

“Hebrew Labour” (AVODA IVRIT) as a pivotal Zionist instrumental concept
Ideological teaching and social structuring in the Labour Zionist Youth
Movement
Reading the movement’s official magazine BaMaaleh 1926 – 1935

Submitted by Ofra Yeshua-Lyth, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Palestine Studies, May 2024.

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Introduction

Several decades prior to the establishment of the State of Israel, in 1948, the notion of **Hebrew Labour** [*Avoda Ivrit*] associated with “the Conquest of Labour” [*Kibbush Ha’Avoda*] was a core component of the Zionist Labour Movement’s ideology and practice. The concept represents a demand that all paid employment in Jewish owned enterprises, as well as a proportional part of government works, be performed exclusively by Jews – mostly young Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe who arrived in Palestine from the 1890s onwards - based on their Jewish (“Hebrew”) ethnicity.

Labour Zionism established itself as the hegemonic political grouping in the Zionist project before the establishment of the state, and kept its leadership position in the state’s first thirty years (until 1977). In Labour-Zionist ideology, the struggle for **Hebrew Labour** is attached both to the idea of establishing and solidifying a Jewish settlement in Eretz Israel/Palestine and to the aspiration to radically alter the traditional socio-economic structure of Jewish society. In practice, this struggle amounted to denying labour positions to indigenous Arab-Palestinian workers. Patrick Wolfe identified the centrality of the **Hebrew Labour** concept in the construction of the Zionist enterprise as a typical core component of Zionism’s settler colonial project. In his words “*the conquest of labour was central both to the institutional imagining of a goyim-rein (gentile-free) zone and to the continued stigmatization of Jews who remained unredeemed in the galut (diaspora). The positive force that animated the Jewish nation and its individual new-Jewish subjects issued from the negative process of excluding Palestine’s indigenous owners.*” (Wolfe, 2006:390).

The “positive force” did not really achieve its declared goal, which was to do away altogether with the Arab workforce as part of Jewish economy (Shapira, 1977; Lockman, 1996). Still the concept “*Avoda Ivrit*” was skilfully used by the Zionist Labour movement to enhance its political appeal and support its claim for the hegemony of the Zionist pre-state Jewish presence in Palestine. Presented as an essential combination of national and socialist idealism¹, it laid the

¹ In a period that still did not read menace into the combination of the two. See Sternhell, 1995:173, referring to the writings of Georges Sorel.

foundations for the demand for ethnic-religious separation and the eventual *ethnic cleansing of Palestine* (Pappe, 2007). The image of the indigenous population as “alien” and undesirable became imbued in the settler community’s collective *weltanschauung*.

The concept was conceived in the period of the Second Aliya [second Jewish immigration wave to Palestine] (1904-1914), originally to support the demand for work by Jewish immigrants. As it encapsulates the demand for pure ethnic-religious segregation and Jewish supremacy, the present research aims to follow its positioning as a well-accepted perception, camouflaged as an idealistic notion, bent on social reform. Ultra-nationalism in present-day Israel, universally attributed to the political “far right”, has its sound base in the advocating and teaching of the Labour movement, self-described as the “Israeli Zionist left”. This study hopes to illuminate this rarely noticed perspective.

Hebrew Labour was neither easily nor unanimously adopted by all segments of the Zionist Jewish population of Palestine – the *Yishuv* – during the decades that followed the inception of this principle. Resistance came from the right and from the left of the Zionist political spectrum. The employer class, consisting of orchard and plantation owners, and later industrialists and building contractors as well, was reluctant to replace the cheap and skilled native Arab Palestinian labour force with the more expensive, needy and less-adapted Jewish newcomers. The right-wing “Revisionist” party headed by Ze’ev Jabotinsky supported the employers. The Revisionists’ nationalist strategy, based on a militarist approach, upheld a liberal capitalist ideology. It opposed the organized labour market that was the power base of the more socialist Zionists. Opponents from the right also included the orthodox religious circles who vehemently rejected what seemed to be secular Marxist-style rhetoric.

Opposition from the Jewish political left was spearheaded by members of the Palestine Communist Party (PKP) and the “Labourers Fraction” (The *Frakzia*) identified with it. Parties such as “*Poalei Zion Smoll*” (Zionist Workers Left) and “*Hashomer Hatzair*” (young guards) occasionally expressed reservations and discomfort at the barring of Arabs from the Jewish labour market (Lockman, 1996).

The Zionist Labour Movement, fully associated in the *Histadrut* – “Hebrew Workers Labour union” (established in 1920 as a union of all self-described socialist political currents) skilfully rebuked all opposition and promoted the concept of **Hebrew Labour**, charging it with positive connotations² and turning it into a useful political tool against all Zionist challengers. The **Hebrew Labour** ideology has become identified with the Labour-Zionist hegemony. As Gershon Shafir pointed out, its ultimate emblem became the Kibbutz: A commune for Jews only, subsidised by the Zionist establishment and heralded as a model of socialist ideology (Shafir, 1996 [1989]).

The present research proposes to follow the campaign propagating **Hebrew Labour** by following ten years of a Hebrew language publication that was the mouthpiece of the *Histadrut*'s youth-movement organisation, the Labouring Youth [*Ha'Noar Ha'Oved*]. **BaMaaleh** [Up the hill] was first launched in 1926. In January 1931, following 7 brochures that were published sporadically over 5 years, it became a bi-weekly, an integral organ of the *Histadrut*'s media apparatus. The most prominent leaders of the Labour Movement, including David Ben Gurion, Berl Katznelson, Yitzhak Tabenkin and Israel Galilee, were regular contributors of articles, reviews and speech transcripts to **BaMaaleh**, stressing their interest in the constitution of its political culture. Canonised writers of the epoch such as Asher Barash, Eliezer Smoli, Yehuda Bourla, Levine Kipnis, A.Z. Rabinowitz, as well as poets Zrubavel, Avigdor Ha'Meiri and Avraham Broides, became contributors and members of the editing staff³.

As part of the educational-cultural machinery of the Zionist Labour Movement, **BaMaaleh** was intent on modelling the ideological-political nurture of young Jewish people, mostly immigrants or children of immigrants into Palestine. It offers, therefore, a perfect perspective on the teaching, advocating, and indoctrination of the principle of **Hebrew Labour**: fervently Zionist and nationalist; advocating its unique brand of socialist nationalism (Sternhell, 1998).

Interestingly, despite its relative prominence in past Labour Zionist circles, **BaMaaleh** has so far not been the subject of any academic research in Israel or elsewhere.

² The positive sentiment was preserved well into the second millennium, as can be learnt from a “national” project of Hebrew Labour for [young Israelis launched in 2011](#).

³ Basic details about all these personalities are included in the following pages, next to their contributions.

Reading the first 10 years of the publication offers a timeframe clear of historical events that later became pivotal for Zionist advocacy. The period 1926 -1935 precedes the second world war horrors – the Shoah, often quoted as a justification for the insistence on a pure “Jewish State”. It also precedes the 1936-1939 Arab Revolt and the 1948 war and Nakba, also often quoted as generators (rather than outcomes) of Jewish insistence on ethnic purity. The historical ideological makeup of Labour Zionism is cherished to this day by the so-called (dwindling) Israeli “left”, also recognised as the Zionist “Peace Camp”. Amne Badran (Badran, 2015) showed how different this group is from Anti-Apartheid white activists of earlier South Africa. Anti-Apartheid activists in 1980s South Africa campaigned for equal political rights to all residents and citizens of the state. Adherence to the fictional “Two States Solution”, also parroted internationally as a would-be “solution to the Palestinian Israeli problem” is in fact acceptance of the present Apartheid regime of the Israeli state⁴.

The hypothesis this work set out to prove was as follows: Many years prior to the establishment of the State of Israel and the expulsion of most of Palestine’s indigenous population, the Zionist Labour Movement promoted, upheld and campaigned for a general policy of segregation, exclusion and rejection towards the indigenous Arab population of Palestine. With nationalist rhetoric that propped itself on archaic religious tradition, the self-proclaimed socialist and secular Labour movement became the leading force of Palestine’s Jewish population. Promoting the discourse of **Hebrew Labour**, it created a consensus around the ideology of ethnic segregation, aggressively and successfully combining elements of European-like disdain of “natives”, common to all settler-colonialist societies (e.g., Veracini, 2006 & 2010; Wolfe, 1999 & 2006); these were well in line with traditional Jewish cultural norms that instruct the self-segregation of the community and ban “*mixing with the gentiles*” (e.g., Shahak, 1994). The fact that the Jewish settlers were actually “*Ostjuden, perennially marginalized by Europe*” (Shohat, 2017 [1988]: 64) and that they declared and believed themselves “secular socialists” did not seem to have any effect on the **Hebrew Labour** discourse that soon became a hegemonic consensus. It enabled the Zionist Labour movement to distance itself from left-wing Zionist groups that believed in co-habitation of Jewish settlers and local Arab Palestinians, and also to portray itself as more

⁴ [See B’tselem January 2021 report](#)

nationally extreme and discriminatory than its rivals in the nationalist right wing of the Zionist spectrum. Anyone who did not support pure **Hebrew Labour** and tended to tolerate native employment was labelled an enemy of the national renaissance concept of Zionism. I hope to display all these through the analysis of the texts of *BaMaaleh* published in the years 1926 -1935. In concepts used by Homi K. Bhabha, *BaMaaleh* offers a sample of “colonial discourse” which was “crucial to the binding of a range of differences and discriminations that inform the discursive and political practices of racial and cultural hierarchization” (Bhabha, 1990:72).

Research Question: Hebrew Labour in *BaMaaleh*, 1926 -1935

Contrary to present-day consensus that sees Israeli mainstream hostility to all indigenous Arabs as a product of militant, right-wing and religious elements, supporters of the post-1967 settlements, I would aim to show that indoctrination towards self-segregation began in the early settlements of the early twentieth century, a view shared by most non-Zionist researchers. The **Hebrew Labour** segregationist principle, heavily advocated by major leaders of Labour Zionism, created the infrastructure for the present Jewish-Israeli state of mind that rejects any idea of equal rights for non-Jewish Arabs in the land, and fervently supports the ethnic segregated “Jewish State”.

The present research follows 10 years of *BaMaaleh*, a major mouthpiece of Labour Zionism, fully owned by the *Histadrut* Union of Hebrew Workers, employing a respectable contingency of writers and editors recruited to carry the leadership message to the Jewish youth of the land. The work aims to answer the question: How, using what rhetoric and which propaganda tools, was the idea of **Hebrew Labour** promoted by the periodical; What were its chief messages, and how do these messages represent the core political making of the Zionist settlers’ project.

Methodology

This work aims to present the Labour-Zionist indoctrination mechanism through a particular Hebrew publication during the 1926 - 1935 decade. Issues of *BaMaaleh* from this period are kept exclusively in a few archives, mostly in microfilm format. Relevant pages from all these issues (in format A3) were scanned and the texts were selectively typed into a file, which was then translated into English. The English file, containing hundreds of items, is available as an appendix to this work and might be useful for researchers looking into various other aspects of early Hebrew-Zionist culture.

The basic work consists of text-analysis which is basic and straightforward. Mostly, these texts speak for themselves: The articles, opinion pieces and literary stories, many with autobiographical input, had been written long before colonial, orientalist and racist inclinations were denounced as politically incorrect and ethically wrong. Writers often displayed assertive self-congratulatory and group-superiority sentiments, not too different from many of their contemporaries in other parts of the world, who cherished imperial endeavours and settler-colonialism and offered “ethnographic” impressions (Wolfe, 1999).

As this study focuses on aspects of indoctrination and propaganda tools, it uses mainly the perspective and analysis tools of cultural studies, with an inter-disciplinary approach. Narrative psychology tells us that “*narrative is central to how we conceive of ourselves, to our identity. It is through narrative that we not only construct a particular connectedness in our actions but also distinguish ourselves from others.*” (Murray, 2015[1986]:113¹). Examining the narratives that were aimed at young immigrants and young natives of a settler society, one can learn quite a lot about how these youngsters were conditioned to distinguish themselves “*from others*”, and how the image of their collective “*imagined community*” (Anderson, 1991 [1983]) was permanently constructed and asserted.

Zionism, Israel and Israeli politics and society have been the subject of research worldwide for many years, and ample literature by historians, political analysts and sociologists offers illuminating perspectives regarding the period under consideration. These include the findings

¹ Referencing to Paul Ricoeur's book Time and Narrative of 1984

of members of Zionist academia, that I have often found informative and useful. Non-Zionist Israelis have often had to conduct research and analysis through overseas academic institutions.

Much had been written about Zionist ideology that *“emerged in Europe [during] the heyday of colonialism”* (Lockman, 1996:21) and eventually managed to subject *“Palestine and Palestinians to structural and violent forms of dispossession, land appropriation, and erasure in the pursuit of a new Jewish state and society”* (Jabary Salamanca, Qato, Rabie & Samour, 2012:1), while *“hiding the violence of colonial disruptions and expulsions beneath articulations of moral legitimacy, national longing and belonging, and the right to claim sovereignty over territory, law and life in Palestine.”* (Hawari, Plonski, Weitzman, 2019:2).

While I fully agree with Ilan Pappé that *“the paradigms of settler colonialism and apartheid”* alone do not fully explain Zionism (Pappé, 2012:39), the similarities that Zionist patterns share with other cases of settler colonialism (Wolfe, 1999; Veracini, 2013) are still illuminating. Many modern-day researchers use this paradigm for the analysis of different aspects of Zionism (e.g., Ben-Arie & Svirsky, 2018; Jabary Salamanca, 2012; Hawari, Plonski, Weizman, 2019). Patrick Wolfe (Wolfe: 2006:396) and Lorenzo Veracini (Veracini:2006; 2013) each dedicated research to the Israeli-Zionist version of settler colonialism.

On the actual topic of **Hebrew Labour**, Anita Shapira (Shapira, 1977) provided reliable historical data, while it was Gershon Shafir (Shafir, 1996 [1989]) who analysed the mechanisms of **Hebrew Labour** and “Labour Conquest” as instruments in the quest for ethnic segregation in Palestine. Zachary Lockman (Lockman, 1996) followed the central role that **Hebrew Labour** played in Arab-Jewish relations throughout the Mandate period. Both Shafir and Lockman dealt with this historical process as sociologists. Lockman expressed criticism of Shafir’s conclusion that the ideas of the second Aliya are at the basis of the Israeli post-1967 *herrenfolk* mentality of the occupation (Lockman, 2012). He is correct in pointing out that violence and coercion were needed to practice the concept of an ethnic-pure labour market. Still, as the present work points out, it was the second Aliya’s peculiar mixture of nationalism and socialism, that utilised **Hebrew Labour** as a useful slogan to promote the exclusionist version of settler colonialism in

Palestine. Its ideas had to be pumped and promoted in a major effort of “*Hasbara*” (Zionist propaganda). The writers and editors of *BaMaaleh* tirelessly assisted in this effort.

Concentrating on the efforts to turn the concepts of **Hebrew Labour** and “Labour Conquest” into core issues of Labour Zionism, the present work uses ten years of texts dedicated to build up and preserve a loyal constituency, providing original narratives for the newly created political Jews-only community. I found some theoretical works related to cultural studies particularly useful for the understanding of the social environment that these texts set out to mould. These include Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of ‘habitus’, Louis Althusser’s notions of ideology and hegemony (following Antonio Gramsci’s ideas) and Itamar Even Zohar’s analysis of cultural planning by elites. Teun Van Dijk’s discussion of elite discourse and racism as well as Stephen Fuchs’s definitions of essentialism assist in following the ideological conditioning successfully performed over the issues of *BaMaaleh* by an impressive arsenal of writers. Nurit Peled-Elhanan’s extensive research of Israeli educational texts and many of her conclusions are relevant to the reading of *BaMaaleh*’s texts of a much earlier period.

The concept of **Hebrew Labour** relates directly to the socio-economic patterns identified with Jewish culture. The insights of Zvi Eckstein and Maristella Bottucini (Bottucini & Eckstein, 2011) and of Yuri Slezkine (Slezkine, 2009) are highly illuminating and helpful in understanding the nature of the major paradigm changes that were aggressively advocated by all prominent leaders of Labour Zionism during the relevant period. Gur Alroey’s detailed history of Jewish migration in the late 19th century and early 20th century (Alroey, 2004 & 2008) shed a light over the predicament of Jews in Eastern Europe prior to their decision to emigrate to Palestine.

The detailed literature review that follows is arranged according to the different headings of this study of the indoctrination effort as reflected in the pages of *BaMaaleh* during the period under consideration.

I should add that there is a personal perspective to my interest in *BaMaaleh* and the ideology that it promoted. Old bound volumes of *BaMaaleh* were kept for many years by my mother’s aunt, as her children - my mother’s cousins - had subscribed to this Labouring Youth Journal in their youth. I liked reading through them as a child in the 1950s and 60s. Both my late parents

were born in Tel Aviv in the 1920s, to parents who had emigrated here under the influence of socialist Zionism: My father's parents arrived as children from Yemen on the eve of World War I, following the second Aliya activists' initiative to bring Yemenite Jews into Palestine to help preserve the principle of **Hebrew Labour** during the Ottoman period (see chapter 8 of this work). Born in 1924, a third surviving child out of nine, my father was named Moshe but nicknamed "Moussa" by his East-European pals to mark his Yemenite (Arab) origins. My mother's parents immigrated in 1924 from starving Odessa, following the Soviet Revolution. Born in 1928 as their only child my mother was named Zahara, an Arab name adopted by modern Hebrew, perhaps to indicate their understanding of the need to be part of a new community shared by Jews and Arabs. Both my parents joined Zionist-socialist youth movements and later became members of the HAGANA and the PALMACH, the paramilitary organisations affiliated to the *Histadrut*. They remained loyal members of the historic MAPAI party (Israel's "Labour Party" in its last incarnation) to the very end (2009 and 2019 accordingly) and are buried in the privileged HAGANAH plot in Tel Aviv's Yarkon cemetery².

² I used details of my family's history in a memoir that was first published in Hebrew in 2004. An English version, *Politically Incorrect; Why a Jewish State is a Bad Idea* was published in 2016 by Skyscraper Publications Ltd., Bloxham, UK.

Literature Review - Academic and historical background

BaMaaleh faithfully and accurately reflected the values and positions of the Labour movement that became dominant as the establishment of the State of Israel grew near. This political movement, mainly represented by MAPAI (“Party of the labourers of Eretz Israel”) led and governed the state in its first 30 years. The list of subject-matters and concerns that were discussed in *BaMaaleh* during the reviewed period indicates that there is hardly a topical Israeli controversy that had not been identified and dealt with by the founding fathers of Labour Zionism and their loyal writers and editors. This particular work aims to analyse the way the idea of **Hebrew Labour** was mediated, explained, defended, and inserted as a fixture into the hegemonic narrative of the Jewish-Hebrew-Zionist *Yishuv* [settlement population]. This endeavour is viewed here through eight different aspects, represented in the table of contents above. I find it helpful to discuss the literature related to each aspect (chapter) separately as follows.

1. The vision: an educational, character-building publication

In the words of Yael Dar, *“during the 1930s and the 1940s the Labour Movement in Eretz Israel established its position as a hegemonic movement, and as such, it declaratively and with great intention took on the task of formatting the next generation according to its ways and its spirit”*. Dar describes this writing as *“applying a move that is essentially an indoctrination, literature which is ‘recruited’ and ‘propagandist’”* (Dar, 2013:1). In much the same spirit, Rima Shikhmanter, who researched Israeli children’s journalism in the 1950s, believes that children’s newspapers offer a good observation *“of the struggle of Israeli political circles [...] over the child’s soul, and even more critically – of the struggles over the future image of Israeli society and its culture”* (Shikhmanter, 2014:4). *BaMaaleh*’s target readers were not exclusively children but youth and young adults. However, as most were newcomers to the land and its newly formed culture, the political incentive to mould them to the desired *weltanschauung* was no less urgent. Itamar Even-Zohar, describing *“The growth and the crystallising of local native Hebrew culture in Eretz Israel, 1882 -1948”* (Even-Zohar, 1980) asserts: *“Looking back one could sum up schematically that its leading precept was ‘the creation of a new Jewish people and a*

new Jewish person in Eretz Israel', with emphasis, just like in the case of the immigration to the New World, [...] on the concept 'new'" (ibid: 171).

Daniel Bar-Tal speaks about the way societies *"in conflict"* develop *"appropriate sociopsychological infrastructure, which includes collective memory, ethos of conflict, and collective emotional orientations"* (Bar-Tal, 2007[b]:1430). **Ba'Maaleh's** texts should be considered a conscious part of this infrastructure, supplying building blocks to the collective memory and ethos for the new society whose members – almost exclusively young immigrants from Eastern Europe – eagerly joined the *"imagined community"* (Anderson, 1983) that was being created around a new political ideology.

Louis Althusser aimed to comprehend the way institutions *"ensure subjection to the ruling ideology"*. (Althusser,1971 [1970]:6). While interested in traditional institutions serving the state, capitalism and the bourgeoisie, Althusser offered a general theory about Ideological (State) Apparatuses which he called ISA, and showed how they succeeded in *"subjecting individuals to the political State ideology"* (ibid: 23). According to Althusser *"all ideology has the function of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects"* (ibid: 37-38), adding that *"ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing"* (ibid:40). As a result of this conditioning, *"the individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely"* (ibid:46). This subjugation causes individuals to *"work all by themselves"* (ibid). *"This mechanism must be abstract with respect to every real ideological formation"* (ibid:46) Althusser guarantees, but effort and struggle are needed for a specific ideology as it eventually *"becomes the ruling ideology"* (ibid:49).

Althusser details the institutions available for the maintenance of ideology. Beside the political system and the educational system, they also include communications and the cultural apparatus (ibid:15).

The need to control culture and communications had been clear for many years: *"Using the 'cultural front' as a political tool was prevalent in all western societies during the first half of the 20th century"* (Almaliach, 2018:50). Almaliach, having researched the more Marxist segments of

the Zionist Labour movement, tells us that this movement as a whole had always operated through cultural means in order to distribute political ideology and solidify its political influence. It established a “*system of cultural agents*” that, next to different press organs, also included publishing houses, theatres and educational institutions (ibid: 52). **BaMaaleh** was an esteemed component of such a system, and proudly announced so occasionally, from its very first issues. Chapter 1 of this work presents the ideological vision that was self-proclaimed over its pages. The recruited writers, editors and powerbrokers, all extremely conscious of their role as educators and advocates, may all be described as agents of “*indoctrination*” and providers of “*literature which is ‘recruited’ and ‘propagandist’*” (Dar, 2013:1), taking part in “*the struggles over the future image of Israeli society and its culture*” (Shikhmanter, 2014:4).

2. The Jewish socio-cultural model and the ideology of Hebrew labour

In the writings and speeches of leading Zionist ideologists the concept of **Hebrew Labour** is frequently mentioned as a steadfast demand. It certainly seemed crucial for David Ben Gurion (Ben Gurion, 1974: e.g., 21; 227), who is recognised as the founder of the State of Israel (Segev, 2019). The two “*related concepts of the ‘conquest of labor’ (kibbush ha`avoda) and ‘Hebrew labor’ (`avoda `ivrit)*”, are often repeated, as “*These concepts would come to occupy a central place in labor-Zionist discourse and practice*” (Lockman, 1996:48). The Labour Zionist Movement included several self-designated workers parties that joined together in 1920 to establish the **General Histadrut of the Hebrew Labourers in Eretz Israel**, representing socialist Zionism, or “National Socialism” as defined by Zeev Sternhell (Sternhell, 1995: 17;29; 41; 44). The struggle over the principle of **Hebrew Labour** in the pre-state Hebrew Yishuv and the difficulties leading to failure of its actual implementation, is the subject of a comprehensive historical research by historian Anita Shapira titled **Futile Struggle: The Jewish Labour Controversy 1929-1939** (Shapira, 1977).

The starting point of the struggle for **Hebrew Labour** is identified with the arrival of young immigrants devoid of independent means in Palestine during the years of the second *Aliya* (1904-1914) (Shapira, 1977:77; Alroey, 2004: 204). These immigrants, some already well organised in Jewish-socialist political associations in their lands of origin, needed to secure

workplaces and livelihood for themselves. The Jewish economy of the land was based on agriculture at the time, mainly citrus orchards with products intended for export. The Jewish-Hebrew agricultural *Moshavot* [village-settlements] that had been established earlier, during the days of the first *Aliya* (1882-1903), were the only sector that could offer multiple workplaces for untrained labourers. The newly arrived Jewish youngsters were met with a tough reality in the form of Arab workers whom the orchard owners preferred as better adapted to the necessary farming jobs. *“The Jewish economy was dependent on the labour of the Arab Workers”* (Gorni, 1985:25). Against this competition, the national principle was introduced: the demand that Jewish orchard owners, whose estates often enjoyed the support of Jewish institutions or Jewish philanthropists and associated with the Zionist idea, must employ Jews in agriculture even when this did not suit their economic interest. This was the initial basis for *“the ideology of Hebrew Labour, that sees the Hebrew economy as designated to give livelihood exclusively to the Hebrew Nation that is being established in Eretz Israel”* (Shapira, 1977:22) and *“for the creation of a Jewish economy based purely on Hebrew Labour, whose development would increase Aliya”* (Halamish, 2006[a]:52). Thus began the *“struggle to force Jewish farmers to dismiss their Arab workers and hire Jews in their place”* (Lockman, 1996:50). Fouzi El Asmar reminds that this *“official programme of the Histadrut”* represented a commitment that united *“all the labour Zionist parties, including the most radical labour Zionist party at the turn of the century, Hapoel Ha’Tzair (The Young Worker)”* (El Asmar, 1986:54)

The idea that young Jews from Eastern Europe would become farm hands collided head-on with the reality and background from which these youngsters had arrived, and with the traditional social, religious and economic culture in which they were trained and nurtured - a culture based on a socio-economic model of literacy and learning that did not prepare young people for manual labour. Prominent Jewish thinkers of that era declared this model problematic and in need of immediate change. Ber Borochov lamented the *“Economic anomaly base of Judaism”* (Gottwein, 1999:75). David Ben Gurion spoke disparagingly about *“the products of the landlord class”* (Ben Gurion, 1974: 54¹) and even about *“idlers living on the*

¹ In an article from 1925.

labour of strangers” (ibid, page 38²). Traditional Jewish culture did not include farm labour, and none of the Second *Aliya*’s immigrants had any experience of work in agriculture (Gorni, 1970: 225, table 31).

The demand that all manual and physical labour in the settled areas of Palestine must be performed by Jewish youth was in fact a tough order for a fundamental paradigm change in the cultural as well as the socio-economic make-up of the entire community of young Jewish settlers. It therefore deserves a somewhat elaborate analysis. Early Zionists felt free to discuss the need to turn the Jewish people into a “nation”³. **Hebrew Labour** came to be considered a basic requirement for this “nation building”, with ample ramifications on the nature of the settler-colonialist Zionist venture.

For centuries, the unique combination of religion, tradition and community values in Judaism had prioritised investment in literacy and in education. Maristella Botticini and Zvi Eckstein (Bottucini & Eckstein, 2012) researched the way this investment afforded Jews a significant relative economic advantage over the surrounding illiterate agricultural environment throughout Europe and other areas. Bottucini and Eckstein’s research focuses on the economic history of Jewish communities in the years 70-1492. Their thesis is that *“in a world populated by illiterate people [...] the ability to read and write contracts, business letters, and account books using a common alphabet gave the Jews a comparative advantage over other people”* (ibid:5). They further concluded that *“The higher literacy of the Jewish people, coupled with a set of contract enforcement institutions (the Talmud, the rabbinic courts, the responsa), gave the Jews a comparative advantage over non-Jews in crafts, trade, commerce, and moneylending”*, trades that were in high demand during the growing process of urbanisation (ibid, 150). Their research indicates that the high degree of literacy – and the socio-economic construct that it generated – were a result of a religious command, in the form of a divine decree. After the destruction of the Second Temple (70 ad) *“the Jewish religion [...] set out on a unique trajectory”* (ibid:6). Due to the annulment of sacrifices and pilgrimages to the Temple, *“being a devout Jew became*

² An article dated 1921.

³ See Shlomo Sand’s *The Invention of the Jewish Nation*, Verso 2009 [2009]

identified with reading and studying the Torah and sending one's children to school to learn to do so" (ibid). In the new teaching, "[...] illiterate people came to be considered outcasts." (ibid).

As Emil Durkheim proclaimed over a century ago, *"religion is something eminently social"* (Durkheim, 1965 [1915]:22). The prominence of Jewish merchants and financiers throughout Europe during the Middle Ages is unanimously accepted and often mentioned in relevant literature (Herr,1974 [1961]: 254). The socio-economic making of the Jewish communities had clear advantages that lasted well-beyond the 15th century. The Czech-Austrian Socialist leader and Marxist philosopher Karl Kautsky defined the Jews as an urban group that specialised in finance and trade (Kautsky, 1926:59). According to Kautsky *"we need only to note the influence of the urban environment on human beings at this day [...] and then to recall that the Jews are the only race on earth that has constituted a purely urban population for approximately two thousand years: we now have an almost perfect explanation of Jewish traits. **They are an exaggerated form of urban traits in general**"* (ibid:66, original emphasis).

Regarding the Jews through the anthropological perspective of communities with comparable socio-economic modes of operation, Yuri Slezkine offers the definition of Jews as one of several *"service nomads"* communities (Slezkine, 2004:18). He identifies such communities as existing in the spaces populated by other demographic groups, mainly farming communities, and characterised by *"mercuriality"*, as *"they were all transients and wanderers"* (ibid). Slezkine opens his book by asserting that *"There was nothing particularly unusual about the social and economic position of the Jews in medieval and early modern Europe. Many agrarian and pastoral societies contained groups of permanent strangers who performed tasks that the natives were unable or unwilling to perform"* (ibid:14). According to his findings, such communities existed in different areas - the Gypsies, the Margi in the Sudan, the Jains and the Farsis in India and a few others in Africa and in Asia. *"They were all chosen people"*, he dryly remarks, *"insofar as they worshiped themselves openly and separated themselves as a matter of principle"* (ibid:24). Often keeping themselves as *"demographically complete endogamous descent groups"* (ibid:14), supported by some *"food taboos"* (ibid: 22) and generally holding to a *"division of the world into two separate entities, one associated with purity [...] the other with pollution"* (ibid: 23), such groups' relations with the *"host societies"* tended to be strained:

“wherever Mercurians live, their relations with their clients are those of mutual hostility, suspicion, and contempt” (ibid:29). Keeping their distance seemed important: *“Strangeness was their profession; aloofness was their way of remaining strange; and their primary loyalty was to each other and their common fate”* (ibid, 31).

Religious decrees that forbid members of one community to mix with “others” bring to mind patterns of well-off segments of the European population in pre-modern times. The professional masters who kept themselves in the European guilds were quite strict about the tendency to *“limit entrance to their rank”* (Blomquist, 1995:218) and their restrictions included *“endogamy”* and other restrictions (Coll, 2019) that drew criticism on their socio-economic mode of operation, prompting even Adam Smith to *“denounce”* them *“as a monopoly”* (ibid). Guilds vanished centuries ago, but the efficient combination of religious culture, literacy and good entrepreneurship survived successfully for the Jewish communities in Europe and elsewhere well into the 19th century. Slezkine points out that it was common for host communities to consider the *“Mercurians”* as *“devious, acquisitive, greedy, crafty, pushy, and crude”* (Slezkine, 2004:32). This often saw disastrous outcomes, as *“The history of most service nomads is a story of sporadic grassroots pogroms and permanent state ambivalence”* (ibid: 44). His historical examples include the fate of the Chinese all over southeast Asia, in particular in the Spanish Philippines, Indonesia, Cambodia and Vietnam, the mass expulsions of Lebanese and Syrian Arabs from Haiti, the massacre of the Armenians in Turkey, riots and expulsions of Indians from some African states, before and after the genocide of Jews and of gypsies in Europe.

Slezkine considers the modern era a stage when Modernity *“was about everyone becoming a service nomad: mobile, clever, articulate, occupationally flexible, and good at being a stranger”* (ibid:38). In his terminology, to be modern one had to become *“Mercurian”*. But while *“All Mercurians represented urban arts amid rural labours [...] only the Jews [...] came to represent Mercurianism and modernity everywhere”* (ibid: 47). They were *“quintessential, extraordinarily accomplished Mercurians because they practiced service nomadism for a long time and over a large territory, produced an elaborate ideological justification of the Mercurian way of life and*

its ultimate transcendence, and specialized in an extremely wide range of traditional service occupations from peddling and smithing to medicine and finance” (ibid: 48).

This, indeed, was and remained a common image. In her Nobel Prize laureated historical novel ***The Books of Jacob*** Olga Tokarczuk describes some Jews as *“poor, miserable and full of prejudices”* who, however, observe the local Polish peasants *“with a certain feeling of superiority”*, as *“it was preferable to be a Jew than to be a peasant”* (Tokarczuk, 2020 [2016⁴]:77). Elsewhere in that novel the antisemitic bishop Soltik Lekosovski declares: *“When I wish to buy or to sell something, I always summon a Jew. He, the Jew, has agreements with all the tradesmen in the country. He knows what it means to do business [...] There is no serious nobleman or estate owner who is not served by people of Israel”* (ibid:259).

Among hundreds or thousands of essentialist utterances attributing special skills to Jews (often seemingly philosemitic but directly related to antisemitism), it is interesting to find one even by Vladimir Lenin. *“According to the novelist Maxim Gorki, Lenin compared the Russians unfavourably with Jews: [...] A bright Russian is almost always a Jew or a person with an admixture of Jewish blood”*⁵ (Service, 2000: 57). For Theodor Herzl, one reason for *“the causes of antisemitism”* seemed to be the phenomenon that *“the power of our money prospers and rises to horrify”* (Herzl, 1960 [1896]:27). The economic success of Jews had always been a source of both pride and anxiety. A chilling episode in *KAPUTT* by the Italian journalist who signed as Curzio Malaparte describes Nazi soldiers in the Soviet Ukraine identifying prisoners of war as Jews because they are able to read a newspaper, and murdering them all on the spot (Malaparte, 1995 [1944]:204⁶).

The socio-economic advantage of the urban Jewish community underwent a process of severe erosion during the 19th century. Urbanisation and proletarianisation, alongside the growing rise of a local middle class in the general population, weakened the traditional stronghold that Jews had on lucrative trades in brokerage, commerce, and finance. In Russia the situation was

⁴ This is a translation from the Hebrew translation of the Polish text.

⁵ Quoted in Robert Service’s biography *Lenin*. The reference (no. 40) is to Gorki’s “Vladimir Lenin, Ruskii sovremennik, no 1, 1924, p. 241.

⁶ Translated from the Hebrew translation of the original Italian.

radically worsened when “to the most typical sources of livelihood of the Jews – commerce and craft - there was no longer demand in the cities” (Alroey, 2004: 14) while “antisemitic propaganda, as well as crowding out of the Jews from their traditional trades by the Polish and the Ukrainian population, pushed many to starvation and imposed conditions of extreme hardship” (ibid: 51). Gur Alroey describes the acute economic pressure that generated a stampede of Russian Jews to the United States in the years 1875 -1924 (in 1924 the option for mass migration to the US was blocked): “The economic process that Russian Jews underwent pushed them to be densely crowded in a very small number of trades. This increased competition radically, and income plummeted continuously all the way to a complete impoverishment of the Jewish masses. On the other hand, Jews did not succeed in attempts to integrate in more lucrative trade options” (Alroey, 2008:36).

Focusing on “the typical sources of livelihood of the Jews” proved to be an advantage for those who managed to extract themselves from the Eastern European regions of distress and to emigrate to the West. In his bestselling book **Outliers: The Story of Success** Malcolm Gladwell describes the economic ascent of a typical Jewish family that had emigrated to New York in 1889. He bases his explanation on findings by sociologist Steven Steinberg who observed: “those Jewish immigrants arrived at the perfect time, with the perfect skills,” as “The economy was desperate for the skills that they possessed.” (Gladwell, 2008:144). Jewish immigrants’ willingness to work independently and creatively, or as the writer puts it, the mix of “autonomy, complexity, and reciprocity between effort and reward” (ibid:149) created a situation wherein “the prospect of those endless years of hard labour did not seem like a burden” but as an opportunity (ibid:150). Thanks to their earlier experience as people who traditionally “clustered in cities and towns, taking up urban trades and professions” (ibid, 142), Jews could easily integrate in the most lucrative branches of the economy in the New World. Present-day self-marvelling at Israel’s success as a “start-up nation” is directly attributed to the way in which “Israeli culture nurtures a unique mix of intensive innovativeness and entrepreneurship.”⁷

⁷ This quote is from the back cover of the book “Start-Up Nation. The economic growth engine of Israel” by Dan Sinor and Saul Singer. MATAR publishers, Tel Aviv (2011 [2009]).

None of these eulogised qualifications were deemed useful by early prominent Labour-Zionist activists. Most of them identified the traditional socio-economic structure of the Eastern European communities as problematic and unsuitable for the project of settling/colonising Eretz Israel with Jews. Arthur Ruppin, who for many years headed the “Eretz-Israel Bureau” of the Zionist *Histadrut*, described this structure exasperatedly as “*a pyramid in whose wide base are the traders, in the middle the craftsmen and industry people and in its narrow top – those dealing with agriculture. ‘But on the contrary Eretz Israel needs a pyramid whose wide base is made of farmers’*” (Halamish[a], 2006:16⁸). “*One of the themes that Ruppin stressed consistently in his **The Jews of Today** was that the necessary condition for the success of the Zionist enterprise was the changeover to a livelihood in agriculture*” (Bloom, 2011:82). Only 18 years old, Ruppin wrote: “*the farmer leads a happier life than the city-dweller*” (ibid). This, needless to say, did not turn **him** into a farmer (my emphasis).

Different currents in Zionism were unanimous on this particular issue. “*The Zionist movement from its very beginning tied its aspiration for a national-territorial solution for the problem of the Jewish People with an aspiration for an internal Jewish revolution, that should correct the distortion in the social structure, created as a result of economic realities and the psycho-social inclinations of the Jewish people in the diaspora*” (Shapira, 1977:14). In other words: bookish habits, focusing on education and scholarship, as well as yearning for excellence and a high standard of living, which had characterised the economic and social culture of the Jews for many centuries, were now, in the new national ideology, defined as “*distortions in the social structure*” and “*psycho-social inclinations*” in need of correction and alteration.

The lack of enthusiasm by many Jewish settlers-immigrants, or pioneers, for physical labour, and the reluctance of many of them to adapt to the new required mode, infuriated the canonised thinker (and agricultural labourer) Aaron David Gordon, known as “*the prophet of physical labour*” (Sternhell, 1995:50). “*For Jews there is no thought for labour – and this is all! [...] and so, they work and produce everything by others, amass money by others, using the others, as far as the hand can reach [...] and these pioneers do not even see how ugly this is*”

⁸ Quoting an article written by Ruppin in 1919.

Gordon wrote angrily in 1911 (Gordon, 1957:117). National resurrection is impossible based *“on such parasitism”* he later snapped (ibid:118). David Ben Gurion did not skimp words in the early 1930s when he asserted that there is no way to absorb the Jews in Eretz Israel *“as long as these masses do not change the modes of their economy and do not get used to labour to which they were not used and did not know in the diaspora. Lots of shopkeepers, brokers, speculators idlers will not be able to integrate in this small, poor and sparsely populated land”* (Ben Gurion, 1974:231⁹).

In the terminology coined by Pierre Bourdieu, socialist Zionism aimed to perform a radical alteration in the *“habitus”* of the Jewish population upon its migration to Palestine/Eretz Israel. *Habitus*, according to Bourdieu, is *“the inertia of all the past experience that we have accumulated in our biological bodies”* (Bourdieu, 2020 [1981-1983]:21¹⁰). It is *“something that [...] turns these social things [...] into living realities: they become like a suit that we wear comfortably because it is the right size”* (ibid:25¹¹). It has two dimensions: *“the ‘inclination to’ and the ‘ability to’”* (ibid). It represents *“dispositions that are permanent life- styles resulting from learning, training and incorporation”* (ibid:26).

Bourdieu described how *“individuals who, having been conditioned by the same influences, have a homogeneous habitus and are therefore homogeneous through the incorporated social features that they share”* (ibid:29). In fact, A.D. Gordon and David Ben Gurion observed correctly: The absolute majority of young Jews who had arrived in Eretz Israel/ Palestine in the years before and after the Balfour declaration possessed a *“habitus”* that was incompatible with the profile and qualifications expected from a farm hand. They had neither the *“inclination”* nor the *“ability”* to spend a lifetime working in fields, cowsheds and orchards. Their learning and training conditioned them for completely different dispositions. And as they all came from a similar background of learned, literate, traditional communities, they shared a *“homogenous habitus”*. The living realities that they wore *“comfortably”*, as it was *“the right size”* for them, were not the reality of an agricultural labourer.

⁹ Transcript of a lecture in the party council titled *“The Crisis in Zionism and the Labour Movement”*, 1932, originally published in *Hapoel Hatzair* 34-40)

¹⁰ From a lecture on October 5, 1982.

¹¹ From a lecture on 12 October 1982

Theodor Herzl, by contrast, never expected the Jewish State to be established on the basis of agriculture. As far as he was concerned, *“the Jews who refuse to follow those who try to turn them into coarse peasants are doing the right thing”* (Herzl, 1960 [1896]). For Ben Gurion the opposite was true. The need for a social revolution seemed vital to him. He *“placed himself at the head of the fight for Hebrew labor. He saw it as ‘a fundamental question that will determine the fate of Zionism as a whole¹²”* (Segev, 2019 [2018]:83). It was no coincidence that Ben Gurion published the collection of his writings twice under the title ***From Class to Nation*** (Ben Gurion, 1955; Ben Gurion, 1974).

Boaz Neuman identified the *“pioneers”* as young people who *“lacked any defined occupation, formal or professional training. They mostly had a traditional or informal general education, and their social consciousness was socialist”* (Neuman, 2009: 17). This did not necessarily turn them into efficient farm hands, but they very much desired to measure up to the ideological requirements of the movement, as is evident by the *“multitude of pioneering texts and their waxing-lyrical tone”* (ibid:30) that they produced. In his book ***Land and Desire in Early Zionism*** Neuman described the *“interaction with the ground through horticulture”* as a *“formative moment in the pioneering passion for Eretz Israel”* which is *“the formative pioneering experience of being in Eretz-Israel”* (ibid: 31). This (settler’s) passion led to *“the pioneering obsession to conquer Hebrew Labour”* that was based among other elements on the *“exclusive channelling of Jewish sweat to the land. The pioneers really were anxious that the ground of Eretz Israel should not be wet by any foreign sweat, mainly Arab”* (ibid:120).

In spite of the enthusiasm, reality *“made clear [...] that the Hebrew Labourer was unable to make a living out of agricultural work in the Moshavot”* and eventually *“the failure of conquering labour in the early Moshavot was a failure from the Zionist perspective and a personal calamity of the conquerors”* (Shapira, 1977: 27). It was the failure of the *“aspiration to create a model Jewish society in the land of the Jews”* described by Shapira as a core ideological issue of the Zionist movement (ibid:14). Summarised by David Zait, the *“desperate struggle”* of

¹² The quote is from an article titled “Bureaucracy and the labourers” in *Ha’Ahdut* 22, March 24, 1911.

the Second Aliya *“for Hebrew Labour ended up in downfall and most of its Olim [Jewish immigrants to Palestine] eventually emigrated out of the land”* (Zait, 1993:6).

A different perspective of this struggle and its outcome is provided by Gershon Shafir. His analysis, based on models developed by Frank Parkin and Edna Bonacich, follows situations where an ethnic group acts to limit access of a competing ethnic group to the labour market or creates a *“split labour market”* whereby *“closure”* is created *“restricting access to resources and opportunities to a limited circle of eligibles”* (Shafir, 1996 [1989]:15¹³). When it becomes difficult to sustain the model of a *“split labour market”*, it appears necessary to develop a new strategy: *“pure, i.e., Jewish settlement came to be seen as feasible only through the bifurcation of the economy”*, thus creating the model of *“the new Jewish sector of the economy in which exclusive employment and collectivism went hand in hand”* (ibid: 19). As Shafir states: *“Jewish settlement became conceivable only through the penetration of European capitalism and Ottoman reforms, above all the creation of a land market¹⁴”* (ibid). Now the Jewish settlers gained *“control over the markets of land and labour”* through the unique *“communal and cooperative settlement mode”* that they had adopted (Shafir, 1993:109). In the words of Lorenzo Veracini, paraphrasing Patrick Wolfe, settler colonialism needs mostly *“indigenous land, not indigenous labour”* (Veracini, 2019:122).

In the Zionist *“cooperative settlement mode”* all branches of agricultural labour were performed purely by **Hebrew Labour**. Non-Jews were not accepted as members of either Kibbutzim or *Moshavim* (the two main forms of cooperative settlements), built on *“national land”* purchased by the national institutions, mainly the JNF, and financially supported by Zionist funds. *“An ethnically homogeneous settlement of the land had been established, and it was secured by a constant physical presence on the ground in the form of agricultural cultivation”*, as Dan Diner describes it (Diner, 1980: 25). Quoting a 1914 article by Zionist activist Nachman Syrkin, Sternhell concludes: it was a co-operation that *“offered the solution to the question of the Hebrew Labour”* (Sternhell, 1995: 131).

¹³ Quoting Parkin, 1979: 44

¹⁴ The details of the Ottoman land reforms and the way that the new Land Code of 1858, updated in 1867, made a land market possible are discussed in detail by Shafir (Shafir, 1996 [1989]: 32 -35)

Steven Fuchs defined “realistic” societies as ones that expect individuals to give up personal advantage for the general good. *“The workers in such cultures tend to be servants of a state or church, drawing their livelihoods from the work they do for the organization. They have little autonomy and discretion, and no independent networks apart from the center or hegemonic organization”* (Fuchs 2001:312). This description suits the members of the Zionist settlement movement. They were expected to drop their urban literate *“habitus”* and comply with the **Hebrew Labour** concept. In Fuchs’s analysis *“Realist cultures are pretty serious about themselves”* and do not tolerate *“playfulness”* (ibid: 154). Societies based on such cultures do not encourage independence, particularity, or selfishness. Fuchs goes as far as to define societies based on such cultures as *“cults”*. His characterisation: *“Total and selfless dedication to the common cause is the prime virtue; self-distinction is vanity [...] Members differ little from each other, or are encouraged to be more like the others. There is not much room or tolerance for internal diversity”* (ibid:220). It is a description that brings to mind Ben Gurion’s assertion at the early age of 18: *“Revival demands human sacrifices of us”* (Segev, 2019 [2018]: 13). It was a sentiment often repeated by Zionist thinkers¹⁵. Chapter 2 in this work will examine editorials, articles, reportages and literary texts that were published in **BaMaaleh**, often urging and insisting on making “painful sacrifices” needed for the successful implementation of the **Hebrew Labour** principle as a prime national as well as social goal. In the name of this principle the young new immigrants to Palestine - *Olim* to Eretz Israel – were demanded to become farm labourers, even when better employment opportunities were available; employers were demanded to give up capitalist principles of profit and loss and refrain from the employment of local Arab labour; socialists were required to adapt to *“a unique synthesis of socialism and nationalism”* (Sternhell, 1998:3, see also next section); non-Jewish labourers, it goes without saying, were expected to keep away from the Jewish-Zionist economy.

3. Socialist ideology and the Hebrew Labour concept

Historian Anita Shapira dedicated a scathing review to Zeev Sterhell’s analysis, accusing him of presenting *“ideas which are ripped-off the actual political-cultural context [...] creating an*

¹⁵ In 1944 a pamphlet titled “The Cruel Teaching of Zionism” [*Torat Ha-Zionut Ha-Akhzarit*] by writer Avraham Sharon was published by Am Oved, a publishing house owned by the *Histadrut*.

apparent image of the historical reality” (Shapira, 1996:557). *“The self-consciousness of the Eretz-Israeli Labour Movement was a socialist one”*, Shapira asserted. *“This consciousness has marked the cultural, social and political reality of the State of Israel more than any ideology. [...] At the time, it dictated the values on which youth was educated, the political discourse in the press and on the street,”* (ibid, 567). Indeed, the ideology of **Hebrew Labour** presents a problem for Labour socialists, with its powerful expression of the principle of ethnic-national (or ethnic-religious) segregation.

This principle was not always accepted by all segments of the settling society. As early as the Second *Aliya* years, the voice of minority groups in the Jewish population who were opposed to this principle was raised, right and left of the political spectrum. Yosef Gorny, reviewing the *“Altruistic-integrational approach”* (Gorny, 1985:47), enumerates some high-profile opponents who included Ahad Haam¹⁶, the leaders of the *“Brith Shalom”* group, and Yitzhak Epstein, author of the 1907 article *“The Hidden Question”* (ibid: 48-51). Rabbi Binyamin (pseudonym for religious publicist Rabbi Yehoshua Redler), Gorny writes, *“openly criticised the labour Movement due to its position on Hebrew Labour. With all his sympathy for the young people who struggled to conquer labour and although he recognised the principle of ‘self-work’ as a condition for national revival, he took exception to the radical opposition of the Second Aliya people against the work of Arab labourers in the Jewish Moshavot”* (ibid:53)¹⁷.

The banishment of Arabs troubled the members of the old Sephardic *Yishuv* in Eretz Israel as well. A wide range of *“prominent Oriental Jewish intellectuals and public figures [...] expressed their trust in the inevitability and blessing of cultivating good Arab-Jewish relations as part of the Jewish revival in the land of Israel”* (Svirsky & Ben-Arie, 2018: 60). Many years later Fouzi El Asmar bitterly remarked that the *“so-called socialist vanguard of the Jewish working class in Palestine was predicated on the institutional exclusion of Arab workers from its concern, thus*

¹⁶ Ahad Haam was the pseudonym of Asher Ginzburg (1856 – 1927). Born in the Ukraine, he became one of the most influential intellectuals of Hebrew culture. His article *“Truth from Eretz Israel”* criticising phenomena he witnessed in the Jewish settlements of Palestine, is considered a classic. (Source: OSU).

¹⁷ A book dedicated to the writings of Rabi Binyamin was published in 2023 (Tzoreff, 2023)

clearly abrogating any form of socialist commitment to class solidarity and brotherhood among nations.” (El Asmar, 1986:54).

As a socialist movement, the Labour Zionist Movement was challenged by colleagues at the Socialist International, who expected Jews and Arabs to promote “class solidarity”. The Zionist response was that there was no room for a parlay with the Arab national movement “*due to the class character of its effendi leaders*” (Gorny, 1985:184). Even in the Zionist Labour Movement not everyone felt comfortable with this position. At a conference of *Ahdut Ha’Avoda* (Labour Unity) party in 1924, Berl Locker¹⁸ is quoted as saying that “*ideology of ‘foreign labour’¹⁹ is not fitting for us*” (ibid:180). For a certain period, *Ahdut Ha’Avoda* party (later merged into MAPAI) adopted the position that a united workers’ organisation should be established based on class (ibid: 188), or should at least support the organising of Arab labourers. David Ben Gurion is quoted as seemingly supporting the idea, agreeing “*to offer the Arab labourer ‘a comrade’s hand, a proper and loyal hand’*”. However, at the same time he warned that “*the labourer of that nation is undermining our existence even while he has no evil intentions against us. It is his very inferior being that undermines our existence*” (ibid: 90²⁰). *HaShomer HaTzair* [young guard] organisation - whose commitment to socialist ideals was somewhat deeper than that of the movements that later merged with MAPAI - continued to promote the idea of a “*united organisation*”, but as pointed out by Aviva Halamish, the aim of this position was “*first and foremost to defend the Jewish labourer against competition with no prospects of winning against the Arab labourer*” (Halamish, 2011).

Adamant opposition to ethnic segregation, based on class ideology was expressed by the Communist party, outlawed during the Mandate period. In his autobiographical novel ***Like a Juniper in the Prairie [KeAr’ar Ba’arava]***, Mordechai Tabib quotes a pamphlet distributed by communist activists: “*Do away with the dispossession of the Arab labourers from their land and*

¹⁸ Berl (Dov) Locker (1887-1972) was born in Galicia and became a prominent leader in the Poalei Zion Party in Poland, identified with the “right” section of this party after its split in 1920, editor of Yiddish publications for Jewish workers and later a general secretary of the movement in the US and delegate to several socialist international gatherings. He emigrated to Palestine in 1936, was a prolific writer and speaker, also member of the third Knesset, representing MAPAI.

¹⁹ The concept “foreign work” (*avoda zara*) in Hebrew, based on Biblical terminology, is synonymous with heresy, the worshipping of idols.

²⁰ Quoted from BG’s article “the Hebrew labourer and the Arab Labourer” in “KUNTRESS” 237, circa October 1925

their workplaces by the servants of imperialism, the Zionist gang, betraying the Jewish nation and the working class” (Tabib, 1957:169). In the biographical-historical novel **ZOSHA** a meeting is described with the protagonist, who had joined the joint Arab-Jewish communist party PKP²¹: *“When the issue of Hebrew Labour was discussed, he heard her say angrily: ‘What does it mean that the Arabs have no right to work and only we have? What are you talking about! Are they not human beings? When they receive eight grush a day and the Hebrew labourer gets twelve, is it because they are less hungry and need less money to buy bread?’”* (Kafri, 2003: 64).

Implementing the principle of **Hebrew Labour** entailed the closure of work positions and work opportunities for Arabs. Its practice included stationing picket-lines to ban the entrance of Arabs into orchards, construction sites or industrial facilities. Jewish employers who were opposed to the pickets and wished to keep their Arab workforce, often requested the help of the British Mandate government. The police force sometimes attempted to remove the pickets and punish their members – for example in some confrontations at Ness Ziona in 1930 (Shapira, 1977:91).

As mentioned above, eventually the Labour Zionist Movement found a practical solution to the issue of Hebrew Labour and the Socialist disposition: the establishment of the Kibbutzim and the Moshavim as *“‘pure settlement’ colonies (i.e., colonies aimed at creating a homogeneous settler-immigrant population)”* (Shafir, 1996 [1989]: XII).

Chapter 3 of this work will follow **BaMaaleh**’s express commitment to socialist universalist principles, and the way it tackled the apparent contradiction of the expected class solidarity and support of the **Hebrew Labour** maxim that required national (ethnic-religious) segregation in the workplace.

4. Hebrew Labour “for the sake of Hebrew Aliya”

Throughout the British Mandate period (1919 -1948) the institutions of the Hebrew *Yishuv* in Eretz Israel actively campaigned to have the government increase quotas of Jewish immigration

²¹ In 1943 a group of “Hebrew Communists” split from the PKP and started what later became the Israeli Communist Party. Their story was researched by Carmit Gai in *STANDING ALONE*, KETER, Ben Shemen 2019 (Heb).

(*Aliya*) to the land. Aviva Halamish's book ***A Dual Race against Time*** (Halamish, 2006[a]) is a detailed account of that campaign. From a British point of view, Halamish writes, "*there was major interest for Mandate land not to burden the British taxpayer*" (ibid:51²²). Following this logic, the "*Scheduling*" of entry certificates for Jewish immigrants as decreed by the British authorities was initially "*based solely on the economic capacity of the Jewish economy*" (ibid:53). A White Paper issued in 1922 by the Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill announced that "*Jewish Immigration would be regulated by the number of jobs available in the country*" (Sabbagh, 2012:53).

Still, "*Palestine Mandate officials, and the British government all favored the entry of Jewish immigrants deemed to exhibit sociocultural and political characteristics associated with being European*" (Banko, 2017:33). In the early 1930s, the British government accepted the application of the principle of **Hebrew Labour** to "*jobs that are depended on Jewish capital, that would not be invested unless Jews were to be employed in them*" (Halamish, 2006[a]:53).

Officially, British Mandate statistics tried to balance between the demand for working hands and immigration licences. It was up to the Jewish leadership to prove that the economy of Eretz Israel urgently needed Jewish labourers. As a result, the demand to increase the number of Hebrew labourers in agriculture became a core issue in the struggle for *Aliya* licences. Jewish farmers were expected to employ Jews only, and refrain from employing Arabs. Young Jews were urged to work in agriculture and give up more lucrative and convenient employment in the cities. "*The demand for Hebrew Labour has turned into a demand for the sake of the Hebrew Ole who had not yet arrived in the land – that is, a demand for certificates*" (Shapira, 1977:164). The demand for immigration licences ("*certificates*") increased as Europe sank into serious economic recession, exacerbating the hardships experienced by Jews all over Eastern Europe. It became even more urgent in 1933, with the Nazi rise to power in Germany.

Meanwhile, "*During the 1930s, the Jewish economy in Eretz Israel went through some extreme upheavals: from recession and slump to prosperity and spikes*" (Halamish, 2006[a]:36). In the years of plenty, Jewish labourers in Eretz Israel tended to avoid agricultural labour. "*The Jewish labourers have deserted farming en-masse and moved into town, following the natural urge to*

²² Referenced to "A Crown Colony or a National Home", by Gideon Bieger, 1983, pp 42-64

improve their life conditions” (Shapira, 1977:163). Halamish quotes Chaim Arlosoroff, a prominent *Histadrut* leader, who in 1931 criticised the Jewish employers for not joining the calls for more Jewish labourers. He complained *“that the alienation of some of the farmers from Hebrew labour and publications in the Farmers Association’s newspaper ‘that there are superfluous labourers in the Moshavot and that the issue of their employment cannot be found there’ had damaged the struggle for Aliya”* (Halamish, 2006[a]: 144). Against the background of squabbles between the different political bodies in the Jewish *Yishuv* over the distribution of certificates to their members, it is understandable that in the period under review one conclusion was that *“more than being an instrument for the struggle over Hebrew Labour, the struggle for increased Aliya was an instrument for punching the farmers”* (ibid: 147). Chapter 4 in this work follows the manner in which **BaMaaleh** was recruited to present **Hebrew Labour** as a vital instrument for the opening of the gates of Eretz Israel to Jewish immigrants (*olim*), calling on young people to become agricultural labourers as a way to substantiate the demand for more certificates.

5. Hebrew labour as a winning argument in the struggle against the Revisionist party

Stormy conflicts over the leadership of the *Yishuv* characterise the years surveyed in this work, as was the case through other periods of Zionist and Eretz-Israel history. The Labour Movement and the *Histadrut* held fierce competition with other Zionist political associations. Those included the Revisionist BEITAR movement, several bourgeois-liberal circles, and parties associated with the religious-traditional sectors. According to Zeev Sternhell the discord was not especially ideological and *“the relations of co-existence and partnership [...] grew stronger in spite of mutual affronts between the labour movement and the bourgeoisie of Eretz Israel”* (Sternhell, 1995:163). Still, competition over positions of power and influence was intense. All political currents sustained newspapers or periodicals that took part in a fairly violent verbal discourse throughout. Sometimes actual clashes took place. *“After the 17th [Zionist] congress, rivalry between the Labour Movement and the Revisionists intensified [...] more than once the struggle between them took a violent turn. Labour disputes erupted in the cities and in the*

Moshavot. On the seventh day of Pesach 1933 members of the general Histadrut vigorously beat up BEITAR boys who marched through the streets of Tel Aviv wearing brown uniforms” (Halamish, 2006 [a]:41).

While the Revisionists, led by the charismatic Zeev Jabotinsky, seemed more aggressively nationalistic and militaristic in their approach to national problems, the principle of **Hebrew Labour** offered the Labour Zionist movement leverage to assail the Revisionists, accusing them of lacking commitment to the major national issue of ethnic purity in the workplace. In fact, “middle-class circles and the Revisionists did accept the view that 100% Hebrew Labour is an integral part of the Zionist credo” (Shapira, 1977:59), and Revisionist labourers “not merely accepted Hebrew Labour as a principle – they were prepared to struggle for it and make sacrifices” (ibid: 194). But the Labour movement insisted that **Hebrew Labour** could only be achieved as part of organised (unionised) labour, and therefore supervised by the *Histadrut*. Anyone rejecting unionised labour could therefore be labelled disloyal to the national maxim of **Hebrew Labour**. The right-wing led by Zeev Jabotinsky was vehemently opposed to the *Histadrut*’s exclusive rights over organising employment. Jabotinsky was supported by most orchard owners and other employers who did not welcome the demand to employ Jews only. Consequently, the Revisionists could be blamed for accepting the integration of non-Jews into the Jewish economy. Years later, Menachem Begin, who took over the leadership of Jabotinsky’s party, would remark that the only difference between his supporters and Labour Zionists was that “Ben-Gurion had resorted to subterfuge [...]” (Flapan, 1987:5).

Bitter animosity reached a tragic peak over the murder of Chaim Arlosoroff in the summer of 1933. The Labour movement unanimously believed - and vehemently declared - that the murder was political²³. Two Revisionist hard-liner activists - members of *Brit HaBirionim*²⁴ - were initially suspected and accused of the murder. The leadership of the Revisionist party declared the two entirely innocent, cruelly framed for political motives. Both left and right

²³ Arlosoroff was a target of a virulent campaign by the Revisionist party. He was denounced for his role in a financial agreement with the Nazi authorities in Germany to transfer Jewish funds to Palestine. The funds were used to purchase German goods, thus adversely affecting the anti-Nazi Boycotts.

²⁴ The official English translation for the name of group, headed by Abba Ahimeir, is *The Union of Zionist Rebels*. The more straightforward literary translation is “the alliance of thugs”.

presented themselves as the victims of the other side's false narrative²⁵. Daniel Friedman's view is that the accusation of the Arlosoroff murder "*made it possible for the Labour Movement and for Ben Gurion, who became its undisputed leader, to ostracise the Revisionists. Cases of boycott and violence against BEITAR members and supporters of the Revisionist movement had been registered earlier, but from now on they mushroomed, and Revisionism was pushed to the margins of Zionism*" (Friedman, 2015:82). During all the confrontations that followed, accusations of disloyalty to the concept of **Hebrew Labour** were routine ammunition in the Labour Movement's arsenal. In the autumn of 1934 riots broke out in Haifa around a construction project that was identified by members of the *Histadrut* as an attempt "*to break-up organised labour*" (Naor, 2019:55). *Davar*, the *Histadrut* daily, printed a full-page headline ironically and angrily lamenting "***The great victory of the Revisionists over Hebrew Labour***". Labourers of BEITAR were described in that article as joining forces "*with Arab and Italian labourers*"²⁶. A scuffle between the supporters of BEITAR's "*National Labourers' Histadrut*" and members of Labour's "*General Histadrut of Hebrew Labourers*" involved the British police that "*reinstated order, with demonstrators severely injured*" (Naor, 2019:55).

Members of both rival parties were stunned as, at approximately the same time and about a year after the murder of Arlosoroff, an agreement leading to a compromise over labour issues had been secretly finalised between the chiefs of the two would-be mutually hostile political associations. Clandestine discussions had been held in London in the autumn of 1934, leading to the "*London Agreement*" between David Ben Gurion and Zeev Jabotinsky (ibid: 52). The leaked publication of this agreement greatly surprised the rank and file of both movements. The idea of future cooperation and compromise about employment methods was hard to digest (ibid:58). Furiously unconvinced *Histadrut* members forced a "referendum" over the issue, and it resulted in Ben Gurion's defeat: The agreement was rejected by a majority of the *Histadrut* members (Jabotinsky had no difficulty getting his supporters to acquiesce). In the months prior to the referendum, the pages of *Histadrut* affiliated publications – including

²⁵ The mystery over who really killed Arlosoroff has never been cleared. Fifty years later, in 1982, Prime Minister Menahem Begin initiated a state-administered investigative committee to investigate the murder, but its research failed to reach definitive conclusions.

²⁶ *Davar*, October 18, 1934, page 3.

BaMaaleh – were packed with “pro” and “con” articles concerning the proposed agreement. All parties to the discussion used the issue of **Hebrew Labour** as powerful ammunition, for or against any compromise.

Chapter 5 of this work follows the use made of the concept of **Hebrew Labour** as a tool in the political struggle against the Revisionists, as expressed over the pages of **BaMaaleh**.

6. Tradition and Jewish religious heritage in support of ethnic separatism and exclusivity

Next to the declared intention to perform a “social revolution” in the Jewish community, the call for **Hebrew Labour** also referred to a basic concept that was accepted by all currents in Zionism: the demand for full segregation of Jews and non-Jews and the establishment of a “*Jewish Eretz-Israel society separated from its environment in the national as well as cultural aspects*” (Gorny, 1985:35). Such a homogeneous society had already been the desired model in the 19th-century “*Hibat-Zion*” associations, and persevered ever since as a conscious tendency to “*build in Eretz Israel a separated national-Jewish society, surrounded by political, social, economic, cultural and even military protective walls*” (ibid:13).

The concept of separating populations and preserving the demographic purity of the immigrating settler sector, while sustaining an image of their inherent superiority over the indigenous population, is not unique to Zionism. It characterises settler communities in various locations around the globe and in various epochs (e.g. Wolfe, 2006; Khalidi, 2020:9; Said, 1979: 31;40,108; Svirsky & Ben-Arie, 2018:X,34,36; Shafir, 1996 [1989]: IX,XI,85). Whatever narratives were used to support policies of segregation and expulsion in other colonial regions, in Palestine/Eretz Israel and in Zionism these were intensified by Jewish traditional culture that considers co-habitation with non-Jews (“assimilation with the gentiles”) a serious national calamity and a threat of “national annihilation”. Reluctance to assimilate is not a feature unique to religious or nationalist circles in Judaism and in Zionism. It is often displayed by the secular Zionist left. Present-day State President Yitzhak Herzog, former leader of the Israeli Labour Party (up to 2017), named assimilation “*an epidemic*” upon his election as chairman of the

Jewish Agency in 2018²⁷. In the Hebrew Wikipedia the entry *“silent Shoah”* [quiet Holocaust]²⁸ is explained as the term used to portray danger of the disappearance of the Jewish People due to assimilation, especially in the US. Former Prime Minister Golda Meir (Labour) is quoted as similarly worried²⁹.

Socialist Zionism was established as a secular movement, vigorously opposed to the dominance of the religious establishment over the Jewish communities in Eastern Europe. But it preserved a powerful linkage, both nostalgic and practical, to religious traditions. Itamar Even-Zohar (Even-Zohar, 2017) points out how the need to sustain social cohesiveness entails the use of *“heritage, a distinct cultural asset whose purpose is to create ‘a community’”*. He describes a process in which this asset *“has been nationalised and becomes an instrument to facilitate this required cohesiveness”*. Educational institutions, *“centrally controlled”*, are recruited to the *“direct bestowment through direct propaganda”* and make a *“powerful instrument for the convincing of different and diverse populations to willingly accept their claimed belonging, that is their membership and loyalty to a certain community. The result of such actions might indeed be what we usually label socio-cultural ‘cohesion’, that may be interpreted with contradicting terminology. On the one hand, as human solidarity, but at the same time a less expensive measure for the achievement of collective discipline”* (Ibid:256). Yehuda Shenhav points to the fact that *“modern nationality uses the every-day religious practice as an integral part of itself, while simultaneously denying its religious practice and presents an imagined secular image”* (Shenhav, 2004:46).

David Lloyd, too, noticed that *“secular Zionism was always haunted by the traditions of messianic redemption,”* noticing *“[...] the interfusion of secular and religious claims³⁰.”* (Lloyd, 2012:64). Prominent secular leaders in Zionist leadership had a very good understanding of the importance of religious tradition for the creation of communal cohesiveness. Menahem Klein explains: *“The motives of Weizmann and his colleagues were not religious. On the contrary, they*

²⁷ [Hakol Hayehudi June 27, 2018](#)

²⁸ [Wikipedia in Hebrew “The Quiet Shoah”](#)

²⁹ [Wikiquote Golda Meir](#): *“as far as I am concerned, each assimilated Jew is an addition to the six millions of the Shoa”*

³⁰ His article references to Jacqueline Rose’s *The Question of Zion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

wanted to strip the Temple Mount of its religious significance. They saw it as they saw all of the Land of Israel—part of the political and cultural renaissance of the Jewish people as a nation of the enlightened and secular West. [...] On Passover in 1928, the chairman of the Zionist Executive, Menachem Ussishkin, affirmed that ‘The Jewish People will not rest and will not remain silent until its national home is built on our Mt. Moriah.’³¹ (Klein, 2014:97). Shenhav elaborates: “The transference of religious asceticism from the monks’ cells into practical life merged religion and secularity into one inextricable mix” (Shenhav, 2004[a]:47). Therefore “in Zionism ‘religion’ and ‘secularism’ are not mutually exclusive categories but a system of discursive practices, and their complicated mutual relations must be viewed from a historical perspective” (ibid:48). Indeed, as Homi Bhabha noted mockingly, in order to claim a racial hierarchy, the “agency of social control appeals in desperation to God instead of Nature to fix the colonized at that point in the social order” (Bhabha, 1990: 76).

Displaying linkage to the Jewish tradition, while adapting it to the new requirements of the Zionist socialist *Yishuv*, was part of the process that Althusser called “*subjecting individuals to the political State ideology*” which is also achieved with the use of “*the religious apparatus*” (Althusser, 1971 [1970]:23). All ideologies, Althusser reminds us, have the function of “*constituting ‘concrete individuals’ as subjects*” (Ibid: 37-38). The result is that the subjected individual “*shall (freely) accept his subjection*” (ibid:46). In the Jewish-Israeli-Zionist case, religion and diasporic tradition are fixed into “*a source of nostalgia, an integral part of one’s identity*” (Stier-Livny, 2013:192).

The Jewish-religious principle that obliges Jews to stay away from non-Jews is well-adapted to the ideology of **Hebrew Labour**. Chapter 6 of this work will review the texts in **BaMaaleh** expressing nostalgia and identification with Jewish national-religious tradition. Flooded with these ideas, the individual is easily led to “*material actions inserted into material practices governed by material rituals*” (Althusser, 1971 [1970]:36), convinced and fully identified with the traditional decree demanding – in the Jewish case - strict segregation on religious grounds.

31 The location of al-Aqsa Mosque, built over the spot of the Jewish Temple “*Beit HaMikdash*” in Jerusalem.

7. Constructing the image of the native Arab population: “The Other” as different, primitive and dangerous

Hebrew Labour entails rejection, ban and negation of “Arab Labour³²”, and requires the removal of Arabs from the Jewish economy. During the reviewed period of this work, *“The uncritical and common understanding [...] that segregation of Arabs from Jews is a consequence of ‘the conflict’”* (Svirsky & Ben-Arie, 2018: 31) had not yet been crystalised. In 1928 David Ben Gurion wrote: *“We do not wish to combat the Arab labourer, and we will not allow the centres of Jewish settlement to become a killing field between the Hebrew and the Arab labourer”* (Ben Gurion, 1974:160³³). Ben Gurion held on to this position even after the 1929 riots that later settled in national memory as *“Year Zero of the Jewish-Arab Conflict”* (Cohen, 2013). At the Zionist congress held in Berlin in 1931, Ben Gurion made sure to describe the slaughter of Jews during the riots as *“the fruit of evil propaganda, religious incitement and political grudge by a gang of religious priests and greed mongers who tried to salvage their crumbling control over the masses of the Arab people by blowing-up racial and religious animosity and creating a war of one people against the other”*. All this, Ben Gurion declared, *“did not tear from our heart the recognition of the partnership-destiny that connects the Jewish people, returning to its land, with its Arab neighbours, the indigenous of the land and its surroundings”* (Ben Gurion, 1974:210). Almost twenty years earlier, Ben Gurion spoke about potential Arab hostility as an advantage from the point of view of the needy Jewish youngsters, who were no match for the Arab labourers when it came to employment opportunities in agriculture. *“Ben Gurion declared in 1910, during the Sixth Congress of Poalei Zion: [Arab] national hatred is the reason that will force, and bit by bit is already forcing, Jewish farmers to take on Jewish workers, whom they hate so much”* (Shafir, 1996 [1989]:87). He was preceded by Joseph Aharonowitz, editor of *HaPoel HaTzair* who *“already in 1908 listed ‘the farmer’s fear of the foreign worker’ as the most important reason for the potential success of the struggle for the conquest of Labour. In his words: ‘the more the Arab goes on developing, such incidents [of attacking Jews] will repeat*

³² For decades, the expression “Arab work” remained synonymous in Hebrew with “a badly performed job”. A popular award-winning TV sitcom by Sayed Kashua was named “Arab Work” based ironically on this connotation (2007-2012).

³³ In an article published in *Davar* daily, January 10, 1928.

themselves [...] and this thing [...] is the safest guarantee of the Jewish worker” (ibid³⁴).

Describing the natives of the land as “*foreigners*” is the standard at the time, and their labour is described as “*foreign labour*”. Author Mordechai Tabib (1910-1979), born in *Rishon LeZion* to immigrants from Yemen, also describes the Arab Labourers (with whom the Yemenites competed in the employment market – see below) as “*foreigners*”. The farmer, he describes in a novel, needs to “*watch out over the savage foreign villagers, so that they do not cheat him nor defraud him with their work*” (Tabib, 1957:139). In the novel, the secretary of the Labour Bureau complains that “*a hundred score of foreigners make a living from the work in our Moshava*” (ibid: 165).

Throughout most of the reviewed period, the leadership of the Labour Movement preferred to describe the inter-ethnic tensions as an outcome of the fact that Arab society could be described as backward, primitive, illiterate and therefore easy prey for “*inciters*” with ulterior motives. Descriptions of deep cultural gaps between the two communities - self-conceived progressive and advanced Jewish society versus the seemingly backward Arab one - were used as explanations, or excuses, for the need to keep the two communities apart. This followed a well-established tradition. Fouzi El Asmar noted that already “*Herzl portrays the local native population [...] as if they are barbaric in the crudest sense of the term*” (El Asmar, 1986:29).

David Ben Gurion, in a seminal article titled **Hebrew Labour**³⁵, defined Arab culture as “*impoverished*” or “*scant*”. His admiration for the “*richly cultured*” German nation – less than two months before the takeover of Nazism – is an embarrassing side-effect:

*We recognise the right of self-determination for all people. The Arab nation in Eretz Israel is entitled to its scant culture, just like the culture-rich German nation. However, the Arab population has no right to **impoverish the land, to its abjection, to its destitution**. This right – to leave the land in its destitution because this suits their culture – this we will not accept. Every nation is entitled to take care not of its culture alone, but also of its unlimited development. This right is given to all nations, ours included.*³⁶

³⁴ Quoted from an article by Aharonowitz in the August/September issue of *HaPoel Hatzair*, 1908.

³⁵ The article originally appeared in **BaMaaleh**, issue 20 of 1932 (November 4, page 3), and was included in Ben Gurion’s collection of writings and lectures under the headline “The Right to Labour/Lecture in the camp of the Labour Youth” (Ben Gurion, 1955:158). In the re-published collection of 1974 this text was not included.

³⁶ Emphasised words in the original text are marked by spaced letters. **BaMaaleh** used several different modes of emphasis, but in this work and its appendix only bold lettering is used.

On a previous occasion, mentioned above, Ben Gurion described the Arab Labourer as one whose *“very inferior being [...] undermines our existence”* (Gorny, 1985:190³⁷). It is, once again, *“the mode of representation of otherness, which depends crucially on how the ‘west’ is deployed within these discourses”* (Bhabha, 1990:72).

Benni Morris shares the observation that the local people were perceived at most as a nuisance, describing the Zionist settlers: *“[...] like other European settlers in the colonial world, they regarded the natives as objects, part of the landscape or as annoying robbers, surely no national rivals”* (Morris, 2012:38). Jews, as Yosef Gorny points out, were not without *“the condescension of Europeans over the ‘Asians’”* (Gorny, 1985: 21). To illustrate the thinking of early Zionist theorists, Gorny quotes Max Nordau who during his controversy with Ahad Haam declared that *“we will never agree that the return of the Jews to the land of their ancestors would entail a regression into barbarism [...] the Jewish people will develop its essence [...] as part of the framework of the general Western culture [...] not within the savage Asiatic one, with its hostility to culture”* (ibid:38). Nordau further elaborated: *“We are not going to turn into Asians over there, from the point of view of anthropological and cultural inferiority ... We will endeavour to do in the forefront of Asia that which the English had done in India... pushing the moral borders of Europe all the way to the Euphrates River”* (ibid: 39³⁸).

Marcello Svirsky and Ronen Ben-Arie are among the scholars who identify the attitude of the growing Jewish immigrants’ community towards the autochthone population of Palestine as a form of *“settler colonialism, a modern social formation characterised by a priority, that is a tendency – the appropriation of native spaces and the elimination of native forms of life and populations for creational purposes – namely, for the formation of new societies by invaders-settlers but for themselves only”* (Svirsky & Ben-Arie, 2018:36). Raef Zreik described the *“settler colonialism paradigm”* in Palestine as elsewhere, based on *“relations of supremacy, subjugation, domination and dispossession”* (Svirsky & Ben-Arie, 2018: ix).

³⁷ See ref. 21 above.

³⁸ Quotations are from Max Nordau’s *Writings*, part 2, pages 112-113, titled “Ahad Haam on *Altneuland*”.

Patrick Wolfe, who coined the concept of settler colonialism, pointed out how in Palestine *“the doctrine evolved into a tool of ethnic conflict, as Jewish industries were actively discouraged from employing non-Jewish labour”* (Wolfe, 2006:390).

As *“The primary object of settler-colonization is the land itself rather than the surplus value to be derived from mixing native labour with it. [...] settler-colonization is at base a winner-take-all project whose dominant feature is not exploitation but replacement”* (Wolfe. 1999:163).

Presenting an image of a *“vicious savage”* is therefore necessary as this savage’s *“wild version”* is of *“a treacherous, anonymous and warlike savagery”* that can be *“counterposed to the steadfastness of resisting pioneers”* (ibid:170). Wolfe points out that the science of anthropology often used *“impressions such as the promiscuity, brutality, childishness, etc. that were characteristic of evolutionism's savage stereotypes”* to support the evolutionist hierarchical perspective that *“legitimated colonial domination”* (Ibid: 67). Jean Paul Sartre summed up this attitude in his introduction to Albert Memmi’s ***The Colonizer and the Colonized***: *“debasement of the colonized to exalt themselves”* - a common mechanism that an *“elite of usurpers”* utilises *“to establish their privilege”* (Memmi, 2003 [1957]:22).

The characterisation of Zionism as a colonialist movement (supported by the British empire and the Mandate) is, however, often disputed, mainly in Israel (Shenhav, 2004 (b):9-10; Pappé, 2017: 41-49). Gershon Shafir qualified the Jewish settlement many years ago as *“a limited pure settler colony”* (Shafir, 1993:114). Shafir also observes that in the *“labor market conflict”* the concept of *“conquest of labor’ was consistent with the aim of pure settlement”* (ibid: 81).

A more Zionist-friendly perspective is offered by historian Aviva Halamish, who insists that there are cases when *“a colonial predicament might be entered into unwittingly”*. She therefore prefers the definition of Mandatory Eretz Israel as *“a dual society”*, because *“examination of the issue by economic rather than by ideological parameters clearly strengthens [...] the difference between the situation in Mandatory Eretz Israel and colonialism, due to the unique characteristics of the bifurcated ethno-national economy of Eretz Israel”* (Halamish, 2005).

Unlike the European colonialists - Halamish points out - Zionism did not have a political-imperial-statal power centre that supported the settling efforts in the new locations. This role was taken over by the British empire that *“is the one deserving the colonial branding, if not*

exclusively than at least in partnership with the Jews, or in a particular variation that is unique to the Mandate regime” (ibid).

This “partnership” was well researched by the Israeli political scientist Menachem Klein who concluded that *“senior British officials were openly sympathetic with regard to Zionism’s strategic aims. Many of them viewed the Jews as agents of the enlightened West, assigned by God and history to bring culture to the Orient. That was also the way Weizmann and his Zionist colleagues saw it.”* (Klein, 2014:114)

In order to perform the civilising mission of bringing *“culture to the orient”* (Homi Bhabha sees it as *“at once a civilizing mission and a violent subjugating force”*, Bhabha, 1990:71) one needed to make sure that the local *“Orientals”* would be conceived as uncivilised and in need of *“culture”*: primitive, backward and therefore menacing. Yara Hawari & al regard the *“pioneer”* attitude as expressing *“the kinds of power relations that maintain settler colonial relations”* (Hawari, Plonski & Weizman, 2019:3). Displaying a hierarchical observation and *“creating a dichotomy between ‘myself’ and ‘the other’”* indeed *“is typical of colonial power-relations concepts”* (Stier-Livny, 2013:191).

As this work deals with images produced and indoctrinated for the consumption of young Jewish immigrants, it is interesting to follow Boaz Neuman’s description of *“desire”* as a psychological factor in the making of the Zionist state of mind, so adamant on the segregation between Jews and Arabs. *“In the ecstatic-symbiotic predicament of the blurred borders between the pioneer and Eretz Israel there is not and cannot be any room for any outside factor. The totality of the Eretz-Israeli, experience leaves no room, no space of existence, for anyone else. Therefore, the passion of the pioneers does not recognise and cannot recognise any other passion about the land”* (Neuman, 2009:102). According to this description, *“that ecstatic-symbiotic attitude is the base of the blindness, or at least the ignoring by the pioneers of the local, autochthone population in Eretz Israel”* and the reason they are regarded as *“an impediment, a proper ecological hazard”* (ibid). Patrick Wolfe quotes: *“to get in the way all the native has to do is stay at home”*³⁹.

³⁹ Quoting Deborah Bird Rose’s *Hidden Histories: Black Stories from Victoria River Downs, Humbert River and Wave Hill Stations*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1991, page 46.

Nurit Peled-Elhanan sees the settlers' ideology – “*the ideology advocating our right to the ‘land’*” – as a mechanism, that “*like every ideology [...] sets clear borders to who ‘we’ are and excludes from it all ‘others’*” (Peled-Elhanan, 2008:167). Following Teun Van-Dijk she points to the binary division between “them” and “us” as the generator of “*superior racism*” that is manufactured and produced “*in newspapers, in schoolbooks, in academic discourse, in political speeches and in parliamentary discussions*” (ibid:175; Van Dijk, 2011:191). It is a mechanism that makes clear “*the polarization between (positive) Us and (negative) Them at all levels of discourse structure, and hence as a manifestation of underlying racist Ideologies*” (Van Dijk, 2011:187). This “*colonial identity that is played out - like all fantasies of originality and origination*” (Bhabha, 1990:81) easily “*sets up a discursive form of racial and cultural opposition*” (ibid:82). Franz Fanon sarcastically described the colonialists as convinced that their “*coming was unconsciously expected— even desired—by the future subject peoples,*” (Fanon, 2008 [1952]:73).

During the period under consideration here, Arabs are often described over the pages of **BaMaaleh** as savages in need of civilising who sometimes stand in the way of progress, and at other times are filled with admiration for the settler society that is there to replace them. The way Arabs are portrayed over the pages of **BaMaaleh**, with emphasis on the way this portrayal is a “*colonial discourse*” serving the ideology of **Hebrew Labour**, will be presented in Chapter 7 of this thesis.

8. The “Natural Labourer” for Hebrew Labour: Yemenites and other Mizrahim⁴⁰

The dichotomic-hierarchical conception of Jews versus Arabs, so critical for Zionism, turned into an ongoing problematic situation upon the encounter between the hegemonic mainstream sector of Zionism, fully identified with the Eastern European “Yiddish land”, and a population that was both Jewish and Arab. This population included the Jewish natives of Palestine/Eretz-Israel as well as immigrants (*olim*) from Arab lands including Yemen, North Africa and Iraq. Their collective designation in Israel is the *Mizrahim* (Orientals). Yehuda Shenhav pointed out

⁴⁰ *Mizrahim*, literally “easterners”, is the Hebrew-Israeli term for Jews from Arab and other Muslim countries and their descendants.

that *“The Arab past of the Jews of the Orient threatened to upset the coherence of the homogeneous Israeli nation and to blur the clear border between Jews and Arabs”* (Shenhav, 2002:109).

Honaida Ghanim chose the concept of “liminality” to describe *“those situated between different and contradictory fields without being really included in them and at the same time not completely removed from them, and consequently they are included in the social patterns [...] solely against the background of their aberration and their incomplete affinity”* (Ghanim, 2009:37⁴¹). Following Victor Turner, Ghanim makes clear that *“in classic anthropology the liminality points to every transfer from one well-defined predicament to another, either in the micro or in the macro level”* (ibid: 38; Turner, 1969:166). The choice of Ghanim to use “liminality” to describe a liminal section of the population seems suitable for regarding the *Mizrahi* Jews as a liminal group: Due to their characteristics, similar to those of the native Arab population, they belonged to categories that *“habitually occupy low status positions in the social structure”* (Turner, 2004 [1969]:167). At the same time, they were – and are - also identified with the hegemonic group that segregates itself from the native population by virtue of the common religious affiliation with the settlers’ group. They were, in fact, called upon to assist in the struggle for separation, and were most willing to oblige as a group. Unlike the temporary and ceremonial liminality described by Turner, this liminality is permanent and undynamic. The Lebanese author Amin Maalouf dedicated his book ***Les identités meurtrières (In the Name of Identity)*** to *“people who carry within them affiliations that [...] sharply collide with one another”* and calls them *“people who are in a certain way borderline, split by ethnic, religious or otherwise fractured boundaries”* (Maalouf, 2010 [1998]:12). Ella Shohat considers the Arab Jews of Israel as the ones *“occupying the actantial slot of both dominated and dominators; simultaneously disempowered as ‘Orientals’ or ‘Blacks’ vis-à-vis ‘White’ Euro-Israelis and empowered as Jews in a Jewish state vis-à-vis Palestinians”* (Shohat, 2017:9). When Arthur Ruppin dispatched Shmuel Yavne’eli in 1911 to get *Olim* from Yemen (Halamish, 2006[b]: 66) *“it was not the hardship in Yemen that induced him to bring over Jews from there*

⁴¹ Ghanim made use of the concept of liminality to analyse the state of Palestinian intellectuals in Israel.

as Olim but the role he assigned them in Eretz-Israel – to successfully compete with the Arab labourers in the struggle for Hebrew Labour in the Moshavot” (Halamish, 2006[a]:15). This struggle generated the idea of employing Jews from communities in the Arab zone, including natives of Palestine of the old Sephardic *Yishuv* and Yemenite Jews, to replace the local Arab workforce. *“The idea of the ‘natural labourer’ began to form as a realistic plan when the labourers who came from Eastern Europe, although they were motivated idealistically and spirited with desire to make sacrifices, were unable to conquer labour in the Moshavot”* (Druyan, 1982:134). Druyan details: *“A solution was proposed for the problem of Hebrew Labour in the land: The Yemenites would conquer it! For a major part of the Yishuv the Olim from Yemen seemed the best ‘natural labourers’, because they arrived from a backward land but had a tradition of labour [...] they ‘make do with little’ based on their life experience in their country of origin”* (ibid). The idea seemed particularly promising because *“their wives, too, would be able to work as domestic-help, and even their children would join the workforce, particularly in harvest seasons. So apparently, an easy solution was found to the problem of Hebrew Labour”* (ibid:136).

