

Organization could become the moving spirit of American Jewish life — but he did not refer to American Zionism in this context. It would seem that in 1941 Ben-Gurion did not consider the American movement to be a reliable political ally.

Following upon their analysis of the international balance of power, Weizmann and Ben-Gurion concluded that the United States would play a dominant role in determining the fate of Palestine after the war.<sup>79</sup> American Zionism's political weakness resulted in part from its unique pattern of development between the two world wars. During the twenties and thirties, American Zionism, greatly preoccupied with fund-raising, adopted a philanthropic Palestinocentrism, while the majority of its leadership considered Zionist ideology to be incompatible with conditions in America. It was content to be a "third force" which aided Eastern European Jews to settle in Palestine. Only in time of crisis, following upon the Palestine disturbances of 1929 and 1936, did the world Zionist leadership try to avail itself of the American movement as a political pressure group. World War II did not bring about any change, and American Zionism did not develop into a political force to which the world movement could turn for support.

Even the fear of anti-Semitism in 1939-1941 did not effect a change in the American Zionist outlook, which continued to consider the classical "European" Zionist theories to be an alien doctrine. Furthermore, in the period under discussion American Zionism failed to supply a palliative for the distress and perplexity sensed by American Jewish youth — who believed themselves to be as American as anyone else — when they came face to face with anti-Semitism. True, Zionist fulfillment in the form of emigration to Palestine was not a practical alternative for American Jewish youth in 1941, but the inculcation of Zionist ideals was not conditional upon their immediate implementation. The gap left by Zionist inactivity was filled by Communism which attracted many young Jews by offering them the standard answers it supplied to all minorities in distress. When the Zionists did openly campaign against anti-Semitism, they used the tactics adopted by other Jewish defense organizations.

America's entry into the war put an end to isolationism, but not to anti-Semitism. American Zionism was now confronted with a new dilemma: at a time when America was mobilizing all its forces for the war effort, could they morally expend resources on a particularistic Jewish and Zionist political campaign? In the years 1942-1945, American Zionists were to face a new challenge.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

## Illegal Immigration: Values, Myth and Reality

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ISRAELI OFFICIAL HISTORIES and school textbooks uniformly describe illegal immigration (*ha'apala*) as the "central event in the life of the Jewish nation" during the 1945-1948 period of the struggle for independence from Britain.<sup>1</sup> However, this *post-factum* assertion is not wholly supported by evidence — official documents and correspondence, newspaper articles, stories and poems of those years. The history of the period is only now being written because of the necessity for proper distancing in order to achieve critical perspective. This is especially necessary as, less than two generations after the fact, these events have become part of a national myth, "whose refrain can be heard in popular melodies as well as in the sound of the ram's horn."<sup>2</sup>

### The Myth

The resumption of *ha'apala* operations in the summer of 1945, soon after the end of World War II, provided the Yishuv (the Jewish community in Palestine) with one of the means of doing battle with the British. Not only did a significant percentage of the population participate, but their enthusiastic response to calls for mobilization, and willingness to turn out at street demonstrations and on the landing beach, exceeded the intentions of the Yishuv leadership.

There were several reasons for this. A strong sense of obligation was felt toward the victims and survivors of the Holocaust, as well as feelings of guilt and frustration from the period in which the Yishuv had been unable

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1 Yehuda Slutsky, *History of the Haganah* (Hebrew), vol. 3: *From Struggle to War*, part 2, Tel Aviv, 1972, p. 1091.

2 Dalia Ofer, *The Illegal Immigration to Palestine during the Second World War, 1939-1942* (Hebrew), unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1981, p. D.

to help their brethren in Europe. Participation also allowed the venting of anger and hatred for the British otherwise repressed by the policy of self-restraint, for in the struggle against the Mandatory power only the first part of Ben-Gurion's slogan — "We must help the British in their struggle [against Hitler] as if there were no White Paper [of 1939] and we must resist the White Paper as if there were no war"<sup>3</sup> — had been put into practice during the war. In popular imagination, resumption of *ha'apala* operations meant not only the rescue of refugees, but that the epoch of the *Patria* and the *Struma* and deportations to Mauritius was over.

After one of the first of these emotional landing-beach encounters between Holocaust survivors and Yishuv settlers, one of the Palmach commanders, Yitzhak Sadch (writing under the pen name Y. Noded), published an essay entitled "My Sister on the Beach." Sadch wrote of his meeting with a survivor "who burst into tears, saying: 'Comrade, what am I doing here? What is there for me here? Do I deserve to have young, healthy people risk their lives for my sake?'" In reply to his "sister on the beach," the author turns and addresses his brothers, the members of the Palmach, and the Yishuv as a whole:

Before these sisters of mine, I bend my knee, I prostrate myself on the ground, I sit humbly at their feet. And when I rise, I straighten up my body, raise my head, and know with certainty that: For the sake of these sisters of mine, I am strong. For the sake of these sisters of mine, I am brave. For the sake of these sisters of mine, I will even be cruel. For your sakes — I will do anything, everything.<sup>4</sup>

In view of Sadch's stature and personality, his essay was influential and his words had a profound ethical and educational impact on the young fighters of the Palmach. It was "my sister on the beach" for whom youthful members of the Yishuv were now prepared to risk their lives. She was the source of their strength, courage and motivation to carry on the struggle. During the war the Yishuv had been impotent; but now, at last, it was possible to help fellow-Jews. And indeed, the organization of illegal immigration was viewed as the Yishuv's mobilization on behalf of its compatriots.

