

**The Holidays of the Revolution
Myth, Ritual and Identity among Tel Aviv Communists, 1919-1965**

by

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**A Thesis
presented to
The University of Guelph**

**In partial fulfilment of requirements
for the degree of
PhD
in
History**

Guelph, Ontario, Canada

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ABSTRACT

THE HOLIDAYS OF THE REVOLUTION MYTH, RITUAL AND IDENTITY IN AMONG TEL AVIV COMMUNISTS, 1919-1965

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The Israeli Communist Party (MKI) and its precursor, the Communist Party of Palestine (PKP), were a unique Arab-Jewish organization. Marginalized and persecuted for most of its formative years, the Communist Party developed, from 1919 to 1965, its own distinctive subculture. Negating and absorbing the Zionist-Socialist and Israeli statist cultures, influenced by both Soviet and left wing European traditions as well as Jewish traditional elements, the Jewish Communists developed their own cycle of holidays.

Through the examination of primary sources, ranging from internal Communist documents and newspaper articles to photographs and posters, as well as interviews with contemporaries and comparison with parallel Communist experiences in the United States and in the Arab world – this thesis examines the myths and rituals reflected in the holidays, as practiced by the Jewish Communists in MKI and the Israeli Young Communist League (Banki). The thesis scrutinizes the identity these cultural practices produced. By examining the Jewish holidays, the Israeli civic holidays, May Day, the Soviet November 7th and May 9th holidays, and the rituals concerning the relations between Palestinians and Jews, it is shown that between the years 1919 and 1965 the Jewish Communists created a local, Jewish-Israeli, anti-Zionist patriotic identity. This identity, although sensitive to the working class, was not a working-class identity; it was philo-Soviet and interested in civic rights of Palestinians. A minority of Party Members were Palestinians. The thesis concludes that, nevertheless, the Jewish Communists were not able to

withstand the attempts of some factions among themselves to favor the nationalist over the socialist principles. Burdened by the weight of the conflict between Arabs and Jews, the MKI finally split in 1965, ending a significant phase in the development of Communist subculture in Israel.

For my father

and

Yael

Acknowledgments

The origins of this research lie in two classes that I took with Professor Yuval Dror and Professor Avner Ben-Amos at Tel Aviv University during my Masters studies. My decision to write an essay about the Israeli Communist Youth Movement exposed me to the primary sources that became the building blocks of this dissertation. When dealing with rituals and national memory in Europe and Israel I encountered the ritualistic aspects of political culture, which stimulated my interest in ritual and myth carried on into this research.

I want to thank the History Department of the University of Guelph that supported me in writing this research. This thesis was guided and encouraged by my instructor, Dr. Alan McDougall, whose keen interest and care set an example of superb professionalism that I can only wish to achieve. Observations of my committee members, Dr. Jasmin Habib and Dr. Renée Worringer, challenged my thinking and greatly improved the quality of this research. The proofing of this work was aided by Joan King. I want to especially thank Ruvik Danieli, a paragon of creative and efficient editor whose help at the crucial final stages of this research was vital. Additional thanks are also due to Ben Yishai Danieli for locating and sending articles from Israel, and to Robin Bergart for doing the same at the Guelph University Library. I want to thank all my interviewees, present and ex-members of the Communist Party and its youth movement, and mainly Yair Tzaban, who gave me a lengthy and fascinating interview, and Tamar and Yoram Gozansky who opened their house and their memories to me.

Another thank you goes to my parents in-law, Anat and Alex Biletzki, who constantly supported and advised me throughout this research. Their political and intellectual commitment will always be a guide to me. A special place in my heart is held by my wife Yael, the first

reader and editor of my work; without her constant support I could not have gone through the rigorous process of a Ph.D. Also a great thank you to my two children Eyal and Illy. I hope that the values of solidarity with the weak and downtrodden, and of human dignity above cultural and ethnic boundaries, will be yours.

Last but most important: To my parents, whose undying love sustains me always, I owe more than I can put into words. My consolation is that my father, who passed away recently, saw me finish this thesis. This work is dedicated to him.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On a beautiful noon in May of 2009, a crowd of about 1000-1500 congregated at a Jerusalem mountain overlooking the ancient village of Abu Ghosh. Beside the stone monument in the foreground, overlooking the wooded valley below, stood a small podium decorated with a photographic image taken by Yevgeny Khaldei of a Soviet soldier waving the flag over the Reichstag. Behind it, in anachronistic defiance of post-1991 reality, the Israeli flag flew alongside the Soviet flag. The ceremony at the foot of the monument was simple, made up of speeches in Hebrew, Russian and Arabic and the laying of wreaths. The audience consisted mainly of young Palestinians, many of them adorned in red and bearing the image of Che Guevara, Communist youth members in white shirts and red scarves intermingling with older Party members, Arabs and Jews and the representatives of the Russian delegation in Tel Aviv. At the end of the ceremony, the participants held a mass picnic, with the youth singing revolutionary songs in Arabic while engaged in barbecuing. This mixture of ritual and mass picnic commemorating the Soviet victory in World War II is organized by the Israeli Communist Party and its affiliated organizations, and it has taken place every year since 1950. This cultural practice and others like it lie at the heart of this thesis, which deals with the rites of the Jewish Communist subculture of the 1920s to the mid-1960s.

The basic premise of this research is that the Jewish Communists developed a unique subculture of their own in the years 1919-1965. This subculture was formed in a process of negation and absorption vis-à-vis two local political cultures: the dominant Zionist-Socialist culture of pre-1948 Palestine, to the point that the Communists participated in the political culture around them as a dissident stance in Zionist-Socialist discourse and the statist culture of

the post-1948 state of Israel. A second influence that shaped the Jewish Israeli Communist subculture was Soviet and East German cultures and the traditions of the European Left.¹ From that aspect, the Jewish Communists in Palestine/Israel were not the only ones whose cultural surroundings were impacted by Europe. The Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) was influenced by both immigrant traditions from Europe and those of American origin. All were interpreted and used in Marxist and American radical contexts. American Communists developed a "special political-cultural relationship between folksong and the Communist movement." Their revolutionary utopian vision of America was based on "a complex mixture of European anarchist and socialist traditions, American utopian Communist traditions, the idealization of the Soviet Union, and, by the late 1930s, a view of American democracy itself."² Through its cultural practices, rituals, myths and symbols, the Jewish Communist subculture disseminated its values among the members of the Communist Party and its youth movement. More importantly, the cultural practices of the Jewish Communists were used to create a distinct Jewish-Israeli Communist identity, made up of Jewish traditional, Israeli local and Soviet and left-wing European elements.

The merger, in 1954, of the MKI (Israeli Communist Party) and Banki (Israeli Young Communist League) with the Socialist Left Party³ led by Moshe Sneh⁴ was a watershed in both the political and cultural history of post 1948 Israeli Communism, upsetting the equilibrium

¹ Paul Mishler, *Raising Reds: The Young Pioneers, Radical Summer Camps, and Communist Political Culture in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 6-7.

² *Ibid.*, 6-7.

³ Between the time of Moshe Sneh's split from MAPAM (United Workers' Party) in 1952 and his followers' assimilation into the MKI in 1954 he formed the Left Socialist Party, or, in short, the Left. Those who followed him to the MKI were thus dubbed the "Left men".

⁴ Moshe Sneh (1909-1972) was an Israeli politician and thinker. He started his political career as a liberal Zionist in Poland. After arriving to Palestine in 1940, he was one of the key figures in the leadership of the *Yishuv*, mainly in the Haganah. At this period he started to lean to the left and led the left wing of MAPAM. He broke away from it in 1952, joining the MKI in 1954. In 1965 he played a key role in the split-up of the MKI and led the Jewish MKI until his death in 1972.

between the local and universal elements in the MKI and Banki. In an attempt to give the Party and its youth movement an Israeli character, the "Left Men" accelerated the adaptation of local Israeli elements at the expense of the Communist ones, thus contributing to not just the political but also the cultural disintegration of the MKI.

The process of localization of Communist parties was not restricted to the MKI and Banki; the American Communist leadership, whose party had grown out of Socialist associations of Finnish, Jewish and Eastern European immigrants, tried to Americanize the Party, encouraging assimilation within American culture. In contrast to the Israeli case, however, the cultural adaptation did not create a tension that threatened Party unity. It was also carried out by the leaders of the Party and not by a group within the Party elite.⁵

Still another case of the localization of Communism was that of the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP). In the years since its founding in 1934, the ICP "went from being an 'international' Communist party, established with the help of the Communist International in Moscow and ultimately intended to pursue revolutionary policies aimed at advancing 'world revolution' in Iraq, to becoming a largely 'Iraqi' political party."⁶

In order to explore the cultural practices of the Jewish Communists, extensive archival research preceded the writing of this dissertation. At the Yad Tabenkin archives and the Lavon Institute for Labour Research, a wealth of primary sources were examined and used. Housing the archives of the MKI and Banki, the Yad Tabenkin archives include official publications of Banki and the MKI, materials like pamphlets, posters, and Banki's newspaper *Kol Hanoar* (Youths'

⁵ Mishler, *Raising Reds* and Theodore Draper, *The Roots of American Communism* (Chicago: Elephant Paperback, 1989).

⁶ Johan Franzén, *Red Star over Iraq: Iraqi Communism before Saddam* (London: Hurst & Company, 2011), 1.

Voice),⁷ and internal documents, such as instructional brochures describing the political and cultural content of Banki's activities. The archive also includes a splendid collection of Communist wall posters. The Lavon Institute for Labour Research holds an extensive collection of original documents of the Party and its front organizations, covering the years from the early 1920s to 1948 when mainly the PKP (Palestine Communist Party) operated. It includes both external publications of the Communists, mainly handbills, and internal documents that were seized by the *Haganah* (in Hebrew, literally defence: the main Jewish military organization before 1948) secret services. The Lavon Institute also houses the personal files of leading Communist leaders Moshe Sneh and Shmuel Mikunis and those of Moshe Aidlberge, an important figure in the Soviet-Israel friendship movement. Another valuable source held in the Lavon Institute is the files of the Communist Party front organization, the V League, which aided the Soviet Union (U.S.S.R.) during World War II, including a fine collection of V League wall posters.

Another primary source is the memoirs of members and ex-members of the Communist Party. Despite the limitations of their recollections as personal and self-serving texts that may embellish their authors' role in historical events, they provide important insights into the history of Banki and the MKI.

The last primary source is interviews, conducted in 2005 and 2009, with Daliya Manheam, Dani Peter-Petziel, Mira Vardi, Nissim Calderon, Tamar Gozansky, Yoram Gozansky, Uzi Borshtien, Yoska Valershtiean, Zafrera Kalorman, Leah Bebkov, Shoshana Shmoley and Yair Tzaban, all of them members and ex-members of the Party and its youth

⁷ Throughout the dissertation titles of books and articles are transliterated at first mention; thereafter, the (shortened) English translation is used. Titles of newspapers and newsletters are transliterated throughout; the English translation is given at first mention.

movement; hailing from the largest branch of Banki in Tel Aviv, they represent both the leadership of the movement consisting of "Left Men" as well as old-guard Communists, i.e., a representative cross-section of the Jewish members of Banki. As for Banki's important branches in Haifa or in towns like Petah Tikva, there is a considerable secondary and primary material to describe the movement's inner life. Most of those who played a part in Banki and the MKI since the 1940s are still alive and their testimonies provide important information. It must be taken into account, however, that the interviewees were involved in the Party's internal struggles and in that sense their oral testimonies are biased to one side or the other: on the one hand representing a critical view of the MKI and Banki's policies from a Zionist point of view, but on the other hand toeing the Party line. The limits of age and human memory should be kept in mind as well: the distance of years from the events has probably distorted many an account. All the same, the oral history is an excellent source for the cultural practices described here, giving us the point of view of the historical agents involved in them.

As comprehensive as the sources of this research are, there are some limitations and biases inherent in them. The oral interviews conducted are Tel Aviv centered and *Ashkenazi*. The Tel Aviv branch of Banki was the largest one of the movement and was completely dominated by its Jewish members.⁸ These facts alone present a distorted image of Banki – coming from a Jewish point of view. This is a vantage point that fails to take into account the voices of Palestinians and non-European Jews. These perspectives and omissions are somewhat offset by the presence of secondary sources that do deal with other branches of the party, but it is clear that this element of the research should be investigated more fully in future work.

⁸ Jacob Markovizky, *Hultsa Levana Aniva Aduma* (White Shirt and Red Tie), (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 2003).

The Tel Aviv-centered focus of some of the research, also mainly in the case of interviews, raises another important element – the localism of the MKI and Banki. Despite the relatively small territory of Palestine/Israel in the years under discussion, the bi-national nature of the country and waves of immigration did create significant local diversity. A few examples suggest this localism. *Tu Bishvat*, for instance, with its planting ceremony was celebrated only in the Communist kibbutz Yad Hana and was not a part of the political culture of urban Party members.⁹ Another case in point was the hostility towards the MKI and Banki members, which was more pronounced in Haifa than in other cities with Tel Aviv being relatively more tolerant towards Communists.¹⁰ These differences in localities have not yet been fully researched, though it does appear in the literature and is touched upon in this thesis.

Indeed, the Jerusalem, Haifa and Nazareth branches of the MKI and Banki are not examined separately in this thesis. This research has not delved into the way Communism and its subculture was experienced differently in various locales. This history awaits more in-depth exploration, focusing on wide-ranging interviews with a wide array of Communists from different geographical areas.

1.1 Continuity and Innovation in the Research of Israeli Communism

One of the few historians to research the history of Communism in pre 1948 Palestine defined it as "an empty space that was not marked on the map of research."¹¹ There is a hint of exaggeration in this assertion. Jewish and Palestinian historians, Zionist and Palestinian

⁹ Carmit Gai, *Masa Leyad-Hana* (Back to Yad-Hannah), (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 1992).

¹⁰ Markovizky, *White Shirt and Red Tie*.

¹¹ Shmuel Dothan, *Adumim: Hamiflaga Haqomunistit Be'erets-Isra'el* (Reds: the Communist Party in Eretz-Israel), (Kfar Sava: Svana Hsofer, 1991), 12. Translation by A. Locker-Biletzki. (Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Hebrew texts by Locker-Biletzki.)

nationalists, and post-Zionists have all dealt with the history of Communism in Palestine/Israel.¹² However, the entirety of their efforts pales in comparison to the literature on European Communism in Germany and the Soviet Union. It is therefore indicative that in the recent histories of World Communism, Robert Service's *Comrades Communism: A World History*¹³, and Archie Brown *The Rise & Fall of Communism*¹⁴ Israeli and Middle Eastern Communism merits not even a footnote.

This exclusion is unwarranted. After the introduction of Communism to Palestine in the 1920s, Communist Parties sprang up in almost every major country of the Middle East. Among Palestinians, before 1948, Palestinian and Jewish Communists modernized and democratized Palestinian politics. After 1948, the Communists forged among the Palestinians left after the *Nakba* (in Arabic, the Catastrophe; the Palestinian name for the 1948 War) a Palestinian community fighting for its rights within the framework of an exclusive Jewish state.¹⁵ Among Jews, the Communists are the oldest anti-Zionist political body in Israel, boasting a history longer even than that of the historical Zionist parties. In 2013 the Communist Party, through its front Hadash (an acronym for The Democratic Front for Peace and Equality), is a vital political force represented by four Knesset (Israeli Parliament) members. Some of the events portrayed in this research, namely May Day and the Soviet victory celebrations, are still being held, presenting to the historian a living picture of continuity and change. Such an ability to survive

¹² For examples of the three schools of historians, see Dothan, *Reds*; Musa Budeiri, *The Palestine Communist Party 1919-1948: Arab & Jew in the Struggle for Internationalism* (London: Ithaca Press, 1979); and Joel Beinin, *Was the Red Flag Flying There? Marxist Politics and the Arab-Israeli Conflict in Egypt and Israel, 1948-1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

¹³ Robert Service, *Comrades: Communism: A World History* (London: Pan Books, 2007).

¹⁴ Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism* (Harper Collins: New York, 2009).

¹⁵ For the modernizing effect and the way the Communists organized Palestinian with Israeli citizenship into a community of struggle, see Ilana Kaufman, *Arab National Communism in the Jewish State* (Jacksonville: University Press of Florida, 1997).

and remain a fixture in Israeli politics and society, in some small way even to thrive in a country hostile to Communists, merits a closer look.

This thesis looks at the Communists from 1919 to 1965 differently from previous research on Israeli Communism. While conforming with the current tendency to view Israeli Communism from a cultural point of view, this research has as its focal point not Palestinian-Jewish interaction within the Party, but the Jewish Communists themselves. The reasons for treating this group separately and as a relatively homogenous group will be detailed shortly; nonetheless, this focal point is a departure from the Palestinian-Jewish paradigm that has dominated the field. The cultural take on the history of the Jewish Communists enables us to map, for the first time, the Jewish Communist subculture that evolved from the early 1920s to the mid-1960s in Palestine/Israel. With the political and organizational side given less emphasis, a more sophisticated view of Communism as a cultural entity emerges and a whole range of issues in the history of the MKI and Banki are seen in a different light. For instance, the connection to the Soviet Union emerges as more than just organizational obedience, but a deep cultural bond. The relation to Palestinians is seen apart from the framing of recruitment levels and politics as a unique way in which the Jewish Communists viewed the Palestinian Other. The thesis places one locale of Israeli Communism in its proper context, on the one hand as part of a global movement that shared the same cultural motifs, and on the other hand as a product of its indigenous Israeli and Jewish roots.

The twentieth century was characterized by the rise of two nineteenth-century European ideologies: revolutionary Socialism and nationalism.¹⁶ Ever since the French Revolution,

¹⁶ For a modernist take on the creation of nationalism, viewing it as being constructed rather than based on predominant ethnicity, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and nationalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1983); and Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

increasingly so from the mid-nineteenth century, nationalism took root in Europe. The further shock of the brutal massacres of World War I awoke in the small nations of Europe, long under the sway of the old empires, a new spirit of independence. Socialism, which originated among small groups of intellectuals and workers as the Industrial Revolution gathered pace, did not achieve state power in nineteenth-century Europe. It did take root in the territory of the vast Russian Empire in 1917 with the establishment of the first workers' state. The case of the Jewish Communists and the unique subculture they developed, which selectively intertwined Jewish national elements with universal Socialism, is a test case of the meeting of these two conflicting ideologies.

With the rise of European nationalism from the 1860s onwards came the rise of Jewish nationalism.¹⁷ By the *fin de siècle*, Jewish Zionist nationalism, which originated among Western and Eastern European Jewish intellectuals, including Theodor Herzl,¹⁸ had taken root among the poor and restless Jewish communities in Eastern Europe. Nonetheless, nationalism was not the only ideology to find a place there. Socialism with its universal message of liberation enchanted the Jewish youth, besieged by the anti-Semitism of the Tsarist regime, the peasant masses, and at times the revolutionary movement's own anti-Semitic outbursts. In the ideological, political battle between Zionism and Socialism, some politically active Jewish intellectuals tried to

¹⁷ For a history of the Jews in modern times and the spread of nationalist ideas and Zionism among them, see Shmuel Ettinger, *Toldot Am Isra'el: Kerekh Shlishi Ba'et Hahadasha* (History of the Jewish People: Volume 3 Modern Times), (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1969).

¹⁸ For a survey of Zionist thinkers in their European context, see Shlomo Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism: the Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State* (New York: Basic Books, Inc Publishers, 1981).

reconcile the two extremes, most prominently Dov Ber Borochov¹⁹. From his marrying together of Zionism and Marxism emerged the first Jewish Communists in Palestine.²⁰

This thesis will argue, in contrast to other scholars, that the Jewish Communists did away with the Zionist aspects of their ideology rather quickly, however, as for the rest of their history they had to confront Zionism. Politically, they negated it completely, as will be explained below, that being a vital principle of Party ideology. At the same time, the Jewish Communists did not exist in a void. They were surrounded by the hegemonic Zionist-Socialist culture of the *Yishuv* (Hebrew "Settlement" – the pre-1948 Jewish Zionist community in Palestine), and after 1948 by the cultural practices of the new Israeli state. In a long process that started in the early 1920s, the Jewish Communist subculture was infused with elements from Tel Aviv culture. In that sense, although their political creed set them apart from mainstream Yishuv society, the Jewish Communists were nevertheless part and parcel of it.²¹ Their reaction to Zionist culture, defined as a reinvented Jewish tradition with secular nationalist content, in all its modes varied during the long period from 1919 to 1965, from outright rejection, mainly in the initial stages of Communism in Palestine, to greater receptivity. As the cooptation of the Jewish Communists to some aspects of Israeli society was accelerated, the process of diffusion of Israeli motifs was hastened. At the end of this process in 1965, the equilibrium between the national local and the internationalist Communist elements was disrupted, tearing Israeli Communism asunder.

¹⁹ For Borochov's synthesis of Marxism and Zionism, see Dov Ber Borochov, *Ktavim Nivharim Kerekh I* (Selected Works, First Volume), (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1944); *Ktavim Kerekh Rishon* (Works, Vol.1), (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1955); *Ktavim Kerekh Shlishi* (Works Vol. 3), (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1966).

²⁰ Dothan, *Reds*; Yehuda Slozski, "Mimapsa Beve'idat Hayesod Shel Ha'Histadrut", ("M.P.S.A in the Founding Convention of the Histadrut"), *Asufot* (collections) 14 (1970): 133; and Slozski, "Mimapsa Ad Ya'ap (Pe'ape)" (From M.P.S to Y.K.P (PKP)), *Asufot* 16 (1972): 3.

²¹ There is a description of the Communists by Shmuel Dothan as "the negative of the Jewish Society in twentieth century Eretz-Israel." See, Dothan, *Reds*, 9. I find this portrayal, like many points in Dothan's important research, unjustifiably dismissive of a group that was, despite all its flaws, the first to criticize the wrongs and failures of Zionism.

Socialism and nationalism may have originated in Europe, but they were not confined to European soil. From the late nineteenth and into the twentieth century, the non-European world was penetrated by European ideas. To the Near East the ideas and ideals of Socialism were brought by Eastern European Jews.²² It took time for Communism to make any headway among Palestinians, and its appeal to Jews, most of them Zionist or Orthodox, was limited. Nonetheless, throughout this history a constant, albeit small, number of ex-Zionists filled the ranks of Israeli Communism, and as the years went by a generation of native Israeli Communists grew up in Banki and the MKI.²³ This research, then, shows how a European framework of thought, Communism, was reflected in the rites, symbols and myths of the indigenous and non-native Tel-Aviv Communists. From that argument stems the premise that the second largest influence on the shaping of Jewish-Israeli Communist subculture was Soviet and European.

Political ritual in the modern world has come down to us from the Middle Ages and the French Revolution.²⁴ The ideologies of the modern age, like nationalism and Socialism, were disseminated through the use of symbols, myths and rituals as cultural practices to create nations or call for a radical change in the social order. Within the confines of their own subculture, the emergent and mostly European Jewish Communists in Palestine since the 1920s developed a unique array of political cultural practices. Here I make the claim that those cultural practices

²² The cultural interaction between Jews and Palestinians in the Communist Party in the years 1919 to 1948 is brilliantly illustrated by Avner Ben-Zaken's pioneering work. His argument is similar to the argument in this work that European frameworks of thought were transferred from a European to a non-European setting. He argues that Marxism, European by origin, was brought to the Near East by East European Jews and then transmitted to small groups of Palestinians. However, I do not accept his paradigm of "Cultural Imperialism", since Jewish Communists viewed Marxism as holding the potential for liberation and as not completely blind to local conditions.

²³ Nessia Shafran, *Shalom Lekha Komunizm* (Farewell Communism), (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1983); Dothan, *Reds*; and Markovizky, *White Shirt and Red Tie*.

²⁴ For the development of political state rituals from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century, see Sean Wilentz ed., *Rites of Power Symbolism, Ritual and Politics since the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985). For the emergence of political rites in the French festivals of the Revolution, see Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

were shaped by the two great cultural models towards which the Jewish Communists were inclined: the one local, Jewish and indigenous, the other Soviet and European.

Borrowing from the tradition of European Socialism, the Bolsheviks shaped a symbolic, ritualistic and mythical language that became the staple of World Communism. The small band of Jewish Communists adopted this language as part of their subculture from the early 1920s. A detailed history of the development of Soviet ritual culture will follow shortly. Nonetheless, here already it is requisite to assert that the Hammer and Sickle, the Red Flag, the Sheaf of Wheat, the profiles of the leaders, the May Day and Revolution military marches all became part of Jewish-Israeli Communist subculture.

As Zionist colonizers arrived in Palestine from the late nineteenth century onwards, the Zionist movement and mainly Zionist-Socialism developed their own celebrations, symbols and myths. Working with the traditional Jewish calendar, rich as it was with religious content, the Zionist-Socialists gave it a new-old nationalist slant. Taking holidays previously on the margins of the Jewish cycle, Zionism gave them a prominent place and nationalist secular meaning. Thus Hanukkah, a small and sidelined family celebration, became a public nationalistic rite designed around the myth of the Maccabees. Tu B'Shevat, a marginalized celebration of "New Year for the Trees," became a national tree-planting holiday. Zionism developed a unique means of transmitting the values of the new nation being built in Palestine through monuments and distinctive theatrical and literary productions. Those and other examples of that cultural transformation will be dealt with below in more detail. Even so, I make the argument here that the Jewish Communists selectively used the cultural means and mechanisms created by the Zionist-Socialists in their own subculture. When, after 1948, new cultural practices evolved centering on the state, the Jewish Communists once again selectively absorbed rituals, symbols

and myths from their surroundings. Thus, the myth of the 1948 War, the Israeli national flag, the myth and celebration of Hanukkah, and many other elements eventually became part of Jewish Israeli Communist subculture.²⁵

"Elik," says one of the most famous lines in the post-1948 Hebrew literature, "was born from the sea."²⁶ Author Moshe Shamir's brother, who was killed in the 1948 War, became the most recognizable metaphor in the Israeli Jewish culture of the *Sabra* (an indigenous desert prickly pear cactus and the name given to native Israel Jews). The new Jew of the Zionist national revival was to jettison the baggage of Jewish life in Europe; he was to be a *tabula rasa* with no past. Likened to the Greek gods of antiquity, he would come from the sea.

