Cocks, Joan. "The Search for Sovereign Freedom." *On Sovereignty and Other Political Delusions*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014. 87–124. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781780933573.ch-003>>.

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The Search for Sovereign Freedom

De te fabula narratur!—Karl Marx, *Capital*

The price of sovereign freedom for the other

*“Sir! We’re to be flogged because you complained about us to the Examining Magistrate” ... said Willem, interrupting himself to clap his hand, over which he had got a stinging blow with the rod, to his mouth. “We are only being punished because you accused us ... Both of us, and especially myself, have a long record of trustworthy service ... we had every prospect of advancement and would certainly have been promoted to be Whippers pretty soon, like this man here.”—Franz Kafka, *The Trial**

Our story of the Jewish search for sovereign freedom has a very different narrative arc from our story of the founding of the United States. That first tale recounted how erasures of the Indian life world paved the way for the English settlers to build, in Arendt’s words, a new house where freedom can live, at least as those settlers understood the freedom concept. It concluded with indigenous insights on the value of non-sovereign relations of the human race to the rest of the earth. This second tale runs, chronologically if not in the order of presentation here, from the modern European oppression of the Jews to the search for Jewish sovereign freedom in Palestine to a new dialectic of mastery and servitude, with Jews in the position of the master. An unexpected truth follows from the fact that the Jewish state is built on a great crime against Palestinian Arabs but was instigated by an even greater crime against the European Jews. This is the truth that the experience of persecution can be a stony ground for the cultivation of empathy towards others who are suffering from persecution and even can be the root cause of that suffering.

Although America can be traced back to one original sin,¹ while Israel must be traced back to two, it is hard not to notice lines of resemblance between their founding processes, if one looks at those processes from the vantage point of their victims instead of their protagonists. There is the same unexpected appearance of religiously and politically inspired settlers from afar, the same multiplication over time of their numbers, and the same dawning realization of the indigenous population that the growth of settler communities represents a threat to life as it had been lived until then. There is the same obliterating myth the first settlers bring with them of an empty territory awaiting their arrival and the same self-absorbed dream to make the land, whether conceived of as a bountiful wilderness or a barren desert, productive for themselves. There is the same condescension towards the natives, obtuseness to the value of indigenous socio-cultural life as it is lived in a particular place, and inability or unwillingness to understand the true impact on others of their own activities or to empathize with them. Alternatively, on the part of settlers who *do* understand, and consequently know they will be hated by the population they hope to displace, there is the same fierce determination to win the battle between diametrically opposed collective interests.

Although the Jews who came to Palestine inserted themselves into a largely agrarian/urban instead of nomadic/agrarian society, there is also a discrepancy less severe but still evocative of the one we saw in the American case between settler and native material technologies, modes of organization, forms of knowledge, institutional structures, and political philosophies. Weirdly enough, there is even, by the 1920s, a special connection to and later a rebellion against the imperial power, Great Britain, with which the American settlers had been entangled, although the background causes of those connections and rebellions are in each case distinct. Finally, there is the same dynamic in which a nascent settler society stretches over a larger and larger swath of territory, culminating in a centralized sovereign state that creates right inside that still-expanding territory but is unauthorized to do so by any prior authority that is higher, more objective, or more universal than itself.²

Like their analogues in North America, the builders of the state of Israel made use of both “peaceful” and aggressive modalities of violence to transform the pre-existing world in Palestine into a new reality. If those modalities warrant exemplification here, it is only in part because, while they are like the American prototypes in gross generalities, they are unlike them in many particulars. More to the point, any consideration of the boomerang effects on the Jews of their search for sovereign freedom must begin with the directly punishing effects of that search on Palestinian Arabs, for ethical reasons and also because Palestinian responses to those effects, and Israel’s responses to those responses, reveal sovereign freedom to be a pipedream for both parties, as neither is free from the impact of the other to be a master of its fate.

Much of world Jewry looks back at the struggle for a Jewish state with great romance. Both the Zionists who by the late nineteenth century had over-shadowed the mystical and orthodox Jewish minority in the Ottoman-governed Holy Land and the generation that fought to found Israel after World War II viewed their own ideals, sacrifices, and courage with romance, too. Nevertheless, the victory of the Zionist struggle hinged on one quite down-to-earth consideration, of which the early pioneers could not help but become aware once the blinding light of the idea of Jewish national regeneration had given way to a grasp of demographic realities on the ground.³ In the perhaps apocryphal words of one Jewish visitor to Palestine, “The bride is very beautiful, but she is betrothed to another.” How could the Jews win that bride, when Muslim and Christian Arabs in the years Zionists began to ask this question outnumbered Jews by at least twenty-two to one and even by the end of World War I still made up 90 percent of the population?⁴

From the 1920s on, various plans for Jewish-Arab federations and confederations were designed by Zionists of different political hues to try to square the circle for themselves, at least until they had acquired the numbers to change the basic equation in their favor, but also to show how it was possible to create an ethnic majority society that did

not oppress minorities as European societies had done. These plans included everything from complete bi-national parity between Jews and Arabs in an ethnically intermixed community; to separate, ethnically autonomous cantons in a larger bi-national federation; to a Jewish state in some portion of Palestine within a larger Arab federation; to a sovereign Jewish state in all of Eretz Israel guaranteeing its Arab minority equal rights and cultural autonomy. But except in the case of perfect bi-national equality, each idea rested on two premises that made its practical success very difficult for any neutral observer to imagine, not to mention any Arab, for whom even bi-national equality was unpalatable. These premises were a general recognition of “the national right of the Jewish people to Palestine, i.e. Eretz Israel” and “a Jewish majority in Palestine.”⁵ In combination, such bedrock principles required the reduction of the Arab population to a minority in that same space, to be achieved by two basic mechanisms. One mechanism was increasing Jewish immigration into Palestine, and indeed, as a result of Zionist mobilization in the context of successive waves of European anti-Semitism, by 1947 immigration had boosted the Jewish proportion of the population in Palestine to one third. The other mechanism was enticing or forcing out of some large portion of Palestine as many Muslim and Christian Arabs as possible.⁶ While building a Jewish majority through in-migration would have obvious political and cultural costs for Palestinian Arabs, the worst forms of foundational violence involved in the creation of Zionist settlements, the birth of the Jewish state, and the state’s territorial expansion were all of the “pushing out” variety.

Before we review specifics of this “pushing out” process—specifics for which we owe critical Israeli scholars a great debt for helping to expose—we need to revisit the question of the words we use to say things about political life. What terms of political discourse best capture this particular effort to replace, in the same geographical area, what Frantz Fanon once called “a certain ‘species’ of men by another ‘species’ of men,” from the point of view of the former “species”?⁷ More exactly, what term best captures this effort in the absence of mass

extermination, for which vicious project, thanks to conceptual innovations after Nazism, we now have the word “genocide”? Two nouns popular with Zionism’s fiercest antagonists—“imperialism” and a sui generis “Zionist entity”—both are misleading, the second dangerously so, although features of Zionism open it to the charge of “imperialism,” while Jewish mythologies feed into the sui generis notion.

The association of Zionism with imperialism has more than a few grains of truth to it. After all, Zionism was a self-conscious colonizing project, and many Zionists exhibited typical Western attitudes of racial and civilizational superiority over the peoples of what now is called the Middle East, even promising European countries that a Jewish state in Palestine could serve as an outpost of Western influence and a bulwark between Europe and Asia. Then, too, Zionist leaders attempted to make deals with rulers of several imperial regimes, including the Ottoman Sultan, and came to pin most of their hopes on Great Britain’s on-again, off-again support for a Jewish state in Mandatory Palestine, embracing its imperial power over the area until near the end. The state of Israel has always identified itself strongly with the West, and these days, especially with the United States, which is not unreasonably viewed by many in the Middle East as a neo-imperial power. From the 1970s until the mid-1990s, Israelis benefited, in typical imperialist style, from cheap Arab labor as a result of their occupation of Gaza and the West Bank, a reprise of the use of Arab physical labor by Jewish citrus cultivators before Israel was born. Finally, Israel’s ambition to increase its territory, the same kind of ambition that the Americans had approvingly called “imperial” when describing their own westward expansion across North America, resembles the iconic outward spread of all ancient and modern imperialist powers. Still, it would be a mistake to characterize the essential impetus and *raison d’être* of either the Zionist movement or the state of Israel (or, for that matter, the continental expansion of the United States) as imperialist in the strict sense of an ongoing exploitation of asymmetries of power between a ruling people in the core and the diverse peoples it conquers in the periphery. Instead, exclusive self-rule in a territory large enough to sustain the

collective ethnos has always been the driving and, for Palestinian Arabs, ominous desire here.

