew case study, we shall be able to analyse it in comparison to other fascisms.

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[39] See footnote 29 above.

[40] Eran Kaplan, The Jewish Radical Right: Revisionist Zionism and its Ideological Legacy, Madison 2005.

[41] Ibid., pp. xvi -xvii.

[42] Ibid., p. xviii.

*Hebrew, not "Jewish": a Local, Secular, Cultural Phenomenon*

The two terms – "Hebrew" and "Jewish" – have a long and 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 "jüdische". The origin of the term "Hebrew" is quite an ancient one, and so is the confusing usage of this term as parallel to "Jewish"; this confusion between the two terms can be found in "Jewish" and "Hebrew" texts as well, using both "Yehudi" and "'Ibri", sometimes congruently.[43]

However, for the sake of this research it is important to distinguish between the two in the context of Palestine in the 20th century. This distinction is important in two dimensions, a positive and a negative one.

Positively, the term is meant to describe the main characteristic of the cultural sphere in which the political movement in concern took action. Hebrew culture and society have gone a long way since Eli'ezer Ben Yehuda's first attempts during the 1880s to revive it as a common spoken language until its proclamation as an official language of the British regime in 1920. Not without difficulties and with means much smaller than those enjoyed by older lingual cultures, a lively, active and rapidly developing Hebrew society already thrived in Palestine during the 1920s. Hebrew was the language of education, press, commerce, art, literature and politics. In an era of modernization and secularization, language was (and still is) a central factor in creating social cohesion. In this aspect, Hebrew was not different from many other modern languages which laid the basis for modern national societies.[44]

Negatively, Hebrew is not Jewish. While the first defines an earthly, territorial, lingual and historical social group, the latter represents a religious, extterritorial, confessional, non-historical congregation. Although Hebrew people and Hebrew groups had connections to traits, traditions and symbols commonly perceived as "Jewish", a clear distinction should be maintained between the two.[45]

These two dimensions are not unrelated one to the other; 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 conscientiousness" is frequently a central part in the praxis of fascist movements, it is not surprising that protagonists of Hebrew

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[43] For the history of the term "Hebrew", see Nadav Na'aman, "Habiru and Hebrews: The Transfer of a Social Term to the Literary Sphere", in: Journal of Near Eastern Studies 45 no. 4 (1986), pp. 271-288.

[44] For 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 2005, pp. 160-172; Itamar Even-Zohar, "The Emergence of a Native Hebrew Culture in Palestine: 1882-1948", in: Studies in Zionism 4 (1981), pp. 167-184; Tamar Liebes/Zohar Kampf, "'Hello! This is Jerusalem calling!': The revival of spoken Hebrew on the Mandatory radio (1936-1948)", in: Journal of Israeli History 29 (2010), pp. 137-158.

[45] Furthermore, one may argue that since Judaism considers the Almighty, and not any man-made leader or social construct, as the supreme authority, a fascist cannot be Jewish and vice versa.

fascism took an active part in what Uri Ram terms "a deliberate effort to be released from 'Jewish' burden", and replace it with Hebrew cultural capital.[46]

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 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 used to accepted this separation between religion and nationality.[47]

*Fascism: not an Accusation*

Considering the immediate contemporary associations of the term "fascism", it is important to clarify how we use it. History of the past is always written in retrospect; the historian's "view backwards" is the source of strength and at the same time also a possible pitfall: on the one hand, it provides the historian with a deeper and wider view of a given phenomenon; on the other hand, it might inflict anachronistic ideas on his/her interpretations.

Like many other political currents in the 20th century, fascism gained both adversaries and enemies. Understandably, the violent defeat of fascist regimes in Europe in 1945 condemned their driving ideology, making "fascism" – at least 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 repulsion fascism instigates 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 on fascism's possible – but not inevitable – consequences. Fascism is a social and political phenomenon, not an abuse.

The basic task of the historian is not to make moral judgments, but to describe and analyze past events and processes within a desired temporary context. It is not necessarily up to the historian to determine whether something was "bad" or "good": this is his duty as a *human being*, but this duty does not bind him more than it binds the geologist, the engineer or the shoemaker.

