

Towards a visualisation of the Zionist *Sabra* 1930-1967

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## Declaration

*I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.*

*Signed*            JC Torday

*Dated*            February 2014

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## Abstract

This study examines ideas about and photographs of the *Sabra*, a small yet influential grouping within Zionism that emerged in Jewish Palestine circa 1930 to play a heroic role in the creation of Israel. Drawing inspiration from labour Zionism, at its height the movement is claimed to have numbered twenty thousand people. The *Sabra* had its own ideals and values that were emulated throughout Jewish society in Palestine. The *Sabra* became one of the appealing myths in Zionism because of the sacrifice in combat, role in military leadership, and (subsequently) in government. Zionist agencies promoted the *Sabra* as the fulfilment of the Utopian new Jew, lauded in the press and in fiction. However, a group of intellectuals in the 1960s, assaulted and soon eroded, the mythical status of the *Sabra*, arguing that their devotion and sacrifice to the state at the expense of individual needs and aspirations was both unhealthy and encouraged a view of the chosen few whose commitment to the state was of a higher order than that of ordinary men and women serving their country, a view that many rejected.

Some scholars dismiss the *Sabra* as an irrelevance, a product of fiction, or propaganda campaigns of early Zionism, and of marginal factual significance in Israeli history. Aside from prominent figures, many *Sabra* rank remain unknown, so many of the photographs shown here are inventions of what young pioneers should look like, show what was expected of them, and whose main purpose was about persuading others to join the cause and build a country. There is no doubt that myths and folk-tales were as important to Zionism as they were to National Socialism. Both were premised on a blood and soil ideology, and it is *Sabra* ideals as expressed in photographs that are considered here. The *Sabra* ethos underpinned the colonial aspirations of Zionism. This study examines Zionism as a colonial movement.

## Introduction

This study is caught between the myths of Zionism, of which the *Sabra* was an inspired example, and the myths of propaganda photographs used to bolster the rhetoric of Zionist publicity campaigns. The *Sabra* represented an ideal, a goal to aspire to, rather as similar elitist movements had done in the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. Not only did these ideologies share the desire to build their nations anew they also shared a need for pioneers to carry out the task. Whilst pioneers in Israel were often dragooned into service, many volunteered needing no convincing about the cause they were serving. The term *Sabra* was coined to capture the *zeitgeist* of the period rather than refer to a formal corps of pioneers of that name. The *Sabra* existed in stories, films and photographs as evocations of what young pioneers should be like and frequently the images of public figures were interspersed among them.

The title of this study, namely, ‘towards a visualisation’ of the *Sabra* is to suggest the possibility that contained within the Israeli archives are photographs that reflect the romanticism of a generation and of the dreams of the Zionist spin doctors of a bygone era. Additionally, the *Sabra* stories written by men who themselves belonged to elite militias and at the time were regarded as the role models of their generation. In fact some photographers were also involved with the militias, and at times it feels as if the writers, photographers, and publicists, were engaged in recording a colourful and heroic account of their own history. Zionism was receptive to the colonisation of a peopled country. Creating a ‘New Jew’ was seen an ideal instrument with which to build the bonds of a new society and the *Sabra* myth was the vehicle used to disseminate the values of the New Jew.

The argument premised here is that Israel was built upon the same foundation as European and American expansion in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Zionists emulated this practice to settle their own populations, to exploit the resources and govern the indigenous population politically. From the perspective of Palestinians the Zionist publicity photographs of the pioneering years is a story of their exclusion and erasure from the Israeli narrative. A largely Jewish state in Arab Palestine was in the end achieved through a settler colonial regime with all the attendant consequences, including military campaigns. Colonialism was explored in Maxine Rodinson's (1973) *Israel: A settler colonial state?* Because of the occupation of Palestinian territories in 1967, Rodinson was asking this question afresh and probing the relationship between Zionism and colonialism. Although this connection is now both recognised and explored in Israeli historical research, it is still limited with respect to photographs and in part prompted this study.

The New Historians, who emerged in the 1980s to challenge official Israeli history, were largely responsible for opening such avenues of inquiry. They claimed that Israeli history was more controversial than hitherto believed.<sup>1</sup> Prominent, were questions about what really happened in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. Israelis were critical of Arab states, claiming they had betrayed the Palestinian cause, citing their own collusion with Trans-Jordan in preventing the creation of a Palestinian state. The 1948 War was fought for 20 months, beginning hours after the UN resolution in November 1947. It ended in July 1949, a few months after the cease-fire, with an armistice agreed between Israel and Syria. Arab Palestine had been destroyed and Israel, one year on from independence had gained spoils it had hardly dared

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<sup>1</sup> In 1987 a group of academics, researchers and journalists in Israel and elsewhere comprised the New Historians. It included Yosi Amital, Myron Aronoff, Benjamin Beit Hallahmi, Uri Ben-Eliezer, Lev Grinberg, Baruch Kimmerling, Yagil Levy, Ian Lustick, Joel Migdal, Uri Milstein, Benny Morris, Ilan Pappé, Yoav Peled, Yoram Peri, Uri Ram, Gershon Shafir, Michael Shalev, Avi Shlaim, Tom Segev, Mark Tessler, and Yael Zerubavel (Mahler 1997, Lustick, 1996).

hope for. That the war had enduring consequences can be seen in all the subsequent Arab-Israeli wars, in the Cold War as it was played out in the Middle East and in the rise of the Palestinian armed struggle. All trace their heritage directly to 1948.

Post Second World War Middle East was one of newly independent states shedding colonial rule, but most nationalist leaders who led their countries through transition were swept aside after the defeat of Palestine. It resulted in Israel seizing 77% of Mandate Palestine and circa 750,000 Palestinians driven from their lands. Jordan took most of the West Bank and Egypt administered the Gaza Strip. In 1987 Israeli historian Benny Morris took up the sensitive issue of the fate of Arab refugees, describing their flight as a violent expulsion. He was censured for his conclusions and denied tenure at most of the country's universities.<sup>2</sup> Morris, who coined the term New Historians believed two factors triggered revisionism.<sup>3</sup> The first was the expiration of the thirty-year embargo on state archives, and the second was that most historians were born after the 1948 war. They grew up at a time when Israeli society was both more confident but also more self-critical. Many of the earlier generation of historians had been active in state building prior to 1948 and had put aside doubts given circumstances that required action ahead of introspection.

The idea dismissed by New Historians was that Arabs were responsible for the refugee problem in 1948. Received wisdom held confrontation with Arabs was unforeseen and painful, but an indirect consequence of Zionist development not a constituent part of it.

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<sup>2</sup>In 1996 he was summoned by President Ezer Weizman and asked to affirm Israel's right to exist. Thereafter, he was given a post at Ben Gurion University (Ben-Ami 2008). This is by no means an isolated case as a number of Israeli academics have faced censure of this kind and remains the case. Even so some scholars enter into debate in an effort to shift the weight of argument in accordance with convictions, political or other.

<sup>3</sup> The New Historians have been challenged with falsification and distortion in their reading and citing of historical documents as well as of falling prey to the sustained propaganda campaign driven by Arab and Western intellectuals against Zionist and Israeli historiography. Efraim Karsh is prominent among those who challenge the New Historians.

Among the other findings of the New Historians was that Britain tried to prevent the creation of Palestinian state even though the Zionists claimed Britain was set against a Jewish state. Further, the New Historians argued that the balance of power favoured the Zionists whereas the latter claimed it favoured the Arabs, and indeed that the Arabs wanted to destroy Israel but in fact Arab states were deeply divided and could not present a united front against Israel. The New Historians also rejected the notion of Arab intransigence in the search for peace and argued Israel was in fact chiefly responsible for promoting a peace process that they knew would never be acceptable.

Zionists mapped out plans fuelling aspirations of a largely socialist and largely *Ashkenazi* vision. Ideas about collective ownership of land, and of economic self-sufficiency, were bound up with a strategy of pre-emptive self-defence in a state with ‘an exclusivist Jewish ethos.’ (Lustick 1996:2) What New Historians argued was the struggle with Arabs ‘was of fundamental, constitutive importance for the kind of state that Jews built in the Land of Israel.’ (Lustick 1996:2) Zionist leaders had been deceitful on the subject of the Arabs in many of their public pronouncements, as they had been about the pecking order within their own diverse community. Those leading research about Israeli photographs (such as Rona Sela, Ruth Oren, Guy Paz and Ariella Azoulay) are critical of the Zionist narrative and its visual archives have become another instrument with which to assault the political ideology that remains the potent force in Israeli politics.

The position taken here acknowledges the arguments of Israeli scholars who make the case that Israel is a colonial state and how Zionism endorsed ‘the historical construction, even invention, of a Jewish caste, calling itself a nation.’ (Sabra 2006) Historian Adam Sabra suggests with the rise of the nation-state in Europe, Jews became regarded as religious, racial,



and national outsiders, leading Theodor Herzl and other founding fathers of Zionism to believe that the Jewish Question was a national issue, though obviously acquiring territory was a prerequisite to its resolution. The myths of Zionism and longing for territory arose at a time when colonialism was viewed favourably and widely practiced. The most important of these myths suggests the academic Gabriel Piterberg, are the ‘negation of exile, the return to the Land of Israel and the return to history.’ Combined as one foundational myth, Zionism can be described as ‘inexorably national and settler-colonial, specific and comparable, shaped by European ideational currents and the reality of colonial strife.’ (Piterberg 2008: xiii)

Piterberg describes a crucial moment in the colonisation of Palestine following various unsuccessful attempts when Baron Edmond Rothschild was persuaded to back models based on the French pattern common in countries such as Algeria. ‘These colonies became ethnic plantations...which relied on a large, seasonal, unskilled and cheap Arab labour’ that was managed by Jewish settlers. (Piterberg 2008: 65) In Palestine essentially the idea was to build a society using colonised labour. Given the plight of Jews in Russia after the 1881 pogroms and the difficulties of mass emigration, the idea of a Jewish homeland became an immigration and colonisation project centered on a national goal. It attracted wealthy Jews, such as Rothschild and Baron Maurice de Hirsch, and marked an interim phase between philanthropy and nationalism. (Gelber 2012)

Private landowners wanted a measured quota of immigrants, as they preferred to employ Arab labour, more conducive to exploitation. (Pappe 2004:52) Within seven years however, Rothschild abandoned the scheme because he was unimpressed with the productivity of the settlements and Arab relations with the colonists. With later immigration more influenced by socialism the pattern was reversed and the arguments put forward were meant to persuade

Jews to undertake all tasks, including manual labour, if they were to make the break with Diaspora Jews and build their own state.

The value of the *Sabra* movement to the Zionist publicists was precisely to stimulate support for the self-sustaining new man who would pick up a gun as easily as a plough to realise the dream of a Jewish state. Even if the movement was a reflection of the zeitgeist of the period, the novels, films and photographs of the period remain, and whether built upon artifice or not, are implanted in Israeli culture, a part of the collective memory. The myth states that *Sabra* arose in the 1930s to spearhead the campaign to create a state, one ostensibly driven by the best minds of a generation, such as Yigal Allon, Yizhak Rabin and Moshe Dayan, political and military leaders.

The sheen on the *Sabra* in part derived from the rapidity of Zionist state building: economic, military, linguistic, and social, involving a massive influx of immigrants. It also resulted from the importance attached to education and mentoring not only by committed teachers but others too, *Palmach* fighters from the elite militia among them, so that the young received instruction that instilled Zionist values. 'It created a youth society with great autonomy...it encouraged a sense of internal solidarity by minimising formal rules and organisational hierarchy.' (Almog 2000:258) Significantly, instruction 'nurtured a sense of exclusivity and chosenness' as well as creating 'a life of adventure and romantic fascination.' (Almog 2000:258)

The *Sabra* might be likened to partisans defined as much by their antipathy to the Diaspora Jewish ethos, as by their *esprit de corps* and commitment to the cause. However, the claims sociologist Oz Amog makes are arguably more appropriate to Zionist youth in general,

particularly those attached to the militias and to pioneering than to the idea of the *Sabra* as some sort of identifiable movement. There is no doubt that the resonance of the *Sabra* myth is based on the devotion to the Land of Israel, camaraderie and sacrifice in pursuit of a cause and a dream. Almog's claims for the *Sabra* appear overstated in terms of who they actually were, but on the other hand the testimony he has pored over is real enough. If *Sabra* were a movement it seems it was informal and composed of disparate groups of Zionist youth sharing common aspirations and willing to be involved in bringing them about. More likely the *Sabra* represent the entourage around a few distinguished military and political leaders, people who were instrumental in achieving Zionist aims upon the ground but who also shaped how these events were perceived by the public.

In his book, *The Sabra, the creation of the new Jew* Almog admits, since the 1980s, 'there has been a growing tendency to portray the *Sabra* as a propaganda tool that had no grounding in reality.' (Almog 2000:263) He describes public perception in Israel as failing to distinguish between myth and reality of the *Sabra* with the public believing they were 'only an allegory, the product of the imagination and wishes of the founding fathers and enlisted writers and artists.' (Almog 2000:263) Yet from the perspective of photographs it is the mystique of the *Sabra* that is compelling, and it is the face selling toothpaste to young Israelis in the 1940s that is of more interest here than the biography of the individual photographed in a publicity campaign. However, there were also men and women who received public adulation for their daring exploits and had cinematic counterparts on occasion, but the symbolism was always important, and the images were used in the service of the state and not for the benefit of an individual. The vision was formulated around young European immigrants civilising a wilderness ranged against a foe, racially and culturally different, but as Israel became ever

more multi-racial the *Sabra* myth became increasingly inappropriate and eventually redundant.

The visual depiction of *Sabra* are as fictional as the feted young heroes in stories and films, or on the cover of magazines like *Bamahane*, produced and circulated by the armed forces. The two young men in Figure 5, intent upon mastering their oars, seem to come straight from the pages of one of the many stories written by *Palmach* fighters enriching *Sabra* folklore, that during the period often echoed Soviet literature. One might argue of the photographs here that they depict fleeting moments from the settlement of Israel but should be considered as belonging to a sequence of photographs that stretches forward to the present day. In this way one can more easily grasp the colonialism of Israel as a continually present and underlying structure of the state. Whilst it is true that the question that must always be asked of photographs is who is using them and with what purpose in mind, in this case, whatever the characters in these photographs thought about themselves, whatever values they held, the fact is their personal economic interests and prospects remained secondary to Zionist ambitions.

Young Zionists were expected to meet the enormous challenges that leaders placed before them, and by rising to them, were rewarded by bonds of shared experience. Figures 4 and 5 can be read in this way too but the images cannot disclose the pressure arriving colonists were subjected to. Despite the praise heaped upon the young they were expected to abandon the culture and language they had grown up with in favour of Hebrew and the surrounding culture, albeit in evolution. The historian Yael Zeruvabel claims that this enormous pressure left 'deep psychological scars.' (1995:28) Noteworthy is that a number of Israeli writers and scholars have accused Zionism in the pioneering years of coercion and indoctrination of the

young. In effect they argue that they had been sold a lie and had been duped by promises of a society that in their view was never realised or was impossible to realise without unacceptable consequences.

Almog however, records a young woman's testimony of the *Sabra* at the time, 'Have you ever seen a *hora* of comrades uniting into a single body, dancing...Have you ever dreamed a dream so beautiful and so pure as the dream of a new enterprise that you will take part in establishing?' (Almog 2000:266) Such was the appeal of the *Sabra*, and the photographs that best express this, engage the emotions of viewers by showing the humanity of the photographed. Looking at them today, it is as if it would be churlish to read into the charm and innocence of such scenes, such as Figure 4, the suspicion that these were prized images of a hearts and minds campaign to lure the unsuspecting into making a fresh start in Israel. One sees the same expressions of zeal and joy in the images of Nazi and Soviet pioneers, the same heroic poses, but given that these ideologies have been abandoned, the sense of the counter memory is everywhere present.

In the late 19th and early 20th Centuries there was acceptance of photographs as scientific evidence, in anthropology, criminology, and psychology. This fuelled spurious science and bolstered the authority of the state in inappropriate ways. It also politicised photographs because they were used to make social and racial distinctions, often serving to support divisive propaganda. Zionist photographs were similarly politicised, despite efforts to portray a melting pot. As filmmaker Wim Wenders expressed it, 'the most political decision you make is where you direct people's eyes.' (Strauss 2003: xvi) In effect, this is what Zionist photographs set out to do, in album after album, to show Israel through the prism of their ideological values and to ignore subject matter that did not accord with it.

Zionist photographs share similarities with those of other 20<sup>th</sup> Century political ideologies and in all the significant propaganda was driven by film and stills. Some links are considered, the colonialism of Italian Fascism, German National Socialism, and Soviet Communism. For example, the intention to portray a new social order, based upon the concept of a 'New Man' whether a socialist or a nationalist. Situating Zionist photographs within the orbit of the other major ideologies of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century reveals that some of them disguised colonial ambition within the rhetoric of building new societies. Indeed, the significance of colonialism in these regimes is often obscured by their other salient characteristics. It is this that particularly connects Israel, the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany.

The visual legacies of these ideologies are considered nowadays in ways very different from the time of their making and their original intentions and purpose have been debunked. This is not the case in Israel where the visual icons of the pioneer years live on, serving as commemoration, transforming yesterday's propaganda into today's history, and posing the question of how such photographs should be studied. In trying to answer this question many more are raised. Among them are those that are not easily answered. It is natural to interrogate a photograph and to want to know something about the lives of those depicted in them. What they thought about the state-building project, the conflict with the Arabs and much more.

How are the interpretations of photographs affected by time and by the context in which they are seen? The more this extends from the date of recording or publication, for example, the more historical context is needed if one is to understand the image in relation to its original purpose. How and where subsequent viewings of the same photographs occur will also shape the reception of meanings, and can also produce different interpretations if they are

considered complex or ambiguous. How does forensic or philosophical analysis, for example, distinguish between authenticity and veracity, or between a recorded and a manufactured image? How do photographs deceive, confuse, and misinform an unsuspecting public? How do they inspire a public and shape opinion?

For historians or policemen, these can be vexing questions since it is argued here that all photographs (and documentary films) are inherently circumspect. Photographs are only interpretations of reality in the sense that an image is only ever a partial view of something in time and space, as well as a result of human choice. In this respect it isn't merely photographs that need to be considered it is also the role of photographers and editors that need to be examined. Some of the photographs shown here have been passed off as real or 'truthful' particularly when they have acquired the status of icons, or become associated with given events and are used as a kind of shorthand for recalling them. Within the photographs here there is also the role of those photographed to be considered. Were they complicit with the photographer or unaware, and is this significant?

Such questions underscore the uncertainty that frequently surrounds the production and consumption of photographs. However, photographic research in Israel is limited as too is the study of Palestinian photography. Perhaps what has most impeded this is the unending conflict unleashed by the process of Jewish colonisation in Palestine. This has led to the destruction and looting of Arab archives as well as to the censorship of Israeli archives. One could liken research to the reconstruction of a mosaic that has barely begun and without all its pieces available. The history of photography of the region not only has yet to be written it is questionable whether it can be if there are important parts of it that are missing.

## Research Approach

The research question has three parts, the first is to explore the possible use of photographs as historical evidence, the second, to provide the framework for colonialism as the historical context in which Zionist agencies photographed the country, and thirdly, to consider the myths and aspirations of Zionism as reflected in the so-called *Sabra* movement.

Secondary research was the preferred option available since I had neither the accreditation to Israeli institutions nor the language necessary to study documents. Fortunately, there is significant Israeli scholarship in English, along with newspapers, official publications, and exhibition catalogues, which made this study possible. Further, secondary sources are important if one wants to look at photographs that the early pioneers would themselves have seen at the time. Photographs considered for this study were found through researching the on-line archives of *Ha'aretz* and the *Jerusalem Post* newspapers. In addition, the Israeli government Web site, the Israel National Photo Collection, Israel Images, the Israel Museum and other Web sites of public institutions were invaluable.<sup>4</sup> Other sources included second hand or specialist bookshops that had collections of out of print Zionist albums, magazines, and monographs.

Two sources were particularly interesting, those from *kibbutz* collections and those from the work of visiting Jewish photographers, who especially contributed to recording the birth of a state. The availability of a small but growing number of retrospective anthologies devoted to

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<sup>4</sup> Though the reliability of information posted on the Internet is bound to raise concerns and invite criticism it is nonetheless a vital source of information for two reasons. Firstly, the Internet facilitates the dissemination of personal testimony, information, and points of view that would not otherwise be accessible. Secondly, the Internet itself is transforming the way popular culture and the collective memory of communities is presented and recalled, meriting its study. The increasing digitisation of documents and photographs and the growth of public institution Web portals is revolutionising research. Further, there is a significant growth of early Jewish and Israeli photographs on Internet sites bringing into the public domain scores of private album photographs hitherto unavailable.



noted photographers allowed consideration of their work in new light. A photographer's archive is part professional, part personal, history as well as biography, observation as well as statement. They add another layer of understanding and the opportunity to contextualise their work in ways that until recently was not available. There is an intimacy in this work that contrasts with the picture albums of the Zionist agencies that used anonymous images and mixed the work of several photographers. It is not possible to understand these albums in terms of their authorship.

Many hundreds of photographs were scrutinised over and above those relating specifically to Zionism. With respect to Palestine these included the archives of Palestine refugees held by the United Nations, and other collections held by the Palestine Exploration Fund, Passia Photography Archive, The Qattan Foundation, and the Arab Image Foundation among others. Also consulted were the collections held by US Library of Congress, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Imperial war Museum, and the New York Public Library. This was supplemented by the collection of 19<sup>th</sup> century photographs at the *Ecole Biblique* in Jerusalem, by two Armenian collections on Palestine held privately in Jerusalem, and by the work of colleagues. Necessarily, both German and Russian photographs of the period were consulted. Firstly with respect to the National Socialists and Soviet Communist programmes and their relevance to Zionism, but also with respect to broader German trends in photographic work, given there were a number of notable German Jewish photographers that reached Palestine in the 1930s. Equally helpful in broadening perspectives was the work of foreign photojournalists on assignment in Palestine and Israel.

This study is informed by my own experience as a photojournalist and based on long periods spent in the region, reinforcing the analysis and arguments throughout. It provided a

knowledge of how photographers' work, translate what they see or want to express into an image, and what happens to it as it processed for publication. It also brought familiarity with the political geography of Israel, its government press office and military censors, as well as with a few of the photographers discussed here. It helped understanding of the criteria used to explore photographs by critics and theorists alike. Photojournalism often involves working in press pools or with one or more colleagues in the field, providing valuable insight into how photographers approach the subject in hand. Working practices can be shaped by the needs of the assignment, by deadlines, or by a range of other factors. A photojournalist can scrutinise photographs in more ways than many imagine would be possible. The experience certainly helps understanding the intentions of photographers or the constraints they may be working under.

The research methodology that provides the framework for this study is largely based on the photograph as social power approach that is widely debated by John Tagg and Allan Sekula and this is contrasted with John Roberts' defence of realism. Broadly, one position argues that photographs can always be manipulated to suit the message or arguments to hand, whilst the other position though not refuting this possibility, recognises the power of photographs to bear witness to human events and activity. In a sense both positions are complementary insofar as each values the possibility of truth in photographs, the one to proclaim its historical worth and the other to manipulate it for given ends.

Thus a helpful research method used here is based on the concept of a counter-image offering a possibility of interpreting a photograph in a way that is often the antithesis of the preferred reading. The counter-image develops from additional knowledge brought to bear upon a photograph, information furnished from sources other than the photograph. Thus the

photographs in this chapter can be read in different ways to enrich their analysis. A counter image can be found ‘in relation to or within a given work acting as a supplement to or negation of that work’s preferred reading or interpretation.’ (Sapega 2002:48) The viewer who comes to observe a counter image has obviously engaged ‘in a re-articulation of facts, events, and bits of knowledge that the dominant order has repressed or dismissed as insignificant.’ (Sapega 2002:48)

In many ways, the counter-image is central to the preoccupations of contemporary research in Israeli photographs, though rarely defined as such. The re-articulation of facts and events is part and parcel of the current debate in Israeli scholarship, dubbed the ‘shattering of myths’ and part of an on-going assault on the pillars of Zionist beliefs. It follows the work of the New Historians who provided critical perspectives with which researchers of photographs could examine in greater detail the visual narratives of Zionism.

The point of analysis with regard to the use of photographs as historical documents then is to reduce the uncertainty, using as many elements as possible to inform analysis. However, no matter how closely reality may be mimicked in a photograph, accepting it as an interpretation, means recognising the constraints as well as the possibilities of what photographs do. For example, the essayist John Berger describes the photograph as a meeting place between those recording the photograph, those recorded in the image and viewers or anyone else using it. Berger suggests the interests of them all may well be contradictory. ‘These contradictions both hide and increase the natural ambiguity of the photographic image.’ (Strauss 2003:32)

What Berger is arguing for is that all points of view or interpretations should be examined when considering the photograph because as photographer W. Eugene Smith put it, ‘there must be the realisation that photography is the best liar among us abetted by the belief that photography shows it as it is.’ (W. Eugene Smith 1988: 336) Smith wonderfully sums up the conundrum that photographs so often pose, and like some of his colleagues, has the profound insight that comes only with long years of experience in the medium. Smith of course should know as many of his own compositions breached the code of conduct that journalists are supposed to adhere to. For him manufactured images, or those doctored in some way, were more convincing because they were better able to express reality than unadulterated images generally could. Smith has summed up the essential ambiguity that has haunted photography ever since its invention and some of the most prized images in the history of photography are not what they seem, and often not what they are presented as.

The visual narrative of Zionism made available to the public presented a benign view of immigration, pioneering, and development, essentially passing off propaganda photographs as documentary ones and presenting a sanitised view of Israeli history, shorn of controversy and violence. A difficulty of looking at Zionist photographs as secondary sources is that so much is missing from public display. The question of what isn’t shown is a combination of what wasn’t photographed, what was embargoed by censors or self-censored by photographers, and of course, what remains unpublished in the various Zionist archives. Even to this day, it remains the case that the ‘state has devoted considerable energy to developing and maintaining common memories that are regarded as vital to its identity.’ (Schuman 2003) Whilst oral and written testimonies critical of Zionism are plentiful, the visual narrative reflects only what Zionist agencies saw fit to disseminate. From the perspective of Sekulla

and Tagg there is little point in studying Zionist agency photographic publications without considering the ideological tenets of Zionism beforehand.

However, other sources provide further important perspectives in Zionist photographs, namely the representation of Arab civil society. Photographs were recorded by foreign journalists, British service personnel, aid agencies, and by local photographers throughout the Mandate and onwards. Whilst offering perspectives of Arab civil society, these representations did not amount to a deliberate narrative to counter Zionist propaganda and often, Arab photographs do not contradict it directly. On the other hand as and when photographs from these sources are examined alongside those from the Zionist archive it will further understanding about Zionist mythology. Yet, until and unless these distinct visual narratives are studied together, it seems improbable that a history of photography of this tiny country can ever be written. This task is made all the more remote by the fact that the internecine conflict begun a century ago is still underway. The skeletons in the closet remain locked and the Israeli state is reluctant to open these archives to researchers at present.

Trying to understand photographs in this period is to recall that Portugal, Spain, Italy, Germany, Russia, as well as Zionist Palestine, were countries where visual culture gained unprecedented importance in the expression of political ideology in the 1930s and 1940s. During WWII most countries used photographs in propaganda campaigns to help the war effort. Despite the unusual circumstances surrounding the birth of the Israeli state, the Zionist archive, like its European counterparts, is 'a site around which the state sought to construct its discourses of power.' (Sapega 2002:46) In Israel, immigrant European Jews were depicted in photographs leading the struggle for independence and 'taming the wilderness' with an increasing use of technology. These photographs when placed alongside those of European states in the same period often reveal close similarities, particularly the idea of building new

and better societies. However, Arab Jews were assigned more humble roles in visual productions continuing a tradition begun by 19<sup>th</sup> Century photographers in the Holy Land.

There are numerous photographs that give a sense of how important the Diaspora was in realising Zionists ambitions for a state. Particularly striking are photographs of Zionist groups and the training camps for agricultural workers or for the guards that would be needed on the settlements. The photographs were recorded in several countries from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century onwards and suggest how international the Zionist project for a homeland had become. Given that many photographs from the training camps were by amateurs they offer a view of history from below. They also underscore its fundamental nature as a colonial project.

Figure 1, shows militia leader and future prime minister, Menachem Begin, at a political rally; a poster propped against the table before him, depicting a rifle spread over a map, its message clear. Figure 2 shows future prime minister Rabin when he was chief of staff, goggles perched on his cap, another portrait showing leaders as men of action, prepared to do what was necessary to realise the dream of a safe haven for Jews. It was Rabin who gave orders to his troops to fire upon the ship the *Altalena* with Begin on board in June 1948 (see Chapter 5) and it was Rabin who was assassinated by Yigal Amir, November 1995. Such were the decisions made by Zionists set against one another, for the sake of a country built upon the principle of minimum Arabs, maximum land. It is precisely these sorts of details that allow for the possibility of a counter-image to emerge.

However, the portraits of political figures in Zionism usually manage to show them for the most part as down to earth, as belonging to the community rather than being isolated from it.

Perhaps this is reinforced by the lack of formality and of formal attire that became a hallmark of the fledgling society but it is also because of an absence of grandeur that was the hallmark of the other political ideologies of the period. In general terms, portraits of Israeli military and political figures were far more benign than sinister, and certainly were less prone to subversion and caricature because of this.



**Figure 1 Menahem Begin, Herut Party convention. *Paul Goldman Press photographer 1943-1961 Israel Museum 2004***

Yet sooner or later, as in Figures 1 and 2, one comes across guns and uniforms, forts and tanks, revealing Zionism as armed struggle as well as ploughing the fields. Both messages are firmly made in Zionist campaigns and the emphasis on military strength and prowess was often at the heart of them.

## **Arab Villages and Colonisation**

In 1983-4 I photographed scores of sites of villages destroyed during the wars of 1948 and 1967. In places it was easy to find evidence of an erstwhile Arab presence as homes had merely changed hands. Sometimes, there was no more than a village well to be found and generally there was an absence of features in the landscape, such as olive groves, to provide clues to former Arab locations. In most places the landscape had entirely changed, replaced by different types of farming, covered by forests, or built over. Finding sites was difficult and without a detailed survey map of Mandate Palestine it would have been impossible to navigate the past at all as modern maps revealed almost nothing of Arab history. It was a journey through the past and the terrain that Zionists had fought their way through and transformed through colonisation.

Some historians claim that up to 400 villages were destroyed from 1948-50 whilst 160 Jewish settlements were built. 'This physical elaboration of Israeli power was underwritten by the fabrication of an imaginative geography that was designed to make it virtually impossible for Palestinian refugees to return.' (Gregory 2004:88) New geography was abetted by changing place names from Arabic into Hebrew, even though differences between them were often slight. The names of towns and villages were changed along with the names of streets. However, it was a reminder to the dispossessed that not only were physical changes wrought to once familiar landscapes, it was if their memories were being reduced to a chimera. By the time I reached Israel, Palestine was far away and long ago.

The theorist Roland Barthes refers to a denotative and connotative function in photographs, but these can also be applied to street names. On a denotative level a street name is a spatial sign that allows people to navigate their path from one point to another, whilst on a



connotative level it 'signifies an ideological content transcending the concrete context and transforming the urban space into a signifying space in itself.' (Pinchevski & Torgovnik 2002:367) This allows for the appropriation of urban spaces to be named for commemorative purposes in what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu termed an act of 'symbolic violence' facilitating those with the power to do so to impose their ideological views on social spaces. 'Viewed from a semiotic standpoint, street names are media through which the urban space is canonized, making the ordinary sublime and vice versa in a dialectical manner.' (Pinchevski & Torgovnik 2002:368) Figure 3 illustrates the emergence of this process with the presence of a makeshift place name attached to the post written in Hebrew and English but not in Arabic.

It also serves as a metaphor for the pioneer, living on the frontier where there is always danger but with the promise of better things to come, an idea that resonates in Zionism as will be seen. The words 'Frontier Danger' are even written on the signpost beneath which the archetypal Israeli soldier can be seen. The image of the Israeli soldier has barely changed ever since and his is not a spit and polish army of spotless uniforms and shiny boots, but a people's army with a slovenly look. As if the substance of the man inside is more important than the uniform he wears and this was the essence of the 'New Jew.' They had to be men and women prepared to struggle, and though Zionist publicity campaigns put a gloss on this, they could not omit allusion to this nor to the sacrifice they might have to make.

The rationale followed in the obliteration or takeover of villages (aside from the removal of the inhabitants where possible) was not always clear, and may sometimes have had more to do with the expediency of the moment. A number of historians argue this was the result of Plan Dalet drawn up by the Jewish *Haganah* militia and issued on March 10 1948. 'Each

command instructed a specific unit to occupy villages or urban neighbourhoods, destroy them and expel the people living in them.’ (Stoakes 2011) It may also reflect the whim of individual commanders who were largely free to implement Plan Dalet as they saw fit, but ‘entire cities and hundreds of villages left empty were repopulated in short order with new immigrants.’ (Segev 1994:161) Tens of thousands were refugees from Europe arriving in the aftermath of war in 1949. ‘For several months, the country was caught up in a frenzy of take-what-you-can, first come, first-served.’ (Segev 1994:162)



**Figure 2 Yitzhak Rabin, Chief of Staff, 1964. Boris Carmi Prestel 2004<sup>5</sup>**

In a few cases, ambivalence or inertia determined the fate of villages, such as with Lifta, abandoned on the outskirts of Jerusalem. Partially spared destruction following the 1948 War it was left standing. Towards the close of the British Mandate, Lifta had a population of 2250

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<sup>5</sup> Unlike Ariel Sharon, Rabin and Begin look less convincing as charismatic heroes in photographs though Carmi’s portrait achieves greater resonance than many.

in a stone built village, with agricultural land and a quarry. Jewish militias attacked in December 1947 and following weeks of intermittent clashes, the villagers mostly dispersed after a handful had been killed in an attack on the coffee shop on December 28. On the following January 11, 1948 the house of the village headman was blown up and on January 13 another 20 homes were damaged during a raid. (Khalidi 1991:303)

All these years later, its emptiness and prominent location draws attention, and it remains ‘a place where memory crystallises and secretes itself’ following a particular historical moment, where there is a ‘consciousness of a break with the past that is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn.’ (Nora 1989:7) This was certainly the overriding impression one had when photographing village sites. The village, like all the others, embodies colonial violation and is a reminder that colonialism is a cultural process beyond its political and economic base. ‘Colonial cultures are not simply ideologies that mask, mystify or rationalise forms of oppression that are external to them, they are also expressive of and constitutive of colonial relationships in themselves.’ (Thomas 1994:2)



**Figure 3 Boris Carmi, signpost near Nahal Oz, 1954 Prestel Publishing, Germany 2004**

The academic Gish Amit (2008) asserts that ‘Occupation is not limited to sovereignty over space; it reaches its full potential in its sovereignty over culture, its erasure or acquisition. Military force never operates in isolation.’ Aside from removal of people, destruction and looting of property, there was the systematic removal of books and manuscripts from private homes, schools and institutions, especially in Jerusalem. One worker wrote to the Zionist National Library in July 1948, ‘I estimate that to date around 12,000 books or more have been collected. The best part of the libraries of the Arab writers and scholars is now in a safe place.’<sup>6</sup> (Amit 2008) Aside from books and manuscripts collected, photographs disappeared too, including from commercial studios. Amit (2008) suggests it ‘illustrates the way in which one culture emerges from the ashes of another.’ He describes the ruin of Palestinian culture as coinciding with the birth of an Israeli consciousness.

The acquisition of Palestinian culture creeps along rather like the annexation of occupied territory. Rona Sela, a curator of photographs (2009) observes the Israeli military and security authorities practice information gathering ranging from surveillance to plunder. The latter often occurs during military offensives that result in desecration of religious sites, damage to schools, and the dislocation of communities. Sela argues that Israeli authorities acquire and collate ‘information regarding the Palestinians and controls its distribution in the public realm and the Palestinian memory, history, culture and heritage.’ (Sela 2009)

According to Sela (2011) for example, during the 1940s *Haganah* scouts collected detailed information about Arab villages, on topography, resources, infrastructure and more. Using informants, ground and aerial photography, and by means of every available subterfuge to prevent British reprisals, they built up an impressive record of ‘village files’ that were

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<sup>6</sup> Some scholars cite 6000 volumes to be found on the shelves of the National Library with the designation AP (abandoned property) written onto their spines. They include dictionaries, linguistics, literature, Islamic studies, science, and biography.

meticulously archived and served as intelligence and preparation for future conflicts. Much of this work was lost or destroyed after 1948 but as Sela observes what little remains are the last vestiges of information about these long vanished sites.

All this is underpinned by the Zionist view of Palestine, as rightfully belonging to Jews rather than to Arabs who had arrived there by chance without any historical connection to it. In their view the political violence and conflict needed to reclaim the land for its rightful owners was just whilst the actions of the Arabs in rejecting Jewish claims were effectively criminal. A sense of this is still present when, in 2011, the Israeli parliament ratified a bill that forbade the commemoration of the 1948 *Nakba*, the date on which Palestinians recall defeat and dispossession.

Histories, their photographs and propaganda campaigns, contribute to the processes that legitimise the formation of states and their political systems. For many years both Israeli and Arab historians served up sometimes uncritical, nationalist perspectives in which Arab writers heaped blame upon one another's states whilst Israelis claimed achievements snatched from an awesome foe. History became a political invention as historians Rogan and Shlaim (2002) suggest. Many official Arab histories tended to advance the interests of the state by invoking the defeat and the loss of Palestine to place blame elsewhere. Israeli official history meanwhile fostered the idea that victory was somehow Zionist destiny and could shrug off responsibility for the negative outcomes of war.

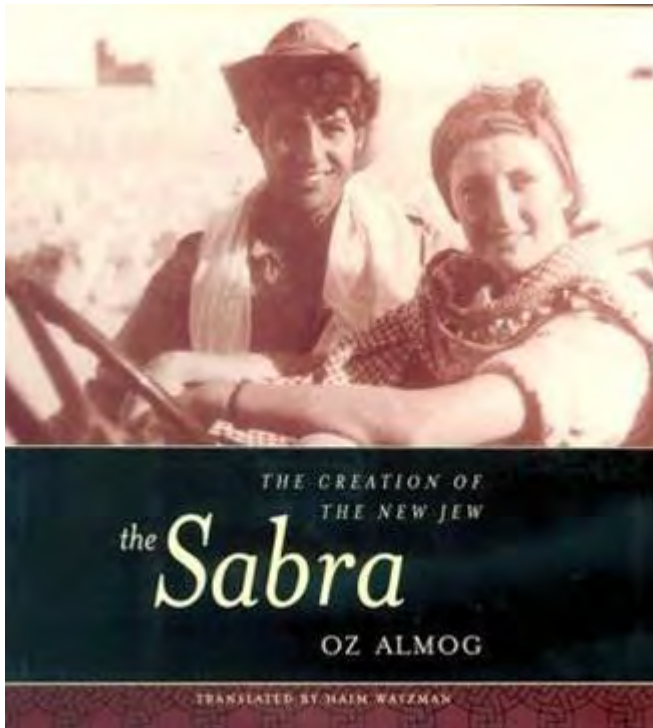


Figure 4 <http://www.alljewishlinks.com/the-sabra-the-creation-of-the-new-jew/> Retrieved 24 January 2009



Figure 5 Boating on the Hula, 1937 Zoltan Kluger, chief photographer, 1933-1958 Eretz Israel Museum 2008

## **Cultural memory and collective memory**

All photographic research has limitations because so much analysis has to come from beyond the photograph itself, but among the elements that are helpful are those relating to the construction of a collective memory that has been vital to the success of Zionism. Professor Jane Marie Law makes a distinction between historiography and cultural memory. The former claims the past is something that can be verified through reliable evidence and therefore to an extent can be retrieved, whilst the latter explores ‘the many projects that memory undertakes: healing, denial, revision, invention, recreation and re-creation, forgetting.’ (2006) The discussion here has to take account of both but satisfying the needs of the historiography of photographs are problematic for reasons explored later.

Marie Law cites philosopher Michel Foucault who called for the separation of history and memory, and argued for acceptance of the concept of counter-memory, as ‘a strategy for displacing what he considered to be hegemonic processes of remembrance.’ (Marie Law 2006) It is a research method that applies here and there is a symbiosis between counter-memory and counter-image. Researchers following Foucault developed the concept further suggesting ‘counter-memory is not the content of memory itself, but rather the role a particular memory is playing in a larger construct of remembrance.’ (2006) In other words, it can be fictitious or single out one memory at the expense of others, or, separate one part from a larger truth. This is what happened with the *Sabra* when Zionist propagandists placed the leaders on pedestals and created a mystique around their entourage.

The counter-memory is used as a way of reinterpreting the past to accord with a particular agenda. Thus ‘the forces producing counter-memory are the present concerns that demand it, and not necessarily the past it claims to keep alive.’ (Marie Law 2006) She also cites

philosopher Paul Ricoeur who thought acts of remembrance contain an element of dissimulation in which some events are recalled and others over-looked, thus 'the phenomenon of forgetting' becomes a 'necessary component of cultural memory.' (Marie Law 2006) One could consider in this context how the importance of the Hebrew Bible in early Zionism has largely been replaced by the commemoration of the Jewish *Holocaust* of WWII as a source of Israeli identification. (Piterberg 2008:196)

The sociologist Paul Connerton (2008) identifies seven types of forgetting: repressive erasure, prescriptive forgetting, forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new identity, or as structural amnesia, or as annulment, or as planned obsolescence and lastly, as humiliated silence. Repressive erasure can be used to deny the fact of a historical rupture as might be evidenced by the Zionist denial of the Palestinian *Nakba* which not only was a major historical break in the history of Palestine Arabs but also largely edited out of Israeli museum exhibits. At best Palestine Arab history was little more than a footnote in Israeli museum culture. When it is believed to be in the interests of all parties to forget, prescriptive forgetting is applied in order to break with endless cycles of revenge and bloodletting, in clan or civil conflicts. It can be explicit or implicit, and was used in the 1950s when the punishment of Nazis was abandoned and the number of convicted persons in Austria and France was kept to a minimum. It could have application between Israelis and Palestinians as well as within both communities.

It also appears as if the existential threat of Arabs has held internal Israeli differences in check, whilst occupation, displacement, and dispossession, erodes community solidarity amongst Palestine Arabs. Structural amnesia arises from what is considered of social importance and because mores change over time, traditions and memories are gradually lost.



This is a result of a deficit of information whereas forgetting by annulment results from a surfeit of information, and in recent years the flood of information surrounding the Arab-Israeli conflict is so overwhelming that details get lost. The Israelis are adept at both information and disinformation campaigns. It has been argued that the need to discard information is growing and this is particularly true in the labyrinthine conflict in which Israel swims. As has been suggested above there is a process of forgetting when it comes to some of the darker incidents in Israeli colonisation, specifically those of a number of unlawful killings that occurred in Arab villages. Were no photographs ever recorded of these incidents? It seems implausible, thus one infamous case of wanton slaughter is discussed in Chapter Five.

Collective memory is considered either on the level of the individual or that of society, but in rapidly transforming societies there can be a significant divergence between both. However, the two may converge when the nation considers itself under threat, as was and remains so in Israel. The construction of a unified collective memory was important to the Zionist movement both before and after the creation of the state. After 1948 there was added incentive because immigrants were diverse in their communities of origin. Many had 'little in common initially except an identity as Jews, and in some cases even that identity had been imposed more by definitions of others (e.g. Germans or Russians) than by personal choice.' (Schuman 2003) In time Israeli Jews developed a culture distinctly its own, different from Jewish culture elsewhere, and part of an intentional effort by immigrants to Palestine. Moreover, the circumstances in which it developed were proscribed by tensions between Arabs and Jews and by repeated wars between them. As such, they were important markers in the forging of a collective memory as well as of individual memories.

Burial rites, mourning, and commemoration of death, play a role in most societies and particularly those killed in service of the nation. As anthropologist Meira Weiss says, 'the

“symbolic immortality” of the fallen, reaffirms the sanctity of the homeland and the hegemony of the collective.’ (Weiss 1997:91) Death has hallowed importance in Israeli society, idealised both in fiction and in political iconography. Weiss draws attention however, to the standardisation and de-personalising of death in favour of collective rites of commemoration and ethos of sacrifice.

Remembrance Day in Israel for fallen soldiers precedes Independence Day and follows a week after *Holocaust* Memorial Day. Weiss interprets these symbolically as destruction, sacrifice and salvation. A memo issued by the education ministry following the 1967 War concludes ‘The champions of Israel went to the battle of freedom with open eyes, and in their death they commanded us to live.’ (Weiss 1997:93) Remembrance Day is a significant moment in the Israeli calendar because it provides an opportunity for national solidarity and Weiss likens the ceremonies in Israeli schools to the agitprop plays in the Soviet Union following the 1917 Revolution. To underline the importance of solidarity won through sacrifice, Weiss points to the opprobrium that Israeli emigrants face when they decide to abandon the country for pastures anew, as if demeaning the fallen and disparaging the community. Thus, private grief and loss individual families experience are ‘glorified to suit the collective ethos of sacrifice and resurrection’ whilst in the gaze of the ‘national panopticon, and on a khaki carpet.’ (Weiss 1997:97)

The religious site the Western Wall and a historical site at Masada both serve the induction ceremonies of conscripts in the IDF. Weiss argues ‘The Israeli cult of the dead...presents itself as a key symbol that cuts across historical periods and ethnic divisions.’ (Weiss 1997:99) Commemoration has increased social mobility over the years, particularly amongst Arab and African Jews marginalised in early years. As the numbers of fatalities increased, so their claim to equality as Israeli citizens became legitimate. Bereavement stimulated

collectivism and paradoxically the sense of emancipation from a Diaspora both vulnerable and dependent on their hosts. Instead, Jews in Israel, through sacrifice gradually built up a sovereignty reinforced by military power that was reassuring rather than threatening to individual autonomy. A rise in civilian deaths in recent years has probably reinforced both claims to equality as well as the sacrifice of all Israelis, not just those in uniform.

In Israel, the cult of commemoration resonates, as not only did the associates of the pre-state militias hold ceremonies for the fallen, but these also continue throughout the corps of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) and among the bereaved parents of conscripts and professional soldiers. Weiss suggests the death of soldiers somehow justifies the right to statehood. Zionist ideology has always been preoccupied with creating a national mythology, confirming the link between an uncertain, distant past and the modern project of state building, whether via biblical stories or anything else interwoven with current rites.

The critic Susan Sontag (2003:86) argues that ‘what is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating: that *this* is important, and this is the story of how it happened.’ She acknowledges commemoration follows a selective process according to political agendas of states. Clearly, Jews and Arabs in the region commemorate their histories differently, but it is not merely this alone that matters, it is also the importance ascribed to these memories by the international community clouded by earlier memories of the fate of Jews in Europe. As Professor Yael Zerubavel observes, ‘collective memory continuously negotiates between available historical records and current social and political agendas.’ (1995:5) She adds this memory is not accurate, systematic or subtle, but sets out to offer basic images that spell out and reinforce a particular ideology.

There is always a measure of friction between the memories that people, organisations, and states, wish to preserve and those they prefer to forget. The sharing of memories contributes

to the construction of a collective memory, bolstered by rituals, monuments and activities of commemoration, but the collective record is never static and is reviewed and revised in line with changing sensibilities. It is easy to find examples of this whether in state museums, children's literature or school textbooks. Egregious examples of revisionism are often those associated with colonialism but many Israelis venerate the images of the pioneering years with pride as an affirmation of collective endeavor. Whilst the meanings ascribed to pioneering images may evolve over time, the images are fixed, and remain as icons of collective memory. However, as Pappe points out Arab (*Mizrahi*) Jews who arrived in Israel 'were greeted in a manner devised to show them that they had left a primitive traditional existence for the sake of a modern one, and ought to be grateful.' (Pappe 2004:178) Further, 'the sense of inferiority attached to anyone Arab was reinforced by the state's cultural policy. A monolithic culture of memory developed that repressed the experience of marginalised groups.' (Pappe 2004:175)

As historian Martha Sandweiss argues, photographs have the capacity to evoke rather than to tell, and to suggest rather than explain. She says that whilst photographs may be a source of fascination for historians or anthropologists they are also problematic, as any given photograph studied may not disclose its original intentions, nor how it was used or received by its original audience. (Dyer 2005: xiii) Analysing photographs in engineering, medicine, police investigations, space exploration or other science may lend itself to procedures that in some way are empirical on the basis of scientific evidence. In the context of this study however, the analysis of photographs is empirical only on the basis of my experience and that of other photographers cited in the text. This is supported by what scholars have to say about Zionism and colonialism and the synthesis in turn is based upon whatever facts and figures

historians provide. It is in the end only a point of view, but one that adds to other studies in the field.

A final consideration as critic Lara Thompson points out, is as technology develops so too does the manner in which society recalls the past. 'In this dialectic, technical limitations become cultural connotations' and she cites the arrival of colour film in the late 1940s that had a profound effect on how black and white photographs were considered thereafter, 'becoming historically connotative of a specific period of the past.' (Thompson 2010) All visual communication whether photographs or television, are part of 'the creation of an image-based, technologically-driven collective memory through which history is filtered, of which the most overt visual signifier of the past has become the presentation of the world in black and white.' (Thompson 2010) Perhaps the black and white photographs here suggest the alleged reassurance of an analogue age, stimulated by the 'emotional loss of a kind imagined, fetishized photographic truth and aura, elevated by Sontag and Barthes, the most visible element of which is a monochrome palette.' (Thompson 2010) As Internet sites proliferate so to does the manner in which the past is recalled and whilst it has revolutionised the availability of documents it has also augmented concerns about the manner in which some are used.

In Figure 6 General Moshe Dayan, a *Sabra* hero, surrounded by mourners, reads a speech at the funeral of a comrade killed during a skirmish. 'Let us not this day hurl accusations at the murderers...for eight years they have sat in the refugee camps of Gaza, watching as we turn the land and villages in which they and their forefathers dwelt into our home...how could we have refused to look squarely at our fate and see our generation's destiny in all its cruelty?' so pondered Dayan in his eulogy to a fallen soldier killed near the border with Gaza. Dayan's

speech caused consternation in some quarters because of its implicit recognition of Israeli colonialism. Fuch's photograph has become synonymous with the eulogy, but Dayan's words echo to this day, he understood Zionism's colonial mission, and that the colonised were going to pay the heavier price. However, an otherwise routine news photograph in the army newspaper can only assume significance with the help of a caption but it is the eulogy, this additional information brought to bear on the photograph, that assures its place in the Israeli visual lexicon. The six images in this chapter are typical of what could be found in the commemorative albums of Zionist agencies and are important cameos from the era recalling the mood and personalities of the period. Seen as counter images in the context of one land, two peoples, they can be understood as the coloniser's point of view. Even the Israelis would have to concede the militarism, the ubiquity of the gun, the danger of the frontier and the siege mentality, or the adoption of local (and indeed any) costume to clothe the new citizens in their new community that is everywhere present in their visual history.



**Figure 6 Moshe Dayan delivering a eulogy at the funeral of Roi Rotberg in Nahal Oz, 1956. Moshe Fuchs. *Bamahane Magazine***

## Chapter One: Theoretical considerations and influences on Zionist photographs

### Critics of and theories about photographs

The perception of the world changed forever with the invention of photography as it disclosed a hitherto unseen view of life whilst photographs became a means to transcend the boundaries of time and space. Paintings represented the world according to their authors' skill and perception, but photographs seemed to offer the possibility of an accurate reproduction of reality. There was however an immediate symbiosis between art and photographs in the 1850s with the rise of French Realism, and many photographers wanted to 'invest their pictures with spiritual attributes, and with the subjective qualities, ordinarily associated with painting' whilst painters wanted to imitate the attributes of photographs. (Scharf 1979:127)<sup>7</sup> Right from the start the desire to interpret and express personal ideas via photographs was present. Many used photographs as aides-memoire in their paintings, for example, to reveal movement that the eye does not perceive.<sup>8</sup> Proudhon (1863) in *Concerning the principles of art and its social destiny* argued that photographs as well as paintings were interpretations and distinguishing between realism and idealism was impossible as both terms were inseparable.

Early writing about photographs in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was primarily about photographic techniques and a recurrent theme was the radical difference between photography and previous methods for obtaining images. For most of the 19th century, this militated against

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<sup>7</sup> Who really invented photography is still a matter of some dispute as are the exact dates of given experiments. Niepce, Daguerre and Talbot are names closely associated with fixed images, but proto-photography had been thought about and speculated upon at least since the camera obscura and later, when the camera lucida had become increasingly available as portable optical instruments used by artists and scientists alike in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Can there be a date for when the desire for a photograph first emerged? 'Photography's historical emergence is therefore perhaps best described as a palimpsest, as an event that inscribes itself within the space simultaneously marked and left blank by the sudden collapse of natural philosophy and its Enlightenment worldview' (Batchen 1999:186)

<sup>8</sup> In the 1870s cameras could record at speeds of 1000<sup>th</sup> of a second and within another decade up to 1600<sup>th</sup> of a second.

the acceptance of photography as a form of art but then, following the call by photographers to be likened to artists in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, gradually writings became ever more preoccupied with art photographs. In part this was a defence against (and a critique of) the growing mechanisation and mass production of photographs.

Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, photographers such as Alfred Stieglitz, wanted photography to be a medium in its own right distinct from painterly or documentary concerns and used his magazine *Camera Work* as a forum for debate. He argued that photographs required the same sort of dedication as any other art form and concluded that photographs should avoid techniques of manipulation or adulteration. Others, like Alvin Langdon Coburn, defended the idea that the production of photographs should use whatever techniques necessary to produce desired results, since art should always be free in its experimentation. However, the dichotomy between the Stieglitz and Coburn positions has always plagued best practice in journalism, as well as emphasising the impossibility of distinguishing between realism and idealism as Proudhon suggests.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century there was a wealth of writing about photographs that included critics from Siegfried Kracauer (1927) Walter Benjamin (1936) Bertolt Brecht (1955) John Berger (1972) Susan Sontag (1977) David Levi Strauss (2003) Geoff Dyer (2005) and Susie Linfield (2010). All enrich the debate in critical studies of the history of photographs and all make claims and assertions upon the basis of argument rather than fact. In other words what they have to offer are well-argued opinions and points of view about photographs, photographers, and photography. In the past four decades meanwhile, the theorists of photographs have drawn variously upon ontology, phenomenology, semiotics, cognitive psychology, linguistics and other social science to underpin arguments about what



photographs are, or how they work, what they mean or how they should be read. Many theories nowadays approach photographs as a language, acquiring meaning through cultural and social conventions, whilst the act of photographing is said to follow processes both conscious and unconscious. The meaning of a photograph may not derive from its content, subject, or genre, or from intentions of the photographer. It is less regarded as intrinsic to the image so much as socially produced and this applies to the propaganda campaigns of Zionism.

The theorist John Roberts suggests that from the 1970s onwards, theories about photographs focused on four major approaches one of which is relevant to the methodology of this study, namely the approach of John Tagg and Allan Sekula who consider the social power of photographs. Elsewhere, Rosalind Krauss, Craig Owens, Hal Foster, Simon Watney, Abigail Solomon-Godeau and Martha Rosler considered critical deconstructionism whilst Pierre Bourdieu offered a sociological critique. Andre Rouillé and Jean-Claude Lemagny opted to approach photographs from the perspective of liberal historicism. (Roberts 1998:4) In the 1980s critical theory changed ideas about everyday visual imagery and Cultural Studies developed a new field of study of image analysis referred to as 'visual culture' that resurrected semiotics. All visual traces are treated as texts embodying messages about politics and class relationship.

