

A voice that would sound all the notes

Sound and regeneration in Vladimir Jabotinsky's Hebrew revivalism

Hearken rather, my brethren, to the voice of the healthy body;

it is a more upright and pure voice.

F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*

Abstract

The vernacularization of Hebrew speech was an integral component of the Zionist conception of national revival. This article explores some of the ways in which the discourse of regeneration, and the figure of the “muscle Jew”, shaped ideas about the sonic component of Hebrew speech, through the case of study of Vladimir Ze'ev Jabotinsky. I show that Jabotinsky took speech, and Hebrew speech in particular, to be a potent site of regeneration, viewed as the cultivation of corporeal sensitivity to form. I trace his invention of a sonic counterpart to the muscle Jew, and demonstrate how, employing a conception of speech sounds as manifesting qualities of speakers, he constructed a ideological program for regenerative Hebrew speech that challenged the grammatical prescriptions of mainstream revivalists, and included observations of, and prescriptions about, patterns of Hebrew speech down to the level of phonemes and phonotactic processes.

Keywords: Hebrew revival, language ideology, regeneration, Jabotinsky, sound symbolism

1. Introduction: from muscle Jew to musical Jew

In 1900, Max Nordau published his article “Muskeljudentum” (muscle Judaism) in the journal of the Jewish-German sports organization “Bar Kokhva”. In this article, Nordau famously bemoans what he sees as the degenerative effects of European Jewish existence on the Jewish body. The sociocultural and material realities of Jewish life, he argues, have twisted Jews' bodily posture and dulled their senses: “In the narrow Jewish street, our poor limbs soon forgot their gay movements; in the dimness of sunless houses our eyes began to blink shyly.”¹ Nordau famously called for the regeneration of the Jewish body through gymnastics and sports, and the re-creation of a “*muscle Judaism*”. Muscle Judaism was not about Jews being good at

sports. As Todd Presner's definitive study of the figure of the muscle Jew and the Zionist discourse of regeneration demonstrates², it was rather, "about the cultivation of certain corporeal and moral ideals such as discipline, agility, and strength, which would help form a regenerated race of healthy, physically fit, nationally minded, and militarily strong Jews".

Nordau's description of Jewish degeneration, however, continues from such obviously corporeal things as limbs and the senses to the less canonically corporeal domain of speech and voice. "The fear of constant persecution", writes (and says) Nordau, "turned our powerful voices into frightened whispers, which rose in a crescendo only when our martyrs on the stakes cried out their dying prayers in the face of their executioners." The vocal domain has received less attention from scholars and is also left out of Presner's study.

The degeneration of Jewish speech was both a longstanding trope of European antisemitism and, at the turn of the 20th century, an important arena of Jewish public discourse and activity³. This trope, which might be linked to a broader, and much older, antisemitic association of Jews with noise epitomized in the sonic landscape of the Synagogue, was often internalized.⁴ For example, in his speech to the first Zionist congress in 1897, Nordau describes Orthodox Jewish communities thus: "Eastern Jews considered it the beginning of apostasy when a member of the race dressed in a European fashion or spoke some language correctly (*irgendeine Sprache richtig spricht*)".

Nordau figures the problem with Jewish speech as a post-traumatic inability to modulate the voice in appropriate relation to differences in context and circumstance: the voice is always a whisper, modulating only involuntarily in response to extreme pain. Within the discourse of regeneration in which muscular Judaism was invented, then, the regeneration of the Jewish voice, much like that of the Jewish body, implies acquiring mental and physical abilities

involved in a healthy speech habitus, one in which speakers have at their disposal, and control, a range of vocal outputs, from the “whisper” to the “crescendo”. Regenerated Jews, in other words, should be both physically and sonically muscular. But how can such a muscular Jewish speech habitus be cultivated, and what would it sound like? Paraphrasing Presner, what kind of speech habitus will encourage “the cultivation of corporeal and moral ideals such as discipline, agility, and strength”? Furthermore, since Jewish regeneration is supposed to be a national project, how would revolutionizing Jewish speech relate Jewish individuals to the national collective? This paper outlines the answers to these questions that emerge from the writings of one of Zionism’s most controversial, aurally charismatic figures, the Russian born Zionist leader Vladimir Ze’ev Jabotinsky. In pursuing the case study of Jabotinsky’s approach to voice and speech, my goal is to contribute to the growing body of research on the language ideologies of the “revival of Hebrew” and their relation to broader Zionist cultural discourses, as well as to contribute to the renewed interest in Jabotinsky’s figure and its complex role in early Zionist culture.

More than any other Zionist leader, Jabotinsky thought and wrote about Hebrew speech and its sounds, and was associated in the public mind with the cultivation of the speaking voice. The main goal of this paper is to analyze and situate his approach to Hebrew speech as a project of Jewish regeneration. This analysis focuses on two components. First, I show how the discourse regeneration shaped Jabotinsky’s conception of speech, and Hebrew speech in particular, as a civilizing activity crucial for Jewish revival, which he linked specifically to the generation and maintenance, of *form*. Building on recent Jabotinsky scholarship, I trace the ways in which he integrated this conception into his broader nationalistic, militaristic, liberal-bourgeois brand of Zionism, and demonstrate his construction, in literary, journalistic, and personal writings, of an idealized masculine figure of the euphonous, vocally agile Hebrew

speaker, the vocal equivalent of Nordau's Muscle Jew.⁵ Second, I show how Jabotinsky translated this conception of speech into a full-fledged, normative system of Hebrew pronunciation. Relying on an astute sensitivity to the sonic dimension of language and the speech patterns he heard on the streets of Mandatory Palestine, and on an intriguing ideological construction I term "manifestive phonetics", he produced a set of choices and prescriptions for Hebrew pronunciation that are exceptional in both their ideological explicitness and especially in their level of phonetic detail, which includes the articulation of individual phonemes and the conditioning of relatively subtle phonological processes. This system, which he advocated as a blueprint for a standard Hebrew vernacular in Palestine,⁶ was aimed at inculcating regenerative speech habits in individuals that embody aesthetic and moral ideals linking them to a race, a land, and a cultural orientation. What underlies this regenerative potency, what allows a manner of speech to transform the individual, is manifestive phonetics -- the idea that the vocal gestures involved in the production of certain sounds and in the maintenance of certain sound *distinctions* manifest qualities of speakers.

Anthropologist Amanda Weidman provides a succinct formulation of (some of) what makes the speaking voice an important object of cultural study⁷: "As a phenomenon that links material practices with subjectivity, and embodied sound with collectively recognized meanings, voice is a crucial site where the realms of the cultural and sociopolitical link to the level of the individual, a site where shared discourses and values, affect, and aesthetics are made manifest in and contested through embodied practice." Linguistic anthropologists and sociolinguists, however, mostly study actual speech communities. The voice as a "crucial site" is, for them, usually an actual site. My object of study here, the speech of the regenerated muscle Jew, is rather a *site under construction*, the aspirational end-product of a project of revolution which has,

by definition, only a futurity. Like all revolutionary projects, however, its construction inevitably involves differentiation from something perceived as being an actual reality, as well as a link to the past. Nordau's article indicates the need to *abolish* the current site of Jewish speech. If shared discourses, values, affect and aesthetics are made manifest through embodied vocal practice, then revolutionizing Jewish values, affect and aesthetics calls for revolutionizing this practice.

The radical transformation of Jewish speech was part of the earliest formulations of political Zionism, formulated in terms of language choice. Herzl, for example, used the speech-based antisemitic slur *Mauschel*, a derogatory term for Yiddish, Yiddish-inflected German, and by extension for speech perceived to be mumbled or unclear, to name the figure of the anti-Zionist Jew he constructed in his vitriolic 1897 article of the same name. The cultural, artistic, ideological and political debates within later 19th and early 20th century Jewish national revival surrounding issues of language choice — between Hebrew and other languages (especially Yiddish and German), between Hebrew and its Biblical and post-Biblical self, and between different traditions of Hebrew pronunciation — have been extensively discussed by many scholars in many fields.⁸ For the most part, these questions did not revolve around sound, with the exception of the well-known debate around the Sephardic and Ashkenazic stress systems in the adoption of accentual meter in Hebrew poetry (a debate which, Jabotinsky argued, would not be happening if Hebrew poetry were recited rather than just written and read). For Jabotinsky, the question of language choice was decided early and easily in favor of Hebrew, to be spoken in the so-called “Sephardic” pronunciation. The questions opened up by the discourse of regeneration, with which Jabotinsky was preoccupied and on which I focus here, are questions not of choice but of execution. Presupposing that the issue of language choice is settled, the

Zionist discourse of regeneration negotiates *how* Jews should speak and what they should sound like – what speech habitus will regenerate them, as individuals and as a collective.