The charge that Zionism does not fit under any category more general than itself but represents a total evil all its own is a strong implication of the second term, “the Zionist entity,” when that phrase is used by Zionism’s enemies. The idea of a total evil also is implied by the simple equation of Zionism with racism, as if there would be no remainder to Zionism once racism was subtracted. The idea of a total evil that is *sui generis* seems at times the subtext of that equation as well, as if the racism that is Zionism were a singular kind of politics or, even worse, a manifestation of something singularly Jewish. While outrage at Israeli injustices to Palestinians and classic anti-Semitism have played separate parts in fostering the idea that Zionism is unique in its abominations, two features of Jewish self-representation and political argumentation have helped the idea not of abomination but of uniqueness to take hold. As Hannah Arendt pointed out in her 1967 preface to the first volume of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, the belief of many Jews that they are God’s chosen people, and/or that they have a special mission on earth, and/or they have been eternal scapegoats victimized by everyone everywhere, suggests that the Jews are in mysterious ways separated from all other peoples, so that ordinary categories into which other human beings fall, and failings to which other human beings are susceptible, do not apply to them. While Arendt went on to pinpoint the dangers for Jews of exceptionalist self-conceptions in the nineteenth-century European setting, those self-conceptions are equally dangerous in the context of Middle Eastern politics today. Most obviously, the claim of many Jews that any criticism of Israel is anti-Semitic feeds the idea that whatever injustices Israel inflicts on Palestinians is the outer manifestation of an inner Jewish essence.

To file Zionism instead under the rubric of *ethnonationalism*, as this chapter will do, is to reinsert it in a larger universe of problematic modern politics inhabited by other individuals and peoples. Zionism does not stand alone in its vulnerability to terms used to characterize and appraise ethnonationalism, but by the same token it is not

exempted by some metaphysical special status from their categorization of its human, all-too-human sins.⁸

Instead of emerging from within a mixed-belt territory that it then sought to take over, Zionism came from elsewhere to claim an already inhabited territory for another ethno-religious group. While not reducible to racism with no remainder, Zionism exhibited *racist* attitudes and practices. As noted earlier, many Western Zionists had absorbed European attitudes of civilizational superiority and reiterated those attitudes when they encountered the indigenous Palestinian population. Furthermore, to account for Arab resistance as well as the hostility of various Western state officials to their enterprise, Zionists were not above drawing on traditional notions of an essential alienation between Gentile and Jew. Most significantly, the Zionists sought to create a society in which the line between national majority and minority, and national insider and outsider, was drawn on the basis of ethno-religious “blood.” In combination, these race discriminations helped set in motion two interacting antinomies: the antinomy of superior and inferior, in which the individual’s assignment to majority or minority within the state was based on the fixity of being, not the shifting sands of political opinion; and the antinomy of friend and enemy, in which members of antagonistic collective identities faced one another both inside and outside the state’s territorial bounds. In turn, these antinomies fuelled the combustible emotions of arrogance, resentment, pride, scorn, humiliation, indignation, hatred, and fear, which then exacerbated the antinomies, which intensified the combustible emotions in a downwardly spiraling loop.

As is true of other ethnonational movements and settler colonies alike, it can be said that Zionism acquired the territory for the Jewish state by myriad practices of *dispossession*— territory from which both the material and memory traces of dispossession were then *erased*. In its attempts to de-Arabize the land it claims for the Jewish people, the state of Israel can be accused of *ethnic cleansing*, a metaphor for which this time we have Serbian nationalists to thank. All these practices, whether “peaceful” or coercive, can be counted as modalities

of *foundational violence*. That is, with every plot of land that is swept within the boundaries of the Jewish state, and every Arab who is swept out or demoted to the status of an ethnic stranger, the state extends its law over a new space for the benefit of a different population.

The earliest and most “peaceful” modality of foundational violence in the struggle for a Jewish state was the consensual contract, but not a contract in the American form of treaties signed by reciprocally recognized yet unequal sovereign nations that transferred land from the weaker to the stronger party. Instead, beginning some seven decades before Israel came into existence, private contracts of purchase and sale between Jewish pioneers financed by Jewish philanthropists abroad and large, mostly absentee Arab landowners were the instruments by which land was transferred parcel by parcel from the latter to the former. If, in the words of one Zionist in 1882, the idea “‘is, in time, to take over the Land of Israel and to restore to the Jews the political independence they have been deprived of for these two thousand years,’” as another Zionist noted later, only three modern methods of land acquisition were theoretically available: conquest, government expropriation, and private purchase. Private purchase was what the Zionists had to rely on, “‘until at some point we become rulers.’”⁹ The political effects on Arab society of these early private land sales were modest, but the economic and psychological effects were marked, above all for poor Arab peasants, who before the Zionists arrived already had been reduced by circumstances of indigenous class domination to tenant farmers on land they once had owned as small proprietors and now were evicted from that land.¹⁰ Although many were able to earn wages, even higher wages than before, as field hands for the first wave of Jewish immigrant farmers, they not only had lost to foreigners their final hold on their home on earth but also had to put up with the contemptuous treatment that colonial overlords all too often mete out to native underlings. Indeed, by 1891 the spiritual Zionist Ahad Ha-Am (who later was to warn that “a political ideal which is not grounded in our national culture” would “beget in us a tendency to find the path of glory in the attainment of material power

and political dominion”¹¹) protested that the settlers were exhibiting towards Arab peasants “‘a tendency to despotism as happens always when a slave turns into a master.’”¹² Ironically, the livelihood of those peasants was more seriously threatened once a radical wave of Jewish immigrants arrived in Palestine. Determined to re-fashion the diasporic urban Jew into a muscular worker of the soil,¹³ unable to compete with more competent and compliant Arab agricultural workers, and allergic on socialist grounds to the colonial exploitation of one race by another, those left-wing immigrants endorsed the policy and practice of Jewish-only labor.¹⁴

Unlike the private land contract, most forms of foundational violence in Palestine/Israel were enabled and legitimated by wars sometimes initiated by others, sometimes initiated by Israel, and often the result of escalating tensions between everyone. That “everyone” included Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs but also other Arab states, including Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq. Some forms of foundational violence were unplanned by-products of war, and some were orchestrated by the Zionist leadership. They most infamously included, during the first Arab-Israeli war, the expropriation of Palestinians who had fled the new Jewish state in a panic in 1948 in fear of Jewish military attack and/or under advisement of near-by Arab countries; the intimidation and forced expulsions of others from their homes, fields, and stores; the transfer of Arabs from one part of the new country to another for military security purposes or to make room for Jews; and the looting and destruction of Arab villages or their repopulation with Jewish immigrants.¹⁵ The ultimate effect of such violence was a gain of more than half a million acres for Jews in addition to the over 55 percent of Mandatory Palestine that the United Nations had allotted to them and the transformation of between 600,000 and 750,000 Arab residents of Palestine into refugees, as well as the political isolation and military supervision of more than 100,000 Arabs who remained on what became Israeli soil and another few thousand allowed back after the war.¹⁶ Administrative and military decrees such as the “Absentees Property Law,” “Law of Land Acquisition in Times of Emergency,”

and “Emergency Regulation of the Cultivation of Fallow Lands” also functioned in this period as non-directly violent instruments of foundational violence. To take the first example, property from which Arabs had fled was counted by law as the abandoned property of absentees and as such made available for new Jewish owners. Even thousands who had fled from their property for only a few days and remained inside the borders of Israel were stripped of their property after being designated as “present absentees.”¹⁷

Many liberal and left-leaning Jews make a moral distinction between the legitimate creation of a Jewish state in 1948 and an illegitimate Occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967. They also distinguish between a humanistic leadership in the pre-1967 period and an aggressively nationalistic leadership afterwards with roots in a right-wing “Revisionist” Zionism that early idealistic Zionists had reviled.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the Sharons, Begins, Netanyahus, Liebermans, and Bennetts who successively moved to political center stage after 1977 are in the most important respect—their commitment to Jewish sovereign power in Palestine—as tightly related to the liberal Theodor Herzl and the leftist David Ben-Gurion as they are to the Revisionist Vladimir Jabotinsky and the sometimes brown-shirted Zionists who in the 1920s and 1930s took their political cues from him.¹⁹ Inversely, despite Jabotinsky’s “maximalist” position that land on both sides of the Jordan River should belong to a Jewish state, his bellicosity towards Palestinian Arabs until the day they would be forced to accept minority status in that state, his distaste for the Orient, his view of Arabs as civilizationally backward, and the Jewish left’s view of him as a fascist, this Revisionist, to whom we will return later, deserves appreciation from Zionism’s foes and friends alike in two connected respects.²⁰ First, although he had been circumspect early on, he later was more honest than other Zionists in calling outright for a Jewish sovereign state in Eretz-Israel, instead of publicly endorsing a nebulous cultural homeland for the Jews while working for Jewish political sovereignty in Palestine behind the scenes. Second, unlike the liberal and leftwing Zionists who imagined that a Jewish state in Palestine could somehow

live in peace with its Arab inhabitants, Jabotinsky understood the inevitability of a clash between two peoples with awakened national aspirations and designs on the same “bride.”