Current discourse in theories of photography broadly ranges between realism, seen as a complex cultural and philosophical category that has validity in the comprehension of the world through photographs, and, arising from Marxist perspectives, that photographs are instruments in the service of ideology, and part of the authority of the state. When, in the 1970s the study of photography entered the orbit of academic disciplines, Marxism quickly

staked its claim and along with all subsequent critical theory, was mostly linked to political positions taking the debate about photography far beyond aesthetics. In an apt prescient metaphor Marx declared 'in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside down as in a camera obscura.' (Freeden 2003: 5) Ideology was a distortion or a sublimation of the material world and its function was to gloss over the contradictions between reality itself and perceptions about reality. Ideology was an instrument of deception and disguised everything cultural that society lives by and thus it is not surprising that by and large the predominant position among theorists is one of scepticism and a consciousness the image may not be quite what it seems, and needs to be understood on different levels and in different ways.

The context in which photographs are seen and to what end they are used can lend themselves to more than one methodology and framework of interpretation. For example, the social power approach of Tagg and Sekula does not exclude some of the observations John Roberts makes in his defence of realism, that photographs still have the capacity to be socially disruptive even in a world of digital technology. However, theorists accept that their scepticism of realism is heightened when they suspect that photographs are being distorted by their use as propaganda or that the medium itself is being abused for political ends, or even personal ends sought by photographers. It is with this in mind that the approach taken by Tagg (1988) and the photographer Allan Sekula (1982) provides a suitable methodology with which to study the visual legacy of Zionism. They suggest that photographs are only instruments in the transfer of power from one place to another, implied in the title of Tagg's book, *The burden of representation* with its implicit moral criticism of ideological power. As Batchen asks, would it be possible to speak of photography *as* power rather than confine debate to photography and power? Tagg, however, says that 'real power, the power of the

state, comes before its representation, whether through photography or any other cultural medium.’ (Bathchen 1999:189)

Tagg argues the history of photography has no unity or identity. ‘Its status as a technology varies with the power relations that invest it.’ (Tagg 1998:118) Photographs have a function in cultural production but are tied to a particular set of circumstances where the product is only meaningful in a defined situation. A camera is never neutral and what it produces are coded representations that have no authority but that given them by the apparatuses of the state. Solomon-Godeau for example, asserts that a photograph is merely ‘a building block in a larger structure’ and also discounts the still prevalent notion that the history of photography is a story about remarkable photographers and remarkable photographs. On the contrary, she regards photographers as ‘ever a hireling, ever the hired gun.’ (Batchen 1999:12) This was essentially the status of most photographers working with one agency or another if not indeed across the entire spectrum of photographers in Israel at that time.

Tagg derives his concepts from the structural Marxism of Louis Althusser ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses’ (1971) as well as from Foucault’s *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. (1972) Tagg claims that Althusser’s theory made ‘cultural politics possible’ and believes there is a ‘disciplinary archipelago’ of state agencies involved in the dissemination of power and knowledge. (Tagg 1988) Photographs are instruments for the work of these agencies and the model applies to Israel when it was a state in the making.<sup>9</sup> He suggests the indexical nature of the photograph does not explain its meanings. Instead of reinforcing realism, the photograph is an ideological construct that hides the means of its production.

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<sup>9</sup> This does not exclude the possibility that photographs could be used in other ways or that subversive anti-state mechanisms could make use of the same image for other purposes. A famous photograph by David Rubinger shows three Israeli paratroopers at the liberation of the Western Wall following the 1967 War. It became an iconic and semi-official image that was used subversively by the artist David Tartakover in an election campaign poster forty years later.

Thus whether photographs of the pioneers, the soldier-poet-farmers, can be considered properly without an understanding of Zionism is doubtful. The following chapter discusses Zionism and colonialism on the basis it is a methodological necessity to do so and additionally, the mythology of the *Sabra* cannot be understood without it.

Tagg attacks the continuing assumption that photography is a medium at all, 'as if photography was a neutral technology or means of representation to which any general and unconditional definition could be given.' (Tagg 1988:118) On the contrary, he argues, the only thing which binds the sites where photographs operates is 'the social formation itself; the specific historical spaces for representation and practice which it constitutes.' (Tagg 1988:118) Rather than photographs, he suggests, it is the sites in which they operate that should be studied. Tagg asserts that photography is too diverse to be defined and asks, 'where must we be positioned to accept it as real or true; and what are the consequences of doing so?' (Tagg 1998:119)

Sekula's essay in *Thinking Photography* (1982) edited by Victor Burgin makes the case that photographic meaning is not intrinsic to the image but is socially produced. Meanings are created by the ideological, cultural, and economic contexts, in which photographs are recorded, produced, and received. Sekula argues the meaning of a photograph is subject to cultural definition to be prised out through discourse, suggesting that 'the notion of a discourse is a notion of limits.' (Burgin 1982:84) Thus, discourse has a limiting function, and 'establishes a bounded arena of shared expectations as to meaning' and is essentially a form of information exchange. (Burgin 1982:84) It is 'the set of relations governing the rhetoric of related utterances.' (Burgin 1982:85) Extrapolating from this, a photograph is a form of utterance or message but usually incomplete, and questions arguments supporting the view

there are intrinsic properties in a photograph. Sekula adds that a photograph, as it stands alone, offers no more than the possibility of meaning, and only in a defined discourse can there be an outcome that has a semantic validity. 'Any given photograph is conceivably open to appropriation by a range of "texts," each new discourse situation generating its own set of images.' (Burgin 1982:91)

Sekula derived his concepts both from the Marxism of George Lukacs and the semiotics of Charles Peirce, arguing that all photographic meanings are the result of traffic between subjectivism and objectivism. The former describes what is emotional, magical, or aesthetic, in the reading of a photograph, whilst objectivism covers what is science based. Photographs cannot be separated from the representational tasks assigned to them by the institutions producing, circulating, and using them. Sekula speaks of the 'traffic in photographs' namely, the production and circulation of photographs in a society based on commodity exchange, continually caught between subjective aesthetics and objective science. Thus meaning in photographs is bound up in the tensions of capitalism and has the potential both to support the established order as well as to undermine it

### **Influences on Israeli photography**

The writer and critic John Roberts, argues from the Russian Revolution onwards the radical nature of photography was in its capacity for critical disclosure. He suggests, 'realism' and the 'everyday' capture the 'political and utopian content of early photography,' and whether avant-garde or documentary, the truth telling power of a photograph was viewed 'as being on the side of human emancipation and reason.' (Roberts 1998:2) Thus realism and the everyday 'offer a greater explanatory power in the discussion of photographic history than the more familiar categories of "expression", "identity" and the "unconscious."' (Roberts 1998:2) He

believes there was a time when the connection between photographs, reason, and class-consciousness, was explicit throughout Europe. Roberts accepts however, photographic theory identified realism with positivism and ‘the photographic document has come to be seen as deeply compromised ideologically.’ It has resulted in a theoretical consensus that discredits the possibility of truth and the use of rhetoric in photographs. (Roberts 1998:145)

In America and the Soviet Union the tribulations and achievements of the everyday were eagerly photographed and by the 1930s the narratives looked strikingly similar. ‘We believed photography could show if anything was wrong and how things might get better.’ (Bendavid-Val 1999:35) When ‘comparing the pictures of that period in both countries today, we might feel compelled to say that the Soviets photographed progress while the Americans photographed poverty.’ (Bendavid-Val 1999:35) In the Soviet Union every effort was made to show the apparent progress of socialism and the benefits of industrialisation. In the USA, photographs produced by the Farm Security Administration (FSA) were intended to engage sympathy and show the fortitude of those suffering from economic collapse. There was an expectation in both countries that technology would produce solutions to enhance quality of life. Zionist photographs played up the value of technology and education, and idea that economic activity could pacify Arabs. In all three countries, governments enlisted the services of photographers to document the progress of their grandiose projects. No matter how small Israeli territory was, by any measure of comparison, Zionist agencies were ambitious especially when it came to mythologizing an ancient Jewish past in Palestine and linking it to the Jewish present in their depictions of immigrants reclaiming the land and of their return to it as the rightful inheritors. The Hebrew Bible was a cornerstone of Zionist ideology at this time. In the early years of the Soviet Union photographers were as

empowered as their American counterparts in the FSA, but Zionist photographers were rarely given the opportunity to explore their creativity.

The USA and USSR were creating 'a national self-portrait that would endorse political policies and values' and the scale of projects was unprecedented. (Bendavid-Val 1999:35) However in the Soviet Union, as it emerged decades later, the photographs expressing socialist dreams overlooked the repression that was an instrument of the regime. The same could be said of the Israeli regime whose policy of attrition in Arab villages was rarely, and often inadvertently, alluded to in Zionist publications. Photographs in the hands of ideologues however, can conceal as much as reveal the differences between one political system and another. The writer Lincoln Kirstein (1938) asserts the camera despite its pretensions to truthfulness 'presents an inversion of truth, a kind of accidental revelation which does far more to hide the real fact of what is going on than to explode it.' (Bendavid-Val 1999:31) The Zionist agency publications became adept at concealment in the construction of their national self-portrait.

The documentary image in order to communicate 'uses a highly charged and controlled photographic space' that leaves no room for doubt and ambiguity. (Clarke 1997:150) Thus, compelling FSA photographs don't so much bear witness to events as direct the way they are seen. Zionist and Soviet photographs shared the intention but preferred publicity culture to documentary that was far more appropriate to their needs in the building of new societies.

A contemporary of Stieglitz and Coburn, the photographer Lewis Hine, was distinguished by his political agenda that foreshadowed the work of the FSA, a government backed agency run by Roy Stryker that documented rural and urban life and had many gifted photographers in its

ranks.<sup>10</sup> Hine's work was more politically engaged than the FSA and he was committed to the struggle of the working class. These three American photographers, albeit for different reasons, contributed to the exploration of industrial culture and its place in society and what it meant for human development. For this reason American Modernism had a powerful impact on German and Soviet photography in the 1920s. 'American vernacularism was thus seen to be extraordinarily liberating. All the leading Soviet photographers and filmmakers in the 1920s acknowledged this.' (Roberts 1998:72) In a speech delivered in 1909, Hine said, 'Whether it be a painting or a photograph the picture is a symbol that brings one immediately into close touch with reality.' (Roberts 1998:74) This was an important recognition that photographs had a political and social role and could be used as instruments of persuasion but most of all it recognised the importance of images however produced to elicit desired responses from viewers.

Following the Russian Revolution, art, documentary photographs, and film, were drafted to serve the new order. Constructivism had its roots in revolution and rejected 'art for art's sake.' The movement lasted until 1934 and was influential in the Weimar Republic. It was an outgrowth of Futurism and pioneered photomontage as well as produced the influential Soviet magazine *LEF* with its distinctive photographs. The magazine was seen as defending the avant-garde against the critiques of incipient Socialist Realism. In 1923 a debate about photomontage and montage preoccupied the avant-garde and was considered central to producing an understanding of the world, not merely reflecting it. 'To sequence an image, or montage one image over another, was to suggest that the active participation of the spectator was being addressed.' (Roberts 1998: 23) The poster campaigns of Zionism were adept at

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<sup>10</sup> Among them Margaret Bourke-White, Esther Bubley, Jack Delano, Walker Evans, Andreas Feininger, Dorothea Lange, Russell Lee, Carl Mydans, Beaumont Newhall, Gordon Parks, Ben Shahn, and John Vachon. (Bendavid-Val) Stryker rejected Lewis Hine when he applied to work with the FSA even though Hine had the credentials to do so.



soliciting the public, particularly in their use of slogans and biblical citations. Some Zionist posters were designed around photographs or a central photograph but were less compelling than the graphic art posters that were more imaginative.

Constructivism, approved by the Soviet Education Commissariat, was used in campaigns to educate the public. It was characterized by abstraction, an acceptance of everything modern, often geometric and experimental, and without much emotion. In Russia and Germany during the 1920s art associated with a bourgeoisie deemed corrupt came under assault. As the writer Graham Clarke notes, the photographers involved in this radical change of direction, rejected 'the idea of a coherent and unified social space' and challenged the accepted wisdom of how the 'natural' world was perceived. (Clarke 1997:189) In this they drew on the notion of *ostranenie* or making strange. Viktor Shklovsky, the Russian literary analyst, coined the term 'de-familiarisation' to denote the making strange of everyday events specifically in order to consider them anew. He wanted the perception of the onlooker challenged and for the literary or artistic work to take more time to be absorbed. He thought that the process of perception was an aesthetic end itself.

*Defamiliarisation* was a technique made use of by a number of Soviet photographers, notably Alexander Rodchenko. His use of unusual vantage points was part of his new aesthetic that would change mass consciousness and he supported the deliberate construction of images, rejecting the idea that photographs could ever be transcriptions of reality. In Europe, avant-garde artists were breaking down barriers in art, trying to undermine the status of artists and to place art firmly within the context of the everyday. In Italy, the Futurists used blur and movement in photographs to portray the dynamism and pace of modern life. In Berlin and

throughout Europe, Dadaist photomontage was used to challenge the authority of mass-cultural representations.

Rodchenko was part of the *Oktober* Group that had its influence on Israeli photographers. Sela (2005) also cites the Russian Society for Proletarian photographers, responsible for what became known as Socialist Realism. The *Oktober* group showed there was room for differing approaches to construct and record messages of socialism. The *Oktober* group was formed in 1928 by a number of architects, filmmakers, photographers, and graphic designers whilst ROPF was formed by photojournalists and preferred the more direct approach favoured by FSA photographers. The differences between the two groups lay more with their politics than with the photographs.<sup>11</sup>

The *Oktober* group held the view ‘the new era required new media and as yet untried processes, and wanted to apply mass production to art.’ (Bendavid-Val 1999:37) Critical to success was the introduction of the photo-essay in Soviet magazines when photography moved from the use of a single photograph to several, supported by extended captions and text. Many features benefited from unusual vantage points, crops, and layouts, the hallmark of the *Oktober* group. Their success was not lost on foreign magazines that soon were producing photo-features of their own. The same style and layout of magazine features was used everywhere and picture stories prospered from the arrival of the lightweight 35 mm cameras in the mid-1920s. Picture essays about Israel were produced by foreign journalists working there as well as by Israeli photographers who were influenced by magazines such as *Life*, *Picture Post*, and *Regards*. Zionist photography followed the trends being set elsewhere

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<sup>11</sup> Among the *Oktober* group, were Sergei Eisenstein, Gustav Klutsis (who developed photomontage) and Alexander Rodchenko. The ROPF included Max Alpert, Arkady Shaikhet and Mark Markov-Grinsberg. In 1932 however, the Communist Party issued a decree that spelled the end of diversity. This was quickly backed up by the public censure of a photographer, Elizer Langman, who had failed to follow the party instructions given to him on an assignment. It was to send a clear message to photographers to better meet Party needs than hitherto.

but was always more concerned with getting the message across rather than striving for creative excellence that was more in evidence in the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany.

By the mid-1920s the term 'documentary' was introduced to describe a more emotional response to the social consequences of economic and social hardship that followed the Great War in Europe and the economic crash in America. In 1926, an article in the journal *Illustrierter Beobachter* claimed that photography could be more convincing than a text by itself. It was the skilful combination of both that would persuade many that magazine features were authentic depictions of reality. The more intimate (even emotional) style of the documentary photograph brought the subject and the viewer ever closer. The documentary by adopting a more humanist style deepened the relationship between photographers and photographed. This was a style favoured by Zionists but with propaganda rather than social documentary in mind and photomontage was also used but with less conviction than in the Soviet Union. However, the contribution of amateur photographs to the national archives in recent years does show the intimacy of documentary photographs of the period and it also reaffirms the popularity of the colonisation venture. Despite the use of some constructivist ideas in Zionist publicity campaigns the emphasis was always emotional rather than abstract.

The photographic historian, Nissan Perez, remarks Jewish photography received impetus in the mid-1920s onwards with the launch of the Jewish National Fund in 1901 (to raise monies for the Zionist cause). On the basis of generous funds the JNF eventually opened a photography department to serve propaganda needs and similarly, the Foundation Fund established in 1920, also served to institutionalize photography and render official the work of photographers inspired by Zionism. Perez points to the difficulty in analysing these photographs today, as it requires awareness of the messages intended at the time. The advent of mass politics was critical to the development and dissemination of ideologies as can be

seen for example when the JNF levied tax and spread the word of Zionism rather cleverly through its stamp production begun in 1902. By the time statehood was declared, stamps with dozens of different designs, had sold in millions. (See Figure 7) Posters and coinage came later but all played a vital role in placing Zionism within the social sphere.



L to R Herzliya Gymnasium, Jaffa, Rothschild Bld. Tel Aviv, Bezael Art Sch. Jerusalem, house in Herzl Forest, Lake Tiberias, Ben Shemen agricultural school, ca. 1935 photographer unknown from a series of JNF stamps

Figure 7 <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/jnf-stamps> retrieved 24 January 2012

Perez claims Jewish photography was dislocated from international trends and cites the absence of late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Pictorialism<sup>12</sup> and in the 1920s there is no reference in photographs to Dadaism or Surrealism. However by the 1930s Jewish photographs came to share an affinity with photographs produced in Germany, the Soviet Union and the USA. In Palestine as elsewhere photographs were ever more in the grip of ideology. The affinity was

<sup>12</sup> Pictorialism was a style that emerged following the introduction of the dry-plate process around 1865. Adherents used several techniques, on the lens, in the darkroom, and on the print, to render them like paintings and often emulated some aspects of Impression. It was a style that persuaded museums to open their doors to photography and was celebrated in the American magazine *Camera Work* (1903-17). It was a movement predicated on establishing photography as an art and in this was successful. Paradoxically, the editor, Alfred Stieglitz, eventually rejected Pictorialism and he along with many of the magazine's contributors started a new movement known as Photo-Secession that advocated unadulterated photography, rather like Group f/64 that was promoting so-called 'straight' photography.

expressed in the ‘representation of events, individuals, and communities, their relationship to government and each other, and their importance to society.’ (Perez 2000:9)

Photographs were displayed at international venues such as the 1937 colonial exhibition in Paris. Following a favourable reception, photographer Joseph Gal Ezer wrote a memorandum, ‘Photographic exhibitions as instruments of propaganda.’ (Oren and Raz 2008:32) At the same time the Zionists were producing films with the same motifs and by 1938 The United Israel Appeal issued a new periodical, *A Land in Construction* that used dramatic and dynamic images whilst remaining faithful to a clichéd view of nation building which added the urban scene to scenes of agricultural farms and industrial buildings. (See Figure 8)

Jewish photographs proselytised as much as those in the United States, the Soviet Union and National Socialist Germany. In Jewish Palestine the emphasis was on reporting progress much as Soviet photographs did. The Zionists urgently wanted immigrants and the Soviets wanted converts’ to the cause of Bolshevism within and beyond, their own vast borders. In Germany, the National Socialists were just as keen to win hearts and minds, and all produced heroic images of pioneers, soldiers, and workers, toiling for a better world. Zoltan Kluger photographing for the Jewish National Fund produced a Soviet style example of photomontage in Figure 8. Some artists in the Berlin Dada movement frequently used photographs and newspaper headlines in their collages and montages. These took on a more overt political role in the wake of WWI. John Heartfield a member of the German Communist Party was a pioneer of photomontage used as satire or caricature of the political and economic situation in a deteriorating Weimar republic. The effectiveness of Heartfield’s work suggests image analyst Dino Brugioni, is the montages were ‘stark, bleak and very lifelike’ and ‘kept a familiar photographic appearance.’ (Brugioni 1993:46) Heartfield

produced montages that attacked Fascists in Italy as well as Nazis in Germany and throughout the 1930s photomontage was often tied to revolutionary politics. In the Soviet Union they were often used in Lenin's public works programmes, like electrification. Though devoid of satire, Soviet campaigns were as brilliant and inventive as those produced by Heartfield. Equally, Mussolini's fascist programmes were illustrated by photomontage and both warring factions in Spain's civil war produced it.



**Figure 8 Zoltan Kluger, photomontage in *A Land in Construction* 1939**  
*Zoltan Kluger, Chief Photographer 1933-1958 Israel Museum 2008*

Common to all political ideologies in the 1930s were cultural influences and traffic in arts occurring between the USA, Russia, and Germany, affecting the use of photographs and combined with technological innovations revolutionised photographic practice and dissemination of images. These representations essentially belonged to partisan histories and were narratives designed partly to contest the alleged truth of events where opponents were

concerned, and partly to keep rank and file adherents on side with the political struggle they were waging. As has been argued 'in the national contests for power, history becomes a weapon in the struggle for symbolic capital, wielded to acquire legitimacy for one's own side while delegitimizing the opposition.' (Friedmann and Kenney 2005:2)

In Soviet and Zionist culture there was a relationship to physical culture and labour and in both was a rejection of earlier values, either of Diaspora Jews or of Russian bourgeoisie. In Soviet and Zionist photographs there was an emphasis on young, ordinary folk whom viewers were encouraged to identify with. Both projects needed young people but there was also a need for them in building of the dream and there were portrayals of people content with their allotted tasks, manual labour included. In Germany too it was the same story and the historian Janina Struk identifies three developments persuading National Socialists of the worth of photographs in spreading important cultural and political values. One was the belief they were regarded as objective and truthful, another the capacity to mass-produce images, and the third was the rise of documentary photography in the 1930s. Zionists similarly recognised photographs as an appropriate and powerful tool of communication suited to their needs. The Zionists and Soviets shared a thematic approach to express state building where, for example, a photograph of tilling the soil on a *kibbutz* did not look so different from its counterpart on a *kolkhoz*. The ability of photographs to mediate ideological messages with subtlety is not always evident and images beamed at a mass audience benefit from simplicity. Zionist agencies were adept at providing images to encourage immigration as well as show the Jewish homeland making progress. It was publicity culture on a small, intimate scale where the expression of unity and solidarity with the mission of Zionism was viewed as essential in photographs.



The National Socialist era, when recalled through its legacy of photographs, reveal not only the awesome power of the state but sways between the splendour of the regime's public façade and the gruesome crimes against humanity. The era benefited from the mass communications established during the Weimar Republic and National Socialists drew upon its artistic legacy, particularly the innovation of German Modernism, whilst condemning much of its art. Photographs were effective in conveying Nazi values especially in restoring national esteem and surmounting turmoil of the Weimar Republic. In nascent Nazi consciousness, Germany was neither politically united nor ethnically homogenous, and in an effort to achieve both, propaganda became a vital tool.<sup>13</sup> Zionists saw their own community in similar terms that could, in part be united through propaganda. At the same time the increasing use of cameras gave photography the reputation of being a democratic medium. Mass communications gave the National Socialists unbridled scope to spread their messages around the world and the Zionist agencies were as adroit as the Germans in making use of them, albeit on a far smaller scale.

Figure 9 is an example of a style developed out of Weimar culture in an effort to revive spirits after the trauma of the Great War. Known as 'publicity culture' it paralleled resurgence in advertising. At first confined to objects and buildings, it soon embraced people, coinciding with a rise of cosmetics, plastic surgery, and prosthetics. This fuelled self-consciousness and appearance and fitness became important. It was a factor in sports too, very much part of National Socialism, Italian Fascism and Zionism. Figure 9 shows three images (two by Liselotte Grschebina of women athletes and a male by Leni Riefenstahl) that reflect the body beautiful culture of the period in Germany and Palestine. The leaping

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<sup>13</sup> When Herman Goring was appointed *reichsmarchall* he commissioned a photo album of himself. The albums follow his career from 1933-1942 and contain 18.500 photographs (Struk 2004:25). Meticulous detail was the hallmark of Nazi photography and rather confirms the authority and status of photography in the Third Reich.



gymnast is a photomontage combining flowing river and trees with a low angle composition of the athlete. Grschebina submitted photographs to the sports pages of Jewish newspapers. Publicity culture is one example where contrived and manipulated compositions segue from 'art' into journalism and precipitate concerns with transforming documentary or news images into aesthetic images. Zionist albums had their content carefully selected to pander to the aspirations and hopes of Israeli communities scattered around the country. Along with on-going publicity campaigns, the albums endorsed the role of Israeli armed forces and the settlers, and created a sense of a society able to reach their goals despite the endless skirmishes and elusive peace.

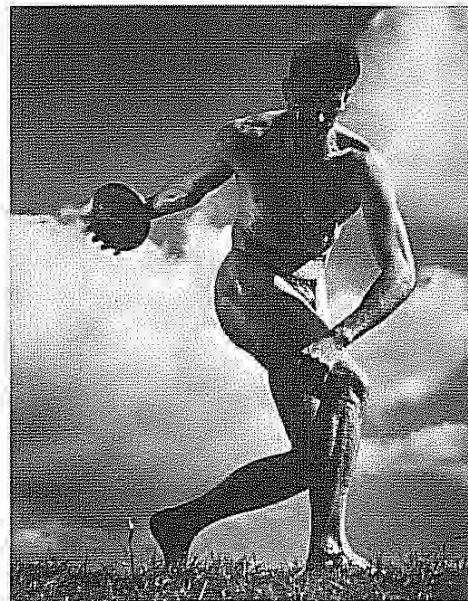
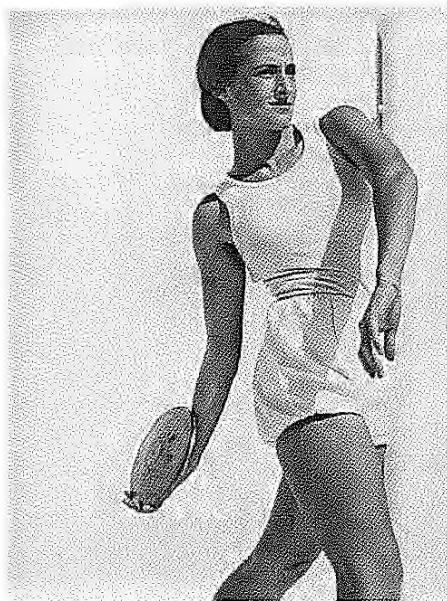
Grschebina arrived in Palestine in 1934 having left Germany. She met Ellen Auerbach in Tel Aviv and together they opened a studio '*Ishon*' that was closed when the Arab Revolt began in 1936 and Grschebina then worked from home. She was part of the German community in Palestine becoming friends with other photographers such as Walter Zadek, Walter Kristeller, Alfons Himmerlich, Fritz Cohen, Anne Landes and Lilly Brauer. Together they founded the Palestine Professional Photographers Association. Grschebina undertook assignments for Palestine Railways and the dairy company *Tnuva*. From 1934-47 she also worked for WIZO the Zionist organisation for women. (Caplan 2008)

Photographs had an important role in Zionist propaganda campaigns whilst losing their autonomy and any sense of authorship. The more authoritarian the regime, the more resources were deployed in staging mass rallies and flag waving events, whose constructed representation was mass-produced. Propagandists everywhere relied on the suggestiveness of photographs and assumed the majority of viewers would regard them as authentic depictions of reality. In time the abuse of the medium by National Socialists led them to divert conscious perceptions away from seeing the oppression of Jews for what it was. Similarly,

Zionist photographs disguised or ignored the oppression of the indigenous Arabs or glossed over the social and ethnic divisions within Israel. Perhaps most of all the photographs steered viewers away from hardships that many endured.



Liselotte Grschebina,  
Light athletics, 1930  
Liselotte Grschebina,  
Leichtathletik, 1930  
ליזלוטה גרז'בינה  
אחלטיקה קלה, 1930



**Figure 9** Liselotte Grschebina 1930, 1937  
*Woman with a camera Liselotte Grschebina, Germany 1908 – Israel 1984, Israel Museum 2008*

Photographs in Jewish Palestine towards the close of the British Mandate and for a few years after the creation of the state, fused Russian, German, and Central European styles (which had their epiphany towards the end of the 1920s). They show how Jewish society was under

construction in human and material ways where so much had to be learned and created. The Zionists were no less adroit than other political ideologies of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in making extensive use of visual media but the scale of production was far more modest and the pomposity of staged events was much reduced.<sup>14</sup> Both Hitler and Mussolini sought to appeal across class divisions by using quasi-religious appeal in their campaign imagery. For example the notable opening frames of *The Triumph of Will* the film of the 1934 Nuremberg Rally by Leni Riefenstahl, where the shadow of Hitler's plane landing, forms a cross on massed ranks of troops below. Hitler steps from the plane, a saviour, to make his way into the sanctum of Nuremberg. As Eatwell observes, 'as well as religious symbolism, fascism developed its own form of liturgy and language: words like "salvation", "redemption" and "resurrection" littered speeches by Hitler.' (Eatwell 2003: xxxvi) Zionism similarly used language redolent with religious imagery and in images such as Figure 10.

By the end of WWII, avant-garde and facto-graphic culture was unable to survive the onslaught by Stalinist culture in the Soviet Union. In America there was a move away from the political legacy of the 1930s towards consumerism and traditional concerns of the working-class eroded by social alienation, the probable legacy of world war. Existentialism addressed alienation with what was an individualist ideology removed from collectivist culture. Israel continued on its own path particularly after the 1948 War when the arts began to flourish but photography was to remain a poor relation and photographers were not feted by society for some years to come. State building was given renewed vigour by the successful outcome of the 1948 War. It was a period when the arts found ways to laud the project Israel was engaging with. If Zionism 'marks the re-imagining of an ancient religious community as

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<sup>14</sup> Nazi party propagandists were not always sure how to define the concepts of persuasion or to manipulate an entire population but they did study mass communication. They churned out an enormous amount of photographs to serve their needs and this far outweighed the fraction of photographs that suggested opposition or resistance to their views.

a nation' then the birth of Israel 'charts an alchemic change from wandering Jew to local patriot.' (Anderson 2002:149)



**Figure 10 Leni Sonnenfeld 1950s**  
<http://www.bh.org.il/> retrieved 20 January 2012

Marxism spawned several distinct and often contradictory variants some of which were applied to culture. For example, Georgy Plekhanov the aesthetician took the view that art recorded social developments and ideology could be inferred from its cultural texts. This line of argument gradually emerged as *Reflection Theory*, and it argued the notion of art for art's sake was a bourgeois phenomenon whose lack of political content does nothing to change the status quo. It has maintained a hold on Marxist cultural practice ever since. The same ideas permeate the aesthetic theory of Socialist Realism that was introduced in 1934 by Stalin's cultural commissar, A.A. Zhdanov whose mission was to have artists following the Party line as any civil servant would. He described artists as the engineers of the human soul. Artists reflected social reality as conceived of by their political masters, rather than just copying what was to be found in the fields and factories. It had to be purged of anything a broad public could not grasp. Out went experimentation and with it the idea that art was the

preserve of an elite whose lives and interests were different to those of ordinary people. At a stroke Modernism was no longer welcome in the Soviet Union, whilst in Israel Modernism was permitted where it served the social reality conceived by Zionist agencies.

There was an attempt to devise a Marxist philosophy of language made by Mikhail Bakhtin whose research in literary analysis emphasised a belief in the plurality of meaning, because in civil society, meaning is both contested and negotiated. This was to spill over into theories of photography many years later. Touching upon the same ground was literary analyst, Viktor Shklovsky who introduced the concept of '*defamiliarisation*' and thought the technique of art should make objects unfamiliar, and forms different, so as to render the perception of the onlooker both more difficult and time-consuming. In this way the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and one to be savoured, and would free art from facile reception. As mentioned this quickly found its way into the approach of the *Oktober* Group but Zionist photographic campaigns were less adventurous and although one finds echoes of this radical style in Israel they are faint.

Perhaps a key difference in Israel is that their society was not a make over as in Germany or Russia so much as a starting from scratch and finding a way both to express a mythical connection to the Land, that was both a symbolic and literal wilderness without the return of the Jews upon it. Meanwhile the people too had to be redeemed and transformed into the New Jew, to signal the break with a derided Diaspora and to strive for the qualities needed for the goal to be accomplished. It was for the Zionist agencies a balancing act between pacifying and cajoling domestic audiences whilst seducing Diaspora Jews to make the leap of faith to start afresh and build a society that was properly Jewish, or rather properly Israeli. The



Zionists like their Soviet and Nazi counterparts despite the inherent contradictions of their tasks became skilful in their messaging.



ZOOM | SIONISME

On lit sur ce placard de 1929, en russe et en yiddish, la langue que pratiquaient les juifs d'Europe: « *Deviens membre de l'OZET [Société d'agriculture juive de Russie]. Juiif-travailleur de la terre: à chaque tour de roue du tracteur, tu participes à la construction du socialisme. Tu l'aides!* » Le graphisme rouge et noir, le montage de la typographie et des photos, le regard et les slogans sont typiques du constructivisme soviétique qui voulait, comme le disait Alexander Rodchenko, mettre l'art au service de la révolution. Dans un mouvement qui va du *shtetl* (village juif) au *kolkhoze*, les communistes russes tentent à cette époque de « soviétiser » la population du Yiddishland en mettant en place des colonies juives comme alternative au sionisme et à l'immigration en Palestine. L'acmé de cette expérience sera, en 1934, la création par Staline, à six jours de train à l'est de Moscou, d'une région autonome des juifs, « terre promise » des juifs d'URSS, le Birobidjan.

L'ÉTAT JUIF DE STALINE

Figure 11 1929 Poster for the Jewish Agricultural Society of the Soviet Union in Russian and Yiddish *Le Monde Hors-serie* June 2008

The analysis emerging from Tagg, Sekula, Solomon-Godeau and Rosler were critical of 'social documentary' photographs, accusing the documentary image essentially of being more concerned with aesthetics than with content, and their arguments influenced subsequent discourse. They recall Brecht's observation about the rise of photojournalism and its failure to inform the public about what was really happening in the world. Brecht regarded photojournalism as a 'terrible weapon against the truth' and the vast quantities of news photographs, whilst superficially presenting reality, were actually obscuring it. Exactly the same argument can be used to question political propaganda campaigns that Zionist agencies were using for example to demonise an armed enemy and to make his civilian counterpart vanish.

Photographs of Palestine from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century onwards served competing ideological interests of Christian states as later serving the needs of Zionists. For example, photographs conveyed ideological messages about the Arab other as it suited their purposes, portraying them in a variety of ways when one message could be at variance with the next. In Israeli photographs one finds opposing ideas about the Arabs, and at times none at all where (for some) the absence of Arabs in photographs cannot pass unremarked. The question also surfaces when one considers how the past is remembered, if reliable sources for its recollection are scarce, or contained as in Israel. Thus, looking at Israeli photographs is always something of a puzzle and perhaps why Sekula argued for a historical investigation of the production of photographic meaning. The Zionists followed on the heels of 19<sup>th</sup> Century European photographs that showed a particular and selective view and the hallmark of coercive ideologies is the absence of anyone else's point of view.

Critical Theory applied the psychoanalytic concept of a 'sub-text' and adapted it in other domains such as the media, film and literature and finally into society itself when the Frankfurt School blended Marxism with psychoanalysis. The key idea for critical theorists however was that there is never anything accidental in a text and echoed psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud who suggested that an in-depth analysis of texts, paying attention to their detail, would allow anything hidden or repressed to be linked directly to the unconscious.<sup>15</sup>

Post-Freudian theorist Jacques Lacan proposed the idea that the unconscious is actually structured like language but is only ever discernible as a 'grammar system' and unknowable beyond that. His views on language appeared to undermine conventional wisdom about the self that like the unconscious is unknowable. Or rather that in trying to understand it becomes obscured by the conditions of language. Barthes suggested that narratives are divided between 'readerly' and 'writerly' categories. The former eliciting a passive response from the reader, whilst the latter inviting an active participation in the text. Barthes favoured the 'writerly' category because he believed the former was authoritarian and tried to impose a particular reading upon its readers. In fact he encouraged the idea of the 'death of the author', to drag readers away from the cult of the author and instead to consider them as merely the conduit through which language speaks. After all, he argued, readers are also creators of narratives just as authors are.

Deconstruction belongs to, and is a reaction against structuralism the theory of language and knowledge based on Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*. (1916) It was closely linked to the theory of semiotics developed by Charles Peirce about the same time. Peirce categorised the relationships between signs and their meaning in three ways, the *index*,

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<sup>15</sup> It might be argued however that psychoanalysis owes rather more to themes and ideas found in literature than it is generally credited with. It may similarly transpire that photography owes a debt to literature. Indeed, the evocation of the *Sabra* in fiction, furnish the best description for searching for their depiction in photographs.



a sign like a footprint that denotes an object; the *icon*, a sign which looks the same as an object, like a portrait; and the *symbol*, a sign connected to its meaning only by social conventions, for example, as found in language. The index and the icon often overlap and the former supports the latter in its realism, however, this may be undermined by the fact both may be endowed with symbolic significance. A photograph can arguably be divided between the “signifier” and the “signified.” Curator and critic Andy Grundberg in *The crisis of the real* (1986) suggests the ‘signifier is like a pointer, and the signified is what gets pointed to, but structuralism also holds that the signifier is wholly arbitrary, a convention of social practice rather than a universal law.’ Yet as Grundberg points out, structuralism overlooks the meaning or the signified part of the sign, and instead examines ‘the relations of the signifiers within any given work’ and ‘holds that the obvious meaning is irrelevant; instead, it finds its territory within the structure of things.’ (Grundberg 1986)

Clearly, critics and theorists remain divided about photography and the conundrums remain. Further, some theories for all their fascination are too esoteric and unwieldy in practical terms as a framework for analysis. The theories touched upon here along with the observations by critics are those that have some relevance to the study of Zionist photographs, but with the suggestion that they seen as complementary rather than competing views. Indeed, if as John Roberts argues in *The art of interruption* (1988) that photographs do have the possibility of realism, and of recording the everyday, then surely it should draw upon the theories and critiques of photographs that argue the contrary to probe their validity. Realism, after all does not exclude the social contradictions that actually exist in social reality. Further, theorists of structuralism in attacking realism are also attacking Marxism and in doing so are widening the gap between historical and theoretical investigations.

Roberts argues that the defence of realism is not to advocate ‘an unmediated notion of photographic truth, but to keep faith politically with the everyday world of appearances.’ (Roberts 1998:144) Within discourse about photographic archives for example, many historians consider them a valuable empirical resource. Roberts argues ‘the photograph is not simply an effect of dominant power relations, or evidence of the “optical unconscious,” it is also a form of *practical* knowledge, an inscription of, and an intervention in, a socially divided world.’ (Roberts 1998:4) Realism is an approach to how photographs are recorded and about choosing subject matter, reflecting a commitment to making it visible, as well as a belief in the communicative powers of photographs to do this. On the other hand, if theories reify and disconnect one from the material world then the value of photographs as historical documents may get lost.

With respect to the pioneering years in Israel however, purges in the Soviet Union and Fascism rising in several countries, meant art was redefined and personal expression bends beneath the weight of political messages that were favoured only where they were sanctioned. In effect it became an age of censorship, and in the *Yishuv* and Israel this was particularly true with personal creativity taking a back seat to the needs of the state. Tel Aviv and other coastal towns in the 1930s were also filled with tensions between political factions, with the British and with the Arabs and there were abundant reasons for controlling media and propaganda campaigns. Thus in addition to theory, analysts of photographs also need to draw on the politics and culture surrounding images and aspects of these are discussed in the following chapter.

The photographer Alfons Himmelreich, for example, arrived in Palestine from Munich in 1933, bringing a modernist vision prevalent at the time. The aesthetic of Modernism is woven

into the function that his photographs served especially in a commercial context. Himmelreich photographed until the late 1970s building up an archive over nearly fifty years. His photographs provide an often poetic or stylised element in the recording of a developing society, and like Kluger and others, had to come to terms with the fact that official Zionists imaginings tended to stifle individual creativity. His work shares themes with that of Alfred Bernheim, another escapee from Germany in the 1930s who photographed architecture, advertising campaigns, and formal portraits, often of prominent people in Israeli civil society. The photographs of Himmelreich included dance troupes and street scenes that, like Boris Carmi's, suggest an independence of mind, following very much their own interests in what they photographed outside of Zionist commissioned work. The industrial photographs of Himmelreich and the architectural photographs of Bernheim share a modernist perspective emphasising New Objectivity, ostensibly shorn of sentiment or narrative. (See Figures 12 and 13) For Zionists however this sat comfortably with depictions of technological progress that was a narrative about political achievements full of sentiment.

Both photographs are powerful even emotional symbols of state building albeit recorded 20 years apart. The building looks like a cruise liner, a flagship of the embryonic state, whilst the refrigerators look as good as if they were in a showroom in America. More than the classic photographs of toiling pioneers, these photographs depict progress and reason under Zionism. Both photographs are constructed to flatter the architecture and technology shown and to appeal to the consumer but for Zionists such images are icons of the collective memory. Bernheim left Germany and settled in Palestine in 1934. He is noted for his architectural photographs, particularly of buildings by architect Erich Mendelsohn. He recorded portraiture of leading figures in Jewish society. Many of his photographs transform buildings into

architectural splendours, and like Helmar Lerski's portraits, the effect is sculptural and Israel a place of beauty and grace.



**Figure 12** *Amcor* refrigerators 1958 Alfons Himmelreich [http://www.luminous-lint.com/app/vexhibit/ PHOTOGRAPHER Alfons Himmelreich 01/2/0/0/](http://www.luminous-lint.com/app/vexhibit/PHOTOGRAPHER_Alfons_Himmelreich_01/2/0/0/) Retrieved 28 December 2011



**Figure 13** Ha'maalot House 1935 Alfred Bernheim <http://www.snunit.k12.il/jerusalem-photo/en/MAINBernheim.html> Retrieved 30 December 2011

In Figures 12 and 13 various narratives are possible and the theories mentioned here can add insights to how they may be understood. To say the least there is considerable scepticism among theorists and it can be no wonder that the writer Barry Goldstein (2007) addresses in an essay the idea that 'All photos lie. Images as data.'<sup>16</sup> He suggests that every image is manipulated, thus no image represents reality. Content depends on a large number of technical and aesthetic choices made by the photographer, based on his or her intent. The response of the viewer to the image will be based on context, content, and perception of intent. Goldstein suggests viewers should not approach an image with the assumption that it represents reality they should assume it does not. Photographs are duplicitous and one of a family group for example, might confirm the individual subjectivity of those portrayed but also diminish them to a visual representation, a commodity, thus not just an image but also an objectification. This understanding is fundamental to the analysis of photographs that even such scenes as straightforward as Figures 12 and 13 that could serve to defend realism are also the result of deliberate manipulation with a clear purpose in mind. For the photographers these were commercial compositions in a Modernist spirit, for the Zionists political compositions that showed what they had achieved so rapidly and convincingly.

Theorist Fredric Jameson suggests a description of the cultural aesthetics in an age of confusion by categorising overlapping fields. For example, *Depthlessness* describes how objects are depicted for their own sake and for the pleasure of them but resists interpretation. *Simulation* suggests that in an age of mechanical reproduction and of virtual reality where everything is copied, there is no longer a sense of what is a fake and what is real. *The waning of affect* describes a lessening of empathy with cultural productions from which audiences are detached because they are less able to identify what is real or important. The other fields

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<sup>16</sup> Barry M. Goldstein (2007) [http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/14640\\_Chapter3.pdf](http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/14640_Chapter3.pdf). Retrieved June 6 2009

described by Jameson, *The death of the subject, pastiche, schizophrenic ecriture, the sublime, and nostalgia* continue to explore the disorientation and loss of identity of the individual as well as the fragmentary nature of culture. (Butler & Ford 2003:22-4)

There is no doubt that the more information, whether theoretical, anecdotal, scientific, biographical, or cultural, that can be brought to bear upon a photograph the more ways it can be approached analytically. Further, it is more likely to serve the historiography of photographs and to endorse their use as historical documents. However, Jameson, Goldstein and the other theorists discussed here are full of caveats about what is occurring in the recording and dissemination of images. There are caveats of another sort explored in the last chapter to supplement what has been discussed here to underline the idea that photographs and what surrounds them need to be probed with caution and an open mind. Theories about photographs cannot alone take proper account of the particular circumstances surrounding the colonisation of Palestine and the growth of a society guided by Zionism. Nor surprisingly do theorists thoroughly explore the roles that photographers must assume on behalf of their clients whether newspapers or Zionist agencies, nor the roles that many others play between the recording of the image and its subsequent publication. Distinctions may be drawn between the political and photographic convictions of the photographers considered here and what bothered photographers most were the constraints on their creativity rather than the doctrines of Zionism themselves.

## Chapter 2 Zionism and colonialism

### The rise of Zionism

At the turn of the 20th Century only a fraction of the Jewish Diaspora thought of themselves as Zionists. At this time there were 12 settlements in Palestine. ‘The land was bought from rich landowners in and outside Palestine.’ (Pappe 2004:11) By the end of the century the position was reversed and Zionism, albeit transformed, enjoyed wide support and its political positions endorsed by a majority of Jews. Early Zionist leaders in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, such as Ze’ev Jabotinsky, Max Nordau (a co-founder with Herzl of the World Zionist Organisation) and Herzl, were dismissive of Zionism before coming to embrace it. Herzl was convinced assimilation of Jews in Europe was not working because they were a nation, not merely a religious or social grouping.



**Figure 14 Theodor Herzl E.M.Lilien 1897**  
*Zionism and the fin de siècle* University of California Press 2001

The term ‘Zionism’ is attributed to publicist Nathan Birnaum in 1891. Zionist ideology maintains that the Jews are a people like any other and all Jews should gather in their own

homeland. In this sense the ideology can be likened to that of the Italian and German liberation movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The common denominator among Zionists is the claim to *Eretz Israel* but otherwise the ideology is best understood as an evolving dialogue between different Zionist tendencies, such as Labour, Revisionist and Liberal Zionism. The nub of the Jewish problem was a national question and for Herzl the preferred option was a sovereign state for Jews. This would allow them to abandon countries where anti-Semitism was active. Herzl saw it as a political issue needing attention at an international level, not to be expedited by Jews alone. In this he differed from *Hovevi Zion*, a Russian based Zionist movement founded in 1881 that had sprung up in response to pogroms against Jews. (Shlaim 2000:3) They already promoted emigration to Palestine with a view to settling there.

In 1896, Herzl published *Der Judenstaat*, a book outlining the path towards a Jewish state whilst avoiding clarification on every detail. It put political Zionism on the map and Herzl on centre stage. Figure 14 is probably the most widely published image of Herzl ever recorded, not merely as a photograph, but the image was adapted for billboards, posters, T-shirts, and used in a plethora of other contexts. (See Figure 17) Lilien more than once used Herzl as a model for his drawings or photographs considering him to be a perfect example of a 'New Jew.' E.M. Lilien, author and artist, was close to the leading Zionists of his day and made several trips to Palestine, and is sometimes regarded as the 'first Zionist artist' helping to establish the Bezalel art school in Palestine. The photograph coincided with the First Zionist Congress held in Basle, 1897. A statement read out at its close said, 'the aim of Zionism is to create for the Jewish people a home in Palestine secured by public law.' (Shlaim 2000:3) Herzl emphasised the creation of a Jewish state per se rather than a Jewish state in Palestine and wrote in his diary, 'At Basel I founded the Jewish State...Perhaps in five years, and certainly in fifty, everyone will know it.' (Goldberg 1996:56)



Israel was never intended as a nation-state as others because it was 'considered as belonging to the "Jewish People" and the existence of an Israeli territorial nation is not recognised.' (Berent 2004:1) 'In Israel there is an identity between nationality and religion' and there is no sense in which an Israeli nation would not include all Jews. (Berent 2004:1) The Jewish nation envisaged by Zionism was committed to a state with Jewish culture and values, though scholars disagree on this. Herzl understood Jews as being unable to assimilate, either because they couldn't or were not encouraged to do so in host countries. Jews were a people not least because their detractors defined them as such. Hard conditions in Jewish communities, rather than the stirring of nationalist sentiment, provided Herzl with opportunity to fulfil his vision. Most Zionists looked to Eastern Europe as the source of immigrants to build a Jewish state. Herzl, like others, was aware of Arabs in Palestine but dismissed them on two counts. First, they were considered less developed than European Jews and therefore might be bought off with economic developments. Second, though Arabs numbered in the hundreds of thousands, few thought they would claim political rights to lands they inhabited. Many thought Arab rights negotiable because, it was argued, prior to the British, Palestine had been part of the Ottoman Empire for centuries. What Herzl ignored was the possibility Zionism, as a national movement for Jews, would lead Arabs to develop a national movement of their own.

Herzl sought the endorsement of powerful states in establishing a political entity for Jews in Palestine. He saw the need for the protection of a powerful ally outside the Middle East, and also the need to avoid recognition of a Palestinian national entity. It was a considerable challenge given that in the years 1881-1917 of the 2.5 million Jews that fled Eastern Europe and Russia only 40,000 chose to settle in Palestine. Zionists in these years were still debating competing views, from what it meant to be Jewish, to what sort of political structures would best suit the new state. Avishai (2002: xvi) The direction was towards statehood and democracy but no one embraced Zionism because they were democrats. For many years there

was tension between the practical and political Zionists with the former emphasising facts on the ground and the latter recognising the need for diplomacy and international support.

Zionist leaders remained cautious about spelling out statehood as their goal, preferring diplomatic guile to provocative statements. Chaim Weizmann, another Zionist leader active in Britain, forged links between Zionists and Britain wresting the Balfour Declaration 1917 from the Foreign Secretary, Arthur Balfour. The letter addressed to Baron Rothschild and British Zionists essentially supported the cause of a Jewish homeland with the caveat that it would not disrupt 'civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.' (Shlaim 2000:7) There was no mention of a Jewish state but neither was there mention of political rights for Arabs. It was a boost to Zionists who numbered less than 10% of the resident 600,000 Arabs. (Shlaim 2000:7)

Weizmann reconciled political Zionists with pragmatists who wanted immigration to Palestine to develop along with settlements, land acquisition and the economy. Political Zionists concentrated on the search for allies but as Weizmann saw it, they were less opposed than complementary positions, both vital to progress. Asked what he meant by a Jewish national home, Weizmann said he wanted 'to make Palestine as Jewish as England is English.' (Shlaim 2000:8) He probably meant that he wanted Jews in Palestine to model themselves on English Jews and was later credited with having persuaded Balfour to support the cause for a Jewish homeland.

Ze'ev Jabotinsky, founder of Revisionist Zionism and father of the Israeli right, was in opposition to Weizmann. He rejected division of Palestine between Jews and Arabs, forming a political party in 1925, *Herut* (Freedom) youth movement, *Betar*, and a military organisation, *Etzel*. He became leader of the *Irgun* militia and advocate of political violence.

His view was wherever Jews came from they belonged now, politically speaking, to the West in every way. Not only in terms of culture and morality but also in the realisation a future Israel would be allied to Western geo-strategic interests. He adopted two principles guiding Revisionist Zionism; first was the territorial integrity of Israel within the borders of British Mandate Palestine, second, was Jews should declare their right to sovereignty of the country. (Shlaim 2000:12)

In order to substantiate their political aspirations the Zionists rewrote Jewish history, reassessing past events to mould them into political myths. 'Zionism shaped its views in reaction to traditional Jewish memory in order to actively change the course of Jewish history.' (Zerubavel 1995: xviii) As ideology it had to seize upon symbolic events of the past and reconstruct them to present its manifesto for the future, namely that of a new national age. From the 1920s until the 1970s Labour Zionists were the most influential of all the Zionist tendencies and they tried without much success to link socialism with nationalism. They established the *kibbutz* movement, the communal and collective settlements based mainly on agricultural economy. Additionally they created the two militias, *Haganah* and *Palmach* and the trade union, the *Histadrut*. Labour Zionists also formed political parties that gradually merged into the Labour Party in 1968.



Figure 15 They who built the wall, and they who bear the burdens, everyone with one of his hands wrought the work and with his other hand held a weapon. Advert, Independence Day, *Davar* 21 April 1950

<http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/independence-day-1950> Retrieved 26 December 2011

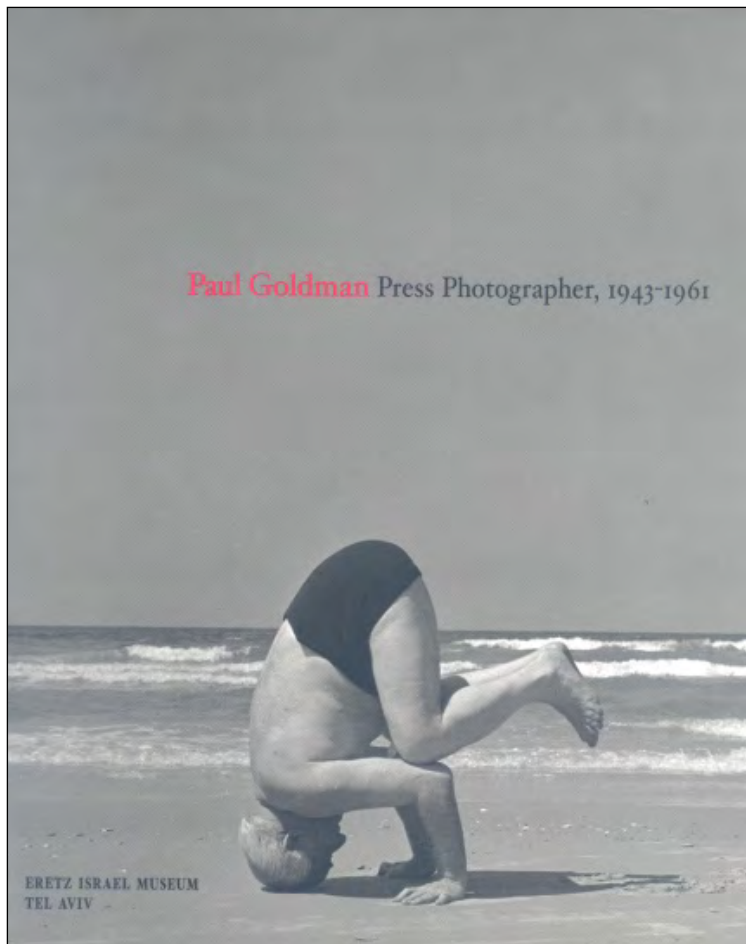
## The Iron Wall

Jabotinsky addressed the Arab question in 1923 in two articles entitled, 'The Iron Wall' in which he dismissed the idea of expelling Arabs from Palestine but discounted the possibility they could be bought off or give up their country for the promise of economic advantage. He thought agreement between them inconceivable and would not change in the future. (Shlaim 2000:13) The way forward was in building settlements, providing them with military protection, and putting them behind an Iron Wall that Arabs could not breach. The Iron Wall served as the instrument for breaking Arab will and crushing resistance. If Arab resistance were broken then negotiations would follow. His second article considered the morality of the 'Iron Wall' and spelt out the choices before Zionism. Either it denied the possibility of self-determination for Arabs, whilst building settlements without consent, or (as the legitimate

ideology of a just cause) it had the moral right to fill Palestine with Jews to fulfil the dream of a homeland. (Shlaim 2000:15)

As Jabotinsky stated, ‘there can only be one purpose in colonisation for the country’s Arabs, and that purpose is essentially unacceptable.’ (Lustick 1996:5) Jabotinsky was unequivocal in his understanding of the colonisation of Palestine and the choices it meant for the colonisers and colonised alike, in which it was made clear that these were stark. If Jews had rights then they would be achieved at the expense of Arab rights. Success lay with expansion of Jewish military might. In this he differed from the Labour Party, then the largest, that was ambivalent on the matter. Gradually, Jabotinsky prevailed and Labour Zionism shifted ground. The ‘Iron Wall’ was an enduring strategy for Zionist policy. Jabotinsky acknowledged the colonial bedrock upon which Zionism was built, though others such as Ben Gurion were less outspoken if equally realist, assessing challenges facing Zionism. Conflict with Arabs was inevitable and the question of their fate remained imponderable. Ben Gurion came to share with Jabotinsky an understanding the Arabs were bent on resistance to colonisation, and negotiations pointless until they had been defeated. (See Figure 16) Both agreed defeat would be certain through military supremacy.