The policy that identified Yemenites and other *Mizrahim* as *“natural labourers”* faced some difficulties and exposed meaningful contradictions in the Zionist-socialist ideology. These days, discovering that *“Native Arab Jews were relegated to inferiority in the Central and East European Zionist establishment”* (Klein, 2014:22) is no novelty⁴². Part of the problem was that the immigrants from Yemen did not easily accept their designated positioning at the bottom of the Jewish economic scale and did not really wish to *“make do with little”*. *“In fact, the myth about the Yemenite who is content with little and is happy with his lot had already been disproved in those early days, but as myths go, this one too persisted for many more years”* (Druyan, 1982:138). Haviva Pedaya believes that *“the acceptance of the Yemenites had always been the ‘softest’ one”* (Pedaya, 2008:152), and that *“the Yemenite had been the ultimate outsider, and therefore the likable and the non-threatening”* (ibid:153) – perhaps in accordance with the *“colonial phantasy”* that Homi Bhabha describes (Bhabha, 1990:71), which sees the

⁴² Present-day Israeli culture is rich with literary and filmographic works that deal with this issue, but their focus is almost exclusively on post-1948 reality.

“black” as “both savage (cannibal) and yet the most obedient and dignified of servants (the bearer of food)” (ibid:85). However, upon their arrival, Yemenites seemed to have already expressed bitterness over the way they were tracked into the role of labourers, while the newcomers from Eastern Europe were allocated lands: *“It is no secret to them, that the property all around them had not all been generated by the diaspora, and in the very days they are asking for ‘homes and some land’ the high echelons are discussing more ‘installations’ in addition to the new lands recently added to Rishon [Lezion] ---”* (Yeshayahu⁴³, 1938:39, quoting Yosef Schprinzak⁴⁴). The *“habitus”* of most Yemenite Jews was based on the same basic (religious) education that insisted on literacy and enabled them to concentrate on income-lucrative professions in their land of origin. It was not much different from the common *“habitus”* of the Jews in Eastern Europe (see chapter 2 above). *“It is well known that in the diaspora the Jews of Yemen were far removed from work on the land”* Israel Yeshayahu wrote (ibid: 67). The Zionist emissary Yavne’eli reported from his journeys in Yemen that most Jews he encountered were *“small pedlars, artisans”* (Yavne’eli, 1938:246), *“most of them are tailors, goldsmiths”* (ibid:249). In the house of a wealthy Jewish Yemenite man who settled each of his two wives in a *“house of her own”* Yavne’eli concluded that the discourse about the hardships of the Jews in Yemen had been exaggerated: *“Many Arabs used to come and go to the home of Mary⁴⁵ Salim Avraham. There are no complaints about them. All in all, I could see that talk about the sorrow and the diaspora here is usually just a mode of speaking, but is not about what they actually experience, at least for the time being. They live in peace and make a living. There was a time when hunger was a problem, but presently it is a thing of the past”* (ibid:150). Yavne’eli gathered similar impressions in few other villages (his tour took place in 1911) and summed up: *“It soothes my soul as I see Jews making a good living”* (ibid:153). Author

⁴³ Israel Yeshayahu (1910 – 1979) was born in Yemen and immigrated to Palestine in 1929. He became a political activist, member of MAPAI’s central committee and a delegate to the Zionist congresses, next to intensive activity in the Yemenite community and for the *Aliya* from Yemen. After the establishment of the State of Israel he became a Member of Knesset and Minister of the Post in Ben Gurion’s governments (Source: Tidhar)

⁴⁴ Yosef Schprinzak (1884-1959) was born in Moscow, his family later had to leave for Warsaw. He was a writer and Zionist activist, became the secretary of *HaPoel HaTzair* party and immigrated to Palestine in 1908. One of his first assignments was the organising of the *Olim* from the Yemen. He became a prominent member of MAPAI and the first Chairman of the Knesset (Source: [the Knesset website](#)) Schprinzak’s book *“With the Yemenites”* (1938) is available in the National Library.

⁴⁵ *“Teacher”* – a title of respect.

Mordechai Tabib backs this description in his autobiographical novel, quoting the protagonist's father *Mary Yehia*: *"There, in Yemen, were the property and the wealth"* (Tabib, 1957:7).

The Jews from Yemen were not party to the ideology that demanded a cultural transformation and a move from middle-class trades to physical labour in agriculture. In Yemen they held *"a major volume of the trade and most of the crafts"* (Druyan, 1982:4) and the main reason for their decision to immigrate to Eretz Israel from Yemen, *"a country whose technological development had been cut short in the Middle Ages"* (Klein-Franke, 2019:151), was *"a desire to improve their social-economic position"* (Druyan, 1982:15), following the news about the considerable amelioration in the economic predicament of the Jews who already settled there⁴⁶. The reality that the Yemenites met in the growing Hebrew *Yishuv* was disappointing from their point of view. The Eastern European Jews *"categorized non-European Jews as backward and primitive"* (Svirsky & Ben-Arie, 2018:11).

The German researcher-traveller Carl Rathjens, well-acquainted with Yemen and its Jews, was shocked to discover immigrants from Yemen in Eretz Israel who had been tracked to become *"the proletariat of the Zionist society, in the lowest level"* as he complained in a letter to the prominent Zionist leader Otto Warburg (Klein-Franke, 2019:162). In his meetings with the leaders of the Zionist *Yishuv*, Rathjens pointed out the *"failed treatment [...] in the immigration of the Yemenites, and complained about their dispossession and the disregard of their rights"* (ibid), against the background of the heavily subsidised settlement of immigrants from Eastern Europe. *"They are not given equal rights, but they are treated like second class citizens"* Rathjens protested in his letter to Warburg, adding that *"the lives of the immigrants from Yemen in Eretz Israel are worse than it was in Yemen"* (ibid). In his special report he recommended that *"one should not encourage the immigration of Jews from Yemen, as their social and economic predicament in Eretz Israel is worse compared to their situation in Yemen"* (ibid:172). Well into the 1930s, and against the background of the struggles for **Hebrew Labour**, a demand was raised again to increase the number of certificates for the immigration of *"Jews from backward countries in Asia and Africa – Yemen, Persia, Babylon [Iraq] Algeria and Tunisia [...]"*

⁴⁶ This, according to Gur Alroey, was also the motive of most Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe to move to Palestine/Eretz Israel, but national memory preserved it differently (Alroey, 2004:30-31)

who in the view of the General Zionist [party] would make ideal [human] material for cheap absorption in the land, with no pretences and no demands” (Shapira, 1977:119). Here, too, the structured image of “the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin” secures and justifies “systems of administration and instruction” (Bhabha, 1990:75). The term “colonized” needs to be adjusted, as we are dealing with a population that had to be imported from abroad, as a replacement for the (really undesirable) native population. Still, as Ella Shohat remarked, even many years later “colonialist, Orientalist, and Eurocentric discourses had shaped the notions” about “the Arab-Jew” (Shohat, 2017:12). A “binarism of savagery-versus-civilization” was typical for the Zionist discourse when Arab Jews were concerned (ibid:13).

From the perspective of the **Hebrew Labour** concept, the idea of bringing more immigrants from Arab countries was based on the “estimate that they may successfully compete against Arab labourers in agricultural work, and that they would persist in their work in this sector and would not join the stampede from the Moshava to the city.” (Halamish, 2006[a]:308). As a result of this assumption – or “colonial identity” based on “fantasy” as Bhabha puts it (Bhabha, 1990:81) - more would-be *natural labourers* were procured: “In the mid-1930s, at the peak of scarcity of working hands [...] the number of certificates for Yemen was increased” (Halamish, 2006[a]:308).

The liminality of the “*natural labourers*” of mixed Jewish and Arab background also had a political aspect. The leaders of the Labour Movement were very interested in recruiting them to their political ranks in the *Histadrut* and in the Labour Youth movement, but their success was limited. Israel Yeshayahu, a loyal Yemenite member of MAPAI, sharply criticised the leaders of the “*Yemenites Association*” for not accepting the discipline of the *Histadrut* (Yeshayahu, 1938:45-46). He lamented that “indeed, the Revisionists have conquered many souls” in the Yemenite public and its educated youth (ibid:48). David Ben Gurion recognised that “a feeling of being discriminated against, insulting and disfavouring, prevents the Yemenite labourer from finding his relevant position in our society of labourers” (Ben Gurion, 1974:83⁴⁷). With clear Eastern-European elitism he warned: “Thousands of labourers of the Mizrahi communities –

⁴⁷ In a lecture during the *Histadrut* council, 1932, *Davar* 1937-9.

*who cannot enjoy the advantage of reading Davar as they are not able yet to read a newspaper*⁴⁸ – they, in particular, might become prey to the charlatans and political adventurers who swarm the Revisionist party” (ibid:93). In fact, though victims of the Eastern European settler’s society, Mizrahim were willingly attracted to its most extreme nationalist currents. They followed a pattern that Albert Memmi identified in other settler societies. The “small colonizer”, in Memmi’s terminology, “defends the colonial system so vigorously [...] because he benefits from it to some extent [...] though dupe and victim, he also gets his share” (Memmi, 2003 [1957]:55).

The issues of **BaMaaleh** during the period reviewed in this work often deal with descriptions of and encounters with youth and adults belonging to the “Mizrahi communities”. These presentations, with emphasis on displays of poverty, prejudice and a lack of general education, will be surveyed in chapter 8 of this work, with an effort to observe to what degree they establish “an epistemological perception that marked the European individual as a cultured person and Eastern individual as a product of ‘nature’ which Europeans are meant to rule and control for their needs” (Rajuan-Shtang, 2018:22); reflect “Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism” (Bhabha, 1990); and display “Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims” (Shohat,1988).

⁴⁸ Actually, the majority of immigrants from Eastern Europe found Yiddish newspapers easier, whereas Hebrew could be read by any who studied in the traditional Jewish teaching system.

Chapter 1

The vision: an educational, character-building publication

BaMaaleh was established and sustained as a periodical representing the institution that issued it – the *Histadrut* of Labour Youth, which was part of the General *Histadrut* of the Hebrew Labourers in Eretz Israel. The General *Histadrut* was established (in 1920) and controlled by political bodies that belonged to the Zionist Labour Movement (during the years surveyed in the present work, the different political bodies merged or split until finally converged, mostly into the Party of the Workers of Eretz Israel – MAPAI¹). “*The periodical ‘BaMaaleh’ was not an arena dedicated to the Belles-lettres. As a periodical belonging to an ideological movement its primary goal was the distribution and the assimilation of the ideology within the youth*” (Maanit, 2020²). A review signed by M. Nemirovsky³ titled **The Organisational Structure of the Labourers’ Histadrut**⁴ identifies **BaMaaleh** as one of the media organs owned by the *Histadrut*⁵.

The Vision of **BaMaaleh** was expressed in declarations of intent about the role and mission of the periodical, as well as declarations about the purpose and the intent of the Labour Youth’s *Histadrut*, its institutions, its cadre of guides and instructors and the events it hosted. Faithfully, this vision represents the ideology of the leadership of the General *Histadrut* and of MAPAI, both identified for many years with the charismatic leadership of David Ben Gurion, who was often described as “*the founder of the State of Israel*” (Segev, 2018:16). **BaMaaleh**’s issues were used as a platform for reports about conferences, political events and lectures. The most prominent leaders of the labour movement, *inter alia* Ben Gurion, Berl Katznelson, and Yizhak

¹ Begun in 1930 as a merger between two of the parties in the *Histadrut*.

² Sara Maanit’s article refers to the 1940s but her characterisation of **BaMaaleh** is also relevant to the earlier period surveyed here.

³ Later known as Mordechai Namir (1897 -1969). Born in the town of Nemirov (now Ukraine), Nemirovsky immigrated to Palestine in 1924 and soon became a prominent political figure in the *Histadrut*, later to become its General Secretary, also a member of the Knesset representing MAPAI, a government minister and later the mayor of Tel Aviv (1960-1969). Sources: Tidhar and [the Knesset website](#).

⁴ Issue 20, 1931 (December 4, page 3)

⁵ The list includes the *Histadrut*’s media organs in 1931: “DAVAR daily [...] (with two weekly supplements: an English and a German one); A Yiddish language weekly; HaSade – an agricultural monthly; **BaMaaleh** – bi-weekly of the Labour Youth; PINKAS – bi-monthly of the employee’s *Histadrut*; UZENU – sports matters pamphlets; periodical brochures in Arabic, etc.” (ibid).

Tabenkin contributed articles and speeches outlining the movement's ideology. Detailed declarations about **BaMaaleh**'s mission were published upon its initiation and also at later stages, clearly expressing the commitment of this periodical to the cultural, political and ideological program of the Labour movement.

The front page of the first brochure of **BaMaaleh** (1926, no signature) displays a motto announcing its mission – a poetic call for metaphoric awakening and strenuous climbing to the top:

*Facing the dawn we climb, hand in hand, embraced, our eyes to the sun. The climb is hard, harder is our deliberation, our suffering, our pain, and we wish to overcome them, to break through the darkness. Let **BaMaaleh** awake and encourage us, be what it should be – lifting us up.*⁶

Thus, from day one, **BaMaaleh** was positioned as an instrument for the re-designing of the emerging Jewish society in Eretz Israel, part of the intensive effort to create a “new Hebrew Nation”. In the words of Itamar Even-Zohar “looking back one could sum up schematically that its leading precept was ‘the creation of a new Jewish people and a new Jewish person in Eretz Israel’, emphasising, the concept ‘new’, as in the case of the immigration to the New World” (Even-Zohar, 1980:171). As Pierre Bourdieu termed it, this is the concept of changing the “habitus” or the “dispositions that are permanent life-styles resulting from learning, training and incorporation” (Bourdieu, 2020 [1981-1983]:26)⁷. Its replacement, the act of “lifting us up” was considered vital for the settlement of the land and the realisation of Zionism.

The hundreds of entries, reports, opinion articles and literary pieces appearing in **BaMaaleh** during the surveyed period were written from the perspective of the Zionist Labour Movement and expressed its particular “Labourers’ Culture, focusing on the Hebrew agricultural labourer and the agricultural settlement movement” (Almaliach, 2018:52). Internal debates were occasionally echoed, but no text negates the clear ideological orientation, assertively drafted, often bolstered with sharp criticism, snubs and at times severe insults against political opponents.

⁶ Brochure A, 1926, front page. **BaMaaleh** literally means “uphill”.

⁷ See also in the literature review above.

“The image of the ‘New Jew’” that the Labour Movement wished to establish “was ideologically based on social solidarity, on socialism, on a link to Eretz Israel and on the Hebrew language” (Almaliach, 2018:52). For Louis Althusser this is the aspiration to “ensure subjection to the ruling ideology” (Althusser, 1971 [1970]:6⁸). Indeed, the very first issues of **BaMaaleh** express the demand to alter the character and the habits of the “human material” arriving in Eretz Israel⁹. Writers, editors and contributors were conscious - often declaredly convinced - that **BaMaaleh** had a role in shaping the character and ideas of young people. More than once, the call to become a member of the political movement was openly expressed in a pamphlet-like manner, as in the very first brochure in an article titled **And Thou shalt choose Life! (reflections)**¹⁰ by the canonised A.Z. Rabinowitz¹¹. The writer urged all working youth to come out of “enslavement” into the *Histadrut*:

Let the Hebrew Labour Youth unite, internally and with the General Hebrew Workers' Union [Histadrut], then he will find the road to all that is good and beautiful and moral in the world.

In much the same spirit, the proclamation by the **Central Committee of the General Union of Hebrew Labour Youth in Eretz Israel**¹² declares its commitment to change the reality of the lives of young (Jewish) workers:

Let each and every one of us remember our duty to penetrate every corner where working youth lives, to encourage and wake it up to new life, organized within our union [Histadrut], the union of Hebrew Labouring Youth in Eretz Israel.

⁸ Althusser is concerned with the ruling ideology of the bourgeois-capitalist classes, but his analysis is relevant to any hegemonic or would-be hegemonic ideological indoctrination.

⁹ In 1998 the book “Good Human Material; Jews versus Zionists, 1945-1951” was published (in Hebrew) by Professor Yosef Grodzinsky. The English version (2004) is titled “In the Shadow of the Holocaust: the struggle between Jews and Zionists in the aftermath of World War II”. It is well-documented research of post WWII Zionist actions to coerce Holocaust survivors to come to Palestine, even against their will.

¹⁰ Brochure A, 1926, page 5

¹¹ Alexander Zieskind Rabinovitz (AZAR), (1854 - 1945) was born in Belarus and for many years made a living as a teacher and gained respect as a Zionist and a writer. He immigrated to Palestine in 1906. His writings emphasized social issues. (Lexicon of Modern Hebrew Literature, OSU)

¹² Brochure A, 1926, page 34

N. Benari¹³ drafted the task assigned to **BaMaaleh** in the second brochure of the periodical, under the title **Up Aspiration Way**¹⁴ (a pun: the Hebrew title is “**BaMaaleh Hashe’ifa**”). In a direct reference to life before the Aliya to Eretz Israel he decrees that the earlier foundation (that is, the diasporic mode of living) has become “rotted”, then calls for the construction of a “renewed human society” which must have completely “different” aspects:

[...] In these short days the boy must acquire the “ethical standards” – the values of life. [...] And indeed – aspiration is the centre of life, it is faith [...] and in this generation of ours – the point of aspiration for all of us, of the entire collective – was the will to rebuild social life. The former foundations have become rotted, they are no longer trustworthy. However, building life is not an easy matter. Especially with new foundations – [which are] work, living together, creating together, new cultural values, a different education for children, different relations between states and nations, languages, new people, etc., etc. [...] Indeed, not easy is the road of youth climbing up in aspiration and wishing to take part in the construction of renewed human society.

In this same issue, comrade “Yaakov” defines educational and organisational tasks in the article **Towards the Conference of the Eretz Israel Workers**¹⁵. Like Benari, he recognises the difficulties of working with the youth who must be “trained”:

A trade-section cannot be established without cultural work being done as well. [...] The Histadrut integrates the national and the class functions and aspirations of the Hebrew worker [...] Our Histadrut trains and coaches pioneering elements who are prepared for pioneering and sacrifices for their aspirations, for the fulfilment of which we have gathered in the land.

Yaakov makes clear that “every enterprise, each action – is educational”. He specifically sees the discussions in **BaMaaleh** as part of the educational arsenal: “[...] in all of this one can find our will and our educational tendency [...]”. And he is well aware of “The diversity of our human material [which] necessitates different modes of action suitable for the different kinds of members.”

¹³ Many of the entries are signed only partly – initials, first name only or just “a comrade”. Some names were changed more than once. N. Behari can be identified as Nahum Benari Brodsky (1883 – 1963), who was born in the Ukraine, immigrated to Palestine in 1924. He was a member of Kibbutz Ein Harod, an author and playwright who was active in the educational and cultural institutions of the *Histadrut* [source: Tidhar]

¹⁴ Brochure 2, 1927, pages 4-6

¹⁵ Ibid, page 6-8

The “*pioneering elements*” that Yaakov identifies, and for whom he plans an educational strategy to suit their different natures, are the “*concrete subjects*” (Althusser, 1971 [1970]:37) whom “*all ideology has the function of ‘constituting’*” and transforming, (ibid: 40) so that they would “*submit freely*” and “*work all by themselves*” (ibid:46).

In the Zionist vocabulary, “*constituting*” was called “*Hachshara*” (training). It usually took place in vocational camps in Europe, where the “*subjects*” or “*pioneering elements*” (often, as above, described as “*our human material*”) were instructed in the ideology as well as in practical agricultural work, and given to understand that to be a pioneer also means to be prepared for “*sacrifices*” as “Yaakov” tells his readers.

Acute awareness of the cultural and educational mission of **BaMaaleh** was also expressed in an early entry signed “Dov” (other entries are by his full name Dov Stock, later changed to Dov Sadan¹⁶). In **On the goal and means of our cultural work**¹⁷ “Dov” pointed out a meaningful difference between labouring youth and studying youth - as he wrote, “*the youth who are privileged to live the early chapter of their life without being introduced to hardships at the dawn of their days*”. For them, as well as for the less privileged labouring youth, the writer sets out the mission:

[...] our cultural work must aim to increase the awareness of national and social liberation of the Hebrew labourer in the country and to coach the comrades to participate in the act of creating done by the General Histadrut of the Hebrew Workers in Eretz Israel

Stock (Sadan) identifies the threat of two alternative ideologies that might attract the young target audience, and keep them away from the vision of Labour Zionism:

The “burnishing of the swords” of the Revisionist youth, on one hand, and the radical Yiddishism in the diaspora¹⁸, on the other hand [...]

The way to defeat both is the “*the programming of our cultural work*” centred, among other things, on “*the struggle of the Hebrew labourer*”:

[...] an interest in everything that has happened and is happening in our life: the history of the Yishuv in Eretz Israel, the struggle of the Hebrew labourer for his

¹⁶ Dov Sadan (1902 - 1989), born in Galicia, was a writer, editor, poet, translator and prominent literary critic. He was educated in Berlin and immigrated to Palestine in 1925 (source: Tidhar).

¹⁷ Brochure 3, 1928, pages 25 - 27

¹⁸ This is a reference to the socialist Jewish Bund.

right to work, economic and social creation in all its aspects, the struggle for the independence of the Hebrew public in the country.

A heightened consciousness of the need to shape youth according to the movement's ideology was also expressed by Berl Katznelson¹⁹, the labour movement leader and thinker described as “an intellectual, a politician, a man of letters, a statesman and the initiator of many of the social and economic institutions that shaped the face of the movement and in its wake, the character of the country as a whole”²⁰. **BaMaaleh**'s second brochure dedicated six pages to Katznelson's speech at the conference of the Labour Youth in Tel Aviv titled **The Question of Educating the Youth**²¹. He profusely praised the Labour Youth:

I know of no other youth movement in the world or in the Jewish Labour Movement that equals your union in the abundance of its functions and contents of activity [...] the right conception of cultural work is also a broad conception of cultural life, with all its aspects”.

During the conference it was reported that the Labour Youth had already numbered 1200 members, but Katznelson was convinced that “the day is not far in the future when you will be counted by thousands”, and reminded his listeners that this age group is the most suitable for ideological influence and installing loyalty:

The work you will be doing will mark our future lives. The question is, to what extent will you manage to guarantee the youth's faithfulness to the tradition of the Hebrew worker. [...]

In a 1929 discussion Katznelson again had the final word summing up the discussions during the **The 6th conference of Labour Youth**²², this time setting the goal for the Labour Youth to keep Jewish youth throughout the world from following the influence of either Communist or Revisionist ideology. Interestingly, he also expressed disappointment that **BaMaaleh** had not yet been turned into a monthly (it became a bi-weekly a year later). In another published

¹⁹ Berl Katznelson (1887-1944) was a prominent intellectual and a leading thinker of the Zionist Labour Movement. Born in today's Belarus, he immigrated to Palestine in 1909, the period of the Second Aliya, and was greatly influenced by A.D. Gordon, the “Labour Prophet” of Zionism. Katznelson was the chief editor of the *Histadrut's* newspaper Davar and a founder of several publishing ventures. Historian Anita Shapira's 1980 biography of Katznelson is titled BERL. It should be noted that Katznelson was the cousin of the prominent Yitzhak Tabenkin. (Shapira, 1980).

²⁰ As described on the back cover of historian Anita Shapira's “*Berl: a Biography*” (Shapira, Cambridge University Press, 1984). It is the English version of Shapira, 1980.

²¹ Brochure 2, 1927, pages 10-16

²² Brochure 6, 1929 [Taratz], pages 2-20

speech, this time in the bi-weekly a few years later, he returned to the goal of “constituting the individuals”, describing the need to “bring to large ranks of young people the proclamation of their lives”. Under the title **The Labour Troupes**²³ Katznelson re-defined the task: to generate a major ideological transformation within the Jewish youth that had not yet joined Socialist Zionism because -

[...] to their detriment and our detriment, they have not yet found themselves, they do not know about the labouring, pioneering, liberating Zionism, which is in one step with the best of human intentions. They have not yet been enlightened [...] there are youth deceived, led to sin and miserable, who do not see their redemption here [...] The hordes of youth captured by hostility and alienation from us are enormous. [...] their world is being contaminated, we are hidden from them in our worth as humans and as Zionists, the value of our enterprise is concealed from them [...]

The message could not be clearer: without Socialist Zionism the Jewish youth in the world lives in a world “contaminated” by hostility and misconceptions, leading them to “sin”, due to the erroneous ideologies which include traditions of the diaspora, Revisionism and Communism. The struggle for **Hebrew Labour** is identified as part of the arsenal – the cultural-political toolbox – that is expected to enhance the attractiveness of the Labour Movement (and the *Histadrut*’s political base) within the youth and combat the political-cultural alternatives offered by Revisionism and the traditional Eastern European Yiddish cultural tradition.

Yet another prominent labour leader, Yitzhak Tabenkin²⁴ (signing Y. Tabenkin) referred to **BaMaaleh**’s role in the spreading of the ideological vision. In an article titled “**On the question of the Labour Youth**”²⁵ he was pleased to conclude:

A very important achievement is “BaMaaleh”. For the first time in the workers’ movement and in Hebrew – an organ for youth which belongs to the youth. Not a formal, dry, or merely professional paper, but an educational periodical.

²³ Issue 15, 1933 (August 11, page 3).

²⁴ Yitzhak Tabenkin (1887 – 1971) born in Belarus, immigrated to Palestine in 1912, was one of the most prominent leaders of the Zionist Labour Movement. He started and led *Ha-Kibbutz Hameuchad* movement (United Kibbutz association), took part in leading MAPAM and *Achdut Ha-Avoda* parties and served as a member of the Knesset on these parties’ behalf (See [entry in the Knesset website](#)). Tabenkin’s original political association was *Achdut Ha’Avoda* which together with *Ha’Poel Ha’Tzair* merged into the creation of MAPAI in 1930. [In the Yad Tabenkin Archive’s website](#) he is described as the personification of “the activist in settlement, security and society”. See also Gorni, 1985, pages 162-164.

²⁵ Issue 16, 1931 (October 9, page 3).

As one must also be aware of the fact that **BaMaaleh** depends on the institutions that fund it, Tabenkin reminds his listeners and readers that:

The financial report shows that the paper has its roots in the movement, that it is supported by the movement.

Earlier in his lecture Tabenkin presented a clear perspective of the role the movement had in building the personality of its young members, turning every one of them into “a pioneering settler”:

[...] We face a labouring boy who will become a worker, it is his destiny - a worker in the land of settlement. Preparation for becoming a pioneering settler must determine his time, his thinking, and the modes of action of his union [his Histadrut]. We risk diversion from the main role of the labourer and the working child – the preparations to become a pioneer, a settler and creator of life forms, the creator of an economy in a land that had no economy [...]

He is well-aware of the diverse “habitus” displayed by different types of youth in the target group:

There is not the same objective, the same educational value of a youth who had been working all day and one who has not. The Histadrut of the Labour Youth began with the conditions of working youth. [...] every technique changes according to the society that makes use of it. [...]

True to the tradition of other socialist teachings of the period (he quotes “scientific socialism”), Tabenkin makes it clear that no other teaching is to be tolerated. He opens by demanding “recognition of the fact that the movement is not a free one, same as man who is not free of his destiny.” And later insists: “it is not possible to have any system whatsoever to distract or shift us.”

David Ben-Gurion²⁶, the central figure in the *Histadrut* of Hebrew Labourers during the reviewed period and the leader of MAPAI, established in 1930, contributed an article or a printed speech to **BaMaaleh** once or twice a year during the period under consideration in this work²⁷. In **The Roles of Youth**²⁸ Ben Gurion dedicated an article to his expectations from the

²⁶ Tom Segev’s *A State at Any Cost: The Life of David Ben-Gurion* is probably the best and most recent biography of the Labour Zionist leader who is credited with the establishment of the state of Israel (Segev, 2019 [2018]).

²⁷ Ben Gurion was the general secretary of the *Histadrut* in the years 1920 -1935 (source: [the Knesset website](#)).

²⁸ Issue 2, 1934 (January 19, page 3). The article is a transcript of a speech during a January 1934 youth conference on the occasion of the *Histadrut*’s anniversary.

young generation, stressing the pivotal goal of creating a “New Person”. In this article he confirms that Labour Zionism is “*a settling labour movement*”, announcing that,

[...] Our enterprise is extremely complex, and it is performed under unusual conditions, nearly unprecedented. We are a settling labour movement, and even though there has been settlement in a few countries – there has been no precedent for settling a land-less nation with no political force [...] Almost on every issue and deed we face a genesis-like situation. [...] We must eradicate the miserable faulty tradition of the schism between the intellectual and the physical labourer [...] The great miracle that we had to perform was to turn an urban, cultured, diasporic people, into a people of the land. [...] We are the layers of the foundations. [...]

This vision to “*eradicate the miserable faulty tradition*” of the past by turning the new Jews into “*a people of the land*” is fundamental to the concept of **Hebrew Labour** and to Socialist Zionism. While Ben Gurion and his colleagues often repeat these notions, they can actually be traced back to the interesting personality of an early non-Socialist Zionist thinker, Ahron David Gordon. Zeev Sternhell describes Gordon as a “*combative anti-socialist*” (Sternhell, 1995:49), an anti-Marxist nationalist whose influence on the Zionist Labour Movement was crucial (ibid, pages 39, 68, 78, 94).

More of Gordon’s teaching is discussed in chapter 2 of this work. In a **Memoire**²⁹ dedicated to him “Dvora” testifies that “*education*” – or conditioning – was always on the great man’s mind. She reports actually hearing Gordon speak on his death bed about the “*the great value of educating the young generation in this land, the environment and the principles that must lie at the base of the education*”.

It seems useful at this stage to present some other components of the vision that **BaMaaleh** and its editors considered important to instil in the young minds of their readers. I suggest a brief mention of some elements, all linked to the mission of creating the personality and character of the desired, idealised new Jewish “*habitus*”; all declared as intentions, assertions and calls for action, that otherwise may be described as “*Hasbara*” or Zionist propaganda, to be discussed in detail in the chapters that follow:

²⁹ Ibid.

- a. Declaration of the righteousness of the ideology and the praxis: “We are for Labour, Defence and Peace”
- b. Declaration of unwavering loyalty to the Labour Zionist movement
- c. Declaration of the social vision: Pacifist, Anti-Bourgeois
- d. Declaration of an opposition to too much education and “lust for scholarship”
- e. Declaration of a need to be born again “with the Lord of Israel”

*

- a. Declaration of the righteousness of the ideology and the praxis: “We are for Labour, Defence and Peace”

The socio-political vision displayed in *BaMaaleh* includes the elaborated position of the Zionist Labour Movement vis-à-vis the autochthone population of the land – the Palestinian Arabs (see chapter 7). It was over the pages of *BaMaaleh* that Avraham Broides³⁰ drafted the historic

slogan of the Labour Youth³¹ – still on the movement’s emblems

these days, almost a hundred years later (see image). **We Are for**

Labour, for Defence and for Peace³² was also the title of an editorial

commemorating the second memorial of the 1929 riots. The article

refers to “*the days of horror, the month of AV [August], 1929*” and

goes on to list Jewish casualties from other traumatic events that

happened since: An attack on Kibbutz Yagur and the disappearance of two young hikers in the

spring of 1931. *BaMaaleh* points at the responsible generators of the violence:



These days the incitement mongers against the Jewish settlers are raising their heads again with false accusations, claiming that the Hebrew settlements endanger peace. Their complaint blames that arms, in sealed crates, were handed by the government to the Hebrew posts.

Our Youth is disgusted with military drills. We would gladly smash any deadly tool that might inflict calamities on humans. But the inciters of Hebron and Safed, who are to blame for the death of our precious victims, they are the ones forcing us to remember and always remind us of our situation here – a position of living in the heart of a desert.

³⁰ Avraham Broides [1907 – 1979] was born in Vilnius, Lithuania, and immigrated to Palestine in 1923. He was a leading writer and poet, member of the senior editing staff of *Ba’Maaleh*. (Source: Tidhar, the Encyclopaedia of the Founders and Builders of Israel; Lexicon of Modern Hebrew Literature, OSU)

³¹ In Brochure 5 of 1929, page 3, it is a part of an unsigned poem.

³² Issue 11, 1931 (July 31, front page).

Some core notions of the Zionist Labour Movement are represented here:

1. Arms in the hands of Jews cannot possibly be considered as a threat to peace. Complaints about them are “*false accusations*”.
2. The Jewish settlement is “*a position of living in the heart of a desert*” – a description that preceded by many years Ehud Barak’s famous description of Israel as a “*Villa in the Jungle*”.³³
3. The generators of violence against the Jewish Settlement are “*the inciters*” - but not all Arabs (see also chapter 7).

The last clause is often repeated and highlighted over the pages of **BaMaaleh**. It is (see also the introduction above) the unwavering position of the Labour Movement headed by David Ben Gurion during that period. It is repeated in two of Ben Gurion’s articles in **BaMaaleh** during the period reviewed here (**Towards the Sea**³⁴ and **Hebrew Labour**³⁵), as well as in editorials such as **Our Eyes to the Future**³⁶, in a **Proclamation of Eretz Israeli Youth to the Youth and Labourers of BEITAR**³⁷ and in extended commentaries on topical issues by N. Benari³⁸ (**A War for Victory and a Battle of Existence**³⁹) and Y. Bankover (**Conquering Labour in the Hebrew Moshava** part 2⁴⁰). All these texts – and many others - point at elements such as “*the effendis*” or “*the Frakzia*” as responsible for inciting futile hatred between Arabs and Jews, bolstering the image of peace-seeking Jewish settlements: Only misunderstandings, misconceptions and incitements could be the source of animosity against them, and those are the sole generators of violent events. These texts make part of the massive infrastructure narrative known as *Hasbara* (propaganda). The primary target audience of this narrative in **BaMaaleh** are the young Jews who are to be charged with a positive vision – a non-threatening one, as far as possible – of

³³ Barak’s famous characterisation of Israel as a “villa in the jungle” is quoted from his 1995 speech to the Jewish community of St. Louis (Bar-Yossef, 2004:438).

³⁴ Issue 12, 1932, (June 17, pages 3-4).

³⁵ Issue 20, 1932 (November 20, page 3).

³⁶ Issue 16, 1932, front page

³⁷ Issue 8. 1934 (April 15, page 3).

³⁸ Nahum Benari Brodsky (1883 – 1963) was born in the Ukraine and immigrated to Palestine in 1914, initially becoming a member of Kibbutz Ein Harod. He was an author and playwright and an active participant in the educational and cultural institutions of the *Histadrut* [source: Tidhar] (see also an earlier reference).

³⁹ Issue 21, 1933 (November 10, page 3).

⁴⁰ Issue 4, 1934 (February 15, page 3).

their enthusiastic participation in the construction of a new, supposedly morally superior society in a new land (see also chapter 7).

b. Declaration of unwavering loyalty to the Labour Zionist movement

On the ways of the Youth Movement⁴¹ by Shlomo Even-Shoshan⁴² is a motivation article that sets forth missions for youth. Young persons must “*make ready for the front of construction and war, shoulder to shoulder with our elder brothers.*” The youth, Even-Shoshan states, must show an “*adamant aspiration for perfection of the enterprise, a totality of accomplishment, fight off negativity, tendencies and deviances, be ready for improvement and amelioration*”. While lamenting what seems like “*a lot of negativity*”, He then goes on to insist (somewhat surprisingly) that even

the issue of salaries, employees, ambience, relations between comrades in the Histadrut and in the Party – all these should be taken care of by the youth.

He concludes by presenting a practical-organisational call for

[...] the unification of the youth movement in the land! The unification of the Kibbutz movement!

This call might be an echo of an internal argument in the Movement that spilled into the pages of **BaMaaleh**. The writer expresses a wish to open a discussion in the printed periodical and laments what he sees as “*a kind of stagnation about this issue.*”

Another “motivation article” published on the same page is by the venerable widow of Ber (Dov) Borochoy⁴³. While Ber Borochoy’s philosophy – “*a unique attempt to absorb nationalism into the conceptual framework of Marxism*” had an initial massive influence on the forming of Jewish Socialism, “*it was mainly neglected eventually*”, as Zeev Sternhell writes (Sternhell, 1995:31). Luba Borochoy’s opinion piece, titled **In Life’s track**⁴⁴, and published 14 years after her husband’s death, stays clear of any hint at either Marxist or national ideas that Borochoy

⁴¹ Issue 6, 1931 (May 21, page 3).

⁴² Shlomo Even Shoshan (Rosenstein) (1910 – 2004) was born in Minsk, immigrated to Palestine at an early age and was educated in *Mikve Israel* Agricultural School. He befriended the writer Y. Ch. Brenner, became a writer and prolific translator from Russian and Yiddish. (Sources: Tidhar, OSU Lexicon).

⁴³ See page 13, in the introduction, also Gottwein, 1999.

⁴⁴ Issue 6, 1931 (May 21, page 3).

held. She calls on the young to become members of the Labouring Youth Movement and generally to take part in its activities and endeavours. She opens by committing to deal with “several complicated queries and problems about this primary question – How should one live?” She then sums up with what seems mainstream platitudes, preaching “*compromise and adaptation*”:

The youth chant about the revolutionary deeds of people who know no fear [...] they do not yet know that it is sometimes necessary to erect a bridge between the aspirations for a good, free, fearless life and life itself. The name of this bridge is compromise and adaptation. [...] Let people be at their best in both private and public life. Let the youth develop, learn life's lessons first and foremost – truth, goodness and beauty – at home, on the street, in the field. Learn and bring to fruition.

The question of real loyalty to the movement produced a verbal scuffle over the pages of **BaMaaleh** in 1931, and seems to have an anecdotal value as it involves an adolescent who eventually became a world famous political-military personality. The boy Moshe Dayan⁴⁵ of Nahalal was offended by a letter to **BaMaaleh** by an activist who signed only his initials “Y.S”. In his **A Letter from Nahalal**⁴⁶ “Y.S” expressed frustration at the lack of interest the youth of this Labour *Moshav* were showing at attempts to impart them with values of the movement, and complained about the young people’s reluctance to participate in the local club’s activities. According to him, not only do the local youth lack “*public spirit*”, but he is worried that this might “*become a national syndrome.*” Young Dayan’s vexed reply⁴⁷ defended the “*Nahalal spirit*”, claiming that there is no disregard for values, but a natural fatigue and scarcity of time, as the young people in this agricultural village are overworked. Y.S. responded with a **Response to the Response**⁴⁸ and the editors summed up announcing that there will be no further discussions on this subject. The questions whether the young people of Nahalal were indifferent to the Labour Youth because they “*lack self-consciousness, indifferent to public matters*”; whether “*this phenomenon exists in other places as well, perhaps even inside the*

⁴⁵ Moshe Dayan (1915-1981), born in the socialist *Moshav Nahalal* became an illustrious figure in the military (Chief of Staff, 1953-1958) and the Israeli political scene (Minister of Defence and later Minister of Foreign Affairs, 1967 -1979). [See entry in the Knesset Website.](#)

⁴⁶ Issue 13, 1931 (August 28, page 5).

⁴⁷ Issue 15, 1931 (September 25, page 9).

⁴⁸ Issue 16, 1931 (October 16, page 3).

Labour Youth branches in the Valley” as Y.S. suggested, or that lack of interest was due to inadequate performance showed by the emissary of the Movement in Nahalal, - the discussion was but a *“futile argument [...]dealing with trifles”* as the young Dayan claimed, remained open.

c. Declaration of the social vision: Pacifist, Anti-Bourgeois

BaMaaleh took positions over a wide spectrum of topical subjects that made part of the build-up towards the projected *weltanschauung* of benevolent socialism, nationally tuned (see detailed analysis in chapter 3 below). The bi-weekly regular sections - **In the Big World** and **In the Jewish World**, as well as articles and editorials, represent global anti-militaristic positions. Often the slogan **“War Against the War”** was repeated – a proclamation to which whole issues were dedicated, directly inspired by the prevalent positions in European socialism between the World Wars. This was combined with prudent criticism of the persecutions of socialists in the Bolshevik Soviet Union – for example in the editorial **The Peril of War**⁴⁹.

Keeping a safe distance from alleged bourgeois symbols and indicators was well demonstrated in an early argument over the name of the youth movement, originally called **“The Labour Scouts”**. In an article titled **On the question of the Labour Youth**⁵⁰, Yitzhak Tabenkin rejected any association of the movement with **“scouts”**:

as if we could possibly be scouts, not workers. There may be scouts among us, but it is not possible to have any system whatsoever to distract or shift us.

According to Tabenkin:

The classic scout entity sees itself as a certain type of person and weltanschauung. For Jews it becomes a technique that is used in different modes and might bring in benefits [...]

This position was later repeated by his co-leader in the movement, signing “Y. Galili⁵¹”. In **The lecture of comrade Galili**⁵² he decreed unequivocally: *“In my opinion, scouting and Labour-*

⁴⁹ Issue 11, 1932 (June 3, front page).

⁵⁰ Issue 16, 1931 (October 9, page 3).

⁵¹ Israel Galili (Barcenco) (1911 – 1986) was Born in the Ukraine and emigrated to Palestine in 1914 with his family. He was close to Tabenkin in his political activism, and became the head of the Hagana paramilitary organisation affiliated to the *Histadrut* in the years 1946-1948. After the founding of the State of Israel he was a member of the Knesset and held ministerial positions in several governments (Source: the Knesset website).

⁵² Issue 7, 1932 (March 31, pages 5-6).

Scouting are two opposing concepts.” During that discussion “Comrade Zelitzki”⁵³ requested that some elements and emblems of the scout movements be preserved, but Galili – like Tabenkin before him – rejected this decisively and demanded that a resolution be passed that *“denies scouting as a system for educational work among working youth”*.

BaMaaleh’s educational mission included severe criticism of popular literature that it considered corruptive and harmful to its young readers, *“poisoning their souls, debilitating their tastes and marring their feelings”*. Sarcastically titled **We shall become like all the gentiles**⁵⁴, the editorial states clearly that this kind of reading material is not suitable for Jews. The rage focuses mainly on

[...] a cheap and contemptible novel by Yeivin, “At the Front of the Nation”⁵⁵. Week after week young readers are handed this stuff that introduces them to the 49 Gates of Profanity⁵⁶ [...] Children twelve years old embrace the “Detective Library” [...] Who would put an end to this literary epidemic that sabotages the soul of children and youth? We must start a wide explanatory⁵⁷ campaign among the youth, they should recognize and know all the corruption and debasement that such literature is causing them and their future.

It is no coincidence that the furious literary criticism targets a writer recognised as a BEITAR member. This is a perfect opportunity to lash out at Revisionist influence, emphasising military “grandeur” identified with European fascism (see also chapter 5).

BaMaaleh regularly pointed to the *Histadrut* and the Labouring Youth institutions as zones of solution and comfort for the masses of distressed and dispossessed young people of the land. Empathy for those suffering the injustice inflicted by social gaps is always coupled with the promise of *“drops of comfort”* to the poor of the land upon joining the *Histadrut*, as in the

⁵³ Moshe Carmel (formerly Zelitzki) (1911-2003) was born in Minsk, at that time part of Poland. He immigrated to Palestine in 1924. Became a prominent leader in Achdut HaAvoda party, was active in the paramilitary Hagana organisation and later a general of the Israeli army, and served as Minister of Transport in several governments in the 1950’s and the 1960’s (Spurce: the Knesset website).

⁵⁴ Issue 5, 1932, February 19, front page.

⁵⁵ The subject of the criticism seems to be Yehoshua Heshel Yeivin, a BEITAR member, journalist and associate in *“Brit Habiryonim”* [covenant of the thugs] [among his books listed in the national library](#) there is no mention of a novel titled “At the Front of the Nation”. However, the concept is part of BEITAR’s political vocabulary.

⁵⁶ A Talmudic reference to profanity, see for ex. [a contemporary rabbinical website \(Heb.\)](#).

⁵⁷ The Hebrew is *“Hasbara”*.

editorial **The Nest of my Forsaken Prayers**⁵⁸ (more of encounters with distressed youth in chapter 8 below).

Writers and editors were united in condemning the “*bourgeois*” mode of living, often expressing concern and criticism of manifestations of coquettishness and passion for entertainment among movement members, as in the article titled **Heavy Rain (note from Jerusalem)**⁵⁹, lamenting “*beads offered by gentiles glitter on the neck of a girl*” as well as “*deviations*” that include “*‘big dance ball’ with selected jazz music, silk dresses, black ties and a modern buffet*” that members of the movement seemed to have organised. Heated arguments erupted over the subject of sexual liberty – as in the article **Concerning that Question**⁶⁰ which generated animated as well as indignant responses.

d. Declaration of opposition to too much education and “lust for scholarship”

As part of anti-bourgeois philosophy, **BaMaaleh** took a stand against what seemed to be a retreat to bookishness. A front-page editorial (“**At the Hour**” section) lamented what the editor considered a race towards too much education which he disparagingly called “*frenzy for learning*”. **No Illusions**⁶¹ signed B. H. complains:

About 13 new secondary schools have been established, boisterous advertising and “plush” curriculums tempt the youth to turn to the study bench. From far away the luminous summit winks: the guaranteed matriculation certificate.

The new schools are “*free of any public scrutiny by the Yishuv*”, namely not under the desired political scrutiny. “*Are the curricula adapted for the needs of the person-citizen in the country’s labour society?*” the writer wonders with contemptuous concern. Indeed, he recognises, some labouring youth might also be “*thirsty for knowledge and education*”. Still “*education in order to ‘get settled’, ‘upgrade’ or ‘get a certificate’*” is altogether undesirable if it entails one’s abandoning physical working life. The Hebrew Yishuv has no need for “*boastful careerism and*

⁵⁸ Issue 19, 1934 (September 23, front page).

⁵⁹ Issue 2, 1934 (January 19, page 9).

⁶⁰ Issue 20, 1933 (October 24, page 9).

⁶¹ Issue 19, 1931 (November 21, front page).

vain intellectualism”, as “*we do not need drifty ‘spiritual souls’ but well-informed beaters of the hammer, people who follow the furrows, conquerors of labour [...]*”

One may be excused for finding some irony in the fact that the harsh pontificating against too much education and “*vain intellectualism*” comes from the group of writers, editors and educators, all making a living in the institutions of the Labour Movement establishment. Expectations of an emerging mass of Jewish manual workers, “*beaters of the hammer, people who follow the furrows*” is the core ideological theme of the period. Learning habits, compatible with the diasporic “*habitus*” typical of the Jewish masses, are perceived as a menace to the vision of Hebrew Labour and “conquest of Labour” (to be discussed in detail in chapter 2).

A desired version of education is presented in the long review of **The Educational Home for the labourers’ children in Tel Aviv**⁶² signed M.A. Beigle⁶³. The writer finds in this school a novel system of education fully compatible with the correct ideology, aimed at “*creating a new and improved society [...] at the foundation of our movement*”. The bottom line is a call for agricultural vocation and physical labour:

*[...] the great majority of the graduates of the Educational Home turn to physical labour, especially in agriculture, and aim to live in a Kvutza [small kibbutz] or a Moshav. [...] loyal and devoted to society and interested in principle issues. [...] they will be true partners in building the land and establishing the future society.*⁶⁴

The positivist-constructive ideology of the Labour Youth and its periodical was expressed with a particularly self-congratulatory tone at the first anniversary of **BaMaaleh**’s existence as a bi-weekly. Under the title **Is there indeed emptiness in our life**⁶⁵, a front-page editorial quote from an entry in another – presumably non-Labour affiliated – publication, it reports a letter of a

⁶² Issue 4, 1932 (February 19, page 5).

⁶³ Moshe Aaron Avigal (Beigle) (1886 -1969) was born in the Ukraine. He travelled as a child to Argentina with his family and in 1924 immigrated to Palestine, where he became a poet and an educator. His earlier teaching post was in the **Tel Aviv Educational Home for the Labourer’s Children**, later becoming the chief supervisor of Labour track Education (source: Tidhar).

⁶⁴ As a graduate (1963) of this educational institution I can guarantee that none of my classmates turned out to be labourers or agricultural workers.

⁶⁵ Issue 21, 1931 (December 25, front page)

frustrated 19-year-old youth, titled **The Howl of Youth**. Its author, signed “anonymous”, is described as expressing -

the cry of a Hebrew boy in the homeland, moaning the emptiness, the lack of content and ideals in life.

This young writer, the editorial reports, presents himself as speaking for many of his friends who, like himself, “suffer from the sickness of the void”. It is a “document”, so the editorial –

by one of hundreds of youngsters who study in the schools in this land, and seek rescue from the chaos, from secular life, and the horrible emptiness.

Such emptiness, the editorial in **BaMaaleh** insists, is adequate for those who live in nations “sated with choices, with government, with mollycoddling and joviality” but not for the Hebrew Yishuv, where the situation is “completely different”:

[...] we, the children of the Hebrew People, a people only now at the threshold of its homeland, a people bitterly fighting for its national existence – do we not have a real, true content in our lives?

BaMaaleh proposes to the “anonymous” to solve his private misery by joining the socialist - national idealistic youth movement, choosing -

[...] a hard road full of hurdles but one that offers content to life, new blood streaming into the veins, filling the heart with joy and love of life – this is the road of labour.

It is, the editorial assures, a track already adopted by other young people, forsaking schooling in favour of the visionary ideal:

[...] moved from the school bench to work, they follow the plough, they live in communes, they build settlements and fulfil their vision, the vision of the nation. They have content, they have an ideal, and if a howl breaks out of their hearts – this is the howl of the whole people, thirsty for salvation and redemption.

As Steven Fuchs observed, this is the vision of a “realistic” society. Such societies demand “Total and selfless dedication to the common cause”, in a culture that does not encourage independence or “selfishness”. These, he points out, are also characteristic of cults (Fuchs, 2001:220).

The call for a proletarianisation of the young Jews of the land, turning them into “beaters of the hammer [...] conquerors of labour” fitted perfectly into the political campaign against the

revisionist right-wing (see also chapter 5). Titled **Threatening with boycott**⁶⁶, an editorial attacks the “*National Youth*” movement’s attempt to prevent a march of Labour Youth members as part of the Hanukah parade, carrying the “Flag of Labour” (the red colour of this flag is not mentioned). **BaMaaleh** describes the rivals, using an unflattering comparison:

Do these youngsters not recall the hubris and disdain of the “national” youth of Germany, Austria and Poland?

There is an educational message to the Labour Youth members:

*[...] do not allow your young souls to be poisoned by the malignant talk of irresponsible kids [...] and do not believe their profane denunciations [...] there is one road only for the Jewish youth in this land – the **Road of Labour** [...] together with us you will proudly carry our flag high – the **Flag of Labour**. (Original emphasis).*

e. Declaration of a need to be born again “with the Lord of Israel”

There seems to be a potential contradiction between the demand to become a human being opposed to the “*distortion of the social structure*” identified with the diasporic past (Shapira, 1977:14) on the one hand, and a deep attachment to the cultural sources of traditional Judaism, on the other. The texts of **BaMaaleh**, however, do not indicate any negative tension between these contradictory values. Mostly they produce a perfectly harmonious image of the desire to cut loose from tradition and the preservation of the glorious past. Avraham Broides⁶⁷, a major poet and writer of that period who for many years was one of the chief editors of **BaMaaleh**, writes in the first brochure under the title **For the Assessment of our Cultural Mission**⁶⁸

So enormous is the revolution in our lives and in the life of our nation. [...]. One needs to be reborn.

In the same initial brochure, his poetical contribution **On Track**⁶⁹ includes the vigorous call:

*Here we come out, the grandchildren, with a formidable song of the pavers,
Hugging hammer and mattock, [...]
Cheer o trumpet, blow ram’s horn (Shofar) –
“Smoothing out the way for the Diaspora’s arriving Jews!”*

⁶⁶ Issue 20, 1931 (December 4, front page).

⁶⁷ See ref. 10 above.

⁶⁸ Brochure 1, 1926, page 10

⁶⁹ Ibid, page 4

*Dog days for dust. Swamp water and fever is our food [...]
Signs of the Messiah are these!
[...] And we whisper: our Homeland.*

The demand for asceticism and suffering (swamp water, fever, the labour of pavers), illustrating self-sacrifice for the sake of national goals, is fortified with religious connotations (a *horn, the Messiah*) and linked to tradition (*the grandchildren*). This attitude (to be discussed in detail in chapter 6) is also laid out in the article **And Thou shalt choose Life! (reflections)**⁷⁰ by the canonised A.Z. Rabinowitz in the same first brochure: traditional evocation for “*The Lord of Israel*”, commitment to the “*treasures of national culture, words of the Prophets and the sages*” coupled with the call for progress, education and training of youth (described as “*labouring to the point of stupidity of heart and mind*”):

we hold treasures of national culture, words of the Prophets and the sages, words of poetry and of science, moral words that uplift the soul. But what have all these bits of knowledge to do with the youth, labouring to the point of stupidity of heart and mind, with neither the leisure nor the training to comprehend these treasures and enjoy them [...] Satan shows the easy shortcut – despair and disgust with life, and the Lord of Israel calls out and says: Thou shalt choose life!

Conclusions from chapter 1

This preliminary chapter makes clear that **BaMaaleh** was established, financed and supported to be “*an educational periodical*”⁷¹ with every intention to take part in the task of designing and “*establishing the future society*” as one writer happily describes another Labour Zionist institution⁷². As this work is dedicated to the way the concept of Hebrew Labour was introduced over the pages of **BaMaaleh**, it is useful to bear in mind that this publication indeed was, presented itself and was seen by others as a mouthpiece of an ideological movement that successfully bore a settler-colonialist message, fully conscious of its aims, aggressively pushing demands for austerity, self-sacrifice and suffering for an imagined collective. **BaMaaleh** was not alone in this task. In 1944, the booklet **The Cruel Teaching of Zionism** was published by the

⁷⁰ Ibid, page 5

⁷¹ As described by Tabenkin on Issue 16, 1931 (October 9, page 3), see above.

⁷² Issue 4, 1932 (February 19, page 5) about the “educational home”, see above.

Histadrut owned Am Oved Publishing House (see visual), that equally praised suffering as the single road to national redemption⁷³.



The Cruel Teaching of Zionism by Avraham Sharon. Booklet published in 1944 by the *Histadrut*'s publishing house Am Oved as part of the series "Opinions" [De-ot].

⁷³ Author Dr Avraham Sharon (Schvadron) (1883- 1957) was born in East Galicia and immigrated to Palestine after WWI. He was a prodigy in Jewish and Zionist studies, and having donated his archive to the National Library in Jerusalem, became its treasurer and manager. He published many articles and booklets on Zionist issues (source: Tidhar).

Chapter 2.

The Ideology of Hebrew Labour as expressed over the pages of *BaMaaleh*

(In Editorials, Opinion Pieces, Literary works and reporting)

*“As though there could be a title more important than ‘Hebrew Labourer’. As if another title could outshine **Hebrew Labour**”* (original emphasis), Yitzhak Tabenkin, in a lecture titled **On the Question of the Labour Youth**¹, reprimanded instructors of Labour Youth during a meeting in 1931.

David Ben Gurion’s **The Hebrew Labour**² was a transcript of a lecture he gave in a Labour Youth conference. In his official position as the general secretary of the Hebrew Labourers’ *Histadrut*, the future founder of the State of Israel decreed:

“[...] the force active in the Jewish people is based, rooted and mainly supported – by Hebrew labour. And its historical purpose is the establishing of Hebrew labour in Eretz Israel.” (original emphasis).

BaMaaleh’s issues reviewed in this work display intensive preoccupation with the principle of **Hebrew Labour**. It was clearly conceived and presented as a prime national goal, an integral concept of the Zionist ideal: speedily populating Eretz Israel with settling Jews, enabling a Jewish political entity in the “Land of the Forefathers”. The **Hebrew Labour** concept was identified by Patrick Wolfe as pivotal *“both to the institutional imagining of a goyim-rein (gentile-free) zone and to the continued stigmatization of Jews who remained unredeemed in the galut (diaspora).”* (Wolfe, 2006:390). It also epitomised *“the negative process of excluding Palestine’s Indigenous owners.”* (ibid).

As discussed in the introduction, the demand for exclusive Jewish labour in the Jewish economy was not acceptable by all the segments and political affiliations of the Jewish population, and certainly not by the British Mandate government. It was unanimously and understandably rejected by the indigenous Arab population. As a publication committed and recruited to the specific ideological education of Labour Zionism, *BaMaaleh* often praised **Hebrew Labour** and

¹ Issue 16, 1931 (October 9, page 3).

² Issue 20, 1932 (November 4, page 3). See also above, page 34 ref. 35.

lashed out at its various opponents. In this work's corpus of well over one hundred issues (five years with up to 23 bi-weekly issues in addition to seven extended yearly or bi-yearly brochures), there are almost a hundred references to **Hebrew Labour** as a national and ideological necessity. In essence they can be divided into two main lines of reasoning, with vigils [*Mishmarot*] to prevent Arab labourers from reaching the workplaces praised as an adequate instrument to enforce exclusive **Hebrew Labour**, justified by both lines of reasoning:

- A. **The national reasoning: a “need” for the segregation of the Jewish and the Arab economies and societies for the benefit of “both communities”;**
- B. **The Social reasoning: a call for a radical change in the diasporic character of Jews** (replacing the traditional “*habitus*”; establishing a Jewish working-class, mainly in agriculture, to substantiate the national project);

The relevant texts include:

- **Criticism, disdain, scorn and fury against all those who do not partake in the effort to become proletarian – or refuse, as employers, to facilitate the creation of a proper Jewish working class.**
- **Descriptions of the physical and spiritual difficulties or sublimations while shifting to a life of farm hands**

Other aspects of the ideology of Hebrew Labour over the pages of *BaMaaleh* will be discussed in the next three chapters: The ideal of organised labour as representing a socialist precept to avoid labourers' exploitation (chapter 3); The national importance of Hebrew labourers as a basis for demanding larger immigration (*Aliya*) quotas from the Mandate authorities (chapter 4); and Hebrew Labour as a winning argument to delegitimise the Revisionist party and the BEITAR movement on the basis of insufficient national loyalty (chapter 5).

The two main reasonings for the concept of Hebrew Labour discussed in the present chapter - its importance to national repatriation purposes; and the need for change in the occupational and class structure of the Jewish nation (move to manual labour) – are mostly joined together and intertwined in a way that blurs distinction. A national return to the ancestral land without switching to organised manual labour – principally in agriculture – is defined more than once as contrary to Zionism altogether. In official texts and ceremonies, the “national and social”

vocations are displayed as inseparable. As, for example, in the “Proclamation” of **The Central Committee of the General *Histadrut* of Hebrew Labour Youth in Eretz Israel**³:

[...] we Hebrew workers of the land; our struggle, our combat for our national and social calling is the light that leads us to persist with ever-growing energy.

A total merging of the “national and the social” is demanded by “Dov”⁴ in the third brochure of the periodical in 1928. In his article **On the Goal and Means of our Cultural Work**⁵ he reports past efforts:

Everything was tuned to arouse the preparation and enthusiasm of the conquering, fighting, and creative Hebrew worker in Eretz Israel

And looking forward:

[...] our cultural work must aim to increase the awareness of national and social liberation of the Hebrew labourer in the country.

“Dov”’s cultural program includes -

[...] the struggle of the Hebrew labourer for his right to work, economic and social creation in all its aspects, the struggle for the independence of the Hebrew public in the country – as we bring all these into our programming, we are on our way to achieve our goal.

The chief ideologue of the Labour movement, Berl Katznelson, joined the united message in his contribution to the second brochure of ***BaMaaleh***. Speaking of the **The Question of Educating the Youth**⁶ he told young activists of the movement:

The work you will be doing will mark our future lives. The question is, to what extent will you manage to guarantee the youth’s faithfulness to the tradition of the Hebrew worker. [...]

³ Brochure 1, 1926, page 34

⁴ Dov Stock-Sadan, see earlier reference.

⁵ Issue 3, 1928, pages 25 - 27

⁶ Brochure B, 1927, pages 11-16.

As Y. Bankover⁷ put it at a later stage, memorising past struggles titled **Conquering Labour in the Hebrew Moshava**⁸, he and his comrades shared -

the deep recognition that the labourer's fight for his right to labour in the Hebrew economy is the fight for true Zionism.

Obviously “*True Zionism*” is meant to be the Zionism of the Labour movement. Still, following is an attempt to look separately at texts that express the two aspects – the national and the social.

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A. The national reasoning for the segregation of the Jewish and the Arab economies

David Ben Gurion's seniority in the Zionist Labour Movement, and the centrality of his own teaching regarding the issue of **Hebrew Labour** make prominent the arguments and ideology that he methodically presented in his article **The Hebrew Labour**⁹ published in *BaMaaleh* of 1932. The article asserts that in an economy based on Jewish investments – public or private – only Jews must be employed, there is no room for Arab Labourers. In the words of Patrick Wolfe, this became a tool to enhance ethnic conflict – always a useful strategy for politicians - “*as Jewish industries were actively discouraged from employing non-Jewish labour*” (Wolfe, 2006:390).

As this seminal article shows, Ben Gurion made an extremely efficient use of the concept of **Hebrew Labour**, enabling him to challenge opponents from the left and from the right, disparagingly joining them as -

[...] those opposing Hebrew Labour of all kinds – from the delegates of the COMINTERN all the way to the Jewish plutocracy [...]

The term “*delegates of the COMINTERN*” refers directly to the Communist *Frakzia* in the *Histadrut*, but socialist-universalist claims about the right of local Arab workers to make a living

⁷ Yosef Bankover (Futerman) (1901 -1977) was born in the Ukraine, was active in the “Dror” youth movement in the Ukraine and the “Halutz” in Poland. He immigrated to Palestine in 1926 and was among the founders of the Kibbutz “*Kovesh*” (*Ramat ha-Kovesh*). Secretary of Ha-Kibbutz Hameuchad [united kibbutz movement], then secretary of MAPAI in the years 1935 – 1936. Joined the British Army in WWII. Delegate to the Zionist Congresses and member of the Zionist General Council. In 1944 he joined the establishment of *Achdut Ha-Avoda* party with others who left MAPAI, later joining the establishment of MAPAM, and was its secretary. (Source: The Israeli Labour Party Historical archive (Heb) <https://tnuathaavoda.info/people/home/people/1108716492.html>)

⁸ Issue 3, 1934 (January 3, page 3).

⁹ See ref. 2 above, page 65.

in the new Jewish ventures based on class solidarity, were also voiced by the members of *Poalei-Zion-Left* and *HaShomer-HaTzair*, both Zionist-Socialist bodies that Ben Gurion considered dangerous rivals to his own MAPAI hegemonic party¹⁰. The “*Jewish Plutocracy*” is a pejorative often used to describe the orchard owners and other employers who were not keen to give up the local workforce and hamper the profitability of their ventures.

Ben Gurion often returned to the subject of **Hebrew Labour** in his writings and speeches, constantly defining the enemies of **Hebrew labour** as “*the alienated Jewish owners of farms, the inciting and hostile effendis, the emissaries of the COMINTERN, and the bureaucrats of the Colonial Ministry*”¹¹. His rhetoric was picked-up and repeated by other opinion writers, as will be presented below. The transcribed speech **The Hebrew Labour** as first printed in *BaMaaleh* of **November** 1932 is therefore a basic text that deserves special attention.

In this lecture to the Labour Youth, Ben Gurion chose an original line of advocating the **Hebrew Labour** principle: He began by announcing that he was about to contradict the well-accepted mainstream Zionist logic supporting it. This is, in fact, a well-calculated strategy vigorously combating political rivals from the Zionist right and left:

I wish to contradict two false defences of Hebrew Labour. A) That it is Jewish Capital that buys the right for Hebrew Labour. B) That we bring benefits to the Arabs, and therefore we may come to Eretz Israel.

It is not the capital that buys the right to **Hebrew Labour**, quite the contrary – it is labour that gives capital its right to exist – Ben Gurion defiantly declares in *BaMaaleh*. To the capitalists’ complaints, that the Jewish labourers are unsuitable for agricultural work he retorts:

Jewish capital is nothing but one of the attendants of this process: the establishing of a working Jewish settlement in the land.

Capital is merely an auxiliary,

*for the establishing of a new economy, that will absorb Hebrew labour. And it is our labour that justifies the economy, **for if the Jews have the right to buy land and settle in the land – this right is due to Hebrew labour.*** (original emphasis)

¹⁰ Ben Gurion, 1955: 270 - 281 in the article “*The Central Question* (from the discussion in the Agricultural Conference, dated June 1931 [KG Sivan TARAZA]).

¹¹ Ibid:270

Putting it this way denies any claims that the investors of “*Jewish capital*” might have to hegemony over the new Zionist Yishuv. Ben Gurion then turns to legitimise claims to hegemony in his own version of labour-Zionism. The next lines seem to aim at the more idealistic members of the Zionist left. Ben Gurion presents the young people of the Labour Youth with a complex thesis:

The land is not empty. It has a resident population. And as we come here with our own desire for life and our right to exist the question arises – how to organize our relations with the Arab population that lives here.

This is a somewhat unconventional statement, in stark contrast with the often-quoted Zionist slogan calling for a “*land with no people*” to be taken by a “*people without a land*”¹². Ben Gurion continues his thesis:

*[...] those who came here are just a part of those masses that want and **must** come here. In front of this “US” which is only a part of the bigger “US” is the reality of an Arab population in the land. (Original emphasis).*

Astutely, his recognition of the existence of the “Arab population” is immediately turned into a launching-pad to dismiss any complaints of Arabs – and their political supporters in the Mandate government – against the principle of **Hebrew Labour** or altogether against Jewish settlement - claiming that those Jews who made it so far to the land do not represent themselves alone, but must be considered part of the large potential of those who wish or “must” arrive in Palestine/ Eretz Israel (see also chapter 4). Jewish capital is thus legitimised in the role of an “*auxiliary force*”:

*Every person has the right to work. And no special justification for it is needed. The present economy in Lydda, in Gaza, in Nablus, does not facilitate our existence in the country; therefore, the Jewish people had produced out of it an auxiliary force – Jewish capital – for the establishing of a new economy, that will absorb Hebrew labour. And it is our labour that justifies the economy, **for if the Jews have the right to buy land and settle in the land – this right is due to Hebrew labour.** (Original emphasis).*

Hebrew labour (actually, Labour Zionism) is thus secured supremacy in the Zionist enterprise, and is now to be described as a great blessing to the indigenous population, while flattering the

¹² The origin of this slogan is often attributed to the British-Jewish politician Israel Zangwill.

young listeners: “*A side-effect of the penetration of Jewish labourers to the land – is the benefit we bring to the Arabs. We are the bearers of a greater culture*” (see also Chapter 7 below for further analysis of this crude orientalist *weltanschauung*).

To ensure that his listeners – some of whom might be doubtful about the righteousness of Labour Zionist policies – would accept his logic, Ben Gurion ventures on a complex imaginary mental exercise: suppose the cultural map were reversed, and Arabs were the people with a more advanced culture. Facing an influx of less-educated Jewish labourers, they might complain to an imaginary independent tribunal. The (imaginary) complaint is “*we are afraid that the Jewish workers, whose culture is inferior to ours, might lower our standard of living*”. The imagined tribunal, Ben Gurion is convinced, is bound to inform the imaginary complaining Arabs that -

[...] the Jewish workers have a right to come to the land, but it is necessary to make an effort to raise their standard of living. You have no right to oppose the Jews coming here to create an economy and work.

It must perhaps be noted that the fake-hypothetical tale already accords full legitimacy to any influx of immigrants, reflecting norms that were not yet shaken by post-colonial theories. In reality the situation was that the Jewish labourers – members of a settler society – were unable to compete with the well-trained, meagrely paid Arabs. Ben Gurion now points out the culprits who created this sad situation, and finds them in his Jewish political opponents, the settlers of the first Aliya who “exploited” the cheap native labour force instead of employing their own co-religionists:

The historical intention, the will of the nation that pushed BILU, the builders of Petah Tikvah, Rothschild¹³, to come and create here – had been distorted by the greed of individuals who came to this land, misconstrued this desire, and instead of introducing Hebrew labour, turned this new economy into a place where Arab labourers can be easily exploited.

¹³ The first Jewish movement, the first settlement and the philanthropist who made the settlement of the first Jewish Aliya to Palestine/Eretz Israel possible at the end of the 19th century.

On the way to the intended correction of this situation Ben Gurion magnanimously promised the Arab labourer who must lose his employment in favour of the Jewish newcomers that “*he has the right to be compensated*”.

Conscious of his young and idealistic target audience’s desire to avoid unethical or immoral acts, Ben Gurion is careful to declare loyalty and commitment to socialist principles (see chapter 3 below): “*First and foremost, we must plant within ourselves the recognition of our blameless right for labour in the land*” he reminds the youngsters, speaking from a truly high horse:

The moral foundations of our work in the land – from a socialist, ethical and human point of view – are not doubted. For us socialism is the way to our salvation; because socialism is for the benefit of nations and not vice-versa. Here in this land, we become a generator and a carrier of the social revolution, not its agitators. The objective conditions of the land are such, that we have no need to take the economy away from the Arab labourer. The resurrection of the Hebrew nation in Eretz Israel need not be built on the destruction of the Arab nation. Surely, there are, among the Arab people effendis and other forces that are hostile and fight us. Does this put our moral right in doubt?

Establishing the argument that “*The Arabs*” do not really need this small piece of land, Ben Gurion coined a phrase that has become a centre point in Zionist *Hasbara* for generations: “*Eretz Israel is not a separate unit, but a part of a very large area – a fragment of an area that belongs to the Arab nation, which is 100 times larger than the area of Eretz Israel.*” The final words in this article dedicated to **Hebrew Labour** sealed this line of reasoning:

Although the Arab factor is particularly important – the faith of the Arab nation is not connected either to the realisation of Zionism or to its failure. For the Hebrew nation this is a question of life or death.

Less charitably, one is led to realize that **Hebrew Labour** seemed indeed a “*question of life or death*” to the settling project spearheaded by Labour Zionism, and of which Ben Gurion was perhaps the most brilliant advocate and leader. A *Hebrew Nation* was being manufactured accordingly.

Earlier that year, a similar attestation was expressed (or parroted?) by the Labour Zionist activist H. Fromkin¹⁴. In an opinion piece titled **Options of Work in the Land**¹⁵ Fromkin decreed that “*Hebrew capital now invested in the country*” must be “*invested and spent exclusively within the realm of the Hebrew economy and not outside it*”. In this article Fromkin set out to prove that the land of Israel/Palestine offers an array of “*economic possibilities for mass Jewish immigration*” – in other words, that the settling project was economically viable. Same as Ben Gurion, he expressed anger at “*the alienation of part of the Hebrew farm sector from the Hebrew labourer*” which he blamed for hindering Jewish immigration (see also chapter 4). Fromkin was also troubled by the employment of Arab labourers in the construction sector, complaining of “*blatant usurpation of the rights of the Hebrew labourer by government and the municipalities*”. He expected the *Histadrut* to insist on “*the need to guarantee Hebrew labour in the economic enterprises now being created in this land by means of international capital (for ex. the Mosul- Haifa oil pipeline)*”. Altogether, he complained, labour options -

“*[...] are taken away maliciously from the Hebrew labourer by the government and the Hebrew farming sector*”.

Fromkin’s text openly displays the strategy of “*split labour market*” whereby a “*closure*” is created “*restricting access to resources and opportunities to a limited circle of eligibles*” (Shafir, 1996 [1989]:15¹⁶). The idea that Arabs are employed in the labour market that he demands for Jews only (the “*eligibles*”) is regarded by him as “*blatant usurpation*” of Jewish rights, as these markets must be restricted and inaccessible to non-Jews.

A clear summary of the ideology of Hebrew Labour in perfect *Hasbara* mode was offered in an unsigned article marked for “*young readers*”. **On Guard for Hebrew Labour**¹⁷ sums up the points regarding national and socialist goals, punching at opponents and whining accordingly, in best settler-Zionist tradition:

¹⁴ Heshel Shlomo Fromkin (1896 – 1974) was born in Russia, immigrated to Palestine in 1920. One of the founders of the *Histadrut*, member of Kibbutz Degania B and the director of the “Labour Centre” and the Economic department of the *Histadrut*. After the establishment of the State of Israel he was a delegate of the MAPAI party to the first Knesset and a member of the Knesset Finance Committee. (Source: the Knesset website).

¹⁵ Issue 8, 1932 (April 15, page 3).

¹⁶ Quoting Parkin, 1979: 44

¹⁷ Issue 20, 1933 (October 24, page 7)

[...] Eretz Israel is the only land where we desire and are able to live a life of labour and creativity. All our life in the diaspora is dependent and conditioned on external factors. There we are not allowed to work the land, to build houses, to pave roads and rails; we are pushed into jobs and livelihoods that turn us into detached foreigners. Only here do we start to sprout, be a nation building and sitting on its own land.

The Arab economy is closed for us. In government workplaces we are outnumbered. Only the Jewish economy is left, the economy whose existence is due to the work of the Hebrew labourers. And now venerable community leaders and “respectable Jews” who consider themselves Zionists and builders of the land – are alienated from Hebrew labour, and with the support of the police they rob the bread of the Jewish Olim.

We shall not give up our right to labour – the right to our existence!

Against the disturbing possibility that young people might doubt the ethics of this strategy another article, signed B. West¹⁸, offers explanations under the title **The Conquest of the People**¹⁹. He begins with the basic Zionist premise:

In this situation of global confusion, bad is the lot of a weak nation that does not live in its own land and does not control its own destiny. Sevenfold worse is the situation of the Jewish people, dispersed throughout the world, a minority in every country where they live.

West goes on to complain of too much friction and weak organisation, generated by “*the lack of a forged and cohesive will to struggle for our defence and actual existence*”. The single way out of this predicament must be “*Returning to labour and penetrating all its branches, until a working settlement with roots deep in the ground of the homeland is created*”. It is, he tells the readers, the “*destined command for a nation in re-birth*”. The way to move the Jewish masses to join the Zionist enterprise is to introduce to them “*the bright dots of light*” from the working community in Eretz Israel.

An editorial titled **Connivances**²⁰ imparts the information that the *Histadrut* was successful in a struggle against both a contractor who employed mostly Arab labourers in the construction of a swimming pool in Jerusalem, and a communist publication that harshly criticised that struggle.

¹⁸ Benjamin West (1896 - 1975) was born in the Ukraine, emigrated to Palestine in 1924 and was active in “*HaPoel HaTzair*” in the *Histadrut* and in Bank HaPoalim. Regularly published articles in “*Davar*” and other publications (Source: Tidhar)

¹⁹ Issue 16, 1932 (August 19, page 3).

²⁰ Issue 17, 1932 (September 9, front page)

The campaign was partially won: for the building of the pool, there will be 30 -40 Jewish workers added, to perform simple concrete professional jobs. And incidentally all the Arab workers will still continue their own jobs, stone quarrying, as they did before.

The comments concerning this struggle in *Ha'Or* - the paper of the communist *Frakzia* - truly upset the editors of **BaMaale**. *Ha'Or* dared to describe the campaign as “*the dispossession of the Arab labourer by the Kozaks of the Histadrut*”. The editorial pounced on opponents from the right (the contractor and the city) and the left (the *Frakzia* and its paper) all at once, with special emphasis on the latter:

The style is well known and the front is one: The municipality, the contractor, the Frakzia and “Ha’or”. The municipality and the contractor will continue to boycott the Jewish labourer, the Jewish labourer will continue to demand his fair share of the employment, and if he succeeds – “Ha’or” will call him a usurper, its members will distribute leaflets calling for “holy insurrection” against the Jewish Yishuv. And the language of “Ha’or” is all like pearls. No Olim [new immigrants] but “Olim” – in quotation marks, no Aliya but “Aliya” in quotation marks; not members of the Labourers’ Histadrut but hooligans. This, for them, is the constant name for the Jewish workers and pioneers.

“[...] we have been too tolerant with this sect”, the editor continues angrily, then moves to direct threats: “*Mortal enemies, who intend to burn down the enterprise of our life – should be treated like mortal enemies*” (see also chapter 3). The article goes on to justify the actions of the unionised Hebrew labourers for the sake of pure Hebrew Labour and to denounce opponents of all sorts: Arab dignitaries (“*instigating effendis and priests*”), Jewish entrepreneurs and “antisemitic” British officials (“*contractors and antisemitic bureaucrats*”); as well as former members of the Zionist labour movement, who now oppose the principle of exclusive Hebrew labour and co-operate with Arabs, which is a danger for the Hebrew Yishuv (“*deserters of the campaign, inciting one worker against the other and calling for pogroms against Israel*”).

That Labour Zionists were not alone in their aspirations for exclusivity of Hebrew Labour can be deduced from an obituary signed by Eliahu Krause, the director of the veteran agricultural school *Mikveh Israel* (established 1870) on the occasion of the death of Baron Benjamin de Rothchild who sponsored this school. Under the title **About the death of the "Well-known**

Philanthropist²¹ Krause wrote: “*The Baron was all for pure Hebrew Labour in the Hebrew farming economy but thought it impossible to send out those Arabs who are already working in the Moshava. [...]*”

- **Vigils [*Mishmarot*] as an instrument to enforce exclusive Hebrew Labour**

Apart from ideological polemics, texts concerning Hebrew Labour include accounts of struggles and vigils. Often these are related in the first person, detailing actions for the national goal of conquest of labour, highlighting sufferings and self-sacrifice.

Vigils and guards to prevent Arabs from entering areas of employment were a tactic regularly used in support of the ideology of **Hebrew Labour**. It was presented as a necessary measure to secure the “*split labour market*” for the benefit of the Jewish labourers, almost all of them young immigrants who did not have other means of supporting themselves. While describing the guards favourably, these articles sometimes reflect the fierce controversy around them in the local Jewish population of the time. In May of 1933, two editorials (on the front-page column **AT THIS HOUR**²²) were dedicated to “*the long strike in Petah Tiqwa, where strike-breakers enjoyed the support of all the evil forces in the land*”. **BaMaaleh** criticised the Hebrew daily *Haaretz* for expressing an opinion unsupportive of the pickets. Under the title **Be Firm with the Stubborn**²³ the guards are described as “*quietly holding a picket with a single demand: Work and bread for the hungry Jewish labourer*”. The next editorial, titled **In the aftermath of the Petah Tiqwa strike**²⁴, issues a warning to strike-breakers:

even following their agreement, the foes should not happily conclude that the labourers have given up their organisation and their right to just labour distribution. Those who were used as whips in the hands of contractors and orchard owners will soon find out what awaits them out of the goodness of their employers' hearts.

“*Just Labour Distribution*” is a code name for employment exclusively administered by the *Histadrut*'s labour bureau and a ban on employing ununionized labourers, most of whom – but

²¹ Issue 22, 1934 (November 9, page 5)

²² Issue 9, 1933 (May 12, front page)

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

not all – were non-Jews. Those who contested the *Histadrut*'s monopoly on labour distribution (mostly Revisionists and other non-socialists – see chapter 5) were labelled saboteurs of the national effort. The image of the pickets as demanding “*work and bread for the hungry Jewish labourer*” served the desired impact. In fact, as often was remarked, the pickets coincided with periods of prosperity, when it was easy to find more lucrative employment away from the picketed enterprises (Shapira, 1977, pp. 153, 167).

The Conquering of Labour in the Hebrew *Moshava*²⁵ by Y. Bankover was a series of three long articles, combining ideology and descriptions, published in early 1934. The articles start as a review of past struggles over **Hebrew Labour**, while showing awareness of the fact that at the time of publication there was no shortage of employment opportunities. Bankover's call is to keep insisting on the purity of **Hebrew labour** in Hebrew farms even in an era of economic prosperity and scarcity of working hands in both city and country. The three articles present the staunch Labour-Zionist position: an inseparable merger between the national-political goal – the Jewish settlement in Eretz Israel – and the desired character of this settlement – pioneering spirit based on physical labour. The belligerent tone aimed at political opponents shows the power struggle behind ideological pontificating.

In the first instalment of the series²⁶, Bankover starts by reaffirming the call for “*The conquest of labour and the conquering of oneself for labour and for new life.*” He makes the political credo clear:

The front is in the Moshava. Here our destiny is to be decided. In the fight over our right to labour and in the Hebrew economy our position will be established, in this land and within the Jewish People. [...] (original emphasis).

Bringing up memories, Bankover (obviously no longer a farm hand) reminisces:

It is only the feeling of the historic mission that the Hebrew labourer fulfils in this land, and the recognition that he is the carrier and the most faithful expression of the needs of the masses and the Jewish youth who aim for Aliya and search for possibilities of absorption in this land, the deep recognition that the labourer's fight for his right to labour in the Hebrew economy is the fight for true Zionism –

²⁵ Issue 3, 1934 (January 31, page 3); continued in Issues 4 and 5 (see below)

²⁶ Issue 3, 1934 (January 31, page 3)

all this empowered the pioneers [...] Our penetration into the Moshava had always been the test case and trial for our movement [...]

Even then, he acknowledges, there were “*signs of heresy*”, and the writer freely admits that not all pioneers shared the fervent conviction about the necessary struggle and its methods:

[...] we knew that every doubt of our absolute right to the sovereignty of Hebrew labour in the Hebrew economy led to a denial of our Zionist-socialist trajectory and ended with leaving the Moshava, exiting labour and escaping this land.

Following the hard times of the economic crisis in the years 1926 -7 there had been moments of failure and despair, Bankover recalls, but the solution was found in the organised campaign:

[...] we raised the flag of organised campaign for masses of labourers in all the Moshavot for the right to work. We turned our despair into a Brenner²⁷-like despair, creative desperation that induces action and vigorous leverage. We ventured on a serious campaign – and won! (original emphasis).

Bankover further elaborates the strategy of the **Hebrew labour** picket-line guards in Petah Tiqwa that included the erection of a residential stronghold in the area, “*all the way to establishing a belt of kibbutzim and organisations around the Moshava.*” This is an accurate description of the eventual solution that was found to the inability of the Jewish settlers to compete with the Arab labourers: the establishment of closed farming and residential units, ethnically sealed and closed to non-Jews (see the introductory chapter above about the establishment of “*pure settlement’ colonies (i.e., colonies aimed at creating a homogeneous settler-immigrant population)*” (Shafir, 1996 [1989]: XII).

In spite of all past successes, and while the strategy of settlements based on pure ethnic identity seemed to offer a solution, Bankover is worried. The present-time economic boom, and the opening of new employment options for Jewish immigrants must, he feels, force the movement to face -

[...] the necessity to protect the soul of Zionism [...] We have to give up our agricultural work, move to construction in the Moshava, move to the city, as the alarming increase of alien labour in the Hebrew economy, the boycott against the

²⁷ Yoseph-Haim Brenner (1881 – 1921), born in the Ukraine, became one of the most influential writers in the Hebrew Language. His writings are characterised as highly emotional. He is the subject of much research, and several books describe his vision. (sources: Tidhar and USU). See also article commemorating him in **BaMaaleh** 1935, Issue 9, page 4. “Brenner-like despair” remained an idiomatic phrase in modern Hebrew.

organised labourer, the serious breaches in the new Moshavot – all these require us to make a new and correct evaluation of how things are in the Moshavot [...] and we must seek a way to stop the escape and regain our pioneering power in the penetration into the Moshava.

The emphasis on the threat of “*alien labour*” (for more about this expression see below) as well as to the “*soul of Zionism*” repeats the concerns that young readers should have identified with. But it seems that the risk to the political “*pioneering power*” was the main concern of **BaMaaleh**’s and MAPAI’s activists, as comes out clearly in this series.

The series’ second instalment²⁸ complains about the preferences showed by Jewish labourers that desert agricultural work in favour of the booming construction sector. For the writer, this constitutes a serious problem facing the recommended version of Zionism:

The escape must be stopped by the increase of the pioneering engagement that calls and commits us [...]

The move from country to city seems a menace to the political might of the labour movement, and the writer hurries to blame “*black revisionism*” for the weakening power of the labourer public (see also chapter 5). Once again, “*the wonderful trio of the Jewish effendis, the police and the strike-breakers*” is pointed at as instigators of the failure, and now an open threat is articulated, using the alarming spectre of a “*civil war within the Jewish community*” (original emphasis). At this stage it is clear that the writer identifies **Hebrew Labour** as organised labour controlled by the *Histadrut*:

*The wave of strikebreaking which is now washing over the land is in fact dangerous gunpowder, generating incessant tensions and bringing us to the verge of a **civil war** within the Jewish community here.*

The last words of this article are repeated in the next and last instalment in large letters above the title:

we shall make every sacrifice and pay any price in the defence of the integrity of the Labourers’ Histadrut, protecting it from all who come to destroy it! (original emphasis).

In the third instalment²⁹, further combat calls are uttered:

²⁸ Issue 4, 1934 (February 15, page 3)

²⁹ Issue 5, 1934 (February 25, page 8)

*[...] In face of the destructive forces in the Jewish populace – we must raise **an organised force of the whole labour public.** (original emphasis).*

The strategy is supposed to focus on *Hasbara* and indoctrination:

It is our duty to instil in the entire public the sense of danger in this land and the thousands of pioneering youths who are being educated to our endeavour. We must foresee the danger and repeat the warning: All our attention must be directed to the Moshava!