To trace the thread of continuity that runs from the pre-state through the post-Occupation periods, we need only consider how foundational violence in the years just before and after 1948 anticipate the modalities by which Israel, after 1967, stretched its sovereign power over more and more of Mandatory Palestine while excluding the new inhabitants it acquired from “the sovereign people.”

The first key continuity between 1948 and 1967 is the creation in both periods of a Palestinian refugee population, with the effect of reducing the number of Arabs on land desired for the Jews. More specifically, the flight of those hundreds of thousands of Arabs from Palestine during the first Arab-Israeli War prefigures the flight during the Six-Day War, whether from panic or Israeli military intimidation, of between 200,000 and 250,000 Palestinians from the West Bank, along with 100,000 Arab refugees who fled from or were pushed out of the Golan Heights.²¹ At the same time, however, Israel gained in the Occupation over a million new Palestinian inhabitants, a number reaching almost 4 million by 2010,²² who not only required far greater military control and political pacification than did the Palestinian remnant living within Israel’s pre-1967 borders²³ but also presented the Jewish state with a political conundrum to do with the future make-up of its people and the future character of its political regime. If Israel were to deny the inhabitants of the Occupied Territories citizenship in its body politic, it would have to rule those inhabitants as a permanent military despot instead of as the Western-style liberal democracy it prides itself on being. If Israel were to grant equal Israeli citizenship to those inhabitants, it could not maintain its self-rule as a Jewish state for very long, not to speak of having to buck the religious right’s rejection of the principle of natural equality between Jews and non-Jews and the secular right’s rejection of the principle of political fraternity between Jews and Arabs. If Israel were to retract the territory under its sovereign power to its pre-Occupation borders to preserve its ethno-religious

constitution of “the people,” it would lose land to which its right wing openly had laid claim and for which its left wing more discretely had longed from the beginning. Moreover, it would gain a next-door neighbor beyond its sovereign control, whose experience of the Israeli Occupation would have given it every reason to be hostile.²⁴

The second continuity in foundational violence between 1948 and the post-1967 period is the massive destruction of Palestinian material existence within the expanding borders of the Israeli state. Jeff Halper, head of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD), notes this continuity when he reports that the erasure of between 417 and 536 Palestinian villages from 1948 into the 1960s has its analogue in the demolition of almost 23,000 Palestinian houses between 1967 and 2009,²⁵ not to speak of, after the start of the second Intifada in 2000, Palestinian roads, water pipelines, electrical grids, and hundreds of thousands of fruit and olive trees.²⁶ Almost all these demolitions, according to Halper and other Israeli critics, are both a form of collective punishment for Palestinian resistance to the Occupation and a method of compacting Palestinians into small, disconnected enclaves while clearing land around those enclaves for Jewish use.

To convey the assaultive process in more detail (although numbers can do only so much to convey the trauma), Halper offers the following statistics. In the wake of the 1967 war Israel evicted 300 Arab families from the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem, destroyed two mosques and the homes of 135 Palestinian families in the Muslim quarter “to create a plaza for Jewish worshippers in front of the Western Wall,” and razed at least 2,000 homes west of Jerusalem, covering them with a park. In 1971, to facilitate the movement of military vehicles, it crushed 2,000 houses in the Gaza refugee camps. It demolished 2,000 homes in the Occupied Territories in the late 1980s and early 1990s while quelling the first Intifada, 1,700 more during the Oslo Peace Process (1993–2000), and almost 5,000 during the second Intifada.²⁷ As one Israeli bulldozer driver described his part in demolishing 800 homes in the Jenin refugee camp in 2002: “‘For three days I just erased and erased.’”²⁸

As a third continuity in foundational violence, the resettlement in 1948 of Jewish immigrants on former Palestinian property prefigures the rapid growth of Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories, sometimes instigated by national-religious settlers and sometimes planned and promoted by the state. Before Israel dismantled Jewish settlements in Gaza in 2005, the number of Jewish settlers had reached 195,000, not including those moving into East Jerusalem, which Israel had annexed outright after the war along with the 64 surrounding square kilometers belonging to 28 Palestinian villages.²⁹ By the beginning of 2013, the number of Jewish settlers in the West Bank and East Jerusalem had climbed to 520,000.³⁰ As I write these lines, a new Jewish apartment complex is being proposed as “infill” in the Arab neighborhood of East Jerusalem, and plans have been announced to build 3,000 new Jewish houses in Greater East Jerusalem bisecting the West Bank.³¹ Just as Israel, in the first year of its existence, had used the law to give Jews a right to the land of Arab “absentees,” it has made use of legal mechanisms promulgated without the consent of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories to turn much of their land into Jewish property. According to Eyal Weizman, in addition to expropriating Palestinian land by military decree, by the early 1990s Israel had registered 38 percent of primarily the high ground of the West Bank as “state land” by resurrecting an old Ottoman Land Law of 1858, which stipulated that land not cultivated for three years automatically became property of the sovereign. Along with cultivated plots for which individual Palestinian owners could not prove title, the state then distributed this uncultivated land to Jewish hilltop settlements for their future expansion.³²

A fourth continuity in foundational violence on both sides of the 1967 divide is the spatial separation of Jews and Arabs. Although Neve Gordon shows us that separation only emerged as Israel’s control mechanism of choice in the Occupied Territories after the start of the second Intifada, separation is in fact no more than a materialization of the purported ontological distinction between Jews and Arabs that has been from the beginning the foundation of all foundational

violence in the Jewish state. The main mechanism of separation in the pre-Occupation period was the classic contiguous nation-state boundary line distinguishing Israel from the larger Arab region, supplemented by more informal horizontal separations between intra-national Jewish and Palestinian neighborhoods. In the post-2001 period, as Weizman shows us, a stricter separation occurs along three different planes. Vertically, in much of the West Bank, Jewish deep aquifer rights, Palestinian shallow water rights, Jewish-only transportation tunnels, and (illegal) Palestinian tunnels are layered on top of one another below ground; Palestinian neighborhoods are administered by Palestinian officials in the flat valleys; Jewish settlements perch on hilltops, subject to normal Israeli law; and Jewish-controlled airspace sits atop everything else. Diagonally, Jewish-only roadways and bridges span impoverished Palestinian neighborhoods in patterns that hide Palestinian life from the sight of Jewish commuters as they drive from Jewish enclaves in the West Bank to “mainland” Israel. Horizontal barriers zigzag around these topographical labyrinths to make up the ever-lengthening “separation wall,” with its bump-out loops sealing off as many Jewish settlements as possible, along with the rest of the Jewish population, from concentrated Palestinian areas as well as from (as in the case of a newly-envisioned wall on the Syrian border) political upheavals in adjacent Arab countries. Finally, militarized checkpoints, at which crowds of Palestinians wait for hours while “Jewish settlers cruise unhindered through separate gates and down protected corridors,”³³ inhibit and at times prohibit the movement of Palestinians from the Occupied Territories to Israel or from one cut-off section of the Territories to another. These segregated residential areas, roadways, barriers, checkpoints, and, most recently, bus lines³⁴ have an explicit security and an implicit ideological function. The security function is to protect Israeli Jews from the non-violent as well as violent protests of Palestinians—in other words, to protect the victors in the struggle for sovereign power from the anger of the vanquished. The ideological function is to cement the notions of victor and vanquished as two alien and differently valued species of beings.

Each of the key continuities between the emergence of Israel in 1948 and its actions after 1967—the creation of a refugee population, the erasure of Palestinian material culture, the settlement of Jews in areas once inhabited by Arabs, and the separation of Jews and Arabs—distantly recalls foundational violence in North America. They also echo a lesson we learned from the American case, that the foundational violence entailed in the establishment of a sovereign nation-state is not confined to the state's original “birthday.”