My discussion proceeds in two parts. First, after briefly giving some general background about Jabotinsky, I discuss the Hebrew speaking voice/body in Jabotinsky's development of the figure of the sonorous, euphonious Jew as a public orator, starting with his journalistic account of his first encounter, in 1903, with an actual voice and body speaking Hebrew in a Palestinian, (roughly) Sephardic pronunciation, that of the pioneering Hebrew teacher and linguist Yizhak Epstein. I show that Epstein formed for Jabotinsky a prototype of the figure of the sonorous Jew, and trace the dynamics of vocal regeneration, the interweaving of aesthetic and ideological dimensions and of visual and aural modalities, that make up this figure in Jabotinsky's essays and in his Biblical novel *Samson, the Nazarine* (published in Russian in 1928).

The second part turns to Jabotinsky's linguistic writings, specifically his prescriptions about Hebrew phonetics and phonology, focusing on his 1930 pamphlet *ha-mivta ha-ivri* 'The Hebrew pronunciation'.⁹ As Svetlana Natkovich has shown, Jabotinsky draws a fundamental, dichotomy between "pronunciation" (*mivta*) and "grammar" (*dikduk*), which, she argues, parallels the one between Idealism and Materialism, with "grammar" associated with the latter and sound with the former.¹⁰ Grammar, which comprises for Jabotinsky those aspects of language structure that do not pertain to sound, belongs to the contingent domain of material history, subject to change and transmutation and devoid of extra-linguistic significance. Pronunciation, in contrast, belongs to the primordial and timeless domain of Myth and is tied to essential, immutable qualities of individuals and racial or national collectives. Connecting Natkovich's insights to the discourse of regeneration and the figure of the sonorous Jew, and inspired by anthropological work on language ideology¹¹, I analyze Jabotinsky's specific

phonetic and phonological pronouncements, arguing that it is this manifestive view of articulatory phonetics that allows Jabotinsky to translate his aesthetic/political ideals into an actual proposal for what the new Hebrew vernacular should sound like.

2. Hebrew speech is reviving: Jabotinsky and the sonorous Jew

Vladimir Ze'ev Jabotinsky was one of the most active advocates of Hebrew speech in the Zionist political leadership. Born in 1880 in Odessa, he was an odd man out in the Eastern European Zionist movement. Growing up in multilingual, multiethnic, cosmopolitan Odessa, he did not receive a Jewish education, knew neither Yiddish nor Hebrew until adulthood, and generally was far removed from any “Jewish” interests until adulthood. His Jewish awareness and involvement with Zionism began around 1903, having returned from several years of (incomplete) law study in Switzerland and then Italy. In 1903 Odessa, Jabotinsky was a well-known Russian journalist and a less well known, struggling Russian writer, poet, translator and playwright drawn to Decadence and Symbolism and interested in sound and the sonic dimensions of poetry. In 1897 he produced a highly successful translation of Poe's *the Raven* into Russian. In 1914, he produced the canonical translation of this poem into Hebrew as well.¹² His Zionist career, however, overshadowed this early period.

The first significant Zionist event Jabotinsky attended, the 1903 Sixth Congress in Basel which he covered for the Odessan newspaper *Oddeskiye Novosti*, was also his first encounter with Palestinian Hebrew speech. On the day before it started, he attended the inaugurating meeting of *Ivria*, an organization dedicated to the spreading of Hebrew speech. The highlight of this meeting of *Ivria*, judging by reports of it in the Jewish press, was a speech given in Hebrew by the Russian Hebrew teacher and linguist Yitzhak Epstein (1863-1943) who came from the

northern Galilee in Ottoman Palestine and spoke in (his version of) the aforementioned “Sephardi pronunciation”.¹³

Epstein’s figure and his speech left a tremendous impression on the audience, including the young Jabotinsky, who had never heard Hebrew spoken like this before. Literary scholar Svetlana Natkovich conjectures, plausibly, that this speech played an important role in Jabotinsky’s decision to join the Zionist movement.¹⁴ His report on the meeting, titled “On the eve of the congress”, is where he begins to outline the figure of the sonorous Jew, linking the Hebrew speaking body to notions of aesthetic regeneration and national awakening. Jabotinsky’s attention focused less on the content of the speech and more on Epstein’s physical presence and his sound:

He spoke with an amazingly beautiful Sephardi accent. Despite the Eastern, guttural *x* sound, his pronunciation was pleasant to the European ear. The assembly listened to Epstein as if enchanted; after his speech, many said to him:

We didn’t even realize that our language was so beautiful.

“Mar” Epstein (Mar is the Talmudic *Monsieur*) himself is an interesting person. In appearance, he is a perfect Arab with a long, curly, black beard and lively mannerisms. About twenty years ago, when he was still a young boy, he emigrated from Russia to the Holy Land and soon became one of Palestine’s best pedagogues. He is an artistic pedagogue: he doesn’t sit with children in a classroom, nor does he give them schoolwork, but leads them out to a field and there has conversations with them about nature, about history—about anything. These discussions must be very absorbing: I became convinced that mar Epstein is a fascinating speaker when I heard him give his speech in which, among other things, he described his idea of spreading Hebrew through theater and ‘people’s houses’.”¹⁵

This description sets Epstein up as an emblem and icon of Jewish regeneration, fusing the sound of speech, the individual body and the nation into a holistic nexus of vitality and creativity. The enchanting beauty of his sound and the lively, masculine vivacity of his gesturing body are articulated to his life's project of creating an unorthodox national *Bildung* that revolutionizes education, taking it out of the formal confines of a school and into nature, where the speech of the youth flows as a natural expression of curiosity, and where a national, communal speech is generated through performance in theaters and democratic assembly houses.

Jabotinsky's description of Epstein contains the first appearance (as far as I am aware) of what will become a core element of his linguistic ideology, setting his approach to spoken Hebrew apart from that of Epstein himself and mainstream Hebrew revivalism more broadly, namely the antagonistic relation between Hebrew and Arabic, between Zionism and the "East". Epstein is described as having the appearance of a "perfect Arab". On the one hand, this appearance is captivating and attractive, associated with a stately black beard and "lively mannerisms", in line with familiar 19th century Orientalist tropes that were common in Hebrew revivalist discourse. On the other hand, the "eastern" elements of his speech, namely the voiceless velar fricative /x/, is marked as unattractive — his speech is beautiful "despite" this sound. The image of the stately, bearded public speaker will soon reappear in Jabotinsky's writing, but without the Arab valance. Already a few days after his encounter with Epstein, when he reported on the other Zionist man who transfixed his gaze, Theodore Herzl, his majestic black beard was no longer described as that of an Arab, but of an Assyrian king. This re-focusing of the antiquity lens, away from Arabs, also informs his theory of Hebrew pronunciation, as discussed below.

Epstein's Hebrew speaking body emerges as the locus of the regenerative power of

Hebrew speech far more dramatically in a longer, more elaborate report written by the Russian Zionist activist, author and publisher Nahum Moshe Syrkin and published in the Polish Hebrew-language daily newspaper *ha-zefirah*, of which he was an editor. Space precludes an extensive comparison of these two reports, but I note here that, in addition to accentuating the homoeroticism of the encounter with Epstein, a comparison of the two reports would be revealing in several ways. First, it puts in sharper relief the contrast between Jabotinsky's budding anti-Oriental take on the Hebrew revival and the highly Orientalist one of more mainstream Zionists, a contrast observed and enlighteningly analyzed by Rachel Albeck-Gidron¹⁶. Even more importantly for my purposes, it reveals how the discourse of regeneration framed the affective responses generated by the audiovisual spectacle of Epstein's speech.

For Syrkin, as for Jabotinsky, it was less the content of the speech and more the encounter with the Hebrew speaking body which was striking, and he laments not being able to reproduce this experience for his readers:

I have tried as much as possible to be faithful to the speaker's words. It is self-evident, however, that I managed felicitously only to repeat his *ideas*. Yet it is difficult for anyone who has not *heard* his words to imagine what impression they left on the strings of the heart and the depth of the soul.

Like Jabotinsky's, Syrkin's narration of the actual audio-visual event of Epstein's speech, situated in the Zionist old-new spatiotemporality which Adam Rovner identifies with the Bakhtinian "folkloric" chronotope.¹⁷ Animated by the regenerative dynamics of *revival-of* and *revival-by* the Hebrew language, it begins with an ideologically saturated description of Epstein's body and the regenerative effects of his speech on the body of the listener.