This research deals with another type of Jew who came to Palestine with a distinctively European past. The Jewish Tel Aviv Communists intentionally turned away from the Zionist revival project and developed an identity that included local Tel Aviv as well as European elements, reflected in their rites, symbols and myths. That identity was made up of three main layers: the first Jewish, the second Tel Aviv oriented and very local, and the third Communist. This division into distinct layers is made for the sake of convenience, as in reality those identities converged and overlapped with each other. Thus, a Jewish Communist identified with the Holocaust of his brethren in Europe as a Jew, celebrated Israeli independence as an internationalist anti-imperialist, and identified with Soviet victory in a local setting befitting of a Zionist Israeli rite.

²⁵ For a description of the origins of the Israeli ritual culture see Avner Ben-Amos and Daniel Bar-Tal, *Patriotizm: Ohavim Otakh Moledet* (Patriotism: Homeland Love), (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2004).

²⁶ Moshe Shamir, *Bemo Yadav: Pirkey Eliq* (With His Own Hands: Elik's Story), (Tel Aviv: Siffriath Poalim, 1965), 11.

1.2 Thesis Structure

The main foci of this thesis are the holidays celebrated by the Jewish members of the MKI and Banki, primarily from Tel Aviv. The chronology of the historical narrative extends from 1919 to 1965. Along this axis, the second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh chapters will examine the origins of the holidays in the early stages of Communism in Palestine. Then subsequent developments in celebratory practices from the early to the late 1940s and until the split-up of the Party in 1965 will be explored. The reason for this periodization is the history of the Party, in which legalization and the founding of the state of Israel were important historical turning points. The narrative will be accompanied by three levels of interpretation. The first is anthropological and derives from the works of Victor Turner and Clifford Geertz. I will use Turner's ritual process, structure and anti-structure, and his concepts of *Communitas* and liminality. These concepts, describing the state of the participants in African rituals in-between and betwixt the social structure, a state of liminality where they create a distinctive human bond called *Communitas*, will be applied to the marginalized Jewish Communists. Lying outside the social order, they created a *Communitas* that reaffirmed their group's identity and uniqueness. Clifford Geertz's analyses of ritual as symbolizing power will be used to describe the form of Communist rituals and to examine how they reflected the MKI and Banki identification with centres of symbolic power like the Soviet Union (U.S.S.R.), the working class, and others. On a second level, I will explore the influences that shaped the cultural practices of the holidays, be they Soviet and European, Jewish traditional or local Israeli. On a third level, I will examine the Tel-Aviv Communist identity as reflected in the ceremonies, myths and symbols portrayed in the historical narrative.

The chapters of the thesis will follow the different layers of Jewish Communist identity. The Jewish and Soviet holidays respectively will be examined as a group because of the clear thematic link between them. May Day, its celebration related mainly to working class militancy, and Arab-Jewish fraternity²⁷, was a uniquely Jewish Communist element, stand as two different themes to be dealt with separately. In the first part I will examine the Jewish holidays, starting with the Jewish New Year and ending with *Shavuot*. The second part deals with the new Israeli national civic calendar, mainly Holocaust Remembrance Day and after it Independence Day. Remembrance Day for the fallen was not celebrated by the Jewish Communists as such, so despite its importance it is not dealt with here nor are other Jewish holidays for which the evidence is scarce. The order of the holidays here follows the chronology of the Jewish traditional calendar as well as the Israeli civic calendar. The third part of the thesis explores one of the Jewish Communists' most public ceremonies, May Day. The fourth part focuses on the Soviet holidays, May 9th and November 7th. The two holidays are arranged according to their order in the Soviet calendar. The fifth chapter of the treatise deals with how the Tel Aviv Communists viewed and interacted with Palestinians. No stable, calendar-based ritual developed from this interaction, but it did create important symbolic and linguistic practices and an ongoing tradition of Arab-Jewish festivals that were not fixed in time but were nevertheless a fixture in Tel Aviv Communist reality.

The thesis, as thus outlined, portrays the Jewish Communists as part of a subculture moving between different temporal circles of an eternal return.²⁸ The first circle is Jewish

²⁷ The term "Arab-Jewish" was used by members of the Party, both Jewish and Palestinian, consistently. We use it in the same way throughout the dissertation when the context requires it. Otherwise, we adhere to "Palestinian-Jewish".

²⁸ The myth of the Eternal Return was conceptualized by Mircea Eliade, who contrasted the circular perception of time, history and myth of archaic societies with the linear, historical, concrete comprehension of these issues in Western Judeo-Christian culture. One could argue that Communism inherited from Judeo-Christian culture a linear, future-based perception and at the same time preserved a circular Eternal Return myth of coming back to a Golden Era of classless society. This might explain how the Jewish Communists were able to move in circular temporal

tradition and the Zionist reinvention of it. The second is the one invented by the Israeli nation-state. The third is the Soviet state's revolutionary and patriotic calendar. The fourth is an internationalist circle that belongs to the traditions of the labour movement. And the fifth is the internationalist content of proletarian solidarity, locally expressed by Arab-Jewish fraternity.

1.3 Concepts

At the heart of this research stand four concepts. The first is the human collective which is the subject of this research, the Jewish Communists; the second is their organizational edifice, the MKI and Banki; the third is the culture in which they all operated, Zionist-Socialism; the fourth is Communist anti-Zionism.

From 1919 to 1965, the Jewish Communists practiced a defined subculture, made up of Soviet and European as well as Israeli and Jewish elements,²⁹ which were reflected in their rites, symbols and myths. In the Israeli historiography and sociological historiography there are few references to the existence of a Communist subculture. Baruch Kimmerling argues that "in the years of statism and hegemony, a public sphere with real autonomy from the state could not be created."³⁰ The only autonomous spheres were the Orthodox community in Jerusalem and the "subculture created by the Arab-Jewish Communist Party."³¹ Those subcultures were so marginalized, he adds, that "they had hardly any influence."³²

frames emanating from Judaism or Soviet Communism. Mircea Eliade, *Hamitos shel Hashiva Hanitshit* (The Myth of Eternal Return), (Jerusalem: Carmel Publishers, 2000).

²⁹ A similar take on American Communism can be found in Paul Mishler's book on the young Communists in the U.S. from the 1920s the 1950s. He formulates it as political culture that was made up of local American as well as European elements. Mishler, *Raising Reds*.

³⁰ Baruch Kimmerling, *Mehagrim, Mityashvim, Yelidim: Hamedina Vebahevra Be' Isra'el – beyn Ribuy Tarbuyot Lemilhemot Tarbut* (Immigrants, Settlers, Natives: The Israeli State and Society between Cultural Pluralism and Cultural Wars), (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 2004), 169.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 169.

³² *Ibid.*, 169.

There is no disputing the fact that the Jewish Communist subculture was marginalized. Nessia Shafran, an ex-member of Banki, described the youth movement as "... one of the less understandable phenomena in Israeli society. People never understood why boys and girls that were born in Israel joined a despised and rejected youth movement, membership in which carried with it a mark of disgrace."³³

Yet if one gazes into its inner workings a more complex picture emerges. Beyond the unique and important place that Arab-Jewish fraternity held in it, the Communist subculture existed in constant relation to other cultures. The two major cultural influences on it were the Soviet and Zionist-Socialist. From the time of the Revolution in October 1917, the Bolsheviks created symbols, rituals and myths that became the universal language of world Communism. This system of symbols, codified by the Soviet State, was adopted by the Jewish Communists in Palestine/Israel. Thus their subculture came to include cultural practices such as May Day parades and the myth of the October Revolution and such symbols as the Hammer and Sickle, and many others.

The collectives which are the subject of this research are the Jewish Communists in Tel Aviv. The MKI and Banki of the 1950s and early 1960s were multicultural organizations. "The Communist Party was filled with people carrying with them their lifelong cultural baggage that they brought with them from their countries of origin: Iraqis steeped in Arabic culture, Bulgarians longing for their language, Poles that held literary receptions in memory of the poets Slonimski and Julian Tuwim, veteran *Yekkes* rooted in German culture, and above all – people that were connected to Mother Russia with all their souls."³⁴ The multiethnic character of the Party is supported by the statistics on the MKI. In a 1961 census 54.6 percent of the membership

³³ Shafran, *Farewell Communism*, 43.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 175.

came from Europe, 11.4 percent from Asia, 3.1 percent from Africa, and 1.1 percent from America. That contrasted sharply with the only 29.8 percent of Israel or Palestine-born Communists, most of them Palestinians.³⁵ Another telling statistic comes from a survey of the strength of Party branches. In the southern district of the Negev, "the greatest increase in party strength"³⁶ took place in 1960-1961. Since the Bedouins living in the area did not vote for the MKI, nor did the kibbutzim members who were Zionist, the increase in MKI strength "stemmed from the new Jewish immigrants,"³⁷ who were settled in the Negev in large numbers during the late 1950s and early 1960s.³⁸

With such persuasive evidence, how can it be argued that the Jewish Communists should be analyzed as one group? Furthermore, how can they be examined separately from the Palestinian section of the MKI and Banki? These two fundamental questions can be answered by three arguments. The first is numerical. From its formative era in the 1920s to its split-up in 1965, the Party was predominately Jewish. The most detailed statistics indicate that out of a total of about 3,000 members,³⁹ as of 1960, 25.7 percent of the MKI membership was Palestinian, giving the Jewish membership a majority of 74.3 percent.⁴⁰ So while they were not the politically dominant group in an organization that self-consciously promoted Palestinian-Jewish equality, they were definitely the largest. The second argument is ideological: despite their different cultural tastes, the Jewish members of the MKI and Banki were bound together by Party ideology. As will be shown, the Jewish Communists conveyed the same ideological messages

³⁵ Moshe Czudnowski and Jacob Landau, *The Israeli Communist Party and the Elections for the Fifth Knesset, 1961* (Stanford: Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, 1965), 20.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁸ The American Communist Party was also a multicultural organization, bringing together under one roof Yankee Okies and Kentucky miners, Black Americans, New York Jewish garment workers and middle-class intellectuals as well as Eastern European workers. See Vivian Gornick, *The Romance of American Communism* (New York: Basic Books Inc., Publishers, 1977).

³⁹ Markovizky, *White Shirt and Red Tie*, 48.

⁴⁰ Czudnowski and Landau, *The Israeli Communist Party and the Elections for the Fifth Knesset*, 19.

about the core issues such as Arab-Jewish fraternity, the U.S.S.R. and class politics. When analyzing subjects like Jewish holidays, Zionism or Israel, they used the ideological terms of Marxism-Leninism. Therefore, despite their cultural differences, the Jewish members of the MKI and Banki shared a common Marxist-Leninist worldview that made them one group. The third argument, negative by nature, is the fact that most of the Jewish members split away from the Jewish MKI after 1965, exhibiting group behaviour.⁴¹

As much as the Jewish Communists were a relatively cohesive group within the Party bound together by Marxist-Leninist ideology, one group stands out. The MKI never managed to make any considerable inroads into communities of non-European Jews – except for Iraqi Jews. In the years before the waves of immigration of Jews from the Arab states, and in the years of the British Mandate in Palestine, the PKP did not approach non-European *Sephardic* Jews. Some individuals, mainly Yemenite Jews that had settled in Palestine in the late 19th century, did join the Party. Smirch Tsabri, one of the central leaders of the PKP at the start of the Arab Revolt, was from Yemenite ancestry.⁴² The Party did make an effort in 1930 to organize Yemenite and Persian women domestic workers and was encouraged to do so by the Comintern⁴³. However, no large numbers of non-European Jews had entered the Party before the 1950s.

In 1961 – the year for which we have the most reliable data about Party membership – there were 11.4 percent of Party members from Asia (mostly from Iraq), in contrast to

⁴¹ On the eve of the 1965 split-up, about 15% of the Jewish Party members stayed in the faction, later to become the Palestinian-Jewish RAKAH. Most of them were Iraqi and Bulgarian MKI members and those that joined the Party before 1948; these groups had an ideological cohesiveness that enabled them to withstand the split. Furthermore, the Jewish members who joined the Party before 1948 had seen the splits in 1940 and 1943, and were thus better able to weather the 1965 split. See Kevin Devlin, "Communism in Israel: Anatomy of a Split," *Survey* 62 (1967): 142, and Shafran, *Farewell Communism*.

⁴² For Simcha Tsabri's life story, see Dalia Karpel, "Bemoskva Qar'u La Yamina" (In Moscow they Calld her Yamina), *Haaretz* (the Land), December 7, 2004.

⁴³ Leon Zahavi, *Lehud O Beyahad: Yehudim Ve'aravim Bemismakhey Haqomintern 1919-1943* (Apart or Together: Jews and Arabs in Palestine according to Documents of the Comintern (1919-1943)), (Jerusalem: Keter, 2005), 223-226.

membership from Africa (mostly from North-Africa) that numbered only 3.1 percent.⁴⁴ The data also reveals that the MKI did not make any large headway into other non-European Jewish communities, especially Jews from North-Africa. This demographic makeup entails that the MKI members were mostly European or Palestinian; but the third largest group in the Party were Iraqi Jews.

Who were these Iraqi Jews who became Party members, and how were they more predisposed than other groups of non-European Jews to Marxism? Most of the Iraqi recruits to the Communist Party had a revolutionary background in their home country. Iraqi Jews "were 14.5 percent from the membership of the Iraqi Communist Party."⁴⁵ They were well educated since the Iraqi party appealed mostly to young Jewish students in the Jewish community in Baghdad.⁴⁶ And they were secular. Shimon Ballas aptly describes how he refused to fast in *Yom Kippur*, much to his family's indignation.⁴⁷

The Party, for its part, was happy to recruit them and the Iraqi-Jewish intellectuals found a cultural outlet in the pages of *Al-Jaded* (*The New* – Arabic), the first literary supplement of *Al-Itched* (*The Union* – Arabic), the Arabic newspaper of the Party. *Al-Jaded* became the most important literary monthly of the Palestinian community in Israel. On its pages Palestinian and Jewish Arab Iraqi intellectuals like David Zemah, Shimon Ballas, Sami Michael and Sasson Somekh – who later rose to prominence as Hebrew writers and academic researchers of Arabic literature – wrote together with the Palestinian writers of the MKI, Emile Habibi, Emile Touma and others. Thus the Iraqi-Jewish Communists, with their sensitivity to Arabic culture, created

⁴⁴ Czudnowski and Landau, *The Israeli Communist Party and the Elections for the Fifth Knesset*, 19.

⁴⁵ Shafran, *Farewell Communism*, 28.

⁴⁶ For a portrait of the young Jewish intellectuals who were drawn to the ICP, see Shimon Ballas, *Beguf Rishon* (First Person Singular), (Benei Berak: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2009) and Sami Michael, *Hofen shel Arafel* (A Handful of Fog), (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 2006).

⁴⁷ Ballas, *First Person Singular*.

with their fellow Palestinian comrades a unique bi-national and mono-linguistic cultural site.⁴⁸ The group of young Iraqi intellectuals who joined the Party in the 1950s were also intensely active in creating a literary club named "Lovers of Arabic Literature in Tel Aviv". In it they debated issues like the move to writing in Hebrew and tried to bring together Jewish and Palestinian writers.⁴⁹

As much as the MKI was receptive – in some sense – to the Arabic culture of its Iraqi-Jewish members, in other respects the Party was alienated from them. Shimon Ballas reported, from early on, that the Party members and its leadership were ignorant in regard to the Arab world. When he met Meir Vilner he was surprised by his unfamiliarity with Syria. This encounter, he says "alerted me to the level of ignorance among the Israeli left in regard to the Arab world."⁵⁰ Even the debate among the Iraqi-Jewish Communist intellectuals about the move from Arabic to Hebrew served to highlight their relative isolation, as they were confined to an enclave of Arabic speaking Palestinians and Arab-Jews. They could converse with the Arab world and with their Palestinian comrades, but, in order to be understood by the other Jewish comrades of the Party and, indeed, by Israeli society at large, they had to write in Hebrew. The feeling of cultural strangeness and a hint of superiority towards Jews from the Arab world is clearly illustrated by a talk Ballas had with Wolf Ehrlich, a central committee member and a German Jew. After Ballas tells the elder comrade about his wish to serve the Party by writing, Ehrlich says: "It was easier for you to be accepted by the Palestinians... it was also more natural. But the Palestinians are sitting in refugee camps beyond the border and

⁴⁸ Ibid., 44.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 45.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 40.

those who are left are locked under the military rule. You have a problem. You are also different from the rest of the immigrants dwelling with you at the transit camps."⁵¹

Beyond these cultural misunderstandings, the Party did not integrate its Iraqi members into its political leadership. Not one of them was in the central committee or the politburo.⁵² The MKI did not even make an effort to publish a newspaper that would address Jews from North Africa and the Middle East, in contrast to its many publications in European languages.

Still, on balance, the Communist Party's record with its non-European members was better than the attitude of the MAPAI (Eretz-Israel Workers' Party) establishment to Arab-Jews. ("Eretz-Israel", the Land of Israel, usually referred to the place rather than the nation or the state; its use could carry political connotations of ownership and belonging. It is used in this dissertation only when quoting others or when referring to explicit use by contemporaries.) The Party championed the grievances of new immigrants, fighting for decent housing, regular work and social rights for the slum dwellers, many from the Arab world, Iraqis among them. As we have seen, Iraqi Arab-Jewish intelligentsia created cultural spaces within the MKI in which to express themselves. The young Iraqi-Jewish intellectuals did enjoy the cultural patronage of the Party and its intellectuals, notably – Alexander Penn.⁵³ However the MKI was not devoid of a hint of Orientalist superiority towards its non-European Jewish members, declining to integrate them into its highest institutions or even to publish their newspaper. Nonetheless, the Party retained strong nuclei of Iraqi cadres that, unlike other groups of immigrants, stayed in it even beyond the 1965 split.⁵⁴ This fact testifies doubly – first to the strength of the link between the

⁵¹ Ibid., 48.

⁵² Shafran, *Farewell Communism*, 28.

⁵³ Sassoon Somekh, "Erev - Aruḥat Ere vim Alexander Pen" (Evening – Dinner with Alexander Penn), *Haaretz* (The Land), January 8, 2007, and Ballas, *First Person Singular*, 85-87.

⁵⁴ Shafran, *Farewell Communism*, 29.

Palestinian and Iraqi-Jewish member, and secondly to the level of loyalty of these members to internationalist Party ideology.

The Jewish Communists, the subjects of this research, organized in two institutional frameworks from the early 1920s to the mid 1960s, the MKI and its youth movement Banki. One of the points arising from the history of the MKI and Banki is that the Communist mother party had little organizational control over its youth movement,⁵⁵ in contrast to the Free German Youth Movement (FDG) in East Germany, which kept tight political control over its youth activity. It was more akin to the American Communists, whose youth activity was of lesser volume than union organizing and racial equality action.⁵⁶ The main thing pulling these two bodies together was the hostility towards both MKI and Banki members of their social surroundings. I argue here that notwithstanding the organizational relations between the MKI and Banki, they should be treated as one political, ideological and above all cultural entity. There was a cultural affinity between them, bonding the elder and younger Communists. This link is expressed in both young and old Communists' declarations of their inner truths. In a poem read at a ceremony where the youngest Banki age group, the *Bney Amal* (Hebrew – sons of toil), received their ties, the young Communists "make a convent... with toil and peace." Their way is illuminated "by the fraternity of two peoples." Finally, the young Communists felt "to us, to us the future."⁵⁷ The same values found expression in the statements of MKI members. In an article named *A Communist Credo*, Party secretary Eliyahu (Alyosha) Gozansky asserted that the Communists "do not want peace until the war. We want peace, not war."⁵⁸ He goes on to say "that for every Rockefeller there are

⁵⁵ Markovizky, *White Shirt and Red Tie*, 71-73.

⁵⁶ Alan McDougall, *Youth Politics in East Germany: the Free German Youth Movement 1946-1968*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004). For the American case, see Mishler, *Raising Reds*.

⁵⁷ "Anu Omdim Yashar Hayom", (We Stand Straight Today), Yad Tabenkin Archives (Ramat Efal, Israel).

⁵⁸ Eliyahu Gojanski, *Bema'arakhot Hama'amad Veba'am: Kovets Ma'amarim Vene'umim* (In the Battles of Class and Nation: Selected Articles and Speeches), (Tel Aviv: The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Israel, 1959), 259.

millions sowing wheat and rice, millions of workers, thousands of writers, artistes and engineers," with all of whom the Communists identify. In conclusion, he states the core tenet of the Jewish Communists' faith: "the unity between the Jewish and Arab peoples, first between the Jewish and Arab working classes, is one of the principles of our work."⁵⁹

The cultural affinity between the MKI and Banki makes it possible to examine them as the centre of the political, ideological and cultural activity of Communism in Palestine/Israel. Political youth movements were important both in Leninist practice and ideology, and in the political culture and practice of the *Yishuv*. In his speech to the third Komsomol Congress in 1920, named *The Roles of the Youth Alliances*, Lenin stressed the importance of the Communist youth as performing "the true role of building Communism."⁶⁰ He went on to depict that role as a combination of practical work among the masses and theoretical Communist education. Throughout the speech, the importance of the Communist youth is said to derive from the fact that they are the ones that do the practical work of the Party among the masses. The old society could be taught "Communism only by connecting every step of its learning, its education, with the unceasing struggle of the workers and toilers against the old exploiters' society."⁶¹ In the fight against ignorance to construct the new society, "... the younger generation is required to take the matter into their own hands. Communism in essence consists of the same youth, the same young men and women, who are in the youth league, saying: that is our business, let's unite and go into the villages and liquidate ignorance."⁶² Finally, the youth would carry the future: "the same generation that is now fifteen will see the Communist society! It will build it."⁶³

⁵⁹ Ibid., 263.

⁶⁰ Vladimir Lenin, *Al Brit Hano'ar: Ne'um Be'Veidat Hakomsomol Hashlishit*, (Words for the Youth: a Speech at the Third Komsomol Congress), (Tel Aviv: The Central Committee of the Israeli Young Communist League, 1958), 6.

⁶¹ Ibid., 18.

⁶² Ibid., 20.

⁶³ Ibid., 22.

In the case of the Jewish Communists, this importance ascribed to the youth translated into the continuous existence of the Communist youth movement, even in skeletal form, during the underground years of the Party. It was also manifest in the revival of Banki after the early 1940s to become the vanguard of the MKI's propaganda work. As one ex-member of Banki recalls, "I was then the girl that went to teach in the slums, who distributed pamphlets in the streets... who dragged her legs from house to house and sold newspapers to strangers," all because "like the Party members, who sent us, we truly believed that we had the monopoly on the secret, that we were chosen by history to bring the great light to the masses, still in darkness."⁶⁴

For the *Yishuv* generally, the Zionist-Socialist youth movements served a vital function as the training site of the elites that would be nation-building.⁶⁵ In a process that started in the 1940s, the youth movements became politicized and attached to the *Yishuv's* political parties, losing their educational autonomy. As Raphael Gat summarizes, "by the end of 1945 the era of the Eretz-Israeli youth movements ends and a period begins of youth organizations that are operated by political bodies and are inspired by the parties."⁶⁶ Banki anticipated that process, having been from the start under the tutelage of the Communist Party. Conversely, the revival of Banki after the legalization of the Party in 1941 paralleled similar processes within the Zionist-Socialist political culture as regards the politicization of the youth movements.

The Jewish Communists organized in the MKI and Banki did not perform their cultural practices in a cultural vacuum. The Zionist *Yishuv*, in a process that began with the second wave

⁶⁴ Shafran, *Farewell Communism*, 45.

⁶⁵ Naor, Mordechai ed. *Tnuot Hano'ar 1920-1960* (the Youth Movements 1920-1960), (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1989).

⁶⁶ Raphael Gat, "Tnu'ot Hano'ar shel Erets-Isra'el Ha'ovedet 1930-1945 – Derekh Hit'havutan Veme'oravutan Hapoliṭit", (The Socialist Youth Movements in Palestine 1930-1945: the Emergence of the Movements and their Political Involvement), (PhD diss., Tel Aviv University, 1974), 294.

of Jewish immigration to Palestine starting in 1904, came increasingly under the political hegemony of the workers parties. The process culminated in the 1930s when the political parties of the Zionist Left, backed by the economic power of the biggest union in the country, the *Histadrut*, took control of the Jewish self governing bodies in Palestine. From a cultural perspective, the symbols, rites and myths of Labour Zionism became the dominant ones among leading segments of the *Yishuv*.

In Israeli historiography and sociological history, the Zionist-Socialist parties' political and cultural hegemony has been framed under the term civil religion. In their pioneering book *Civil Religion in Israel*, Charles Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya define civil religion, after the American scholar Robert Bellah, as one that "embodies characteristics of traditional religion – it projects a meaning system, expressed with symbols, but at its core stands a corporate entity rather than a transcendent power, even if it only refers to transcendent reality or even a supernatural power."⁶⁷ The civil religion is in turn used to legitimize the social order, giving it a sense of rightness and purpose in the eyes of the collective. In the Israeli case, according to Liebman and Don-Yehiya, the term refers to the Zionist civil religion as differentiated from traditional religious Judaism. In their analysis of pre-1948 Zionist society in Palestine, they distinguish between five civil religions: civic liberal, Revisionist, Orthodox Zionist, non-Zionist and Zionist-Socialist. Zionist-Socialism is defined by Liebman and Don-Yehiya as a "religious surrogate ... [t]hat provided meaning and purpose to individual existence by mobilizing the individual in the collective effort to establish in the Land of Israel"⁶⁸ an ideal society based on national and social justice. After 1948, they argue, the domination of Zionist-Socialism was replaced by statism that gave rise to a quasi-religious system around the state and its symbols,

⁶⁷ Charles Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 4.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

only to itself be replaced later by a more traditionally oriented Jewish civil religion (which remains outside the scope of this dissertation).