In 1946, the British began intercepting ships and incarcerating *ma'apilim* (illegal Jewish immigrants) in a military camp at Atlit, from which they

were released after a time, their numbers being subtracted from the monthly quota of 1,500 Jewish immigration certificates. However, *ha'apala* activities continued and grew. By the summer of 1946, relations between the Yishuv and the Mandatory Government reached a state of crisis. Ships arrived with ever increasing frequency, carrying hundreds and even thousands of *ma'apilim*. Incident followed incident: the "Night of the Bridges," the "Black Sabbath," searches and arrests in Tel Aviv, and starting in mid-August, the deportation of illegal immigrants to Cyprus.

The summer of 1946 was a watershed in the battle against the British. The decision taken by the Yishuv leadership to exercise restraint and to steer the struggle for statchood into political channels meant that clandestine immigration was virtually the only remaining battlefield of the organized Yishuv. Yet, paradoxical as it may seem, at the very moment when the British introduced deportations, public participation in *ha'apala* operations virtually ceased. The August demonstrations in Haifa, in which three people were killed, were the last manifestations of mass efforts on behalf of the "illegals." After August 1946, the *ha'apala* operations were waged almost exclusively by the *ma'apilim* themselves, together with a handful of people in the Yishuv.

Many people were aware of the changed nature of the *ha'apala* and the reduced Yishuv involvement. Protests were voiced both in public and in private: how could the Yishuv stand by and place the burden on the weak shoulders of the *ma'apilim*? This theme was developed in the "Seventh Column" poems of Natan Alterman, who closely followed the events. At the start of *ha'apala* operations, after the passengers on the ship *Hannah Senesz* were brought ashore on Christmas Eve 1945, Alterman wrote the poem "Reply to an Italian Captain after Landing Night," in which he coined the phrase that subsequently entered common usage: "Did you notice then how from ship to shore / They [the young lads of the Palmach] carried their own people [the immigrants] on their shoulders?"<sup>5</sup>

But whom does the poet laud in this poem? — the night, the danger, the grueling toil, the ships en route, "our boys" and the captain. Of the *ma'apilim* themselves, not a word. And when Alterman informs the captain what the future holds — "For the gates they are open, / Awhile they've been open, 'pon my soul!" — he also states who opened them: "Tis the party of youth / That stood that night in the waters."

On "Wingate Night" (March 26-27, 1946) the Yishuv again answered a call for public assistance in what proved to be an unsuccessful operation. The attempted landing was intercepted by the British who opened fire,

3 M. Bar-Zohar, *Ben-Gurion* (Hebrew), vol. 1, Tel Aviv, 1975, p. 401. Reference is marked.

4 Y. Noded, "My Sister on the Beach" (Hebrew), in *Book of the Palmach*, ed., Z. Gilad, vol. 1, Tel Aviv, 1953, p. 725.

5 Natan Alterman, *The Seventh Column* (Hebrew), vol. 1, Tel Aviv, 1962, pp. 97-99.

killing Palmach member Bracha Fold. During the seven months that followed, the British intensified their blockade against the *ma'apilim* while the Yishuv slackened its efforts on their behalf. It was then that the ship *Bracha Fold*, with 806 *ma'apilim* on board, approached the coast of Palestine. On this occasion Alterman wrote:

She just came to see if her blood that was shed  
Lay forgotten in the court of the dead.  
She just came to see and testify  
Whether the nation who'd called her to battle  
Was able or willing to pay back in kind  
One thousandth of what she had given  
When the Bren-gun spat lead in her guts.  
But from Haifa to the Bronx, midst trouble  
and dust,  
Those who paid their dues sleep the sleep of the just.  
Only posters on walls, in clarion tones,  
Urge her resume that same struggle  
In which she was crushed to a pulp . . .  
And the night fell silent. The Empire  
raised a fist: Back to the sea!  
And the people, oh the people, were not within reach,  
from Canaan to Brooklyn, came not to the beach . . .  
And deportation took its due course.<sup>6</sup>

Here the role of the Yishuv is still mentioned, although the reference is in the past tense. Disappointment, however, is already felt concerning the seeming indifference of the Jewish people — both in Palestine and the United States — to the struggle that should have engaged the entire nation. But note the fact that the obligation to continue the fight is no longer toward “my sister on the beach,” but toward another sister, a member of the Palmach — “our sister” Bracha Fold. On November 26, 1946, when British troops and unarmed *ma'apilim* of the *Knesset Yisrael* fought on the Haifa quayside, Alterman sharply rebuked the Yishuv for its inaction. His poem “Division of Duties” begins: “The resistance of the *ma'apilim* of the *Knesset Yisrael* was broken with smoke grenades.”<sup>7</sup> The poet then goes on to tell of an illegal immigrant girl choking on the fumes, desperately trying to reach fresh air: “But then she remembered that I, the

6 *Ibid.*, pp. 105-106.