'Before us stood a type bearing a complete Jewish beauty, who lives on his land and wets it with his sweat, a tanned face full of daring and strength, shiny black eyes full of noble spirit and the

fire of youth, a strong and solid back, *the emblem of the Jew of the first generations, before they were all wiped away by exile...*

And as I continue to sharpen my ears to listen, so as not to miss a single word, I felt *my heart expanding in awe, my pulse beating fiercely*, such a Hebrew I have never heard before in all my life! Every word in his precise Sephardic pronunciation -- is a pleasant, strong tune, full of gentleness and force, *thus, without a doubt, spoke our forefathers, thus preached our law makers* as the charm of their speech drew great crowds, *and thus and not otherwise will, in the coming future, speak also our People, as it begins to live a new and fresh life in its old new land.*¹⁸

Taken together, these two reports exemplify the discursive parameters within which the figure of the sonorous Jew as a public orator emerges. Epstein embodied this figure for his audience and the sound of Hebrew speech was at the core of this embodiment. Jabotinsky's thinking about the place of Hebrew in the quest for Jewish regeneration developed, I contend, largely within the parameters identified in this first encounter. I now turn to two further examples of the Epsteinian, audio-visually captivating public orator appears in Jabotinsky's imagination: the essay *Three arts*, probably also from 1903, and Jabotinsky's Biblical novel *Samson, Nazorei* 'Samson, the Nazarine'.

3.1 The orator in “Three arts” and “Samson”

In *Three arts*, three friends are arguing about the hierarchy of different arts or crafts. It is tempting to read their positions as reflecting the three passions that organized Jabotinsky's own aspirations along his life trajectory, from past to future. The first friend advocates for poetry (past). The second advocates for oratory (present), and the third for statesmanship (future). The relevant friend for current purposes is the second one, who provides the following description of

the ideal orator, again invoking Heine:

I don't think you can have art without an audience – the two are inseparable. What is neither heard nor seen by anyone is, for me, not art. Art is what can move human hearts. And therefore, the pinnacle of art is, for me — human speech. If I had been asked before my birth what art I should like to practice, I should have answered: that of the orator. Do you remember Heine's description of the orator in that letter from England? A stunning picture. There is only one detail that is not quite right – his orator is a homely little man. That's not good. The Greeks would not have allowed him to ascend their tribunes. *The orator should be kalos k'agathos, tall, stately, virile, broad-shouldered and full-bearded, with a voice that would sound all the notes: from the murmur of grass trembling in the breeze to the roar of an avalanche*¹⁹

Here, the previously Arab sonorous orator gains explicitly Hellenic features. To his arsenal of powers is added the ability to sound “all the notes”, an element of vocal prowess alluded to in Nordau's *Musklejudentum* article. This ability to maintain and execute sound distinctions exemplifies a basic element of the discourse of degeneration and regeneration going back to Nordau, namely the maintenance of sharp distinctions between discrete, “natural” categories. As Presner notes, “Nordau considers degeneration to be a crisis of formlessness: degeneracy blurs outlines, contaminates structures of difference, and disintegrates the binary logic of the world”.²⁰ Translated to the domain of speech, an element of degeneracy is the loss of sound distinctions, and regeneration is the maximal maintenance of distinctions through physical and mental effort, and the ability to appropriately and intentionally modulate speech in context.

In later writings, Jabotinsky explicitly ties this conception of regenerated speech as maintaining distinctions of form to militarism. In his 1929 Yiddish article “On Militarism” he declares: “We Jews suffer from the lack of forms.” One of the positive aspects of military life, he

explains, is “The ritual, the clear and precise rules how to walk, how to stand, how to salute, how to speak to an equal and how to address a superior”.

The same principle of vocal versatility premised on an abundance of distinct forms emerges clearly in Jabotinsky’s Biblical novel, *Samson, the Nazarine*. *Samson* was published serially in Russian in 1926 and as a book in 1927, at which point it was promptly translated into German and English, and later also into Hebrew.²¹ For example, in a scene early in the novel, the young Samson has just ignored the communal custom disallowing youth from addressing an assembly, and moved forward to speak. The ensuing speech event, which sets Samson up as the model of the vocally regenerated sonorous muscle Jew, is described as follows (my translation is from the Hebrew translation of the Russian original, italics mine):

... Here it was obvious that Samson is speaking effortlessly, not loudly and not softly, or — both loudly and softly at the same time. Who can say whether the wheat resounds loudly or softly when the wind blows it? It is a whisper, but it is heard from far away.

This voice reminded the farmers of their fields, the sailors — of the sound of waves breaking on the shore, the prophets — of the wind wailing in the hollows, the shepherds — of the growl of the ox, the mothers — of the baby’s happy babble as it clings to their breast, and each young woman, of the voice of the groom she hazily hoped to meet. Everyone listened to him not with their ears but from the inside, and surrendered to him before they understood what he said. But he was also easy to understand. ...

... A minute had already passed since Samson finished speaking... but the crowd was still listening, *not the content of his words, but to the gentle waves of his voice*, in each person’s own breath. (pps. 51-52)

The force of Samson’s speech comes not what he said, which the description omits, but the

sensorium of the voice, figured as a resonating field of wheat, at once bucolic and linked to cultivation and nourishment. This voice lingers after the speech is over and is imbued with the ultimate versatility: achieving the precise affective meaning most appropriate for each element of the audience. While the content of Samson's speech is entirely elided, his voice is not thereby reduced to the pure physicality of sound, devoid of denotational meaning. Rather, we are told that semantic content becomes ever more transparent and "easy to understand" when the vocal performance is right. At the same time, Samson's vocal versatility is also revealed as an instrument of national regeneration. Samson's speech awakens in each social group in the community, divided along lines of labor and function in the collective, the essential force that structures its life. His voice, in other words, is an aesthetically potent object that stirs and strengthens healthy vital and libidinal forces in listeners, holding an entire society together without erasing its clearly delineated, structuring seams.

Throughout his life and career, Jabotinsky would emulate this figure of the public orator, with significant success.²² The socialist Yiddishist Abraham Cahan, one of his fiercest ideological enemies, bemoaned the loss of his talent in his obituary in the American Jewish newspaper *the Forward*, writing that "When Jabotinsky spoke, even the deaf could hear."²³ This success, however, was far from universal, and many saw him, much because of his oratorical style, as a bombastic demagogue.

The vocal regeneration Nordau called for in his *Muskeljudentum* article, then, emerges clearly in Jabotinsky's figures of the Orator and of Samson exemplify. Far from being limited to "frightened whispers" that rise uncontrollably in response to pain, these speakers have at their disposal a rich vocal palette and know what voice to use when. Their vocal prowess is matched by their bodily prowess and their general disciplined, self-possessed habitus which allows them

to maintain natural distinctions of form. It is with these ideas about the voice and the speaking Jewish body that Jabotinsky turned to Hebrew, the only language in which, according to him, they could be carried out. A discussion of his ideas about *how* the sonorous Jew should speak Hebrew, however, requires an explication of his views on race and the relation between race and speech.

4. Race, aesthetics, phonetics

Soon after his exposure to the charms of Epstein's Hebrew speaking voice and black curly beard, Jabotinsky started learning Hebrew seriously. Eight months earlier, in January 1903, he published an article in *Odesskiye nóvosti* called *On Nationalism*, in which he declared that "Natural factors produce *race*" and that, while racial traits are distorted and made invisible by a "roaring mishmash of economic factors", once progress introduces order into the "maelstrom of multiple and diverse economic interests", then the principle of race will "draw itself up and blossom". Marina Mogilner, in a couple of eye-opening recent papers, contextualizes Jabotinsky's view of race and racial purity in the context of early 20th century debates about empire and national identity in Russia, relating it to his views of language.²⁴ In 1904, Jabotinsky joined the editorial board of a new St. Petersburg based Zionist periodical *Ebreiskaia jijen* 'Jewish life', which published in serial form and in Russian translation a book by Polish-Jewish anthropologist Ignacy Judd, in which he argued that Jews were a physical race, though not a Semitic but rather a "Mediterranean" one. As Mogilner shows, the construction of the *Mediterranean race* was a project of self-racialization within a broader anti-imperialist nationalist discourse, rooted in physical anthropology and allowing Russian Zionists to claim a coherent, secular national identity informed by science. An important aspect of this self-

racialization project is that it sought, as Mogilner puts it, to replace imperial hybridity with an ontology of “pure forms” and “simple things”. In other words, it shared the ideology of discrete forms that informed Jabotinsky’s figuration of the sonorous Jew and that are shared with Nordau’s discourse of regeneration.