The concepts of Liebman and Don-Yehiya will be used throughout this research, though not without criticism of their content and form. First, the term civil religion does not capture the subject of this research. Liebman and Don-Yehiya admit that in the pre-1948 era the *Yishuv* had a plurality of civil religions, but still stress the fact that it "... was united in its commitment to Zionism, to settlement of the Jews in the Land of Israel, to a renaissance of Jewish culture, and to the formation of an autonomous Jewish society."⁶⁹ On these specifications, the term civil religion becomes restricted only to the legitimization of the social order by Jewish Zionist communities. Communities of Jews that challenged the Zionist social order are thus excluded from analysis. Another limitation of the model offered by Liebman and Don-Yehiya is its monolithic explanation of Israeli political culture, which does not account for the move from a Zionist pluralism of civil religions to an all-inclusive statist civil religion.

In order to negate the limitations of the civil religion framework and inject some flexibility into its basic tenets in this research, the terms "culture" and "subculture" will be used. Zionist-Socialism can be viewed as a dominant culture, and Communism, in its Israeli context, as a subculture of Zionist-Socialism, at times negating some of its aspects, at other times absorbing them. The same framework applies to statism, as Israeli Communism can be analysed as having been in a constant process of negation and absorption of the state's symbols, myths and rites. A civil religion is used as a tool to legitimize the social order in the eyes of the community of believers and to mobilize it for the aims of the elite. Nevertheless, these attributes of civil religion do not apply in the case of a group whose aims are outside the norms of a particular civil religion, or in the Israeli case a Jewish anti-Zionist community of believers like the Jewish

⁶⁹ Ibid., 28.

Communists. Nonetheless, the term “culture” allows a wide range of expression to dissenting groups, which nevertheless share the same space as the mainstream political culture. In the Israeli case, that means the Jewish Communists organized in the MKI and Banki could be part of both Zionist-Socialist and statist cultural discourse. They could thus mobilize their community of believers and legitimize their power hierarchies while operating contrary to the aims of mainstream Zionist culture.

The exact ideological strands of Zionist-Socialism that the Jewish Communists interacted with and their approach to Zionism will be dealt with shortly. At this point it is imperative to present a short working definition of Zionist-Socialism and to formulate its differences from Palestine/Israel Communism. For the purpose of this research Zionist-Socialism is the whole of the ideological, cultural and institutional framework, which was a concretization of an ideology combining Zionism with nationalized Socialism. This ideology was realized by a set of institutions like the Zionist-Socialist parties, the Histadrut, an underground military – the Haganah – and the Kibbutzim, as well as a cultural, political set of rituals and symbols. This hegemonic Zionist-Socialist culture was the one in which the European Jewish Communists operated, absorbing parts of it and negating others.

Although it might appear that in the cultural arena the Jewish Communists, at times, resembled Zionist-Socialism, in a great many other respects they were two very separate entities. Throughout their history, the Jewish Communists had, to various degrees, consistently rejected Zionism. Excluded from tools of the state-in-the-making that the Zionist-Socialists controlled since the early 1930s, they were lacking in any real governmental or state power after 1948. The Jewish Communists, during these years, had a pronounced preference for Socialism, with its universal and humanist context, over Jewish Zionist nationalism.

This thesis deals at great length with the Jewish Communists' relations with Zionist political culture, both during the pre-state era and after it. In the pre-state era, one could argue that the Communist Party and its youth movement were both anti-Zionist. When one looks at the Jewish Communist subculture, however, it is hard to avoid the Tel Aviv and Jewish elements that constituted it, especially as regards the way the Jewish European Communists dealt with the 1948 War and the Holocaust. Did the Jewish Communists actually become Zionists in a gradual process from the early 1920s to the mid-1960s? It is important first to define the Zionism that the Jewish Communists objected to and to chart the historical development of their anti-Zionism from 1919 to 1965. It is also important to critically deal with the historical literature that has tackled the question regarding the Zionism and anti-Zionism of the Communists in Palestine/Israel.

The Communist Party defined Zionism in April 1926 as a "movement of the Jewish Bourgeoisie and financial capital."⁷⁰ In a 1930 letter from the Comintern political secretariat to the PKP, Zionism's link to British imperialism is clearly defined. "The Jewish bourgeoisie is the main agent of British imperialism in Palestine... Zionism revealed its true nature as an expression of the Jewish bourgeoisie's desire for exploitation, expansionist nationalism and oppression."⁷¹

The Zionist-Socialist ideology was defined by the Jewish Communists early in their history as a "national bourgeoisie ideology that hurts the revolutionary idea." At the 11th Party congress, Meir Vilner expressed the MKI's antipathy to Borochovist ideology, stating in a programmatic

⁷⁰ "Hahevdelim beyne'inu" (Our Differences, April 1926), in Zahavi, *Apart or Together*, 135.

⁷¹ "Lamiflaga Haqomunistit Hapaleština'it 10.23.30" (To the Palestine Communist Party 10.23.30) in, Zahavi, *Apart or Together*, 236.

lecture that "Socialist-Borochovist Zionism contains most of the basic qualities of Jewish bourgeoisie-nationalism."⁷²

The same basic definition of Zionism was reasserted in 1961 by Samuel Mikunis. In a report to the 14th Party congress, he stated that "Zionism is the ideological tool of the Jewish bourgeoisie in the era of imperialism and the link between it and imperialist reaction." The Communist Party is the one "that uncovered the true nature of Zionism as the class tool of the Jewish high bourgeoisie against the mass of Jewish toilers." The entire history of Zionism "is the history of the use of Zionism by imperialism for its own aims." He extended this ideological definition beyond the Marxist Zionism of Borochov to include Zionist-Socialism as a whole, insisting that "most of what is said here applies also to Socialist Zionism."⁷³ Thus, for the Communists the nationalist content of Zionism exceeded the Socialist element of its ideology.

Zionist-Socialism was the hegemonic political faction of the *Yishuv* era and of the state of Israel until 1977. The Zionist-Socialist movement that had been developing since the early twentieth century in Palestine encompassed the kibbutzim, the workers parties, and youth movements, and it wielded enormous economic power in the hands of the Cooperative Workers' Company that was controlled by the all-inclusive union, the *Histadrut*. By the early 1930s Zionist-Socialism had become the hegemonic political, cultural and economic power in Jewish Palestine and the World Zionist movement. In the first decades after 1948, Zionist-Socialism preserved its hegemonic position and was the politically dominant power in Israel.

Ideologically, Zionist-Socialism was supposed to be an harmonization of Jewish nationalism and Socialism; in fact, however, the two ideological political forces of Labour Zionism – the one emanating from the unification of the right wing of *Po'aley Zion* (Workers of

⁷² Meir Vilner, Programmatic Lecture, 11th Congress Book, in Markovizky, *White Shirt and Red Tie*, 42.

⁷³ Samuel Mikunis, *Besa'ar Tkufot 1943-1969* (In the Storms of our Times: Selected Articles and Speeches, 1943-1969), (Tel Aviv: The Israeli Communist Party Central Committee, 1969), 388.

Zion) with *Hapo'el Hatzza'ir* (The Young Worker), and the other originating in *Hashomer Hatzza'ir* (the Youth Guard) – both relegated Socialism to a subordinate role to the aims of political Zionism.

In origin, Hashomer Hatzza'ir was heavily influenced by the anarchism of philosopher Martin Buber and Pyotr Kropotkin and the Socialism of Gustav Landauer. However, from 1924 onward it developed a Marxist-Zionist ideology that was formulated by 1927 in the Two Stage Theory. Zionism was defined as "the complete rehabilitation (of the Hebrew People) by the establishment of a Socialist society in Eretz-Israel, which will be realized in two stages: 1) establishment of the Hebrew national home in Eretz-Israel on an independent economic basis; and 2) The Socialist Revolution." The Socialist stage was defined in Marxist terms: "The new Socialist society will be built upon the training and education of the working class toward the seizure of power and the management of the economy and production on the one hand, and the destruction of the existing order on the other hand."⁷⁴ Despite the Marxist rhetoric it invoked, the Two Stage Theory was able in reality to indefinitely postpone the realization of the Socialist revolutionary stage. *Hashomer Hatzza'ir* and its settlement movement and successive political parties concentrated on achieving nationalist aims in the 1930s and 1940s, subordinating their Marxism to their Zionism.

MAPAI (Eretz-Israel Workers Party), which first appeared as a unified party in 1930, went even further in its subordination of Socialism to Zionism. Over the course of the 1930s and 1940s and into the first decades of statehood, MAPAI was the focal point of political and economic power. It was the dominant party in the Histadrut, in the Jewish Agency, and in the

⁷⁴ "The Ideology of the Kibbutz Ha'Artzi, Established by *Hashomer Hatzza'ir*," Meqorot (Origins), Booklet 5, 156-158, in Rina Peled, *Ha'adam Ha'adash shel Hamahapekha Hatsyonit: Hashomer Hatzza'ir Veshorashav Ha'Erope'im* ("The New Man of the Zionist Revolution" Hashomer Hatzza'ir and Its European Roots"), (Am Oved Publishers: Tel Aviv, 2002), 53.

world Zionist movement. It was the centre of governmental power, heading every Israeli government until 1977. Ideologically, MAPAI developed a form of nationalized Socialism that unified non-Marxist Socialism and Zionism. MAPAI preached the building of workers organizations that would be financed by national funds controlled by the Zionist middle class in Europe. Thus, Zionist-Socialism – or, in the ideological jargon of the party, Constructive Socialism – was regarded not as a Socialist vanguard in the class war, but as a national elite meant to rejuvenate the Jewish people.⁷⁵ The rejection of Marxist Socialism and the preference for Zionism are evident in the words of MAPAI's historian, Meir Avizohar: "From the approach of Constructive Socialism, it was concluded that the problem of the Jewish workers in Eretz-Israel was in essence different: capitalism was not the reality they wished to change, but the *galut* (exile – Hebrew). The change was to be accomplished not by revolution and correction, but in exiting. Whoever left the *galut* and came to Eretz-Israel would not find an existing society and economy, which had to be seized, but a largely uninhabited country. Talking about an Eretz-Israeli revolution against the Jewish capitalist class, or against British imperialism, between the wars is *preposterous* empty talk."⁷⁶ These ideological tenets resulted in interclass peace between the labour movement and the bourgeoisie, cooperation with the British, and the exclusion of Palestinians. They constituted the ideological divide that separated Palestinian/Jewish Communism from Zionist-Socialism from the 1920s to the mid 1960s.

Already in the early twentieth century the contradiction between Zionism and Socialism emerged when the first members of *Po'aley Zion* arrived in Palestine with their Borochovist ideology. The right wing of the Party struggled to shape the politics of its Palestinian branch in

⁷⁵ For a critical view of Zionist-Socialism in terms of National Socialism, see Zeev Sternhell, *Binyan Uma O Tikun Hevra* (Nation-Building or New Society?), (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 1995).

⁷⁶ Meir Avizohar, *Ide'alim Hevratyiyim Vele'umiyim Vehishtakfutam Be'olama shel Mapay: Miflegat Po'aley Erets-Isra'el Vebilti-Miflagtiyim 1930-1942* (National and Social Ideals as Reflected in MAPAI – The Israeli Labour Party – 1930-1942), (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 1990), 50.

1907 in accordance with the tenets that would later form the core of Constructive Socialism. However, not all members of the Party agreed with the preference for the national over the Socialist: "How are we to more tightly combine the idea of international proletarian solidarity with the national competition against the Arabs... one of the two: if we are 'real' internationalist Socialists, we must not push out foreign workers because we are all brothers and comrades against capital and its rule."⁷⁷ When those *Po'aley Zion* members that opposed the rightwing *Ahdut HaAvoda* (Labour Unity) formed the MPS (Socialist Workers Party) in 1919 to 1920, their preference for internationalist Socialism was pronounced in a programmatic article. The early Communists declared: "Socialist Palestine will be built on a sound economic alliance with the mass of Arab toilers. Our Socialism means one Socialist economy for the whole country and its populace. We do not believe in 'Socialism' only for one part of the population. Our demands and slogans must concern all the workers of Palestine. The wall that was erected between Arab and Jewish workers by the bourgeoisie and social-traitor elements must be replaced by a Socialist alliance."⁷⁸

The formation of the PKP and its acceptance as the section of the Comintern in Palestine marked the formulation of its anti-Zionist ideology. Zionist-Socialism was defined not only as preferring the nation over the class, but also as a tool in the hands of the bourgeoisie. Thus, Jewish Communist anti-Zionism, which originated from the doubts concerning the compatibility of Zionism with Socialism, became part of a wider Marxist analysis. According to a pamphlet:

Zionism is a movement that express the aspirations of the Jewish bourgeoisie that wants to create its own market, for which purpose it exploits nationalist romanticism. Zionism is linked to British imperialism, and economically to the

⁷⁷ Slozski, "M.P.S.A in the Founding Convention of the Histadrut," 133-162.

⁷⁸ *Unser Emet*, pamphlet quoted in Slozski, "M.P.S.A in the Founding Convention of the Histadrut," 157.

Zionist colonization project that is based on acute exploitation. All the actions of the Zionist organizations are preparing the ground for capitalist settlement at the expense of the exploited masses. All those parties (like *Ahdut HaAvoda* and *Hapoel Hatzair*) that talk about Socialist settlement are making it easy for the Zionist bourgeoisie to achieve its aims.⁷⁹

A document from 1926 reporting to the Comintern about the activity of the Party shows how the PKP tried to advance its political aims in accordance with its "new analysis of Zionism" as follows: "The Palestinian Communist Party is operating within the *Histadrut* to form a left wing that will place first... the questions of class struggle, dismantling the united front with the Zionist bourgeoisie, and forming a link with the Arab masses."⁸⁰ Thus, the PKP acted upon its ideological tenets in an attempt to sever the link between Labour Zionism and Jewish capital, open up the union to Palestinians, and award preference to Marxism over Zionism.

The 1930s were characterized by a continuation of the basic anti-Zionist tenets that were formulated in the 1920s. The resolutions of the Seventh Party congress, which accelerated the Arabization of the PKP in the aftermath of the 1929 Riots, give clear expression to the anti-Zionist line of the Party. Zionism, according to the Communists, is being used by the Zionist bourgeoisie to transform Palestine's Jews "into a tool for the oppression and control of the Arab workers." Zionism is also immanently linked to British imperialism as "the main tool of oppression in the hands of the British occupiers against native Arab inhabitants."⁸¹ Zionist-Socialism is attacked for neglecting the Jewish working-class interests in favor of nation-

⁷⁹ "The Communist Movement," in G. Z. Israeli, *Maps-Pekape-Ma'ki Hahaistoriya shel Hamiflaga Ha'komunistit Be'Eretz-Israel* (MPS-PKP-MKI The History of the Communist Party in Eretz-Israel), (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1953), 27.

⁸⁰ "Hamiflaga Ha'komunistit Hapalestina'it Upe'iluta, 6.2.1926" (The Communist Party in Palestine and its Activity, 6.2.1926), in Zahavi, *Apart or Together*, 77.

⁸¹ "Ha'kongres Hashvi'i shel Hamiflaga Ha'komunistit Hapalestina'it, Detsember 1930" (The Seventh Congress of the Palestinian Communist Party, December 1930), in Zahavi, *Apart or Together*, 259.

building: "The Party should uncover the *Histadrut's* betrayal of the Jewish workers themselves, in the course of strikes; it needs to urgently establish a class-based revolutionary trade union opposition inside the *Histadrut* that will struggle against the leadership and their Zionist colonial policy."⁸² Once again, the original criticism of the preference for Zionism over Socialism, which originated in the anti-Zionism of the Jewish Communists, resurfaced. In 1931, for instance, one Moshe Hashomroni argued that "'the Zionist reformism openly declares its 'nationalism' and builds on it its worldview."⁸³

The early 1930s and the first years of the Arab Revolt saw a continuation and radicalization of the strong anti-Zionist ideology formulated since 1924. However, by 1937 the Jewish Section of the PKP began a reassessment of the anti-Zionist policy. Driven by what they saw as a growing Palestinian national movement, which was destroying its progressive nature,⁸⁴ the Jewish Section argued for a more sophisticated approach to the *Yishuv* and to Zionism, all the while agreeing to the basic policy of the PKP regarding Zionism. A 1940 document of the *Emmet* (Hebrew – Truth) faction, which emerged from the Jewish Section and splintered from the Party, formulates the Jewish Communists' understanding of Zionism in the latter part of the 1930s. The document deals with Communist activity within various organizations of leftwing and liberal Zionists aimed at Arab-Jewish understanding. In accordance with the PKP line, the Jewish Communists describe Zionism as a tool in the hands of British Imperialism used to "maintain the separation between Arabs and Jews" and to blur the class war and the liberation struggle of Palestinians and Jews alike.⁸⁵ However, on the question of Zionist-Socialism, the

⁸² *Ibid.*, 259. .

⁸³ Moshe Hashomroni, "'nationalism and Socialism" – "*Ha'or*", July 4 1933," in Israeli, *MPS-PKP-MKI*, 90.

⁸⁴ For the circumstances that led to the founding of the Jewish Section and their assessment of the Palestinian Rebellion, see Israeli, *MPS-PKP-MKI*, and Dothan, *Reds*.

⁸⁵ "Haliga Le'havana Arvit-Yehudit, 'Ha'emet', Ogust 1940" (The League for Arab-Jewish Understanding, 'Ha'emet', August 1940), Lavon Institute for Labour Research, IV-445-2 (Tel Aviv, Israel).

Jewish Communists softened their approach. For them there could be a distinction between progressive and reactionary forces within Zionism. Thus, it is possible to turn "reactionary Zionism" into "Zionist Socialism", as long as this Zionism remains in the non-national context of Socialism, or, in their words, is a Zionism "that recognizes the cooperation between the peoples as a stipulation for unmitigated class warfare."⁸⁶ Despite the contradiction to the more radical line that originated in the 1920s, the Jewish Communists still believed they remained within the boundaries of Communist anti-Zionism. They continued to give preference to Socialism over Zionism, albeit in more moderate form.

The 1940s were marked by further moderation of the Jewish Communists' anti-Zionism. In an article summarizing the Party's policies in the aftermath of World War II and before its 9th conference, PKP secretary Shmuel Mikunis presented a new view of Jewish nationalism and Zionism. The PKP now voiced the views first formulated in the late 1930s. The Jewish Communists argued for the recognition of the national rights of the *Yishuv* within a bi-national Palestine. They recognized the right of the Jews of Palestine to a National Home, which they viewed as "giving the *Yishuv* a possibility of freely developing... its economic life" as well as its "national life based on progress and friendship between the peoples," while politically developing autonomous self-rule. The Jewish National Home would be "part of a democratic regime," meaning a Jewish-Arab national state.⁸⁷ This vision contradicted the Zionist demand for a Jewish state, which became open in the Baltimore Plan of 1942. The Jewish Communists still maintained the link between Zionism and British imperialism, but in contrast to earlier formulations, Mikunis asserts "that lately the British imperialists have not been using the Zionist movement as the principal tool [emphasis in the original] to realize their policies in Palestine and

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ "At the End of War World Two," in Mikunis, *In the Storms of our Times*, 45.

the Middle East."⁸⁸ In effect, by moderating their approach to Zionism, the Jewish Communists made an ideological adjustment that enabled them to argue in favor of a non-Zionist Jewish nationalism accommodated in a bi-national state. This retreat from the anti-Zionist hardline enabled the Jewish Communists to accept the 1947 Partition Plan and join in the Israeli war effort. Despite the growing integration of the Jewish Communists into the *Yishuv* and their moderation of their anti-Zionism they never became ardent Zionists. At times, the old analysis of Zionism, most particularly Zionist-Socialism, was used. On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the *Histadrut*, Mikunis comes back to the basic rift between Socialism and Zionism: "The workers and the *Histadrut* were not founded as one. The founders made it into a colonizing tool and decorated it with the right ideology and clung to it until the present time. In a backward colony and under the protection of imperialism, the role of establishing a 'new society,' of the realization of 'Constructive Socialism' and building 'The General Commune of the Workers of Eretz-Israel was presented to 'the barefoot and hungry' as the way to solve the Jewish question." The building of Jewish Palestine was accomplished, Mikunis continues, in order to conquer "a living space for her majesty the bourgeoisie," and all in an effort to "mask the charms of the world revolutionary movement, to twist the struggle of the worker, to prevent the creation of a freedom-loving force, one of proletarian solidarity and fraternity between the peoples for the liberty of the Arab and Jewish masses."⁸⁹

Even as the Jewish Communists recognized the validity of the Jewish nation in a bi-national Palestine, moderating some aspects of their anti-Zionism, they still clung to the main elements of the 1920s anti-Zionist ideology. The 1950s were marked by continued duality in the

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁸⁹ "Beyom Hashana shel Hahistadrut" (On the Anniversary of the *Histadrut*), in Mikunis, *In the Storms of our Times*, 218.

MKI's line toward Zionism. In the *Kol Ha'am* (People's Voice) trial,⁹⁰ Mikunis persisted with the non-Zionist nationalism formulated by the Jewish Communists since the late 1930s. The ideological commitment to Zionism was replaced by loyalty to the state as the aspiration of the Jewish-Israeli nation. When asked how the MKI related to the state, Mikunis answered: "The MKI's relation to the state is positive. The Party fought for Israeli independence."⁹¹ As opposed to the Zionist perception of the Jewish state as a tool for Jewish immigration and of national revival, the Communists saw the independence of the state as its main attribute. When the MKI proposals for the text of the Declaration of Independence were debated, Mikunis stressed that "we demanded to add the word independence in every place where the words 'Jewish state' appeared,"⁹² The independence of the country – in the Communist context, from imperialism – was as important if not more so than the Jewish nature of the state as a basic tenet of Zionism.

The existence of anti-Zionism alongside recognition of a non-Zionist Jewish-Israeli nation is evident in Moshe Sneh's *On the National Question: Conclusions in the Light of Marxism-Leninism*. Written as a formulation of the Left's Communist ideology before joining the MKI, it is a clear reflection of the Communists' ideological approach toward Zionism. Sneh opens by defining Zionism as "the principal nationalist reactionary ideology of the Jewish bourgeoisie in the age of imperialism." He goes on to assert that "the link between Zionism and imperialism is organic and continues, as Zionist history proves,"⁹³ illustrating his argument by historical examples extending from the nineteenth century to the 1950s. Sneh also reflects the

⁹⁰ *Kol Ha'am* trial – In 1949 the Communist organ attacked David Ben-Gurion's anti-Communist statements. The newspaper was sued for libel by the state attorney. In a landmark case for Israel's freedom of speech, the trial became a debate about the role of the MKI in the 1948 war and reveals the way it perceived its ideology and politics in the early years after 1948.

⁹¹ Edut Bemishpat Kol Ha'am Ben-Guryon (Testimony in the *Kol Ha'am* – Ben-Gurion Trial), in Mikunis, *In the Storms of our Times*, 118.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 119.

⁹³ Moshe Sneh, *Sikumim Bashe'ela Haleumit: Le'or Hamrksizem-Leninizem* (On the National Question: Conclusions in the Light of Marxism-Leninism), (Tel Aviv: The Left Socialist Party Publication, 1954), 85.

preference for Socialism in its Marxist form: "Even the most 'leftist' among the Zionist 'Socialist' faction" defer the class war and solidarity among Jewish and Arab workers until the fulfilment of Zionism, thus providing "a good service to the bourgeoisie; by splitting the unity of the working class."⁹⁴ As for the existence and development of the *Yishuv* and Israel, Sneh gives renewed expression to the notions of the Jewish Section.⁹⁵ He justifies the existence of a Jewish-Israeli nation by discounting its Zionist existence. It is not Zionism that built the nation; that is a "false perception that is borrowed from idealist thinking... [it is] not the Zionist idea [that] 'created' the *Aliyah* and settlement, security and independence," but "objective processes and struggles emanating from them."⁹⁶ The development of capitalism in Palestine is what created the Jewish-Israeli nation. (I will deal with settler colonialism in a later part of the dissertation). "The capitalist development, the one that settled Jews on parts of Eretz-Israel, is the one that caused the process of nation-making."⁹⁷ Like Mikunis before him, who substituted the state for Zionism, Sneh calls for a commitment to Israeli patriotism, one that contradicts Zionism: "As for Israeli patriotism, Zionist cosmopolitanism and nationalism are completely opposed to it."⁹⁸

The two approaches to Zionism that characterized the Jewish Communists remained in existence to the 1960s. In a report to the 1961 14th Party conference, Mikunis asserts that "Zionism is the theoretical tool of the Jewish bourgeoisie in the age of imperialism and the covenant between it and reactionary imperialism"⁹⁹ The "economic and financial enterprises of the 'workers cooperatives' and the kibbutzim are by no means 'Socialist cells' in Israel," but only a poor substitute for "class warfare and the defeat of the capitalist system and chancing it by a

⁹⁴ Ibid., 124.

⁹⁵ The Jewish section of the Party was established in 1937 by the Central Committee and was meant to be a way for the Party to work among the *Yishuv*. By 1940 it split from the Central Committee and was in effect a Jewish party.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 133.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 144.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 132.