7 *Ibid.*, pp. 102-104.

Yishuv! / Had ordered: ‘Halt! Don’t move! . . . / Do not go willingly! / Fight it! / Resist!’” Alterman claims that in this struggle there was an inequitable “division of duties” between the *ma'apilim* and the Yishuv that did not correspond to the “division of forces.” He makes this point by having the girl say: “The Yishuv has no right to demand / What it fails to demand of itself and its children.”

In the summer of 1947 the *ha'apala* reached a climax in the *Exodus 1947* affair. The Yishuv was wracked by feelings of guilt toward the *ma'apilim* — “our *ma'apilim*” in newspaper headlines — who suffered in their “holy crusade” in which “the valor of women” came to light. For a period of about two months, the Yishuv was swept up in the collective catharsis of identification with the refugees. Toward the end, Alterman, in his poem “The People and Its Envoy,” asked whether the Yishuv was worthy of the sacrifice of the *ma'apilim*.<sup>8</sup> The poem was inspired by a newspaper report: “A baby born on one of the deportation ships after they set sail died en route. He was buried at sea in a tin box off the Bay of Biscay.” Alterman does not confine responsibility for the child’s death exclusively to the British:

For we summoned him for this mission — I, you, all of you!  
Such an envoy obliges [us]!  
For the clear meaning of such an envoy is pondering  
And questioning whether the nation pursues to its limit  
A life of boundless and immeasurable sacrifice,  
Setting its shoulder to the times and their yoke.

The poet concludes with a reference to the ongoing debate in the Yishuv about resistance:

The nation may recruit [the child-*ma'apilim*] for duty  
Only if it believes in its heart  
That it is worthy of staring them in the face  
At their funerals.

Such pointed criticism soon abated and faded away, and from all the poems quoted above, and many of the others written by Alterman in that period, the image etched in the selective, collective memory is of “our boys, [who] carry their own people on their shoulders,” and perhaps also the Italian captain. The *ma'apilim* themselves are hardly mentioned at all.

Another poetical form that helped forge the collective consciousness of the period were the songs of the Palmach. "Dudu" by Hayim Hefer tells the life story of a Palmach fighter, giving substantial attention to the *ha'apala*:

The night they landed will never be forgotten  
 When the anchor screeched in the dark  
 He carried the child from sea to shore  
 He stroked his cheek and fell silent.  
 The boys then were sure: he's done for.  
 "What have you come to, Dudu?"

The lyrics are reminiscent of "My Sister on the Beach," of the encounter between the Yishuv and the Holocaust survivors, with the Palmachnik carrying the child to the shore. The child manages to pierce the sabra's rough exterior, arousing feelings that he can not articulate, but can only express through stroking the child's cheek in silence, an action which provokes the quasi-cynical reaction "'What have you come to, Dudu?'" In 1948, seven years after the Palmach was founded, Hayim Hefer wrote a popular song about the unit entitled "Batsheva," describing the marches, campfires, soldiers' talk, and the start of war. Of the four stanzas, one is devoted entirely to the *ha'apala*. The first half tells of the men waiting on the beach: "The time I reached the shore at nightfall / With the ship slowly drawing nigh"; the second half, of those who escorted the arrivals: "The time the destroyer roared / And tear-gas grenades were thrown aboard." However, of the 243 episodes recounted in *Yalkut Hakzavim* (collection of Palmach anecdotes), we find only one (!) that deals exclusively with the *ha'apala* itself. This anecdote is entitled "Benny Lands *Ma'apilim*":

Benny, our political officer, would go berserk if he missed a single operation. One landing night at Caesarea, he was assigned to the "water detail," which among other things was supposed to take the *ma'apilim* from the boat to shore. He worked like a mule. He would hoist a Jew with all his belongings onto his back, splash through the water on his stout legs, and set him down safely on shore. Bubbele would welcome the *ma'apilim*, kiss them, and pass them on. The last boat held a giant of a figure, who begged in Yiddish: "Friend, take me along." Benny heaved the mountain of a man onto his shoulders, and gasping for breath, reached shore. The "*ma'apil*" leaped off his back, slapped him on the shoulder, and said: "Salamtak, Benny."<sup>9</sup>

9 Dahn Ben-Amotz and Hayim Hefer, *Yalkut Hakzavim*, Tel Aviv, 1979, p. 113.

In this anecdote, as in the poem "Dudu," there is a strong, quasi-cynical element in the attitude of the Palmachniks toward the *ma'apilim*. Once again the subject is those that "carry their people on their shoulders" and not the *ma'apilim*, who remain passive, shadowy objects of rescue.