Working within this paradigm, Jabotinsky presented Biblical antiquity as the period during which the Hebrew race was formed in the cradle of and as part of the Classical European world. The formation of the Mediterranean race, like that of all races, was on this view the culmination of a long period of racial intermingling in which various qualities of different races were absorbed into the dominant race of the area, the Ancient Hebrews. As Mogilner shows, Jabotinsky’s Samson, his literary model of the sonorous muscle Jew, is an exemplar of the racially-stable end result of this period of formation.

One of the immutable qualities that race, on this conception, carries with it through historical transformations are “national instincts” that were set by its racial makeup and the geography and climate of its original mixing grounds, and are carried by “blood”. These instincts determine the aesthetic inclinations of the race, including what Jabotinsky will later refer to, in his pamphlet *ha-mivta ha-ivri* ‘Hebrew pronunciation’ (henceforth *hamivta*), as its “collective ear” (האוזן ההמונית), which gives rise to a “national intonation” (נגינה לאומית). This racial ear, according to Jabotinsky, was strongly anti-Oriental and had an inherent natural and uncontrollable (hence also unapologetic) aversion to the sounds of non-European languages. In 1918, stationed in Cairo with the Jewish Legion of the British Army, and finding the city utterly delightful, Jabotinsky wrote to his wife: “I have not learned Arabic and am not learning it—I don’t like it. From birth I have had an antipathy towards everything non-European, and these languages somehow do not stick to me. *I really love Hebrew, but I Italianize it with all my*

might.” This Italianization, which overcomes the one blemish he observed in Epstein’s speech a decade and a half earlier, is not just a quirky instance of Jabotinsky’s lifelong Italophilia, but an integral element of his ideal of the sonorous Hebrew-speaking Jew as a member of the Mediterranean race. As I show in the next section, some of the phonological elements that Jabotinsky considered Italianizing, such as gemination (consonant-doubling), were also instances of what he considered regenerative speech practices.

After the war, Jabotinsky started writing a Hebrew textbook, first in Russian with the Hebrew in Latin script, and then, after the revolution, switching to English.²⁵ In this textbook, he laid out his ideas about how Hebrew phonemes should be articulated. The textbook goes in order through the alphabet, making pronouncements about how each element of the phonological inventory of Hebrew should be pronounced, warning various groups of speakers – Russians, Germans -- against phonological habits typical of their native tongues, and exercises with which to train oneself against these pitfalls. An elaborated and expanded version of these pronouncements, along with an introduction that contextualizes them within the Jabotinskian regenerative project of Hebrew revival, and which is one of the strangest and most fascinating texts of the revival period, was published in 1930 as the pamphlet *ha-mivta ha-ivri*.²⁶ At this point, Hebrew was already widely used in many speech contexts in Palestine and a stable population of young people for whom Hebrew was the first language existed, though multilingualism with Hebrew as an acquired second or third (or more) language was very much still the norm.²⁷ This publication, to which I now turn, was no longer a textbook, and not aimed specifically at youth, but rather a manifesto of and manual for regenerative Hebrew speech. Addressing them in the 2nd person plural, it explained to the Jewish public in Palestine how and why to cultivate, through self-discipline, attentiveness, practice and exercise, the speech habitus

that would make it into a public of sonorous muscle Jews with a voice that can sound all the notes – a Mediterranean race returning to the language it forged.

4. Race and phonetic poiesis in *ha-mivta ha-ivri*

ha-mivta opens with two interrelated moves that together invert the logic of mainstream Hebrew revivalism, shifting it from an outlook based in philological reconstruction to one based in creativity or *poiesis*. The first declares that reconstructing the sounds of the speech of “our forefathers”, the ancient Hebrews, is impossible, as that sound has been lost forever. The second declares that the essential *manner* of their speech, the overall speech habitus that shaped it, is, in contrast, self-evident and bears normative force:

It is impossible now to guess what Hebrew pronunciation sounded like in the days of our ancient forefathers; yet one thing is clear — their pronunciation was characterized by unmistakable precision. They did not speak hurriedly, did not swallow syllables, did not mix one vowel with another — in short, were unfamiliar with the sloppy manner of pronunciation one hears these days on our streets.

These two moves form the basis of the regenerative language ideology informing Jabotinsky’s approach to Hebrew speech.

Declaring the irretrievability of ancient Hebrew pronunciation frees Hebrew speech from the prescriptions of mainstream revivalists, philologists and pedagogues such as Eliezer ben Yehuda and David Yellin (and Jabotinsky’s early hero Yizhak Epstein), who advocated as faithful a reproduction as possible of the sound system of ancient Hebrew. There were several reasons for the heterodox framing. First, it fit Jabotinsky’s identity as a mischievous, anti-authoritarian, anti-conformist *infant terrible* and a bourgeois liberal committed to radical

individualism. Another reason was political. Mainstream revivalists argued that the key to authentic Hebrew pronunciation was to be found in Arabic, which retained various “Semitic” consonants²⁸. An affinity with Arabic was, as mentioned above, anathema to Jabotinsky, incompatible with his conception of the sonorous Jew as a regenerated member of the Mediterranean race. He dismissed it as infatuation with the “Orient”, which he considered to be a different word for cultural backwardness.²⁹

His argument against Arabic as a model for Hebrew speech relied on his fundamental distinction between grammar and pronunciation pointed out by Natkovich:

There are experts who believe that our pronunciation should be brought closer to Arabic pronunciation. This too is but a mistake. Hebrew and Arabic are “Semitic” languages, but this does not mean that our forefathers spoke with an “Arabic accent”... *Similarity of roots and grammar does not indicate similarity of pronunciation. Because the pronunciation of a language does not depend on its structure: it depends on the “musical” taste of the race that uses that language, on what is pleasant and unpleasant to the collective ear of this or that nation.*³⁰

The collective ear that should, according to Jabotinsky, guide Hebrew speech is that of the Mediterranean race, formed at the culmination of the period of racial formation through mixing in the Biblical land of Israel. Building on a Romantic connection between language and geography/climate, the identification of the Jewish “ear” with that of the Mediterranean race distances Hebrew from Arabic geographically, thereby making a linguistic claim against Arab indigeneity.

In the days when our language was flourishing in ancient *eretz yisrael* we barely had any contact with the Arabs. The name “Arab” is rare in the Bible. The language of the Arab developed under climate and natural conditions that do not resemble those of our land: in an unlimited space and

not in the four cubits between Dan and Be'er Sheva, in the plain and not in valleys, in the tropical heat of Arabia and not in cool Jerusalem, in the solitude of the desert and not in the bustle of a crossroads between Assyria and Egypt.

Furthermore, re-imagining Biblical antiquity as the scene of the birth of the Mediterranean race through absorption of Biblical races by the dominant Hebrews links Hebrew, in contrast with Arabic, to the assumed cradle of Western civilization.

The race is also different. In the beginning of the ancient conquest, Canaan was full of races like a pomegranate: Jebusites, Hittites, Amorites, Philistines, and many more, some of them remnants of nations of Europe and Anatolia, and some descendants of Ham. But by the end of the era of Kings these nations were already gone, or almost gone: that means, that they mostly blended into Yehuda and Israel³¹. *Thus the Hebrew was created as a man of the Mediterranean, in whose blood and soul blended various aspirations and various tastes also from the peoples of the North and the West.*

In support of these claims, Jabotinsky cites various phonological differences between Hebrew and Arabic, such as the stress pattern and the presence of spirantization (so-called *beget kefet*, discussed below), as evidence that “the auditory-sense of these two nations, in the period when their languages were created, had developed in different directions”. The “phonetic phenomena” (חזיונות פונטיים) that are found in Hebrew but not in Arabic are to be found, rather, in the languages of the West, such as English and Italian. For example, “an epenthesized /a/ (פתח “גנובה”) ... is a characteristic property of English pronunciation: poor, door, deer, pair [written in latin script in original, IF] — these are pronounced peah, deeah, doah, pooah [written in Hebrew script in the original, IF]”. Therefore, he concludes, “if we must look for points of support in other languages, let’s look for them in not in Arabic, but rather in the languages of the West, and

especially in those that were also born or developed on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea.” Jabotinsky also suggests that this “epenthesized /a/” should be borrowed from prestige English dialects as the pronunciation of the “semitic” pharyngeal *ʕ*. Indeed, many of Jabotinsky’s suggestions for the pronunciation of specific sounds of Hebrew import phonemes from European languages. This is hardly surprising considering his polyglotism and the extensive language mixing in his personal letters, and an important reminder that hybridity and multilingualism are not inherently antagonistic to nationalist or racist agendas.³²

Most importantly, in the current context, rejecting mainstream prescriptivism was necessitated by the logic of vocal regeneration that defined the figure of the sonorous Jew. If Hebrew speech is to be a project of national regeneration, it must be driven not by blind submission to authority and pedantic intellectualism, but by activating the natural, living creative forces of the collective. These forces were, for him, the very measure of language vitality, and their main manifestation was poetry. Poetry, he wrote in his introduction to a 1924 volume of English translations of Bialik’s poetry, is the “only fair and sure visible proof of a language’s vitality: that little flower which marks the difference between a tree that can still blossom – and a log of timber, useful but dead”.³³ Since the tradition of Hebrew poetry was never interrupted, Hebrew was never a dead language, and like the blossom of its poetry, the foliage of its speech can only be the product of auto-poiesis. “In the end”, he writes in *ha-mivta*, “we have to **c r e a t e** the pronunciation”.