⁹⁹ "Ma'avakenu Bahazit Ha'ideologit" (Our Struggle on the Ideological Front), in Mikunis, *In the Storms of our Times*, 387.

Socialist system."¹⁰⁰ By that time, however, as the former "Left Men" sought political and cultural hegemony within the MKI and Banki, the Israeli nationalist element had begun to supersede the anti-Zionism of the Jewish Communists. When the balance between those elements was disturbed, the Communists split up. The political battle that developed in 1965 was between those Jewish members who were non-Zionist, and those members including both Palestinians and Jews that stuck to the Party's original anti-Zionist Socialist line since the 1920s.

While the anti-Zionist ideology of the Communist Party was constant during the years from its founding to its split in 1965, the political practice of that ideology differed over the course of Party history. In the early 1920s until 1937 there was great compatibility between the ideology of the Communists and their political practices, as the Communists actively opposed and struggled against the Zionist colonization of Palestine. The first case of the Jewish Communists venting their anti-Zionism was the Afula affair, where they came into a direct clash with Zionist colonization in Palestine.¹⁰¹ This trend in Communist politics was reinforced in the aftermath of the Comintern-directed Arabization of the Party, in the years 1929-1930. The Party's anti-Zionist ideology was seen as the "obligation of the Party and its Jewish members to expose the true aim of the Jewish bourgeoisie," which was to turn the Jewish minority in Palestine into "a tool of oppression and control over the Palestinian workers."¹⁰² Thus, in political practice, the Jewish Communists were required to "conduct propaganda and incite large scale unrest against the *Histadrut* and against its main slogans – 'the occupation of labour' and 'occupation of the land'" and to "struggle against the *Histadrut* leadership Zionist colonial

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 394.

¹⁰¹ For the Afula affair, see Dothan, *Reds*.

¹⁰² Zahavi, *Apart or Together*, 259.

policy."¹⁰³ This strong link between ideology and political practice could, for example, be seen in the Party's support for the struggle of Palestinian workers in Rommel, one of Jerusalem's neighbourhoods, who were fired because of the Zionist "occupation of labour" policy in 1930.¹⁰⁴ The high point of the anti-Zionist political practice of the Jewish Communists was their support for the week long Palestinian uprising of 1933 and the 1936 Palestinian Rebellion. Most of the support lent the Palestinian Rebellion was political;¹⁰⁵ some Jewish members, however, tried to bomb and set Jewish targets in Tel Aviv and Haifa on fire while some of the Palestinian members joined armed groups in the countryside.¹⁰⁶

However, as the anti-Zionist political practice achieved its highest water mark, the Jewish Communists started to fashion a more moderate policy towards the *Yishuv*. The overtly pro-Palestinian stand of the PKP central committee prompted the Jewish faction of the Party to formulate an ideological political turn that recognized the national rights of the Jews of Palestine. This new ideological stand was still anti-Zionist in its content, but in practice it dictated a policy of cooperation with parts of the Zionist Left. In a letter from 1942, given to the Soviet delegation visiting Palestine, the writer – one Sasha Philosop – describes the ideological turn the Jewish Communists underwent in the late 1930s and its political consequences. Due to the "chauvinistic deterioration of the Party among the Arabs,"¹⁰⁷ he writes, "the Party identifies *the entire* Jewish population with the national and social interests of the chauvinist Zionist leadership and does not pay attention to the fact that the **objective** interests of the Jewish

¹⁰³ Ibid., 259.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 288.

¹⁰⁵ Pamphlets and letters in Zahavi, *Apart or Together*, 366-378.

¹⁰⁶ For these actions and incidents see Dothan, *Reds*.

¹⁰⁷ This is an example of the bias of the Jewish Party members and is evidence of their distance from the Palestinian perspective.

population, the struggle against imperialism and Jewish reaction (Zionism), are in accordance with the *real* interests of the Arab masses."¹⁰⁸ (emphasis in source).

This recognition in the interests of Jews as a nation oppressed under imperialism was manifested, then, in political practices that were meant to cooperate with segments of the *Yishuv*. The Jewish Communists were part of organizations and movements which put them into contact with wider circles within Jewish Palestine. The results were "a large-scale aid operation for Spain, the establishment of the League for Jewish-Arab Understanding, encouragement of democratic forces in the struggle against Arab terrorism, popularization of the struggle against the Peel Commission's Partition Plan, which advocated the partition of the country into 'two states,' Jewish and Arab."¹⁰⁹

These political practices in effect co-opted the Jewish Communists into the *Yishuv* institutions. This process was further escalated after the legalization of the Party in 1941 and the split between the Jewish and Palestinian Communists in 1943. By 1944 the Jewish Communists were readmitted to the *Histadrut* and were represented in the *Yishuv* Assembly of Representatives. Consequently, in 1947, Esther Vilenska, a representative of the PKP in the assembly, could naturally support the anti-British actions of the *Yishuv*.¹¹⁰

This integration into the political system of the *Yishuv* culminated with the support the Jewish Communists gave to the state of Israel during the 1948 War. By the end of the war the MKI was part of the new state's political system, participating in the Knesset elections and supporting the Law of Return.¹¹¹ Even at the grassroots level the Jewish members of the Party

¹⁰⁸ Zahavi, *Apart or Together*, 400.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 400.

¹¹⁰ Esther Vilenska, *Arakhim Vema'arakhot* (Value Concepts and Class Struggles), (Tel Aviv: Hedim, 1973), 182-187.

¹¹¹ The Law of Return, enacted in 1950, provided for (almost) automatic citizenship for Jews immigrating to Israel. Yair Tzaban stresses that even the Palestinian members of Knesset voted for the law. (Yair Tzaban, interview by

enlisted and served in the IDF. Paradoxically, *Kol Ha'am* ran obituaries for one of the Party members who was killed in the 1956 Sinai War, a war the Party objected to.¹¹² An obituary for a Party member who died in an accident while serving in the army states that "even when serving in the army he consistently stuck to the principles on which he was brought on."¹¹³ Banki joined the Zionist projects, helping the new immigrants in slums on the edges of the cities.¹¹⁴

In contrast to their political and social practice, however, Communist ideology remained ardently anti-Zionist. Even as late as 1961, Shmuel Mikunis could attack Zionist articles of faith such as the Negation of the Diaspora, the Ingathering of the Diaspora, or the fixed nature of anti-Semitism and argue that "Zionist ideology and policy are deeply contradictory to the reality of lives of the Jewish masses and their vital interests."¹¹⁵

The rift between ideology and practice was clear to Party members. Dani Peter-Petziel gives a clear expression of this element: "It was a Party that signed the Declaration of Independence, accepted the Law of Return... indeed it was not a member of the Zionist Organization, did not advocate the Ingathering of the Diaspora, but was never against *Aliyah* or against the immigrants that came into the country."¹¹⁶

The growing move towards political practices that were increasingly close to Zionism endangered the genuine anti-Zionist ideology of the Party. Resembling the German Social-Democrats, who, after their heroic underground years under the "Socialist Laws" from 1878-1890, developed a reformist practice while still adhering to Marxist revolutionary ideology, the

author, Tel Aviv, Israel, February 12, 2009). It is difficult to know if the reasons for this may have been true as no Palestinian Members were interviewed for this dissertation.

¹¹² "Le'zikhro shel Yonatan Toyvs" (In Memory of Jonathan Toivs), *Kol Ha'am*, November 1, 1959; "Le'zikhro shel Arye Avraham – Ish Hamatspun Vehama'avak" (In Memory of Aryeh Abraham - The Man of Consciousness and Struggle), *Kol Ha'am*, November 6, 1957.

¹¹³ "Le'zikhro shel Ha'avver Tsvi Drukman" (In Memory of Comrade Zvi Druckman), *Kol Ha'am*, July 28, 1957.

¹¹⁴ Zafreera Kalorman, interview by author, Tel Aviv, June 6, 2005.

¹¹⁵ "Our Struggle on the Ideological Front," in Mikunis, *In the Storms of our Times*, 388.

¹¹⁶ Dani Peter-Petziel, *Lev Betsad Šmol: Kerekh Shenii* (Heart on the Left Part Two), (Tel Aviv, Tcherikover Publishers, 2000), 79.

Jewish Communists' political reality contradicted their ideology. Thus, the consensus that enabled the joint action of Palestinian and Jewish Communist was threatened. When factions of the Party wanted to make their political practice into a Zionist ideology, the Party was split in 1965.

The historical literature that deals up to 1965 with the development in the attitude of the Communist Party toward Zionism charts an arc that leads from radical anti-Zionism to Zionism. While most Zionist historians dealing with the history of the Communist Party have viewed its anti-Communism as a given that requires little proof, and while Palestinian historians of the Party see it as a precursor of modern Palestinian nationalism¹¹⁷ and thus anti-Zionist, two historians have dealt exclusively with the issue of the Party's anti-Zionism, Johan Franzén and Lea Miron.

In an article titled *Communism Verses Zionism*, Johan Franzén examines the formulation of "theories that sought to combine the seemingly irreconcilable ideologies"¹¹⁸ and argues that in a gradual process from the 1920s and 1930s a positive view of Zionism became part of the discourse of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), later to become Soviet official policy toward the Zionist project in Palestine in the late 1940s. Mostly based on British sources, Franzén's article describes the development of the doctrine named *Yishuvism* as part of an ideological chain set in motion in the 1920s by the Jewish Communists that led to the change in the Soviet view of Zionism. *Yishuvism*, as enacted by the PKP in the 1920s, "maintained that the Yishuv was playing a progressive social and economic role". Fuelled by Jewish immigration and

¹¹⁷ For Palestinian Historians who saw the history of the Party as a precursor to Palestinian nationalism see, Bashear Suliman, "The Arab East in Communist Theory and Political Practice, 1918-1928" (PhD diss., University of London, 1976); Budeiri, *The Palestine Communist Party 1919-1948*.

¹¹⁸ Johan Franzén, "Communism Verses Zionism: The Comintern, Yishuvism, and the Palestine Communist Party," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 36-2 (2007): 6.

economic changes towards a capitalist economy in Palestine, it led to a "breakdown of the feudal structures of the Palestinian countryside"¹¹⁹ and class differentiation within both Palestinian and Jewish society. He maintains that these early ideological formulations were partly responsible for the Soviet change of policy toward Zionism, a move that was motivated "from the Yishuvist notions whose intellectual roots went back to the 1920s."¹²⁰ Thus Franzén creates an historical ideological narrative of the Zionization of the Communist Party from the 1920s to the 1940s. As compelling as this explanation is, it interprets *Yishuvism* as being closer to Zionism than it actually was. *Yishuvism* was formulated in the PKP between the Party's admission to the Comintern in 1924 and its Arabization in the wake of the 1929 Riots. It was the majority tendency among PKP leaders and the rank and file. A small radical minority argued for abandoning all efforts among the Jews and concentrating Party activity only on Palestinians.¹²¹ However, the positive appreciation of the *Yishuv's* progressive role was not meant to effect the Zionization of the PKP, but to de-Zionize the *Yishuv*. This element is clearly evinced by the words of Nachman List, then a young agitator for the PKP: "Legions of Jewish and Arab workers united together in a common class struggle: peasants and mainly the members of kibbutzim and moshavim, but also settlers cooperating with the *fellahin* in defending their interests, merchants, artisans and small industrialists... collaborating against the economic policy of the Mandate Government, and all embark together on the inevitable political struggle for the country's liberation, its development and independence."¹²²

This utopian dream of a joint Arab-Jewish anti-imperialist struggle that surpassed class distinctions was a far cry from any Zionist formulation of the time. It differentiated between

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 10.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 20.

¹²¹ Budeiri, *The Palestine Communist Party*, 21.

¹²² Nachman List, "Tsadaq Haqomintern [Hey]" (The Comintern was Right [E]) *Keshet* 7-C (1965): 80.

Zionism and the *Yishuv*, attempting "to draw a dividing line between Zionism on the one side, and the rise of the Jewish community in Palestine on the other."¹²³ It enabled the Jewish Communists to act within the reality of a dynamic and growing Zionist-Socialist political, economic and cultural presence in Palestine, while rejecting "the tenets of Zionist nationalism."¹²⁴ Thus the Jewish Communists, without being Zionists, could at the same time argue in favor of Palestinian-Jewish cooperation to fight the inequities brought by Zionist capitalism and British imperialism.

Johan Franzén's thesis dealt only briefly with Palestinian Communism's interaction with British and Soviet trends regarding Zionism. A lengthier, more locally based and more elaborate theory of the interaction between Zionism and Communism in Palestine/Israel is extended by Lea Miron. In a book aptly named *A Red Star in the Israeli Flag*, Miron charts an historical narrative depicted as moving in a circle: "[T]he examination of the positions prevalent in the MPS (Socialist Workers Party) at its founding shows many similarities with the stands taken by the MKEI (the Eretz-Israeli Communist Party) at the end of the Mandate era."¹²⁵ At origin, Miron argues, the MPS "merged within it elements of proletarian Zionism and anti-Zionism,"¹²⁶ but in a gradual process of attraction and rejection of Zionism, the Jewish Communists developed an anti-Zionist line. From then onward, a basic pattern of behaviour emerged: on the one hand, a desire to be part of the *Yishuv*'s settlement enterprise, detaching themselves from the Zionist movement which they viewed as a Socialist element, and on the other hand a sharp and radical rejection of Zionism. These two basic elements played out in the history of the Party: the

¹²³ Jacob Hen-Tov, *Communism and Zionism in Palestine: the Comintern and the Political Unrest in the 1920s* (Cambridge: Schenkman Publishing Company, 1974), 110.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹²⁵ Lea Miron, *Kokhav Adom Bedegel Kaḥol-Lavan: Yaḥasa shel Hatnu'a Haḳomunistit Be'erets Latsiyonut Velamifal Hatsiyoni Betḳufat Hayeshuv ve'im Ḳom Hamedina* (A Red Star in the Israeli Flag), (Jerusalem: Magnes Publishers, 2011), 1.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

anti-Zionist elements were on the rise after the Arabization of the Party leadership after 1929, reaching a height of anti-Zionism at the start of the Arab Revolt. This dogma was challenged, however, by the Jewish Section of the Party. Founded to operate among Jews in 1937, it split from the Party. In the 1940s the Jewish Communists grew closer to the Jewish *Yishuv*, increasingly becoming Zionists and supporting the funding of Israel and its war effort during 1947-1949. In the first years after the founding of Israel, Miron claims, the MKI, like the right-wing *Herut* party,¹²⁷ tried to flaunt its support of the defensive and settlement projects of the Zionist Labour movement to affirm its commitment to Zionism.

Miron's arguments are backed by "research and memoirs and a wide variety of documents."¹²⁸ As well researched and well-argued as her thesis may be, however, it exhibits tautological thinking, framing her in the tradition of Zionist historiography of the Communist Party. Miron interprets the spectrum of opinions within the Party in its various stages as moving tautologically from anti-Zionism towards Zionism. This thesis will argue that the Communist Party and its youth movement developed alternative modes of practicing Jewish-Israeli identity and culture, modes that were Tel Aviv based and at the same time negated the Zionist hegemonic discourse. Inarguably, the Jewish Communists wanted to be part of their political and cultural surroundings: however, they wanted to do it on their own terms, namely without the Zionist added value. Miron's arguments, with their focal point on the Jewish-Israeli Zionist aspects of Communist thinking, take no heed of the importance of Soviet and left-wing European elements in Communist ideology, practice and identity. Elements such as the longstanding hostility to

¹²⁷ Herut – Freedom. This party was founded in 1948 by the veterans of the Irgun headed by Menachem Begin and was the principal right-wing party in Israel in the 1950s. *Herut*, like the MKI, was ostracized by the ruling MAPAI, a state of affairs encapsulated by David Ben-Gurion's famous saying, "Without *Herut* and the MKI," earmarking them as being unsuitable as partners to a coalition or to any political exchange whatsoever. On certain political issues both parties took similar stands, most notably in the question of reparations from West Germany and the relations with Bonn.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

Jewish nationalism, from the early days of Russian Social-Democracy and European Socialist internationalism, played as much a part in Israeli Communist practice as did dealing with Zionism. She also discounts almost completely the importance that the Jewish Communists ascribed to their links with Palestinians in the pre-state era and after it.

Miron's portrayal is very much based on the writings and actions of various factions within the Communist Party that challenged the prevailing anti-Zionist ideology; wishing to align the Communist Party with the settlement and defence projects of the *Yishuv* and the state of Israel, those factions moved from the original MPS into the Jewish Section, from there to the Hebrew Communists,¹²⁹ ending with the "Left Men". Foremost among those who wished to change the anti-Zionist ideology of the Party was Chanoch Brzoza, a young biology student in Jerusalem and one of the founders of the Jewish Section in 1937. However, when he speaks about the attitude of those young kibbutz members who turned to Communism, he describes not a wish to take part, but a sense of disappointment and a wish to depart from it:

The national sensitivity to the insult of the Jews, the one that brought them to the country, enraged them against another affront – the one of cooperation with an oppressive regime. The same aspiration for inner wholeness, for building better lives, that brought those youngsters to the country as part of the Zionist movement, is the one that led them to the denunciation of it. These circles came to Communism not so much from criticism of a worldview as from repulsion at the

¹²⁹ The Hebrew Communists – A Communist Party established in the late 1940s, officially known as the Communist Educational Association in Eretz-Israel. Its members, young Palestine-born Communists, split from the binational PKP in 1943, criticizing its reluctance to cooperate with segments of the *Yishuv*. Ideologically it tried to amalgamate Communism and Zionism. In 1948 the Hebrew Communists united with the MKI only to split from it a year later and were shortly afterward absorbed by The Zionist–Socialist United Workers Party (MAPAM).

way it was being implemented, the defence of the British colonial policy, and the practice regarding the Arab problem.¹³⁰

This understanding of the rise of a local Jewish-Palestinian nation rather than a Zionist one is clear from Brzoza's remarks at a meeting with Palestinian Communists in the early summer of 1939. Talking to Bullas Farah, he says that "the situation in the country has changed lately in light of the recent political, economic and human changes. The *Yishuv* (Palestine Jews) numbers half a million Jews and the increase in the number of Jews has changed their political character and aspirations."¹³¹ He continues to assert, much to Bullas Farah's indignation, that "the thing is not to discount the social and economic awaking of the Jewish *Yishuv* and at the same time to disregard its right to self-determination,"¹³² at this point most probably in a binational state.

Even Moshe Sneh, Brzoza's ideological successor, negated the Zionist articles of faith and constructed a local form of nationalism draped in heavy Marxist jargon. In his book *On the National Question*, written upon his departure from Zionism, Sneh uses the Stalinist national theory, which defines a nation as the product of joint territory, language and economy, to debunk the idea that the Jewish people is one exterritorial, eternal nation. He asserts that

There is not even one sign of a supra Jewish nation. The concept of "exterritorial nation" that is used in order to define all Jews as a "nation" is an absurdity. First, the concept of the nation is conditioned on territory, since only on one's territory can a nation be created... second, the Jewish general public is not just without territory but lacks a joint language, joint economy and joint culture; thus those

¹³⁰ Chanoch Brzoza, *Drakhim Rishonot* (Early Roads), (Tel Aviv: Am Hassefer, 1965), 41.

¹³¹ Bullas Farah, *Mehashilton Ha'othmani Lamedina Ha'ivrit: Sipur Hayav she Komunist Vepatriyot Palastini 1910-1991* (From Ottoman Rule to the Hebrew State: the Life Story of a Communist and Palestinian Patriot 1910-1991), (Haifa: published by Udi Adiv, 2009), 60.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 60.

who maintain the Jews as a nation in reality mean a nation without common territory, economy, language and culture. They maintain contrasts contradictory in adiecto.¹³³

He continues to assert that the "development of capitalism in one country is what creates a nation. Thus the Jewish nation in Israel developed in the 1940s,"¹³⁴ adding that "the Communist movement 'recognizes' the nation developing in Israel, because it is developing and exists – and 'denies' a 'universal nation' since such a one is nowhere to be found."¹³⁵ The criticisms by Sneh and other Communists of the link between Jews outside of Israel and the Jews in Israel were the forerunners of a non-Zionist Israeli citizenship and identity.

The credence of Miron's thesis is further eroded when, in contrast to her professed thesis, she tacitly acknowledges the existence of local Israeli nationalism. When discussing the *Kol Ha'am* trial, she says that the MKI replaced Zionism "with its ideological commitment to Socialism, and in the new alignment the movement set itself, '*national patriotism*' was defined as a commitment to the strengthening of the *Socialist state* in Israel and not the *Zionist state*,"¹³⁶ hardly a wholehearted commitment to Zionist nationalism.

There is no disputing the fact that the Jewish Communists wanted to be part of their political cultural surroundings, or that they were not "a homogeneously radical and essentially anti-Zionist unit."¹³⁷ However, the trajectory taken by the Jewish Communists went not from anti-Zionism to Zionism, but consisted of a change in the degree of anti-Zionism, from radical negation in the formative stages of Palestinian Communism to the creation of local national alternatives from the late 1930s to the mid-1960s. When factions within the Party tried to break

¹³³ Sneh, *On the National Question*, 74.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹³⁶ Miron, *A Red Star in the Israeli Flag*, 149.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

this basic tenet of Communist ideology, they endangered the identity of the Jewish Communists and the integrity of the Communist movement. As an ex-member of Banki testifies, "The Communist Party in Israel was built from its origins on alienation from the Zionist project. In order to break this alienation, it is necessary to go to the root of the problem, and such an act could only end up in the destruction of the Party."¹³⁸ Thus, the 1965 schism does not mark the ascendancy of the radical left anti-Zionist faction headed by Party leader Meir Vilner and the Palestinian leadership, but a preservation of the basic anti-Zionist agreement that held the Party together.

This thesis is based on two models that influenced the development of Jewish Communist subculture and ritual, the first European, mainly Soviet and East German, and the second Zionist-Israeli. In the following pages the development of these ritual traditions will be briefly described, and elements of the models will be compared to Israeli Communist cultural practices, particularly in Tel Aviv.

1.4 Myth, Ritual and Symbol in the U.S.S.R.

Four ritualistic traditions originated in Tsarist Russia. There were popular rituals rooted in the pagan past, filled with "song and dance, lewd carnivals, bear ceremonies, ritual burnings of stylized devils"¹³⁹; the Orthodox Church rituals, which "combined hierarchical order, music, worship, a luxurious array of vestments and ornament"¹⁴⁰; the military review, which projected power and rationality, geometrically displayed as an impersonal collectivism;¹⁴¹ and the revolutionary tradition. Revolutionary ritual was structured mainly around May Day, an

¹³⁸ Shafran, *Farewell Communism*.

¹³⁹ Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams, Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 79.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

importation from Europe. The day's main symbolic element was the colour red. The demonstration itself was not an elaborate ritual; it consisted of radical songs, a show of red, and speeches.¹⁴² The marches were tense and restricted to a space threatened by the police. This gave the procession and the marchers an air of "militant trespassers into alien zones."¹⁴³

The overthrow of Russian autocracy in 1917 was initially accompanied by unplanned carnival-like gatherings. One of the ritualistic high points celebrated under the Provisional Governments was Liberty Bond Day on May 25th, anticipating the mass festivals of Bolshevik rule.¹⁴⁴ The Russian Bolsheviks developed a ritualistic and symbolic idiom of their own. The early Bolshevik rites mirrored the Tsarist-era ceremonies in which "solemnity and merriment stood side-by-side."¹⁴⁵ These elements became a part of Soviet ritual by late 1918.

The early period of Bolshevik ritual was characterized by elaborate and colourfully decorated mass festivals. The first ceremonial occasion of the new regime was the May Day celebration of 1918, which featured a demonstration march. There was an innovative, utopian and carnival side to the early Soviet rite, making Petrograd a giant work of art, "a cartoon, a Pleasure Island, a Castle in Spain, and a land of Cookaigne."¹⁴⁶ The anniversary of the revolution in Moscow on November 7th 1918 was a more solemn occasion. Inspired by Tommaso Campanella, a seventeenth-century Catholic heretic who envisioned a Papal world state, Lenin erected 50-60 monuments, busts and inscriptions between 1918 and 1921. Some of them were inaugurated for the 1918 anniversary. In this early rite the symbols of Communism, the Red Star and the Hammer and Sickle, were first deployed. The focus of the ritual was a march in the Red

¹⁴² Richard Stites, "The Origins of Soviet Ritual Style: Symbol and Festival in the Russian Revolution," in *Symbols of Power: the Aesthetics of Political Legitimation in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, ed. Claes Arvidsoon and Lars Erik Blomqvist. (Stockholm: Almqvist & Bissell International, 1987), 24.

¹⁴³ Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams, Utopian Vision and Experimental Life*, 80.

¹⁴⁴ For a detailed description, see James Von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals, 1917-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 20.

¹⁴⁵ Von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals*, 40.

¹⁴⁶ Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams Utopian Vision and Experimental Life*, 85.

Square which was followed by carnival celebrations, including the mass burning of the enemies of the revolution in effigy.