### The Reality

How many young men and women of the Palmach actually participated in *ha'apala* operations? The above anecdote begins: "One landing night at Caesarea." All told, there were four landings at Caesarea. Three took place during the summer of 1945; and after January 1946 there were only five landings in the entire country. Between August 1945 and the establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948, 64 ships carrying illegal immigrants were sent out by Mossad L'aliya Bet agents. But we read that the Palmachniks longed "to set out with the *ma'apilim* warriors, to shelter them with our very bodies, to pave the way for their deliverance."<sup>10</sup> However, rather than participating in the actual operations, most were ashore, waiting in vain for a "landing night." The "detail" assigned to what the *Book of the Palmach* describes as "the principal operational activity for many months of the struggle,"<sup>11</sup> only numbered two men at the start and twenty-four at its maximum.<sup>12</sup> Besides these, several dozen Palmachniks working in Europe helped ready the ships and the *ma'apilim* for departure, and served as escorts on the journey.

Study of the documentary evidence suggests that the *ha'apala* played a larger role in the Palmach's consciousness than in its actual experience. This is because consciousness was heightened not only by action, but also by numerous briefings, official correspondence, lectures by the "political officer," Palmach newsletters, poems and songs.

Why was all this necessary? The decision of the Yishuv authorities in the summer of 1946 to transfer the struggle to the political arena, and to limit resistance to self-defense, settlement and protection of immigration, dealt the Palmach a heavy blow, "curtailing our natural and essential wish to continue fighting for those values in which we have been educated" — as one Palmach newsletter described it.<sup>13</sup> The damage done by the decision

10 Roshem, "Waiting for News" (Hebrew), in *Book of the Palmach*, vol. 1, pp. 686-688.

11 Yosef Dror (Yossele), "The Detail" (Hebrew), *ibid.*, p. 757.

12 Slutzky, *History of the Haganah*, vol. 3, part 2, p. 976; Yohai Bin-Nun, "From the Chronicles of Naval Sabotage" (Hebrew), in *Book of the Palmach*, vol. 1, pp. 733-741.

13 Slutzky, *History of the Haganah*, p. 246.

to the Palmach was twofold. First it meant abandoning the field of action to the *porshim* (the dissident factions), giving them "the false glory ... of being the only fighters," while reinforcing the inclination of youth to join their ranks.<sup>14</sup> Secondly, the members of the Palmach, who had come to believe themselves, and not the *porshim*, to be the vanguard of the nation, now sensed estrangement and loss of public esteem. The Palmach leadership and rank-and-file now found themselves fighting not just the British, but also internal Jewish political battles on several fronts. One was against the Yishuv leadership for tying their hands with the restrictive limitations of self-restraint. Another was against the Yishuv in general for its apathy and lack of involvement. A third, against the *porshim*, was a struggle for the support of Jewish youth, for supremacy in the fight against the British, and for maintaining national authority.

Palmach disillusionment with both the leadership and general public was expressed in various ways. For example, at a meeting of Palmach commanders (squad leaders and higher ranks) with Ben-Gurion, in April 1947, critical questions were asked. Ben-Gurion summed them up in his diary as follows:

Why is there no resistance to the deportation of the *ma'apilim*? Why is *ha'apala* still nothing but a small-scale venture? Why isn't *ha'apala* assigned to the Palmach (the sailors loathe the Mossad L'aliya Bet)? Why do we confine our "response" to Haifa Port (instead of overseas)?<sup>15</sup>

In his account of the battle in Haifa Port, the commander of the *Knesset Yisrael* wrote:

Just a stone's throw away were the lights of the Carmel and the honking horns of Jewish cars — and Jewish Haifa was so quiet. . . . Just this night we saw the bonfires ablaze on the Carmel — as if to remind us that there are still Jews in Haifa, brethren who failed to come to our assistance in our time of trouble. . . .<sup>16</sup>

The same tone is found in the story told by one of the commanders of the *Chaim Arlosoroff*:

14 *Ibid.*

15 Ben-Gurion's diaries, entry for April 17, 1947, Ben-Gurion Heritage Archive, Sedeh Boker.

16 Yossi Harel (Hamburger), "The Fight of *Knesset Yisrael*" (Hebrew), in *Book of the Palmach*, vol. 1, pp. 691-692.

The passengers began jumping into the sea . . . only to be arrested on the beach. . . . If their fellow-Jews (who knew what was going on) had swarmed the beach to defend and extricate the *ma'apilim*, many of them might possibly have been saved.