Figure 16 is one of a sequence of photographs recorded by Paul Goldman on 20 September 1957 at Herzliya beach. The photographer, a Hungarian, reached Palestine in 1940 and enlisted with British Forces. After his discharge from the army, due to injuries, he became a press photographer. He was fortunate enough to have unfettered access to Ben Gurion on this occasion and his images are quite unusual for a head of state in this period. Published in Israel and abroad, the photograph embodies *Sabra* ethos with its emphasis on a simple, healthy life.



**Figure 16 Ben Gurion Herziliya 1957, Boris Carmi Israel Museum 2004**

The Arab Revolt of 1936-9 hardened Ben Gurion's resolve to build up military forces. The revolt had two phases: the first was a series of strikes and protests largely peaceful and led by the Higher Arab Committee representing mainly the interests of an urban and better-off population. This phase was largely subdued by political concessions and regional diplomatic moves by the British, but the second turned violent in 1937. The *fellahin* or landed peasants led the second phase of the revolt targeting British forces that responded with repressive measures to crush the uprising. It led via the Peel Commission set up to investigate the uprising, to the proposed partition of Palestine. In 1937 a large state was proposed for Arabs and a small one for Jews. There was to be an enclave (embracing Jaffa in the west and Jerusalem in the east) under a permanent mandate. Ben Gurion saw this as the fault line that would crack up the British Mandate and give birth to a Jewish state. (Shlaim 2000:19) In

order to facilitate this Ben Gurion declared before the executive committee of the Jewish Agency in 1938, 'I am in favour of a obligatory transfer, a measure which is by no means immoral.' (Rouleau 2008) The following year Ben Gurion set up the village files, the information gathering process on the demography, economics, and strategic value, of the Arab villages that continued through to the 1948 war.

The relationship between the *Yishuv* (the Jewish community in Palestine) and Britain was often antagonistic but even so, British forces trained Jewish fighters in guerrilla warfare, forming the kernel that became *Palmach* fighters. (Lustick 1996:8) Zionists and other Jews received military training with the British backed Jewish Legion and various regiments during WWII. The British welcomed the support of extra personnel during WWII but all that they had shared in technique and technology with the fifth columnists of independence movements came back to haunt them when the empire fragmented under the weight of debt and disillusion. More significant for Palestinians was the brutal suppression of the Arab Revolt stymied effective resistance against either Jewish or British forces, and was a contributing factor to their defeat in 1948.

Ben Gurion was unconcerned by the modest dimensions of the Partition Plan because he didn't believe borders to be permanent. If partition led to a state, however small, it would provide the legitimacy to bring in immigrants, develop land and build a powerful army. (Shlaim 2000:21) The new state would provide the bridgehead to a larger one and Zionist ambitions would be fulfilled. This view was given impetus by the looming war in Europe that led the British to curry favour with the Arab states. A White Paper published in May 1939 reversed British support for a Jewish State. This compelled Ben Gurion to lobby for Jewish rights above those of the Arab majority in Palestine. He wanted to bring in millions of Jewish

refugees and to resolve the Arab question by demography. In this way, with a flood of Jews, Arabs would become a minority and have to accept the status a Jewish majority would confer upon them. From 1942 onwards the Zionists argued publicly without reserve for the whole of Mandate Palestine to be absorbed into a Jewish state.

This nonetheless caused a rift between Weizmann and Ben Gurion, the former still arguing for an alliance with Britain and for a diplomatic solution to achieve statehood. Ben Gurion meanwhile was keen to ramp up the pressure and actively oppose British rule. At the Zionist congress of 1945 he called for an armed uprising and by that autumn the *Haganah* was given orders to work alongside other militias, notably *Irgun* and a splinter group, the Stern Gang. *Irgun* had already launched attacks on the British since the White Paper in 1939. From November 1945 through till the following July the three militias led what has been called the Hebrew Revolt.

Though the British put down the revolt it was clear their days in Palestine were numbered. The Second World War had depleted resources and desire for further commitment to their mandate. In February 1947, Britain handed over the unresolved Question of Palestine to the United Nations. In November, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 181 allowing for the partition of Palestine. It was a significant achievement for Zionists even if they disliked the size of the proposed state.

In 1947 at the time of UN Resolution 181 only 5.8% of Mandate Palestine was held in Jewish ownership. (Pappe 2006:30) The United Nations, then in its infancy, essentially accepted Zionist territorial claims in the Partition Resolution and included 400 Palestinian villages in the proposed Jewish state. (Pappe 2006:34) Arabs were to be given 42% of the country and in



this portion 10.000 Jews would live alongside 818.000 Arabs. Jews were to receive 56% of the land on which there were 449.000 Jews and 438.000 Arabs. (Pappe 2006:35) There may have been an assumption by the UN that the two communities would co-exist tolerably but Arabs (and wider Arab world) had rejected partition from the outset and had not co-operated with the UN. Zionists meanwhile had been compliant with the UN because what mattered was international recognition of a Jewish state in Palestine. As Ben Gurion already knew, borders of that state would be the result of military supremacy and not what was drawn on UN maps. The UN Resolution paved the way to war and within days of its adoption the ethnic cleansing of Arabs had begun. Conflict intensified soon after and continued through to the declaration of independence in May 1948. This ushered a second round of hostilities that lasted until the following January with the routing of Arab forces. The Arabs had reluctantly invaded Palestine in a forlorn bid to prevent the collusion between Transjordan and Israel in dividing up the territory granted to Palestinians under the UN plan.

### **A view from 1947**

Zionism has survived longer than its early contemporary ideologies and many factors contributed to its longevity, not least unerring political and financial support of powerful nations, notably the UK until 1948, and thereafter the USA. Zionists were willing to bend dogma in favour of pragmatism when the need arose, whilst never abandoning long-term goals. W.T. Stace (1947) pondering the fate of Palestine a year before the first Israel war wrote when one nation compels another to act contrary to its will it stands against the 'principles of justice, democracy and self-determination.' As a former British colonial officer he thought the methods of settlement in Palestine were disastrous, and would lead to violence and war.

Stace believed the Zionist cause was based on five arguments, firstly, Palestine was a Jewish land, and Jews had a right to it on the basis of long possession (and had been forcibly dispossessed against their will). Secondly, for Jews, Palestine had ‘a peculiarly sacred religious significance.’ Thirdly, the Balfour Declaration had promised them a national home in Palestine. Thus there was a moral claim supported by the principle of the sanctity of promises. Fourthly, they were homeless after persecution and suffering in many countries, and their ordeal was far from over. Fifthly, Zionists claimed the Jews in Palestine had demonstrated their ability to ‘improve the country’ in economic if not cultural terms. Thus, if more settled Palestine, further benefits would accrue for everyone living there.

Stace countered these arguments by saying Palestine was shared by another people, who had arrived before Jews came and had remained since. Further, ‘returning’ Jews were converts to Judaism with no direct link to Palestine. The idea of long possession therefore was less persuasive than the Arab claim of continuous settlement. Stace then asked, ‘can we admit religious feelings as giving any sort of claim to mass immigration into a country?’ whilst recalling that Palestine also ‘holds a special place for Muslims and Christians, no less than for Jews.’ Thirdly, Stace observed ‘the reality is Britain did not own Palestine and so could not give it away to anybody else, no matter what arguments it uses.’ A British promise made in the absence of proper legal foundation cannot translate into a moral right for Jews.

The fourth argument was bound to touch sentiments everywhere. Stace suggested ‘the European countries that were responsible for two thousand years of anti-Semitism own the solution.’ He questioned what moral claims could be yielded upon this, and thought Europe, Russia or North America were more appropriate places than Palestine to redress any claims against persecution and homelessness. Lastly, the argument that immigration would be

beneficial to the Arabs, much as the British had claimed in India, was to miss the point. Similar arguments proposed, in Ethiopia by Mussolini and in France by Hitler, had been used to justify aggression.



**Figure 17** If you will it, it is no dream. Yitzhak Prolov 1929 publisher unknown <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/> Retrieved 27 December 2011

Stace considered if Zionist and Arab claims were placed before an impartial judge, logic would dictate that the former was without foundation whilst the latter entirely correct. However, the reality was ‘that we... do not want to take our fair share of the burden. We have found a small country, Palestine, and a remote and defenceless people, the Arabs, on whom we can unjustly shove the burden of our duties.’

## **Zionism and anti-Semitism**

Zionism developed at a time when Jews in Russia and Europe suffered regular abuse and persecution. Their aim to seek redemption and safety in their own state was understandable but failed to address anti-Semitism that Zionists firmly believed was not going to go away, nor could be overcome (with hostile and negative attitudes reversed). On the contrary 'accommodation to anti-Semitism (and the pragmatic utilisation of it for the purpose of obtaining a Jewish state) became the central stratagems of this movement' (Brenner 1983:1) and this remained in place up to and including genocide of Jews. Herzl thought opposing anti-Semitism was pointless and did nothing to exploit the wave of support for Jews that followed the Dreyfus affair.<sup>17</sup> In 1899, public outrage led to a retrial of Captain Dreyfus and Herzl failed to recognise that because of it 'anti-Semitism in France was driven into isolation lasting until Hitler's conquest.' (Brenner 1983:2)

Herzl disparaged French Jews of all political persuasions who, following the resolution of the affair, dismissed Zionism as an irrelevance. Herzl, nor his disciple Weizmann, ever attempted to rally Jews to protest anti-Semitism, and Herzl all but courted it. In 1895 for example, Herzl thought the anti-Semitic mayor-elect of Vienna, Karl Lueger should be confirmed in office and met with Prime minister, Casimir Badeni to discuss his support. The Hapsburg emperor had twice refused to confirm Lueger, recognising anti-Semitism was the last thing his weak dynasty needed when he regarded Jews as loyal. On another occasion Herzl lent his support to the 1902 Aliens Exclusion Bill on its passage through Westminster even though it was destined to exclude immigrant Jews from Eastern Europe. Herzl was pragmatic in his bid to get Jews to a properly safe haven rather than endure this perpetual migration of Jews from one unfriendly nation to another.

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<sup>17</sup> Dreyfus was falsely accused of treason in a spying scandal and put in prison. Despite a retrial and release from custody he was never exonerated of the charges.

The mainspring for Zionism was anti-Semitism. 'Zionism is not now, nor was it ever, co-extensive with Judaism or the Jewish people.' (Brenner 1983) What appears to have evolved over several centuries was a move from an ancient proselytising Jewish culture that comingled with Gentiles to one largely segregated from them. Doubtless the objections of the Catholic Church to Jewish converts played its part, but Jews themselves were largely opposed to mixed marriages, regarding them as a rejection of orthodoxy. Whether in the West or the East, mixed marriages were seen by Jews as depleting the community. This was compounded in the West by Jewish reform movements that sought to modify religious practices, and by the rise of secularism among Jews. No matter Herzl's indifference to religious sensitivities, by the time of his death in 1904, cosmopolitan Zionism was an idea whose time had come and gone. The World Zionist Organisation (WZO) was never compelled to take a stand on the question of mixed marriages because a majority of Jews rejected any erosion of their cultural and religious practices.

German Zionists picked up the baton of political activism following Herzl's death and further developed ideas of Jewish separatism, borrowing from prevailing currents amongst non-Jewish students of the period. One chauvinist idea that surfaced in Germany was of *blut und boden*, the blood and soil ideology that amongst other things was inherently anti-Semitic. Yet its advocacy for racial purity in the homeland was not without appeal to Zionists and a number of students adapted these ideas to their cause. For one thing, Zionists agreed with the concept of a German *volk* to which ultimately they did not belong even though Jews had been established in Germany for centuries. As they were not in favour of a merger with non-Jews they accepted the principle of 'German blood' whilst arguing that Jews had claims of their own in this regard, and were purer in blood than Germans who had intermingled with Slavs.

What was missing for Jews was the soil and Palestine was the best possible solution for this. The historian Lenni Brenner draws a distinction between middle class German Jews and working class Eastern European Jews to whom socialism was much more attractive with its growing assimilation of Jews. Brenner suggests the German Zionists were out of kilter with Eastern Jews and suggests this ‘*volkisch* Zionism was simply an imitation of German nationalist ideology.’ (Brenner 1983:20) German Jews, like philosopher Martin Buber, were able to accept that Zionism and patriotism for Germany during WWI could coexist.

Inspiration for racial purity was not purely German, but was a consequence of social Darwinism that reinforced the aims of imperial conquest European powers pursued in Africa and Asia. Zionists had their own version of racial purity first expressed by Jewish anthropologist Ignaz Zollschan, whose belief in Jewish purity was shared by Buber and physicist Albert Einstein. Zollschan postulated Jews had pure blood by virtue of their rejection of mixed marriages and improved by family values, intellectual traditions, and general abstemiousness from sins of the flesh. He thought if Jews were racially pure, it would be best preserved in their ancient homeland. A number of other Jewish scientists at this time were exploring similar ideas including Elias Auerbach, Aron Sandler and Felix Theilhaber.

This did not alter the choice of America as a preferred haven for persecuted Jews however. The Zionist response to this was odd because not only did they imply Jews were largely responsible for anti-Semitism but also suggested it would arise wherever Jews settled. Zionists labelled this principle as the ‘Negation of the Diaspora.’ The problem with this was Zionist campaigns to undermine migration (unless to Palestine) became vitriolic to the point where it was hard to distinguish between the anti-Semitic and Zionist press. ‘This style of Jewish self-hatred permeated a great deal of Zionist writing.’ (Brenner 1983:23) Perhaps the

most damaging aspect of this harangue was the way it impacted on the pretensions of Labour Zionism.

Brenner believes that Labour Zionism never won over working class Jews in the Diaspora. Zionist arguments were counter-productive and claimed Jewish workers were always going to be exploited because they were given no choice but to work in marginal trades in host countries. This was specious but allowed Zionists to claim class struggle would only be resolved for Jews in their own state. Needless to say few Jewish workers were going to invest their energies in an uncertain and remote land when concerns of the present consumed them. Labour Zionism was a misnomer and appealed essentially to middle-class Jews, wanting to break free of class shackles, but not prepared to support the working class in countries where they lived. Labour Zionism became ‘a counter-culture sect, denouncing Jewish Marxists for their internationalism and the Jewish middle-class as parasitic exploiters of the “host” nations.’ (Brenner1983: 24)

### **Zionism and Fascism**

Fascism rose in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century but unlike Marxism or liberalism did not have a long maturation process, and took form in 1914. It was often easier to understand what it was opposed to than what it stood for, and generally borrowed ideas about order, authority and tradition from the Right and ideas about change and progress from the Left. The historian Roger Eatwell argues that this synthesis between both means that ‘fascist ideology is in some ways best understood within the framework of a matrix rather than a precise definition.’ (Eatwell 2003: xxiv) At a minimum, fascism during its embryonic period in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, embraced the concept of a ‘new man’ and particularly in the context of an elite who would chart a course (a Third Way) that would discourage diversity, would favour

homogeneity, and would combine elements of capitalism with socialism. This is reminiscent of Zionism and pertinently the Zionists in pursuit of their own goals were content to allow fascists to pursue theirs.

The civil war in Spain for example attracted the support of both Hitler and Mussolini because if the Republican cause gained ground it would have galvanised opposition movements in Germany and Italy. Germany sent 25,000 troops to support Franco's tank and artillery corps, and 14,000 men of the Condor Legion whilst Italy sent 100,000 'volunteers.' The International Brigades supporting the Republican cause numbered 40,000 personnel of which it has been estimated that sixteen per cent were Jews. (Brenner 1983:174) At the time the Jews would have identified themselves as radicals or communists rather than as Jews. Of this number a few hundred Zionists from Palestine went to Spain in a private capacity. The Zionist movement was not only opposed to Jews leaving Palestine to serve in Spain (who were all members of the Palestine Communist Party) they also fulminated against Jews in the International Brigades who they believed should have joined the struggle in Palestine instead. As Brenner points out all 'Zionists saw the solving of the Jewish question as their most important task, and they sharply counter-posed Jewish nationalism to any concept of international solidarity; none despised "red assimilation" more vigorously than the Labour Zionists.' (Brenner 1983:174) Both the *Histadrut* trade union and *Hashomer Hatzair* (a Zionist tendency) either expressed sympathy with the Republican cause or tried to understand the issues that Spain raised but Zionist leaders were making approaches to the Nazis at the height of the war in Spain. Brenner suggests that the Zionist leadership not only failed to address the Spanish issue, it failed to tackle fascism and indeed lost some of their supporters to the Stalinists and Trotskyites 'as they offered nothing beyond isolationist and Utopian rhetoric in the midst of a world catastrophe.' (Brenner 1983:176)



The German concept of nation centred around the idea of blood whereas Italian fascism was one essentially based on culture.<sup>18</sup> For all that, Italian fascism that had emerged as a political force more than a decade earlier than the Nazis and was an inspiration to Hitler. Both Nazism and Italian fascism shared the same geo-political outlook in which the ‘defence of the nation was intimately linked to control over relatively large areas of territory, whose inhabitants were viewed at best as second-class citizens and at worst as slaves.’ (Eatwell 2003:xxiii) The geo-political view of the Zionists was comparable despite the absence of territory at that stage. As for the racist element, whilst early Italian fascism was not anti-Semitic, Italy was involved in a harsh colonial war in 1935 in Ethiopia that provoked measures that separated the conquering race from the defeated one. This too is comparable to what transpired in Palestine.

Zionists failed to address fascism and if anything admired its national political traditions. Zionists and Fascists shared an understanding of the need to court the masses whilst retaining links with the Establishment. They also shared recognition of the importance of strong leadership, governance by an elite, and propaganda to convey the ideology. It has been suggested that fascism is dictatorial and destructive and owes more to psychology than to ideology but, as Eatwell suggests, the intellectual roots of fascism were inspired by two developments that arose in opposition to the Enlightenment. The first was the rise of the Romantic Movement in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century that rejected the dour rationalism of the period and sought refuge in the worship of nature and the ‘glorification of the national and historical against the universal and the timeless, and the exaltation of genius over the mediocrity of the masses.’ (Eatwell 2003:6)

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<sup>18</sup> Many Jews joined the Italian Fascist Party since it was open to assimilation, however, things changed when the party adopted legislation in 1938 rather akin to the Nuremberg Laws that had been introduced in Germany a few years earlier.

The second development was the growth of holistic nationalism that was linked to the spread of racist politics. In due course these ideas found political expression in the search for leaders to steer their countries to a national rebirth. Eatwell argues that by the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, there was a ‘diffuse hostility’ towards materialism that found expression in political anti-Semitism as distinct from Christian anti-Semitism which was a far older phenomenon. ‘The Jew was pilloried as the epitome of capitalist materialism – a view particularly prevalent in the German *Volkisch* movement, which railed against the evils of urban, industrial society.’ (Eatwell 2003:7) The German movement was linked to the spread of a more emotive nationalism that saw that capitalism as socially divisive and became more right wing in response, calling for social unity. Paradoxically in its early phase of development nationalism had been more associated with the sovereignty of the people and the need for legitimacy to change political regimes but by the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century this position had changed and nationalism sought to shore up regimes and to prevent their collapse.

Accusations that Zionism is fascist arise with unflinching regularity particularly among those who are hostile to Israel but notably surfaced in 1948 when a number of prominent Jews, among them Hannah Arendt, wrote a letter to the *New York Times*, December 8, claiming that the *Herut* Party was ‘akin in its organisation, methods, political philosophy and social appeal to the Nazi and Fascist parties.’ In part the letter was inspired by the fact that Begin and the *Irgun* militia were involved in its membership, and the latter was accused of terrorism against, Jews, Arabs, and British alike. However, whilst common values were shared between them, the likelihood of a fascist movement arising in Israel was improbable.

### **Zionism and nationalism**

One well-known definition of nationhood expressed by the Soviet leader Josef Stalin in 1912 suggests that ‘a nation is a historically evolved, stable community of language, territory,

economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture' but this definition may better suit the needs of propagandists than anything else because the terms are imprecise or do not fit all models. (Hobsbawm 1991:5) Jews for example, who often define themselves as a nation, even though 'they share neither religion, language, culture, tradition, historical background, blood group patterns nor an attitude towards the Jewish state.' (Hobsbawm 1991:8) In effect, nationalism emerges at that point when social groups however they are composed are persuaded by the idea of a national consciousness. Among the last to be affected by this, suggests historian Eric Hobsbawm, are the popular masses, the bulk of civil society, thus the spread of a national consciousness is uneven. In this phase of development it is possible to pinpoint the rise of pioneers and militants, like Zionists, who campaign for a national idea. Later still, nationalist programmes acquire mass support and sometimes as in the case of Ireland and Israel, this happens before the creation of a national state. Hobsbawm warns however, that nationalist historians are inclined to be politically committed and this blunts their scepticism and suggests that being a Fenian, an Orangeman, or a Zionist, is incompatible with writing a credible history of the Irish or of the Jews. (Hobsbawm 1991:13)

Nationalism at least required two conditions to function effectively, one was some form of economic base and thus it had to be of a certain size. The second that followed from the first was the idea that the building of nations was also a process of expansion with the exception of separatist nationalism. In effect, nationalism that sought to unite disparate groups into one unity was perceived as legitimate, whereas when it sought to separate one part from another or one group from another, it lost its legitimacy. Hobsbawm suggests that three criteria allow for the identification of a people as a nation assuming the two preconditions are met: historic association, culture and a proven capacity for conquest. An historic association could be either with a current state or one within reach of living memory that had a lengthy past.

Culture described long-established elites ‘possessing a written national literary and administrative vernacular.’ (Hobsbawm 1991:38)

Jewish nationalism was born in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century and until that point the Jewish Diaspora had always managed to identify itself as a special group but not one with any serious intentions to lobby for a Jewish political state still less a territory. In all but the span of a lifetime Jewish nationalism not only created a state but also rallied tens of thousands to its cause. Another important consideration was the fact of partition in Palestine. In Africa, Latin America and Asia where colonialism was eventually replaced by nation states, a majority retained the boundaries of the erstwhile colonial units. However, countries such as Ireland, India and Palestine followed somewhat different trajectories insofar as they all experienced partition, when, in effect, two states were created where there had previously only been one, and the new entities claimed a direct link with the prior state.

As the literary critic Joe Cleary notes, ‘partition, in short, entails a reorganisation of political space that invariably triggers complex reconstruction of national identity within and across the borders of the states involved.’ (Cleary 2002:20) This assumes the prospect of population transfer and the idea that groups should live apart because of the impossibility of their living together. It could also assume the prospect of having to redraw borders or reduce the numbers of ethnic minorities to lessen their potential threat. Cleary suggests there can be no surprise that attempts to impose partition usually result in ethnic cleansing, coerced assimilation, or expulsion. He also points out that ‘the post-imperial partitions have always left substantial nationalities stranded on “the wrong side” of the new state borders, and these have continued to be a source of both domestic and interstate conflict.’ (Cleary 2002:22) This would include Israeli Arabs who found themselves after 1948 in a territory that was defined in terms of the

Jewish majority and bound to present challenges (as well as opportunities) of representation in photographs of Israel.

### **Colonialism**

Western colonialism arose in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century and continued unrelentingly until WW1. By then, European powers had colonised vast territory around the world. In the 19th Century colonialism benefitted from the rapid advances in technologies such as printing, weaponry, and transportation. Behind the taskmasters of military campaigns and commercial enterprise, the scientific missions, campaigning missionaries, and literary tourists followed up river. In Jerusalem, for example, Europeans claimed the Christian heritage for their own. Mostly, colonialism furthered disempowerment, whether of human rights, or political and economic ones. There was no regard for cultural, ethnic or religious boundaries, and a lack of participation in local government and imperialist policies encouraged rivalries between subject peoples.

By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century racism was firmly established as an ideology and yoked to the colonial cause. Colonialism it seemed was a biological necessity and the laws of nature indicated lesser races would disappear. Racism gave colonists a licence to kill. In 1898, Robert Cecil the British prime minister declared, 'One can roughly divide the nations of the world into the living and the dying.' (Lindqvist 1998:140) He admitted living nations encroached upon dying ones, as if stating a fact of life. Voices that dissented from this view were brushed aside in the day-to-day business of empire. The idea European domination belonged to a natural process of evolution gained prevalence. Some suggested if lesser peoples were doomed it would be humane to accelerate the process. Death caused by disease or dispossession was the same wherever it occurred and periodically massacres were needed to curb dissent.



**Figure 18 Zoltan Kluger Zoltan Kluger, Chief Photographer, 1933-1958 Israel Museum 2008**

Colonialism, often thought of in terms of ‘far-off continents,’ has frequently arisen in neighbouring countries. What is common to most forms is colonialism causes displacement, and the striking example of rapid spatial advance was in the United States. This was the conclusion of Friedrich Ratzel zoologist and geographer.<sup>19</sup> In 1897 he published *Politische Geographie* a work that spawned concepts of *lebensraum* and Social Darwinism. In Ratzel’s mind, *lebensraum* was an idea uniting social and natural science and later became a Nazi justification for expansionist policies. *Lebensraum* was a slogan that Hitler brought to prominence when considering reunification of the country and acquisition of colonies, rather on the lines of the French and British models. Ratzel was persuaded the development of a

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<sup>19</sup> On a field trip to North America, Mexico and Cuba (1874-5) he studied the influence of people of German origin and other ethnic groups particularly in the Midwest. He wrote up his findings in 1876, in *Städte-und Kulturbilder aus Nordamerika* that was to become a seminal work in establishing the field of cultural geography.

people is primarily influenced by their geographical situation. Those who successfully adapted to one location would proceed naturally to another. This expansion to fill available space was a necessary feature of any healthy species. Ratzel adopted a questionable biological theory of life and linked it to a geographical theory of space.



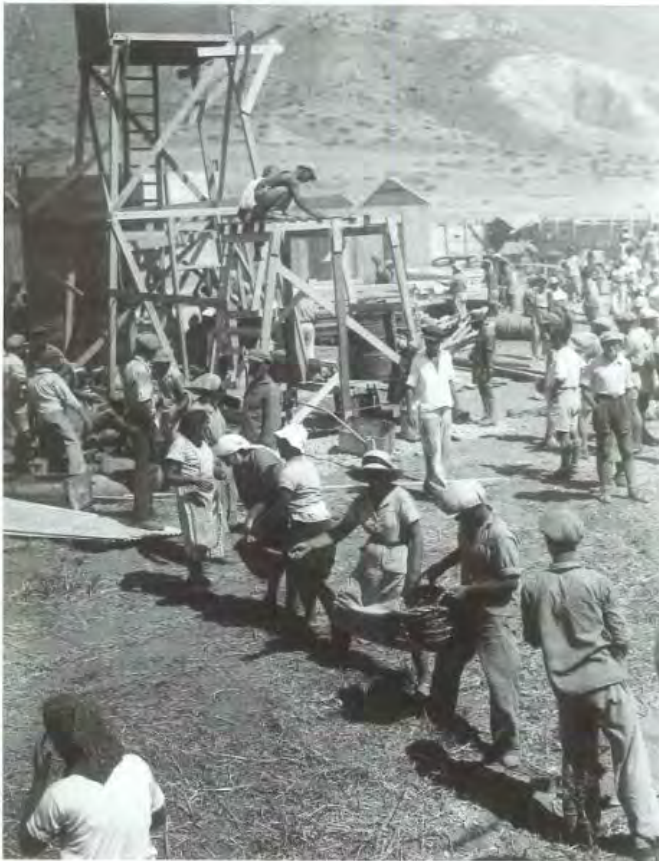
**Figure 19** Zoltan Kluger *Zoltan Kluger, Chief Photographer, 1933-1958 Israel Museum 2008*

There are two broad strands in colonialism, metropolitan and settler, but from the perspective of those under its yoke, settler colonialism was arguably the worst. The difference between them is one of intention, thus, for example, when the Dutch established Cape Colony in South Africa in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> Century it was as a trading post with access to the Indian Ocean. When the British set foot in Ireland in late 16<sup>th</sup> Century, or America in early 17<sup>th</sup> Century, the intention was to settle and where necessary to remove locals. The debate in Israel is whether dispossession of Arabs was the result of a deliberate plan or consequence of war. For Arabs, the point was moot, for Israelis the distinction is one of morality. However, the argument is specious and denies the inherent characteristics of colonialism, namely dispossession,

enslavement and, in some cases, extermination. Such characteristics contribute to the enduring consequences that colonialism everywhere has wrought.

Piterberg identifies five features of colonialism the first is geopolitical thus what are the actual or potential resources of the territory, size, topography, and commercial viability? The second is demographic as for the British in Ireland or America and contingent upon the notion of a surplus population in Britain at the time. This includes the ratio of colonists to locals and whether the balance between them shifts. A third feature is land (the struggle to possess it) and labour (how this affects race relations and the rewards or exploitation of labour). The fourth feature is the complex issue of race (and racism) and the fifth, explores the triangular relationship between mother country, settlers and locals in the colony. (Piterberg 2008:51-2) Additionally, four types of colony can be identified, occupation, mixed settlement, pure settlement and plantation. (See Figure 21) These distinctions are a reminder colonialism evolved over time, varied between countries, and in the case of Israel, within the country. Figures 18 and 19 give a sense of this the former shows one man ploughing sand with a horse whilst another passes by on a camel. Here is a scene that shows colonists borrowing the age-old techniques of Arabs for farming and transportation but of course the implicit claim is this is how their Jewish ancestors lived and worked. Figure 19 shows both the role of women in building-up the country and the use of technology in doing so. Given the weight of the freight wagons and the quarried stone it seems a little improbable that the wagons could be so easily shifted along the rails. It is unconvincing as a documentary image but it is easy to understand its propaganda value. Figure 20 by Zoltan Kluger is a masterful composition that echoes colonial scenes in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Africa and America but also conveys the communal unity and the sense of purpose Zionists were so keen to instil. Figure 21 shows Palestine from the air and in terms of colonisation it is a triumphant signal of power.





**Figure 20 Zoltan Kluger, building the watchtower in Ein Gev 1937**  
*Zoltan Kluger, Chief Photographer, 1933-1958 Israel Museum 2008*

### **Colonialism and Zionism**

Zionism arose in Europe when capitalism was expanding and empires consolidated. Zionists shared with Europeans the view that territory could be considered empty if the local population had not achieved independence and recognised statehood. During this period anti-imperial and socialist groups were attracting more Jewish youth than Zionists were. Few at the time would have understood that Zionism in the guise of socialism was colonial conquest based on an ethnocentric ideology. This was complemented by a tenet of Zionism that saw Jews as alien in non-Jewish communities. It stimulated the search for a Jewish state and Britain was to be its imperial sponsor, using Zionists as a bulwark against Arab nationalism. Britain largely acceded to the continued expansion of Jewish settlements and ultimate displacement of the majority of the Arab population from their lands.



1939 והר"ל

**Figure 21 Zoltan Kluger, Nahalal colony 1939 Zoltan Kluger, Chief Photographer, 1933-1958 Israel Museum 2008**

Colonialism and Zionism overlap and as Rodinson (1973:38) suggests, ‘European supremacy had planted in the minds of even of those who shared in it the idea that any territory outside of Europe was open to European occupation.’ This was accepted because of the belief they would derive advantages from European knowledge and technology. A founder of political Zionism, Leo Pinsker for example, preferred Palestine for a Jewish state but accepted it could be anywhere from North America to the Ottoman Empire. Pinsker thought location was secondary to the ‘creation of a Jewish colonial community destined one day to become our inalienable, inviolable homeland – our own homeland.’ (Rodinson 1973:38)

Pinsker knew the daunting challenge for Zionists lay in persuading political powers to endorse the call for a Jewish homeland. He had no concerns whether any potential locations were populated or not. Herzl shared this view fourteen years later when he proposed Argentina and Palestine as prospective sites for a homeland, mentioning experiments in

colonisation tried in both places. The movement Herzl created was based on ideas that ‘unquestionably fit into the great movement of European expansion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.’ (Rodinson 1973:40) This was unsurprising, because aside from a clutch of socialists, liberals, and revolutionaries, Europeans (who never visited colonies) were inclined to view colonialism as benign. Everything Herzl proposed sat comfortably with European imperialism, and the fact some states within the former Ottoman Empire were searching for independence, only fuelled Zionist ambitions.

As with so many other colonial projects, the discourse of Zionism essentially viewed Palestine as an empty space whose indigenous population was not given due consideration in the pursuit of a Jewish homeland. As historian Derek Gregory says, ‘a series of campaigns at once political and military, economic, and cultural, was waged to establish this imaginary, as “brute facts on the ground.”’ (Gregory 2004:78) As early as 1878, there were purchases of agricultural land by Jews in Europe, and for Zionists these plots were just the beginning of the reclamation of the Holy Land. Their alleged return ‘to the Land of Israel would thus signify their re-entry into history (or, rather History).’ (Gregory 2004:79) The Zionist view of the land was that it was for Jews alone to reclaim and without their presence there it was no better than a wilderness. As if it was also ‘condemned to an exile so long as there was no Jewish sovereignty over it: it lacked any meaningful or authentic history, awaiting redemption with the return of the Jews.’ (Piterberg 2001:32)

Zionist settlement practice owes much to the German model and, contrary to the conventional wisdom, the collective farms and communities were not driven by socialist principles but rather were camouflaged by them. Piterberg suggests the ‘decisive factors were the conditions and desire of colonisation; that, even in terms of ideational flow from Europe to Palestine, what we have is ideas of colonisation and race rather than socialism.’ (Piterberg

2008:78) He suggests instead that German Jewish settlement experts played a leading role in the early phase of settlement and the approach was based on the colonisation project in Poznan (Ostmark, Poland) undertaken by Germany in the pre-WWI period. Developed following the crisis in German agriculture, the purpose was ‘to effect a demographic transformation...by dispossessing the Polish majority of its hold on the land and settling Germans in their stead.’ (Piterberg 2008:79) The German approach, adopted by Zionists, favoured national colonisation that gave its proto-state institutions control, rather than a private sector approach based on profitability. It also created a frame of mind in which the pure settlement concept could flourish.<sup>20</sup>

Without a supporting caption, Figure 22 could as easily pass a depiction of a German boy engaged in a character-building programme organised by the National Socialists. Whereas the youth may well have belonged to the *Hachsara*, a programme developed by the Zionist movement to prepare immigrants for life in Palestine by providing training in agriculture and other manual skills. To this end, communes were established in Europe and America, where, in addition to basic skills, pioneers received some instruction in ideology and Hebrew as well knowledge of the country itself. In figure 23, ten teenagers can be seen laughing by a chalet on a snow-covered hill with conifer forest rising behind. The scene depicts youth of the *Habonim*, a movement modelled on the Scouts, spread across several countries. Scores of similar scenes recorded in several countries refer to the preparation that many underwent ahead of emigration to Palestine. Alongside the agricultural schools, *Habonim* and similar organisations encouraged colonisation and provided skills for those willing to make the journey. The scene recalls the duality between personal and collective memory, beginning as a family photograph and later incorporated into the collective memory. One imagines scenes

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<sup>20</sup> There were two men closely involved in the early settlement of Palestine, Franz Oppenheimer and Arthur Ruppin, the latter often cited as the father of Israeli settlement. Ruppin favoured racial purity among Jews and espoused biological determinism.

of Zionist training, in Europe and North America played well with domestic audiences in Israel. The photographs speak of the dedication and planning of the colonial project engineered by Zionists.



**Figure 22 Member of the youth *Aliyah* trains in Germany for emigration to Palestine 1935, Leni Sonnenfeld *Eyes of Memory* Prestel 2004**

Figure 23 is illustrative of the fact that followers of Zionism, whether or not they had any official capacity, often-recorded photographs sharing nation-building themes. In essence, it described their personal journey as pioneers similar in content to the official narrative. Amateur and professional photographers shared the same experience as the people they were photographing and all of them were in a new setting trying ‘to create an identity and develop a sense of belonging’ and suggests that for them ‘the process of capturing images becomes an



act of appropriation through photography.’ (Perez 2000:11) ‘Amateur photographs help people order their memories and demonstrate cultural membership.’ Further they help ‘individuals mobilise with others in a way that is necessary for collectively working through events experienced in common.’ (Zelizer 2002)



Figure 23 *Habonim* winter camp in the Alps, Germany 1935 Erwin Liebling <sup>21</sup>

<http://www.ynetnews.com/.../0.7430.L-3777007.00.html> retrieved 19 March 2011

### Three waves of Jewish immigration

If settler colonialism is not concerned with extracting surplus value out of the indigenous labour force, it is because it is more concerned to displace that labour from the land and introduce settlers to replace them. In this way one can consider the three waves of Jewish immigration into the *Yishuv* not so much as an event but as part of a structure and one essentially geared to the removal of the indigenous population. Piterberg suggests that two

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<sup>21</sup> Liebling is an example of a photographer not working in an official capacity but nonetheless as a committed Zionist caught up in documenting the family migration to Palestine from Germany. He captured the changing circumstances in their lives and their development in a new society. He and his brothers were part of a group who made *Aliyah* during the 1930s to be joined by their parents on the eve of WWII.

factors shape this; one is the extent to which the settlers organise and control the governance of the colonised population, and the other is how far settler privileges become institutionalised. (Piterberg 2009:61) The first wave of immigrants built private farming communities on the coastal plains and then developed smaller concentrations in the lower Galilee, in an area known as the Huleh Valley, running north from the Sea of Galilee to the Lebanese border. For these immigrants, Jaffa served as their cultural and organisational base. The second and third wave of immigrants arrived mainly from Russia, essentially a proletariat influenced by both Zionism and socialism. Differing from the first wave farmers, the new pioneers established the collective and co-operative settlements on plains further south. Urbanisation was rapidly developing, in Jaffa, Tel Aviv and Haifa. By the mid-1940s a new frontier developed in the Negev desert, and after the state was created, settlement there intensified. Border areas were similarly settled. This frontier development expanded again after 1967. The academic Ephraim Ben-Zadok identifies periods of settlement based on a central national settlement plan. He describes the start as 1882-1903 with the founding of nineteen agricultural settlements on purchased land and these were largely dependent on Arab labour, though did not prove to be economically viable. From 1904-14, an additional thirty agricultural communities were set up on a co-operative basis. By 1947 there were 286 agricultural settlements with an ideological structure populated by a quarter of Palestine Jews of a total population of 645,000. The majority lived in towns and cities. At this point the Palestine non-Jews numbered an estimated 1.2 million. (Ben-Zadok 1985:333)

Each period of settlement produced its own particular myths and geographer Aharon Kellerman identifies three categories; environment, society, and security. In the first case narratives were produced that emphasized the struggle to tame land and adapt to local climate, often characterised as unforgiving. The society myth concentrated on the renewing of a Jewish society in an ancient homeland. Kellerman says 'the two coincided temporally

and spatially, so that the idea of struggling with nature was combined with that of establishing a new society.’ (Kellerman 1996:368) The security myth related to the hostility between Arabs and Jews where frontlines emerged with settlement construction. Kellerman suggests the settlement of valleys became ‘one of the cornerstones of Labour ideology, settlement ethos and deed, and, since this movement dominated the pre-state Zionist organisations as well as the Israeli government until 1977, its political, ideological and cultural expressions were greatly amplified.’ (Kellerman 1996:371) This is reflected in literature, song, school curricula, and where possible through photographs. They illustrate an approach in agriculture and an evolving pattern of settlement that was more than just taming barren areas or swamps, but rather was ‘integrated into a world view that focused on social innovation’ based on ‘co-operation, asceticism, manual labour, equality and sacrifice.’ (Kellerman 1996: 371)

Figure 24 belongs within a canon of tens of thousands of images that celebrate the redemption of the Land of Israel and the achievements of colonisation. It is a timeless scene, difficult to place and date, but has the calming effect that fishing scenes often have. Five men spread the net on their rowing boat looking for holes or at their catch. The simple scene effortlessly links the men to an age-old tradition and idea that these Israelis belong, as they always have, in Israel. Elsewhere, in albums one finds the transformation of a wilderness underway. There is a constant reference to continuity that juxtaposes with scenes showing the progress of colonisation in all its guises, and most impressively, the ultimate triumph, are the views that show the conquest of the land from the air (see Figure 21). The weaving of Israelis into the tapestry of distant history reinforces the idea of colonisation as a natural and proper undertaking. Within Figure 24 however, as with so much of the Zionist canon, are the seeds of a counter memory, because explicit or not, propaganda photographs usually allow for other



interpretations, especially by those against whom the propaganda is directed. In Israel, for the colonised and the occupied, the narrative is partly their own, despite their overwhelming absence from it. Thus figure 24 can be read both as a metaphor for the expulsion of Arabs and as a vision of Israel as a safe haven for Jews. This same shore has been photographed by 19<sup>th</sup> Century photographers in the service of empire, and by droves of others ever since; school outings, hiking conscripts, religious groups of all faiths, each playing out and recording their own private dramas in front of their cameras. Figure 24 is one that belongs among multiple narratives and illustrates Piterberg's notion of a society myth. It also reflects the circle that Sela describes as a motif of the *Sabra* era.



**Figure 24** Leni Sonenfeld, fishermen on the Galilee, 1957 *Eyes of Memory* Yale University Press 2004

### **The Sharon Plan**

In Israel colonisation was ordered and its vision enshrined in the Sharon Plan, an audacious blueprint for the entire country, drafted by architect Arie Sharon. Breath-taking in scope, the plan targeted two and a half million inhabitants and intended to provide temporary housing for immigration following the war. At that time about 82 per cent of the population was spread along the coastal plain and much of the rest in Jerusalem. By 1954, a further 300 agricultural settlements had been established, mostly of the *moshav* type 'because of the

social and ethnic background of the newcomers and their lower ideological motivation.’ (Ben-Zadok 1985:333) The Sharon Plan (implemented by 1966) changed the percentages and resulted in 45 per cent living in cities and 55 per cent in rural areas in small to medium sized towns. (Rotbard 2003:65) In 1966 the population of Israel was approaching 2.4 million. Whilst meeting the pressing needs of new immigrants the plan also worked to prevent the return of Arab refugees to their villages and lands. The plan was imposed on new immigrants because it was understood that newcomers would not have volunteered to live on the periphery of the already established communities or further afield in rural backwaters.

Israel was divided into twenty-four districts in which farms were spread around villages and in turn villages clustered around a regional town meant to house between twenty to fifty thousand people. The planners owed a debt to geographer, Walter Christaller (1939) whose ‘Theory of Central Places’ served as a model for Israeli planners. They also referred to British and Soviet planning in an effort to avoid mistakes of ad hoc colonisation that characterised spatial settlement in the New World. (Rotbard 2003:68:76)

Prior to the war architecture played a prominent role in colonisation. *Homa Umigdal* (watchtower and stockade) forts were used to consolidate territorial conquest. They were ‘the metaphor of the Israeli fait accompli. *Homa Umigdal* is the fundamental paradigm of all Jewish architecture in Israel.’ (Rotbard 2003:46) The system was first used in 1936 inspired by Shlomo Gur in Tel Amal *kibbutz*. (See Figure 25) In the following three years, fifty-seven were assembled each fort designed to accommodate forty people and built in a day. It had to defend itself from attack, at least until reinforcements arrived. Each had to be accessible by road and be in sight of another so that signals could pass between them by means of mirrors or lamps.

*Homa Umigdal* served as the precursor of larger settlements. Rapidly put together in pre-fabricated parts easily moved, it was as useful as a tank in war. In 1937 a model of the *Homa Umigdal* was displayed in the Land of Israel pavilion at the World Fair in Paris. The German entry took the gold medal with a work by the Nazi architect Albert Speer. (Rotbard 2003:47) Where militias led, civilians followed, but the distinctions between them were (and still are) often blurred. The defensive nature of architecture was echoed in many building projects to come. The *Homa Umigdal* collectively provided a fortified network with surveillance that served to control land. Israeli architecture also helped disparate immigrants to identify with each other because ‘the degree of communal unity is directly connected to the imminence and intensity of external threats.’ (Rotbard 2003:49) Moreover, the repetitive pattern of settlements facilitated a homogeneity based on security as well as ideology (see Figures 20 & 21).

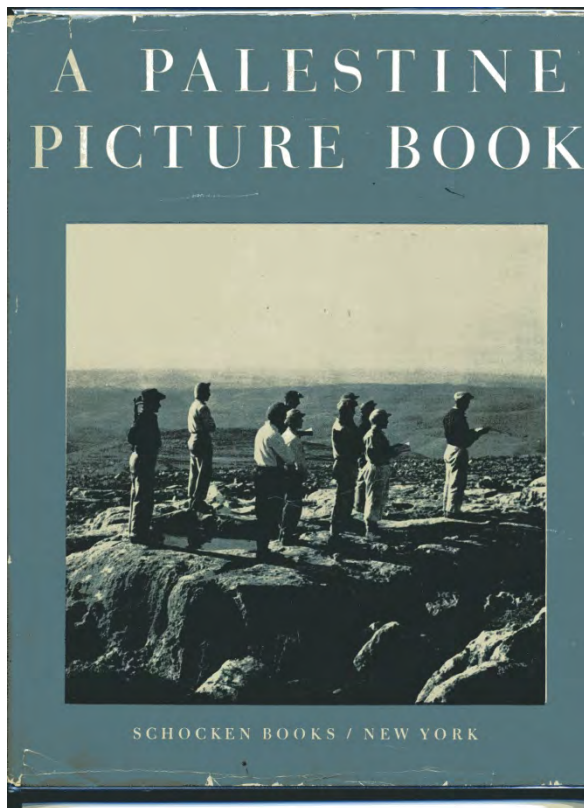
The need for fortification and surveillance determined the location of *Homa Umigdal* and was dependent on a combination of military and civilian activity, a practice that endures today. It was an industrialised process that divided land along strategic lines, taking account of natural resources and military needs. Following the 1948 War a radical territorial restructuring was made possible because of international acceptance of Israeli sovereignty and development of the armed forces.



Figure 25 Raphael Ernst Salus, first man made hill at the *homa unigdal* collective settlement 1936  
<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3530671,00.html> retrieved 02 January 2012

### Colonialism and Photographs

The anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1997) describes colonial photographic practice involving indigenous people as ambivalent from the outset about 'its documentary authority, since it simultaneously seeks to capture individual subjects both as tokens and as types.' This understanding is reinforced when one considers 19<sup>th</sup> Century photographs of the Middle East with captions such as 'The Oriental Harem' to select one among dozens of themes. He argues the function of colonial photographs was to provide an ethnological classification and taxonomy of the 'natives' irrespective of whether the purpose of their making was scientific or official. He believes all colonial photography was used to document and archive imperial mission whether or not photographers were 'part of the gaze of curiosity, of horror, of conversion or of criminology.' (Appadurai 1997)



**Figure 26 Jacob Rosner, 1947<sup>22</sup>**  
Retrieved 28 December 2011

<http://www.danwymmanbooks.com/bibliography/bibliography.htm>

The photographic document enabled colonists to convey differences between them and colonised, and came from people working with the colonial departments, whether soldiers, missionaries or people in commerce (see Figure 26). As art historian Steve Edwards' notes, this dovetailed with the rise of photography in anthropology in the 1870s. He suggests 'images of the colonial other are overwhelmingly predicated on an idea of essential race difference and a concomitant vision of racial superiority.' (Edwards 2006:24) He identifies two tendencies in colonial photography, the first based on a comparative method that grew from developing approaches in police photography. It allowed for a comparison of specimen races, adopting frontal and profile poses of the face at specific distances, likewise for the body, clothed and unclothed. Despite the seeming objectivity in this approach, Edwards

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<sup>22</sup> The cover of Rosner's book appears to show a group of hatted men at prayer with a guard at the edge of the group on the left hand side. As Zeruvabel (1995:33) notes the 'resettlement' of Palestine represented a national rebirth and colonists 'regarded themselves as engaging in the work of Creation, secularising religious metaphors and drawing upon biblical images to highlight their own contribution to the formation of a new national era'

believes that ‘it was steeped in colonial ideology and illicit desire’ and there was no compunction in photographing the hapless naked who lent their image to public scrutiny. (Edwards 2006:24) Many Palestinians have complained about the threat emanating from illicitly acquired photographs by the Israeli security services in seeking to pressure them into becoming informers.

The second involved the ‘projecting of a fantasy of an ethnographic other thought to be outside of modern society, indeed outside of time.’ (Edwards 2006:25) The colonial view was the culture of colonised peoples was not progressive, and incapable of development. The desire to record people in given poses, contexts, and costumes, entrenched the view colonised culture was stuck in the past, but also includes photographers own imaginary conceptions rather than external conditions.<sup>23</sup> The International Colonial Exhibition of 1931 held in Paris, designed to show that colonialism would provide Europeans with a better life opportunity abroad. A park displayed the culture of the various colonies from France, Denmark, Belgium, Italy, Holland and Portugal, enlivened by the presence of native inhabitants of the colonies. The Surrealists reacted by publishing a tract ‘Do Not Visit the Colonial Exhibition!’ They joined forces with the Anti-Imperialist League and the French Communist Party and mounted a counter exhibition ‘The Truth of the Colonies’ that included pictures of atrocities in the colonies amongst other information. Corroborating the view that colonists and their fellow travelers were not averse to photographing all aspects of colonial life historian Adam Hothschild describes the terror and the bloodshed in the Congo (1890-1910) as ‘the first major international atrocity scandal in the age of the telegraph and the camera.’ (2002:4) During King Leopold’s tenure 1880-1920, the population of the Congo was halved.

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.port.ac.uk/special/france1815to2003/chapter6/interviews/filetodownload.26396.en.pdf> Retrieved 23 March 2010.

In Palestine, Sela argues 'colonialist photography unwittingly gave rise to a set of images that would support the Zionist cause.' (Sela 2005:82) Many photographs suggested a sparsely inhabited country. Biblical imagery so popular in the 19th century was intent upon evoking scenes through which a distant audience could vicariously experience the Holy Land. It was possible to believe the daily rhythms of peasant life had scarcely evolved during succeeding centuries. It conjured a view for Zionists of a people who would benefit from an infusion of immigrants with skills and technology. This view of simple peasant life and piety equally evoked a vision of the ancient Hebrews from whom Zionists claimed they were descended. They saw Arabs and particularly Bedouin as inheritors of a way of life that in some imagined past had been properly their own.

Linked to landscape, this is realised through leisure, work pursuits, and symbolic acts that translate into private or public ownership of that place. Zionists were keen to link immigrants to landscape, to tell stories derived from myth and connect them to landscape in a hands-on way. It was linked to a territorial definition, namely a Jewish homeland, creating its own national narrative, through which a sense of national identity would be acquired. The point was to have a strategic presence in Palestine and foster spiritual bonding through ritual and commemoration in public spaces. These had distant historical and contemporary political significance (such as battle sites). Supported by cultural practices and texts of differing sophistication, providing the means to foster and renew national identity in locations throughout the country. For Zionists the aim was to make looking at the landscape like reading a text that would reaffirm belonging as well as be a reminder of the sacrifice and toil needed to hold on to it. Oren suggests that Zionist photographs were mobilised to express national identity through landscape themes as part of an awareness campaign for a domestic

audience. She suggests they were a form of cultural appropriation, commissioned and distributed in booklets, calendars and albums. (Oren 2005)

Despite the singularities of Zionism it shares with other political ideologies of the 20th Century, colonial intentions, partially obscured by the brouhaha of nationalism or Bolshevism. Photographs did not serve these ideologies to advocate colonialism but to depict the benefits of modernisation, technology, and state building. The idea was to build a better life, and in the perception of Zionism, a secure homeland with the support of powerful nations. The depiction of labour, of technology, of community endeavour and progress, displaying the success of Zionism also reveal colonial greed, its essential project for land and resources, passed off as a just cause. Missing from these narratives was the fate of those in their way. There was rarely a dissenting view, emphasising rather than hiding, colonial discourse present in visual depictions of Arabs, indigenous people colonialism invariably subdued, for as long as possible. Zionist albums left no doubt Arabs lagged behind Israelis in most regards. At best, Arabs were beneficiaries of an advanced Israel, at worst were hidden from view.

Missing from the Zionist (if not Israeli) photographic narrative, are photographs that dissent from the mainstream view in blatant opposition (though this does not mean such work does not exist). Neither does there appear to be idiosyncratic photographs offering an alternative interpretation of Zionism. Innovative photographs were found in the commercial sector, often recorded by German photographers such as Kluger and his contemporaries. In the absence of biographical information it is difficult to be categorical about the political convictions of these photographers. The assumption is most would have been comfortable with Zionism and relieved in a competitive environment, to be employed by one of the political agencies to



record the progress of Zionism. However, some photographers did not settle permanently and left either for economic, political, or social reasons. Such decisions could not have come easily, particularly for those who had forged ties and put down roots, but it does beg the question of how driven they must have been to leave.

### **Biblical archaeology**

One difference between Zionism and secular Jewish nationalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was the adoption of the Hebrew Bible into Zionist ideology. It was considered essential to establishing an identity for Jews in Palestine. 'Before the Jews had a country, they had forged a country in their imagination that was the destiny of their desire' (Piterberg 2009:195 citing Shapira). The Bible was seen as a tool to reinforce the Jewish claim to ancient Israel. Zionists endorsed biblical archaeology, hoping it would realise historical continuity. Martin Buber pointed to the relationship between Jews and the land that would serve their needs for a full life but also be completed by the presence of Jews upon it. Ben Gurion elaborated upon this and saw the Bible as having a direct relationship with Jews and the land, testimony to Jewish life in earlier times as well as a blueprint for Hebrew culture in the resurrected state. (Shapira 2004:11) It was considered essential to establishing an identity for Jews in Palestine. As Ben Gurion expressed it before the Peel Commission in 1937, 'The British Mandate is not our Bible, but rather the Bible is our mandate to the land.' (Piterberg 2009:197) Ben Gurion realised the value in promoting the Bible within Zionism as a foil to the Marxist oriented *Mapam* Party because they looked to the Soviet Union for guidance. It was for this reason Ben Gurion shut down the *Palmach* that had close links to *Mapam*. *Palmach* fighters 'regarded the 1948 War as a missed opportunity, as they believed Israel could have seized all of Western Palestine.' (Pappe 2004:147) *Mapam* remained hawkish for years to come with little regard for the Palestinians they dispossessed.

Archaeology has long been driven by the idea that ownership of history is entitlement to the land itself. It spearheads a turf war of the imagination and spills into several fields of scholarship. In two decades following the 1967 War an estimated 730 sites were excavated in the West Bank and 170 in East Jerusalem. Some argued the digs were aimed at shoring up Israel's claims to occupied territory but many findings actually undermined the basic premises of biblical archaeology. (Segev 2007) To this day archaeology is a political tool of Zionism and its most acute expression can be found in Jerusalem.

Archaeology in Palestine developed in the 19th Century alongside that of imperial cultures as in Egypt and Mesopotamia. In Palestine there was enthusiasm for anything that would support biblical accounts or curious doctrines like chiliasm that fed into British support of Jewish claims to Palestine. Chiliasm was inspired by a biblical prophecy that spoke of the restoration of Jews from the Diaspora into Israel, leading to their conversion to Christianity. As early as 1808 the London Society for Promoting Christianity among Jews was established and one of its luminaries, the Earl of Shaftesbury, was influential in lobbying for the creation of a British consulate in Jerusalem in 1838. Part of its mission was the 'protection of Jewish interests, and granting Palestinian Jews British citizenship.' (Fox 2001:58) In 1853, Shaftesbury wrote in his diary 'There is a country without a nation; and God now in his wisdom and mercy, directs us to a nation without a country'. He said much the same in a letter to the Foreign Secretary, Lord Palmerston in July of that year. (Muir 2008) For Zionism, as settler colonialism, it was vital that 'the appropriation of the national homeland through the Bible and biblical archaeology' worked in two directions to be 'simultaneously claimed for the Jewish nation, and implicitly denied to the indigenous foe.' (Piterberg 2008:260)

By 1865 the Palestine Exploration Fund was sponsoring cartography and excavations, the one for a territorial knowledge that was essential to the business of empire, the other to 'corroborate biblical texts about Palestine through retrieving artefacts from the ground.' (Zureik 2002) Two strands of biblical scholarship were used to interpret the rise of ancient Israel, one was the German approach and the other was American, considered the nation of immigrants.