The target audience is then called upon for action:

*The major necessity of preserving Hebrew labour in the Moshava requires supplementary young forces for conquest and for creation. If the masses of labouring youth in the country have a healthy instinct and loyalty to the pioneering trajectory of the Labourers' Histadrut - a great action of **recruitment and volunteering** of hundreds of youths will emerge to go to the Moshava. The Labour Youth will be tested in this responsible task! (original emphasis).*

The call to “*go to the Moshava*” is in fact a call for action to fortify the *Histadrut* against the opponents of organised labour, headed at the time by the Revisionist movement. The rhetoric presents a call for national struggle – represented by the ethnic purity of **Hebrew labour**, so dear to the hearts of the settling immigrants and so important for their earning capacities. In fact, a total and useful blurring is introduced as to the concepts of “*national effort*”, “*preserving Hebrew labour in the Moshava*” and “*of the integrity of the Labourers' Histadrut*” (original emphasis. More on this in chapter 5).

The urgent appeal for voluntary and self-sacrificing action was repeated a month later by another *Histadrut* publicist. This time the motivation piece is by H. Fromkin³⁰. His article is titled **At the Front of the Aliya and of the conquest of labour**³¹ (see also chapter 4), while across the page a title in large bold letters reads: “***Labouring and learning youth, Emerge to labour in the Moshava!***”

Fromkin – who two years earlier had contributed an article about **Options of Work in the Land**³² is troubled this time by problems generated by the economic boom, described as a threat on a national level:

³⁰ See ref.15 page 72.

³¹ Issue 7, 1934 (March 30, page 3)

³² Issue 8, 1932 (April 15), page 3.

Due to the lack in Hebrew working hands thousands of Arab workers have been added in the last six months to the Hebrew Moshavot.

He points an accusing finger at the government which does not seem to comply with the settling community's expectations: "*With force the government wishes to distort the Hebrew image of the newly created Hebrew economy.*" And he is also bothered by the prosperity in the non-Jewish sector, as the economic boom has also (so unfortunately...) "*increased the working options in the Arab economy*". Gravely, Fromkin – seemingly oblivious to claims that the Jews came to Palestine specifically to improve Arab standards of living (see chapter 7) - informs the reader:

According to authorised sources, the Arabs have planted nearly 25,000 dunam of new plantations in the year 1933. About half the planters are fellahin, living in the vicinity of the Hebrew Moshavot, who have learnt new cultivation methods from the Jews; moreover, the means for these plantations have also come mostly from the Hebrew economy. [...] This year, too, there is going to be a major planting by Arabs.

According to Fromkin, the *Histadrut* is waging "*struggles for honour and responsibility, to defend Hebrew Labour in the Sharon*". Having surveyed the urgent need for working hands in construction and in industry he is concerned first and foremost for the agricultural sector, and insists:

*This honourable war must be the exit-point for us to be spread along the whole front. **Let us not allow anyone to remove us from agriculture!** Let all the construction labourers in the rural communities be recruited to this combat – agriculture comes before everything else! And even if this might cause the most serious obstruction for urgent and necessary construction works: farm buildings, industry and residence – let us not give up agriculture! Let the cry over these economic damages rise and pressure the government to stop choking the Hebrew forces of labour and creation. (original emphasis).*

In other words: the writer, at the time an important bureaucrat³³, demands of labourers and labouring youth to give up the better paid and less physically demanding employment opportunities in order to guarantee Jewish exclusivity in the farms and orchards – gruelling, poorly paid physical work. "*An important and responsible role in this war will also be requested from the city labourers*", Fromkin insisted, convinced that personal comforts (of other people)

³³ Director of the "Labour Centre" of the *Histadrut*, see earlier reference.

are to be given up in view of the national goals. It is a demand that corresponds to Steven Fuchs's description of "realistic societies" or "cults": The welfare of the group matters more than the welfare of its members (Fuchs, 2001:220. See also in the introduction).

Published in the same issue as Fromkin's urgent call, **The Meeting**³⁴, signed by Asher Shlomo and reporting a personal experience, reflects a perfect internalisation of the required pioneering and selfless spirit by many of the young responders. The article brings impressions from an encounter of a group of Jewish pupils with another group of young new Olim:

[...] in this wooden shed we had the first meeting with the comrades and friends who came to carry the burden of labour with us and support the preserving of Hebrew labour positions and save thousands of workplaces in the Hebrew economy for young people from the diaspora, who will make their Aliya in the future. And they came to us full of power and energy, with blazing strong desire, and here in the wooden shed, in the Hora-dancing circles, hand in hand, arm to arm – we danced, circled round and round, circles of the fiery youth, and vigorous, great singing sounds were heard ever rising.

It is an illustration of how the "Eretz Israel experience of the sublime" fortified and maintained by "the overflowing singing and the ecstatic Hora dance" (Neuman, 2009:47 - 48) is recruited by the Labour-Zionist decree to accept agricultural labour for the sake of the nation. Asher Shlomo concludes his report:

Respect and glory to the young comrades, who had come to guard Hebrew labour in the Hebrew economy, which is expecting Aliya. The youth knew its role, it knew that it is their duty to go to the labour-front, to be of assistance to the labour-army that lives in the Moshavot and Kibbutzim. It knew that it is on labour, over the land and its building that the nation will be established.

Another description fully compatible with Neuman's "**Land and Desire in Early Zionism**"

(Neuman, 2009) is given by Yosef Weitz³⁵, describing the settlers coming to the Hefer Valley,

³⁴ Issue 7, 1934 (March 30, page 5)

³⁵ Yosef Weitz (1890-1972) was born in Russia (present-day Ukraine) and having served in the Russian army immigrated to Palestine in 1908. He became a prominent activist in the realm of agriculture and land purchasing by the Israel National Fund and is considered a leader in the realms of forestation and the establishment of Jewish settlements. Kibbutz Yechiam is named after his son who was killed in a 1946 PALMACH action bombing bridges. (sources: the [INF website](#), Tidhar). In 2021, the [documentary "Blue Box" offering a critical survey of Weitz's role in the JNF](#) was presented by his great-granddaughter Michal Weitz.

earlier named Wadi Hawarith (see also chapter 7). Under the title *In Emek Hefer*³⁶ Weitz describes the preparatory hours just before the newcomers take possession of their new land:

*And the deep passion for the land that was hidden and incorporated into the souls of the pioneers now found its expression and its realisation: they turn it over and over as all their lives are in it.*³⁷

As Anita Shapira found out, the economic prosperity of the years 1933-1935 exerted considerable pressure on the idea of **Hebrew labour**. “In spite of being educated for Zionism, the Jewish labourer had not overcome the tendency to keep a distance from manual labour and from working on the land [...] did not integrate with non-professional farm labour, physically hard and poorly paid” (Shapira, 1977:163). The leadership of the labour movement, however, continued to fight vigorously for the principle that no Arabs should be employed in the orchards of the Sharon area that belonged to Jewish farmers. An editorial in *BaMaaleh* of April 1934 is dedicated to explaining (*hasbara*) this unequivocal position, in times that saw no unemployment that might have justified the vigils of Jewish labourers against Arab labourers. Under the title **What are the Labourers of the Sharon fighting for?**³⁸ The editor clarifies:

The bitter struggle of the labourers in the Sharon, marked by arrests, strikes and boycotts, is a struggle over the soul of the movement, over the essence of liberating Zionism. There will not be nor exist Zionism without Hebrew Labour.

He then goes on, repeating a mixture of national, social and immigration arguments, labelling the indigenous labourers “foreign”. The expression “foreign labour” or “alien labour” (*avoda zara*) often used by contributors to *BaMaaleh*, is a concept identified in Judaism with paganism and other sorts of heresy. The connotation is profanity, sacrilege and treason (see also chapter 6).

Zionism built on foreign labour closes the gates of Aliya right in front of us, denies the Hebrew nation any right to the land and turns our life here into a new

³⁶ Issue 12, 1934 (June 1934, page 7)

³⁷ The piece also details some background to this event: “The legal action about the borders that the Bedouin raised against the JNF was rejected and the court has authorised the map according to which the land of Wadi Hawarith was purchased. The court has ruled that the Bedouin vacate the six thousand dunams they had been holding and to return them to the owner – the JNF. The verdict was finalised as validated a few days ago. Ever since the morning our guys were prepared to move onto the ground. They are about three scores this time too. Waiting in the courtyard on the first conquered hill.” (See also chapter 7 about the Hawarith trial and verdict).

³⁸ Issue 8, 1934 (April 15, front page).

version of life in the diaspora – detached from the source of labour, from Mother-Earth. And such Zionism is perilous to the whole enterprise, to all the efforts invested in this land and to the aspirations of all generations.

The repeated maxim is this: There can be no Zionism if the Jews do not shift to manual labour.

A few months later another editorial titled **We will Follow the Call**³⁹ uses the same “*avoda zara*” concept:

Were we to abandon the workplaces in the Hebrew Moshava to foreign, cheap labour – we would abandon our brothers and sisters, our own destiny and our vocation in this land. Labour youth, loyal and committed, is called upon to be recruited to the front of Hebrew Labour.

On the occasion of May Day, the labour celebration of 1934, an editorial presents Zionism as a persecuted ideology due to its struggle for **Hebrew Labour**. At the same time the article states that there are Zionists who do not support this struggle. The headline **Zionism in Fetters**⁴⁰ refers to the trials of labour movement members who were indicted for participating in the picket lines that barred Arabs from entrance to workplaces. The police were alerted by Jewish orchard owners, whose own version of Zionism, and that of their political supporters, did not include the ideology of **Hebrew labour**. The editorial opens with a furious criticism of the Mandate government:

[...] the government spoke loud and clear: It wishes to have Arab labourers working in the Hebrew economy. With a tough hand, with cruel trials, this is how the government intends to achieve this goal.

Following is the reproof to the Jewish orchard owners:

This delights the alienated orchard-owner. His goal has been achieved, and the government stands by him. Why should he care about the trouble of the Jewish People and the suffering of Hebrew youth?

According to **BaMaaleh**'s editorial, “*Hebrew labour is the foundation of Zionism.*” Therefore:

The labourers of Kfar Sava, who stand in picket lines, are not merely waging their own war, it is that of Zionism. Not two labourers alone were sentenced to penal servitude – all of Zionism is in fetters.

³⁹ Issue 21, 1934 (October 26, front page).

⁴⁰ Issue 9, 1934 (May 1, Front page).

Bullying Arabs, the editorial piously asserts, does not bear any foul intentions regarding the local Arab population. The rhetorical flic-flak is impressive (see also chapters 3 and 7 below):

The government must be joking, speaking to us about the problems of the Arab labourer. The Hebrew labourers will find a common language with the Arab labourers.

The bottom line is clear: Not allowing Zionists to secure exclusiveness to Jewish labourers in Jewish plantations is persecution.

The Zionist labour movement was of course aghast when the Mandate government tried to legislate against picket-lines that target labourers on the base of their ethnicity. **BaMaaleh** expressed its hard feelings in another editorial in May of 1934 under the title “**Uproot it All**”⁴¹:

It is with a heavy hand that the government of the land intends to perform its malevolent design – to throttle Jewish Aliya and to deprive the Jewish labourer of work in the Hebrew economy as well. The lethal legislation against the Hebrew guard is being materialised. The best of our comrades sent to prison, to hard labour. It will not come as a surprise if by tomorrow or the day after we will face a fact: the Hebrew labourer, who is building and establishing the land, will be expelled from it, accused of the “crime” of his defence-battle for the right to exist, the right to work.

Not for the first (or last) time, the text is a bitter complaint of a would-be innocent, harmless victim. The strategy of self-victimisation (or playing the victim) is often instrumentalised by agents who find no other way to justify non-ethical methods⁴². While the accusations are directed at the government and its “*malevolent design*”, the internal opponents are also admonished, as a presumed “annihilation” seems to be looming:

Tyrannic forces are up against us, they desire to annihilate us. The civic Yishuv – the Farmers Association and those who are dragged along in its footsteps – warm up nicely by this devouring fire that they themselves have started.

The only salvation from this “*volcano under our feet*” is for youth “*to place themselves on the Zionist pyre*”. The call is for “*Total recruitment for the labourer and the labouring youth*” and the situation could not be described in a more horror-conjuring manner. This time, the call is also to the Jews in the diaspora to come and save the Yishuv from the supposed threat:

⁴¹ Issue 10, 1934 (May 18, front page).

⁴² This is a layman’s perspective, as this work does not deal with psychological phenomena.

Out of the blazes of our one and only home, the shriek of our suffering will be heard by all the dispersed people of Israel: Jewish portly men and a tyrannical government has risen upon us to annihilate us. Spread over all the roads, break all fences, come and join us in Aliya, the Wall of Israel is in danger!

A similar sentiment is expressed in the same issue in a long commentary signed Benjamin Maaravi⁴³ and titled **Under the Light of Looming Danger**⁴⁴. The article deals mainly with the link between Aliya quotas and the strategy of Hebrew labour (see chapter 4). The writer repeats the complaint that British government policy aims to “*limit Hebrew labour in the Hebrew farming economy and replace it with Arab labour*”.

The vigilant picket-line participants saw themselves as performing a prime national task. Some shared their experiences with the readers of **BaMaaleh**. An eye-witness piece signed “Chaim” – seemingly a young pioneer – titled **What News Tonight, Oh Guard**⁴⁵ is dedicated “*to the guard comrades in prison*”. The piece includes the image of a fellow-guard, a labourer who expresses grief watching “*alien hands take care of his trees*”. Referring to the fact that Arab labourers tend an orchard that “should have been” in Jewish hands, this is yet another direct allusion to the *avoda zara* (“foreign work”) concept of sacrilege and profanity. One month later a piece signed Avraham Avia, another vigil member, brings his experiences under the title **On Your Walls**⁴⁶ with a dedication “*to the prisoners of hope in the Hebrew Sharon*”. The piece describes picket members united in deep resentment at a Jewish orchard owner, who is supported by a British policeman and an Arab labourer. The writer quotes the scornful calls flung at the owner: “*Give us back our right to perform creative, Kosher, labour! Let us build the homeland!*” Using the evocative, Jewish religious term *kosher* for “purity” as opposed to “profanity” (see also chapter 6), the emphasis is on the fact that the business decision to employ Arabs hampers the national, “kosher” Jewish interest.

⁴³ The name Benjamin Maaravi (“Benjamin of the West”) does not appear in data bases of the period. The style and the first name allow us to guess that this might be another pseudonym of the editor who had signed many editorial pieces in **BaMaale**, using the initials B. H or the first name Benjamin. The editor of **BaMaaleh** since 1931 was Moshe Ben Ellul.

⁴⁴ Issue 10, 1934 (May 18, page 5).

⁴⁵ Issue 11, 1934 (June 5, page 4).

⁴⁶ Issue 14, 1934 (July 16, page 7).

The national interest here is linked to the desire to increase Jewish immigration quotas (see chapter 4), and a “*young female comrade*” is described as crossly hurling at the orchard owner:

“You are to be despised, you who usurp the right to Aliya from a tortured people in the diaspora!”

The final words in this piece repeat the national phraseology, peppered with biblical references:

[...] we stand guard over the dignity of the nation and the land, and our right to labour and to guard it – against those who “see the homeland through the hole in the Grusch⁴⁷”.

We guard, we wait, and we ask impatiently: “watchman, what of the night”⁴⁸ and we are not deterred, for scores of years. We stand guard, just as in the days of Nehemiah, over the layers of the wall which is being erected⁴⁹. And we are the first to climb the wall.

And we will certainly crack the blocked wall of the few who dispossess the Hebrew labourer!

While passionate and emotional, plainly the two eye-witness reports lack any mention of employment distress on the part of these strikers. The year is 1934, at the height of economic prosperity in Palestine. The demand for “*Work and bread for the hungry Jewish labourer*”⁵⁰ is not relevant, but the national outcry is as fervent as ever.

B. The Social reasoning: call for a radical change in the diasporic character of Jews

Over the pages of *BaMaaleh* a consistent call is being voiced presenting the ideology of Hebrew labour as vital for the necessary cultural-socio-economic transformation of Jewish society, part of the move to build the image of the “‘*new Jew*’ as an antithesis to the diasporic Jew” (Stier-Livni, 2013:193; Halamish, 2006:11; see also chapter 1). A blend of articles, stories, memoirs, and opinion pieces praises the positive value of manual labour as opposed to the traditional trades.

For the Assessment of our Cultural Mission⁵¹ appeared in *BaMaaleh*’s first brochure of 1926.

The editor, author and poet Avraham Broides (Signing A. Broides), asserts the need to break

⁴⁷ The Mandatory small coin had a hole in the middle.

⁴⁸ Isaiah 21:11.

⁴⁹ Nehemiah ch.3 and 12. The reference is somewhat confusing or mixed: The national wall which is being built must be preserved; a wall of opponents, built against the Hebrew Labourer, should be cracked.

⁵⁰ See above, editorial in issue 9, 1933.

⁵¹ Brochure no. 1, 1926, pages 10-13.

away from the “*petit-bourgeois milieu with its airy tradition*”, and “*to be reborn [...] to begin from scratch, to create the worker*” as part of “*the revolution in our lives and in the life of our nation*” that prescribes “*to live on one’s own labour and not at the expense of others*”.

Broides recognised the personal toll demanded of anyone undergoing such “*habitus*” transformation. In this piece he reminisced about his own difficulties in accepting the ideological decree to become a manual labourer (by the time of writing he must have been spending most of his time at a desk). He had, however, a clear notion of the necessary “*human material*⁵²” needed for the great Zionist enterprise (or, in Fuchs’s terminology, for sustaining the demands of the ‘realistic society’):

What we need are people who will live on the land, suffer over the land, carry their destiny together with the masses, and through these endeavours develop, be educated, thrive in the dark and climb up to the summit with them. And this means hardship. I realize this in my own flesh; much do I suffer. My self gets blurred, cruelly broken [...] and many things need to be given up.

In ***BaMaaleh***’s second brochure of 1927 it is N. Benari⁵³ who alludes – under the title **Up Aspiration Way**⁵⁴ - to the expected hardships while constructing the “*renewed human society*”:

not easy is the road of youth climbing up in aspiration and wishing to take part in the construction of renewed human society.

In the same issue “Yaakov”, in **Towards the Conference of the Eretz Israel Workers**⁵⁵ also reminds his readers that the “*pioneering elements*” (see chapter 1) must be -

[...] prepared for pioneering and sacrifices for their aspirations, for the fulfilment of which we have gathered in the land.

In the third brochure of ***BaMaaleh***, 1928, “Dov”’s article **On the goal and means of our cultural work**⁵⁶ (see above) combines the necessary national and the social change calling out with emphasis, as he sees a necessity -

[...] to increase the awareness of national and social liberation of the Hebrew labourer in the country. (Original emphasis).

⁵² “Human material” was a favourite expression of Zionist activists. In 1998 the book ***Good Human Material. Jews versus Zionists, 1945-1951*** was published by Yosef Gorodzinsky (Hed Arzi Publishing, Or Yehuda, Israel [heb])

⁵³ See ref.12 on page 47.

⁵⁴ Brochure no. 2, 1927, pages 4-6. The title is a pun: ***BaMaaleh*** means the way up.

⁵⁵ Brochure No. 2, 1927, pages 6-10.

⁵⁶ Brochure no. 3, 1928, pages 25 -27.

More than any other, the ideas of Aharon David Gordon, the “*the prophet of physical labour*” (Sternhell, 1995:50), were pivotal in the conviction of second Aliya settlers regarding the importance of changing the typical Jewish employment mode (see above). **BaMaaleh** introduced A.D. Gordon’s ideas on several occasions. **The late A.D. Gordon (Sketches from his life)**⁵⁷ was published in the third brochure of 1928, signed by Yosef Baratz⁵⁸ who emphasized Gordon’s “*deep regard for the work of the land*”, summing up:

[...] to the very last moment he was motivated by the consciousness and belief that physical work is Everyman’s principal vocation [...] a national consciousness and the revival of man must begin with physical labour.

On the 10th anniversary of Gordon’s death, **BaMaaleh** dedicated a full page to his memory, decorated with a large image of **Aharon David Gordon**⁵⁹. The quote underneath read:

“Our chief ideal must be labour. We have been diseased with work (I am not saying ‘we sinned’ because it is not our fault that we have so become) and we shall be cured by work. We must put labour at the centre of all our aspirations, base all our establishment on its foundations [...]”

Another section was devoted to Gordon’s relentless criticism of the traditional Jewish mode of living in the diaspora, a “contagion” [*nega*] in his sharp tongue:

“[...] Only if we turn the very concept of work into an ideal, or more precisely, only if we expose the ideal of work, will we be cured of the contagion that had stuck to us, and mend the rift that tears us away from nature. Labour is a grand human ideal. The ideal of the future.”

“**The Vision**”⁶⁰ is the title of a short memoir by author Miriam Singer⁶¹, member of Kibbutz Degania, describing the influence Gordon had on her and her comrades, the young pioneers:

*Then **He** entered our live, the old man of simplicity. The grandfather from another world. In his tough, blistered hands his own life became one great revolution. For*

⁵⁷ Brochure no.3, 1928, page 30.

⁵⁸ Yosef Baratz (1890 – 1968) arrived in Palestine in 1907, was a prominent member of the Second Aliya and one of the founders of Degania, the first Kibbutz. He was an activist and a prolific writer (Source: Tidhar).

⁵⁹ Issue 3, 1932 (February 5, page 5).

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ There is no entry about Miriam singer (1898 -1989) in either the Tidhar Encyclopaedia or the OSA Hebrew literature Lexicon, but details about her popular children’s books are in the [Hebrew Books website Simania](#) (Heb) and in the national library. She was born in Prague, then a part of the Austro-Hungarian empire, immigrated to Palestine in 1919 and became the first kindergarten teacher in Kibbutz Degania, where she lived for the rest of her life.

us he was a gateway from the chaos of desires to actual existence. He appeared as a prophet. On the track of our young lives, he pointed us to the ground, he pointed out the hard and steep road he took himself – the road of work itself. And because he had followed and fulfilled his own teaching, because he produced his teaching from his own life and made his teaching life itself – he saved us from lofty idealism and introduced us to a life of doing. Life of labour and creation.

The tough message was repeated vigorously by another central leader of the movement, Yitzhak Tabenkin. His speech at the conference of the Labour Youth in *Nana*⁶² was printed in both *BaMaaleh* and *MiBifnim*, the publication of the Kibbutz movement. In this speech, titled **On the Tenth Anniversary of the “Young Halutz” [Young pioneer] movement**⁶³, Tabenkin echoed the demand for a life change that includes even “brutality”, a path of no return, with strong emphasis on self-sacrifice:

There is a kind of brutality in permanence – by beginning to live as a labourer, one has no way out – unfarfallen [Yiddish: no failure]. Everything is a problem: love, family, health, everything – for a labourer who is a Kibbutz member: revolutionary content, new Zionism [...] to aspire to become a ploughing, quarrying, settler and immigrant – this is the image of the “Young Pioneer”.

Positive descriptions of the manual labourers are enhanced by disparaging and belittling descriptions of the middle class. In one of the very first issues, “A.K” signed **Memories of a boy**⁶⁴, describing a minor - hard working, badly treated - who is pleased to discover that he has the option to join the “club” of the Labour Youth and receive tuition. On the following page “Benjamin” (who seems to be one of the editors), in a piece titled **Youth**⁶⁵, describes

Round faces, pink cheeks, boys tall and wide-shouldered, many clearly fat. Their clothes are nice and well-ironed, the girls dolled up.

These youngsters are “easy going” and there is worse:

[...] indifference to all, no wish for deep pondering, cynicism to all that is grand and beautiful, a lack of tender feeling. The girls’ false sentimentality masks their mental emptiness. With the boys it is visible – they seem to be proud to be hollow, coarse.

⁶² Nana is the name used throughout the reviewed period to the kibbutz started by the Labour Youth that later became known as Na’an.

⁶³ Issue 9, 1934 (May 1, page 3).

⁶⁴ Issue 5, 1931 (May 1, page 8).

⁶⁵ Issue 5, 1931 (May 1, page 9).

By contrast, the writer offers the “*beauty of simplicity*” at the club of the Labour Youth:

[...] pale thin faces, shabby clothes. Not always fit to measure, not always clean. Crooked backs. Reading a newspaper, talking, playing. [...] Fragmented words, broken Hebrew. But those fragmented phrases come from the heart. They have the beauty of simplicity. Thinking is realistic and raw. It is deep and sensitive, so much tragedy in the straightforward naked discussion of hard, unjust reality.

This very page carries the (probably first) publication of the new hymn for the “Educational Home for the Children of Labourers in Tel Aviv” by the poet Zeev⁶⁶. **May Day**⁶⁷ goes as follows:

*Hands / One and Two / The hands work in the city / Work in the country / Quarry the mountain / Drive ships / By air and by sea / Building the world*⁶⁸

A similarly enthusiastic appraisal of the labourer’s image is included in a description titled **Lights**⁶⁹, about an exhibition by the “*Labouring Scouts*” (this was one of the first titles of the Labouring Youth movement, removed later as demanded by Tabenkin and Galili⁷⁰):

And so, simply – dressed to work and with a hammer in hand, by labour and in labour we have opened the exhibition [...] and had small consolation from the youth. We knew that we are escorted by a younger generation, coming from healthy foundations, and immersed in the land. Youth who know our pain and pour the remedy, who also see the comfort at the very beginning – in the clod of ploughed earth.

⁶⁶ Aaron Zeev (original name Aaron Zeev Weintraub) (1900 – 1968) was born in Sokolov, East Poland, and immigrated to Palestine in 1925, escaping the Polish army. He was one of the founders of the “Educational Home for Labourers’ Children” and later was delegated to post-WWII missions abroad by the Zionist movement. He was later the founding editor of Labour Movement’s children’s weekly and the Chief Educational officer of the IDF. He was laureated with the Israel Prize for education, and a national prize for children’s literature carries his name. (Source: OSU)

⁶⁷ Issue 5, 1931 (May 1, page 9).

⁶⁸ Decades later this hymn was still chanted in the “Educational Home for Labourers’ Children named after A.D. Gordon” in Tel Aviv, to a tune by composer Mordechai Ze’ira. None of the pupils (I was one, 1955-1963) had manual labourers for parents.

⁶⁹ Issue 7, 1931 (June 5, page 3).

⁷⁰ See Chapter 1.

Physical labour is often described as a national mission that is not connected to actual economic product but to social improvement and liberating the people from the “ugliness” of the diaspora. So writes David Ponsky⁷¹ in a May Day call **To the Labour Youth**⁷²:

[...] you are being educated to work, but your work is not merely “Labour for one’s living”. This is the work project of the nation, the building of the people on the basis of work, this is the labour that will build our people, free it from all ugliness and diaspora lifestyle and bring it to a communal socialist life with all other nations of the world in a renewed socialist world [...]

BaMaaleh often expresses concern about a potential retreat of young pioneers to a lifestyle and employment more accommodating than the hard, poorly remunerated work in farming. In an article titled **To the Village**⁷³ reporting a conference dedicated to the memory of Theodor Herzl, the writer, signing “B”, raises alarm against the tendency of immigrants “to settle in the city”, described as a “peril” to the “original idea of Zionism”. The desired “habitus” of a Jewish farm labourer seems undermined by urban perks:

The forces that motivate the Aliya to settle in the city – are growing stronger by the day. This omen foresees the peril that the original idea of Zionism will become forged and degenerated. It is a danger for us as a people. Because without a true return to the land a nation cannot be rooted in the country. It is a peril to us as Jewish people because the creation of a new Jewish type, working, free, creator of stable values – is only possible in the life of the village, close to nature. There is also danger to the social ideal, which is embodied in labour Zionism, as it is only from the village that new social forms have grown and will be growing. (Original emphasis).

The need to further promote and nurture the idea of **Hebrew Labour** is always at the centre of the educational mission. Under the title **Educational Questions in the Labour Youth movement (meeting of instructors in Shfeya, August 2-4)**⁷⁴, “Chaim” reports speeches and lectures by prominent personalities including Berl Katznelson and M. Braslavsky⁷⁵. A “program for the

⁷¹ I was not able to identify this name. Speculatively, it could be a pseudonym of David Ben Gurion, born in Plonsk. This is also indicated by the fact that the article is signed by an engraving – a sign of respect that only few earned in **BaMaaleh**. An article by Ben Gurion titled **Our Histadrut** appeared on the same page, and is included in the appendix.

⁷² Issue 9, 1932 (May 1, page 3).

⁷³ Issue 12, 1934 (June 15, page 9).

⁷⁴ Issue 16, 1934 (August 8, page 3).

⁷⁵ Moshe Braslavsky (1901 – 1961) was born in Romania, and arrived in Palestine with his family as a child in 1905. He joined Kibbutz Beit Alfa, where he exposed an antique mosaic. In 1930 he was sent as a delegate of *Ha’Halutz*

learning of the issue of Hebrew labour” was presented by Bracha Habas⁷⁶, he reports. Details of the program were not included in Chaim’s report, but there can be no doubt about the prime relevance of the subject to the target audience, instructors of the Labour Youth movement.

In the days of economic prosperity, the movement could no longer expect a workforce of Jewish labourers interested in earning a living in the orchards. This predicament pushed it to try and recruit volunteer city youth in the hope that this will preserve Hebrew exclusiveness in the harvesting of citrus fruit in the Sharon area. **We will Follow the Call**⁷⁷ is an editorial urging young readers:

*Our movement, as an implementing revolutionary labour youth movement, is called upon today to recruit all its forces and make them available for **Hebrew labour in the plantation economy during the harvest season.** (Original emphasis).*

The editorial goes further to hone the ideological message: Recruitment for harvest is fundamental to *“the content of our Zionist and socialist life.”* The explanation:

*[...] the same way that Zionism is impossible without the masses of the people, without land and with no Hebrew labour, there is no real Jewish socialism without **Hebrew Labour.** (Original emphasis).*

The urgent call to *“recruit”* for the harvest season is actually a testimony confirming that there were in fact no Hebrew labourers who needed these jobs or were interested in them.

BaMaaleh, however, insists: *“[...] our struggle for Hebrew labour is stubborn and loyal, and our readiness to stand at this front is a touchstone for the sincerity and readiness of our movement.”* It repeats the logic that to *“abandon” Hebrew Labour* means losing the *“vocation”* of the settling community, as well as risking the national mission of getting more Jewish immigrants to Eretz Israel (to be discussed in chapter 4):

to Poland and Germany. His literary work and research focused on the Labour Movement in Eretz Israel and he was a prolific contributor to the press and awarded the *“Histadrut Prize”* (Source: Tidhar).

⁷⁶ Bracha Habas-Hacohen (1900 -1968) was born in Lithuania and was brought to Palestine as a child with her family in 1907. She studied education and was a teacher, a writer and editor. She took part in the establishing of the Labour Youth and was later one of the founders of the children’s weekly *Davar Liladim*. (Source: Tidhar)

⁷⁷ Issue 21, 1934 (October 26, front page; see also above, ref.36)

Were we to abandon the workplaces in the Hebrew Moshava to foreign, cheap labour – we would abandon our brothers and sisters, our own destiny and our vocation in this land.

By early 1935 there was no longer room for illusion about Hebrew labourers interested in agricultural work in the Sharon region. In a short diary titled **In the labour Camp**⁷⁸, “Y.A.” reports the background of a decision to take a group of youth to a labour camp:

[...] In the midst of prosperity and the chase after high earnings, in days of bustle that silences any pioneering gleam in youth, the pioneer immigrant, while hundreds of labourers desert the Hebrew farming economy in the Moshava and return to the city [...]

The writer describes a settling of what seems to be a temporary group that started out in the *Moshava* Kfar Saba. He expresses hope and doubts about his own and his comrades’ ability to -

[...] swim against the current that has carried so many of us, will [people agree] to leave the city and come to the village even for a short time? Those doubts had a sound base [...]

He clearly sees the move as declarative and demonstrative. Even staying in the camp “*for a short time*” would be considered an achievement, as it would be a selfless response to the call of the movement:

It indicated the keenness of the comrades, who gave up their private needs, left parents and steady workplaces and responded to the call of the movement – protecting the positions of Hebrew labour in Kfar Saba.

The dedication had a clear declarative political aim: “*the will to let no negative criticism gain ground.*” The original declared goal was “*protecting the positions of Hebrew labour in Kfar Saba.*” The report indicates an internal organisation that eventually enabled the group to settle next to the *Moshava* in a Jewish-only settlement – Kibbutz *Ramat HaKovesh*⁷⁹ on lands that had been purchased for this purpose by the national institutions. This was the same strategy that followed and replaced the struggle for **Hebrew Labour** in other locations (see above, the case of Petah Tiqwa): The solution found was the establishing of a “*pure settlement*” colony (Shafir, 1996 [1989]: XII).

⁷⁸ Issue 1, 1935 (January 11, page 10).

⁷⁹ The name indicates the “conquest” of Hebrew Labour.

The move to the settling strategy-model is expressed in two editorials in *BaMaaleh's* next issue. Both deal with the demand to further subsidise the pioneering Jewish settlements: in *Nana (Has the time not come yet?*⁸⁰) as well as in *Ein Harod (With the Conclusion of the Camp for Instructors*⁸¹). An article signed Dr A. Mokdony⁸² links the ideology of **Hebrew Labour** with the demand for larger immigration quotas to Eretz Israel (see chapter 4). At this stage the struggle for Hebrew Labour is defined as a failure for the first time – as was later echoed in Anita Shapira's research (Shapira, 1977). Early in 1935, M. Naishtat⁸³, writing **On the Issue of the Labour Agreement**⁸⁴, lamented “*our horrible defeat in the struggle for Hebrew Labour*”. Naishtat repeated the aspiration to alter the *habitus* of the Jews in Eretz Israel and the need “*to start a new Jewish settlement here – not merely in a new site, but mainly with new content; a healthy settlement, completely different from the Jewish communities in the diaspora – economically, culturally, and socially,*” while admonishing against “*the peril of erasure of our new life in this land*”. The “*peril*” denotes the attempt (that failed eventually) to come to an agreement with the Revisionist party. Although this agreement did not touch directly on the issue of **Hebrew Labour**, its many opponents in the Labour Movement used this theme to torpedo it (see chapter 5).

- **Expressing criticism, disdain and anger at opponents of the Hebrew Labour maxim**

What seemed like a failure of the struggle – against the background of the economic boom and improved job opportunities – did not stop the persistence of the ideological preaching (namely: the propaganda/indoctrination campaign) for **Hebrew Labour**. Opponents were described as preferring life of non-pioneering comfort and welfare if they were would-be

⁸⁰ Issue 2, 1935 (January 25, page 2. As of 1935, the editorial section At The Hour was moved to page 2).

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Dr Mokdony was the editor of the Yiddish language newspaper Loddzar Morgenblat in the Polish city Lodz (mentioned in Tidhar, no specific entry).

⁸³ Malech (Eliezer Shimon) Naishtat (1895 -?) was born in Galicia, and immigrated to Palestine in 1926. Had positions in the financial institutions of the *Histadrut*, published many articles in the different press organs of the Labour Movement and in the Yiddish press abroad. After WWII he published a collection of memoirs about Warsaw's Jewry. (Source: Tidhar).

⁸⁴ Issue 4, 1935 (February 21, page 3)

workers; or as choosing “greed” by exploiting cheap indigenous Arab labour, if they were employers.

While harsh words were heaped upon the Mandate government and its efforts to declare the banning of Arab workers illegal, as well as upon Jewish capitalists and against Jewish communists, there was also clear resentment of the Jewish immigrants, veteran and new alike, who did not seem to accept the call to dedicate themselves to physical labour in agriculture. The editorial “**Uproot it All**”⁸⁵ in 1934 issued a call for

Total recruitment for the labourer and the labouring youth, recruiting in every sense of the word. For the adult and young standing on the scaffolding, for those in the workshop, sitting in an office and pupils at school – they are all recruited to the guard. To prison. To penal hard labour....

All were called to combat the “*Jewish portly men and a tyrannical government*”. In the same issue, in the article **Under the Light of Looming Danger**⁸⁶ (see above), Benjamin Maaravi bitterly reprimanded “*faulty pioneering*”. Maaravi was worried about low immigration quotas allotted to the Jewish community (see chapter 4), but noted that the British Mandate government was not the only body responsible for this situation:

Out of the shortage of labourers the position of Hebrew labour in the Moshava is particularly damaged. Much is also being caused by the faulty pioneering of many labourers, and in particular amongst the young immigrants, who should be first to answer the call for conquering labour and continuing the pioneering labourer’s tradition in agriculture.

He repeated the movement’s axiom:

[...] the aspiration for the healing of the economic structure of the Hebrew nation, basing it on labour and creativity in Eretz Israel in all branches of the national economy – that is the principal aspiration and the fundamental content of Zionism: resurrection of the nation in its homeland, on the ground.

He expressed great distress at the vision of Arab labourers working in the thriving Jewish urban centre:

[...] the entire Yishuv is not shocked and appalled at the sight of Arab labourers even penetrating Hebrew Tel Aviv, presently employing about 1500 cheap labourers [...]

Once again, “the youth” was called upon to remedy the situation:

⁸⁵ Issue 10, 1934 (May 18, front page. See also above).

⁸⁶ Issue 10, 1934 (May 18, page 5, see also above).

The organised labour movement at this time is facing the urgent need to establish a large movement of youth in this land, school graduates as well as labouring youth, who should leave the city, commit their lives to agricultural labour and become the guard of the Hebrew labour in the Moshava.

The chiding tone went up and the alarm was raised from the writer's desk: "*peril of annihilation looms*" over national efforts, therefore "*the call and the demand for the conquering of labour will have to be heard in all the gatherings of the youth.*"

A particularly sharp reprimand was expressed in an editorial shocked and appalled about the idea that Tel Aviv was about to celebrate the Purim holiday with a jovial parade (*Ad-Lo-Yada*). This presents the youth with a negative model, the editor scolded under the headline **Days of Merriment and Jubilation**⁸⁷. It is a call for an immediate discussion about negative aspects of Jewish life in Eretz Israel, too similar to bad habits of the diaspora (Stier-Livny, 2013:194). The writer particularly lamented the fact that the "*the desperate battle over Hebrew labour*" seemed neglected.

In the same issue, "Yerachmiel" reports **A Discussion in Tel Hai**⁸⁸ with young people listening to a lecture about the foundation of *HaShomer* [The guardsman] organisation. For the writer it offers an opportunity to make an unflattering comparison with the segment of present day non-ideologically-motivated youth (scolded for aspiring "*decent living*"):

[...] that urban youth, finding content for its boring life of visiting cinemas, dressing-up [...] They feel no pain while labour positions are pulled away one after the other from under our feet. For what interest have they in agricultural work that does not offer a decent living, what interest have they in pioneering enterprises and in collective life, as long as they have steady well-paid jobs in the city? [...] would this youth ever learn to fulfil the great role assigned to them, would they know how to conquer the land of the Galilee, to dry the swamps of the Hula and retrieve their past glory?

While "*faulty*" pioneers and uninterested youth caused the writers of **BaMaaleh** frustration and sorrow, the opponents of the very idea of **Hebrew Labour** were under even more serious fire. Threats were hurled at the communists (more of this in chapter 3). Particular hostility is shown to the "*alienated*" employers, whose capitalistic motive for preferring Arab workers was

⁸⁷ Issue 5, 1935 (March 15, front page)

⁸⁸ Issue 5, 1935 (March 15, page 3)

based on profit calculations. Eye-witness testimonies from the pickets of Hebrew labour in the orchards include uncomplimentary physical descriptions of members of the employer class, metonymic of the sector as a whole: the orchard owner riding his donkey with “*his fat face. His eyes deep in their sockets*”⁸⁹, or the wife of another owner, “*A well-powdered lady*”, with “*a satanic smile*”⁹⁰. Pejorative attributions are common. The satirical column **Crumbs** regularly employed the fable form to compare the farmers to unpleasant, inferior, disgusting or dangerous creatures: “*the snake*”⁹¹, “*the black crow*”⁹², “*the serpent*”⁹³, “*the dog*”⁹⁴ or the “*portly one*”⁹⁵. The head of the orchard-owners association, Moshe Smilansky, was often personally targeted in this column, for example under the title **Tartuffe**⁹⁶ – inspired by Moliere’s play featuring a priest who personifies hypocrisy (a Hebrew version of the play was at the time on a stage in Tel Aviv). Under the title **Peace at Home**⁹⁷, the column’s author, “Arie”, supplied another disdainful fable for the farmers and the government together. In a few words the fable describes a pact offered by a wolf to a dog whose job is to guard the sheep: attack the sheep together and share the bounty. Eventually the dog attacks the sheep but then the treacherous wolf breaks-up the agreement and eats both the dog and the sheep. In this parable the unfaithful dog represents the farmers, and the vicious wolf is the Mandate government. The Hebrew labourers and the expected immigrants are the sheep:

The Farmers’ Association has given a hand to the government in its combat against Aliya and Hebrew labour. The orchard owners are pleased with the peace that they have made with the government, but they do not realise where this “peace” will finally end them.

- **Descriptions of the physical and spiritual sublimations or difficulties while shifting to a life of farm hands**

The teaching of A. D. Gordon, “*the prophet of physical labour*” (Sternhell, 1995: 50) and his own vision of physical labour, preferably in agriculture (see above) is echoed over the pages of

⁸⁹ In **On Your Walls**, issue 14, 1934 (July 16, page 7).

⁹⁰ In **What News Tonight, Oh Guard** Issue 11, 1934 (June 5, page 4)

⁹¹ Issue 10, 1934 (May 18, page 3).

⁹² Issue 22, 1934 (November 9, page 3).

⁹³ Issue 11, 1934 (June 5, page 4).

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Issue 17-18, 1933 (September 20, page 3).

⁹⁶ Issue 3, 1934 (January 31, page 3).

⁹⁷ Issue 11, 1934 (June 5, page 4).

BaMaaleh throughout the period under review here. In a piece titled **Lines (impressions of a trip)**⁹⁸, “Shlomo” describes an idealised personal transformation “*of the New Man in our midst*”:

The rain was flogging the tin roof, and a gramophone was playing melodies by Schubert and Mozart. And the guy was listening, his whip under his arm. One stood and looked at him, listening to this symphony of the New Man in our midst, the boy who only yesterday left the Yeshiva and became a labouring man.

The ideological spirit and the expressions of “*pioneering passion*” (Neuman, 2009:31) found literary expressions, too. In **The Hill**⁹⁹ (a fragment from a story or from a novel), S. Richenstein¹⁰⁰ writes about physical and spiritual pleasure, excitement with some erotic connotations, of hard labour on a lovely spring day:

*Over the rocky fields, dozens of young men and women are scattered [...] they remove rocks [...] stones are placed in baskets and moved from hand to hand [...] a white dress drifts in the light breeze, exposing a fair knee that seems so much whiter than the tanned calf. A sleeve flies like the wing of a white bird, muscle rises and prepares under the tanned skin... Sounds of juicy laughter and birds humming mix together. [...]
[...] Uriel, beating so crazily with the hammer you would not last long, Uriel... And Uriel does not mind the sniggering remarks [...] It is this mighty orchestra that plays inside him with every blow of the hammer, with every cracked rock [...] [...]
[...] youngsters like Uriel cannot resist the mighty night for too long [...]*

The principle of **Hebrew Labour** is also hailed in the memorial articles eulogising the great contemporary writers and poets. Eulogising the poet Rachel under the title **The Sorrow of Rachel**¹⁰¹, writer Yosef Sah-Lavan¹⁰² finds it necessary to connect the beloved poet who died young in Tel Aviv - of tuberculosis - with the pioneering ideology of demanding farmwork:

[...] Her pioneering life track, her labour in the fields of the Jordan Valley and the shores of the Sea of Galilee – for her were a source of value-changing, of the

⁹⁸ Issue 7, 1935 (April 15, page 3)

⁹⁹ Issue 15, 1931 (September 11, page 7)

¹⁰⁰ Two novels by Shlomo Reichenstein (1902-1942) are in the National Library collection, as well as a play that he wrote. [His book *Reshit* was published in 1943 by Am Oved publishers](#), and [his collection of short stories was reviewed by the author Ehud Ben Ezer](#). Still his name is not on data bases of either Yishuv pioneers or Hebrew Literature.

¹⁰¹ Issue 8, 1935 (April 29, page 9)

¹⁰² There seems to be a typo in the name as it appeared in print. Writer Yosef Se-Lavan (Salawan) (1906 – 1986) was born in the Ukraine, and immigrated to Palestine in 1922. Joined the *Histadrut* and was active with Labour Youth. He worked as a teacher and as a popular lecturer on literature, published articles on literary subjects as well as books about writers Brenner, Agnon and others. (Source: Tidhar).

deepening of ideas and soul searching. [...] she was alien to self-congratulation and spiritual satisfaction [...] Rachel's tender poems were a true expression of the Jewish and human effort for renovating and correcting – in spite of the hardships awaiting the pioneers and labourers in this land. [...]

An article commemorating Y. H. Brenner by Eliezer Tsuperfin¹⁰³ also serves to identify this canonised author, murdered during the Jaffa riots of May 1921, as a supporter of the **Hebrew Labour** ideology. Under the title “**From Here and From Here**”¹⁰⁴ Tsuperfin quotes:

[...] one deep and content-rich paragraph in ‘From Here and from Here’¹⁰⁵ which goes: [...] “One must in any case work, as long as one breathes, some acts are sublime and some moments are superb. Long live Hebrew human labour!”

Tsuperfin’s analysis considers this story by Brenner

[...] a summary of the nation’s life [...] In his eyes the Knesset of Israel, with its roles of agents and mediators that it filled during the Middle Ages and in modern times, resembles a miserable prostitute in the port cities; [...] Mediating became second nature for us.

But then, the writer continues, Brenner:

[...] emphasises it clearly: ‘A Hebrew labourer – this includes everything. This makes it all come real. The prayer of Israel from now on must be: Let the Hebrew labourer be, multiply and fortify in all the branches of labour’¹⁰⁶.

N. Benari joined the pejorative view of the “*mediating*” practice, identified with Jewish penchant for trade. In his summarising article **With Ha’Halutz Conferences**¹⁰⁷, Benari, having followed several conferences in Poland and in Czechoslovakia as well as other centres in Eastern Europe, wrote:

we knew that this was the place to start. The idle Jewish young man has first of all to be driven out of his idleness, let him work and feel the taste of labour as a source of living.

¹⁰³ Eliezer Leoni Tsuperfin (1912-1974), writer and actor. In the catalogue of the National Library.

¹⁰⁴ Issue 9, 1935 (May 16, page 4). The title quotes one of Brenner’s important novels.

¹⁰⁵ ‘*From Here and from Here*’ [“MIKAN U-MI-KAN”] is the title of a Brenner’s novel.

¹⁰⁶ In September 2020 researcher Nurit Guvrin exposed an “undisclosed diary” by Nahum Shevach, describing Brenner’s failure to become an agricultural labourer. The title: [“The actual labour – he was disappointed with it, but not with the concept of labour”](#) (Haaretz/Hebrew 07.09.2020).

¹⁰⁷ Issue 9, 1935 (May 16, page 3)

Lamenting the lack of “*Those very attractive sparks*” of pioneering spirit in segments of the Jewish diaspora population, complaining about “*this fake fortification in the cities*”, Benari hoped that “*this fever*” might still be found – “*infected*” as he puts it - if only the correct education would be administered:

No, the pioneering training was not in vain! Even those who carried with them to Eretz Israel a very small number of “pioneering ideals” still had enough of them, so they are qualified to be infected with this fever here as well.

Testimonies of young labourers who published their impressions over the pages of **BaMaale** in the reviewed period confirm that there was sound ground for the concerns expressed by the more established writers. A tendency to get out of the demanding toll of farm labour must have been obvious. Young pioneers who landed from Eastern Europe experienced considerable physical as well as mental difficulties while trying to exchange their built-in “*habitus*” of middle-class literate agents for the “*habitus*” of proletarian farm hands. First-person reports display perfect acceptance of the labour-pioneering ideology and submission to its austere demands. Contributions published in **BaMaaleh** express the challenging demands of physical effort, combined with devotion to the mission, as well as anger at those who do not share the Hebrew labour ideology, mostly employers and orchard-owners. The short piece **I have worked**¹⁰⁸ by Yosef Hananni includes a bitter observation of a devout employer, who seems immersed in pious prayer while his employee agonises under the burden of labour:

*With bent back I worked over my hoe in the heat of the day under the burning rays of the sun. Gleaming drops of sweat fell one by one onto the dredged soil under the mirthful hoe. “He” stood all day to watch me, in case ...
[.] His work was to murmur to his God while I was working – I observed his figure moving back and forth and in my heart a voice called: come work with me, this is where God is...*

Yaakov Tamari describes boredom and monotony of hard physical labour in a short piece titled **Notes from the Workplace**¹⁰⁹:

I sank into my monotonous boring job, and look forward to the moment when I shall lie down and sleep without noticing anything around me.

¹⁰⁸ Issue 6, 1931 (May 21, page 6).

¹⁰⁹ Issue 15, 1931 (September 25, page 5).

Zvi Hagivati¹¹⁰, too, writes about his ordeal with physical labour, his soul “*torn*” by the harsh transition from life of learning into that of labour. The suffering, he announces, is his “offering”

To the Homeland¹¹¹:

[...] because my soul is torn. Is it easy to cut off old life, concepts immersed in mother's milk, changing lifestyle, language and culture? Is it easy to swap the life of a learner, life of spirituality, for hard physical labour? Days of working with the hoe. The supervisor scolds, and one is tired, the heart beats hard, one's knees fail, one stumbles, falls, rises again – hoe in hand [...] Is it not enough for you, you homeland?!

Bringing up memories from the past, senior writer Y. Bankover, too, reported a personal testimony of hardship in the first instalment of his series **Conquering Labour in the Hebrew Moshava¹¹²**.

The inhuman working conditions of the first labourers made this struggle even harder [...] hunger and stupidity all around. The workplace was infested with fever, hunger and alienation [...] all three – labour, fever and hunger were new to me, and most interesting.

Another veteran labourer turned prominent writer was poet Avraham Broides who, in the first brochure of **BaMaaleh**, reminisces about his past tough experience as part of his piece **For the Assessment of our Cultural Mission¹¹³**:

this means hardship. I realize this in my own flesh; much do I suffer. My self gets blurred, cruelly broken [...] and many things need to be given up.

A description of the “*subject's*” difficulty in the process of being made to adapt (Althusser, 1971 [1970]) is offered by “Avraham F.”, relating the “*distress*” under the title **Notes¹¹⁴**:

[...] One is seized by a kind of distress: one gets up in the morning, goes to the orchard and digs all day between the trees; or goes to a building site, mixes clay, puts one brick over another; and maybe one pumps water, or goes to an office, going today and again tomorrow and so day after day, and in a year, in five years – every day it is the same. And one knows: this is how it has to be, this is how it must be! And this is what we aspire for in the land: that every person will be

¹¹⁰ The only mention of Zvi Hagivati (ca. 1901 -1973) is in the catalogue of the National Library, and only a personal letter signed by him had been preserved in the archive. Another piece by him under the same title “To the Homeland” was printed in issue 17, 1932 (September 25, page 4).

¹¹¹ Issue 19, 1932 (October 14, page 4).

¹¹² Issue 3, 1934 (January 31, page 3).

¹¹³ Brochure no. 1 (1926, page 11).

¹¹⁴ Issue 7, 1935 (April 15, page 3)

working, doing any work whatsoever. All over the world people aspire for such a regime, a regime of labour, but it does not take the distress away.

Standing vigil in the pickets of **Hebrew labour** was another tough mission. Both “Chaim” and Avraham Avia, reporting personal experiences on pickets, describe personal suffering: “*The soul is weary with the heat and with idleness*” while “*sitting under the blazing sun*”¹¹⁵. One walks “*over the heavy boiling sands*” and there is a feeling of “*horror and [...] disgrace*”¹¹⁶. In **A Year in Ein Harod**¹¹⁷ Shlomo K., a young immigrant from Germany, remembers the first time he took the train to his future Kibbutz: “*for the first time I saw fields that had been cultivated by Hebrew labourers*” (he was witnessing fields of the well-protected, ethnically homogenised environment of a Kibbutz). He further relates the difficulties he and his comrades had to face while (successfully) replacing their former bourgeois *habitus* with the new form of life:

*The shift from a bourgeois home in the big city to the small village was difficult. One example: two months after our arrival I travelled to Tel Aviv to visit relatives and already did not want to return to Ein Harod. In my imagination I pictured life of comfort in the city. [...]
[...] It was hard to prove to us the need to work in the field. Most guys wanted to work in the workshops, and the girls – take care of children. [...] I was very scared of hard labour [...] but then this work particularly interested me [...] I studied the language [...] sometime later I travelled to Haifa and to Tel Aviv. This trip no longer made me wish to stay in the city. [...]*

Another entry on the same page carries the same ideological message. **In the Hula Valley**¹¹⁸ is written and illustrated by Arie Navon¹¹⁹. The young artist lovingly and somewhat mockingly describes the settlers near the marshy lake, fishing and suffering from the mud and mosquitoes, and uses this opportunity to scoff at the spoilt city dwellers:

Indeed, over there in Tel Aviv one sits in cafes, running sophisticated discussions, watching Greta Garbo and “The Guys” at the cinema, and here – the guys work quietly and modestly, putting down the foundations for a great endeavour that will become a source of life for hundreds of thousands of persons.

¹¹⁵ In What News Tonight, Oh Guard, Issue 11, 1934 (June 5, page 4).

¹¹⁶ In On your Walls, Issue 14, 1934 (July 16 page 7).

¹¹⁷ Issue 5, 1935 (March 15 page 8).

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Artist Arie Navon (1909 – 1996) was born in the Ukraine, and immigrated to Palestine with his family in 1920 (aged 11). He is considered the first cartoonist in the Hebrew *Yishuv*, a comics artist, designer of theatre sets, illustrator of books. In 1996 he was laureated with Israel Arts Award. (Source: Tidhar & WorldCat.org).

The front page of another issue in 1935 deals with the problems and difficulties of mastering a highly appreciated new trade for **Hebrew labour**: shepherding. Towards an upcoming conference of '**Ha'Poel' and the Youth of the Labouring Eretz Israel**¹²⁰ the would-be shepherds report:

[...] about a long and difficult road. About doubts and attempts amidst Bedouin tents. Wandering day and night with the Arab shepherds – learning the trade, understanding the sheep, becoming a shepherd. So many were the failures, but in spite of it all – years have gone by, the tanned faces became deeply wrinkled, and they, the veterans, are now prepared to start all over again, to offer a hand to Labour Youth in order to establish a group of Hebrew shepherds. [...] This is our homeland, this is the old motherland. We must go back to it and give it life. We must go back and become Hebrew shepherds.

There seems to be a questionable ideological basis for this desire to produce a new branch of Hebrew labour while learning the trade from the very people – “*Arab shepherds*” – who eventually are to be banished or at least limited in their freedom to exercise it (see chapter 7). There is also another aspect of this specific romantic vision. Idealizing harsh labour associated with land, ploughing, or shepherding in the new homeland refers exclusively to that segment of the Jewish population that is expected to perform a radical adjustment in their lifestyle upon immigrating to Eretz Israel. By comparison, local Jews who make a living performing the same jobs are truly pitied. So, for example, is **Obadiah the Shepherd**¹²¹ who takes care of three cows of the experimental farm Bitania¹²². Obadiah is a local orphan whose parents have emigrated from Turkestan. The writer M. Ben-Shmuel deeply sympathises with the sad predicament of the child:

I continued ploughing heavy hearted. The chance meeting made me think about the fate of Obadiah and his mates, those who must enter the hardships of life at early childhood, when they are not yet equipped with the most basic things. Are we to accept this horrible destiny?

As will be shown in chapter 8, the hammer and the hoe are not always portrayed as a source of great joy, generating a feeling of contentment and achievement, but as a “*horrible destiny*”

¹²⁰ Issue 7, 1935 (April 15, front page)

¹²¹ Issue 5, 1932 (March 4, page 7).

¹²² Bitania, the first settlement of *Ha-Shomer Ha-Tzair* was originally situated near the Sea of Galilee but already fell apart in 1921, 11 years before this entry. The site was later an experimental agricultural farm. See: Michaeli, Ben Zion. *The Agricultural Farms, first National Settlement in Eretz Israel*, Milo Publishers 1977 (Heb).

that one wishes to avoid. The difference, easy to trace, lies in the ethnicity of the labourers. No bombastic phraseology praises the harsh proletarian ordeal of Yemenite and other Mizrahi Jews who are supposedly part of the Jewish settler community.

Conclusions from Chapter 2

The many texts surveyed in this chapter display *BaMaaleh*'s commitment to preach the ideology of **Hebrew Labour**, presented as a core Zionist principle. Writers and major political activists were adamant in asserting that Labour Zionism is the only "correct" form of Zionism. **Hebrew Labour** was conceived as the chief instrument for settling the land and making this settlement purely Jewish. Concurrently, it promoted the idea of **Hebrew Labour** as vital to the changed character of the Jewish nation, altering its "faulty" diasporic modes of employment. Achieving both goals – the settlement and alteration of character - imposed a ban on Arab Labour throughout the settlers' economy, in favour of **Hebrew Labour**. The highly emotive texts in *BaMaaleh* expose the realisation that the **Hebrew Labour** ideology was not fully accepted by all segments of the Jewish population of the land at that time. The writers of *BaMaaleh* needed to relate to target audiences, whose support of the principle of **Hebrew Labour** did not appear fully guaranteed: potential labourers – new immigrants, veteran residents and labouring youth; employers – orchard owners, industrialists and contractors; Zionist institutions (expected to act in favour of immigration and to finance the settlement enterprise), political opponents from the right and from the left; and the British Mandate government.

In the period under consideration Labour Zionism was still struggling to gain prominence in the settlers' community. Its call for ethnic purity in the workplace must have been popular as a "national" notion but faulty in practice. As the following chapters will show, the popularity of the notion of ethnic purity was based mainly on two sound traditions: classic settler colonialism and religious teaching. Labour Zionism branded itself as a socialist ideology, but seems to have ascended to the hegemony of the Jewish Yishuv in Palestine mainly due to the success of the pious rhetoric of ethnic purity, in which the call for **Hebrew Labour** was a central layer.

Chapter 3

Socialist ideology in *BaMaaleh* and the Hebrew labour concept

Loyalty to Socialist ideas, working class solidarity and adherence to universality, identified with socialist and Marxist teaching, were intensively expressed over the pages of *BaMaaleh* during the years under consideration in this work. Labour Zionism adopted “constructive socialism” (Gorney, 1985: 78, 164; Sterhell, 1995: 35, 40, 302) and while adherence to the national fundamental ethos was always emphasised, insistence on purely socialist ideology was equally demonstrated and contradictions fully ignored. Almost a century before “*an alien framework of reference that gives the lie to an entirely false ‘universalism’*” (Naser-Najjab, 2020:312) was forced into the educational system in occupied Palestine, such framework was methodically built into the educational narrative of the Jewish settler community.

National and patriotic ideas were not uncommon among European labour unionists and intellectuals at the time (Sterhell, 1995, 16). Still, the basic Socialist-Marxist teachings that were repeated over the pages of *BaMaaleh* were incompatible with the periodical’s insistence on solidarity with Jewish labourers alone.

Extensive discussions over the theories and personal history of Karl Marx, as well as articles about other socialist thinkers, were regularly published. Loyalty to Social Democracy was also manifested in detailed reports about the world conferences of the Socialist International, compiled by delegates of Labour Zionism. *BaMaaleh* regularly protested against aspects of the regime in the Soviet Union, mainly against the persecution of Zionists and socialists, criticising the anti-democratic system while keeping a friendly tone for the “masses”. Harsh criticism was lashed out at Jewish political groups in Palestine and in Europe who did not identify and often criticised Labour Zionist strategies, in particular the concept of **Hebrew Labour**, the attitude towards Arab labourers and the efforts to remove them from labour positions in the Hebrew economy under the aegis of the **Hebrew Labour** principle.

Most texts related to these subjects include a mixture of issues and emphasise more than one theme. In this chapter an attempt is made to isolate some major themes and to highlight the core ideology and the dominant messages that were transmitted to the readers of *BaMaaleh* in the years 1926 -1935. They are, mainly:

- A. General commitment to socialist and Marxist notions
 - Detailed teachings about Marx and Marxism
 - Universal Socialism and socialist role-models
 - Highlighting Socialist international symbols: the red flag, the labourers' hymn
- B. The Zionist version of socialism
 - The “two flags” model
 - Socialist Zionism as an instrument against assimilation
 - The Borochof model
- C. Socialist Zionism and Arab Palestinians
 - Socialist aspirations for world peace
 - Aspirations for Peace with the Arabs of the land
 - The insistence on separate national organisations
- D. Socialism in the fight against political opponents
 - Against Communist “venom” and other undesirables on the left
 - In the battle with Revisionism and capitalists/the property owners
- E. Towards “A new Jewish world” in socialism
- F. Self-Criticism, inward-looking critique

A. General commitment to socialist and Marxist notions

May Day offered a suitable occasion for highlighting socialist and Marxist commitments. Issue 5 of the year 1931 is the first May Day issue since the initiation of *BaMaaleh* as a bi-weekly. Accordingly, a whole issue was dedicated to the traditional and international “Feast of Labour”. The front page (see visual) carried a proclamation titled **May Day**¹ and signed by the secretariat of the Labour Youth, vowing: “[...] we will march, rows tight, for the redemption of the Nation and Humanity [...]”.



¹ Issue 5, 1931, May 1, front page.

Page 3 of that issue, decorated with a large portrait of Karl Marx, carried a review of the **First International** (of the Labour Federation in 1865). The writer “Dekel”² emphasised the importance of the conference’s focus on “*international organisational liaisons*” and its practical adoption of the *Communist Manifesto*.

[...] within the proletariat it was the birth of scientific socialism that had laid the historic and ideological foundations for internationalism, and this is where it was born as a true road map to the future of the working class. Earlier the Communist Manifesto had discussed international socialism and indicated the target: “Workers of all countries unite!” Socialist internationalism has carried the flame since the “Communist Manifesto” and ignited the united working-class all over the world.

- **Detailed teachings about Marx and Marxism**

Marxism, and the actual person of Karl Marx, received much respected attention over the pages of **BaMaaleh** in the period under consideration. On the 50th anniversary of his death, in 1933, a portrait of **Karl Marx**³ and some of his quotes linking the concepts of class and of nation appeared on the front page. Page 3 of the same issue started a series of 8 instalments titled **Marxism as a Proletarian Life Theory**⁴ by Max Adler⁵ (no mention of translator). It is a model teaching of universal workers solidarity, opening with an interpretation of Marx’s role as a thinker and activist, with the help of Friedrich Engels’s writings.

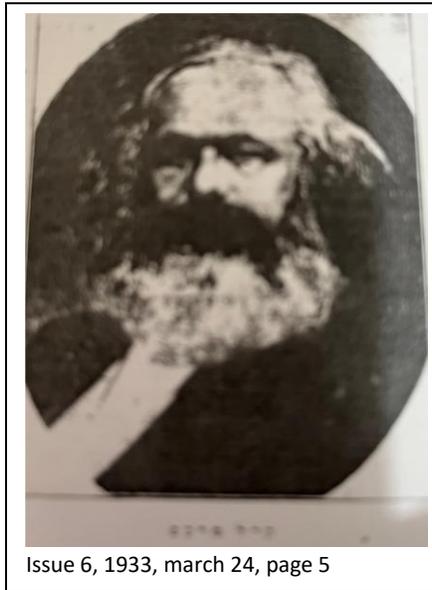
² This may be David Kala’y (Gold) (1898 -1948). Born in Skotchin, Poland, he came to Palestine in 1920 and was a member of Davar, the *Histadrut* daily. He wrote about socialist thinkers and translated their writings, often signing “Dekel” (source: Tidhar).

³ Issue 6, 1933, March 24, front page.

⁴ First of 6 instalment, issue 6, 1933 March 24, page 3.

⁵ Max Adler (1873 – 1937) was an influential central European Marxist philosopher.

Another grand series of Marx-related articles started on the same issue. **Karl Marx (Biographical Notes)**⁶ signed Dekel, begins with a detailed review of the philosopher's Jewish origins (“A



Issue 6, 1933, march 24, page 5

Jewish ‘prodigy’”), decorated with another image (see here). Marx’s own perspectives on the “*Jewish Question*” (1844) were not mentioned. The second instalment of the **Biographical Notes**⁷ related the principles of “*Scientific Socialism*” and went on to describe Marx’s contributions to the disciplines of philosophy, economics and public writings, including the Communist Manifesto, summing up:

[...] In short and precise phrases Marx clears up the fundamentals of the economic and political relations of the present regime and declares the historic role of the Working Class: to take over the political government and change the production modes, in order to create a socialist society. For this goal “Workers of all Nations Unite”.

Two years later **Friedrich Engels**⁸, too, received an extensive biographical sketch, and was praised for his support of -

[...] the one most suffering and in most urgent need of liberating society from its chains – the working class. [...] The ideal of the future is the ideal of the future class – the proletariat. And this is how socialism was turned from a utopia into a science. This is the socialism that dominates the labour movement to this very day.

About the class struggle⁹ is a long quote from a speech by Max Adler that was given on the 50th anniversary memorial of Marx¹⁰. **The Victory for Marxism**¹¹ by “Uri” that followed in the same festive issue expressed hopes:

Not far is the day when the unemployed, the oppressed millions will wake up and uproot black Fascism with terrific force.

⁶ First of two parts, issue 6, 1933, March 24, page 5.

⁷ Issue 8, 1933, May 1. Page 4.

⁸ Issue 19, 1935, Oct 11, page 5; it is signed S. Parii and credited as reprint from **IGERET** socialist publication.

⁹ Issue 6, 1933, March 24, page 4.

¹⁰ No mention of venue or date or translation.

¹¹ Issue 6, 1933, March 24, page 5.

- **Universal Socialism and socialist role-models**

BaMaaleh often displayed solidarity with international (European) Socialist causes. The memory of prominent Socialist leaders, repeatedly murdered by fascists, was cherished and their legacy incorporated into the educational process for the benefit of the young Zionist socialists.

An article titled **Jean Jaurès**¹² signed by A. S. Juris¹³ carried a eulogy for the French socialist leader who was also a committed internationalist. Described as “*One of those members of the human race who will never be forgotten*” the writer describes what he sees as Jaurès’s commitment to the combination of socialism and patriotism:

[...] He was enthusiastic about the International, considering it the instrument for World Peace. [...] Even though Jaurès was an enthusiastic Marx disciple, he brought to his own socialism the flame of French excitement [quoting Jaurès:] “a lot of Patriotism brings the International closer”.

The **Death of Matteotti**¹⁴ is a eulogy for the Italian activist, signed D.W., who tells the young readers:

“With his last breath he called ‘Long live socialism!’ [...] The memory of Matteotti is deeply engraved in the heart of the worlds’ proletariat”.

Yet another victim of murder by fascists is Karl Liebknecht. To commemorate the 15th Memorial Day to Liebknecht’s murder in Germany together with Rosa Luxemburg, **Karl Liebknecht and the Youth**¹⁵ was published. The writer, signing R.T., focused on Liebknecht’s teaching which is relevant to young people, and on “*fragmented ideas of Liebknecht about the proletarian youth movement that he made a special effort to groom.*” He quoted Liebknecht’s views on the link between militarism and education (in Germany):

¹² Issue 12 of 1931 (August 14, page 3).

¹³ Avraham Shmuel Juris (1890 – 1971) was a Zionist writer, lawyer and activist born in Warsaw (original name Kuperman). He studied law in Vienna and used to sign articles “Dr. Juris” (Jurist). He immigrated to Palestine in 1924 and wrote for Hebrew publications as well as for publications in other languages, and was in charge of the *Histadrut*’s cultural programs in Tel Aviv (Source: Tidhar).

¹⁴ Issue 22, 1933, Nov. 24, page 2.

¹⁵ Issue 2, 1934, January 19, page 5.

“Naked militarism and utilitarianism is what controls the educational system here” [...] Education today aims to turn people into war machines when they are still of school age”

Powerful solidarity with other nations’ labourers was often expressed. A special proclamation by the **Labour Youth**¹⁶ was dedicated to the attempted (and violently crushed) revolution of the Austrian socialists:

*To the struggle for freedom of Vienna’s labourers
[...] Long live labouring Vienna!
Long live the World’s Labour Movement!*

A year later, **Red Vienna Will Rise Up Again!**¹⁷ was a front-page emotional piece by “Arie”, vowing never to forget the crushed Austrian revolutionaries:

[...] Who can describe the greatness of their heart, the purity of their ways and the virtue of the souls of the martyrs of Vienna’s labourers? [...] the world had never known a battle like the battle of the Austrian Labourers! [...] [...] The spirit of red Vienna, the spirit of its heroes, its sons, has not been overpowered! [...] because Red Vienna will rise again, liberty and freedom will rise again, socialism will again rise and triumph! [original emphasis].

Expressions of fervent hope for a global future of social justice for all labourers were also present when local issues were discussed. **Unemployed Woman**¹⁸ [signed “a comrade”] is a story in the first person, describing financial and food insecurity with sleepless nights, summing up with a promise of victory of the working class:

[...] the world is full of brothers and sisters suffering just like me, they also think about me. And there is hope, it is hope that keeps us all alive: the day will come soon when another regime will be established, the rule of justice. By then, brothers, we will be studying, because we are still young, and we will not go out to work in our early childhood. And you brothers, vendors of shoelaces, will no longer scream in the streets in the middle of the night...

- **Highlighting Socialist international symbols: the red flag, the labourers’ hymn**

Symbols of the international workers’ movement seemed to have been cherished and highlighted at every opportunity.

¹⁶ Issue 4, 1934, Feb. 25, page 9.

¹⁷ Issue 3, 1935, Feb. 8, front page.

¹⁸ Issue 4, 1935 (Feb. 22, page 11).

The Flag:

There is a particular sensitivity to the flag of the labour movements worldwide – the red flag. Editorials chastised the animosity towards this flag, expressed by the right-wing Zionist political movements. **Threatening with boycott**¹⁹ is an angry response to a threat of the “National Youth” (BEITAR) to boycott a children’s parade if this flag was to be carried. **BaMaaleh** retorts:

We are not deterred by this threat; we will not give up our flag in order to satisfy the “national” ambition of the “national” youth. [...] there is one road only for the Jewish youth in this land – the Road of Labour [...] together with us you will proudly carry our flag high – the Flag of Labour.

The controversy was ignited again a few weeks later. Another editorial titled **The Flag of Labour**²⁰ presented the ideology of class equality:

This flag, which so horrifies them, is dear to us. It represents our aspiration for a life of justice and equality in our land as well as in the whole world.

Labour Nationalism is emphasised:

The “National Youth” make themselves a laughingstock arguing against us in the name of “nationality”. Do they really believe that people who live on other people’s toil, usurping and exploiting workers – are nationalist? Are they those building a homeland for the nation?

The controversy over the red flag was a recurring feature. An editorial titled **In the Name of ‘Pure Nationalism’**²¹ related the banning of the Labouring Youth School’s pupils from a celebratory tree-planting at the traditional tree celebration (“TU BISHVAT”). The opponents of the red flag were condemned with the most powerful pejorative:

[...] such a Hitlerite decree in our own schools in Eretz Israel? [...] Do not believe a “nationalism” that fights against the Hebrew Labourer and his Histadrut. This is fake nationalism that bears no truth. Raise the pure Labour Flag high and proud!

Singing the “International”

¹⁹ Issue 20, 1931 (December 4, front page).

²⁰ Issue 3, 1932 (February 5, front page).

²¹ Issue 4, 1934, Feb. 15, front page

Few indications of loyalty to internationalism and “universal values” could be more powerful than the workers’ hymn “*The International*”, sung by a crowd that identifies with class solidarity that presumably transcends national borders. **BaMaaleh** often made a point of reporting a powerful sing-along of the **International** in public gatherings of the Labouring Youth and of other *Histadrut* organisations. Some examples: **In the conference of BAHAROUT**²²; **In a youth meeting**²³; **The Youth Assembly in Tel Aviv**²⁴; **The Assemblies in Jerusalem**²⁵; **The Fifth Congress of the Socialist International Youth in Copenhagen**²⁶. **The nightingale and the crow**²⁷, a political fable by “Arie”, dealt derisively with complaints of right-wing activists and publicists who “*found fault with the singing of the International. This song rasps in their ears*”. In the fable the opponents were compared to a “*crow*” complaining about the nightingale song. In the fable the “*king of the birds*” rejects the crow’s complaint:

Your ears have been accustomed to hearing the croaking of frogs and the snorting of pigs, so how will you grasp the singing of the nightingale?”

And the moral is: “*those who got accustomed to the songs of slavery, songs of praises*²⁸ – *how might they understand the singing of labour and freedom?*”

B. The Zionist version of Socialism

Yitzhak Tabenkin, one of the most prominent leaders of Labour Zionism, credited the second Aliya’s settlers with introducing socialist ideology in its Zionist version. In **On the Tenth Anniversary of the “Young Halutz”** [Young pioneer] **movement**²⁹ (text of his speech in a conference), included in one of the festive May Day issues of **BaMaaleh**, Tabenkin reminded his readers that it was before WWI that “*the foundations [...] were laid for the enterprise*”. The movement, according to him, is to be evaluated by “*its value for the future, its revolutionary*

²² issue 20, 1933, Oct. 24, page 9

²³ issue 23, 1933, Dec. 24, page 4

²⁴ issue 5, 1934, Feb.25, page 9

²⁵ issue 5, 1934, Feb.25, page 9

²⁶ issue 17-18, 1935, Sept. 27, page 2

²⁷ Issue 22, 1934, Nov. 9, page 3.

²⁸ The Hebrew text uses “*Ma Yofith*” - a pejorative attribute for a Jew who performed Jewish religious prayers to entertain powerful gentiles who seemed to have liked this particular tune.

²⁹ Issue 9, 1934, May 1, page 3. A footnote points out that the text was already published by another Labour publication, “*Mibifnim*” [From the inside], indicating its importance as a canonised, authorised document.

value, its value for the revolution". While making clear that the Zionist version of socialism is a national one – *"in opposition to the assimilating socialist movement,"* Tabenkin spoke as a true believer in its revolutionary potential:

[...] this revolution that we carry with us – a labour-society with no exploitation – will only be realised through a total change of life: moral, political, economic, educational change.

He further elaborated:

What does the Socialist Party aspire? – political victories for socialism. What does the trade union aspire? The improvement of the labourer's working conditions, for socialism.

His conclusion:

"We have an ideal: Eretz Israel. Socialist, with most Jews in it. But not merely farms, villages, but the human living in it and his values."

The *"human living"* in this settler's socialist haven must, this is made clear, be Jewish. Other *"humans"* simply are not recognised, in the best tradition of settler-colonialist societies elsewhere.

A similar message was included in David Ponsky's emotional **To the Labour Youth**³⁰ on the occasion of an earlier May Day. The work they do, he tells the youth,

[...] is the labour that will build our people, free it from all ugliness and diaspora lifestyle and bring it to a communal socialist life with all other nations of the world in a renewed socialist world [...]

Typically, this writer's *"renewed socialist world"* seems to be relevant exclusively to *"our people"*, meaning the settlers' group only. The *"all other nations"* did not include the natives of the land.

Secure and convinced that the path chosen by the Zionist Socialist settlement is appropriate for any international gathering, members were appalled to discover that other socialist Jews did not approve of it. In a report about **The Fourth Congress of the Socialist International**³¹ which he attended as a delegate, Y. Gurevitz³², writing about expectations that the organisation

³⁰ Issue 9, 1932, May 1, page 3

³¹ Issue 13, 1931, August 28 page 3

³² Yitzhak Gurevitz (1898 - 1982) was born in the Kiev area (then Russia), and received a traditional Jewish as well as Russian education. Was a member of the Socialist-Zionist party and was arrested for this activity in Leningrad in 1925. Following his sentence of expulsion, he immigrated to Palestine in 1927. Was an educator as well as activist

might supply “a clear roadmap for the redemption of tortured humanity”, was disturbed by the positions of the Jewish-Socialist party from Poland that attacked Socialist Zionism:

The “Bund”, upon entering the International, hooked up with the left-wing opposition of the independent Workers Party in England. Even before setting foot in the congress, its arrows were prepared against Zionism in general and against Socialist Zionism in particular, in a pamphlet it distributed to all the delegates.

A swift “Hasbara” action materialised immediately, in the form of a “counter-pamphlet”, and the delegate Gureviz was pleased to report that the Socialist-Zionist movement had already become strong and influential in the “International”:

Our comrades in the congress responded to the “Bund” by a counter-pamphlet. The “Bund” is not a strong or influential power in Socialism. Also, the balance of power in the congress between them and us was not in their favour (2:5). Still, we face a battle as the “Bund” appears on the same stage as we do: It can attract all Zion-haters in international socialism. The first attempt was made, the attack waged. But our own power, steadily increasing with the growth of labouring Eretz Israel will benefit us in this war. The strength of the Eretz Israel Workers Party and the Zionist-Socialist movement, uniting all the forces of Labour Zionism, will increase our power and our influence at the International.

- **The “two flags” model**

The idea of an ever-lasting link between socialism and nationality is further promoted in an article by the canonised writer and poet Avigdor Ha’me’iri³³. **The ingenious innovation**³⁴ by Ha’meiri is an ironic title (irony and sarcasm were frequent polemic tools). The poet, formerly a Revisionist, relates the circumstances of his decision to terminate his membership in the Revisionist Movement and join the Labour Movement. He mocks Revisionist teaching: “*Is the socialist idea really a danger to the national idea?*” He then denounced “*the new ‘Revisionist’ move, mixing ideas and announcing that Socialism is the enemy of nationalism*”, explaining:

in MAPAI, a delegate of the Zionist 17th congress in Basel in 1931 as well as to the Fourth Socialist International in Vienna (Source: Tidhar).

³³ Avigdor Hame’iri (1890 – 1970) was born in Hungary. He was traditionally educated and became an established writer and publicist in both Hebrew and Hungarian before World War I. He was drafted by the Hungarian army, made an officer then became a prisoner of war by the Russians and later moved to Odessa, from where he immigrated to Palestine with a group of Hebrew writers in 1921. In Eretz Israel he wrote literary and journalistic works and was also active in theatre life. He was laureated with the Israel Prize for literature in 1968 (Source: OSU).

³⁴ Issue 19, 1933 (October 4, page 3).

As for me, I have not turned my back on the Revisionist party overnight. Four full years I have been watching, observing, biting my lips while seeing the ethical and logical deterioration in this camp [...].

For this new believer in Labour socialism, it is important to have “two flags [...] the blue and white flag and the red flag”. He considers the Revisionists’ rejection of the red flag as offering a version of “Judaism that lacks any morality”.

His conclusion was to reject the Revisionist teaching that does not embrace the two flags system: “We must meet these new-found ethics with perfect disgust, with all our Jewish-moral abhorrence.”

- **Socialist Zionism as an instrument against assimilation**

On May Day³⁵, signed by Arie L.³⁶, called for “solidarity and [...] peace between the labourers of the West and the East.” Frustrated over the fact that the global workers’ revolution had not yet occurred, criticising the totalitarian nature of both the Soviet and the Italian Communist parties, Arie L. focused on the harsh reality of a Jewish labourer, offering yet another testimony of the direct link assumed between “assimilation and national annihilation”:

A Jewish labourer, if he is a Jew whose heart goes out to Zion - is persecuted and exiled to penal colonies. If he is a Jew with no feelings for Zion – he is bound for a life of assimilation and national annihilation.

Resisting doubts and confusion, the writer is pleased with the Hebrew version of socialism:

*If in the past we used to celebrate and join the workers of the world in theory, today we do it as an inseparable part of the workers’ collective, tied and bound to his own territory.
In our Hebrew Socialist action for national redemption and human, social liberation, we extend a hand and build a bridge for fraternity, for solidarity and for peace between the labourers of the West and the East.*

³⁵ Issue 9, 1932 (May 1 page 3).

³⁶ Possibly Arie Lifshitz (1901-1986). Born in Cracow, Poland, he immigrated to Palestine in 1920, worked for the Histadrut’s Youth department and published articles and opinion pieces in an assortment of publications, including **BaMaaleh**. (source: Tidhar and OSU).

A series of articles in issues 9, 11 and 12 of 1932 commemorated the Jewish-Russian socialist activist **Morris Wintschewski**³⁷. The writer, Yehuda Raznicenco³⁸, described two different trends among Jewish socialists in Russia: those who had opted for an assimilatory “Russification”, “*openly and consciously denying Judaism*”, and those who had embraced a “*Jewish-traditional*” model. He counted two leaders who “*stand out*” as integrators of socialism and Judaism:

*A. S. Lieberman, who was named the “Father of Hebrew Socialism”, and
Morris Wintschewski, who was crowned the “Grandfather of Jewish Socialism”.*

According to the article, Wintschewski (1856 -1932)³⁹ was arrested and persecuted in Germany and Austria, eventually moved to France and settled in England, and then in 1894, already much respected, arrived in the US and joined the Communist party, but the writer was convinced that “*his joining remained platonic*”. The series emphasised Wintschewski’s loyalty to Jewish tradition and language, summing up: “*The ‘Grandfather of Jewish Socialism’ is now his name and his memory in the annals of the Jewish Labour Movement.*” Quotes from his writings clarify that the socialist Wintschewski was never a Zionist, even if his adherence to his Jewish origins indicates his belief in Jewish nationalism. (For more about the link between the national and religious sentiment in Labour Zionism as expressed in **BaMaaleh** see chapter 6).

- **The Borochov model**

³⁷ Issue 9, 1932, May 1, page 3. Sequels in issue 11, June 3, page 9; and issue 12, June 17, page 9.

³⁸ Yehuda Erez Raznicenco (1900 – 1983) was born in Russia and immigrated to Palestine in 1923. He was a member of the Kibbutzim Tel Yosef and Giv’at Chaim, a delegate of the *Histadrut* to Europe by the end of the 1920’s. Published articles in the Labour Movement’s publications and as an editor worked on David Ben Gurion’s books. (Source: Tidhar).

³⁹ Mentioned on several websites for Yiddish poetry and literature, Wintschewski was born in Lithuania, moved to London and then to the USA, and was a prolific writer and editor in the Yiddish press, mostly under the pseudonym Ben Netz.

The legacy of the important socialist-Jewish thinker **Ber Borochov**⁴⁰ was surveyed in a full-page historical-biographical article by M. Aram⁴¹. Borochov⁴² is identified with the formulation of the convergence of Socialism and national Judaism. His philosophy was “*a unique attempt to absorb nationalism into the conceptual framework of Marxism*” and had an initial massive influence on the forming of Jewish Socialism, but “*it was mainly neglected eventually*”, as Zeev Sternhell observed (Sternhell, 1995:31). In **BaMaaleh** of 1932 Aram told readers:

Anyone interested in the national issue in general and in Jewish reality in particular [...] must unwittingly be using Borochov's system and premisses.

Readers were informed that prior to Borochov, nationality had been a “*a total monopoly of the bourgeoisie,*” and “*The socialist [writer] clarified that the labourer has nothing to do with the national problem*”. Quoting from Borochov's booklet (originally in Yiddish) “***Class Interests and the National Question***”, Aram explained that Borochov “*makes clear what the national interest is for the classes of a free nation versus an oppressed nation*”, adding Borochov's formulation:

[...] real nationality is the nationality that does not blur class consciousness, which is to be found in the most progressive class of the oppressed nation – the organized and revolutionary working class.

For the benefit of **BaMaaleh's** young readers Aram added:

Borochov does not recognise a national interest that is not generated by and connected to class interest, just as he does not recognise class interest that would deny the national interest of that class. The two are one.

He goes on to mention that other national minorities, Ukrainian and Lithuanian, adopted this line of ideas as well, some even calling themselves “*Borochovists*”. Borochov, however, realised that Jewish labourers had to act differently:

His deep conception of the national issue also determined Borochov's approach to Zionism. In his book “Unzer Plaatform”, the basic text of Poalei Zion,

⁴⁰ Issue 22, 1932, Dec. 9, page 5.

⁴¹ Moshe Aram (Kazernovsky) (1896 – 1978) born in Moghilev, Russia, immigrated to Palestine in 1924. Activist for *Poalei Zion* and a Hebrew educator, member of the Tel Aviv Workers Association (a *Histadrut* body), a MAPAM member of the first Knesset. Specialized in minorities issues, published in Hebrew and in Yiddish. (Source: Tidhar).

⁴² Dov Ber Borochov (1881-1917) was born and died in the Ukraine. He is credited as the founder of the *Poalei Zion* socialist and Zionist movement, and was arrested by Russian authorities for his socialist teachings, later left Russia and moved to the USA. He returned to Russia after the revolution in early 1917 but died of pneumonia in December of that year, aged 36. In 1963 his remains were brought to burial in Israel. A rich literature deals with his legacy, in Hebrew as well as in English, see for example

<https://danigutwein.files.wordpress.com/2017/08/d791d795d7a8d795d79bd795d791.pdf>

B. Borochoy lays out for us a comprehensive picture of Jewish reality with all its diverse social colours. [...] Borochoy had seen the Jewish labourer as full of revolutionary zeal, a powerful desire to fight for liberation; but he had also seen the other side of the same coin – the inability of the Jewish labourer to belong to the revolution’s generators [...]

Industry [...] does not absorb the Jewish labourer but pushes him to the cracks of the economy, to small workshops of manual artisanry. It leaves him in his traditional trades: tailoring, shoemaking, making headwear etc. In agriculture he has no position. His influence on the flow of the economy is very small [...] In America the same process of focusing on the previous trades repeats itself. [...]

Borochoy, according to Aram, followed this analysis with the indication that the solution to the situation of the Jewish labourer must be a “*territorial convergence*”, which, according to the writer, is what makes Borochoy a Zionist (in fact, Borochoy started the party of “*Poalei Zion*” [Labourers of Zion] which, according to Sternhell, “*aimed to materialise Zionism while sticking to the basic principles of Marxism*” in stark contrast to the Zionist “*HaPoel HaTzair*” that was sharply anti-Marxist (Sternhell, 1995[1986]:151). Aram’s own understanding of “*Borochovism*” is fully compatible with the vision of Labour Zionists, focusing on Jewish labourers only:

In Eretz Israel the Jewish labourer no longer plays “second hand” in the political arena. He becomes a factor with control over own destiny, a warrior equal in rights at the international proletarian front.