*Palestine, Israel, Cana'an*

Another possible difficulty might arise with the use of the toponym "Palestine". This difficulty is generally semantic; nevertheless, this name might require some geographical fine-tuning, abolishing unnecessary ideological burdens loaded upon it during the past decades.

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[46] Uri Ram, "Historiosophical Foundations of the Historical Strife in Israel", in: 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 1971, pp. 328-330.

[47] See for instance Nadav Shelef, Evolving Nationalism: Homeland, Identity and Religion in Israel, 1925-2005, Ithaca 2010, pp. 122-123, and Jabotinsky's letter to Ben Gurion from May 1935, cited there.

Cana'an is the southwestern most part of Asia. It encompasses the lands from the Sinai peninsula to the south and the Mediterranean sea to the west, the Anatolian mountains to the North and the Syrian desert to the east.[48]

"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. In 1922, the British government granted the parts of Palestine east of the Jordan river to Prince 'Abdillah of the Hashemite family; thus, Palestine was divided into Transjordan Palestine and Cisjordan Palestine. This division of the land was probably the most crucial single event which lead Jabotinsky and his followers to form the Revisionist Movement, the political current from which Hebrew fascism gradually emerged.[49]

Therefore, "Israel" is actually a synonym to "Palestine". It is also 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, and whose leader, Benjamin Netatnyahu, is Israel's incumbent Prime Minister – did recognize the separation of Israel East of the river from Israel West of the river. Until today, however, 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.[50]

This definition of the borders of the country are not a mere historical anecdote, but an actual, contemporary issue. When Palestinian nationalists (be it the Muslim Brothers of the Hammas movement or PLO and PA officials) draw the map of "Palestine", its borders include all of Israel West of the Jordan river.[51]

*Geographical Focus*

Although Palestine was the object of their political efforts from a very early stage in its history, the Zionist movement was not born there; neither did it have there its operational center, 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 center of the

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[48] Boas Evron refers to the issue of "Holy Land versus Home Land" in his book Jewish State or Israeli Nation, Bloomington 1995, pp. 115-132.

[49] For a detailed review of the events leading to the administrative and political division between Cis- and Transjordan, see Isaiah Friedman, "How Trans-Jordan was severed from the territory of the Jewish National Home", in: Journal of Israeli History 27 (2008), 1, pp. 65-85.

[50] See, for instance, Moshe Arens, "Palestinian Dream of Statehood Further Away than Ever", Haaretz, 1.12.2009. For a comprehensive review and analysis of the Revisionist movement's evolving definition of Israel's borders see Shelef, Evolving Nationalism, pp. 81-106.

[51] See for instance the map presented on the website of the NGO "Palestine Remembered": http://www.palestineremembered.com/Acre/Maps/Story571.html. The official website of the Hammas government in Gaza gives a written description of these borders: http://www.pmo.gov.ps/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=97:2009-05-25-16-30-36&catid=51:2009-04-27-06-38-49&Itemid=72 (both pages were visited on 10/05/2011).

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 a central string (though not the only one) connecting Palestine and Europe during the years examined in this research.

Revisionist Zionism, direct 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 organizations and factions. "Beytar", the revisionist youth movement, for example, was founded in Lithuania, and its naval school was in Civitavecchia, 70 km from Rome.[52]

However, it is possible to differentiate between local political thought and praxis and international Zionism. That Zionism was a non-territorial and non-native movement did not evade the notice of Hebrew nationalists at the time. In contrast to the Zionist movement, whose main interest was given to an imagined "Jewish People", Hebrew nationalists saw language and territory (i.e. the Hebrew language and the Hebrew land) as their main point of reference. This difference is crucial, as the question of nativeness and independence versus migration and foreign influence became one of the central points of debate and animosity between them and the Zionists. 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, separating them from other right-wing groups and the mainstream of Hebrew Palestinian politics.

The clear difference between ex-territorial Judaism and native Hebrew Nationalism was the main reason for the schism between Adolf Gurevitz – later known as 'Adaya Gur Ḥoron – and Jabotinsky, at the inauguration congress of the New Zionist Association in Vienna in 1935. Four years later, Abraham Stern would leave the National Military Organization and establish the "NMO *in Israel*" (later known as "Israel Freedom Fighters") because of a similar reason. Among the papers found on his desk after his murder (in February 1942) were the first publications of Gurevitz about the non-Jewish history of the Hebrews.[53]

*Fascism without a State?*

The research of totalitarianism has contributed a lot to the common connotation made between fascism and a strong state apparatus. But is an established state a pre-condition for fascism, or can fascism exist without such an institutional framework?