Settler colonialism was the method by which the Zionist movement acquired and expanded the boundaries of a Jewish sovereign state, fomenting in response the desire for freedom in a population displaced from its habitat and subjected to almost half a century of military occupation much crueler than this chapter was designed to convey. A state under permanent siege has been the outcome of that method and response. In turn, as David Lloyd and others have argued, the Israeli state has offered a new model of hyper-fortified sovereign politics for all liberal democratic states in the “age of terror.”³⁵ All this is true, and yet the desire for liberation from oppression, not the desire either to oppress or to live under siege, was the original impetus to the Jewish search for sovereign power. To comprehend that desire, we must step outside the limits of a “settler colonial” analysis and begin the second part of our story.

The search for Jewish sovereign freedom

We shall live at last as free men on our own soil, and die peacefully in our own homes. The world will be freed by our liberty, enriched by our wealth, magnified by our greatness. And whatever we attempt to accomplish for our own welfare, will react powerfully and beneficially for the good of humanity—Theodor Herzl, The Jewish State

Anyone familiar with modern Jewish history should be struck by another curious resemblance besides the resemblance between foundational violence in America and Palestine. This is the resemblance

between the relegation of Palestinians *by* Jews in the present and the relegation *of* Jews in the past to the position of despised Other. The dispersal of refugees into a world-wide diaspora; the use of state force and law to expropriate the property of one ethno-religious group for the benefit of another; the geographical transfer or articulated wish to transfer human beings as if they were objects; the confinement of a putatively alien-by-nature population to separate, walled off, impoverished quarters; the circulation of notions of ethno-racial superiority and purity, which periodically give rise, as if in a chemical reaction, to spontaneous physical assaults³⁶—in short, the punishment of people for being who they are and where they are—all these practices have in Israel their distinctive origin, development, rationale, and proximate triggers. Nevertheless, they eerily evoke the treatment to which European Jews once were subjected before the quantitative increase in anti-Semitic offenses had taken that final, fatal qualitative leap. If such evocations are shocking when viewed from one angle, from another angle they are unsurprising. This is not simply because of the human inclination to make prejudicial *we/they* distinctions but also because the Jews learned the lesson of what it takes to be a free people from their former overlords.³⁷

While the trials of the Jews are too complex to detail here, something can be said about the bookend episodes of the modern story that culminates in Zionism's birth. The first bookend is noteworthy for the date of its occurrence, its reference backwards to sheer religious hatred and forwards to the identitarian temptations of the sovereign nation-state, and its testimony to former mutual sympathies between peoples now at odds. In the same year that Christopher Columbus set sail for what would become "America," the last remnant of Moorish power in Granada was defeated by the Catholic Reconquista. That defeat was disastrous not only for Muslims but also for Jews, who had flourished for many years during Arab rule over the Iberian Peninsula. In what could be seen as the beginning of modern race politics, the sovereign monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella instigated an inquisition that found blood, not belief, the ultimate proof of religious faith, followed by

their purification of Christian Spain by expelling alien elements from its territory. Of the Jews who made it out alive, many fled to the Arab Maghreb and the Ottoman imperial cities of Istanbul, Salonica, and Sarajevo, where they became a welcomed part of the tapestry of cosmopolitan, multi-ethnic urban life.³⁸

The second bookend, more than three centuries later, was the so-called Jewish Emancipation, a series of halting steps by liberalizing European states to emancipate the Jews from their restricted ghetto life by bestowing equal civic and political rights on them. The invitation to political assimilation, however, opened the door to social suspicions of every trait Jews exhibited or alternatively were thought to be masking that was “racially” particularistic rather than in line with the national people’s proclivities, sensibilities, and beliefs. Meanwhile, in the decades before and after Zionism emerged as a distinguishable tendency, romantic nationalist movements across Europe declared ties to the soil, folk culture, and ethno-religious identity the basis of political community³⁹; pan-nationalist movements touting blood and belonging contested the legitimacy of multinational continental empires; and anti-colonial movements against overseas European imperialism drew on ethnic imagery to constitute their respective peoples. In this political atmosphere, it is hardly surprising that nationalism might come to seem the only effective remedy for an ethno-religious minority at the mercy of national majority prejudices regardless of legal equalizing measures.⁴⁰ Given the ongoing universalization of the modern nation-state form, the rise of nationalist movements even in the once hospitable-to-difference Ottoman Empire, the unique situation of the Jews as a minority in every actual and prospective nation-state, and the self-image of Jewish religious exclusivity, the conclusion of at least some Jews that the freedom of all Jews was contingent on their ascent to sovereign power inside a national territory of their own thus seems in retrospect almost foregone. Although a few “empty sites” in Argentina and Uganda were briefly considered, the choice of Palestine was also predictable in retrospect. Nationalist movements may emerge in reaction to real collective suffering, but they must galvanize their

would-be peoples on the basis of a myth. A return from exile to Zion was the only mythic idea with the magnetism to galvanize traditional Eastern European Jews trapped in an impoverished and increasingly insecure ghetto life, Central and Western European Jews once their hopes had been dashed that their efforts at assimilation would bring them acceptance and love, and Oriental Jews who, while they had been belittled rather than crushed in Arab countries, were pitched into a more difficult situation once Israel was born.

If the idea of a “natural right of the Jewish people to be masters of their own fate, like all other nations, in their own sovereign State”⁴¹ sparked the imagination of only a few individuals politicized by anti-Semitism in the early 1880s, it became alluring to many more over the next 50 years with each new wave of anti-Jewish state legislation and popular pogroms, especially once this “push” factor was fused with the promise of a return to the Holy Land as the “pull,” the tireless efforts of organization and agitation on the part of Zionist activists being a crucial third factor. After the rise of Nazism and the refusal of other countries to save Jewish refugees from its horrors en masse, most of world Jewry was won over to the cause of winning sovereign power in Palestine at any cost.⁴²

The passion for sovereign power for its own sake has a relatively straightforward psychological basis and dynamic. The thirst for wealth and honor and every other good that sovereign mastery promises to bring in its wake, the competitive drive to win supremacy over one's peers and turn them into one's inferiors, even the acceptance of inherited prerogative, which veils power urges in ornamental costume and weighs down those who wear jeweled crowns with obligations to their inferiors—all are variations of a desire to derive benefits for the self over against others that is no more mysterious than the opposite desire to enjoy the company of others without ruling, besting, or destroying them. While these twin desires are never unmediated by social conditions, they are elemental in the sense of flowing directly from the existential situation of the self as simultaneously separate from and drawn to other selves, and vulnerable to those other selves on both counts.

The passion for sovereign power as the solution to oppression, persecution, and humiliation, is, so to speak, a secondary reaction of the self to its vulnerability to the other and as such involves new psychological and social complications. Those complications are not difficult to decode when the enslaved self (if I might use the master/slave image metaphorically) desires sovereign power simply to turn the tables on his master, in order to enjoy all the pleasures of domination that were previously denied him.⁴³ Obviously, this desire can have unfortunate consequences for the master, especially as *ressentiment* foment a vindictive approach to rule, and it also can injure the slave by trapping him inside his revenge obsessions. Still, the slave who becomes the master of his former master achieves essentially what he has aimed at, and in that sense his victory produces no real surprises for us or for him.