The Teaching of Borochoy⁴³ is another article eulogising the Jewish socialist theoretician, commemorating the day of his death (December 17, 1917, at age 36). The writer Eliezer Tsuperfin joined others in crediting Borochoy with the linking of the Zionist national ideal and Marxist ideology, thus creating the idea that Zionism is impossible without Socialism:

*B. Borochoy then did for the national framework what Marx did for the general framework: **He made the connection between the Zionist idea and a specific subject, with the Hebrew labourer** [...] He made it clear that Zionism would materialise if there were a labouring-working Zionism, otherwise it could not be realised. [original emphasis]*

Tsuperfin saw a direct link between Borochoy and the hegemonic ideology of Labour Zionism which was focused on achieving “a territory” for the benefit of the Jewish Labourer:

*Borochoy came to Zionism out of Jewish **reality**. He could see that we are in a state of constant impoverishment; [...] Borochoy well recognised the source of*

⁴³ Issue 1, 1935, January 11, page 3

these troubles: that we are ex-territorial, with no land and no homeland, we do not have the positive factor for this struggle. [original emphasis]

Whether Ber Borochov would have adopted notions of Jewish exclusivity, or, as the “left” part of his *Poalei Zion* association claimed, these notions were not compatible with his teaching, was left unanswered due to his early death.

C. Socialist Zionism and Arab Palestinians

Socialism during the period that followed WWI was generally identified with a strong pacifist, anti-war sentiment. *BaMaaleh* fully adopted this sentiment. When it came to relations with the native community in Palestine, the terminology of “aspirations for peace” seemed to have been handy.

- **Socialist aspirations for world peace**

BaMaaleh marked the 20th anniversary of WWI with an issue fronted with the headline and editorial **WAR AGAINST THE WAR!**⁴⁴ that carried the powerful socialist message:

And you youth, in any people and any nation – despise the war, hate the rule of blood. Aspire for a new world – a world of creative joy and of peace! Establish and build the Socialist regime! [original emphasis]

The fierce controversy between communists and socialists in Europe was reflected earlier in an editorial warning against the **Danger of War**⁴⁵. While commiserating with the threatened “hungry Russia”, the editorial warned that it was hard to support Russia due to the “*deep abyss*” created by an “*atmosphere of fraternal hostility and terror towards the Socialist Workers’ Movement*”.

A 1935 opinion piece expressed the dilemma due to horrors that were committed simultaneously under the supposed socialist regime of Soviet Russia and under fascism in European countries. The main editorial concern in **Purity of the Flag**⁴⁶ is with crimes committed under the supposed socialist tradition. They seemed harder to accept because:

⁴⁴ Issue 15, 1934, July 27, front page

⁴⁵ Issue 11, 1932, June 3, front page

⁴⁶ Issue 1, 1935, January 11 page 3

[...] the flag of the labourers, the flag calling for renewal, for purity, for liberty and for peace is the flag of comfort to each sufferer and to everyone who is oppressed [...]

A whole page article - **The Second International**⁴⁷ by Dekel⁴⁸ - described the many international congresses related to this socialist organisation, and emphasised – next to highlighting Jewish participation - splits and arguments over the issue of Internationalism⁴⁹. The anti-war sentiment was repeated:

The most nationalist of the socialists was the French Jean Jaures - who could equal him with the hatred of war, that finally cost him his life. [...]

The May Day issue of 1935 carried yet another fervent message by the Secretariat of the Labouring Youth – it addresses both Labouring and Studying Youth⁵⁰. This time the traditional passionate vow of solidarity with “*brothers of nations, lands, and races*”, avoided a mention of Arab Labourers (see below). The emphasis was on problems experienced by Socialists and Zionists who at the time suffered persecution in Russia. A warning against “*Revisionist Fascism*” seems targeted mainly at the Jewish-Zionist Revisionists rather than at the (not mentioned) Nazis of Germany. Loyalty to the “*red flag*” and to “*peace*” was described as essential:



We will raise our red flag, the flag of labour, equality and peace, the flag of socialism – [...] But our faithful call will reach the courageous labourers in Russia – [...] free their country of the hatred for the socialist labourers [...] exiled and tortured brothers in the prisons and prairies of Siberia, you who are loyal to the flag of liberating Zionism, stand strong to defend the ambers of the labouring Eretz Israel! [...] for the day you will make Aliya and work with us [...] despise evil [...] seek a brave fight for light and for liberty!

⁴⁷ Issue 9, 1932, May 1, page 8

⁴⁸ See ref. 240

⁴⁹ A footnote explains that this is a follow-up on the article that appeared in the May Day issue of the previous year, about the **First International**.

⁵⁰ The incorporation of studying youth by the Labouring Youth Movement was the topic of several arguments and discussions, that are not too relevant to this particular work.

- Aspirations for Peace with the Arabs of

Front page of Issue 8,1935, April

the land

Against the fervent peace and solidarity rhetoric it is particularly interesting to follow the references to the local residents of Palestine – especially to Palestinian-Arab labourers. The 1932 May Day issue carried a front-page declaration signed by “the secretariat of the Labour Youth”, titled **To Labour Youth!**⁵¹. It is a call for global pacifism and world socialism devoid of national elements (the banner in the image reads: “Workers of all nations unite”):

With burning aspiration, deep faith and tremendous desire, the Labour Youth of the world will enlist to celebrate May Day with the rest of the Working Class.

A year of hardship and misery, hunger and poverty, blood and destruction is behind us. Out of this terrible ordeal the worker will raise his flag to demand and execute the realisation of his vision – the liberation of the class and the whole world from the chains of torment, enslavement and fraternal-hatred.

[...] Let the veil be removed from the faces of the capitalists and rulers of the world [...] The blood of the victims, the tears of the sufferers and the cry of orphans will haunt those who send tens of thousands to the killing fields.

On this day we will remember the millions of workers and their families who are dying of hunger, who are lost all over the world with no hope nor escape. This system, drowning in abundance of production and harvest while starving tens of millions to death – cannot and must not exist. Our battle is on.

*For **The realization of Socialism in the world** [original emphasis]*



Front page of Issue 9,1932, May 1

While the declaration focuses on Hebrew labourers, vowing that the land “*will become a citadel for the labouring Hebrew nation*”, a mention of Arab Labourers is present towards the end, in connection with goals (like *Aliya*) that could not possibly be in the interest of Arab Labourers:

Together with the organized working public we shall continue our fight for free Hebrew Aliya, for extensive labouring settlement and for a true peace between the Hebrew and the Arab working people.

⁵¹ Issue 9, 1932, May 1, front page

There is no mention of a joint labour struggle based on class solidarity with “*Arab working people*” (see below) but a wish to achieve “*a true peace*” while the Hebrew citadel is being fortified and the *Aliya* continues.

As part of the section **In the Wide World**, Page 2 of the same issue offers an analysis titled **May Day and the Moslem Orient**⁵². The writer, signing M. A.⁵³, reported that in countries “*like Persia and Turkey*” socialist movements are considered anti-national:

Every demand by the workers in these countries is immediately interpreted as a forbidden political demand [...]

By contrast, all “*labourers of the East*” are (presumably) welcome in Zionist Palestine:

In this ocean, Hebrew Eretz Israel is a lone island flying the red flag on May Day. It calls on all the exploited masses in the orient: wake-up, labourers of the East, and join the Jewish labourers and workers of the whole world – to defeat the rotten system, the system of robbery and usurpation, to establish a regime of justice and peace!

How the “*labourers of the East*” might “*join*” the Jewish labourers, as long as their *Histadrut* of Hebrew labourers kept its exclusive nature and did not accept non-Jews, is left unclear.

- **The insistence on separate national organisations**

The proclaimed identification and solidarity with the labourers of the world was further upgraded in the festive May Day issue of 1933. The headline **Long live socialism! Long live May Day!**⁵⁴ is the title of an emotional call signed by the **Centre of Labour Youth**. A strong sentiment of support and affinity with labourers and with “*humanity*” in general is expressed:

⁵² Issue 9, 1932, May 1, page 2

⁵³ This must be Michael Assaf (Ossovsky) (1886 – 1984), the correspondent of DAVAR for Arab affairs who also published books and research papers on the subject of the Arabs in Eretz Israel. He often signed by his initials M.A. or by the pseudonym “Menachem”. Assaf was born in Poland, immigrated to Palestine in 1920 and was sent by the *Histadrut* to Berlin where he learnt Oriental Studies. Upon returning to Palestine, he studied local Arabic with local people. For many years he contributed commentary on Arab affairs and reviews of the Arab press for the Hebrew *Histadrut* daily DAVAR. In **BaMaaleh** he was responsible for the bi-weekly column “**In the Arab World**”. He was awarded several prizes, including The Tel Aviv Honorary Award for 1983. (source: [Hamichlol](#)).

⁵⁴ Issue 8, 1933, May 1, front page

May 1. In one single camp, surrounded by enemies, the labourer appears in the world on May Day. His red flag is lifted, holding the working hammer in his hand, with the song of tomorrow in his mouth. Dark and obscure are the heavens over the world. Brown-black fascism, emissary of capital, stabs the back of the Labour movement. In Germany rampant Hitlerism has put the labour camp in chains. Tens and hundreds of loyal labourers are being executed. The whole land is one big prison for the labourer, the labouring youth and any free thinker. Hitlerite Germany is covered with the blood of the People of Israel. In anxiety and admiration, the labourer remembers the victims of fascism. His comrades-brothers who are being tortured in the prisons and the concentration camps. And he vows –



To further escalate our war against the present regime and its collaborators, to loyally raise high the flag of socialism!
And the labourer's voice will be heard loud and clear:
You profaners of the dignity of the labourer and of humanity, be assured, the day of vengeance and repayment will arrive! [original emphasis]

The declaration includes mentions of splits within the Labour Movement worldwide, condemns the persecution of Jews under the Nazi regime, and repeats the demand to open the gates of the land to *aliya* – Jewish immigration (see chapter 4). It also chastises “*the ignorant BEITAR members [who] appear, wearing brown shirts, boasting and saying that they will turn the land being built by the free labourer into a land of slavery, of mud and of blood.*”⁵⁵ The announcement ends with a carefully drafted slogan of solidarity with local Arab labourers, making quite clear that they are not solicited to join the Jewish labourers but “*their organisation*” will be supported by “*brotherly hands*”:

Our call must reach all corners of the land, it must be heard among Arab labourers and workers, all who gather strength in the struggle for their organisation, standing up for themselves and their existence, the Jewish organised labourer will offer them a brotherly hand.

⁵⁵ See chapter 5 for the origin of identifying the “*slavery, mud and blood*” slogan with Revisionist teaching.

The bombastic phraseology about universal fraternity of the working classes did not change the fact that there was no intention to “join hands” in real labour disputes. Zakarie Lockman (Lockman, 1996) covered some attempts at joint Jewish and Arab labour struggles, commenting that the *Histadrut* insisted “that the class struggle must be subordinated to the ‘national’ tasks” (ibid: 120). True to the party line, **BaMaaleh** took care to express solidarity and sympathy with Arab labourers in industrial disputes, while making clear that these labour disputes must be run with strict national-ethnic segregation (see also chapter 7). The call for joint struggle was described as an undesirable, inconceivable and impractical strategy. Two rare utterances that favourably reported industrial disputes carried by Arabs carefully avoided or openly disproved of any idea of collaboration beyond “national” demarcation lines:

Deeds and Words⁵⁶ is an editorial expressing “sympathy” by “all Jewish Labourers” to “Arab comrades” during a very tough strike in the Nesher cement factory near Haifa⁵⁷. It even encouraged financial contributions for the strikers. Still, the editorial cautioned against “the over-enthusiastic articles” as well as “The unnecessary righteous claim,” that perhaps proper participation of Jewish labourers in the strike would have been more helpful. It quoted and rejected the claim that must have been raised, that “not offering a helping hand – is the source of much evil”. The writer used the opportunity to remind his readers that class solidarity cannot (should not) transcend assumed national differences:

Let us just remember how difficult the road is for a union of workers of one nation, and ten times harder with workers of different nations and in our own special conditions. Let us refrain from words and do the deeds.

Two and a half years later it seems that a joint struggle of Arab and Jewish labourers did take place and was even modestly successful. **BaMaaleh** now seemingly trumpeted class solidarity that ignored national differences. At the same time, its editorial carried orientalist, disparaging insinuations. **Upon the end of the Strike in Haifa**⁵⁸ celebrated the victory and pointed a finger at the “real” promoters of national segregation:

⁵⁶ Issue 19, 1932, October 14, front page

⁵⁷ See Lockman, 1996:207 -210

⁵⁸ Issue 5, 1935, March 15, page 2

All attempts of the oil company's agents to spread religious and national hatred among the labourers came to nothing. The workers demonstrated organisational ability, loyalty and solidarity and stood as one person in the difficult front.

The organisational unity that persisted was described – perhaps belittled - as “*seeds of cooperation and mutual support among Jewish and Arab Workers*”. Hopefully “*the time of germination will arrive. One day we will see fruit.*” In other words, this time had not yet come. Then comes the seemingly innocent but dubious crude compliment:

[...] the strike revealed the raw power of the labourer who is 'son of the desert'.

The non-Jewish labourers were – as ever - described as the ultimate “others” - primitive natives from the far away uncultured regions of the “*desert*”. Conveniently, the writer ignored the urban location and nature of the dispute, and the fact that Haifa existed as an Arab city many years before the first Jew had moved in⁵⁹ (see also chapter 7).

D. Socialism in the fight against political opponents

Verbal squabbles with political opponents often provided an opportunity to celebrate Socialist ideology. Labour Zionism had to defend itself and compete both with movements from the right – the Revisionists, whose ideology was attractive to young people and could rely on the support of the affluent classes as well as of the more traditional – and from the left – mainly the Communist-affiliated *Frakzia*, that attracted many young and idealistic immigrants who had followed fashionable trends in Eastern Europe as well.

- **Socialism against Communist “venom” and other undesirables on the left**

The issue of Hebrew Labour and the attempts to eliminate the work of Arab labourers was often used by the left to denounce the Zionist Labour Movement for its insincere socialist phraseology. As the standard-bearer of the mainstream Labour-Zionist ideology, **BaMaaleh** reacted aggressively.

⁵⁹ Carmel, 2002[1969]:140

Political and ideological confrontations with the local Communists were bitter and often abusive. **BaMaaleh**'s writers blamed the communist "*Frakzia*" for "incitement", making the Arab population aware of the problematic nature of the Jewish settlement (assuming there was no other way for Arabs to have grasped the situation). **The Enemy is within us!**⁶⁰ is an editorial that warned:

The recent flyers of the Frakzia, calling the fellahin to the harbours to demonstrate against the Zionist immigrants and to force them to return to where they had come from – remind us again that the enemy is within us. A ruthless enemy, for whom all means are legitimate as long as there would be riots in the land.

In the next issue, both the global Communist movement and its local Palestine-Jewish affiliate, represented by the communist *Frakzia*, were harshly chastised over what the editor considered inappropriate May Day utterances. **Keren Or**⁶¹ ("*a ray of light*") is an editorial drafted with bitter sarcasm (*Ha'or* - the Light - was the name of the *Frakzia*'s newspaper). It starts with the squabbles of communists versus socialists in Europe:

[...] the communists' slogans about the socialists as "traitors, submissive servants of capital and fascism" numbed and hardened the hearts of some of the youth [...] May Day has been turned by the communists into a day of disgrace for the Workers' Movement. All the movement's foes rejoiced to see their job done by the labourers themselves. [...]

The editorial then moves to "*our own land*" using harsh language:

And in our own land? The leaflets that have been distributed by the toddlers of the Frakzia during the celebrations of the Labour Youth are a Mark of Cain for the distributors and their dispatchers. Once again, the despicable defamations about the Hebrew Labourer and his Histadrut are heard. Calls to the Arab fellah to rise against the Zionists who usurp his land and his work, and a new bloody provocation about Jewish youth who "enlist and arm themselves in order to grab the last piece of bread from the Arab labourer." So were the leaflets that the Frakzia had distributed on May Day. Have the children-distributors read the leaflets they were holding? Were their hands not trembling and their hearts not twitching as they practiced this abomination? Did they know who they serve with this activity? Labour Youth disgustedly ignored these flyers and continued their own agenda. But one's heart aches upon seeing boys and girls so duped in vain, sacrificing all that is sacred on the altar of deception and evil that had been

⁶⁰ Issue 8, 1932, April 15, front page

⁶¹ Issue 10, 1932, May 13, front page

installed by foes who undermine the existence of both the Hebrew and the Arab labourer.

This rage is aimed at pamphlets that target the problematic principle of Hebrew Labour, completely out of line with the pious *Histadrut* slogans celebrating socialism and internationalism. The young communists hit a soft spot. The mouthpiece of the Zionist youth Labour Movement, while not mincing words against “*the despicable defamations*” the “*abomination*”, and the “*Mark of Cain*” is also careful to describe its opponents as “*toddlers*” and “*children-distributors*”, thus belittling their importance and at the same time lamenting them with “*heart aches*” as “*duped*” and victims of “*deception*”; repeating the Labour-Zionist self-congratulating position, described as upholding “*both the Hebrew and the Arab labourer*”.

In **Our eyes to the future**⁶² readers were reminded that “*the virulent incitement by the Frakzia goes on and the ignorance and poverty of the Arab masses offer a fertile ground for all kinds of slander and defamation about us and our enterprise.*”

On the very next issue **Connivances**⁶³ again takes issue with the *Frakzia*'s newspaper *Ha'or*, and sarcasm is again the literary device used to call it disdainfully “*a purely revolutionary newspaper*”. The communists are defined as “*deserters of the campaign, inciting one worker against the other and calling for pogroms against Israel.*”

The “*deserters*” were obviously taken seriously and considered a real threat to Labour Zionist teaching. A very long article (full translation in the appendix) proposed an analysis of **The origins of the Communist Frakzia in Eretz Israel**⁶⁴. The author, publicist N. Benari, offered mainly “*psychological factors*” as an explanation to the seemingly disturbing success of the political opponents from the left. Avoiding an ideological debate, he described the communist *Frakzia* as a mere creation of the COMINTERN, introduced for the sole purpose of serving the international strategic needs of the Soviet Union, using a “*general criminal tactic*”. The members are recruited to an organisation that “*combats the Hebrew labour movement in the most barbaric manner*”, based on an “*internal lie*” and “*double-faced propaganda*” which

⁶² Issue 16, 1932, August 19, front page.

⁶³ Issue 17, 1932, Sept. 9, front page.

⁶⁴ Issue 19, 1932, Oct. 14, page 3

reflect “*degeneration*” and “*ties to all the dark forces*”. Next is a detailed characterisation of the “*human material*” available to take part in this sinister mission. Benari identifies “*two sources of Jewish youth*” that the *Frakzia* “*feeds on*”: One is the “*innocent, excitable, gullible youth, easily deceived*”, the second originates in “*circles of the older degenerate people who had been sobered, exasperated, decayed and befouled away*”, and are perhaps even more dangerous.

The second type is the first to be discussed. Some of them are people who have experienced disappointment “*in a fast realisation of Zionism and socialism*”. Desperate, they are left “*lacking social ideals*”. Some of them must be “*the fall of rotten, dissociated intelligenzia*”, and so “*the typical ‘Frakzioner’ in Eretz Israel*”, is someone

[...] worshipping all the false gods, bowing to profanities and selling himself to slavery for next to nothing, out of the smallness of spirit, without any hope for redemption. [...] He wishes to escape to Russia, to the new illusion – but the way to Russia is not always open for him. The COMINTERN insists on his staying “at the front”.

Next the writer moves to describe the young supporters, as this is “*much simpler*” as youth is so easily excited by what might be “*heroic and secret*”.

Slowly but surely, they are educated with high-sounding phraseology to fight the “enemies”, to accuse all who are outside the camp of treachery, to despise everybody, to create havoc and generate conflict. [...] they receive orders, and so they become “robots” of the communist party.

As the only explanation offered is one of “*imbecility of senses bordering on pathology*”, and as the writer takes care not to condemn communist ideology (writing for a publication that venerates Marxist teaching), he ends the diatribe with a comforting conclusion:

Following this it is correct to conclude, that the Frakzia is basically not a communist movement – but a movement of “haters of Zion” clad in communist attire.

Most other mentions of the *Frakzia* have to do successively with its malign influence on Arabs (suggesting class solidarity rather than national-religious segregation): They are part of **Those Poisoning the Wells**⁶⁵ and **Those who Commit a Suicidal Act**⁶⁶, they represent “*An enemy, a*

⁶⁵ Issue 11-12, 1933, June 30, page 2 (editorials continued).

⁶⁶ Issue 20, 1933, Oct. 24, front page.

foe, [who] hides inside our home, inside our settlements, calling to destroy our nest”⁶⁷; they are also named “those despicable slaves – the Frakzia and its different embodiments”⁶⁸. In **To our defamers**⁶⁹ “Shmuel” accuses the authors of the communist newspaper *Ha’or* for resorting to a “fraudulent” track:

“Ha’or” men fight against the conquest of Labour because they are comfortable with this position which is the realm of the socialist preacher in the diaspora – for him, preaching for socialism is sufficient as he is not the one to carry socialism and to realise it. Here in this land, too, they would have the Jewish labourer as preacher for socialism, while the one fulfilling socialism would be the Arab.

On the occasion of a May Day controversy, a short “fable” titled **Life and Death by the Tongue**⁷⁰ was included in the political-satirical fables column “**Crumbs**” (no signature), scolding:

[...] On May Day – the day of peace and fraternity among all the world’s labourers, the Communists call out to the labourer public with leaflets, warning them of the perils of hatred and division to the working man. But in these same leaflets they do not omit to spit their venom at the Socialist labourers’ movement and at the comrades of MAPAI whom they hate so much... [...] Indeed, life and death hang by the tongue.

Communists were not the only opponents from the left; in the same issue **BaMaaleh** dedicated a whole page to an altercation with the leadership of **Ha’Shomer Ha’Tzair** (“Young Guard”). This movement, part of the *Histadrut* of the Hebrew Labourers⁷¹ but tending to the “left” of Labour Zionism, complained in an **Open Letter**⁷² that its members were not accepted into The Labouring Youth *Histadrut* (which meant exclusion from job opportunities). The undersigned leadership of **Ha’Shomer Ha’Tzair** bitterly protested the fact that “instructors of the Labouring Youth” told their young members that “*HaShomer HaTzair is aiming to institute Arab Labour*”. In **Open Response**⁷³, **BaMaaleh** (unsigned) retorted by blaming the “young guard” movement for expressing “*arrogance of the ‘intelligent’ youth vis-à-vis the proletarian youth*” and declaring:

⁶⁷ Issue 21, 1933, Nov. 10, front page.

⁶⁸ Issue 20-21, 1935, Nov. 1, page 2.

⁶⁹ Issue 15, 1932, August 5, page 3.

⁷⁰ Issue 10, 1934, May 18, page 3.

⁷¹ It is still active in 2022, part of the MERETZ political left-Zionist party.

⁷² Issue 10, 1934, May 18, page 6.

⁷³ Ibid.

[...] the complete union of the working class is a fundamental basis of the education in the Labouring Youth [...].

Next to **Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair** and the *Frakzia*, **BaMaaleh** pointed irately at another Jewish left-wing political organisation – the non-Zionist BUND, that attracted many Jewish labourers in Eastern Europe, mainly in Poland. In the editorial **Brethren at war**⁷⁴, reporting on riots in Warsaw between Jewish Communists and BUND members, the editor (signing B.H.) showed sympathy to the BUND members while using the opportunity to reprimand them:

You are quite right, members of the “Bund”, to admonish about the rot that has been seen in the camp of the Jewish labourers [...] But are you not, too, to blame for this terrible predicament?

A year later the BUND was addressed in a far less friendly tone – there seems to be a struggle over the recruiting of members. **BaMaaleh's** editorial is titled **Be Strong, Halutz**⁷⁵ [*Ha-Halutz*, “the Pioneer”, was the name of the Labour-Zionist youth movement in Eastern Europe]. The non-Zionist competitors were notified that their actions are “*a stab in the back of our movement*”, and described as spreading “*poisonous vapour*” against Labour Zionism. Interestingly, the BUND's strategy was compared to that of the *Frakzia* – except that the alleged incited non-Jewish labourers are not Arabs but Poles:

[...] The masses are releasing themselves from the poisonous vapour that the “BUND” disseminates against Eretz Israel, against Zionism and against the Hebrew Labour Movement, and out of their need and recognition they move to the Halutz ranks [...]

The Bund is furious and out of this impotent rage it tries, just like the “Frakzia” people in this country, to raise the Polish masses who suffer from unemployment and an oppressive regime, against the Halutz, against Jewish youth.

- **Socialism in the battle with Revisionism and capitalists/the property owners**

While the communist *Frakzia's* socialism was judged as flawed due to lack of loyalty to national values, concern for socialist values was raised to hit on the arch-national enemy –

⁷⁴ Issue 6, 1932, March 18, front page.

⁷⁵ Issue 11-12, 1933, June 30, page 2.

the Revisionists (for the campaign that portrayed Revisionist ideology as faulty over national values see chapter 5).

An editorial targeting the youth of Revisionist BEITAR was titled **Open your Eyes!**⁷⁶ It called:

Rise and free yourselves from all the parasites that have stuck to you, give a hand to the organised labourer, to construct the labour-homeland for you and for us!

It was followed two few weeks later by a **Proclamation of Eretz Israeli Youth to the Youth and Labourers of BEITAR**⁷⁷ that further praised socialist ideology:

[...] And what is socialism – if not the fight against the blood-regime and a desire to establish a new world order, a world of freedom, light and liberty for every person, any labourer, every nation? Do your hearts not follow this noble aspiration for which the best of humanity, the best of youth have for generations offered their lives? [original emphasis]

The 1934 May Day proclamation, issued only two weeks after this direct “proclamation”, was titled **May Day – the Feast of Light and Liberty!**⁷⁸. Signed by “The Centre of the Labour Youth” it included another admonition of Revisionists’ animosity to socialism:

[...] Let May Day be a day of uniting the forces of worker and Labouring Youth to a war against Revisionism, which poisons the soul of the youth, educating them to strike-breaking, to blood-spilling, to hatred to the Hebrew labourer and his creation; planting in their hearts animosity to socialism and leading them in the road of slavery, mud and blood [...] [original emphasis].

⁷⁶ Issue 7, 1934, March 30, front page.

⁷⁷ Issue 8, 1934, April 15, page 3.

⁷⁸ Issue 9, 1934, May 1, page 2.



The headline of the issue, above an image of a May Day procession, read: **Long live May Day – the celebration of labourers! Long live socialism!**⁷⁹ (see visual).

Against the background of Nazism in Germany and a general increase in European fascism, the proclamation by the centre for the Labouring Youth on page 2 under the title **May Day – the Feast of Light and Liberty!**⁸⁰ also vowed: “[...] *we may not rest and we may not be silent until we announce the world liberated – by socialism!*”

Directed to the “*Jewish labourers and Jewish youth*”, the call expressed a fervent hope that:

[...] workers of the world will march together, hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder – towards liberation and deliverance, towards Socialism!

The concern for socialism – and the possible negative effect of Revisionism – was also in the centre of the grand debate in early 1935, preceding the referendum over the agreement between the Revisionist party and the *Histadrut*, which was eventually rejected (see chapter 5). In the heated debate within Labour Zionism, **BaMaaleh** dedicated considerable space to articles “for” and “against” the agreement. Both sides quoted loyalty to the socialist ideal as the basis of their position.

The editorial board of **BaMaaleh** took a clear stand against the proposed agreement in an opinion piece titled **If only we knew**⁸¹, exclaiming: “*We are against the agreement, we support labour, building and creation.*” (Original emphasis).

⁷⁹ Issue 9, 1934, May 1, front page.

⁸⁰ Issue 9, 1924, May 1, page 2.

⁸¹ Issue 1, 1935, January 11, page 3.

Representing a supportive position for the agreement, M. Naishtat⁸² in **On the Issue of the Labour Agreement**⁸³ declared his belief that an agreement with the political opponents would actually ease the way towards the aspired socialist utopia:

The labourer public aspires after all to start a new Jewish settlement here – not merely in a new site, but mainly with new content; a healthy settlement, completely different from the Jewish communities in the diaspora – economically, culturally, and socially.

By contrast the staunch opponent “Arie” published on the same page **Why I Reject the Agreement**⁸⁴. According to him, all “*socialist Zionists*” must reject the idea of cooperating with the class enemies:

We will not be calm at the sight of injustice and inequality that exist among us, we will not accept order in a world of effendis and satisfied entertained rich cats next to masses of labourers who live under harsh working conditions and whose children are constantly deprived. We shall not accept the regime that sends youth and children to the labour-market, denies them learning and development because they are the workers’ children.

Ideological differences with the Jewish bourgeoisie were also stressed on the municipal level. Towards elections in Tel Aviv, **BaMaaleh** suggested that the city, clearly the vibrant economic engine of the Jewish settlement in Palestine, was run by ultra-right-wing nationalists. In **Rights of the Working Man in the Hebrew City**⁸⁵ the writer (signing A. Denison) complained that the city where “*a third of the Hebrew Yishuv is concentrated*” had been turned into a centre for “*the reactionary forces of the Hebrew Yishuv in this land*”. He mourned the “*black social character of the dominant majority in the municipality*” which according to him was hostile to “*the organised labouring public and its institutions*” (all emphasis in the original), discriminating in favour of “*The bourgeois and fascist sports institutions*”, openly neglecting the *Histadrut*’s education system while ingratiating itself “*with the Jewish clerical circles*”.

E. Towards “A new Jewish world” in socialism

⁸² Malech (Eliezer Shimon) Naishtat (1895 -1959) was born in Galicia, immigrated to Palestine in 1926. Held positions in the financial institutions of the *Histadrut*, published many articles in the different press organs of the Labour Movement and in the Yiddish press abroad. After WWII he published a collection of memoirs about Warsaw’s Jewry. (Source: Tidhar).

⁸³ Issue 4, 1935, Feb. 22, page 3.

⁸⁴ Issue 4, 1935, Feb. 22, page 3.

⁸⁵ Issue 8, 1935, April 29, page 9.

Promoting the national-Zionist brand of socialism encountered some resistance, it seems, when young people who arrived as refugees from Nazi Germany had to be convinced that their own ideas about socialism needed to be radically adapted. **The question of the Immigrant youth from Germany**⁸⁶ is an unsigned report from the council of the Labour Youth in Ben Shemen, that took place in November, 1934. The speakers, apparently veteran employees of the Labour Youth Movement, sound frustrated: The newcomers have brought with them “*particular political concepts*” that seemed unreconcilable with reality in Jewish Palestine, and might even have been influenced by “*Marxist circles and Antifa*”⁸⁷. It is hard to convince them of the importance of Hebrew Labour. The anti-fascism sentiment of MAPAI recoiled when it seemed that Antifa and Marxism went too far. Some excerpts from the discussion:

Arie from Haifa: [...] organising this youth is not easy [...] these young people, whose feelings had been badly hurt by the events in Germany, being young socialist Jews, have brought with them the particular political concepts that they had been educated on and it is hard to get loose of them and acclimatise oneself to the reality of Eretz Israel. They still have the same terminology and the same weltanschauung without checking and finding out [...]

Comrade Theo: There are also the Marxist circles and Antifa that are trying to rob these youth from us.

Baruch Eisenstadt (Ein Harod): [...] The issue of the youth leaders: Most youth leaders do not clearly understand the chief problems of our lives: Hebrew labour, the conquering of labour, Hebrew culture etc [...]

A few months earlier **BaMaaleh** published a personal piece by a young German Jew who did find his way into Zionism after some deliberations and under the vicious pressure of life in Nazi Germany. Titled **A Comrade arrives in “Ha’Halutz”**⁸⁸, the memoir, translated from “*Ha’Kashir*”, a German language brochure published by the ‘Ha’Halutz’ in Germany” offers an insight of a born-again who became fully convinced that he was joining a society focused on “*Social Justice*”, committed “*to live next to the Arabs and even to help them*”:

Contrary to my opinion that I would encounter narrow nationalism, I found an aspiration for a homeland. Contrary to my assumption that Eretz Israel was being taken away from the Arabs as the land they live in - the homeland to be lost for

⁸⁶ Issue 23, 1934, November 30, page 9.

⁸⁷ Apparently, this abbreviated name for all anti-fascist organisations was already in use in the early 1930’s.

⁸⁸ Issue 14, 1934, July 16 page 7.

*them in order to become the homeland for the Jews - I found the **strong and honest** will to live next to the Arabs and even to help them. **Contrary** to my opinion about private, capitalist non-social structure, I found in “Ha’Halutz” and in its various bodies a dear desire for the construction of **social justice** and I found mates, friends and comrades. [original emphasis]*

Russian socialist Victor Chernov⁸⁹, himself a refugee from Bolshevik Russia, had no problem paying tribute to the ideology of Labour Zionism that also employed his services as publicist in DAVAR, the *Histadrut’s* Hebrew daily⁹⁰. **To the Labour Youth**⁹¹ is his front-page article praising “*The pioneering spirit of Jewish youth*” (original emphasis) and the “*aspiration to create a national and cultural whole*”. Chernov showed great sympathy to the creation of Jewish nationality “*when the old bourgeois economy is falling apart*” and interpreted it as a novel phenomenon, fully compatible with the establishing of “*new foundations*” for “*humanity*”. He elegantly ignored the fact that natives of the land are not included in the renewed “*humanity*”:

This is a new Jewish world, the world of pioneers [...] The nations of our time have developed in a stichic mode, as grass grows in the field, as sandbars in the sea. For the first time in history a nation is being created all anew and it is forming its own national image with the power of a creative idea, through organisation, by materialising a well-framed recognised program. It is being resurrected in time, just when the old bourgeois economy is falling apart, as humanity tends to seek new foundations for its social being [...]

Yet another East European socialist leader visiting the Jewish Yishuv was the Polish writer Stanislaw Dubois⁹². His full-page article for *BaMaaleh* was titled **To May Day**⁹³, and discusses the way Polish labourers demanded “*social and national redemption*”. Dubois stated that “*Socialism alone may bring the usurped and oppressed people their full and true independence*”. His version of socialism and nationality presents the opposite of national segregation, as he is convinced that “*On May First, the flags of Jewish, Ukrainian and German*

⁸⁹ Victor Chernov was a Russian politician, leader of the Social-Revolutionary party, chairman of the Establishing Assembly in Russia (1917). He opposed the Bolsheviks and was expelled from Russia after the Kronstad Insurrection (<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/authors/victor-chernov>)

⁹⁰ In 1934 Chernov began collaboration with the *Histadrut’s* daily Davar and published monthly articles. In 1934-35 he visited Eretz Israel. (Davar e.g., 19.12.1934; 2.1.1935; 6.1.1935).

⁹¹ Issue 1, 1935, front page.

⁹² His photo inserted in the article, identifies him as “the leader of the Socialist Youth in Poland, presently touring Eretz Israel”. The visit was mentioned in Davar (April 30, 1935, page 8; May 8, 1935, page 2). During World War II Dubois was arrested and executed by the Nazis (source: Wikipedia).

⁹³ Issue 8, 1935, April 29, page 3.

labourers will be raised next to the flags of the Polish labourers [....] No difference of nationality and party affiliation.” The editors of **BaMaaleh** did not seem to notice any contradiction between this presentation and the aspiration to see only Hebrew labourers around.

Another definition of “*real socialism*” is offered by a Jewish activist who signs M.M. Rosenboim⁹⁴. It is a foreword to his **Memoir**⁹⁵ about to be published, relating his escape from Tzarist Russia. Rosenboim identifies as a member of the Labouring Youth Kibbutz Nana. For him socialism is “*complete liberation*”, a celebration of closeness -

[...] to Mother-Earth and to free nature; [...] the bliss of creating such settlements in the land of our ancestors, to be the pioneer of renewed life of our nation on the basis of labour, honesty and fraternity –

Here Rosenboim supplies yet another replica of commitment to national settler socialist colonialism: His celebration of socialist “*liberation*” and “*renewed life*” relates to the “*land of our ancestors*”, and the “*fraternity*” belongs to “*our nation*” and takes no notice of native life already rooted in *Mother Earth*” or “*free nature*”.

F. Self-Criticism, inward-looking critique

Quite a few writers and members expressed criticism and remorse over what they considered flaws in the ideological making of the movement or its leadership. The soul-searching mostly refers to insufficient adherence to “true socialist values”, never touching on the national fundamental ethos.

⁹⁴ There is no entry about this writer in either the Tidhar Encyclopaedia or the OSU Lexicon, but his book, translated from Yiddish, is available on old books websites and in the National Library of Israel. One of **BaMaaleh**'s early brochures recounts M.M. Rosenboim as an elderly man who upon arriving in the land was interested in purchasing land but immediately returned to the US and started fund raising for a Labouring Youth farm (Brochure 5 of the year 1929, page 17).

⁹⁵ Issue 4, 1935, Feb. 22, page 4.

A young man signing “Israel” aired his frustrations in **On the Verge of Adulthood**⁹⁶. Rather than complain about the enemies of the movement, he suggested, “*take a look into your own camp*”. He then goes on to elaborate:

I see the emblem of the Histadrut on several so-called “cooperative” factories, where the majority of the workers are hired hands, including youth, against government legislation [...] we are not yet pure and proper, much profanity is amongst us, and we must shake it off completely.

A writer signing David Ish-Nana (or: “David of Nana”, the Kibbutz of the movement⁹⁷) raised his concerns before an upcoming conference in **Some Issues of our Movement**⁹⁸. He was worried about splits in the movement, and found it necessary to remonstrate, “*emphasising the shadows*” about what he considered unsatisfactory leadership:

The camp lives in isolation, feeling the lack of a controlling, educating and instructing leadership.

He then went on to quote another writer from a Labour Zionist publication⁹⁹, who complained about the failure to institute **Hebrew Labour**:

“Trailed with blood and anguish was the road of the Labour movement from its genesis [...] how many souls had been crushed and wrecked. [...] And at the end of it all, the blazing sword of the exploiting class in this land still threatens us”.

Next came some rhetorical questions, pointing at the reality of inequality within the *Histadrut*:

“Is it necessary to point out the personal, moral and pioneering deterioration of many [...] How can one educate the girl who is exploited in household service by a comrade of the Histadrut, who has to deal with that attitude of the “mistress of the house”, a member of the Histadrut just as she is?” (See also chapter 8).

Further on, another writer was quoted, describing an encounter with a group of Labour Youth members enjoying an evening in town in a manner that seemed to him inappropriate for young socialists:

“[...] how happy they are in their chatter and jabber? Here in the middle of this urban clamour, they are happy to stand there, to lick sweet ice cream [...] to chat – and yet consider themselves the carriers of... socialism. And they like it this way.”

⁹⁶ Issue 6, 1931, May 25, page 9

⁹⁷ This name was later changed to Na’an.

⁹⁸ Issue 10, 1935, June 3, page 3

⁹⁹ The quote is from a leaflet titled “No Way Out” by publicist Moshe Braslavsky

Conclusions from chapter 3

Throughout the period under consideration *BaMaaleh* diligently, ardently and enthusiastically projected the importance of socialist ideology and socialist values to its young readers, as part of fulfilling its educational mission discussed above in chapter 1. Proud to be part of a movement that was affiliated with the Socialist International, and offering detailed references to European socialist and Marxist thinkers, *BaMaaleh* seemed to promote socialist values that included universalism and class solidarity based on the Marxist slogan “*Workers of all Countries Unite*”. At the same time, *BaMaaleh* also vigorously promoted what seems a direct contradiction of this slogan, Labour Zionism’s maxim of **Hebrew Labour**. As criticism of this contradiction seems to have occurred at the time to various observers and opponents, locally and abroad, writers and editors of *BaMaaleh* took great pains to portray what they saw as the just version of socialism based on national values. Sharp language was used to repudiate any opponents from the socialist or communist left¹⁰⁰, who used the *Histadrut*’s treatment of Arab workers to expose what they saw as bigotry and hypocrisy. Promoting the “*two flags*” strategy *BaMaaleh* rejected left-wing criticism as ignoring the national fundamental ethos, while complaining that right-wing politics lacked the social conscience of socialism.

¹⁰⁰ Poignant expressions were not unique to Labour Zionists and seem to have characterised much of the Communist as well as Revisionist publications of the period.

Chapter 4

Hebrew Labour as a vital tool for generating immigration licences (certificates for *Aliya*)

The calls for **Hebrew Labour** urgently and frequently pressed throughout the pages of *BaMaaleh* were designated to serve various goals of the Zionist settler community. Next to the declared intention to alter the occupational structure of the Jewish people and to assert sovereignty over the labour market (discussed in chapter 2), a primary goal, compatible with the pinnacle of Zionist aspirations, was to create a massive homogenised Jewish community that would be able to demand national Jewish sovereignty over Palestine. As it was “*the clear intention of the Zionists to achieve a Jewish majority in Palestine through immigration*” (Smith, 1993:13), a link between **Hebrew Labour** and immigration quotas authorised by the Mandate government throughout the period under consideration soon became a pivotal argument in favour of **Hebrew Labour**: the demand that only Jewish workers would be allowed to work in Jewish owned enterprises, which at that period consisted mainly of citrus orchards. A shortage of Jewish labourers in the orchards therefore “legitimised” the demand for more immigrants who would fill the vacancies, as non-Jews had to be banned. Employers were demanded to refrain from employing Arab workers and Jewish workers were expected to give up more lucrative and less exhausting jobs and become farm labourers, making sure that no Arabs would be employed in the Jewish-owned orchards.

The British Mandate rule made economic viability a priority for deciding the number of entry permits (“certificates”) (Halamish, 2006[a]:51). In 1921, the first British high Commissioner Herbert Samuel already decreed that “*immigration levels should be determined [...] in relation to the Zionist Organization's ability to create employment and provide facilities for Jewish newcomers*” (Smith, 1993:68). However, as the economic cycles turned, in periods of prosperity an abundance of labour opportunities in the growing urban centres became available. With the arrival of a massive middle-class group of immigrants in the “fourth *Aliya*”, “*many immigrants drifted into the cities to join the ranks of the urban proletariat*” (ibid: 75¹). Young immigrants who were interested in farm work were able to join collective farms (Kibbutzim and Moshavim)

¹ Smith’s book focuses on the first decade of the British Mandate only, but this observation is also valid for the years that followed.

on land purchased by the Jewish National Fund. Jewish property owners and orchard owners could not find Jewish labourers even if they were interested in paying them above the wages of Arab labourers (often they were not interested, as it did not suit their economic needs).

As immigration certificates (for immigrants without property, see Halamish, 2006[a]:20) were issued depending on the need for new workers by the Jewish economy, a strategy that should secure immigration certificates for more Jews “without independent means” who wished to arrive in Palestine had to be developed. It had to rely on demand for **Hebrew Labour**, and this seemed well suited to the relevant segment of the Jewish population in Eastern Europe that was generally identified with Labour Zionist parties. The interested candidates mostly joined the training camps of *Ha’Halutz* movement in Europe. In fact, as Aviva Halamish writes, it was the intention of the Zionist Organisation to select for immigration “*unmarried people only and to encourage ‘only people who are courageous and young, ideologically motivated and pioneers by nature’*” (Halamish, 2006:19²).

The call for **Hebrew Labour** now focused on its supposed capacity as an instrument to “open the gates” of the land for mass Jewish immigration. Sharp condemnations were issued against all groups and individuals in the Jewish Yishuv who rejected the demand to keep Arabs out of workplaces. This lumped together the employers, orchard owners, industrialists and their respective organisations; non-socialist political parties such as the Revisionists, headed by Jabotinsky (see chapter 5); and left-wing socialist or communist organisations. *BaMaaleh’s* articles labelled all those opposing exclusive **Hebrew Labour** as enemies of the Jewish masses who might be interested in immigration to Palestine. The Mandate government that decreed a limit on immigration certificates was equally castigated. In fact, “*ideological casuistry and dissimulating the importance of the Zionist goals had more than once been a camouflage for prosaic power struggles between parties and movements that needed the Aliya for survival in the land as well as in the diaspora.*” (Ibid: 153).

Initially, complaints about limiting Jewish immigration were aimed at the government or at Arab opponents. From the point of view of *BaMaaleh*, the very idea that the government might

² The quote is referenced to Moshe Mosk’s article about Herbert Samuel, pages 296-303 in “Research Chapters in Zionism’s’ History”, Jerusalem, 1986.

contemplate the expulsion of young immigrants who overstayed a tourist visa was unacceptable. Increasing the numbers of Jewish residents of Palestine through immigration had been a primary goal throughout Zionist history, and remained a “*cosmic act of ‘tikkun Olam’³”* which “*legitimises any act or neglect by the collective*” (Kimmerling, 2004: 291). In Zionist terminology, “*‘redemption’ and selective Aliya were synonymous with what is ‘best for the land’*” (Halamish, 2006[a]:12).

In hindsight, the discussion about options to leave Europe for a safer haven in the early 1930s sounds incredibly sensitive. Tom Segev noted that “*As the situation in Europe grew more serious, demand for immigration certificates rose, and the shortage became acute. Distribution of the permits took on a Darwinian cast— those chosen lived; those not chosen were likely to die. There was little hope of relief.*” (Segev, 1994 [1991]:40). Still, in the period under discussion here, and even later, there was a clear political aspect to the distribution of immigration permits (certificates). The Jewish Agency received the permits from the Mandate authorities and handed them to the political parties according to their representation in the Yishuv, which meant that “*Each party tried to get as many certificates as it could to distribute among its members and sympathizers*” (Ibid). The process was “selective”, and as Labour Zionists had a dominant majority in the Jewish agency it seemed natural that their politics dictated a “*preference for those who could play a role in their program for building the country. They preferred healthy young Zionists, ideally with agricultural training or at least a willingness to work on the land.*” (Ibid:42).

True to its mission as representative of Labour Zionist ideology, **BaMaaleh** texts meticulously linked the issue of immigration (*Aliya*) with the concept of **Hebrew Labour**. Articles repeatedly pointed out that any Jews who intend to become – or already are – labourers, have an undisputed right to stay in the land, regardless of how he or she had entered. Following is a review of the many texts that deal with the link between Hebrew Labour and *Aliya* according to the emphasis on argumentation, targeted accusations and complaints.

³ “Correcting the world” – a basic Judaic concept relating to the duty of Jews to make the world a better place.

1. *The government as the main culprit: demanding rights for immigrants without independent means*
2. *Admonishing the enemies of immigration “from within” the Jewish Yishuv*
3. *Pickets against Arab labour to fortify demands for more Aliya*
4. *Hebrew Labour in days of prosperity: “whistle blowers” against Aliya*
5. *Preserving positions for Aliya “in the future”; calls for more immigrants*

*

1. *The government as the main culprit: demanding rights for immigrants without independent means*

An editorial titled **Is Anyone Listening?**⁴ makes the point that coming to Palestine as a labourer must be enough to make the (Jewish) immigrant a legitimate resident. The article is a bitter complaint over the intention to expel two sojourners, ordering a young man to leave “*after building himself a home and work, even burying his parents in this land.*”

The point that the right of Jewish labourers to enter the land must be unlimited, and need not be linked to permits from the government, is put forth forcefully two years later in the editorial **Degrading Jewish Honour**⁵ which expresses rage over the intended expulsion of two other men, claiming that they were picked on due to their identity as “Jewish Labourers”. The Mandate police claimed that one of the two, Moshe – or Morris – Glat, was a Polish native who did not obtain a permit to reside in Palestine. The police raided a residence that he shared with others in Nes Ziona⁶. **BaMaaleh** identified both Glat and his colleague David Eizen as members of the *Poalei Zion* party. “*The police perform a sort of Inquisition over the Jewish labourer and his opinions*”, it lamented, describing the hardships of labour immigration, and asserting that the “Jewishness” of the labourers makes Palestine their “*own homeland*”:

These expulsions are such humiliations of Jewish dignity! Jewish youth and labourers must overcome so many obstacles on way to the homeland: restrictions, decrees, road hardships. Now at last one is in the land itself, invests one’s life in

⁴ Issue 6, 1931, May 21, front page

⁵ Issue 2, 1933, January 27, front page

⁶ DAVAR, January 25, 1933 quotes the police as claiming that “*various illegal leaflets had been found*” in his possession.

work and in creation. But the police are watching him and are able to put an end to his work, cut him off his land, uproot him from his homeland – because one is a Jewish labourer.

Had ever such abuse been seen in any other land – expelling a labourer from his own homeland? [...] Let us not allow the police to deny us the right to our homeland!

Towards the end of 1931, linking **Hebrew Labour** and immigration quotas becomes clear. **Open the shut gates for the Aliya!**⁷ is an editorial declaring the beginning of “*a war of life or death for the opening of the land’s gates*”. The article complained about the discrimination between people with and without means. It is a ruse, it claimed, “*as the government smartly softens the edict with promises – easing the immigration of persons with capital*”. Reality, according to the writer, means limitations: “*a sentence against scores of thousands of working and learning youth, who are pushed away from any place of employment, humiliated in all the learning institutions, suffering from insults and persecutions, and find the gates of all countries closed.*” The conclusion was fully compatible with the political needs of Labour Zionism:

Without the Aliya of Hebrew labourers there is no Zionism. There is no rescue for our masses and no safety for those already settled in Zion. The concern for the fate of the Aliya must encompass us all. We shall wage adamant war, a war of life or death for the opening of the land’s gates.

The focus on much-needed Hebrew labourers – preferably unskilled, potential political supporters of the *Histadrut* and Labour Zionist parties – was shown in a different manner in another editorial on the same page. **No Illusions**⁸ is directed at youngsters of school age, complaining about a surplus of both supply and demand for secondary education. It is an opportunity to make clear what the desired Jewish population in the Yishuv is, from the perspective of **BaMaaleh**: no need for “*frenzy for learning*” but for “*well-informed beaters of the hammer, people who follow the furrows, conquerors of labour, absorbers of Aliya*”. In other words, the local young generation, just like the newcomers from Eastern Europe, must aspire to be manual labourers, supposedly a guarantee for more *Aliya* opportunities.

⁷ Issue 19, 1931, Nov. 20, front page

⁸ Issue 19, 1931, Nov. 20, front page, see also chapter 2

A few months later, the call **Do not close the gates of Labour!**⁹ focused on “*internal Aliya*”, or the prevention of emigration away from Palestine. Veteran Jewish builders were called on to train young boys to become masons. Finding employment for youth might stop them from considering migrating abroad while “*aliens*” (the Mandate government) block immigration, the article said:

[...] the “veteran” builders [...] were not raised as masons and it was the public effort that enabled them to acquire the craft. Should the public not take care now to coach new professionals? Dozens of boys are going around unemployed, and they become bored, start doubting and considering migrating away from this land.

While aliens are closing the gates of the land on us, we must not be closing the option of internal Aliya.

Following reports by the national poet H.N. Bialik who had been touring Poland – he contributed a special piece to **BaMaaleh** titled **About the Jewish Youth in the Diaspora**¹⁰ - an editorial made a direct link between economic hardships of young people in the Jewish diaspora and the demand to open the land to Jewish immigration in order to solve unemployment problems abroad. As usual, the Zionist zeal was for young immigrants who would fortify the settler community. Under the title **The Epic of Horror**¹¹ the editor writes:

A whole young generation, full of energy, love and desire for work and creation faces an abyss.

[...] Would the Hebrew settlement shake up hearing this epic? For on what gates should this Jewish youth knock if not the gates of the homeland? And do we have the right to demand that other lands open their gates to the Jewish youth of Poland as long as the gates of Eretz Israel are closed to them?

Can Eretz Israel absorb Aliya?¹² is a series of two lengthy articles, signed

M. Aram. The articles seem to have been prompted by the British government’s 1930s *Hope Simpson Report on Palestine (Immigration, Land Settlement and Development)*¹³. This report

⁹ Issue 3, 1932, February 5, front page.

¹⁰ Issue 5, 1932, March 4, page 5.

¹¹ Issue 5, 1932, March 4, front page.

¹² Two instalments: Issue 2 &3, 1932, January 22 and Feb, 5, page 3 .

¹³ <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/hope-simpson-report>. It should be noted that the report was swiftly annulled by the “MacDonald Letter” of 1931 in which Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald confirmed – following vigorous Zionist protests – the acceptance by the British government that the

followed the Shaw Commission recommendations, and included comments about “*the constitution of the Jewish agency*” that was committed to “*hire Jewish workmen only*” (Hope-Simpson, 1930:53).

Aram begins his series with a sharp rebuke of both the government and the Arab elites – typical of the period, it does not attack “Arabs” as a group but only dignitaries and property owners:

[...] We witness how the government administers an open policy of hatred and hostility towards the labouring Jewish Aliya [...] legends are spread, as if the Arab fellahin and labourers supposedly suffer much from the Jewish Aliya and therefore must be “protected” from the “Jewish Menace”. In this anti-Jewish campaign, the government is not alone. It has its loyal supporters – the ruling Arab classes: the estate owners, property owners, religious leaders – all unanimously cry that the Jews are the true culprits in the distress of the Arab fellah and labourer [...]

Next, the writer sets out to contradict the arguments included in the report. He opens with the rhetorical question: “*Is space really too small in Eretz Israel for Arabs and Jews together?*” Rejecting the government’s statistics on the size of areas suitable for cultivation and settlement as “*based on falsehood and deceit*” (original emphasis), Aram presented his own estimate:

“[...] Eretz Israel is capable of the next stages of development, becoming a central country for mass Aliya for tens and hundreds of thousands of Hebrew labourers without even slightly touching on the property of the Arab fellahin.

He further pointed out that Jewish settlement is not merely in agriculture but also includes urban settlement, then indicated technologies that would allow (presumably for Jews only) the cultivation of previously arid lands. The assertion that all this is possible “*without even slightly touching on the property of the Arab fellahin*” might have seemed realistic to the writer in 1932. In hindsight, knowing what took place only 16 years later, in 1948, it appears to be cruel mockery.

The second instalment of the series presented the thesis that Jewish settlement brings nothing but advantages to the fellahin economy. The principle of **Hebrew Labour** and the strong

“principle of preferential and, indeed, exclusive employment of Jewish labour by Jewish organisations is a principle which the Jewish Agency are entitled to affirm.” (Smith, 1993:145).

objection to employing Arabs in the Jewish economy are not mentioned in this particular advocacy work.

The argument that the native Arabs of Palestine do not suffer, but in fact even “benefit” from the Jewish settlement (see also chapter 7), was a basic premise of Zionist advocacy and of *Hasbara*. It is forcefully expressed in **The Study Month on Our Hill**¹⁴ by Asher Shlomo who takes a step further and asserts that not merely is the Jewish settlement a great blessing to the autochthon Arabs of Palestine - actually the insistence on Hebrew Labour and *Aliya* is good for them. The report described a gathering of Labour activists who among other things listened to a lecture about the Arab population. They were pleased, the writer relates, to be informed of some gratifying statistics about improved Arab welfare – better economic conditions and better health – all thanks to the arrival of Jewish immigrants and their enterprises:

[...] we are faced with the figures. And the figures prove the force of Hebrew settlement and Aliya and its effect on the Arab population in this land; they prove that thanks to Hebrew Aliya and settlement, the Arabs' economic situation here has improved, their mortality rates were reduced due to Jewish enterprises, for example the drying up of the swamps replaced by forestation [...]

2. Admonishing the “enemies of immigration from within” in the Jewish Yishuv

The issue of immigration – *Aliya* – was seemingly useful for lashing out at political opponents of the Labour Zionist *Histadrut*. As immigration quotas were conditioned by the demand for Hebrew labourers, this demand, according to **BaMaaleh**, had to be boosted, whether or not more Jewish working hands were needed. Jews who did not cooperate with this idea – and those who openly disagreed with the need to increase Jewish immigration – were labelled enemies of the needy Jewish youth abroad, and traitors to national goals. **The Enemy is within us!**¹⁵ is an editorial expressing abhorrence of “*defamers and foes*”, in particular members of the communist *Frakzia*. It bitterly described

¹⁴ Issue 4, 1935, Feb. 22, page 11

¹⁵ Issue 8, 1932, April 15, front page

The recent flyers of the Frakzia, calling the fellahin to the harbours to demonstrate against the Zionist immigrants and to force them to return to where they had come from [...]

The “evil hand that had written this flyer”, the editor warns, ignores the fact that had the *fellahin* accepted the position of the *Frakzia* members, they themselves would be in a risky situation:

[...] had their malicious idea come true, and the fellahin would demonstrate – where would they have been, at whose home would they ask for shelter?

The obvious assumption is that Jewish *Frakzia* members would always need the protection of other Jewish nationals, rather than cooperate with Arabs who share their ideology. Against the perils of *Frakzia* logic (that must have seemed serious) the editor suggested an action of *Hasbara* (explaining). The writer must have been well-aware of the fact that his movement’s position had a lot of explaining to do. The explanation was that the **Hebrew Labour** concept must be adhered to for the benefit of “*the Jewish masses in the lands of the diaspora*”, which is why *fellahin* may not be employed. Only “*defamers and foes*” do not recognise this:

We must organize a wide action of Hasbara, we must relate to our Labour Youth the distress of the Jewish masses in the lands of the diaspora, our destiny and our vocation here in this land. Labour Youth must recognize the situation in all its cruelty. They must know that defamers and foes of our project and our existence are not present just outside but inside as well. We have a cruel combat on our hands against the Frakzia and those who trail behind it.

While Labour Zionism was consistent in this line of reasoning throughout the period discussed, the targeted enemies from the left were not alone. On the political right, bourgeois circles who supported the orchard owners were equally condemned. **Options of Work in the Land**¹⁶ is an article signed by H. Fromkin, who later became the editor of the *Histadrut*’s Economic quarterly. The article reviewed the construction and agricultural sectors that enjoyed a period of fast growth at that time, stressing the point that almost all new enterprises were financed by “Hebrew” capital, and therefore only Jews are to be employed in them, as this will allow for increased demand for Jewish immigration into Palestine. Fromkin scolded Jewish farmers (the

¹⁶ Issue 8, 1932, April 15, page 3

“alienated”) as well as construction entrepreneurs, for employing Arabs, thus blocking the options for increased *Aliya* quotas.

Eretz Israel is presently the only corner in the whole world that has economic possibilities for mass Jewish immigration. [...However] the Hebrew capital now invested in the country does not yield the outcome it might have, had it been invested and spent exclusively within the realm of the Hebrew economy and not outside it.

Had it not been for the alienation of part of the Hebrew farm sector from the Hebrew labourer [...] the country could have absorbed many more thousands of Hebrew workers. [...] Taking over these options for labour, a continued struggle for the creation of absorbing sources for the thousands of Hebrew youths agonizing in the dark diaspora – this today is still the main role for the land’s Histadrut with its different departments.

David Ben Gurion, who in those years was the general secretary of the *Histadrut*¹⁷, contributed a festive article to the 1931 May Day issue, marking the eleventh anniversary of the *General Histadrut of Hebrew Labourers*. In **Our Histadrut**¹⁸ Ben Gurion made clear that the *Histadrut* is not just another trade union like any other in the world, but one that has a major role in the absorption of *Aliya* by placing Jewish labourers in workplaces in Eretz Israel. The Labour Movement that had been established during the period of the second *Aliya*, he informed readers, was “destined to alter the *Yishuv* and the Zionist enterprise in this land and in the diaspora”. Using a powerful biblical image¹⁹, Ben Gurion described his political vision:

The Aliya and the settlements are the two tablets of the covenant of the labourers of Eretz Israel. We have been conceived by the Aliya and our existence has been founded on settlement, both are engraved with fire and blood on the flag of our movement.

History, the founder of the *Histadrut* told **BaMaaleh**’s readers, expects this organisation to be -

[...] a powerful instrument to absorb masses of Olim from all the diasporas and root them for good in labouring life in this land. This is the goal for which our Histadrut was created.

¹⁷ Having founded the *Histadrut* in 1920, Ben Gurion continued as its general secretary until 1935 ([source: the Knesset’s website/Hebrew](#)).

¹⁸ Issue 9, 1931, May 1, page 3.

¹⁹ See also chapter 6.

In this same issue the short address signed by David Ponsky (see above) **To the Labour Youth**²⁰ reminded young readers that it is up to them to make special efforts for the mission of *Aliya*. As usual, individual aspirations were to be set aside. Your work, he told the Labouring Youth

[...] is not merely “Labour for one’s living”. This is the work project of the nation, the building of the people on the basis of work, this is the labour that will build our people, free it from all ugliness and diaspora lifestyle and bring it to a communal socialist life with all other nations of the world in a renewed socialist world [...]

The notion of *Aliya* as a solution to the problematic situation of Jews worldwide (namely in Eastern Europe) was repeated in **The Conquest of the People**²¹ by B. West. Work in Eretz Israel is the only possible salvation for the serious predicament abroad, he explains: “[...] for a long time there had not been a period as full of evil and suffering as the present, as if all around us people rise to annihilate us.” The writer then swiftly moved to discuss internal political problems, mainly the “*incitement and deception by the dark forces in Zionism*”:

Inside the nation as well, the curse is everywhere, great is the fracture [...] The lack of organisation among the people [...] The Zionist Histadrut, this pioneering body of the people in the diaspora – is in ruins. Every party stands aside looking after its own, not for the enterprise in its entirety. The Zionist funds are low. Added to the objective difficulties due to the impoverishment of the nation – there are also added incitement and deception by the dark forces in Zionism.

West is troubled both by the fact that “*The masses are neglected, with no forces to invigorate and educate them*” and by the solution that some individuals adopt, turning their back on religious tradition: “*Assimilation is also never ending*” (see also chapter 6). He worries that “*Zionism has not been running any educational or Hasbara activity*”, then points at the single possible solution to the problems of Jewish suffering: immigration into Palestine and becoming labourers:

[...] there is only one lit corner in the life of this suffering and anguished nation, and this is Eretz Israel – the land where basic foundations of labour and construction are being created for the whole people. [...] By the darkness of the night that has neglected the Hebrew nation in the lands of its dispersion, the bright dots of light come from the labouring camp in this land.

²⁰ Issue 9, 1931, May 1, page 3.

²¹ Issue 16, 1932, August 19, page 3.

In **The origins of the Communist *Frakzia* in Eretz Israel**²² (see also chapter 3 above) by N. Benari's, the writer's core complaint against the *Frakzia* (he disdainfully calls it a "two faced" organisation merely committed to the "criminal tactic" of the COMINTERN) was the fact that their position was harmful for *Aliya*, as they reject the Hebrew Labour doctrine:

The issue of the Hebrew labour-pioneering Aliya to Eretz Israel is a crucial test for the Frakzia. A genuine revolutionary movement should have supported the cause of fortifying the Hebrew labourer in Eretz Israel. Without a conscientious Hebrew labourer – there is no possibility here of any labour movement.

Benari was convinced that the benefits of Jewish immigration to the whole "land and its issues" were perfectly understood by the members of the *Frakzia*, but they were choosing to ignore those benefits due to the alien political considerations of the COMINTERN that controls and guides them:

*Every thinking person, including those in the Communist movement, knows that the Jewish Aliya in general is beneficial for the land and its issues, even considering the options of its proletarian development. But the COMINTERN does not care at all about the **historical development** of the proletariat in Eretz Israel, nor does it care about the historical role this proletariat has in the local class struggle. The COMINTERN cares about one single thing only: **the present conflict within the British Empire** (original emphasis).*

Similarly vehement, "Shmuel" lumped together all the opponents of Labour Zionism in the article titled **To Our Defamers**²³. Complaining about the position of the communists who objected to increased *Aliya*, he blamed them for preventing an idyllic (fabricated) vision, in which Arab and Jewish labourers "work together":

According to them we have no right to come here, they encourage the Arab opposition to Jewish Aliya – so why should an Arab labourer want to work together with the looter of his bread and his land?

Obviously and conveniently "Shmuel" ignored the fact that avoiding "working together" was the very essence of **Hebrew Labour**.

²² Issue 19, 1932, Oct,14, page 3.

²³ Issue 15, 1932, August 5, page 3.

3. Pickets against Arab labour to fortify demands for more Aliya

As the economic situation in the land improved, the claim that Jews desperately need unskilled manual jobs was no longer credible. The first issue of *BaMaaleh* in 1933 confirmed this in the editorial **Towards the coming days**²⁴:

We recently heaved a sigh of relief. The curse of unemployment threatens us no longer [...] the Hebrew labourer now turns all his energy to getting established and fortifying the basis.

1933 also marked an increased demand for immigration certificates, following the rise to power of the Nazi party that took control of Germany in January that year²⁵. *BaMaaleh* continued to link the need for certificates with the need to get more labourers to immigrate to the land. In **Open the gates for Aliya!**²⁶ an editorial, still focused on economic difficulties in the (presumably Polish) diaspora, calls for immigration certificates based on the lack of “*working hands*” in the country:

*The Jewish People groans in the diaspora and in poverty and yearns to make Aliya to the homeland. And the homeland cries out for Olim, for the building-sons, who would fertilise and construct and erect it. **There is a lack of working hands in the country – in the town and in the countryside:** and the Avenging Angels who are in charge of the gates of the land push down the immigration quotas [...] (original emphasis).*

With similar sentiment, the editorial **We are fully Experienced**²⁷ assails orchard owners who employ Arab labourers (singling out the Rokakh brothers²⁸), calling the pickets that *Histadrut* activists erected against Arab workers (see chapter 2) part of a “*holy war*”, as they are meant to preserve “*the only and last option to live and to work in the land*”.

²⁴ Issue 1, 1933, January 13, front page

²⁵ In fact, not all the actually obtained certificates were used eventually, as some did not “*feel an urgency to leave Europe and immigrate to Eretz Israel. Some considered Aliya a licence, a kind of insurance policy and were not in a hurry to use it*” (Halamish, 2006:142)

²⁶ Issue 16, 1933, August 25, front page, continued on page 2

²⁷ Issue 20, 1933, Oct. 24, front page

²⁸ Yitzhak Rokakh headed the “*Pardes Syndicate*” association and was a member of a joint Jewish-Arab association that dealt with citrus export; his brother Israel Rokakh was the mayor of Tel Aviv, 1932-1952. Both brothers, born in Palestine to a wealthy family, were members of the General Zionists party. (source: Tidhar)

It is not just the labourers of the Sharon – every Hebrew labourer and every Hebrew youth whose heart is with liberating Zionism will be giving a hand to this holy war.

Well-fed orchard farmers and well-armed police are at the disposal of the Rokakh brothers. The Jewish labourers will not be deterred by all these powers and will not allow the robbing of the Jewish people of the only and last option to live and to work in the land.

On the very same page a similar reproach titled **Those who Commit a Suicidal Act**²⁹ is hurled at the communist *Frakzia* that apparently “*joined the demand of the Arab inciters to close the gates of the land to Jewish Aliya*”.

The tight link between *Aliya* and the maxim of **Hebrew Labour** is most clearly spelled out in an article dedicated specifically to the youngest readers. The unsigned piece **On Guard for Hebrew Labour**³⁰, seemingly representing the editorial board as well as the movement’s leadership (see above, chapter 2) opens with the words:

The government is fighting the Aliya – and Jewish orchard owners are helping this by denying Hebrew labourers’ work.

The next few words repeat the main message: a link between immigration to Palestine and becoming a manual labourer is presented as obvious:

*It is **labour** that gives us the right to come and settle this land. Labour is the basis of our aspiration for a revival. Eretz Israel is the only land where we desire and are able to live a life of labour and creativity. All our life in the diaspora is dependent and conditioned on external factors. There we are not allowed to work the land, to build houses, to pave roads and rails³¹; we are pushed into jobs and livelihoods that turn us into detached foreigners. Only here do we start to sprout, be a nation building and sitting on its own land. (Original emphasis).*

²⁹ Issue 20, 1933, Oct 24, front page.

³⁰ Issue 20, 1933, Oct 24, page 7. See also in chapter 2.

³¹ This Jewish and Zionist perspective is widely accepted even today but was often refuted, e.g., in Leonid Soloveitschik’s book (1898) about the Jewish proletariat, quoted by Gabriel Piterberg (Piterberg, 2008:13). In *The Chosen Few*, Botticini and Eckstein – who concentrate on the period before 1492 – remark that “*In pointed contrast to both conventional wisdom and generations of scholarly study, we show that no significant restrictions on Jewish economic activities existed [...]*” (Botticini & Eckstein, 2012:54).

N. Benari contributed yet another ideological commentary piece later that year. In **A War for Victory and a Battle of Existence**³² he wondered why Jewish immigration is not encouraged or welcomed in spite of the fact that it “*brings economic and social prosperity to the land*”:

We witness a strange state of affairs: It is now clear to all inhabitants of this land that our Aliya brings economic and social prosperity to the land. These are well-known facts. [...] And still... where is the weak spot? Why are we encountering such difficulty, misunderstanding and open hostility here inside the borders of the land? What are the objective reasons for it? We must know all this clearly, so that we shall not make mistakes in our calculations and in our relations.

Wandering what could possibly be the “*weak spot*” he does not, of course, consider the ban on Arab employment. Instead, he identifies culprits: “*two distinct factors are adamantly against our Aliya to this land: the Colonial British bureaucracy and conservative forces in the Arab public*”. Then he offers his interpretation of the assumed motives of these two adversary groups. First: The British Mandate government and the British capitalists, who dislike the free-spirited Jewish immigrants and their expectations of reasonable wages (interestingly, he also accuses them of disliking people who demand “*a democratic system, checks and balances etc.*” Natives of the land do not seem to be included in the “*democratic system*” demanded by the “*settlement*”):

The British rule is always more comfortable leaning on localities of primitive people than on a settlement that demands a democratic system, checks and balances etc. The English capital that begins to be invested in various projects in this land is also uncomfortable finding a level of labour wages that is not at all in accordance with the level of labour wages in the neighbouring countries. Such capital is accustomed to find options for maximal exploitation in the colonies.

Jewish capitalists are accused of collaborating with British imperialist capitalism. It is this local Jewish segment of the population, Benari continues angrily, “*that backs the colonial policy*”, having no need for Jewish labourers. His description includes more than a whiff of antisemitism:

[...] the Smilansky³³ gang, those Jewish effendis who sit in their estates in the Moshavot of Judea, for whom Zionism is a milking cow to increase their assets. They need neither the Jewish labourer nor the Jewish public, and they already

³² Issue 21, 1933, Nov. 19, page 3

³³ Moshe Smilansky (1874-1953) was an orchard owner as well as president of the Farmers Association and political editor of its publication “The Orchard Owner” [*Ha’Bustenai*]. For a while he also served as chief editor of the daily “Do’ar Ha’yom” and a consistent advocate against “the rule of the left” (source: Tidhar).

show the marks of the Jewish assimilating bourgeoisie, that pushed itself into the gentile community in every country and was finally rejected by every society.”

The British officials and Jewish capitalists then find “*allies within the Arab public*”, as

Arab estate owners and various religious officials in their midst do not see any good arising for themselves from a massive Jewish Aliya. [...] they have absolutely no desire to accept massive Jewish immigration that might dictate a new economic order in the land: raise wages, fight for another public regime, and add a political factor that would wish to take over leadership from them. [...] this element, mass Jewish immigration, is a dangerous element for them politically [...] sick with political radicalism [...].

The analysis is a fascinating piece of rhetorical acrobatics, mainly due to the factors it chooses to ignore so nonchalantly: On the Arab side the writer sees only “*estate owners*” (*effendis*) and “*religious officials*”, but no mention of Bedouin and *fellahin*, the people who at that time were actually being forced to give up places of residency as well as arable and pasture lands, once these lands were purchased by Jews; there is also no mention of local Arab labourers who were being pushed out of jobs in the Hebrew economy by the demand of the *Histadrut*; or who were the target of efforts made to reduce their number in the government’s infrastructure works.

In the alternative reality reported by Benari, while “*The powerful wave of Jewish Aliya is growing*” the result is that “*A rapprochement is to be felt between the two peoples*”, which leads him to predict gleefully: “*soon the effendis’ ship might drown in the waves of progress in the land.*” The “*rapprochement*” remained a product of the fertile imagination of Labour Zionist propagandists (for ex. see Lockman, 1995: 212; 220; 222 & Lockman, 1996:46).

4. Hebrew Labour in days of prosperity: “whistle blowers” against Aliya

The economic prosperity that provided an abundance of working opportunities did nothing to reduce the insistence on Hebrew Labour in manual unskilled jobs, although newcomers could easily find better positions in the labour market. **BaMaaleh** continued to faithfully promote the call for **Hebrew Labour** in agriculture, that remained at the centre of Labour Zionism’s political

agenda. **Conquering Labour in the Hebrew *Moshava*** was a series of three lengthy articles³⁴ signed Y. Bankover. The first instalment opened with the declaration – quoting the *Histadrut*' conference decisions - that it is important to preserve the “*pioneering basis*”:

[...] especially in this period of prosperity and the continuous increase of our public and its organisational and economic institutions, it is necessary to avoid arrogance and take care of the pioneering basis of the movement.

To be sure, the pioneering foundations were described as “*The conquest of labour and the conquering of oneself for labour and for new life.*” As conditions were changing, the ideology seemed to be threatened. Bankover, also quoting the prominent Ben Gurion, decrees that “*the front is in the Moshava*” (original emphasis). *Moshava* (settlement) was the name generally used for the agricultural village that preceded the socialist second *Aliya*. Most farm work in the *Moshava* was performed by hired labour. Bankover considers the battle over securing employment for Jews-only in this front as critical:

Here our destiny is to be decided. In the fight over our right to labour and in the Hebrew economy our position will be established, in this land and within the Jewish People.

“*Our position*” relates to the position and status of the political Labour movement within the Jewish settlement (*Yishuv*) in the land, and within the general Zionist movement worldwide. The battle for workplaces in agriculture is directly linked to the problems of immigration (*Aliya*). It is “*the crucial front*”:

Without the effort to conquer labour positions for the Hebrew labourer – all talk of Aliya is merely verbal. Instinctively our movement noted that here is the crucial front.

This line of thinking was not consensual at the time, either in the Zionist movement or in the Jewish settlement of Palestine. Bankover brought-up personal memories, mixing his own experiences – he arrived in 1926 - with those of the members of the second *Aliya*, like Tabenkin and Ben Gurion:

Under conditions of horrible loneliness, in face of mockery and the disdain of the carefree Yishuv, alienation and a lack of understanding on the part of the nation,

³⁴ Issues 3, 1934, January 31, page 3; Issue 4, Feb. 15, page 3; Issue 5, Feb. 25. Page 8.

with no moral or realistic support of the Zionist movement – this is how the Hebrew labourers began to penetrate the Hebrew economy.

His own experiences and difficulties were then described with some nostalgia:

[...] The inhuman working conditions [...] The workplace was infested with fever, hunger and alienation [...] all three – labour, fever and hunger were new to me, and most interesting.

There is no indication of the length of time Bankover lasted as a farm hand suffering these “interesting” experiences, before becoming a full-time political writer and activist, but he feels fully qualified to represent the labourers’ ideological convictions, focused on *Aliya*:

It is only the feeling of the historic mission that the Hebrew labourer fulfils in this land, and the recognition that he is the carrier and the most faithful expression of the needs of the masses and the Jewish youth who aim for Aliya and search for possibilities of absorption in this land, the deep recognition that the labourer’s fight for his right to labour in the Hebrew economy is the fight for true Zionism – all these empowered the pioneers [...]

Next, he describes the solution that was found to counter the hard conditions in the *Moshava* and the disinterested employers: the establishment of fully sponsored Jewish-only settlements, based on cooperative principles³⁵ (see chapter 2). Still, and in spite of the growing political base of the Labour Movement, the writer is concerned. He is alarmed at indications that more comfortable living is preferred, as this opens the way to “alien labour in the Hebrew economy” (namely, labour of native Arab workers). He demands to halt the “escape” of Jews from manual labour:

[...] we are again increasingly facing the necessity to protect the soul of Zionism [...] The forsaking of agricultural work, the move to construction in the Moshava, moving into the city, the alarming increase of alien labour in the Hebrew economy, the boycott against the organised labourer, the serious ruptures in the new Moshavot – all these require us to sharply make a new and correct evaluation of how things are in the Moshavot [...] we must seek a way to stop the escape and regain our pioneering power in the penetration into the Moshava.

The link between Hebrew Labour and *Aliya* was at the centre of the next two instalments of this series. After beginning with a repeated lamentation over the “escape” of Hebrew labourers

³⁵ *Ramat HaKovesh* [“Conqueror’s Heights”], the Kibbutz Bankover joined, was established by a group who originally tried to make a living as labourers in the *Moshava* Kfar Saba.

from the *Moshavot*, the writer proceeded to condemn the “*black farmers*” who dare to continue employment of unorganised, often cheap Arab labour. But first and foremost, he was concerned about what he considered the enfeeblement of his own movement’s ideological commitment to “*destiny in labour and Aliya*”:

*[...] there is no error more fatal for the whole movement, if it does not understand that in spite of the prosperity in all the economic sectors in this land – the first and most crucial condition for our destiny in labour and Aliya in the coming years is **the guarantee of our position in the Hebrew [farming] economy.** Here is where hope lies to overcome critical years when they come, this is the starting point of our political campaign against the decrees forbidding Aliya [...]* (original emphasis).

While the farmers’ association and the Revisionist party were singled out as the main culprits – breaking strikes and introducing unorganised and Arab labour - Bankover was worried about his own comrades:

*[...] **we too were dragged** and chose the ‘easiest resistance’. We accepted the orchard-economy’s taking leave of Hebrew labourers [...]* **The Pioneering spirit in our rows has been weakened** (original emphasis).

He expressed hopes for “*leverage in the campaign for constructive labour and the increase of pioneering Aliya*”. While the farmer class wishes to “*preserve the present situation, cheap labour, inferior labour conditions and its reactionary dominance*” the labourers must be “*bravely, decisively and uncompromisingly campaigning for work, for the Aliya of thousands of pioneering youths*”. Members of the movement were clearly not supposed to campaign for their own working conditions, but for a national-political cause, in the best traditions of “*realistic societies*” (Fuchs, 2001:220). The “*cause*” did not seem to include older members of the pioneers’ families.

In the third instalment of the series, Bankover called Jewish employers of Arabs “*saboteurs*” of the campaign for increased immigration quotas. The orchard owners’ refrain from demanding more Jewish labourers from Europe was defined as an act of “*violence*” against the masses of Jews by “*whistle blowers*”. Bankover’s rhetoric here resorted to frequently-used sarcasm:

[...]as the reactionary government maliciously sabotages Jewish Aliya, in times that we are required to unite all our forces in defence – in times like this to come

as whistle blowers to the government and hint, that they are not with those who demand a large Aliya – this is no violence to the masses of Jews, God forbid; and also the “great understanding” of the evil war of the government against the “illegal” Aliya – must be considered a great Zionist act.

The end-phrase of the second instalment is also the title of the third instalment:

We shall make every sacrifice and pay any price in the defensive war for the integrity of the Labourers’ Histadrut, protecting it from all who come to destroy it! (Original emphasis).

The potential “war” alluded to was in fact over the political power of the *Histadrut* and the Labour movement in the Zionist institutions (see also the next chapter). The political opponents were the orchard owners and the Revisionists. The preservation of organised (Jewish) labour was described as essential for securing more immigration, a national goal that supposedly united all Zionists. To defend the positions of Labour Zionists, Bankover expected the young to enlist. The call is to defend the labourers’ institutions, and the principle of Hebrew Labour, which is crucial “for Aliya”:

*[...] go out on picket-guards and with **our bodies**, with **our blood** [...] In face of the destructive forces in the Jewish populace – we must raise **an organised force of the whole labour public**. We need this force in order to prevent the powers of ruin from taking over, in order to guarantee our struggle for labour and for Aliya.* (Original emphasis)

Immigration necessities and the abysmal situation of the Jews in Europe were also quoted when *BaMaaleh* raised the alarm against a government attempt to legislate against actions in the workplace barring the employment of people from different ethnic and religious background. According to the proposed legislation, such actions were not to be recognised as grounds for an industrial dispute (Shapira, 1977:166). The furious editorial **For Whose benefit?**³⁶ condemns the initiative. It describes the proposed legislation -

[..] according to which conflict generated from the objection of workers to the employment of other workers due to their race, religion or language – will no longer be considered an industrial conflict.

³⁶ Issue 6, 1934, March 16, front page

This, *BaMaaleh* correctly realises, threatens to outlaw pickets imposing **Hebrew Labour**. The editor considers this an outrage, explaining that barring Arabs from work is necessary in order to facilitate the immigration of Jews:

Our campaign for Hebrew Labour in the Hebrew economy is aimed only against the Jewish employer, having arrived here due to the national effort, who keeps his enterprise thanks to the Hebrew labourers who work there and make a living for themselves and for the employer, while preparing the ground for the Aliya of masses of Jews.

Angrily the editor complains:

*The government that knows how to collect enormous sums in taxes from the Jewish Yishuv is **actually boycotting the Jewish labourer**. Shutting the Hebrew economy in the face of the Jewish labourer means starving him and starving his children, removing them from the land and dashing the hopes of the Hebrew nation for redemption. (Original emphasis).*

As 1934 saw real economic prosperity and no shortage of workplaces, the talk of “starving” labourers or their children is empty rhetoric. To denounce the new legislation the editor defined it as a malicious scheme to block more *Aliya*:

This lethal law is merely intended to limit the Jewish construction endeavour; to add one more obstacle to the Jewish Aliya and to induce racial and religious hatred between the Jew and the Arab workers.

Why banning picket lines against Arab workers would “induce racial and religious hatred” is left to the readers’ imagination, as it might seem that the pickets themselves were more likely to induce animosity. There is no attempt to explain this apparent mystery.

The number of articles and urgent calls to support the **Hebrew Labour** principle grew steadily throughout 1934, against the background of economic prosperity and the pressure on the labour market that this boom exerted. Most texts express anger and frustration over what was described as lack of solidarity and unwillingness to support the maxim of exclusive Jewish labour, by those sectors of the Jewish population of Palestine who were not part of the Labour Zionist movement. **All alone on the Wall**³⁷ is an editorial written in bitter sentiment, expressing

³⁷ Issue 7, 1934, March 30, front page

concern for the Labour Movement version of the national enterprise, condemning the employers for using “foreign” (that is, native Arab) labour as “*The wall of the Hebrew Labour is in danger*”:

From time to time the Hebrew labourer finds himself alone and lonely on the wall. And it is on him, on his own shoulders, rests the heavy burden of defending the home of our lives. As ever, so also today, the nation stands up to the crisis in alarm. The wall of the Hebrew Labour is in danger. The Hebrew economy in the Moshavot demands working hands – and there we are again, alone, on the wall. [...] What good is all the “boom” in the cities for us, if we are to lose today the position of Hebrew labour in the Moshava to pure greed? What good for us are the hundreds of orchard owners who employ foreign labourers? Without Hebrew labour surely an end will come to all our enterprise in this land. [...] only the Hebrew labourer and the pioneering youth have been alarmed and presented themselves to the picket-guard of Hebrew labour.

Foremost fury is turned against opponents of **Hebrew Labour**, left and right, or in the terminology of **BaMaaleh**: “*hasslers and informers, members of the Frakzia and of the Bustenai*”. The calls for **Hebrew Labour** are now openly defined as a device to support the demand for increased immigration certificates. Apparently, the opponents of the *Histadrut* and the concept of **Hebrew Labour** were aware of this and made their position known. They spread, **BaMaaleh** furiously accuses, “*conspiratorial libels*”:

saying that the screams for Hebrew Labour are only directed at the government, to increase the labouring Hebrew Aliya.

5. Preserving positions for Aliya “in the future”

The linkage between insistence on Hebrew Labour and expectations of more immigration is pronounced favourably and enthusiastically in **The Meeting**³⁸, signed Asher Shlomo, describing a group of students who joined a temporary labour camp. Their camp, the writer says, was created in order to support “*Aliya in the future*”:

we had the first meeting with the comrades and friends who came to carry the burden of labour with us and support the preserving of Hebrew labour positions and save thousands of workplaces in the Hebrew economy for young people from the diaspora, who will make their Aliya in the future. [...] Having left pens and books they came to hold the hoe and the pruning shears [...] Respect and glory to

³⁸ Issue 7, 1934, March 30, page 5

the young comrades, who had come to guard Hebrew labour in the Hebrew economy, which is expecting Aliya. The youth knew its role, it knew that it is their duty to go to the labour-front, to be of assistance to the labour-army [...]

The same line of reasoning is used in another *hasbara* article, aiming to explain, as the title of the editorial maintains: **What are the Labourers of the Sharon fighting for?**³⁹ . *BaMaaleh* again enlightened its readers, explaining that struggling for **Hebrew Labour** is a fight for more Jewish immigration:

The bitter struggle of the labourers in the Sharon, marked by arrests, strikes and boycotts, is a struggle over the soul of the movement, over the essence of liberating Zionism. There will not be nor exist Zionism without Hebrew Labour. Zionism built on foreign labour closes the gates of Aliya right in front of us, denies the Hebrew nation any right to the land and turns our life here into a new version of life in the diaspora – detached from the source of labour, from Mother-Earth. And such Zionism is perilous to the whole enterprise, to all the efforts invested in this land and to the aspirations of all generations.

Zionism that is not based on labour for Jews only is declared perilous, and the editorial scolds “Civil Zionism” that speaks highly about “Pure Nationalism”:

you will not be forgiven this distortion, telling us that we are fighting against the Arab labourer. Every labourer who recognizes our right to Aliya to this land and to work here – must recognize the Principle of Hebrew Labour in the Hebrew economy.

The struggle against the picket guards, which included police intervention at the request of orchards owners and generated violence and arrests, was condemned in another angry editorial titled “**Uproot it All**”⁴⁰ . Next to expressing indignation against the (Jewish) “Farmers Association and those who are dragged along in its footsteps”, *BaMaaleh* turned furiously at the government:

And you, the government of the land, should know this: the torture of generations, persecutions, exterminations, and the fire of longing for the homeland and for redemption has brought us to this land. We have burnt behind us all the bridges – from here we will not move!!!

³⁹ Issue 8, 1934, April 15, front page

⁴⁰ Issue 10, 1934, May 18, front page

This is followed by a call to the young supporters of Labour Zionism who had not yet decided to come to Palestine:

Spread over all the roads, break all fences, come and join us in Aliya, the Wall of Israel is in danger!