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[52] See for instance Alberto Bianco, "Les sionistes révisionnistes et l'Italie: histoire d'une amitié très discrète (1932-1938)", in : Bulletin du centre de recherche français de Jérusalem 13 (2003), pp. 22-45.

[53] See Aharon Amir, "Ḥoron b-'Erec h-'Ibrim", in: Qedem v-'Ereb: Kna'an – Toldot 'Erec h-'Ibrim ["East and West: A History of Canaan and the Land of the Hebrews"], Tel Aviv 2000, pp. 17-27. The booklet "Chem: Revue d'action hebraique" and other papers found on Stern's desk are kept at the Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem, CZA A549/19.

I tend to choose the latter option, for two reasons: an inherent one and a structural one. Inherently, the strong connection between state and nation are 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?[54] Ethnic ("chauvinist", "primordial") nationalisms may, precede states, and see the establishment of a national state as their goal. The Habsburg Monarchy during the 19th century and until its disintegration after the First World War provides a plethora of examples for such nationalisms.

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, i.e. initial formation and root taking. 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 not in independent states, but in territories which were parts of the British Empire at that time.[55]

*Pro-Italianism and Autochtonic Fascism*

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 of the Mediterranean, a competition 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. Although the borderline between autochtonic fascism based on deep political conviction on the one hand and simple pro-Italianism on the other might be blurred and not always stable, one should be aware of this difference and differentiate between the two.[56]

The difference between autochtonic, ideological fascism to anti-British and pro-Italian sentiments is a matter of Realpolitik. It can be seen as parallel with

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[54] Different interpretations of nationalism can also compete within a national community. See Shelef, Evolving Nationalism: Homeland, Identity and Religion in Israel, 1925-2005, Ithaca 2010. For a review of both the global phenomenon and to the specific Israeli case, see also Joseph Agassi, Liberal Nationalism for Israel: Towards an Israeli National Identity, Jerusalem 1998.

[55] 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, 1931-32", in: History Australia 5 (2008), pp. 1-20.

[56] 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, in: Israel Affairs, vol. 10 no. 3 (Spring 2004), pp. 90-109.

motivated, devoted fascists who formed a fascist movement because of ideological convictions on the one hand, and "pragmatic" band-wagoners who joined it expecting future political benefits on the other.

However, this division runs partially parallel to the division between those Revisionists and sympathizers of Jabotinsky who immigrated to Palestine, and those who were born there. The immigrants were "reared" in Europe and went through experiences similar to those which 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 for this. Those born in Palestine, on the other hand, usually saw their main aim in native national struggle, which made them seek Italian support in their anti-British struggle: Ben Abi's latinization of Hebrew writing is an example for that. Therefore, to some extent those were rather the immigrants who tended more towards developing genuine fascism, while the natives were more "practical" pro-Italianists.

*Racism*

In the ongoing process of defining and understanding fascism, some attributes and components are well agreed upon as being integral parts of it: these include (among other things) ultra-nationalism, cult of the leader and mobilization of the masses. However, the role of other sociological phenomenons in forming the base for fascism is disputed. One such phenomenon is racism.

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, culminating in genocide. And while Mussolini's Fascism did not reach the same scope of murder as its northern neighbour, it also developed racist praxis and implemented it gradually, first in Africa, and later on in Italy itself.[57]

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 fascism, or can a fascist movement emerge and evolve also without being inflicted by it?

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, or even necessarily anti-Semitic. He adds, however, that fascist nationalists were all racists in the general sense of considering blacks or non-Europeans inferior.[58]

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[57] Carlo Moos, Der späte italienische Faschismus und die Juden. Hintergründe und Folgen einer rassenpolitischen Wende, Themenportal Europäische Geschichte, www.europa.clio-online.de (22/02/2008).

[58] Stanley G. Payne, A History of Fascism, 1914-1945, Madison 1995, p. 11.