Empathizing with the *ma'apilim*, he adds:

The people defended themselves with their last strength as they were dragged to the landing craft. Even then, their eyes searched the shore, seeking the awaited help, but help was not forthcoming, and their eyes ached with yearning.<sup>17</sup>

The Palmach remained loyal and subordinate to the elected civilian leadership. But commanders found it difficult to maintain morale and discipline at a time when operations were severely restricted. Ships were being intercepted, *ma'apilim* deported to internment camps in Cyprus, and the *porshim* were attacking the British and boasting of their military successes. This explains the education and propaganda campaigns, the occasional approval of sabotage operations ("to let off steam"), the repeated entreaties and orders of Yigal Allon to organize *ma'apilim* resistance aboard ship and in Haifa Port.<sup>18</sup>

In other words, from the summer of 1946, *ha'apala* assumed the additional and highly important domestic role of a unifying popular cause — one that had broad public support, the approval of the elected communal leadership, clear and well-defined bounds, and within certain limits met with a degree of British acquiescence. At the same time, overt efforts were channeled into political action while clandestinely a national army was being trained to fight the decisive battle — the war with the Arabs — that was in the offing. When the Yishuv's participation in the *ha'apala* slackened, there was a corresponding increase in declarations such as "The Yishuv will not give in!" and "We Jews of Eretz-Yisrael won't stop struggling for any Jew's right to immigrate to his homeland!"<sup>19</sup> Such rhetoric was meant mainly for internal consumption: to fortify the camp, to close ranks, and to prove that "our boys" were still on the alert (i.e., that not only the *porshim* were fighting the British).

In fact the *ha'apala* was the most effective ammunition in the war of the organized Yishuv and its leaders against the *porshim*. The harshest criticism

17 Nissan Livyatan, "*Chaim Arlosoroff*" (Hebrew), *ibid.*, pp. 692-694.

18 See photocopy of telegram dated April 25, 1947, *ibid.*, facing page 673; and Yiftah (Yigal Allon), letter dated June 21, 1947, *ibid.*, pp. 838-841.

19 *Hakama*, April 3, 1947, in Sturzky, *History of the Haganah*, vol. 3, part 2, p. 976.

that could be leveled against the dissidents was that their acts sabotaged illegal immigration. In the Haganah wall posters — *Hahoma* — the *porshim* were denounced for “fragmenting the Jewish front” and “obstructing the Return to Zion.”<sup>20</sup>

The climax came in the summer of 1947, when the two strategies were dramatically juxtaposed. The heroic struggle of the *ma'apilim* on the *Exodus* contrasted with the hanging of two British army sergeants by the Irgun Zevai Leumi (I.Z.L.). The *porshim* were blamed for worsening the tragic fate of the *ma'apilim* and for preventing the Zionist movement from taking political advantage of their impressive struggle.<sup>21</sup> The I.Z.L., for its part, attempted in late July to direct public fury about the deportation of the *Exodus* passengers to France into support for its struggle “under the banner of total war,” and to ready the public for the hanging of the two British sergeants should the three imprisoned members of the I.Z.L. be executed.<sup>22</sup>

The domestic role of illegal immigration, bolstering public morale and uniting the Yishuv, dictated the names chosen for the *ha'apala* ships. The use of Hebrew names was a post-World War II innovation. Before and during the war, ships had set sail with the sole purpose of saving lives. After the war, *ha'apala* operations had additional goals. In a society which attached enormous significance to both the written and spoken word, as well as to symbols, the selection of suitable names was fraught with meaning.<sup>23</sup>

The Mossad L'aliya Bet applied itself seriously to this task, establishing a special committee for the purpose. It is almost certain that in many cases the head of the Mossad, Shaul Avigur, himself chose the names of the ships.<sup>24</sup> The people in the field — Mossad agents, Palmachniks, the

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 954.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, the speech of M. Shertok (later Sharett) at a Zionist General Council meeting in Zurich, August 25, 1947, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem (hereafter C.Z.A.), 55/320; Y. Gurinkal (later Gouri), *Hapoel Hatzair*, August 19, 1947; Yitzhak Laufbahn, *Hapoel Hatzair*, August 5, 1947.

<sup>22</sup> Kol Tzion Halohemet, July 23, 27 and 30, 1947, Jabotinsky Institute Archive, Tel Aviv, 7/13–4kaf.

<sup>23</sup> The importance of the names as symbols and values can be gathered from Allon's remarks to Ben-Gurion in June 1948, during the debate about disbanding the Palmach: “Without going into the current dispute about the structure of the army and our brigades [the Palmach], the names and their histories ... I request that nothing be changed.” Yoav Gelber, *Why Was the Palmach Disbanded?* (Hebrew), Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, 1986, p. 164.

<sup>24</sup> Telegram from Palestine to France, April 26, 1947, in Haganah Historical Archive, Tel Aviv (hereafter H.H.A.), 14/702. See photocopy of telegram on this subject dated September 18, 1946, in Ze'ev Tzahor, “Mossad L'aliya Bet — The Source of Its Authority” (Hebrew), *Cathedra* 39 (April 1986), p. 168.