Shaping their own symbolism and rituals, the Bolsheviks connected themselves to ancient rebels like Spartacus, and to regicides like Brutus. Lenin associated the revolution with the French Revolution and European Socialism, from the utopianists to Luxemburg and Libknecht, and with Russian rebels like Sten'ka Razin, the Decembrists, the thinkers of the 1840s and 1860s, the Populists and Plekhanov.¹⁴⁷

The end of the Civil War and the start of the NEP were characterized by a downsizing of mass spectacles. The task of conducting political rites was assigned to *Circles of Artistic Laymen*, who were members of Workers' Clubs attached to trade unions. The May Day and November 7th Anniversary parades were where the Workers' Clubs could deploy their talents, exhibiting floats of "grotesquely comic representations of imperialism, capitalism, foreign politicians and the enemies at home – nepman, bureaucrat, alcoholic, pope, kulak – made out of wood, papier-mâché, or straw."¹⁴⁸

The first Five-Year-Plan was accompanied by a cultural revolution that assaulted the relatively liberal cultural sphere of the 1920s. The May Day and November 7th parades in Moscow became stiffer and more rigid. Replacing grassroots and modernist avant-garde artistic innovation, rigidity, standardization and militarization came to dominate the ceremonies. The regimentation, standardization and militarization of Soviet ritual were most evident in the 7th November anniversary. The march encompassed ever greater numbers of military units and

¹⁴⁷ This sense of a revolutionary European lineage is evident in Trotsky, see Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1975), 86. "We Marxists live in traditions, and we have not stopped being revolutionists on account of it. We celebrated and lived through the traditions of the Paris Commune, even before the first revolution, then the traditions of 1905 were added to them, by which we nourished ourselves and by which we prepared the second revolution. Going further back, we connected the Commune with the June days of 1848, and with the great French Revolution."

¹⁴⁸ Rosalinde Sartori, "Stalinism and Carnival: Organization and Aesthetics of Political Holidays," in *The Culture of the Stalin Period*, ed. Hans Günther, (New York: St. Martins Press:, 1990), 54.

marching civilians.¹⁴⁹ Everything turned around Stalin. On November 7th 1938, Stalin, like a high priest of antiquity or an absolute ruler, stood above the waxed cadaver of Lenin as half a million people passed by. The marchers carried portraits of Lenin and Stalin and other leaders. There was still a trace of buffoonery in the ridicule extended to the traditional enemies of the Soviet people. However, the carnival aspect of Soviet ritual culture had been banished to the non-political margins.¹⁵⁰

Mass holidays and ritual activity greatly diminished during the crisis of World War II, and only a few occasions were observed in its course. The first was the military parade of November 7th 1941, after which the troops who marched in the Red Square proceeded to the front. The second was the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Revolution in besieged Leningrad. Organized against the backdrop of overwhelming odds, it was perceived as an act of defiance and resistance.

After Stalin's death, an era of limited reforms began under Khrushchev. The aversion from the massive coercion of the Stalinist era, economic difficulties and the survival of religious sentiment among Soviet citizens drove the Soviet elites to refashion Soviet rites. The renewal of ritual in the U.S.S.R. had begun by the end of the 1950s, drawing on three traditions: labour,¹⁵¹ patriotic and revolutionary.

Of these three, the most important and sacred was the patriotic-military tradition. The brutal war and the tremendous victory of the Soviet Union over Nazi Germany had aroused patriotic feelings and pride. These feelings were diverted by the Soviet establishment toward love of the Motherland and toward "loyalty to the political unit and its social system, the Soviet

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 229.

¹⁵⁰ For the place of carnival in Stalinist Russia, see Sartori, "Stalinism and Carnival," 62, and Christel Lane, *The Rites of Rulers Ritual in Industrial Society - the Soviet Case* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 42.

¹⁵¹ For details on the labour tradition, see Christel Lane, *The Rites of Rulers*, 109-129.

Socialist state."¹⁵² Victory Day was first celebrated in 1945 as the "Great Patriotic War" ended. The official celebration took place in the Red Square. There were ceremonies at each town's war monuments, including short speeches, retellings of heroic deeds followed by oaths to replicate them, music, declamation of verse, a minute's silence for the fallen and the laying of wreaths. The memorial rites were followed by a military march or veterans march through the town's centre and the central parade in Moscow.

May Day and the November 7th anniversary were the two mainstays of the revolutionary tradition of Soviet ritual. May Day featured two main forms of ritual, the procession-demonstration and the revolutionary rally. The largest procession-demonstration marched in the Red Square, with various political and social groups participating. The crowds congregated at the outskirts of each town and marched to the centre, holding up banners, slogans, decorated panels, emblems, etc. In Moscow, the march passed by Lenin's mausoleum, where state and Party leaders stood and watched the parade.

1.5 Myth, Ritual and Symbol in the GDR

German Communism's cultural origins lay in the Weimar Republic.¹⁵³ In those early years, the ritual of German Communism developed as "Communists each year celebrated the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution and commemorated Lenin's death along with Luxemburg's and Libknecht's in the LLL festivals."¹⁵⁴ In the East German state created after World War II, there were four elements of national myth originating in the Weimar era and the Soviet Zone (SBZ)

¹⁵² Ibid., 141.

¹⁵³ For more details on the forging of Communist culture in 1920s Germany, see Eric Weitz, *Creating German Communism 1890-1990: From Popular Protests to Socialist State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 233-279.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 242.

period: German *Kultur*, the anti-Fascist myth, the myth of the Soviet Union, and the myth of the Socialist Fatherland.¹⁵⁵

The earliest myth to be propagated during the Soviets' direct rule over the Eastern zone was that of German *Kultur*, which originated in the eighteenth century. It held Goethe, Schiller, Bach, Beethoven and others to be "*representative* of Germany, rather than, as one might think, absolutely *exceptional*."¹⁵⁶ In the Weimar era, the German Communist Party (KPD) took no part in the discourse of *Kultur*. The profoundly anti-bourgeois German Communists had little use for what was usually the property of the middle class. However, *Kultur* came to be a part of the arsenal of German Communism at the "Brussels Conference" in 1935, where the KPD called upon its remaining members in Germany to wrest classical German culture away from the Nazis.

The first celebration of German *Kultur* under the Communists was the National Goethe Celebration in 1949. Goethe was described by SED (German Unity Party) officials as a progressive figure, "an enemy of nationalism and chauvinism,"¹⁵⁷ and a forerunner of Germany's cultural unity.

An important place in the anti-fascist myth was reserved to the Spanish Civil War and the International Brigades. The war veterans (after the political difficulties some of them experienced during the Slánský trial subsided) became a privileged elite group within East German society, active participants in the memorialization of the war. The Spanish Civil War commemoration inspired a symbolic and ritual language with a military and ideological emphasis and gave rise to its own hero cult. The East German ritual in honor of the International Brigades concentrated mainly on the young and was moulded in conformance with the

¹⁵⁵ For a detailed account of myths that are less relevant to this research, see Alan Nothnagle, *Building the East German Myth: Historical Mythology and Youth Propaganda in the German Democratic Republic, 1945-1989* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), 143-198, 93-142.

¹⁵⁶ Nothnagle, *Building the East German Myth*, 40.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 63.

traditional practices of the Free German Youth Movement: campfire songs and talks with veterans, cross-country marches, all saturated with military indoctrination.¹⁵⁸

Another facet of the commemoration of the International Brigades was the hero cult celebrating individual German volunteers. The best known and most celebrated on a national scale was Hans Beimler, who was born to a Bavarian working-class family in 1895 and killed in Madrid in 1936. Beimler's legendary status began with his mass funeral in Spain and was intensified by publications in the International Brigades' newspapers, which attributed to him the roles of commissar of the German battalions of the Eleventh Brigade and member of the KPD's Central Committee. Another way of keeping Beimler's memory alive was his immortalization in Ernst Busch's song "Hans Beimler, Comrade". Beimler was portrayed as an impeccable heroic soldier, a role model to be imitated by the East German youth. His memory was ritualistically kept up by an annual paramilitary competition and the awarding of the veterans' medal named after him. The Spanish Civil War myth found its ritualistic geographic centre in the memorial statue of the International Brigades in Friedrichshain People's Park, complete with a monument.¹⁵⁹

1.6 Zionist Myth, Ritual and Symbol

The ritual and symbolic Zionist language in Palestine/Israel was shaped by elements originating from Jewish history and Zionist ideology, and constituted the cultural surroundings in which the Jewish Communists shaped their subculture. Zionist cultural practices originated in the late nineteenth century with the rejection of Jewish culture as it had been created in the *galut* (Hebrew – Diaspora) and the selective adoption of Jewish pre-rabbinic and rabbinic traditions,

¹⁵⁸ Josie McLellan, *Antifascism and Memory in East Germany: Remembering the International Brigades 1945-1989* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 88: "In the early years of the GDR the *Thälmannpioniere*... carried out annual field exercises under the motto 'We defend Madrid'. The children sang International Brigades songs, read books and memoirs, carried out exercises in the field... and listened to veterans' tales around the campfire."

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 115.

replacing the religious content of the holidays with national Zionist content.¹⁶⁰ Stemming from the critique of Judaism by the Jewish *haskala* (Hebrew – enlightenment) and the absorption of anti-Semitic motifs into Zionist thinking,¹⁶¹ *negation of the Diaspora* was meant to create a new Jewish or Hebrew nation in Palestine and a new Jew, the *Sabra*.¹⁶² Other national myths were borrowed from antiquity, four of which came to dominate Zionist symbolism: the myth of Hanukkah and the Maccabees that became important in Jewish Communist subculture, the Masada myth,¹⁶³ the myth of the Bar Kokhva Revolt,¹⁶⁴ and the modern myth of Tel-Hai.¹⁶⁵

Zionism devised unique ways to deliver these myths. One of the original mediums created by Zionism was the *Maschet* (Hebrew – tractate), a basic literary form used by the Jewish Communists. The word *Maschet* is connected to the term "Masakh" and to the biblical use of the latter as a spun piece of material. It is also connected to the Talmudic and Aramaic word *maschta*, which means a group of religious Jewish researchers and deliberators. It came to signify the basic technique of Zionist ritual. The *Maschet* has its roots "in the propaganda plays in the U.S.S.R., in ceremonies of the revolutionary rallies there, and in the propaganda-didactic plays in Germany of the nineteen-twenties."¹⁶⁶ Brought to Palestine by the pioneer immigrants of

¹⁶⁰ Avner Ben-Amos "Bama'agal Haroked VeHamezamer: Textim Vehagigot Patriyotim Behevra Ha'Isra'el it" ("In the Circle of Singing and Dancing: Patriotic Rituals and Celebrations in Israeli Society."), in *Patriyotizm: Ohavim Otakh Moledet* (Patriotism: Homeland Love), edited by Avner Ben-Amos and Daniel Bar-Tal, 275-316 (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2004), 278. "It must be remembered that the Zionist rituals and holidays were not complete innovation. They were based on the traditional system of Jewish rituals and holidays."

¹⁶¹ Liebman and Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel*, 37.

¹⁶² For a detailed analysis of the cultural and historical formation of the native Israeli, see Oz Almog, *Hatsabar – Dyukan* (The Sabra – A Profile), (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 1997).

¹⁶³ The Masada myth has been well researched in Israeli historiography and historical sociology; for a definitive work on this myth, see Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

¹⁶⁴ For seminal works on the Bar Kokhva myth, see Liebman and Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel* and Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*.

¹⁶⁵ For an analysis of the Tel Hai myths, see Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*. For the ritual practices connected to it and their relation to the Israeli Remembrance Day, see Ben-Amos, "In the Circle of Singing and Dancing", 293-296.

¹⁶⁶ Gideon Ofrat, *Adama, Adam, Dam: Mitos Haḥaluts Vepulḥan Ha'adama Bemaḥazot hahityashvut* (Earth, Man, Blood: the Myth of the Pioneer and the Ritual of Earth in Eretz-Israel Settlement Drama), (Tel Aviv: Tcherikover Publishers, 1980), 202.

the Second and Third *aliya* (Hebrew – literally "ascending," denoting immigration to Palestine), it was adopted as an "indispensable theatrical educational tool"¹⁶⁷ and became part of every ceremony in Israeli life. The first *Maschet* to be published in Palestine appeared in a 1909 comedy named *Habachlan* (literally a complainer). But the Zionist *Maschet* did not belong onstage. It became established in the 1920s and 1930s as part of Zionist public ceremony. In its basic form, the *Maschet* became "a kind of collage, a systematic play of literary segments revolving around one subject of a particular holiday."¹⁶⁸ This basic form keeps reappearing in Banki documents like instructor brochures that depict the Jewish Communists' cultural practices. Its flexibility made the *Maschet* suited for such occasions as May Day, the Jewish holidays connected with the agricultural cycle revived in the kibbutzim, and others. After 1948 the *Maschet* was incorporated by the state into its two main events, Remembrance Day and Independence Day.¹⁶⁹

Despite Judaism's restrictions on the plastic arts, the Zionist settlers in Palestine made ever growing use of monuments. The Zionist, later the Israeli, monument is a living symbol of "the renewed connection that was forged between the New Jew and the national territory."¹⁷⁰ The most successful monument in the pre-state period was the "roaring lion" monument in Tel-Hai, erected in honour of the ultimate Zionist martyr, Joseph Trumpeldor (a decorated hero of the Russian-Japanese War and one of the few Jewish officers in the Tsarist Army, who died in a futile attempt to defend the remote settlement in 1920), which became a ceremonial focal point of the Zionist youth movements. As the conflict between Zionism and Palestinian nationalism worsened, "the graves and monuments multiplied by the side of the roads, on mountaintops and

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 200.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. See also Don Handelman, *Models and Mirrors*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 1998).

¹⁷⁰ Maoz Azaryahu, "The Israeli Monument: Myth, Art and Politics," *Ştudio* (Studio) 37 (1995): 24.

in the new settlements, gradually becoming sort of Zionist chapels¹⁷¹ and turning into pilgrimage sites.

Two types of monuments are typical of the Israeli landscape. The first is the *galed*, "... small monuments made of piles of stones or from one massive stone."¹⁷² The names of the fallen are written on a wallboard. These monuments are usually located outside urban areas in the battlefields where the soldiers were killed. A second type of monuments might be called "assembly monuments". They are larger than the small *galed* type and meant to be a rallying point for large gatherings and ceremonies. These monuments are made out of readymade materials and, after 1948, combined at times with discarded enemy weapons. The Israeli monument thus follows in the Jewish tradition, which shuns the representation of manlike figures, and in the case of the *galed* it "is well rooted in the old Hebrew tradition that is connected to the story of the Patriarchs and the conquest of the country."¹⁷³ The Jewish Communists' Red Army monument was a *galed* type monument well rooted in Israeli local traditions and at the same time a monument for the purpose of assembly. As the focal point of the May 9th celebration, it commemorated not Zionist heroism but the Soviet victory.

With the first waves of Zionist immigration to Palestine, the early Zionist rituals began to take form. The first to be held in Palestine were those connected to the agricultural cycle like Tu-Bishvat. As early as 1879, the Jewish colonizers reinvented the ancient tradition of bringing a tenth of the agricultural produce to the Temple in Jerusalem.¹⁷⁴ In some Zionist colonies, it became "a planting holiday of a patriotic-educational nature. The planting of the trees, which was performed in a ceremonial framework, mainly by pupils, had a practical and symbolic

¹⁷¹ Almog, *The Sabra*, 50.

¹⁷² Oz Almog, "Andarṭa'ot Lanoflim Be'Isra'el" (Monuments to the Fallen in Israel), *Megamot* (Trends) 2 (1992): 184.

¹⁷³ Azaryahu, "The Israeli Monument," 25.

¹⁷⁴ Ben-Amos, "In the Circle of Singing and Dancing," 281.

dimension: the act of planting symbolized the re-rooting of the Jews in Eretz-Israel."¹⁷⁵ For some Jewish Communists, mainly in Yad-Hana, it became a commemoration ceremony for Communist martyrs.

Until World War I, the character of Zionist ritual was sporadic and uncoordinated. With the end of Ottoman rule and the beginning of the British Mandate, the Zionist *Yishuv* developed a "relatively unified ceremonial system, cohesive and institutionalized."¹⁷⁶ Observed in many Jewish communities and schools all around Palestine, the new Zionist calendar was based on the Jewish tradition; nonetheless the content of the rituals was secular and nationalist. The kibbutzim played a unique role in shaping Zionist ritual, serving as "sort of a hothouse in which a consciously escalating process of cultural planning"¹⁷⁷ took place, its high point the rewriting of the Passover *Haggadah*.

From the 1930s onwards, the hegemony in the Zionist movement belonged to Zionist-Socialism. This hegemony extended into ritual and symbol. Zionist-Socialism developed a cohesive and elaborate system of symbols and rituals. In the pre-state era, Hanukkah became one of its major focal points. Invented and instituted to commemorate a miraculous episode in the revolt of Judah Maccabee against the Seleucid rulers of Judea (167-158 B.C.), the holiday was used in order to disseminate a new national myth. In Palestine it was celebrated by Zionists of every persuasion "as an important national holiday."¹⁷⁸ In Zionist consciousness, its religious meaning was constantly being adapted. Originally, Hanukkah was meant to celebrate God's deliverance of the Jews, The revolt itself was, both historically and as considered by Judaism, a religious affair. It "... began as an uprising of traditional Jews against religious decrees enacted

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 282.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 283.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 286.

¹⁷⁸ Eliezer Don-Yehiya, "Hanukkah and the Myth of the Maccabees in the Zionist Ideology and in Israeli Society," *Jewish Journal of Sociology* XXXIV 1 (1992), 6.

by a Greek ruler... who wished to impose on the Jewish people an alien secular culture."¹⁷⁹ However, the Zionists in Palestine turned the Maccabees into patriotic national fighters and celebrated the holiday "as chiefly expressing the values associated with the struggle for national liberation."¹⁸⁰ And though Hanukkah was celebrated by all Zionists under the umbrella of the Zionist-Socialist hegemonic culture, there was a class-conscious perception of the holiday; the Maccabean revolt was seen as a popular uprising of the working masses.¹⁸¹ From the late 1920s and well into the mid-1960s, the Jewish Communists, many of whom shared the cultural world of Zionist-Socialist culture, absorbed elements of it into their subculture. In a gradual process, elements of the Zionist-Socialist myth of Hanukkah and some of the nature holidays were diffused into the cultural world of the Jewish Communists.

Hanukkah gave rise to a set of rituals during the pre-state era. While the traditional lighting of candles was still observed by secular Zionists, the once familial ceremony became public. The kindling of the Hanukkah lights was accompanied by "political songs, speeches and proclamations."¹⁸² The new public aspect of the holiday rituals included an elaborate "pilgrimage to Mod'in (the birthplace of the Maccabees where the revolt started)."¹⁸³ The pilgrimage was accompanied by a marathon race and a variety of sporting events marking the holiday.

Another facet of Zionist ritual in pre-state Palestine was the reinvention of traditional Jewish holidays as agricultural holidays. For Zionism and for the Zionist-Socialist culture in particular, the return of the Jews to the land was one of the basic tenets of national revival. The

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 9.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 6.

¹⁸¹ Eliezer Don-Yehiya: "In the Labour Movement literature the perception of the revolt against the Greeks as a popular uprising led by villagers and peasants was expressed." "Hag Masorti Vemitos Le'umi: Hag Hanuka Vemitos Hamakabim Batsiyonut, Bayeshuv Uvimdinat Isra'el" ("Traditional Holiday and National Myth: Hanukkah and the Myth of the Maccabees in Zionism, the Yishuv and the State of Israel), in *Between Tradition and Modernism* (Jerusalem: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1995, 587.)

¹⁸² Liebman and Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel*, 53.

¹⁸³ Don-Yehiya, "Hanukkah and the Myth of the Maccabees," 16.

traditional Jewish calendar had few holidays connected with the changing of seasons and the agricultural cycle. These remnants of ancient Hebrew traditions from the times of the First and Second Temples were charged by Zionists with new meaning. Traditional Judaism celebrated these holidays in a religious context without relation to their agricultural origins. In Zionist-Socialist culture, mainly in the kibbutzim, they were reinvented and recast as celebrations of national revival.

The two main such reinvented holidays were Tu-Bishvat and Shavuot. Tu-Bishvat was designated by Rabbinic Judaism as a new year for trees, when certain injunctions pertaining to tress were to be performed. It was celebrated in the Diaspora "by prayers in the synagogue and the eating of dry fruits."¹⁸⁴ Zionism, mainly Zionist-Socialism, made it a tree-planting holiday. The tree-planting symbolized "the conquest of, and the making of an eternal covenant with, the country's land."¹⁸⁵ The ritual itself was celebrated en masse, with specially written blessings being recited while the young toddlers dressed in white shirts and blue pants and *kovaei tembel* (Hebrew borrowed from Arabic: fools' caps) planted the trees.

The new Jewish state, which was founded in 1948 in the midst of a turbulent war and fast-paced social change, was to have a profound effect on Zionist-Socialist ritual. The early 1950s were characterized by a radical change in Israel's demographic makeup. Massive waves of immigration arrived from North Africa, as did the remnants of European Jewry, confronting the new political elite with the need to socialize the immigrants to Zionism by using the new state organs¹⁸⁶ in what was a Eurocentric nation-building project, which gave rise to a centralization of functions. Functions in the military and educational spheres, which had been in the hands of political parties and voluntary organizations during the *Yishuv* era, were transferred to the state.

¹⁸⁴ Ben-Amos, "In the Circle of Singing and Dancing," 290.

¹⁸⁵ Almog, *The Sabra*, 95.

¹⁸⁶ Liebman and Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel*, 83.

This new *Mamlachtiyut* (Hebrew – statism) meant a new culture, complete with symbolic and ritual systems revolving around the state. In its initial stages, statism sought to replace the myths, symbols and rituals of the *Yishuv*. Ancient and modern heroes were replaced by Biblical ones.¹⁸⁷ They were also superseded by two new additions to the Zionist pantheon, the IDF (Israeli Defence Forces) soldiers and the Jewish ghetto fighters.¹⁸⁸ The agricultural holidays became outmoded.¹⁸⁹ Due to the change in their importance from the pre-state era, rituals were affected at the symbolic level. The symbols of the state, its flag, anthem and emblem, the menorah,¹⁹⁰ became the centrepieces of the new ritual language. The new ritual calendar in Israel in the early 1950s took shape around three national celebrations: Independence Day, Memorial Day for the fallen IDF soldiers¹⁹¹ and, to a lesser degree, Memorial Day for the Holocaust and Heroism.

In 1948, to mark the establishment of the new state, the commemoration of the death of Herzl was celebrated as State Day. It was a one-time event. A year later, following legislation in the Knesset, the first Israeli Independence Day was marked. The date chosen for it was the Hebrew date of the proclamation of the Declaration of Independence on *Hey B'Iyar* (May 14th, 1948). It was the day the British left the country and the mandate officially ended. From 1951 onwards, Memorial Day for the fallen was established on the day before Independence Day. A

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁸⁸ Ben-Amos, "In the Circle of Singing and Dancing," 298.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁹⁰ On the design of the Israeli state emblem from national secular and traditional Jewish motifs, see Alexander Mishori, "Menorah and Olive Branches: The History of Designing the State of Israel Emblem", *Katedra* (Cathedra) 46 (1987): 169-187.

¹⁹¹ The Israeli Memorial Day for the fallen did not leave any particular mark on Jewish Communist rite. It can only be assumed that Jewish Communist veterans participated in the state rites as individuals. It can also be assumed that the stand of the Party, which viewed only the 1948 War as justified and objected to the 1956 War, discouraged any attempt to develop an alternative to the state-sponsored rites. For good portrayals of the development of the Israeli Memorial Day, see Ben-Amos, "In the Circle of Singing and Dancing" and Maoz Azaryahu, *Pulḥaney Medina: Ḥagigot Ha'atma'ut Vehantsaḥat Hanoflim Be'Isra'el* (State Cults: Celebrating Independence and Commemorating the Fallen in Israel 1948-1956), (Tel Aviv: Ben-Gurion University Press, 1995).

marked feature of the two holidays' ritual aspect thus became the jarring transition from communion with the dead to the celebration of national salvation.¹⁹²

From an early stage, the celebration of independence featured three forms of ritual expression. The first was the official state ceremony. The second was a mass celebration in the streets, aimed at bringing the holiday to the common people. The third was a military parade.¹⁹³ The official ceremony was held on the holiday's eve in the national cemetery on Mount Herzl.

Independence Day was a mass celebration in the streets for Israelis. The November 1947 U.N Partition declaration had been accompanied by spontaneous mass celebrations. As the U.N. vote ended, the masses flooded into the streets and began dancing in circles, and this became "the dominant image in the Israeli cultural field"¹⁹⁴ regarding the holiday. The organizers of the mass celebrations of independence took great pains to recreate this original spontaneity. From the early 1950s onwards, the organs of the state and local government provided for dancing circles and supplied free artistic entertainment on stages set up in the cities, in an attempt to release the masses' supposedly spontaneous joy. Special radio hours were allocated for Israeli folk music during the celebrations. Youth movements, *Histadrut* sports clubs and even professional dancers and choreographers were encouraged or hired to spur the masses to dance. Despite these efforts, the spontaneous dancing circles did not form. By the mid-1950s, the organizers surrendered to popular taste and broadcast popular music.

As the 1950s ended and the state became more of a day-to-day reality, the enthusiasm aroused by sovereignty subsided. The Memorial Day for the IDF Fallen (the name was changed in 1957) grew in importance as war became a common fixture of Israeli reality.

¹⁹² On the state and time of commemoration see Handelman, *Models and Mirrors*.

¹⁹³ The parade is of little relevance to this research. For an extended analysis of it, see Azaryahu, *State Cults*, 74-92.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

Zionist-Socialism and Statism both rejected the culture and way of life of the Jews living outside the state. They shared the emphasis that the New Hebrew culture in Palestine and Israel placed on notions of physical and military valour. Zionist eyes viewed the Holocaust, primarily a catastrophe of the Yiddish-speaking Jews of Eastern Europe, through these two ideological lenses, complicated by guilt for the little help rendered by the *Yishuv* to their suffering brethren in Nazi-occupied Europe.¹⁹⁵ This complex approach to the Holocaust contributed greatly to sidelining the legislation of Remembrance Day for the Holocaust and Heroism, to mark the events in Europe.