The same issue carries a long commentary dedicated to the linkage between immigration quotas and the **Hebrew Labour** principle. **Under the Light of Looming Danger**⁴¹, signed Benjamin Maaravi (See also in chapter 2), accused the government of refusing to respond favourably to the Jewish Agency's scheduling demands (Halamish, 2006: 101-105; 126) using "*economic reasoning of blinding political essence*". The government "*cruelly amputates the quota for labouring Aliya*" as its intention "*to limit Hebrew labour in the Hebrew farming economy and replace it with Arab labour – now stands out clearly and undisguised*". The alarming result is that "*cheap labour is conquering one position after another, and has already arrived at the fortified spots of Hebrew labour.*"

Next to the government, orchard owners and right-wingers, Communists and other left-wingers - all of them opposing the imposition of pure **Hebrew Labour** and therefore enemies of Jewish immigration - the complaint also included the labouring public, and even the new immigrants. Writer Maaravi expressed frustration with what he considered "*faulty pioneering*":

Much is also being caused by the faulty pioneering of many labourers, and in particular among the young immigrants, who should be first to answer the call for conquering labour and continuing the pioneering labourer's tradition in agriculture.

Lack of enthusiasm by the young individuals – mostly well-educated – over gruelling manual agricultural jobs in the *Moshavot*, and the preference of more rewarding opportunities in the city, are a direct threat to the thesis that only pure **Hebrew Labour** may enable the realisation of the national goal. The employment of Arab labourers (while Jewish labourers were not available!) was "*malicious*" from the writer's point of view. He was appalled at the fact that Arab labourers were working in the city of Tel Aviv:

The malicious assault against Hebrew labour inside our enterprise is happening right at the hour of economic prosperity in this land such as we had not known

⁴¹ Issue 10, 1934, May 18, page 3.

earlier. And it is in this situation, when in Eretz Israel there is plenty of work [...] while in the diaspora there is hunger, and unemployment and yearning for Aliya – the entire Yishuv is not shocked and appalled at the sight of Arab labourers even penetrating Hebrew Tel Aviv, presently employing about 1500 cheap labourers.

“Recruiting Hebrew labour guards in the Sharon is far too slow and sluggish” The writer warned, then surprisingly revealed that in fact, Aliya is needed to guarantee **Hebrew Labour**, and not vice versa:

Without a large, expanded Hebrew labouring Aliya there will be no solution at all to the subject of Hebrew labour – the most important issue of our existence here in the homeland as a healthy national sector.

Once again it is made clear: A “*healthy national sector*” – or in other words, an “ethnically pure” labour force – is a basic condition for the kind of settler community desired by Labour Zionism. As the expected mass of labouring immigrants was not available, a demand was made of the young members of the Jewish community. Irrespective of their own needs and desires they should “*leave the city, commit their lives to agricultural labour and become the guard of the Hebrew labour in the Moshava*”. This is yet another affirmation that - as is typical in a culture based on essentialist idealism - “*Total and selfless dedication to the common cause is the prime virtue*” (Fuchs, 2001:220).

The new Jewish Year TARZA⁴² opened with the anguished rhetorical question **Are We Sentenced to Extinction?**⁴³ It is a bitter complaint against the legal ban on pickets keeping Arab labourers out, and sentences of imprisonment for members of pickets. The new laws “*lock the gates of the land in our very faces*”. They “*sentence us to live a life of idleness, decay, life that is worse than death*”, the editorial complains, rising to new peaks of hysterical rhetoric:

*[...] is there in the world a law that sentences a nation to **extinction** and orders it to keep silent? And is there a force that would choke the scream erupting from the depth of the heart [...]? (Original emphasis).*

The fury was enhanced by the fact that the judge from Haifa who sentenced the picket members was himself a Jew, to the great amazement of the editor:

⁴² Septembre, 1934.

⁴³ Issue 17-18, 1934, Sept. 9, front page.

Let the Jewish judge, he who knows how to moralise the labourer standing vigil, the Jewish immigrant and the Jewish labourer, answer - What can they do in this land with no work? Let him for one moment answer, what would he have done, had he been in the position of this labourer?

For **BaMaaleh**, faithfully representing the party line of the *Histadrut* and MAPAI party that controlled it, forbidding the ban on native labour was equal to “*slavery and humiliation*”, because it was a decree “*against Aliya*”. English patriotism is waggled as a would-be relevant model (in fact totally irrelevant):

The government must know that just as there is no Englishman who would accept a law robbing him of his homeland, sentencing him to a life of slavery and humiliation, just as any Englishman would fight to his last drop of blood over his liberty and the liberty of his people – in the same way we will not accept the decrees against Aliya and the decrees about our right to labour in this land.

Proclaiming that “*Aliya and labour are for us like air and water,*” the writer completely ignored the fact – often reported in **BaMaaleh** – that there was no shortage of working places for Jewish labourers at the time, and that most Jews were not interested in the physically exhausting, meagrely remunerating work in agriculture. “[...] *our war against the decrees on Aliya and labour will be stubborn and uncompromising!*” was his ominous prediction.

The suggestion – enthusiastically endorsed by **BaMaaleh** – to temporarily recruit Jewish youth for the citrus harvesting season, clearly illustrates the situation of the labour market, whereby orchard owners found themselves coping with the serious shortage of working hands due to the *Histadrut*’s ban on Arab labour and the almost non-existence of Jewish farm labourers. **We will Follow the Call**⁴⁴ vowed an editorial in the name of the young readers. *Aliya* was positioned as the justification for this recruitment, the labour of native Arabs branded “*foreign*” and exclusive **Hebrew Labour** legitimised as “*Jewish socialism*” while clearly the recruited temporary workers were pupils who did not consider farm labour as a vocation:

*Our movement, as an implementing revolutionary labour youth movement, is called upon today to recruit all its forces and make them available for **Hebrew labour in the plantation economy during the harvest season**. This simple call contains the content of our Zionist and socialist life. We must repeat once and again this one simple truth: The same way that Zionism is impossible without the masses of the people, without land and with no Hebrew labour, there is no real*

⁴⁴ Issue 21, 1934, October 26, front page

*Jewish socialism without **Hebrew Labour**. Anyone contradicting Hebrew labour is against our right of existence as workers, labourers who carry socialism and implement it. [...] There is no value to our struggle over Aliya if we do not preserve the workplaces for the Jewish immigrant. Were we to abandon the workplaces in the Hebrew Moshava to foreign, cheap labour – we would abandon our brothers and sisters, our own destiny and our vocation in this land.* (Original emphasis).

Celebrating the 14th anniversary of the establishment of the *Histadrut* of Hebrew Labourers, the festive editorial **The Book of the Life of the *Histadrut***⁴⁵ credited the trade union organisation with “[...] *Years of never-ending war for the right to Aliya, for labour and for settlement*”. Clearly the national goals – not necessarily the welfare of members – were prioritised by this Union, that did not even pretend to care about the fate of labourers who were not Jewish.

Conclusions from chapter 4

Hebrew Labour, a core component in the ideology of Labour Zionism, was not unanimously accepted among the Jewish settlement of Palestine and needed to be propped up with extra justifications. The idea that insistence on **Hebrew Labour** is necessary to help claim increased immigration quotas seems to have been one of the strongest *Hasbara* messages in favour of support for **Hebrew Labour**, one that targeted the national sentiment shared by most of the Jewish population. As explained by historian Anita Shapira, “*The demand for Hebrew Labour has turned into a demand for the sake of the Hebrew Ole who had not yet arrived in the land – that is, a demand for certificates*” (Shapira, 1977:164). **BaMaaleh**, as the quotes in this chapter demonstrate, portrayed the need for immigration as a primary reason for protecting the **Hebrew Labour** principle. At least once⁴⁶ it also confirmed the opposite: that immigration was needed to secure **Hebrew labour**. It should be noted that the need for *Aliya*/immigration always refers to the need for able, young people who were expected to become agricultural labourers. There is no mention of the desire to bring over families with children or the elderly.

⁴⁵ Issue 23, 1934, Nov, 30, front page

⁴⁶ See above Maaravi’s article on issue 10, 1934.

Attempts to resist the pickets against Arab labourers - by employers, left-wing political groups or the government – were portrayed as opposition to the national efforts to rapidly increase the number of Jewish immigrants. When it became clear that there was not enough Jewish workforce available to support the need of the farming sector (mainly in the orchards) **BaMaaleh** both criticised the “*faulty pioneering*” spirit of the labourers in the land and issued “emergency” calls to recruit Jewish youth for temporary work sessions during the harvest period, to block the hiring of non-Jews.

Enabling more Jewish *Aliya* was given as a primary reason for the efforts to preserve ethnic purity at the workplace. This also became a useful tool in the confrontations with opponents of the *Histadrut* parties, as they resisted the concept of exclusive **Hebrew Labour**. As Aviva Halamish put it: “*more than being an instrument for the struggle over Hebrew Labour, the struggle for increased Aliya was an instrument for punching the farmers*” (Halamish, 2006: 147). More about the instrumentalization of the *Aliya* and **Hebrew labour** against the most formidable political opposition – the Revisionist movement – in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Hebrew labour as a winning argument in the struggle against the Revisionist party: presenting Labour Zionism as more loyal to the national ideal of ethnic purity

For purely economic reasons – preference of a cheap and efficient labour force - the natural opponents of **Hebrew Labour** were the employers: orchard owners, building contractors or industrialists. The Revisionist party and institutions fully backed the employers. Their support, politically but also ideologically motivated and based on their objection to the growing might of the *Histadrut*, offered Labour Zionists an opportunity to attack them over apparent lack of loyalty to the national fundamental ethos. This on-going debate, that was an integral part of the fierce competition over the political hegemony of the *Yishuv*, seems really bizarre – and apparently not sufficiently noticed - as it puts the two parties in positions that are opposed to their conventional roles in national politics. Labour Zionism is traditionally identified as the moderate, “left” wing of Zionism. Revisionists are well-recognised as the extreme, nationalistic and militaristic right-wing of Zionism. It is therefore surprising to find a consistent campaign of Labour Zionist writers accusing the Revisionists of not being nationalistic enough.

Commonly, and fairly logically, Zionist Revisionism is seen as the ultimate brand of ultra-nationalist, militaristic, uncompromising disposition of Zionism. The Revisionist wing of Zionism was created and headed by the very charismatic Ze’ev (Vladimir) Jabotinsky (1880 – 1940) whom Shlomo Avineri described as an outstanding intellectual who was *“not merely one of the most controversial but also one of Zionism’s most colourful and fascinating figures in those days of social and national fermentation”* (Avineri, 1999 [1980]:182). His teaching became *“Synonymous with an ideology that has Jewish nationalism as its centre”* (ibid:183). His admiration of fascist Italy and his insistence on militarism marked him and his many followers as dangerous weirdos even before colonialism went out of fashion altogether. According to Jabotinsky, the *“first step in transferring the sovereignty of Palestine to Jewish hands must be the re-establishment of the Jewish Battalion and entrusting it with the keeping of law and order in the land”*, explaining that this was modelled *“on the rights and authority offered by the colonial British rule of Kenya to the white settlers there, in view of the dangers to them from the*

Negro population" (ibid, 213). Jabotinsky's concept of the "Iron Wall"¹ that was advertised as the core of this militaristic ideology (Gorny, 1985: 219 -245) became an immediate hit: It "swept many masses" of Jewish people "all over Eastern Europe", who seemed weary of "official Zionism, that combined actions of settlement with prudent diplomacy" (Avineri, 1999 [1980]: 190).

The popular appeal of the Revisionists made them a dangerous threat to Labour Zionist hegemony. Jabotinsky was famous for his staunch objection to any form of organised labour. In his conception "any class-based organisation, and in particularly unionisation of the working class is a cause of particularism that endangers the unity and the integrity of the nation" (ibid:201). This objection was enhanced by the fact that Jabotinsky's opponents in the Zionist movement were the Labour parties of the *Histadrut* who, in those years, consolidated their control over the Jewish settler society in Palestine. Jabotinsky's collection of articles about issues of labour, published in 1933, included titles like: "**The Red Swastika**" and the very famous "**Ja, Brechen**" [Yiddish for "yes, break it", referring to the *Histadrut*) (ibid).

The Revisionists' hostility towards the *Histadrut's* hegemony and what they considered a "socialist Bolshevik" nature of organised labour was leveraged against them by Labour Zionists who claimed that Jabotinsky and his troops refused to support the ethnic principle which was at the centre of Zionist ideology.

The ideology of **Hebrew Labour**, central to the teaching of the "*Histadrut of Hebrew Workers in Eretz Israel*" thus became a major instrument in the political struggle that Labour Zionism waged against its most significant competitor. As the Revisionist Party and its *BEITAR* movement challenged the hegemony of MAPAI and the other Labour Zionist parties in the crystalising Jewish settlement of Palestine, their objection to unionism and organised labour was pointed at as synonymous with objection to **Hebrew Labour**, and they could be portrayed as disloyal to the maxim of ethnic purity that was essential to Jewish settler society.

¹ Jabotinsky's Iron Wall article was published in April 1923.

Reading the pages of **BaMaaleh** in the decade of 1926 -1935 reveals that in the harsh controversies and bitter turf-wars between the Labour Movement and the Revisionists, the slogan of **Hebrew Labour** was constantly used to brand the Revisionists as faulty Zionists. In fact, this claim had some weak points, as Revisionists did accept the core logic of **Hebrew Labour**. According to Tom Segev “Ben Gurion was still living in Plonsk when Jabotinsky wrote that, first of all, the Arab workers must be ‘pushed out of the Hebrew colonies. Like Ben Gurion, he viewed Jewish workers as the ‘kernel of the nation’ and compared them to soldiers” (Segev, 2019 [2018]:249)². Still, the support given by the Revisionist movement to orchard owners and other employers in their anti-*Histadrut* campaigns, allowed the *Histadrut* and writers affiliated with it to build the case against them, and claim that refusing to fight against the employment of non-Jews proves disloyalty to the national fundamental ethos.

Hostilities escalated after the murder of Chaim Arlosoroff in the summer of 1933, and the controversy over the identity of the perpetrators³. A particularly interesting period began when it was revealed that David Ben Gurion, already a powerful general secretary of the *Histadrut*, and Ze’ev Jabotinsky, founder and admired commander of *BEITAR* and Revisionism, concluded a cooperation agreement while both sojourned in London during the summer of 1934. Quite a few of the rank-and-file members of the *Histadrut* were unable to accept such a change-over, just one year after what seemed an apex of enmity. They forced a referendum and eventually the agreement had not been signed (ibid:252; Naor, 2019:58-61). During the controversy over the agreement, heated opinion pieces appeared in **BaMaaleh**. Revisionist antagonism to the Hebrew Labour principle was quoted as a cardinal argument against the cooperation agreement. Following is a review of some main aspects of the animosity towards the Revisionists in **BaMaaleh**, emphasising the issue of nationality:

1. ***The dispute over the “Flag of Labour”***
2. ***Rage against “Brown Strike Breakers”***
3. ***The Arlosoroff Murder Controversy***
4. ***In the service of “Jewish effendis”***
5. ***“Screaming against Hitler – and following his ways”***

² Referenced to Jabotinsky’s 1905 Article (originally in Russian) “What must be done – the Labour in Eretz Israel”, in Jabotinsky’s *Zionist Publications*, 1949, page 207.

³ *Histadrut* leaders and members were convinced that the murderers were right-wing thugs; Revisionists considered these accusations to be political victimisation. See also in the introduction.

6. Shocked by news of an agreement: “keep away from any Satan”

1. The dispute over the “flag of Labour”

In 1931 the Revisionists were often portrayed as aggressors. The editorial **Following the Elections to the Congress**⁴ blamed the political opponents for making use of

school kids who were dispatched by their “stately” educators to disrupt Zionist congregations, to throw dirt at whoever does not join the Revisionist wagon [...]

The article calls upon members of the Labouring youth to “[...] always stand ready to the call of the working public in the political, cultural and economic struggle.” In other words, in view of pupils activated by the right-wing party⁵, youth must also be activated by the Labour Movement. Another editorial later that year, **Threatening with boycott**⁶, referred to a threat by the “*National Youth*” affiliated with the Revisionists to boycott a children’s holiday march if the red flag (it is described as “*the flag of labour*”, no colour specified) be raised. **BaMaaleh** retorts angrily: The flag would not be given up. A comparison was made between the young Revisionists of Zionism and the fascist youth of Europe: “*Do these youngsters not recall the hubris and disdain of the ‘national’ youth of Germany, Austria and Poland?*” Schoolchildren were urged to ignore the nationalist-right-wing challenge, and stick to the “*one road only for the Jewish youth in this land – the Road of Labour [...]* together with us you will proudly carry our flag high – the **Flag of Labour**.” (Original emphasis).

The controversy over the red flag returned a year later⁷. The editorial **This is what youth is being incited for**⁸ described thugs identified as Revisionist youth who assaulted the pupils of the school for Labour Youth and “*tried to tear up their flag, causing much anxiety to the hundreds and thousands of children*”. The brawl led to a court case; the accused aggressors

⁴ Issue 7, 1931, June 5, front page.

⁵ The Hebrew press of the period does report an event in London where Revisionist activists disrupted an election conference (Haaretz, 4.6.1931). There was no mention of the involvement of schoolchildren but this might have been reported elsewhere.

⁶ Issue 20, 1931, Dec. 4, front page.

⁷ Interestingly it may be noted that “*the use of the red flag in a march brought harsh criticism from nationalists*” also in Dutch south Africa in the 1930’s, as George Chaplin remarked (Chaplin, 2020:56).

⁸ Issue 1, 1933, January 13, front page.

claimed that they were motivated by “*national sentiments*”. **BaMaaleh** described them as “*enemies of the labourer*” and vowed again that “*we can and will protect our dignity and our flag*”. The British police – personified by an apparent Jewish Hebrew speaker – was not sympathetic:

[...] officer Goffer, instead of fulfilling his duties, lectured to our comrades for not being satisfied with another flag and also raising a red flag.

The political dichotomy seems clear: socialist left – carriers of the red flag – against nationalist right, opponents of the socialist emblem. A somewhat different strategy developed later when right wingers, religious functionaries and what was considered radical left were bound together in “Shmuel”’s opinion piece titled **To our defamers**⁹. In one phrase three political publications are equally condemned: the *Bustanai* (of the farmers/orchard owners association, allied with the Revisionist party), *Ha’Or* (of the communist *Frakzia*) and *Ha’Thor* (of the religious MIZRAHI party):

[...] this is where the battleground lies between us and all of them, Bustenai or “Ha’or” people who take exception to the Hebrew labourer and his struggle over the right to work. [...] To the people of “Ha’Thor”, the “Bustenai” and “Ha’or” we have one reply: increasing our power, deepening our cultural-educational activity, and facing up to ever new conquests.

The strategy from now on is clear: People “*who take exception to the Hebrew labourer*” are the enemy, and so the Labour Zionist movement is self-portrayed as the sole political body loyal to the national principle, bearer of the “*cultural-educational*” values that were ignored or neglected by the bourgeoisie, the communists, the religious circles and the Revisionists.

2. Rage against “Brown Strike Breakers”

Animosity between Labour and the Revisionists escalated in 1933. A Tel Aviv parade of *BEITAR*, the Revisionist youth movement, generated violent clashes - this time members of the *Hisradrut* and the Labour Youth were accused of starting the brawl. **BaMaaleh** rejected the

⁹ Issue 15, 1932, August 5, page 3

accusations as completely fake¹⁰. Again “Shmuel” published a long commentary under the heading **Facing fabricated accusations**¹¹, blaming the daily *Doar Hayom*, identified with *BEITAR*, as using its “*sick, sadist imagination*” to pejoratively describe the labourers. He immediately moved to point out the link of *BEITAR*’s pronounced ultra-nationalism – “*Jewish Hitlerism*” in his words¹² – with the struggles over the pickets of **Hebrew Labour** that tried to block Arab labour. *BEITAR* youth, he accused, “*upon the command of their god Jabotinsky*” served as strike and picket breakers:

[...] to make cracks in the organizing of the labourers, serving greedy contractors and labourer-hating orchard farmers. The cases of Frumin and Petah Tiqwa are merely initial elements in BEITAR’s offensive against the achievements of the labourer, the organisation and the Histadrut.

While the pickets in the Petah Tiqwa orchards at that time aimed to boycott Arab labourers in the name of the Hebrew Labour principle, the Frumin factory strike was dragged into this struggle although in fact, as Anita Shapira comments, this strike was explained by the demand that only *Histadrut* members would be employed in this biscuits manufacturing plant (Shapira, 1977:198). “*There was a basis to the claim of BEITAR members, that strikes meaning to impose organised labour were in fact targeted against them*” she concluded (ibid:199).

A long article titled **Will we ever learn?**¹³ signed by Aaron Cohen¹⁴ further fortified the claimed link between the concept of **Hebrew Labour** and the lack of national loyalty in the Revisionist movement. Returning to the *BEITAR* parade Cohen described a “*a gang of Jewish Hitlerites*” who dared to raise the “*the fascist flag*” in Tel Aviv, which he directly connected with the

¹⁰ On April 19, 1933, the *Histadrut* Daily *Davar* reported that a municipal investigative committee was established following the riots around the *BEITAR* parade. The Revisionists complained about a “hooligan style assault”. The Labour representatives complained about “provocation”.

¹¹ Issue 8, 1933, May 1 page 3

¹² Nazis at that time already took control of Germany.

¹³ Issue 10, 1933, May 26, page 8

¹⁴ Aaron Cohen (1910-1980) was born in Bessarabia (then part of Russia) and immigrated to Palestine in 1929. He was one of the founders of Kibbutz *Shaar Ha’amakim* (1930), an activist in *Ha’Shomer Ha’Tzair* movement, prolific writer and eventually an expert on Arabic subjects. In the 1940s he was a major supporter of Arab-Jewish collaboration. In the 1950s he was charged and indicted of collaboration with foreign (Soviet) agents. The trial and his 5 years in prison became an enormous political scandal, and Cohen was eventually released from jail. (Source: Tidhar).

marching group's support of strike breakers in Petah Tiqwa and their objection to the **Hebrew Labour** idea. The young Revisionists, he accused -

made a pact with the boycotters of the Hebrew labourer and with the police, in order to comply with the command "Break!"¹⁵ that was decreed by the chief [...]

Cohen went on to warn the *Yishuv* against the "*brown Golem*" that, as he claimed, was reared by the local bourgeoisie to fight against the local labourers – much in the same way that the "*German bourgeoisie has grown for itself*" the fascist "*iron-nails*" who defeated the German Socialist movements. Labour Zionism, he continued, was the only movement whose goal was support for the "*homeland-less masses*" arriving from "*the diaspora*". Its "*heavy decrees*" were meant to make it possible for Jews alone to work in the projects of the planned "*new world*" that was being constructed in Palestine.

The animosity between the two political blocks reached unprecedented dimensions at that time. While the right-wing mouthpieces accused the *Histadrut* and the institutions affiliated with it of "Bolshevism" and communism, the left freely compared right-wingers to Hitler, Nazis and other fascists, pejoratives that have become a total taboo in the present, post-Shoah Israeli public.

3. The Arlosoroff Murder Controversy

Some weeks after Aaron Cohen's warnings of the "*brown Golem*", Chaim Arlosoroff, one of the most prominent Labour Zionist leaders, was tragically and mysteriously shot to death while walking with his wife along the Tel Aviv beach. The murder generated an immediate escalation in the hate-rhetoric of both political rival groups: The left was united in its conviction that two right-wing activists were the culprits. The two, members of the infamous "*Brit Ha'Birionim*" ("*Alliance of the Thugs*") were actually accused and stood trial. By contrast, right-wing activists, convinced that the accused were innocent, complained of a blood-libel. The Revisionist press floated some conspiracy theories, including suppositions that Arlosoroff's comrades or even his

¹⁵ The call "yes, break" (*ja, brechen*) refers to a seminal article by Z. Jabotinsky in a Polish-Yiddish newspaper confirming the need to break-up the *Histadrut*'s power in Eretz Israel (Shapira, 1977: 198; Avineri, 1999 [1980]:201)

young widow Simma were involved in the crime. The pages of **BaMaaleh** in the following months were filled with angry denials of these theories, and with appalled condemnations of what seemed like the turning of the two accused men into real martyrs for **BEITAR**'s circles and the media affiliated with the Revisionists. In this heated rhetoric, the Revisionists' support for the employers who did not accept the **Hebrew Labour** principle was used as a major argument in the effort to portray the political opponents as treacherous and disloyal to the national fundamental ethos of Zionism.

Arlosoroff was shot on the beach of Tel Aviv on June 16, 1933. It seems that **BaMaaleh**'s issue that was due at about the same time was postponed, as a double issue¹⁶ was printed two weeks later, and was almost entirely dedicated to mourning the heavy loss to Labour Zionism caused by the killing. One editorial directly targeted the popular Revisionist leader Ze'ev (Vladimir) Jabotinsky who was sojourning in Warsaw. **The Chief in a frenzy**¹⁷ portrayed him as busily defaming "*the Hebrew labourers*" as he

[...] publishes blasting poisonous articles, inciting against the labourer public in this land. What libel has the frenzied chief not made up about the labour public? [...] The labourers' slogan "workers of all nations unite" turned in his words into a monstrosity – a call to kill property-owning Jews; the joint organisation, for him – is a call for a pogrom against Jews. With all these nonsensical chatters he is trying to prove that the Hebrew labourers are eager and pleased that the killer of Arlosoroff would be a Jew and nothing else.

Yet another article in the same issue, titled **Those Poisoning the Wells**¹⁸, blamed the right-wing press for "*Intentionally and maliciously*" spreading "*Nazi*"-style fake news, claiming that members of a labourers' organisation "*together with Arabs, assaulted the BEITAR members and threw stones at them.*" The next issue carried the editorial **Hast thou killed and also taken possession?**^{19 20}, charging that Jabotinsky and his movement invented the most horrible

¹⁶ Issue 11-12, 1933, June 30.

¹⁷ Issue 11-12, 1933, June 30, front page.

¹⁸ Issue 11-12, 1933, June 30, page 2.

¹⁹ Biblical phrase referring to King Ahab, Kings I 21:19.

²⁰ Issue 13, 1933, July 14, front page.

defamation against Arlosoroff, “that he had sold his people in return for money from Hitler²¹”. The article mentioned that Chaim Weitzman²² was also accused by Jabotinsky of “betrayal”. Jabotinsky was also blamed for a “bomb thrown at our comrade Ben Gurion²³”. The editorial then moved to the controversy and the struggle against organised labour – tying it directly with the killing of Arlosoroff:

You have commanded your faithful believers to break up the labourer’s Histadrut, to break strikes and go on a rampage against organised labour. You and only you, Jabotinsky, are guilty of the death of Arlosoroff.

In the next issue, while a victory of the Labour parties in the general elections for the Zionist Congress was celebrated, animosity against the right-wing competitor was expressed in powerful metaphors. The editorial **Our Joy is Incomplete**²⁴ warned that the Revisionists are still powerful and growing:

The viper flinging its venom at the revival movement still giggles [...] the brown stain has not been removed from the movement, it is a burn in our flesh, demanding action.

Another editorial on the same page - **Let the Nation Judge**²⁵ described the dreaded – and very popular - Jabotinsky as he “rides his carriage of lies and hatred through the diasporas of the People of Israel, as great masses cheer him.”

Following was an analysis explaining the success and popularity of the Revisionist party, with special emphasis on their hostility to the principle of **Hebrew Labour**. Under the title **Our Reply to the Defamers – Uniting**²⁶, David Zmiri²⁷ accused Jabotinsky – he called him, among other names, “death-master” - of serving “the greed-worshippers”, supporting strike breakers and

²¹ Such accusations were made indeed at the time owing to the fact that Arlosoroff assisted German Jews to transfer funds to Palestine under an agreement with the Nazi government. He was actually murdered two days after his return from Europe where he dealt with this issue.

²² Chaim Weizmann was one of the most influential Zionist leaders. He is credited with obtaining the Balfour Declaration and was president of the Zionist Organization for many years. In 1948 he became the first president of the Israeli State.

²³ This might refer to a case of stink bombs and heavy objects that were part of the attempts to disrupt Ben Gurion’s speech in Warsaw, in April 1933 (Segev, 2019 [2018]).

²⁴ Issue 14, 1933, July 28, front page

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Issue 14, 1933, July 28, page 3

²⁷ This is possibly a pseudonym for another writer, as the name is not mentioned in the main Zionist data bases.

fighting “*the Hebrew working class*”, who had proved to be the “*real pioneer of the nation returning to its old homeland*”. While the labourers are “*those who invested all their might in the building of the homeland [...] who pointed the road to the construction of a new society, with no exploiters, for a life of honesty and equality,*” the powerbase of the right-wing party was described with great disdain:

The Revisionist movement draws its water from three poisonous sources: A. The global reactionary movement. B. The destruction of the Jewish middle class in the diaspora and the increase of antisemitism. C. The Jewish bourgeoisie, the alienated farmers and the speculative capital present in Eretz Israel.

All is done “*to strike at the Hebrew labourer*”:

The befouled lake, which has generated the beginnings of the Revisionist slime has not been dried. The Jewish bourgeoisie, and particularly the Boaz²⁸ kind, members of the Farmers’ Association, have made Jabotinsky their horns with which to strike at the Hebrew labourer and destroy the walls that were erected by the Olim [Jewish immigrants] with infinite efforts and despite obstacles.

The “*walls*” erected with effort refer to the barriers against non-Jewish labour, the dreaded “*ocean of cheap working hands*”. The Revisionist sympathisers are the cheering “*strike-breakers who had been purchased by all kinds of capital holders*”, ready to wage “*war against Zionism’s most loyal carrier, the Hebrew labourer*”.

Astutely, the self-described nationalist-militarist ideologue Jabotinsky and his followers were criticised here yet again from a position that advocates a superior national-purism. The right-wing party was condemned for lack of nationalism, Labour Zionism praised for better protecting the national interest against the undesired indigenous population. Revisionists were blamed for not fighting the threatening “*ocean of cheap working hands*”. It was a perfect launching-pad to furiously attack “*the leprosy of Revisionism*”, the “*militarist nature and the negation of all the values*” which unfortunately was indeed attractive to masses of youth, enchanted by the so called “*Religion of the Fist*”. The picture was made very clear: The Revisionists do not serve Zionism and do not aim to serve the nation, as they merely “*carry the golden calf to the people*”.

²⁸ Derogatory name for the property-owning farmers in the early *Moshavot*.

One month later, an editorial angrily listed pejoratives used by Revisionist leaders against Hebrew labourers. **“Romanticism” of Slavery, Mud and Blood**²⁹³⁰ was, again, an article simmering with the rage over the murder of Arlosoroff and the Revisionists’ denial of responsibility for the alleged crime. Revisionists, **BaMaaleh** blamed, educate towards *“slavery, deception, hatred and blood.”* Against this version of fake romanticism, Labour’s teaching is the (positive) romanticism, educating towards *“pioneering and creative labour, of walking behind a plough, drying up the swamps and planting forests”*.

The theme was repeated in the festive double issue on the Jewish New Year. **On the Verge of the New Year**³¹ sees the Revisionist ideology as responsible for all that is wrong with the Jewish people – and connects it directly with the murder of Chaim Arlosoroff:

[...] The calamity of Judaism, dipped in the essence of its blood through the black and brown reaction, induced in some parts of the nation the desire to imitate the worst of nations: See them adore enslavement, tyranny and terror – then we should follow their way [...] and the blood of our comrade Arlosoroff cries out to us from the ground of our homeland.

Unsurprisingly, the said unfortunate *“parts of the nation”* were also linked to *“the stubborn heart of Jewish alienated orchard owners”*, those *“whose hearts are filled with hostility towards the Hebrew labourer and pioneer”*. Comfort was to be found in the *“achievements and victories of the Hebrew labourer”*, and these victories supported *“the flag of national liberation.”* All in all, this is another sample of a Labour Zionist text hitting on right-wingers from the right, waiving a tougher, more uncompromising, nationalist position.

Another piece in this New Year double issue, **On Issues of the Labouring Youth / Towards the Council**³² signed “Uri”, made a direct connection between **Hebrew Labour** ideology and the frustration over the popularity of the Revisionist positions regarding the murder of Arlosoroff. *“Sicarii Romanticism”*, a typical expression used by Labour speakers while mentioning **BEITAR**

²⁹ Issue 16, 1933, August 25, page 2

³⁰ **BEITAR** and the Revisionists vehemently deny that the slogan advocating “slavery mud and blood” is a quote from Jabotinsky. According to the official **BEITAR** Book, this was a fabrication based on a misquote of Jabotinsky, and it became *“a slogan that hammered like a chorus in Left Zionist publications of all currents, brochures and speeches”* (Ben-Yeruham, 1973:73)

³¹ Issue 17-18, 1933, Sept. 20, front page

³² Issue 17-18, 1933, Sept. 20, page 11

and the Revisionist movement, is juxtaposed to Labour Zionist teaching concentrated on agriculture. Lamenting the spectacle of “*youth applaud the murder suspects*”, the article demanded that the Labouring Youth council -

[...] make clear to our comrades and the many youths who follow us the essence of our path. It is a difficult road, it has no Sicarii romanticism and no verbal revolutionism, but it is the only one leading to our goal, to the redemption of the nation and mankind [...] we must remember that our redemption and our revival as a nation and as labourers is dependent mainly on our share in agriculture.

Labour – **Hebrew labour** – is set as the only path for the ultimate national goal: “*redemption of the nation*”. This redemption was described as relevant to “*mankind*”, but this is a particular mankind that apparently cannot include indigenous labourers, as “*our redemption and our revival as a nation*” necessitates the increase of “*our share*” in agriculture.

4. In the service of “Jewish effendis”

The partnership between orchard owners and the Revisionist party was discussed in detail in Y. Bankover’s series³³ **Conquering Labour in the Hebrew Moshava**³⁴. On the second instalment³⁵ of the series Bankover described the way the Revisionists joined the anti-**Hebrew-Labour** campaign. He sees it as an unprecedented political manoeuvre:

[...] the novelty now is that for the first time a political party has emerged, in the form of Revisionism, making its aim the breaking of strikes, availing itself to all the dark forces in the war against the labourer public. [...] And just as nothing is more dangerous in fascism than the fact that it fights labourers with labourers – we must also do well to remember the “Farmers Association” and all the property owners who are now fighting the worker public in the country with the help of BEITAR pioneers [...]

Opponents of pickets against Arab labour are therefore a “*destructive and degenerative section of Zionism*”. It is a union of “*the wonderful triumvirate of Jewish effendis, the police and the strike-breakers*” who hope to break the organised Jewish workers “*with money and lies.*”

³³ See also chapter 4.

³⁴ Issues 3-5 of 1934.

³⁵ Issue 4, 1934, Feb. 15, page 3.

However, as the Jewish public actually supports the idea of “*Hebrew Labour*”, the opponents make declarations in favour of this concept. Bankover, convinced that this support is not genuine, warns that a “*mask*” is being used:

[...] declarations that “Hebrew Labour is the essence of our existence” – [are] nothing but a mask. A mask that makes it possible to deny the real concern about the need to increase the number of Hebrew labourers in the orchards’ economy.

The precious concept of **Hebrew Labour** had to be preserved as a monopoly of Labour Zionism. From the *Histadrut*’s point of view, only “**organised Hebrew Labour**” (original emphasis) counted, and Bankover dismissed “*all the attempts to introduce Yemenites, the Poel Hamizrahi*³⁶ *and other organisations as destroyers of the labourers’ organisation*”, as “*the ‘free market’*” dangerously offered “*a certain hope for the introduction of Arab labour.*” With *BEITAR*’s entrance into this labour market - “*professional strike-breakers*”, as he called them - “*the problem became much more serious.*” His final words in this instalment can be read as a threat:

*The wave of strikebreaking which is now washing over the land is in fact dangerous gunpowder, generating incessant tensions and bringing us to the verge of a **civil war** within the Jewish community here. (Original emphasis).*

We “*seek peace*”, he declared, then went on to sound an even more ominous threat:

But we shall make every sacrifice and pay any price in the defence of the integrity of the Labourers’ Histadrut, protecting it from all who come to destroy it! (Original emphasis).

The option of “*civil war*” became even more credible as the last emphasised phrase of the second instalment turned out to be the headline for part 3 of the series **The Conquest of Labour in the Hebrew Moshava**³⁷. This last article described four political parties – “*all the reactionary circles*” as having joined a “*coalition*” which is “*united by a common will and hope – to break the labourer’s Histadrut*”. The political struggle was in full swing, and Bankover openly and freely revealed that the pickets against Arab labourers were in fact part of the

³⁶ Religious Zionist organisation of labourers.

³⁷ Issue 5, 1934, Feb. 25, page 8.

propaganda (HASBARA) machine, to fight the political opponents whom he described as using lies, incitement and whistleblowing against the labourer' parties:

In our campaign [...] we use means of hasbara, gaining public opinion, pressure and organising, and when all these measures are not enough - we come out with picket-guards next to the orchards, to defend the dignity of the Zionist movement.

The political nature of the conflict necessitated exclusive ownership of the concept “*Conquest of Labour*”, clarifying that only “organised” workers (in other words, the *Histadrut*) may advocate it:

*[...] In face of the destructive forces in the Jewish populace – we must raise **an organised force of the whole labour public**. [...] This demands **strong internal cohesion**, the expanding of the pioneering elements and the raising anew of the banner of conquering labour. (Original emphasis).*

Arousing the “*sense of Danger*” was a warning against any erosion of the *Histadrut*'s hegemony. The Jewish labourer, Bankover confirmed, had been able to become part of the “*mainstream*” of Zionism, but presently his “*right position*” was no longer secure without firm action:

[...] with the waves of economic activity in the country he was forgotten again – and we must not accept this. It is our duty to instil in the entire public the sense of danger in this land.

The unequivocal link of struggle for *Histadrut* hegemony and the **Hebrew Labour** struggle was also manifested in a short report, on the same page, titled **In the Labour Youth branch of the Sharon Region**³⁸ and signed “Yitzhak”. The report is about the cooperation between the farmers and *BEITAR*. The political opponents have joined the class enemy:

The bourgeoisie is closing ranks over its class interests. Things are done openly, no attempts to conceal. In Kfar Saba they tried to introduce Arab labour. “Respectable” farmer circles support BEITAR almost openly and they are pleased to have it: there at last they have a loyal ally in their battle against the labourer.

There is no mention of the need to secure working positions for Jewish workers. “Yitzhak” was clearly concerned that youth might be attracted to the camp of the *Histadrut*'s opponents. His concern is about educating for “*our way*” which is “*that of building and of redemption*”, as

³⁸ Issue 5, 1934, Feb. 25, page 8

opposed to those who support the “*battle against the labourer*” (exclusively the Hebrew labourer, introduction of Arab Labour is presented as the greatest problem). He is clearly anxious about the ability “*to instil our narrative in the heart of the growing generation*”. His target audience is youth, described as “*neglected*”, with “*no nurture, no development and consciousness.*” Clearly a dedicated *Histadrut* activist, on the pages of **BaMaaleh** “Yitzhak” called for more investment in the educational-indoctrination task: “*It is vital to find a comrade who would be fully committed to work with the youth in the Sharon.*”

This political strategy was repeated in an editorial addressing labourers who were already followers of the Revisionist party – or readers of **BaMaaleh** who might be considering such a path. **Open your Eyes!**³⁹ sounds almost desperate, trying to combat the growing popularity of the right-wing with its militaristic-national message. The Revisionists, the editor was chiding, are neither concerned with Jewish youth in the diaspora, nor with the “*brethren in labour*” nor with “*the building of this land and with defending it*”:

You the labourers hanging-on to BEITAR, open your eyes to see who you are serving as you come to annul labour-contracts and break up the labourers' organisation. [...] Do consider, please, why your commanders and leaders call you. [...] are they at all interested in the situation of the tens of thousands of Jewish youths, yearning for labour? What have they got to do with the building of this land and with defending it? [...] Why make life miserable for one another, to the pleasure of all the contractors, the orchard-owners, and the exploiters? Have you been sold to them as slaves to rise against your brethren in labour?

The “*exploiters*” and the “*commanders*” were blamed for ignoring the situation of the Jewish youth who are not even in the land – and were mostly not likely, at that stage, to be interested in (or “*yearning*” for) labour in the orchards. The “*building of this land*” and “*defending it*” (presumably against poor Arabs who wished to work in agriculture) was positioned as a goal that only the Labour Zionist organisations held and could deliver.

The direct speech mode was again used in the next issue, this time a longer text titled **Proclamation of Eretz Israeli Youth to the Youth and Labourers of BEITAR**⁴⁰. The “proclamation” was a response to *BEITAR*'s response to a previous proclamation by the

³⁹ Issue 7, 1934, March 30, front page.

⁴⁰ Issue 8, 1934, April 15, page 3.

Labouring Youth Movement. It might have been distributed as separate leaflets, as it is hardly likely that the “Youth and labourers of *BEITAR*” were readers of *BaMaaleh*. Newspapers of that period do mention a “Leaflet War” over political issues⁴¹. The present text was drafted as a response. It starts out in a belligerent tone, mentioning a “war” against Revisionism, blaming it for liaisons with the employers and the breaking of strikes that were meant to stop Arab labour. Revisionism, the “proclamation” stated, advocates “*mud, slavery and blood*” (original emphasis) as well as

[...] assisting any exploiting contractors and every alienated orchard owner, aiming to abandon the labourer to the whims of any Jewish effendi [...] educates for the breaking of strikes, [...] betrays the Jewish National Fund and supports any land-broker and any speculator of rates! We wage war against those who in the name of distorted “nationalism”, defile our lives here in this land!

It is followed by a condemnation of the “*the alienating orchards-owners*” to whom *BEITAR*’s leaders “*sing the ‘Ma Yofith’*”. There was a particular reproach for the support those leaders were giving to “*Moshe Smilansky, who denies Hebrew labour; they kneel before him because he is the one calling for debasing the Hebrew labourer and belittling his Histadrut.*” Pejoratives regularly aimed at the employers were targeted at their allies, the leaders of *BEITAR*, and meant to convince young people that the road they were following is an actual betrayal of the “*Jewish labourers*” and the “*Jewish immigrant*”. The employers, interested solely in profit, were described again with the ultimate insult: “*these Jewish effendis*” – that is, Jews who behave like rich Arabs. They were also alleged to be whistle-blowers, serving the British Government (informing that there is no need to increase Jewish immigration for the labour market). They therefore -

*[...] starve the Hebrew labourer in this land and the Jewish youth of the diaspora
[...] prepared to sell all that is sacred and precious to the nation for their own benefit [...]*

Against these immoral, disloyal, greedy allies of the Revisionists, Labour Zionists are self-described with shining colours: hard work, self-sacrifice and sublime ideals of justice, fraternity and equality, all aimed at constructing the future “*real Hebrew state*”:

⁴¹ In Davar, Doar Hayom and Hazit Ha’am, April-May 1934.

So many are the sacrifices and the graves of the Hebrew labourers [...] and you will see that it is only the pioneering youth and the organised labourers who are establishing the real Hebrew state. A state that will not be ruled by evil and greed, but by justice, fraternity and equality. (Original emphasis).

The last shot in the long pamphlet repeated the concept of **Hebrew Labour**, reminding the reader that the Revisionists' festivities were always held in settlements that do not employ Jewish labourers as a rule:

And on a day of festivity, where do your leaders lead you? To Zikhron Yaakov, to Rosh Pina, sites that do not let in a single foot of Hebrew Labour.

Loyalty to the national fundamental ethos as superior to the greed of estate owners and the “*bourgeoisie*” was also at the centre of an analytic commentary by N. Benari titled **A War for Victory and a Battle of Existence**⁴². The Revisionist party or *BEITAR* were not mentioned by name, but the political animosity to their allies is made clear by the fiery text. Orchard owners were associated with the Jewish sector that is to be despised both for its assimilatory tendencies (see also chapter 6) and for the rejection it apparently experienced in non-Jewish society. The British rulers who need support, Benari disdainfully wrote, find it in the “*Smilansky gang*”, associated with the “*Jewish effendis*” who do not need the “*Jewish labourer*”. It is “*Arab Labour*” that the Jewish bourgeoisie prefers, Benari states.

Hostility to Smilansky, the eloquent speaker of the employer class, was also displayed in the satirical fable column **Crumbs** signed by “Arie”. On the occasion of Moliere’s play in *HABIMA* national theatre, “Arie”’s short fable **Tartuffe**⁴³ describes the orchard owner as a modern-day version of the “*hypocritical priest*”, appearing in court “*to our shame and dishonour*”.

5. “Screaming against Hitler – and following his ways”

The fiery hostility between the political opponents grew even further as the murder of Arlosoroff trial progressed, leading to the acquittal of one of the accused. His comrade was found guilty (later he, too, was acquitted in the appeal court⁴⁴). With Revisionists’ celebrations

⁴² Issue 21, 1933, Nov. 10, page 3

⁴³ Issue 3, 1934, January 31, page 3

⁴⁴ Ilani, 2004 :42-45; Tevet, 1982: 259-266

over the acquittal, Labour Zionist circles fumed. An editorial titled **The Lesson of these Days**⁴⁵ used powerful language to denounce the Revisionists as “*this entire party, nurturing vipers and sicarii*”. **BaMaaleh** was particularly annoyed with the fact that the opponents include some prominent personalities, and they too were condemned as enemies of the Jewish working class, acting out of “*their hatred toward the Hebrew labourer*”:

Who could possibly believe that rabbis, authors and scientists, due to their hatred of the Hebrew labourer, discard all morality, might turn their backs on any human emotion, and defend those who had shed the blood of honest innocents [...].

The murder of Arlosoroff was described as criminally generated by this hatred of the “Hebrew labourer” idea:

The terrible truth must be clear to every labourer and to every labouring youth. This truth is: whoever turns an assassination on the labourers and their leaders, whoever sheds their blood – must not be prosecuted, must not be punished, as he is no murderer but a “National Hero, a saint and a Zionist Patriot”. It is a bitter lesson, but a useful one that the Hebrew labourer and labouring youth will learn from the days of this horrible insanity in the life of the Hebrew Yishuv [...].

A Jewish New Year editorial, **As the Year ends**⁴⁶, is another mixture of a sincere and horrified lamentation over the terrible year endured by Jews all over the world – not only in Hitler’s Germany – and an opportunity to point out the similarities between Europe’s thugs and the *Histadrut*’s political opponents:

The dance macabre of demons, frolicking of clowns. Imitating the worst amongst nations: screaming against Hitler – and following his ways. [...]

This is followed by denunciation of the employers “*who got rich and fat in this land*” while turning their backs on Jewish immigrants and denying “*bread to the poorest of Israel*”.

The redemption of the “*Hebrew labourer*” is connected to the Labour Zionist camp, with its shining promise:

[...] go out to the fields, you Hebrew labourer, walk the land length and breadth [...]. The singing of labour and of free creation, singing of sharing and of justice.

⁴⁵ Issue 12, 1934, June 12, front page.

⁴⁶ Issue 17-18, 1934, Sept. 9, front page.

The praying of poor priests, who plough the barren earth preparing a true haven for the masses of the people.

This promise necessitates “war for Hebrew Labour and for the purity of the idea and of the flag.” It is a political war, and the youth are called to join the struggle: “remove the curse of the haters of Israel and the haters of the Hebrew Labourer”. The political identity of the “haters” had already been established.

6. Shocked by news of an agreement: “keep away from any Satan”

In the fall of 1934, little over a year after the murder of Chaim Arlosoff, the leaders of the two rival parties, David Ben Gurion and Ze’ev Jabotinsky, met in London and arrived at an agreement that was meant to start a mode of cooperation between the Revisionists and the *Histadrut*⁴⁷. Ben Gurion’s opponents in the Labour movements were shocked and appalled, and eventually forced a referendum by all members of the *Histadrut* about the agreement⁴⁸.

BaMaaleh opened its pages to the heated discussions for and against the agreement.

Unsurprisingly, the issue of **Hebrew Labour** was presented as a crucial component in the reasoning of both sides. Opponents, who seem to have been taken aback by the need to stop their aggressive attacks against the Revisionists and the *BEITAR* movement were well represented in **BaMaaleh**’s editorial staff. Soon after the leak that announced the pending agreement, an editorial titled **War – Not an Eruption**⁴⁹ clarified that Jabotinsky’s movement was still the “viper”, pointing at labour disputes in Jerusalem and in Haifa where the Revisionists supported the employers, in particular contractors who employed non-Jewish labourers⁵⁰. Adamantly opposing any idea of an agreement with *brown Revisionism*”

BaMaaleh’s unsigned editorial warned that

[...] the cases of recent days hit us in the face and show clearly, that this viper cannot exist without casting its venom and without crackling and destroying the wall of our resurrection, bringing calamity over us and all our hopes.

⁴⁷ Minutes of a meeting that took place in London on September 10, 1934, were published in *Haaretz*, October 10, 1934

⁴⁸ Goldstein, 2019:307.

⁴⁹ Issue 21, 1934, Oct.26, front page.

⁵⁰ In Haifa, *Histadrut* pickets tried to stop the employment of Italian as well as Arab workers in a large construction site but were forced to back off. The *Histadrut* daily *Davar* published a furious full-page article sarcastically titled “**The Great Victory of the Revisionists over Hebrew Labour**” (*Davar*, October 18, 1934).

[...] One does not create alliances with snakes, nor offer spells of their venom. [...] there is no room for alliances and agreements with fascism. [...] we must react to the sad occurrences in Haifa – the city, where Revisionism is unable to destroy the labour of building and creation and wage the sicarii war facing the united power of the labourers.

The next issue carried another editorial against the suggested agreement. In **Let Us Not Fall for the Network of Deceit**⁵¹, the editors openly criticise the “Zionist management” (rather than the general secretary of the *Histadrut*, Ben Gurion, who personally reached the agreement with Jabotinsky) for the idea. Once again, denouncing the Revisionists was reasoned by their refusal to allow Hebrew labourers the exclusive right over workplaces in the Jewish economy:

It is not for nothing that major segments of the labourer public and Labour Youth were shocked by the news of an agreement between the Zionist Management and the head of the Revisionist party [...]
The agreement with Jabotinsky, the prophet of mud, slavery and blood – has deeply pained the heart of every labourer. [...] This is the man who waged blood-war with organised labour [...] If the issues of the Hebrew labourer and the enterprise of resurrection are dear to us [...] we shall keep away from us any Satan who comes to confound us and break-up our rows [...] give a loyal hand to the Hebrew labourer, carrying redemption and sovereignty to the people and to the land.

Other opinion articles concerning the suggested agreement followed⁵². **No Agreement!**⁵³, signed “Moshe”, presented unequivocal opposition to the Revisionists who “betrayed the struggle for Hebrew labour”:

Revisionism in the Jewish public has gone bankrupt, from a moral as well as a Zionist perspective. It never built, only destroyed. It boycotted the funds; blew the whistle for the government, betrayed the struggle for Hebrew labour, educated youth towards terror [...]

The agreement was eventually published by *Davar* in December of 1934⁵⁴ and a referendum was forced for its ratification. Articles in **BaMaaleh** were written both by supporters and by

⁵¹ Issue 22, 1934, Nov. 9, front page

⁵² On the Revisionist side, a declaration by Jabotinsky sent to all the branches of his movement, was published in the movement’s newspaper *Hayarden* on November 16, 1934. There was no challenge. *Davar* of November 17, 1934, reported that the declaration consisted of a commitment to comply with the non-violent agreement “even in cases that the agreement might not be respected by the other side”.

⁵³ Issue 22, 1934, Nov. 9, page 3

⁵⁴ *Davar*, Dec. 18, 1934

adversaries of the agreement. One supporter, M. Naishtat⁵⁵, writing **On the Issue of the Labour Agreement**⁵⁶ expressed great concern for the (failed, as he defined it) “*struggle for Hebrew Labour*”. The ultimate goal, he reminded his readers, was to stop the Revisionists’ growing political growth. This growth, Naishtat was convinced, was helped by “*the Revisionist fabrication*” that the *Histadrut* denies work to non-members. The agreement might put an end to this political advantage, as more *HASBARA* would be available in favour of Hebrew Labour:

[...] our horrible defeat in the struggle for Hebrew Labour [is it] not an indication of how altered the Yishuv has become? [...] We have no means, in this country, to take over sovereignty, so that we shall be able to put an end to Jewish fascism with coercive legislation. We have no other way but that of Hasbara – [...]

On the same page, and under the joint title **Towards the referendum**, “Arie” signed **Why I Reject the Agreement**⁵⁷. For him, support of organised labour supervised by the *Histadrut* - which he identified as **Hebrew Labour** – was a cardinal reason for rejecting an agreement with the Revisionists:

[...] The Histadrut assembly has decreed to reach agreements with labour organisations out of its desire to guarantee an equal right to labour for every worker who recognises organised labour, Hebrew labour, decent work conditions and solidarity of labourers in their work. [...] this agreement introduces a new factor into the life of the labourer, a factor that can take decisions about one’s life – [...] a fascist party.

The next issue carried another anti-agreement article, this time signed by “Shmuel”, resounding a powerful nationalist-Zionist sentiment in the name of the “*Hebrew labourer*”. In **Why I Oppose the Agreement**⁵⁸ Shmuel declared:

[...] My whole mind and my entire Zionist and socialist sentiment are shrieking against this agreement with the Revisionists. [...] I want the Hebrew labourer to persist – in his path of creation, of building and class struggle – and reject the agreement with brown Revisionism.

⁵⁵ Malech (Eliezer Shimon) Naishtat (1895 -?) was born in Galicia, and immigrated to Palestine in 1926. He held positions in the financial institutions of the *Histadrut*, published many articles in the different press organs of the Labour Movement and in the Yiddish press abroad. After WWII he published a collection of memoirs about Warsaw’s Jewry. (Source: Tidhar).

⁵⁶ Issue 4, 1935, Feb.22, page 3

⁵⁷ Issue 4, 1935, Feb.22, page 3

⁵⁸ Issue 5, 1935, March 15, page 3

The agreement was not ratified by the referendum, and the Revisionist party decided to quit the Zionist Action Committee (*Ha'Vaad Ha'Poel*)⁵⁹. For **BaMaaleh** this was a reason for celebration, merely regretting, as in the editorial **Faithful Skippers**⁶⁰, that the exit was initiated by the rival party, as it would have been better to “*expel*” them. The language – perhaps an indication of the general political discourse of the period – is toxic yet again:

It must also be one of the leading slogans of the labour public for the next elections of its congress: purify Zionism of the scum of Revisionism.

Conclusions from chapter 5

The concept of **Hebrew Labour** was invented during the years of the second *Aliya* (1904-1914) to serve the needs of unemployed young Jewish immigrants into Palestine who could not compete for manual labour in the local economy. The idea was to remove local Arabs from the desired workplaces in favour of the newcomers. In later years, and even when most Jewish newcomers did not need or did not desire positions as farm hands, **Hebrew Labour** continued to be cherished by Labour Zionism, due to its political appeal. **Hebrew Labour** symbolised a demand for ethnic-religious purity in the workplaces, as was also manifested in the collective settlements (Kibbutz and Moshav forms) that accepted Jews only. Great effort was put into describing it as synonymous with organised labour. With Labour Zionism's *Histadrut* as the sole representative of Jewish workers, and as all *Histadrut* members had to be Jewish, any opposition to the monopoly of the *Histadrut* on the job market was perceived – or made to be perceived – as an opposition to the popular principle of ethnic purity in the workplace, conceptualised as **Hebrew Labour**.

Labour Zionism controlled the Zionist settler movement institutions in Palestine and abroad, but was met with fierce opposition from the right, in the form of the Zionist Revisionist movement led by the charismatic Ze'ev Jabotinsky. Jabotinsky, who modelled his ideology on the Fascist teachings of Mussolini, preached a militaristic version of national Zionism that relied heavily on the colonial vision and might of Great Britain. His version of settler colonialism was

⁵⁹ Naor, 2019:61

⁶⁰ Issue 7, 1935, April 15, page 2

straightforward and blunt, with much emphasis on festive ceremonies, impressive uniforms and military-style parades. It gained his movement massive popularity in the dense Jewish communities of Eastern Europe as well as with large crowds of Jewish youth in Palestine. He was perceived as a serious political threat to Labour Zionism, and the aversion was mutual. Jabotinsky objected to any kind of labour unionism, seen as potential perforation of “national” unity, and he took every opportunity to advertise his hostility to the *Histadrut*, that he rightly considered his greatest competitor for popular support. As demonstrated in this chapter, Labour Zionists were quick to portray Jabotinsky’s objection to organised labour, as well as his close ties to the employers’ organisations and non-socialist middle classes in Jewish Palestine (the “bourgeois” classes, as Labour Socialists preferred to call them), as joining the sabotage of the cherished concept of **Hebrew Labour**. Therefore, Jabotinsky and the Revisionist movement could be portrayed as disloyal to the basic Zionist maxim of ethnic purity. A major settler-colonial principle, that rejects the very presence of natives in settlement project, in which it is “*anomalous that historical Indigenous people should exist in the same space as white people*” (Wolfe, 1999:173) - could be described as betrayed by an ultra-nationalist party. Revisionists did share the settler colonialist state of mind that “*does not desire indigenous labor; it simply wishes indigenous people to vanish*” (Veracini, 2019:136). Still, their tolerance of orchard owners’ economic considerations and their hostility to labour unions enabled their depiction as disloyal to a basic value of the Jewish settlers’ society: the desire for a purely Jewish-Hebrew environment.

The many excerpts from *BaMaaleh* quoted above demonstrate that this was done systematically, on a regular basis. They offer a perspective – perhaps for the first time in the many years of research and analysis of Zionist development – on the way Labour Zionism, spearheaded by the historic MAPAI, positioned itself successfully as more nationalistic, more Zionist, more committed to the maxim of ethnic purity of the settler community, and better adapted to basic Jewish teachings of self-segregation (see the next chapter) and distance from non-Jews, compared to the political circles associated with the far right. In an oxymoronic manner, not unprecedented in Zionism, Labour Zionism was furiously condemning fascism

while congratulating itself on its superb adherence to ethnic purity and denial of indigenous rights.

This perspective allows a contemporary observation on present-day Zionist left and centre political bodies. Right-wing Israeli politicians often claim that their methods, notorious for the treatment of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and for gradually enhancing the apartheid nature of the State of Israel, merely carry a tradition established by state founder David Ben Gurion and his historic MAPAI party that founded the state. This claim seems to contain more than a grain of truth. Labour Zionist handling of the **Hebrew Labour** issue as reflected by the texts in *BaMaaleh* during the decade under review here indicates that when it came to preserving ethnic purity, Labour made an effort to project a profile that was more intransigent than its officially right-wing political opponents. It is perhaps not a coincidence that the *Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Pappe, 2006) took place under Labour Zionist hegemony.

Chapter 6

Religious tradition and historical mythology in support of Jewish separatism

Settler-colonial societies find a variety of *“ideological justification for the dispossession”* of indigenous people (Wolfe, 2006: 389), and of *“privileging [...] settlers”* as well as regarding the indigenous locals as *“inconsequential”* (Piterberg, 2008:55). Ethnic purity, Piterberg summarises following the research of Richard Nelson¹, is *“germane to a settler ideology, presented as it is to a group about to invade a ‘promised’ territory and disinherit its indigenous people”* (ibid: 272). Gershon Shafir remarked that Zionism was similar to other *“‘pure settlement’ colonies,”* that aimed to create *“a homogenous settler-immigrant population”* (Shafir, 1996[1989]: xiii). Indeed *“Euro-American settlers imagined that it was their destiny to take control of colonial space”* (Hixon, 2013:viii) and Dutch in South Africa, like many other imperialist settlers, adopted the view that *““we are here, so God must have wanted it”* while often claiming *“divine status into their rhetoric to justify what would otherwise be seen as a theft”* (Chaplin, 2020:47).

Still Labour-Zionism, with its constant hammering the values of universal socialism and high regard for all labourers, had to invoke values no less sublime in order to instil in its disciples an absolute abhorrence of the idea of living and working together with non-Jews, or accepting their employment by other Jews. The necessary ideological instrument was easily found in the teaching of the Jewish religion. A decree that Jews are not to fraternise, dine together or mingle in any way with non-Jews is basic to the ancient religious Jewish heritage. Consequently, the demand that only Jews be employed by Jews, and that Arabs must not be allowed to work in the workplaces designated for **Hebrew Labour** could very naturally be accepted by anybody educated in traditional Jewish teaching².

This particular character of the Jewish religion is often commented on by present-day secular Jewish nationals of Israel. A secular activist recently explained that *“Judaism [...] is a religion that had been developed as a diasporic technique to keep the Jews disconnected from their*

¹ Referring to R.T. Neldon, ‘Josiah in the Book of Joshua’, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 100/4 (1981), pp 531 -40

² In July 2023, the announcement that the national-religious publicist altruistically donated a kidney “on condition that it be transplanted only in a Jewish body” caused an uproar. [The donor Arnon Segal defiantly defended this condition, claiming that he considers all Jews part of his extended family.](#)

surroundings [...] in order to justify the gap between the 'chosen people' and its miserable diasporic existence Jewish religion parented the conception of Jewish racism" (Furman³, 2022). Zionism, self-identified as a national liberation movement, is correctly associated with the rebellion of masses of Jews in Eastern Europe against the stifling, strictly religious, disciplined life in Jewish communities of the Pale of Settlement, known as the "*Shtetl*" lifestyle. The passion for secular freedom and education was eternalised in hundreds, perhaps thousands, of written works of research and of fiction, reaching poetic literary apogees with the works of Y. Ch. Brenner, M.Z. Feilerberg, Y. Abramovic ("*Mendele Moicher Sforim*") and others. But in no way did Zionism cut itself off from some socially significant features of the Jewish tradition, and it fiercely preserved the vision of Jews as a separate, exclusive and self-segregating community. In the words of Gabriel Piterberg, Zionism extremely values ethnic purity (Piterberg, 2008:272;276). As for Labour Zionism, a particularly secular version of the Zionist movement, its many "*non-religious and anti-rabbinical*" expressions (ibid:276) did not prevent it from making use of religious instructions that legislate mandatory ethnic purity⁴.

Edward Said, explaining how religious norms provided a basis for orientalist dispositions in non-religious societies, wrote that although one notices some elements that "*[...] represent secularising tendency, this is not to say that the old religious patterns of human history and destiny and the 'existential paradigms' were simply removed. Far from it: they were reconstituted, redeployed, re-distributed in the secular frameworks*" (Said, 1977:121). It is a mechanism that was perfectly activated by secular Zionists, particularly in the Labour movements.

Two seemingly opposing strategies can be identified in this process: one is the "*return to history*" prevalent in Zionist discourse: "*the view according to which the present Jewish settlement in and sovereignty over Palestine/ Eretz Israel is the return of the Jews to the land*"

³ Ram Furman is the chairman of the "Secular Forum" NGO which he founded in 2011. His article "[The link between Ben Gurion and Ben Gvir](#)" was published by Haaretz on Sept.24, 2022 [Heb].

⁴ Mandatory differentiation according to ethno-religious affiliation, generating privileges and disadvantages, is a major characteristic of the present-day Israeli regime that culminated in the 2018 "Nationality Decree" .This legislation, gaining international notoriety, actually followed a long list of apartheid-enabling laws and regulations that began in the 1950s - rules about "absentee properties", "present absentees", land rules and citizenship laws (Aminov, 2022:154; Har-Shefi, 2022:116), all legislated under Labour-Zionist political hegemony.

regarded as their homeland” (Raz-Krakotzkin, 2013:37). Next to the “*Return to history*” and complementing it is the strategy known as the “*negation of exile*” [*“shlilat hagalut”*]. The history of Jewish communities in other parts of the world, next to the inhabitants of other nations, is considered an unimportant period in the life of the nation (Piterberg, 2008:105, 134). Both strategies make use of orthodox-religious texts, scriptures and traditions. They include the re-creation of ancient myths and tales of heroism and martyrdom, as well as an abundance of stories and memoirs that indicate a powerful, nostalgic linkage to East-European orthodox existence. The stories are rich in magical-divine revelations, as well as in Jewish suffering among the gentiles. They hail an uninterrupted liaison to the “historic homeland”, making the “return to history” seem obvious; the “negation of the diaspora” is enhanced with tales of acute misery and suffering of Jews among the gentiles.

True to its vision to serve as a major tool for the education of young Labour Zionists, and well aware of the significance of Jewish religious heritage for Zionism, **BaMaaleh** regularly carried articles, editorials, stories, memoirs and nostalgia-pieces that bolster, invigorate and intensify a durable linkage to the Jewish tradition. The strict ban on “*mixing with the gentiles*⁵” which makes ethnic purity a fundamental rule and makes **Hebrew Labour** seem culturally indispensable is often emphasised.

The present chapter focuses on the main elements highlighted in **BaMaaleh**’s texts according to some major themes.

- 1. Teaching from the top down: David Ben Gurion and Biblical-historical heritage**
- 2. Assimilation as a personal and national disaster**
- 3. Homecoming - return to the ancient past**
- 4. Secular rage at the religious establishment, reverence for Jewish Religion and symbols**
- 5. Memoirs, nostalgic religious tales and holiday celebrations**
- 6. Tales of martyrdom, heroism and faith**
- 7. Tales of Tzadiks (The Righteous) and miracles**
- 8. Emphasis on antisemitism**

⁵ Deuteronomy 7:3-4

1. *Teaching from the top down: Ben Gurion and Biblical-historical heritage*

The musing and ruminations of grass-roots members, indicative of the state of mind of the settler community, did not materialise out of thin air. They reflect an ideological teaching that was shared and lectured constantly by the movement's leaders and ideologues. Anthony Smith pointed out that almost every "*ethnie*" that began the road towards active nationalism had "*a secularizing intelligentsia led by educator-intellectuals [...] who supplied the motor of transformation*" and the "*rediscovery of the ethnic past*" (Smith, 1989: 355). David Ben Gurion, a political master who is justly credited with the creation and establishment of the State of Israel and its Zionist spirit (Segev, 2019 [2018]), was a prime model of such an "*educator intellectual*", as his very rich legacy of articles, scripted lectures and speeches testifies (Ben Gurion, 1974; 1955). He perfected the art of "*negation of exile*" in favour of the "*return to history*" (Piterberg, 2008: 105; 134; 146 etc; Raz-Krakotzkin, 2013:37), skilfully manufacturing an imagined direct link between the immigrating settler community and a presumed glorified historical-biblical "*past*", evoking "*myths of common descent, common memories, culture and solidarity, and associations with a homeland*" (Smith, 1989:340) as regular parts of his rhetorical arsenal. Ben Gurion contributed several articles to ***BaMaaleh*** during the period under consideration in this work. His long article (nearly two full A3 Pages) **Towards the Sea**⁶ is a prime specimen making creative use of old myths, ancient history and a few extra decorative additions. The article declares his intention to stir the settler community towards a new mission: becoming a maritime empire. But in fact, it bears an even broader ambition, setting out to establish a "*historical link*" between the settling immigrants and a supposed glorious imperial past. Eager to harness even Phoenician achievements to the "*Jewish nation*", Ben Gurion finds it necessary to recruit no other than the historical figure of the Carthaginian general Hannibal to the myth of regenerated Zion, turning him into a Hebrew icon.

While the focus of the article seems to be a call to direct resources and efforts for intensive Zionist involvement in maritime economy, the rhetorical strategy subtly indicates the "*return to history*", conjuring up an imagined glorious past:

⁶ Issue 12, 1932, June 17, page 3

[..] more than being torn away from its land, the Hebrew nation was distanced from the sea.

Following-up on the “conquest of labour” strategy, the call now is for “conquest of the sea” – in other words, claiming lucrative workplaces and resources in the port and the small commercial navy of Palestine that were in full Arab control, for the benefit of the settler community. Rather than announce a new target for usurpation, the move is positioned as a vindication of presumed past assets.

In his typical poetic pathos, Ben Gurion set out to build a historical narrative that links the Jews to the Mediterranean Sea. He began with an admission that such linkage had not been real in ancient times: *“Even at the time when the people dwelt in its land, its ties with the sea were fragile and sporadic”*. Then comes the twist that should appropriate the sea to the nation of immigrants, claiming that at least some historical Jews were *“valiant sea-people”*:

The Jews fortified themselves on the Mediterranean coast only in the period of the Second Temple, and only in Jaffa. The conquest of Jaffa and thereby the creation of an outlet to the sea was one of the great achievements of the Hasmonaeans [...] it was the first and only port of liberated Judea on the Mediterranean coast. Until the end of the Second Temple days, Jaffa remained a Jewish town. The Jews of Jaffa were valiant sea-people [...]

The choice of Jaffa as the conquered *“outlet to the sea”* cannot have been accidental. Ben-Gurion never made secret of his personal animosity to Arab Jaffa (Segev,2019 [2018]: 59⁷). In 1936 he wrote: *“The destruction of Jaffa, the city and the port, will happen and it will be for the best. [...] When Jaffa falls into hell I will not be among the mourners.”* (Segev,2000 [1999] ,383⁸). In a MAPAI Central Committee meeting on Sept. 29, 1936, he announced: *“I want a Jewish Sea”* (Segev,2019 [2018]:262). This desire must have already been on his mind in 1932 when - for the benefit of **BaMaaleh** readers, and somewhat carried away - he appropriated the maritime achievements of the Phoenicians to the Jews:

One of the Hebrew-Canaanite tribes, whose spoken language was close to that of the Bible [...] already settled on the Mediterranean coast in the early days [...] This people, known in the history of nations as Phoenicians, pioneered sailing and marine-trade in the world [...] and their capital coastal cities, Tyre and Saida, were at the time as important as London and New York in our days. The

⁷ Quoting Ben Gurion in a 1968 interview: “When I saw Jaffa I hated it [...] I saw it worse than Plonsk.”

⁸ Referenced to Ben Gurion’s diaries, 11 July 1936, in the Ben Gurion Heritage archive.

Canaanite descendants in Carthage kept the Hebrew-Canaanite language, and Hannibal was titled “Shofet” [...]

From here the “return to the land” and “return to the source” (Raz-Krakotzkin, 2013:37) flow naturally: “*descendants return now*” to the land, which is made of “*earth and of sea*”:

[...] the Hebrew tribes [...] their descendants return now after thousands of years to their land [...] In our days the Jews return to the land via the Great Sea and settle in the coastal valleys, in the centre of the land and by the banks of the Jordan River, the Sea of Galilei and the Dead Sea [...] This is where the marine and commercial centre of Western and Central Asia is to be erected [...] A landless nation’s thirst for land had developed in us new senses and new capabilities [...]this land of ours is made up of earth and of sea.

This particular piece is but a sample of the great (successful) project of Ben Gurion who “frequently evoked the Bible and Jewish destiny” (Segev, 2019 [2018]:17) and used every opportunity to insist on linkage between the immigrant community and the ancient Hebrew legacy (Raz-Krakotzkin, 2013:37).

2. Assimilation as a personal and national disaster

While historical texts could help with the “*rediscovery of the ethnic past*” (Smith, 1989: 355), a powerful Jewish decree fully justified striving for ethnic purity. Secular Labour Zionism made liberal use of Jewish rejection - even anxiety - of any hint of “*mixing with the Gentiles*”⁹, namely assimilation¹⁰.

The third brochure of **BaMaaleh** included a constitutive text that carried a clear moral message: severing ties with the Jewish religion turns one into an eternal outcast not just from the community but also from one’s own nuclear family, and the break is irreparable even in the afterlife. The story **A Road Encounter**¹¹ by canonised author A. Z. Rabinovitz also known as AZAR¹², described an incidental meeting while traveling in a carriage between Russian towns. The author’s interlocuter is a middle-aged man of Jewish descent who had been kidnapped at

⁹ Joshua 23:7

¹⁰ Emma Jo Aiken-Klar, writing about the “fear factor” of assimilation, analyses – from the perspective of Jewish communities outside Israel – how organised Jewish communities these days instrumentalise Israel as a “tool against assimilation” (Aiken-Klar, 2009:106).

¹¹ Brochure 3, 1928, pages 36-7

¹² Alexander Zieskind Rabinovitz (AZAR, 1854 - 1945) was a leading writer of the early Zionist movement. His writings emphasized social issues (Lexicon of Modern Hebrew Literature, OSU).

age 13 to serve in the Czar's army. He saved his life by converting to Christianity. Presently, many years later, living in a village with his local family, he describes himself as "*burning with longing*" for Judaism and for his original family. Having made the journey to his hometown, he discovers that he was not wanted there. Sadly, he tells the writer how his brother refused to have any contact with him: "*You are a meshumad [apostate], I do not want you*". [...] The writer continues the man's sad confession:

*[...] he said to me: My life is worthless anyway. There is no way out of these dire straits. And what do you think? – he asked me – Will the Lord forgive my sin and allow me to meet my mother in the afterlife?
I remained silent.*

Sympathy is shown to the "*meshumad*", but the message is clear: the miserable outcast may not even be comforted with an empty promise of reconciliation in the "*afterlife*". The national-religious norm is confirmed: Nothing but religious identity matters in the identity politics of the (allegedly secular) Labour Zionist literary universe.

Assimilation (see introduction) is invariably described as the greatest peril, both to Jewish continuity and to Zionist aspirations. "*Assimilation is also never ending, despite the difficult external situation*" B. West lamented in **The Conquest of the People**¹³, a commentary dedicated to rationalising the principle of **Hebrew Labour** as a necessity, dictated by the miserable situation of Jews all over the world (meaning Eastern and central Europe). Like many others, he hoped to redeem the unstable predicament of Zionism with more "*hasbara*".

Berl Katznelson, the undisputed spiritual leader of the Labour Zionist movement at the time, expressed concern upon having found out that Jewish children in Poland and Czechoslovakia go to "*general*" schools rather than receive traditional-orthodox education. In the wake of one of his trips abroad, **BaMaaleh** carried the text of a Katznelson speech titled **Following the Youth in the Diaspora**¹⁴. "*The free education given by the government is not Jewish,*" Katznelson complained, as religion seemed the sole guarantee against assimilation.

¹³ Issue 16, 1932, August 19, page 3

¹⁴ Issue 1, 1934, January 7, page 2

German Jews, in particular, were reprimanded for wishing to adopt German culture. The editorial **Slavery within Liberty**¹⁵ lamented the tendency of Jews in the diaspora to identify with their countries of residence, particularly disparaging the German Jewish liberal community:

[...] liberal Judaism kisses the whip that hits it and declares: 'I love my master! German culture is my culture, the German homeland is my homeland.'

In **America – a New Diaspora**¹⁶, a series of two articles, David Rachlevski criticised what he described as excessive “*Americanisation*”. Veteran Jewish immigrants, he complained, demand of newcomers to the thriving resident Jewish community “*a total blurring of the ancestral tradition, the exorcising of the past from the immigrant’s soul*”.

Assimilation was pointed out as a false solution (“*vain belief*”) in the editorial **On the verge of the New Year**^{17 18} as well. Summing-up the dire predicament of Jews in various countries, emphasising their serious economic distress, the editor concluded:

All work and livelihood positions are pulled from under their feet and they are pushed into the arms of dark despair [...] If there was ever faith or a dream of assimilation – it too has vanished and gone, and this vain belief is being roughly trodden upon [...]

3. Combining Biblical texts and diasporic suffering

The “*return to history*” ideology, fortified with links to Jewish misery in the diaspora, was well pronounced in **In the Homeland**¹⁹, signed by Hasida Abayov²⁰. The young woman, daughter of immigrants, managed to combine victimhood-consciousness with sentiments of territorial entitlement, both conjured-up out of the collective memory of the community (Halbwachs, 1980 [1950]:41-50). Her self-congratulatory tone is typical of the settler community; her identification with the national mass-suffering (which she did not experience personally)

¹⁵ Issue 16, 1932, August 19, front page

¹⁶ Issue 14, 1932, July 22, page 4.

¹⁷ Jewish New Year starts in the autumn.

¹⁸ Issue 18, 1932, Sept. 30, front page.

¹⁹ Issue 5, 1932, March 4, page 7.

²⁰ It can be assumed that this is the daughter of Manoach Abayov, who immigrated to Palestine from Russia in 1906. Having lived in Jerusalem for a while, he joined the founders of the Be'er Ya'akov settlement and was its Mukhtar for the rest of his life. One of his daughters, Hasida, married Benyamin Zehavi. (Source: Tidhar)

predated a tradition that would, some decades later, dispatch hundreds of thousands of young Israelis to march around the represented-for-posterity extermination camps of Europe wrapped in Israeli national flags²¹. Abayov wrote:

I am a native of the land and have not known the suffering of the diaspora, the violent riots, edicts, shame and disgrace. [...] My ear had caught only a fragment about life in the far away countries. [...] The picture I see is this: persecutions and sentencing, “Jid” jeering, curses and abuse, the sufferings and the worries of life, fear and horror.

She then posed a rhetorical question: “[...] *this hard and bitter life, where does it come from?*” and her answer is ready, no pause: “*From a lack of ground under one’s feet.*”

The idea that lack of territory is at the bottom of the Jews’ troubles is a powerful Zionist notion, detailed in Herzl’s *The Jewish State* (Herzl, 1896). It tends to ignore the fact that masses of people had been murdered, persecuted, tortured, kidnapped to slavery or driven away while living on ancestral land (often due to their living on a land that other people coveted). For Abayov, in the haven of the newly regained territory, the problem seemed angelically solved.

She feels blessed as vegetation, wild birds and livestock offer their recognition:

And here I am on the land of my ancestors. [...] Everywhere – the scent of the homeland. [...] the mountains and the valleys, the hills and the creeks, the rocks, the streams – the bright colours of the Land of our Ancestors, the wildflowers, the grain the birds in the sky and the farm beasts – they all chant the song of the land. The song of rebirth and of liberty [...]

The “*song*” literally and dutifully recounts the narrative of the “*return to the land*” and the “*return to the source*” identified by Raz-Krakotzkin, but also incorporates martyrdom and nationally inspired sacrifice:

And the choir tells about past generations, about free life in the homeland, the people who sat under their vine and under their fig tree. It chants of risking souls and martyrdom, about the fathers who sacrificed themselves for the nation.

The idyllic scene naturally includes the farmer – the Hebrew landowner: “*all his hopes and his future are tied and connected to the earth of the homeland*”. Having completed her work on the farm, the writer moves on to her other task: reading the Bible “*with special emphasis*”. The

²¹ [See for ex. Haaretz opinion piece of February 2022](#)

reading is yet another exercise in self-reassurance about entitlement by grace of the Almighty, a typical sample of pseudo-secular instrumentalization of religious scriptures:

[...] reading with special emphasis: “therefore God gives thee of the dew of heaven, and the fat of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine”²². I have read and I know – there is a particular grace in these words in this environment of ours, the environment of labour in the homeland. Can there be a greater pleasure?...

A similar sense of “return” pleasure produced by Biblical reading is described by Haim Brenner²³ in **A trip to Transjordan**²⁴. Reporting on what sounds like a typical excursion of young settlers (touring the land often features throughout the period). Having camped in “*a silvery moonlit night on the bank of the Dead Sea*”, the youngsters’ organised trip is enhanced with biblical instruction:

[...] then the group’s guide opens his Bible and blesses what we are about to perform: “Let me go over, and see, the good land that is beyond Jordan” (Deuteronomy 3, 25).

The references continue as the traveller’s imaginations conjures up -

[...] the song of the Son of Beor: ‘As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river’s side - - - He shall pour the water in his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters’²⁵.

The trans-Jordanian Arab city *Al-Salt* is identified as “*Gador*” from the *Mishnah* [ancient rabbinic text], “*perched on the shoulder of a mountain where beacons were lit to sanctify the new month in the days of the Second Temple.*” Upon seeing the hills of the Gilead “*the invocation and the greetings of which we had always been dreaming: the smell of perfume and scent, ‘The Scent of Gilead’ reaches our noses from every corner.*”

At the conclusion of the trip, the travellers are satisfied that this east bank of the Jordan is an inseparable part of the ancient Jewish homeland. The Arab villages and towns they cross, the inhabitants they converse with, the sounds of prayers from the mosques that they hear make no difference to their conviction:

²² Genesis 27, 28, *Ibid*.

²³ There is no indication of a link between this writer and the important Hebrew writer Yosef Haim Brenner who was murdered in the Jaffa riots of 1920.

²⁴ Issue 16, 1932, August 19, page 10.

²⁵ Numbers, 6 and 7. The quote (in Hebrew) is slightly inaccurate, originally “pour the water out of his buckets”.

[...] our neighbouring country, whose form, history and geographical as well as economic situation unite it necessarily together with Western Eretz Israel as one single state, that will make the two inseparable parts partners in the creation and the development of their economy.

The traveller's conclusion is ecstatic and well-adapted to the "return" narrative:

From my heart the words came out: "Hail my homeland, my homeland!"

The whole episode illustrates the analysis of Nadim Rohana "that Jewish national claims in Palestine rely on religious claims in order to obscure the reality of the Zionist project as settler colonial in essence" (Rohana, 2021:45²⁶).

Yet another experience of "return to the source" (Raz-Krakotzkin, 2013:37) is presented in Sara Glzman²⁷'s piece **In the Gilboa Mountains**²⁸. She recounted an emotional experience generated by (another) group tour. A "weird feeling" was described as generated by direct identification with the ancient biblical "prophets":

I was suddenly engulfed with a weird feeling. In these mountains – I wondered for myself and for everything. Who knows what prophets have wandered here, along these paths, dreaming their spiritual visions?

A sense of identification generated by collective historical memories was also reported during a trip to Egypt. In **Impressions from a trip in Egypt**²⁹ two members of the Youth Village Ben-Shemen, in entries signed "a [female] traveller", report their sense of identification with the builders of the giant tombs and pyramids, "our forefathers" and even "the Jews who were Pharaoh's slaves" (obviously, referring to the biblical Hebrews as "Jews" is a later concept).

4. Secular rage at the religious establishment, reverence for Jewish religion and symbols

The Labour Zionist movement was an expressly secular movement that openly refused to accept (most) religious norms and commands. **BaMaaleh** offers an early perspective on what

²⁶ The quote is from the abstract, as the full article is in Arabic that I am unfortunately unable to read.

²⁷ Sara Glzman (1915 -1988) was born in the Ukraine, immigrated to Palestine in 1923 with her family at a young age and was educated in Tel Aviv. After a short period in Kibbutzim, she worked for the department of education, published articles, stories and novels in instalments for children and for adults. (Source: OSU)

²⁸ Issue 9, 1935, May 16, pages 10-11

²⁹ Issue 4, 1931, April 17, page 9

“*Jewish secular’ emotions in a settler-colonial society*” (Gutkowski, 2021:42) stood for. Many texts forcefully defend the secular position, rebuking criticism from Orthodox and rabbinical circles and complaining about them, vehemently lamenting the sympathies religious personalities or newspapers showed for political parties identified with the “bourgeois” classes and their contrarian positions against the Labour Movement, in particular against the call for **Hebrew Labour**. Still, while anger was targeted at rabbis, religious officials, affiliations, and institutions, respect for the actual religious tradition was carefully – if selectively - manifested. A typical combination of protesting religious coercion while making sure not to offend religious sentiment is to be found in **Coercion**³⁰. In harsh words, this editorial compared representatives of the religious establishment to the church inquisitors of the Middle Ages:

The men of religion are determined to force us to obey the Sabbath laws with measures out of the Middle Ages. The Sabbath Conference has issued a list of decisions that smell like the Inquisition: No Jewish employees are to be employed if they are not Sabbath-observers; No credit is to be given those who do not respect the Sabbath and Jewish Holidays regulations; non-observant teachers are to be fired, etc etc.

This passage is followed by a careful reservation assuring respectfully that there is no intention to speak ill of religious feelings, religious practices or practitioners:

The Jewish Labour Movement in Eretz Israel has not declared war on religion. It is a barbaric, unethical action whenever one tries to force one’s religious or anti-religious views on another.

The adversarial positions were often openly expressed: **Shadows of the Middle Ages**³¹ is an editorial signed B.H. lashing out heatedly at rules and practices in the religious educational system, that seem to threaten “*our World*”:

A boy was expelled from the religious Tachkemoni School because he joined the “Labour Scouts” movement and celebrated May Day together with his worker father. Whipping is practiced at the Mizrahi Movement schools. [...] should we not consider these shadows from the Middle Ages, aiming to take over our world? We wage war on those who wish to impose the darkness of the Middle Ages on us!

³⁰ Issue 19, 1932, Oct 14, front page.

³¹ Issue 6, 1931, May 21, front page.

The Wise Should Speak Softly³² is an editorial complaining about an article in the national-religious paper *Ha'Thor* that criticised the irreverence of members of the Labouring Youth, blamed for desecrating the Sabbath. Quoting the harsh words *Ha'Thor* used against the young working youth, **BaMaaleh** turns on the accusers, reminding them that the controversy is mainly political: “[...] *Why, we never hear you reprimanding the usurpers of orphans, the greed worshippers?*”

The “*negation of the diaspora*” attitude is emphasised in some other memoirs, focused on exposing the bigotry of the religious establishment. “Michael” describes religious fanatics as exercising violence against Zionist rebels. In **How I made Aliya to Eretz Israel from my town in Poland**³³ he related how a Hassid who saw a group of youngsters “*sitting with heads uncovered, speaking about Eretz Israel*” alarmed the Rabbi who was informed about the outrage and “*immediately gathered 30 Hassids who assaulted us with blows, smashed the glass windows and threw out a table with papers and money.*”

A comic perspective on the rivalry of the traditional religious leadership and young aspiring socialists is offered in a story by Meir Ayally³⁴. In **From One Battle to the Next**³⁵, two-long suffering Yeshiva students find a trick that enables them to read Karl Marx with impunity:

Moshe takes a brochure out of the pages of the Talmud: “Marx and Engels: The Communist Manifesto”. Yaakov continues looking at the Talmud and listens to Moshe reading from the brochure, intoning the same Gmara tune: “So says rabbi Yehuda. Only by the solidarity of all the workers of the world in their battle against capital and the capitalist regime ... and as it is known from Rabbi Karl and from Rabbi Friedrich: “Workers of the world Unite!” Supervisors pass by the window, hear the tune of learning and say: “marvellous boys.”

The religious establishment was described as part of the unloved bourgeoisie in the story **The God of the Poor People**³⁶ signed by L. Habib. In this story a widowed mother insists that her son

³² Issue 13, 1932, July 1, front page.

³³ Issue 14, 1932, July 22, page 4.

³⁴ There is no mention of Meir Ayalli in the Lexicon of New Hebrew Literature, or in the on-line Tidhar Encyclopaedia, but he is the author of several books that are kept in the National Library.