What *ha-mivta* proposes, then, is a model and guide for speaking in a regenerative way, rather than in accordance with tedious grammatical rules. As such, it has no exceptional authority over other models, and accepting it is a matter of individual choice. The normative aspect, the imperative of regeneration, is not the proposed sounds themselves, but the national speech

habitus of the forefathers, with its “unmistakable precision”:

Each of us has the right to propose his own system, that fits his own musical taste; Time and life will determine whether “his taste” is also the taste of our entire people. An orator, teacher, theater director, or author of a book called “pronunciation”, can offer only what is pretty in his own eyes, what pleases his own ear, and say: this is my own pronunciation — if you like it, receive it, and if not — please set yourselves a different system: but a **s y s t e m!**

Lack of systematicity is for Jabotinsky one of the symptoms of Jewish degeneration.

Interestingly, his key example of the formlessness of Jewish life in *On Militarism* is the Synagogue, the place whose soundscape, Ruth Hacoheh identifies as the heart of the antisemitic association of Jews with noise (see fn. 3). The synagogue is contrasted with the systematic nature of military life:

Listen to the old Maggid in the synagogue; he is as wise as ten philosophers, but he cannot calmly develop one idea till the end, he jumps from one subject to another, and the worst of it is that his audience revels in it. They have lost the sense of order, of regularity, of beginning and middle and end, where one follows the other — like an army on the march.

The systematicity of vocal regeneration, much like physical fitness, is premised on will, intention and self-discipline, and Jabotinsky accordingly rejects also the opposite of prescriptivism, the idea that language change is a natural, uncontrollable process. In the last article he wrote about language, written on the boat to the US in March 1940, five months before his death, he articulates this point:

In general, we must take special care with regard to this philosophy of the holiness of the “natural process”. If we accept it as a principle, then we may not shave or cut our fingernails. There is no

room for such a “principle” in culture. The essence and core of culture is precisely in bridling “natural process”, guiding it and subjugating it to the demands of the contemplating mind.³⁴

That culture, as a civilizing force, is based on subjugating natural process to human will underlies Jabotinsky’s key cultural-ideological construct, the set of principles which he called *hadar* “majesty” and which formed the core ethos of *Betar*, the youth movement he founded. The principles of *hadar* were principles of uprightness and decorum, included discipline, restraint, chivalry, and a fervent attention to details of external form such as dress, personal appearance, politeness of address, and most importantly for current purposes, Hebrew phonetics.

4.1 Manifestive Hebrew phonetics

Having established that Hebrew pronunciation is not a matter of historical faithfulness but of auto-poiesis, Jabotinsky turns to elaborate his view of what regenerated Hebrew speech should sound like. The many diacritics for different sounds found in the Tiberian Massoretic tradition of producing the Biblical text, he says, indicate that the ancient Hebrews had “a sharp and refined sense of hearing”, and that they “spoke a language that was rich in sonic nuance, they insisted on even the slightest difference between one speech sound and another and brought out each and every syllable. You might say that they *flaunted* their pronunciation.”³⁵ How can speech reawaken this sharp, refined sense of hearing in contemporary Jews, leading them to insist on minute nuances of sound? Jabotinsky’s choices are guided, I argue, by the assumption of a specific kind of sound-symbolic relation between speakers and sounds that I call *manifestivity*. A sound is taken to be manifestive of a quality of its producer when its manner of articulation – the way it is produced in the mouth -- is ideologically construed as requiring, and hence manifesting, certain qualities of its producer. Manifestivity shares properties both with

what linguistic anthropologists call *indexicality*, and with what they call *iconicity*.³⁶ Here, I point out only that manifestivity is indexical in that sounds that are taken to manifest qualities of speakers are also taken to *point to*, such speakers (in the way that, say, smoke points to fire). It is iconic in that, as will become clear below, sounds that are taken to manifest qualities of speakers by virtue of how they are produced in the mouth are also taken to themselves have the very qualities that they manifest.

¹ Austin, John L. *How to do things with words* (Oxford university press, 1975).

Assuming a manifestive relation between sounds and speakers makes the cultivation of a speech habitus akin to the cultivation of physical fitness. Just as one creates physical strength or agility by repeatedly carrying out acts that call for and manifest strength or agility, so one creates vocal prowess by repeatedly carrying out linguistic acts that call for and manifest vocal strength or agility. In the case of speech, the relevant acts are acts of articulation in a particular manner, that is, acts of linguistic annunciation, what John Austin will later call *rhetic* acts.³⁷ Jabotinsky's prescriptions therefore include the exercising of articulations that manifest the qualities of the Mediterranean race: virility, vigor, strength, and maintenance of subtle distinctions of form. The metaphor he uses, however, is not from gymnastics, but from the quintessential domain of sound-form, musicianship: "Just as the violinist or pianist works on a sonata which he will play in public tomorrow, so each person must work on improving his accent".

The body of *ha-mivta* is presented as a self-training guide, complete with one of Jabotinsky's favorite genres, linguistic exercises and drills, at times tailored specifically to speakers of Russian, German and generally ``diasporic'' or ``ghetto'' linguistic backgrounds.

The pamphlet proceeds through the Hebrew alphabet, commenting on how to articulate the phoneme associated with each letter as well as some of the phonological phenomena of Hebrew. Here I discuss three of his suggestions: spirantization, gemination, and abolition of the postalveolar fricative ψ . Taken together, these suggestions exemplify how the manifestive conception of articulatory phonetics translates Jabotinsky's ideas about vocal regeneration into one of the most detailed and elaborate proposals for Hebrew pronunciation of the revival period.

Spirantization, instinct and vigor

One section of *hamivta* is dedicated to a well-known feature of Hebrew grammar, which has become a major site of instability and variation in the modern language, namely the allophonic realization of oral stops as fricatives known traditionally as *beqed kefet* (בג"ד כפ"ת) and in modern terms as spirantization.³⁸ In a nutshell, spirantization refers to the fact that the oral stops /b/, /g/, /d/, /k/, /p/ and /t/ have fricative allophones that surface, roughly, in post-vocalic position (after a vowel). For example, the /b/ in the 3rd person masculine form *baxar* 'he chose' is pronounced as /v/ in the infinitive *livxor* 'to choose', in which it follows a vowel. In the Hebrew that Jabotinsky was hearing in Mandatory Palestine, spirantization was restricted to /p/, /b/ and /k/, and was no longer allophonic, which means it was no longer entirely predictable phonologically whether a word features a /b/ or a /v/, etc.³⁹ The resulting situation was (and still is) one of great instability and variation in stop-fricative alterations in the language, with literacy playing an important role in conditioning when speakers spirantize stops.

Jabotinsky alerts the reader at the outset of this section, called "b, k, p word initially", that the advice he is giving here "contradicts a well-known rule of Hebrew grammar", recommending adhering to the rule of spirantization only in a "restricted number of cases", for in

this domain “common speech has determined different rules, and very successful ones at that”. For all his valorizing of the collective ear, this is the only case in the pamphlet, perhaps in all his writings about Hebrew, in which he commends the *vox populi*, as it were. The emergent popular speech habit is commendable in that it reduces and, in a way clarified below, systematizes the production of fricatives, leading to what he sees as a regenerative speech pattern.

Common speech, Jabotinsky observes, avoids fricatives in some of the contexts where classical Hebrew demands them, leading to more stops. For example, he points out, speakers do not spirantize stops at the beginning of a word when the previous word ends in a vowel, even though grammar prescribes that they should: “under no circumstances would anyone say *ani faniti* [I turned] and *hu varax* [he ran away], but only *ani paniti* and *hu barax*.” (p.33). This choice to replace fricatives with stops discloses something internal about the speakers who are making it, namely a “natural tendency to get rid, to the extent possible, of ‘weak’ letters” which is “a healthy sign of an instinctive inclination to invigorate our language”. The idea that the preference for stops over ` fricatives “discloses” speakers’ instinct for vigor relies on a notion of consonantal strength that makes stops strong, fricatives weak, and spirantization a case of consonantal weakening, known in linguistics as lenition.⁴⁰ But why are stops strong and fricatives weak?