*ma'apilim* themselves — were allowed no say in the matter. In late 1946, the escorts aboard a large vessel about to sail from Yugoslavia wanted to name it *Hameri Ha'ivri* (The Hebrew Rebellion),<sup>25</sup> as an expression of activist spirit at a time when the armed struggle against the British had effectively ceased to exist. The decision, however, was in favor of *Knesset Yisrael*. A similar debate arose when the *Exodus 1947* set sail. The *ma'apilim* aboard the ship wanted to name it the *Mordechai Anielewicz*, in honor of the leader of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. The American crew preferred *Roosevelt* (it is unclear whether they meant the late president or his widow Eleanor), while the Palestinian Jewish escorts again suggested *Hameri Ha'ivri*. The issue was resolved by a peremptory order from Palestine: “Your name is to be *Exodus 1947*.”<sup>26</sup>

Ships were given various types of names. Some described current events such as Operation Biryá, the Night of the Bridges, the Black Sabbath, and the UN partition resolution. Names given toward the end of the *ha'apala* period traced the course of the fighting: *Halamed Heh*, *Yerushalayim Hanetzura*, *Yehiam*, *Tirat Izvi*, *Mishmar Ha'emek*, *Nakshon*, and *Krav Emek Ayalon*. Others commemorated founders and early leaders of the Zionist movement, leaders of the Yishuv, English friends of the Zionist movement, Palestinian Jewish paratroopers who had fallen in Europe during World War II, and members of the Yishuv who had participated and fallen in *ha'apala* operations. However, only one ship commemorated the 12 *ma'apilim* who fell in battles with the British. The *San Miguel*, already en route to Palestine, was renamed *Hama'apil Ha'almoni* (The Unknown *Ma'apil*) in honor of an unidentified “illegal” killed when the *Langev* was boarded, on February 9, 1947. Some names were chosen as morale-raising slogans: *Af-Al-Pi-Khen* (In Spite of It All), a reaction to the deportation of the *Exodus 1947* passengers to Hamburg; *Kadima* (Onward), *Lo Tafhidimu* (You Won't Frighten Us), *Lekememiyut* (To Independence), and *Lenitzahon* (To Victory). There were only two Diaspora-inspired names: *Mordai Hage'taot* (The Ghetto Fighters) and *Yehuda Halevi* (a ship carrying North African *ma'apilim*). Like all the symbolism of the *ha'apala*, the names of the ships were Palestinian. Thus the memorial prayer for Bracha Fold was in much the same spirit as that written by Berl Katznelson for Yosef Trumpeldor and his comrades 26 years earlier.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> *Book of the Palmach*, vol. 1, pp. 680, 691.

<sup>26</sup> Telegram from the ship to the Mossad office in Tel Aviv, July 14, 1947, and from the Mossad office in Tel Aviv to the ship, July 15, 1947, H.H.A., 14/234bet; Mordechai Roseman, private interview, December 1984; Yehuda Pecker, private interview, February 1985; testimony of Yossi Harel, H.H.A., 4277; Azriel Einav, interview broadcast on Kol Israel, April 5, 1964, H.H.A., 4744.

<sup>27</sup> The *yizkor* (memorial) for the victims of Tel Hai was first published in *Kuntres*, no. 29

However, even Jewish Palestine had symbols that were not appropriate for the fight against the British, a limited action that was never allowed to develop into full-scale war. A concerted and consistent effort was therefore made to disqualify mention of Massada.<sup>28</sup> The Warsaw Ghetto, too, was considered an unsuitable symbol for the time.<sup>29</sup> Samson's "taking the Philistines with him" was similarly dropped from the list of acceptable images.<sup>30</sup> The organized Yishuv used moderate expressions, not merely because of censorship laws (constraint being exercised even in forms of expression not exposed to the watchful eye of British censorship), but simply on account of the limited scale of the struggle.

Only occasionally were the constraints loosened so as to permit a verbally virulent expression of anti-British feeling. This was the case when I.Z.L. and Stern Group members were hanged in the spring of 1947;<sup>31</sup> and during the *Exodus* affair, when the British consistently broke the unwritten rules of war against the *ha'apala*. Anti-British feeling — as expressed in the press, in public gatherings, mass demonstrations and closed meetings — reached an unprecedented level. In the summer of 1947, sentiments hitherto repressed were given public utterance, and even the moderate journal *Hapoel Hatzair* compared the Bevin Foreign Ministry to "the evil Nazi regime."<sup>32</sup>

Alterman, who usually refrained from mentioning the British or depicting them as enemies, departed from his custom in two poems, one written after Moshe Barzani and Meir Feinstein committed suicide in their cell on the eve of their scheduled execution in April 1947;<sup>33</sup> the other penned the following September after the *ma'apilim* of the *Exodus* were disembarked in Hamburg: "This is a day on which the nation is filled / With faith in her

(March 1920). Bracha Fold's *yizkor* was published in Sluzky, *History of the Haganah*, vol. 3, part 2, p. 876.

<sup>28</sup> See *Book of the Palmach*, vol. 1, pp. 541, 620.

<sup>29</sup> See letter signed "Yiftah" (Yigal Allon), dated April 28, 1947, *ibid.*, p. 838. The following is an excerpt: "I would not advise you to use the symbol of the Warsaw Ghetto for your flags. Find an alternative symbol more suitable to the community in the midst of which you are working, and to the cultural concepts of your 'ghetto.' I think the symbol should express not only readiness for self-government, but yearning for the motherland and desire to immigrate as well."