³⁵ Issue 20, 1934, Oct.12. page 7

³⁶ Issue 17-18, 1933, Sept. 20, page 7.

Baruch go to the synagogue to say *Kaddish*³⁷ for his dead father rather than join his mates on a trip – seemingly a Labouring Youth activity. Upon arriving at the synagogue Baruch discovers that participation requires the offering of a donation. His own employer is honoured as “*Shillings fly out of his mouth*”. Back home the working boy bitterly reports to his mother that in the synagogue he found only “*the God of the Rich. The God of the Poor would not live in that house...*”

Respect for religious decrees was manifested in practice. **To the Village**³⁸ (unsigned) summoned members and readers to an upcoming conference. Next to the description of the many activities and lectures, **BaMaaleh** announced: “*there is no exit from the village on the Sabbath*” (original emphasis). In other words, the organisers advertised their adherence to the Sabbath rules, even though on other occasions **BaMaaleh** insisted that working youth must be entitled to travel for recreational purposes on the holy day.

Is there a God in this Place?³⁹ is a fierce admonishing of religious leaders, signed “Shmuel”, for their support for the right-wing political opponents in the aftermath of the Arlosoroff murder (see chapter 5). The article compared the support that prominent rabbis, including the much-respected Rabbi Kook⁴⁰, offered the Revisionist party and its two members who were indicted (and later acquitted) to the way the ultra-right in Europe was supported by religious circles there. Shmuel furiously continues: Reminiscent of the days of Tsar Nikolai, he repeats accusations that – following a decree that Jewish boys must be recruited to the Russian army – rabbis helped make sure that children of poor Jews would be grabbed for army service rather than those of the rich⁴¹. He then laments Labour Zionism’s cooperation with religious circles, making clear that it is “*this kind of God*” (and not religion altogether) which he disapproves:

³⁷ Prayer for the soul of the dead.

³⁸ Issue 12, 1934, June 15, page 9

³⁹ Issue 11, 1934, June 5, page 2

⁴⁰ Zvi Yehuda Kook (1891 -1982) was born in Lithuania, the son of the important Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook who arrived in Palestine to be the chief rabbi of Jaffa. He also became a prominent rabbi, credited with accepting Zionism as a “first step” towards divine redemption of the Jews. His teaching is very relevant for Israeli politics to this day, see the [link to Haaretz, Sept. 3, 2021](#)

⁴¹ There are many references to this alleged practice, mainly in literary texts (I have not found relevant academic historical research). Yechezkel Kutic (1847-1921) in a memoir that was translated into Hebrew from Yiddish and included in the “Ben Yehuda Project” (the Hebrew equivalent of the Gutenberg Project) describes a vicious assault

We are also to blame, as we have “negotiated” with them over religious matters. [...] It is only against us that they fight, and we did not know how to fight back. [...] this is not the God of the poor and the orphans, it is the God of money, of the powerful and the exploiters who lives in this place. We have no part in the worship of this kind of God.

A month later “Shmuel” again attacked the religious establishment. **In Our Isolation We Will Live and We Will Act**⁴² is a forceful opinion piece against the right-wing parties and their supporters in the farmers’ association. It rages about their open allegiance with the suspected murderers of Chaim Arlosoroff, dedicating special attention to the rabbis:

The Rabbis, too, those innocent lambs, busy with nothing but “Spiritual Matters” – take off your black gowns and show your faces in full view. They are the ones who supported the “dear authors and poets” who call the Jewish youth for acts of murder, to play in “bixalach”⁴³ and daggers, those who elevated to the level of “pure and sacred” the guy from Brisk whom the court recognised as the murderer of the late Arlosoroff.

His rage, he again makes clear, is not against religion but against its unworthy servants who use it improperly. Reverence of the religious tradition is repeated: *“these Rabbis profane the Torah and the synagogues”*.

An editorial on the next issue: **How murderers were turned into “heroes”**⁴⁴ refers to iconic religious symbols as the objects of great respect. The Torah, the Western Wall and the synagogues are sacred national icons together with the flag and the national anthem *“Hatikva”*. Following the acquittal of the two Revisionist members who had been indicted for the murder of Arlosoroff, **BaMaaleh** was still convinced of their guilt and blamed their supporters of sacrilege, noting clear similarity between the Torah and the nation:

by community “[kidnappers](#)” who forced an eight-year-old orphan into military service. A footnote explains: *“Due to the quotas system, the communities had to hand over a fixed number of recruits, and the community elders carried a personal responsibility for the decree. When no volunteers were to be found, the elders preferred to forcefully recruit elements of the community that were deemed negative or weak (vagabonds, poor families’ children, orphans and the like). This discriminating and cruel policy practiced in 1854 (that year over 7500 Jews were drafted) generated, as was to be expected, much social tension as well as bitterness and harsh criticism of community elders.”* (**Seen with my own eyes**, memoir of Yechezkel Kutic, translated from Yiddish into Hebrew by David Assaf, [chapter 9](#))

⁴² Issue 13, 1934, June 29, page 3

⁴³ Yiddish for guns

⁴⁴ Issue 15, 1934, July 27, front page

Don't you utter the name of the nation and the name of the Torah of Israel in vain! We have seen you greeting the murderers with cheers as you welcomed them in the synagogues, and you have handed the Torah to hands smeared with blood. [...] "The Lord shall smite thee with madness"⁴⁵ [...] misleading rabbis [...] profaned the flag of the people, befouled the hymn "HaTikva" and were not ashamed to bring murderers to the Western Wall [...] (original emphasis)

5. Memoirs, nostalgic religious tales and holiday celebrations

A nostalgic tone may be found in an autobiographical fragment by the writer Ever Hadani⁴⁶. In **Jeremiah travels to Eretz Israel**⁴⁷ the storyteller remembers himself as a fourteen-year-old alone on a ship on his way to Eretz Israel, longing for home in (then) Russia, carrying a few items that include his embroidered *Tefillin* bag⁴⁸.

A nostalgic and loving perspective of religious tradition was shared in two entries by Aharon Kave. In **Old People**⁴⁹, a group of aged men and women finds itself in a commune that does not offer them praying facilities, but when the holidays arrive, especially the celebration of Passover, "*Rabbi Moshe sometimes sees a perfect victory,*" as some "*comrades*" are interested in the "*Seder*" that he organises. **The Old Blacksmith**⁵⁰ describes the arrival of a girl's father to the commune. He is suspicious of the social order but the fact that he organises a *Kiddush* for the Sabbath turns out to be a joy for the already resident old women in the commune: "*For the old women he was like a gift of God, as if something was returned to them from their husbands who had died long ago.*"

⁴⁵ Deuteronomy 28,28.

⁴⁶ The author Ever Hadani, Nee Aharon Feldman (1899-1972) was born in Pinsk, immigrated to Palestine as a young boy in 1913 and studied in the Herzlia Gymnasium in Tel Aviv. His stories, poems and articles were widely published in newspapers and literary magazines. (Source: OSU).

⁴⁷ Issue 1, 1935, January 11, page 6

⁴⁸ Traditionally *Tefillin* (phylacteries) – small boxes with leather straps, containing written verses from the bible and worn over the arms and the forehead during prayer – were given to boys for their Bar-mitzva, at age 13.

⁴⁹ Issue 18, 1932, Sept. 30, page 7

⁵⁰ Issue 14, 1933, July 28, page 7

Much admiration is expressed in two articles dedicated to the prominent 12th century Jewish rabbi and philosopher, the RAMBAM (known as Maimonides)⁵¹. **Maimonides**⁵² signed by Nahum Ish-Gamzu⁵³, offers a biographical note, stressing the fact that next to his greatness, acknowledged by Muslim and Christian scholars as well, Maimonides was fiercely opposed by many of his contemporary Jewish community leaders. “[...] *He also conceived of a bold idea, to combine the two major concepts of Judaism – religion and philosophy – to connect creed and science and to put Judaism on the basis of contemplation and research*”, Ish-Gamzu wrote. **Teacher of the Perplexed**⁵⁴ by Zvi Karol⁵⁵ on the same page, (the title is also the title of the RAMBAM’s book) informs readers that Maimonides “*did not belong to the austere and the dogmatic [...] He opened the eyes of the depressed*”.

While the Jewish religious establishment expressed open hostility to the Zionist Labour Movements, efforts were made to prove that in fact the “true” Jewish religion can and must be part of Zionist-socialist teaching, following the claim that proto-socialist ideology is already part of the original Jewish religious tradition. The first instalment of a two-part series titled **Holidays, Festivities, and Labour Youth**⁵⁶, signed by “Akiva”, described how “*different platforms of the Proletarian Youth of Europe*” seek the creation of new “*cultural values*” that are not related to the “*Church and bourgeois values*”. Akiva pointed out that while the “*international festivities*” like “*May Day, War Against War Day, Youth Day [...]*” are useful (see also chapter 3), the Hebrew tradition offers some “*national holidays*” that are suitable for the Labouring youth. The movement, he assured, can “*rely on the Hebrew tradition, all that it holds alive and viable, so that the holidays may be a source of our original national folklore.*” The fact that

⁵¹ There is no explanation as to why the two articles appeared in this particular issue. On March 15, 1935 a [Tel Aviv municipality bulletin indicated that a new hospital would be named after the RAMBAM as “this is the 800th anniversary of his birth”](#). Other sources indicate Maimonides’ birth year as 1138. A RAMBAM hospital exists in Haifa today.

⁵² Issue 7, 1935, April 15, page 4.

⁵³ Ish-Gamzu was born Nachum Dov Karpibner (1890 -1937) in Moghilev, Russia (now Belarus) and immigrated to Palestine in 1925. He was an educator and published stories, poems and translations, most of which he signed “Nachum of Gamzo”. (Source: OSU).

⁵⁴ Issue 7, 1935, April 15, page 4

⁵⁵ Zvi Karol (1907 – 1948) was born in the Minsk area (Belarus) and immigrated to Palestine in 1925. After working as a manual labourer, he studied in the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He worked as a writer and journalist, researched Jewish socialism and published poems as well as humorous texts. (Source: OSU)

⁵⁶ Issue 8, 1931, June 19, page 3

“*reactionary religious activists*” try to oppose the celebration of Jewish holidays by the socialist movement must not deter the socialists from following the national-religious traditions, in his view. Akiva repeated this call in the second instalment of this series⁵⁷, reminding the readers that since “*the Workers Movement intends to renew the world*”, the Jewish holidays are useful, too: “*Our holidays must awaken one’s inner strength for this goal, this is why we have them*”.

The holidays - in their perfectly traditional form - were often fondly remembered in a series of nostalgic memoirs, with no attempt to instrumentalise them “*to renew the world*”. Moshe Kalori⁵⁸, the author of several such memoirs, contributed **The Celebration of Passover among German Jews (memories)**⁵⁹, as well as **Shavuot holiday by the Jews of Germany/ Memories**⁶⁰ and **Sukkot [tabernacles] Holiday in Germany (memories of childhood)**⁶¹. The venerable tradition was fondly remembered and cherished, sanctity included: “*One’s heavy state of mind, imbued with endless sanctity, seems to melt in the joys of the Sukkot holiday,*” he described. **Simhat Torah**⁶² in Harbourg⁶³ was described by “Esther”. **Childhood**⁶⁴ by M. Ben Ami⁶⁵ is another memoir waxing lyrical as it describes Jewish traditional values – this time it is the all-important Sabbath, the only comfort for a suffering family:

And with all these – the Sabbath. With all our poverty, it continued to be the single happy day of the week. The one spot of light of our whole sad life, as it was the only day of bliss, it had this special glow increased by the sufferings of the weekdays. Throughout the week we lived in anticipation of this joyful day of the Sabbath, everything good and beautiful was related to it.

⁵⁷ Issue 9, 1931, July 3, page 4

⁵⁸ Moshe Kalvari [Kalori] born 1876 to a rabbinical family, studied in a Berlin Yeshiva and was a teacher in Germany, arrived in Palestine in 1914 but then returned to Germany with the outbreak of World War I, returned to Palestine in 1922 as a teacher and headmaster, also a political activist and member of MAPAI, published press articles in Hebrew and in German (source: Tidhar).

⁵⁹ Issue 3, 1931, March 27, page 4

⁶⁰ Issue 6, 1931, May 21, page 6

⁶¹ Issue 15, 1931, September 25, page 5

⁶² A celebration ending the holiday of *Sukkot* (Tabernacles) and the yearly cycle of Torah chapter readings.

⁶³ Issue 22, 1933, Nov. 24, page 4

⁶⁴ Issue 4, 1932, Feb, 19, page 6

⁶⁵ Chaim Mordechai Ben-Ami (Rabinovitz) (1854 -1932) was born in Podolia to a Hassidic family and grew up in an orphanage. He studied in Odessa University and contributed stories and articles to the Russian Press even after he left Russia and lived in Vienna and in Geneva. Was highly esteemed by Bialik and Ahad Haam and some of his writings were translated into Hebrew. In 1923 he immigrated to Palestine. (Source: Tidhar)

Shmuel Rosenstein's memoir **A holiday's abrupt ending**⁶⁶ opens with a confirmation that Hannukah was the most favoured holiday for kids, as it had a "*mixture*" of religious as well as secular flavour:

As Kislev⁶⁷ enters the children of the "Cheder" in the diaspora are busy preparing for the Hannukah holiday, they cherish this holiday above all others. It is a mixture of the sacred and the profane.

In fact, "*No Jewish holiday had been so nationally upgraded as Hannukah*", as Israeli writer Yoram Meltzer (Meltzer, 2007:376) asserts. This holiday – celebrating a Jewish-Hasmonaean supposed victory over the Greek occupation during the Second Temple period – was easily adaptable by the new version of nationalist-militarist spirit. **BaMaaleh** fully participated in the Zionist trend as "*the pre-state Hebrew literature intensively processed contents from the Hasmonaean myth into a scheme that included the negation of the diaspora, portrayal of the option of determined brave Jews overcoming the occupier, with emphasis on historic Jewish destiny throughout the generations as what necessarily would lead to independence and statehood. Motives related to the Hannukah holiday were instrumentalised for the constitution of the linkage to Eretz Israel*" (ibid: 378).

The play **The Maccabi Rebellion**⁶⁸ by N. Benari is an illustration of such literary work, combining the necessary ideological ingredients of "*farming of the land and war heroism*" (Amit, 2007:254⁶⁹). Instructions for the dramatization include the participants: Matityahu the Hasmonaean, his wife and five sons, next to Greek soldiers, one refugee and "*the mass of the people*". The drama opens inside a cave: Women knead dough for bread; old Matityahu calls for restraint; Yehuda (the Maccabi, his son) argues for rebellion; a refugee describes the cruelty of the Greeks. Outside the cave the Greeks are calling for killing, looting and uprooting of olive groves and vineyards. When they leave, the dwellers of the cave find that their cattle herds have been taken. A mute man arrives with a written note explaining that he had cut out his own tongue (!) in order not to be able to tell the whereabouts of the priest's family. At a distance Jerusalem is burning. Matityahu now changes his mind and joins the women who

⁶⁶ Issue 23, 1932, December 23, page 7

⁶⁷ The third month of the Jewish calendar (November-December).

⁶⁸ Issue 23, 1932, Dec. 23, page 5

⁶⁹ Quoting Uriel Simon.

encourage the men to rebel. Yehuda the Maccabi summons: “*Call the people! War for freedom!*”. Altogether “*the historic background of Hannukah enables a description of the Jews who in their heyday were not made according to diasporic models but used to be people of action, heroism and fulfilment. It offered a memory of the Jew as a warrior who established Jewish statehood in ancient times*” (Meltzer, 2007:378).

Passover holiday offered another option for the “*return*” theme. **From Slavery to Liberation**⁷⁰ is an article of admonition and reproof, comparing contemporary immigration and settlement to the biblical exodus from Egypt:

[...] are we not in the same position as our forefathers have been in three thousand years ago – we exited the diaspora [...] we are in the land and we feel liberated; but have we really ceased to be slaves in all our life modes [...]

Yet another holiday suitable for supporting the settler myth of benevolent return is *Tu Bishvat*⁷¹. In January 1932, a whole issue of **BaMaaleh** was dedicated to this holiday, with stories and made-up legends manufactured for this purpose. The stories offer a somewhat crude glorification of the settler society, describing it as bringing a benevolent healing influence into an ill-used environment (more of this in chapter 7). As Irus Braverman notes, the “*declensionist’ narrative*”, or “*blaming [...] natives for [...] the region’s environmental decline*” is “*familiar from other colonial contexts*” (Braverman, 2023:13).

In **Notes from the countryside**⁷² (signed “Smike”) personified remnants of “*A Pre-historic Forest*” are described, trees that “*were savaged by the desolation, many of them were put to death under the axe of evil*”. Presently, “*at last*”, the trees need not cringe in fear “*at the sight of a human being*”, as the new humans have no evil intentions to destroy – as the previous residents must have done– but come “*with plants in their hands*”. **The Sycamore**⁷³ (signed B. Fishko) is another story on the same page, featuring an ancient tree that survived neglect and desolation, and now belongs to a “*young gardener’s plot*”. The new owner, for sure not a



⁷⁰ Issue 7, 1935, April 15, page 2.

⁷¹ Jewish “New Year of the Trees” (the 15th day of the month of Shvat).

⁷² Issue 2, 1932, January 22, page 6.

⁷³ Issue 2. 1932, January 22, page 6.

native, will not allow the place to be a “*haven of lizards and reptiles.*” The traditional “holiday of trees” is an opportunity to produce a really smearing image of the local, indigenous population, described by default as hostile to its own landscape and vegetation, and fully compatible with the “*settler ecology*” (ibid:2). It is the “*narrative of improvement*” which is “*familiar from ‘neo-European’ settlements the world over*” and easily adopted by the “*early Zionist-European founders of the settler state*” (ibid:8), as Braverman noted, writing many years after the State of Israel was founded (see also in chapter 7).

6. Tales of martyrdom, heroism and faith

The Carob Tree⁷⁴ by “Elkana”⁷⁵ is a newly created “historical legend” for *Tu Bishvat* with heroic national martyrdom adding to the tree mythology. The legendary time is the Roman siege on Jerusalem, towards the end of the Second Temple period. The protagonist is -

[...] one of the Hebrew heroes, with his only son. And he was named the man of the rocks, because the man was as strong and as brave as the rock upon which he had built his nest [...] and from this steep hill he valiantly nearly single-handedly fought the Romans.

Father and son eventually and clandestinely move to Jerusalem, where the wounded father is dying. In the meantime, a vicious decree against the hill (!) was ordered by the angry Romans: “*Never should a human leg tread on it and never should it know a plant or tree*”.

Still the dying father instructs his son to disobey the order and plant a tree on the hill. This cost the son his life, and was immediately – so the story - turned into a *Tu Bishvat* sacred tradition:

The children of Israel keep the memory of the boy in their hearts, and it is therefore their custom to plant trees and to eat the fruit of the carob on the fifteenth day of Shvat.

National ideologies often make efficient use of “*Politics of Grief*” (Evans, 2007), and Zionism could rely on a rich traditional library⁷⁶. More martyrdom-for-the-nation stories are to be

⁷⁴ Issue 3, 1934, Jan. 31, page 7

⁷⁵ Only first name is provided, and I could not find information about a writer or activist named Elkana.

⁷⁶ The tale of the “Maccabean mother of seven sons” (Evans, 2007:10; 18-20; 38;41) was dramatized yearly in the Tel Aviv “Educational Home for Children of Labourers” in the 1950s and 1960s. Mother Hanna instructed all her sons to be executed rather than agree to sacrilege. I had the honour of performing this role in the 5th grade.

found accordingly in **BaMaaleh** of the 1930s. “Elkana” is the provider of another “legend” of voluntary mass-suicide. **The Legend of Hulata**⁷⁷ is marked especially for young children. It tells of the cruel Romans who took over the beautiful land of the Jewish Galilee on their way to Jerusalem. The local inhabitants tried to block their road to the holy city but were outnumbered. Although grace was promised, they “*chose hunger and death rather than becoming slaves of the Romans.*” When the warriors eventually found themselves surrounded, they decided to request the “*Sea of Sivchi*” (another name for the Hula Lake) to “*overflow and hold us in its waves*”. The lake consented and drowned them all. The horror-story ends with an upbeat contemporary happy ending, fully adapted for young children’s ideological education about the “*return*” mythos: After many years, the area is about to be redeemed by the descendants of the martyrs. The lake and the swamps -

*[...] are waiting for the day when the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the heroes would come to dry up Hulata, also known as the Hula, to redeem its land and bring up the memory of their heroic ancestors. And now the day has come*⁷⁸.

In another chilling “legend” – this time the creation of the much-acclaimed Eliezer Smoli⁷⁹ - multiple death is again the only solution against the might of vile gentiles. **The Sand Lily**⁸⁰ goes back in time to the era of King Solomon and happens in a holiday villa by the beach of “*today’s Tel Aviv*”, owned by a wealthy Jerusalemite – perhaps fulfilling the desire to claim the coastal area of Palestine that was never famous for Jewish-Israelite habitation. The wife and daughters of this man are attacked by the ruler of Jaffa –

[...] Philistine commissioner, grandson of Goliath, and this man was of a giant race, evil, with fury in his eyes and hostile to all Israelites, looking for a way to annihilate them.

As this horrible person spots the pretty Israelite womenfolk, “*his heart treacherous and filled with murderous passion*”, he overwhelms their guard. The mother and daughters choose to

⁷⁷ Issue 1, 1935, Jan. 11, page 5.

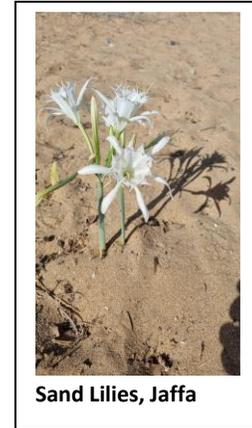
⁷⁸ See also chapter 7 – **In the Hula Valley**, Issue 2, 1933, January 27, page 3.

⁷⁹ Eliezer Smoli (1901-1985) born in the Ukraine and immigrated to Palestine in 1920, was one of the most important writers for children and youth in the Hebrew *Yishuv* (Jewish population before the founding of the State), laureate of the Bialik award for children’s literature and the writers’ association award for life achievement. Source: OSU.

⁸⁰ Issue 16, 1931, Oct. 9, page 6.

choke in a sand-cave in the dunes “with a smile on their lips”. In line with the patterns of Greek mythology, flowers replace the victims of the atrocity. The moral of the story is powerfully national, conveniently associated with typical Jaffa vegetation:

[...] they perished... and a bundle of white flowers rose from the cave [...] And so Israel knew ... and they called the flowers: Lily of the Sand. Each and every evening by summer's end the flowers surreptitiously open their goblets and look around fearfully, asking: has the danger passed? Is the horrible Philistine not lurking anymore?...



Reporting a traditional **Ascent [Aliya] to Tel Hai on Yud-Alef Adar**⁸¹, “Uri” uses it as an opportunity to bring-up more collective memories of martyrdom, lyrically combining biblical stories with the most recent addition to the Zionist martyrdom myths⁸². Listening to the choir singing during the memorial ceremony and watching a drama performance, the writer is fondly reminded of his days as a pupil in the Ukraine, learning of courageous Israelite monarchs from the bible:

I did remember: a small town in the far away Ukraine, a room full of pupils, studying a chapter in Shmuel 2, the war of Saul and Jonathan against the Philistines. We witnessed the fall of Israel, Saul falling on his own sword – and our hearts are so bereaved, crying and sobbing. [...] How Heroes have fallen –

The Breakout⁸³ by Yaakov Hoorgin⁸⁴ is a story for young people that combines heroism, nationalism and deep mistrust of non-Jews – mostly extremely hostile and cruel (the single exception, a friendly non-Jewish girl, aspires to join the Jewish religion). The long tale, described as a “*story of a Jewish boy in the days of the war of the Jews against the Romans*”, is

⁸¹ Issue 6, 1935, March 30, page 7

⁸² The 11th day (*yud alef*) of the month of Adar is celebrated as the day of Martyrdom, commemorating the death of Yosef Trumpeldor and his group at the Tel-Hai settlement in 1920, fighting an Arab attack. Both the Revisionists and the Labour movement tried to appropriate the tragic memory of the battle as an important symbol of their political agenda. *Ba'Maaleh*'s Issue 6 of 1935 is dedicated to this Memorial Day.

⁸³ Issue 16, 1932, August 19, pages 6-7

⁸⁴ Yaakov Yehoshua Hoorgin (1898 -1990) was born in Jaffa, received a traditional Jewish education, and was drafted as a translator first into the Turkish Army, then to the British army following its march into the area. He was a teacher, editor and later a professor of Hebrew Literature and published books and stories, mainly for young people. (Source: OSU Lexicon)

an excerpt from a novel for youth that was eventually published in 1935 (re-printed in several editions, up to 1989). In the story Jewish children in captivity are cruelly mistreated by Roman soldiers. A non-Jewish girl helps the protagonist boy Gera escape captivity, which surprises him greatly as she is an “alien”. As the two children escape the Romans, they meet a gang of independent Jewish boys and wish to join them to save their lives. The gang is doubtful about accepting the gentile girl, then the leader decides she is allowed to stay with them because she “saved a Jewish boy from slavery and death”. The girl is greatly moved, only worried about her religious ignorance:

She fell on her knees and kissed his hands:

- *I am your sister! I am a sister to Gera...*

And immediately she added sadly:

- *But still, I do not know how to pray to your God... I have not yet learnt to pray...*

7. Tales of Tzadiks (the Righteous) and miracles

One popular genre, often present in the pages of **BaMaaleh** is the Hassidic tale. Stories regularly published and signed mostly by “Elkana”, usually feature a “Tzadik” (great rabbi, a righteous one) displaying some acute social awareness which is atypical of his flock of well-to-do community members, the old-style Jewish bourgeoisie. In most stories the Tzadik – one with a direct line of communication to heaven - finds out about an extremely miserable member of the community whom the Almighty favours. The stories follow a well-established and popular Hassidic tale tradition that was canonised in the 19th century by Y. L Peretz⁸⁵, a beloved Yiddish and Hebrew writer.

Ha Lachma Ania [this bread of poverty]⁸⁶ by Elkana is adapted for the Passover season. It presents a simpleton country Jew:

Zelig the villager - a Jew in his heart and a “Goy” [gentile] in his appearance and speech, who used to walk from the village to the feast at the Tzadik’s table.

As Zelig arrives before Passover to receive the traditional special “Matzoth” (the traditional unleavened bread) from the Tzadik, he is mocked by the town Jews because he

⁸⁵ Peretz (1852-1915) was born and died in Poland.

⁸⁶ Issue 8, 1932, April 15, page 6. The title is a quote (in Aramaic) from the Passover prayer book.

[...] reeks of cow and horse dung. The town people jeer him: “Zelig, is there no risk of leaven in the stink of manure about you?”

But during the holy evening of the Passover ceremony, the image of the poor country Jew becomes the centre of the *Tzadik*'s attention:

The Tzadik's table gleams in its whiteness [...] The “bowl” is covered by a white tablecloth and the golden letters on it read “Ha Lachma Ania” [this is the bread of the poor]. Many guests sit around the table, and the eyes of the Tzadik are turned to the golden letters on the tablecloth.

To his eyes the image of Zelig the villager is conjured-up. His nose notices the smell of sweat and of manure, and he mumbles softly: Ha Lachma Ania... The guests hear the words but do not understand the meaning.

Another Passover miracle tale is **Send your Mazza over the Waters**⁸⁷ by Yosef Arikha⁸⁸. It is set in the times of riots and pogroms. A Jewish mill owner is unable to travel to spend the holiday with his father, the rabbi of a nearby town. As Passover approaches, the family is worried about not having *Mazzoth*. The rabbi, the miller's father, has an idea: he puts a *Mazza* pack in a barrel and ties it to a log floating down the river. The son accidentally (and miraculously) finds the barrel, his wife is convinced that the *Mazzoth* had been sent by the prophet Elijah.

Divine grace is found again through hardship and squalor in **The Desecrator of the Shabbat**⁸⁹ by Elkana. The story is about a miserable boy in the Jewish town of Schpola:

The orphan Shloymele [...] This emaciated miserable body had always been clad in torn rags, come summer come winter [...] he would shrink like a hedgehog in his long, wide, patched garments, receive blows and kicks, and stay silent.

The kind-hearted tailor Zalman made a gift of a new garment to the orphan, but the town thugs tore it off him and the boy sobbed bitterly. The good tailor hurried to mend the garment, but as this happened on the Sabbath a great uproar broke out. According to the pious citizens, having committed a sacrilege, Zalman must be “torn like a fish”:

Desecration of the Sabbath? Even a Goy would not dare to desecrate the Sabbath in Schpola! [...] stoning, burning, killing, hanging [...]

⁸⁷ Issue 7, 1933, April 7, page 6.

⁸⁸ Yosef Arikha (Dolgin) (1907 -1972) was born in the Ukraine and made Aliya in 1925. Following a few years of studying in New York he returned in 1932 and worked for the Tel Aviv municipality. He wrote for young people and edited a monthly for children, received several literary prizes. Source: OSU Lexicon

⁸⁹ Issue 13, 1932, July 3, page 6.

Contrary to the pampered town dwellers, the *Tzadik* displayed divine righteousness, saying: “*Zalman, Zalman, if only more desecrators of the Sabbath like you lived among the People of Israel ...*” In other words: The rabbinical authority of the town favoured the proletarian poor, in tandem with socialist teaching.

In **Pure Prayer**⁹⁰ Elkana writes about the boy Obadiah who sets free a dove that was meant to be slaughtered and roasted for a New Year (*Rosh Ha-Shana*) feast. The dove lands in the synagogue next to the rabbi, circling around his head before flying away, while the congregation follows reverently – yet another indication of a magical-divine benevolence associated with the holiness of the synagogue on sacred occasions.

The Tear of an Orphan⁹¹ by Elkana is another Peretz-style Hassidic tale with a proletarian-socialist moral. Once again, the well-fed bourgeois community despises a poor orphan but the *Tzadik*, with direct heavenly inspiration, identifies him as the representative of divine grace at the pivotal moment, loaded with religious sentiment, of the *Shofar* (ram’s horn) blowing:

It is the time of blowing the shofar. The crowd of the Hassidim has been purified and sanctified [...] all are praying and crying – and the shofar does not respond... [...] Now the rabbi lifts his eyes and meets the eyes of Shlomo, the Orphan [...] they are sad and tearful. The rabbi’s face now radiates. With trembling hands, he takes the shofar and brings it to his mouth – and the place is filled with the sound of the blowing, that bursts out and rises higher and higher.

Another great *Tzadik* who discovers grace in proletarian humility is rabbi Duddel of Talne⁹², revered as **The Pillar of Fire**⁹³. In this story by Elkana, his “*Hassidim watch and wonder*” as he respects a poor tailor even though he seems to have taken non-Kosher food in time of need. In another tale, **The Tears of the Boy**⁹⁴, the *Tzadik* reveals that the pity a wild boy has for a young cow pleases the Lord who forgives the sins of Jews and gentiles alike.

⁹⁰ Issue 17-18, 1933 Sept. 20, page 9.

⁹¹ Issue 17-18, 1934, Sept. 9, page 9.

⁹² Talne is a town in the Ukraine that had a large Hassidic centre, presently their centre is in Ashdod, Israel.

⁹³ Issue 7, 1934, March 30, page 5.

⁹⁴ Issue 17-18, 1935, Sept. 27, page 7.

In **When will the Messiah come?**⁹⁵, Elkana presents a rabbi whose wisdom and direct link to heavenly spheres turned him into a proto-Zionist of the eighteenth century. This *Tzadik* is based on a historical figure. Rabbi Abraham of Kalisk was a disciple of the all-important “*Maggid of Międzyrzecz*”. The story describes how the death of the *Maggid* caused a dark age: “*Darkness increased. Great orphaned sorrow came down on the world and many were the decrees*”. The loyal disciple, who inherited his role as leader, decided to lead the believers’ community to Eretz Israel/Palestine, a journey that caused joy in heaven and a malicious interference by Satan, failing as the group eventually arrived at the city of Safed.⁹⁶

Divine intervention is also at the core of a historical-biblical tale by Elkana. **The treasure**⁹⁷ describes the expelled residents of the biblical Judean kingdom following its defeat by the Babylonians. The protagonist is a priest, and the treasure he hangs on to is a bag of dirt from the burnt temple. The moral of “*return*” comes directly from heaven:

At that time Nebuzaradan Master of Slaughter arrived, he saw what was done and commanded to bring over to him the first rebel, the priest. [...] An echo was heard: Woe to you, Nebuzaradan Master of Slaughterers. You have burnt my Temple, ruined my land, killed my people, exiled my priests and elderly – but this small treasure that you despised, this is what will recover my dispersed people from their land of exile and the sons will return to their borders! Morning came, and a merciful sun regarded the exiles of Judea proceeding to their Babylonian exile.

The story represents all elements of the Zionist mythology of “*Return*” that were well absorbed by generations of Israelis (Piterberg, 2008:146), mourning the destruction of the Temple, tightly joined by divine commitment for redemption and return.

8. Emphasis on antisemitism

European antisemitism, which eventually enabled the Shoah, was not necessarily connected to religion. Still, as it was instrumentalised by the Zionist movement as a powerful generator of nationalist sentiments years before the horrors of WWII, it too has a place in this chapter. Idith

⁹⁵ Issue 22, 1933, Nov. 24, page 6

⁹⁶ Indeed, the historical Rabbi Abraham of Kalisk brought his community to Palestine and died there in 1810. Source: [Jewish Encyclopaedia online](#).

⁹⁷ Issue 14, 1933, July 28, page 7

Zertal showed how antisemitism – with emphasis on the Shoah - enabled the reasoning and the justifying of return to the national-religious group, that invigorated Zionism (Zertal, 2005[2002]). With it came the inclination to preserve the group’s traditional exclusive norms and the insistence on ethnic-religious purity. **BaMaaleh** offered a variety of texts that confirmed this mechanism. In **To the Homeland**⁹⁸, Zvi Hagivati laments his old homeland Russia that he feels has “ejected” him:

You, Oh Russia, great and vast, you have ejected me as if I were some loathsome shoot! Why, then, did I have to suck and be nourished by your culture [...] why this tragic duality of my fate the fate of a Jewish youth, why?

Under the title **A Jew**⁹⁹, M. Ben-Ellul¹⁰⁰ bitterly described (in the first person) two encounters of antisemitic hostility and rejection which he had experienced in Russia. In the first one, a young POW of Slavic descent complains to him that Russians do not see him as equal - but upon realising that he speaks to a Jewish person he refuses to continue the conversation; in the second encounter, the young narrator helps an invalid in the street, but when his own identity is revealed the invalid and the hateful crowd turn on him.

A Comrade Arrives in “Ha’Halutz”¹⁰¹ is a translation from the publication of the *Ha’Halutz* movement in Germany (see also in chapter 3). Written in diary-form by a member of *Ha’Halutz* youth movement in 1934 Germany, it details the metamorphosis of a young German Jew. The writer reveals that he considered himself German and did not have any interest in Judaism or Zionism. But once Nazi antisemitism declared him an alien and robbed him of his German identity, his job and most of his social milieu, he found refuge in the Jewish youth movement.

In 1932 the writer describes the following: “*For years I have been living in a Christian society, with no contact to Judaism and no ties with Jews.*” Then comes January 1933: “*I fight for my German identity that they wish to take away from me. I insist that I am perfectly, fully German*”.

⁹⁸ Issue 17, 1932, Sept. 9, page 4.

⁹⁹ Issue 2, 1935, January 25, page 7.

¹⁰⁰ Moshe Ben-Ellul (Reichrudle) (1901-1981) was one of the founders of **BaMaaleh** and its editor in the years 1931-1942. He was born in Russia and received an orthodox education. In 1920 he arrived in Palestine, was a labourer, librarian and teacher. After his years in **BaMaaleh** he established and edited *Davar’s* weekly magazine *Dvar Hashavua* (1946-1956) (source: Tidhar).

¹⁰¹ Issue 14, 1932, July 16, page 7.

As the year progresses, the writer loses his job and some of his non-Jewish friends. In April of 1933 he concludes “*I am indeed left on my own*”. Later he reports: “*Gradually I conclude that we Jews really are different from other people*”. In September of that year, he consents to try the local branch of *Ha’Halutz*. He is embarrassed and unemployed, wishing to learn “*about Eretz Israel, about Zionist and pioneer labour,*” adding that he was “*aiming at a personal solution as well.*”

The need for a solution turns out to reverse his earlier conceptions of Zionism:

*Contrary to my opinion that I would encounter narrow nationalism, I found an aspiration for a homeland. Contrary to my assumption that Eretz Israel was being taken away from the Arabs as the land they live in - the homeland to be lost for them in order to become the homeland for the Jews - I found the **strong and honest** will to live next to the Arabs and even to help them.* (Original emphasis).

The writer further reported that in the German-Zionist movement he found “*desire for the construction of **social justice***” as well as “*mates, friends and comrades.*” (Original emphasis). In Marxist terminology, the praxis – in this case, the young man’s tragic circumstances – radically altered his consciousness¹⁰².

Conclusions from chapter 6

The abundance of texts saturated with nostalgia and reverence of religious traditions and even religious beliefs in *BaMaaleh*, a periodical of a movement that was – and still is – considered a progressive, secular and socialist faction of the Zionist movement, is not a coincidence. It is indicative of the national narrative that held religion as the only binding factor for the creation of a common national identity. Anthony Smith explains that in order to establish a modern nation “*the communal culture must be redefined and reconstituted through a national and civic appropriation of ethnic history, which will mobilize members on the basis of a rediscovered identity*” (Smith, 1989:362). It is therefore interesting to observe how religious decrees and practices were highlighted in the pages of *BaMaaleh*, a periodical dedicated to express the

¹⁰² “*It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness*”. Source: [K. Marx, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, with some notes by R. Rojas.](#)

teachings of Labour Zionism. The nature of these decrees and practices sheds a light – often ignored – on the basically religious nature of the seemingly secular Zionist project.

Writers, editors and readers of **BaMaaleh** shared a traditional orthodox upbringing that was an integral part of their “*habitus*”. Zionism offered a path radically different from what seemed an obsolete “*shtetl*” way of life, but it astutely preserved some religious-traditional norms that could unite the community of immigrants with similar cultural background. Ilan Pappé puts it clearly: “*They came from secluded townships in Eastern Europe, the Shtetl, and created a new kind of seclusion in Palestine*” (Pappé, 2012:43). It was a seclusion that followed hundreds of years’ self-segregation which was the basis for a robust community cohesion, a combination of strict religious culture and social-economic practices of a highly literate and sophisticated group.

BaMaaleh’s writers and editors often expressed exasperation with the religious establishment and the orthodox leaders who held a dim view of the disregard to most religious commands that characterised the Labour movement. This movement, however, took great care never to suggest severing all ties with orthodox tradition¹⁰³. Taking seriously its role as an educational publication for young people (see chapter 1), **BaMaaleh** used the religious-orthodox curriculum as part and parcel of the legacy that needed to be handed on to the young generation.

The norms preserved were chiefly those that asserted the essential uniqueness and vital exclusiveness of the new settler community. Religious texts provided the basis for the powerful myth of “return” to the land, and simultaneously provided a sound foundation for insistence on ethnic purity, practiced in the concept of **Hebrew Labour**.

Among the major sentiments that **BaMaaleh** was committed to preserve was the traditional Jewish religious emphasis on the negativity of “assimilation”. It was a sentiment that must have come naturally to the immigrants who came from self-segregated religious communities, and almost all of them were educated in orthodox religious institutions. The tradition of keeping away from “the gentiles” invigorated the praxis of ignoring, alienating, and rejecting the native

¹⁰³ The idea of separating “church and state” is still a taboo for most dedicated Zionists.

population. Exploiting this population and its natural resources was typical of all colonial and settler-colonialist societies. But adherence to traditional Jewish religious teachings and practice proved perfectly adaptable to the ethnic purity needs of the Jewish settler community in Palestine, supporting its insistence on the **Hebrew Labour** concept.

The abundance of texts repeatedly extolling certain traditions helps to explain the seeming “*mystery*” of Zionism as a unique combination of a settler-colonialist project and the apartheid paradigm (ibid: 40). The narrative of “return” to history and to the “land of the ancestors” supported by Biblical tales, enabled colonising the land while convincingly denying that western-style colonisation was taking place. Legends about rabbis and *Tzadiks* sensitive to social justice due to heavenly instructions, achieved the double purpose of sustaining group’s nostalgia and sense of uniqueness (“*chosen people*”¹⁰⁴), as well as an enhanced feeling of self-righteousness based on socialist slogans. Tales of martyrdom and heroism for the sake of the faith boosted morale against local native resistance. With symbolic tales that include voices from heaven, miraculous sites, and leaders like Ben Gurion insisting on tribal glory that needs to be redeemed, young impressionable people in need of social and economic security as well as of community spirit and comfort for hurt pride, should have been satisfied and convinced that their actions were proper. *BaMaaleh*’s attachment to the Jewish religion, faithfully reflecting Labour Zionism’s values, allowed young members to feel that while they moved out of their dwindling communities, often leaving behind needy family members, they were still participating in a reconstruction and vindication of their forefathers’ world.

¹⁰⁴ In Judaism, the term “Chosen people” expresses the idea that Jews have been chosen by God as his special people.

Chapter 7

Image of the Arabs of Palestine as projected to readers of *BaMaaleh* in the years 1926- 1935:

“The Other” as different, primitive and dangerous

It is customary to describe Palestinians and Jewish Israelis as two societies in an *“intractable conflict”*. Such conflicts are *“protracted, irreconcilable, violent, of zero-sum nature, total, and central. They are demanding, stressful, exhausting, and costly both in human and material terms”* (Bar-Tal, 1998). This description is relevant to the many decades since the establishment of the State of Israel, the *Nakba* and the years that led to these events. The present work, however, looks into an earlier period of the Zionist settlement in Palestine. The years 1926 to 1935 are roughly the second decade after the Balfour Declaration and the establishment of the British Mandate that had a commitment to this declaration. They precede the historical events that etched the collective consciousness of both Jewish and Arab societies: the genocide of European Jewry in the Second World War; the struggle of both societies with British rule; the Arab revolt of 1936-1939; the partition plan; the 1948 war; the *Nakba*; the founding of the Israeli-Jewish state, and the mass immigration of Jews, mostly from Arab countries, into the new state. Based on texts that were written for and by Labour Zionists in those years, it is possible to follow the conceptions that members of this particular settler community had – or were encouraged to have - about the natives of the land into which they moved, prior to any of these historic events. *BaMaaleh*, as a leading educational tool of the Labour Zionist movement adapted for the young generation, reflected as well as produced images and conceptions of the settlers about the local Arab population. Most of these images and conceptions resemble images and conceptions typical of other colonialist and settler-colonial societies (Wolfe, 1999). Orientalism, as Edward Said pointed out many years after the 1930s, *“lives on academically through its doctrines and theses about the Orient and the Oriental”* (Said, 2003 [1977]:2). In Zionist discourse, the *“Arab Palestinian has been pitted against an [...] antagonist whose consciousness of himself [...] is exactly, positionally, superior”* (Said, 1980:15, original emphasis). Rather than assume that racist images are developed “naturally” by the masses, it is worth noting that often *“prejudiced arguments [...] are ‘prepared’ by elites”* (Van Dijk, 1993:10) with “top down” effects that inspire *“ethnocentrism, that is, a system of ethnic group dominance*

based on cultural criteria of categorization, differentiation, and exclusion [...] eurocentrism [...] segregation and colonization [...] regarding ethnic or racial inequality" (ibid:5-6). This work is dedicated to the "top down" efforts produced by **BaMaaleh**, following texts that conjure up Arab and Muslim images of "viciousness, veniality, degenerate vice [...] and stupidity" (Said, 1980: 26), which according to Edward Said were "appropriated by Zionism, valorizing the white man's superiority and his right over territory believed to be consonant with those ideals" (ibid:29). The present chapter displays most of the texts dealing with the "Arab Issue" (soon to be defined as "The Arab Problem") discussed repeatedly during the period under consideration.

Readers as well as writers must have been in constant contact with the local indigenous people who constituted the majority of the land's inhabitants: labourers, *fellahin*, traders, Bedouins, merchants and businesspeople. As an educational organ of the Labour movement, **BaMaaleh** seems to instruct its readers as to the recommended image of the local Arabs, reflecting the contemporary party line of the era. The riots of summer 1929 (the "events" in Zionist discourse), that cost hundreds of Jewish and Arab lives, occurred during that period. Hillel Cohen's book about the riots calls 1929 the "Year Zero of the Jewish-Arab Conflict" (Cohen, 2015 [2013]). He sees this year as the "starting point of a journey to the roots of Jewish life in the Land of Israel, of the long-time Arab experience in Palestine, and the causes of violence and bloodshed between the two" (ibid:XII). Eventually in "Jewish historical memory the riots of 1929 became emblematic of Arab savagery" (ibid). The riots, indeed, supplied the Zionist movement with a convenient perspective of the initiation of hostilities ignoring any reference to the causes of the popular uprising. Still, while **BaMaaleh** writers and editors fully adopted this "emblematic" depiction, the image of Arabs as dangerous, blood-thirsty, hostile natives was not (yet) dominant in the pages of the periodical during the years following the riots. This is in line with the official Labour movement's effort to describe the 1929 riots as "the fruit of evil propaganda, religious incitement and political grudge by a gang of religious priests and greed mongers who tried to salvage their crumbling control over the masses of the Arab people by blowing-up racial and religious animosity and creating a war of one people against the other" (Ben Gurion, 1974:210, see also in the introduction). The many references and descriptions of Arabs and encounters with Arabs in Palestine during the period under consideration tend

mostly to support the party line: offering observations of native Arabs as wild and innocent, easy prey for political incitement, and only potentially dangerous. In fact, the depictions of Arabs by the leadership of Labour Zionism as well as by texts throughout the issues of **BaMaaleh** at the time are fully compatible with the “*logic of dehumanisation*” typical of newly created settler colonial nations for whom regarding “*non-Europeans as inferior*” seemed essential (Pappe, 2017:139).

The texts under scrutiny in this chapter combine the usual mix of the periodical: opinion pieces, commentary, reports and analysis, as well as literary works – fiction and memoirs. The projected images are well-adapted to the ideology of **Hebrew Labour**, depicting an irreconcilable abyss between settlers and natives as a cardinal justification for the insistence on ethnic purity in the workplaces and residential areas. Most of these texts were written by professional and highly esteemed Hebrew writers, who in those years were able to make a living by producing stories and memoirs, usually driven by ideology.

It is worth noting how often the technique of writing as an “*omniscient narrator*” is used in the literary texts about encounters with local Arabs. Writers report directly from the (imagined and fictional) consciousness of an Arab character. The narrated “Arab reflections” vary – they might be admiring and friendly, alternatively hateful and threatening. In all cases narrators express their asserted feeling of superiority – they can tell what the locals “think” and must not even be told. Many years later Edward Said pointed out how “*the expert Orientalist believed that only he could speak (paternally as it were) for the natives and primitive societies that he had studied - his presence denoting their absence*” - summing up that in the same way “*the Zionists spoke to the world on behalf of the Palestinians.*” (Said,1980:39).

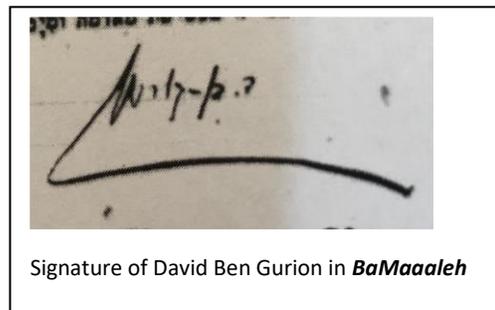
Following is a presentation of texts related to Arabs in **BaMaaleh** during the period under consideration, according to the perspective they offer (often texts carry more than one aspect, but an effort was made to categorise):

1. ***Opinions from above: David Ben Gurion on Arab “scant culture”***
2. ***Getting to know Arabs: Objective or pseudo-anthropological descriptions and observations***

3. *The local Arab as a primitive “savage” native*
 - a. *Bedouin images: primitive, wild savages*
 - b. *The friendly admirer*
4. *Urban Arabs: admiring Zionist achievements or copying them; greedy, scheming, cunning inciters*
5. *The Arab as a generator of destitution and neglect*
6. *Dirt and misery as a social indication of “Arabness”*
7. *The Arab Labourer: a competitor, different, primitive, poor. Looked on with compassion*
 - 7a. *Support and sympathy, no joint struggle*
 - 7b. *In competition: the Arab Labourer as a miserable usurper*
8. *Expelled: victims of the effendis’ greed; ruins left behind*
9. *Rage with no justified cause: native Arab simpletons as easy prey for inciters*
10. *A constant threat: Arabs as a life-threatening danger*

1. *Opinions from above: David Ben Gurion on Arab “scant culture”*

In 1932 David Ben Gurion already held a very high position in the Zionist Labour movement. Officially, he was the general secretary (and founder) of the *Histadrut* which was the most important organisation of the Hebrew Yishuv. The *Histadrut* was the owner and publisher of *BaMaaleh*, and



Signature of David Ben Gurion in *BaMaaleh*

therefore articles contributed by Ben Gurion were significant and influential (signed with an image of his actual signature – an homage reserved for only few political contributors, see image on this page). Two of Ben Gurion’s articles published in *BaMaaleh* during the period under consideration display acute awareness of the “Arab Problem”. Both present the core line of the hegemonic *hasbara* skilfully drafted by Ben Gurion for internal as well as external needs. It is to be found in Zionist discourse decades later, repeated in thousands of texts and still relevant today, presenting a perfect dynamic of “*Elite Discourse and Racism*” (Van Dijk, 1993).

In **Towards the sea**¹, calling for Jewish control of the maritime industry and transport (see also chapter 6) Ben Gurion reminds the young readers that there are native Arab people – he calls

¹ Issue 12, 1932, June 17, page 3&4

them “*neighbours*” or “*others*” - in the land settled by immigrants. He adopts a native-friendly speech mode - admitting that the land is not “*entirely empty*”, before proceeding to preach the takeover of control over the Mediterranean coast economy:

The land is small and many are its seekers. It is also not entirely empty. We will not push out the neighbours inhabiting the land for generations, we will not harm what is theirs. We will not build ourselves at the expense of others.

The terminology is indicative of settler-colonial discourse: Indigenous people are “*others*”. Like any other “*non-Europeans*” they will be described as “*inferior*” which means that the new immigrants are free to consider them “*not deserving the same rights as the settlers*” (Pappe, 2017:139); naming indigenous people “*others*” paves the way into making them “*practically excluded from any meaningful participation*” (Veracini, 2006:83), providing access to a coveted territory that they seem to be holding (Wolfe, 2006:388), in this case, the “*Sea*” that the settlers are urged to take over and control in this specific article by the leader of the *Histadrut*.

Ben Gurion bluntly and disdainfully indicated his opinion of Arabs and Arab culture (soon to become a mainstream view in Labour Zionist circles) in a later article that year, offering his (hegemonic) doctrine of **Hebrew Labour**² (see also chapter 2). Once again, self-righteous tone precedes the aggressive discourse:

*We recognise the right of self-determination for all people. The Arab nation in Eretz Israel is entitled to its scant culture, just like the culture-rich German nation. However, the Arab population has no right to **impoverish the land, to its abjection, to its destitution**. This right – to leave the land in its destitution because this suits their culture – this we will not accept. [original emphasis].*

Defining Arabs as a nation of “*scant culture*” which bears responsibility for impoverishment and destitution of the land is a cornerstone of *Hasbara*: As a people of scant culture (“*tarbut dala*” in the Hebrew original) Arabs must accept and acquiesce that they should be crowded out of workplaces in favour of the Jewish immigrants who intend to make the desert bloom. It is after all a desert generated by Arab culture, a destitution that “*suits their culture*” as Ben Gurion aims to make clear, echoing the logic of a settler colonialism project that justifies itself with “*the extreme inferiority of colonized indigenes*” (Wolfe, 1999:11). Describing the land as

² Issue 20, 1932, Nov. 4, page 3

“impoverished” and in *“destitution”* is another reminder of settler-colonial rhetoric, calling a land *“terra nullius”* (the Hebrew much-used equivalent for wasteland is *“Eretz Shemama”*) as *“a rationalization rather than a motive for colonial invasion”* (ibid: 27). *“An empty land is a common settler delusion”*, George Chaplin remarks, referring to South African history (Chaplin, 2020: 45). The term repeats the familiar *“haughty rhetoric of a labour mission civilisatrice”* (Piterberg, 2008 :71). The idea that the local community is *“responsible for the ecological decline in the region”* (Braverman, 2023:4) persisted for over a hundred years, demonstrating *“how deeply entrenched the colonial mindset has become in the ecological way of thinking”* (ibid:7).

2. Getting to know Arabs: Objective or pseudo-anthropological descriptions and observations

A realisation that some contact between settlers and native Arabs on a mutual recognition basis is necessary, must have generated the rare biweekly column **“Conversations in Arabic”** sub-titled **Lessons for Beginners**³. The column was initiated in 1931 and continued for almost 3 years, with 66 instalments⁴, signed H. Keler⁵. The initiative indicates an intention to start a dialogue with the local population, speaking a language that none of the immigrants could understand. The first words chosen for study are greetings, pointing at an amical spirit. As the lessons progressed, the studied vocabulary mostly indicated the sites of interaction between Arabs and Jews: tools for construction and for farming, the weather, agriculture and thefts, spiced with popular idioms and tales.

Census of the Working Youth in 1928⁶ is a first and last mention of labouring Arab youth. The report summarises a census: statistics concerning working youth according to gender, age and national affiliation. The age range is between 10 and 18 years. Daily and monthly wages as well

³ Issue 7, 1931, June 5, page 9 is the first appearance of the column.

⁴In 1931 and 1932 the column was included in every issue, in 1933 it seems to have been out-crowded occasionally and the last entry was in issue 16 of that year (August 25). Advertisements encouraged readers to buy sets of the lessons from **BaMaaleh** (issue 18, 1932, page 9 and issue 11, 1934, page 11).

⁵ Haim Yitzhak Keler (1892 -1975) was born in Rosh Pina, one of the first *Moshavot* in Palestine/*Eretz Israel*. He was a teacher and activist, and published a study book for Arabic. (source: Tidhar)

⁶ Brochure 3, 1928, Feb. 29, pages 37-40

as working hours are duly quoted. **BaMaaleh** offers no information on the actual census, but the information is revealing when it comes to ethnic identity of the youth in this data base⁷. The census – so the article – took place in three cities: Tel Aviv, Petah Tikvah and Jerusalem. The figures and tables refer only to Jerusalem. The number of working Jewish boys is quoted as 412, Jewish girls 100, and only 46 working Arab boys. One can only deduce that the census took place only in Jewish-owned workplaces, as the number of working Arab boys in 1928 Jerusalem should be in the many thousands. The tables indicate that Arab boys were on a lower wage scale compared to the Jewish youngsters. The data is partial, but no Arabs made more than 400 grush (4 lira/pound) a month compared to a maximum of 600 grush (6 lira/pound) that a few Jewish working boys could make.

The short piece **Birth**⁸, signed N.D. Karpibner⁹, describes an exceptional encounter with Arab youngsters who induce a positive sentiment. It occurs when a group of Jewish children on a short walk comes across young shepherds of about the same age:

Some children who could speak a bit of Arabic started up a conversation with the shepherds. The latter answered with a few words, with a shadow of a smile on their lips. As the children turned to go they noticed near the herd a sight that mesmerised them:

A small Arab boy took care of a sheep that was lying on the ground. Next to her laid a tiny lamb that had just come into the world [...] the children observed, silent and focused, amazed to see that the small boy knew so well what to do in this situation and how to deal with the mother and her offspring [...]

Cultural differences are narrated here with respect, as the children observe the Arab boys “*silent and focused*”. Their amazement conveys esteem. It is worth noting, however, that while the young Jews are described as children, the young Arabs of the same age are called youth

⁷ **BaMaaleh** of 1928 gave no credit to the surveyor, but it is likely to have been Walter Preuss, described as “one of the first statisticians who conducted such research” in a book dedicated to the Labouring Youth movement by Munia Admati (Admati, 1974). In 1926 Preuss conducted a survey that dealt exclusively with Jewish youth in several towns and cities in Palestine (ibid:15). His own segmentation was focused on communal affiliation in the Hebrew *Yishuv*: *Ashkenazi* (Eastern European), *Sephardi*, Yemenite, Persian, Caucasian (Georgi) and Moghrabi (“Western”), Hallabi, etc.) (ibid:16). It seems that in 1928 few Arab boys in some workplaces were also counted, perhaps due to their being employed in Jewish enterprises.

⁸ Issue 7, 1932, March 31, page 7

⁹ Nachum Dov Karpibner (1890 -1937) was born in Moghilev, Russia (now Belarus) and immigrated to Palestine in 1925. Was an educator in Nahalal, Tel Adashim and Kfar Malal. Published stories, poems and translations, mostly signed “Nachum of Gamzu”. (Source: OSU).

(the Hebrew differentiates between *yeled*=child and *na'ar*=youth). It is clear that while Jewish children are still in school – here during an outing – Arabs of the same age are already farm labourers, specialising in the native art of shepherding, which some settlers were interested in learning (see chapter 2).

Another short, rare, friendly mention of Arabs and Arab customs is included in a 1934 entry, detailing preparations for an upcoming conference. **To the Village**¹⁰ announces that the conference, dedicated to the memory of Herzl, is to be focused on the importance of village life for the Zionist settlement. Among the participants “*schools from some Arab villages*” were included, and “*Clothes, tools, utensils, and furniture from the Arab village will be on display, as well as photos of village life in other countries*”. The organisers expected the event to remind that “*without a true return to the land a nation cannot be rooted in the country*” (see discussion of the “*return*” in chapter 6). Arab lifestyle was displayed as a worthy model to be followed. As Dafna Hirsh shows, some traits of Bedouin or *fellah* life seemed “*highly valued in the context of Zionist colonization*” (Hirsh, 2015:309) next to the general view of Arabs as “*primitive and inferior*” (ibid).

Several entries seem intended to present native Arab customs and celebrations in an objective, pseudo-anthropological style, which occasionally diverts into a patronising-but-friendly tone. The first issue of **BaMaaleh** in the bi-weekly format brought the detailed article **Ramadan**¹¹, signed “Menahem”¹². It is a report about the commandments, customs, prohibitions and importance of this holy Muslim month. A few months later **Nabi Rubeen**¹³ by Haim Brenner¹⁴ described the yearly celebrations of a month-long feast by the inhabitants of Jaffa and the area around it. The writer made a point of identifying “*Nabi Rubeen*” as a biblical (Hebrew) figure, one of the forefathers of the Israeli nation, rather than a real prophet (*Nabi* in Arabic, *Navi* in Hebrew, always in quotation marks):

¹⁰ Issue 12, 1934, June 15, page 9

¹¹ Issue 1, 1931, Feb. 20, page 6

¹² The style and the content suggest that the writer was actually Michael Assaf, see ref. 55 on page 122.

¹³ Issue 13, 1931, August 28, page 5

¹⁴ See ref. 25, page 200.

One of the prophets who gained special admiration in the Muslim tradition of Eretz Israel and a mass pilgrimage for hundreds of years is the “prophet” Reuben son of Jacob – called Nabi Rubeen by his [Muslim] worshippers. [...] How did the season of pilgrimage to Nabi Rubeen start, and when did he become a “prophet”? We know that Reuben’s dominion fell in the eastern bank of the Jordan river. What is the liaison between the historic essence and generations of tradition?

The writer then moves on to base his analysis on like-minded research snubbing the Muslim believers. Quoting Yitzhak Goldhar¹⁵, Brenner informs his readers that “*with no doubt*” the Arab pilgrimage had been established in order to counter Christian processions, then suggests an altogether different interpretation of the origins of *Nabi Rubeen*: This time he identifies him as an important Jewish rabbi of the second century, Rabban Gamliel of Yavne. In conclusion the writer states: “*In this entire lowland area the site is considered a nice place to have a good time*” (perhaps in line with the idea that everything attractive in Palestine must be affiliated with the settler community’s Jewish traditions).

3. The local Arab as a primitive “savage” native

The attribute “savage¹⁶” is common throughout the texts. In *Memoirs*¹⁷ signed “Dvora”, the writer reminisces about her meeting with the legendary veteran labour-philosopher A.D. Gordon (see chapters 2 and 3):

[...] From far away an Arab singing voice is heard, monochromatic, full of savage sounds, and over the hill that comes into life the old man walks steadily and firmly [...]
I caught up with Gordon. He replied to my greeting as if we were old acquaintances. We started up a conversation. [...] that evening we spoke about Isadora Duncan. Gordon has read about her and knew quite a lot about her.

The young disciple juxtaposes western culture with the local one – inevitably labelling the local, unfamiliar sounds “savage”. She and the aging labour philosopher find a common ground in a

¹⁵ Ytzhak Goldhar (1847 – 1925) of the first *Aliya*, immigrated to Palestine in 1895. For several years he was employed by the administration of the Baron de Rothchild as a land surveyor in the Galilee, and began local research. His book “Sacred Earth” (*Admat Kodesh*) was published in 1913. (Source: [the Bnei Akiva movement website](#)).

¹⁶ For a detailed analysis of the way the attribute “savage” was applied by the anthropologists of the early 20th century, see Wolfe: 1999

¹⁷ Issue 3, 1932, Feb. 5, page 5

discussion about a famous American modern dancer. Their affiliation with “high Western culture” represented by Isadora Duncan is emphasised by the “*monochromatic, full of savage sounds*” singing voice of a native, in a land to whose culture they are both alien and which they immediately label as inferior.

3a. Bedouin images: primitive, wild savages

Bedouin society availed a perfect image of natives as total “*others*”. In line with the best anthropological traditions of the 19th and early 20th century, writers set out to produce appropriate descriptive “research” for the benefit of young readers who were educated in the Jewish towns of Eastern Europe, emulating the “*Claims to authority over indigenous discourse made from within the settler-colonial academy*” in other parts of the world (Wolfe, 1999:3). As characteristic at that time, their perspective was one that identified in remote societies “*a faded copy of or incomplete pre-stage to the modern West*” (Fuchs, 2001:83). Fuchs describes how “[...] *as social distance increases*” separated cultures “*tend to think of each other as barbarian noncultures [...] outside of civilization proper*” (ibid:84).

About Bedouin Life¹⁸ is a pseudo-anthropological article signed by Tovia B. Ashkenazi¹⁹. It sets out to summarise the origins and customs of the “*nomadic tribes, semi-nomads, and permanent residents*” of the Arabian deserts, who “*created primitive modes of nomad shepherds who live in tents and live on the herd’s products*”. Asserting that there is “*no political or cultural union between the different tribes. Each tribe dwells alone*” the writer proceeds to report an assortment of sweeping unifying features that he found in Bedouin life, using some quite banal generalisations according to the emphasised headings:

“The Sheikh”: Resembling “*the type of the affluent farmer*” and uniquely enjoying “*Elegance, cleanliness and decorations*” in the tribe.

“The men”: Excel in “*moral and physical fortitude*” and only rarely beat their wives.

“The women”: Perform all the chores of the household.

¹⁸ Issue 3, 1931, March 3, page 10

¹⁹ Tovia Ashkenazi (1904-1969, born in Serbia) arrived in Palestine with his family in 1907. Studied at the Sorbonne and specialized in Orientalism. Served in senior positions in the Israeli army and the JNF after the establishment of the State of Israel (Source: Tidhar). His book “*The Bedouins, their origin, their lives and their customs*” (1974) is [available on-line in the Ben Yehuda Project](#).

" The children": Naked.

" The tent": In gypsy style; (the writer goes into surprising details when it comes to the prices of different canvasses).

" Education": Primitive, based mainly on listening to adult tales.

" Food": "not in abundant".

"Health": "a variety of illnesses".

The report is summarised on an upbeat note: "*in spite of poverty and hardships, the Bedouin is happy with his lot and is content with little.*" The image of the "*noble savage*" (Wolfe, 1995:45) is complete. The "*romantic depictions*" of savage nobility must be a "*function of distance*" (ibid:170), and indeed nothing could be more distant from the emerging settler community than Bedouin tent dwellers.

A more adventurous report combining anthropological observations with personal ones is the series "*Notes from the diary of a Jewish shepherd with the Bedouins*", initially signed P. Bar Adon²⁰ but later carrying the signature of his pseudo-Arab pseudonym *Aziz Effendi*²¹. Bar-Adon spent time with a Bedouin tribe on the east bank of the Jordan River²², seemingly as a guest of the local Sheikh (in one of his stories he refers to the nice breakfast in the Sheikh's tent). The series portrays Arabs in a very friendly manner, as amiable, accomplished savages. The perspective of a savvy European must have been considered normative at the time of writing but presently would be identified with "*the apogee of Orientalist confidence*" (Said, 2003 [1977]:49) owing to its "*ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority*" (ibid:42).

By the Jordan River²³, the first story in this series, opens with a pastoral description of a walk with a shepherd who, on the long and gruelling road to find water for his herd, passes a thorn field and lifts up his garb to avoid tearing it, as he would rather have his legs scratched and

²⁰ Pesach Bar-Adon, a Polish born writer (1907-1985). In later issues his signature is "Aziz Efendi". Originally named Pesach Panitch he immigrated to Palestine in 1925 (age 18) and was described as "an adventurer and amateur archaeologist" (source: [HAMICHLOL, Jewish Encyclopaedia on line](#) see also [entries with his articles in the national library archive](#)).

²¹ Arabic for "beloved master"

²² Bar-Adon published at least two books about Bedouin life (ibid).

²³ Issue 5, 1931, May 1, page 8.

bleeding than spoil his only garment. Together with his Jewish pal, the narrator, the shepherd enters the waters of the Jordan River but tires too soon in a swimming competition. The narrator, winner of the competition, enlightens the shepherd that “*Some people can use a strong current to do whatever they wish!*” Pointing to the stone homes on a hill behind the Bedouin tents he informs the shepherd that these settlers’ houses use “*electric*” that can light the whole neighbourhood “*And all by overpowering this powerful stream, with machines!*”

Sa'id opens wide his deep, savage-black eyes, measures his interlocuter with his eyes and gives him a cunning look, as if probing that he is not pulling his leg. Then suddenly he bursts out laughing, shakes his long hair, turns over and disappears in the water. A minute later he reappears, his white teeth gleaming with laughter as he makes an effort to wade against the current and get closer.

- *I do not understand it at all. Who does that?*
- *Yahood²⁴...*
- *“Shughl Il Sheitan (work of the devil), by Allah... making “electric” from the water stream... He gaily emits a Bedouin curse to make clear his “appreciation” of the grandness of this work. Then suddenly lowers his voice and asks:*
- *Ya Aziz, what is this “electric” that you were saying earlier?*

The short exchange offers the young Hebrew reader a volume of information: The Bedouin is clearly a “*savage*” with “*savage-black eyes*” (this adjective will be further repeated in Bar-Adon’s texts). He is extremely poor (would rather have his legs bleed than risk damaging his one and only garment; later a lack of food is also mentioned). He is an excellent shepherd who takes good care of the sheep – as savages often do; and he is fascinated and suspicious at the tremendous achievements of the Jews, who control a technological power that he had never encountered before. His only way of interpreting the fantastic abilities is to see them as “*Satanic*” – implying a potential resentment of the new neighbours. The friendly “*effendi*” narrator, by contrast, has nothing but concern for the well-being of the native from the heights of his own advantage. He presents “*Electric*” as a unique achievement of the “*Yahood*”. In fact, most Jewish immigrants of those years did not come from areas of Eastern Europe that had easy access to electric supply at the time²⁵.

²⁴ Arabic for Jews.

²⁵ In Poland, where Bar Adon was born in 1907, the Polish Electrical Board was established in 1920 and became statutory in 1922. By the end of 1938 only 3% of Polish villages were connected to the national grid. Source: [Polish site in the EU official website](#). In Palestine the introduction of electricity was first suggested to the British colonial

The next item in the series *notes from the diary of a Jewish shepherd with the Bedouin tribes*, signed Aziz Efendi, is titled **Shepherd's Talk**²⁶ and carries a dedication “*For the dear children of Kfar Giladi – Tel Hai*”²⁷. It starts with high praise for the narrator's Bedouin pal:

By destiny I was sharing the shepherding with a partner, a young open-faced Bedouin, with dark-tanned shining eyes gazing at the whole universe with courage and self-esteem. An accomplished rider, perfect shot [...] never misses; singing and playing the flute [...] dancing [...] excellent storyteller, happy, joyful and kind, liked by all and found attractive by the young Bedouin girls [...] and this friend Mohammad had become like a brother to me.

A pejorative – even abusive – perspective of Bedouin life is abundantly expressed, but carefully quoted only from the mouth of the noble savage himself:

[...] he looks disparagingly at his mates the shepherds, gaily rioting and fighting all day long.
- *What are we? Just living with the herd days and nights, like the sheep and the cattle, what else have we got?*

Following a visit to the Jewish Kibbutz the Bedouin is deeply impressed. This is time for the storyteller to turn into an “*omniscient narrator*”:

Dreamy and feverish Mohammad returned to his herd in the mountains. Thrilled and excited he sat by the herd, clad in his abaya, deliberating about what his savage eyes had seen. The impressions galvanise his mind and his heart and never leave him for a minute.

From his vantage point the *omniscient narrator* can tell exactly what the “*savage eyes*” of the young man saw, and appreciate its difference from the savage's own environment. The direct reporting is duly quoted (with quotation marks):

“the ‘living legend’ – the kvutza [small kibbutz] in the Galilee. [...] how orderly everything is [...] Just fraternity between comrades and children [...] No thefts, no murders there.”

The shepherd is also reported to be deeply impressed with the music, the gramophone and radio and - strangely enough - even with the “*dabke*” dancing that he presumably witnessed

rule by Chaim Weitzman (in a 1919 letter to the foreign office), and later planned by Pinhas Rotenberg who raised Zionist financing (Shealtiel, 1990: 43; 50). The electricity enterprise was considered a “distinct Zionist enterprise” but starting it was “conditioned from the very beginning by the acquiescence of the Arabs” (ibid:106).

²⁶ Issue 11, 1931, July 31, page 9

²⁷ Kfar Giladi is a Kibbutz that was started in 1916 in the upper Galilee, and later incorporated the historic Tel Hai settlement.

(Jewish immigrants did adopt this traditional Arab-Palestinian dance). Summing up his pal's illuminations the narrator concludes:

[...] in his simple native sense, with his primitive and honest perception he grasped the lustre of this form of life.

More abuse of Bedouin life follows, as quoted from the native's discourse: Tribe life is "*rubbish [...] the life of a wachsh (wild animal) [...] Does the Bedouin know anything?*" By contrast, the clever wild person is enchanted with the progressive Jews and with their fair and well-educated females:

We fear Allah only in mere speech, we only say that we fear Allah, but we have no religion and no dignity. They fear Allah truly, in their heart, in their deeds - - the book opens their minds. And their girls sometimes know and understand more than our Sheikhs... they can read and write, they read newspapers and books after work. Pretty and fair are the girls - -

Touched by his friend's enthusiasm, the narrator comes up with a revolutionary suggestion: He invites Mohammad to join the *Kvutza (Kibbutz)*. The suggestion is rejected on the spot: the young Bedouin explains that he is committed to support his family. The Jewish friend has another offer: If Mohammad cannot come, let his five-year-old brother join the model children society of the Kibbutz. Again, a rejection: the Bedouin would not hear of it, this time due to his unfavourable opinion of the little boy (!). There seems to be no end to the abuse from one Bedouin to another, as the narrator duly quotes Mohammad's reply:

By Allah, he would just spoil your own children, will throw stones, even wound with a knife, do you not know Khalil?

Eventually the two friends reach an agreement: Once Mohammad gets married and has a son, the boy would be handed to "*Aziz*" to be educated in the Jewish "*kvutza*" that both hold in very high esteem. The future child would enjoy the coveted upward social mobility away from his father's savage habitat. The fictional amical agreement secures a long delay for co-habitation of a young Arab in the Jewish settlement, which is actually totally unrealistic. Jewish settlements, and in particular the collective communities that were funded by the Zionist institutions, were hermetically sealed to any non-Jewish members, particularly to autochthones²⁸.

²⁸ The first ever case of an Arab person accepted as member of a Kibbutz occurred in 2008 – one hundred years after the establishment of the Kibbutz movement. Ynet reported the unprecedented admittance of an Arab

This particular “memoir” by “Aziz Efendi” effectively offers a double perspective, both fully compatible with Labour Zionism’s hegemonic narrative. Portraying the native as a complete savage is only one aspect. Even more useful is the self-congratulating image of the Kibbutz as supposedly reflected by the “*savage eyes*”. It is the image of a utopian human environment, a “*live legend*”, where peace, fraternity and love raise the admiration of the primitive native. Thus, it sustains and increases readers’ confidence and trust of the collective settlement – the apex of Labour Zionist enterprise - while at the same time enhancing and consolidating the settler society norm of total, “inevitable” segregation from the locals, based on their superior cultural achievement, and positioning a hierarchy that the natives embrace (but fortunately refuse to join, thus ethnic purity is to be preserved).

Oddly enough, and surely by sheer coincidence, on the same page as **Shepherd’s Talk** by Aziz Effendi **BaMaaleh** published another piece titled **Towards the Light**²⁹. Signed “Shlomo”, this article laments unfavourable aspects of the Labouring Settlers’ society, complaining about a tendency to see as “*the shadows all round*”, as “*The work is hard, the days monotonous*”, and the young labouring youth “*who knows the burden of loneliness*” longs for “*friendship, feeling and understanding.*” Those burdens and shadows were conveniently not spotted by the “*savage*” Bedouin of the previous tale.

Orphans³⁰ is the third story in the series “*notes from the diary of a Jewish shepherd with the Bedouin tribes*”. It is a detailed account by Aziz Efendi about the deep misery of two children who have been adopted by their harsh and tight-fisted aunt and uncle. The narrator’s compassionate observation of the poor children is simultaneously a judging reflection on the awful, exploitative relatives, offering yet another commentary on Bedouin society as tough, primitive and unkind to the weak and needy.

3b. The friendly admirer

woman into a kibbutz [as a possible “Swallow heralding the spring”](#). Gideon Spiro, a journalist and left-wing activist, formerly member of Kibbutz Merhavia, [wrote in 2009: “an Arab was not able to be accepted as a Kibbutz member, neither in those days nor today”](#).

²⁹ Issue 11, 1931, July 31, page 9

³⁰ Issue 11-12, 1933, June 30, page 9

Moshe Mosenzon³¹'s **Sketches**³² is an iconic illustration of an encounter between a colonist and a native, the latter in great awe, full of appreciation for the settler's enterprise. The writer, on his way to kibbutz Nana (named after the nearby Arab village Nana; later the name was changed to Kibbutz Na'an), not merely translates the compliments he heard from his Arab interlocuter, but in true "*omniscient narrator*" fashion proceeds to quote the assumed admiring discourse of other villagers who "*open wondering eyes*":

This time, as a year already passed, the first Arab plougher I met knew that "il compania jadida kudamac" (the new settlement is in front of you) and while talking about rain, mice and Dola [state?] added: Well! I often visit them. Shabab mlach (good guys).

[...]

The Arabs of Nana go back to their village from Rehovot and open wondering eyes: A Bayara³³ has turned out – as if by magic!

- "*Walla shatreen!*" (*By the faith, smart guys*). [Original emphasis].

To use Franz Fanon's mock "quote" from the writings of Octave Mannoni: "*their coming was unconsciously expected— even desired—by the future subject peoples*", (Fanon, 1986 [1952]:73³⁴).³⁵

³¹ Moshe Mosenzon (1909-1979) was born in the Ukraine and was brought over to Palestine with his parents in 1911. He grew up in Ein Ganim near Petah Tiqwa. In 1930 he joined the group that started Kibbutz Naan. He published stories and books, as well as memoirs about service in the British army in WWII. In the years 1947-1955 he was the editor of **BaMaale**. His brother Yigal Mosenzon and daughter Dvora Omer are well known Hebrew writers (Source: OSU lexicon).

³² Issue 8, 1932, April 15, page 7.

³³ Well.

³⁴ The quote is from Mannoni's "Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization (New York, Praeger, 1964). Originally *Psychologie de la Colonisation* (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1950).

³⁵ It is worth mentioning that the actual memoirs of this particular Nana Group are somewhat less idyllic. A collection of memoirs titled "Milestones" published in 1959 describes "youth, lacking any life experience, with no tradition of social or teamwork" who needed to "go through all stages of doubts and worries about holding on to the new form of living". The group found itself on ground that was "exposed, dissected by wadis, away from any Jewish settlement, up front and in the back dwelled Arabs – hither in Bedouin tents, and thither in the village of Nana. Drinking water was purchased for six months from the neighbouring Arab village and transported by cart in barrels. Hunger and suffering, long periods of inactivity – this is what the group had to put up with in the early days" (Tamari, 1959:6-7).

In the land of Benjamin^{36 37}, following a visit into the village *Anatot*³⁸ near Jerusalem, the visiting Jewish "*Hawajat*³⁹" are welcomed with extreme hospitality. On the way out they even discover "*some Arab flatbread and fruit in the car – 'provisions for the road [...]'*". During the visit the locals are most appreciative, and the "*village throws a celebration to honour the Jewish visitors.*" A venerable old person gives a scholarly talk about the affinity between Judaism and Islam:

*It is certain, he says, that we **fellahin** have the blood of the ancient Jews (original emphasis).*

The visitors are mainly preoccupied with Hebrew-biblical references to the place (associated with Nowzaradan, the prophet Jeremiah, Yehuda the Maccabean, King David and the Philistines, see also chapter 6). Against the pronounced misery of the "*poor small village*" with its "*caves and grottos*", the travellers are pleased to "*spot the splendid buildings of the Hebrew University, surrounded by greenery and thick pine woods*" from a distance – juxtaposing two habitats that are geographically close and ideologically separated. The description emphasises elements of dirt, muck, stench and children who "*roll over in the garbage*" (see section below about the descriptions of dirt).

4. Urban Arabs: admiring Zionist achievements or copying them; greedy, scheming, cunningly dishonest

While a degree of mandatory compassion and even friendliness is to be found in depictions of poor and primitive Arabs, no amical sentiment accompanies depictions of urban or middle-class Arabs, unless they are full of admiration for the Zionist enterprise. They are regularly described in hostile pejoratives. A friendly encounter with admiring urban Arabs is described in a 1934 travel report titled **What is Recounted About the Land**⁴⁰ signed "Asa'el".

³⁶ Issue 9, 1931, July 3, page 6

³⁷ The area described in this entry is today part of the occupied West Bank, near Jerusalem. It has been officially renamed "Benjamin Country" as it was, according to biblical tradition, inhabited by the tribe of Benjamin.

³⁸ *Anata* (the visitors called it by the biblical name) is presently a very dense suburb of Jerusalem, outside the Separation Wall.

³⁹ Arabic for "masters"

⁴⁰ Issue 23, 1934, November 30, page 7

The writer recounts an exchange with some Arab merchants on board a passenger ship sailing from Haifa to Trieste. The businesspeople express high praise for the Zionists in Palestine and for Jews everywhere, with only a hint of criticism:

Among the travellers there are also four Arabs from “Birra” village near Ramallah. These Arabs are already travelling for the fourth time to America, where they deal in commerce and merchandise. “Walla – one of them says – one must admit that the Jews have introduced wealth, commerce, construction, education and medical treatment to this land. Wherever Jews come they have good influence. You hold commerce in the whole world. In America the Jews are first class in dexterity, and the Arabs are second class; [...] In New York for example there are 4 million Jews, and it is very good to do business with them, better than with the others. There one only needs to be ‘Good-Man [sic]. There nobody asks about one’s religion. It should also be the same in this land.”

While the flattering attitude to Jewish dexterity and success seems touched by a whiff of antisemitic prejudice (“*You hold commerce in the whole world*”), the favourable impressions of Jews introducing “*wealth, commerce, construction, education and medical treatment*” to Palestine repeat the core of Zionist propaganda⁴¹. The suggestion of the ethnic-religiously-based economic model – as opposed to the American model where it is enough to be a “*Good-Man*” – is not addressed by the writer. He seems content with his interlocutor’s idea that Jewish immigration should also be directed to Transjordan: “*Jews must also come to Transjordan. The inhabitants there are so miserable*” and could benefit from Jewish presence.

Other depictions of Arab middle-class types are far less friendly. As Ilan Pappé noted, David Ben Gurion and his mates found Palestinian town dwellers objectionable: “*They were educated, nationalists and more or less grasped what Zionism was all about. They were ‘impertinent and too assertive’⁴²*” (Pappé, 2012:52). A focused – poignantly hostile – observation of members of the Arab middle class is central to two stories by author Miriam Singer⁴³, member of Kibbutz Degania. Her **The son of the Horan**⁴⁴ follows the hardships experienced by a primitive and ignorant *fellah* who arrives in search of work and bread from the hills east of the Jordan river.

⁴¹ Displayed, for example, in the 1935 film “[For New Life](#)”. Issue 22 of *BaMaaleh* of that year carried a review of this film by Sara Gluzman, page 4.

⁴² Quoting Natan Shifris, ‘The Memoirs of a Factory Worker’, *The Book of the Second Aliya*, p.191.

⁴³ See ref. 65 on page 90.

⁴⁴ Issue 21, 1933, Nov. 10, page 6

The writer expresses deep compassion for this poor creature, depicted as a model specimen for many others. It is through the *fellah* perspective that the vicious image of well-to-do Arabs emerges. Having walked miles down from the famished Horan Hills, the *fellah's* “*meagre remuneration*” is often stolen or robbed by the more prosperous local Arabs. In the story, the (archetypal) *fellah* encounters three unscrupulous individual prototypes of the Arab middle-class who all cruelly take advantage of this innocent simpleton. The first of these is the government official:

The manager of the quarantine, a junior government official, stands in front of his house watching the day. From the Jews he has learnt that it is pleasant to have a garden around the little house. He too would like to plant some trees, so today he observes the road. Today he would like to dig holes for the pepper trees. He does not keep a gardener for that purpose, of course; and no way should he do the work himself, although there are days when he has nothing else to do: what has he become a government official for? See, a small Horani is arriving from the east with his donkey. Without too much talk the official stops him with a hand gesture. The uniform with its shining buttons, always impressing children and primitive people, does the job. The tired thin-faced Horan man must stop and dig the holes for the trees for the government official [...]

Number two is the police officer:

In the police station a few pairs of horses need watering. It goes without saying that this has to be done by the fellahin from the Horan. Each one of them receives two buckets, they need to bring water from the Sea of Galilei for the state's horses. The lake bank is steep in this area, and this year that has seen little rain the water is far away! So it is a long way to go and fill buckets. The Horani would not dare refuse the “state” and the policeman knows very well why he turns to the innocent, ignorant man of the mountains.

The third exploiter is the dishonest merchant, who avoids the payment that was agreed-on after the *fellah* spent a day's work carrying heavy loads:

Because there is no commitment when it comes to the son of the Horan, he knows nothing about protective legislation, he only knows the iron law of deprivation, to which he succumbs with no protest. It is deprivation that pushes him from his mountains into the valley.

All the exploiters are native Arabs of Palestine. Jewish pioneers, by contrast, are the object of the *fellah's* admiration. The writer, another “*omniscient narrator*”, reports directly from the

consciousness of the primitive peasant (although in another story she informs readers that she does not understand Arabic at all). The archetypal *fellah*, according to the story, upon returning to his Horan village, would surely tell his neighbours about the marvels that he had the privilege to witness:

But occasionally, when he passes the Hebrew settlements on his way to Tiberias, he sees the crawling tractors in the black fields and hears the sound of the clamouring threshing-machines. Curiously he watches the irrigation ditches and his eyes widen with wondering. In his village he would tell people about the “combines” and their marvels...

The next lines are a forward-looking vision (hardly in line with the teaching of mainstream Labour Zionism⁴⁵):

And he does not even imagine, the hungry son of the Horan, that in a few years, over there, in the fields beyond the Horan-wall, the Hebrew fellah will be opening furrows with his tractor. With his hoe he will crumble the clods of earth that had been left to waste for so long. He does not foresee that by then he would not need to walk all the way to Tiberias with his meagre crop but will have a closer, more lucrative market. By then, when over there on the other side of the Horan mountains the tractors will be humming and the artificial rain will spread its water – the situation of the Horan fellah will also improve. He will learn how to extract most from the land, just as the Arabs of Eretz Israel have learnt.

The fictional world created in the story loyally echoes the hegemonic narrative: pious compassion for the native peasant, described from a typical colonialist perspective as “*primitive and inferior*” (Hirsh, 2015:309) while any Arab achievements must be the gifts of Zionism: the “*Arabs of Eretz Israel*” owe their ability “*to extract most from the land*” to what they learned from the settlers; even the government official learnt from the Jews “*that it is pleasant to have a garden around the little house*”. The story predicts a golden future for further expansion of the colonialist settlement all the way up the Horan hills: “*the tractors will be humming and the*

⁴⁵ The insistence on incorporating “the two banks of the river Jordan” to the future Jewish homeland was central to the teaching of the Revisionist movement under Jabotinsky, often criticising Labour for neglecting the vision of “The Whole of Historic *Eretz-Israel*” as part of British Mandatory Palestine (see for ex. “A Hebrew State – solution for the Jewish Problem” by Ze’ev Jabotinsky, T. Kopp publishers, Tel Aviv, 1937, pp 89; 97)

artificial rain will spread its water” as soon as “the Hebrew fellah will be opening furrows with his tractor [...] in the fields beyond the Horan-wall”⁴⁶.

In a story titled **In a Tomato Field**⁴⁷, Miriam Singer further illustrates disagreeable images of Arab middle-class individuals – this time small vegetable merchants. Arab traders are described as undesirable parasites against the hard-working members of a farming settlers’ community. Wishing to buy second rate (cheap, “*Thani bab*”) tomatoes from the kibbutz fields, the Arab merchants arrive early in the morning, spend all day idly, gobbling free tomatoes incessantly. The portrayal is jeering and hostile:

[...] From the hem of his garment he extracts the “pita” [Arab flatbread] in a very Biblical gesture, and sits down near the “Thani bab” [second rate] crate. His long grey fingers select tomatoes, one by one: this is his first breakfast, these are “business relations”. We know that for lunch he will produce a second and a third pita and have another meal.