The weak-strong distinction is an old one in philology and linguistics and lenition is a staple of phonological theory. Consonantal “strength” is characterized in different ways by different people in different contexts. Jabotinsky ties the distinction to “invigorating” the language, which suggests that his understanding of it is tied to the physicality of speech, i.e. to manner of articulation: the production of stops involves stronger articulatory gestures than that of weaker ones. This is a widespread conception of consonantal strength, a typical modern

characterization of which is the following from Ladd and Anderson: "...strength is equated with resistance to airflow through the vocal tract, and weakness with lack of such resistance."⁴¹ Stops are stronger than fricatives on this conception because their production involves more resistance to airflow. A standard linguistic description of the manner of articulation of stops is the following by Halle et al.: "With the nasal cavity closed, a rapid closure and/or opening is effected at some point in the oral cavity. Behind the point of closure a pressure is built up which is suddenly released when the closure is released".⁴² The production of fricatives, in contrast, involves only partial closure in the oral cavity, which generates a continuous turbulent flow of breath through a narrow channel.

The next step in Jabotinsky's move, associating the preference for strong consonants with speakers' "inclination to invigorate [the] language", is where *manifestive phonetics* comes in. Stops are not an index of vigor in the way that a New York accent is an index of being from New York. Rather, they are a sign of vigor because their articulation itself is a vigorous gesture and hence *manifests* the vigor of the speaker. Except for involving more resistance to airflow by total blocking of the oral cavity, the gesture of producing stops is also conceived as having a clear beginning, middle and end (close cavity, build pressure, release explosion). The continuous gesture of fricative production, in contrast, has no built-in contour. This, plausibly, is another factor in setting up stops as an antidote to degeneration as a "crisis of formlessness".

The common speech pattern is praised not just for its abundance of stops, but also for the choice of when to use fricatives. Speakers spirantize, Jabotinsky argues, only when this weakening corresponds to a weakening in meaning, and hence maintains a natural form. This happens, he observes, in "short (usually, disyllabic) phrases" in which a morpheme ending in schwa is followed by a noun beginning with a spirantizing stop, and in which "it is not important

to emphasize the short word in itself'. His example is the phrase *le-fi da`ati* 'in my opinion' (literally 'to the mouth of my reason'), where the word *pi* 'the mouth of' surfaces as *fi* after the schwa of the preposition *le* 'to'. In this fixed, idiomatic expression, the word *fi* is semantically inert. It does not, synchronically and literally, mean mouth, but is just part of an idiom. In parallel phrases in which it actually means *mouth*, Jabotinsky claims, people say *pi*.

The common pattern of spirantization thus emerges as both a sign and a symptom of vocal regeneration, shaped both by the "instinctive inclination to invigorate" speech by preferring strong sounds that call for intense, structured gestures, and by attention to natural categories encoded in subtle distinctions in form, with weak sounds corresponding to weak meanings.

Gemination and virility

Gemination is, phonetically, the pronunciation of a stop for an extended duration. Producing a geminated stop involves retaining the full closure of air flow in the oral cavity longer (usually twice or three times as long) in relation to a non-geminated stop. In Biblical Hebrew, gemination was contrastive, meaning there were minimal pairs like *ana* 'where' and *anna* 'please' that differ in meaning and differ phonologically only in the length of the consonant. The loss of gemination in modern speech was bemoaned by revivalist prescriptivists because it was historically there, but by Jabotinsky because he considered it a regenerative sound and an element of *hadar*. Not only was it beautiful and increased the inventory of fine distinctions in form that one could train oneself to make, but it was manifestive of the "vigor and virility" of the Mediterranean race. In an undated English manuscript of Jabotinsky's textbook found in his archive. There, he corrects

and rewrites a purely aesthetic formulation in manifestive terms: “one of the main ~~charms~~ ~~of~~ Hebrew factors of the Hebrew tongue’s ~~stren~~ vigor and virility”. In *ha-mivta*, it is explicitly linked to *hadar*, and is augmented with another tenant of regeneration, a warning against exaggeration and distortion:

The *dagesh xazak*, that is, the doubling of the letter, is one of the foundations of the beauty, the *hadar*, the vigor, that glorify our language. Whoever gives up the *dagesh*, gives up the glory of the tongue... But after you accustom your tongue to doubling the letters – learn also to avoid exaggeration. ... over-zealousness is better than negligence, but a sense of good measure is better than either.

In the textbook, Jabotinsky alludes to the affective dimension of second language learning, specifically the shame or embarrassment that accompanies linguistic non-conformity. Pupils, he says, must insist on doubling their consonants even if their speech comes off as “affected”. As I noted earlier, Jabotinsky took “affected” speech, a sort of vocal Dandyism that he called “flaunting” one’s pronunciation, to be a characteristic of the speech habitus of the ancient Hebrews. Flaunting gemination was also a regenerative activity for Jabotinsky himself. In a 1921 letter to his friend Nina Berlin, written from a ship to New York, he relates (in Russian): “Do you know what I have been doing all week? Translating Dante into Hebrew and paying attention to the rules of *dagesh xazak* and *schwa na*’⁴³. Got totally carried away!”

The association of gemination with vigor and virility relies on the same phonetic ideological construct, the association of sounds with qualities based on manner of articulation, that underlies Jabotinsky’s analysis of spirantization as manifestive. The articulatory gesture involved in producing a geminate requires more articulatory effort than the one involved in producing the equivalent non-geminated consonant, because the active articulator (the tongue,

the lips, etc.) needs to sustain the full closure of the oral cavity for a longer period. The act of pronouncing geminate consonants manifests the vigor and virility of the speaker since such pronunciation is taken to inherently involve vigorous employment of the articulators.

The ugliest sound

I end with one of Jabotinsky's strangest linguistic obsessions, his outrage with the Hebrew letter *sh*, or more precisely with the sound it represents, the post-alveolar fricative /ʃ/ (as in English *shy*). Jabotinsky's aversion to this sound is expressed already in the 1918 textbook, and this is how he describes it in *ha-mivta*:

This trouble is even more bitter than monotony⁴⁴. For even the most sublime lyrical creation in our language begins with the words: “*shir ha-shirim asher li-shlomo yishakeni mi-nshikot pihu...*” It seems this racket [*kishkush*] did not grate our forefathers' ears, or maybe their pronunciation of the “shin” was different than the one common with us. Or perhaps the author of this book was an Ephraimite and said *sibolet* instead of *shibolet*. But our own ear is offended by the abundance of “shins” found in every Hebrew line, and there is no doubt that this is a deficiency and not a virtue. (p. 36)

The sublime lyrical creation alluded to is, of course, the famously alliterative first line of the *The Song of Songs*. To reduce the occurrence of this sound, Jabotinsky recommends avoiding the /ʃ/-heavy Hebrew numerals (e.g. *shayim*, *shalosh*, *xamesh*, *shesh*, *sheva...*) and replacing them with letters of the alphabet. In the English version of his textbook, found in his archive, he refers to the numerals as “a hissing orgy of sh-sh-sh sounds”, and in his letters to journalists and editors he often asks them to try to avoid using this sound, especially in repetition.

That the sibilant /ʃ/ is loaded with sociolinguistic drama is hardly surprising. Sibilants are everywhere and always very salient sites of sociolinguistic variation and a locus classicus of language ideology, from the Biblical shibboleth to contemporary studies of gendered styles in American English. Recently, an entire volume of a linguistics journal has been dedicated to the sociophonetics of /s/.⁴⁵ In the absence of recordings, it is, of course, impossible to know what Palestinian Hebrew sibilants were like acoustically, but they were clearly discussed, and a source of anxiety. The journalist Itamar ben-Avi, son of mythical revivalist Eli'ezer ben Yehuda, and known in Zionist mythology as the “first Hebrew speaking child”, for example, is reported to have proposed abolishing the sound altogether, replacing it with /s/.

Jabotinsky's archive reveals the consistency of his aversion to /ʃ/, the extent to which it preoccupied his imagination, and his struggle to avoid the sound in his own writing. Much like with his practicing of gemination in his Dante translation, Jabotinsky got “totally carried away”, in his dealings with /ʃ/. Reducing occurrences of /ʃ/ was a common element of self-correction in his own writing. In the draft of *ha-mivta ha-ivri* found in his archive, he repeatedly battles his tendency to use common /ʃ/-increasing locutions, such as the subordinating complementizer *she*, which he is careful to cross out and replace with the Biblical *ki* or *asher*, the latter of which, perhaps due to the presence of surrounding sounds, he finds less offensive. For example, in the very paragraph that contains the quote above about *The Song of Songs*, the subordinator *she* is erased and replaced with *asher* in the phrase “most sublime in our language”.