The biblical scholar Julius Wellhausen contested biblical historiography was formulated during the Babylonian Exile but suggested instead it was a reconstruction of a historical narrative with a theological purpose. (Herzog 1999) Wellhausen did not accept there had been a consecutive series of events as described in the Bible whilst as Piterberg points out, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Germans analysed 'the ancient Israelites through the lens of Bismarck's unification and creation of a nation state.' (Piterberg 2008:263)

The archaeologist William Albright took the contrary view suggesting the Bible was a historical document, despite numerous revisions, corresponding to ancient reality. He excavated in Palestine in the 1920s with the intention of using science to refute the claims of sceptics. In Albright's mind it wasn't the job of archaeology to question the truth of scriptures but to confirm their truth. He was interested in the Old Testament narrative (Book of Joshua 1-11) that recounts how Israelites conquered and dispossessed Canaanites, settling in their place. It was a story with evident appeal to Zionists, who read in it a justification for their own re-entry into Israel. For example, Albright saw the conquest of indigenous Amerindians by colonists, a process of extermination or containment in reservations, as inevitable. In 1957, from the 'impartial standpoint' of a historian, he wrote 'it often seems necessary that a people of markedly inferior type should vanish before a people of superior potentialities,

since there is a point beyond which racial mixture cannot go without disaster.’ (Piterberg 2008:263)

Yet neither Albright nor archaeologist Amihai Mazar came up with evidence concerning biblical texts such as the exodus or wanderings in the desert. Nor is there evidence of the conquest of Canaanites detailed in the Book of Joshua, whilst elsewhere, there is no mention of Egyptian presence in Palestine despite excavations attesting to their rule until the 12<sup>th</sup> Century BC. When archaeologist Ze’ev Herzog aired his conclusions in *Ha’aretz* newspaper it was reminiscent of the way New Historians challenged received wisdom of the 1948 War a decade earlier. Ironic that, ‘the fidelity to scientific truth of the archaeologists of Herzog’s generation has refuted precisely that which was supposed to be confirmed and reasserted.’ (Piterberg 2008:259)

Archaeologist Albert Glock explored the idea of archaeology as cultural survival after jettisoning his earlier commitment to biblical archaeology. (1994)<sup>24</sup> He understood archaeology was vulnerable to subjective findings due to ideology closely allied to nationalism. He was dismayed by the prevalence of digs that favoured the Iron Age above other periods because it spanned the biblical patriarchs through to the destruction of the First Temple. He was following both the Copenhagen School (biblical exegesis or Minimalist Thought) and the New Archaeologists emerging during the 1960s. Both questioned assumptions upon which excavations were based, in effect, what is found is what is looked

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<sup>24</sup> A footnote to an article written by Dr Albert Glock published in 1994 mentions that the archaeologist was killed by an unidentified gunman in Bir Zeit, the West Bank university town where Glock worked. He was shot three times from a distance of one metre by a military handgun. The murder was barely investigated by the Israeli authorities despite the fact that Glock was an American citizen attached to a Palestinian university during a troubled period. The murder as well as its motive remains unsolved.

for, arguing ‘archaeology is objective, scientific inquiry separate from and uncontaminated by political agendas.’ (Steen 2000:10)

The historian Danielle Steen links archaeological and nationalist narratives, arguing narrative is a means to understanding the relationship between archaeology and nationalism. She claims archaeologists in Israel produce narratives that draw upon nationalist themes (thus undermining rigorous scholarship) and in turn are aired in public discourse. She sees a historical trend to ‘privilege narratives associated with Jews and Israelis over those of the Palestinians.’(2000:4) Steen suggests archaeology was used to bolster modern Israeli identity ‘reinforcing the claims of the state to the land by creating a fictive continuity between modern and ancient Israel.’ (Steen 2000:5) Most celebrated were sites related to Jewish revolts against the Roman Empire, particularly Masada.<sup>25</sup>

Herzog (1999) argues that the Israeli academic community accepts serious anomalies in biblical accounts, but Jerusalem, extensively excavated, has not yielded evidence to support the conviction it was the capital of an empire in the time of David and Solomon. The Israeli academic community appears unable to persuade the public of the significance of findings despite the evidence available. Challenges to the Bible are ‘perceived as an attempt to undermine “our historic right to the land” and as shattering the myth of the nation that is renewing the ancient kingdom of Israel.’(Herzog 1999)

The right of Jews to struggle for self-determination was a cornerstone of Zionism as was the need for a homeland as a persecuted nation. The symbolic importance of this was secondary to the notion of historic justice implied by their return to the homeland. ‘The term “exile”

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<sup>25</sup> The site became a pilgrimage for droves of school children and the narrative that accompanies the Masada experience is compelling. It was a former palace of Herod the Great and the place where Jews chose to kill one another rather than be captured by Roman forces sent to finish off the revolt.

served the Zionists not only as a means of rejecting the past, but also as a way of presenting Jewish existence outside the Land of Israel as a temporary reality.’ (Almog 2000:44) For Zionists, Jewish exile had been imposed and their moral right to Palestine was never questioned in the *Yishuv*. This right implied ownership and was never challenged by Israeli society until 1967. It would have been a fillip to the Zionist cause had biblical archaeology come up with evidence, vindicating their arguments.

Certainly for *Sabra* the myth of the right to the land had considerable influence on their thinking and made it wholly acceptable that territories were annexed from Arabs in the 1948 war. They saw it as liberation of land once belonging to their ancestors and if so ‘then the Sabra warrior who freed them was not simply a second generation immigrant...but the successor to the biblical boy who walked in his sandals over the mountains of Canaan.’ (Almog 2000:45) More than others *Sabra* felt themselves natives of the soil even though they were immigrants or children of immigrants.

Even modern Diaspora narratives are interpreted to further aims of Zionism. The historian Gulia Sylvie Nakache (2006:219) argues Israel is ‘a space with multiple narrative “memories”, long overlooked, ignored or marginalised in the name of national construction.’ Israel faced a challenge absorbing immigrants and managing the merger between *Ashkenazi* and *Sephardic* branches of Judaism. The state had to confiscate ‘the many memories of the exile, so as to place them back within the setting of a national memory.’ (Nakache 2006:220) She cites the subordination of the memory of Jews from Iraq within the dominant Zionist narrative. After Israel declared independence, Ben Gurion was keen to accelerate immigration, inviting Jews from the Land of Islam.

### **Ethnocentric myth**

The historian Shlomo Zand (2008) questions the identity of Jews (if not of Palestinians) offering a further challenge to Zionist historiography. He argues the Romans never expelled Jews en masse after the destruction of the Second Temple. This is a basic premise of Zionism and 'without the ethnocentric myth, which states that all Jews are the descendants of exiles from the Second Temple period, Zionism had nothing to go on.' For Zand, Jews in the Diaspora are likely the descendants of converts.<sup>26</sup> *Sephardim*, Jews in North Africa, are thought to be of Berber extraction, owing their origins to a tribe that converted. For Jews in Eastern Europe it is argued they are a Turkish-Hun people, the Khazars. Conversion to Judaism by Khazars was the most significant demographic increase to Jewish populations anywhere. Zand believes Jews of Eastern Europe are a mix of Slavs and Khazars and not, as Zionist historiography suggests, a result of German Jews founding the Yiddish community. The ideas put forward by Zand suggest that whilst the Khazar conversion was known about as early as the 1950s the information was concealed from Zionist discourse and the public arena largely for political reasons. The state builders did not want the immigrants and citizens to have doubts about their direct descent from the 'children of Israel.' Zand's arguments have been challenged not least for the flaws in the arguments but for poor scholarship as well. (Bartal 2008)

Palestinians<sup>27</sup> are possibly offspring of Jews who lived during the Second Temple era. Even if thousands were dispersed to Babylon or killed by Romans to crush dissent, Jews in their majority stayed put on farms and in communities. Following Arab conquest of the region many Jews converted to Islam and assimilated into the new order. Ben Gurion and Yitzhak

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<sup>26</sup> For example, the Jews in the Yemen kingdom of Himyar converted in the 4th Century AD and are the descendants of an Arab tribe.

<sup>27</sup> A popular Zionist argument suggests that a great many Arabs living in Palestine during the British Mandate era were recent immigrants attracted there both by the British and Jewish presence which offered employment opportunities.

Ben-Zvi (the second Israeli president) accepted the idea the progenitors of Palestinian Arabs were Jews, at least thirty years before Israel became a state. (Segev 2008) Ben-Zvi wrote in 1929 that, 'the vast majority of the peasant farmers do not have their origins in the Arab conquerors, but rather, before then, in the Jewish farmers who were numerous and a majority in the building of the land.' (Ilani 2008) Nonetheless, the preamble to the declaration of Israel's independence states Jews were 'forcibly exiled from their land, the people remained faithful to it throughout their dispersion.' (Ilani 2008) This is something most Israeli children learn in school, that their ancestors were expelled circa 70 AD and yet remained loyal and 'never ceased to pray and hope for their return to it and for the restoration in it of their political freedom.' (Ilani 2008) Zand argues this is a fiction and there never were a Jewish people only a Jewish religion, proselytising its faith.



## Chapter 3 Photography in the Holy Land, the *Yishuv*, and Israel

### Beginnings

More than 170 years have elapsed since photography took root in the Holy Land when it was a modest province in the Ottoman Empire. Control of Palestine passed to the British in 1917 and after 1948 was divided between Israel, Egypt and Jordan. From the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century, Europeans and Americans were photographing the Holy Land, partly to satisfy resurgent interest in religion prevalent in Europe, as well as servicing imperial ambition, and interests of Christian nations. Photographers emphasised biblical heritage and romanticised the Orient. Photographs served various branches of military, government departments and police, as British forces became entrenched. The mapping of Palestine required photographs.

When British forces overran Palestine tourism was developing and mass-produced *Kodak* cameras were available for \$1 USD. Photographic studios opened across Palestine and Jewish immigration increased throughout the Mandate bringing photographers from Central and Eastern Europe. There were Arab and Armenian photographers, many in Jerusalem, serving tourism and local needs. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Palestine was a small, Eastern Mediterranean country whose landscape was soon transformed, but already recorded in photographs. The interests were missionary and colonial, and expressed little enthusiasm for photographing the indigenous community, except as typologies reflecting the scholarship of the period.

The photographic historian, Issam Nassar (2003:321) suggests trying to describe photographers' as being local or indigenous to Palestine is fraught. He says the *Millet* system (a non-Moslem religious community) operating within the Ottoman Empire makes such distinctions difficult. Connection to, and identification with the system, was more important than facts and location of birth. Jerusalem was merely one city amongst others in the regions

of empire, its religious and political significance more recent, arising in the 19th Century. Nassar (2003:322) describes three categories of photographer in Jerusalem at the turn of the century, visiting, resident and local. Locals appeared last of all, most trained by visiting and resident photographers, and put to work portraying Palestine as the Holy Land. Resident photographers were European and American, first opening studios in Istanbul, Beirut and Cairo. Armenian and Turkish photographers followed but Nassar classes them as local, beginning in the late 1870s.

Historian Badr Al-Hajj (2001) notes development of 19th Century photography in the Levant 'is inseparable from the colonialist enterprise with which it coincided.' This began with Napoleon Bonaparte's Egyptian Campaign that opened floodgates for 'an influx of numerous artists, archaeologists, academics, photographers and soldiers, many of them into "scientific" or "religious" missions.' (Al-Hajj 2001)<sup>28</sup> This was followed by research institutions linked first to European, then American universities, feeding a stream of data furthering European dominance of the region.

Foreigners recorded scenes Sela suggests are colonial unconsciously serving Zionists by implying Palestine was thinly populated with room for settlement. In the European mind the effect was similar as they recorded images of an uncluttered biblical past and little more. Zionism exploited this genre to link Hebrews of biblical times with Diaspora Jews of the present. In this respect, as a cultural and historical entity, Arabs were marginalised, allowing

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<sup>28</sup> In the Palestinian narrative, prior to the rise of Zionism, Napoleon is said to have offered Jews a state in Palestine in return for their support in a document published in April 1799. There are references to this in the Hebrew Encyclopaedia as well as the Carta Historical Atlas but the commentary implies that it was viewed as propaganda and dismissed as unimportant. Whether or not Napoleon's offer was more than hot air, it was for Palestinians a blueprint for Jewish colonialism on their doorstep. The Palestinian narrative follows this colonial strand when they accuse Moses Montefiore of articulating in 1845 the idea of the transfer of Palestinians to Turkey in order to create more room in Palestine to accommodate Jewish immigration. (Rubinstein 2005)

Zionists to lay claim to an ancient homeland and in effect to right a perceived wrong, that of unfair dispossession.

Nassar (2003:320) observes over two thousand books about Palestine were published from 1800-78. This was due to many travellers and numerous expeditions scouring the Holy Land. It is in this capacity photography was introduced into the Levant, accompanying the 'advent of modernity in general, a process largely connected with political and social events whose centre lay in distant places.' (Nassar 2003:321) Europeans were lured by a 'romantic passion for imaginary and exotic sites' that photographers did their best to create. (Nassar 2003:321) Photography was a 'referent of European modernity' an instrument 'to prove the colonial fiction, that difference and inequality between peoples, nations, classes and religions was the normal order of the world.' (Nassar 2009:37)

'Zionist discourse and its insistence on ignoring native histories of Palestine' resulted in a history of photography of Jerusalem from which the role of Arab and Armenian photographers is largely absent. (Nassar 2003:324) He is not alone in remarking this, the anthropologist Annelies Moors (2001:1) for example, suggests 'when political power is contested, images are far from innocent.' She cites the spread of postcards of Palestine in the early part of the 20th Century in Europe and America that satisfied a curious public that had no alternative depictions to compare with. Many postcards could be read as biblical allegories and locals were used as stand-ins to re-enact stories and parables.

*National Geographic* ran a major spread 'Village Life in the Holy Land' in 1914. Moors (2001:3) suggests the feature depicted daily life in fields and villages, intended to 'explain Biblical events not contemporary ones' though this assumed the Arab way of life had not changed in centuries. The feature transformed Palestine into 'a "living museum", its historical

and contemporary character erased.’ This, despite the fact Palestine was undergoing considerable transformation, or that postcards in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century showed scenes recorded three or more decades earlier. (Moors 2010:94) She argues photographs of Jews and Arabs were influenced by scientific and religious discourse. Categorising subjects along religious or ethnic templates was part of what photographs showed, borrowing notions of social evolution, already discarded by some scientists. It did not prevent publications from indulging in unflattering comparisons. ‘Notions of Christian women as beautiful and happy, and Moslem women as unattractive, downtrodden and subordinated’ could be found in travel guides. (Moors 2001:4)

Religious motifs were favoured but reinforced the idea that Arabs were ‘depicted as living not only in another place, but in another time, an earlier historical epoch, that the viewers had long left behind.’ (Moors 2010:95) This distance between viewer and photographed was emphasised by captions that constantly referred to the Bible, and use of locations where its stories could be re-enacted with models using costumes as needed. Jews were similarly depicted excepting elderly men who ‘were seen as condemned to drift homeless for their refusal to accept Christianity.’ (Moors 2010:98) Nor was this approach confined to the Holy Land, the entire Middle East was photographed to suit the passions and beliefs of a distant audience.

Photographs divided people as nomads, villagers or townfolk, in evolutionary progression. Nomads were shown as contemporaneous with biblical patriarchs, whilst villagers were represented as medieval suggests Moors. Urban scenes owed more to the 19th than to the 20th Century. *National Geographic* during the 1930s and 40s often dwelt on Bedouins perceived to be carrying on a way of life as described in the Bible and thought to have remained unchanged. (Moors 2001:4) A fascination for Bedouin culture was shared by *Sabra*

but Arab life otherwise was of scant interest to *National Geographic*. It turned its attention to Jewish life, and along with other magazines, ‘the Zionist movements and the new Jewish immigrants became the major protagonists of progress and development.’ (Moors 2001:5) Figure 27 is a typical depiction in which machinery or other technology dominates the foreground, not merely to stress the march of progress but also to show that Jews rather than Arabs had the know how to achieve it.



**Figure 27 Naftali Oppenheim, Building the Jordan Rift Valley, ca. 1949**  
<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3354572,00.html> Retrieved 26 December 2011

Biblical postcards declined as the century progressed, replaced with other themes. Among these were Jewish immigrants and pioneering scenes, promoted by the commercial sector and Zionist agencies (like the Jewish National Fund and the Foundation Fund). *Palphot* was a leading postcard producer founded in 1934, producing series such as ‘We build up Palestine’ that shared the outlook of Zionist agencies. Moors recalls an interview with the owners of *Palphot* who describe the postcards as ‘showing muscular men building Jewish cities in the desert and robust maidens merrily harvesting fruit in the *kibbutz* orchards’ believing the

postcards played their part in promoting independence. (Moors 2010:99) Figure 28 illustrates their point. The images not only signalled the difference between Jews in Palestine and those in the Diaspora and often showed peaceable Jews always in reach of a gun just in case.



**Figure 28 Citrus orchard Degania 1948, Boris Carmi**  
*Boris Carmi Photographs of Women 1940-80 Israel Museum 2006*

At a minimum suggests Nassar, 250 European photographers worked in Palestine from 1839-1885.<sup>29</sup> By the turn of the century the number had risen significantly; travel became easier and developments in camera technology no longer necessitated bulky equipment and glass

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<sup>29</sup> Notable among them are Francis Frith, Francis Bedford, George Wilson Bridges, James Graham, James Robertson, the Cramb brothers, Felix Bonfils, Maxim Du Camp, Felice Beato, Auguste Salzmann, Louis Vignes, Frederic Goupil-Fesquet and Frank Mason Good.

negatives. In 1888 and 1891 respectively George Eastman introduced the gelatin plate negative and nitrocellulose film. Reduced camera size, increased shutter speed, and improving optics, appealed to a growing market of photographers.

Armenians pioneered photography in the Ottoman Empire inspired by the literary and nationalist renaissance that Diaspora Armenians encouraged in the Near East and the Caucasus. Further facilitated by Armenian migration from the provinces to Istanbul, and to their receptiveness to the spread of European influence in culture and science in Turkey. As Christians they did not face quandaries of portraying human images as Moslems and Jews did. By the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Armenian, Assyrian, and other minorities had studios scattered throughout the Ottoman Empire and Egypt. El-Hage (2007:23) suggests, 'Armenians dominated the photography production market in the East until the mid-twentieth century.' There were growing numbers of Europeans either living in Istanbul or passing through as pilgrims, tourists and merchants, some of them travelling on to the Levant and Egypt. (El-Hage 2007:25) This fuelled the demand for photographs and Armenians swiftly stepped in to meet it.

In Jerusalem, the Armenian priest Yessai Garabedian began teaching photography to Armenians in late 1859 and the classes played an important role in the spread of photography across the city. The young photographer Khalil Ra'ad attended classes with Garabedian. (El-Hage 2007:26) Garabed Krikorian, another Armenian, opened a studio in Jerusalem circa 1885 followed, in 1898, by the studio of Khalil Ra'ad who had also trained with Krikorian. Also in the same year, the American Colony Group started a studio that was established by Swedish missionaries responsible for training another Arab photographer, Hanna Safieh. (Nassar 2000) Safieh and Ra'ad were pioneers of Palestinian photojournalism and in 1946, when Safieh joined British Mandate Authorities as a public information officer he had access

to military and political events. Unfortunately, many of his negatives of the period are lost. In the 1967 War his studio was looted but some photographs survive, mostly in publications such as *Reader's Digest* and *National Geographic*. At the time Safieh worked, most Palestinian photographers were busy with social usage (weddings, portraiture and gatherings) and few were documenting the political scene. In April 1948 he photographed the funeral of resistance leader, Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni, killed in the skirmish of al-Qastal near Jerusalem. The following day, 9 April, he photographed corpses at a nearby village, Deir Yassin, where a massacre occurred, though these photographs apparently are no longer to be found. However, enough of his archive survived to produce a retrospective monograph produced by his son Raffi, *A man and his camera, photographs of Palestine 1927-67* (1999). Khalil Ra'ad also had his studio in Jaffa Road, Jerusalem, looted in the aftermath of the 1948 War, and it is difficult not to view these two break-ins as suspicious. 'Aside from the 1230 glass plates his archives contain numerous negative films' that were rescued by a friend of Ra'ad's. (al-Hajj 2001) Oxford University has his collection of forty prints depicting Ottoman soldiers in Palestine but what remains of his archives remain to be explored.

It is difficult to know exactly what was lost in the Ra'ad and Safieh archives and there seems to be no written record or notes left by either photographer. Yet there can be no doubt about their importance to Palestinian photography and specifically to a documentary approach. Up to a point this approach was present in the photographs commissioned by NGOs and international organisations present in the region since WWII and with them another source of photographs emerges around 1950. Notable was the UN agency charged with providing humanitarian assistance to Palestine refugees. At first, photographs document the work of the agency (UNRWA) used for fundraising, then to 'interpolate the UN, local and international press, governments of refugees' host countries, refugees themselves and UNRWA staff."



(Abdallah 2009:43) The historian Stephanie Latte Abdallah asserts that ‘audience and reception’ was a critical factor in the production of images. UNRWA film and photography staff was engaged in production of scripts and visuals building an archive over four decades. UNRWA was an instrument of the international community and had to be careful describing what was photographed. A key example is the dispossession and expulsion of Palestinians that is never referred to explicitly in UNRWA texts.

The ICRC and the American Friends Service Committee also recorded documentary photographs but had different mandates reflected in the work produced. Both recorded scenes of the growth of refugee camps. Nassar (2009:33) points out the diverse groups of photographers had agendas but ‘it should not be forgotten that photographs are artefacts produced in particular historical, social and cultural contexts as well as by individual photographers, who themselves are complex and often contradictory.’

Conditions during the war and its aftermath were difficult physically as well as politically. UNRWA was in an invidious position picking up the pieces the UN had itself created with the 181 Partition Plan. The photographs produced by UNRWA, suggests Nassar, ‘are not essentially about refugees – the subject of the photos – rather about the agency’s work.’ It meant showing the UN was functioning well, avoiding offending member states, especially those directly involved. The language in film scripts and captions was carefully worded and described refugees as having fled their homes rather than having been forcibly removed. ‘The notion that these people simply “fled” was an integral part of a propaganda campaign that has proven to be entirely unfounded.’ (Nassar 2009:35) The UN used politically neutral vocabulary in its public messaging even at the risk of distorting the facts of dispossession.

Photographs by Arabs, Armenians and British, disclose their own perspectives and the impression is one of communities leading separate ways but sharing geography. In Arab Palestine photographs were not used in the service of a political ideology, they did not perceive the need to go into the fields like Soviets or Zionists to photograph one another tilling the soil of a new and better land. There was no political mission photography was harnessed to, and Palestinian photographs do not consciously contradict the Zionist narrative or construct a narrative of Palestine. Arab photographs gradually engage politically in the 1940s as conflict spread. Even so, the approach remained unstructured as compared with the use of photographs by Zionists. The problem with this source of photographs is they are widely scattered and not always available to the public. From what is in the public domain however, there are ample photographs from which Palestinian narratives could be developed, including foreign NGOs and press agencies. The fact remains, however, that even more than Israeli photographs, the study of Palestinian photographs and of photographs about Palestine are scarcely begun.

### **Photographs in the *Yishuv***

The suggested starting point for proto-Israeli photography came in 1906 when *Bezalel* School for Art was founded. A more fitting date suggests Perez (2000) would be 1898. It was then that Theodor Herzl visited Palestine when Kaiser Wilhelm II was in Jerusalem on a tour of the Near East. The two met in an encounter celebrated in Zionist folklore and remembered in a photograph.<sup>30</sup> Perez claims the first Jewish photographers were Zionists whose ‘photography reflected naïve, romantic Zionism in a quest for roots and Jewish identity in the land of the ancestors.’ (Perez 1997) The photographs portrayed the first settlers and their

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<sup>30</sup> The photographer, David Wolfsson, was compelled to use photomontage with the complicity of Herzl, to combine his photograph with that of the Kaiser after failing to photograph them together at their meeting. The significance to Zionism of the encounter and of its memorialising in photography was a portent of things to come.

return to the land and to agriculture. They were recorded in documentary style but ‘conveyed the photographer’s deep concern and sense of belonging, their pride and joy in the development of the country.’ (Perez 1997) He believes many were self-taught, worked in an insular environment and, until the 1950s, ‘undisturbed (unspoiled?) by the already established canons and aesthetics of photography.’ (Perez 1997) This observation is considered further in Chapter 5.

Jewish photography was utilitarian but because it had no artistic pretensions, tended to disclose unsentimental images of people building up communities. It produced a ‘vernacular photography of *Eretz* Israel, a photographic genre and practice native and peculiar to this particular country and society.’ (Perez 2000:9) Perez separates Jewish from Ottoman and European photography in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century and first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup>. Jewish photography was preoccupied with Zionist ideals and ‘instrumental in the creation of a collective consciousness and memory loaded with biases which, at that time, were indispensable.’ (Perez 2000:9) Photography played a role in ‘imagery at the service of the Zionist ideal.’ (Perez 2000:9) A key role ‘was the creation of a new mythology and a nationalist myth for a nation in formation.’ (Perez 2000:9)

Until the mid-1920s, photography was confined to those recording the developing country. It was as social commentary in pursuit of Zionist ideals rather than as artistic or personal exploration. Twenty years later, as Figure 29 shows, not much has changed in terms of mythologizing but the march of progress continued. In this layout both photographs are linked; the plane a potent symbol of protection for the Zionists and the young girl representing the nation’s future is the object of protection. However, at this time with war looming, images that showed Israeli modernity or superior technology was a boost to morale.

Figure 29 also reflects the importance attached to the role women in all spheres of Israeli life, at least in photographs. It also underlines the role of the pilot, a role revered by the Israeli public, rather as it had been in Britain and Germany during the war years, and air power was as important in psychological terms for Israeli civilians as it was in military terms for the armed forces. ‘Israelis have no more powerful symbol than the Jewish pilot’ (Ben-Ami 2009). Pilots were widely regarded as the embodiment of a ‘New Jew’ and this reflected the growing status of pilots internationally following WW1. The few Jewish pilots of this period were lionised and this continued with the establishing of an air service in the *Haganah* and peaked with the air campaign in the 1967 War that destroyed Egyptian air power whilst it was still on the ground. ‘The Israelis in the air were perceived not just as clever or daring but also as more beautiful.’ (Ben-Ami 2009)



Figure 29 Zoltan Kluger, cover, *Dvar Hashavua* 1947

Arriving immigrants brought a familiarity with European photography and noteworthy were German photographers, who left ‘a lasting mark on the thirties, influencing photographic vision until the late 1950s.’ (Perez 2000:9) According to Oren and Paz (2008) German photographers arrived with the fifth wave of immigration 1939-40 constituting a second generation. As their predecessors had, they photographed an idyllic view of settlements and immigrant life but curators such as Oren and Paz think this was done in a more convincing way. Photographic historian Ruth Oren cites a number of publications during this period where this work was shown. For example, *Keren Hayesod* (1946) *Emek Jezreel 1921-1946* *25 Jahre arbeit Jerusalem, A Palestine Picture Book* (1947) and *Israel, the Land of Yesterday and Tomorrow* (1958) both edited by Beni Rothenberg and *Land of Israel* (1958) edited by Harman and Yadin. Occasionally photographers were sent on assignment to Palestine from abroad as was the case for Tim Gidal who was sent in 1930 by *Munchener Illustrierte Presse* to do a story called ‘Arabs against Jews.’

The rise of the Nazis prompted the flight of photographers into the *Yishuv*.<sup>31</sup> Some found work with Zionist institutions or serving the international press. In the 1930s there was not much demand by the local press for news photographs, as it was ill equipped and under-resourced, unable to compete with better financed Zionist institutions. During WWII the situation temporarily reversed, a declining demand from the institutions and a growing one for news of the Arab-Israeli War in 1948 fed by the local press. Photographers opened studios (often cramped and improvised) but the competition for work was fierce, compelling the introduction of official licences issued by Tel Aviv Municipality. The number of photographers was simply too large among German immigrants or *Yekkes* as they were

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<sup>31</sup> Among them were Tim Gidal, Alfred Bernheim, Helmar Lerski, Hans Pinn, Walter Zadek, Alfons Himmelreich, Ellen Auerbach, Lilly Brauer, Anna Landes and Liselotte Grschebina. Despite the absence of Hebrew for the most part immigrant photographers managed to work without too much constraint.

known.<sup>32</sup> It has been suggested that in order to adapt to a new country, the immigrant has to shrug off the former identity by constructing a new one that is also part of a new community. Jewish studies Professor Eran Kaplan suggests that the Germans did have a sense of belonging but preferred their own version of integration that was slower than for other communities. (2008:150)

German photographers had the advantage of familiarity with German culture that Zionists drew inspiration from and modelled their style of nation building programmes on. However nationalist in intention the commemorative albums, they frequently display the symbols associated with colonial movements. Redemption of the land through settlement, the plough and the rifle, the white foreigner roaming outside of Europe armed with advanced technology. The difference between Zionist and other colonial movements perhaps, was the strength of the idea of a return to the land of Jewish forefathers. Though this subject is bitterly disputed, the right of return of Jews to Israel is widely accepted among Jews and this alleged ancestral link clouds minds to the idea that colonialism was the driving force of Zionism. Equally, there are many who ask what real alternatives were there to repeated pogroms and the limited possibility of sanctuary in most parts of Europe?

Immigrant photographers worked under direction for the Zionist agencies. 'The photographers were enlisted in propagating Zionism, both on an ideological and operative level' and (as part of the wider intelligentsia) were drafted into the 'building of a native Jewish-Zionist identity.' (Oren & Raz 2008:8) This orchestration of nation building stymied early published photographs as uniformity and attention to the themes Zionism promoted,

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<sup>32</sup> The term *Yekke* does not have a precise meaning or known provenance but was initially used in a pejorative way. The High Court ruled on the term in 1979 and described it as a term of honour and the person addressed was honest, educated and scrupulous (Kaplan 2008:151). The *Yekkes* had to bear the brunt of jokes and satire because of their visible difficulties in casting off their past.

often furnished contrived rather than observed images. 'Official' photographs used for political ends were subject to anonymous censorship and filtering by editors, posing the question of how far they reflected what was there to be seen, and how far it was a constructed view, the photographer just one of many involved in the dissemination of the image.

Many immigrant photographers wrote to the Zionist Archive seeking commissions, financial support, and even recognition. Judith Caplan, a curator of the Israel Museum, stated 'the battle was crude, blatant and acute, and they all participated in it – veteran photographers and old-new photographers.' (Karpel 2008) Competition was fierce and supply outstripped demand. It took time for immigrants to adjust to life in Jewish Palestine and for some the process of integration was slower. German Jews for example, were reluctant to abandon their culture. Those sympathetic to Zionism probably found it easier to adjust but immigration was both an individual experience as well as a collective one. The arrival of trained photographers in a community where photography was present added to the development of commercial and social photographs, but few gained recognition or were published during their working life.

Zionist organisations used photographs in ways that included advertisements, magic lantern slides, postcards and cigarette cards. For example, the cigarette company, Dubek, issued 216 printed cards that could be collected in an album. Published in the 1940s, the album collection was divided in themes, defence, sport and conquering the land. Many of the photographs were by Zoltan Kluger who recorded them in 1938-9. (Oren and Raz 2008:33) Kluger went on to produce a series of a thousand aerial photographs some of which, in 1938, were published in luxury editions and offered as gifts to dignitaries. The aim of this was fund raising in the Diaspora and the United Israel Appeal (as it became known) established a

photography service in 1921 that by 1947 had acquired an archive of 15,000 negatives. These photographs served domestic markets such as schools, the Hebrew University and kibbutzim. There were differences of opinion in how Zionism should be portrayed akin to debates in other countries where some were aesthetic others political.

In Zionist albums the Arab presence or not (akin to the fate of Arab villages) wandered between the deliberate, the unconscious, and the unavoidable. The propaganda and dreams provided by film and photographs was a vital component of Zionist communication from the 1930s until 1948 when the Israeli state was inaugurated. Thereafter, there was a need to reaffirm a national identity, often coinciding with periodic rounds of conflict, resulting in more commemorative albums. Zionism had created a state where none had existed previously, fashioning an imagined community where immigrants arrived from several cultures, speaking different languages, with little in common, other than religion.

A feature of this implanted community was the discarding of the image of wandering Jew of the Diaspora in favour of the new, muscled Jew, and colonist. David Ben Gurion, the first Israeli prime minister, cited for example, Salonika as ‘a Jewish city unlike any other in the world, not even in Eretz Israel’ when referring to the characteristics of Greek Jews whom he thought embodied the qualities needed to build up the Jewish state in Palestine. The writer Primo Levi (1947) also referred to the qualities of Greek Jews in his book *If this is a Man* in appreciation of their community spirit, the adoption of physical culture in their daily life, and their participation in the revolt of the *Sonderkommando*, October 7 1944 in Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. (Aini 2010)

Figure 30, from 1896, recorded in a studio with painted backdrop of Jerusalem’s Old City, shows a group scene, studiously posed young men wearing Bedouin costumes or resembling



Ottomans in tunic and fez, and another wearing a headscarf like an Iraqi Kurd. Partisans of curious origin given their motley costumes, but the flirtation with Arab dress was a romantic deference to the ancient Hebrew, akin in dress and sharing similar customs to many living in contemporary Palestine. It is also representative of a break with Diaspora culture and it suggests the solidarity of the new pioneers. Sela believes the group are students from the *Mikveh Israel* agricultural school, the first to be founded in the *Yishuv* in 1870. She suggests it reveals an 'Orientalist' and colonial viewpoint absorbed by the *Yishuv* and cites photographers Leo Kahn and Avraham Soskin as exponents of this style of portrait photography. Palestine for the Western Jews held 'the enchantment of the East' and led to flirtation and romanticising of Arab culture or rather selective imaginings of it. Arabs rarely appeared in Jewish photographs but did so vicariously 'through the customs and dress borrowed from them by the Jews, thus serving as silent proof of their presence in the country.' (Sela 2005:85) Author Vivienne Silver-Brody argues that images like Figure 30 illustrate 'that Jewish photography did exist in Eretz Israel, and that it was linked to national aspirations.' (1998:33) There were scores of images recorded of armed men such as watchmen from *Ha Shomer* where the penchant for dressing up in Arab and Bedouin costumes is evident and continues a tradition that dates back to the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Dressing up in 'exotic' costumes was however, a common motif in colonial photography even when discretion and disguise were not uncommon reasons for donning local costumes. This exotic image of the East, if not of Africa, reinforced European notions of superiority just as pseudo-science did, and allowed Zionism to suggest a backward Arab other in contrast to progressive and hard-working Jews. The messages put out through film and photographs by Zionist organisations were sometimes basic and lacking in sophistication but the assumption was the audience was not well informed and had a layman's view at best. This allowed them

to show modernity and progress, and where possible suggest an unbroken link to biblical times in pastoral or bucolic settings.



**Figure 30** circa 1896 Mikveh Israel students dressed up as Arabs  
*Documentors of the dream* Magnes Press 1998

There was obviously a need to develop a national narrative comprising rhetoric and imagery embracing new immigrants, establishing links between them and the landscape, regarded as a sacred and meaningful space belonging to Jews from time immemorial. Yet it was easier to suggest links to landscapes than it was to cast an Iraqi Jew in the mould of a Greek from Salonika. Zionist agencies could overlook marginal immigrant communities but had to address ethnic inclusion in their publications in the post 1948 years. Many immigrants however, neither saw themselves as foreigners nor as colonists bent on the exploitation of land and resources. It is difficult to accept that they were not, aside perhaps refugees of WWII presumably unwilling to remain in Europe. The Zionists gained sympathy as the horrors of war crimes and genocide became known, and exploited this to press for diplomatic

advantage and specifically to assert that all the Jews in the Displaced Persons camps were Zionists who wanted to go to Palestine. Jews were given a choice between returning to Eastern Europe and going to Palestine. 'Few were able or willing to return to countries then in the grip of various degrees of hunger, anti-Semitism, and communism, and they were never given the option of choosing between Palestine and, say, the United States.' (Segev 2002:491)



**Figure 31 women in a transition camp 1950, Boris Carmi**  
*Photographs of women 1940-80 Israel Museum 2006*

Figure 31 may well include women whose choice of future was proscribed by events in Europe and the machinations of Zionists in search of immigrants. Carmi's informal group scene is much more down to earth than the posed Figure 30, yet half a century later the frontier is still in place, the immigrants immediately confronted with challenges though in this scene the women are engaged with the domestic front that was government policy in the period.

Sela, among few to extensively scrutinise the archives of Zionist organisations, believes they contain an untapped wealth of photographs revealing how they were classified, catalogued or filtered from public view. Archives developed in the 1930s and 40s include commissioned photographs in the public domain and independently produced. Today, some collections continue to receive and commission work whilst others only preserve what they have. (Sela 2005:75)<sup>33</sup> She argues the organisation of archives discloses their ideological intentions both in their classification and use as propaganda. Photographs were carefully edited because it was a Zionist aim ‘to build a national consensus as broad as possible that left no room for the exceptional or different.’ (Sela 2005:75)

During WWII exhibitions were used to bolster morale and afterwards international exhibitions were held in England and America. For photographers like Kluger, the demands of Zionist organisations were stifling and he complained to colleagues he was not making progress. Kluger, a Hungarian, was a flight photographer in WWI for the Austro-Hungarian Empire then moved to Berlin in the 1920s to freelance. In 1933 he went to Palestine and photographed the opening of Haifa Port, demonstrations in Jaffa against Jewish immigration, and new immigrants from Germany. He co-founded the *Oriental Press Company* and photographed for the Zionist Agencies. His work was used in albums and exhibited in Tel Aviv, Paris and New York. In the early 1950s, he photographed a book with writer Moshe Shamir, in an effort to win respite from photographing ‘laughing pioneers’ when everyone knew they are ‘dying from fever, living in poverty, tired and gloomy.’ He thought his creativity stifled and was falling behind his peers elsewhere in the world. But by the 1950s commissions with the Zionist bodies was tailing off and Kluger lacked work. He left behind 50,000 negatives (held by the Jewish National Fund and United Israel Appeal) when he left

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<sup>33</sup>She mentions the archives of the Lavon Institute for Labour Research, the Central Zionist Archive, the Women’s International Zionist Organisation and the Government Press Office among others.

for New York in 1958. For 25 years he documented the state in the making and its first decade of independence. 4000 photographs are displayed in the Israel government press office. The range of his work was considerable and a significant contribution to the Zionist archive. Many regarded him as a patriotic Zionist despite his misgivings about what they wanted. (Karpel June 2008)

Kluger wanted to explore the country and communities and keep up with what photography was producing around the world. He photographed Arabs in Jaffa and Bedouins in the north along with routine coverage of public and cultural events and public figures. He wanted access to the elite and freedom to pursue his many interests in photography. Many commissioned photographs were staged by Kluger to produce dynamic images.<sup>34</sup> Figure 32 is a typical example, the young woman encouraged to crouch above the handlebars, gaze fixed on the road to victory ahead.

Russian born photographer Boris Carmi was a member of the *Haganah* serving both as cartographer and photographer, following service with the British armed forces. He later served as a staff photographer on the Israeli army magazine *Bamahane* recording the 1948 War and continued working for it as a reservist until 1956. From 1952-76 he worked with the trade union paper *Davar* but throughout he ‘distanced himself from the official political stance of the Zionist movement and of the Israeli government’ that ‘promoted the ideal of the heroic “new Jew” and of the collective.’ (Nocke 2004:6) This much can be seen in retrospectives of Carmi’s work that include many of his photographs that were never published by Zionist agencies. He also photographed immigration in all its aspects and this exploration of up rootedness extended to the Palestinians. The humanity and breadth that

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<sup>34</sup> After the 1948 war, Kluger and his generation were joined by an emerging group of photographers, including more Germans. This included Boris Carmi, David Rubinger, Werner Braun, Beno Rothenberg, Maxim Salomon, Fritz Schlesinger, Edgar Hirshbein and David Eldan.

characterises his work is largely missing from the Zionist albums and it is only in the last ten years or so that Israeli curators are discovering that photographers of Carmi's generation worked with a broader brush than was published by the Zionist agencies. Carmi's photographs place Israel firmly in the Middle East, while Zoltan Kluger places Israel in Europe. Though reference to ethnic diversity had to be made, the Zionist albums generally described Arabs of whatever faith in more folkloric contexts and with a Eurocentric perspective.



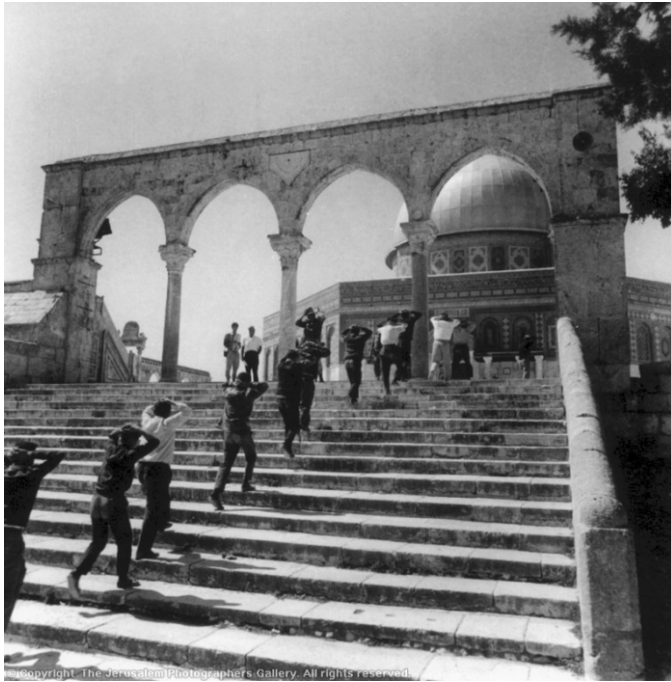
Figure 32 Zoltan Kluger *Haganah dispatcher* 1948  
From an exhibition poster <http://lib-stu.haifa.ac.il/staff/oruth.html> Retrieved 26 December 2011

Perez believes a majority of publications whether postcards, posters, magazines or albums, were 'carefully designed to convey the patriotic Zionist message clearly and unequivocally.' (Perez 2000:11) This was given impetus with the rise of photography in the *kibbutz* movement that by the 1960s was established as a leisure activity. The *kibbutz* was the crowning achievement of Zionist dreams and with an improving economy more were

contributing to documenting or celebration of their communities through photographs. The *kibbutz* photographers were recording, what for them, was the fulfilment of all that Zionism had worked for. Perhaps as well the contained environments with the need for commune members to be self-sustaining in many of their activities, fuelled the desire to engage more with photographs documenting the life and times of their particular way of life.

Sela identifies two types of commemorative album the one published by official institutions, the other, more informal album published commercially. The latter were more akin to what many, like the *kibbutz* workers were photographing. It was the construction of a sanitised narrative and the collective memory of a young nation. Albums and special publications were amplified by commemorative and national occasions including military marches and public gatherings. Over time, war memorials, national monuments, and the naming and re-naming of streets, contributed further to the construction of a national memory. Sela describes albums as having the intention to ‘create shared memories in order to integrate and instil a single, unified and harmonious national narrative.’ (Sela 2005:149) Albums joined textbooks in schools in spreading shared memories, allowing the young to identify with the heroes of the past and preparing them for an eventual call to duty. Sela says they omit ghoulish scenes of war but show Arab POWs and enemy destruction to emphasize Israeli success. (See Figure 33 that although shows Arab prisoners from below clambering up the steps towards their holy shrine, does so perhaps to underscore their humiliation. On the other hand if one had wanted to illustrate a Palestinian perspective, a valiant attempt at the gates of their holiest shrine to defend it from the enemy, one could do worse than to record the image exactly as it has been).





**Figure 33 Arab POWs Jerusalem 1967 Werner Braun**  
<http://www.snukit.k.il> retrieved 30 May 2011

In the late 1940s, Oren suggests, representation of Arab life and landscape in albums was sporadic. Arabs were portrayed to suggest how Israelis were tolerant of Arab religions and of the freedom of movement in Jewish space. The rapid modernisation by implication would benefit all, but this depiction glossed over abandoned Arab patrimony and minimised the territorial basis of the conflict. It was a case of removing controversial elements from the narrative and from Israeli consciousness. Oren argues there was always a duality between the presence of the passive Arab in Jewish space (see Figure 38) and his counterpart the armed Arab just beyond the frontier. This was a perpetual reminder of the need for secure borders but also of the need for action that soldiers crave. ‘Border landscapes, were presented as a spatial "separation" between the national territories and the territories of the “others.”’ (Oren 2005) She also describes the duality between the need to safeguard borders whilst needing to reach beyond them at times of military necessity or political brinksmanship, requiring them to be elastic, even extendable. ‘In presenting the border as a spatial entity... a dualism existed, whose main point was photography of populated spots close to the border, in relatively safe



places, along with the presentation of a blurred, breached border' facilitating adventure, but signalling the need for vigilance. Israel, always the dominant military power of the region, able to call upon the support of US military might or technology when required, yet always pleading vulnerability against Arab hordes or invoking the terror of unceasing persecution.

Figure 34 is a classic example of Helmar Lerski's approach to portraiture based on techniques he acquired as a lighting technician in silent film. He moved to Palestine in 1932, the year following the publication of his book *Köpfe des Alltags* (1931) that comprised 140 portraits of anonymous sitters from working-class Berlin. In this sense he has some affinity with the work of photographer August Sander whose work fell foul of the National Socialists. His portraits were theatrical, using up to 16 mirrors and/or filters to use natural light reflected onto the face. The compositions thus had grandeur and on occasion the sculpted quality of busts. His portraits are arguably more expressionist than New Objectivity.<sup>35</sup> He left Palestine barely two months before the state of Israel was inaugurated. Perhaps looming war precipitated his departure but Lerski had already a modest and growing reputation, and one suspects his career as an artist, was more compelling than his commitment to the Zionist cause. The potential for interesting subjects for photographers in Israel was surely considerable but for some this was not enough. Recognition for photographers in Israel was slow in coming and bypassed most of Lerski's generation, and along with economic constraints, may have played a part in their departure. However, whilst his appeal to Zionist iconography is understandable, there is nothing in his subject matter that could be read as an endorsement of Zionism.

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<sup>35</sup> <http://www.filmsnotdead.com/2012/08/14/the-sixteen-mirrored-photographer-helmar-lerski/>  
[http://image.eastmanhouse.org/files/GEH\\_1961\\_10\\_02.pdf](http://image.eastmanhouse.org/files/GEH_1961_10_02.pdf)



Figure 34 Helmar Lerski, working man 1940s

<http://www.imj.org.il/images/news/all/11/Lerski9.jpg> Retrieved 30 December 2011

Capa's photograph (see Figure 35) depicts an immigrant ship docking in Haifa Port. An important theme in Zionism this was portrayed by several photographers, many working for Zionist organisations. The image of shipboard immigrants catching their first glimpse of their new home was bound to be compelling and many photographs were recorded and continue to be seen in newspapers, indicating that successive governments have placed great importance on immigration. Such images have long been familiar to many, not least because Zionist agencies seized the possibility that viewers could imagine themselves in the place of those depicted and internalise the message. As seduction, the shipboard photograph was more effective than the transit camp or absorption centre and was repeatedly used. It was, after all, the moment of arrival, the end of an uncertain thread and the start of another. Most photographs associated with this period have these two points in common they depict

Europeans and ships. Both were desirable, the former because it met Zionist aspirations, the latter because ships and harbours were visually compelling.

The choice of this picture for the cover of a book about Israel is surely no accident, the symbolism is understood because the narrative is well known, this was an escape to freedom after depredations of war and the title makes it explicit. However, immigration photographs from the mid-1950s onwards showed arrival scenes more at airports with migrants from the Middle East. Air travel was different and a plane with immigrants less arresting visually, compared with a ship where passengers and those waiting at the docks had more time to absorb the scene. Capa recorded a composition that would be hard to match in an airport, showing seven people whose expressions can be discerned clearly. It doesn't appear they know anyone on shore, with no looks of recognition, rather a quiet contemplation of Haifa docks and the scene beneath them. It seems to capture that uncertain moment of transition, perhaps relief at having arrived safely, but not sure of what would come next. The *Magnum* photographs published by *Aperture* to commemorate Israel's fiftieth year devotes nearly half the photographs to foreign or occupied territory, though in the latter case no mention is made of this. Many photographs portray the militant chaos of the Middle East and provide a more sombre view than the one many of the same photographers recorded for Israel's fortieth anniversary.

### **Photographs in Israel**

After 1948 in Israel, there was an epiphany in artistic endeavour subsequently hailed as a national awakening. This overlooked Israeli photography that continued its path of documenting for official agencies for promotional and fund-raising campaigns. Sela emphasises the role of captions in these campaigns suggesting that public and private

archives 'fulfil an important function in conveying the message, sometimes even more than the visual image itself.' (Sela 2005:98) The photographer Walter Zadek, for example, endorsed the captions and wrote his own without guile. He thought Jewish immigration good for Arabs in material and moral ways and they benefitted from knowledge, skills, and technology of Jews. Zadek, another German, co-founded the association of professional photographers in Israel with Helmar Lerski.

Two early examples of in-depth political reportage of Israel are a book co-authored by I.F. Stone and photographers Robert Capa, Jerry Cooke and Tim Gidal published in 1948, *This is Israel* (see Figure 35) and another by Robert Capa and Irwin Shaw published in 1950, two years after the founding of the state, *Report on Israel* (see Figure 36). Both are memorable because they reveal passion and commitment to a Jewish homeland and the contribution of Diaspora Jewish photographers (and writers) to the creation of Israeli narratives, a tradition that continues. Perhaps, the conviction photographers like Capa share is a sense there is a necessary point of view to be depicted, that one side in a conflict needs endorsement more than another. This is often driven by a sense of right or wrong, or identification with some more than others, or by notions of justice or injustice. Clearly, Capa, Gidal, and others, had their convictions in place ahead of arriving in Israel.

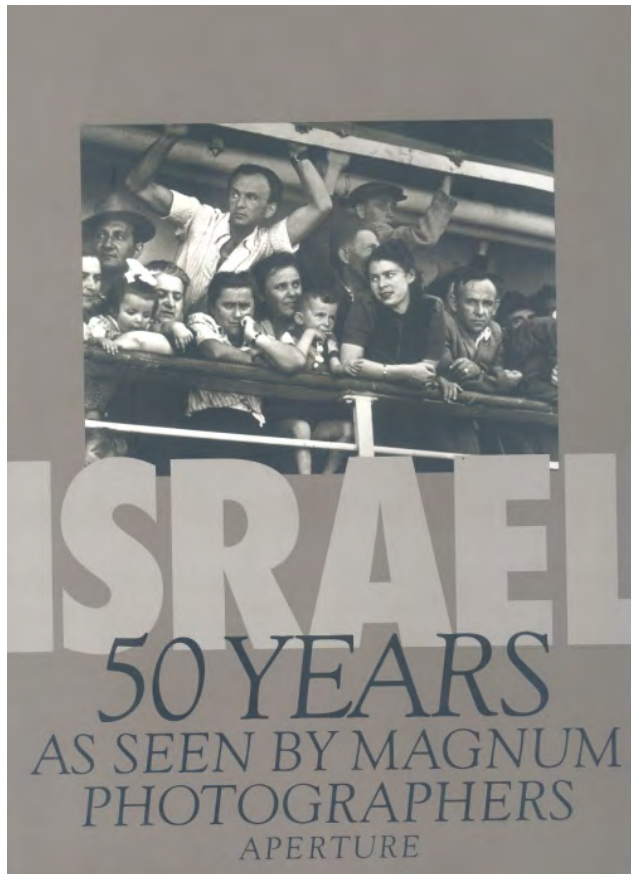
In considering the following photographs questions arise as to the political convictions and personality of the photographer as well as awareness he or she had of what the image could say. It does seem possible to draw a distinction between the spontaneous photographs of amateurs on a collective farm, or those of visiting photographers, and the resident photographers working for the Zionist agencies. No wonder some of the latter quietly continued their personal work that remained unpublished until the last few years. No wonder

most fell into neglect after their services were dispensed with, or that some left the country, voting with their feet. After a decade or more of settling in to a new country the motivation to leave must have outweighed the upheaval it would have caused, such as in Kluger's case. Some complained about the parameters of their assignments and it seems photographers had little say in how their images would be used. It must have been hard for some of them to accept that their photographs were anonymous in Zionist publications. There were several spheres of Zionism where one could be a hero, a public figure even, but the cult of photographer was studiously avoided by the Zionist agencies. One suspects the combination of lowly status, the stifling of personal expression, and other constraints, is reflected in the photographs scattered throughout the archives.

The photographs raise questions about how much access photographers had to the Arabs and under what circumstances. Would they have felt uninhibited in what they recorded or would they have felt compelled to lower their cameras in certain situations? How much peer pressure was there to conform to Zionist norms? How far were those on side with Zionism willing to turn a blind eye to situations that the agencies would not have published anyway? The more committed to Zionism a photographer was, the more this shines through in their work as, for example, in the political portraits of David Harris or indeed of Paul Goldman, but it is possible to uncover differences elsewhere in their work that suggest Goldman was either more curious in his quest for photographs or less willing to see everything through rose-tinted spectacles.

In Figure 36 the double page spread deftly evokes the ambience of 1948, man with a gun, running man in an empty street, man with a suitcase, all elements suggestive of the political uncertainty. Figure 38 emphasises this, civilian casualties always carry a potent symbolism

and is used as propaganda by all parties to the conflict. Historians dispute the extent to which the outcome of the 1948 war was ever in doubt but the Zionist account of the war is one of victory in the face of daunting adversity. Zionists were nonetheless cautious about publishing civilian or military casualties and they were used sparingly, newspapers were bolder.



**Figure 35 Robert Capa 1948 Haifa (Aperture 1988)**

In Figure 37 Shaw's book cover sends out a more confident message. Ben Gurion is mixed with fellow Israelis, a man of the people among them, and altogether the depiction is more cheerful. A man with a plank suggests the building of the nation continues apace whilst another with a gun promises vigilance, but he will never disappear from the pages of Zionist history because the existential threat of enemies is embedded in the mythology of Zionism. The use of portraits of ordinary, working men surrounding the prime minister on both covers was presumably to engage the viewer and set the tone for the inside pages and reinforce the image of Labour Zionism.