The passion for sovereign power as the solution to oppression is more problematic, and the route towards its actualization is more tortuous, when the slave wishes not to invert but to transcend the master/slave relationship, to take his rightful place as a self-determining subject who governs himself according to his own lights, equally with every other free subject in the world. In this case, the enslaved self's worst fate is not imprisonment in an inverted master/slave relation that he longs for but imprisonment in a new master/slave relation that he fails to anticipate but is forced to initiate as soon as he acts to defeat forces hostile to his will. If beautiful ideals infuse the slave's original desire for sovereign freedom outside all master/slave dynamics, political inexperience and naïveté at once encourage those ideals and set up the slave for inevitable disenchantment. The slave's myopic focus on his own situation, which can blind his eyes to the impact of his actions on others and close his heart to felt concern for them, helps to tarnish the "beautiful" struggle for sovereign freedom, too.⁴⁴

Of course, in real life desires are never cut and dried, and the human heart has its very dark chambers. Therefore it is not impossible, and perhaps not improbable, that the enslaved self wishes to transcend the master/slave relationship at the conscious level but at the unconscious level wishes to invert it.⁴⁵

Before the state of Israel was anything more than a distant and vaguely articulated dream, no Zionist would have said, and few were likely to secretly think, that the Jews should gain sovereign freedom so that they could enjoy the pleasures of mastery by foisting the pains of subjugation onto someone else. The vice that most Zionists could most fairly be accused of was utter self-absorption, which fed a tendency to imagine a space for Jewish sovereign freedom in which no one else was there, or at least a space in which those who were there were magically reconciled to Jewish national aspirations. Because freedom for the Jews was the pivot around which the early Zionist imagination turned, an analysis of the oppression of the Jews that made their freedom urgent was the centerpiece of many classic Zionist texts. Regardless of one's view of the Zionist prescription for acquiring freedom, the Zionist diagnosis of the social illness that begged for an effective prescription of *some* sort should and, one hopes, would have been welcomed as an important contribution to the general critique of marginality, subordination, and degradation were it not for three countervailing factors. The first factor was the Zionists' fixation on the plight of the Jews, which disinclined them to extend their insights to the situation of other beleaguered minorities. The second factor was the Zionists' exaggeration of the difference between the Jews who had no homeland and all other minorities who could be said to have a country to return to if they were in desperate straits—but perhaps the exaggeration is more obvious *as* an exaggeration today, when economic destitution in so many "homelands" has pushed even majority peoples into social marginality, and when political cruelty keeps driving millions more into flight. However, the most potent factor preventing Zionist insights from being absorbed into the larger critical literature on the politics of domination and exclusion is the part Zionism has played in the practical recapitulation of those politics. The dismissal of Zionist voices on such grounds is unfortunate, as those voices not only illuminate the political psychology of oppression but also exemplify the logic that leads from oppression to the search for sovereign freedom to a new oppression.

The two major and one minor Zionists we shall highlight here to reveal that political psychology and logic—Theodore Herzl, Vladimir (Zé'ev) Jabotinsky, and Albert Memmi—have been selected in part because their writings offer complementary insights into the plight of the cultural minority, which in turn set the stage for a defense of sovereign power as the route to freedom for the Jews. Certain aspects of their early political formation are complementary, too. Each man was a secularist who once had been enamored of Western universalistic ideals, whether in the liberal idiom of freedom, the socialist idiom of equality and fraternity, or the cosmopolitan idiom of “world” (i.e. European) culture and citizenship. Each man suffered intense disillusionment when those lofty ideals turned out to be empty phrases at odds with brutal realities. As Memmi poignantly put it: “Encamped on the pink clouds of the Universal, for a long while I passionately asserted that man, in his heart, was one, that all men were brothers, generous and equal. Down on earth, however, a real and difficult battle was in progress, whose blows I was hardly able to avoid and hardly ever able to return.”⁴⁶ Such a passage just as easily could have been Herzl’s or Jabotinsky’s, although neither directly received the vicious blows that Memmi did. There was also a reactive quality to each man’s embrace of Jewish nationalism. One gets the strong impression of Zionism not only as a counter to inhumanity against the Jews in general but also as a personal repudiation of a repudiation, a method of assuaging the unrequited love of these three Jews for the particular societies that had rejected them. And yet all were able to light on Zionism because they had imbibed from those same societies the idea that the cure for the wounds inflicted on oppressed by dominant peoples lay in injecting the wounded with the virus of national exclusivity and power. Still, of the three men, only Jabotinsky was convinced that the wounded must acquire the capacity and willingness to wound, even if that meant having to become a full-time “Whipper.” Otherwise, “if you want to be good, let yourself be killed: and renounce everything you would like to defend: home, country, freedom, hope.”⁴⁷

As Jabotinsky's sentiment signals, our thinkers also differ from one another in ways that are important, even if those differences prove that a wide variety of contextual situations and personal proclivities can issue in the same basic political conclusion. This variety is partly one of time and place. Herzl was born in 1860 to a German-aculturated middle class Jewish family in the Austro-Hungarian city of Budapest, studied law in Vienna, and as a journalist with the Viennese *Neue Freie Presse* was sent to Paris, where the anti-Semitic private slurs, public speeches, and career restrictions that until then had simmered at the lower levels of his consciousness were finally brought to a boil. Jabotinsky was born 20 years after Herzl, further east, in Odessa, where he fell in love with Russian literature; he studied law in Rome, where he fell in love with Italian nationalism; and, while embarking on a promising literary career as a foreign newspaper correspondent, poet, editor, linguist, and translator, was inducted into Zionist politics through his involvement with Russian Zionists who were organizing in response to the 1903 Kishinev pogrom. Memmi, the outlier of the three, was born 40 years after Jabotinsky on the edge of a poor Jewish ghetto in Tunisia. Although active as a boy in Zionist youth groups, he was immersed in the culture of the Maghreb, identifying during the colonial period with Arabs against the West and with poor Jews and Arabs against the wealthy classes, including Frenchified Jews. Imprisoned as a Jew in a forced labor camp in Vichy-ruled Tunisia and then meeting anti-Jewish and anti-Arab prejudice while studying philosophy in Paris after the war, Memmi returned to Tunisia to join the nationalist movement. He departed again for France when he saw no place for Jews in a free Tunisia that centered the first article of its Constitution on its identity as a Muslim state.⁴⁸

The relationship of each man to the Zionism movement is also distinct. Herzl not unjustifiably saw Jewish nationalism as his brain-child⁴⁹ and was obsessed with the material conditions of its realization from the mid-1890s until his early death in 1904. He published his mobilizing tract, *The Jewish State (Der Judenstaat)* in 1896,⁵⁰ organized and presided over the first World Zionist Congress in 1897, and

crusaded tirelessly thereafter for a Jewish Homeland among Jewish philanthropists (who showed little interest), world leaders (who gave a few promises but very little real support), and poor Jewish masses, who were his most receptive audience.⁵¹ Jabotinsky believed himself Herzl's truest heir. He was a charismatic, peripatetic, and highly controversial figure who championed the Zionist cause in a dazzling number of languages and through a prolific output of speeches, articles, and organizing efforts in Russia, Europe, North and South Africa, Turkey, and North America, as well as in Palestine until the British banned him from there in 1930 because of his incendiary politics. He helped found and lead the right-wing World Union of Zionist Revisionists, for which the nation was not merely the supreme but the sole principle; acted as head and mentor for a Jewish military youth organization, *Betar*; and agitated for armed Jewish self-defense and ultimately armed struggle against whomever he saw as an enemy of the Jews, as well as for the territorial expansion of Jewish colonization in Palestine and unrestricted, i.e. illegal, Jewish immigration.⁵² Unlike Herzl and Jabotinsky, Memmi was a follower of Zionism rather than a leader, and moreover a follower from afar. He was an Oriental as opposed to a European Jew, and a Jew who chose to remain in the despised (by the Zionists) diaspora. Memmi's searing portraits in *The Colonized and the Colonizer* of the mentalities produced by colonialism—for the painting of which “all I needed to do ... was to call up my own memories and contemplate the scars”⁵³—gained him fame among anti-colonial nationalists across the globe. He is less touted for using the same provocative pen in *The Portrait of the Jew*, *The Liberation of the Jew*, and *Jews and Arabs* as well as in his autobiographical novels to convey the problems of Jewish minorities in North Africa and France.⁵⁴ Memmi came to defend the Jewish state as a necessary if not sufficient condition of the dissolution of those problems, declaring Israel essential to the liberation of an oppressed people and “part of the destiny of every Jew anywhere in the world who continues to acknowledge himself as a Jew.”⁵⁵

Aside from but informing how each understood his Zionist commitments, the three men ran a long ideological gamut. Herzl

was an aristocratic, optimistic, modernity-infatuated liberal. While disdainful of the shallow and self-interested rich (as he complained in his diaries, “All the prosperous Jews are against me”⁵⁶), he was equally appalled by the prospect of a workers’ revolution and was not above raising the specter of an incendiary Jewish working-class to convince others to back Zionism as the more moderate option. Jabotinsky, who admired capitalists and was even more hostile to socialist revolutionaries than Herzl had been, had the intellectual temperament of an austere Nietzschean,⁵⁷ valorizing the noble virtues of physical strength, mental fortitude, pride, courage, chivalry, and self-discipline, and vacillating between heroic individualism (“In the beginning, God created the individual, a king who is equal among kings,”⁵⁸ and no state should interfere with the “royalty” of every man over his “individual ‘kingdom’”⁵⁹) and proto-fascism (“There is nothing in the world more valuable than Iron,”⁶⁰ an “unjust strike ... harmful to the State, must be mercilessly squashed,”⁶¹ and “a mass of free people ... can function with the absolute, utter precision of a machine”⁶²). Memmi, in contrast, was influenced by Marxism, although he concluded from his experience of European colonialism that the psychic life of racism was no less central to modern politics than economic exploitation. He stood far from Herzl and even farther from Jabotinsky in taking up the cause of not just Jews or national minorities but all species of “dominated men.”⁶³