While Jabotinsky does not, as far as I can tell, explain his judgment of /ʃ/, it coheres with his manifestive phonetics and, I suggest, is motivated by a conception of it as a degenerate sound. Phonetically speaking, the gesture involved in the production of /ʃ/ involves less intensity

of stricture in the oral cavity than the production of /s/. The production of /s/ involves pushing air through a smaller passage, which requires more stricture, making it a “stronger” sound than /ʃ/.

Beyond manner of articulation, I propose that Jabotinsky saw /ʃ/ as a degenerate sound because of its acoustics more broadly, perceiving it not only as weak, but as shapeless, a kind of formless white noise, perhaps veering outside of the semiotic order of speech altogether towards whistling.⁴⁶ This sound, in other words, may have been for him the very image of the crisis of formlessness that is degeneration. Indeed, the introduction to *ha-mivta ha-ivri* ends with the following sweeping condemnation of Hebrew speech in Palestine: “...we have degraded our language one of the most majestic and noble languages that there are in the world, down to the level of *noise without nuance or character*.”

As mentioned, Jabotinsky was an avid translator of poetry and particularly attuned to its sonic dimension. The presence of degenerative /ʃ/-alliteration in what he evidently considered the greatest lyrical poem in Hebrew, *The Song of Songs*, was so irksome to him that he experimented with remedying it. In an undated page of one of his archived notebooks, he attempts a regenerative re-writing of the offensive lines, along with the first few verses of Genesis, in roman script. The solution he chooses is to replace the sound with its voiced counterpart /ʒ/, the first sound in his last name, which he transliterates as j. His version renders the lines thus:⁴⁷

jir ha jirim ajer li j'lomo: yijjaqqeni mi nejiqot pihu ki tovim dodeca mi yayin.

On the same page, the first lines of the book of Genesis are also re-worked into:

Be rejit bara elohim et ha jamayim we et ha areç

This solution to the problem of expelling the most recalcitrant degenerate sound from

Hebrew is fascinating in several respects. It is rooted in the same manifestive phonetics that make gemination and the popular pattern of spirantization regenerative. Given the construal of consonantal strength as based on articulatory effort, the voiced retroflex fricative /z/ can be construed as stronger than /f/. Being voiced, it requires sustained vibration of the vocal cords while maintaining the stricture at the front of the mouth required for sibilance. It is also retroflex, which means it requires holding the tongue in a concave shape, curved back towards the hard palate. The choice of /z/ is interesting also because this phoneme is not native to Hebrew. Jabotinsky is here going well beyond the insistence on gemination or the preference for stops over fricatives, importing into the language an entirely foreign, borrowed sound that is not part of any tradition of Hebrew pronunciation and, with an irreverence that is surely facilitated by his relative lack of a Jewish cultural background, injecting it straight into the heart of the Jewish cannon. Jabotinsky never made this radical suggestion for a phonemic revolution public, and as far as we know, it could have been nothing more than a moment's utopian diversion, squiggled at a boring meeting about Zionist bureaucracy. Diversions, however, also have their structure.

4. Conclusions: Speech revival and regeneration

Nordau's concept of *Muskeljudentum* and the discourse of degeneration and regeneration played an important role in articulating the Zionism's cultural and political project of transforming European Jewry. This paper makes the case for a sonic counterpart, or component, in the figure of the muscle Jew, which can be observed in Vladimir Ze'ev Jabotinsky's attitudes towards, and practices of, the revival of Hebrew speech. Shifting the focus from (but not losing sight of) issues of language choice and Hebraism as a cultural-ideological component of Zionism, I traced the ways in which Zionist conceptions and ideologies about the body, articulated within the

discourse of degeneration and regeneration, shaped the project of creating a Hebrew speech community in Palestine and in the diasporas.

If muscle Judaism emphasized bodily prowess and physical fitness, its sonic component emphasized vocal prowess and the aesthetics of speaking. From Jabotinsky's literary and essayistic prose, his and others' reactions to experiencing Hebrew speech, and his prescriptive and pedagogical interventions, emerges a masculinist view of Hebrew speech as a vehicle of regeneration. Jabotinsky's language ideology, structured around sound on the one hand and speech as part of bodily habit on the other, creates a conglomerate that fuses together aesthetic and ideological components of cosmopolitan European liberalism, romantic notions about language and geography, emerging ideas of race "science" to fashion a civilizing program of aesthetic education through Hebrew pronunciation for the Jewish masses. Based in a radical reimagining of Jewish antiquity as essentially Classical European, this program stirred Hebrew speech revival away from the Orientalist mainstream perspective and towards a Eurocentric orientation which sat well with the nationalist outlook of the Revisionist movement.

The shift towards sound and speech affords is how the discourse of regeneration, seen as addressing a crisis of Jewish formlessness, is translated by Jabotinsky into a detailed and quite sophisticated set of phonetic and phonological prescriptions rooted in an acute sense of linguistic structure and of language variation. At the heart of this model of Hebrew speech is what I called *manifestive phonetics* – a sound-symbolic construct that allows the inference of properties of speakers from the manner of articulation of the sounds they produce.

The revival of Hebrew speech thus emerges as a fascinating case of language ideologies negotiated at a national level go beyond collective questions such as choice of national language or choice of script, and serve, to paraphrase Presner again, to inscribe a nationalist ideology on

the individual body.

Notes

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¹Max Nordau, "Musklejudentum," in *Zionistische Schriften* (Köln, Leipzig: Jüdischer Verlag, 1909), 379–82.

²Todd Samuel Presner, *Muscular Judaism: The Jewish Body and the Politics of Regeneration* (London: Routledge, 2007).

³On the trope of degenerate Jewish language and "sounding too Jewish", see ch. 1 of Sander L. Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (Psychology Press, 1991).

⁴Ruth HaCohen, *The Music Libel against the Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011). Non-spoken languages, and Deaf members of the Jewish community, were not part of the picture in public discourse at the time and did not really enter this picture until well after the state of Israel was formed. See Marco Di Giulio, "The Origins of Israeli Deaf Ethnicity." *Jewish Social Studies* 27, no. 2 (2022): 144-182.

⁵Gender is a crucial component of Hebraism and of Jabotinsky's language ideology, which space precludes me from adequately discussing in this paper. For a fascinating, authoritative discussion of gender in Hebraism and in Jabotinsky's writing on accent in particular, see Naomi Seidman, *A Marriage Made in Heaven: The Sexual Politics of Hebrew and Yiddish* (Univ of California Press, 2021), especially chapter 4.

⁶An important aspect of Jabotinsky's revivalism that I cannot discuss here is his work with Hebrew theater groups. See Ruthie Abeliovich, *Possessed Voices: Aural Remains from Modernist Hebrew Theater* (State University of New York Press, 2019).

⁷Amanda Weidman, "Anthropology and Voice," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 43, no. 1 (October 21, 2014): 37–51. The voice has been theorized from a great and heterogeneous variety of disciplinary and theoretical perspectives which it would be futile to attempt to survey or summarize here. My investment is not in theorizing the voice per se, but in the speaking voice as an element of the cultural history of Zionism and of the revival of Hebrew.

⁸See, among many others: Benjamin Harshav, *Language in Time of Revolution* (Univ of California Press, 1993); Ron Kuzar, *Hebrew and Zionism: A Discourse Analytic Cultural Study*, (Walter de Gruyter, 2001). Yael Reshef, *Historical Continuity in the Emergence of Modern Hebrew* (Lexington Books, 2019); Miryam Segal, *A New Sound in Hebrew Poetry: Poetics, Politics, Accent* (Indiana University Press, 2010); Ivy Sichel and Miri Bar-Ziv Levy, "trumatan shel neshot ha'aliyah harishona lebniyat kehilat dovrei ivrit berishon leziyon", *Cathedra* 169 (2018):75-108; Liora Halperin, *Babel in Zion: Jews, Nationalism, and Language Diversity in Palestine, 1920-1948* (Yale University Press, 2015).

⁹Jabotinsky, Ze'ev, *hamivta ha'ivri*. (Tel Aviv: hasefer, 1930)

¹⁰Svetlana Natkovich, "Jabotinsky's linguistic program: between history and myth, between grammar and phonetics" *bikoret uparshanut* 45 (2017): 99–119. (in Hebrew). Linguistically speaking, of course, phonology is as much a part of grammar as any of the other grammatical subsystems that interact to form the structure of human language varieties.