In fact, the state made no attempt to build a central site or sponsor a state ritual connected with the Holocaust.¹⁹⁶ The only state-sponsored ritual, which was held in *Yad Va'shem*, was largely ignored, and thus Holocaust Day went unnoticed by most Israelis during the 1950s. This left the commemoration of the Holocaust in the domain of two political camps: Labour-Zionism, meaning the parties to the left of MAPAI with their kibbutzim and youth movements, and the Zionists-Religious party in control of the Ministry of Religious Affairs.¹⁹⁷

For the Zionist Left, the main value deriving from the Holocaust was armed resistance.¹⁹⁸ The main event to be commemorated in that context was the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, which began on the eve of Passover, April 19th, 1943. The centrality of the uprising and armed

¹⁹⁵ Ben-Amos, "In the Circle of Singing and Dancing," 301. For the way Israelis viewed the Holocaust and its survivors, see Tom Segev, *Hamilyon Hashvi'i: Ha'Isra'elim Vehasho'a* (The Seventh Million: the Israelis and the Holocaust), (Keter Publishing House: Jerusalem, 1991).

¹⁹⁶ On the stand of MAPAI regarding the Holocaust with all its nuances, see Roni Stauber, *Halekah Lador: Sho'a Vegvura Bamaḥshava Hatsiburit Baret Beshnot Haḥamishim* (Lessons for this Generation: Holocaust and Heroism in Israeli Public Discourse in the 1950s), (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 2000), 61-83.

¹⁹⁷ For an account of the Zionist-Religious alternative Memorial Day, site and ritual practices based on traditional Judaism, see Stauber, *Lessons for this Generation*, 136-142.

¹⁹⁸ Mirroring attitudes in Israel, in Belgium, France and the Netherlands post-Nazi occupation governments and powerful underground veteran organizations have disregarded the memory of mostly Jewish survivors of the Holocaust. Residual anti-Semitism, the national humiliation caused by military defeat and occupation, and Cold War tensions all lay at the root of this policy. For a detailed analysis of national memory in those countries, see Pieter Lagroo, "Victims of Genocide and National Memory: Belgium, France and the Netherlands 1945-65," in *The World War Two Reader*, ed. Gordon Martel (New York: Routledge, 2004), 383-421.

resistance was the basis on which rituals were performed on this day in kibbutzim associated with Labour-Zionism.¹⁹⁹ Zionist-Socialists connected the uprising in Europe with Eretz-Israel and the ghetto rebels with the Masada myth, calling the Warsaw Ghetto "the Masada of European Jewry."²⁰⁰ The Zionist-Socialist ritual commemorating the Holocaust followed the pattern of Zionist-Socialist ritual of the pre-state era, using the *Maschet* and monuments as its main media of representation.

In a process starting from the late 1950s and culminating in the Eichmann Trial in 1961, the Holocaust gained in importance. This was recognized, as Holocaust Day was enacted in the 1959 law, *Remembrance Day for the Holocaust and Heroism*. The law prohibited places of entertainment from opening on the eve of the holiday. It also decreed that special radio shows on the subject be broadcast, and that ceremonies be conducted in army barracks and schools. Holocaust Day came into prominence after the 1961 Eichmann Trial, when the day and its rituals became the centre of national attention.

In a political process that started in the late 1930s, the Jewish Communists recognized the national rights of Palestine's Jews. That process culminated in the recognition of the Communists in the state of Israel, and the aid the Jewish members of the Party lent to the Israeli side in the 1948 War, as the Jewish Communists tried to insert themselves into the Israeli national narrative through the development of a patriotic, anti-Zionist and anti-imperialist myth and practice. They therefore participated in the "independence" mass rallies and practiced alongside other political movements in the commemoration of the Holocaust. The Jewish Communists did not view "independence" as the realization of Zionist ideology, but as part of the anti-British struggle that

¹⁹⁹ Stauber, *Lessons for this Generation*, 238: "The perception that the active struggle against the Germans has to have a special status in the national collective memory was the ideological foundation of the Memorial Day ritual commemorating the Holocaust that was held every year in Kibbutz *Lohamei HaGeta'ot*."

²⁰⁰ Liebman and Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel*, 102.

the Party had been engaged in since 1919. They perceived the achievement of Jewish self-determination, as part of the global struggle against imperialism, as having been the main aim of the 1948 War. These recognitions prevented them from fully understanding and engaging with the Palestinian experience of the war. They did not understand the formative influence it had on Palestinian nationalism and on their own Palestinian comrades. This was to mark the entire history of the Party.

1.7 History and Historiography of Israeli Communism

Communism as a whole has attracted scholarly attention since its earliest days, through the Cold War, and now too after the collapse of European Communism. The Communist movements and parties in Germany and the U.S.S.R. alone have attracted large amounts of research. Although Communism in Palestine/Israel, by contrast, has drawn considerably less attention, nonetheless scholars of different stripes have debated its history and created a small body of works about its different aspects. In what follows I provide a brief survey of these works, as well as the most recent history of Banki.

The Israeli Communist movement has been the subject of scholarly attention since 1948, beginning with the article *Communist Tactics in Palestine* by Martin Ebon.²⁰¹ The historiography of Communism in Israel can be differentiated into three groups; Zionist Jewish historians, non-Zionist Jewish cultural historians and Palestinian historians.²⁰² The main paradigm dominating the field is the question concerning the relation between Palestinians and Jews within the Party.

²⁰¹ Martin Ebon, "Communist Tactics in Palestine," *The Middle East Journal* 2 (1948): 257. The article gives a brief history of the Party from the 1920s to 1943 and describes its tactics in 1948. The Party is seen mainly as a tool of Soviet foreign policy.

²⁰² Other historians who critique Zionism but do not deal with Communism, such as Edward Said, Gershon Shafir, and Gabriel Piterberg, are dealt with in other parts of this dissertation.

Historians of Communism in Palestine/Israel depict the Communist Party as having been perpetually torn between the national orientations of its members.

Zionist historians argue that Communism inevitably clashed with Zionism and that the Arabization of the Party after the 1929 riots prevented the Party from becoming truly binational, that is, Palestinian and Jewish.²⁰³ By contrast, the Palestinian historians researching Communist history in pre-1948 Palestine claim that there was an ever-growing compatibility between Palestinian nationalism and the Party. Driven by a desire to locate the Palestinian national movement's origins in progressive Marxism, they argue that the Arabization of the Party gained it its first Palestinian followers. This process reached its peak in the 1943 split-up of the Party when the Palestinian Communists set up their own faction, in fact integrating Communism and Palestinian nationalism.²⁰⁴ Cultural historians for their part look at Palestinians and Jews as part

²⁰³ For the Zionist historians, see Walter Laqueur's two books, *Communism and nationalism in the Middle East*, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1956) and, under the pseudonym Israeli, *MPS-PKP-MKI*; Nachman List, "Gilguley Haqomunizem Be'artsot Arav Vebe'erets-Isra'el" (The Metamorphosis of Communism in the Arab States and Eretz-Israel), *Molad* 2-9 (1969) and "The Comintern was Right"; Slozski, "M.P.S.A in the Founding Convention of the Histadrut," 133-162 and "From M.P.S to Y.K.P (PKP)"; Jacob Hen-Tov, *Communism and Zionism in Palestine: the Comintern and the Political Unrest in the 1920's*; Shmuel Dothan, "The Jewish Section of the Palestine Communist Party, 1937-1939," in *Zionism: Studies in the History of the Zionist Movement and of the Jewish Community in Palestine*, ed. Daniel Carpi et al (Tel Aviv: Massada Publishing Co. Ltd, 1975) and *Reds*; Yehoshua Porat, "Mahapkhanut Ve'etzerizem Bemedinyut Hamiflaga Haqomunixtit Hafalestinait (Pekape), 1929-1939" (Revolution and Terrorism in the policy of the Palestine Communist Party (PKP), 1929-1939), *The New East* 18 (1968) and "Haliga Leshihur Le'umi (Atsabat Et-Tahrir El-Vatani): Tqumata, Mahuta Vehitparquta (1943-1948) (The National Liberation League: Its Rise, Its Essence and Fall (1943-1948))" *The New East* 14 (1968); Eli Reches, "Jews and Arabs in the Israeli Communist Party," in *Ethnicity, Pluralism and the State in the Middle East*, ed. Milton J. Esman et al. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), "Leshe'elat Hayaahasim beyn Yehudim Ve'arvim Bemaki" (On the Question of the Relation between Arabs and Jews in MKI), in *State Government and International Relationships*, edited by Gabriel Shaper, 67-95 (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1998), and *Ha'aravi Be'Isra'el: beyn Qomunizem Lele'umiyut Arvit* (The Arab Minority in Israel: Between Communism and Arab nationalism), (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing, 1993); Sondra Rubenstein, *The Communist Movement in Palestine and Israel, 1919-1984* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1985). All these historians share the same basic outlook on Communism.

²⁰⁴ For Palestinian historiography, see Bashear Suliman, "The Arab East in Communist Theory and Political Practice, 1918-1928" (PhD diss., University of London, 1976); Budeiri, *The Palestine Communist Party 1919-1948*; Maher Al-Sheriff's and Shamih Samara's works were written in Arabic, and their views as well as the views of all the Palestinian historians dealing with the subject can be found in Reches, "Yehudim Ve'arvim Bapekape – Sugiya Bahistoryografya hafalasttinit-Arvit Bat-Zmanenu" (Arabs and Jews in the PKP – An Issue in Contemporary Arab-Palestinian Historiography), in *Zionism: a literary collection of the history of the Zionist Movement and the Jewish Yishuv*, edited by Matitياهو Mintz, 175-86 (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1990). Despite the problem of accessing works written by Palestinians through a source written by an Israeli researcher, Reches is a well-

of the same discourse, one that, despite the conflicts between Palestinians and Jews, featured cultural concepts that drew both sides together.²⁰⁵

The overemphasis on the relationship between Palestinians and Jews, understandable as it is in a country that has been contested since the late nineteenth century, has led to a neglect of other issues such as the Party's youth movement and cultural aspects of ritual, myth and symbol. This myopic look at only the political and social aspects of the history of Communism in Palestine/Israel, even by cultural historians, overlooks the unique subculture that the Jewish Communists created from the 1920s onwards. That subculture was in constant negotiation with Zionist-Socialist culture, Soviet and European influences, and Jewish tradition.

Banki, the Party's youth movement, has rarely been researched. This disregard reflects the emphasis that researchers of the Israeli youth movements place on the Zionist-Socialist movements, to the neglect of a movement like Banki which existed outside the political consensus. There is one exception, the work by Jacob Markovizky, *White Shirt and Red Tie*. Markovizky's book is the first history of Banki and, though unpublished, is to be considered the foundation for future research.

In many ways, Markovizky shares the basic assumptions of Zionist writers on Israeli Communism. Though he recognizes the contribution made by Palestinian historians, he says that "it can be argued that the weight of those [the Palestinian nationalists] was negligible in comparison to the inner Jewish process in the consolidation of the Communist Party in Eretz-

established scholar of Palestinian politics in Israel. There is no indication in the article or elsewhere that he has misrepresented the words of Maher Al-Sheriff and Shamih Samara, and, to the best of my knowledge, he has not been challenged on this article.

²⁰⁵ For a cultural history of Communism in Palestine see Beinun, *Was the Red Flag Flying There?*; Zachary Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906-1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Ben-Zaken, *Communism as Cultural Imperialism*; and Kaufman, *Arab National Communism in the Jewish State*. The latest addition to the scholarly research of Communism in Israel is the documentary collection by Zahavi, *Apart or Together*.

Israel."²⁰⁶ Despite its Zionist bent, his summary of Communist history is devoid of the virulent anti-Communism that some Zionist scholars indulge in.

Three main themes emerge from the detailed narrative of Banki's history constructed by Markovizky. The first is the attempt by ex-members of the Left party, mainly from the mid-1950s, to endow Banki with an Israeli character that would make the movement part of mainstream Israeli society.²⁰⁷ A second point follows from this basic point, namely the incompatibility between the national and the international. Markovizky portrays Banki as a movement torn between the growing desire of its Jewish members to be part of the national body, the international and socialist values that were an integral part of Party ideology, and the growing national feelings of the Palestinian members. When it came time to choose between these value systems, most of the Jewish members awoke from the internationalist dream and preferred a growing affinity with Jewish nationalism. The third theme is the breakdown of the system of Palestinian-Jewish cooperation within the ranks of Banki and the MKI, making "the national conflict the main obstacle... in the development of the movement and its chances of surviving."²⁰⁸ In that sense, Markovizky positions himself in the mainstream of this field.

Markovizky's pioneering work marks the first time the full extent of Banki's history and activity has been explored. Nonetheless, the nature of his work, which presents an overview of the movement, precludes going into the details of the unique Communist subculture developed in Banki and the MKI. Another flaw in Markovizky's work that compels more research of Banki is his Zionist slant. In his introduction, he admits that "Rakah members who split from the MKI were reluctant to talk. Those who did talk were close-minded or developed a one-sided approach

²⁰⁶ Markovizky, *White Shirt and Red Tie*, 13.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 181. "Model of a youth movement that will conform its educational contents, and would see itself loyal to the state."

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 181.

that sought to justify their historical and movement activity."²⁰⁹ By the same token, it can be argued that those who remained in the Jewish MKI developed their own justifications for their historical actions. A non-Zionist historian with some empathy for the MKI and Banki, and with access to those whom Markovizky could not reach, might produce a more complete and different portrayal of the movement's history.

Markovizky's history is, by his own admission, a history from above based on "texts and primary sources, mainly of the movement and party leadership."²¹⁰ The history of Banki and the MKI proposed here will be a history from below, in an attempt to understand how the Jewish Communist identity was constructed. Through the use of sources ranging from personal interviews and internal educational materials to official MKI and Banki documents, the symbolic, mythological and ritual aspects of this identity will be uncovered. Markovizky's research describes, at some length, the political and functional autonomy that Banki enjoyed and the inability of the MKI, until a late stage, to effectively control its youth movement. An exploration of the cultural aspects of Banki and the MKI reveals a different reality in which the Party and its youth movement shared cultural and political concepts, making them a more cohesive entity than the organizational and political aspects might suggest.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 21.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

Chapter 2: The Creation of Jewish Progressive Tradition

The Jewish holidays were the subject of an intense process of design and redesign among Jewish Communists. Like others within the cultural discourse of Zionist-Socialism, the Communists sought to fill the old vessels of Jewish tradition with new content. But whereas Zionist-Socialists sought to infuse nationalistic secular content into the Jewish calendric cycle, the Communists were looking for something different. Rejecting Zionism, while accepting notions of Jewish non-Zionist nationalism, they filled the Jewish holidays with secular progressive content. Their rituals incorporated elements from local Zionist-Socialist cultural practices, Marxist influences and Jewish traditional rituals. In shaping this tradition, the Jewish Communists created and reflected a unique Jewish progressive identity which, despite being supported by Zionist-Socialist practices, was distinctly Jewish Communist.

The high point of this process came in an article written by Moshe Sneh in 1959, on the occasion of the launching of a new school curriculum centered on Judaism. Sneh began by stating that the Communists were not rejecting tradition, though they were conscious of its class content, for "in a society torn by class contrasts and struggles there is no unified spirit and no unified cultural and spiritual work – not in any people and language and not even in our own people."¹ The main impetus for the creation of culture, according to Sneh, would be "the contradiction between the exploiters and the exploited, between the oppressors and the oppressed, between rich and poor."² From that basic point, Sneh went on to portray Jewish history from antiquity to the twentieth century as having been driven by "a continuous class

¹ "Erkhey Haqidma Ve'hashalom Bamasoret Vebatarbut Hayehudit: Al Toda'a Yehudit" (The Values of Progress and Peace in Jewish Tradition and Culture: on Jewish consciousness,) *Kol Ha'am*, January 6, 1959.

² Ibid.

motive that crosses Jewish society and its culture... between the wealthy upper class and the poor people."³

The process of assimilating the Jewish holidays into the Communist subculture alternated between two extremes. The formative period of the Party was characterized mostly by rejection of the new Jewish Zionist calendar, which was perceived as a manifestation of Zionist ideology. After the legalization of the Party, however, Banki shaped its own rituals and symbols celebrating the Jewish holidays. The movement reinvented in Communist form the rituals of Hanukkah, Passover and other holidays. In the process, many cultural elements of Zionist-Socialism diffused into the Communist subculture. This development escalated with the admittance of the "Left Men" to Banki and the MKI, which upset the cultural balance between the different identities within the Communist movement.

Admittedly, the 1965 split of MKI was mainly motivated by political differences regarding the MKI's tactics and ideology concerning the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. However, there was a cultural side to it as well. The MKI could be termed a limited rudimentary form of a multicultural party. Bound together by Marxist-Leninist discourse, the MKI and Banki partly accommodated the Arab-Jewish culture of Iraqi immigrants,⁴ the Eastern European culture of Bulgarian and Rumanian immigrants and the Soviet-style cultural elements of the Party old guard, as well as the Arabic cultural elements of its large Palestinian membership and, to a lesser extent, the more educated and elite Palestinian leaders. The arrival of the native-Israeli Sneh men prompted a cultural effort to create "a new Communist Israeli Left."⁵ This attempt was received with wariness by the Party old guard and was a source of constant tension within the MKI, eventually tearing it asunder in 1965.

³ Ibid.

⁴ For a lively portrayal of the Arab-Jewish cultural scene in the MKI of the 1950s, see Ballas, *First Person Singular*.

⁵ Shafran, *Farewell Communism*, 139.

The diffusion into the Communist subculture of Jewish motifs was also accompanied by the reinvention of symbols, myths and rituals. Like other participants in the Zionist-Socialist cultural discourse, the Jewish Communists based their myths, symbols and rituals on Jewish tradition, but gave them their own explanation. Using Marxism and what they perceived as popular and progressive Jewish traditions, they formed their own rituals, symbols and myths.

In this chapter I will demonstrate how the Communist subculture, from the late 1920s, assimilated and shaped the Jewish holidays in relation to the hegemonic Zionist-Socialist culture. I will also describe the rituals performed by the Jewish Communists in their versions of the Jewish holidays. These rituals will be placed in three contexts. First, I will examine the anthropological aspects of Jewish Communist myths, rituals and symbols in light of the works of Clifford Geertz and Victor Turner. Second, I will explore the similarities and differences between the way the Jewish Communists dealt with tradition and the experiences of European Communists. Third, I will examine and analyse the Jewish identity formed by the myths, rituals and symbols extant among the Jewish Communists in light of the identity crisis that shook Jewish communities in Europe.

2.1 The Holidays

2.1.1. Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkot

There is no evidence prior to the 1950s that Communists in Palestine developed counter-holidays to Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkot. It is also likely that in the circumstances of underground work the performance of public activities was impossible. The bulk of the sources on the celebration of those holidays dates from the 1950s and 1960s. Even then, however, those

holidays did not really draw the attention of the Jewish Communists and they were lacking in notable rituals and symbols.

The holidays opening the Jewish traditional calendar, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkot, stimulated no attempt to reinterpret them by the Communists. They were mostly exploited, as by other Zionist-Socialist youth movements, to tour the country. A pamphlet of the Ramla branch of Banki for the Rosh Hashanah trip of September 4th-6th, 1964, features such activities as night boat rides and bonfires into the early morning hours. The place of national heroism is not absent, showing the deep diffusion of Jewish national elements into Banki, as the travelers were to "climb the Arbel and tour the strongholds of the rebels against Herod and the Romans."⁶ Likewise Sukkot was a time for field trips. The educational activities within the movement's clubs included a stress on peace (the theme of *Sukkaht Shalom* was studied) for the younger ages, and on class issues for the older members. As part of their field trips, Banki members visited the slums where the new immigrants who came pouring into Israel in the 1950s lived.⁷ Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish traditional calendar, elicited but little reaction from the Communists. It was exploited mainly as an opportunity, at least in the Tel Aviv area, for a seminar on Marxism for rank-and-file members and instructors alike.⁸

The lack of any particular stress on the holidays opening the Jewish calendar points here to two factors. First, the evidence that we have shows that the "Left Men" were the ones who put more stress on those holidays, an indication of the growing influence of Jewish nationalist motifs on Tel Aviv Communists from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s. Second, it is also obvious that the Communist subculture, like the Zionist-Socialist culture, preferred to ignore certain holidays

⁶ "Tiyul Rosh Hashana – Brit Hano'ar Ha'komunistit Ha'isra'elit, Snif Ramle, September 1964" (Rosh Hashanah Trip - the Israeli Young Communist League, Ramla Branch, September 1964), Yad Tabenkin Archives.

⁷ Shoshana Shmuely, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, February 22, 2009.

⁸ Tamar Gozansky, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, February 21, 2009. Yoram Gozansky, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, February 23, 2009.

of a marked religious character that did not serve the Communists' search for progressive content for their holidays. That search for progressive secular content for the Jewish holidays set the Communist subculture apart from Zionist-Socialism.

2.1.2 Hanukkah

The next holiday in the Jewish calendar is Hanukkah, which was undoubtedly the most important Jewish holiday to be celebrated by Jewish Communists. In the *Yishuv* era, it was celebrated by Zionists of all political leanings. In the Zionist context, the story of Hanukkah and the Maccabees became a narrative of national liberation rather than divine deliverance. Zionist-Socialist culture further interpreted the holiday from a Socialist class point of view, portraying the rebellion as having been carried out by the lower classes. The emergence of a national cult around Hanukkah was the background to the first Communist reaction to the holiday.

It came in the form of a booklet issued by the Young Communist League in December 1929, written by Party leader Yosef Berger-Barzilay and a group of young Communist activists.⁹ Cumbersomely entitled *The Mufti Matityahu and the Great Peasants Uprising Two Thousand Years Ago*, the booklet uses the historical events of antiquity to launch a political attack against the British Mandate and the Zionist and Palestinian leaderships, which it criticized for their reactionary nature.¹⁰ Its main argument is that Matityahu and the Maccabees usurped the mass

⁹ Dothan, *Reds*, 145.

¹⁰ It is not known whether Palestinian Party members engaged directly in critiquing their leadership in the late 1920s. The Communist Party, however, had relations with the notable families that controlled the Palestinian polity. The Communists helped the Husseinis in their bid for the mayor of Jerusalem, see Dothan, *Reds*. On the other hand, the Communist Party sought to cooperate with elements in the *al-Istiqlal* party in the 1920s, see Zahavi, *Apart or Together*. In the 1940s the young Palestinian intellectuals who organized in the NLL (National Liberation League) and the unions were highly critical of the traditional Palestinian leadership organized in the HAC, as attested to by their disagreement on the issue of the status of Jews in the future Palestinian state and the fact that they were not given a seat in the Hussein-controlled organization. In the 1950s the Communist Party politics among Palestinians sought to replace the traditional familial leadership that was represented in MAPAI-sponsored Palestinian parties. See Markovizky, *White Shirt and Red Tie* and Kaufman, *Arab National Communism in the Jewish State*.

uprising of the poor peasants against the Greeks and their servants in Judea, fearing that "if the people would rebel against the Greeks and drive the foreign leeches from the country, and feel that they could do it without the 'clerks,' then nothing would remain of them and their donations and taxes."¹¹ Thus, the Maccabees exploited religious fanaticism to wrest control of the uprising, which made them kings of the land and enabled them eventually to sell out to the Greeks and Romans. This turn of events is contrasted to the present when "there is a working class, there is a Communist Party, and they will strike an alliance with the poor and oppressed peasants"¹² to drive out the present-day Greeks and their collaborators.

Beyond its thinly veiled political metaphor, the 1929 booklet is a cultural statement. It condemns the heroic role assigned by Zionism to the Maccabees, and in that it reflects the anti-Zionism of the Communists. At the same time, the booklet rejects the religious narrative of the holiday, portraying it as a ploy to "stupefy the minds of the youth with foolish legends."¹³ As anti-Zionist as the booklet is, though, it is nonetheless part of the Zionist-Socialist cultural discourse of Hanukkah. That is most evident in its class analysis of the Hanukkah narrative. Despite the sharp criticism of the Maccabees as an antique version of bourgeois Zionists, the uprising of the poor peasants is presented as a popular guerrilla struggle.¹⁴ The whole text is steeped in terms of class as a social category and anti-Imperialism; it depicts the Syrian Greeks' rule over Judea as a "Greek 'Mandate',"¹⁵ contrasts the peace-loving peasant masses to their

¹¹ Palestinian Young Communist League, "Hamufti Matityahu Vemered Ha'ikarim Hagadol Lifney Alpa'im Shana: Sipur Le'Hanuka" (The Mufti Matityahu and the Great Peasants Uprising Two Thousand Years Ago: a story for Hanukkah), Lavon Institute for Labour Research, IV-445-2.

¹² Ibid., 8.

¹³ Ibid., 7.

¹⁴ Ibid., 6.

¹⁵ Ibid.

exploitative religious leadership, and ultimately rejects the idea of Jewish heroism originating from antiquity.¹⁶

The booklet marks the start of the Jewish Communists' use of Marxist terms in describing the narrative of Hanukah. The archaic nature of this explanation is justified by the basic Marxist explanation of history as the struggle between classes.¹⁷ Albeit relatively awkwardly, in the hands of the Jewish Communists the Marxist historical portrayal was used, as will be seen below, as a basic myth justifying Hanukkah, and indeed many other Jewish holidays, in their eyes. The use of Marxist categories, as cumbersome and even laughable as it may be to present-day readers, shows us how Jewish nationalist motifs diffused¹⁸ into the Communist subculture. To a political collective that in essence rejected Jewish nationalism and Zionism, only Marxist language could make a myth like Hanukkah palatable. Paradoxically, this connected the Jewish Communists to Zionist-Socialist culture.