Perhaps as a reflection of their clashing ideologies, these three figures exhibit different attitudes with respect to the sovereign freedom/domination nexus. Herzl was almost completely blind to that nexus, seeming to believe not only that the slave can become a master without negative effects on anyone else but also that everyone living in the vicinity of the new master would rally as supporters of his efforts and reap much-appreciated benefits from them. In his utopian novel, *Altneuland* (in which even a German nobleman sings the praises of an imaginary Jewish state), Herzl went so far as to have a fictional Arab declare: “‘Jewish immigration was a blessing for all of us.’”⁶⁴ Jabotinsky, being much more steely-eyed, understood that a Jewish state very definitely would not be considered a blessing by the Arabs and did

not hesitate to call for sovereign domination of the resistant Other as the path to freedom for the self.⁶⁵ Between those positive and negative poles, Memmi was alert to the dark side of sovereign freedom and considered those in harm's way with a sensitivity that Jabotinsky never had the inclination to muster. He admitted that nationalism "is far too frequently an alibi for hatred and domination," wrung his hands over its inevitable "contraction of a people within themselves," lamented the Jews' "collectively neurotic choice" of a site for their state in an "already inhabited, terribly exposed corner of earth."⁶⁶ Still, he endorsed Jewish sovereign power over that corner, if only as a "temporary ending" during a historical stage in which peoples fortified themselves against one another in separate nation-states,⁶⁷ to be one day surpassed, he hoped, by a "binational or even anational symbiosis."⁶⁸

From sovereign freedom to sovereign domination

Young men, learn to shoot!—Vladimir Jabotinsky

"In the beginning is the idea," Herzl announced in his opening address at the Fifth Zionist Congress, and the very existence of that Congress, whose members came annually from many parts of the world to help turn the idea of a Jewish state into actuality, seemed to testify to the truth of that claim.⁶⁹ Yet in hindsight, one also might have suspected that Herzl's faith in the primacy of ideas over material reality was what caused him to overlook the conflicts that Jewish sovereignty in Palestine was likely spark, were it not for the equally strong belief in the power of ideas of Jabotinsky,⁷⁰ who could foresee exactly what the real-life trouble was going to be. And, of course, one need only recall that famous non-Zionist revolutionary leader who also was convinced that an idea could change or at least speed up the course of history once it had found its dedicated human vessel, whether that vessel was a collective mass, a vanguard party, or a single determined man. What distinguished Vladimir Lenin from Herzl, both of whom held to the same idea/human vessel formula, was Lenin's combative world-view,

his first-hand familiarity with the social and political terrain on which his ideal was to be made real, and his solid grasp of the forces that would be arrayed against the effort. It was not, then, Herzl's faith that an idea wildly at odds with empirical reality could become empirical reality that explains his erroneous supposition that the whole world would embrace the Jewish state. It was rather his liberal progressive outlook, which led him to marry an energizing "optimism of the will" to a dangerously misleading "optimism of the intellect"; his physical and cultural distance from the actual geographical site for his plans; and, finally, his assumption that imperial powers were the only forces that really mattered in world affairs, and their leaders the only ones it was crucial to win over.

But if Herzl was naïve about the realities that would have to be overcome to actualize his idea in that portion of the Ottoman Empire on which Zionism had trained its eye, he was far from naïve about realities in Europe that prompted that idea in the first place. He knew that European societies were unwilling to embrace their Jewish populations whether or not they had given them equal civic and political rights, and that they had or would soon have a strong interest in shipping most of their Jews elsewhere. Admittedly, even on this last point Jabotinsky would prove more of a realist than Herzl, when he wrote in 1940 (and to be sure, things in Europe had gotten much worse by then) that sadism simultaneously hates and "does not wish to lose its victim." It was one of the "mysteries of mass-psychology," Jabotinsky noted, that racial hatred of the Jews made their presence at least for a while more desirable to society than their absence. That hatred could be likened to "a spice or sauce which enables the masses to swallow a species of poison which would be too corrosive without it ... the piquant sauce which accelerates both the swallowing and the digestion of ideas and policies" that otherwise would be unpalatable to those forced to consume them.⁷¹

In the beginning is, then, not the idea but the background reality that provokes the idea and makes its actualization seem imperative. The background reality that first badly jolted Herzl, or at least epitomized

for him the reason why his Jewish readers should be badly jolted, were popular demonstrations in 1897 against bringing the French Jewish officer Alfred Dreyfus back from Devil's Island so that he could defend himself against trumped-up charges of treason.⁷² "The people of France, the magnanimous people which is in love with justice, the people of the rights of man ... [did] not wish to have the guilt of the Jewish captain even called into question ... They did not howl 'Down with Dreyfus!' but 'Down with the Jews!'"⁷³

The rage with which the French people condemned a minority group for the suspected sins of an individual, who was suspect precisely because he was a member of that group, did not prompt Herzl to rethink the value of popular sovereignty in the political sense of the term, for he had dismissed Rousseauist ideals of popular social contract and democratic law-making in the first place, declaring that societies owed both their foundations and their day-to-day rule to a small number of leaders, "directors," or "gestors."⁷⁴ But Herzl did rethink the principles of universal freedom, fraternity, and equal treatment in which he *had* believed, on the grounds that, in every existing political order in the civilized world, it was an ethnic (or ethno-religious or racial) majority people that turned out to be sovereign in the social sense. Unlike Arendt in her own response to the Dreyfus case half a century later, Herzl was never tempted to salvage the popular ideal by distinguishing "the People" from "the Mob," the first faithful to an inclusive, republican notion of nationhood and the second lashing out against the secret machinations of racially alien insiders. He suggested instead that every national people could be induced to support, incite, or metastasize into a mob against an identifiable minority living in its midst. When the chips were down, the difference between (French) civic and (German) ethnic constitutions of "the people" proved to be merely apparent.

To the political fact Herzl had discovered that "the people" is inevitably an ethnically particular category, Jabotinsky appended the "human nature" fact that every self preferred its own ethnic group to the rest of humanity. *His* qualm about popular sovereignty, while

rooted in his penchant for strong leaders, also stemmed from his awareness that nothing in the most democratic constitution of a sovereign people prevented it from oppressing those not considered part of the sovereign popular body. But if Herzl and Jabotinsky gleaned their understanding of normality from the ethnic exclusivity they saw in the world around them, their belief that the ideal had to remain within the limits of normality goes a long way to explaining why they thought that no political organization could liberate the Jews except one based on the principle of ethnonational particularity.

Three aspects stand out in Herzl's analysis of actually existing anti-Semitism, each acquiring a Jabotinskian supplement. Each aspect also, incidentally, finds a later echo in Arendt's own writings on the subject. Indeed, Arendt congratulates Herzl for recognizing anti-Semitism as a political problem requiring some kind of political solution, even as she slams him for swallowing German nationalist presumptions about peoples "as biological organisms mysteriously endowed with eternal life," for touting "an unchanging hostility toward the Jews that was ready to take the form of pogroms or persecution at any moment," and for conspiring with imperialist powers to achieve his aims.⁷⁵