In less than twenty minutes four other Arabs emerge from among the yellow leaves of the vineyard, [...] “Thani bab” is always in demand [...] They ask about first grade produce – “Awal bab”, but the price is too steep for them. [...] To annoy us all four “merchants” who did not buy seat themselves next to the half-full crate for which Hassan is waiting. They cross their legs, pull back their wide sleeves, with a Biblical gesture produce “pitas” from the hems of their garments and begin to munch with great relish. The tomatoes are fresh, cool, juicy; and the merchants who came from the other side of Tiberias seem very hungry. In matter of moments almost half of the “Thani bab” in the crate disappears.

The hyper-ironic narration is packed with pejoratives. The “*merchants*” are in quotation marks; they move in “*Biblical gestures*”; they “*munch with great relish*”; eat “*noisily*”; and “*seem very hungry*” while unable to afford the full price for the higher quality “*first grade*” tomatoes grown by the kibbutz members.

The story continues with a recollection of an attempt by the dishonest Arab merchants to con the tomato growers. It is a flash-back: Once they brought larger crates in an attempt to receive more tomatoes for the same price. “*A proverb I learnt at school suddenly appears: ‘Arabs are*

⁴⁶ After the 1967 war, Israeli expansion into the east of the Jordan river did occur as Singer predicted, with the exception that the native population had been driven out completely from this part of the Occupied Territories. The Horan is the southern part of the Golan.

⁴⁷ Issue 2, 1934, Jan 19, page 6

home-foxes’”, the narrator surprisingly recalls (Singer grew up in Austria, and it is a mystery if and why such a line was included in the texts she studied). She then proudly continues:

He thought we would not notice, but “Jews are also home foxes”, surely when it comes to business matters. Mordechai discovered this immediately and the attempt was a failure.

The story, saturated with expressions of sneer and contempt, ends on a gloating note: During Ramadan the undesirable merchants fast and cannot help themselves to the Kibbutz tomatoes. Hassan merely “*looks at the red, juicy tomatoes with desirous eyes*”, the others watch “*With lust as well as self-denial*” and the narrator concludes triumphantly: “*Indeed, something has changed in our tomato-field.*”

In 1933 the Palestinian leadership decided to display their achievements in a great exhibition in Jerusalem, perhaps in response to the bi-yearly commercial fairs that took place in Jewish Tel Aviv in the 1920s and 1930s⁴⁸. From an Arab perspective the “**Arab Fair in Palestine**” as it was called by the contemporary Palestinian press was conceived as an exciting and meaningful event (Hasan, 2017:107). Its advanced spirit was manifested by a surprising “*large influx of women*”, both as enthusiastic attendants and as presenters in the pavilion that displayed crafts and art work (ibid). The sour way it was introduced and commented on for the Hebrew readers of **BaMaaleh** is therefore enlightening, revealing the misgivings of the settler community at the sight of a successful urban enterprise by Palestinians. **The Arab Exhibition**⁴⁹, signed M.A., recognises the exhibition as an important event, while conveying a lack of any sympathy for the efforts of bourgeois Palestinian Arabs to display their economic, industrial and artistic achievements, as well as their positive ties with neighbouring Arab lands.

The commentary by the expert writer on “Arab Affairs” makes several derogatory remarks, all in line with official *Hasbara* logic:

⁴⁸ Details about these fairs, remembered mainly due to the 1934 “Fair of the Orient”, are to be found in several historical websites in Hebrew, for ex. <https://lib.cet.ac.il/pages/item.asp?item=18713> of the “Centre for Educational Technology”.

⁴⁹ Issue 15, 1933, Aug. 11, page 2.

1. The exhibition is an enterprise of political propaganda rather than an economic undertaking (ignoring the political importance attached to the Zionist fairs that he is about to praise):

The Arab Exhibition in the land was so far merely a political movement [...] Politics that have no economic aspect will end up degenerating [...]"

2. The exhibition is an attempt to imitate the economic success of the Jews, often displayed in fairs and commercial exhibitions:

From one day to the next, the recognition in the Arab camp grows to understand that the power of the Jews in this land is concentrated in their economic enterprises, prompting the political factors to consider them; therefore, in this realm too, the Arabs must imitate the Jews. [...] The regular organisation of the exhibitions in Tel Aviv and the great impression they make on residents of the country as well as people from abroad pushed some of the Arab leaders [...] to try and follow the example of the Jewish exhibition.

3. In spite of all the efforts, fund raising and calls for participants failed:

[...] this initiative also met with much difficulty. [...] less than two thousand Lira were collected – an amount insufficient for a proper exhibition. The Arab businesspeople in the country [...] were not interested in supporting it. [...] One must also add that influential political circles did not show much enthusiasm either.

4. Eventually merchants and industrialists from Syria and the Lebanon agreed to participate; this is only because they suffer “*terrible stagnation*” in their businesses.

5. In fact, this is not a real exhibition but merely a bazaar:

They grasped the business of the exhibition in the simplest possible manner: a bazaar. A fair to sell their merchandise wholesale and retail.

6. Even though some gains were noted, and in fact it is “*an important enterprise, first of its kind in the Arab movement*”, it is merely a one-off show, as Arabs are not capable of long-term enterprises. The exhibition is “*a short-lived momentum that suits the volatile Arab temper.*”

7. A boycott principle was basic to the organising of this exhibition:

[...] from day one the organisers of the exhibition decided not to allow Jewish participation.

This might have been correct. The writer however ignores the possibility that this boycott mirrored Zionist enterprises that did not allow Arab participation⁵⁰.

Summing-up, the writer grudgingly admitted that the exhibition was a success for what he considered “*propaganda*” and boosting Palestinian self-esteem:

[...] it is still too soon to evaluate the event on a permanent basis. [...] from the political-national point of view, a great achievement was accomplished. [...] it proved great propaganda for Arab production and for increasing Arab self-esteem. 'Arab Palestine' [...] penetrated non-political circles of traders and industrialists. Many new liaisons were established.

Still, while acknowledging the aesthetic achievement of the exhibition that took place in a “*grandiose Muslim building*” and was well-decorated with national symbols, art and craft works as well as merchandise from the entire Arab world, M. A.’s final note is patronising, belittling, and at the same time anxious about possible Arab gains:

The childish boasting: “We too have an exhibition, even prettier than the exhibition in Tel Aviv” – must have an effect on the young Arab generation, who have been visiting the exhibition in organised classes with their teachers from different locations. In summary: The economic value of this exhibition [...] is not great. [...] However, the political value of the exhibition was considerable, and has undoubtedly boosted the Arab movement in the country.

Friendliness to the Jewish settlers or readiness to do business with them did not usually change the negative image of rich Arabs. A particularly unflattering image of an upper-class Arab man is included in a story published in the first issue of *BaMaaleh* in its bi-weekly format. **Homeland Horizons**⁵¹ is a fragment from the four-volume novel **Bat Zion** (“*Daughter of Zion*”) by Yehuda Bourla⁵², to be published that year. The novel’s plot, taking place during the first two decades of the 20th century, introduces an initially scandalous protagonist: a young Jewish woman raised in a respected old Jerusalemite family who converted to Islam in order to marry a rich young Arab

⁵⁰ Needless to say, there are enough indications and declarations of the ban on any Arab participation in Jewish workplaces, which is at the centre of the present work. Arab products were also banned in favour of the “*Hebrew Product*”.

⁵¹ Issue 1, 1931, Feb. 20. Page 5

⁵² Yehuda Bourla (1886 – 1969) was a prominent Jerusalem-born writer, as well as a senior director of the *Histadrut*’s Arabic section. Laureate (twice) of the Bialik Literary prize and a president of the Hebrew writers Association (Source: Lexicon of Hebrew Literature, OSU)

aristocrat. However, the heroine Rosa eventually reverses this move, drops the Arab husband, and returns to Judaism in its new Zionist version, with a suitable alfa-male Jewish pioneer for a partner⁵³. The chapter chosen for the first issue of the new format of *BaMaaleh* describes the young woman's first encounter with the Jewish settlements of Palestine, after the First World War. She arrives as the veiled spouse of the *effendi* Taufiq, who makes a fortune by selling lands to the Jews. On a tour of the Jewish colonies the young woman discovers the novelty of "New Jews" who are very different from the dwellers of her own old orthodox Jerusalem community which she had left in disgust. Here begins the process of her becoming a born-again Jewish woman, a committed Zionist, regarding the Jewish settler-immigrants as superior to the natives of the land, Jews or Arabs, including her own (loving and well educated) husband. Enthusiastic about the blossoming colony, she tries to figure-out her Arab husband's state of mind:

*[...] Clearly the mesh of enterprises, working and doing, the green landscapes, the thriving grasslands, the valleys and lowlands covered with shrubs and trees, plants and grain – all nurtured by Jewish hands. And all of this grace, all the visions pouring comfort and soothing her soul – are being presented to her by him, by Taufiq... [...] And he, Taufiq, does he really not notice anything she senses and feels? Or perhaps he, too, holds his tongue for fear that his words might arouse things that he does not wish to awaken? Does he really think her own heart is completely sealed and blocked to those sights and emotions? Has his own heart become so blunt by the brightness of gold, that he notices nothing, sees nothing except the thousands reaped by his hands, with no room for anything else there? What does he feel, how does he react when he observes how his "own" lands are being transformed in Jewish hands? Are his eyes blinded to the marvellous creation of landscapes and sights? Does he perhaps willingly and generously offer his hand and his desire, perhaps in a round-about way, to the Jews who are building and making all of that in front of his very eyes? And perhaps his eyes see nothing? Or does he keep secret silently? Is he afraid to open his mouth and speak to her as he notices that **she** is silent or discusses whatever comes to her mind but says nothing about the very thing that strikes the heart?... She must deliberate on this too, slowly and cunningly... [original emphasis]*

Disguised under the veil, Rosa passes some harsh judgements of her husband, the *effendi*, who seems too complacent facing the enterprise they both visit. She considers several options for

⁵³ A detailed analysis of the Arab male image as reflected in this novel was the subject of a seminary paper for a course on gender relations in Israel's Open University that I submitted to Dr Dana Kaplan (2017).

his apparent peace of mind: 1. He is stupid and greedy (“*sees nothing except the thousands reaped by his hands*”). 2. He is truly indifferent and does not grasp the importance of Jewish progress (“*Are his eyes blinded*”) 3. He is cunning and conspiratorial (“*keep secret silently*”). The main Zionist *Hasbara* message could not be pronounced more clearly: “*the green landscapes, the thriving grasslands, the valleys and lowlands covered with shrubs and trees, plants and grain – all nurtured by Jewish hands*”. By contrast, with Arab owner and tenants, it was a “*naked, desolate land*”. In the world of the novel, beautifully composed by an aspiring Labour Zionist activist with Jewish-Arab origins, the comfortable conjugality of Rosa with the young *effendi* was doomed, she was ready to join the Jewish-Zionist enterprise.

5. The Arab as a generator of destitution and neglect

The idea that while natives live on the land, it is bound to be neglected, desolate and ruined is central to settler societies. Colonial settlers considered themselves entitled to the “*terra nullius*” that they were settling, seeing themselves as “*more efficient societies*” who should be allowed to better realise the potential of the land (Wolfe, 1999: 26;27). Zionism fully adopted this attitude that was compatible with its goals. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, David Ben Gurion, in one of his contributions to *BaMaaleh*, bluntly stated that it suited Arab culture “*to leave the land in its destitution*”⁵⁴. This (fabricated) complaint has been repeated and emphasized in several literary entries over the pages of *BaMaaleh* during the period under consideration, supplementing the description of the native Arabs as “*savages*” with the idea that Arab habitation caused the land to become a wasteland that needed cultivation by a more enlightened group who “*will make the desert bloom*”⁵⁵ – another favourite *Hasbara* topic (Said:1980:139⁵⁶).

⁵⁴See above, in the article Hebrew Labour, issue 20, 1932, Nov. 4, page 3

⁵⁵ The myth of Zionists “making the desert bloom” is pivotal to the Zionist narrative, e.g. <http://213.8.150.43/activities/bengurion/negev.htm>. It generated several Palestinian texts refuting this idea, e.g. <https://www.mintpressnews.com/israel-desert-bloom/244003/>

⁵⁶ Said also quotes Richard Bevis’s article “Making the Desert Bloom: An Historical Picture of Pre-Zionist Palestine,” The Middle East Newsletter, V, 2 (Feb.- Mar. 1971).

On the occasion of the traditional Jewish New Year of the Trees (*Tu Bishvat*) in 1932, two short entries under the joint title **Notes from the countryside**⁵⁷ present, in semi-legend form, the malicious liability of the natives for the destruction of the natural wood of the land and its deliverance by the settlers. The first “legend” signed “Smike” is titled **A Pre-historic Forest**:

[...] remnants of a very ancient forest. Old and lonely are its trees, scattered amongst the creeks – a single one here or there – they have seen many days, and many things.

They have seen the destruction of the community, [...] the trees, too, were savaged by the desolation, many of them were put to death under the axe of evil [...]

But now, at last, their wish has come true. No longer must their bark cringe at the sight of a human being. Now the humans do not come with an axe on their belt and ruinous intention in their heart – they come with plants in their hands.

The contrast could not be clearer. In the past trees were used to “*cringe*” at the sight of humans (native Arabs) who carried “*an axe on their belt and ruinous intention in their heart*”. Now they see a new breed of humans, with benevolent intentions: “*plants in their hands*”. The dichotomy “good settlers” versus “bad *indigenes*” is blunt. A similar moral is included in the second entry of **Notes from the countryside**, titled **The Sycamore**, and signed B. Fishko. A “legendary tree” managed to survive the bad times all alone, in a once-blossoming area that became wild and neglected: A “*haven of lizards and reptiles. Jackals wailed at night, and during the day masses of insects hummed and buzzed.*” But now, as the settlers took over, better days have come: “[...] *the wonderful sycamore is a part of the young gardener’s plot*” - clearly not a native plot anymore, but part of the settlement that “takes better care” of the land and its nature. As Wolfe tells us, the dominant feature of colonialist settlement is “*not exploitation but replacement.*” (Wolfe, 1999:163). As pointed out in chapter 6 above, Irus Braverman, researching the conservation regime in Palestine-Israel many decades later, explains how a “*declensionist narrative*” became popular in many colonial contexts. It is the narrative that “*has taken a turn toward blaming [...] natives for what would then be presented as the region’s environmental decline*” (Braverman, 2023:13).

⁵⁷ Issue 2, 1932, Jan.22, page 5. See also above, chapter 6.

A similar perspective is expressed in the long story (two instalments) **To the land of the Forefathers**⁵⁸ signed N. Tamir⁵⁹. This tale about a Yemen-born boy who arrived to join the Zionist pioneers (to be discussed in detail in chapter 8) includes a description of the new settlement at which the Yemenite boy arrives. The narrator offers a “flashback”: It was once a neglected Arab swamp; Jewish settlers turned it into a blossoming garden:

The Arabs have a strange name for the blooming village “Ein Havered”⁶⁰. They call it “Bitsat Havered”⁶¹. And this is the history of those two opposite names: many generations ago this used to be a place blessed with roses and perfumes, with a spring of clear water. But over the years it was neglected, and the blessing became a curse. The spring became a swamp where every disease dwelled. It was as though the Arabs invited the swamp. Then they were forced to flee it. So the swamp kept growing for generations. Until a group of [Jewish] labourers came and transformed the “Swamp of the Rose” back to become the “Eye of the Rose”. They dried the swamp and cleaned up the spring. They invested great efforts there. From their own life they took away what was needed to bring life to the place.

Here again, the Zionist narrative is repeated in a nutshell: “[.] the Arabs invited the swamp”, then the hard-working Jewish settlers turned it into a “*blooming village*”, (where a Yemenite-Jewish child would grow-up to become a dedicated Zionist, see the next chapter).

6. Dirt and misery as a social indication of “Arabness”

Condescending descriptions of extreme poverty characterise writings about Arabs (as well as about Jews of Arab descent, as will be shown in the next chapter). As already mentioned above, **BaMaaleh** writers do not usually notice affluent, educated professional Arab middle-class persons. There is, however, a vast scope of reports about misery, almost always associated with dirt, and described as an essentialist cultural character (in sharp contrast to reports about Jewish-Ashkenazi poverty). Fouzi El Asmar noted: “*I did not come across a single reference to clean Arab homes or clean Arab villages*” (El Asmar, 86:77).

⁵⁸ Issues 7 and 8, 1932.

⁵⁹ Likely to be Nachman Tamir (1913 -1999), born in Pinsk, immigrated to Palestine in 1934. Prior to his *Aliya* he edited the Hebrew publication of *Hashomer Hatzair Mitzpe* in Poland. He was later a journalist and a manager of the cultural department of the *Histadrut* in Haifa, a delegate to the Zionist Congress, and an officer in the IDF.

⁶⁰ Hebrew for “eye of the rose”.

⁶¹ Hebrew for “swamp of the rose”. The writer did not even bother to find out the correct Arabic expression (which would have been *Mustanqat al Warda*.)

Poverty among the “subaltern” groups and individuals (Arabs or *Mizrahi* Jews) is almost always coupled with dirt and filth. As Mary Douglas taught us many years ago, “*pollution ideas relate to social life*”, and “*It is not difficult to see how pollution beliefs can be used in a dialogue of claims and counterclaims to status.*” (Douglas, 1984 [1966]:3). Dafna Hirsh, who also suggests regarding “*hygiene as a specific cultural repertoire*” (Hirsh, 2015:303), discovered reports that describe the Zionist pioneers (the “*halutzim*”) as “*indifferent towards hygienic and sanitary matters*” (ibid:306). There was, however, no indifference to dirt when it came to observations about natives.

Descriptions of essentialist native poverty characterise two entries signed “Arie L.”. **In the Old City of Jerusalem**⁶² brings impressions of the city’s beauty and its social gaps. A handsome Arab woman is described as coming at the end of the day to collect “*her children and sheep that are rolling and jumping around in the garbage, putting them all to rest.*” In **Under the Load**⁶³ (see also the next section), Arab labourers “*lie in the dirt, in rags, bare footed*” and are further described as sheep and ants, their misery compared to that of donkeys. In **In the land of Benjamin**⁶⁴, mentioned above, emphasis is on elements of dirt, muck, stench and children who “*roll over in the garbage*” in the friendly village Anata near Jerusalem.

A particularly blunt study on poverty, dirt and degeneration as introduced into the (clean) Hebrew city of Tel Aviv from its Arab vicinity features in the story **The Two**⁶⁵ by the canonised Hebrew writer Asher Barash⁶⁶. In line with Lorenzo Veracini’s perception of a “*settler state of mind*” that stubbornly “*sees indigenous peoples entering the settler space when obviously and historically the opposite is the case.*” (Veracini, 2010:86), this story concentrates on two poor Arab children who enter the Jewish streets of Tel Aviv from neighbouring Arab Jaffa. The story’s realistic and compassionate depiction is imbued with delicate disgust:

⁶² Issue 7, 1931, June 6, page 7.

⁶³ Issue 3, 1932, Feb. 5, page 7.

⁶⁴ Issue 9, 1931, July 3, page 6.

⁶⁵ Issue 21, 1931, Dec. 25, page 6.

⁶⁶ Asher Barash (1889 – 1952) was born in Galicia and immigrated to Palestine in 1914. He was a prominent writer and a central literary authority. Next to publications of his own prose and verse in many books, he was also one of the founders of *Mitzpe* publishing house and its chief editor for many years, a patron of several younger authors. He later became a member of the Academy for the Hebrew Language and the President of the Authors Association (Source: OSU).

They come out running every day from the dirty sand alley leading from the Arab neighbourhood to the Tel Aviv Junction. She is an Arab girl about nine or ten, clad in a filthy blue dress with dyed embroidery at the bottom, her head wrapped in a black rag, one of its wings tied round her throat and the other coming down to her waist. Her chin is tattooed with blue dots in the form of a big triangle and her small nose has a dark nose ring. Her mouth is tight and graceful, and her eyes are clever even though they are afflicted with trachoma. [...] He seems a year or two younger. Small and plump, a forelock of sun-bleached hair stands wildly at the top of his shorn head. His sleeveless coat falls over a filthy white gown and his bare legs stick out of wide cotton underwear. His eyes are crossed and squint, his nose flat.

The two come from the area described by Franz Fanon as “*The colonized sector [...] a disreputable place inhabited by disreputable people. [...] a sector that crouches and cowers, a sector on its knees [...]*” (Fanon, 2003 [1963]:7). Following the short exposition packed with details of repulsive deformities, filth and unseemliness, the purpose of the pair’s arrival to the Hebrew city is revealed. Clearly “*The colonist’s sector is [...] a sector of lights and paved roads where the trash cans constantly overflow with strange and wonderful garbage, undreamed-of leftovers.*” (ibid):

Her sharp eye spots every cast cigarette-butt, she dives down and picks it up swiftly. She puts it on her palm and sniffs. Then she somewhat opens the box which is pressed to her chest, drops it in and closes the lid with a graceful gesture. [...] And he – his eyes gaze at the dung heaps of horses, donkeys and camels drying yellow next to the sloppy concrete road and in its middle. With an agile move he grips the feces, shakes it once or twice and enters it into the tin he holds under his armpit. And if there is much dung, crushed by either wheel or foot, he moves his coat, kneels on his gown, and hurriedly, before a car or a policeman’s horse would hit him, collects the whole lot into his tin. He also gets heated-up and his squinting eyes gleam like sparks shooting out of roasted ash.

Cigarette butts and beast dung are what the Arab children seek in the Jewish streets with their “*strange and wonderful garbage*”. Next the story dwells on the unpleasant relations between the two. The boy is proud of his pretty sister:

His posture is all-powerful, his voice the voice of a man filled with pride and recognition: You see, mister, such a sister I have, me the wretched one, the collector of dung. She collects cigarettes – cigarettes that were discarded by elegantly-clad gentlemen.

The gracious girl denies her wretched brother who deals with dirt:

*[...] with a grown up, cool feminine voice she called:
I have no idea, by the life of Allah. He is a stranger, from the “Balad”⁶⁷.
And she seemed to be completely shaking off the touch of an alien body, totally
disgusting – from dung.*

It is useful at this stage to pause and take notice of the way extreme misery and poverty were reported from the settlers’ own community in Palestine of those days as well as from the Jewish world of Eastern Europe. Poverty and misery were repeatedly quoted in **BaMaaleh** as arguments for increasing immigration into Palestine, portrayed as an intolerable aberration that must be put right, but there was never a focus on the filth that accompanies Jewish hardship. In **A Letter**⁶⁸, a writer (who only signs as Z.N.) quotes what he describes as one of many letters piled daily at the “*Council House*” (presumably in Tel Aviv), signed by “*sombre comrades*” who cannot make ends meet. The published letter, signed by a young girl, portrays a distressing picture:

I live in a shack. [...] On days of rain and strong wind the paper gets torn, wind come through the cracks and the roof started going up. [...] we thought we might be killed because there is no roof and then the wind got stronger and it was so cold at night that I cannot tell any more. [...] My father does not have work and when he is not working, he gets angrier with us and he hits us when we ask him for food.

Z.N. ends the discussion of the situation with an emotional plea: “*it is not possible, impossible to go on living in this system of famine and unemployment*”. None of the descriptions of Arab (or Arab-Jewish, see next chapter) misery comes coupled with similar protest. Dirt and filth are not part of the description of Eastern European poverty either, in the several “Hassidic tales” about poor Jews published in **BaMaaleh** (see chapter 6). In **The Desecrator of the Shabbat**⁶⁹ we meet “*The orphan Shloymele [...] This emaciated miserable body had always been clad in torn rags, come summer come winter*”; in **Ha Lachma Ania**⁷⁰ the scorn of well-to-do Jews for the “*stink of manure*” that is carried around by the poor Zelig is proven wrong as the *Tzadik* sees

⁶⁷ Arabic for hometown.

⁶⁸ Issue 12, 1932, June 17, page 9.

⁶⁹ Issue 13, 1932, July 3, page 6.

⁷⁰ Issue 8, 1932, April 15, page 6. The title is a quote (in Aramaic) from the Passover prayer book.

virtue in this poverty and stench; in **The Tear of an Orphan**⁷¹, the poor boy Shlomo lives “Without a home or family, [...] alone in the world, living on the leftovers in the houses he serves as a messenger and a home helper” - but his misery, that touches the rabbi, does not include filth. There is also no mention of dirt in a distressing report by Labour leader Berl Katznelson who returned from a trip to his native Poland in 1934. **Following the Youth in the Diaspora**⁷² by Katznelson describes lamentable situations in Jewish homes:

I have often seen, in a single room with no floor, a family with 7 -8 children; relatively, almost naked, and eating only potatoes; the whole family squeezes into two beds [...]

Katznelson’s concern in this report was to make sure that youth, in these unfortunate circumstances, would make the right political choice, which must be Labour Zionism, rather than find support in “other places”, alluding to Revisionist circles.

Understandably, he did not dwell on hygiene details involved in the sad predicament of poor Jews in Poland.

7. The Arab Labourer

As this work looks at the positioning of the **Hebrew Labour** concept, the perspective on Arab Labourers as reflected in texts published in **BaMaaleh** is of particular relevance. The *Histadrut*, true to its vocation as a trade union, was officially in favour of unionising labour in the Arab sector. At the same time, as part of its Zionist charter, it adhered strictly to the strategy of separating Arab and Hebrew (Jewish) Labourers. The *Histadrut* was founded in order to make sure that Jews would remain in a separate labour union (Sternhell, 1995: 28 & 106).

As was shown in chapter 3, solidarity with Arab labourers was verbally expressed in **BaMaaleh**, while the practical limits of such solidarity were also clearly marked. Calls for class solidarity with “all” labourers were often announced, in particular in May Day issues during the period under consideration. In two instances (Issue 9, 1932 and issue 8, 1933) Arab labourers were mentioned as partners of class solidarity.

⁷¹ Issue 17-18, 1934, Sept. 9, page 9

⁷² Issue 1, 1934, January 7, page 2 - text of a speech delivered following a trip abroad.

7a. Support and sympathy, no joint struggle

The editorial **Deeds and Words**⁷³ deals with a strike that Arab labourers started at the *Nesher* quarry that supplied raw materials to a cement factory. The editorial offers “*sympathy*” and even suggests money donations for the strikers, while strictly opposing any idea of actively joining this labour dispute. The editor warns particularly against “*over-enthusiastic*” articles or ideas, and blasts any claim that the Jewish workers carry some responsibility for the situation of the seemingly discriminated-against Arab workers.

Zackary Lockman gives a detailed account of the strike at the quarry, operated by the Arab entrepreneur al-Shaqifi: “*At the end of September 1932 al-Shaqifi announced a wage cut and some 150 quarry workers, pressed beyond the limits of endurance, went on strike*” (Lockman, 1996:207). He further reports that the *Histadrut* announced its support of this particular labour dispute, but its officials blamed the Jewish communists for the eventual failure of the long strike, “*seeing them as traitors always on the lookout for opportunities to disseminate their anti-Zionist poison and mislead naive Arab workers*” (ibid:211). The editorial in **BaMaaleh** asserted that there is no way Arabs and Jews could belong to one and the same organisation. The fierce rejection of a united labour union was claimed to be based on supposedly irreconcilable “*differences*” as it negated the core national model set by the “*Histadrut of Hebrew Labourers in Eretz Israel*”⁷⁴.

In March 1935, the editorial **Upon the end of the Strike in Haifa**⁷⁵ referred to a strike that might have been a rare case of a united struggle. The article mentioned “*attempts of the oil company’s agents to spread religious and national hatred among the labourers*”, celebrating the fact that these efforts “*came to nothing*”⁷⁶, and expressing satisfaction that “*Seeds of*

⁷³ Issue 19, 1932, October 14, front page.

⁷⁴ Aviva Halamish pointed out that even the Zionist-left *Hashomer Ha’Tzair*, apparently influenced by Marxist ideology and calling for a joint labour union of Arabs and Jews, offered “more of a slogan than a real plan for action”. (Halamish, 2011; see also in the introduction).

⁷⁵ Issue 5, 1935, March 15, page 2

⁷⁶ *Davar* daily of February 24, 1935, reported the breakout of a strike of Arab workers at the Iraqi Oil Company in the Haifa port. The strike was not assisted by the Hebrew Labourers association, as the paper clarifies. On March 25 *Davar* carried a detailed commentary by Aba Hushi (a well-known *Histadrut* activist in Haifa who became the mayor of Haifa after 1948). His article reviews the *Histadrut*’s assistance to the strikers, but blames Arab activists for the limited gains of the strike.

cooperation and mutual support among Jewish and Arab workers” presumably “*have been sowed*”. The writer, however, used this opportunity to add: “[...] *the strike revealed the raw power of the labourer who is ‘son of the desert’*”. In other words: Arab labourers are a different, primitive and uncultivated human entity. “*Son of the desert*” is surely a savage with whom a joint organisation remains inconceivable (see also chapter 3).

7b. In competition: the Arab Labourer as a miserable usurper

When it comes to urban areas and the need to compete over workplaces, the image of Arab labourers as a different, inferior species becomes clearer with the help of some literary devices. **Under the Load**⁷⁷ signed “Arie L.” is presented as an eye-witness story from Jerusalem. It describes Arab labourers suffering from the extreme cruelty of an Arab foreman, as well as criminal negligence that causes the death of an innocent old Arab passer-by. The story constantly uses animal metaphors to describe the poor Arab labourers, subtly dehumanising their existence and illustrating Fanz Fanon’s depiction of some thirty years later: “*when the colonist speaks of the colonized he uses zoological terms. [...] in his endeavours at description and finding the right word, the colonist refers constantly to the bestiary.*” (Fanon, 2004 [1963]:7). The mandatory emphasis on dirt is also present (see previous section on dirt and “Arabness”). The narrator’s declared sentiments of pity and compassion for the Arab labourers’ misery come across as insincere, as he concurrently stresses the point that the work they are doing should have been given to Jewish labourers:

Like those sheep lying stretched here for buying and selling, they too stand or lie in the dirt, in rags, bare footed, shaking with hunger and cold, waiting for their “Nasib” (luck), that someone might come and wish to employ them and with the mercy of Allah they will have bread to eat.

While the jobless Arabs are compared to sheep in the dirt, the lucky ones who found employment are likened to insects: “*they move and buzz like ants.*”

The main grievance as described by the writer belongs to the unemployed Hebrew labourers:

At the side of the road Hebrew labourers, forced to unemployment, move about, touring. They watch with pain this work that was taken away from them in their own place of residence. And twice as painful it is for them to watch the vision of slavery and exploitation of these miserable “labourers”.

⁷⁷ Issue 3, 1932, Feb. 5, page 6

The Hebrew labourers are magnanimous enough to have great pity on “*the vision of slavery*”; it is work “*that was taken away from them*”, and the actual miserable Arab workers are “*labourers*” in quotation marks.

Committed both to the declared socialist agenda (chapter 3) and to the **Hebrew Labour** maxim (chapter 2), this particular text displays the logic of a settler colonial project “*whose dominant feature is not exploitation but replacement*” (Wolfe, 1999:193). The writer conveys compassion, while simultaneously leaving no doubt that the locals are a liability and should not even be present at this particular location, or - as Wolfe puts it - they “*get in the way*” by the very fact that they “*stay at home*” (ibid:1; 36). It is “*the extreme inferiority of colonized indigenes*” which causes their oppression (Ibid:11). Just like the Australian Aborigines who venture to come out of the bush, the poor Arab work-seekers moved out of their natural habitat – the village – and “[...] *once inside the frontier, they become like lumpenproletarians*” (ibid:53), upsetting the Hebrew labour-seekers, who desire to replace them.

The story is another opportunity to portray a total negation of Arab society:

” *Their bent, sweat-covered bodies seem to be planted with the pick and the “belamina” [tampering iron] in the ground, none of them would dare to pick up their head and breathe some air.*

The misery of the Arabs labourers is conveniently blamed on another native - an Arab of a higher class. This individual is pejoratively described: “*A fat supervisor, colourfully dressed, runs it with screams, finding culprits wherever he turns.*” (See section 4 above for the depictions of other unpleasant urban Arabs)

Representing the employer – obviously another Arab (and symbolising the Arab employer class) – the fat, pompously clad and vicious supervisor announced from the outset that he pays very little, but still the labourers “*Fearful, subjugated and hushed, with the remnants of their energy and breath they continue their work ever more vigorously.*”

As the story progresses another Arab happens to pass by. It is an old man, leading two donkeys loaded with merchandise. Hearing the verbal abuse to which the labourers are subjected the old man scolds and curses the foreman, thus authenticating the picture of native misconduct and cruelty. The story ends with a shocking depiction of a lethal accident: During the

dynamiting of rocks, a stone hits the head of the old donkey owner and kills him on the spot.

The nasty supervisor reacts with self-interested indifference:

The driver of donkeys' sighs, his soul is dying. The rock splinter that flew and hit his head lies there stained.

- *Ya Allah, Chalasna! [we are through] screams the supervisor as loudly as he can and wakes the labourers from their pondering.*
- *Pick him up and take him to the village. He who died is dead and gone. This is the will of Allah, the blessed and the noble, no further consideration – collect the tools because our work is arrested. Ma-Leish [never mind]. You will be paid for half a day!*

Heads down, with sorrowful looks, the burden still on their backs, the old man's donkeys stand orphaned and neglected...

The abused labourers find themselves paying for the neglect that caused the tragedy – their wages are to be halved. The final metonymic image of their chagrin comes once again from the animal world - the “*orphaned*” donkeys.

The story makes a strong point of emphasising the distance “*between us and them*” (Wolfe, 1999:45). Members of the settler group “*move about, touring*” by “*the side of the road*”, certain that the place and its labour opportunity must belong to them. On the other hand, three images of native Arabs are depicted. The first is the “*lumpenproletariat*”: deep in slavery and misery they “*stand or lie in the dirt*”, or “*swarm*”, all in all impersonating the “*extreme inferiority*” (ibid:11) of the colonised out of their “*natural habitat*” (ibid:53). The second image is the Arab supervisor, a caricature of a cruel parvenu, in clear contrast to the self-depicted compassionate writer and his Hebrew compatriots for whom it is “*twice as painful*” to watch the suffering of “*these miserable 'labourers'*”. The third image of a native is the old donkey owner. This benevolent and independent individual is doomed to get killed in a violent accident as soon as he tries to intervene in favour of the labourers. As we shall see, he is not the only “*good Arab*” who ends up badly in a fiction work in **BaMaaleh**, as there seems to be no place or real solution to their existence next to settler society.

An additional point made in the story relates to a major aspect of settler economy: It offers an explanation of the economic model that enables Arab peasants to offer their services as labourers for “*either a good or mean salary*” which is not realistic for the Jewish labourers. For the native *fellahin*, the narrator explains, “*it is worth it indeed to leave the village and neglect*

the farm” and seek employment in the city, as “*There are lots of slaves and servants who can take their place in the village for a pittance.*” All in all, the readers will conceive the image of a primitive, cruel and exploitative class-divided society – where even the wretched labourers exploit “*slaves and servants*”: the perfect antithesis to their own ideal social habitat of legitimate (never in quotation marks) labourers.

8. Expelled: victims of the effendis’ greed; only ruins left behind

Having neglected the land (see section 5 above), it is only natural that Arabs must vacate it in favour of the more suitable newcomers. When **BaMaaleh** follows evacuations and expulsions, however, they have little to do with the settlers and more with actions of other Arabs. As we have seen above in the story of **Bat Zion** and her spouse, the rich effendi (section 4 above), lands have to be sold so that prosperous Jewish colonies may be built on them.

A rare literary piece offers a seemingly objective compassionate observation of poor and suffering *fellahin* who are forced out of their homes, due (as suggested by the story) to an arbitrary decision by another Arab – an *effendi*, the real cause of such misery. **Immigrants**⁷⁸, signed Zrubavel⁷⁹, describes the sad vision of a family uprooted against its will from its village. The writer is deeply touched by the calamity experienced by the deportees and emotionally conveys the distress of a woman whose loud wails caught his attention: “*It was not a usual weeping sound but rather a suffocated wail of a persecuted animal...*”

With all the compassion, the sense of estrangement is clear. The sad women remind the poet-narrator of large “*dark birds*”, off to nest “*somewhere in the mountains*” following the inhuman depiction of cries “*of a persecuted animal.*” It is yet another illustration of Fanon’s observation that when a colonist needs to find the right word to portray a native’s situation, he “*refers constantly to the bestiary.*” (Fanon, 2004 [1963]:7). A friend (or relative) of the woman points at an “*effendi*” as responsible for the deportation. He offers “*much work*” at another village. There is no hint that a change of land ownership might be the cause of the forced

⁷⁸ Issue 3, 1932, February 5, page 6.

⁷⁹ Zrubavel Gil’ad (1912 – 1988) was a well-respected poet. Born in Serbia, he immigrated with his parents to Palestine after World War 1 in 1917. His first collection of poems “*Youth*” was published by **BaMaaleh**. He usually signed his works by his first name only. (OSU and the National Library website).

transfer⁸⁰, and the writer offers no explanation for his own presence on the scene. In answer to his question the woman-friend explains:

- *Oh, Sir, she had to leave her village. Her mother, her sister, her mates... maybe she will never return, she will never come back - see this land, yes Sir, Yes Sir - - - They turned and climbed up the steep path [...] seemed like great but dark birds, taking off to nest somewhere in the mountains - - -*

The narrator is well aware of his own mastery position as “Sir” (*Adon* is the Hebrew for the Arabic *Hawadja*). From his point of view, he is merely an eyewitness to a disaster caused by a rich Arab. His narration about these “*Wretched of the Earth*”, much like the observations of Arie L. of the miserable “*labourers*” in Jerusalem, brings to mind more observations on colonial images: “*their blank faces; this vegetative existence*” (ibid: 34).

Another narration about Arab tenants who were moved out of their land included no expressions of compassion. In **On the Land of Wadi Hawarith**⁸¹ (see also in chapter 2), Yosef Weitz, a senior executive of the JNF, brought a detailed diary entry of taking over land in Wadi Hawarith (known today as Hefer Valley) against the will of the original dwellers of the land. He opened by describing a group of settlers driven with household baggage, “*through the deserted fields of Wadi Hawarith*”. The fields must be “*deserted*” (“*terra nullius*”) in line with the idea that only Jewish pioneers are intended to “*make the desert bloom*”. It is a well-recognised feature of settler colonialists: “[...] *the sustained resilience of terra nullius in the face of manifest indigenous attachment to land should thus be associated with a number of repressive impulses (as well as with a self-serving settler inclination to dismiss alternative claims to land)*” (Veracini, 2010:88). Weitz actually related how, fully aware of the discontent they were sowing, the settlers were worried about the “*neighbours*” they intended to uproot, but reassured themselves that if there is discontent, it comes from “*inciters*”:

would they manage to pass this section of the road without disruption from the neighbours and with no upheaval from the evil inciters?

The group moves into “*an old, decrepit stone house which will be their dwelling*”. They blatantly ignore the fact that the house must have been previously inhabited, and show no

⁸⁰ The issue of “transferring Arabs to other areas” is discussed in detail by Jack Kanu (Kanu, 1992:45)

⁸¹ Issue 18, 1932, Sept. 30, page 5

interest in its previous dwellers. Once up on the roof of the old house, they see themselves as “*the first builders*”. The senior JNF official quoted their expressions of satisfaction with the new location:

Have you ever seen a valley as wide and as beautiful as this one? Would not our trouble and toil here be a mere trifle compared to the great and eternal satisfaction of being the first builders?

Having internalised the colonialist perspective, the young settlers allow no merit for anything the natives have built – it seems never to have existed, even though they have just climbed on its roof to admire the view. “[...] *as far as settlers are concerned, they are the first real inhabitants of the place they settle*”, Veracini confirms (Veracini, 2010:93).

A few months later the settlers were annoyed when “*disturbances*” broke out, as Weitz reports:

[...] the disturbances were started by the Bedouins who resided in tents in Wadi Hawarith. The inciters came and incited. The incitement against the Jews took place among the Arabs in this land in recent years and was increased in the year 1929, until it erupted full force in the bloody riots at the end of August 1929. Things did not settle down after the riots, and actually even increased, in particular around Nablus and Tul Karem, the two cities where incitement had nestled long ago and from there spread throughout the area. Now as the Jews came to Wadi Hawarith to hold the land that has become the property of the JNF, the inciters persisted and instigated the Bedouins to disrupt the Jews from their work, although the Bedouins received compensations and were merely tenants on the land.

Weitz further reported that “*Negotiations with the government were slow*”. The British government eventually proved to be on the side of the purchasers of the land, and not with the Bedouins who fought to keep the last 6000 dunams that they considered their own. Eventually “*the government [did] give the land to the Jews to plough and to cultivate.*” All in all, the Bedouin are described as activated by “*inciters*” – urban Arabs from “*Nablus and Tul Karem, the two cities where incitement had nestled long ago and from there spread throughout the*

area”. Bedouin, so the reader must understand, do not have a real grudge about their dispossession, and would not have struggled against it if it were not for the urban “inciters”.⁸²

Eventually the former Arab presence becomes a spectre of a remote past, as illustrated in the story **Without a friend**⁸³ by Eliezer Smoli. In this story the remnants of an Arab village are incorporated into the world of settler children. A lonely child wanders around his parents’ yard into a stone room that he knows is a sheikh’s tomb:

Yiftach stands wondering. He feels anxiety. This is a burial place, he knows... an Arab is buried here. An old sheikh. Dad told him... [...]

The darkness gets brighter. Slowly one can see in the middle of the room a form of a long, tall tomb. It is covered with a green cloth, above it a jug that seems to have oil and a wick in it. Old mats cover the floor. [...]

- *Sa’ida, ya-sheikh! (Hello, sheikh!) Yiftach calls into the space of the room and burst out laughing.*

At this early stage of the Zionist settlement (1932), relics from a recent past of an Arab dwelling already serve as no more than an exotic site. The Sheikh’s tomb is but another opportunity for an entertaining childish adventure, its presence conceived as a natural phenomenon in the settler’s environment. The child-protagonist will go on to discover other marvels of the new country life (he watches a scorpion eating a spider and befriends a lamb).

Other articles published in **BaMaaleh** offer a perspective for the process of targeting lands that are coveted for Jewish possession while the original Arab residents still live there and make a living working the land. **In the Hula Valley**⁸⁴, signed D. Schneider, is a pastoral description of a highly desired “wasteland”. A settler group visits the area and is hospitably welcomed by the friendly unsuspecting present residents (see also section 3b – “The friendly admirer”). The visitors’ intentions are freely expressed in the Hebrew periodical:

[...] what good is the pretty landscape for us – if it is desolate, neither ploughed nor sown, with the forces of nature still held deep in the ground. Only here and

⁸² The Bedouin case in Hawarith is described by Kanu (Kanu, 1992:28-29; 34-35), who also discusses the idea of “transfer” for the indigenous tenants (ibid, 46-47). The auction of the lands and the legal proceedings with the Bedouins are also detailed in the *Emek Hefer Brochure* (Emek Hefer, 1970: 57-60). The [website Israeli Trips Site \(Heb\)](#) describes the purchase of the lands of Hawarith as a move that took advantage of an “interesting trick”: “As the land was sold by auction the results were not appealable legally and therefore all claims and demands of Arabs whose lands bordered these lands and have been purchased by the JNF were rejected”.

⁸³ Issue 14, 1932, July 22, page 6

⁸⁴ Issue 2, 1933, Jan. 27, page 3

there we observe an Arab plough and in these places maize and other corn grew so tall, reaching three meters. The plough has not done much on the banks of the marsh, inside grows a thicket of papyrus, that is what they make their mats from, that is where Anopheles nests – the Malaria-bearing mosquito. Only enormous powers, able to overcome natural hindrances, will be able to plough this marshland. [...] Many areas remain uncultivated as it is impossible to work them with the Arab plough. Using other means, with loyal working hands, the entire Hula valley could be turned into a prosperous cultivated area. The Arabs received us graciously, serving us different foods from the local products of the Hula. In their conversation with us they acknowledged the many options still unexplored in the Hula, the use of which they have not the means. Only one person from Beirut has planted a five-dunam citrus orchard here – three years old today – and the trees already bear fruit. Here and there one sees small fruit gardens that bear magnificent fruit with no special treatment.

For this writer, the pretty landscape is of no good as long as settlers, well-equipped with “*other means*” at their disposal, do not turn the “*entire Hula valley*” into “*a prosperous cultivated area*”. The fact that work has already begun and that some gardens already “*bear magnificent fruit*” does not interfere with the fantasy that sees the area as waiting to be turned into the property of those who have “*enormous powers, able to overcome natural hindrances*” – something an “*Arab plough*” would not achieve. The “*gracious*” reception by the Arab dwellers of the marshy area does not change the fact that they “*have not the means*” and are not included in the prosperous future of their land. It is another confirmation of Wolfe’s explanation that the natives “*get in the way*” by the very fact that they “*stay at home*” (Wolfe, 1999: 1; 36). For the visiting settlers, the Hula Valley is yet another “*terra nullius*” ; seeing themselves as a “*more efficient*” society (ibid: 26;27), they are convinced and eager to take it over, illustrating literally the definition of settler colonialism as “*the domination imposed by a foreign minority, racially (or ethnically) and culturally different, acting in the name of a racial (or ethnic) and cultural superiority dogmatically affirmed, and imposing itself on an indigenous population constituting a numerical majority but inferior to the dominant group from a material point of view*” (Veracini, 2010:4⁸⁵), leading, eventually, to the “*unbending logic of exclusion*” (ibid:86).

⁸⁵ Quoting Georges Balandie’s ““The Colonial Situation”, p. 54.

9. Rage with no justified cause: native Arab simpletons as easy prey for inciters

The memoir-style story **Amongst Arab Workers**⁸⁶ by R. Ben Yerucham⁸⁷ carries the core Labour-Zionist message: We bring blessings to the primitive and poor Arab natives; they dislike us and suspect our good intentions mainly due to the doings of malignant “inciters”. As Lorenzo Veracini remarks, “*Narratives of settler colonisation emphasising notions of peaceful settlement*” and myths of “*essentially nonviolent dealings*” with the native majority often feature in the settler colonial narrative (Veracini, 2010:89).

The narrator in this story presents himself as a labourer, co-working with Arab labourers in an urban environment. The related encounters take place on “*the days following the 'Events'*”, referring to the 1929 riots and massacre. Mutual Arab-Jewish sentiments are at the centre of attention:

The air is charged. Hearts not yet calm. Nerves are wracked and tense. Our comrades the Arab labourers sit down to dine together. It is their usual meal – pita bread and olives. Most are fellahin from the neighbouring villages. During the meal, a discussion develops about “bolitics”. I pass by and hear the name of Balfour. He was still alive at that time.

The reported conversation includes the impressions that “*Balfour is Jewish*”, that he “*lives in Tel Aviv and owns a central street in the city*”, and a “correction” by an urban (literate) labourer: Balfour is “*an English Wazir (minister) and resides in England*”, where he received from the Zionists “*4 million Liras for Palestine*”. The fellow-labourers are greatly surprised when the narrator-comrade identifies himself as a Zionist:

“a good guy like you and a Zionist? How come? They are the ones who brought about all the noise and all the confusion, they want to expel us from the land, they want to appropriate our holy mosque”.

The narrator immediately recruits himself to the mission of *Hasbara*. He draws a chart to prove that there is enough room in Palestine for Arabs and Jews together. Only ignorance and illiteracy can be responsible for the belief that the Jews have bad intentions. Settlers everywhere often claim to offer benefits to the local population: “[...] *productivity, growth, and*

⁸⁶ Issue 5, 1931, May 1, page 8.

⁸⁷ Possibly a pseudonym, no suitable reference found.

civilisation are announced as beneficial actions in places where they purportedly had not existed before” - Veracini quotes anthropologist Debora Bird Rose who researched the Australian settlement policy, mentioning that next to the “*right hand*” that brings the good news, the “*left hand*” is busy literally “*erasing*” indigenous existence (Veracini, 2010:100⁸⁸). Ahmad Sa’di points out that in 1899 Theodor Herzl – the founder of the political Zionist movement – already tried to convince the Arab mayor of Jerusalem to expect “*benefits which the Palestinians would gain as a result of the fulfilment of the Zionist project*”, quoting from a letter by Herzl that claimed: “*it is their well-being, their individual wealth which we will increase by bringing our own.*” (Sa’di, 1997:26) Herzl further spelled out this view “*in his fiction of Altneuland, published 1902 [...] His argument that Zionism is a modernizing force in relation to the Palestinians*” has since been “*repeated by countless Zionist political leaders, academics, writers and propagandists*”, Sa’di continues (ibid). It seems that R. Ben Yerucham, who authored the piece **Amongst Arab Workers** was one of these writers.

In the story, the Jewish labourer-narrator becomes an educator. His illiterate pupil of dark complexion has some questions, as “*bad things*” are told about the Jewish settlers in his village:

Hamdi’s face, as black as tar, his white teeth and his two large eyes attest to the Negro blood in his veins. [...]

I teach him some Geography, [...] the discoveries of science, the marvels of technology.

- *If things so remarkable are over there in Moskobi (Russia) and Germany etc., then why do you all leave these countries and come to this poor land of Palestine?*

I explain to him our goal in the land, and that we are not going to harm the Arabs, on the contrary, they will benefit from our presence.

Hamdi finds it all hard to understand. In the village bad things are said about the Jews. [...]

The teacher and the Mukhtar are the only literate people in the village.

Hasbara messages, here as elsewhere, have a double target. Feeding the Zionist narrative to the ignorant native, assuring listeners that that Arabs “*will benefit from our presence*”, is only part of the mission. Equally important, and eventually much more successful, is the task of

⁸⁸ Quoting Deborah Bird Rose’s “Reports from a Wild Country”, pp. 56–57, 60–62.

energising the Hebrew readers' assurance of the righteousness of the Zionist settler project, which some of them are bound to question. The story carries several messages supporting the core ideology of Labour Zionism:

- a) In line with traditional settler-colonialist anthropological logic (Wolfe, 1999: e.g.11): We are dealing here with total primitives (even their faces are "*black as tar*"), they have no idea of the world they live in ("*I teach him some Geography, [...] the discoveries of science, the marvels of technology*"), and all illiterate as "*The teacher and the Mukhtar are the only literate people in the village.*"⁸⁹
- b) Arabs, in their ignorance, are all too easy to absorb false messages of incitement against the Jews, for no good reason.
- c) Arab unreasonable hostility might prove dangerous, as manifested by the 1929 riots and massacre.
- d) In fact, Arabs have the most to gain from Jewish settlement. Readers would believe this as "*[...] the Zionist vision adopted the 'White Man's narrative' according to which developing civilisation and making the desert bloom is the thankless duty of the occupier to the natives*" (Bar-Yosef, 2004:451). Ahmad Sa'di recognised that "*The self-presentation of Israel as an agent of modernization vis-à-vis the Palestinians dates back to the first encounters between Zionism and the Palestinians at the end of the nineteenth century.*" (Sa'di, 1997:25)
- e) The simpleton native Arabs are unable to grasp this vision because "*bad things*" about the Zionists are told by inciters with an agenda.
- f) It should be quite easy – and it is important - to disprove evil anti-Jewish propaganda, and prove the true situation (Jews are good for Arabs). The narrator is doing just that: drawing *Hasbara* charts, teaching and fraternising.

⁸⁹ Illiteracy was indeed the common state of uneducated Arabic speakers at the time. "According to the 1931 government's census, 19 percent of Arabs over the age of 7 could read and write [...] in the villages, the rate of literacy increased from 11 percent in 1936 to 15 percent in 1936" (Vashitz, 1947:236).

- g) The Jewish pioneer enjoys an enormous educational advantage, commands a knowledge of the world and the universe while the Arab *fellah* cannot even write his name.
- h) In spite of the great gap in education and knowledge, the Jewish pioneer aims to be an equal partner and comrade to the Arab labourer (even one that has “*Negro blood in his veins*”). They work side by side, share food and wages in true socialist solidarity unaffected by the differences in “human capital”.
- i) The friendly comradeship must not be affected by the atmosphere of “*riots*” or “*charged air*”. This is in line with the idea that a “*settler society*” nurtures a “*fantasy where a perception of a constant struggle is juxtaposed against an ideal of ‘peace’ that can never be reached*” and therefore “*settler projects embrace and reject violence at the same time*” (Veracini, 2010:77⁹⁰).

10. A constant threat: Arabs as a life-threatening danger

Throughout the decade 1926-1935, and in line with the official Labour Zionist politics (see above) an effort was made to retain the impression that only “radical” or “incited” Arabs might become violent against the Zionists. As shown above, texts in *BaMaaleh* during the period under consideration are careful not to portray all Arabs as life-threatening enemies, as this was not (yet) the rule⁹¹. Still, it is taken for granted that in general Arabs are a menace, contrarians and dangerous to all Jews, and their political leaders are dangerous troublemakers. This is directly conveyed in quite a few articles, editorials, commentaries and literary works.

Following are some examples.

The traumatic events of 1929 (Cohen, 2015 [2013]) are a clear benchmark. The fifth brochure of *BaMaaleh* carries the date “Alef Elul TARPAT” (August 17, 1929) but must have been printed

⁹⁰ With reference to an article based on the Israeli situation: “Political Myth, or Foreign Policy and the Fantasy of Israel”, by Roland Boer in *Arena Journal*, 23, 2005, pp. 77–95.

⁹¹ In present-day Israel the very term “Arab” often generates the title “terrorist” or the designation of “a dangerous person”, not merely by ultra-right politicians and their followers but also in mainstream media. See for example: “[We own this astonishment: one must blow the myth about non-violent Arab society](#)” by Kalman Liebeskind, *Maariv*, 9.1.2016.

after the riots (August 15 to 25, 1929) as it features an emotional poem (unsigned but generally attributed to Avraham Broides) that has become the slogan of the Labouring Youth Movement until the present day (see introduction): **We are here for Labour, Defence and Peace**⁹².

Lamenting the riot's dead martyrs and pointing at the murderers whose knives "*still drip blood and marrow*", the poem calls for a policy of calmed determination: "*We will calm our scorching fury / We are here for labour, for defence and for peace.*" This constitutive text summarises the Labour Zionist movement motto: Arabs embody a life-threatening danger and commit horrible crimes, but "we", the settlers, are here to stay and calmly persevere in our national enterprise, in accordance with the notion that "[...] *settler collectives are [...] escaping from violence*" in their pursuit of "*a 'secure future'*" (Veracini, 2010:77).

Two years later, marking two years since the riots, an editorial on **BaMaaleh**'s front page repeats the 1929 motto in its title: **We are for Labour, Defence and Peace**⁹³. This double-edged message is repeated: One must expect Arab violence, remember past events and prepare for more; the settlers are and must be a non-violent, peace-loving group, but they must be equipped with lethal arms (actually "*embrace and reject violence at the same time*" [ibid]). The unsigned editorial (the poet Broides was at the time a member of the editorial board of **BaMaaleh**) elaborates:

The heart shouted for vindication and revenge, and our call was aimed internally, to the youth in the land: For Labour, Defence and Peace. [...] Two years have gone by. These two years were not calm. The victims' blood in Yagur⁹⁴ is screaming at us from the ground. We are terribly anxious about the young comrades⁹⁵ that have been missing for five weeks.

Following is a complaint about (presumably Arab) protest of the fact that the British government supplies arms to Jewish settlers:

⁹² Brochure 5, 1929 (marked August 17 but probably printed later)

⁹³ Issue 11, 1931, July 3, front page.

⁹⁴ In April 1931 a group of the Kibbutz members was attacked on its way back from a trip in the area. Three members were killed. The murder was attributed to the *Az-A-Din Al Qassam* group. (Source: [Kibbutz Yagur Website](#)).

⁹⁵ A young couple was murdered by Bedouins who committed a savage rape and were later captured and sentenced. *Davar*, November 16, 1931.

[...] false accusations, claiming that the Hebrew settlements endanger peace. Their excuse: arms in sealed crates were handed by the government to the Hebrew posts.

The essentialist, ethnic-focused vision is clearly recited. The memory of the bloody riots – that had indeed broken out as a nationalist-ethnic feud – is tied to criminal events and serves to justify the arming of settlers' civil militias, courtesy of the colonial government. Any complaints about this move must be considered “*false*”, and the editorial proceeds with righteous self-congratulation: “*Our Youth is disgusted with military drills. We would gladly smash any deadly tool that might inflict calamities on humans.*” As usual the settler society is “*primarily characterised by the absolute or relative lack of violence*” (ibid). The biblical allusion⁹⁶ is followed by a reminder of the basic concept of the settler's narrative, purported to be “*a position of living in the heart of a desert*”. This is an earlier version of the “*villa in the jungle*” concept (see below), the ultimate settler-colonialist image of the righteous newcomers surrounded by dire conditions, mainly primitive humans who dislike them unjustly, expressing the “*ongoing concerns with existential threats and a paranoid fear of ultimate decolonisation*” that seems to be “*a constituent feature of the settler colonial situation*” (ibid:81).

Apparently, it was sometimes unnecessary even to mention an Arab identity when evildoers were discussed. The editorial **We are shamed by the incident of the assault**⁹⁷ speaks merely about a “thug”, not mentioning his national identity:

A thug forces a Jewish driver off from his car [...] this same thug later encounters a car full of Jews [...] shoots the passengers, wounds two of them and manages to escape [...]

Yet a link to historical Jewish suffering is inserted automatically: The incident must be seen as “*a reminder of our predicament in the diaspora and our predicament in this land before the Second Aliya period and 'Ha'Shomer'*”. The mentioning of *Ha'Shomer* armed militia is not accidental. It is a reference to the efforts to continue building the armed Jewish forces as the settlers supposedly see themselves “*trampled-on by evildoers*” who represent the native

⁹⁶ To the much-quoted phrase “and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruninghooks”, Isaiah, 2:4.

⁹⁷ Issue 18, 1932, Sept. 30, front page.

population. The “*predicament in the diaspora*” is a reminder of a generation-old principle, often instrumentalised for indoctrination: Jews are persecuted by non-Jews on a regular basis and will forever be victimised unless armed and united⁹⁸.

A sample of the settler’s bitter disappointment upon encountering unfriendliness of natives is expressed in “Shmuel”’s impressions, discussing a group trip. In **Wadi Hawarith**⁹⁹ he is startled and worried:

Near Qalqilya a group of boys meets us, screaming. One of them, the biggest of the gang, throws dirt at our backs. I look at his face, and my heart shrinks with pain: when would this boy understand our spirit and the great blessing that our enterprise holds?

Shmuel’s heartache returns at the conclusion of the trip, clearly based on the “*White Man’s narrative*” of “*the thankless duty of the occupier to the natives*” (Bar-Yosef, 2004:451):

[...] how ignorant, how malicious is the fabrication, that we bring with us dispossession and economic ruin. Here lies the wasteland in front of our very eyes. What was and what will be here without our Aliya and our settlement?

On the same page, the expert commentator on Arab affairs signing M.A. (Michael Assaf) offers his analysis of Arab displeasure. In **Why are the Arabs agitated**¹⁰⁰ he points at Arab political activists’ failure to organise against the Mandate government, following the shelving of the Passfield White paper¹⁰¹ that was rejected by the Zionist leadership. M.A. sums-up unsuccessful Arab attempts to raise money for a national “Arab Fund” dedicated to land purchases (he sees it as an attempt to mirror the powerful JNF), concluding: the Arabs now opt for “*negative steps*” and wish to create “*political commotion*”. Six months later M.A. returns with **The Arab Agitation**¹⁰², following demonstrations and strikes against the British government due to its support of Zionism. He brings up the memory of the 1929 riots and is pleased to announce that these events actually harmed the Arab cause, turning public opinion – and even government policy – against them, while the Zionist enterprise prospered:

⁹⁸ See for ex. Zertal, 2005 (2002).

⁹⁹ Issue 5, 1933, March 9, page 5.

¹⁰⁰ Issue 5, 1933, March 9, page 5.

¹⁰¹ M00481_BritishWhitePaper1930English.pdf

¹⁰² Issue 22, 1933, November 24, page 3.

[...] A stain of a savage slaughter that has not been whipped. The political outcome, too, that originally was in favour of the Arabs (in the form of Passfield's "White Paper") did not materialise [...]
After the recession of 1930, the Zionist enterprise enjoyed years of prosperity. As of 1931 the Jewish Yishuv in the land is much stronger now than it was before the riots of 1929 [...] The attitude of England [...] has improved.

M.A. reflects the then-party-line that sees "radical Arabs" as the problem. Blaming the recently established "*Istiklal*" (independence) party for desiring "*a fully Arab government, with no foreigners' interference*" – an outrageous idea from a Zionist point of view – he goes on to blame the Arab press for presenting the news of Nazi persecution of Jews as exaggerated; and for planting anxieties of imminent expulsion of the native Arabs (that would turn out to be fully justified):

The newspapers, with various measures, planted anxieties in the hearts of the Arabs, that the land is about to be Judaized and that they would all be expelled, God forbid.

The British government was blamed for "***appeasing the Arabs at the Jews' expense***" [original emphasis], and described as preparing "*a spectacle of self-flagellation, in the form of an investigative committee that should discover who is responsible for the bloodshed [of 1929].*" All in all, M.A. writes irately, "*The politics of appeasing the Arabs at the expense of the Jews merely reinforces the agitation and teaches the Arabs that this is the way to proceed.*"

Prior to the mid-1930s, M.A. showed an interest in regional Arab politics. He reported expectations that the Arab leadership might try and enlist Italian support against the British rule. This, he reported hopefully, would improve the Zionist stand with the government. M.A.'s commentary concerning this issue was titled **The Italian-Ethiopia Conflict and the Arabs**¹⁰³. A few months later he returned triumphantly to what seemed to be a confirmation of this idea in **The "Bomb" against the Mufti**¹⁰⁴, discussing a leaked "*letter from the Emir to the Mufti with plans to join an Arab alliance with Italy against France, England, and Emir Abdalla*".

¹⁰³ Issue 2, 1934, Nov. 9, page 2

¹⁰⁴ Issue 9, 1935, May 16, page 2

Another commentator, M. Nissani, further discussed the matter in two instalments of **Italy, the Arabs and England**¹⁰⁵, and concluded that “*Italian propaganda in the orient was not successful. [...] But Italy is not giving up on the orient and is bound to keep on trying to take advantage over each new situation.*” In other words: There is still hope to portray the Arabs as enemies of the British government, plotters and war-mongers.

The image of “the Arabs” as a menace is often used in texts of **BaMaaleh** during squabbles with political opponents. The editorial **The Road for Life**¹⁰⁶, dedicated to the 7th anniversary of the Nana Group (later Kibbutz Na’an) points angrily at the wrong paths that might lure unsuspecting youth. Left and right are pointed at in a single phrase, both likely to incur Arab hostility:

Many are the paths beckoning and calling the youth with much charm. Political right and left mix. Blowing a shofar near the Western Wall, a miserable demonstration at the university, sanctifying the murder, waving a flag, distributing leaflets, incitement of Arabs – these are the paths beckoning and calling Jewish youth who makes it here to the one and only island, its last haven.

While “*distributing leaflets*” and “*incitement of Arabs*” are recognised as malicious actions from the left, “*blowing a shofar*”, demonstration at the university and “*sanctifying the murder*” are references to the right-wing Revisionists (the “sanctified” murder refers to the shooting of Labour leader Chaim Arlosoroff¹⁰⁷). All in all, it is taken for granted that “Arabs” are a dangerous element that must not be triggered into action by activities unauthorised by Labour leadership: openly insisting on Jewish supremacy (the political right), or pushing for Jewish-Arab equality (the political left). The boundaries of the legitimate ideology must match the Labour Movement’s politics (described as moderate and socialist in other texts).

To our defamers¹⁰⁸ is another poignant attack on all Jewish opponents of the Labour Movement. The writer “Shmuel” points his arrows at the opposition from right and from left.

¹⁰⁵ Issue 22, 1935, Nov. 15, page 2

¹⁰⁶ Issue 19, 1933, Oct. 4, front page

¹⁰⁷ See chapter 6

¹⁰⁸ Issue 15, 1932, August 5, page 3

Ha'Or, the communist publication identified with the Communist Youth Movement (the writer derisively calls them “*Comsomoly*” youth, in quotation marks) is reproached:

[...] they encourage the Arab opposition to Jewish Aliya – so why should an Arab labourer want to work together with the looter of his bread and his land?

Shmuel implies that without Jewish encouragement, Arabs are unlikely to oppose immigration of people who intend to replace them in their workplaces. He is also appalled to discover that “[...] “*Ha'or*” men fight against the conquest of Labour”, as if the whole point of “*the conquest of Labour*” is not to avoid the very idea of Arabs who “*work together*” with Jews.

The long story **A Gleam of Light**¹⁰⁹ by Eliezer Smoli offers perhaps the nearest perfect “image of Arabs” as projected by **BaMaaleh** to its young readers during the period discussed here. Published two years after the riots of 1929 which culminated in the Hebron (*Khalil*) Massacre (Cohen, 2015 [2013]), this story by a canonised writer (a full translation is included in the appendix to this work) covers every one of the points made above concerning the “image of Arabs” as conveyed to members of the Labour Zionist movement: primitive and innocent natives; easy prey for Arab middle-class, educated inciters; their unreasonable hostility to all Jews, thus provoked, rapidly translating into violent-criminal behaviour; the chief rioters as marginal criminals of Arab society – “*thieves and murderers and hoodlums*”; a “good Arab” caught in the middle is likely to come to a tragic end.

The story’s protagonist is a Jewish “*artist stone-chiseller*” immigrant who gets a job working with Arab stone cutters. He is supposed to be a better artisan than any of them, which is surprising as his training was “*only in the learning of the Tora*” while stone-chiselling is an Arab tradition. The narrator asserts that this Jew was “*not Yemenite nor a native of the land but a Halutz [pioneer] from Russia*”, still in the fictional universe of the story “*decorating and chiselling, which require delicate and precise handling*”, may only be performed by “*a Hebrew expert*” (of pure *Ashkenazi*/European descent, see also next chapter).

¹⁰⁹ Issue 11, 1931, July 31, pages 6-7

The quarry is in an Arab village and the protagonist Avraham gains popularity among the locals and learns their language immediately. They call him Ibrahim, and one of them, the kind Mustafa, offers him lodging in his home during the week (on weekends Avraham has to keep the Sabbath in a Jewish environment¹¹⁰). One day a sudden change in the mood of the villagers occurs. They were told that the Jews have evil intentions, and believe every word because it was related by “*learned*’ people: lawyers, clerks and the children of *effendis*, they are smart!” (Original emphasis). Violent riots break out all around, urged by urban “*Arabs in fancy European attire*”, and “*emissaries of the Jerusalem Mufti*”. The Jewish stone cutter is trapped in the Arab village. His Arab host Mustafa protects him against the hatred of incited villagers; some honest co-workers help, but as the village thief, who had been killed by British soldiers while plundering, is declared a martyr, the whole village (especially children) turns against all Jews; the good Mustafa escorts Avraham to the safety of a Jewish Jerusalem neighbourhood but is killed by British soldiers who mistake him for a rioter.

The introduction and the title present the story as a “Gleam of Light” – hope for peaceful and friendly co-existence of Jews and Arabs, based on the heroic self-sacrifice of the *Good Arab*¹¹¹ Ibrahim. His death, however, casts doubt on this hope, together with the vivid portrayals of plundering women, violent men, blood-thirsty children and scheming inciters. There is no question of Jewish violence or provocation: Mustafa’s death and the earlier killing of the thief-turned-martyr are caused by the armed forces of occupying Britain. This story by a well-loved author holds all the elements of the Israeli myth of the Jewish enterprise as a “*Villa in the Jungle*” – a phrase coined by Labour ex-prime minister (formerly military chief-of-staff) Ehud Barak, who was born 11 years after this mind-constitutive text was published¹¹².

¹¹⁰ This is yet another assertion of the importance of religious traditions for this segment of the population, labour Zionists who are normally portrayed as secular.

¹¹¹ The concept of “Good Arabs” was discussed in Hillel Cohen’s book that deals with a later period: “Good Arabs: The Israeli Security Agencies and the Israeli Arabs, 1948- 1967”, translated by Haim Watzeman, University of California Press, 2010 (2007).

¹¹² Ehud Barak was born in 1942. See also in chapter 1.

Conclusions from chapter 7

Portrayals of ignorance, illiteracy and primitiveness are common images of natives as projected by writers and researchers of colonialist or settler-colonialist societies throughout the world and well into the 20th century (Wolfe, 1999), displaying a variety of savage stereotypes (ibid:67). Such images, as shown above, filled the pages of **BaMaaleh**, the *Histadrut's* periodical for the Labouring Youth, in the years 1926 to 1935. The relatively few representations of Arabs who are not primitive, poor or illiterate, who have some degree of education, social position or economic standing are displayed as cunning, dishonest and hostile, as well as very badly dressed. The single exception of members of the Arab middle-class who are not pejoratively portrayed are of those offering flattering praise to the Zionist enterprise.

The general message to the young reader is clear: the *autochthone* population of Palestine is of human quality far below that of the settling population, mainly immigrants from the Jewish centres of Eastern Europe. Attempts to work with them as equals (as labourers, shepherds or stonecutters) are bound to fail as there is an inherent *"instability between us and them"* (Wolfe, 1999:45; 47). The enormously different *"habitus"* (Bourdieu, 2020 [1981-1983]:21) means that *"us and them"* are divided *"into discrete and homogeneous domains"* (Wolfe, 1999:169). The logic that when cultures are very different from one another, they *"tend to think of each other as barbarian noncultures living on the edge of the world, outside of civilization proper"* (Fuchs, 2001:84), supports the settler colonialist observation of native culture as different and inferior. Ideologically it helps to justify dispossession of the natives (Wolfe,2006:389). Zionism – as Ahmad Sa'di pointed out – constantly presented itself in the role of the *"modernizing agent"* and **Ba'Maaleh** offers a perfect display of settlers portraying themselves *"as bearers of higher culture, and civilized values. [...] endowed with a moral right and even with an obligation to spread civilization among the natives"* (Sa'di, 1997:28).

For Labour Zionism, the display of Arab culture as inferior and of Arabs as either primitive savages or vicious copy-cats *"in fancy European attire"* was a prime instrument in the struggle for the "Conquest of Labour". Claims of ethnic differentiation causing the ethnic conflict were used as tools to actively discourage Jewish employers *"from employing non-Jewish labour, even though Arabs worked for lower wages and, in many cases, more efficiently"* (Wolfe, 2006:390).

Added to the basic commands of the Jewish religion of staying clear of all gentiles which became a cultural norm for most Zionists (Shahak, 1994: 2, see also chapter 6), images of Arabs as savage, dangerous aliens were highly supportive of the ideology of **Hebrew Labour**” and ethnic purity.

Chapter 8

The “Natural Labourer” for Hebrew Labour: Yemenites and other *Mizrahim*¹

Zionism as a political strategy as well as an ideology is a product of central and eastern European Judaism. Labour Zionism is also a product of Jewish communities in Europe, in particular the “Pale of Settlement” area in the eastern regions of Europe where the ideologies of socialism and communism became attractive for a whole generation of disenfranchised young people. The introduction – urged by Zionist leaders and activists – of Jews from Arab countries into this Eastern-European settlement project created a paradoxical situation. The settlers, trained and conditioned to regard the Arab inhabitants of Palestine as inferior natives that needed to be excluded or removed, people whose “*labour remains a secondary consideration*” (Veracini, 2019:124), found themselves forced to accept into their midst Arab Jews – of Yemenite and other origins – who were allowed into the settlers’ community due to its strict definition as “Jewish”. Their ability to be labourers was of prime consideration. The “*Arabness of Arab-Jewish immigrants*” (Lentin, 2018:82) had made them undesirable to the hegemonic settlers’ mainstream. The mixed feelings produced an ambivalence that hounded the Eastern European Settlers’ community and their leaders, exposing a serious crack in the Zionist narrative. As co-religionists-turned Zionists, Arab Jews automatically had to be considered part of the collective “us”, part of the (fervently imagined) Jewish nation; simultaneously, they were part of the despised and often feared “others”, the native Arabs (see chapter 7), with whom they shared a language, cultural habits, skin complexion and food preferences. In the words of Historian Hillel Cohen “*The mainstream Zionist conception may be summarised so: Confronting the gentiles we are (mostly) one people; internally, European Jews are superior to Jews from Muslim lands*” (Cohen, 2022:40).

Faced with the scarcity of Eastern European immigrants willing and able to practice **Hebrew Labour** and “*conquest of labour*” in competition with the better qualified native Arab

¹ *Mizrahim*, literally “Easterners” or Orientals, is the Hebrew-Israeli term for Jews from Arab countries and their descendants. It includes people of Moroccan origin and other North African lands known as “Westerners” (*Maghrabi*) in Arabic.

labourers², Zionist leaders came up with the idea of recruiting and employing Jews from Arab countries, thus preserving the exclusive national-religious nature of the new settlements. Small groups of Jews from Yemen and from the poor Jewish quarters of Palestine already joined the workforce of the early Jewish colonies in Palestine, prepared to take on hard labour in return for low wages. The economic potential of the Zionist settlers' enterprise was attractive for most residents of the Arab regions. Capital resources and superior technology offered a potential standard of living above the standard typical at that time in Palestine and other Arab lands. Living in *"a country whose technological development had been cut short in the Middle Ages"* (Klein-Franke, 2019:151), Yemenite Jews (and other Arab Jews) were willing *"to improve their social-economic position"* (Druyan, 1982:15), following news about the amelioration in the economic predicament of the Jews who were already settled in Palestine.

Describing the period of Zionist settlement in the years 1881-1914, Nitza Druyan writes with some irony: *"An idea for the solution of the Hebrew Labour Problem in the land was suggested: the Yemen-originated Jews will do the conquering! In the eyes of a considerable part of the Yishuv the immigrants from Yemen seemed the best 'natural labourers', as they came from a backward country, but had a tradition of labour [...] they are 'content with little' by the very experience of their lives in their homeland"* (ibid: 134). As an added bonus *"their women will be able to work as housemaids, and even their children will join the workforce, at least during harvest seasons. Apparently, a convenient solution was found to the problem of Hebrew Labour"* (ibid: 136).

In 1911 the Zionist bureau in Palestine, headed by Arthur Ruppin, dispatched an emissary, Shmuel Yavne'eli, to Yemen. His mission was to recruit Yemenite Jews to join the Zionist project as labourers (it was a clandestine mission as far as the Yemenite authorities were concerned: Yavne'eli was disguised as a Rabbi coming to take advice on religious matters). (Yavne'eli, 1938:239). Ronit Lentin (Lentin, 2018), who analyses Zionism as a mainly racist ideology, points out that Ruppin *"only reluctantly authorized the importation of Jewish laborers*

² See also Dan Miron's ["Yosef Haim Brenner's charade as a farm hand could not continue more than one or two weeks"](#). Haaretz April 5, 2023 [Heb]

from Yemen” (ibid:93), as he considered them racially inferior to the Jews of Eastern and Central Europe³.

“Approximately 2,000 Jews arrived in Palestine from Yemen as a result of his [Yavne’eli’s] mission”, historian Aviva Halamish writes (Halamish, 2006 [b]:66). Altogether in the last two decades of Ottoman rule “approximately 5,000 people arrived from Yemen to Palestine” (ibid:59). Another 7000 arrived in the years 1932 -1938 (ibid:62). During the years of the British Mandate rule, 15,837 immigrants from Yemen and Aden arrived in Palestine, according to the sources quoted by Halamish (ibid:59⁴). “Yemeni Jews were viewed as ‘natural workers’” (Halamish, 2006[b]:65), and “The farmers’ association was therefore ready to pay their travel expenses and take responsibility for their livelihood during their first year in Palestine, as required by the Mandate rules” (ibid:66).

Many of the men, women and youngsters who arrived in Palestine as Jewish immigrants from Yemen quickly adapted to life as labourers, farm hands, home-help and errand boys. Some experienced their immigration as traumatic. A contemporary observer complained that “the life of the immigrants from Yemen in Eretz Israel are worse than they were in Yemen” (Klein-Franke, 2019:172). Jews in Arab lands, just like their co-religionists in Europe, were products of Jewish culture with its insistence on literacy and education (for men). Most of them were members of the middle and lower-middle classes in their countries of origin, making a living in commerce or artisan professions, and were not usually employed as farm hands, manual labourers, porters or servants. The Zionist emissary Yavne’eli reported that most Jews he encountered in his journeys in Yemen were “Small peddlers, artisans” (Yavne’eli, 1938:246); “most of them are tailors, goldsmiths” (ibid:249). Often, they employed local Arabs as farm

³ Lentin’s references are to Etan Bloom’s article “What ‘the father’ had in mind? Arthur Ruppin (1876–1943), cultural identity, Weltanschauung and action,” *Journal of History of European Ideas*, 33(3): 330–349.; also to Tom Segev’s article “[The makings of history revisiting Arthur Ruppin](#),” in *Haaretz* (Oct.9, 2009) , which is a review of Etan Boom’s doctoral thesis. See also Bloom, 2011.

⁴ Based on: Moshe Sikron, *Immigration to Israel from 1948 to 1953: Statistical Supplement* (Jerusalem, 1957) 6, Table A8 [Hebrew].

labourers (ibid:243). Apparently, Yemenites did not share the view that becoming manual labourers was superior to the more comfortable position in urban professions (see below in quotes from **BaMaaleh**).

Yemenite poverty was conceived by the mainstream settler population as a basic and “natural” phenomenon, in the same way that Yemenites were considered “*natural labourers*”. There is no evidence that anyone in the Zionist hegemony of those years was prepared to accept the view of the contemporary German traveller and researcher Carl Rathjens who observed that Yemenite immigrants suffered discrimination and maltreatment in Palestine. Rathjens complained, in a letter that was sent to the Zionist leader Otto Warburg in Germany in 1931, of “*failed treatment*” of Yemenite immigrants to Palestine and of “*dispossession and the disregard of their rights*”. In his view “*they were not given equal rights*” and were “*treated like second class citizens*” (Klein-Franke 2019:172). The letter⁵ was promptly ignored, but it offers a glimpse into the reality of this community of “*natural labourers*”.

Some Yemenite activists must have considered the allocation of Zionist funds discriminatory at the time. Few were prepared to openly voice protest. Israel Yeshayahu, himself Yemenite born, who successfully attached himself to the powerful MAPAI, prudently quoted a comment by the prominent *Ashkenazi* Yosef Schprinzak⁶ to describe the Yemenites who “*in the very days that they are asking for ‘homes and some land’ the high echelons are discussing more ‘installations’ in addition to the new lands recently added to Rishon [Lezion]’* ---“(Yeshayahu, 1938:39, see also in the introduction). In other words, while “*agricultural settlements established by penniless, highly motivated, socialist settlers*” were created by the Zionist establishment (Reichman & Hasson, 1984:57⁷), and while grants were budgeted to start and maintain Jewish-only

⁵ Apparently, Rathjens also met with some prominent Zionist figures in Palestine, including Yitzhak Ben Zvi, Ben Zion Di-Nur (Dinburg) and Yehuda Leib Magnes and pointed out to them that Yemenites were badly treated (Klein-Franke, 2019:162).

⁶ Yosef Schprinzak (1884-1959) was born in Moscow, his family later left for Warsaw. He became a writer and Zionist activist, became the secretary of *HaPoel HaTzair* party and immigrated to Palestine in 1908. One of his first assignments was the organising of the *Olim* from Yemen. He became a prominent member of MAPAI and the first Chairman of the Knesset (Source: [the Knesset website](#)) Schprinzak’s book “With the Yemenites” (1938) is available in the National Library.

⁷ According to the writers, this was the Zionist version of a settlement model copied from East Prussia.

settlements⁸, Yemenite immigrants were not entitled to similar considerations and could not expect much free land or financial grants⁹.

Next to institutional discrimination, Yemenites and other *Mizrahim* were also subject to popular abuse based on racist tendencies, which Ronit Lentin, following Patrick Wolfe, sums up as “*a set of local practices of imposing classificatory grids on colonized populations*” (Lentin, 2018:103).

Lentin emphasises that “*racial categorical segregation*” does not stop “*between Jews and non-Jews, but also [exists] between Ashkenazi (European) Jews, Mizrahi (Arab and ‘oriental’) Jews*” (ibid: 12).

For Labour Zionists, Jews from Arab countries presented several challenges. As poor labourers – true Jewish proletarians – they deserved empathy and solidarity, based on socialist-national ideology. Their presumed efficient and cheap labour capabilities had to be embraced as the ideal solution to the **Hebrew Labour** dilemma. However, they also presented a political risk. Once part of the settler community, they were suspected of favouring the opponents of the Labour movement, either the Revisionists or religious political bodies like *Mizrahi*¹⁰. Yemenites rarely joined labour unions, which apparently increased their attraction for farmers in need of employees: “*they were not affiliated with the General Federation of Jewish Labor [the Histadrut], which means they were unorganized workers and could be paid less than unionized Jewish workers*” (Halamish, 2006 [b]:66).

The real and presumed disadvantages of Yemenite Jews and other Mizrahim: Meagre wages; limited traditional education; large families based on traditional patriarchy; and rampant illiteracy among women and girls – coupled with socialist and national empathy and solidarity - gave rise to a strong institutional and individual call for a “civilised mission” to be carried out by benevolent, progressive colonialists like Labour Zionists. It seems that the notions of “*the white*

⁸ *BaMa'ah's* third brochure carried a detailed account of the funds needed for a new **Farm for the Labouring Youth** (signed A.M. Koller, 1928, pages 20 -24; tables not included in the translated appendix). 100 Dunams were asked for 50 youngsters and 4155 pounds were expected to be allocated for starting the farm.

⁹ The 1991 documentary film [Low-Top Palm \[Dekel shfal-Tzameret\] \(available on Vimeo\)](#) by Ayelet Heller follows a single Yemenite settlement that lasted a few years until evacuated due to the demands of members of the nearby Kibbutz Kinneret.

¹⁰ *Mizrahi* was originally the name of the religious-Zionist association, identified with Eastern European (*Ashkenazi*) members. Only later did *Mizrahim* become an adjective describing Jews from the Arab/Muslim regions (Cohen, 2022:12).

man's burden" (Wolfe, 1999:49) were easily adopted by socialist settlers. Hillel Cohen offers a direct perspective. For members of movements like *"HaPoel HaTzair"* [the young labourer], he writes, Jews from the Arab lands were regarded as *"ignorant and non-entities"*, and *"any Sephardic Jew who did not join the socialist ranks was considered 'Arab' and inferior"* (Cohen, 2020:70). The expectations that a successful "civilising act" would secure the loyalty of the "civilised" to the political "civilising body" seems to have been fulfilled at least as several prominent Yemenite activists and intellectuals became ardent advocates of Labour Zionism (see below).

As a major mouthpiece of the Labour Zionist movement, **BaMaaleh** had to navigate carefully in the complicated political field of Jewish labouring persons. Yemenites and other *Mizrahim* were vital for maintaining the concept of **Hebrew Labour**, but were not often keen on the socialist agenda. The periodical dedicated many reports, stories and opinion pieces to *Mizrahim* and to Yemenite Jews. The "modernising mission" is dominant: Texts offer a humanist observation, focused on sufferings and misery due to issues of poverty, abuse, ignorance and patriarchal tyranny. It is a compassionate observation, subtly alluding to the misery as associated with the Arab-oriental origin of the poor sufferers. The "civilising mission" included a recurrent promise of an ameliorated life for poor young *Mizrahim* upon joining the *Histadrut*-affiliated Labouring Youth clubs and evening classes.

As with the general Arab population, there is no mention of well-to do *Mizrahi* families in the pages of **BaMaaleh** in the period surveyed here¹¹. This is in line with the general tendency of Zionist publications to categorise *"non-European Jews as backward and primitive"* (Svirsky & Ben Arie, 2018:11). As Marcelo Svirsky and Ronen Ben Arie noted, it seemed necessary for settler-colonial Zionist society to ensure the success of the settler project and the *"dispossession and displacement of the Arabs"*, and this had to be complemented by *"destruction of the social and cultural infrastructure that made Arab-Jewish life an identity and*

¹¹ Upper and middle-class *Mizrahim* or *Mizrahi* intellectuals like Nissim Malul, Shimon Moyal (Svirsky & Ben Arie, 2018:80;82) or the Chelouche family (Chelouche, 2005[1931]) were not noticed by **BaMaaleh** during the decade between 1926 and 1935.

a historical reality” (ibid:10). This had to be accomplished, however, while at the same time ensuring the further cooperation of the “*natural Labourers*”, vital to the vision of ethnically pure **Hebrew Labour**.

Following is a review of the many texts dedicated to or mentioning *Mizrahi* and Yemenite Jews published in *Ba’Maaleh* during the period under consideration, according to the main perspectives they offer:

- A. Emphasis on the “otherness” of Jews from Arab background while stressing their desirability as political partners**
- B. The civilising mission**
 - a. As hope or promise for improving dire conditions**
 - b. As a cure for delinquent “otherness”**
 - c. For children in home service**
- C. Manual labour as a problem (rather than ideal) for Yemenites and *Mizrahim***
- D. Arab Jews in the internal Zionist political competition**
- E. Some voices of dissent, criticism of discrimination**
- F. The “civilised”: Yemenite activists of Labour Zionism offering their perspectives “from within”**

* * *

A. Emphasis on the “otherness” of Jews from Arab Background while stressing their desirability as political partners

“Otherness” in the case of Jews from Arabic background is mainly “Arab-ness” as opposed to “white European-ness” with which settler-immigrants from Eastern Europe identified¹². Perfect similarity between Arab Jews, natives of Palestine, and other members of Arab communities in

¹² “*Ashkenazi-European Jewish people, conceived by Europeans as other than white, ‘became white’ in the United States in relation to blacks [...] In Palestine [...] European Jewish colonists consolidated their whiteness in relation to Palestinians but also to non-European Jews*” (Lentin, 2018:87)

the land is favourably detailed in **Peki'in**¹³ signed by Y. Ben Zvi¹⁴. The writer is positively impressed:

The most unique Jewish community nests in Peki'in, a community of Jewish fellahin [farmers], no different in their customs of life and work, attire and food, philosophy and logic, from the thousands of Muslims, Druze and Christians in the same area, with the only difference being their Jewishness.