¹¹This paper is not the place to fully explicate the complex theoretical apparatuses employed in this literature, but excellent overviews, see especially Susan Gal and Judith T. Irvine, *Signs of Difference: Language and Ideology in Social Life* (Cambridge University Press, 2019) and Asif Agha, *Language and Social Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

¹²For an overview of Jabotinsky's early years, see Michael Stanislawski, *Zionism and the Fin de Siècle: Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism from Nordau to Jabotinsky* (Univ of California Press, 2023) and Brian J. Horowitz, *Vladimir Jabotinsky's Russian Years, 1900-1925* (Indiana University Press, 2020). For the most thorough analysis to date of the relation between Jabotinsky's literary oeuvre and his ideological positioning is only available

in Hebrew, see Svetlana Natkovich, "bein ananei zohar: yezirato shel vladimir (ze'ev) jabotinsky baheksher haxevrati" (Jerusalem: Magness Press, 2015).

¹³ The main characteristics of the Sephardi pronunciation of relevance here are that it has five vowels (/a/, /i/, /e/, /o/, /u/) and no diphthongs, mostly final stress, gemination, epenthesis of schwa to break consonant clusters, and retention of the two "Semitic" consonant, the voiced pharyngeal fricative 'ayin and the voiceless velar fricative het, and doesn't spirantize /t/ to /s/. For an in-depth discussion of the controversies surrounding the choice between different traditions of recitation, see Segal, Miryam. *A new sound in Hebrew poetry: Poetics, politics, accent*. Indiana University Press, 2010. On Epstein's invented "Galilean" pronunciation, see Bar-Adon, Aaron. *The Rise and Decline of a Dialect: A study in the Revival of Hebrew*. *Janua Linguarum* vol. 197. Mouton, 2018

¹⁴ Natkovich 2017: 99–119.

¹⁵ Vladimir Jabotinsky, *nakannune kongressa*, *Odesskiye Novosti*, August 19, 1903. All translations are mine unless stated otherwise. I am grateful to Jessica Kantarovich, Anne Eakin Moss and Alexandra Price for help with some of the translations.

¹⁶ Rachel Albeck-Gidron. "Exiled and Suppressed Voices: On the Ashkenazi Pronunciation of Hebrew as a Postmodern Question" *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature* (2003): 65–90. (in Hebrew)

¹⁷ See Adam Rovner, "Jewish Geographies: Jabotinsky and Modernism," *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 15, no. 2 (2017): 315–39.

¹⁸ While Syrkin does not identify Epstein visually as an Arab, he does identify his Hebrew speech as Semitic, confusable with, hence in the vicinity of, Arabic. Unlike Jabotinsky, nothing about this affinity strikes him as unpleasant to "European ears".

¹⁹ *Three arts*, published in the collection *Causeries* in 1930, but written, probably, in 1903. The English quoted here is from a typed version found in the Jabotinsky archive and dated 1910 there (file F-1910/ 201). It seems to be a self-translation. Emphasis mine.

²⁰ Presner, *Muscular Judaism*, p. 51.

²¹ For illuminating discussion of this novel, see Natkovich, Svetlana. "Samson, the Hebrew Novel: The History of the Writing and Reception of Jabotinsky's Novel and the Consolidation of the Norms of Realism in Hebrew Literature." *Jewish Quarterly Review* 110.4 (2020): 733-755.

²² Jabotinsky's oratory in Yiddish can be seen and heard here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=spOqRS1HzTY>. His oratory in Hebrew can be heard here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rzDpZdXXPtQ>.

²³ Quoted in Seth Lipsky, *The Rise of Abraham Cahan* (Schocken, 2013). p. 182.

²⁴ See: Mogilner, Marina. "Mediterraneanizing Europe: The Project of Subaltern Race and the Postimperial Search for Hybridity." *Isis* 112, no. 4 (2021): 670-693, and Mogilner, Marina. "Racial Purity vs. Imperial Hybridity: The Case of Vladimir Jabotinsky against the Russian Empire." *Ideologies of Race: Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union in Global Context* (2019): 103-131.

²⁵ Jabotinsky was a strong advocate of the latinization of the Hebrew alphabet and wrote many of his Hebrew letters and texts in latin script. See *inter alia* Aytürk, İlker. "Attempts at romanizing the Hebrew Script and their failure: Nationalism, religion and alphabet reform in the Yishuv." *Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 4 (2007): 625-645.

²⁶ Albeck-Gidron calls this pamphlet "a treasure trove of linguistic sociology" (*Suppressed voices*, p. 77)

²⁷ Reshef, Yael. *Historical continuity in the emergence of Modern Hebrew*. Lexington Books, 2019. Halperin, Liora. *Babel in Zion: Jews, Nationalism, and Language Diversity in Palestine, 1920-1948*. Yale University Press, 2015

²⁸ On Ben Yehuda's views of Arabic in relation to Hebrew pronunciation, see Harshav, *Language*, p. 157-159, as well as Segal, *A New Sound*, ch. 2.

²⁹ Jabotinsky explained in his 1926 article *The Orient* that "Orient" was not a geographical notion, but a cultural one, defined by such things as cultural stagnation or "quietism", repression of Women's rights and especially female sexuality, technological underdevelopment, etc. Comparing Harun Al-Rashied with the Rome of the time, Rome was Oriental and Harun Al-Rashied Western. In modern times, however, Europe was Western, and the Islamic world (Turkey, the Arab world) was Oriental (though it was slowly Westernizing).

³⁰ *hamivta ha'ivri*, p.4.

³¹ Judea and Israel are the two ancient Hebrew Kingdoms described in the Hebrew Bible.

³² A reviewer correctly points out an important qualification here: while multilingualism was fine for the leading elite, it was less tolerated for the general public. Yizhak Epstein, for example, a polyglot himself, who interviewed various Zionist leaders, including Jabotinsky, about the role of different languages in their lives, wrote a dissertation (in Lusanne) on the detrimental effects of a multilingual environment on the child acquiring their first language. For more on multilingualism and monolingualism in the cultural dynamics of the Yishuv in the mandatory era, see

Halperin.

³³ *ibid*

³⁴ Jabotinsky, Vladimir Ze'ev, *al nose balshani*. hamashkif 320, 4/26/1940, p.3, available at the Jabotinsky archive, file ת-1940/14-ב

³⁵ *hamivta*, p.4

³⁶ For a particularly lucid introduction to the theoretical concepts and issues, see Gal and Irvine, *Signs of Difference*. A full theoretical discussion of manifestivity within this context must await a different occasion.

³⁷ Austin, John L. *How to do things with words* (Oxford university press, 1975).

³⁸ *beged kefet* is an acronym based on the letters used for the relevant stops.

³⁹ For a recent, clear overview of the phonological issues involved in spirantization see Albert (2019). For discussion of the relation between Biblical Hebrew spirantization and spirantization in Modern Hebrew, see Dorit Diskin Ravid. *Language Change in Child and Adult Hebrew: A Psycholinguistic Perspective*. (Oxford University Press, 1995). pp 81-84.

⁴⁰ Since the association of notions like “strength” with sounds is ideological, one person’s strong sound is another’s weak. For Jakob Grimm, for example, the change from stops to fricatives that he discovered in Germanic (known as “Grimm’s law”) was an instance of strengthening, not lenition.

⁴¹ Roger Lass and John Mathieson Anderson, *Old English Phonology* (Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 21.

⁴² M. Halle, G. W. Hughes, and J.-P. A. Radley, “Acoustic Properties of Stop Consonants,” *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 29, no. 1 (January 1, 1957): 107–116.

⁴³ By *Schwa na* Jabotinsky intends, roughly, the epenthesis of a schwa to avoid consonant clusters, another phonological process of Biblical Hebrew that he considered regenerative.

⁴⁴ By monotony Jabotinsky is alluding to the tendency to accumulate rhyme in the sentence due to common verbal and nominal morphology. For example, the plural ending on nouns, adjectives, and the present participle (which is, morphologically, also a noun) are identical, leading to sentences like *yeladim ktanim rabim garim be-batim yeshanim* (many young children live in old houses) etc.

⁴⁵ *Linguistics* 55, no. 5 (2017): 979-992.

⁴⁶ Whistling in the production of sibilance is also associated with certain speech pathologies. Jabotinsky’s only child, Eri, was born with a clefted lip, and had to undergo treatment for speech defects as a child. I have no evidence, however, for the tempting conjecture that this early trauma played a role in Jabotinsky’s aversion to /ʃ/.

⁴⁷ Jabotinsky archive, file 1-11/1א