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 758.

<sup>31</sup> Broadcast on Kol Tzion Halohemet, July 23, 1947, Jabotinsky Institute Archive, Tel Aviv, 7/13-4kaf.

<sup>32</sup> *Hapoel Hatzair*, July 23, 1947.

<sup>33</sup> "At times such as these / the enemy / gnashing his teeth loses the battle" (Sluzky, *History of the Haganah*, vol. 3, part 2, p. 923). The poem does not appear in the early editions of Alterman's collected works.

sons and contempt for her enemies."<sup>34</sup> The immigrants from the *Exodus* also joined in condemning the British and during their protracted struggle even went so far as to draw flags that combined the Union Jack with the swastika. In general, however, the rhetoric of the refugees was less caustic than that of the Yishuv, and the *ma'apilim* tended not to compare the British to Nazis. Since they had known worse days than those they spent on the ships, had encountered far crueller regimes than that of the British, and had experienced far more inhumane behavior than that of British soldiers and sailors, they refrained from drawing such facile comparisons.

### *The Official Histories*

The Palmach had pride of place in generating and fostering the myth of the *ha'apala*. In the same way as they had fought between 1945 and 1948 to win over the youth of the nation from the *porshim*, the veterans of the Palmach strove in the post-independence years to safeguard their place in history. They were among the first to publish material relating to that period (*Book of the Palmach* appeared in the early 1950s). They were expert at depicting the ambience of the Yishuv, and enjoyed a near-monopoly on nostalgia for the years immediately preceding statehood. Even in the 1960s (1964 was "Ha'apala Year") and the 1970s (when Haim Gouri's *The Crazy Book*, and Gouri and Hefer's nostalgic *The Palmach Family* were published), the Palmachniks continued glorifying the *ha'apala* and their role in it.

In writing its history, the disbanded Palmach took care to emphasize its contribution in the establishment of Israel (in contrast to that of the *porshim*), and its role in the *ha'apala* as against that of the Mossad L'aliya Bet and other Yishuv institutions.<sup>35</sup> Toward the Yishuv itself, whose apathy it had so harshly criticized at the time, the Palmach now showed a forgiving attitude. (As usual, the *ma'apilim* hardly get a mention.) An example of this is the case of the *Shabtai Luzinski*, which managed in March 1947 to slip through the British blockade and reach the beach of Nitzanim, where its *ma'apilim* disembarked. Some managed to slip away and were hidden in neighboring Jewish settlements; others intermingled with the throng who had come down to the shore to help them land. Both the welcomers and

<sup>34</sup> Natan Alterman, "What Is a National Holiday?" (Hebrew), in *The Seventh Column*, vol. 1, p. 88.

<sup>35</sup> An outstanding example of this tendency can be found in Y. Allon, *Book of the Palmach*, vol. 1, pp. 577-579.



the new arrivals refused to identify themselves to the British. As a result, 170 of the 700 people deported to Cyprus were Jewish Palestinian nationals; of the 240 people arrested, but not deported, some were *ma'apilim*. A few years after the event, Allon described the operation as a resounding success:

This operation featured total resistance to the enemy; everyone refused to identify himself. The police finally gave up, releasing all the prisoners including the *ma'apilim*. There is no better proof of the power of a mass fighting movement and of the effectiveness of refusal to identify as an ethical and practical weapon. This was indeed a mass operation that achieved its goal in entirety; an operation that captivated the heart of the Yishuv and renewed the spirit of the camp of fighters.<sup>36</sup>

Was it really so? The *Book of the Palmach* relates the stories of three Palmachniks who participated in the operation and came away deeply disillusioned by the Yishuv's lack of involvement. It also reports that some twenty Palestinian Jewish prisoners identified themselves by name and were released.<sup>37</sup> One participant describes the enormous difficulty — "a true humiliation" — in persuading the people on the beach not to reveal their identity.<sup>38</sup>

In the *History of the Haganah*, there is also a disparity between a complex corpus of evidence highly critical of Yishuv attitudes and behavior, and editorial obfuscation. According to the text, the Jewish national institutions in Palestine reached an agreement with Jewish municipal authorities, according to which the latter would budget a certain sum to further the cause of *ha'apala*, but "The collection of the 100,000 Palestine pounds dragged on for months, and did nothing to enhance the image of the Yishuv and its institutions." The book also states that "The frequent protest strikes organized by the national institutions in the wake of British oppression of the Yishuv, and of *ma'apilim* in particular, left a negative and demoralizing impression." An opinion expressed at the time is also quoted: "The Jewish community is tired of this form of response."<sup>39</sup> Several pages later, however, we find the contradictory statement that "The Yishuv felt

somewhat guilty that the main burden ... was borne by the war refugees, and were willing to do whatever they could to support the struggle."<sup>40</sup>

Thus, the early written accounts of the *ha'apala* were an extension and continuation of contemporary polemics, and were intended, in practice, to reinforce the stance of one or other faction. It is therefore natural that both *Book of the Palmach* and *History of the Haganah* should depict the illegal immigration — the antithesis of *porshim* operations — not only as a strategy that won public approval, but as a form of battle that mobilized the masses.