Figure 36 This Is Israel 1948

<http://cgi.ebay.com/ROBERT-CAPA-PHOTOGRAPHS-ISRAEL-1948-1ST-HARD-CO-/230573957232>

retrieved 15 March 2011

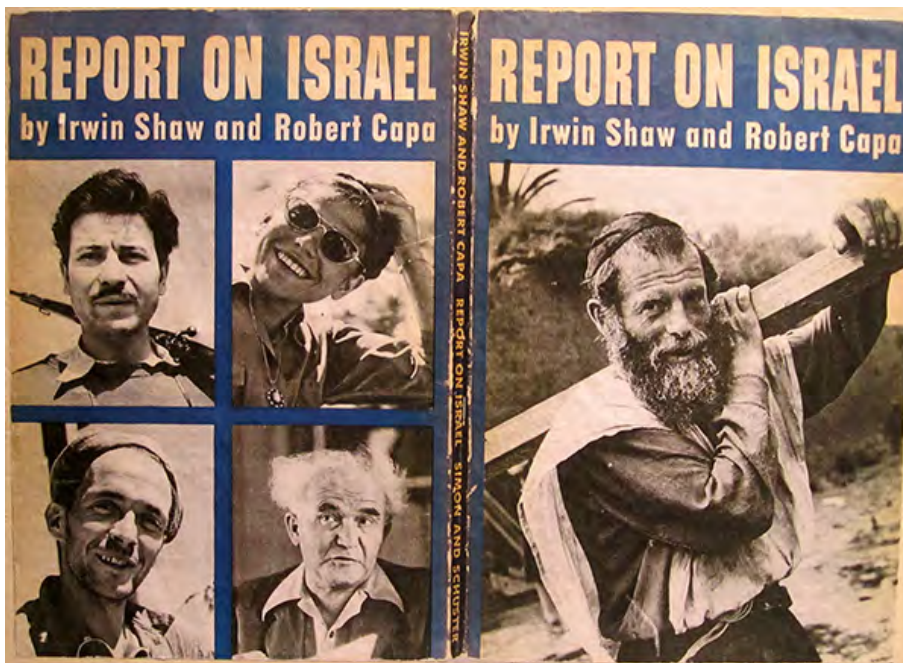


Figure 37 Report on Israel 1950 <http://www.soulman.org/meta.html> retrieved 14 March 2011

However, this ideological experiment in nation building was taking place in a country that already had a name with diverse peoples living there. Israeli photographs often disregarded



this inherent contradiction, the building of a socialist democracy in a divided community. For example, the Zionist agencies albums sometimes showed Arab dead, but never Israeli dead, or showed Arab prisoners of war, civilians in disarray, of situations in which Arabs were observed, and others from which they were excluded. Unlikely then that Figure 38 was ever published in a commemorative photographic album that had the blessings of the state. It is a reminder of the unseen threat reinforced by the use of the words ‘terrorist attack’ in the caption. Given that this image was retrieved via the Internet, who can say when the caption was written, but nowadays terrorism refers to an illegitimate activity often inflicted upon the innocent. The term is frequently used to delegitimize an enemy and Figure 38 can be read today exactly as it could have been in 1948, even though it was during war.



**Figure 38 Werner Braun After a terrorist attack in Ben Yehuda Street 1948**  
<http://www.snunit.k12.il/jerusalem-photo/en/MAINBraun.html> retrieved 20 May 2011

Figure 38 is an interesting example of how Arabs were frequently photographed in the presence of Israelis. Though the photographer in this case is standing at street level on the



same plane as the Arabs in the street, there are troops standing up in a jeep and two more on the balcony of the building behind and all are looking down upon a defeated enemy. Photographers also photographed Palestinians from above to emphasize dominance but in Goldman's case he nearly always photographed at eye level. Images like Figure 39 that pose questions can be found elsewhere in Goldman's work because had one wanted to show the Palestinian perspective in this photograph one might well have stood next to Goldman.



**Figure 39 Majdal after surrender 1948, Paul Goldman**  
*Paul Goldman press photographer 1943-61 Israel Museum 2004*

Figure 40 is a scene frequently echoed over the years, and Chim Seymour's 1957 photograph is clearly linked to the pioneer spirit, the simplicity of a Spartan landscape and of the outdoor marriage ceremony. Time stands still and the period clothing does not lessen the relevance and symbolism of the scene even now. It has a frontier spirit, a middle of nowhere feel, yet the message of the wedding canopy, the *huppah*, with its embroidered Star of David, reaffirms the continuity of Jewish tradition. It also signals via the pitchfork and the gun propping up the canopy, the dignity of labour and the readiness to respond to a call of arms. These joyous scenes are seen repeatedly in Zionist albums, the edited highlights of thousands

of crafted moments that woven together show the dream of Zionism and its achievements. They generally ignore the irrelevant, the controversial, or anything that contradicts its progress. The view always implied is that the rewards are worth toiling for.



**Figure 40** Chim Seymour wedding in the Border Regions, Israel 1952 <http://j.w.blogspot.com/2010/02chalutz-wedding.html> retrieved 7 June 2011

In 1952 for example, eight commemorative albums were produced depicting the life, times and government of the country. The editors included photographers Lazar Dunner and Beno Rothenberg. (Sela 2005:144) Albums appeared annually until the 1973 October War, but their popularity was never higher than following the 1967 June War. Albums combined text with photographs in equal measure, and in their endorsement of progress echo Soviet albums. (Sela 2005:145) Usually accompanied by a foreword written by a public figure, the effect they sought was comparable to family albums, to instil pride and foster unity. Notably absent from albums were pressing social issues whilst captions were florid and bombastic failing to describe what was occurring or where and when photographs were recorded. The caption could be direct ‘First Aid by the Light of Oil Lamps’ or full of bravado ‘Explosives

Forward!' or contain an occasional biblical reference. (Rivlin 1958)<sup>36</sup> They referred to heroism and the sacrifice expected of ordinary men and women.



**Figure 41 Paul Goldman, Athlit camp 1945. Paul Goldman, press photographer 1943-1961. Israel Museum 2004**

Figure 41 shows Jews alighting from freight cars in a wartime scene that has a filmic quality. If this photograph is shorn of its context it might, as easily be a still from a film set as a moment in a recorded event. Given the usual association between Jews and freight cars in this period, Goldman's photograph catches the viewer off guard. Nonetheless it depicts the arrival of Jewish refugees into a British detention camp in the Middle East. There is no tension between the soldiers and the refugees that are ignored by their guards who have their backs

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<sup>36</sup> Boris Carmi and Beno Rothenberg were the photo editors in this publication on behalf of Israel Defence Forces



turned to them, as the rather excited bunch of youngsters spill out of the cars. It is a composition that shows the British as an irrelevance, the gaze of the soldier, like that of empire is fixed on other horizons. The soldiers are ignored by the chattering youth, who in their minds are setting foot in Zion and not about to face the depredations of a detention camp. If these youngsters can endure the freight cars of German Nazism, they can survive those of British colonialism. The joy in the faces of the youngsters can be read as an act of defiance, Zionism is unstoppable. It is also a personal photograph insofar as Goldman, a Hungarian, arrived in Palestine via the same detention centre as in the photograph. He then joined the British Army and saw active service in Libya where he was wounded and consequently discharged.



**Figure 42 Chim Seymour 1954 Children's Reception Centre *David Seymour (Chim)* Phaidon 2005**

Goldman was a close friend of Capa's and they worked together from time to time when Capa was on assignment in Israel. Though by this time he was in mid 40s and with poor Hebrew, and it was quite a challenge for him to report news. He fared better with foreign

press agencies than with Israeli news outlets. Between 1945-63 some 34 commemorative albums were published but Goldman's work only appears in four of them. (Nir 2004: 12) In part this is because his journalism was less concerned with the themes expressed in the romanticised albums and was more suited to newspapers. Of his generation, he was probably the most factual in his photography, owing much more to journalistic standards than to artistic ones. As historical documents his photographs are more credible than, say, those of Kluger. Goldman's portraits of political and military figures are very effective and insightful.

Figure 42, another by Chim Seymour, shows a reception centre for new immigrants in which children are made welcome with the aid of candle lighting ceremony. The boy's sailor suit catches the eye and the innocence of the scene was exactly the sort that was used in the recruitment of new immigrants. Seymour's work in Israel, along with that of Robert Capa, his close friend, is intensely personal and both photographers have had their work repeatedly published in Israel. The contribution by Jewish photographers to the recording of the growth of Israel is immensely important. Their return tickets, foreign passports, fresh eyes, and Jewish solidarity, provided ideal ingredients with which to record a dream in the making, Israel a phoenix rising from the ashes of Jewish destruction. There is more than a touch of romanticism in the photographs of visiting Jewish photographers who would not be around long enough for the disenchantment to set in.

The agencies were preoccupied by mass immigration, fuelled by the Law of Return (1950) allowing Jews anywhere the right to live in Israel and hold citizenship. 'The need to bind together the vastly disparate social elements of the new nation became a primary goal, inspiring a new photography of heroism.' (Perez 2000:11) Photographers could empathise with immigrants having shared a similar journey and transition. The displaced milled around

a new cultural space, dutifully and willingly photographed. Israelis were creating a sense of belonging and photographers were part of that process.



**Figure 43 Polling station in the field**  
*Israel today and yesterday Am Oved Publishers 1966*

Figure 43, a scene from a commemorative album, juxtaposes the gun and the ballot box in a composition that spells out the importance of a democratic vote no matter what the circumstances. Zionists placed great store on Israel's democratic credentials with regard to her neighbours and to the support of Western powers, and this sort of image would play well with foreign and domestic audiences alike. It serves equally as an important signpost amongst others from which Zionist collective memory is forged. There is rarely any contradiction between the militarism and democracy of Israel, the latter often flagged as a justification for belligerence against neighbouring states seen in the main as autocracies. However, as Ricoeur suggests, a photograph (like the ideologies it serves) may carry a

surplus of meaning, conveying more than is desirable or more than is intended. Figure 43 is not without a sense of this and perhaps an inappropriate message to promote democracy.<sup>37</sup> In the context of the period however, the Zionists would have read this image differently believing the combination of the gun and the ballot box would have signalled the message of how Israel was both building as well as defending democracy.



**Figure 44 The Sinai Operation, 1956. Aryeh Yaakobi**  
<http://www.netnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3623486,00.html> Retrieved 21 March 2010

Figure 44 is a reminder of other forces at work in the state building project, not least the need for coercion at one level or another, of manpower, of military machines and implicitly the backing of a powerful ally. Figure 44 looks more like a scene from the pages of American military history than of Israeli but it is emblematic of an enduring alliance between both countries. It has a relaxed atmosphere and was recorded by American born Aryeh Yaakobi who had long been involved in Zionism, joining the *Hashomer Hatzair* youth movement in New York and doing his agricultural training in New York State ahead of a stay on *Kibbutz*.

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<sup>37</sup> The ballot box was not available to Arab-Israelis for many years and in the first 'republic' 1948-67 there was a dominant party that only ceded to a competitive system after 1967.

*Hatzor*. During WWII he served as an aerial photographer with the USAF before settling permanently in Palestine in 1946 where he photographed for the Israeli Air Force and ran their photo labs. His work was diverse including bygone scenes of English village life where he was stationed between bombing runs across Europe. Figure 44 is probably a personal moment recorded with his colleagues given that aside from his official work the remainder of his photographs were unpublished. An accomplished photographer who, like many of his generation, went unrecognised and were it not for diligent researchers and inquisitive journalists, a number of photographs shown here would never have seen the light of day. What Yaakobi achieves in this composition is the idea that so soon after the state had been inaugurated Jewish society had coalesced into one with ‘a specific cultural character and a high level of self-awareness, as well as established social, economic and political institutions.’ (Even-Zohar 1990:175) It was different culturally to the *Yishuv* as well as to Diaspora and in Yaakobi’s composition the uniformed officers appear to reaffirm the idea that Israel had come of age.

In the various state archives, according to Chava Brownfield-Stein, there are scores of photographs showing women (often with men) serving in several capacities (from pilots to artillery officers) yet political leaders, and notably Ben-Gurion, were no longer keen to have women involved with or portrayed in combat after statehood was achieved. The army had created the illusion of equality in its formative years partly to satisfy early socialist Zionist aspirations as well as to promote an idea of equality that would percolate into the wider community. But this masked a real inferiority of women within the military hierarchy whilst cementing the identification of women within the military system. Quoted in an Israeli newspaper article, Brownfield-Stein claims that women soldiers have no ‘visual presence at the climatic military moments of victory.’ (Glick 2003) Moreover the more typical representation of women was to show them with a rifle, suggestive of a defensive role at the



rear whilst also of a civilian in uniform (see Figure 45). Brownfield-Stein argues that ‘most of the photographs do not depict a situation of action, rather at the points of contact between the civilian and the military or at ceremonial parades.’ (Glick 2003)



**Figure 45** The first mass recruitment to the Haganah Tel Aviv 1947  
*Boris Carmi. Photographs of Women 1940-80 Israel Museum 2006*

Sela argues that the Zionist agencies marginalised the role of women photographers, suggesting that they ‘had neither penetrated public consciousness nor earned the right to be recorded in the local history of photography.’ (Sela 2005:211) This was despite the fact that many had already proven track records in the field. Women fared better as painters, but across the arts and in journalism, women were neither given parity with men in the same fields nor had they equal opportunities of advancement. Where photography was concerned many women were only ‘discovered’ forty years later. (Sela 2005:213) Because of this absence of professional opportunities, women had fewer constraints in the choice of what to photograph, alongside the men who either rejected working with the Zionist institutions or

had been turned away by them.<sup>38</sup> Sela observes that women emulated the way men worked reinforcing the dominant reality in which women were assigned an inferior position. Only a few women, she suggests, were quietly subversive in their work and provided an alternative to Zionist photography. A number of women managed intermittent assignments with various Zionist institutions, either through membership of organisations, or through connections, but their work failed to enter the canon of Israeli photography and was 'erased from the collective memory.' (Sela 2005:214) For both the men and women who worked outside of the mainstream institutions the survival of personal archives has been uncertain. Only by chance once in a while does a lost archive turn up and has extracts published. For women, it wasn't until the 1970s that their professional aspirations began to be addressed. 'The New Hebrew nationalism that developed...at the time of the *Yishuv* was inherently masculine whether in its symbolic and mythological aspects, or in reality' and remained this way until the 1960s. (Sela 2005:211) Zionist support for the equality of women was always qualified but the photographs suggested parity with men when it came to building and defending the Land of Israel until after the 1948 war. However, the struggle of women for parity does not diminish their obvious contribution to photographs of this period.

Women were not the only subjects where Zionist agencies wanted to emphasise their own agendas according to evolving needs. Jameson suggests whilst an image can show reality, it could at the same time, portray a misrepresentation of it and in order to satisfy aesthetics, reality becomes corrupted in its representation. Figures 45 and 46 show agricultural scenes common in Israeli photographic albums and among the emblematic themes of settler colonialism reinforcing the link to the land and importance of physical labour. The scythes and pitchforks underline this and the probable assumption was that those who worked the

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<sup>38</sup> Sela cites Dinah Gotz, Liselotte Grschebina, Trudi Swarz, Alice Holz, Sonia Gidal, Marli Shamir, Hanna Degani, Charlotte Meyer, Gerda Meyer, Ricarda Schwerin and Chava Salomon. In addition there were photographers who left Germany during the rise of Nazism such as Ellen Auerbach (Sela 2005:216).

land would fight harder to defend it. In both photographs there is a suggestion of circles that at this time in Zionist mythology were used to indicate purity. The repetition of images and themes popular in Israeli albums has the effect Jameson describes, that reality becomes distorted. Farming scenes often showed harvesting, or ripening fields glowing in sunshine, as if there was only ever one season. Whereas one finds the seasons present in transit camps, one rarely finds them in agricultural scenes.



<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3351502,00.html>. Retrieved 21 March 2010

**Figure 46** Kibbutz Ein Gev, harvest festival, circa 1940 Naftali Oppenheim

Just as the cinema that fictionalised the American pioneers holding onto their farms against foes both uncivilised and unwilling to compromise, so Zionist photographs told a similar story. There were the photographs of *Givati* cavalry, or the *Hashomer* watchmen cantering on horses in open landscapes. Or the harvesting scenes as shown here, farmer turned gunslinger as the need arose and always the pastoral, the frontier ahead of them. There were of course comparable scenes of Arab peasants arming themselves with rifles to defend their villages or toiling with pitchfork and scythe, narrating the same stories as the Zionists. What is missing from many (but by no means all) such photographs is the point at which the two communities

intersect. The flight of Arabs and the arrival of immigrant Jews primarily appear as separate narratives as if unconnected to one another.



**Figure 47 David Perlmutter harvesting at Kfar Menachem date unknown**  
<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3507259,00.html> retrieved 20 December 2009

In Figure 48, a staged event specifically intended for the photograph, the combination of ‘farming’ and dancing presses all the right buttons to reinforce a sense of joy or fun that was a conscious ploy of Zionism to attract people to the cause and specifically to generate togetherness that one also finds in Figure 46. Also with Figure 49 there is a suggestion of the innocence, even goodness in the Zionist project. The two boys helping each other to bang in a post in the middle of all that emptiness, the virgin land, not only signals that the very young could play a role in redeeming the wilderness but also signals the vulnerability of pioneers.

Hard to imagine how these boys could be a threat to anyone and the idea that their ancestors had marched out of ancient Israel due to the political violence of the period or that their parents had marched back in again because of political violence elsewhere was something that many Jews must have felt acutely at the time.



Figure 48 Farmers dance, performed by Ofra Ben Zvi, 1950, Alfons Himmelreich [http://www.israelimages.com/searchresult\\_watermark.php?image=Web-Regular/10978.jpg&watermark\\_text=829&watermark\\_color=ffffff](http://www.israelimages.com/searchresult_watermark.php?image=Web-Regular/10978.jpg&watermark_text=829&watermark_color=ffffff) Retrieved 28 December 2011

From 1967 onwards, Israeli photography began to change. The need for pioneer photographs was over, and after the 1967 War, Israel secured territorial gains as a consequence of annexation and occupation. The landscape of Israeli visual discourse broadened, and by the 1973 War, it was evident Israeli attitudes had matured, the relative innocence of the pioneering period replaced with a critical, independent view of civil society and conflict.

Many *kibbutz* photographs echo commissioned Zionist photographs suggesting personal memories were collective and all shared a common experience. In an immigrant culture, a new society, recording of scenes as potential memories was important. There was a burning desire to record history-in-the-making to propel into the future. Many of the amateur



photographs thus unconsciously reflect the themes that the more cynical Zionist agencies consciously strived for.



**Figure 49 Asher Benari, Hazorea 1930s**

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3507259,00.html> retrieved 3 January 2012

Figure 50, quite possibly another of Kluger's orchestrated images, can be contrasted with the more natural feel of Benari's composition, a hallmark of his published images. Whether the collective farm photographers were professional or not what seems to characterise their surviving archives is an intimacy that is clearly the result of their place within the community. The caveat here being that Israeli researchers have yet to explore this work thoroughly and what has been published thus far is in part the result of a process of re-discovery, and in part the result of newspaper campaigns profiling this work with nostalgia in mind. The boy with the glider on the other hand belongs to the corpus of work of a well-known photographer who deserves his place in the annals of Zionism. Figure 50 is another classic image from the Kluger set that despite being contrived, nonetheless is the sort of uplifting image that his employers would have been pleased with. If it has a message it is one

of hope, and shows the glider and boy as if they are already flying through the air, a portent of the state to come. The viewer might even consider that the boy with his tousled hair, faint smile, and look of determination, had built the glider himself. Just as with Figure 49 it is a scene that also says that Zionism is not in the business of churning out ‘ghetto Jews’ or ‘victims’ associated with their brethren in the Diaspora.



**Figure 50 Zoltan Kluger, youth holding a glider, Kibbutz Ma'abarot 1947**  
*Zoltan Kluger, Chief Photographer, 1933-1958 Israel Museum 2008*

The irony of the Zionist view can be seen in Figure 58 amongst others relating to Germany where Zionist programmes emulated those of National Socialism. More pertinently, with the growth of the Internet, several examples of Jewish partisans in countries such as Belarus can be found along with testimony that gives the lie to the Zionist myth of the Diaspora Jew as feckless and weak. Indeed some remarkable examples serve to reinforce the idea that Zionist ideology far from supporting their brethren in Europe was cynical and ruthless in the extreme in the pursuit of its goals and ready to abandon Diaspora Jews who did not serve them..



**Figure 51** Micha Bar Am 1967 paratrooper at the Wailing Wall  
*Israel the first fifty years* Simon & Schuster 1998

Micha Bar Am was present when Israel conquered Jerusalem in 1967 and inevitable the symbolism of reclaiming the Wailing Wall (the pre-eminent site of Judaism) would command the attention of photographers. In Zionist imaginings the moment represented the completion of a journey across two millennia, a return home, and fulfilment of a religious mission. Photographs memorialised the event and one by David Rubinger is celebrated that he describes as his signature photograph (see Figure 52). It showed three paratroopers standing shoulder-to-shoulder, viewed from below, gazing upon the Wall. It became Israel's defining photograph of the 1967 war and was used in an official capacity. Used repeatedly across the years and even in a political campaign in 2001, and the following year, subversively by an anti-Zionist group, *Yesh Gvul*, to condemn 35 years of occupation of Palestinian territories.



The election poster (using the image) was subject to a court case in which the judge declared the photograph a national treasure and not subject to embargo. It was seen as ‘the ultimate symbol of the Zionist worldview and Zionist photography...as delineated by propaganda departments of the nascent state’s national institutions in the 1930s and 1940s.’ (Sela 2005:242) Rubinger’s image matched the criteria perfectly with its ennobling vantage point.



Photo © David Rubinger

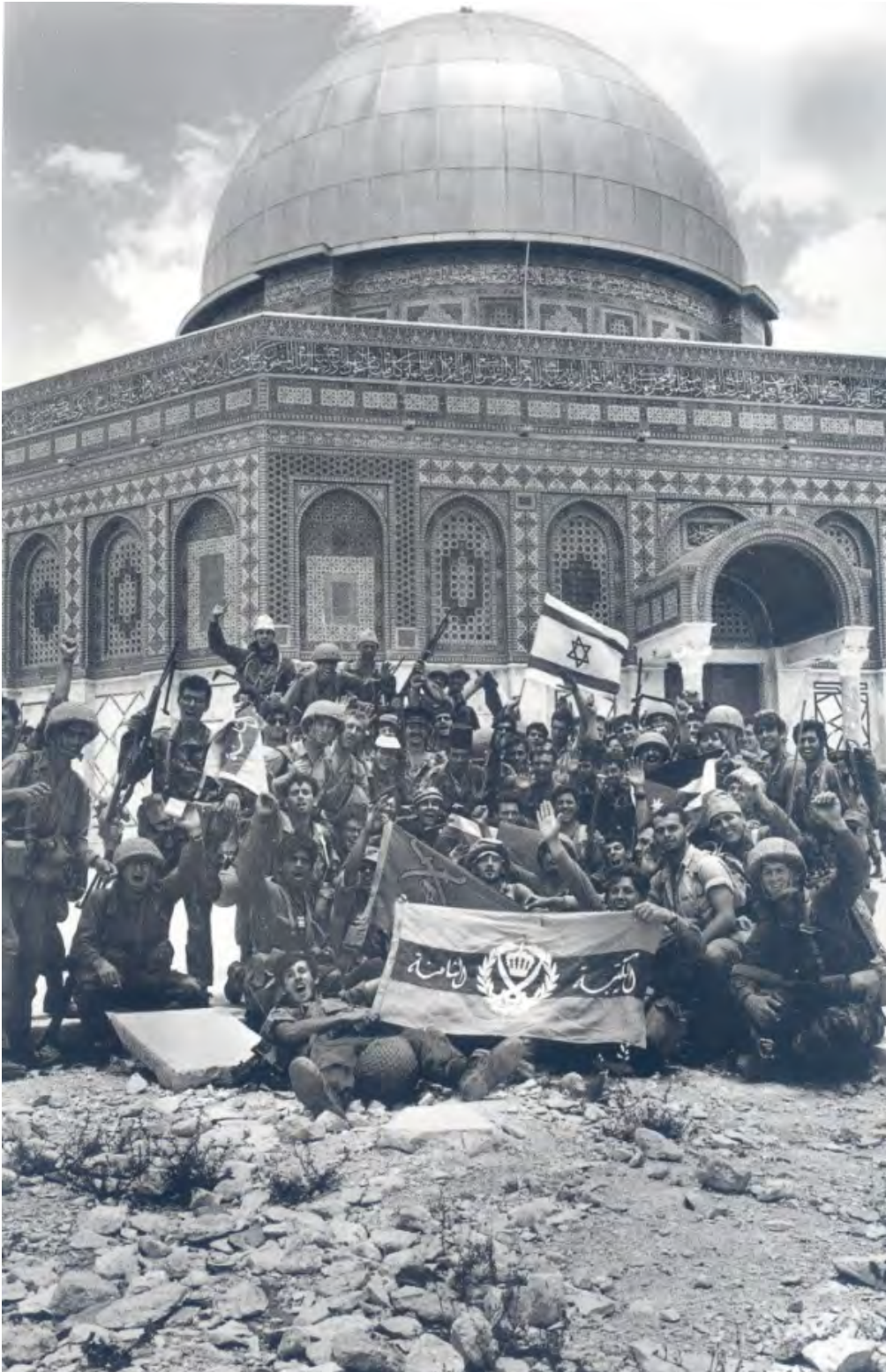
**Figure 52 Paratroopers at the Wailing Wall 1967**  
[www.vdfa.com/artists/david\\_rubinger/](http://www.vdfa.com/artists/david_rubinger/) retrieved 30 May 2011

Figure 52 captures *Sabra* ethos and is a valedictory photograph of the *Sabra* movement. Representing the attainment all had striven for. The middle soldier draws the gaze and few of the iconic images in Israeli collections match it for emotion. Sela believes it shows euphoria, reflecting admiration felt for the victory of a small nation ranged against hostile neighbours. However, euphoria is not an accurate description of what can be read in the expressions of the three combatants and it would be nearer the mark to describe them as being moved in the presence of their holy site seen for the first time. The 1967 War marked a turning point,

making it harder for Israel to trade on its image of underdog in the Middle East. Rubinger's photograph might be described as the last from an age of Israeli innocence. Thereafter Israeli photojournalism became more sceptical, and following the 1973 War more critical.

Figures 51 and 53 by Micha Bar Am are from a book marking Israel's fiftieth anniversary. They record the conquest of Jerusalem and are repeatedly published. Whatever Bar Am had in mind, they hint at the direction Israeli photojournalism was to take. The ammunition belt around the neck of the soldier in Figure 51 could be understood as triumphal (given the context) but is implicitly menacing. It contrasts not only with Rubinger's in this respect but both reflect key ideas of Zionism, the redemption of an ancient homeland, including Jerusalem, using military might when required. What marks Figure 51 is the soldier's religious head cover, a departure from the dress codes of erstwhile *Sabra* fighters whose appearance in most regards was visibly secular. It contrasts with Rubinger's soldier who has removed his helmet, in a gesture that appears to add to the awe visible in his expression.

The second victory photograph by Micha Bar Am, figure 53, is located a short walk from the ammunition belt soldier at the Western Wall. It speaks directly to the viewer and barely needs a caption to inform. The Dome of the Rock behind the soldiers is a site known to millions, whilst the Israeli flag is another familiar symbol, and neither leave doubt as to location. Five Jordanian flags can be seen, two with Arabic script. This is a group composition recorded to celebrate victory, soldiers playing to camera, with raised hands and firearms, some cheering. Fatigue and elation are suggested by the expressions of soldiers. It implies defeat of the enemy with soldiers clutching captured Jordanian flags, the Moslem shrine visibly under Israeli control.



**Figure 53** Micha Bar-Am 1967 IDF celebrate victory at Dome of the Rock  
*Israel the first fifty years* Simon & Schuster 1998





Figure 54 Wadi Salib riots Haifa 1959 Oskar Tauber  
 Cover of *Haolam Haseh* [www.flickr.com/photos/isotype75/179793693](http://www.flickr.com/photos/isotype75/179793693) retrieved May 30 2011

Figure 54 is a news photograph alluding to riots that broke out in Haifa following a confrontation between a drunk and the police who shot him. Two days of rioting followed before spreading to other towns. Various theories emerged about the political orchestration of the riots but this does not change the fact that they were basically caused by ethnic tensions between Jewish communities, primarily Arab and European. The differences between *Mizrahi* and *Ashkenazi* Jews and indeed other ethnic groups are as much a feature in Israeli society as any other, but in the *Sabra* era, Zionists always made a great show of the ingathering of exiles and of international Jewish solidarity. What they could not prevent was the growing maturity of Israeli society and the independence of the press that increasingly accentuated the differences between Zionist agencies and an inquiring press, One

photographer who covered these protests with Tauber never published his photographs of the event because, as was later confided to colleagues, he thought it would tarnish Israel's image abroad. This again raises the question of how the visual lexicon of Israel should be approached by researchers and there is an obvious need to be mindful of the broader view when considering particular subjects within it. It is another reminder of how easily the interpretations of photographs can shift when the order and mix of their presentation is varied.

## Chapter 4 The *Sabra*

Photographs were widely used in the seduction of Diaspora Jews into the Zionist dream of Jewish redemption as well as flirtation with socialism, or used to suggest what a Jewish state could become given the circumstances the photographs pointed to. (See Figure 55) A view that did not shrink from difficulty, remaining hopeful, suggesting that toil, ingenuity, and determination, led to progress. Determination can be read in the faces of the two young Germans in Figure 55. Zionism both inspired and proscribed photographs recorded and used to construct Israeli identity. Whilst the era of *Sabra* waned after 1960, in terms of photographs, 1967 is a fitting cut-off point as so much changed thereafter. The composition in Figure 55 is a classic style of the period and was used by the Soviets and Germans.



**Figure 55 Herbert Sonnenfeld Young pioneers on their way to Palestine 1935**  
*Eyes of Memory* Yale University Press 2004

The *Sabra* movement was lionised in Zionist literature and film and based on an ideal that the Jews of Israel should emulate Europe in culture, governance and ethnicity. This was reflected in photographs one way or another until 1948 but by 1950 Israel had become more ethnically

diverse following an influx of Jews from Arab states. *Sabra* elitism was challenged when Zionist photographs had to engage with massive immigration. Many were photographed arriving in the country, housed in transit camps and later, merged with the community. Their depiction in publications became routine. (See Figure 56)

Almog (2000) argues the *Sabra* was a minority within the Jewish population of Palestine but influential in society. They included a nucleus that became public figures helping to forge the state, and regarded as much for daring as for intellect. He suggests they were the cultural fulfilment of a utopian notion of the New Jew, with a group identity but keeping apart from others. Disdainful of Jews in the Diaspora they nonetheless had sympathy with their plight, endorsing immigration. They assumed a military culture but claimed to dislike war. They adopted some Arab customs whilst shunning Arabs and much of their culture. (Almog 2000:255)



**Figure 56** Soldier giving a class in Kfar Saba transit camp, 1958, Micha Bar-Am  
*Israel the first fifty years* Doubleday 1998

*Sabra* were steeped in Zionist propaganda, absorbing ‘the idealistic verses of sensitive poets, the visionary literature of great writers’ and listening to ‘impassioned speakers noted for their broad horizons and social concern.’ (Almog 2000:256) Significantly the aspirations of Zionism dovetailed with the emerging reality of its facts on the ground and sanctified its message, inspirational to all pioneers. During the rise and fall of *Sabra*, they played a part in laying the foundations of a state in civil as well as military affairs. Photographs were used to promote the transformation of an arid land and the developing community of a future state.

Representation of *Sabra* in photographs or posters either portrayed popular figures that were known to the public or those who were photogenic or suitable in some other way. Literature as well as photographs depicted the heroes of the movement, but for the most part, served the idealisation of a culture rather than documenting a specific group or individuals. In other words depictions of people as individuals or in groups, aware or unaware of being photographed, and in static or dynamic scenes, were acceptable as long as their qualities could be evoked visually. In Figure 56, Micha Bar Am’s teacher and pupil is a persuasive example of this, the soldier in uniform deployed to instruct the young in a transit camp.

Sela describes *Sabra* culture as elitist, suggesting the consciousness of the ‘virtuous few’ was honed within settler and militia frameworks that provided fertile territory for the exchange and refining of ideas among *Sabra* youth. (Sela 2005:107) She identifies six settings where the ‘New Jew’ was portrayed, such as proud soldiers having medals pinned on chests, on parade, or during civilian celebrations. ‘In many instances use was made of circular motifs (wholeness, a symbol of the collective) white clothing (purity, freshness, optimism) to emphasise these positive aspects.’ (Sela 2005:107) There were variants of people working, emphasising self-reliance. Scenes on farms or in factories pointed to progress, contrasting with those of less developed Arab peasantry. Sports and manual labour embraced the belief



that the 'New Jew' would be liberated through physical culture in contrast to Diaspora Jews who either did not bother with manual labour or were doing it in the wrong place for the wrong reasons. (See Figure 57)



**Figure 57 workers installing water pipes in the Negev, Paul Goldman 1949  
Paul Goldman Press Photographer 1943-1961 Israel Museum 2004**

### **The myth of the *Sabra***

The *Sabra* refers to a cactus imported from Central America in the 18th Century that adapted easily in Palestine. The prickly, sweet fruit was likened to the desired character of the children of the second wave of immigration (1904-1914). These immigrants pursued a life of pioneering and taught their children to follow their example, to be tough, even uncompromising, yet not without compassion or sentiment. The *Sabra* was to become one of Zionism's greatest myths. Their influence was larger than implied by their numbers, a small group bound by a fervent, almost ascetic commitment to Zionism. They were a refinement upon the early Zionists who in their vast majority came from Central and Eastern Europe.

The first wave of *Ashkenazim* settlers arrived in Palestine two decades prior to the Zionist movement founded by Herzl. This was succeeded by two further waves of immigration lasting until 1923. Collectively, these three describe the Pioneers or *Halutz*. The last wave beginning in 1919 was especially influenced by the ideas of the Russian Revolution.

The term *Sabra* was used at first to denote those born in the *Yishuv* in the 1930s onwards (but these children were referred to as *estrogim* or citrus fruit). *Sabra* was initially interchangeable with the 19<sup>th</sup> Century term favoured by Zionists movement to distinguish between Jews of the Diaspora and the New Jew. Herzl believed manliness and freedom were intertwined with militarism and patriotism. He sought to reclaim the imagined drama of a distant Jewish past as an inspiration for Zionism and rejection of weakness in the Diaspora. The New Jew was above all else a Muscle Jew. In the minds of the Zionist leadership, a Jew should emulate a gentile, preferably 'tall, virile, close to nature and physically productive' and be exceptional, so that 'a fit body would help his Jewish mind to excel and who would thus be able to stand up to anti-Semites.' (Near 1985) (See Figure 58) German ideology, specifically *Deutsche Kultur* of physical fitness and patriotism had a profound influence on Herzl, Nordau and founding Zionists who wanted to adapt German nation building programmes for their own purposes. Near suggests that 'much of the Zionist ideology of a nation and masculinity was derived from the German experience.' (Near 1985:188)

Almog asserts the term *Sabra* first took on a charged meaning when used by Uri Kesari in an article published by the newspaper *Do'ar Ha-Yom* 18 April 1931. It was headlined 'We are the leaves of the Sabra' and accused Zionist institutions of favouring Russian and German Jews and *Ashkenazim* immigrants above those who were native born. (Almog 2000:4) Kesari and contemporaries adopted the term for their own use, and like the plant itself, it quickly

took root. Only a year later references to the *Sabra* frequently appeared in the print media such as in the illustrated newspaper *Kolnoa* or the literary weekly *Ketuvim* among others. (Almog 2000:5)



**Figure 58 Maccabee athletics, Berlin 1935 Leni Sonnenfeld *Eyes of Memory* Yale University Press 2004**

In Palestine, pioneers created *moshav* and *kibbutz* collectives and set up a paramilitary organization (*Ha-Shomer*) that was to become a legendary, closely-knit group of watchmen protecting settlements. The younger generation of the Pioneers grew up in Palestine in the 1930s, schooled through various organizations mostly with socialist values. The Zionist movement facilitated the immigration of children without their parents, a sort of boarding-school arrangement on a *kibbutz*, with a secular but moralistic upbringing that included farming and military training. The epitome of this programme was the *Palmach* an elite military unit (men and women) who trained and fought together, and during the lulls, went

back to work on communal farms. (See Figure 60) The founder of the *Palmach* was Yizhak Sadeh a leader who had the common touch and enjoyed the company of artists, and wrote regularly for the *Palmach* bulletins.<sup>39</sup> He fostered a sense of community and loyalty among his fighters and was a soldier by training leaving Russia in 1920 to serve the Zionist cause in Palestine. In appearance, he seems the antithesis of the dashing young *Sabra* and an unlikely hero, yet he remains a significant figure in the movement who was often photographed. (See figure 62) Within the *Palmach* were the *Mistarabim* a unit that operated covertly amongst the Arabs by borrowing their language, customs and dress. Their behaviour was both romantic and artificial suggests Almog, and echoed earlier groups such as the *moshavot* and *Ha-Shomer* guards who preceded the creation of the *Mistarabim*. (See Figure 59) Nonetheless they were role models for the *Sabra*, and the ‘fervent desire to be Jews of a new, better breed led to the self-conscious imitation in dress, language and folklore.’ (Almog 2002:188) The *Sabra* link to Arab culture was based largely on masculine ideals. Bedouin culture was masculine but the adoption of their ways was ‘not only an important tool for becoming familiar with the enemy and making Jewish settlers more respectable in his eyes, but also as a way of stating that the *Sabra* had shed the skin of the Diaspora and developed a native Land of Israel mentality.’ (Almog 2002:188) The *Sabra* ideal was a composite of farmer, soldier, poet and adventurer. This was reflected in all visual media as well as in fiction.

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<sup>39</sup> Around 2000, two army reservists started a club to recall the glory and myth of the pioneering years. The Yizhak Sadeh Wandering Song Club meets quarterly in different venues to gather around bonfires with food and drink, to sing songs and recall the stories of the militia. The 400 members achieve a sense of community where the message and vision of the *Sabra* era continue to resonate. (Kobi Ben-Simhon *Ha'aretz* 10 September 2005)



**Figure 59 unidentified guards of Hashomer Hatzair. Photographer and date unknown**  
<http://israelity.com/tag/hashomer-hatzair/> Retrieved 27 December 2011

Almog (2002:1) suggests the *Sabra* were a product of the Hebrew Revolution a socio-cultural process that evolved rapidly to develop a new society, culture and language. The key figures backed heavily in propaganda of one sort or another played a role in shaping the mores and customs of this new society. Significantly though, becoming a *Sabra* owes more to the culture of Zionism than it does to the country of birth. What Zionists had been devising since the 1880s was a political and social vision without which there would not have been ‘an immigration of Jews to Palestine of a completely non-traditional secular nature.’ (Evan-Zohar 2005)

What would have been more natural without this intervention was that immigrants would have organised themselves along familiar lines namely as ‘Jewish communities loosely connected and undoubtedly even lacking the most basic agreements among them, such as an agreement on a common daily language.’ (Evan-Zohar 2005) There were several alternatives available to this invented Hebrew culture and there were instances of opposition to its spread

throughout the *Yishuv*. Moreover, even among authors and distributors of this culture there was disagreement, and throughout, ‘heterogeneity was a real option within the new culture, not only during its initial stages.’ (Evan-Zohar 2005) However, there was widespread agreement on certain issues such as the primacy of education or the need for defence and a common language, all of which would have been factors encouraging conformity and community solidarity.



Figure 60 *Harel* Brigade 1948 photographer unknown  
<http://museumpublicity.com/2011/11/08/mosaic-rooms-opens-from-palestine-to-israel-a-photographic-record-of-destruction-state-formation-1947-50/palmach-photographic-collection/> retrieved 4 January 2012

In elementary schools, for example, there was a class called ‘knowledge of the homeland’ and in view of the growing importance of the subject throughout the 1920s, several homeland texts were published. Almog mentions that the ideological messages contained in these books were both explicit and implicit the latter evoked by a series of key words and phrases that frequently played to the emotions and strengthened the underlying nationalism within texts.



To put this into perspective, instruction in homeland classes extended to the army that established field schools often led by *Sabra* fighters from one militia or another. In practice, classes were frequently held outdoors, in urban settings in a school garden for example, whilst in rural contexts, fields served, particularly critical moments in crop cycles. Gradually, this programme spread throughout the education system and a culture of hiking trips and military style marches swept through Zionist ranks. Some British officials (such as Jerome Farrell, director of Education) saw a suspicious resemblance between Hebrew and Nazi education. Even though Braun's photograph of children playing recorders is probably in a school classroom, there is nonetheless an air of informality in Figure 61 as if the children might be equally at home outdoors during a class.



**Figure 61 Werner Braun 1953 music lessons Neot Mordechai**

[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PikiWiki\\_Israel\\_3057\\_Art\\_of\\_Israel.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PikiWiki_Israel_3057_Art_of_Israel.jpg) retrieved 22 May 2011



**Figure 62 Yizhak Sadeh commander of the Palmach before battle for Lod airport 1948**  
*Boris Carmi Photographs from Israel Prestel 2004*

Central to pioneer ethos was the mystification of the landscape, and biblical references to the longing of exiles to return, as well as to its inherent beauty, were themes present in Jewish literature. However, Almog believes that the sanctity and yearning for the land was more down to earth than literature expresses. It was ‘a mechanism for marking ownership (in the presence of rival residents) and, more important, a means for creating a new identity of being at home in a land that was foreign to most of them.’ (Almog 2002:160) This was akin to colonists in Australia, South Africa, or the United States, where the emotional attachment to the land deepened as physical conquest spread. (See Figure 63)





**Figure 63 Harvest Festival, Naftali Oppenheim, date unknown.**  
<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0.7340.L-3351502.00.html> retrieved May 30 2011

This attachment emerges in literature and in visual arts where pastoral scenes, both naïve and childlike, were popular and reinforced spirituality of landscape and nature. In part, suggests Almog, this was the pioneer's acceptance that links to the Diaspora had to be severed and in part that the new homeland had to be invested in and roots put down, literally and spiritually. The importance of this was recognised by Zionists who moved quickly to formalise the relationship with the land within the programmes of education being devised. From the 1920s onwards there were several publications from guidebooks to natural histories, put out by the Jewish National Fund or the *Histadrut* trade union for reasons, practical and ideological. It was accepted there was a bond between 'knowing the land and loving the land – and that instruction in Palestinian geography and natural history was a pedagogical tool for creating identification with the land and a sense of partnership in the pioneer enterprise.' (Almog 2002:162) This was bolstered by work camps on collective farms during school vacations, welcomed by urban families who saw ideological as well as health value in them for their children. Youngsters, who grew up in the countryside were more engaged with their

environment, not just learning natural science but involved in farming as well. Rural and urban youth came together during the work camps and hikes at a time when transportation in the countryside was infrequent and rural life remote, thus permitting encounters normally beyond reach.

The culture of camping, hiking, and learning skills for life was similar to scouting movements and to the German *Wandervogel*. It proved successful and popular with youngsters and young adults whether as civilian or military endeavours. Additionally, there were longer annual trips such as exchanges between *moshav* communities, effective in developing skills and promoting links between them. For Zionists 'homeland' activities, containing rites of passage, and the integration of communities, were at the core of their programme. If the Bedouin with age-old customs provided a reminder of the ancient Hebrews, they also had a link to nature and the characteristics important to survival in arid terrain. The *Sabra* tapped into this but it was a partial and romantic view of Arab culture. However, the context was the 'all-encompassing endeavour to eradicate the old Diaspora Jewish culture and to replace it with a New Hebrew one that characterised the entire pre-state period.' (Evan-Zohar 2005)

What favoured efforts to spread Hebrew culture were the growth of institutions from kindergartens to unions, and the willingness to participate in a great experiment covering every aspect of life, from personal hygiene to the organisation of public areas. The dissemination of Hebrew culture (and language) took several years to filter through civil society, largely due to the efforts of 'cultural entrepreneurs' from Central and Eastern Europe. The cultural theorist Evan-Zohar disagrees with commentators who argue that coercion was used in the rise of Hebrew culture. Implicit in this new culture was a rejection of the exilic, Diaspora Jew, and he adds, 'everything that could be presented as fully divergent from Eastern European culture was "new" and desirable.' (Evan-Zohar 2005)

Almog includes among the *Sabra* Jews who were born in Palestine at the close of WWI and were 'educated in social frameworks belonging formally and informally to the labour movement of the *Yishuv*, as well as immigrants who arrived as youngsters (alone or with their families) and were assimilated in the same milieu.' (Almog 2000:2) There were school programmes to choose between and various pioneer youth movements or pre-military corps youngsters could sign up with. Others in the *Yishuv* or volunteers from abroad and from Nazi Germany joined the ranks of the *Palmach* alongside *Sabra*. They did not speak the slang or have Hebrew names but presumably shared similar experiences as fighters. After the war the *Palmach* was disbanded and transformed first into the *Nahal* then merging with Commando Unit 101 and the paratroopers, or as pilots and marine commandos all of which inherited the brigade ethos. Other *Sabra* fought with the British Army or with the *Haganah* later to become the Israel Defence Forces (IDF). (See Figure 64) The years of the *Sabra* overlapped with the formative years of the Israeli state and no doubt this was a factor in fanning the success of the myth. There were lots of groupings, formal and informal, that catered for youth and many youngsters would have overlapped in one setting or another, possibly giving rise to the sharing and spread of ideas and culture, the *Sabra* ascetic, but also to the illusions that went with it.

The *Sabra* had its own slang, dress code, musical and literary interests. Women belonged within its culture, even in the militia, but by and large it was masculine and the experience of battle lay at the heart of it. Almog suggests it was rooted in Jewish culture even though the *Sabra* would have rejected the idea at the time, believing that they had shrugged off erstwhile traditions of Diaspora Jews. The *Sabra* was the generation for whom Hebrew was the language they spoke and read. Their education was either affiliated with the labour movement or was sponsored by the Jewish Agency. Their adolescence was spent with the pioneer youth

and after finishing school they volunteered on the settlements. The *Palmach* had its own agricultural military training units, the *Hachsharot*. Ben Gurion had high expectations of the army and viewed it as a ‘pioneering, educating force, nation-building, wilderness-redeeming...moulder of the nation’s leaders, the cultural instrument of the ingathering of the exiles, their unification and spiritual uplifting.’<sup>40</sup> (Segev 1998:268)



Recruitment posters for the British Army 1939

Figure 64 Rudi Weissenstein <http://picasaweb.google.com/lh/photo/HEmeGdou-vF-MHpm75t5Q>

### The *Kibbutz*

The *kibbutz* was an intentional community planned to differ from the majority of other institutions and social practices where ideology was important to the community. ‘*Kibbutz* ideology, in keeping with its pragmatic and idealistic bases, stresses the virtues of hard work and self-help, as well as communal property and general collective sharing.’ (Barkin &

<sup>40</sup> Ben Gurion was dismayed by the performance of the various armed brigades before and during the war of 1948, concerned that an unchecked force would be a threat to democracy. Further he was worried by the *Palmach* link with the Social Democratic Labour Party (MAPAI). Founded in 1930, the party dominated the political scene until the 1960s.

Bennett 1972:460) Segev describes the *kibbutz* as ‘an original social creation, yet always a marginal phenomenon.’ (2000:249) Selfish behaviour, competition, and personal aspirations, were frowned upon but not to the extent that it was shut off from public or political life. Until statehood was declared, the *kibbutz* ‘was the symbol of Zionist courage and determination, and many incoming refugees and pioneers chose to settle in or establish *kibbutzim*.’ (Barkin & Bennett 1972:464)



**Figure 65 Kibbutz 1958**  
*Sunrise to sunrise, scenes of life in Israel Sifriat Poalim, Israel 1958*

Almog has suggested that some *Sabra* participated in communal living as was practised on *kibbutz*. These agricultural settlements were important to Zionism and early members were adherents of the cause. Most were male teenagers or in the twenties at the time settlements were created. Their relationship with the *Yishuv* was economic and political, and though this evolved over the years, the *kibbutz* was to prove a successful instrument of communal living.

(See Figure 65)<sup>41</sup> The first recruits were also sympathetic to socialism but none had much idea about Palestine and as for communal living, the *kibbutz* experience during the years of the *Yishuv* was a process of trial and error. As Bowes describes it ‘the rather diffuse socialism and Zionism and ad hoc approach to problem solving are explained by the absence of a clearly defined and articulated plan for living.’ (1990:88)

Prior to the founding of Degania, Israel’s first *kibbutz* in 1910, there had been several other arrangements of communal living. The seminal years coincided with the Second *Aliyah* when Zionist youth adopted the principle of the ‘conquest of labour’ the idea that Jews should liberate themselves through self-help. Drawn from middle-class families who ‘were determined to become farm labourers, to compete with Arabs on their own terms, and thus to turn existing villages into all-Jewish settlements.’ (Near 1985:178) This was a tough challenge and without ideological commitment to the project it would not have taken hold. As historian Henry Near points out, for every wave of immigration ‘it seems more than likely that two left the country for everyone who stayed.’ (Near 1985:180) Those who did stay on in the *kibbutz* were staunch Zionists, driven by duty, and physically and mentally prepared for the task. In the climate of the times, pioneers were expected to join the collective endeavour, but in fact their contribution lay in military struggle, and were ‘the guardians of Zionist land, and their patterns of settlement would to a great extent determine the country’s borders.’ (Segev 2000:249) Figure 66 illustrates the contribution to military struggle but was always wrapped up in the guise of self-defence rather than the strategic advance that the collective farms provided.

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<sup>41</sup> Burma and a few West African states developed a practical interest in the *kibbutz* as a means to develop co-operatives whilst in Japan and Italy a few collectives drew their inspiration from the *kibbutz*. Researchers observed that productivity in the absence of high wages was maintained, that rotating managers was more effective than one long-term manager, and elderly people fared better because they remained in a community. These were among some of the benefits identified along with socialist principles that for many were the whole point of the movement. Above all pragmatism rather than adherence to dogma was the key to the longevity of these communities.





Figure 66 Naftali Oppenheim *Kibbutz Ein Gev* guard squad. <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0.7340.L-3351502.00.html> retrieved May 30 2011

For Zionists the *kibbutz* movement was worth the support it required and in fact considered the best means for colonising land and promoting the ‘revival’ of Jewish culture in Israel. There was a symbiosis between both, the *kibbutz* representing a Zionist branch office on the settlement frontier but free to work out how to make communal living viable. *Kibbutz* people in their bid for self-reliance wanted to be free from the suspicion of living on the charity of the Diaspora, suggests Near. Some were drawn from the ranks of those who had tried different types of communal living, but as the relationship between the Zionist authorities and the *kibbutz* became institutionalised, so the model of Degania became the proto-type for many more. In 1920 there were ten *kibbutzim* functioning but this was just the beginning. Even then doubt was expressed about the ability of the *kibbutz* to play a role in the absorption of new immigrants, prompting the departure of a group from Degania leaving to found the first *moshav*, Nahalal. It spurred the search for other models of *kibbutz* particularly larger

scale ones and those diversified beyond agriculture alone. At the start of the Third *Aliyah* there were 446 *kibbutzim* but within a few years this had grown significantly.

During the British Mandate the *kibbutz* movement gradually became a part of the Zionist establishment, and though their numbers were insignificant in the *Yishuv* population, they were influential in shaping Zionism if not the state itself. In the closing years of the Mandate, the *kibbutz* proved a recruiting ground for Jewish militias (especially the *Palmach*) as well as providing them with operational bases. It seems that Almog in trying to put a particular gloss on his idea of the *Sabra* is actually for the most part describing *kibbutz* people and particularly those who joined the *Palmach*. These communities also came to dominate agricultural production and this dovetailed with the idea of a Jewish rebirth through a return to the soil.<sup>42</sup>

Segev describes communal life as a mix of idealism and necessity in harsh conditions, and a rejection of a Jewish way of life in the Diaspora, nodding to Soviet socialism that acknowledged the dream of a new world order if not of a New Man. Segev believes this was intertwined with ‘a yearning to “return to nature” also rooted in romantic European nationalism, and in this sense the pioneering phenomenon was anti-modernist’ and complemented ‘the Zionist longing for the glory days of the biblical era.’ (Segev 2000:256) Figure 66 showing a guard squad drilling reflects this idea of idealism and necessity, where instead of working the fields or herding cattle, young men are compelled to learn how to use guns against an unseen threat. It is once again, a classic Western scene, civilised people

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<sup>42</sup> Some Zionists, like Ber Borochov, argued for a socialist revolution in Palestine and A.D.Gordon for the dignity of labour and manual work. Borochov didn’t think European Jews had a sufficient proletarian base whilst Gordon was a pioneer on *kibbutz* Degania. (Bowes 1990:89)



trying to do the decent thing, forever having to watch their backs against unreasonable and unprovoked attacks.

*Sabra* prestige soared during the 1948 War and many admired the conspicuous role they played in it. Eulogists drawn from the older generation, down played everyone else's contribution to winning the war. The army newspapers for example often ran cover photos of *Sabra* combatants wearing traditional Arab scarves lauding the glamour and heroism of these young fighters. (Almog 2000:8) Segev suggests 'the *kibbutzim* saw themselves as the social elite of Israel and of Zionism, the ideological vanguard.' (Segev 1994:172) They recognised that duty, sacrifice and helping new immigrants were considered part of a moral effort required in building up the country. Figure 66 also reflects this moral effort and the idea that these young men were the vanguard of Israeli society, driven by idealism yet compelled by necessity to exchange the pitchfork for the gun.

Among the core of the *Sabra* a number became distinguished and prominent public figures. Notable among them and the exemplary *Sabra* is Ariel Sharon, farmer, colonist, and soldier, personifying the characteristics Ben-Gurion thought essential for Zionism to be fulfilled. (See Figure 67) Author David Grossman described Sharon as violent, cunning, brave, and corrupt, but thought such traits essential to forging a nation. (Levine 2007) The era of the *Sabra* coincided with the formative years of Israeli society. They fought their way through WWII, the 1948 War and finally on to the Sinai Campaign in 1956. Almog has estimated the *Sabra* generation in the 1930s numbered a maximum of 8000 rising to 20,000 when Israel declared statehood. He concludes that the *Sabra* were never more than 10% of the total *Yishuv* population. (Almog 2000:3) Most significant however, was a nucleus of public figures and

their entourage that essentially provided the role models for the propaganda campaigns inspired others by their courage and leadership.

It was the disparity between the low numbers and the significant cultural influence of the *Sabra* within society that underlines their assumed importance in Israeli history. In the 1930s, for example, there was a need for a robust image of a *Sabra* as tension and conflict with the Arabs grew. The literary critic Yael Ben Zvi (2000:3) claims that Almog does not sufficiently acknowledge the degree to which *Sabra* culture was a primarily masculine and critique's him for reaffirming the myths that he sets out to analyse. Whilst she supports his arguments that Zionism became the religion of the *Sabra* and this culture was inspired by the same Jewish traditions that it sought to negate, she is less convinced by his analysis of *Sabra* elsewhere that 'leaves the portrait free of from explicit conflicts with women, *Mizrahim* and Palestinians.' (2000:4)

The asceticism of the *Sabra* was an ideal, as well as a reality caused by relative austerity throughout the 1930s and 40s. Many immigrants in the second and third waves came without property and found themselves engaging in physical work in primitive new settlements, with enough to eat but few luxuries. Asceticism had its roots in socialism and the settlements were collectives, small seeds from which Zionist aspirations would grow. The hardship was a test of *Sabra* mettle and group solidarity, of putting the community above the individual. The historian Tom Segev (1988:296) notes that the cost of absorbing each new immigrant in 1949 was estimated at between USD 2-3000, a significant sum when 230,000 people arrived in that year. It caused a substantial balance of payments deficit as the unemployment rate stood at 14 per cent.