Modern anti-Semitism, according to Herzl, while grafted onto traditional religious intolerance, was not a function of the religious antipathy that Christians felt towards Jews. Instead, it arose in response to a more amorphous Jewish "difference" that became a popular irritant once states decided to undo "the inhumanity of discriminatory legislation" against the Jews.⁷⁶ The emancipation proclamations of those states proved not merely "friendlier than customs."⁷⁷ They exacerbated the customary hostility of native majorities as soon as cultural strangers freed to make their way as equal individuals of society became more accomplished than the native professional middle classes, or richer than the native economic elites, or poorer and more dangerously revolutionary than the native proletariat, or, in their creative endeavors, matchlessly clever at imitating a national cultural "original."⁷⁸ Just a few decades of deteriorating circumstances gave Jabotinsky greater cause to dismiss the effectiveness of legal equalities in the face of anti-Semitism,

as the equal rights of minorities enshrined in law between 1871 and 1919 in the German Empire, Austro-Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the Baltic states did nothing to halt and arguably something to spur that racial hatred. Jabotinsky also added crisp details to Herzl's generalities about the economic jealousy that arose among Gentiles once Jews were allowed to compete freely with them. Equal rights mean "the right to win if you are better equipped," wrote this enthusiast of all competitive battles,⁷⁹ who once declared (albeit with some thought about ameliorating the process): "Humanity must always be stormy and seething ... one will rise to the heights, another will slide down the precipice."⁸⁰ However, no equal legal right could protect, for example, "better equipped" urban Jews from the resentment of Polish peasants flocking to the cities in search of work in a period of increasing industrial unemployment.⁸¹ What we today would term the structural determinants of the persecution of minorities, Jabotinsky dubbed the "anti-Semitism of things" (in distinction from subjective feelings of repulsion or the "anti-Semitism of men"): objective conditions that encourage the ostracism of the Jew "almost independent of whether his neighbors like or dislike him."⁸²

In turn, Herzl insisted on the impossibility of Jewish assimilation into Gentile society. Assimilation was a dead end for Jews in large part because of the Christian majority's rejection of them, for true assimilation is, in Jabotinsky's words, a "duet," not a "solo performance."⁸³ But equally prohibitive was the demand that the individual who wished to re-train himself for either a duet *or* a solo part in this new orchestra cut his ties to his old community or at least turn his Judaism into a purely private affair. The paradox as Herzl saw it was that ghetto Jews were bound to one another by both shared traditions and a shared plight in which they were "without honour, without rights, without justice, without defense," while Jews who enjoyed "freedom, liberty and equality presented to them as a gift by the civilized world ... ceased to be Jews." The sacrifice of the "warmth of community" for individual freedom was worse than an exchange of a loss for a gain, for that exchange meant that the individual would be stranded on his

own when the larger society turned its back on him. This is why, Herzl concluded, “a man, to be a man, must have both freedom and the feeling of community.”⁸⁴

Finally, Herzl characterized the Jews as a “surplus” population, initially in the most anti-Semitic countries, then in neighboring states to which they fled when conditions at home had become too oppressive, and finally in societies they tried to reach after hearing that other Jews lived freely and happily there. Ultimately, he warned, even liberal England and the United States would become, as the result of massive immigration, as inhospitable as Germany, Austria, Poland, and Russia. “[T]ossed from country to country”⁸⁵ with “their miserable bundles,”⁸⁶ the Jews were fated to bring the “bundle” of anti-Semitism along with them, eliciting at their point of arrival the antipathies that they were trying to escape at their point of departure. Every place, Herzl noted, “can tolerate a certain number of Jews ... once this indeterminate number is exceeded, anti-Semitism cries out: Stop!”⁸⁷ Or, to paraphrase Jabotinsky’s blunter words, “No one wants the Jewish tramp.”⁸⁸

To these sociological factors—the incompatibility of political equality and social difference, a doomed assimilation process, and the multiplier effect of being branded as a surplus population by any one nation-state—Jabotinsky adds what he sees as three unpleasant truths about human psychology. The ugliest truth is that some people are sadists who enjoy seeing a hated race “squirming and writhing beneath one’s feet.” The most historically specific truth is that, once the ideas of humanity and equality have been embedded in culture, a “formidable effort” is required to make a “clean sweep” of those ideas so that leaders can “send the masses to their death, and to massacre others.” Modern racial ideologies are the fruit of that effort. But the most “elemental and primordial” truth is the special sympathy everyone feels for “one’s own people” and everyone’s consequent willingness to sacrifice the alien in times of distress, on the calculation that “it’s either my son or the Jew’s son, for there’s only one loaf.”⁸⁹ Jabotinsky attaches to this self-preferring instinct a disclaimer he repeats whenever he tries to force

the hard facts of life on the politically inexperienced Jews (about whose leaders Herzl once had written: "Report card: Arithmetic: Excellent; Politics: Poor"⁹⁰). The preference for kin over strangers, according to Jabotinsky, "is definitely not praiseworthy. It is disgraceful, bestial. Were I the ruler of the universe, instead of the Almighty, I would create an entirely different universe. I would never permit such a characteristic to develop. But it nevertheless exists, among Jews as well, and cannot be eradicated."⁹¹

Memmi lives late enough into the twentieth century and far enough outside the West to complicate Herzl and Jabotinsky's analysis of anti-Semitism by dissecting the "middling" instead of entirely abject position of the Jews in regions colonized by European countries. He describes the ghetto Jews of his native Tunis as "steering a course for a century between Arabs and Frenchmen, carefully locking their doors at night, but punctually celebrating their Sabbath ... poor, without recognized rights, but in spite of several alarms, almost at home." Sandwiched between colonizer and colonized, Tunisian Jews looked up to the French, but they led the same materially degraded lives that Muslim Arabs did, as well as sharing almost all of their habits, customs, sensibilities, and tastes. Regarded by the French with colonial contempt before Tunisian national independence, the Jews became a "civic and national negativity" afterwards. "The independence of Tunisia and of Morocco ... was not directed against the Jews, but neither was it made with the Jews ... It is in the very way in which new nations were born that differences became clear, were confirmed, showed us plainly that we were not part of it."⁹² Anti-colonial nationalism, in short, unearthed a new version of the Jewish Question at the same moment that it buried the Colonial Question by forging "the people" in culturally singular terms.

According to Herzl—and while Memmi might have balked at the final clause of the definition, Jabotinsky would have not—a nation is "a historical group of people who recognizably belong together and are held together or driven together by a common foe."⁹³ It can be inferred from this proto-Schmittian proposition that a nation is

oppressed when it is ruled by that same foe. When a national minority is oppressed by a majority, three pathways to freedom are theoretically open to it. The individual members of the nation can try to merge with their foe, but Herzl was adamant that this assimilation option was closed off to most Jews. The minority as a whole can rise up against its oppressors, but Herzl was hardly the type to endorse revolutionary action and in any event would have judged the chances of success for a minority revolt against a majority people to be suicidally slim.⁹⁴ The third pathway to freedom is the surgical excision of the minority from the oppressive society so that it might attain the status of a majority someplace else. This was the pathway Herzl set out on in 1896, Jabotinsky urged all Central and Eastern European Jews to take in 1940, and Memmi echoed in 1962 with reference to Jews in Arab countries, when he concluded that, if other peoples “are as yet unable to put up with the presence of compact minorities among them ... the Jew must be removed from their midst.”⁹⁵

There was something, however, about particularly Herzl’s and Jabotinsky’s prescriptions that smacked of a certain complicity between Zionism and anti-Semitism, and the suspicion that they trucked with anti-Semites was an unpleasantness that dogged them both. The medical language they used in describing Jews as a “painful abscess in the organisms of other nations,”⁹⁶ Zionism as “a kind of new Jewish care” for the “poor, sick Jewish people,”⁹⁷ and mass evacuation as “the only remedy for the cancer of Jewish distress”⁹⁸ was ambiguous about just who was making whom unhealthy, and why, if the Jews were suffering from the disease of anti-Semitism, they were the ones who had to be cut out like a tumor from the body of their host. In practice, Herzl counted on anti-Semitic animosity to induce the requisite number of Jews to desire their own state and indeed, given that “the enemy is the iron ring that holds a nation together,”⁹⁹ to see themselves as a nation in the first place. The anti-Semites, in sum, had to go on being anti-Semites to “create a desire to emigrate where it did not previously exist, and strengthen it where it existed before.”¹⁰⁰ And, as Zionists would render “a patriotic service” in the “countries where

the Jews are disliked,”¹⁰¹ they could request and expect the help of “honest Anti-Semites” to ease the process of Jewish departure.¹⁰²

If the details of this seamy underside of Zionism lie beyond the scope of this study, so do the details of the paradise that Herzl believed the Jews would erect. Suffice it to say that he anticipated a tolerant, humanistic, polyglot, worker-and-industrialist-friendly Jewish state based on the most advanced arts and sciences—a model of progress and justice for the rest of the world that Jabotinsky also envisioned, although with less emphasis on humanism and greater emphasis on Jewish particularity, emblemized in his demand that Hebrew be the sole national language of the Jewish people.