In contrast to the undeserved self-glorification of the Yishuv's role in the *ha'apala*, the dearth of historiographical references to the *ma'apilim* themselves is conspicuous. During the 1945–1948 period, the Yishuv's attitude to the illegal immigrants changed. Initially it viewed them as refugees, oppressed compatriots who must be saved. Subsequently, the escorts aboard ship and others began to speak of them as "difficult human material." Palmach escorts accompanying the *ma'apilim* prior to embarkation, or who sailed with them — they who in the summer of 1945 had wiped a tear and stroked the cheek of a child *ma'apil* — now met with behavior they found hard to understand and, on occasion, even repulsive. A similar change of attitude toward Jewish refugees — from identification to lack of understanding and even antipathy — is to be noted in the attitude of American soldiers in Europe.

At the same time it was recognized that the *ma'apilim* were the ones bearing the brunt of the struggle. Anyone caring to consider this fact would not only feel pangs of conscience, but would also fall prey to fears that the "weak-shouldered" *ma'apilim* were unequal to the task. The behavior of the *Exodus* 1947 passengers, their protracted resistance and stubborn refusal to disembark in France, was greeted by all parties — the general public, the Yishuv leadership, the Mossad operatives, and Palmach sailors — with surprised admiration. The image of the *ma'apilim* changed radically. The newspaper *Ha'aretz* described the atmosphere of general pessimism preceding the deportees arrival back in France: "Everyone thought the passengers would get off. We stood there dumbfounded, wondering from where they got such strength."<sup>41</sup> The Hiehalutz youth movement envoy reported back to Palestine: "We did not believe in the strength of this community.... We were taken by surprise."<sup>42</sup>

But how was the *Exodus* episode recorded in writing? Let us take as an

36 *Ibid.*, p. 590.

37 Yosef Gidron, Benny Marshak and Uri Yaffe, "Shabhai Luzinski" (Hebrew). *ibid.*, pp. 700–701.

38 Dani Mass quoted in Slutzky, *History of the Haganah*, vol. 3, part 2, p. 1147.

39 *Ibid.*, pp. 961–963.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 972.

41 *Ha'aretz*, August 22, 1947, article by Arieh Gelblum.

42 Letter signed by Hanan Reichmann, August 26, 1947, C.Z.A., S25/2630.



example Bracha Habas' book *The Ship That Brought Victory: The Story of "Exodus 1947,"* published in 1949 and structured in episodal form. One episode entitled "The Event as Retold by Its Perpetrators" tells of exploits by the Mossad L'aliya Bet and the Palmach. Another, entitled "They Were with Us," depicts the admiration of the *ma'apilim* for the Haganah fighters who accompanied them on their protracted journey. "The Anonymous Letter" comprises excerpts of letters sent by deportees from ships in Port des Bouc. The letters are by no means anonymous; they are properly and duly signed. Even so, the people who wrote them are still considered to be anonymous.

Thus, the domestic importance of the *ha'apala* did not cease with independence. On the contrary, once the British Mandate had ended, the debate began about "who drove out the British?" in which the *Exodus* affair and the hanging of the British sergeants were juxtaposed as the contrasting methodologies of the rival camps. Even within the far from united ranks of the former organized Yishuv, political mythologizing of illegal immigration continued apace. Factionalism that had made its appearance in the latter days of the Mandate became more pronounced after independence was won, and political leaders and contenders alike attempted to glorify their own roles in the *ha'apala*.

## Financing the War of Independence

Yitzhak Greenberg

THE COSTS OF THE War of Independence and their sources of financing have not yet been addressed in the historiography of the period. These questions were vital during 1948, when the Jewish community in Palestine and later Israel had to fight for its survival. In the course of this struggle, the country's economy suffered and serious material destruction was caused. The circumstances of the war made it imperative to divert resources and exploit all opportunities to meet the budgetary demands of warfare. The direct cost of the war and the means of raising the money to pay for it are the subject of this article.

At the outset, it is necessary to consider two methodological questions. The first concerns the definition of the cost of war. There are clear direct outlays which include maintaining the military apparatus, fortifications, equipment and the like. There are also the economic costs incorporating both the direct expenditure and the indirect opportunity cost: the decline in industrial and agricultural output, and in building and services; damage to the agricultural economy, buildings and equipment; rehabilitation — pensions for the families of the fallen and the crippled, hospitalization and the like. Income to meet these outlays derived from taxes and customs, domestic borrowing and foreign appeals, contributions in kind from abroad (such as foodstuff and equipment), as well as land, buildings and orange groves which fell into the hands of the government with the conquest of enemy territory. This article focuses on the direct costs of the war and their financing. A general study including the indirect burdens requires additional research.

The second question concerns the data required for estimating the costs of the war and identifying the sources of financing them. No systematic budget was prepared in 1948 for the whole financial year. Instead, hastily

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