**Figure 67 Ariel Sharon with paratroopers 1957, Paul Goldman**  
*Paul Goldman press photographer 1943-1961 Israel Museum 2004*

Many immigrants into the *Yishuv* brought capital along with skills, but after the state was founded most immigrants were impoverished with lower educational attainment than their predecessors. An austerity programme was introduced to tackle the crisis that included rationing. It stimulated the resurgence of a black market and led to strikes and demonstrations during the course of 1950-1. Tens of thousands of immigrants remained stuck in camps and by 1952 the numbers of new immigrants had declined steeply because of the crisis, falling to 23,000. (Segev 1988:321) These were tough times but were not ones that Zionist agencies or the government press office wanted to publicise.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, ‘the constant threat (real or imagined) of annihilation has made Israeli Jews rely heavily on military and physical strength; in turn, militarism has become intimately connected to the construction of both Jewish nationalism and Israeli Jewish

masculinity.’ (Mayer 2000:284) Geographer Tamar Mayer comments that societies who have this “siege” perception also allow militarism to shape gender identities. Whilst albums acknowledge women (as they do minorities) they are assigned a secondary role to men in the defence of the nation. Herzl perceived the role of women in Zionism to be limited to reproduction and sustaining the nation on a domestic level but early albums accord them a role in both civil and military affairs. The years when women ceased to play roles on a par with men ended with the British Mandate and the creation of Israel. Zionism had always encouraged gender equality in its proselytising years, yet as a colonial project, it was unlikely women were going to find the freedom sought in a foreign country in threatening circumstances. Mayer suggests many women understood there was not going to be equality with men only after reaching Palestine.

Daily life for the first Israelis was more preoccupied with banalities than with heroics and dreams. The society emerging in Israel was not as *Ashkenazi* or as enlightened as hoped for and the longed for peace with basic democratic freedoms remained elusive. Segev believes the euphoria of reaching Israel, and dreams that led immigrants there, disguised the painful reality of their situation but without robbing them of the patience needed for starting a new life. It was the common dream that restrained them when ‘civil war might have erupted between old-timers and newcomers, *Ashkenazim* and Oriental Jews, or the religious against the secular, just as war had been the outcome between Jews and Arabs.’ (Segev 1988:323)

Zionism provided the ideology to attract immigrants as well as bind them to the new culture being created. Zionists were critical of Jews who preferred assimilation and regarded it as indicative of a declining (and failing) Jewish culture throughout the Diaspora. Of note was the adoption of a new language to supplant Yiddish. The adoption of the *Sephardi*

pronunciation of Hebrew was a further rejection of old *Ashkenazi* values. The language and its pronunciation were regarded as a cultural opposition of the New Hebrew versus Old Jew.

This did not sit well with all immigrants arriving in Palestine and many felt estranged from Hebrew culture. On the other hand, Jews largely assimilated into secular culture and already removed from traditional Jewish mores, were better equipped to adjust to new circumstances. In the second wave of immigration (1905-14) many had already untied 'the psychological and cultural bond with the Jewish caste community.' (Evan-Zohar 2005) Young German Jews, considering themselves in all respects German, proved among the foremost fighting pioneers.

Notwithstanding the success of Hebrew culture it never wholly seduced all civil society. With the arrival of so many and the diversity of cultures they sprang from, divergent positions were bound to surface. Some preserved the culture they had left behind others blended it with Hebrew culture. Even with the help of institutions, Hebrew culture never enjoyed blanket acceptance within society. Like immigrants anywhere else around the world everyone arriving in Palestine had to make a choice about the culture they sprang from and the one they joined. Jews arriving in Palestine considered they had equal rights with earlier immigrants, a perception that eased their integration into the *Yishuv*.

The debate that surrounds Hebrew culture today is how far its introduction into the *Yishuv* was a matter of coercion and how far it was willingly embraced. The debate is not without emotion for those who believe they were duped by the messaging of Zionism and too young to recognise what was happening to them at the time. There are accounts that express bitter disillusionment with Zionism and former *Palmach* fighters among others have stated coercion and deception were used to win hearts and minds. Tikva Honig-Parnass enlisted in

the *Palmach* soon after the UN Resolution declaring the partition of Mandate Palestine in November 1947. (See Figure 68) She thought the *Palmach* akin to a guerrilla army that seemed to be fighting for the freedom of the people and whose soldiers came from the ranks of the oppressed. This impression contributed to what she describes as ‘the myth of legitimate “self-defence.”’ (Honig-Parnass 2002) She suggests the myth propagated by Labour Zionists insinuated the only purpose of the *Palmach* was to defend the *Yishuv* against attacks. She and many contemporaries internalised this position whereas, she argues, the *Palmach* was a military force waiting to fulfil ‘Zionist plans of conquest and the dispossession of the Arab inhabitants of Palestine.’ (Honig-Parnass 2002) In the next chapter an example is given in the case of Arna Mer Khamis whose disillusionment with the *Palmach* and Zionism echoes that of Honig-Parnass.

After completing her schooling she was compelled to work for a year on a *kibbutz*. In her youth this was a precondition for entry into higher education but as she identified with the values of Labour Zionists and the *Sabra* image, she was blind to its contradictions. It seemed as if the *Sabra* was regarded as the jewel in the crown of the entire Zionist project and so powerful was the mythology that her early conditioning stayed with her long after she realised that Zionism was ‘a colonialist enterprise’ that from its inception ‘sought to build an exclusivist Jewish state in all of historic Palestine.’ (Honig-Parnass 2002) It was nostalgia for her youth and the ‘brotherhood and comradeship in arms’ that held her in thrall to *Sabra* ideals long after she had intellectually discarded them. She discovered, thanks to the recovery of letters she had written to her parents during her time at war, that the *Sabra* generation had been ‘programmed to reject the concept of human rights and to accept subjection to “the collective aims” of Zionism.’ (Honig-Parnass 2002)



**Figure 68 Palmach fighters Ein Gedi 1942 Photographer unknown**  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palmach> retrieved 4 January 2012

No doubt for quite a few Israeli scholars and commentators, without sacrifice and coercion, Zionism could not have built a unified community essential to Israel's development. Schools and training schemes were central to the spread of Zionism's revolutionary programme, neither democratic in their values, nor open to alternatives. Schools provided the environment to promote a national consciousness that valued the belief that Jews were a chosen people in the chosen land. All this followed half-hearted attempts by the British and their Arab and Jewish interlocutors to establish joint educational programmes. However, with few exceptions 'the principle of segregation was accepted by all parts of the Zionist movement.'<sup>43</sup> (Segev 2000:284) As it transpired, segregation was particularly helpful in allowing Zionists to use the education system to spread Zionist values.

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<sup>43</sup> "Segregation also guided the Zionists' strategy of purchasing land to create a single contiguous area of Jewish ownership" and was, suggests Segev, the reason behind the development of Tel Aviv (Segev 2000:285)

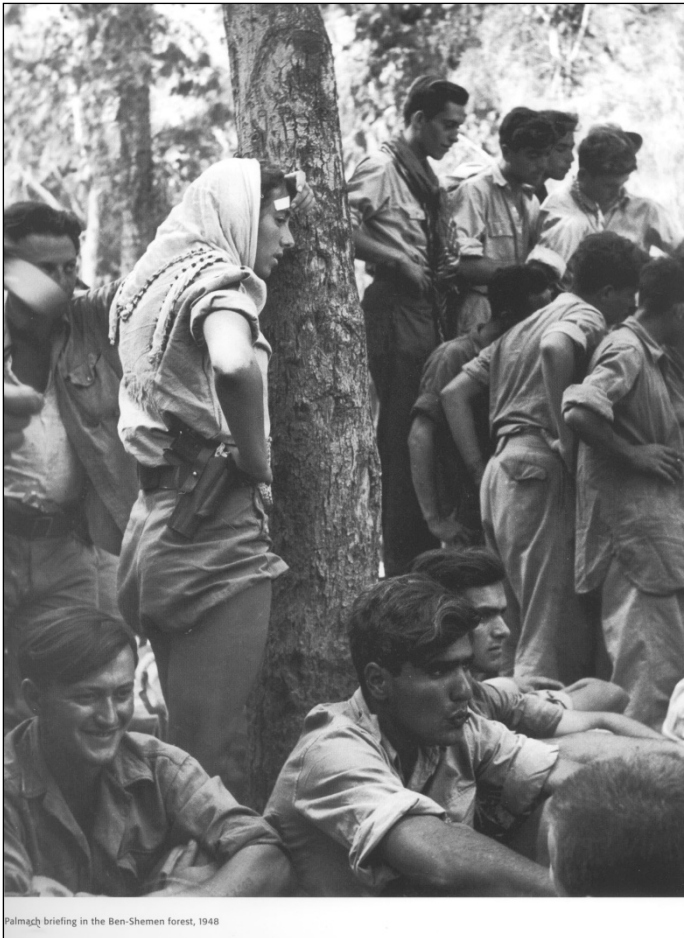
Despite the mythology of the *Sabra* their photographic representation is contextualised in a broader portrayal of Israelis. In some ways the *Sabra* is unidentifiable in photographs and looking for them akin is a search for an idealisation. Aside from a veneer of the European in look or dress there isn't more to go on. Thus some photographs shown here may not depict *Sabra* so much as an imagined community and these photographs still circulate, turning up in exhibitions or commemorating one anniversary or another in newspapers. Some have seen repeated use in albums that show how far the legacy continues to the present. <sup>44</sup> Photographs of the *Sabra* period are still found in anthologies today and one by Boris Carmi evokes the *Palmach* ideal particularly well. (See Figure 69) Recorded in the Ben-Shemen forest in 1948 the photograph shows a military briefing. There are several figures in army fatigues but only the faces of nine soldiers can be seen, the others obscured. At the centre is a young woman, armed with a pistol, leaning against a tree, her expression pensive. Carmi's photograph is among scores depicting women combatants serving with militias, widely published at the time. It is an icon of the *Sabra* period.

The girl with the pistol stood before the photograph decades later as an elderly woman at an exhibition of Carmi's work in the *Haganah* Museum looking back at 'those days of dreams, days of blood, days of massacre.' (Kaniuk 2004:14) In the framing of this composition the girl with the gun becomes transformed as a mythic *Sabra* figure, every bit as powerful as depictions of male heroes. Yet most of the heroes were men and the role of heroines in photography, whether in fiction or news reports, came a poor second. The photograph is a reminder that women served in roles where risk and danger was no different to that which men faced.

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<sup>44</sup> Many have English texts and captions and English is widely used in Israel. In fact, reflecting the widespread Jewish Diaspora and the nature of Jewish immigration (a process that is on-going) many languages are present in Israel in speech, print and the broadcast media and have been since the time of the *Yishuv*.





**Figure 69 Palmach soldiers in Ben Shemen forest 1948**  
*Boris Carmi Photographs from Israel Prestel Verlag 2004*

After Israel had become a state, pictures of women began to disappear from the pictorial albums and certainly by the Sinai Campaign women have vanished from published representation of their roles in the army. Almog describes *Sabra* women as dressing simply and uniformly. Often ‘their hair was done up in a ponytail or in braids, and they wore wide khaki shorts held to their thighs with elastic bands.’ (Almog 2000:209) Blouses and jumpers were staple items, but generally neither jewellery nor make-up was applied. The simple, drab and colourless dress codes, was an inverted ostentation, it spoke of class and status whilst pretending to be proletarian. Almog suggests it illustrates ‘the seriousness that characterises a society of naïve and mobilised believers, in which the individual will is given over to public endeavours.’ (Almog 2000:212) (See Figures 68, 69 and 71) Looking at the pioneers in

whichever branch they served is as hard as distinguishing *Hasidic* Jews in their costumes so adopted was their clothing. It was one component of the *Sabra* ascetic code.

The commemorative albums portrayed ordinary people with a sprinkling of public figures mixed in amongst them to suggest unity and collective purpose. They showed the diversity of immigration whether European or Arab and local Arabs and minorities (such as Druze) were sometimes included. It wasn't uncommon for Israeli families who had lost relatives during national service to receive albums from the government. These were widely distributed, and for those in Israel or following from afar, charted the tribulations and triumphs of the young state year on year. The *Sabra* was included in these anthologies without pride of place but their glamour prevailed. The puzzle that Almog creates in his assessment of the *Sabra* is that they are identifiable in the guise of public figures and fictional heroes but not otherwise as a distinct group as say, *Gadna* or *Palmach*, and when discussing this with those who had served in either group, (such as photographers David Harris or Micha Bar Am) there was never a sense in which they described themselves as *Sabra* even though in most respects their belief in Zionism matched that of the *Sabra* myth.

In Fig. 71 for example, the arranged composition shows a young woman with arms and legs bared, whip raised above her head, standing in a cart drawn by a well-tended horse. It looks like a cover for a hobbyist's magazine, with obvious appeal to propagandists promoting the benefits of Zionism. This titillating image of the new Jew, a picture of health, living an adventure, was a repeated theme. Women with horses was especially popular, but many arranged compositions depicting women driving farm machines or military vehicles, sometimes with a rifle slung nonchalantly over a shoulder, implied women had a role in realising Zionist ambitions.



Absorption camp "Sha'ar Alyia," Haifa, 1951

**Figure 70 Absorption Camp, Haifa 1951 Boris Carmi Photographs from Israel Prestel 2004**

It suggested women could be independent, in charge of their lives, making a contribution to the collective endeavour. As one contemporary suggested, *Sabra* women were ‘proud and solid of character’ they were ‘independent and rebellious, like a symbol of that native generation of the homeland.’ (Almog 2002:112). Zadek was not alone in producing glamorous depictions of women who at times looked more as if they were modelling the latest tractor than as if they were driving it to work. Boris Carmi and Zoltan Kluger were others whose images suggest much the same idea. The compositions were as carefully chosen as the girls themselves who were always neatly turned out and didn’t look as if they had just come from working fields. Even Figure 70 has a studied air about it with the woman in the foreground with loaves of bread appears to have stepped out from the hairdresser’s shortly before the photograph was recorded. Her appearance is altogether far too composed for someone working in a bustling field kitchen.



**Figure 71** Walter Zadek no date, untitled  
*Time Frame, a century of photography in the Land of Israel*, Israel Museum 2000

Figure 71 photographed by Walter Zadek might be described as a typical *Sabra* scene and, as with figure 70, it gets the point across, steering the viewer away from any hint of drudgery, even implying a sense of fun and an atmosphere of togetherness that was very much at the forefront of the collective endeavour. The historian Tony Judt described his three *kibbutz* summers in the mid-60s as an ‘intense sentimental education’ and he joined with ‘fellow feelers in happy collective revels, excluding dissenters, and celebrating our reassuring unity of spirit, purpose, and clothing.’ Judt admits that the collective farms were largely faithful to the founding principles of Labour Zionism, namely to create (or recreate) the promise of muscular Jewish work and the antithesis of an effete Diaspora. However, he discovered that the collective farms were ‘characteristically fragmented into conflicting sectarian cults’ and were ‘provincial and rather conservative, their ideological rigidity, camouflaging the limited horizons of many of their members.’<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> <http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2010/jan/18/kibbutz/> retrieved 21 January 2012





**Figure 72 Boris Carmi *Palmach* fighters of the Harel Brigade 1947 *Time Frame a century of photography in Israel*. Israel Museum 2000**

Figure 72 shows relaxed men and laughing women of the *Palmach* in a battered jeep, an effective recruitment poster for the adventurous and especially women who may have read in this image the possibility of equal status for those in uniform. Yet at this time, a jeep no matter what its condition was a status symbol, a vehicle used by elite such as the *Harel Brigade*. Similar photographs were published by various agencies and used in the construction of a national memory. As Thompson suggests, ‘the photograph works to extend our experience of time, delaying the degradation of past events and experiences, while working to trigger, prolong, and in some instances, to transform memory.’ (Thompson 2010) The transformation of memory is a trick of time as well as a reflection of the way collective

memory is selective. Yet Figure 72 is eloquent in its naturalness, as if this was the second or third photograph in a sequence that he recorded, and one of the frames catching them in an unguarded moment. One man poses for the camera, smiling, the other two looking diffident, even serious, and in contrast to the laughing women. It shows the group more vulnerable than tough but of course such oppositions lay at the heart of the *Sabra* soul according to Almog.

Hardly surprising then, that the *Sabra* passed into folklore. Their mystique lent gravitas through heavy losses fighters sustained during the 1948 war. Literary anthologies (including those published under the aegis of the Defence Ministry) were peppered with references to *Sabra*. To conjure such an image was tantamount to describing a cultural hero, and references could be found across the arts. Almog describes the memorialising process through war albums portraying *Sabra* fighters especially *Palmach*. A photograph of a handsome commander, Avraham Eden, seen apparently hoisting a makeshift flag in Eilat became an icon of the period. (Almog 2000:8) Later young Eden look-a-likes appears both in advertising campaigns and as leading men in films. (See Figure 73) Widely published, captions to this photograph refer to raising the flag without acknowledging that it already is. Eden needlessly climbs the flagpole perhaps solely for the photograph, as if to underline the symbolism of the moment, if not of the photograph. The Eilat ink drawn flag was used on a commemorative postage stamp in 1998 and all this was a weak acknowledgement of the flag raised in Iwo Jima (see Chapter Five) and the photograph never achieved international recognition. In using the photograph in a commemorative way it elevates the status of the image to that of icon but as a peon of triumph, it is less than heroic and a man climbing a flagpole is not the same thing as raising a flag on a field of battle.



**Figure 73** Soldier fixing an ink drawn flag, Eilat 1949  
*Time Frame* Israel Museum 2000

### **The *Sabra* in fiction**

By the 1948 War there was flourishing literary culture and a growth in magazines and newspapers. Segev notes that novels and poetry anthologies sold tens of thousands whilst dramas played to packed theatres. The *Sabra* was always a popular theme ‘part cowboy in a Western movie, part epic hero in a great Soviet novel.’ (Segev 1998:290) The new generation of writers emerging during the war years were preoccupied with the same themes as the generation of pioneer writers, and like them were part of the Labour movement. However, they were marked by experience of the 1948 War and alienated from changes war had wrought. Most of the Arabs had gone, immigrants were pouring in, and new construction infested the landscape. Curiously, suggests Segev, the absence of Arabs produced a sense of loss, and though they were the enemy, nonetheless had preserved the link with the biblical

nature of the land. He believes this caused ambivalence in the prose of the period. (Segev 1998:291)

One of the prolific authors of this period was Moshe Shamir who wrote fifty-two novels, plays and short stories. Journalist Lawrence Joffe (2004) suggests that Shamir was among those instrumental in forging the *Sabra* myth and his stories echoed their hopes, fears, and achievements. Perhaps this is what can be understood in Figure 72. At the time of his early writing Shamir was a member of the *Mapam* party that at one point favoured the spread of world Marxism and a bi-national Arab-Jewish state in Palestine. He lived for some years on a *kibbutz* prior to signing up with the *Palmach* and his experience epitomises that of elite *Sabra*. 'With his own hands' (1951) has a protagonist based upon Shamir's brother who had been killed in the 1948 war. His last novel *Ya'ir* (2001) tells the story of Avraham Stern, leader of Stern Gang during the 1940s. Journalist Yizhak Laor claims that from the 1940s until the 1970s Hebrew literature had more blue-eyed blonds in its pages than could be found on the streets in Israel. In one key novel, *He walked in the Fields* (1947) one character is described thus, 'if you were to tear his shirt off his back, near the shoulder, his white, delicate skin would reveal large sun spots and golden down.' (Laor 2009:xxii) He suggests that the literary image of the *Sabra* is telling of the ideological make-up of the New Jew in Palestine, The *Sabra* 'is the victim of circumstances, or a victim of the cruelty of the generation before him, or of the cruelty of Jewish history.' (Laor 2009: xxi) In turn the *Sabra* had to be cruel, though it was seen as excusable, because he was 'the historical answer to the riddle of Jewish history' (Laor 2009: xxi). Perhaps this sense of victimhood is suggested in the behaviour of characters like Uri in *He Walked in the Fields* or Alec in *With his own hands* (1951) who, whilst skilled with a tractor or a rifle, is inclined to be more at ease in the open air than in the company of others.



There were other characteristics in this male image that emerge in the novels of Shamir, such as *Alik's Story* (1951) or in *Days of Ziklag* (1958) by S. Yizhar, one of which is the fact of the youth of the fighters, as if perpetually caught between boyhood and manhood, physically as well as emotionally. (See Figure 74) Israeli heroes required the kind of adoration that aroused protective feelings in the reader and acknowledged their vulnerability given they were required to sacrifice their lives if needed. (Laor 2009: xvi) This same representation is less convincing in photographs and contingent upon their ability to elicit emotion. Nor do photographs articulate the inner turmoil of *Sabra* youth, still less relationships with peers and parents, or the search for approval among the members of whichever collective they belonged to. Even when there was a growing permissiveness in sexual mores, the literary depiction of young men as 'pure and asexual' continued, and belonged with his other endearing traits of naivety, shyness and confusion. (Laor 2009: xv) Laor thinks Israeli propaganda cultivated an image of vulnerability, eliciting as well as asking for sympathy and support.

Author and researcher Avner Holtzman argues 'the corpus of Hebrew writing acts as something of a collective Jewish memoir' particularly in fiction. However, fiction emerging from the first two waves of immigration (1882-1903, 1904-14) 'was inextricably interwoven with the incipient Zionist activity in the Land of Israel.' (2002:2) Holtzman thinks almost every facet of Jewish or Israeli collective experience has been explored in fiction, but is a trend that continues. The early *Palmach* generation of writers that came of age in the Sinai Campaign had a particular view of the individual versus collective path in Jewish society and explored natural tensions between them as in, *The night train to Yatir* by A.B. Yehoshua. But the *Palmach* era writers, suggests literary research professor Yigal Schwartz, put their protagonists on a path that is both existential and national and 'the voice that powers them is

not the “voice of the world” but rather the strength of agricultural and military machinery.’

(Schwartz 2000)



**Figure 74** Dmitri Kessel, *Haganah militia 1948*

<http://benatlas.com/2009/07/life-in-israel-in-1948-part-2/> retrieved 8 June 2011

Another story written by S. Yizhar confronts the reality of settlement and the war it provoked. Published during the course of the war, the story was called *Khirbat Hiz'ah* set in an Arab village conquered by Israeli forces with little resistance offered. The men have fled, leaving behind women and children to be evicted by soldiers ahead of blowing up the houses. The conclusion dwells on this loss and the narrator ponders exile. He reflects that he has never been in the Diaspora and could never understand what it meant until this moment, even though he had grown up with stories of exile and its messages permeated culture everywhere. Watching the departing Arabs, tired, hungry, and weeping, shuffling into exile, the narrator

asks himself what he and his companions really had done that day. This doubt and concern expressed by the narrator is sensed by his companion who tells him that despite the destruction and dispossession, the village will one day be rebuilt and peopled by needy immigrants who will work the land, build schools, and synagogues, and the past will be forgotten. Who can say what was going through the mind of the young soldier in Figure 76 supervising the distribution of water to the defeated townsfolk of Ramle, but like Figure 54 of the Haifa riots, it is recognisably a news photograph and immediately sets a different tone to the publicity culture of Zionist agency photographs. That said it does no discredit because two Arab boys can be seen serving water to the visibly parched prisoners. The caption states they are inhabitants but this is something of a misnomer and possibly some of the people seen in the photograph may have died of thirst a few days later after their expulsion from the town. Figure 76 presages so many more images of Palestinians behind fences, barricades and walls that were or became part of their daily landscape. It was a portent of photographs to come, each one deeper into Palestinian territory than the last, and each a reminder of how many mechanisms were deployed either to disperse the Arabs or to contain them. An unceasing process from 1948 onwards, and one of course that can be connected through photographs between then and now.

Ramle in Figure 76 was attacked on July 12 under the command of Yizhak Rabin. There were many killed in the course of 'Operation Dani' an assault on Ramle and nearby Lydd and the survivors dispossessed of everything and perhaps 50,000 were marched to the West Bank. Foreign correspondents of the period and historians subsequently have described the wanton killing of non-combatants during the war that was part of the ethnic cleansing. Yizhar was bold in raising the issue of dispossession when events were still fresh, but historian Noah Efron (2008) ponders how the meaning of Yizhar's story has mutated in the intervening

years, reflecting changes in the political mood of the country. In 1949 the story was not seen as an expose of misconduct since most readers knew what befell Arab villages. 'Its aim was to clearly describe what had appeared vague in the fog of war and then exaltation of victory: the moral muck inevitable in creating a Jewish majority in Palestine.' (Efron 2008)



**Figure 75** still from *Hill 24* directed by Thorold Dickinson, the first foreign film made on location in Israel recalling the war in 1948. The night before a cease-fire called by the UN a platoon of volunteers defend their position whilst recounting stories of the different paths they had followed prior to hostilities. <http://www.israelfilmcenter.org/israeli-film-database/films /hill-24-doesn-t-answer> retrieved 24 January 2012

An example of dilemmas faced by soldiers occurred on October 29 1956 in Kfar Qasem where Border Police opened fire on 60 Arab Israeli citizens, killing 47 and wounding 13. A few soldiers subsequently stood trial and were given lengthy sentences but all were released a year later with a presidential pardon, a regular occurrence in Israel. On the eve of the Sinai Campaign, Major Malinki briefed his men that war was imminent and they were to impose a curfew on eight Arab villages with shoot to kill orders for anyone who broke it. Three officers queried the order, Nimrod Lampert, Yehuda Frankenthal, and Binyamin Kol and all found ways to disobey it. The court acknowledged that their action prevented further loss of

life. Each addressed the moral question of shooting unarmed civilians in cold blood (most of whom did not even realise that a curfew had been imposed on their villages).



**Figure 76 Distribution of water to the inhabitants after Ramle's occupation 1948**  
*Paul Goldman Press Photographer 1943-61 Israel Museum 2004*

Having successfully negotiated this, the three faced a second dilemma when the case came to trial. As witnesses, two of them adjusted their testimony to protect those who had killed the Arabs whilst Frankenthal spared no one. Frankenthal's role is portrayed in a 1994 play called 'Malinki'. Written by journalist, Ruvik Rosenthal who contextualised the incident in a book where he suggests Moshe Dayan had a contingency plan, a diversionary tactic, to attack Jordan and confuse the enemy. This involved the transfer of the residents of the eight villages to detention camps and possibly on to Jordan, 'the ground, then, was ripe for war crimes, but in Frankenthal's sector the illegal order was not implemented.' (Karpel 2008)

Much later, with the arrival of *Likud* in power in 1977, when a television adaptation of Yizhar's story was in production, public resentment against it being aired resulted in a ban. The generation who had not lived through the war saw the story as a morality play about Arabs and Jews, as a template for those who saw injustice in Zionism. The detailed description of Israeli soldiers emptying a village in 1948 was bound to resonate year on year, through military campaigns, dispossessions, territorial gains, and occupation and settlement of what was left. Yizhar probably intended the story as a 'tortured struggle within the narrator between the demands of patriotism and the demands of human decency.' (Efron 2008) Moral ambivalence was a recurrent theme, reflecting 'the awesome price of Jewish national independence' paid by colonised and colonists alike. Yizhar, like Jabotinsky, addressed the moral dilemmas that accompanied the creation of the state, and even if these were profoundly rhetorical, they went much further than the visual record in tallying 'the awesome price.' Decades later, his story was seen as a lament on the destruction of the 1948 Arab landscape so familiar to Jews of his generation. Yizhar held back from describing the horror and abuse of dispossession and remains faithful to Zionist ideology. He was after all the chief editor of the IDF army magazine *Bamahane* and knew well the boundaries of the permissible. He later pursued a political career and invariably attracted controversy in his politics as well as his prolific writings. After the 1967 War he moved to the right.

In much the same way the archivists of state and Zionist agency holdings, desist from releasing or publishing examples of photographs that indicate looting, piled corpses in mosques, or anything that comes close to a documentary depiction of the situation of non-combatants. Photographers like Carmi and Goldman despite the acknowledged humanity in their photographs, fall well short of the mark in their portrayal of fleeing refugees. The presumption that such photographs exist is because it is widely accepted, and in many

countries already proven, that everything under the sun been photographed. Not so in Israel because the past is ongoing and the conflict has never stopped in one way or another, preventing the disclosure of such images.

Disclosure of another sort was an issue in the representation of women because whilst Zionism ostensibly offered gender equality the reality was different. The first Zionist congress in 1897 granted women the right to vote but this wasn't implemented in the *Yishuv* until 1926. In effect, suggests Ben-Ari, during the second wave of immigration women did hard physical labour just like the men but were not encouraged to have their own pioneer organisations and did not progress within the Zionist movement. (Ben-Ari 2004) Their aspirations were neither fulfilled in reality still less in the literature of the period. In *Sabra* novels women have secondary roles for the most part on the periphery of the action. Women belonged to the domestic arena and 'symbolise the home, tradition, history, Judaism and obligations that the new authors sought to transcend.' (Fuchs 2001 2) Professor Esther Fuchs suggests reading *Sabra* fiction to find how women are represented is of interest because this native born literary generation was supposed to be rid of innuendo and stereotyping when it came to issues relating to 'sexism, ethno-centrism and racism.' (Fuchs 2001:1) Putatively the novelists of the period were committed to the ideals of socialist Zionism that ostensibly spurned, and were untainted by, the 'bourgeois anti-egalitarian prejudices', that apparently undermined Zionist ideals in the wake of the massive rise in immigration following Israeli statehood. (Fuchs 2001:1)

Socialist Zionism was dedicated not only to equality and justice but also to a national Jewish revival. Fuchs suggests that Mossinsohn, *kibbutz* member and *Palmach* fighter, portrayed women as 'passive bystanders incapable of understanding the political urgencies of the time.' (Fuchs 2001:3) Zionism rejected traditional patriarchal culture yet the *Sabra* ideal was built

upon a male centred culture and the generation of writers who grew up in the 1920s created protagonists who were neither shackled to tradition or to their families. The heroes in Mossinsohn's novels can be found everywhere facing adversity and challenges on every front, building up the *kibbutz* or fighting Arabs and British, whilst trying to reconcile personal aspirations within a wider society. *In the Negev Prairies* (1948) Mossinsohn's drama explores another theme in *Sabra* mythology, where the soldier son is asked by the father to take incredible risks (break through enemy lines to seek help for the besieged *kibbutz*) that will cost him his life. As author and poet Yizhak Laor expresses it 'the father remains ambiguous, a sort of victimizing victim.' (Laor 2009: xviii) There are biblical echoes in this story as, for example, when Abraham banishes his Egyptian handmaid and their son Ishmael to the desert to die of thirst, or when the father of Isaac is told to give his son up in offering. (Laor 2009:xix) In this story the son was a source of faith in a better future, and as a *Sabra* had none of the complexes of the Diaspora Jew. As Segev comments the *Sabra* New Man was upright and willing to do what was needed, including killing, but whenever he could 'he would cry in self-pity, for of course he hated war more than anything else.' (Segev 1998:290)

The *Sabra* rose again in public esteem as Israel inflicted a bitter defeat upon Egyptian forces. The public lauded their fighting skills but reverence ebbed within a decade. Criticism emerged of *Sabra* culture and its mythology was debunked. Perhaps admiration was due to the elite, who had a profound impact on the development of Israeli society and culture. What they achieved was the moulding of an Israeli identity that was wholly different to the perceived identity of Jews in the Diaspora. All played their part as the soldier writers, the soldier politicians, or the soldier photographers and all belonged to the same club. Israel was a relatively small community and many of these people knew one another. Perhaps it was elitism itself that came to be resented but essentially the *Sabra* in fact, fiction, and



photographs was an idea whose time had come and gone. The club fragmented and lives moved on as civil society abandoned its erstwhile heroes.



Figure 77 <http://972mag.com/wishes-for-a-year-of-little-faith/1796/> retrieved 23 January 2012  
David Eldan winter 1950 Tel Aviv

Figure 77 of a snowball fight in Tel Aviv between four young women as a man and a car pass by captures the alleged innocence of the *Sabra* era and the snow evokes the idea of purity. Snow scenes were as popular with Zionist agencies as they were with the press, there was delight in the unusual event and familiar street scenes, landscape, or architecture could be transformed into iconic expressions symbolising ‘renewal, promise and hope.’ (Feldstein 2003:3) In Figure 78 Sonnenfeld has an agricultural scene recorded during the 1950s near Safad in the Galilee region that could read in the same way. Curiously, a post-Modern perspective might read it rather like a 1990s advertisement for a brand of jeans invoking a 1950s mid-western rural scene in the USA. Indeed, the young man in a sleeveless vest, and trousers without belt, could be from a dozen countries or from a number of different decades.

It isn't difficult to imagine him as a *Palmach* veteran of 1948 or of his returning to a combat role in 1956. Or as someone who by dint of combat had earned his place in the furrow and the right to the land. His gaze sidesteps the viewer, fixed at some point beyond engaged with the challenge before him. Is this Sonnenfeld's metaphor for the Israeli front line? Figure 78 could be read as the pioneer 'opening the first furrow and splitting the virgin soil.' (Feldstein 2003:3)

In films, as in all *Sabra* mythology, the New Hebrew strived for excellence whether on the farm, sports-field, or trenches. Its propaganda value was undoubtedly the expression of an ideal, one that young people could identify with and emulate. Films acknowledged the sacrifice and scarcities early pioneers had to endure in the realisation of their projects, but doubt and failure were absent. There is one filmmaker (widely regarded for his photographs) Helmar Lerski, whose documentary 'Avodah' (1935) typified the achievements of the *Yishuv*. Researcher Nurit Gertz has explored in film and literature the tensions between native Israelis and new immigrants, among them survivors of the WWII genocide. Gertz mentions the growing divide that emerges in the 1940s and 1950s in fiction and film between Zionist ideology and its realisation. The various immigrant nationalities assumed differing roles within nation building and this was also a source of tension between them. Whilst, for example, Polish and Russian Jews dominated the political scene in the formative years of Israel, German Jews eschewed politics and were not particularly receptive to Hebrew culture.

The archetype of the pioneer as has been suggested, was of a young Jew prepared to leave family, even country, to make his way to the Promised Land. It was a mission that embraced exploration and redemption in equal measure and one that filmmakers and photographers sought to promote. Was this the case for the man in Figure 78 had he undertaken such a

journey? Time and again the portraits of Seymour and Sonnenfeld seem to resonate with the spirit of the times or at least their photographs betray their own obvious faith in the new state. Film historian Ariel Feldstein says immigrants of the second wave were ‘charmed by ideas of bravery and courage, human dignity and national excellence and these perceptions became the terrain of political parties and youth movements active in *Eretz* Israel during that period.’ (Feldstein 2003:2) No doubt this helped fuel the rise of the myth of the *Sabra* and it seems too that visiting Jewish photographers were similarly charmed, the transience of their assignments adding to the intensity of their experience and emotions. Without their contribution, in Israel and in the Diaspora, the visual legacy of these years would have led to a less compelling account of the pioneer years.

If the *Sabra* had taken control of shaping his own destiny it was done so in the belief that his European counterpart had failed to do so. It was a motive for self-reliance. The *Sabra* was psychologically, if not physically, a long way off from the old Jewish world which included pogroms and genocide. Moreover, many hardly provided a welcome to genocide survivors when they first landed ashore (in time for some of them to serve as combatants in the 1948 war). Antipathy to what was regarded as collective Jewish failure in Europe was only dispelled much later. On the other hand, whatever *Yishuv* Jews or indeed those in the Diaspora beyond Europe actually imagined was happening to the Ashkenazim, it paled by comparison with what they learned subsequently.



**Figure 78 Safed region 1950s Leni Sonnenfeld**  
*Eyes of Memory* Yale University Press 2004

Consciousness of mass genocide took several years to filter through to Israeli society so the antipathy of the *Sabra* to the old Jewish order was as much due to the ideological tenets of Zionism as it was to any particular historical fact. The Jewish narrative born so many centuries ago has fostered a culture of memorialising. The *Holocaust* now lies at the heart of this culture but at the time of the *Sabra*, within Israeli society at least, it was their loss and above all their sacrifice that was eulogized, whilst the genocide survivors were either misunderstood at best or cynically regarded at worst.

The apparent innocence of the *Sabra* melted away with the staging of the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in 1961 that exposed an Israeli public to horrifying testimony of camp survivors. Such testimony and the genocide itself was being addressed in literature but it briefly

took on a different and more curious guise within the genre of pulp fiction. Pocket books called *Stalags* were written and published in Israel in the early 1960s and were runaway best sellers. The books told ‘perverse tales of captured American or British pilots being abused by sadistic female SS officers outfitted with whips and boots.’ (Kershner 2007) (See Figure 79) The pocket books became the subject of a court order banning their circulation barely two years after they first surfaced.

Moreover, with the Eichmann trial, public awareness of the WWII genocide began to take hold and this suggests Kershner prompted survivors to sense the ambivalence towards them by their fellow Israelis ‘who blamed them for not having emigrated in time and questioned what immoral deeds they might have done in order to stay alive.’ (Kershner 2007) However the trial led to a reversal in attitudes towards the survivors, whose experiences had never been adequately recognised. ‘Prior to the trial, refugees had been largely ignored, for they represented weaknesses and were an all-to-bleak reminder of a tragic chapter in European history that Israeli pioneers and natives preferred to ignore.’ (Kleeblatt 2006)

During the trial a camp survivor and writer K. Tzetnik gave evidence. Tzetnik had to disclose his real name rather than the pseudonym he wrote under that literally means one who was in a concentration camp. He was widely known for his novel ‘Doll’s House’ (1953) which tells the story of a woman condemned to serve the sexual inclinations of German soldiers in Block 24 in Auschwitz. This story was a source of inspiration to the *Stalag* writers, and the pornography of genocide folklore duly found its way into the Israeli school curriculum. The director of a documentary film about the pocket books, Ari Libsker (2006) recalls that the first time he saw pictures of genocide in primary school were those of naked women. The

brief rise and fall of pocket books and the trial itself spelled the demise of innocence and of the alleged purity of the *Sabra* era.



Figure 79 Stalag comic <http://nonpartypolitics.blogspot.com> Retrieved 5 June 2011

For a brief period comic strips written in Hebrew appeared in the United States, Europe, and Israel. In the *Yishuv* the first comic appeared in 1935 in *Itonenu Lektanim* an original story called 'Miki Mau' *Veliyau* by Immanuel Yafe. It encouraged further development of comic strips throughout the 1940s. In the next twenty years there was a gradual evolution and both *Davar* and *Ha'aretz* newspapers developed children's sections that had longer adventure strips. One such was 'Gidi Gezer' that appeared in the 1950s and told the story of an Israeli boy during the 1948 War. The characters were heroes and in the post war period had greater powers. In the 1960s one character drew his power from drinking milk. The strip was in fact an advertising campaign whose stories became ever more intricate. Another story by Pinchas Sadeh in 1960 was about a scientist working at the nuclear facility in Dimona and was among a number of titles that had science fiction as its mainspring. Few strips ever lasted long enough to become classics. There do not appear to be comic strip characters directly drawn from known *Sabra* heroes, but were an extension of them, an everyman version of the *Sabra*.

However, cartoonists of the period certainly memorialised *Sabra* heroes in publications like the *Gadna* youth movement newsletter aimed at teenagers rather than children. The drawings portrayed the charm and roguishness of the *Sabra* in sandals and shorts ‘with his slipshod appearance and his hair falling over his forehead.’ (Almog 2000:9)

There are many photographs that convey the zeitgeist of the *Sabra* era, the vision of a determined and selfless new man for a new society built by hard work and good will. There is in photographs of the pioneers something reminiscent of early American photographs and suggestions of redemption and hope jostle with those of struggle and danger. These remain as cherished elements of the collective memory because not only do they appeal to religious values they continue to reinforce myths that are still held dear in Zionism. In effect they are seen as a valid account of Israeli history. Their fictionalisation in the stories of the period are also the roots of Israeli literature. It has been noted how the *Sabra* were always diluted among the wider population in the commemorative albums but now and again given pride of place on magazine covers but in a retrospective book or exhibition it would be possible to curate a powerful work that shows them as a nucleus of mostly brilliant and exceptional men who led their country. Around them was an entourage, some known others not and interwoven among them were the romantic and pastoralist evocations of a new life in a growing country, whether amateur or professional. It was an optimistic view but of course things changed after 1948 and the relevance of the *Sabra* as propaganda was much diminished in the face of overwhelming immigration including refugees, bringing a new diversity of people to be photographed, absorbed and integrated into Hebrew culture. The elitism of the *Sabra* had no place in this emerging post war society even though some of the ideals were retained. Israeli photography added new and powerful themes for fund raising drives and to garner international support, the boatloads of immigrants or the tented

absorption camps, but additionally non-European Jews had to be woven into this new tapestry. A distinguishing feature of Zionism was its flexibility and pragmatism and this was as true of the propaganda effort as anything else. It had to appeal to diverse domestic and foreign audiences and to juggle contradictions that were bound to arise. The amateur record that has been more widely published in recent years was not subject to the same constraints but their viewpoint remains European, self-absorbed and parochial.

The *Sabra* propaganda whether visual or literary was a political irrelevance long before it was debunked by intellectuals in the 1960s. However, the ideals of the *Sabra* have never really been rejected not least those which touch the common man and live on in Israeli values and culture. 1948 opened a Pandora's box out of which flew the antithesis of all that the Jews had striven for, a safe haven for a community free of persecution and prejudice. Yet if one ponders photographs of contemporary Israeli society all the same elements are in place, the defensive architecture, the ubiquity of the gun, the multiplication of the security infrastructure, and more besides. Perhaps Israelis now view photographs of the pioneering years as an age of innocence a time before the dream of a peaceful Jewish homeland was banished from the mind's eye if not from the contemporary photograph.



## **Chapter 5: Uncertainty and photographs**

### **Manipulation**

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century because photographs revealed something of the external world there was an assumption that it disclosed the truth rather than a partial truth or a fiction. Conventional wisdom suggests that understanding some historic events, such as war is best achieved through visual information. Some argue that short of first-hand experience, film and photographs provide some sense of certainty because they are instruments that can deliver scientific data. Such assumptions ‘provided the ideological underpinning for the use of the camera for news and documentary photography.’ (Andersen 1989:97) What is considered believable is also what is capable of eliciting public reaction.

Even from the early days of photographs however, photographers and editors were prone to the same sort of interventions that continue to this day. Roger Fenton in the Crimean War and Mathew Brady in the American Civil War used cumbersome equipment and long exposures to record events. Neither was able to record movement and each had to photograph still life. The Mathew Brady team of photographers brought back the horror of war with photographs of corpses whilst Fenton avoided horror or anything that would provoke anti-war sentiment because he was embedded with the British Army. Brady and Co. rearranged reality for aesthetic purposes whilst Fenton was perhaps the first example of a photographer who practised self-censorship. Self-censorship and aesthetic considerations have been with photography since its earliest days and in Israel it is the former that merits further exploration.

It was inevitable in photography that there would be a fascination for the possibility of removing some unwanted detail or adding one in a composition, in effect as film critic Larry

Gross suggests, 'there is a real conflict between an ideology of unvarnished truth and the reality of a lot of varnishing' speaking of the many ways in which photographs deceive. (Leach 2005) For example, racial purity was expressed through photographs approved of by the National Socialists. Historian Peter Reichel (Honef & Thomas1997) suggests this was presented in images that divided the good from the stigmatised portrayed as outsiders to the national community. A four-page spread by Friedrich Franz Bauer called 'Concentration Camp Dachau' shows a haven for reform and rehabilitation. The portraits of head-shaved inmates are unflattering and the captions describe them as various types of criminal. The feature was published in *Illustrierter Beobachter* (an overtly anti-Jewish magazine) at the end of 1936 using photographs as pseudo-science to categorise faces into types. Creating divisions and otherness was a characteristic of propaganda campaigns in several European countries of the period. It was of course a factor in Israeli photographs, creating otherness in the case of Palestinians, more condescension than stigma, and inadvertent divisions in the case of Jewish communities, despite the best intentions of Zionist agencies.

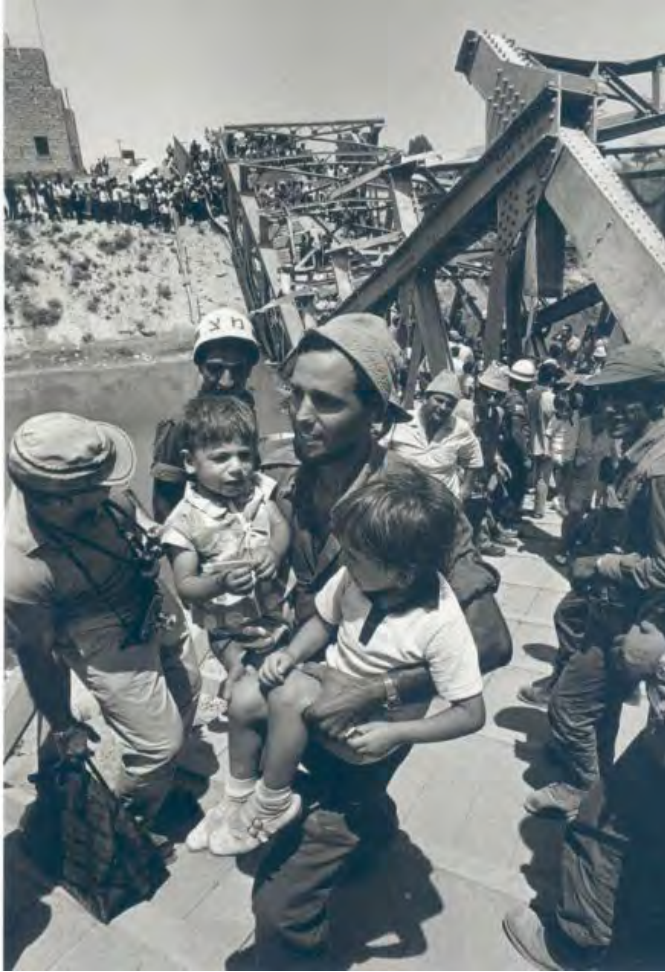
Some experts in the field of photographic analysis argue there has never been a time in the history of photography when it has been possible to say that a photograph is genuine unless the photographer can authenticate the circumstances of its making. Already image analysis was challenged during WWII when advances in technology allowed photography to play a part in deception. Struk cites the use of atrocity photographs in a campaign to support the German invasion of Poland in WWII pointing out that 'it was not always clear who had taken the photographs, and for what purpose, but rarely was this considered significant.' (Struk 2004:29) There were a number of atrocity photographs emanating from the Middle East from the 1930s onwards, including allegedly of both Jews and Arabs, but rarely were these sourced and for the most part were obviously part of propaganda campaigns by Arab belligerents. On the Israeli side there were occasional publications that compiled selections from the Arab

press in order to show how merciless and hostile they were towards a Jewish state, if not towards Jews in general. They used atrocity photographs as a form of counter propaganda, writing their own commentary around them and using exclusively Arab sources managed to show how prejudiced the Arab view of Jews was. At the same time this was intended for a domestic audience in order to discretely reinforce the Jewish prejudice against Arabs. However, as has already been mentioned this does not explain the sourced and recorded allegations of unlawful killings carried out by Israelis during the years of this study and the absence of photographs documenting these events. It again raises the question of self-censorship and to what extent within the privately held archives of Israelis and Palestinians there may be unpublished images relating to these incidents.

The further back in time, the easier it is to identify manipulation but alterations nowadays are more difficult to detect. Even when photographs are not tampered with, their purpose can be to tamper with perceptions that people hold. This was important during wartime propaganda campaigns that included disinformation (often about military capacity) and the psychological use of photographs to elicit reaction and prejudice. Many photographs appear to combine techniques of documentary journalism with a structured public relations style, thought out and manufactured for the purposes in hand. As the historian Richard Evans describes it, 'governments, understandably, put a priority on nurturing the morale of the armed forces and the people, intimidating the enemy with the force of the national will.' (Evans 2004) Nations locked in combat use propaganda to demonise an enemy and reassure a domestic audience and Israel was no exception. However, Zionists were skilful in their publicity campaigns and readily used understatement in photographs. Through omission and disingenuous portrayals of the country they guided foreign and domestic audiences alike in a favourable reception of Israel's progress. There was good will towards the new state among the international community that facilitated the task of the publicists. In the civilian sphere the emphasis was

placed on achieving and maintaining solidarity in the community whilst in the military sphere it was a judicious mix of reassurance and a need for selflessness among conscripts. When one considers the iconic images of Zionism in the 1930s and 40s, there is much that ordinary people could identify with beyond the presence of would-be heroes and heroic postures. There was a sense in the commemorative albums of everyone being in the same boat and all pulling the oars in unison. The elite, whether government, military or cultural were always interspersed throughout the albums rubbing shoulders with the common man so to speak.

Figure 80 suggests the possibility of how photographs can plant perceptions in the minds of viewers, where an IDF soldier is seen carrying two children across a collapsed bridge, damaged during the 1967 War. The caption explains that the soldier is helping two Palestinian boys returning home after the fighting. A cursory reading puts the soldier (and by implication Israelis) in a caring role as he carries the boys. In this scene it is hard to cast Israelis as belligerents, the probable cause of the boys' departure in the first place. It is an effective photograph, inviting compassion and what is more it isn't an official photograph. The boys appear to have something in their hands, like an unwrapped stick of chewing gum, possibly offered as a pacifier to offset the fear of being handled by a soldier who would have scared children that age. Behind them, barely visible in the photograph, a woman carries a child, who might be connected in some way to the two boys with the soldier. On the other hand there is no way to be sure even if the scene does pose questions about where the parents might be. This is a clear composition in which the smiling soldier foregrounds a scene that shows the broken back of the bridge in the water and a crowd of onlookers on the far bank. With a glance, one can tell there's been a major mishap but the situation is under control and the defenceless are carried to safety.



**Figure 80 Leonard Freed 1967 Allenby Bridge (Magnum, *Israel 50 years*, Aperture 1998)**

Next to the soldier, left of scene is a man with two cameras around his neck, one hand grasping a holdall, but intriguingly uninvolved in recording images. Around him, men are looking to the left of where the photographer is, and from their expressions, suggest they are looking not just towards the photographer but possibly as well to other journalists present.<sup>46</sup> If so, this conforms to a scheduled news event that might have been called by the Israeli Government Press Office. It would have been usual to invite journalists to watch the repatriation of refugees given that such images could soften the negative depiction of war. In any event, the Allenby Bridge demarcating an international border is subject to security

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<sup>46</sup> Boris Carmi was certainly present during these days and his own version of returning refugees crossing the bridge is devoid of any hint of guile or artifice.

controls where people cannot wander at will and journalists would not have been present without authorisation. If so, then Freed's image is probably recorded during an orchestrated event (in order to achieve precisely the effect of his photograph). Had the press not been in attendance would the soldier have carried the boys across? Scheduled news events are not usually cited in captions even if the information is invaluable for historiography. As Linfield (2010) observes, because the photographer is in place when events happen (particularly horrifying ones) 'all kinds of ethical problems emerge. Did the event happen for the camera? Would it have happened if the camera wasn't there?' (Crouch 2010) This was Sontag's question about the execution of a Vietcong suspect by General Loan of the South Vietnamese Army that was American backed.

Figure 80 contrasts with Figure 81 that depicts refugees travelling in the other direction at the onset of the war. Photographed by Myrtle Winter-Chaumeny (responsible for establishing the photographic department of the United Nations agency) it records refugees leaving as war engulfs the region. Unlike Freed's image this one recorded with a telephoto lens that compresses the scene to the extent where a caption is vital to tell the viewer what is going on. For Israelis, there would have been little reason to show refugees fleeing war but every reason to show their repatriation. For the UN there would be justification to show both, but fleeing refugees sends a more powerful and urgent message than returning refugees. Both are documents of 1967 serving ideological needs, portraying children as subjects, but where inclusion of parents is partially obscured or absent. It is not clear if the person carrying a young child is a mother or a sister. Without scrutiny, the presence of adults goes unobserved, barely discernible and not obviously connected to the children.



**Figure 81** Myrtle Winter-Chaumeny UNRWA refugees crossing Allenby Bridge at the onset of 1967 war (UNRWA archive)

Perhaps for Winter-Chaumeny an emphasis on children and their wellbeing was the point, whilst for Freed it could have been the helpful soldier, but as with Hartman's photograph (girl with doll, Figure 85) the fact they are isolated from their respective parents, prompts speculation about their circumstances. In all three images what is absent is as noteworthy as what is included. Framed to include and exclude elements in order to tell a particular story. If Figure 80 was orchestrated for journalists then the 'truth' of the image suffers because an important detail is overlooked. In Figure 81 there is a man just in frame holding a bag on the front left of the image, and a woman, head obscured, on the right of the photograph possibly relatives of the children between them or possibly not as so much is guesswork in the analysis of photographs. Like endgames in chess, the photographic analyst has to explore all the moves available, but unlike chess, the outcome may never be certain.

A significant number of newspapers and state-sponsored publications always present photographs as if they are truthful and there is wide acceptance they speak with authority (whether or not accurate). The political agendas of newspapers, government agencies, or parties, determine how photographs are used, and defined in particular ways via captions, but ‘cannot give a political or social context, much less analysis.’ In essence, ‘time collapses when the shutter clicks and one single moment, removed from the context that produced it, is placed into some other.’ (Andersen 1989:98) The dislocation of time, changing contexts, and absence of coherent explanation of photographs, presents challenges to the interpretations one has of them. It draws attention to the need to find information within and beyond photographs, to interrogate images and not simply to absorb them. This idea has particular resonance in the case of Israel’s contested history where taking images at their face value in the context in which they are displayed is not always helpful as in Figure 82.

What gradually emerged following the proliferation of photographs into all walks of life was the extent they had a ‘dual role in mediating both personal recollection (in the form of autobiography) and collective memory (in the guise of history) transforming them both into denatured hermetic practices.’ (Przyblyski 1998) Roberts (2008) maintains that ‘photography retains its theoretical fascination, because, essentially, its effects, affects, and functions are split between these forces of reification and the exigencies of knowledge production in palpable, living, and intrusive ways.’

An interesting example of this duality can be found in Figure 82, initially recorded as a personal memory, where an armed woman is seen handing something (a coin, a pill perhaps?) to an elderly Arab. As far as is known the photograph was first published in the magazine *Divergences* and contextualised in an interview that recalls the fighter’s deception with the



outcome of the 1948 war, and its failure to achieve an equitable outcome for Israelis and Palestinians alike. In the magazine, her portrait appears with another photograph depicting the flight of Arab refugees in 1948 and both serve to illustrate the story that Arna Mer Khamis recounts in the interview. She was born on a settlement, Roshpina-Jaoni, in the Upper Galilee near to the Arab village of Jaoni. She joined the *Haganah* at the age of 12 years whilst attending an agricultural high school (that adhered to Martin Buber's ideas). Her family were Marxist, profoundly anti-fascist, and supported the idea of a bi-national state. In 1948 she served in the *Palmach* deployed on the Egyptian front as an ambulance driver. After the war Khamis became disillusioned with the *Palmach* and joined the Israeli Communist Party in 1949, aged 19. She became a staunch anti-Zionist, declaring that Zionism was racism. (Passevant 2009) Khamis was among a number of men and women who experienced a change of heart about Zionism and the common feeling they shared was the recognition that they had been both indoctrinated and then discarded by the cause that once they had so much admired. As dissenters they felt stigmatised.

Figure 82 shows a close proximity between the woman and the man that is infrequently seen in Zionist agency publications though periodically one comes across photographs that show Israelis offering medical assistance to Arabs or Israelis teaching Arabs how to drive a tractor or use some farm machine. The propaganda value of such photographs was obvious but today photographs like Figure 82 that find their way onto the Inter-Web may be co-opted onto sites such as the *Palmach* commemorative web site depicting the illustrious past of the soldier colonists of the *Sabra* era. This is more than a reminder of the duality between personal recollection and collective memory it also illustrates the dilemma of modern research in which the Inter-Web has a prominent role to play yet must be engaged sceptically. It is another reason why the defence of realism is so often undermined. It also reinforces the idea

of the systematic use of the counter-image in the analysis of photographs or as Berger would have it, to consider all the points of view between producers and consumers of photographs.