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.[59] 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 made a significant part (either in numbers or symbolically) of the Fascist party's membership.[60]

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 antisemitic 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".[61]

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, Turkish – all these generic fascisms may serve as a proof that the notion of European supremacy is not an inherent part of fascism.[62]

During the last decades, the term "racism" has been so widely expanded so it is now often used to describe various kinds of discrimination, based upon gender, cultural preferences, religious affiliations and so on. This inclusive definition has also been used in retrospect, for instance as some scholars claimed that the Italian Fascist racism had been a "spiritual" rather than a "biological" one.[63]

But exactly because of the theoretical vicinity between fascism and other rightist ideologies which tend to be culturally exclusive and discriminative towards groups of "others", precision and accuracy are crucial when coming to assess the role of racism in fascist ideology and practice. Maybe the best place to begin with will be what Fredrickson describes as "scientific racism", which was common in Europe during the 1st half of the 20th century.[64]

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[59] Carlo Moos, Ausgrenzung, Internierung, Deportation: Antisemitismus und Gewalt in späten italienischen Faschismus, Zürich 2004, p. 39.

[60] Roberto Farinacci's address is cited by Moos, Ausgrenzung, p. 15.

[61] Zvi Kolitz, Mussolini: His Personality and Doctrine [Mussolini: 'Išiyuto ve-Torato], Tel Aviv 1936, p. 5.

[62] On Japanese, Chinese and Arab fascisms, see the articles of Gregory Kasza, William Kirby and Haggai Erlich in: Larsen (ed.), Fascism.

[63] Moos, Der späte italienische Faschismus.

[64] George Fredrickson, Racism: A Short History, Princeton 2002, p. 3.

*Neighbouring Fascisms*

Investigating 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 neighbouring countries. Ḥaj Amin al-Ḥusseini's collaboration with the German SS and Rašid 'Ali al-Kaylani's German-inspired rebellion in Iraq are among the better known cases of Arabist support of Nazism.[65] But even if they were driven by a wholehearted admiration to the Nazi regime (and, at least in the case of Ḥaj Amin, a strong anti-Jewish sentiment), they probably reflect a political support for the enemies of Great Britain rather than an attempt to constitute local national generic fascism in the fertile crescent.

The Ba'ath party, whose Iraqi wing was officially in power until the fall of Saddam Ḥussein, and whose Syrian wing is still – at the moment these lines are being written – officially in power in Syria, is often regarded as a fascist one. Founded in Damascus in 1940 by two Lebanese intellectuals, the Ba'ath (Arabic for "rebirth" or "renaissance") has clearly adopted and embedded in its ideology and practices some of the era's political fashions. But if we see the abandonment of free institution 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'ath regimes can therefore be regarded as authoritarian rather than fascist.[66]

The only "Arab" state which had such institutions is Lebanon. And indeed, it is there where one 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 their Arabic name *Kataayeb*] and the Syrian National Socialist Party, respectively.[67] However, the existence of a fascist movement in one country does not rule out the existence of such a movement in its neighbouring country.

*Conclusion*

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 came beyond the initial stage of forming a small movement. At the same time, this Hebrew fascist movement had many similarities

[65] 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", in: Middle Eastern Studies, vol. 41, Issue 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 2006; and the review essay: Gideon Botsch, "Neues vom Mufti? Palästina und der Nationalsozialismus", in: ZRGG 61 (2009), pp. 280-286.

[66] See Paxton, Anatomy, p. 300.

[67] Next to its updated website (www.ssnp.com), see also Götz Nordbruch, "Defending the French Revolution during World War II: Raif Khoury and the Intellectual Challenge of Nazism in the Levant", in: Mediterranean Historical Review vol. 21, no. 2, December 2006, pp. 219-238.

with other contemporary fascist movements – a fact which clearly enables us to examine it within a comparative scientific framework.

For obvious reasons, fascism has quite 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. To this, one should say two things.

First, 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: those Revisionist activists who embraced fascism at a certain point, have also changed their opinions and attitudes. 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 tagging of a whole movement as "fascist".

Secondly, acknowledging the existence of a fascist movement within the Hebrew society of the discussed period can show us that the Hebrew nation was not different from other societies in its formation and political development. Such historical meticulousness should lead us to a better understanding of the political past which, in turn, might help us shape our political future.