The Labour Zionist leader saw the Jews of Peki'in as part of the national project and even of the Labour movement, indicating a wish to include them in the Labour Zionist grouping as they “*know the Histadrut, and they hope for the expansion of the Jewish Yishuv in their area.*”

The effort to reach out to Yemenite youth also seemed a worthy – if challenging - task to poet-editor Avraham Broides. In **For the Assessment of our Cultural Mission**¹⁵ (see also chapter 1) Broides's initial outline for the vision of the Labouring Youth movement and its new publication **BaMaaleh** included the concern for incorporating Yemenites in “*our ranks*” while acknowledging their “*otherness*” as they cannot be considered part of the hegemonic group which is made up of “*the hundreds of comrades from Europe*”. They are, he paternalistically describes, at a “*lower level of development*” - a common orientalist expression in the days before orientalism was recognised as a problem of the observer rather than of the observed. His main worry is the Yemenites' political affiliation (see also section D below), and his suggestion to attract them “*with games, easy talks supported by stories etc.*” makes his paternalistic-down-looking attitude even clearer:

[...] how to include the working Yemenite youth. Some attempts have been made but almost to no avail. Yemenite youth who are at a lower level of development cannot find their environment among the hundreds of comrades from Europe. I believe they need to be organized first in designated groups into which lively and interesting special content should be introduced, with games, easy talks supported by stories etc., and slowly bring them closer and make them enter our ranks.

¹³ Issue 11, 1932, June 3, page 3

¹⁴ Yitzhak Ben Zvi (Shimshelvitzi), (1884 – 1963), one of the most prominent leaders of Labour Zionism, became the second president of the State of Israel (1952 -1963). He was born in the Ukraine, immigrated to Palestine in 1907 and was famously interested in the history of Jewish communities in different parts of the world. In the 1920's he joined David Ben Gurion in authoring a book about *Eretz Israel* and its history (sources: The Knesset Website; Segev, 2018, pp 134-135)

¹⁵ Brochure 1, 1926, pages 10-13

Other implications of the “otherness” of Jews of Arab background seem to worry a “*woman comrade*” who anonymously signed **Segments from a diary**¹⁶ in one of the early brochures of **BaMaaleh**. This “*comrade*” records her experience of meeting a Yemenite member of the Labouring Youth in a summer camp:

[...] I sat down to talk to one of the comrades who is Yemenite. I gazed at his tanned face, his charred eyes, and reflected: the problem of the [ethnic] communities is not to be solved by the grown-ups but by the youth, and in the group. [...] Our regular mode of operation does not suit the Yemenite or Sephardi comrade, because there is a rift between our environment and the living environment of the Yemenite comrade.

On a more upbeat tone she feels that among the Labouring Youth, an obvious civilising framework, the “*rift*” may be overcome: “*We are all members of one family and the Sephardi and the Yemenite members live the life of the Group, share its concerns*”.

Youth camps, while offering an opportunity for mixing ethnic groups, were also locations for emphasising cultural differences, generating patronising observations on the very few Mizrahi members. In **A Day in the Camp of the Labouring Scouts**¹⁷ signed “Moshe” the “otherness” of a new member attracts attention:

A. who is everyone's favourite is missing at the table. This is the new scout who lives in Neve Shalom, who discovered here in the camp for the first time ever that one must brush one's teeth too. He is not at the table and when found in one of the tents it transpired that he prefers to eat with the cooks, they eat “like human beings”, he says. So, what was the solution? He was made to be a cook and he eats with them.

The allusion to hygienic habits (“*one must brush one's teeth*”) is a subtle reminder that the “others” are not as clean as the well-educated hegemonic group-members (see discussion on “cleanliness” and dirt descriptions in chapter 7). The report about A.’s eating habits frames the popular comrade where he belongs: as he “*prefers to eat with the cooks*” the solution is: “*He was made to be a cook and he eats with them.*” There is no explanation as to who those cooks are, except that they have the same eating habits as the one who was not used to brushing his

¹⁶ Brochure 4, of He Ayar Tarpah, April 25, 1928, page 16.

¹⁷ Issue 4, 1931, April 17, page 4. “**The Labouring Scouts**” was the official name of the *Histadrut*’s youth movement, but later that year **BaMaaleh** reported that this title was declared unsuitable by one of the prominent leaders of the Labour Movement, Yitzhak Tabenkin (see Tabenkin’s **On the question of the Labour Youth**, issue 16, 1931, Oct. 9, page 3).

teeth. It seems safe to assume that the Labouring Scouts (early version of the Labouring Youth) employed local Arabs in the kitchen, and the likable A. had more in common with them than with his camp comrades.

The next paragraph in this entry includes another revealing concept: A Yemenite comrade and a red-haired Russian one sing and dance, each in their very different style – “*belly dancing*” versus “*Kosachok*”. Each tries to attract the rest of the group and the narrator savvily concludes: “*And so the battle between east and west continues*”. Geography has nothing to do with orientalist perspectives, as Yemen is not at all to the “east” of Russia, and Russia is not in the “west”.

An early depiction of a non-*Ashkenazi* image in **BaMaaleh** is in the 1927 diary-style story **Naim’s Beaming Smile (impressions from the evening classes)**¹⁸. The narrator – the story is signed “Eliezer”, recognizable perhaps as the young Eliezer Smoli – is a teacher in evening classes, and Naim is his pupil, a working child who lives in an Arab-Jewish slum. The boy Naim – we learn this from a dialogue reported by the teacher – is a labourer who works hard, many hours a day. The empathy expressed for the poor boy and his ordeals reflects a typical hegemonic discourse about subalterns. The boy addresses the young socialist teacher intellectual as “*Sir*” [Adon] which seems to be the expected attribute. His Hebrew language is recorded as sub-standard, with gross grammatical errors (*We not to own clocks, Sir*). It should be noted that Hebrew was not the native language of the settlers’ immigrant community. Prominent leaders as well as rank-and-file often communicated in Yiddish or in broken, mixed Hebrew. It is therefore noticeable that faulty grammar is reported as typifying this young *Mizrahi* boy’s speech, whereas when quoting members of the hegemonic ethnic group (throughout the period under consideration, in this perfectly Hebrew-edited publication) all their utterances are reported as wholly standardised.

As Naim fails to turn up in class, the teacher – true to his civilising mission – embarks on a home visit and reports his dismal impressions of the poor people’s dwelling environment:

¹⁸ Brochure no. 2, 1927, page 25

A dirty courtyard. Common rue plants in old tins, and upside-down eggshells over sticks in the ground. An old door decorated with blurred drawings of “hamsas”¹⁹ – against the evil eye. This is the abode of the Mizrahi family.

The emphasis on “dirt” in the home environment adds the final touch to the subaltern framing:

“This is the abode of the Mizrahi family.” (See discussion on dirt descriptions in chapter 7).

Several years later Eliezer Smoli (signing his full name) offered another observation based on his experience as a schoolmaster. **The Days of Our Liberation**²⁰ is a folkloristic depiction of religious holiday teaching in a school. It features a Janitor-turned-religious-instructor during the school holidays. On regular schooldays his chores include *“cleaning the floors and the courtyard, boiling tea or coffee [...]”*. During the holidays *“Yosef is elevated to a higher class”* and is allowed to teach traditional texts to the children of Yemenite labourers. The description of this metamorphosis from labourer to teacher is both mocking and patronising, using an animalistic-metaphoric (rather contrived) pun: *“On these days Yosef Nachash changes, as if he shed his skin and replaced it”* (the janitor’s last name *Nachash* means a snake in Hebrew).

To the Land of the Forefathers²¹ is an exceptionally long story (two instalments, full translation included in the appendix) signed N. Tamir. It is a fictional tale about the successful civilising of a Yemenite youth by *Ashkenazi* pioneers. The youth eventually becomes an accomplished Zionist emissary, rescuing other Yemenite children from cruel life in the diaspora.

The tale begins in Yemen, with the brutal murder of a Jewish peddler by a fanatic Jew-hating Muslim Arab, a mirror-image of an antisemitic Ukraine hooligan. His orphaned son Yaakov – already motherless – had to be hidden as the Yemenite law decreed that all Jewish orphans must convert to Islam²². Yaakov eventually joins a group travelling to Eretz Israel. The arrival of the group to the holy land is described as a deeply religious act, in line with the tendency of *“foregrounding the naïve religiosity”* of Arab Jews (Shohat, 2017:44). The story also describes them as penniless and homeless: *“Poverty-stricken and destitute the Yemenites came. They had no shelter. They spent their nights in tents, in shacks and in cellars.”* Interestingly, as the story

¹⁹ Hamsa is a typical Arabic symbol: an open hand with five pronounced fingers, used for home blessing.

²⁰ Issue 7, 1934, March 30, page 5

²¹ First part: Issue 7, 1932, March 31, pages 6-7; second part: Issue 8, 1932, April 15, page 6

²² This is based on a historical fact: Such a decree did exist in Yemen. Historian Bat Zion Eraki-Klorman explains that the idea behind the decree was the will of the state to take care of neglected minors. The decree was fiercely resisted by the Jewish community (Eraqi Klorman, 2003: 27)

progresses a different portrayal of Yemenite Jews in their land of origin contradicts their image as “*poverty stricken*” (see below). Luckily for the boy Yaakov he is saved from Yemenite destitution by some “*Labourers from the Galilee*” who decide to bring him to be educated in a Kibbutz²³. Following Yaakov’s successful development into a member of the Kibbutz community – he learns from the Bedouin how to become a good shepherd - he takes on a Zionist mission back in Yemen: “*to tell the Yemenites about Eretz Israel and to lecture them.*”

Yaakov’s narrated arrival causes great excitement in the Jewish-Yemenite village:

“The Yemenite village was engulfed with bliss. Goldsmiths brought silver and gold gifts to Yaakov”.

The offerings of silver, gold and silk gifts refute the description of Yemenite Jews as “*poverty stricken and destitute*” upon their arrival in Palestine, but the story does not offer an explanation for this discrepancy.

The long story seems to have been written by a Polish Jew who had not even visited Palestine (see reference to the writer above). It is saturated with images of extreme cruelty of local Arabs to Jewish children and the elderly²⁴. It is also packed with powerful indications of Yemenite Jews’ religious piety. The “otherness” of the remote Yemenites and their community could not be emphasised more strongly. In real life, when Zionist emissaries were dispatched to induce Yemenite Jews to become “*Olim*” (immigrate to Palestine), “*it was not the hardship in Yemen [...]*” from which they were meant to extract Yemenite Jews “*but the role [...] assigned to them in Eretz-Israel – to successfully compete with the Arab labourers in the struggle for Hebrew Labour in the Moshavot*” which was at the heart of these missions (Halamish, 2006[a]:15). Zionism badly needed cheap labour that was both Arab and Jewish.

Yemenites are described as dextrous, hardworking and deeply devout by Yosef Weitz as part of his memories of the settlement **In Emek Hefer**²⁵, in which, apparently, some Yemenite families managed to participate. They are, he describes -

²³ About the description of the fictional Kibbutz as the location of redemption from Arab neglect see Chapter 7.

²⁴ In contrast with historian Bat Zion Eraqi Klorman’s research reporting “fairly adequate relations and even friendship ties between Jews and Moslems” (Eraqi Klorman, 2003:25-27).

²⁵ Issue 12, 1934. June 12, page 7.

[...] poor but rich in energy and stamina to uproot rocks and straighten things in order to get bread out of the land for themselves and for their brood. [...] The Yemenites are moving slowly. Saadia, the head of the band, tanned face with a black beard, rides his donkey and behind him walk about ten men, tall and small, light and thin [...]

The sight of Yemenite Jews who are actually going to live on their own land is depicted as quite extraordinary:

[...] thanking the Lord that kept and gave them life up to this day when they receive the land as their estate for eternity, for them and for their sons, and they are prepared immediately to cultivate it with their hoes and shovels. In this place they took possession sitting down and there they spent the night with mother-earth underneath and the star-studded sky above. [...]

Writing as an “omniscient narrator”, reporting from the consciousness of these exotic settlers, this powerful Zionist employee is convinced that Yemenites consider their good fortune a gift from heaven. Eastern-European settlers who were about to start living on land purchased by the JNF were not expected to thank “*the Lord*”. The (self-described) secular Zionist enterprise “*heavily relied on newcomers without private resources who could be sent to settlements or workplaces chosen by the Zionist organization*” (Richman & Hasson, 1984:67). Weitz correctly identified the sight of a few Yemenites that managed to become landowners as extraordinary, and expressed his pleasure with their intention to begin working immediately “*with their hoes and shovels*” as the natural labourers they were expected to be.

B. The civilising mission

True to the mission and vision of an educating organ of Labour Zionist ideology (see chapter 1), many entries in ***BaMaaleh*** combine compassion and empathy for the tough lives of youngsters from traditional *Mizrahi* and Yemenite families, with the indication of the path for redemption and amelioration, the correct way out of misery and hardships: joining the ranks of the Labouring Youth movement with its facilities for education and socialisation. Minors with no profession or training, some (mainly girls) even illiterate, could indeed expect benefits from the basic education that evening classes offered. The “club” of the Movement must have been conceived as a site of welcome camaraderie for working boys and girls. Based on their Jewish

identity, Yemenite and other Arab-Jewish kids were entitled to be accepted to Zionist institutions, to participate as members, and have direct access to a growing and well-sponsored economy that might have offered a path out of third-world conditions. An added bonus was an opportunity to be set free from the oppression of traditional communities and families. Unlike the young immigrants from Eastern Europe, *Mizrahi* youngsters and teenagers did not leave their traditional families behind but arrived in Palestine or were born there as part of families who expected to carry on patriarchal traditions.

B.a. Civilising as hope of improving dire conditions

The benefits of dropping old traditions in favour of moving in with the “pioneers” are described in quite a few entries. **Itzhakito**²⁶, signed Aaron Haim Cohen²⁷, is a story displaying victory over stifling conditions and prejudices in the home front. In this story the employer of the boy Itzhakito complains to his father that his son seems to “*go astray*”: He fraternises with “*Moskobi*”²⁸ friends and mates”, and demands with “*audacity*” to have shorter working hours – an indication of his awareness of labour laws. The worried father consults a community elder who advises him to discipline the boy by locking him out of the house in the evening, as he is sure to repent if turned homeless. The advice turns out to be useless: The father banishes Itzhakito as suggested by the elder, but the son simply disappears for a few days, presumably with help from his new mates. Eventually the father gives up, and the boy is reinstated in the household, signalling a victory of the new “*Moscobi*” norms and the inevitable submission of the old ways to the new socialist winds: Another *Mizrahi* labouring youth is now a suitable Hebrew labourer.

Redemption is also found by the unnamed protagonist in **The Working Girl**²⁹ signed “Judith”. The piece vividly describes the ordeals of a proto-typical working girl who is “*but a drop in an*

²⁶ Issue 17, 1932, sept. 9, page 7.

²⁷ Aaron Haim Cohen (1906 - 1962) was born in Jerusalem to Persian born parents. He was one of the founding fathers of the Labouring Youth movement and a member of its central committee, also was a member of the Histadrut’s Arab Department and wrote about Arab issues (source: Tidhar). Hillel Cohen mentioned that he was commissioned by Yitzhak Ben Zvi to collect information about Arab activities prior to the 1929 riots (Cohen, 2022:118).

²⁸ *Moskobi* was a name given to *Ashkenazi* immigrants by natives of Palestine, including members of the Jewish communities.

²⁹ Issue 6, 1931, May 21, page 9

ocean of sufferers". She begins her day early, labours in darkness, abused by her employer – "her tired head seems to drop, but she works and works" – but there is a silver lining. As her workday ends -

she runs to meet her comrades, the ones who give her the little knowledge she has, from them she will learn to make her way in life, together with them she will labour and fight for a new life.

Loyalty and faith in the socialist youth movement against the oppressive and patriarchal home environment are also expressed in **A Comrade Who did not Join the Camp**³⁰ signed Simcha Mizrahi³¹. The writer (real or invented) relates her positive experiences in the club of the Labouring youth. It is there, she writes, that she finds escape from the difficult demands of life as a working girl who belongs to an orthodox *Mizrahi* family. She is not alone in this position:

"I meet dozens of other boys and girls, who, like me, suffer both at home and in the harsh workplace".

The narrator is bitter over her father's refusal to let her join a labour camp with other mates:

My suffering at home is very great. I will tell you about one case and you can infer from it. On Saturday it was decided that we will join the camp. I too wanted to go to camp, but my parents refused. Because, they said, in the Labour Youth boys and girls are together and this might harm my chances to make a good match. My father thinks that we girls need to know nothing [...] I did not attend the camp, but I do not wish to go on living like this!

The "civilising mission" is also directed at the older generation. In **A Discussion about "Capital" in a Yemenite Abode**³² by Yehuda Bourla³³, a young Yemenite girl sets out to educate her old father and his traditional friends about the advantages of socialist ideology, hoping that this would convince them to accept her close association with a German-speaking youngster.

The girl Na'ama's typical day job is as a maid in home service (see below). Back at home she serves her father and his learned guests. The father worries about her friendship with the "pioneer" Yosifon, and she tells him that the young man is busy translating the writings of Karl

³⁰ Issue 20-21, 1935, Nov. 1, page 13.

³¹ This might be the name of a real member, but it is also a generic name indicating *Mizrahi* origins.

³² Issue 23, 1933, Dec. 6, pages 6-7.

³³ The story is a chapter from Bourla's novel "Na'ama", published in 1934.

Marx from German into Hebrew. These writings, she explains, are about issues that “*are the essence of life. The life of people and the life of labour.*” Talking about the usurpation of the working class by the capitalists, the girl gets the full attention of the older men, who hear for the first-time about texts that the readers of **BaMaaleh** are all too familiar with:

The guests hear this and listen carefully to the great things that Naama is saying, their eyes filling with sorrow and compassion, their faces bereaved and mournful.

There is subtle mockery in the condescending description of Na’ama’s father who now seems to accept his daughter’s unorthodox romantic choice. He is prepared to “*pay tribute to the name of that genius Karl Marx, may he rest in peace, and the name of his faithful disciple as well – this Yosifon, the pioneer...*”

B.b. Civilising as a cure for delinquent “otherness”

In **The Educational-Cultural activity in the Jerusalem branch**³⁴, “Shlomo” reports his insights about youngsters from *Mizrahi* background whom he tries (with difficulty) to organise at the Labouring Youth club:

[...] These youths growing up in the environment of their families and their Arab neighbours feel inferior. Their environment nurtures their bitterness towards the “Ashkenazi” who is said to grab the juicy chunks for himself.

“Shlomo” is totally mystified by what he sees as “*this unbiased bitterness*”, and hopes that the movement will soon “*find a female comrade who will dedicate herself to the organisation of this work-area and fight this inferiority*”, specifically among girls. He further laments other common problems that he sees among young people from traditional families and Arab neighbourhoods: “*empty ambition*” that drives ethnic hostility; tendencies to petty crime, lying and preoccupation with sex, including masturbation. He seems to identify “*the problems*” as ethnic-related: “*The young adults among the Sephardi and the Maghrabi communities frequently visit brothels without considering how this may affect their spiritual and mental development,*” he piously complains, as they are influenced by “*adult friends who have not*

³⁴ Issue 16, 1934, Aug. 10, page 3

received any youth-movement education”³⁵. Many years later Ella Shohat diagnosed the veteran Israeli tendency to “‘cleanse’ the Sephardim of their Arabness and redeem them from their ‘original sin’ of belonging to the Orient.” (Shohat, 2017:44).

Shlomo seems to have great faith in the civilising power of “youth movement education”. He repeated his faith in **Heavy Rain (note from Jerusalem)**³⁶ (see above, chapter 3). Witnessing child exploitation all around, Shlomo points at the club of the Labouring Youth as the one adequate (civilising and clean) escape, again using “filth” as a signifier of native character:

The family home in the neighbourhood, with its crowding, filth and stifling air, must be exchanged for a different, better one. One’s family atmosphere must be forgotten in the purifying society of young comrades.

In **From the Life of the Street Children**³⁷, signed by the initials A.R., the forming of “city gangs” is described as beginning at the age of 8. The gangs originate in Tel Aviv neighbourhoods that are recognizably populated by Yemenite or other *Mizrahi* communities. Those are:

“Kerem Ha-Teimanim [Yemenite vineyard], Ohel-Moshe, Mahane-Yosef, Neve-Shalom, Neve-Tzedek, Neve-Sha-anan, the Georgian neighbourhood, Shapira Neighbourhood as well as the Arab neighbourhood near Jaffa, and from Jaffa itself”³⁸.

While “positive groups” are led to the “Labour Youth” to improve themselves, groups whose leader has “criminal tendencies” would end up in the “Tul Karem”³⁹ institute for young delinquents. Most children, the writer reports, come from extremely poor living environments: up to 13 people in one room, bad hygienic conditions; most of them already work, many seek their livelihood in crime. As an activist, A.R. is full of good intentions and is convinced that a civilising mission is in order, not merely for the sake of the children he hopes to improve, but also to save future trouble “for the Yishuv”:

It is our duty to get these kids to a children’s society [...] give them a home and a park [...] this will all return to our society a creative asset – that otherwise might become a big trouble for the Yishuv.

³⁵ In 1933, an exchange of articles concerning sex-education and sexual freedom took place in several issues of **BaMaaleh**. The debate over “**That Question**” (issue 20, 1933, Nov. 25, page 9) was not associated with ethnic origins.

³⁶ Issue 2, 1934, Jan. 19, page 9.

³⁷ Issue 15, 1933, Aug. 11, page 9.

³⁸ It is unlikely that non-Jewish Arab children from Jaffa were included in this report. Poor Arab-speaking Jews did reside in Arab neighbourhoods.

³⁹ The town of Tul Karem became part of the Palestinian West Bank after 1948, since 1967 it is occupied by Israel.

In the story **Paths Down a Slope**⁴⁰, signed Yehoshua Ben Zvi, the boy Rahamim behaves badly: He gets into fights, spends money on expensive clothes and is no good at holding a job, having dropped out of school. His mother is troubled: *“The widow Rachel has suffered much due to her son”*. On a stormy night the poor woman is advised by a mysterious voice: *“What your son needs is good friends. Friends whose main road is work and morality. Those are the only ones who can bring him back up from the downhill path he is on”*. The (somewhat crude, seemingly divine) message of the narrator: Joining the Labouring Youth is the only way back to *“work and morality”*.

B.c. The civilising mission for children in home service

Official Zionist opinion was that as Yemenites came from a backward Arab land they would *“make do with little”* (Druyan, 1982:134). It was also generally agreed that *“their wives, too, would be able to work as home-help, and even their children would join the workforce [...]”* (ibid:136).

Female servants of Yemenite origin soon became an integral part of the Zionist enterprise⁴¹. During the period under consideration these home help began their service at a very tender age, as reflected in entries published in **BaMaaleh**. Most of the entries that dealt with the employment situation of women and female-children as servants in the settlers' households were focused on the difficulties of getting the girls to participate in the activities of Labouring Youth clubs. As Ella Shohat sarcastically described – writing about a later era - the benevolent writers and activists of the movement wished to take them *“out of ‘primitive conditions’ of poverty and superstition”* and lead them *“gently into a modern Western society characterized by tolerance, democracy, and humane values”* (Shohat, 2017:39⁴²).

⁴⁰ Issue 13, 1934, June 29, page 7

⁴¹ Well into the 1970s and 1980s, the term *“Teimaniya”* [Hebrew for Yemenite female] was synonymous with a cleaning woman or laundress.

⁴² This is a reprint of her *“Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims”* in *Semantic Scholar*, 19/20 (Autumn, 1988), pp. 1-35, published by Duke University.

Rachel Yefet⁴³ reported from the labouring Youth branch in her area on **Little Girls in Household Jobs**⁴⁴ :

Most girls who work in household jobs are young, seven to eleven-years-old or more. The pay is next to nothing. A ten-year-old performs jobs just like a fifteen-year-old. [...] The girl works from morning to evening with no rest. [...] One must eat and one must earn.

In our neighbourhood of Sha'arayim⁴⁵ some parents object to our going to evening classes or for us to be in the Labour Youth.

The shocking description is bad enough, but it also reveals a very clear double standard based on ethnic origins. When reporting dire conditions of immigrant families from Eastern Europe, as in **A Letter**⁴⁶, quoted in chapter 7 above, genuine outrage was expressed by the writer-activist who pleaded - *“it is not possible, impossible to go on living in this system of famine and unemployment”*. It was rightly inconceivable to suggest that the poor 13-year-old Hanna Zimmerman, who signed the sad letter, should find a job and try to earn money for her starving family. By contrast when talking about Yemenite children aged 8 to 11, Rachel Yefet seems to accept this reality, savvily accepting that *“One must eat and one must earn”*.

Yefet is mainly concerned with the obstacles to the civilising mission, as *“some parents”* of Yemenite families did not permit daughters to join evening classes. Seven years earlier, in the very first 1926 brochure of **BaMaaleh**, “Ovadia”, reporting from the same **Labouring Youth branch in Sha'arayim**⁴⁷, was also troubled by the difficulties of getting working children to attend the Labouring Youth club. Next to the parents who do not allow their sons to participate as they would be *“desecrating the Sabbath”*, he pointed at other causes, namely the pious employers:

[...] the girl-members are busy doing chores during most hours of the Sabbath as well. All attempts to allow them a free day on the Sabbath have failed, as even the best of mistresses, members of the “Organization of Hebrew Women” are opposed to this idea.

⁴³ The name indicates Yemenite origins.

⁴⁴ Issue 15, 1933, August 11, page 10.

⁴⁵ A Yemenite neighbourhood near Petah Tiqwa.

⁴⁶ Issue 12, 1932, June 17, page 9.

⁴⁷ Brochure 1, 1926, dated “Ellul TARPAV” (August-septembre, 1926), pages 26-27.

Here we have the grim reality of these char-children: The traditional families' reluctance of "desecrate the Sabbath" does not seem relevant to the slavery working conditions of their daughters, who must work seven days a week; and apparently even "the best of mistresses" (?) refuse to let their little servants one free evening in the week.

In 1934, a **BaMaaleh** editorial returned to this uncomfortable issue, using sharp language against the "mistresses", or **Righteous Women**⁴⁸ (rudely even portrayed as "fat cows"):

The "righteous women" in the streets of the Moshava scream bloody murder at the Yemenite girls who demand to have Saturday as a day of rest. These "fat cows" do not wish to know that the hands of the Yemenite girls are not made of steel and iron, and these thin tanned hands are begging for some rest after six days of hard labour. [...] We call on you, dear comrades of Yemenite descent: do not be discouraged! [...] Believe in your power, take care of your organisation. Your struggle is our struggle.

Solidarity for the labour dispute over slavery conditions of minors was expressed with warm words: "take care of your organisation. Your struggle is our struggle". It seems that the *Histadrut* had little else to offer, and Yemenites organised outside the Labour Zionist institutions. The *Histadrut's* daily *Davar* carried a report about the dispute over the demand of the Yemenite girls in Rehovot for a day off. Women from the Labour Council were reported to have been involved and a picket-line on a Sabbath was organised by the Labouring Youth⁴⁹.

In the story **Yemenite Life**⁵⁰, signed Miriam S.⁵¹, the writer's heart goes out to a poor woman in search of a cleaning job: "with God's help, one of the 'madams will turn up and hire her, Sara, for a day of washing" (original emphasis). There is no mention – or awareness – of the fact that this kind of "Yemenite life" did not characterise the environment of Yemenite Jews in their land of origin. The description of the poor Yemenite family in this story includes the mandatory reference to filth:

⁴⁸ Issue 13, 1934, June 29, front page.

⁴⁹ *Davar*, June 14, 1934, page 5. *Dvar Hapoelet*, a women's labourer's magazine, carried a story (June 26, 1934) about this labour dispute that seems to have been initiated by the girls. Apparently, the women employers got organised against the strikers and fired many of the little home-helpers; some parents supported the employers and their children had to go on working seven days a week.

⁵⁰ Issue 7, 1931, June 5, page 9.

⁵¹ This could be Miriam Singer, see earlier reference.

In the narrow filthy alleys of the Yemenite Vineyard Sara's children role in the muck, hungry and dirty.

These children are minded by a 9-year-old child, responsible to feed and wash the little ones. The writer, now an *"omniscient narrator"*, reports from the child Shifra's mind; She *"feels for them because they are not at all like the nicely clad clean kids she sees on the streets of Tel Aviv"*. The narrated report knowingly tells readers that Shifra has plans for her own future and hopes to improve the life of her siblings:

Shifra makes up her mind: when she grows up and makes money, she will buy nice clothes for her siblings, just like those kids.

But the narrator already knows that this is not going to happen, as the child Shifra will not be allowed to continue her studies (or join a Labouring Youth club for evening lessons). Unwillingly removed from such a civilising environment, she will be forced to become a home help to support her needy family:

Cruel fate forced her to quit school and be handed on to serve in the home of a "madam". [...] life's sorrow is deep inside her. [original emphasis]

Whether it was *"Cruel fate"* or the strategy that kept Yemenites away from the nourishing support of Zionist funds (the *"homeland was not offered to all with the same largesse"*, as Ella Shohat puts it [ibid:38]), the question remains a controversial issue for almost a century after this text was written and published. The **Hebrew Labour** concept needed Yemenites of all ages and genders as reliable working hands.

The Little Labourer⁵², signed "Jemima", also deals with the miserable lot of Arab-Jewish female children. The writer, a Labouring Youth activist, meets the *"child Labourer"* as they both work in a laundry. The *"dark-faced"* child named Simcha describes herself to the narrator as *"khadma maskina"*⁵³, working for a mistress *"from morning till night"*. Full of empathy to the fate of the child, the writer sees into her future: growing to marry a young man from a similar background who is presently (knowingly the *omniscient narrator* can describe) *"running and running after each car, waiting for the arrival of the train to carry the luggage for some bulky*

⁵² Issue 18, 1932, September 30, page

⁵³ Arabic for poor servant. No Hebrew translation provided in the original.

gentleman”. A dismal future is guaranteed for the two poor children and for their would-be offspring:

[...] by the time they are 18-20 there will already be ten or twelve years of hard labour behind them. And their children will be like them – chasing and being chased – chasing a few pennies and chased by their work, their masters and the mistresses.

The narrator-activist decides to intervene: *“this is too painful a picture, one must save Simcha!”* As the solution is in the socialist Youth Movement, she makes an effort to convince the girl to join the “club”, where she would learn to read and write. Simcha is in a hurry to return to her mistress but before she leaves, Jemima manages to arrange another meeting *“to continue our talk and get her into the circle of the Labouring Youth.”* The reader must assume that while the narrator “Jemima” is a laundry labourer just like little Simcha, she does not need to supplement her income by serving a “mistress”.

“Dina” is another teacher or instructor writing about encounters with needy children and their families. In **In the Small Shack**⁵⁴ she compassionately writes about her visits to several Yemenite families, asking parents’ permission to have their daughters join evening classes. The sight of the first family home is dismal:

The old Yemenite sits leaning against the wall. Tired at the end of a day’s work, his waterpipe bubbling. Around him lie his sons asleep – tired too, perhaps hungry. Even the little boy’s body is thin, his face lean and weary.

Permission to allow the family’s daughter to study is withheld. *“The child works all day and at night she must rest”*, the father explains. The visitor understands why education is not prioritised in this family:

[...] how can he take an interest in the education of his children, if every day he needs to wage a harsh war of existence, to give bread to the toddlers? This is one of thousands who live in the poor people’s quarters.

In another family the father’s refusal to let his daughter study is based on tradition and rejection of the new values:

⁵⁴ Issue 15, 1932, Aug. 5, page 4

“She need not study. My woman did not study either, and God willing she lives, and what do you teach in your talks? That they should go without sleeves, dance with guys, and not stay modest” ...

Eventually permission is given. The young instructor concludes that poverty is the problem. Without civilising education, the young would turn “into a delinquent”. She is convinced that better Labour consciousness is the solution, if only these wretched people – these legitimate Hebrew labourers – would join the “*struggle to liberate the working people*”:

[...] in everywhere I see the same picture: the monster of poverty that breaks and oppresses masses of people, including the young youth who get lost in a world of ignorance, depression and hardship. These will make it into a delinquent, wild and suffering from feelings of social inferiority. [...] Let them all march with us in the labourer’s struggle to liberate the working people!

Rumia⁵⁵ By Levin Kipnis⁵⁶ is an unusually long (three instalments) story detailing a several years long “civilising mission” of a Yemenite servant girl. The story seems to be modelled on the author’s experiences as a father of a young family, a teacher in the developing Tel Aviv of the 1930s⁵⁷. It begins with the young Carmi family confronting difficulties, needing to cope with a new baby and house chores. The idea of hiring a child-servant is raised, and an agent introduces a suggested recruit with discourse that could fit any slave-era lingo, employing the “*zoological terms*” identified by Franz Fanon (Fanon, 2004 [1963]:7):

You are better off with this little Yemenite than with a big Ashkenazi girl: She does much work and eats little. It is, however, important to know how to deal with them. They are like beasts, you would not get them to move without a stick and a whip.

The new little slave is accepted into the household. Having just landed from Aden, she does not understand Hebrew or even local Arabic. The wife complains, the enlightened husband calms her:

The child is indeed quite savage. We have seen this sort. In our home she will be educated shortly.

⁵⁵ Issue 3, 1935, Feb, 8, page 6. Continued on issue 4 and 5 of 1935.

⁵⁶ Levin Kipnis (1894 – 1990) was a canonised and prolific writer, mainly for children. He immigrated to Palestine from the Ukraine in 1913. Kipnis was awarded many national and international prizes and his books were translated into several languages. A book and many articles deal with his life and his writing (source: OSU).

⁵⁷ Kipnis was a teacher in the Lewinsky Teachers’ Seminary since 1924 (source: Tidhar)

This perfect example of “*initiating the Oriental Jews into the ways of a civilized, modern society*” (Shohat, 2017:39) turns out to be successful. The girl “*was washed, shampooed and combed*” and even given a new name. The baby was happy, the house chores done, and the pay “*almost for nothing.*” In other words: The little Hebrew labourer was made both civilised and efficient. The only trouble was the child-servant’s avaricious father, who threatened to place his already civilised daughter in the service of a better-paying family. The mistress, Mrs. Carmi, is besides herself with rage at the impudence:

- *I took in a savage, dirty, child, I turned her into a human-being, and now this one says “I want!?”*
- *Then you must add some extra... said the father, a smile dancing in his eyes [...]*

Eventually the dishonest Arab-Jewish father moves his child out of the family home and the household collapses. The grandmother finds the distress of the family ridiculous, as another cheap servant-girl can be easily found. Expressing a typical “coloniser” spirit that expects to “*benefit from plentiful and undemanding labour and servants*” (Memmi, 2003[1974]:52) she scolds the young Carmi couple: “*Are we out of Yemenites in this land?*”

Still, money is a problem, Mrs. Carmi explains. The family father is a teacher, “*his wages so meagre and even this is not paid regularly on time.*”

The perspective on the social stratification according to **BaMaaleh**’s writers and readers, members of the Labour Zionist community, is thus made clear: Eastern European settlers’ wives cannot manage without affordable servants; home services must be procured from cheap Yemenite children. It goes without saying that according to the strictly adhered-to doctrine of **Hebrew Labour**, this community of Jewish settler-immigrants from Eastern Europe would not have considered poor local Arab children as suitable servants; Yemenite children (deemed “*savages*”) were acceptable as they were both cheap and Jewish.

The Rumia saga continues over the following issues. Abused by her new employers she returns to the benevolent Carmi home, and stays there for a few years. When she grows old enough, she (naturally) joins the Labouring Youth. Asked about her opinion of the “club”

she properly sums up *“her impressions in one short sentence: ‘Over there Ashkenazi and Yemenites are together. All of Israel are friends.’”*⁵⁸.

A dedicated activist, Rumia eventually gets to hold an *“important position in the club of the Labour Youth”*, but this does not save her from the traditional tyranny of her native community: Her father decides it is time marry her off. As she prefers to stay with the Carmi’s, he sends *“a gang of Yemenite boys”* who ambush Rumia and try to kidnap her. She is saved temporarily, but this time the protective Carmi family agrees to let her go. It happens to be a convenient time for them: Their child is now a toddler that no longer needs a nurse, and *“Rumia’s wages and the food she consumes [...] is more than they can afford.”* It seems a relief to have the girl - objectified now just as she was a few years earlier when she was handed to them – returned to her autocratic father. There is no hint in the story of any awareness of the irony in this obvious hypocrisy.

The story plods on with its righteous narration: The Carmis are honoured guests at Rumia’s wedding ceremony. The celebration indicates that the Yemenite girl and her whole family of a savage background are already halfway civilised: The food served to the guests is both *Ashkenazi* and Yemenite; Rumia reports happily that the bridegroom, an uncle from Yemen who is twice her age, is ready to break away from traditional backwardness, and has promised not to take a second wife. He is dressed in European attire, with *“a gold watch displayed on his chest and gold spectacles”*. While this depiction of ostentatious appearance is intended to ridicule the would-be bourgeois Yemenite male, it also unwittingly indicates that the stereotype of poverty-stricken Yemenite Jews was no more than convenient fiction. Talking to her enlightened guests, Rumia commits to *“educate well”* her future children, and the narrator ends the long story on a cheerful note: *“The next generation will be a happy one!”* The present Yemenite generation is not expected to exit the position allotted it by the Zionist-*Ashkenazi* establishment. Yemenites are not *Sephardi*, but as the category of *“Mizrahim”* covers both groups, it is worth quoting Ella

⁵⁸ Labour-Zionism did nurture a non-racist image, but still, in August 1997 Ehud Barak, then chairman of the Labour Party, officially apologized to the families of *Mizrahi* Jews about his movement’s discrimination of *Mizrahim* the early years of the State of Israel, see [Arik Bender in Maariv, July 24, 2019](#). Barak, later Israel’s prime minister, was born about a decade after the period under consideration in this work.

Shohat who concentrated on a later period: *“Sephardi Jews were first brought to Israel for specific European-Zionist reasons, and once there they were systematically discriminated against by a Zionism which deployed its energies and material resources differentially, to the consistent advantage of European Jews and to the consistent detriment of Oriental Jews”* (Shohat, 2017: 38).

C. Hebrew labour as a problem (rather than ideal) for Yemenites and Mizrahim

As was shown in chapter 2, young *Ashkenazis*, mostly Yeshiva graduates with no skills or physical capacities, were required and expected to embrace the hardships of physical labour according to Labour Zionist teaching, and to adhere to it as a noble vocation. As they could not compete with native Arabs, they either left work in agriculture or joined Jewish-only collective settlements, but continued to adhere to the ideology that held labour as the *“essence of life”* as A.D. Gordon put it (e.g., Gordon, 1957:137⁵⁹). By contrast, most Jews from Arab countries, equally the products of Jewish culture that emphasised literacy and encouraged middle-class vocations, did not aspire to consider themselves *“natural labourers”*. Ella Shohat noted that *“The actual historical record [...] shows that Oriental Jews were overwhelmingly urban”* (Shohat, 2017: 43). The track of manual work seemed to most of this target population a miserable disgrace, a sad fate that should be avoided.

BaMaaleh published texts that model these two opposite attitudes. In **The Hill**⁶⁰, signed S. Reichenstein (see above, chapter 2), hard labour is portrayed as a great joy, physical and spiritual (for *Ashkenazi* immigrants), even hinting at erotic pleasure:

[...] It is this mighty orchestra that plays inside him with every blow of the hammer, with every cracked rock [...] they remove rocks [...] stones are placed in baskets and moved from hand to hand [...] a white dress drifts in the light breeze, exposing a fair knee that seem so much whiter than the tanned calf. A sleeve flies like the wing of a white bird, muscle rises and prepares under the tanned skin...

⁵⁹ His essay *“Labour”* is from 1911. This same year Shmuel Yavni’eli was dispatched to recruit Jewish labourers in Yemen.

⁶⁰ Issue 14, 1931, Sept. 11, page 9. See also chapter 2, page 104.

But in **On the Life of Yemenite Youth**⁶¹, Yemenite writer Mordechai Tabib laments that for a Yemenite youth, becoming “*a lowly hole-digger*” means that “*he would become lost and wretched economically as well*”.

In **Obadiah the Shepherd**⁶² signed M. Ben-Shmuel, the narrator, working on a tractor, expresses sorrow and regret at the cruel destiny that forced a young Mizrahi Jewish boy (the name Obadiah as well as his story indicate his origins) to hard labour. Ben Shmuel finds this a “*horrible destiny*”:

I continued ploughing heavy hearted. The chance meeting made me think about the fate of Obadiah and his mates, those who must enter the hardships of life at early childhood, when they are not yet equipped with the most basic things. Are we to accept this horrible destiny?

A.D. Gordon’s teachings about the wonderful values of manual labour did not seem relevant to the destiny of other *Mizrahi* children either. In **Heavy Rain (note from Jerusalem)**⁶³, the narrator “Shlomo” describes a hard-working Jerusalemite boy who is employed in deliveries for a grocery store and is regularly beaten by his father. The boy wishes to escape but is reluctant to leave for work in a village, as “*he is afraid of the hard work in the orchard.*” Shlomo’s compassion for the boy seems to contradict the wisdom repeated by **BaMaaleh** that encourages a lifestyle of “*hard work in the orchard*”, for example in the editorial **No Illusions**⁶⁴ that announced to high-school students that

[...] we do not need drifty “spiritual souls” but well-informed beaters of the hammer, people who follow the furrows, conquerors of labour [...]

Eventually the “*beaters of the hammer*” and the “*people who follow the furrows*” had to be Yemenite and *Mizrahi* Jews. **Hebrew labour** needed “*natural labourers*”.

D. Arab Jews in the internal Zionist political competition.

⁶¹ Issue 8, 1931, June 19, page 7

⁶² Issue 5, 1932, March 4, page 7. See also in chapter 2, page 104

⁶³ Issue 2, 1934, Jan. 19, page 9

⁶⁴ Issue 19, 1931, Nov. 21, front page.

Getting Yemenite and other *Mizrahi* Jews to join the Zionist Labour movement turned out to be a frustrating issue for political leaders. In **On the question of the Labour Youth**⁶⁵, Yitzhak Tabenkin (signing Y. Tabenkin) lamented the problem:

Our Histadrut has taken a beating when it comes to uniting the communities, our unity with the Yemenite worker.

As already mentioned above, the problem of “[...] *how to include the working Yemenite youth*” in the *Histadrut* organisations troubled Avraham Broides in 1926 (see above, his comments In **For the Assessment of our Cultural Mission**⁶⁶).

A direct link between the civilising-educational mission and recruiting efforts to Labour Zionism among Arab-Jewish communities can be observed in reports about the Labouring Youth activities with young Syrian Jews in Damascus. **Reading in the Group**⁶⁷ is a short report by Shlomo Dany who identifies as an elementary school pupil in Haifa. The boy-writer is deeply moved, having heard about problems of Jewish children in Syria who lack a Jewish education (the group’s councillor read the children a report about this subject from **BaMaaleh**). He expresses his relief upon hearing that “*the Labour Youth is now beginning an educational program there*”. The very same issue carries a report signed M. Levite, titled **A Trip to Syria**⁶⁸ about a mission to this country. Next to sightseeing in Baalbek, Beirut and Damascus, the group of Labouring Youth activists learned about the hard labour conditions of Jewish children in copper workshops and about activities in *Ha-Halutz* clubs. They also joined a seminary of the MAPAI party, learned about objections of the local Jewish families to their children joining Zionist activities, but expected to meet some of the youngsters in the future, ending the report with the hopeful note: “*See you in Eretz Israel!*”.

Three years later in **Ha’halutz Ha’tzair** [Young Pioneer] in **Damascus**⁶⁹, Eliyahu Cohen relates how “*a group of street-kids, labourers of a factory and others*” were collected in Damascus for Hebrew lessons, some against their parents’ wishes. He considered this an important success in

⁶⁵ Issue 16, 1931, Oct. 9, page 3

⁶⁶ Brochure 1, 1926, pages 10-13

⁶⁷ Issue 17, 1932, Sept. 9, page 10

⁶⁸ Issue 17, 1932, Sept. 9, page 4

⁶⁹ Issue 10, 1935, June 3, page 10

the competition against the attraction of the opposite Zionist youth-movement BEITAR. Cohen also described some frustrations during the civilising mission. Working girls seemed unimpressed with the simplicity and austerity sanctioned by the Labour movement, and rather continued to *“spend most of their money dolling themselves up: dresses, red lipstick etc.”* An even greater disappointment was the path chosen by some members *“who travelled to Eretz Israel and were swept with the current of prosperity and stayed in the cities”*. In other words, they did not become agricultural labourers as was expected of them.

In **A Meeting near the Spring**⁷⁰ signed “a participant”, another perspective of the mission of the Labouring Youth in Damascus emerges. The report is from a training camp for youth groups at a pleasant site near *En Harod* - the spring of Harod - in the northern Jezre’el Valley [of the land]. The veteran participants met with *“few of the immigrants from Damascus who are in the land [...]”* and were introduced to the Damascus group’s concept of *“‘assimilation’”*, used to describe assimilation not *“among Arabs in Syria, but rather here in this land.”* It is a pejorative depiction of *“pioneer degeneration”*, meaning *“descent regarding the ideas on which they were brought up in the ‘Ha-Halutz’ and ‘Ha-Halutz Ha-Tzair’ movements there”*. Members seem to have been attracted to *“the atmosphere of ‘prosperity’”*, that was also mentioned in the report by Eliyahu Cohen (above). Next, the veteran participants hear *“of severe accusation of Labour Youth in this land”* that apparently did not give enough *“educational support”* to the members who arrived from Damascus, and did not treat them as equals:

[...] A demand came up to let them have equal rights with the Labour Youth undergoing training here, and thus saving them from anarchic, unintended and incidental Aliya from an organisational and educational aspect.

Whether or not more *“educational support”* would have been enough to stop the new immigrants from aiming at *“prosperity”* seems a legitimate question, in an era that had great faith in ideological education (see chapter 1 and 2 above). It is clear however, reading this report, that the new immigrants from Syria felt that they were not given *“equal rights with the Labour Youth undergoing training here”*, which might indicate displeasure with the allocation of resources (see the next section).

⁷⁰ Issue 14, 1935, Aug 4, page 3

Tensions and complaints over the treatment of *Mizrahi* and Yemenite youth have often been instrumentalised for political purposes. Long before complaints about the “ethnic demon” [*Hashed Ha-adati*] became a standard feature of Israeli politics, a glimpse into the potential to turn feelings of deprivation into political leverage is also offered in **BaMaaleh**’s pages. Angrily rejecting any criticism about discrimination against Yemenites, “Shmuel” quotes political opponents who raise the subject. **To Our Defamers**⁷¹ is a diatribe attacking publications in both the employers’ journal *Bustenai*⁷² and the communist newspaper *Ha’or*⁷³. Rejecting all allegations about discrimination, Shmuel typically waves the issue of **Hebrew Labour** as his winning argument, while not dealing at all with the allegations about discrimination. The “subalterns” themselves, needless to say, do not take part in the squabble between members of the competing political affiliations in the hegemonic mainstream.

Shmuel indignantly report about the article he read in *HaBustenai*:

The editor of HaBustenai, Mr. Moshe Smilanski, took pains to leave his abode and estate and get down to the dwellings of the Yemenites, and saw – two Yemenite boys who are members of the Labour Youth [...] and from what the boys said [...] he prepares a whole meal to entertain his readers, who as everyone knows are really concerned about the poor Yemenite Youth. The editor of Ha Bustenai titled his feuilleton-styled article “Culture”. That is, culture in quotation marks [...]

Continuing in the same sarcastic tone Shmuel turns on the communist publication *Ha’or* that apparently also used the Yemenite predicament to attack Labour policies:

[...] the editor of “Ha’or” is also full of compassion for Yemenite youth: He grumbles about the Ashkenazi Labour Youth movement discriminating against Yemenites and shoving Yemenite youth out of every position.

Dismissing all complaints from left and right, Shmuel points out what he considers the real bone of contention: Both opponents oppose the concept of “conquest of Labour” cherished by the *Histadrut* and the Labouring Youth.

[...] they yammer and reproach our education, aiming to educate the youth towards labour Zionism, to the conquest of labour.

⁷¹ Issue 15, 1932, Aug 15, page 3

⁷² “The Orchard Man” – a newspaper identified with the employers, mainly farmers, see also ref.36 on page 151

⁷³ “The Light” – the newspaper of the Communist Faction of the *Histadrut*.

Shmuel does not bother or even try to refute the accusations about discrimination of Yemenite youth. The article concentrates instead on a fervent preaching in defence of the **Hebrew Labour** concept. How this concept was related to the lot of poor Yemenites is not admitted. The writer must have assumed that his readers identify Yemenites as the proper solution for the problem of the conquest of Labour, being “*natural Labourers*” and treated accordingly.

D. Some voices of dissent, criticism of discrimination

Poet and editor Avraham Broides seemed to have been well aware of the racist tendencies against Arab Jews that Ronit Lentin (Lentin, 2018, see above) described. **BaMaaleh** carried a report about maltreating of poor working Mizrahi children, which Broides submitted to a 1935 council of Labour Youth. The report, under the title **Deserted**⁷⁴, indicates that the hegemonic mainstream bore obvious responsibility for the dismal situation of *Mizrahi* children. Still, while exposing racist behaviour of individuals who are clearly not associated with Labour politics, Broides stopped short of mentioning institutional discrimination. He described witnessing a grown man slapping the face of a small Yemenite boy, who claimed that the man and his German-speaking wife paid him less than what he was promised for carrying a flower box. As the writer alerted a policeman to stop the beating, the couple called the boy a criminal. In another incident a poor boy was rudely refused the sale of a small portion of a sausage. Broides gravely concluded:

*I could see before my eyes so many deserted and “delinquent” youths, led to the police where they are told off, whipped, put under surveillance.
But are they to blame? Is it not the fault of the respectable gentlemen and the delicate ladies? Are we not all to blame, every one of us?*

The entry is exceptional in its very recognition that social discrimination does exist, yet it does not accuse Labour Zionist politics of this, or mention the unequal allocation of community resources as part of the treatment for which the editor takes some “*blame*” together with “*every one of us*”.

Hints of discontent with the discrepancy between the idealistic portrayal of the movement’s clubs and the dismal realities of working minors from *Mizrahi* background do feature

⁷⁴ Issue 14, 1935, Aug. 4, front page

occasionally. In **Two Brothers**⁷⁵ signed “Yitzhak” – apparently an instructor in a Labouring Youth club – exasperation of the young people is expressed. The narrator describes two unfortunate boys. The “[...] *cross-eyed and emaciated brothers are no good for work, even less so for learning*”. With a sick father, extreme poverty turns the two into unsuccessful street peddlers. As they “*long to be with other boys like them*” they come “*to us*”, the narrator continues. With other boys that seem to be suffering similar hardships “*they have become a small group*”, that received the nickname “*kibbutz*”. When the brothers fail to join the group on the designated day, the narrator, meeting them accidentally on the street, receives an explanation: “[...] *we did not sell anything, and if there is no food one does not need a kibbutz*”. The grim reality of the little street-peddlers seemed to defeat the haughty ideas of socialising in the Labouring Youth club. As Karl Marx remarked much earlier, “*material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life*”⁷⁶.

In **The Children of Jerusalem**⁷⁷, signed Levy Yitzhak, Zakaria⁷⁸ - a new recruit to the movement - expresses his frustration in a more explicitly bitter manner, displaying an early version of *Mizrahi-Ashkenazi* antagonism that would become one of Israel’s chief malaises many years later. Arriving for the first time at the club of the Labouring Youth, following a suggestion of a fellow street-porter, Zakaria reacts furiously when confronted with the request to pay membership fees.

His astonishment grew when he was told fees are monthly. He lost all trust upon realizing that the secretary is an Ashkenazi.

He exited the Club whispering:

- *Damned Ashkenazi, a curse on your homes. **Mafish massari** [no money].*
(original emphasis)

Labour Youth activist Shlomo seemed completely mystified as he encountered the deep resentment expressed by young *Mizrahi* members in a club that he was responsible for.

⁷⁵ Issue 18, 1931, Nov 6, page 5

⁷⁶ Quoted in: K. Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm>

⁷⁷ Issue 9, 1931, July 7, page 4

⁷⁸ Typical *Mizrahi* first name.

Describing **The Educational-Cultural activity in the Jerusalem branch**⁷⁹ Shlomo (as mentioned above, section **B.b**) lamented what he considered “*unbiased bitterness*”. His observation:

Their environment nurtures their bitterness towards the “Ashkenazi” who is said to grab the juicy chunks for himself.

E. Perspectives “from within” by Yemenite activists of Labour Zionism

Two prominent Yemenite activists who joined the Labour Movement published long entries over the pages of **BaMaaleh** that dealt with the predicament of young Yemenites, indicating that a serious problem was in evidence and offering adequate explanations. Israel Yeshayahu and Mordechai Tabib offer their “insider perspectives” on young Yemenite Jews. Both articles (fully translated texts available in the appendix of this work) are perfectly adapted to the hegemonic Labour and Zionist positions, presenting the origins of the Yemenite community difficulties in the community’s own collectively deficient character (too traditional, too patriarchal, too primitive, too backwardly authoritarian). There is not even a hint of possible responsibility of the Zionist institutions. Eventually both writers would rise to important positions in the political and literary fields of the hegemonic Labour Zionism, well into the first decades of the State of Israel. It seems that they were already loyal to the hegemonic political movement in the 1930s.

As mentioned above, in another text published in the 1930s, Yeshayahu chose to quote an *Ashkenazi* Labour Zionist prominent activist, Yosef Schprintzak, to describe the fact that Yemenites were aware of their discrimination by the Zionist establishment (Yeshayahu, 1938:39, see also in the introduction). No such hints were given over the pages of **BaMaaleh**.

In **On the Life of Yemenite Youth**⁸⁰, Tabib compassionately described Yemenite boys’ suffering under the traditional religious education forced on them: a violent torturous experience that produces distaste and rebellion:

⁷⁹ Issue 16, 1934, Aug. 10, page 3

⁸⁰ Issue 8, 1931, June 19, page 7

Torah study is achieved by beatings which stupefy the boy and instil in him the continuous desire to evade his studies and teacher⁸¹.

Boys, Tabib continued, usually desert those classes, and at the age of 11 they begin working to support their family. Concurrently, the family makes sure that the son should have no opportunity to partake in evening classes (associated with secular teaching). As Tabib puts it: the parents “*make sure that he should not fraternise with that ‘heretic’, the one person who had intended to help the boy.*” In other words, the benevolent (secular, socialist) instruction offered by Labour institutions (already dedicated to “*The Israelization of Arab Jews*” [Shohat, 2017:13]) is the one and only way out of the Yemenite boy’s predicament of ignorance and hopelessness. The result of depriving youngsters of this education, Tabib grimly predicts, is their turning “*bad*”:

It is clear that the Yemenite youth, having undergone 18 such years of imprisonment, would evidently turn out bad.

Tabib points to the parents as responsible for this undesirable outcome of traditional learning:

They must know and remember that if they are to throw obstacles on the boy’s path, he would become lost and wretched economically as well. In the city – a porter and a shoe-polish. In the country – a lowly hole-digger for the rest of his life⁸².

Three years later it was Yeshayahu who contributed a long commentary article titled **About the Image of the Yemenite Youth**⁸³. The title informs the readers that the “*image*” (seemingly pejorative) of Yemenites is already established, Yeshayahu merely sets out to explain the causes for this unfortunate apparition. His tone is analytical and often judgemental, and his exposition revealing. He starts by presenting the difficulties involved even when raising the subject for discussion within the discussed community. Yemenites, Yeshayahu writes, are a “*social phenomenon with both advantages and assets and, at the same time, disadvantages and deficits.*” As an insider-expert about the disadvantages of “*this segment of society*” he reveals

⁸¹This might be an accurate depiction, but it does not appear to be very different from the way Torah teaching was described by some *Ashkenazi* writers, see for ex. M.Z. Feierberg’s LEAAN [where to] first published in 1897 [Heb], as well as texts by the national poet Haim Nachman Bialik (e.g., SAFIACH), and the popular Shalom Aleichem (e.g., Motel Ben Peisi the Kantor).

⁸² See also above, section C.

⁸³ Issue 20, 1934, Oct. 12, page 9

that Yemenites are “*seized with a sentiment of social inferiority.*” In fact, he announced that he is bracing himself for a “*seething protest*” from community members who would accuse the writer of observing them “*with an evil eye.*” All this is due to the fact that “*criticism strongly emphasises their sense of inferiority*”, Yeshayahu summarised, exposing an essentialist perspective in tandem with the one held by the majority of the hegemonic Zionist-Ashkenazi community.

In the following analysis, he divides Yemenite youth into three distinct segments: “*a) the children of the new Aliya. b) The natives of the land. c) The ‘intelligentsia’.*” He then proceeds to characterise each segment separately:

In his analysis the first group (“*children of the new Aliya*”) is in need of “*acclimatising from the traditional-diasporic lifestyle to the renewed lifestyle of Eretz Israel.*” The term “*acclimatising*” here means adapting to the hegemonic norms and becoming “*civilised*”. This group contains two sub-groups: The first is the “*learned kid*” who would soon become “*a full-scale cultivated person*”⁸⁴. By contrast, the “*ignoramus*” is doomed to become a “*miserable poor creature [...] easily duped by any inciter or demagogue, ready to dance to any drumbeat*”. Here Yeshayahu volunteers a direct reference to the arch-enemies of Labour Zionism, the right-wing Revisionists, famous for their military-style parades. The Revisionists were successful in recruiting support among disenfranchised immigrants of *Mizrahi* and Yemenite origins. The sub-group “*ignoramus*” is not only politically but also personally condemned: Its members “*tend to absorb immediately the faulty externalism of fancy clothing and a cocky walk*”. In other words, they adopt the despised bourgeois style rather than the austerity recommended by the socialist movements. Still, next to criticism the writer also identifies “*one good aspect*”. These inadequately attired youngsters quickly adapt to “**Labour**” [original emphasis], which turns them into contributors to the “*positive aspects of our renewing settlement*”. They fulfil the role assigned to them in the Zionist project and are indeed Hebrew Labourers.

Yeshayahu goes on to marvel at the way these young people fit into the Zionist project: “*Labour fills all their being and feeds them materially, spiritually, and socially*”. Had it not

⁸⁴ Himself Yemen-born, Yeshayahu must have identified himself as belonging to this sub-group of accomplished persons.

been for their labour – he further elaborates - they “*would be condemned to both social and spiritual extinction*”. Having fully adopted the conception of (other) Yemenite-born youngsters as “*natural Labourers*” this Yemenite activist is pleased that “*an easy solution was found to the problem of Hebrew Labour*” (Druyan, 1982:136).

The next group on Yeshayahu’s list, “*The natives of the land*” were also praised for being good workers, but before that, the writer cautioned, they must get rid of some unnecessary “*revolutionary*” ideas⁸⁵. At their best young Yemenite Jews born in Palestine discover, just like their brethren from Yemen, that “*most important is to work*”. Dexterous and economy-conscious, the Yemenite is “*very far from being extravagant and luxurious*”.⁸⁶ He goes on to praise Yemenite Jews for their generosity in supporting their relatives who are still in the diaspora, saving them “*from the iron inferno and bring them out from slavery to redemption*”⁸⁷. From here Yeshayahu proceeds to delicately lament the less agreeable aspect of being a Yemenite Jew born in the Zionist project:

*To our great regret, the ethnic split of the youth of Eretz Israel entails that there is no single live, uniting, activating, interesting and invigorating artery for all of them together. And the Yemenite youth, for example, in a general gathering of youth, does not at all experience one’s own inspiration, but inspired by “them”, and his feeling of inferiority or of secondary being deepens and widens and there is no solution.*⁸⁸

According to Yeshayahu “*the ethnic split*” has “*no solution*”, as “*it is the fault of the diaspora*” and its “*cultural differences*”. Rather than complain about “*the Eurocentric framework*” of the Zionist project (Shohat, 2017:13). he adds a somewhat cryptic assertion:

But it is twice as much our own fault, those standing here. We do not take care to bring hearts together, we do not try to mend the cracks in our walls.

⁸⁵ At least one Yemenite-Jewish woman is well remembered for her “*revolutionary*” spirit: Palestine born Simcha Tzabari (1913-2004) joined the pioneer Communist youth movement at age 14 and became a dedicated anti-Zionist activist ([see Haaretz article of Dec. 7, 2004 \[Heb\]](#)).

⁸⁶ Extreme modesty was indeed a commonly used high praise for Yemenites by mainstream Jewish Israelis, way into the 1970s. I base this on personal hearsay. At present Yemenites are popularly labelled in Israel as very stingy.

⁸⁷ Historical research, as mentioned above (Eraqi Klorman, 2003:25-27), does not support this description of Yemenite Jews’ life in Yemen, or their relations with local people, as slavery or “*iron inferno*”.

⁸⁸ Mordechai Tabib superbly recounted similar feelings of alienation in his writings, chiefly in the novel “*Like a Juniper in the Prairie*” (Tabib, 1957).

It is impossible to follow who Yeshayahu points at here, using the collective “*We*” that bears some responsibility for the “*split*” and the “*cracks in our walls*”. Are those “*We*” the Yemenites, the Labouring Youth Movement, or the entire settler community that he now fully identifies with? As not a word is said about material deprivation, “*structural oppression*” (Shohat, 2017:38) and unequal distribution of Zionist resources, it is unclear who “*those standing here*” are, and what is expected to be done in order “*to mend the cracks*”.

It is for the third and last group of Yemenite youth that Yeshayahu has the harshest words, beginning by denouncing their very definition: the educated:

*What is “intelligentsia”? [original emphasis]
It is youth with no roots, who have no clear and certain lifestyle, who - having left the traditional-diaspora lifestyle of their ancestors - had gone downhill and reached the bottom and presently they live with no religion and no ideal, no faith and no program, no god and no purpose.*

Further denouncing those Yemenites who erroneously chose to be educated rather than perform as “*natural labourers*”, Yeshayahu furiously reports that their souls are “*empty and poor [...] filled with boredom and zero interest*”. Eventually “*One goes astray*” or concentrates on “*dreaming about America, ‘the Golden Land’*” [original emphasis]. Their only desire, he concludes contemptuously, is “*to be wealthy. As this is unachievable – what will become of them?*” Surely such Yemenites are of no use to the model society that this would-be politician attached himself to.

Conclusions from chapter 8

The idea of promoting **Hebrew Labour** through the recruitment of Jews from Arab background, defined as “*natural labourers*”, offers a useful perspective on the concept of ethnic/religious purity in the workplaces created by the settler community and its many internal inconsistencies. The way this issue was presented in the pages of **BaMaaleh** is fully compatible with mainstream Labour Zionist ideology that became the hegemonic ideology in the Jewish Yishuv in the years prior to the establishment of the State of Israel and continue to haunt Israeli society for many decades, [even to the present day].

The Zionist preoccupation with ethnic purity for the settler project encountered a serious problem when the desire to allow only Jews to work in the new settlements met with the inability of most Jewish immigrants to compete in a free labour market (see chapter 2). The possible solution of this problem by importing Jews from Arab backgrounds, mainly from Yemen, produced further complications.

When Arab Jews were discussed over the pages of *BaMaaleh* - and they were often discussed - the entries in the journal expose gaps and ambiguity in Labour Zionist discourse over the topics of **Hebrew Labour**, Jewish solidarity and socialism.

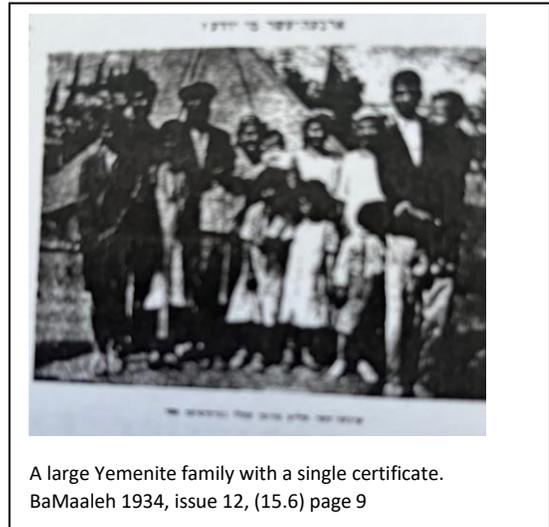
As “*natural labourers*” (Druyan, 1982:134; 136), “*best suited to compete with Arab workers in the labour market*” (Halamish, 2006[2]:66⁸⁹), Yemeni Jews, with their “*reputation as diligent workers*” (ibid:70), were sometimes even given preferential treatment as potential immigrants to Palestine by Zionist institutions as “*bringing Jews from the Yemen was intended to protect workplaces where Jews were employed, prevent them from going back to Arab hands and even make it possible to conquer new Labour positions*” (Halamish, 2006[a]:310).

The Jewish settler community of immigrants mainly from Eastern Europe developed a mixed and complex attitude towards the Arab Jews, who in the early years of Zionist settlement included mostly *Sephardi* Jews, natives of Palestine, and Yemenites: Being Jews they were theoretically accepted as an integral part of the settler community. Their similarity, however, to the local Arabs resulted in treating them as natives. Farmers and other employers favoured them because “*they were unorganized workers and could be paid less than unionized Jewish workers*” (Halamish, 2006[b]:66). Leaders and executives of political parties aspired to attract them into their ranks. Activists of Labour Zionism, regarding themselves as enlightened Europeans obliged to civilise and educate the natives - already set on the “*Zionist discourse, with its tacitly tendentious binarisms of savagery-versus-civilization, tradition-versus-modernity, East-versus-West, and Arab-versus-Jew*” (Shohat, 2017: 13), and directly inspired by the colonialist vision of “*The White Man’s Burden*” - made efforts to attract young Yemenites and

⁸⁹ Quoting from Margalith Shilo, “The Immigration Policy of the Zionist Institutions, 1882–1914,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, XXX(3) (July 1994) 597–617.

other *Mizrahi* Jews to the clubs and the evening classes of the Labouring Youth. Concurrently, they did not consider the dismal labour situation of all Yemenites, and specifically of minors, as anything out of the ordinary, as the entries in this chapter demonstrate.

The Yemenites, favoured for their assumed contribution to the concept of **Hebrew Labour** [*Avoda Ivrit*] (Halamish, 2006[b]:68)⁹⁰ found themselves as a liminal community in the Jewish settler colony: desired as immigrants, privileged compared to the natives of the land, yet removed from Zionist funds and looked down upon as ignorant, coloured natives, tracked to become “*the proletariat of the Zionist society, in the lowest level*” (Klein-Franke, 2019:162).



The assumption that Jews from Yemen – and Arab Jews in general - had the desired habitus of “*natural labourers*” turned out to be inaccurate. Jewish culture has always been based on literacy (Botucini & Eckstein, 2013) and Jews everywhere were able to provide special services that were useful to societies with a majority of illiterate members (Slezkine, 2014), mainly in urban environments (Shohat:2017:43). Jews from Arab lands were not different from Jews of Eastern Europe in their ability - and preference - to choose middle-class professions in their native countries. This was also made clear in reports about the aspirations of Arab Jews in **BaMaaleh** as shown in this chapter.

Still, the opportunity to join the Zionist project with its improved economy and seemingly advantageous treatment of Jews attracted most Jews in Arab lands. They were quick to adopt the “*The reconceptualization of Jewishness as a national identity*” (ibid:6) that was based on an aggressively promoted myth of a divine pledge about to materialise. It was a narrative that was

⁹⁰ Aviva Halamish points out that the preference given by the Zionist institutions to issue a large portion of immigration certificates to Yemenite Jews was also influenced by the fact that they came with large nuclear families, thus supporting the intent to “create in Palestine a critical Jewish demographic mass” (Halamish, 2006[b]:67)

well-suited to their *“self-definition”* and their *“storied world”* (Murray, 1986:113) and they were keen to join the new *“imagined community”* in Benedict Anderson’s famous definition (Anderson, 1991) that was being created in Palestine.

Upon arriving in Palestine, many of them resented their designated position as a Jewish proletariat in the Jewish settlement, and the fact that they were *“systematically discriminated against by a Zionism which deployed its energies and material resources differentially, to the consistent advantage of European Jews and to the consistent detriment of Oriental Jews”* (Shohat, 2017:38⁹¹). At the same time, a problem evidently troubled the Eastern European (*Ashkenazi*) settler community. It appeared that *“what the European Ashkenazi settlers imagined as racial homogeneity”* was *“challenged by intra-Jewish heterogeneities with the arrival of Arab and Mizrahi Jews”* (Lentin, 2018:103).

As a modern-era socialist movement, Labour Zionism nurtured secularity and objected to religious-orthodox edicts; However, solidarity with native Palestinian Jews and Yemenites, and especially reliance on their role as *“natural labourers”* to support the *“Conquest of Labour”* was based on religion and religious culture; there was no other common ground as far as language, norms and habits, or even physical appearance. The entries in ***BaMaaleh*** during the period under consideration in this work place special emphasis on the religiousness of Yemenites and other *Mizrahim*, *“foregrounding the naïve religiosity and the technological backwardness”* associated with them (Shohat, 2017:44). Labour-Zionist core teaching and preaching about the high value of manual labour was not shared by *Mizrahim*, who were cornered into manual and agricultural labour due to poverty and privation. As fellow-proletarians they seemed in need of an urgent *“civilising mission”*; Labour-Zionist institutions and activists did enlist and were recruited for this *“mission”*, as repeatedly recorded in the pages of ***BaMaaleh***. This further emphasised the *“otherness”* of the Arab Jews and the perspective that defined them as native and subalterns, in constant need of education and enlightenment.

A word of caution is however in order: With all the evidence about discrimination of the Arab Jews by the hegemonic group of Zionism and Labour Zionism – and this is an issue very well

⁹¹ First published in 1988.

researched and discussed in Israel⁹² - it is wrong and even ridiculous to portray *Mizrahim* as powerless subaltern victims of the system which they joined willingly, in fact. Declarations such as *“we, the Mizrahi Jews, like the Palestinians, are victims of this pernicious idea [Zionism].”* (Lentin, 2018:106, quoting Tom Mehager⁹³) or the verdict that *“the US European minority has co-opted the Mizrahi moral, economic and cultural power to resist”* (Ibid:107, quoting Reuven Abarjel and Smadar Lavie⁹⁴) are amazingly patronising, assuming that *Mizrahi* masses and leaders were (and are) nothing but a large public of dupes with no agency of their own. The facts, as well demonstrated even on the pages of **BaMaaleh**, is that Yemenites and other Arab Jews enthusiastically cooperated with the ideas of Jewish unity and the striving for religious purity in Palestine, which actually meant Jewish supremacy in the land. Their bitterness about the fact that they were not considered equal partners in the Zionist enterprise, even though their contribution to its goals was vital and eager, is understandable; but being made subaltern does not turn them into anti-colonialists: in the same way that white American women who insisted on gender equality but were active supporters of race discrimination may not be considered great “feminists”. Albert Memmi identified the issue of the “*small colonizer*” (Memmi, 2003 [1957]:55) who nevertheless is a “*a supporter of colonialists and an obstinate defender of colonial privileges*”. Although victimised by the colonial system, this person defends it vigorously because “*he benefits from it to some extent. His gullibility lies in the fact that to protect his very limited interests, he protects other infinitely more important ones, of which he is, incidentally, the victim. [...] though dupe and victim, he also gets his share.*” (ibid).

While I fully accept Ronit Lentin’s theoretical analysis that “*[...] racism, racialization, racial categorization, and racial discrimination constitute the Israeli realities of occupation and siege*”

⁹² Next to the many historical research it is worthwhile to point at filmographic works that had much impact, e.g., [RUACH KADIM \(easterly wind\) by David Shitrit](#) or [Dimona Twist by Michal Aviad](#), both winners of important artistic awards. Mainstream literature takes for granted knowledge about “... that deprivation, the inferior opportunities that were offered to immigrants [*olim*] from certain countries during the 20th century” (Gavron, 2023)

⁹³ Tom Mehager, “*Mizrahi or Ashkenazi Jews: Israel’s regime of separation,*” Middle East Eye, July 17, 2016, [Mizrahi or Ashkenazi Jews: Israel's regime of separation | Middle East Eye](#)

⁹⁴ Reuven Abarjel and Smadar Lavie, “*Another act in the Mizrahi-Palestinian tragedy,*” The Electronic Intifada, July 24, 2006 [Another Act in the Mizrahi-Palestinian Tragedy | The Electronic Intifada](#)

(Lentin, 2018:83), I cannot fully concur with her assumption that “*the overriding goal is white supremacy*” (ibid:104). As Lentin and others point out, “*Zionism [is] built on biblical discourses of Jewish racial supremacy.*” (Ibid:84). Arab Jews were discriminated against by Eastern European Zionism and did not enjoy a “fair share” in the spoils offered by its institutions and by the results of later expulsions and subjugation of Palestinian Arabs by the State of Israel. But on the whole, they embraced wholeheartedly the idea of “Jewish Supremacy”. Internal squabbles with other Jews never infringed on this rewarding concept. The fact that they were “*a Jewish Third World people*” forming perhaps “*a semi-colonized nation-within-a-nation*” (Shohat, 2017:38) did not stop them from adopting all the characteristics of the settler community when it came to usurping the rights of non-Jewish residents of Palestine. While Tom Mehager, Smadar Lavie and Reuven Abarjel clearly see the anomaly of present-day Israeli identity-politics, they must be aware of the fact that they do not represent the masses of Jewish- Israeli Mizrahim who ardently support the Zionist idea. With all their fury and nurtured hostility to the so-called “*Ashkenazi elites*”, their fury and vengeance against native Arab Palestinians, unfortunately, are ever on the rise.

The historic entries in ***BaMaaleh*** of the 1920s and 1930s emphasise the eagerness of the hegemonic group to recruit Arab Jews into its midst as well as the eagerness of members of the Arab-Jewish communities – certainly the Yemenites - to be included. The naïve girl’s wish in **Rumia**⁹⁵ is that “*All of Israel are friends*” in the Labouring Youth club; the very real politician Israel Yeshayahu called for an “*invigorating artery for all of them together*”⁹⁶. His embrace of the idea of Yemenites as useful labourers for the Zionist enterprise, just like writer Mordechai Tabib’s earnest call for an intense civilised mission by the “*one person who had intended to help the boy*”⁹⁷ – namely the Labouring Youth representative, the only hope against young Yemenites turning “*bad*” - are all representations of the generations-long appeal for solidarity with the traditionally segregated Jewish community. Structuring their community around a religion based on exclusivity, the Eastern European settlers, naturally imbued with colonialist disdain of all “brown” natives, found themselves inviting natives into their exclusive midst.

⁹⁵ Issue 3, 1935, Feb. 8, page 6. Continued on issue 4 and 5 of 1935.

⁹⁶ In issue 20, 1934, Oct. 12, page 9

⁹⁷ In issue 8, 1931, June 19, page 7

Twenty years later masses of Arab Jews were called to fill-in for the masses of expelled non-Jewish native Arabs. The predicament and ordeals of *Mizrahim* as reflected in the texts of ***BaMaaleh***, surveyed in this chapter, offer an illustrative prequel to the issue of the “ethnic rift” which has turned out to be one of the major ailments of troubled Israeli society.

Zionist Jews, like other settler-colonial societies, exercised racism against natives. The fact that their ideology forced them to (grudgingly) accept some natives and reject others, turns Zionists into a unique breed of colonisers⁹⁸. Labour-Zionism’s peculiar mixture of would-be socialism and labour ethics, mixed with would-be solidarity based on religion, created a society that was – and is – even more problematic than other settler societies. Socialism and labour-ethics have long ago evaporated from Israeli politics, and only remnants are left of the once-powerful Labour-Zionist political movement. The movement’s adherence to religion as a unique base for national solidarity, and its rejection of non-Jews, are presently aggressively promoted by the ruling far-right in Israeli politics⁹⁹. Its ambiguity regarding members of the settler community that did not fit in with the original imagined community of Eastern-European Jews, continues to perforate the Jewish-Israeli narrative from within.

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⁹⁸ Perfectly white-skinned non-Jews were and are disliked and rejected both legally and socially in Israeli Zionist society.

⁹⁹ These lines are being written during the October 2023 war that seems to signal yet another crack of the Zionist project. But there are no signs, presently, of a change in the population’s state of mind.

Postscript conclusions

In June of 2023 Barak Obama, interviewed by Christiane Amanpour for CNN, said some words that caught my attention: *“all humans have a strong desire to coalesce – particularly in times of stress – around tribe, clan, race, wherever our religious preferences are. **And politicians have a good way of exploiting that.**”*

It is the way politicians and other elite figures exploit the natural human tendency to “coalesce” along racial, ethnic and religious tribes, that Teon Van Dijk analysed in his seminal *“Elite Discourse and Racism”* (Van Dijk, 1993) as well as in his “Conclusions of 30 years of research” (Van Dijk, 2011). And it seems to summarise well this work that deals with one organ of Labour Zionist propaganda, packing messages targeted successfully at a stressed community about a century ago.

Academics have long ago identified *“Israel as a settler society and Zionism as a settler project”* (Veracini, 2006:14). Still, a large section of Jewish-Israeli society – identified with the segment that used to be the “hegemony” of this society – firmly holds on to the belief that Israel is a western-style democracy (officially, this is also the opinion of the leaders of the free world, as formulated by most international documents and decisions). The idea that it is politically and morally acceptable to preserve a regime that openly discriminates against the natives of the land is rejected only by a negligible minority in the Jewish-Israeli population.

The texts produced by the Labour-Zionist periodical ***BaMaaleh*** in its first decade, 1926 – 1935, display a remarkable adherence to the party-line of the political group that eventually took over the hegemony of the Jewish settlement in Palestine and went on to be adopted by Jewish communities world-wide. Concentrating on the concept of “Hebrew Labour” enabled this elite group to develop a tone that was both pious and belligerent. Skilfully pouncing on opponents from right and left of the political spectrum of the period’s Jewish settlement, the leadership, that was finally personified by the charismatic and powerful David Ben Gurion, managed to sweep energetic disciples to following the principles of exclusive self-segregation, disguised as a sublime form of socialist spirit, loyal to the much-venerated Jewish tradition. Although the actual concept of **Hebrew Labour** was never successfully materialised (Shapira, 1977), the

ideology it designed was crucial to the crystallizing of political Israeli culture. It offered a strategy for and an initiation to the demand for ethnic Jewish purity, that eventually led to *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Pappe, 2007).

This research question for this work was: How, using what rhetoric and which propaganda tools, was the idea of **Hebrew Labour** promoted by *BaMaaleh*? Bearing in mind that this periodical of the Labouring Youth Movement, fully sponsored, supported and supervised by the Leaders of the *Histadrut of Hebrew Labourers of Eretz Israel* was the powerful institution that unified the Labour Zionist Movement, and held a firm hegemonic position over the Jewish Yishuv of Palestine long before the State of Israel was founded (and for almost thirty first years of the State's existence): How did its promotion of **Hebrew Labour** represent and support the core political making of the Zionist settler project?

The work followed publications of BaMaaleh from eight different perspectives, that I believe cover all cardinal aspects of the teachings of this periodical:

Chapter 1 displayed the vision as announced by the periodical, as well as its importance for the Zionist Labour movement that produced and financed it. The chapter briefly sketched the core messages that *BaMaaleh* diligently transmitted to its young readers in both its original incarnation as a yearly or bi-yearly brochure, and its later form of a by-weekly newspaper. From its very first day the periodical aimed – and declared its aims - to influence its target audience and shape its character to suit the Zionist Labour movement ideology that had **Hebrew Labour** at its centre.

Chapter 2 concentrated on the ideology of **Hebrew Labour**, as forcefully advertised by *BaMaaleh* and presented to its young readers, with emphasis on the message of **Hebrew Labour** also as heralded and interpreted by the powerful General Secretary of the *Histadrut* at the time, David Ben Gurion, recognised as the founder of the State of Israel in later years. Through the texts published in *BaMaaleh* the chapter followed the problems and challenges to the population of young settler immigrants, and the expectations that they themselves would become agricultural labourers, in sharp contrast to their education and upbringing (their “*habitus*”) in order to fulfil the goals of the Zionist enterprise. *BaMaaleh* made clear that the

indigenous population was undesired in the Hebrew-Jewish economy and its articles fiercely attacked opponents of this attitude in the Jewish Yishuv, both on the right and on the left of the political spectrum.

Chapter 3 surveyed the way *BaMaaleh* expressed, promoted and taught the presumed socialist convictions of Labour Zionism. It followed texts advocating Marxist history and teaching, often mentioning the call for universal solidarity of all labourers of all nations. The few references to Arab labourers made clear that they should be separated from Zionist socialism. **Hebrew Labour** was promoted as a clear sign of the national fundamental ethos. The idea of “two flags” (a red labour flag next to the blue and white national flag) was presented as the convergence of nationalism and socialism.

Chapter 4 dealt with the way the concept of **Hebrew Labour** was promoted as an instrument to demand increased immigration permits into Palestine, a vital move towards materialising the vision of increasing the settlers’ share of the local population.

Chapter 5 showed how the same concept was instrumentalised in internal Zionist squabbles to discredit the Revisionist party, arch-enemy of Labour Zionism. The objection of the Revisionists to the exclusivity of organised Jewish Labour by the *Histadrut* and their support of the farmers who often wished to employ cheap Arab workers were pointed at as objection to **Hebrew Labour**. This enabled Labour propaganda to describe the Revisionists – self-proclaimed militaristic right-wingers - as lesser nationalists than their socialist opponents. It is a strategy that stands in sharp contrast to well-established images of “right” and “left” in Jewish-Israeli politics.

Chapter 6 followed texts displaying deep attachment to Jewish religion and Jewish cultural tradition. Against the declared secular character of Zionism and particularly Labour Zionism, attachment to the religious tradition that demands a total separation from gentiles (“*Am Levadad Yishkon*”) provides a powerful rationalised pretext for the **Hebrew Labour** decree against the presence of non-Jews in workplaces. The religious-traditional element is recognised as a major generator of the Israeli insistence on “ethnic purity” (see Shahak, 1994) that was also

behind the motives for the *Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Pappe, 2007), otherwise called the Nakba.

The last two chapters of this work deal with the settlers' attitudes and images of the native people of the settled area, which included two very different segments. Much can be learnt from the difference in *BaMaaleh's* treatment of the images of the two groups, revealing a major problematic aspect of Zionism in general and of Labour Zionism in particular.

Chapter 7 follows the way images of the local Palestinian Arabs were displayed throughout the texts of *BaMaaleh*. The emerging picture presents a familiar Eurocentric, colonial-style contemplation of the indigenous population: The Arabs of Palestine were described as primitive and ignorant, causing much damage to the land and gullible enough to be led by inciters into violence against the benevolent settlers who wish to ameliorate their standard of living. Their "*inferior culture*" was quoted as another justification to keep them away from the Hebrew workplaces and from Jewish-only labour unions, thus offering a sound base for the **Hebrew Labour** maxim.

Chapter 8, the last chapter, follows how *BaMaaleh* writers and editors dealt with the uneasy encounters with the part of the population that belongs both to the settler community (based on their religious affiliation) and to the native community (based on their Arab ethnicity, language and culture). *Mizrahim*, and especially Yemenites, seemed indispensable for preserving the concept of **Hebrew Labour**. At the same time, it was difficult and undesirable to accept them as equal members of Eurocentric [European-originated] Settler society.

Following the different aspects and reflexions of the **Hebrew Labour** concept in the pages of *BaMaaleh* enables a direct and undiluted perspective of the development and entrenchment of the ethnic purity maxim that was and still is basic to Zionism. Conventional wisdom identifies ideology of ethnic superiority as a right-wing feature. Reading *BaMaaleh's* early issues, one discovers that in Zionism ethnic segregation and Jewish supremacy were perfected through the teachings of the official Labour movement.

Understanding this offers a perspective on what is presently considered the Israeli liberal left and its historical peculiarities. *“Critical positions over Zionist policies towards the Arabs”* (Tzoreff, 2023:16) were rejected unanimously, and after the establishment of the State of Israel were officially marked as *“illegitimate positions”* (ibid:17).

The conceptual and ideological implications of the struggle to establish perfect **Hebrew Labour** in the Zionist settler colonial project were profound, and their practical implications were disastrous. Soon after the 1948 Nakba, a series of apartheid-like legislations (Nationality/Citizenship laws, present-absentee regulations, JNF regulations etc.) passed with hardly any mainstream Jewish objections. *“An enormous system of apartheid legislations has been operating the workings of the Israeli State for 70 years [...] the nationality law as a basic law brands and converges these laws into a kind of a completed apartheid constitution”* (Aminov, 2022; 155).

In 1967, the occupation of further areas of Palestine generated further catastrophic legislations against the *autochthon* populations of the West Bank and the Gaza strip, and a blatant exponential increase in settler-colonialist expansion. The many Israeli Jews and their supporters abroad who hope to arrive at an end to the present bloody conflict are well-advised to realise that the occupation is not the source of the present malaise but merely one of its outrageous outcomes, and that the source is the very *“framework of the national Jewish state”* (Tzoreff, 2023:19) which is the creation of Labour Zionism. The skilful *“cluster of myths”* (Pappe, 2017:8) which *“offered policies of disinformation and distortion”* (ibid) did not start with the ascension of ultra-religious fascists or with the personality of a particularly cunning political crook who became a Prime Minister of Israel many years ago. Reading **BaMaaleh**, this educational organ of Labour Zionism (modelled on *“National Socialism”* as defined by Zeev Sternhell [Sternhell, 1995: 17;29; 41; 44]), anyone hoping to find peace in the Middle East must realise that the present malaise took hold over a hundred years ago. The present research shows how the promotion of the concept of **Hebrew Labour** by a Labour Zionist organ supported the core political making of the Zionist settler project, which efficiently and systematically *“legitimised”* Jewish supremacy for the immigrating settler population.

These conclusions support the view advocating the dropping, once and for all, “[...] *the sacred distinction between Jewish settlements in Israel (before 1967) and those in the West Bank (after 1967)*” (Pappe, 2017:137), as the “*charade will end soon, peacefully or violently, but either way painfully*” (ibid).

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