**Figure 82, Palmach fighter, ca. 1948 (*Divergences* 17 November 2009)**

Courtesy of the Inter-Web, it is possible to find photographs like Figures 82 previously unavailable to the public, but as this enriches archives so search engines diffuse data in several ways. The Khamis photograph in this new context is as suggestively benign as Figure 80. Thus, like so many others, it falls prey to ‘a process largely determined by social forces beyond the control of a single individual’ and represents a ‘paradigm shift, from the agency of the individual to the forces of social reproduction.’ (Marie Law 2007) As published images from the past are scanned and uploaded, so their original captions are often rewritten, just as they are in retrospective monographs or catalogues. Thus for example, Goldman’s photograph of refugees being expelled from Bir Burin (see Figure 85) was originally published as ‘Arab women with their children were returned to Arab territory.’ (Nir 2004) Admittedly, the change to the caption in this case rectified a serious inaccuracy but the question about how the Inter-Web will transform awareness and understanding about photographs remains. This recalls the need for examining all sources of photographs wherever possible, particularly when competing narratives are available.

Tampering with perceptions is easily done, via captions, cropping, or some other manipulation, but sometimes the photograph itself is sufficiently arresting that opinions about it become entrenched to the exclusion of other considerations. During the US Vietnam war, for example, the execution of an alleged Vietcong soldier by General Loan quickly became a notorious photograph as it was wired around the world. *Associated Press* assigned Eddie Adams (who had recorded the image) to follow General Loan and discover more about the reviled symbol of war he had become. Adams found that Loan was fighting for a way of life that Americans believed in, yet his was an ideological position that was pilloried by the anti-war movement. It was among a handful of photographs that caught the public imagination and co-opted by public opinion to undermine support of the American War in Vietnam. Barthes might have described this transformation as the death of the author and the birth of the reader, and though the editors at *AP* anticipated the impact the photograph was likely to have upon audiences, it surpassed their expectations.

What the readers saw was a remarkable if brutal image of an execution, of an unarmed civilian, hands behind his back, in the middle of a street. His helplessness emphasised by the soldiers flanking him and by the outstretched arm of Loan pointing a pistol at his head. It is easy to see why this photograph sickened readers and provoked anger, but above all it is an image that barely needs a caption to disclose what is occurring. The shutter apparently pressed as the bullet was penetrating the suspect's head. Perhaps this was why it became such an anti-war icon. Both the executioner and the prisoner became symbols of a divided country and of all that was wrong with a war that the Americans could never win. Susan Sontag (2003:8) claims that the execution was staged by Loan and would never have taken place had not Adams and another journalist been present at the time. Sontag though was in no position to comment on the facts of the incident as she wasn't there and perhaps had never

experienced the dilemmas that journalists contend with in the field. Moreover, Adams reacted instinctively to the situation and could not have known at the time how things would happen nor if his photograph would even record what happened. Sometimes the testimony of a photographer gets lost in the hubbub surrounding an image that captures public attention and then gets picked over by theorists and critics. It does however, underline the point made earlier about the claims critics make for photographs that historians cannot substantiate.

Edwards points out that ‘the news media...takes as one of its founding ideologies the idea that the apparatus presents an impartial record of events.’ (Edwards 2006:68) However, many photographs considered as icons are more regarded for their symbolism, for the way in which they capture the public imagination, than for their literal facts. There are legendary examples that do not conform to journalistic standards yet are feted. In this sense what artists or journalists strive for is that the image and its narrative resonate with an audience. They want the viewer to go beyond the surface and imagine being in the scene itself, as if stepping into a compelling illusion. As Edwards suggests, what really needs explaining is the ‘peculiar form of the photographic image, which appears not to be an image at all; rather, it seems like a direct re-presentation of lived reality.’ (Edwards 2006:69) In this one returns again to the words of W, Eugene Smith about how manufactured images are better able to express reality than an unadulterated recording.

Larry Burrows was among a handful of British photographers who reported the American war in Vietnam. Burrows’ records so many details of war from the vast military machine to the human condition in intense conflict that it does seem as if lived reality is being served up. His marines are innocents abroad; the brave, bloodied and dazed instruments of US foreign policy. His use of colour had never been used so compellingly before to depict combat. His

oeuvre is seen from a soldier's perspective that reveals the folly of war and the struggle of men far from home and understanding.

Two others, Don McCullin and Philip Jones Griffiths, both highly regarded for their reporting during the Vietnam War also reported on the Arab-Israeli conflict. McCullin's photographs in war and peace are frequently haunting and accusatory, challenging the viewer to take a lingering look at the anguish present in the heart of the photographer and in the situations of those photographed. McCullin was consciously political as evidenced in a book titled *The Palestinians* (1979) and another, *Beirut, a city in crisis* (1983) the former a portrait of the Palestinians that went out of its way to explain the background to and circumstances of the conflict between the Arabs and Israelis, at a time when sympathy for the Palestinians was muted. The Israeli siege of Beirut and the attendant blood letting in the Palestine refugee camps in 1982 marked a turning point and public perceptions of Israel became more critical.

McCullin's second book was a timely protest against the chaos and suffering that infused Beirut, his photographs angrier than his prose, but implying that everyone had contributed to the suffering and there was more than one villain to point the finger at. McCullin has argued that photographs can be the truth if recorded by a photographer who has integrity. The question then is what was the position among the photographers who worked directly for the official agencies with any of the brave new world ideologies of the period? How many believed they could do little else but keep quiet and do their jobs, and how many never doubted their integrity because they believed in the cause they were serving?

In *Vietnam Inc.* by Philip Jones Griffiths (1971) the work reveals a photographer who accepted that history is political, subjective, and qualified. The production of history was

fundamentally personal and his photographs and reports were on the one hand testimony to the situations he observed, and on the other, a form of advocacy perhaps, reflecting deeply held convictions. Trenchant commentary accompanies the photographs, leaving the reader in no doubt as to his views. The fury of his words is interwoven with the irony, pain, and condemnation of his images. Whilst in Vietnam, all three addressed the human consequences of the war, but Griffiths' work invokes a tradition that recalls the monumental work of Ernst Friedrich (1924) *War Against War!* a concerted campaign against war, intended to shock the public into a complete rejection of it. But in Israel this approach to photography with its explosive emotional power was rarely seen. Nor apparently were photographers engaged in work that contradicted or dissented from a mainstream view of Zionism. Or at least from what is known so far and until the unpublished archives of Zionist agencies are fully explored the puzzles of Israeli photography remain.

As Sontag remarks, the memory of war is mostly local and for a conflict 'to break out of its immediate constituency and become a subject of international attention, it must be regarded as something of an exception, as wars go, and represent more than the clashing interests of the belligerents themselves.' (Sontag 2003:35) Israel receives perennial foreign media attention to the extent that there is all but a parallel narrative alongside the Israeli collective memory. Yet for all the political passions, for all the opportunities available for Israeli photographers, it is as if there is something missing when one pores over the photographs of one conflict after another, or indeed one commemorative album after another. There appear to be far few compelling photographs in Israel of the same genre as the three British photographers for example. In Israel, despite many accomplished photographers, it is as if the visual legacy lags behind the written narratives of Zionism, and certainly of photographers in other countries. Yet here were immigrants and refugees from half way around the world,

among them a pool of talented photographers, developing a new society in a new country that one might have thought provided the right ingredients to produce a vibrant photographic culture. Moreover, a number of photographers served in reserve or combat units and presumably had opportunity as well as skills to record all the facets of army life that soldiers everywhere else have recorded. It is certain that within the archives of photographers in Israel there are images that were never published at all entirely at the discretion of individuals for fear of sending the wrong political message or stirring a hornet's nest of controversy.

The puzzles in Israeli photography result in part from limited research but other factors alleged include the practice of self-censorship, embargoed and lost archives, and the rediscovery of a trickle of private archives. Factors that slowed the development of an Israeli vernacular include the absence of a tradition of photography in the *Yishuv* towards the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century among indigenous Jews and early colonists at time when photography was flourishing in several countries elsewhere around the world. Above all the overbearing role of the Zionist agencies constrained the development of personal exploration and it isn't until after 1967 that more distinctive photography emerges. Even then, it is at first more a pushing at the boundaries of censorship and conformity than a flowering of creativity. Though Zionists were keen to exploit the technology of film and stills neither were recognised as cultures in their own right, the understanding and the approach was utilitarian rather than creative. It took the work of another generation of photographers before photography began to have a prominent place within Israeli culture.

Historians mention a number of incidents during and after the 1948 War, in which non-combatants were slaughtered in what might be considered as non-combat arenas and on occasion even refer to the presence of photographers at the scene. This was the case in Deir

Yassin in which a sustained assault on the village resulted in many civilian deaths. At the time the number of dead was put at 254 according to the Jewish Agency and the *New York Times*. The number has subsequently been disputed because some believe it was exaggerated for propaganda value during ethnic cleansing inspired by Plan Dalet. The incident is often recalled by Palestinians as one of the most flagrant examples of wanton slaughter perpetrated by Israeli forces on unarmed non-combatants.

There are a few unattributed photographs that circulate on the Internet purporting to show the aftermath of Deir Yassin, April 1948. Authorship is never credited and though many show corpses, from one to several, there is nothing in any of them that ties them to Deir Yassin. Indeed, two particular photos used that appear frequently on Web sites appear to have been recorded many years later and whilst they may be of a massacre it is not Deir Yassin as features such as hairstyles and dress do not fit the period. Ever more unattributed photographs are uploaded and frequently one atrocity photograph substitutes for another.

Many reports suggest the *Irgun* and *Stern* militia took ten hours to secure the village, aided for part of that time by *Palmach* fighters. The attack commenced circa 0200h on 9 April and by early afternoon the drama had played out. The only testimony of a photographer present during the attack comes from Meir Pail, a *Palmach* fighter, there to observe proceedings, accompanied by a photographer with two rolls of film at his disposal. Pail wrote up his report that he sent the following day to Yisrael Galili, head of *Haganah* in Tel Aviv, along with the negatives. It is likely that others photographed there at some point in the aftermath.

Pail reports the photographs were recorded inside houses as well as outside. He recounts that most of the dead were women and children and estimates that the death toll was around 200-



250. Pappé believes in total 93 people were killed of whom 30 were infants. (Pappé 2006:91) Over the years the death toll has been recalculated but consensus is still absent as it is for the number of residents living in the village at the time. In the circumstances, variations in such figures are to be expected, but ICRC estimates placed the toll at 200. Pail describes events as a massacre, spontaneous rather than planned, and denies rape occurred or corpses looted. He reports that *Palmach* fighters departed on his orders at 1100h after fighting had ceased but before the slaughter began. Pail regrets the decision because he believes their continued presence would have averted a massacre.

In the early afternoon, orthodox Jews from nearby Givat Shaul told the militiamen they were in violation of a truce between the two villages. There is agreement that 25 Arab survivors were put onto a lorry and taken into Jerusalem, paraded in front of their enemies, then taken to a quarry in Deir Yassin where they were executed. Three truckloads of survivors were dumped outside the Old City of Jerusalem where they fled to safety. Whilst there is acceptance that a massacre occurred, it is the nature of it that is disputed, significantly by some survivors. Many agree that both parties to the conflict exploited the massacre for propaganda, the one to encourage flight, the other to encourage resistance. What Morris suggests is over time the horror was ‘amplified and exaggerated in the Arab re-telling.’ (Tamari 1999:106) The idea was that embellishments were fabricated in order to spread fear and provoke flight amongst the Arabs.

According to three survivors, there were no rapes and more than one villager had dressed up as women in order escape. The head of the ICRC said in his report that the villagers had been ‘massacred in cold blood’ and when he arrived on the scene, executions were still continuing. (Tamari 1999:107) British authorities sent CID officer, Richard Catling, to interview women

survivors who had taken refuge in Silwan, outside the Old City. He filed his report on April 15, stating, 'many young schoolgirls were raped and later slaughtered. Old women were also molested. Many infants were butchered and killed.' (Tamari1999: 106) Catling admitted interviewing the women had been difficult and whilst there is consensus on the savagery of the killing, the matter of rape is disputed.

Though the *Haganah* distanced itself from the attack it did not prevent them subsequently from citing Deir Yassin repeatedly on radio broadcasts as a warning to Arabs to flee their homes. Given disparate accounts of Deir Yassin it is conceivable the photographs recorded by Pail's assistant might provide some clues, but what happened to the negatives that Pail sent to Galili? These appear never to have been published.<sup>47</sup> If other photographers were present at Deir Yassin, or indeed if anyone recorded anything from similar events where are the photographs? Part of the problem is that some events are disputed such as the discovery of an alleged massacre at Tantura. This re-examination of the 1948 event was made public in 2000 and provoked denials by a number of professional historians and a libel case brought by veteran militiamen against the student who had done the research. Yet one former soldier in the militia battalion that attacked Tantura has gone on record to say that there were executions in the village after the fighting was over. In any event there is considerable reluctance on the part of the state if not among the public to acknowledge a colonial past or accept that war crimes occurred. The absence of photographs surrounding these events could be due to the fact that photographing was constrained or prohibited, that the ratio of cameras within the population was low, or by the reluctance of those who may have such images to

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<sup>47</sup> (<http://middle-east.yu.hu.com/peacewatch/dy/dypail.htm>)  
(<http://www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/980410/1988041030.html>)

publish. Whatever the reasons are, for the most part the written accounts of these events are devoid of photographs.

### **Imagination**

Arguably under-represented in theory is the extent to which the imagination of photographers and viewers has a role in the recording and interpreting of photographs. 'Photographers often record scenes to see what things look like when photographed. Photographs are recorded 'to tell us some "truth" about the world, on the other hand, we need to see that world photographed in order to apprehend that truth differently.' (Folgarait 2008:1) This 'truth' is the end result of an imaginative process considered as mediations between people and the habitat surrounding them. What applies to photographers can apply to editors or those engaged in the production and consumption of images. A photograph 'is a portal in ticking time that connects us, but not quite, to the past.' It 'channels time back and forth, never resting completely on either end of the stretch from depicted moment to viewing moment.' (Folgarait 2008:184) What someone knows of reality and what photographs reveal, 'combine to produce something greater than the sum of both. We experience this "something" between those two places of meaning that cannot be produced completely by either.' (Folgarait 2008:1)

Roberts adds that photographs can be examined in a dialectical way allowing them 'to speak back from the past in non-objectified ways, at the same time as taking care to respect the determining effects of dominant relations of power on how culture is produced and consumed.' (Roberts 1998:5) An example he cites is the possibility of reading *American Photographs* by Walker Evans as a critique of the Farm Security Administration whose ideology Evans no longer shared in the late 1930s. Evans rejected documentary practice (and its idealisations) at a time when it was most valued in America and Britain. Despite the FSA

claims for the social role of photography Evans understood the difference between the power of the state and that of the market.

Figure 83 however suggests that the dialectic photograph is not axiomatic as it shows a baby (Miriam) held aloft by her father, Eliezer Trito on the settlement of Alma in the Galilee. Miriam wears an Italian baptismal dress brought from Italy from where 80 Italian peasants made the journey from their village, San Nicandro Garganico, to Israel in 1950. The dress is a link to their past in a barren village in southern Italy where the curious story of their conversion to Judaism began. Donato Manduzio, a paralysed war veteran, persuaded other villagers to convert to Judaism following his immersion in the Old Testament. Manduzio wrote to the rabbinate in Rome that eventually accorded the group the status of semi-Jews. During WWII the group was protected and hidden by the remaining villagers to avoid German retribution. In 1943 San Nicandro was liberated by the British 8<sup>th</sup> Army, specifically by the Jewish Brigade, the first forces to reach the village. It was an encounter that both stimulated and facilitated their desire to emigrate to Israel. (*Time Magazine* 15 September 1947) Zionists encouraged immigration at the time Miriam was photographed and were keen to increase the Israeli born population. Seymour's photograph shows a happy moment, the start of a new life for Trito and Miriam both, in the newly built Jewish settlement of Alma.

The Arab village of the same name was half a kilometre distant from the Jewish one and situated near the border with Lebanon. Alma was attacked by Israeli forces (Operation Hiram) on 30 October 1948 and met no resistance. In 1949 the *moshav* (collective farm) of Alma was founded about half a kilometre from the former village. The first inhabitants were Jews from Libya, later joined by the converts from Italy who subsequently moved to other nearby *moshavim* and were replaced by Indian Jews from Cochin. Some scholars believe that

Alma had been a Jewish settlement from the 1<sup>st</sup> Century through to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. It is unknown why the village was abandoned but Ottoman archives show in 1572 the number of tax paying households had declined to three. A British Mandate Census of 1931 records 712 Arabs living in 148 houses.



**Figure 83** Chim Seymour 1951<sup>48</sup> First child born in the settlement of Alma  
From *David Seymour (Chim)* Phaidon 2005

Whereas conflict may lay claim to timeless or enduring scenes, Figure 83 is a reminder that without background information, a photograph can be both eloquent and mute, can inform but not always enough. The baby's over-flowing baptismal dress strikes a note of incongruity as the proud father holds her up outside new homes in Israel, in effect, the incongruity stimulates the imagination. What was the occasion for her wearing the dress or was it in honour of the photograph? Seymour was noted for the sympathetic way in which he engaged with those he photographed and his humanity is often reflected in his compositions. Captions cannot always explain the story attached to a photograph unless it is the story itself. In the

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.rslissak.com/category/geographical-history> retrieved 18 March 2011.

context of albums where this photograph is often found, it is easy to imagine a joyful moment in the life of an immigrant, suggestive of promise, of a start towards a better life. Yet this photograph also draws attention to the colonialism on which Israel was built. As a counter-image it is eloquent because it is one thing to speak of a safe haven for persecuted Jews attested to by photographs of young male workers revealing their tattooed numbers, but it is another to contemplate photographs of religious converts as colonists. Seymour's photograph whilst a celebration of a story remarkable in its own way is also a portal to another story about immigration.

Whilst early Zionism pioneered state building based on ideals, the state itself was compelled to accept all comers in the aftermath of war. The view was whatever the origins of immigrants, their children would grow up Israelis and that was what mattered most. For Israelis, identification as being such was as important as identification as being Jewish. Demography was (and remains) a vital factor, and if allowing in immigrants whose Jewish credentials were questionable, that was preferable to too few immigrants. In this sense Figure 83 is still relevant to Zionism and a similar scene recorded today would achieve the same desired effect. On the other hand, knowing the location of this photograph allows for the exploration of contested history, and as one learns more about the Arab and Jewish communities sharing the same name, so other perspectives emerge, allowing this image the possibility of being used both to support Zionism as well as to accuse it. How would Figure 83 appear if it were shown next to a photograph of the Arab village of Alma in ruins?

The critic David Levi Strauss (2003:74) provides an example of the imagination in the viewer when describing finding a photograph of a boy resembling his father as a child. He thought of it, 'as a picture of my brother who had died before I was born.' This shows the capacity for

the imagination to shape interpretation or the power of a photograph to stimulate it. Language is of course essential to this discourse but it also shapes interpretation, through the grammar and punctuation used in captions, as spoken words do when used to describe or explore the photographs. Barthes says captions anchor the photograph to a preferred interpretation and what matters most is its ascribed meaning within a given culture. The meaning of a photograph may not be contained in the image itself so much as in the social interaction that surrounds it. Barthes claims that every portrait photograph is a return of the dead. He connects the image to the world outside by considering that the people are already dead or one day would be dead.



**Figure 84 French IDPs Leni Sonnenfeld 1949 *Eyes of Memory* Yale University Press 200**

Figure 84 is a composition in which the boy guarding the suitcases, unaware of the photographer, is highlighted as the main subject of the photograph. This is emphasised by the gaze of two young bystanders, a girl in the background looking in the direction of the

photographer, and another little girl looking towards a boy with shaven head in the middle of the image, looking at the boy on the suitcase. Both seem to be aware the photographer is poised to record the image, the shaven headed boy probably alternating his gaze between Sonnenfeld and the suitcase boy. The photographer has framed the composition to exclude adults perhaps with the intention of keeping the viewer concentrated on the boy with the suitcase. He has both hands firmly gripping suitcases wedging other bags between them. He takes his role as guard seriously and this detail is one that can capture the imagination. The image draws in the viewer's gaze from the first boy, to the second, and then onto the girl at the back. It is only after this that the viewer may consider a small girl to the left and another to the right clutching the doll. The doll seems to be gazing at its owner, whilst the girl on the left looks towards the boy with the shaven head, and the girl at the back, looking at the photographer when the picture was recorded, now looks at the viewer.

Strauss implies that the photograph is a trigger, stimulating memory or the imagination that brings to life the person(s) depicted. For Strauss his chosen photograph opened up a theatre of the imagination and one could apply similar speculation to Figure 85. As Strauss observes, many photographs can 'accrete believability over time' and 'come to act as amulets or talismans, triggering certain emotions or states and warding off others.' (Strauss 2003:74) Strauss came to believe that the photograph was indeed a photograph of an unknown dead brother and points out his experience is far from unique 'People use photographs to construct identities, investing them with "believability."' (Strauss 2003:74) He suggests that one should always ask, who is using the photograph and for what purpose? To some extent, iconic images, like Capa's *Falling Soldier* become talismans for their metaphoric quality but the talismans of Zionism are those images that convey its core beliefs and in trying to do them



justice, Zionist bodies groomed their photographs to the point of denying so many other photographs the chance to have a life of their own among the public.

Photographs however they are conceived and subsequently recorded have consequences, provoking reactions that have prompted everything from laughter to slaughter. It highlights the potential relationship between the viewer and the subject of the photograph. The photographer may be irrelevant in this contemplation and the connection between photographer and subject (or why the photograph was made at all) is easily brushed aside. The effect on an individual or a mass audience can be the same, as newspaper editors, political leaders and others know well. The visual media can be persuasive and this inevitably stimulates (if not manipulates) the imagination of viewers when confronted with photographs that hold their attention.

For example, this is the case in the work of Robert Barry called *Inert Gas Series* (1969) that comprises photographs of invisible gases being released at various locations in and around Los Angeles, such as wasteland, seaside or car park. No one is depicted releasing the gas from its container and only the caption informs the viewer of what is occurring. This information is essential in guiding interpretation in the reading of the series. It does not explain the intention of the artist but the mere fact of an invisible artwork engages the imagination of the viewer. Barry's series test the limits of what photographs convey. As documents, they depend upon the photographer's notes for their credibility, but as symbols or indexical signs, they cannot really say much if they cannot be seen. As Green suggests, the intended effect is to 'produce a belief in the existence of this invisible phenomenon.' (Green 2003:51) This too is an act of imagination (as presumably it was for Barry when he first conceived the idea) and not just of faith. Matter of fact captions describe what he does, at a

given location and time, for example, 'one litre of krypton was returned to the atmosphere.' (Green 2003:51) Whether the series is considered as documentary or perhaps, as a performance of some description, the imagination has to be engaged, not least in the absence of key visual information.

Technology creates all sorts of possibilities for how images can be recorded and displayed, but every step of the process is guided by imagination in finding solutions to achieve desired results. Much can happen in the wake of a moment, recorded by a camera, on its journey towards a viewer, beginning with the mind's eye of the photographer. Photographers rely on serendipity as well on intentions mapped out or conceptualised. Scenes may be imagined and staged until a desired result is recorded. Others may wait until a sufficient number of elements of the imagined scene emerge. In Figure 85 the scene foregrounds a girl holding a doll, and Hartmann could have imagined scenes of this sort before searching for them in the immigration hall. He surely saw the possibilities that a doll could serve. The caption steers the viewer towards the correct interpretation of the scene.

Viewers are prompted by captions to find clues to reinforce them, but they may be compelled to imagine possibilities both because and in spite of captions. Whilst there are no visual details to confirm immigration in Figure 85, it can be imagined. The girl doesn't appear to belong to anyone around her, shut off from her surroundings, eyes downcast and probably vulnerable, an idea reinforced by the doll in the torn carrier bag, a talisman for venturing beyond familiar surroundings, and the suggestion of what might be a travel document tucked under one arm, touched by fingers to reassure herself it is still there.

Hartmann has found a scene that allows him to put himself in the girl's place, a child arriving in Haifa instead of Ellis Island. Hartman knew immigrant experience as a young teenager arriving in the USA after departure from Austria. He speculated how it might have been had his family gone to Palestine instead. 'That was the question which was always present no matter what I saw or photographed there, and it is with the same question (to which there can be no answer) that I look at the resulting photographs.' (Hartmann 1988) He said of Israel that separating his profession from his feelings was impossible. Rather like Capa, Hartmann's assignments in Israel were propelled by personal motives and the girl with the doll served as his muse.

Perhaps, as Susie Linfield (2007) puts it, the problem with photographs is that they do not explain so much as 'offer an immediate, emotional connection to the world' and we turn to them, for example, not to understand the reasons for given events but to see what they look like, and to 'find out what our intuitive reactions' to them might be. Linfield's point about emotional responses to photographs is well made and enables understanding of how the qualities of photographs allow them to support ideological positions, some more subtle than others. In effect, photographs can be moveable feasts whose function and intention never ceases to vary and as a result, so too do their interpretations. Certainly, once a photograph enters the public domain it assumes a life of its own.

Another consideration as Thompson argues, is as technology develops so too does the manner in which society recalls the past. 'In this dialectic, technical limitations become cultural connotations' and Thompson cites the widespread introduction of colour film in the late 1940s that had a profound effect on how black and white photographs were considered thereafter, 'becoming historically connotative of a specific period of the past.' (Thompson

2010) All visual communication whether photographs or television, are part of ‘the creation of an image-based, technologically-driven collective memory through which history is filtered, of which the most overt visual signifier of the past has become the presentation of the world in black and white.’ (Thompson 2010) Perhaps this is accentuated as a digital age replaces an analogue one, and the longing for the alleged reassurance of an analogue age is stimulated by the ‘emotional loss of a kind imagined, fetishized photographic truth and aura, elevated by Sontag and Barthes, the most visible element of which is a monochrome palette.’ (Thompson 2010)



**Figure 85** Romanian immigrants, Haifa, 1958. Erich Hartmann  
*Israel: 50 years, as seen by Magnum photographers* Aperture 1988.

The philosopher Vilém Flusser observes, ‘this specific ability to abstract surfaces out of time and space and to project them back into space and time is what is known as “imagination.”’ ‘ (Flusser 2000:8) He argues that it also provides the wherewithal to encode the photograph into two-dimensional symbols as well as to read those symbols. However they are not unambiguous symbols (as numbers are for example) because they provide opportunity for differing interpretation. He suggests, images are significant surfaces, and in order to decode and comprehend them, the viewer is compelled to use imagination to do so. ‘It is the precondition for the production and decoding of images. In other words: the ability to encode phenomena into two-dimensional symbols and to read these symbols.’ (Flusser 2000:8)

Whilst many have remarked that barely more than a glance is spared to images seen in everyday contexts, this contrasts with what occurs when photographs are contemplated. Flusser believes that ‘the gaze follows a complex path formed, on the one hand, by the structure of the image and, on the other, by the observer’s intentions.’ (Flusser 2000:8) (See Figure 84) This idea of intention is critical to how the imagination is triggered when reading of photographs. Whether esoteric or not, imagination is everywhere present in the making of photographs irrespective of genre despite the idea that common sense suggests a photograph is a transparent copy of reality. Historians need to be informed of this and even more so do the courtrooms that accept visual images as an element of proof. In the history of photography there are famous examples that have captured the public imagination occasionally sparking controversy with respect to some aspect of the photograph.



**Figure 86 US marines raise flag Iwo Jima, Joe Rosenthal**  
*Glass warriors Collins 2005*

Joe Rosenthal's raised flag on Mount Suribachi in Iwo Jima is an icon of WWII from the American perspective as is Yevgenny Khaldei's Red flag over the *Reichstag* in Berlin from a Soviet perspective. Both were subject to controversy and once suspicions are aroused they may never entirely fade. Conversely those who accept the authenticity remain adamant in their defence to the point of dogmatism. It appears at times that such disputes have more to do with the support and affirmation of a particular photographer than with the accuracy or otherwise of specific images. Rosenthal's image is, however, mired in confusion because of a story put out (but later retracted) in *Time Magazine's* radio show 'Time Views the News' that Rosenthal had posed marines for his photograph. It became the symbol of the Seventh War Loan Drive used on 3.5 million campaign posters and even more ubiquitous was its presence on postage stamps. By 1949, the image was used to re-enact the raising of the flag in a film, *Sands of Iwo Jima*, starring John Wayne. Years later Clint Eastwood revisited the scene in a film entitled *Flags of our fathers*. Rosenthal was questioned about the authenticity of the photograph all his life. The controversy is based on the fact that Rosenthal did pose a

different group of marines around a much smaller flag, on the orders of base command. Rosenthal told Robert Sherrod a *Time Life* reporter that he staged one of the photographs and Sherrod mixed them up. An examination of the photograph suggests that had Rosenthal posed the men with the flapping flag in exactly those positions and gestures, it would have been a demanding exercise of choreography to have thought out the composition and then orchestrate the men in every detail. Felix de Weldon rendered the image into a bronze statue, the Iwo Jima Memorial (1954) in Arlington, Virginia.<sup>49 50</sup>

### **Capa and the Falling Soldier**

The most notorious photograph whose authenticity has plagued journalism for decades is the one recorded by Robert Capa during the Spanish civil war. It became known as *Falling Soldier* and apparently shows a soldier at the moment of his death. It is of interest here because much has been written about the ideological conviction of the photographer when he was on assignment both in Spain and in Israel. This does not mean that Capa's photographs of Israel are to be questioned for their authenticity as his reports from Spain have been, but doubt must remain and meanwhile his photographs endorsed the ideals of Zionism at the time, just as they continue to do so today.

The photograph was first published in *Vu Magazine* on 23 September 1936 and the following year appeared in two more French publications, *Paris-Soir* and *Regards* whilst also appearing in *Life Magazine* on 12 July 1937 and from then on it was repeatedly published (see Figure

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<sup>49</sup> <http://www.ap.org/pages/about/pulitzer/rosenthal.html>. Retrieved February 26 2010

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/21/business/media/22rosenthalcnd.html> Retrieved February 26 2010.

<sup>50</sup> Periodically, the profession exacts retribution on journalists, as happened to Brian Walski of the *Los Angeles Times* who had doctored a photograph of an occupying soldier with Iraqi civilians in April 2003. A veteran of thirty years, he was fired because he had combined two photographs to make one more powerful image. The editor of the *Daily Mirror*, Piers Morgan, was sacked in May 2004 following the publication of hoax pictures depicting British soldiers mistreating Iraqis. The paper published a retraction.

<http://www.cs.dartmouth.edu/farid/research/digitaltampering/>. Retrieved 13 March 2009 and

[http://www.temple.edu/ispr/examples/ex04\\_05\\_17.html](http://www.temple.edu/ispr/examples/ex04_05_17.html). Retrieved 13 March 2009

87). However, Philip Knightley in his book *The First Casualty* (1974) argued that whatever else it showed Capa's photograph did not depict a dying soldier, suggesting that the event had been staged and that the authorship was questionable. This latter, because Gerda Taro (a colleague and lover of Capa) shared his by-line at the time and an examination of their photographs recorded in Spain, according to historian Carlos Serrano, means that it is not always possible to distinguish which of them photographed what. (Kershaw 2003:43) None of any of this could be proved one way or the other since neither the negatives nor any original prints until now are known to exist. (Kershaw 2003:42) However in 2008 news of the discovery of 3500 negatives of the Spanish Civil War was reported, part of Capa's lost archive, that may yet shed more light on the controversy that remains the most significant in the history of photojournalism. (Hill 2008) But how long does it take to look through the recovered negatives to discover whether the *Falling Soldier* is among them?

Capa is among scores of journalists who have been accused of falsifying their work. The supposition must be that this is this done for vanity, reward, or through ideological conviction. The journalist Martha Gellhorn, who reported from Spain at the same time as Capa, said of her experience that Spain was a place where all those who loved freedom should fight with whatever means possible. She said of Capa that 'he did not expect to fight, since he had never held a rifle, he expected to take pictures which would force everyone to see what there was to fight.' (Kershaw 2003:33) She observed that 'war was our condition and our history, the place we had to live in.' (Linfield 2006:9) If Capa was an idealist, no less so were thousands of others who volunteered to serve in Spain and many shared his sympathies for the Loyalists including Gellhorn and reporters Egon Kisch and Vincent Sheean. As Capa once commented to Gellhorn, 'In a war you must hate someone or love somebody; you must have a position or you cannot stand what goes on.' (Linfield 2006:14)



Capa was public about his admiration for the anarchist movement and he worked with both the CNT militia as well as with the Trotskyite POUM militia. What is not known is how he felt about their betrayal by the Soviet backed Spanish militias. In Israel too, Capa was surrounded by idealists whose goals he shared and did his best to express the idealism of Zionism in his photographs. Again it is not known what he knew or felt of the political factions within Zionism but he was obviously aware of the circumstances surrounding the *Altalena*.



Figure 87 Robert Capa <http://warchronicle.com> retrieved 20 March 2011

Capa collaborated with Irwin Shaw to produce a book, *Report on Israel*, a sympathetic and optimistic portrayal of how Zionism was living up to its promises. No Arabs were photographed for this project because it was deemed unsafe to cross Arab lines. Shaw did mention the plight of the Palestinians however, but Kenneth Bilby, who reported in *New Star in the East* wrote of the dispossession of the Palestine Arabs suggesting that the Jewish State had hung out an ‘unwanted sign...the Arabs of Palestine languished in perpetual exile.’ (Kershaw 2003:212) What would Capa have made of the makeshift camps where Palestine

refugees were squatting? As for the Israeli immigrant absorption camps, Capa wrote bitterly about the poor souls who had endured concentration and displaced persons camps for years now found themselves behind barbed wire once again in primitive conditions living off rationed food.

Two issues arise with Figure 87, the first is that it has become the most iconic photograph in Spanish history, if not in the history of photojournalism, and is therefore in many respects unassailable. The second is that no substantive evidence supports the claim that the captions make of a man photographed at the moment of his death. As historian Caroline Brothers comments, ‘the fame of this photograph is indicative of a collective imagination that wanted, and still wants to believe certain things about the nature of death in war.’ (Kershaw 2003:46) Brothers’ suggests that Capa’s photograph showed both tragedy and heroism and whilst undeniably symbolic of the many, the man in the photograph was still an individual whose death was of consequence. That the controversy surrounding this photograph continues is reason enough for doubt, and there appear to be no documents to convince historians of the authenticity of this photograph. Capa was not an impartial reporter, and moreover as Kershaw argues, ‘he ignored atrocities committed by the Republicans, and would soon stage at least one documented attack as well as serve as an ideological cheerleader to the communist cause in Spain.’ (Kershaw 2003:47) Alex Kershaw, unofficial biographer of Robert Capa is right to underline Capa’s political convictions but the real issue here is that he abused his press credentials with false reporting.

In the original magazine spread the ‘Falling Soldier’ appeared with a second photograph of another militiaman wearing dark overalls, white espadrilles and two ammunition pouches on his belt. The sub-heading is ‘How They Fell’ and the caption mentions two different men but

places both on the same hillside. If so, who was the second man, and did Capa record both photographs at the same location? Capa said on the record in an interview with *WNBC Radio* in New York 1947 that the 'Falling Soldier' was a fluke. 'I just kind of put my camera above my head and even didn't look and clicked a picture when they moved over the trench.' (Kershaw 2003:42) Is this also how he photographed the second soldier?

This contradicts information he gave to a reporter from the *New York World-Telegram* when he stated that he had climbed out of the trench following the Loyalist soldier before recording the scene. Speculation among his contemporaries is that during a lull in the fighting Capa asked the soldiers to stage manoeuvres. In one version, the soldier is miming injury whilst in another more sinister one he has actually been shot (as he was posing) by Nationalist forces that took the opportunity to fire on the exposed Loyalist. It does seem incongruous that a putative attempt at miming death turned out to be a real thing but it would also explain why Capa had reason to be coy about his most celebrated image.

As for the second man in the original magazine feature, he is all but forgotten. Claims that the 'Falling Soldier' had been identified as Federico Borrell by a Spanish researcher (Mario Brotons) were never substantiated though Richard Whelan the official biographer of Capa, and one or two newspapers, quickly accepted the findings. Archivists in Madrid and Salamanca, however, rejected these claims, saying they had no record of Federico Borrell. (Kershaw 2003:46) The absence of a record however, is not proof one way or another but perhaps the puzzle over the identity of the two soldiers can be explained by an eye-witness account of German writer, Franz Borkenau, who wrote up his account of that day in Cerro Muriano in *The Spanish Cockpit* 1937. In a scene similar to those that were to take place in Palestine in 1948, such as Deir Yassin, on the eve of a massacre, Borkenau recalls that 'the

whole village was in flight; men, women, and children, on foot, by donkey, by cars, and motor Lorries.’ (Kershaw 2003:36) He observed some of the CNT, anarchist militia, deserting, and some shouting to him that their rifles were no match for shells and bombs. The flight of the villagers made all the more urgent because on the morning of 5 September 1936 it was bombed and followed by announcements on the radio (by Nationalist General Quiépo de Llano) saying that his men would rape all the ‘female reds’ when they reached the town. Was the ‘Falling Soldier’ a deserter who gave up the fight at some point after Capa had photographed him? Or did all the militia retreat in the face of overwhelming odds?

Capa’s political development had begun in Budapest but continued for two seminal years ‘in Berlin’s newly democratic culture of journalism...words and images, radical politics and avant-garde experimentation, reporters and intellectuals, all mixed.’ (Linfield 2006:7) As early as the 1920s Berlin had 47 daily newspapers, 50 weeklies and 18 magazines following the abolition of censorship in 1918. The illustrated magazines published in Germany would inspire the founding of others such as *Vu*, *Regards*, *Match*, *Picture Post*, *Illustrated Weekly*, *Life*, *Look*, *Let’s Produce!* and *USSR in Construction* in France, UK, USA and USSR respectively. In Germany photo-agencies were formed to meet growing demand for photographs, notable among them *Dephot* run by Simon Guttman (close to the Dadaists and Spartacists) who gave Capa his first employment. By the time he was in Paris in the early 1930s Capa was supportive of the Popular Front that, suggests Linfield, gave Capa and contemporaries something invaluable ‘the lived experience of hope for the future, of politics as solidarity, and, at least for a brief time, of victory.’ (Linfield 2006:9) Many Jewish photographers who went to Israel to record the birth of a Jewish state doubtless felt a similar sentiment.

For much of his life Capa lived through dark times and according to Linfield, ‘Spain became Capa’s template’ and all his other conflicts were measured by it and considered ‘as a struggle between fascism and democracy, or between tyranny and freedom or between oppression (including anti-Semitism) and justice.’ (Linfield 2006:14) Mendelson and Smith are much more circumspect about Capa’s photographs of Israel that suit ‘examining the construction and recapitulation of myth through “objective” news coverage.’ (Mendelson & Smith 2006:187) They suggest that his photographs indicate a preferred reading via the captions in many of his published features, presuming that the creation of the Israeli state was both right and natural. His photographs ‘argue that the Israelis were creating a state ex nihilo by turning a desolate, unpopulated strip of land into both an urban and agricultural oasis.’ (Mendelson & Smith 2006:187)

Many US and European magazines of the period were selling features that were based on the distinct views of the photographers and *Life* Magazine for example was typical in its presentation of photo-essays showing the personal view of the photographer, albeit only if it accorded with the editors. In that respect, none of the major picture magazines provided objective coverage. What some scholars argue for in this regard is an understanding of how this personal view is shaped by the class or society of the photographer and how that influences ways of seeing the world. If the social location of the subject, the photographer and the observer are not taken into consideration can a valid account of the photographs be given? Scholars may be right to ask but they are probably asking too much. It does on the other hand recall the intriguing question about the political convictions of amateur and professional photographer alike when they were out about recording the progress of their country.

However, this has prompted some to investigate the ideological value as distinct from the news value of journalism. Or, in the case of Capa, if one accepts that he had personal or cultural bias then, with many of his photographs, he recorded one aspect of an event or situation in an on-going moment that was preferred to others. Mendelson and Smith argue that many photographers in pursuit of their personal viewpoint fall prey to myths and prevailing cultural mores as they move from place to place, and suggest this was the case with Capa and would probably have made the same observations of many Israeli photographers.

Whether the controversy is ever laid to rest, it is unlikely that the status of the photograph will be affected. The image has joined the ranks of those that are frequently used as a kind of short hand to refer to major events, such as Rosenthal's Iwo Jima photograph. Some of these icons have been questioned for their veracity as might be expected, but whether found to be wanting or not, have continued in their symbolic function. It can be argued that the symbolic function of photographs when used in this way is more important than the facts of their making. If *Falling Soldier* stands with Picasso's *Guernica* as major commemorations of the Spanish civil war, then it speaks for many and serves a purpose. Exactly the same thing can be said of the iconic images in the Zionist archives. David Rubinger's *Three paratroopers* would be a notable example that became such an icon of the period that the photographer recreated the image with the three paratroopers gathered once again to commemorate the event decades later.

In the case of the *Falling Soldier* the symbolism that the photograph has accrued over time overrides the puzzles that remain. The photograph is perhaps more than a peon to the heroism of death it is also about death for a cause. The fact that the photograph depicts a Loyalist is

surely significant in the elevation of this image into an icon. As Brothers noted the death of this soldier mattered at the time (if indeed he was killed) but all these years later however, this is an irrelevance. If anything the anonymity of the falling soldier adds to the symbolism, the hero could be anyone, one of a thousand faces. As Kershaw concludes whether or not the photograph is authentic it is in the end testimony to the idealism and political beliefs that Capa held onto during his coverage of the war in Spain and on his assignments to Israel.

*Falling Soldier* is an image that would have resonated with the *Sabra* soldiers who were resigned to death, especially in 1948 when the toll among them was high. Martyrdom for the homeland was a price that *Sabra* were prepared to pay. There is considerable testimony of this in letters sent back home and in impromptu wills written on the eve of battle. The willingness to die for a cause is frequently cited and Almog suggests that the ‘idealism of the Zionist religion served as a mechanism of comfort, mostly via the culture of memorialising.’ (Almog 2002:72) For many young men of the *Sabra* era faith in Zionism lessened the anguish of random death in war and gave meaning and purpose to their lives and as Almog notes, belief in these ideals ‘endowed death with a moral purpose.’ (Almog 2002:72)

Capa had the same commitment to Israel as he had for Spain and he reported alongside Israelis as he did with the Republicans in Spain. It is often not possible to report from more than one side in a conflict but in Israel as Bilby observed, ‘coverage was usually distinguished by intense partisanship. You fell into a category, Arab or Jewish, soon after arrival and it became immutable.’ (Kershaw 2002:204)<sup>51</sup> This partisanship could be found amongst British forces and other personnel serving in Palestine during the Mandate and

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<sup>51</sup> It was for this reason that I abandoned interviews with three Israeli photographers who were working during the period of this study. I was categorised as Arab and Bilby was right, it was immutable. As colleagues we all got along, even worked alongside one another occasionally, but when it came to discussing politics and their photographs, it wasn’t something they wanted to share.

ideological positions everywhere were polarised. In recognising this the Zionists were not merely keen to present their vision of what was happening they were just as anxious to prevent dissenting views of new immigrants from getting out to the wider world.

The head of the Immigration Office, Itzhak Refael, began censorship in 1949 on the mail new immigrants were sending home to prevent disparaging views getting out, especially about the appalling conditions many had to endure on arrival. Poor conditions had been exacerbated by an influx of immigrants that in the eighteen months following independence had doubled the population of Israel. (Segev 1998:95) This had been made possible by the fact that Israel was prepared to pay expensive exit permits to various countries, including cash bribes where necessary, as well as to Jewish communities to encourage their departure, the latter two being directed by *Mossad* (not the same as today's organisation of the same name) and Immigration agents operating abroad. 'The propaganda methods employed by these agents combined scare tactics with inducements.' (Segev 1998:108) The Zionists privately admitted that mass immigration was most likely to be caused by distress. Once they had reached Israel the real hardship began and they were poorly regarded as a 'mass of refugees with no pride and no dignity' and in the local argot were described as 'human debris'. As Segev puts it many of them were 'ground into debris' after their arrival in Israel irrespective of where they had come from. After the British Mandate expired, censorship was introduced in Israel that Bilby recalls as restrictive and deceitful and furnishes one more reason for circumspection in the reading of photographs published at the time.

Comparing Capa and Seymour's work from both Spain and Israel it is clear that optimism and joy resonate in their Israeli images whilst their record of Spain is altogether darker and more poignant. The one a bitter defeat the other the birth of a miracle. Capa's *Falling Soldier*



and its noble message of death for a cause is, along with some of his other images from Spain, a reminder of what is missing in Zionist publications. Martyrdom, grief, death, the visceral portraits of combatants and civilians engaged in war are crucial elements rarely seen and even though these themes are touched on it is never with the immediacy and rawness of the news image. News photographs in Israeli newspapers were usually more dramatic and less coy than the groomed output of Zionist agencies but both laboured under censorship as much literal as moral.

Figure 88 recorded outside the Arab village of Bir Burin shows villagers compelled to leave towards Tulkarm by Israeli forces. The metal girders, anti-tank traps, in the foreground are props of war but they act as a barrier between Goldman and fleeing women and children. At the front a few women can be seen walking, carrying bundles or children, and the girders might be a makeshift checkpoint. There do not appear to be men present and their absence noteworthy. This village was one of a total of 531 from which inhabitants were driven out as part of Plan Dalet drawn up by the *Haganah* whose aim was the destruction of urban and rural Palestine.

According to Pappé (2006: xiii) with the onset of war ‘Clashes with local Palestinian militias provided the perfect context and pretext for implementing the ideological vision of an ethnically cleansed Palestine.’ Pappé points out this most formative event in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Palestinian history has yet to be recognised for what it was by the state. In official histories the cleansing was described as voluntary transfers and it has never been conceded this was either a war crime or a crime against humanity. Pappé speaks of a moral imperative to have the expulsion of Palestinians recognised because he believes dozens of rapes and massacres took place under the aegis of Plan Dalet.



**Figure 88 Paul Goldman Arab villagers after their expulsion from Bir Burin 1948**  
*Paul Goldman press photographer 1943-61 Israel Museum 2004*

This information allows Goldman's scene to be pondered from another perspective. Was Goldman among those who knew what was occurring (and aside from the combatants of Plan Dalet) who else knew? Pappe is categorical this was a premeditated plan launched prior to the departure of the British on May 15 1948 and not a consequence of the fog of war. Another question is why Goldman's scene was recorded? The explanation for this could have been that Zionist agencies wanted to illustrate the 'voluntary transfer' of Arabs. As for wanting to record the scenes as testimony, Goldman's photograph shows an orderly and peaceful exodus with nothing of the brutality Pappe refers to. Boris Carmi has a similarly tranquil scene depicting the flight of refugees from Jaffa, but is this all there is? Are there no photographs that portray chaos and misery, the handmaid of all refugee experience?

Photographs are defined by their use and a striking example of this can be found in the private photo albums of German soldiers compiled during World War II. Many of them were submitted as some form of evidence or exhibit in the various post-war trials held to convict

civilians and soldiers alike. Rolf Sachsse describes the quantity of these albums recovered as 'one of the most terrifying moments in German photography.' (Sachsse 1997:97) What had been essentially family mementoes unintended for public use became testimony in a war crimes court. The change of use of those albums brought them before a different audience and opened up new possibilities of interpretation. Their presence in court also raises questions not only what the photographer meant to show but also how the information photographs contain can be used as evidence, advisedly or not. Linfield refers to a school of criticism that argues that the photographs recorded by Nazis should not be viewed, or engaged with, by the public. 'The photographs themselves were meant to humiliate the victims' and 'represent exploitation and cruelty'. She says that photographs often reveal things that were unintended and 'also reveal the cruelty of the perpetrators'. She adds 'we may see the insanity of the perpetrators far more clearly than ever before, and certainly more clearly than they ever saw themselves.' (Crouch 2011) In any event even if German soldiers and civilians photographed more assiduously than soldiers of other states as Sachsse implies, it is reasonable to suppose that soldiers and civilians elsewhere were nonetheless documenting the world around them in much the same way. The idea that German soldiers were more cruel or voyeuristic than soldiers elsewhere is unconvincing but the fact that Germany was defeated is one reason why photographic archives were rigorously plundered for anything that could sully the legacy of the Third Reich.

Aside from the press and combat photographers, there were also legions of amateurs, both civilian and soldiers that 'could not prevent people from photographing undesirable motifs.' (Sachsse 1997:97) Many amateurs were drawn to scenes of devastation and disaster and photographed furtively, unwilling to be observed by officials. As Sachsse suggests, it is a moot point 'whether these photos served their owners as a form of psychological exoneration or as proof of their heroism.' (Sachsse 1997:97) It wasn't only the souvenir photographs of

atrocities that turned up so frequently in the albums, but the fact that they would sit side by side with the family portraits in an 'abrupt proximity of idyll and evil that is so terrifying.' (Sachsse 1997:97) There were numerous photographs of shootings and hangings on the edge of combat areas, there were mass killings (often Jews in occupied territory) and there were the photographs of those who served with the *Wehrmacht* and the *SS* and had access to particular scenes that others would be excluded from. In what Sachsse describes as a phenomenon of 'male voyeurism as a fascist eroticism of violence' often disclosing naked women about to be shot. Perhaps Sachsse is right but the testimony of subsequent wars and civil incidents due to developing technology suggests cruelty is as present today as it was during the years of this study. It is however a case of out of sight, out of mind, and if there are no atrocity or gruesome photographs in view it is easier to overlook the fact that such incidents occur in every country and in every theatre of war, and more often than not they are being photographed.

Sachsse (1997) suggests that the individual propaganda photograph signifies little, and its symbolic value is diminished by ubiquity. On the other hand the photographic testimony of camps and ghettos or of partisans and resistance was far more unusual and what survives therefore has assumed the status of icons. The *Sonderkommando* for example, comprised Jews as well as a number of Russian and Ukrainian POWs in five Nazi death camps. They lived in separate barracks (in marginally better conditions) preparing the gas chambers for each session, dragging corpses into the crematoria for burning. Initially, *Sonderkommando* teams were killed periodically and replaced with new arrivals whose first task was to dispose of their predecessors. However, in Auschwitz, many apparently survived for longer because as the volume of gassings increased, seasoned workers were preferred to keep up daily

quotas. *Sonderkommando* were reportedly linked to Jewish resistance cells because they lived long enough to acquire useful information and had some freedom of movement.

A group of *Sonderkommando* acquired a camera, possibly from a new arrival stripped of valuables, or reaching the camp via Polish resistance. David Szmulewski and Alter Fajnzyberg provided testimony how they recorded concealed photographs. Fajnzyberg interviewed, said the whole group were authors of the photographs even though only one actually pressed the shutter and wound the film. Apparently involved were brothers Szlomje and Josek Dragon and Alberto Errera who operated the camera. The exposed film was given to Helena Szpak-Daton who worked in the SS canteen. She smuggled the film out with a message in Polish by Jozef Cyrankiewicz and Stanislaw Klodzinki, both involved with the Polish Resistance in the camp. Allegedly, the film reached Teresa Lasocka-Estriecher with the resistance in Cracow. (Crawley 2002) It appears only four photographs were recorded (and as is often the case with controversial events, the negatives have been lost).

Stone argues the *Sonderkommando* photographs are important because they are more than recollections. 'There is urgency, an immediacy about these photographs that appears to render the whole discussion of representation problematic.' (Stone 2001) When confronted with atrocity photographs, there is a disinclination to theorise about them. Researcher Dan Stone cites Ernst Junger's claim in 1931 that there was barely an event in human activity not recorded on film. For Stone the photographs and written testimony produced by the *Sonderkommando* are especially significant. The idea that all human activity is recorded has been borne out ever more tellingly in a digital age, and in Israel for example as elsewhere, the abuse of civilians by armed forces surfaces periodically via mobile phone technology. Where

Zionist photographs of the pioneering years are concerned the absence of photographs showing abuse is conspicuous.

By 1933, Josef Goebbels realised that private photographs could be an important carrier of propaganda and called for an 'army of millions of amateur photographers for the unlimited and nationally important area of spiritual and mental labour of reconstruction.' (Bopp 2004:14) He assigned an important role to women calling for them to be at the centre of the German family image and reiterated this at the onset of war. 'Likewise it is an absolute duty of the soldier...not to let the camera rest right now.' (Bopp 2004:14) A similar recognition in Israel of the value of private photographs emerged in the 1960s and photography became more widespread and amateur photographs on communal farms were encouraged as a popular activity. With the advent of the Internet, many *kibbutz* and family archives have been added to the collective memory. What many of these reveal is a similarity with Zionist depictions, at times more convincing because of an intimacy between photographers and photographed. There were also many amateurs recording scenes throughout the period of this study, some of them accomplished photographers. From the point of view of the Zionist agencies they were so concerned by the need to control their messages, they overlooked a potential resource that the National Socialists recognised. The Zionist agencies recognised the importance of films and stills but they constrained their photographers and only now are these photographers being acknowledged as contributors to Israeli culture.

### **The *Altalena* photographs**

The *Altalena* brought an important cargo of illicit arms and immigrants and deliberately ran aground off the coast of Tel Aviv. The arms shipment brought in by Begin and the *Irgun* challenged the authority of Ben Gurion when he was at a delicate stage of negotiating a

ceasefire with the Arabs. A photograph recorded by Capa (see Figure 89) is one of several versions of a ship close to the shore in what was a notorious incident in Israeli politics. The events leading to the *Altalena* incident followed the departure of the British who left Palestine a month earlier. In revoking its Mandate Britain had plunged the country into chaos. Ben Gurion had negotiated a ceasefire with the Arab forces on 11 June and publicly was opposed to its violation by the landing of an arms shipment on board the *Altalena*. More urgently, he was concerned by *Irgun's* assailing of his own authority as well as that of the fledgling state. Ben Gurion ordered his own forces, the *Haganah* (soon to become the Israel Defence Forces) to open fire on *Irgun* fighters. This was after an agreement had been reached at the start of the month for the two forces to merge following years of dispute between them. Ben Gurion, who had not yet had time to organise a government, described the clash as an attempt to destroy the army and 'murder the state.' (Segev 1998: xix) In fact Ben Gurion had agreed to the landing of the cargo and was quite prepared to violate the ceasefire.

The incident had enduring political significance because for some the *Altalena* symbolised the triumph of Israeli unity at a time when it was needed most, for others it punctured the dream that the Israelis were building a moral society where Jews would not kill one another. Israeli leaders did not dwell on the incident yet it is still referred to as political allegory in newspaper articles today. Part of its resonance no doubt is that the incident serves as a warning against the dangers of internecine strife and nor was this the first incident of violence involving Jewish militias in which there were many civilian casualties. In late 1940, both *Irgun* and *Haganah* militias placed explosive charges on board SS *Patria* in Haifa harbour. The militias claimed they wanted to delay or prevent the departure of the immigrants but there were more than 1700 immigrants aboard when the explosion occurred 0900h 25 November, resulting in 260 deaths and 170 injured. The survivors were taken to Atlit Detention Centre and eventually allowed to settle in Palestine. The remaining passengers

were deported to Mauritius until the end of WW11. The decision to attack the *Patria* was approved by Moshe Sharrett, head of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency. The operation to lay explosives was supervised by Yitzhak Sadeh, the commanding officer of the *Palmach*.<sup>52</sup>



Figure 89 Robert Capa [http://www.isracast.com/images/NewsImages/150608Altalena\\_n.jpg](http://www.isracast.com/images/NewsImages/150608Altalena_n.jpg) Retrieved 18 February 2010.