More pertinent for us are two other, final points. First, the Zionists were no more able than anyone else to evade the paradox of all political foundings, whether they occur through colonial settlement or not. Herzl registered this paradox both when he declared in *The Jewish State* that a “state is created by a nation’s struggle for existence. In any such struggle it is impossible to obtain proper authority ... beforehand.”¹⁰³ While he admitted in his diary that, like all other founders of states, “I conduct the affairs of the Jews without their mandate,”¹⁰⁴ the higher-rightlessness of all sovereign national right was exacerbated in the case of a diasporic people, whose members were too spread out over the globe to give a new state even the veneer of being grounded in the consensual agreement of its prospective citizens for which Arendt had praised the Americans. Thus Herzl believed that a small, self-selected Society of Jews would have to found the Jewish state in the name of the larger mass.¹⁰⁵

Second, and specifically licensing colonial settlement, the members of a perpetual minority could “live at last as free men on our own soil, and die peacefully in our own homes” only if they were granted sovereignty “over a portion of the globe large enough to satisfy the rightful requirements of a nation.” The consequence of such a grant seemed so unproblematic to Herzl that he predicted that the Jews not only would be free once they had their own territorial state but “would probably have no more enemies,” or at least no more than “every nation has.”¹⁰⁶

Jabotinsky, being hyper-aware of the enemies that Jewish sovereign freedom was likely to incur precisely because of the territorial issue, comes much closer to embracing, for that reason, sovereign freedom and domination as an inseparable pair. I say “much closer,” because although Jabotinsky acknowledges the dependence of sovereign freedom on the domination that procures and protects it, he denies that such domination is necessarily either unjust or unpleasant for the Other. The clash between that acknowledgment and that denial lends his commentary on relations between Zionist Jews and Palestinian Arabs a highly agitated quality.

Thus, on the one hand, Jabotinsky insists that the Jews must colonize Palestine on both sides of the Jordan River to accommodate the millions of immigrants who will require resettlement once the diaspora is entirely liquidated. He admits that, historically, colonization always has been accomplished without the consent of the colonized, and that “against colonization by an outside race, the local population always fights, everywhere and without exception.”¹⁰⁷ Therefore the Jews will have to impose their “indomitable will-power” on Arabs by means of arms.¹⁰⁸ As Jabotinsky said with respect to the Zionists’ conflict with the British colonial administration in Palestine but could equally have said about their conflict with the Arabs: “I abhor broken windows just like everyone else, broken heads even more ... If it were in my power to create today’s world, I would do it completely differently. However ... [t]he world is what it is.”¹⁰⁹ In any event, if colonial compulsion counts as a crime, “it follows that America is a crime, this country [England] is a crime, all Europe is a crime, and our Bible history is the story of a crime.”¹¹⁰

As the Arab inhabitants of Palestine will naturally begrudge the loss of any of their native land to the Jews, between even the Zionist minimalists and the most moderate Arabs “there is no connecting bridge.”¹¹¹ Therefore Zionists must create an “Iron Wall” with “no single loophole”¹¹² to force an agreement on the Arabs on the Jewish terms that, as Jabotinsky had articulated them as early as 1919, “everything glorious the land has to offer belongs to us—the Jewish nation.”¹¹³ The same

Iron Wall must protect Jewish national dominance in Eretz-Israel once this agreement has been reached, for “[e]very distinctive race aspires to become a nation, to create a separate society, in which everything must be in this race’s image—everything must accommodate the tastes, habits, and unique attributes of this specific race.”¹¹⁴ To express its individual spirit, every national people must own its own “‘laboratory,’ a land where the nation ... manages its own affairs and is free to adapt its communal life to its own ideas of what is good or not good.”¹¹⁵

On the other hand, Jabotinsky claims that it is a righteous act for the Jewish “vagabond” to take a portion of “excess land” from the Arab nation, given that the Arabs possess vast and empty land holdings.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, this vagabond can build its state without dislodging anyone else. Indeed, there is room for one million Arabs, another million of their offspring, and many more millions of Jewish immigrants to live within the same territorial boundaries, so that the Arabs should not feel the need to emigrate (although it wouldn’t be “a tragedy or a disaster” if they did). Even if “it is pleasanter to be in the majority than the minority,” a national minority “can live in reasonable contentment.” As proof of Zionism’s having “nothing to do with the will to dominate over anyone,” the Jewish state should accord Arabs equal civil rights; a proportional share of Parliamentary seats, cabinet offices, court judgeships, and state benefits; equal legal status with Hebrew for the Arabic language; cultural autonomy with respect to religion, social assistance, and education; and equal access to holy sites and wasteland allotments.¹¹⁷ However, the Jews must retain their standing as the sovereign national majority, the Arabs must live in the country as a permanent minority, and “Zion is all ours!”¹¹⁸

Historically, as we have seen, Jabotinsky’s demand for Jewish sovereign freedom derives its positive charge from nineteenth-century ideals of ethnonational distinctiveness and self-determination, and its negative charge from the persecution of Jewish minorities by anti-Semitic states and national majorities. But philosophically, that demand has its roots in Jabotinsky’s interconnected convictions that “men are almost gods,” that “every man is a king,” and that “I am a

King and claim my Kingly birthright.”¹¹⁹ The first conviction, that men are almost gods, elevates the human race nearly to the level of metaphysical sovereigns or, to put the point differently, secularizes theological sovereign power. The second conviction, that every man has a right to lordship on the grounds of his equality with all other men, implicates each man in an unresolvable contradiction, for no man can be a king unless other men are subjected to his will, whether by being subjugated inside the space over which that man is king or by being forbidden by that man to enter that space. The third conviction, that “I” am a king, attributes to Jabotinsky as a Jew this contradictory secular right. All the conundrums generated by the idea of sovereign power once it is brought down from the heavens and combined with the incompatible principle of human equality surface in Jabotinsky’s call for Jewish sovereign freedom in Palestine. The same conundrums are compacted in a line Jabotinsky wrote just before his death. As if he were asserting, simultaneously, a right to equal treatment with every other human being on earth and an intention to exert sovereign mastery over all the earth, he proclaimed: “I insist on law and justice for myself; and if I do not receive it I shall overturn the world making it a desert and wasteland.”¹²⁰

A requiem for national self-determination

If the project of disentangling the members of an oppressed group from Europe so that they might live as they wished in Palestine was doomed to failure, this is not because of an eternal anti-Semitism that supposedly follows the Jews everywhere. The project was doomed because of the inevitability that a minority seeking sovereign status in a new geographical space would become entangled with inhabitants of that space who were bound to resent and reject that status. In truth, any subject seeking sovereign freedom—that is, the freedom to act according to its own will without being subjected to the pressure of the wills of other subjects—either will have to fly to a distant star or

devote itself to crushing the capacity for free action of others here on earth, thereby becoming vulnerable to their warranted hostility. It thus is unsurprising that, to the same degree that Zionism succeeded in achieving Jewish sovereign power in Palestine, which as Jabotinsky was forthright enough to admit hinged on Jewish domination *over* Palestine, the Jews would meet the antagonism of Palestinian Arabs, which would have boomerang effects on the sovereign power and freedom of Israeli Jews, as the separation walls, military checkpoints, security barriers, segregated roadways and bus lines, and the surveillance labyrinth with which Israel has blanketed itself now testify. This time, however, the antagonism facing the Jews is a function of, not the hatred of the oppressor for the oppressed, which Jabotinsky once rightly pronounced poisonous and, at its outer edges, sadistic, but the anger of the oppressed at the oppressor, which the whole world understands and with which many in the world just as rightly feel sympathy.

Sometimes history is so unkind as to trumpet a compelling answer to a grave social problem that proves to be the wrong answer or at least an answer that creates new problems just as grave. Not only could it not supply its people with freedom in the sovereign sense of the term; the Jewish state did not succeed in bringing freedom in the different, Arendtian sense of the capacity to escape all objectively determined processes to create something new. Out of dedication, energy, and imaginative flair, the Zionists created a political society from scratch to establish what they saw as the precondition of freedom for an oppressed people. However, in grasping for themselves the prerogatives of national self-determination, they set in motion a relentless “bad dialectic” of aggressing and avenging forces, with, thus far, asymmetrically punishing outcomes but equally severe effects of self/other alienation on both sides. There seems to be no light at the end of *this* tunnel. Would the triumph of the Palestinian struggle for sovereign freedom count as such a light? Certainly every lover of justice should wish the very best outcome for the Palestinian cause, even though the material conditions for an optimal outcome are shrinking every day. Still, not all the wishes in the world can inoculate a people on the

sovereign power route to freedom from its own susceptibility to the warning we lifted earlier from Marx: “this story”—or some version of this story—“will be told about you!”

Epigraphs

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