The 1941 German invasion of the U.S.S.R. dramatically changed the position of the Communist Party in Palestine. After having been hunted by the British from the start of the war, the Party was legalized, only to split up into its national components in 1943. The war changed the way Jewish Communists in Palestine viewed Jewish heroism. Soviet Jewish soldiers in the Red Army were covered regularly in the Communist Party press.¹⁹ The acclamation of Soviet

¹⁶ Ibid., 7: "The Zionist swindlers want to use this holiday to prove to the youth that in order to be worthy of the name 'the descendants of the Maccabees' they should perform today in Palestine the role of the despicable *Mityavnim*."

¹⁷ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Penguin Books, 2004).

¹⁸ I am using the word "diffused" instead of "assimilated" or "infused" because of its passive nature. The Jewish Communists did not take a completely conscious decision to assimilate Jewish nationalism into their subculture. Those elements were diffused in a process that started in the 1920s until they came to a critical mass in the early to mid-1960s. Then there was a conscious attempt to create an Israeli nationalist Communism, which contributed to the split, see Markovizky, *White Shirt and Red Tie*. Yair Tzaban, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, February 12, 2009.

¹⁹ *Kol Ha'am*, July 12, 1944, which portrays the heroic deeds of Lieutenant General Ya'akov Kreyzer, a Soviet Union Hero and a member of The Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee; another case from *Kol Ha'am*, September 26, 1944, is that of Major General Motel Vinroeb, the son of a Jewish coachman from Novosibirsk; and in "Giborim Yehudim Batsava Ha'adom" (Jewish Heroes in the Red Army), *Kol Ha'am*, December 2, 1944: "56,767 Jewish

Jewish heroism was not missing either from the pages of the Young Communist League organ *Kol Hano'ar*. In its January 1943 issue, a long item was dedicated to the story of Haim Diskin, a young Soviet Jewish gunner "who without fearing death... in all his body, as a hero, in boundless dedication,"²⁰ destroyed five enemy tanks and was wounded fourteen times. Despite the exaggerated language of wartime propaganda, this stress on Jewish national heroism opened the Jewish Communists to a more positive appreciation of the Hanukkah myth. The reassertions of the myth of Hanukkah did not reflect on the Nazi-Soviet pact when the PKP blindly followed Moscow's line. In the world of the newfound national myth of Jewish heroism, such inconvenient political facts had no place. For the sake of political expediency, the Communists claimed that, until the June 22nd invasion of the U.S.S.R. by Nazi Germany, the war was a battle between imperialist groupings, but since then it had become a justified anti-imperialist war.

Next to the item describing Haim Diskin's heroics, an article simply named "Hanukkah" presented the new Communist myth of the holiday. Signed by one Samuel from Jerusalem, it is a historical political metaphor, as was the 1929 booklet. It begins with the question: "Hanukkah, the day of the victory of the Maccabees... what does this glorious chapter in our people's history symbolize?"²¹ The answer consists of a long historical narrative in which class and national heroism are interwoven. One line of connection between the 1929 and 1943 texts, and between them and Zionist-Socialist culture, is the class analysis of the events in antiquity.²² With the penetration of commerce into Judea, in accordance with Marxist ideology, came "the language of commerce, Greek, and the defenders of commerce, the Greek gods."²³ The new economic order

officers and soldiers were cited until 1 October 1944... the fourth place among the Soviet people in medals for bravery belongs to the Jewish people."

²⁰ "Haim Diskin Gibor Brit Hamo'atsot" (Haim Diskin Hero of the Soviet Union), *Kol Hano'ar*, January 1943.

²¹ "Ḥanuka" (Hanukkah), *Kol Hano'ar*, January 1943.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

both destroyed the Jewish peasantry and caused an internal class war within the ruling class between the old land-owning elite and the new commercial class. This situation became more entangled when the Seleucid Empire²⁴ intervened on behalf of the new, culturally Hellenistic commercial elite. In an attempt to impose Hellenistic culture and religion, it tried to ban the practice of Judaism, resulting in a war of popular liberation led by Judah the Maccabee.

This Marxist narrative of the Hanukkah myth differs from the 1929 booklet in its positive approach to the Maccabees. The Hasmoneans and Matityahu, negatively portrayed in the late 1920s, have become "a family of country clerks from a small town... who rejected the foreign ways."²⁵ Judah the Maccabee is "the man who was able to be the leader of an entire population. He was the man that symbolized the national pride of the people of Judea."²⁶ Like the 1929 text, the historical narrative ends with the morals of history for the present. Nevertheless, whereas in the 1929 booklet the idea of Jewish heroism was rejected, in 1943 it was embraced. Hanukkah once "symbolized for us through the generations the heroics of the past – today when the Jewish people is once again fighting for its life, freedom and culture – the memory of the Maccabees encourages us to fight."²⁷ Leading this new fight was not the Zionist *Yishuv*, however, but "liberated Soviet Jewry that is fighting alongside the rest of the U.S.S.R. people against the Nazis."²⁸ Here the Jewish Communists gave expression to their own genuine feelings of sympathy with the plight of the Jews in Europe. At the same time, they were being used as a tool of Soviet policy that sought to mobilize Jewish public opinion in the West on behalf of the Soviet war effort. The rosy, idyllic portrayals of Jewish heroism disregarded the fact that anti-

²⁴ Seleucid Empire - the eastern part of Alexander the Great's empire 312-63 BC. It played a key role in the history of Judea by attempting the Hellenization of the empire, which sparked the Maccabean revolt.

²⁵ Hanukkah, *Kol Hano'ar*, January 1943.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

Semitism still existed in the U.S.S.R. and that an organization like the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee was more a stooge of the NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) than the authentic leadership of Soviet Jewry.

This diffusion of Jewish nationalist elements into the Communist myth of Hanukkah gathered pace during the 1940s. Under the influence of the Holocaust and the *Yishuv's* struggle against the British, the Jewish Communists began framing Hanukkah more and more in Jewish nationalist terms. This is evident in the December 1947 article *To the Sons of the Maccabees*. At that point, soon after the Gromyko Speech, delivered by Soviet ambassador to the U.N. Andrei Gromyko in support of the 1947 U.N. Partition of Palestine, the Jewish Communists identified almost completely with the *Yishuv*, which was in the midst of an escalating war with the Palestinians. Like its predecessor in 1943, the 1947 text starts with a question: "What is the meaning of Hanukkah for us?"²⁹ What follows is a historical narrative of the events in Judea, almost identical to the class-based account delivered in 1943. The *Mityavnim* (Hebrew – Hellenistic Jews) are described as having been driven by their class interest to cooperate with the Greeks.³⁰ The uprising is described as a popular peasant revolution motivated by class and nationalist interests.

The 1947 article *Lebney Hamakabim* (To the Sons of the Maccabees) differs from its predecessor in two main respects: the image of the Maccabees and the present-day political moral to be drawn from history. In 1943 the approach to the Maccabees was still somewhat reserved. They are described as a land-owning elite, driven by internal class warfare to lead the uprising. In 1947 they become completely identified with the uprising, being portrayed as "the

²⁹ "Lebney Hamakabim" (To the Sons of the Maccabees), *Kol Hano'ar*, December 1947.

³⁰ Ibid.: "Here the selfish interests of Judea's wealthy overrode the interests of the people and they cooperated with the conquerors of the Greek Empire."

vanguard of the people's war against its oppressors."³¹ They also became part of a Jewish heroic lineage ending with the ghetto fighters in Europe. In 1943 the Jewish Communists accepted Jewish heroism, but only in the context of World War Two, presenting Soviet Jewry as the heirs to Maccabean bravery. By 1947, having become committed to the political "independence" of the *Yishuv*, they were describing the present-day political lesson of the holiday in nationalist terms: "The bravery of the Maccabees and their fight is a symbol to us now – a symbol and a command – with the coming of independence."³²

The nationalist elements of the Hanukkah myth, with its class-based Marxist explanation, are detailed in a December 1949 article named *Hanukkah – the Holiday of the Revolt*. Signed by one David, it elaborates upon elements of the Communist perception of the holiday in existence since 1943. The article begins with a quote from Lenin stating that only the proletariat is the true defender of national rights. Then the text develops a point already touched upon briefly in the pre-state 1947 article. The Jewish people has spawned a revolutionary lineage of heroism stretching "from the Hasmoneans and Bar Kokhva to the Warsaw Ghetto uprising and Israel's War of Independence."³³ The text also features a class-based, anti-Imperialist analysis of the historical events that encapsulates the present-day political moral. The Seleucid Empire is a parallel to American imperialism, the Hellenistic Jews to the contemporary servants of America: "Even today there are circles – in the state of Israel from the upper bureaucracy, 'clerks,' the wealthy – that aspire to strengthen their rule over the people with the help of 'the rich uncle from America'."³⁴ This danger of subversion of hard-won independence is what makes the holiday a

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ "Ḥanuka - Ḥag Hamered" (Hanukkah – the Holiday of the Revolt), *Kol Hano'ar*, December 1949.

³⁴ Ibid.

celebration of true independence, and the Communists fighting for it the "true successors of the Maccabean spirit."³⁵

The Communist myth of Hanukkah came into its own in the 1950s to the mid-1960s. In a section of *Kol Hano'ar* from November 1956, in the midst of the Sinai War and the Hungarian Revolution, the contrast between past and present dominates. The Jewish Communists were isolated by their objection to the 1956 War, and their propaganda, as exemplified in the pamphlets, fell on deaf ears. In reaction to their isolation, they internalized the holiday myth. A collage of literary pieces, poetry and short articles, the section is informed by the dichotomy between past and present as phrased in the traditional way, "in those days, at this time". The anti-Imperialist rebellion of antiquity, a fight in which the people of Judea "struggled alongside the peoples of the Middle East,"³⁶ is contrasted to the present day "when the peoples of the Middle East have broken the yoke of the robber empires in the freedom and independence struggle,"³⁷ while Israel was aligning itself with the decaying empires of France and England. The contrast between past and present is also cultural. Whereas in the past "the people fiercely defended its national culture, proclaiming holy war on Hellenization,"³⁸ at present American culture was a corrupting influence allowed to rage unabated. Finally, a contrast is struck between the popular revolt "of peasants, artisans, small merchants and clerks"³⁹ headed by the Maccabees, and the war frenzy of 1956. Once again, as in the case of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the inconvenient truths about Soviet policy, then in the midst of crushing the Hungarian Revolution, were kept outside the Jewish Communist myth. The 1956 events were dutifully described by Moshe Sneh as "a

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ "Hanuka – Lemi Shayakh Hayom Haze?" (Hanukkah – whose day is it?), *Kol Hano'ar*, November 20, 1956.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

second Spain."⁴⁰ The impact of the Hungarian affair was also mitigated by the start of the Sinai War, the MKI objection to which was met with extreme hostility, resulting in a cementing of Party ranks. The Jewish Communists were too busy attacking French and British imperialism and Israeli complacency with it, using among other tools the myth of Hanukah, to also attack Soviet imperialism.

From the contrast between past and present the article draws its final conclusion that the legacy of the holiday belongs to "those on whose flag peace and independence are inscribed,"⁴¹ meaning the Communists. The text also adduces the contrast between the Maccabean revolt and Hasmonean rule. By using parts of two literary works, Howard Fast's *My Glorious Brothers* and Moshe Shamir's *The King of Flesh and Blood*, the young Communists contrast the popular humane leadership of Judah the Maccabee to the cruel rule of the Hasmonean King Yannai, who butchered his own people with the aid of foreign mercenaries. The *Kol Hano'ar* article reiterates the elements evident in the previous articles: the popular class nature of the rebellion, recourse to the past as a repository of political morals for the present, and recognition of the Communists as the true heirs to the myth of Hanukkah.

The myth of Hanukkah was disseminated among the young Communists not only by Banki's public organ, but by its instructors' brochures as well. The latter offer a window into the cultural world of the young Communists. In the case of Hanukkah and other Jewish holidays, they show how elements of, respectively, Jewish tradition and Soviet and left-wing European culture were expressed and changed by Banki members, and how Zionist-Socialist discourse, in this case the narrative of Hanukkah, was adapted into Communist cultural practice. Indeed, the

⁴⁰ Shafran, *Farewell Communism*, 180.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

basic medium of Zionist-Socialist and statist culture, the *Maschet*, became the commonplace way for Jewish Communists to express their cultural inclinations.

The instructors' brochure of November 1955, like others used by Banki, was built on the *Maschet* model as a collage of literary, theoretical and theatrical pieces revolving around one or two subjects. The section that deals with Hanukkah opens with a quote from Meir Vilner, who strings together the Hasmonean and Bar Kokhva rebellions as part of a "progressive revolution of the Jewish people."⁴² As in other Banki texts, he contrasts those Jews who wished to become Hellenistic to those who stood firm against foreign rule and culture. He also asserts that the example of the ancient rebels should be used to educate the young Communists, as it holds a moral for the present, and Vilner encourages Communists "to defend our honour, national independence, and resist the *Mityavnim* of today."⁴³

The text moves on to a historical description of the Maccabean uprising. The historical narrative exhibits many of the typical characteristics of the Communist myth of the holiday. The revolt is described as a popular uprising that pitted the people against the Greek mercenaries and their Jewish lackeys.⁴⁴ The identification of the Maccabees with the people, as its leaders, is also evident. The political moral is not forgotten at the end, either. After comparing the Seleucid Empire to Western imperialism and equating the Hellenization of antiquity with bad American culture, the text concludes that "our period is very much like the Maccabean. Then and now, those who want peace and independence, the patriots, must unite and fight for Israel's

⁴² "Hanuka – Alon Lamadrikh, Novmeber 1955" (Hanukkah – Instuctor's Brochure, November 1955), Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #1.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

independence against pre-emptive war, for world peace and peace between Israel and the Arab states."⁴⁵

In one respect, this text does differ from the previous ones examined, namely its positive approach towards the religious motives of the uprising. The 1929 booklet was as dismissive of the holiday's religious content as it was of its Zionist content, portraying the Maccabees' religious motivation as a ploy to exploit the fervour of the people for their, the Maccabees', own ends. In 1955, the young Communists approached the religious devotion of the ancient rebels differently. While still insisting that the plunder of material goods from the people was hurtful, the text stresses that "we should understand that religion at that time personified the tradition and the cultural spiritual life of the peoples."⁴⁶ This change in attitude toward the religious content of the historical narrative does not mean, however, that the young Communists' secular awareness changed. It does show how deeply Jewish national motifs had sunk into the Jewish Communist consciousness of Hanukkah.

Besides the historical portrayal, there are two other texts connected to Hanukkah in the 1955 brochure. One is a short children's play, the other a Hanukkah song filled with anti-American hints, carrying on the motif of using the holiday as a present-day political allegory.⁴⁷

The next instructors' brochure to deal with Hanukkah is dated November 1956. At this very politically sensitive moment for the Communists (the only Jewish political force in Israel objecting to the 1956 Sinai War), the authors of the brochure stressed "that according to Banki's secretariat resolution there is the utmost importance to organizing public celebrations that are

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

devoted to Hanukkah."⁴⁸ In the *Masechet* style, the booklet is constructed around the motifs of just and unjust war and the traditional Hanukkah blessing, "in those days, at this time". It contains everything from an essay by Mao to a poem by Natan Alterman. Of the literary pieces focusing on Hanukkah, two came from sources of cultural importance to the Communists.

The first is two poems by Haya Kadmon, the Party's undisputed poet laureate and one of the most romantic and tragic figures in Communist circles.⁴⁹ Kadmon held an influential cultural position within the MKI. Her "extensive knowledge of Hebrew and world literature made her one of the important contributors to the literary supplement of *'Kol Ha'am*'."⁵⁰ Both poems in the 1956 instructor's brochure express motifs already established in the Communist myth of Hanukkah. The first, *Yet Again as in the Time of Modi'in*, continues to pursue the theme, in poetic form, of striking a parallel between antiquity and the present, as the following lines well demonstrate: "Yet again as in the days of Modi'in/ the enemy besieges the land/ and the pig of Mammon enters the Temple/ Once more a handful of seated parasites/ burn incense for foreigners and bow to their words."⁵¹ Another motif expressed in the poem is the popular nature of the Maccabean revolt: "Common people, poor priests/ will awaken the spirit of revolt."⁵² This motif, taken from Zionist-Socialist culture, is also related to the present: "Once more the Hasmonean fires burn/ From Judea to the Galilee;/ 'The days of slavery shall end.'"⁵³

The second poem by Kadmon revisits the motif of contrasting the fiery Maccabees to the wicked *Mityavnim*, those Jews who choose to accept foreign ways.⁵⁴ It also reasserts the popular

⁴⁸ "Hanuka – Alon Lamadrikh, November 1956" (Hanukkah – instructors' brochure, November 1956), Yad Tabenkin Archives File #2.

⁴⁹ For the detailed life story of Haya Kadmon, who came with the Left into the MKI, see Shafran, *Farewell Communism*, 107-110.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁵¹ "Hanukkah – instructors' brochure, November 1956".

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

character of the uprising, describing how "tens of thousands from the vineyard and the field, from the workshops and the city's huts, broken and wretched/ already gathered here to the flag of Modi'in,/ to the flag of the proud sons of Matityahu!"⁵⁵

A second important source is the book *My Glorious Brothers* by Howard Fast, an American Communist writer who occupied an enormous place in the cultural consciousness of Banki members in the 1950s. Shoshana Shmoely refers to it as the "Bible" of Hanukkah. She recalls that her copy of the book was repeatedly marked with the sections to be used on Hanukkah.⁵⁶ It provided material that would be read to the younger age groups by their Banki instructors or acted out in the form of plays, serving in effect as a manual for their activities with the younger members,

The holiday featured diverse practices, including plays and scout games, which extended to the movement's clubs. In a circular from the early 1950s, it is suggested that the local club be decorated "in Hanukkah lamps and *dreidles*."⁵⁷ Instructors are advised to conduct a menorah-making contest, and that one entry at least should be "on the background of the (Soviet) Pioneers symbol."⁵⁸

From the late 1920s, Hanukkah acquired growing symbolic importance among Jewish Communists. Its message of national liberation, of revolt against oppressive foreign rule and traitors at home, suited the Communists' cultural and political needs. The high point of the integration of the Hanukkah myth into Banki came in the early 1960s, as an attempt to produce a unified guide for the holiday in 1963 makes evident. Like many of Banki's instructors' brochures, the 1963 booklet begins with a historical narrative of the holiday. Once more the same elements

⁵⁵ Ibid., 7.

⁵⁶ Shoshana Shmoely, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, February 22, 2009.

⁵⁷ "Mazkirut Bney Amal Behakhana Avur Hanuka" (Secretariat of the Junior Level Banki in preparation for Hanukkah), Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #3.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

can be found. The uprising was carried out by "poor peasants, artisans, small merchants and small town priests,"⁵⁹ pitted in a class war against "rich clerks, wealthy merchants, landowners and tax collectors – a handful of parasites."⁶⁰ Judah the Maccabee is positively described as "the scion of a farmer family from Modi'in."⁶¹ The uprising is linked to a progressive Jewish tradition of freedom-fighting as another link in the chain stretching from "The Great Revolt, the Bar Kokhva revolt, other revolts against the Roman Empire, the Ghettos Revolt and the War of Independence."⁶²

As in the earlier texts, the contrast between the *Mityavnim* and the Maccabees is a motif with meaning that extends to the present day, as the young Communist should learn "that there was not and cannot be any unity between *Mityavnim* and Maccabean, between the lovers of Rome and the Zealots, between Judenrats and the Ghetto Fighters, between the servants of Imperialism and those who oppose it."⁶³ Again the contrast is struck between the popular, liberating character of Judah the Maccabee and the despotic rule of the Hasmoneans, who sold out national independence to Rome. And there is a final moral that history presents. In contrast to the past, "today when a third of the world is inhabited by liberated peoples, and in the rest of the world the people are marching safely toward their complete liberation – under the constant guidance of the working class – in the twentieth century, the century of Socialism and Communism – one oppressor will not be replaced by another."⁶⁴

The 1963 booklet is divided into three main sections, featuring poems appropriate for the holiday, stories and plays, respectively. The first section opens with a poem by Alexander Penn,

⁵⁹ The Cultural Section of the Central Committee of the Israeli Young Communist League, "Ḥanuka Ḥag Ha'orot Ḥag Haḥerut, November 1963" (Hanukkah the Holiday of Lights, the Holiday of Freedom, November 1963), Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #5.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

the most important cultural figure in the Communist subculture in the 1950s and 1960s. Penn joined the Party in 1947 and very quickly became "the Party's great poet, its high priest."⁶⁵ His performances reading his poems at Party events left a lasting impression on those who witnessed them.⁶⁶ His poems in *Kol Ha'am*, dealing with the politics of the day, were a regular fixture throughout the 1950s and 1960s. In his contribution to the 1963 booklet, *Brothers' Light*, the main motif is light, one well connected to Hanukkah, the Jewish festival of lights. The light in the poem is ignited "from the Volga to the Vistula,"⁶⁷ connecting Soviet heroism with the "light of our brothers and glorious heroes,"⁶⁸ alluding to the Maccabees. Thus, a motif that first emerged in World War II reappears in poetic form in the early 1960s.

The booklet's poetry section also contains poems by Haya Kadmon, who features prominently in other Banki booklets and articles on the holiday; poems by the French Communist poet Paul Eluard; and a children's poem by the important Israeli poet Natan Alterman. All the poems repeat such motifs as light, freedom and anti-Americanism, American ascendancy once more being compared to the Hellenistic Imperialism of antiquity. In the booklet's second section there are stories about Jewish partisans during World War II, and stories recreating events from antiquity. One story is situated in a traditional Jewish setting. It deals with young Jewish pupils who give their traditional Hanukkah allowance to their poor Rabbi. This story, and a play by Shalom Aleichem in the booklet's third section, show the emphasis placed by Banki's instructors on what they considered to be Jewish popular traditions with a class

⁶⁵ Shafran, *Farewell Communism*, 103.

⁶⁶ In an interview 50 years and more after the fact, Yoram Gozansky still vividly remembered Penn's performances and described them as once-in-a-lifetime experience; Yoram Gozansky, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, February 23, 2009.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

element to them.⁶⁹ Also in the third section, Howard Fast's book is presented as a play again, along with other plays that became a regular staple of Banki's Hanukkah material.

The booklet's contents illustrate the cultural shaping of Hanukkah in Jewish Communist subculture. The holiday was interpreted through a cultural mix of Jewish popular stories, Israeli Communist as well as non Communist poetry, and the reinvention of antiquity to suit the Marxist version of history. The aim of such varied cultural elements was to implant the holiday in the young Communists' minds in terms that were ideologically permissible in a Communist movement, thus creating a Jewish Communist progressive narrative of Hanukkah.

As celebrated among Jewish Communists from the 1920s, Hanukkah featured an alternative ritual that, despite being rooted in Jewish tradition, had a distinctive Communist aspect. The main ritual traditionally associated with the holiday is the lighting of candles. Zionism and Zionist-Socialism took this ritual, usually performed in the privacy of the family, and turned it into a national public event. The Communist subculture followed the same path, and the lighting of the candles became a ritual performed in Banki's clubs. The uniquely Communist aspect of the ceremony was the blessings said with the lighting of each candle. The young Communists replaced the traditional blessings with ones featuring Communist content, such as blessings for the U.S.S.R., Communist Parties worldwide headed by the Soviet Party, etc.⁷⁰

There is no evidence indicating that the ceremony was performed in the early days of Communism in Palestine. This kind of open activity was only possible in conditions of legality. Tamar Gozansky dates the start of the ceremony to the merger of the Left with the MKI in the

⁶⁹ Shoshana Shmuely stressed the fact that in all the Jewish holidays Banki activists were looking for a class Jewish element; Shoshana Shmuely, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israe, February 22, 2009.

⁷⁰ The Culture Section of the Central Committee of the Israeli Young Communist League, "Hanukkah the Holiday of Lights, the Holiday of Freedom, November 1963".

mid-1950s. Yoram Gozansky, on the other hand, believes it to have existed long before the 1950s.⁷¹ The earliest visible evidence is a photograph of the ceremony in a 1956 issue of *Kol Hano'ar*. It shows three members of the Tel Aviv branch, a young girl and two boys; the girl is lighting the Hanukkah candles. Above the three youngsters hangs a banner with the slogan: "We will follow the Maccabean way on the path of struggle for the homeland's independence!" The caption below the photo reads: "Members of the Tel Aviv Banki branch light candles in memory of the liberation from the yoke of the invaders." Although both slogan and caption adduce nationalist motifs, giving the old Jewish ritual new national content, the symbols surrounding the ceremony are Communist. To the left is the Banki emblem, made up of the national flag signifying the local Israeli element, the Red Star and the Sheaf of Wheat signifying the progressive, internationalist and Soviet Socialist element. To the right is the emblem of the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY), betokening interracial solidarity and universality. These symbols give the ceremony its uniqueness. It is a traditional Jewish ritual with nationalist content as performed by Zionist-Socialism, but in a Communist setting.

Though there was no uniform protocol for the Communist ritual of Hanukkah, the blessings accompanying the lighting of the candles featured a common content and orientation. In Yad Hana the ceremony was performed in front of the congregated kibbutz members; the blessings over the candles included "a candle for freedom, which the heroic Maccabees enjoined us to fight for no matter what the cost, a candle for peace between nations, a candle for toil, a candle for fraternity between humans and between nations, a candle for the love of the homeland, a candle for the Party that lights our way, a candle for all children and a candle for our

⁷¹ Tamar Gozansky, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, February 21, 2009. Yoram Gozansky, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, February 23, 2009.