In Capa's photograph, Figure 89, the decks are cluttered with equipment that is poking through the billowing smoke. Near the stern one of the davits is being used by someone to shimmy down into the water. A pilot's ladder has also been unrolled and another person is climbing down. However small both figures appear, they nonetheless suggest the urgency of the moment. Nearby in the sea some twenty or so figures can be seen swimming or paddling on boards. It seems as if those with the boards are going to help. The photographer was perhaps on the top floor of the Armon Hotel, just above the beach looking down on the

<sup>52</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patria\\_disaster](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patria_disaster) retrieved 3 February 2010.



vessel. This was where he and other correspondents were said to have been at the time the drama commenced. (Kershaw 2002:206) The ship is trim in the water yet one swimmer wading in is just waist deep emphasising how close the vessel is to the shore. Her bow would be in shallow water perhaps a metre or more deep, and since she has not cast anchor, suggests that she is aground. Also, this indicates a shallow draft, not uncommon on cargo ships, because she is not keeled. There is no name or lettering visible and there is no flag or radar in view. All this can be understood from looking at the photograph but it does not explain why the ship was on fire or beached.

Another photograph of the *Altalena* by Hugo Mendelsohn, Figure 90, appears ambiguous, and is a rather different view from the other photographs of the incident that continue to circulate. Most are obvious news photographs insofar as the main subject (the burning ship) dominates the frame. Mendelsohn's scene shows it as merely one element of a landscape scene. Four people are gathered in a cemetery, backs to camera, gazing upon the vessel some distance away. Another group can be seen further off in the direction of the ship. In the foreground a woman sits on a tomb at the right of the frame, whilst a man in shorts and two women, one wearing a straw hat are clustered together as a group to the left of her.

Despite the plight of the ship, nothing suggests urgency, and the only motion is the breeze plucking smoke from the ship. The people are bystanders not participants, and the smoke (and possibly the sound of gunfire?) is attracting their attention. An incongruity is struck by the European clothes in the style of the period but who appear to be in a Moslem cemetery. The building in the background and the shape of the tombs suggest the idea. The scene at least appears unusual insofar as the cemetery and the people do not match one another. It suggests a colonial setting and dispels any illusion of community that a first glance at the

photograph might have prompted. In Mendelsohn's composition there are apparently three narratives available (vessel in distress, cemetery, and nonchalant bystanders) but none are obviously connected, and this creates the ambiguity.



**Figure 90 (Perez 2000:43) Hugo Mendelsohn 1948.**

This photograph was used fifty years after the incident in an exhibition (with a catalogue) commemorating a century of Israel and the *Yishuv* as a new millennium dawned. Evidently to an informed Israeli audience in the year 2000 the name of the *Altalena* alone was sufficient to evoke its significance. However it appears on the same double-page in the catalogue as two photographs depicting immigration. (See Figure 91) One is by Mendelsohn the other by David Harris and in this usage the *Altalena* implies the risks that many immigrants faced on their journeys to Israel. It isn't hard to imagine that there might have been refugees on board the burning ship but rarely is this ever referred to. Photographs of the *Altalena* viewed then or now, cannot allude to the political significance except insofar as they are symbolic of it. For

the most part only photographs showing the ship are used to describe the events and there is a curious absence of photographs of the immigrants, of the drenched survivors, the wounded, and in all likelihood, censorship would have restricted the public reception of the event. The bitter skirmish continues to resonate in Israeli politics. In 1994 the film director, Ilana Tsur, for example, made a documentary about the *Altalena* that explored the memories of survivors and participants (including Yitzhak Rabin).

The question why Mendelsohn's composition included the cemetery remains intriguing and offers a counter-narrative to the ship and to the people watching. Dominating the foreground, it speaks of another history altogether. Mendelsohn had time to consider the scene and in this regard his composition was deliberate. The cemetery suggests there is a village or town nearby, but all the photographs of the incident mention Tel Aviv as the location. There were only two cemeteries on that stretch of coastline where Mendelsohn could have photographed. The first was Sheikh Muwannis (now Tel Aviv University) the other is near the mosque of *Hasan Bek*, a cemetery that was on a slight bluff above the beach further south. Nowadays his photograph is one of few that show the cemetery that was destroyed some years later. The photograph was recorded only two months after the Arabs had been driven out of Jaffa. Reminders of an erstwhile Arab presence are common in Zionist photographs of the period and it would have probably required a conscious effort to avoid them.

There is a photograph of the *Altalena* recorded by Paul Goldman that hints at the ship's significance as a political event because of the large number of people gathered on the shore before the ship. (see Figure 92) It appears in a catalogue of an exhibition celebrating Goldman's works (2004:78) and Capa has a remarkably similar photograph, suggesting they

were together at the time. But what about Figure 91 with its consignment of refugees, some claimed as camp survivors from the horrors of Poland? <sup>53</sup>



**Figure 91** *Time Frame, a century of photographs in the Land of Israel.* Israel Museum 2000

At the time when Goldman, Capa, Pinn, Mendelsohn and others photographed the *Altalena* there was clearly a consciousness of a state in the making. The declaration of independence imbued new citizens with pride and a shared hope for the future. No matter what their own circumstances were, many Israelis invested their energy in collective advancement rather than in personal gain. At least it appeared that way and there were few who wanted to puncture the

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<sup>53</sup> From 1937-1939 half of all Jewish immigrants came from Germany (estimated 50-60,000) and most came as refugees and not because they were Zionists. Only one in ten Jews who fled Germany went to Palestine, the majority preferring whatever other options were available to them. Segev believes that they did not fit with the image of the 'New Jew' that they were trying to create and regarded the immigrants with 'condescension and contempt' Though for the most part they stayed on in Palestine (as did their children) there were fundamental differences between the German immigrants and the wider principles and objectives of the *Yishuv* (Segev 1993:34-5).

bubble. The *Altalena* was an erstwhile WWII US tank-landing ship (LST-138) that had been purchased by the *Irgun*. The new name was chosen to honour Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the former militia leader since it was apparently a play on the pseudonym he used when writing. The ship sailed from New York to Cuba before crossing the Atlantic. The *Altalena* sailed from Port Bouc, France and moored off the Israel coast at Kfar Vitkin on June 20 1948. (Rosenbloom 2001) The people standing on the beach (see Figure 92) were citizens of a country without a past. Some of them lured to the country by one ideology whilst others arrived there in order to escape from another. It was a country being forged by Zionism but at the same time was a culture in flux.

The *Altalena* was shelled from the shore and the cargo of weapons and ammunition was hit. Fear of further explosions prompted the crew to flood the vessel as refugees escaped overboard. Les Solomon, an eyewitness, claims that many who jumped overboard faced gunfire both on the boat and in the sea. None of the photographs of the burning ship or many published accounts explain the events in detail. Among the passengers were refugees and survivors of Nazi camps who had been housed in Allied DP Camps a long time. (Rosenbloom 2001) Another participant, Uri Yarom, a *Palmach* soldier under the command of Yitzhak Rabin, describes how casualties were lowered into the water whilst 'indiscriminate shots were aimed at the helpless wounded and at those who swam to rescue them.' (Honig 2007) Bilby recalled 'Jews began killing Jews at point blank range in a confused pattern of anarchical warfare. All the troops were dressed identically and no other outsider could tell who was shooting at whom.' (Kershaw 2002:207)

As early as October 1944 however, the *Haganah* commander, Eliahu Golomb, had warned Begin that it wouldn't matter which side pulled the trigger first in a civil war. 'The

propaganda apparatus is in our hands. We will direct history's chroniclers. You will always be singled out as the instigators of civil conflict.' (Honig 2007) It was in the end the spectre of civil war that survives in the public imagination, and given the association with the *Altalena* a photograph of the burning or charred wreck is invariably chosen as the symbolic reference. Somehow in Israel there was an idea that things could only get better and amid the depredations of war and daily toil, a feeling bolstered by stories of people being reunited. It was a message that Ben Gurion was keen to promote. When announcing his new government before the parliament (Knesset) he spoke of the need for pioneering, socialist

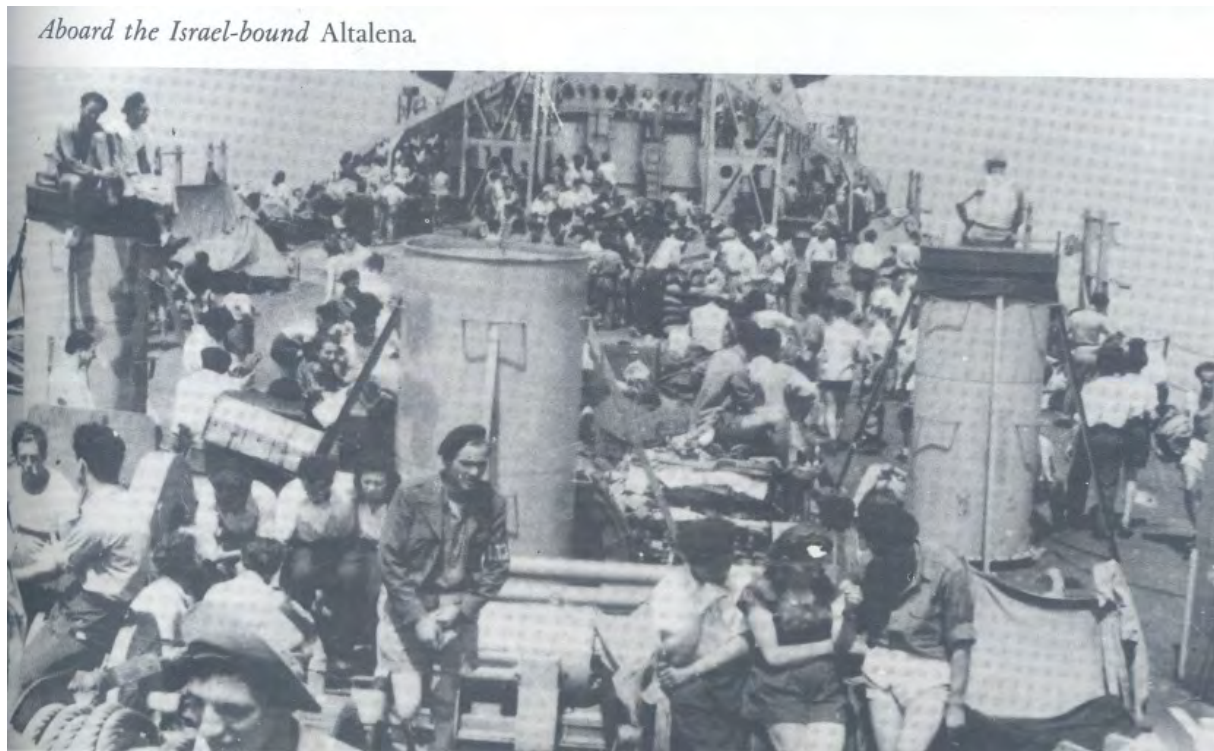


**Figure 92 The Altalena July 1948 Paul Goldman  
Israel Museum 2004**

Zionism. To build a society based on the vision of the early Jewish forefathers – a society that upheld moral values and passed them on to the nation's youth. The whole affair was cynically managed in the end and the true record of events passed into oblivion. Who was the



photographer in Figure 93 and was s/he present when the attack began? When one contemplates the passengers the obvious question is what happened to them? What journeys had led them to that shore that some of them never quite reached alive? For those that survived it was a shocking start to a new life.



**Figure 93** On board the *Altalena* bound for Israel  
*To the promised land* Doubleday 1988

Clashes had broken out between Israeli and Arab Forces in November 1947 and were to continue and intensify until January 1949. In that time six thousand Israelis were killed and several thousands were wounded. Deaths were not announced in the newspapers however, for fear of sapping morale.<sup>54</sup> By early 1949 many thousands of soldiers were demobbed and returning to civilian life as increasing numbers of immigrants were landing in Haifa and Jaffa ports. By the time Capa, Bilby, and others returned to report on the first anniversary (about

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<sup>54</sup> A poll conducted by the *Haganah* in Haifa revealed that 6 out of 10 residents preferred that military deaths should not be announced (Segev 98: xv).

nine months since Capa last visited Israel) they were to find many changes.<sup>55</sup> Hebrew was developing as a national language and mass immigration from around the world was allowing Jews to shape their own destiny in a sovereign state. It wasn't only a new society in the making but a social as well as political experiment. In the end most of the circulating photographs of the *Altalena* serve only as an allegory and say nothing about the lives that were lost, a fact that was overlooked for years in the following example.

### **The *USS Liberty***

There is another infamous case in Israeli maritime history that ranks on a par with the *Altalena* incident both for its continued reverberations across the years, and for its apparent duplicity, though in this case American as much as Israeli. The events took place in the Eastern Mediterranean about seventeen nautical miles from the coast of El Arish on June 8 1967. The memorialisation of both incidents is often expressed via photographs but in the case of *USS liberty* the photographs became part of the testimony of American sailors who survived an Israeli assault (by sea and air) on their vessel during the six-day war. The Israeli account of the incident suggests that following an explosion in El Arish, the Israelis became alarmed and assumed their troops were under fire from an enemy ship (the explosion possibly caused by Egyptian sappers blowing up an ammunition dump, retreating from Israeli forces).

Three motor torpedo boats were sent from Ashdod to investigate the unidentified ship off the coast. The MTBs calculated that the US ship was approaching the coast at a speed of 28-30 knots according to their radars. However, they later admitted that these calculations were

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<sup>55</sup> War weary soldiers and bewildered immigrants were ploughing the same streets each burdened with their own concerns. On one such occasion a newly arrived Polish immigrant bumped into her son in Haifa – a soldier recently returned from the front– having not seen him in eight years (Segev 98:ix). They had been separated by the war in Europe and she thought he had perished in the Nazi death camps. *Maariv* newspaper (12 September 1949) ran the story that was both poignant and symbolic. Stories like this spawned a wave of newspaper advertisements and even a radio show ‘*Who recognises? Who knows?*’ (Segev 98: x).



inaccurate and in fact the American vessel was only making five knots. Also, from their identification guides the Israelis would have known the maximum speed of the American ship as well as the Egyptian ship they claimed to have mistaken the *USS Liberty* for, and from their military intelligence could have known that the Egyptian vessel was no longer seaworthy and was tied up in a dock in Alexandria.

However, the Israeli claim is that neither the three MTBs nor the eight aerial passes by *NordAtlas* aircraft revealed a flag or markings on the bows and stern.<sup>56</sup> They further claim that the *USS Liberty* did not respond to ship-to-ship signals from an MTB, and finally the unidentified ship was in fact an Egyptian troop carrier, *El Quseir*.<sup>57</sup> Built on Tyneside, 1929, the *El Quseir* had a displacement of 2460 tons, a speed of 14 knots and was 275 feet in length. The *USS Liberty* had a displacement of 7725 tons, a speed of 17.5 knots, and was 460 feet in length, significantly longer than the Egyptian vessel. (See Figure 97) She carried a cluster of radio antennae and a sixteen-foot microwave dish on her aft-deck that could be raised and lowered as required. She was one of only two ships (both American) anywhere in the world to carry such dishes at that time. The Israeli MTB would have known this from their recognition guides, and both vessels were listed in Jane's manuals. Superficially, the two vessels bore a slight resemblance as both have cargo hulls, a smokestack mid-ships and masts fore and aft. The *USS Liberty* had her name painted in ten-foot high letters on the stern and similarly for the GTR-5 lettering on her bows.

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<sup>56</sup> The Israelis purchased six *Nord Atlas* N-2501 IS aircraft (three additional aircraft after they admired its performance during the Suez Crisis in 1956) and 16 N-2501D versions not long before the 1967 war. For the most part they were used as cargo planes or for carrying about 40 paratroopers. The Israelis also adapted some for use as long-range bombers notably for missions in Egypt such as *Operation Drought* and, as is known, for maritime reconnaissance. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nord\\_Noratlas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nord_Noratlas). Retrieved 9 February 2010 The French had a version called the *Gabriel* that was used for intelligence gathering, but it is unknown what modifications the Israelis might have made for theirs. It does not seem credible that the reconnaissance planes would not have carried cameras of some description, but there appears to be no mention made of any recordings that the Israelis may have made in the numerous published documents and accounts that have appeared in the intervening years.

<sup>57</sup> <http://www.usliberty.org/elquseir.htm> retrieved February 5 2010.

This case of mistaken identity leading to an attack on a neutral ship in neutral waters is largely what the Israeli case is built upon.<sup>58</sup> However one of the reconnaissance planes reported a sighting of GTR-5 lettering on the side of the ship (see Figure 95) in a debriefing by Lt Commander Pinchasi (a navy representative at Air Command) who in turn verified that it was *USS Liberty* and passed on the information to naval operations and intelligence.

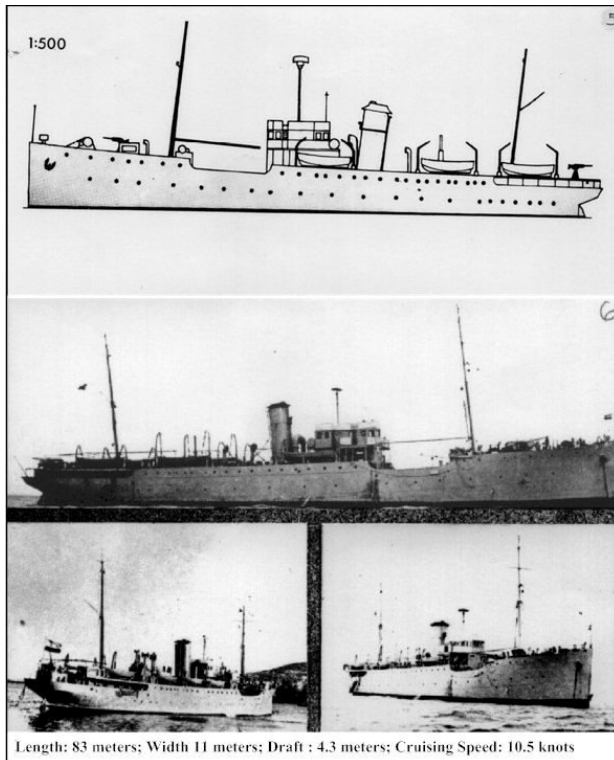


Figure 94 illustration of *El Quseir* in an Israeli navy identification guide to the Egyptian fleet <http://www.usliberty.org/elquseir.htm> retrieved February 5 2010.

The *El Quseir* was neither capable of cruising at 30 knots, nor had guns big enough to pound the shore with. (See Figure 94) If the Israelis searched for possibilities to explain why they fired in error upon the American ship, the choice of *El Quseir* is logical but unconvincing. The testimony of witnesses, the analysis of radio transcripts, signals, photographs and other data, cast doubt about the reliability of this. Many US government officials have gone on record to express their misgivings, but the official position of the government from that

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<sup>58</sup> 'War Crimes Committed against US Military Personnel, June 8 1967' submitted to the Secretary of the Army June 8 2005. <http://www.usliberty.org/report/report.htm> retrieved on 8 June 2007

fateful day to this, is to concur with the Israelis that it was a tragic error and the Israelis eventually acknowledged this with financial compensation both to the personnel on board as well as to the US Navy whose vessel was irreparably damaged.<sup>59</sup>

Many have sought to establish a credible motive for the attack that was sustained and deliberate but passed off as a tragic mistake. The ship had been under aerial surveillance for eight hours prior to the attack launched at 1400h that lasted one hour and fifteen minutes. Variations exist for distances given, for the duration of the assault, and for the type and markings of various vessels, according to sources. For example, the number of torpedoes fired varies 2-6 whilst the assault lasted from 1.25-2 hours. The air assault incorporated machine gun, 30mm canon, napalm and one thousand pound bombs delivered by *Mirage* and *Mystere* fighter planes. According to American testimony the fighter planes had no markings unlike the previous reconnaissance flights when the Star of David was identified. The three MTB launched torpedoes of which only one found its target. The boats also strafed the *USS Liberty* with machine guns notably holing the life rafts that the American sailors had thrown into the sea in readiness to abandon ship, in total more than 820 rounds of armour piercing rounds holed the ship.

Further, three intelligence analysts, Steve Forslund, James Gotcher and Richard Block, located in the US, Vietnam, and Crete respectively, all report reading intercepts between the Israeli pilots and ground control in which Israeli pilots clearly state that they have identified an American ship and ask ground control to confirm the attack, once again. Two other officials, Oliver Kirby with the NSA and Patrick Lang at the DIA also corroborate the transcripts, as did the two serving US Ambassadors, Dwight Porter in Beirut and Andrew

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<sup>59</sup> <http://www.usliberty.org/report/report.htm> retrieved 8 June 2007.  
[http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2009316427\\_liberty09m.html](http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2009316427_liberty09m.html) retrieved 5 February 2010 and  
<http://www.counterpunch.org/weir06232007.html>. Retrieved 5 February 2010

Kligmore in Qatar. The NSA transcripts of Israeli radio traffic comes from the recordings made by a US Navy EC-121 aircraft that was an intelligence gathering mission and its presence was unknown to the Israelis or indeed to the *USS Liberty*. During the course of the attack crew members managed to send out a distress call that was received by various vessels including *USS Saratoga* positioned some 400 miles west. Twelve navy jets 1424B were dispatched within minutes and just as quickly were recalled by radio contact with US Secretary for Defence, Robert McNamara, who ordered a 90-minute standoff. A second flight departed after the waiting period but again was recalled on his orders.

Meanwhile, the crippled ship steamed north and was approached by a Soviet destroyer, 626, that offered assistance and shadowed the *USS Liberty* until dawn when finally she was joined by elements of the Sixth Fleet. Howe (1981) in his book *Weapons* suggests that the *USS Liberty* was being followed by a *Polaris*-armed, *Lafayette* class submarine, the *Andrew Jackson*, that whilst unable to help during the attack had nonetheless filmed the incident via its periscope. Howe suggests that the mission of the submarine was to destroy Israeli long-range missile sites in the Negev in the event of an Israeli attack on the Syrian and Egyptian capitals because it was assumed that the Soviet Union would respond to such an attack and this was a preventive measure to reduce the threat of escalating US-Soviet tension. If Howe and others are correct about the presence of the submarine and the recording of the incident, then presumably the photographs might set the record straight about whether the *USS Liberty* was flying a flag.

However, another source suggests that whilst there was a submarine present (and many sailors have testified to having seen a periscope) it was not the *USS Andrew Jackson* but a *Tench* class submarine the *USS Amberjack* that was on a mission in UAR waters from April-

July 1967. James Ennes, a survivor of the *USS Liberty*, interviewed crew of the *USS Amberjack* who admitted being there during the attack. However, August Hubal, the submarine captain denies this and has gone on record to say the vessel was 160km distant from the attack at the time. In 2003, following a lawsuit using the Freedom of Information Act, Joel Leyden acting on behalf of the Israel News Agency, requested any evidence that the *USS Amberjack* had gathered by means of its periscope. The NSA stated that there had been no radio intercepts made by the submarine.<sup>60</sup>

The fact that successive administrations had not altered their position led the *USS Liberty Veterans Association* to file a War Crimes Report with the Secretary of State for the Army in June 2005, calling for a Congressional Investigation of the attack, claiming that inaction thus far ‘has resulted in an indelible stain upon the honour on the United States of America’ and sends the wrong signal to serving personnel who may find their interests subordinate to those of foreign governments. If one accepts the Israeli attack was calculated, two theories have been advanced to explain it, the first is that Israelis were fearful that Americans would reveal their battle plans for the Golan Heights to the Syrians. The second is that the *Liberty* arrived in the area when IDF soldiers were killing Egyptian POWs because they did not have the resources or manpower to hold them securely.<sup>61</sup> On 21 July 1995 *Davar* reported that 35 Egyptian civilians thought to have been soldiers were executed during the 1956 Suez Crisis

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<sup>60</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS\\_Liberty\\_incident](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Liberty_incident). Retrieved 12 February 2010  
<http://www.gtr5.com/>. Retrieved 9 February 2010 [https://www.afresearch.org/skins/rims/q\\_mod\\_be0e99f3-fc56-4ccb-8dfe-670c0822a153/q\\_act\\_downloadpaper/q\\_obj\\_8b2b1cde-5c02-455e-9917-9d202ebd3a57/display.aspx?rs=enginespage](https://www.afresearch.org/skins/rims/q_mod_be0e99f3-fc56-4ccb-8dfe-670c0822a153/q_act_downloadpaper/q_obj_8b2b1cde-5c02-455e-9917-9d202ebd3a57/display.aspx?rs=enginespage). Retrieved 11 February 2010  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2001/aug/08/israel>. Retrieved 10 February 2010  
[http://www.chicagotribune.com/services/newspaper/edition/chiliberty\\_tuesoct02,0,43090.story?page=4](http://www.chicagotribune.com/services/newspaper/edition/chiliberty_tuesoct02,0,43090.story?page=4) retrieved 8 February 2010 and <http://www.counterpunch.org/stclair1126.html> retrieved 31 December 2006  
<http://whatreallyhappened.com/WRHARTICLES/ussliberty.html> Retrieved 10 February 2010.  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/6690425.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6690425.stm) Retrieved 8 February 2010.  
<http://www.thelibertyincident.com/documents.html> Retrieved 12 February 2010. <http://www.washington-report.org/backissues/0697/9706019.htm>. Retrieved 12 February 2010  
[http://wapedia.mobi/en/USS\\_Liberty\\_incident?t=4](http://wapedia.mobi/en/USS_Liberty_incident?t=4). Retrieved 15 February 2010

<sup>61</sup> <http://www.washington-report.org/backissues/0296/9602017.html>. Retrieved 10 February 2010

because the IDF did not have troops to spare to guard them. This brief item sparked a string of revelations in the Israeli and international press claiming massacres perpetrated by Israeli soldiers had taken place during both the Suez Crisis and the 1967 War. A report citing Aryeh Yitzhaki published in *Ha'aretz* on 17 August 1995 alleged that as many as 1000 Egyptian soldiers were killed unlawfully in the 1967 War, about a third of which were perpetrated by the *Shaked* Unit commanded by Binyamin Ben Eliezer (who, at the time of the report, was serving as a government minister). The operation named 'Gazelle Hunt' took place in El Arish. Gaby Bron, a journalist present at the time, witnessed ten executions before ordered to leave the scene. The problem with this is why would the IDF risk another massacre in an attempt to hide a first? Did the IDF seriously consider that the Americans would blow the whistle on the executions in El Arish that would have been much easier to deny (and were denied for many years) than the crippling of an ally's ship in neutral waters?

The call for a Congressional investigation followed a commission of inquiry led by four senior military and political figures that delivered their findings in 2003. They ruled that the attack was deliberate and that it was an act of murder against American sailors and an act of war against the US. They ruled that stretcher-bearers and life rafts came under fire and that the White House prevented the US Navy from launching a defence of the *USS Liberty*. They admitted that the crew was intimidated into silence and that the US had covered up the incident. All this is a matter of public record, but at the time, the commission reported the only media that picked up the story was the *Associated Press* and one magazine reporting on Middle East affairs. This is especially puzzling given the fact that the *USS Liberty* was one of the most decorated ships in American naval history. In what might be seen as a step forward came in June 2009, when a former seaman on board the *USS Liberty* was awarded the Silver Star for bravery under fire 42 years after the attack. Unlike the dozens of medals given earlier

to Navy personnel who had served on the ship, for the first time the citation mentions Israel as the country that had attacked the *Liberty*.

Peter Hounam (2003) author of *Operation Cyanide* contends that the attack on the *USS Liberty* had been planned months before as Israel developed its battle campaign against Egypt. Elements in the Israeli and US governments allegedly colluded on this in order that the attack would be blamed on the Egyptians (and ultimately by proxy, their ally the Soviet Union). This, Hounam argues, would pave the way for a massive retaliatory strike by the Israelis that would then guarantee the outcome of the war and was in fact part of a plot to topple Nasser.

What is known is that the *USS Liberty* did request an escort ship prior to its deployment in the Mediterranean but that this was turned down. It is questionable whether the Israelis believed that sinking a ship was a necessary tactic to win the war, when by June 8 1967, Jordan and Egypt had already accepted a ceasefire, when the air forces of Egypt, Jordan and Syria had been destroyed and when Egyptian armoured forces in the Sinai had been routed. At that point Israel really did not need such subterfuge to successfully prosecute the war. However, the preferred explanation for a deliberate attack remains with the Israeli desire to keep its attack on the Golan Heights from being known, in order not to lose the important element of surprise. However, the reason why President Johnson and Secretary McNamara called off the immediate defence of the stricken ship or why they colluded with Israel on the tragic accident scenario is much less clear, though there has been much speculation about this.

The photographs of the American ship yield information through analysis and have become part of the testimony of the claim that the attack was deliberate and the mission was to

destroy the ship. However, official pronouncements by both governments more or less compel an opposite reading of the photographs. The motive for the attack cannot be confirmed and the case of the mistaken identity cannot be disproved even though it stretches credulity. The attack appears to be a case where memory and history instead of confirming one another are in fundamental opposition. Memory is always evolving ‘open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived.’ (Nora 1989) Memory is distinguished from history because, suggests Nora, history is always incomplete, a reconstruction of what is no longer exists, and in effect, a representation. Segev remarks that neither the US or Israel have declassified all the documents relating to the incident and there are bound to be questions that remain. ‘The secrecy prompted countless conspiracy theories that have yet to dissipate.’ (Segev 2007:386)

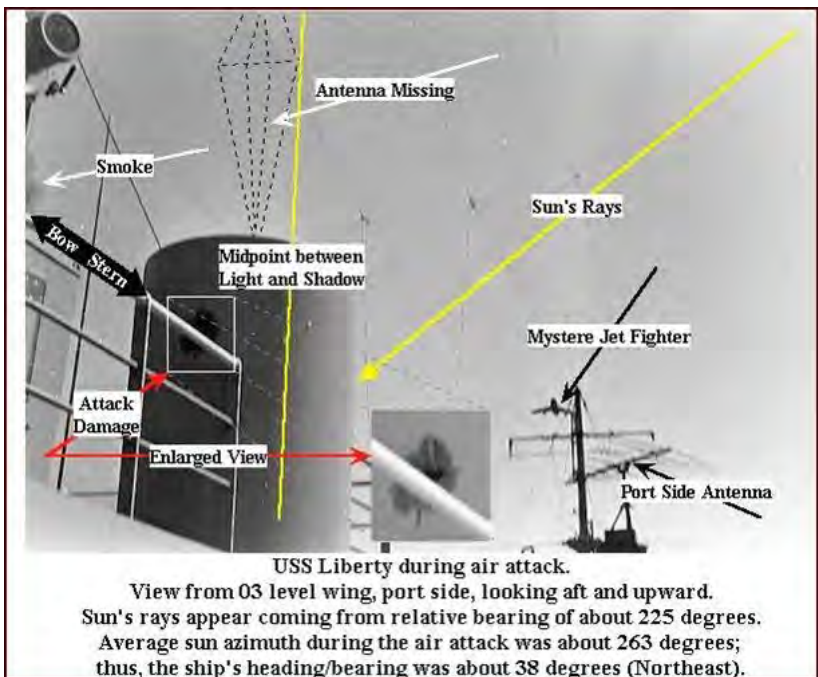
Figure 96 is one of several photographs recorded during the air attack either by the crew. Given the continuing dispute about whether the attack on the *USS Liberty* was deliberate or accidental, can the photographs provide any further clues? From an analysis of the solar calendar for that date and location it is possible to establish the ship’s bearing that, suggests analyst Ken Halliwell (2009) removes the doubt of conflicting testimony among the crew about which course she was charting during the attack. The ship’s captain, William McGonagle, always maintained that they were on the same bearing throughout, on 283 degrees, but the above and other photographs show that this was incorrect. The photograph confirms that visibility at the time of the attack was good, despite the resulting smoke, and the pilots would have had a relatively easy task in identifying her salient features, such as the radar mast, microwave dish and flag.





*USS LIBERTY AGTR-5 (455 FEET LONG, 62 FEET WIDE AT MIDSHIP)*

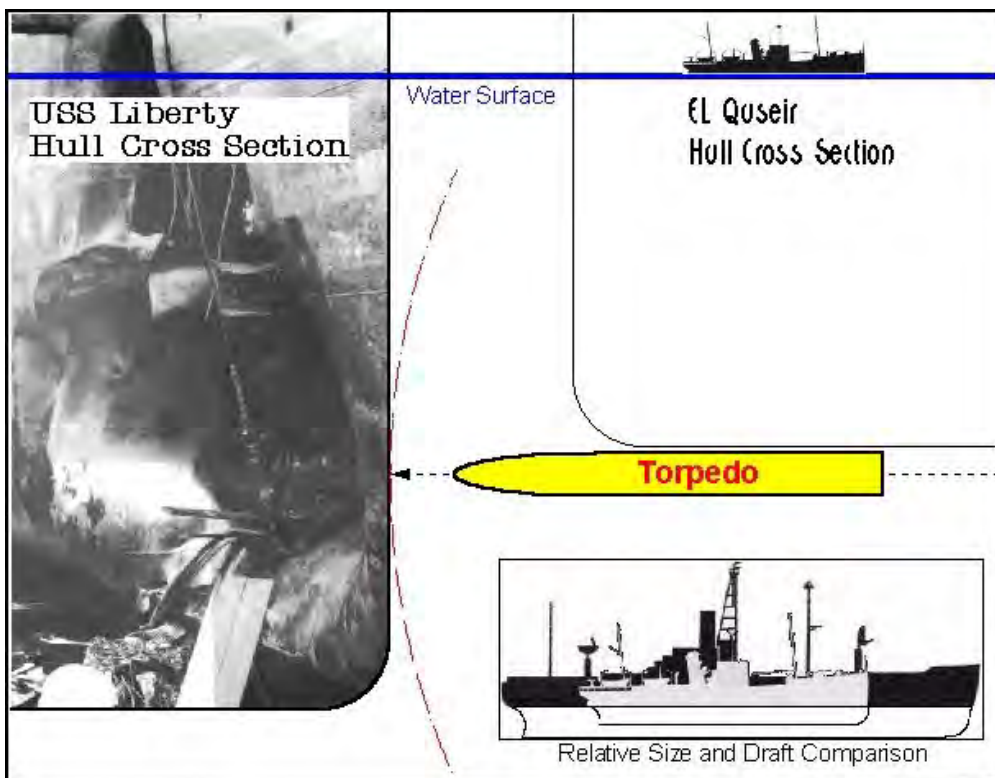
Figure 95 USS Liberty 1966 <http://www.gtr5.com> retrieved 30 May 2011



USS Liberty during air attack.  
 View from 03 level wing, port side, looking aft and upward.  
 Sun's rays appear coming from relative bearing of about 225 degrees.  
 Average sun azimuth during the air attack was about 263 degrees;  
 thus, the ship's heading/bearing was about 38 degrees (Northeast).

Figure 96 USS Liberty crew photo 1967 <http://sites.google.com/site/usslibertyinquiry/essay6> Retrieved 15 February 2010

The image analyst Ken Halliwell (2004) has also examined photographs recorded in the aftermath of the attack showing the damage caused by a torpedo, fired from one of the MTB (see Figure 97). To achieve this he used the photograph of the blast hole as a perspective drawing and aligned it with the ship's blueprint. What this yielded is that running depth of the torpedo would have been around 12 metres when it struck and crippled the *USS Liberty* and the significance of this is that it happens to be the optimal depth to inflict maximum damage upon impact. Equally, the optimal depth for an attack on the *El Quseir* was around seven metres.



**Figure 97 Comparison of Liberty with El Quseir**  
<http://www.uslibertyinquiry.com/essays/torpedodepth.html>. Retrieved 15 February 2010

Figure 98 analyses the ships' approximate heading, the angle of view from the camera, and the over flight of the fighter jets. Figure 99 shows the approximate position of the ship at sea and one way or another much of the information needed to make the case brought by the surviving crew derives from photographs and the analysis of photographs in this way can be

helpful. Whereas in many cases it is the photographs themselves that deceive or manipulate the viewer, in the case of the burning ships the photographs are helpful but the problem has been the absence of public disclosure by state authorities.

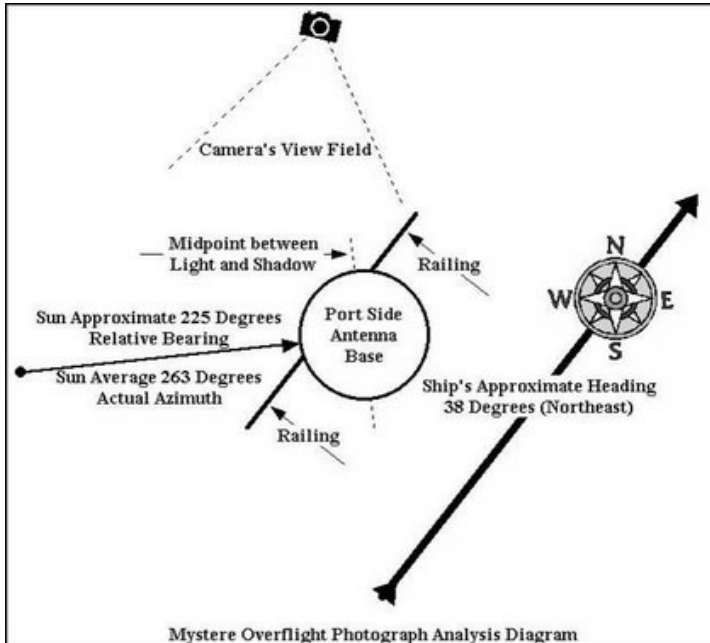


Figure 98 Mystere over flight analysis

<http://sites.google.com/site/usslibertyinquiry/essay6> Retrieved 15 February 2010.

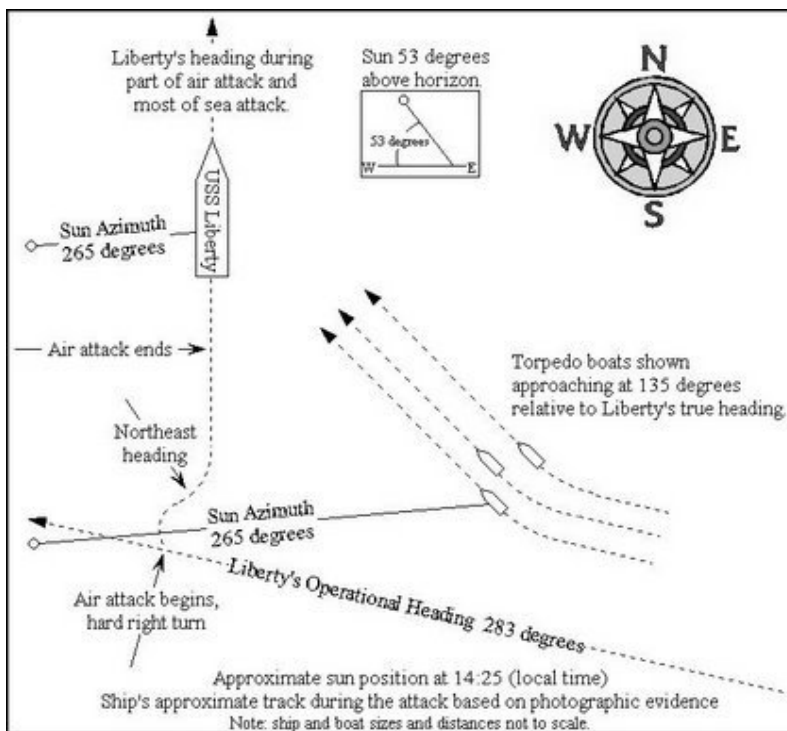


Figure 99 <http://sites.google.com/site/usslibertyinquiry/essay6> Retrieved 15 February 2010

In effect the photographs of the crippled ships discussed here reveal the overwhelming political influence on the use or embargo of photographs. In effect, the iconic *Altalena* photographs appear to camouflage the sinister details of a ruthless attack, and the ship itself has replaced the images of sectarian strife that probably would have depicted the event more poignantly, but would have been censored at the time. Just as the ship rather than people commemorates the clash, so it is always referred to obliquely, as ‘The *Altalena* affair’ and not named for what it was, namely insurrection. Whilst the new Israeli government could scarcely deny the clash there was no wish to dwell on the defeat of the *Irgun*, on the murder of civilian immigrants, or the loss of the arms shipment. Using photographs of the ship alone was a way of sanitising the event whilst allowing it to serve as a salutary reminder of the danger of disunity. The affair became an Israeli parable and the photographs merely signpost this. For some, the weight of what is known (and equally, what is not) about the ‘Falling Soldier’ denies belief in its literal truth. The *USS Liberty* photographs however, serve as an accusation against a perceived truth denied. In fact, because of the embargo imposed on crew testimony for so many years, no pictures of the damaged American vessel were published at the time and did not enter the public domain until years later.

In all the examples discussed, contradictory testimony, allegations of conspiracy, official pronouncements, the absence (or the exclusion) of certain photographs, all add to the uncertainty of what can be understood of the respective events visually. It should give pause for thought about the many claims put upon photographs and what can be learned from them. Historians of photographs have an array of possibilities to contend with every time they scrutinise a photograph but they also have an armoury with which to unpack the contents of photographs. However, this chapter reflects a conviction that all sources and all avenues of inquiry should be used in the analysis of images. The argument for this in exploring incidents

like the burning ships, massacres, or the raising of flags is compelling. The argument for using all avenues of inquiry is the possibility that it can offer a fresh insight or perspective into what can be understood from a photograph. Given the diversity of photographic sources in the region it is time for researchers to study them holistically, or for example, to explore the possibility of contrasting perspectives of the *Sabra* era photographs.

## Conclusion

A theme of this study has been how photographs can serve historical research. It has been argued that photographs are inherently ambiguous and mean different things to different people, such as Seymour's photograph of the Italian convert in Alma settlement. Or they are interpretations rather than transcriptions of reality, such as Capa's *Falling Soldier*. Further, it has been suggested that political interests have influenced the production and consumption of images since the beginnings of photography, and critics, historians, and theorists, have been attempting to piece together all the elements that are needed to understand what photographs mean for the better part of a century. In both the *Altalena* and *Liberty* narratives, the political fallout was enough to manipulate the use of photographs.

There have been several examples of uncertainty and manipulation of photographs and I share Goldstein's premise that all photographs lie as a useful starting point in any investigation. The photographic historian must often tread a minefield to determine the authenticity, circumstances, and intentions of photographs. These concerns are magnified in this study due to the absence of comparative research, to a limited understanding of unpublished Zionist photographs, and to the embargoed archives of 1948. Additionally, there are also the other photographic representations of the same geography that have yet to be fully explored. Thus the combination of all rather means that the jury must still be out when it comes to drawing conclusions about the photographs discussed here.

This study has looked exhaustively at the reasons why circumspection and scepticism must always be present in the analysis of photographs. It has also explored what W. Eugene Smith has said about their essential ambiguity, caught between deceit and veracity. This duality is heightened in a digital age as photographs proliferate on the Internet providing research

possibilities as never before, making political control more difficult, but nonetheless 'subject us all, to endlessly circulating falsehood and fantasy.' (Edwards 2006:133)

The alleged massacre photographs at Deir Yassin discussed earlier, attests to this. For some there is the idea that the Internet will transform the reception of cultural memory and Jameson is among those who argue that distinguishing between the real and the make believe is problematic. Particularly so for a defence of realism, when for example, there was a process of subversion of the photograph of Arna Mer Khamis, the young *Palmach* fighter, as it was posted on the Internet. This potential for the transformation of images within the canon of Israeli photography is a further reminder of the importance of knowing the provenance of the photograph and an idea of what it intended. As for the *Liberty* photographs would they stand the scrutiny of expert witnesses in a court of law? Had they not been posted on the Internet would the incident have melted away as the authorities wished? Photographs provide no shortage of conundrums even as they open lines of enquiry, stimulate ideas, and shape opinions.

Roberts is right to suggest that photographic archives are a potential gold mine for historians and he is right to mount a defence of realism because after all photographs can supply diverse information as has been discussed. The work of the three British photographers in Vietnam was cited in the defence of realism but what makes it valuable to historians is the manner in which it can be contrasted with the work of others in the same terrain including photographs on opposing sides. In order for realism to have wider credibility, historians of photography must be both more critical of journalistic sources, and more willing to use all sources available to them. Too often, the histories of photography and of photojournalism overlook available sources and too often they accept the hierarchies of worth of photographers, and of

certain subjects, that are determined by art markets, newsmakers, and pundits. Additionally, with respect to Israel and neighbouring countries, this study has noted the absence of comparative histories of photography and remarked upon the limited and partial nature of current research.

There is the other important question that has been alluded to repeatedly throughout this study, namely, the perception of reality in photographs. The photographer Gilles Peress, quoted by Linfield, suggests every photograph has four authors, slightly echoing Berger's contention of the photograph as a meeting place. Peress claims the authors are the camera, the photographer, the viewer, and reality. He suggests that of the four it is reality that convinces the most, but despite his experience, this is no more than a considered judgement that isn't written in stone. Berger and Peress along with the critics and theorists cited in this study contribute significantly to the understanding of photographs but what none of them do is remove lingering doubts. For the historian of photography this is perturbing because it is for them to pronounce on the authenticity, for example, of Capa's *Falling Soldier*, or to draw a distinction between the symbolic importance of photographs and their authenticity. More than this, it is the historian who can provide the historical perspective that is necessary to assess photographs of past events. Thus, it is the historians of Zionism and colonialism who have determined the approach taken in this study as much as the theorists of photography have. Understanding the rise and early years of Zionism is to my mind the key to understanding the photographs discussed here more than any other single element of research.

Nonetheless, theorists and critics have done much to promote the viewer in the reading of photographs and to challenge commonly held assumptions about photography. Tagg's views on photographs as instruments of state power are particularly useful in this study as too are



the observations of the sceptics who encourage different ways of apprehending reality. Perhaps this is a reminder of the power of images to shape public opinion, even when the reality they describe may not be what it seems. Linfield points out that this power is what brings forth strong emotions whilst also dissociating an image from its political context and inhibiting analysis. The power of Soviet and German photographic campaigns in the 1930s has been recognised but, in my view, the Zionist photographs of the period of this study deserve their place among the visual portrayals of 20<sup>th</sup> Century radical, political ideologies.

Comparisons have been drawn between the state building programmes of Israel and the Soviet Union, between New Deal America and the Soviet Union. Labour, working the land, and technological developments, were especially important in the Soviet Union and Israel. There are resemblances between the iconic splendour of Fascist Italy and Portugal and that of the Nazis, but along with Israel, all had versions of personality cult, military prowess, and elitism. What needs to be explored in greater detail is the extent to which Zionism emulated the other regimes in the depredation of their opponents and masked it with a utopian vision reflected in stories, photographs and films.

The youth culture and the New Man culture of Germany and Israel show clear resemblances, both in ideology as well as visually. The socialism of the Soviet Union is partly mirrored in Israel, particularly in the *Yishuv* period. These present research opportunities to follow, particularly the link to colonialism. However, photography in Israel also has singularities that distinguish it from political ideologies elsewhere because whereas Soviet and German interests strayed across their own borders, Zionism was bent only on one territory that required conquest and dispossession of the indigenous population. Further, given the small scale of that territory, the photographic narrative in Israel is less formal or grandiose than its

European counterparts of the period. Moreover, Israelis were building a society from scratch with immigrants from several countries rather than reinventing a society from within an extant community. What also distinguishes the Israeli narrative is precisely the presence of the British until 1948, the periodic flood of an international press corps from 1948 onwards, and the presence of the Palestinians throughout, and all collectively contributed their own photographic narratives to add to the mosaic. As has been discussed this provides additional points of view of the same terrain and will benefit from more research.

It is only in recent years, however, that there has been productive academic dialogue between Arab and Israeli historians that has gone beyond mutual accusations and recriminations. Thus there were severe constraints upon comparative research, yet the two contrasting photographs of refugees crossing the Allenby Bridge in both directions in the 1967 War at least suggest the potential of what such research could disclose. Both have more to say when studied together, because whilst their function was similar, they have distinct messages. Such photographs are instructive if the theory of the counter memory and counter-image is applied to their analysis. So many examples remain to be explored such as the photographs of ships bringing in immigrants into Haifa port. There are scores of photographers, Israeli and international who reported such events, scenes that convey powerful emotions, but how would our perceptions alter if such scenes were contrasted with the boatloads of Palestinian refugees fleeing Jaffa port to seek sanctuary elsewhere?

Some argue that the writing of history is profoundly linked to the era in which it was written and in this sense Zionist historiography is itself part of the narrative of Zionism. The political success of the Balfour Declaration, for example, inspired Zionist historiography to seek the approval and recognition of both domestic and foreign audiences. The wars of 1948 and 1967

also produced significant shifts in Zionist historiography, and it was not until the aftermath of the 1967 War, and the start of the prolonged occupation of Palestinian territories, that the history of Zionism began to be integrated into the wider history of the region. Perhaps because Israel is still a new country in relative terms, the study and writing of its history is constantly subject to political spin. Yet notwithstanding this, the tarnished legacies of the soldier heroes of the *Sabra* era remain feted and serve as role models for today's generation.

My own view of the *Sabra* is that the propaganda and myths were and remain of cardinal importance to the birth of the Israeli state and to the current values and mores of Israelis. The portraits shown here of men such as Rabin, Dayan, and Sharon, are reminders of their importance in realising Zionist aims. Their legacies are assured in Israeli history, despite the controversies that infuse them, and they and the many who followed them, embody the *Sabra zeitgeist*. The pioneering spirit, the sense of the frontier, and the values of the New Jew continue as Zionism adapts to current needs, refining its messages, and adjusting policy as needed. According to many Israelis the threat of anti-Semitism, or from neighbouring states, the struggle for resources, and the problems of demography remain. The challenges Israel contends with today stem from those present at its birth requiring the same qualities of its citizens to stay on course. This in part explains both the reluctance to open up the blocked archives as well as the relative absence of themes such as cruelty or suffering in photographs as discussed already. These are issues that remain politically sensitive and reflect the continuing need for circumspection about the past in public debate.

There is a view that the promotion of the *Sabra* ideal was always a smokescreen to mask the brutality of conflict. There is the suspicion that the heroes of the pioneering years enjoyed the complicity of those willing to participate in the bloodletting and destruction because they

shared the conviction of Zionist ideals. The people whom the *Sabra* campaigns lauded were the ones who defended and pushed back the frontiers, the ones who created the collective farms and settled the land. With the emergence of 'lost' archives particularly the amateur photographs documenting *kibbutz* and *moshav* life, one finds the intimacy of amateur photographs that convey the *Sabra* ethos with far less flamboyance than the official photographs did, and express the thrall in which the ideals of Zionism were held at this time. The question remains is what else is there in these emerging archives of which relatively little appears to have been published?

The study of myths is an integral part of the study of cultural history and the myths of Zionism are preserved as long as they remain useful in maintaining and furthering its objectives. It has been suggested here that the propaganda value of the *Sabra* as some sort of mix of fiction and real personalities declined steeply after the 1948 War but as to the *Sabra* ideals and to the acknowledged public heroes, they remain important both to Zionist historiography and to the virtual history of early Zionism. The *Sabra* era photographs of amateur and professional alike are a remarkable testament to the pioneering years and combined with the fictional evocation of those times provides an enduring legacy of Zionist aspirations.

In recent years as Zerubavel observes, 'the multiplicity of texts and the debate on the past indicate that contemporary Israeli culture has become more pluralistic and that Israelis display a greater readiness to examine critically the essence of their collective identity and multiple roots.' (Zerubavel 1995:237) It comes from both within the country and from without, and among other things for example, reflects the impact of continuing immigration, not least the influx of Russians, but also of the changing mores of society, for example, the

rise in religious conservatism that changes the views held on secular Hebrew culture.<sup>62</sup> However, pluralism needs to develop within Palestinian communities and between Israeli and Arab communities if sectarian and partial accounts of virtual history are to be supplemented by other perspectives.

Many countries are compelled at some point to come to terms with their past and address dark chapters in their history. This comes from continuing research, from the court of public opinion, or even from the pressure of the international community (for example the issue of the Armenian genocide and the hoped for recognition of it by Turkey). This usually arrives decades after controversial events have occurred. In order for states to states to change course, issue apologies, offer compensation, or re-write school texts, there has to be a willingness and consensus to do so. Few countries have ever publicly conceded the deleterious effects of their colonialism upon others, and aside from tokenistic attempts at the level of the United Nations for international recognition of the phenomenon, it is otherwise overlooked. It remains to be seen whether the colonialism of Zionism will be more widely recognised or ever properly acknowledged. To date most Israeli historians accept the colonising role of the pioneers and immigrants but reject the idea that Israel is a colonial state. They point to the inflow of capital into the *Yishuv*, to the purchase of land by Jews from Palestinians, or to the absence of a mother country.

If Israel was built upon the basis of colonialism for some it was also built upon a negation of evil for others, and the impulse for states to recognise its declaration of independence was inspired by it. Balfour, in his vision for a Jewish homeland a century ago, wanted it to be

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<sup>62</sup> Photographer Alex Levac (2011) noted in a newspaper article that the director general of the schools run by the *Shas* party had complained to the Museum of the Ghetto Fighters about photographs of naked women prior to their execution by Nazis suggesting they were inappropriate for school children. The Museum acceded to this request and removed the offending photographs.

much more than a safe haven for Jews and wrote of the possibility that the Jews would become 'a light unto nations.' The *Sabra* myths were part of the vision for Israelis to become New Jews and the *kibbutz* and *moshav* 'became the agency for concretising the hopes of a new society in miniature.' (Kaplan 2007) Almog describes the *Sabra* in much the same way as others have described elites elsewhere, when driven by powerful ideologies that inculcate discipline, obedience, and loyalty to a cause.

It is always difficult to allow the past to speak with its own voice and not be 'forever fragmented through the present's claims to it or memory's claims to it.' (Marie Law 2006) This surely is true of the contested history of the region where scholars, to suit their arguments, interpret every scrap of information. The writer William Faulkner suggested that not only is the past not dead, it isn't even past, and he might have been speaking about the locked files, the private albums, and the un-researched archives that have much more to say about Israeli colonialism than is currently known.

Despite the shattering of myths by the New Historians, and by the scholars who tread in their footsteps, many still regard Zionism as a nationalist movement rather than as a colonialist one. Even Israel's harshest critics who recognise her colonialism are inclined to assign its role to the past and ignore its continuing legacy. It is, as was noted at the start of this study, a salient feature of Zionism that has been overlooked just as it has been in the history of Nazism and of Communism. Setting out the case for Israeli colonialism and exploring ways in which this understanding can be applied to the analysis of photographs has been the main focus of this study. It is to be hoped that other researchers currently investigating the link between colonialism, Zionism, and photographs, will advance arguments that enrich our understanding.

Drawing on my own experience of photojournalism, has been the idea argued here that photographs are moveable feasts, leading one to distinguish between the reality of the photograph and the consciousness of the viewer. The arguments that support the defence of realism, an idea about reality in a photograph, could be more persuasive if they were less categorical and more able to accept that the consciousness of the viewer may not see the same reality but another. Of the four authors that Peress describes, it is Peress as author who determines the parameters of reality as author. In effect his point of view, like that of Roberts and many more cited in this work, is no more than this, however well informed. Further the theorists and critics cited here are often in opposition to one another because of their political and social beliefs (Linfield versus Sontag or Roberts versus Tagg) and this reminds us how much our understanding of photographs is based on value judgments.

At the start of this study I argued that what photographic histories should attempt is to reduce the gap between opinions and facts and to do this we must consider all the sources available to research as outlined here. What I have learned from my own partial research is that the photographs of the pioneering years are among the most remarkable testimonies to colonialism ever recorded anywhere. As evocations of the aspirations of Zionism, they are equally remarkable, both in professional and amateur photography. The achievement of the *Sabra zeitgeist* in photographs, films, and literature lies in the combination of official guidance and public enthusiasm for the Zionist project in Israel. The myths of Zionism were essential to its survival and the publicists exploited the *Sabra* myths brilliantly. This study has attempted to open an avenue of inquiry into this propaganda campaign and to suggest ways how photographs in the region should be studied, what elements ought to be taken into consideration, and where research should follow. It has drawn attention to why the history of photography in the region cannot yet be written and why it needs to be if the photographs

discussed here are to be contextualised in a way that satisfies the demands of historical research.



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