Yad Hana."⁷² According to the testimony of a former Yad Hana member, the ceremony also included the acting out of parts of Howard Fast's *My Glorious Brothers* by the kibbutz children. The ceremony was conducted under a banner that read "A great revolt happened here," no doubt a repudiation of the traditional slogan "A great miracle happened here".⁷³ In Tel Aviv the same basic pattern was followed. Candles were lit for the true independence of Israel, for Jewish-Arab fraternity, and in condemnation of the military government. The ceremonies were conducted in the local Banki club on a decorated stage with a large candelabrum. The members took turns lighting the candles and reciting the blessings over them. The ceremony was followed by a party.⁷⁴ Elements of Communist and Socialist solidarity also had a place in the Hanukkah ceremony. Some of the testimony describes candles being lit for the Soviet Union and the MKI, and a candle lit in solidarity for national liberation struggles like the Vietnam War. Local Communist struggles were not forgotten either, as candles were lit for the Arab brethren and in condemnation of the military government imposed upon them.⁷⁵

By the mid-1960s Hanukkah had become a central Communist holiday. A short ceremony with detailed blessings was featured in the 1963 booklet, apparently in an attempt to apply uniform practice in all Banki branches. The ceremony was to begin with the playing of a tune or song. Then the candles were to be lit; the first one, the *shamash*, was to be lit "for the great deeds that were done and are being done by the fighters for freedom, peace and independence in those days at this time."⁷⁶ The blessings over the candles that follow exemplify the different aspects of Communist subculture and identity in Israel as they developed from the

⁷² Gai, *Back to Yad-Hannah*, 258.

⁷³ Zafirra Kelorman, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, November 6, 2005.

⁷⁴ Yoram Gozansky, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, February 23, 2009.

⁷⁵ Zafirra Kelorman, interview by author, November 6, 2005. Yoram Gozansky, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, February 23, 2009.

⁷⁶ The Culture Section of the Central Committee of the Israeli Young Communist League, "Hanukkah the Holiday of Lights, the Holiday of Freedom, November 1963".

late 1920s. The first blessing connects the holiday to the Jewish heroic lineage from "the Maccabean bonfires, from the fire of the Zealots' revolt and Bar Kokhva, from the flames of the ghetto's rebels and the fire of Israel's independence struggle."⁷⁷ The last entry was justified in the eyes of the Jewish Communists as having been an anti-imperialist fight for national liberation, on this point ignoring its colonial aspects. The text equates the present-day with past oppressors and calls for an intense struggle against "the oppressors external and internal, the heirs of Antiochus and the *Mityavnim*."⁷⁸

Solidarity with other peoples is expressed in the blessings over the second candle, which was to be lit for all the people struggling for freedom, and over the fifth candle, to be lit "for all the people of the Middle East, who are casting off their chains."⁷⁹ Notwithstanding the Arab states' anti-Israeli positions, the Communists saw in their radicalization a progressive factor.⁸⁰ Loyalty to the Soviet Union and the Communist movement is expressed in the blessing over the third candle, to be lit for "the People of the Soviets"⁸¹ and the nations of the people's democracies. The fourth was to be lit for "the Communist parties worldwide, and for the lighthouse – the Communist Party of the Soviet Union."⁸² The sixth, seventh and eighth candles were to be lit on behalf of local Party constituents. The sixth candle was for "our dear friends

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ The 1956 Sinai Campaign was defined as an aggression against "Revolutionary Egypt," see Markovizky, *White Shirt and Red Tie*, 49. However, the MKI's relation with the Arab states was more complex. When the MKI endorsed the Soviet stand in support of Qasim in his dispute with Nasser, the Party was heavily punished by its Palestinian electorate and its representation in the Knesset dropped from six Knesset members (MKs) to only three (see Markovizky, *White Shirt and Red Tie* and Rekhess, *The Arab Minority in Israel*). At the same time, the support for what was perceived as Palestinian anti-imperialism ran deep within the ranks of the Jewish Communists. Clear evidence of that came during the 1965 split when the Palestinian-Jewish faction that would later found RAKAH "stressed the struggle between imperialist and anti-imperialist forces" in the Middle East and Israel see Markovizky, *White Shirt and Red Tie*, 55).

⁸¹ The Culture Section of the Central Committee of the Israeli Young Communist League, "Hanukkah the Holiday of Lights, the Holiday of Freedom, November 1963).

⁸² Ibid.

from Nazareth, the Triangle and the villages of the Galilee,"⁸³ and the blessing vowed to keep alive the struggle to end the military government. The seventh candle was for "the humiliated and exploited toilers of Israel."⁸⁴ Here the blessing vows to bring to them the words of the Communist movement, "the word of truth that rouses to struggle."⁸⁵ The ceremony was to end with the singing of the Zionist secular Hanukkah song, "*We Are Carrying Torches*."

Victor Turner defined liminality and *communitas* as part of the ritual process meant to neutralize crisis points within the social structure such as the differences of status and gender. The ritual carries its participants outside of the normal social structure into a liminal state where they are in effect between and betwixt the social structure, thus creating an anti-structure, an alternative to the day-to-day structures of society. In this condition, those taking part in the process are outside their social roles. Through the ritual and symbol enacted in this liminal condition, a generalized social bond of *communitas* is revealed, in juxtaposition to the social political order.⁸⁶

The Hanukkah rituals performed by the Jewish Communists bear all the characteristics of the rituals of *communitas* and liminality. The Jewish Communists were persecuted, at times relegated to the margins of Israel's political, social and cultural structures. But even when they were marginalized, MKI and Banki members shared Jewish cultural concepts with the broader society. In Tel Aviv, the young Banki members were mostly young, Hebrew speaking, native-born Israelis. This closeness on the one hand and remoteness on the other placed the Jewish

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1969). *Communitas* was later standardized by Turner in his analysis of Christian pilgrimage rituals. He defined it as "A relational quality of full unmitigated communication, even communion, between definite and determinate identities, which arises spontaneously in all kinds of groups, situations, and circumstances" (Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture Anthropological Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 250). He clearly connected the concept to the qualities of "lowliness, sacredness, homogeneity and comradeship." Ibid., 250.

Communists between and betwixt the social structure. This position with the tension it brought was enhanced by the performance of rituals that expressed affinity with Jewish traditions. At the same time, the Jewish Communists sought to reinvent those traditions to fit their ideological sensitivities. They did so by giving them new, progressive, secular content. Thus their holiday rituals were meant to bond them together in rituals that combined Jewish traditional motifs with Marxist ideology. The rituals were meant to elevate their status, making them the heirs of the progressive revolutionary aspect they found in Hanukkah.

The Hanukkah ritual had no equivalent in ritual practices in the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe. Its ritual language⁸⁷ was made up predominately of local elements from the Zionist-Socialist culture and Jewish tradition. Nonetheless, into the content of their various Hanukkah rituals the Jewish Communists amalgamated both nationalist and Communist elements. Thus it came about that over the lighting of the holiday candles there were blessings for the U.S.S.R. and the Party as well as for the fallen of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF). These rituals reflected the attempt by the Jewish Communist to create a Jewish-Israeli Communist subculture structured, as the Hanukkah blessings show, on a delicate equilibrium between local Israeli, mostly Zionist-Socialist elements and Communist ones. This cultural hybrid could only exist when various elements were balanced. By the early and mid-1960s, when under the influence of the "Left Men" the Jewish Communist subculture came to resemble the Zionist-Socialist culture, its existence became untenable.

⁸⁷ The ritual language of the Jewish Communists and the elements from which it is constructed are derived from concepts developed in Clifford Geertz, "Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power" (in *Local Knowledge*, ed. Clifford Geertz (New York: Basic Books Inc., Publisher, 1983)). Geertz argues that the line between the symbolic of power and power itself is in many cases blurred. Symbolic power emanating from centers of power affects and reflects reality as perceived and idealized by wielders of power and those affected by it. As case studies for his theory, Geertz adduces three historical events: Queen Elizabeth I's Royal Progress on January 14 1559, entering London a day before her coronation; the medieval court of Java's king, Hayam Wuruk; and Mulay Hasan of Morocco (Geertz, "Centers, Kings, and Charisma," 121-26).

The integration of the Hanukkah myth into Banki's Communist subculture culminated in the early to mid-1960s. Banki, which was by then controlled by the veterans of the Left party, made an attempt to change the movement's ritual calendar and posit Hanukkah as a central occasion for its members. Yair Tzaban's proposal to enrol new members to the movement during Hanukkah sent a shock wave through the Party,⁸⁸ highlighting the cultural differences between the "Left Men" and its old guard. This symbolic act brought into the open the conflict between the two approaches to Zionist-Socialist cultural practices in Banki and the MKI: the more Zionist approach brought by the "Left Men" and the one stressing Communist and class motifs. With the balance between those elements disrupted, Jewish Communist subculture lost its uniqueness and its reason to exist.

2.1.3 Nature Holidays

The Zionist reinvention of the Jewish calendar stressed the holidays that had a prominent connection to the agricultural cycle and nature. In the kibbutzim, where the most innovative Zionist-Socialist cultural experiments took place, *Tu Bishvat* was celebrated as an agricultural holiday and one of national revival. In the formative years of Communism in Palestine, there is no evidence that any importance was ascribed to this new Zionist ritual. Conversely, after the mid-1950s as the influence of the Left members on Communist cultural practices increased and the MKI was joined by Yad Hana, its importance grew. An instructors' brochure dedicated to *Tu Bishvat* suggests that the instructor address the subject through "practical activities – hikes, drying of flowers, album-making, arts and crafts using pineapples and twigs, and songs and

⁸⁸ Yair Tzaban remembered in an interview the shock his decision caused old party member Pnina Fainhauz, to the point that she needed him personally to calm her, without much success; Yair Tzaban, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, February 12, 2009

games."⁸⁹ The social aspect of the holiday is referenced, the instructor being encouraged to take the young members on a rainy day to "watch closely how 'shack-dwelling sons of poverty' live, and to learn – 'the hatred of poverty of the workers' son'."⁹⁰ The brochure recommends that, in order to conclude the subject, a *Masechet* be performed that includes "reading literary and poetry pieces... musical works and folk songs all about men and nature."⁹¹ Moreover, in explaining the origins of the holiday, the brochure points to the commonalities with the Palestinian traditions of the *second Coal (al ghmrea altania)*, which is held at approximately the same time as the Jewish *Tu Bishvat*. The same stress on the agricultural elements shared by Palestinians and Jews appears also in a piece by Moshe Shamir, *The Power of Rain*, which describes the sowing of seeds by Jewish and Palestinian peasants.

The main ritualistic activity on *Tu Bishvat* was the planting of trees by young children. This Zionist-Socialist practice was incorporated into the Communist subculture when a planting ritual was instituted in Yad Hana. The ceremonies combined elements from Zionist-Socialist culture and cultural elements unique to the Communists. The rituals began in 1953 when the kibbutz members planted a thicket in memory of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. The plan to erect a monument on the site was rejected by the Jewish National Fund, the owner of the land, which refused to support it. So the members of their own accord put up a plaque commemorating the Rosenbergs. The site became the focal point of the *Tu Bishvat* planting ceremony performed each year by the children of the kibbutz together with urban Banki members. At the centre of the ceremonies stood a *Masechet* revolving around a poem by Ethel Rosenberg, written for her children. The veneration of the Rosenbergs' martyrdom disregarded the complexities of the case. It had elements of legal murder, as the Rosenbergs' actions did not merit the death penalty, but at

⁸⁹ "Tsu Laṭeva" (Go Out into Nature), Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #31.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

the same time they were part of the Soviet espionage apparatus in the U.S. as low-level operatives.

Of all the Jewish Communist holidays, *Tu Bishvat* most resembled those of Zionist-Socialist culture in its ritual practices. The planting of trees, so central to the Zionist-Socialist interpretation of the holiday, was adopted by the Jewish Communists. Nonetheless faithful to their own cultural motifs, they used this reinvented tradition to their own ends. The planting of the trees became a ritual of commiseration with the martyrs of World Communism, the Rosenbergs.

On the symbolic level, the holiday was purged by Banki instructors of its context of national revival borrowed from Zionist-Socialism. Instead, nature and agricultural elements common to both Palestinians and Jews were emphasized. The tree planting ritual can be interpreted as a ritual of liminality and *communitas*: the Jewish Communists, secluded in their own kibbutz outside the normal structure of society but in a natural setting, strengthening their bond in a ritual symbolized by Communist martyrdom.

2.1.4 Purim

Next on the Jewish calendar is Purim, which celebrates the deliverance of the Jews in ancient Persia from destruction. It is a holiday of masquerading and buffoonery. At the same time, it features a violent symbolic imagery of revenge being wrought upon the enemies of the Jews. The holiday, mainly the main parade in Tel Aviv, was covered by the Party press. The 1955 parade, the first after a break of 20 years, was used as a pretext to criticize the government on a number of issues. The attempt to cheer up the masses had foundered because "of the thousands of citizens who, because of the economic distress that the government is responsible for, have no

bread in their homes and nothing with which to cheer their children."⁹² The more violent side of the holiday is represented by the character of Haman (the villain in the biblical narrative of Purim). *Kol Ha'am*, on March 9th 1955, scorned the Purim parade for not symbolically "hanging Haman and his present heirs the generals of the *Wehrmacht*, the enemies of our people."⁹³ For the Jewish Communists, the parade offered an opportunity to engage in a form of political buffoonery and to exploit the holiday imagery for their political aims. Overall, however, the parties held in the various clubs to celebrate the holiday⁹⁴ that did not have any political meaning.

An instructors' brochure dealing with the planning of Purim includes songs, games and theme-based parties⁹⁵ for the younger age group of *Bney Amal*. The instructor is encouraged to "use all the material devoted to Purim... and his imagination and initiative to construct a successful and joyful party."⁹⁶ The party was to revolve around the theme of friendship, which would be expressed in costumes like "Jew-Arab, Black-White, French-Algerian, etc."⁹⁷ The stories dedicated to the holiday in this brochure had a social message.

Other more direct political messages and political buffoonery found their way into Banki's practice of Purim. Reflecting early Soviet ritual that used political mockery against the symbols of the enemies of the revolution, Banki's organ *Kol Hano'ar* reports as early as 1952 that "with all-out laughter and sympathy the Jerusalem audience received a group of youths

⁹² "Festival Purim Be'Tel Aviv Heḥel" (The Purim Festival in Tel Aviv has Begun), *Kol Ha'am*, March 9th, 1955.

⁹³ "Ḥatsi Milion Anashim Tsafu Ba'ad Lo Yada" (Half a Million People Watched the Purim Parade), *Kol Ha'am*, March 9th, 1955.

⁹⁴ For instance, the 1947 ball in Tel Aviv featured the Party's choir, dancing, a lottery, games and food. The 1957 Banki and MKI ball in Tel Aviv included dancing, food and a playroom, and a Purim *Masechet* revolving around the English story *Three Men in a Boat*. "Hikonu Leneshet Purim Hagadol" (Be Ready for the Big Purim Ball), *Kol Ha'am*, March 6, 1947 and "Neshet Purim Lano'ar" ("Purim Ball for the Youth"), *Kol Ha'am* 3.18.57.

⁹⁵ "Ḥomarim Shonim Le'Purim" (Various Purim materials), Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #32.

⁹⁶ "Alon Le'madrikhey *Bney Amal*, Purim, Merts 1962" (A brochure for *Bney Amal's* Instructors, Purim, March 1962), Yad Tabenkin Archives File #32.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

dressed up in costumes symbolizing Ben-Gurion's attachment to the American magnates and their representative Truman."⁹⁸ The report goes on to describe the exploits of the youths, who were carrying an effigy of the Israeli Prime Minister. One of them dressed up as an S.S. man, approached two policemen and gave them the Nazi salute, saying "Hello, colleagues."⁹⁹ The political buffoonery was not restricted to Jerusalem. In Tel Aviv, Banki members masquerading in political masks infiltrated the Purim parade.¹⁰⁰ One group scorned the Ben-Gurion government, another attacked American foreign policy.¹⁰¹ The counter ritual was welcomed "with approval,"¹⁰² according to *Kol Ha'am*, due to the successful execution of clever ideas. Similar political critique can be found in the coverage of the 1957 Purim parade in the aftermath of the 1956 War, which was scorned for being militaristic and tasteless.¹⁰³

The political, ideological stress on class intertwined with Jewish popular culture can be found in the texts that were offered to the movement's instructors for the holiday. There were stories by Shalom Aleichem and other Yiddish writers stressing class differences in the Jewish community in Eastern Europe.¹⁰⁴ The popular heretical side of the holiday was also debated in the pages of *Kol Ha'am*. In a 1949 article by one Yitzhak Hersberg, Purim is described as "the popular holiday that is widely liked."¹⁰⁵ In complete accordance with Zionist-Socialist cultural practice, the writer suggests that "popular tradition should not be abolished; it should be filled,

⁹⁸ "Le'Masa Umatan im Bon" (For Negotiation with Boon), *Kol Hano'ar*, May 1952.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Yoram Gozansky, interview by author, February 23, 2009.

¹⁰¹ "Hofa'at Purim shel Banki Moki'a et Ha'hamanim shel Yameynu" (Purim Performance of Banki denounced Hamans of the Present), *Kol Ha'am*, March 9, 1955: "The second group of masked members showed a Nazi general walking with a big atomic bomb inscribed with Made in the U.S.A. The youths shouted the slogan: Down with Atomic War!"

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ "Mitsad Purim Kaṭan Be'Tel Aviv Belo Ta'am Uberu'ah Militaristit" (A Small Purim Parade in Tel Aviv – without Taste and in a Militaristic Spirit), *Kol Ha'am* March 18, 1957.

¹⁰⁴ Shoshana Shmueli, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, February 22, 2009.

¹⁰⁵ "Ḥag Purim" (Purim Holiday), *Kol Ha'am*, March 11, 1949.

from time to time, with new content while preserving the traditional vessel."¹⁰⁶ The article goes on to analyze the historical validity of the biblical story and concludes once more with the statement that "we should know to quickly fill the old costumes and holidays with new content, to shed a new light on them in the spirit of progress and the New Man."¹⁰⁷ The view of Purim as representing popular tradition persisted among Jewish Communists. In a 1955 article, the satirical and anti-establishment character of the holiday is more pronounced. Purim is defined as "a typically secular holiday, the day of simple joy, the day of scorn and satire,"¹⁰⁸ specifically satire aimed at the elite of the Jewish community. The text ends with a political lesson, invoking once more the symbolic figure of Haman. It warns against the "Hamans that are on the Rhine and the Atlantic."¹⁰⁹

This serious note regarding Purim is also struck in a handbill from 1955 directed to the inhabitants of Tel Aviv and signed by the MKI's Tel Aviv branch. The text of the handbill invokes the figure of Haman in parallel to the modern "Haman of this generation – Hitler."¹¹⁰ This dual image is used to criticize the reestablishment of a West German army and the Reparations Agreement. The handbill was issued against a background of growing relations between Western Germany and Israel, culminating in the establishment of diplomatic ties in the mid-1960s. It asserts that the organizers of the Purim parade "were bribed by 'reparations' and obliged to keep quiet and silence the struggle against the rearming of Germany."¹¹¹ The text ends

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ "Purim Ḥag Hašimḥa" (Purim the Holiday of Joy), *Kol Ha'am*, April 4, 1955.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ "Arur Haman shel Ha'avar! Arur Shivatayim Haman shel Hahove, Merts 8, 1955" (Dammed Haman of Old! Seven Times Dammed – Haman of the Present!, March 8, 1955), Lavon Institute for Labour Research, IV-445-2.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

with the call: "Let's not raise a new Haman to the Jewish People! Let there not be another war and annihilation!"¹¹²

Two main rituals, then, characterized Purim as celebrated by the Jewish Communists: a non-political party or ball, and political masquerading. The latter had in it elements reminiscent of political buffoonery in the U.S.S.R. of the 1920s. In the U.S.S.R., such traditional elements as the burning of effigies and comic masquerading were used by the Bolsheviks as a means of ridiculing the enemies of the revolution. The Jewish Communists made similar use of the traditional Purim masquerading. Although they did not consciously imitate Soviet practices, they used similar means to ridicule their political rival Ben-Gurion and to attack political moves by the government such as the warming of relations with West Germany.

The symbol chosen by the Jewish Communists to further their version of the holiday was Haman. They used it to attack their political opponents, forging a link between the archetypal biblical villain and Hitler and atomic weapons. This use of the symbol of Haman is typical of the Zionist-Socialist practice, adopted by the Communists, of using traditional symbols to new ends. It shows the influence of Zionist-Socialist culture on the Jewish Communists and how they absorbed local elements from their political and cultural surroundings.

2.1.5 Passover

Passover is one of the main holidays of the traditional Jewish cycle. It combines elements of a spring celebration passed down from antiquity and the biblical narrative of the Exodus of the ancient Hebrews from Egypt. The main ritual connected with the holiday is the reading of the *Haggadah* during the family Passover Seder. In the kibbutzim, in the 1930s, a radical experiment was undertaken, an attempt to rewrite the *Haggadah* and restructure the Seder itself. The holiday

¹¹² Ibid.

myth of the Hebrew slaves' struggle for freedom suited the Jewish Communists' class and national sensibilities. Freedom and liberty became the catchwords of their version of the holiday. The Communists also used the nature elements of the holiday such as its associations with spring and the sowing of the land.

The myth of the holiday was accepted by the Jewish Communists as early as World War II. In an article entitled *From Slavery to Freedom*, author Het Vilner attributes the biblical story to the hostility of the Jewish Bedouin tribes toward settled habitation. The holiday is described as "the nature holiday of the Bedouin tribes that our forefathers filled with the content of popular tradition and turned into the holiday of liberty."¹¹³ Despite the rejection of the biblical story as non-historic, the writer acknowledges the importance of the holiday to Jewish culture and its progressive nature: "Although these Jewish stories and legends did not call for active struggle for freedom, they preserved and developed the love of freedom."¹¹⁴ From this love of liberty sprang the Jewish progressive traditions, from the Maccabees through Masada and ending with the Jewish revolutionaries in Tsarist Russia. The text goes on to make the connection between the holiday and the present, using the biblical Pharaoh as a metaphor for capitalists and the *Amalek* as a parallel to Nazism. The article ends with the prediction that the end of the war would bring with it the end "of the rule of parasitic capital over creative, working human beings,"¹¹⁵ at which time humanity would celebrate "the 'great Passover – The Passover of the future'."¹¹⁶

The April 4th 1949 issue of *Kol Ha'am* devoted two articles in its cultural section to Passover. The first, once more by Yitzhak Hersberg, dealt with the historical validity of Passover. The second, by Yehudit Veniar, dealt with the history of the Passover customs and

¹¹³ *Kol Hano'ar*, 1943.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

rituals. It traces the origins of the holiday to a spring celebration of the Hebrews in which an archaic manner of sacrifice was employed to symbolize "the unity of the tribes, the national and spiritual independence of the people."¹¹⁷ The article goes on to portray the development of the holiday through Jewish history, having always preserved "the people's abhorrence of slavery"¹¹⁸ and its national identity. It ends with a call for a change in the holiday "in accordance with the demands of the times."¹¹⁹ This phrase shows the flexibility in regard to Jewish tradition that the Jewish Communists absorbed from Zionist-Socialism. They too wanted to add new meaning to Passover, meaning that was progressive and universal as well as nationalistic.

The 1949 debate was heavily influenced by the patriotic stand taken by the Jewish Communists during 1948, thus stressing elements of national identity and freedom. But the universal aspect of the holiday was not forgotten. In *Kol Ha'am* of April 1948, Alexander Penn uses the convergence of Passover and May Day to give poetic expression to the international facet of Passover. Named *Hagada shel Pesah Lefi Ha'eḥad Bemay* (The Passover Haggadah according to May Day), his poem is constructed around a speech made by a comrade at a workers' rally "in one of the land's towns"¹²⁰ on May Day. The biblical story of the holiday is described as "the first letter in the chronicles/ that announced to the universe the torment of slaves."¹²¹ Moses is dubbed "the first revolutionary in the world."¹²² The holiday is conjoined with May Day in a phrase laden with Jewish symbolism: "because when the Hebrews left Egypt/

¹¹⁷ "Pesah Ḥag Haḥerut" (Passover the Holiday of Freedom), *Kol Ha'am*, April 13, 1949.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ "Hagada shel Pesah Lefi Ha'eḥad Bemay" (The Passover Haggadah According to May Day), *Kol Ha'am*, April 29, 1948.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

they did not know – that the fourteenth day of the month of Nissan/ would be the firstborn of May Days!"¹²³

All through the 1950s and early 1960s, two elements dominated the Jewish Communists' perception of Passover: first liberty, and second, the natural cycle connected with the day. In the 1955 cultural column dedicated to Passover, the editorial states that "a person who remembers that 'we were slaves' has the moral duty to extend a brotherly hand to every person who leaps into the sea and waves to be liberated from slavery."¹²⁴ The despotic, anti-freedom nature of the U.S.S.R. and its dictatorial rule over Eastern Europe is not mentioned. The same two elements are intertwined in Haya Kadmon's poem from the 1956 cultural column, which contrasts images of sowing, spring and freedom with images of slavery and oppression, "the Jewish Pharaoh who has risen today to impose the rule of force on brother and neighbour"¹²⁵ with "the people that wove the blossoms of spring into a single garland and revolted and told the story from generation to generation until dawn."¹²⁶

A more intellectual look at these twin elements can be found in an article by Shmuel Eisenstadt, a prominent intellectual sympathizer with the MKI. Eisenstadt first stresses the folk quality of the holiday, around which the people wove "a tapestry of legends and symbols."¹²⁷ Passover has "an overtone of a spring holiday and a freedom holiday."¹²⁸ He next portrays an ancient country idyll "where free working people... sang in the Passover nights the Song of Songs, the song of awaking nature, the song of freedom."¹²⁹ At present, however, the holiday's "core of liberty, with active resistance to any form of slavery, needs fostering and

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ "Hag HaHerut" (The Holiday of Freedom), *Kol Ha'am*, April 6, 1955.

¹²⁵ "Pesah: Ve'ata Yatsata Me'avdut, Semel HaHerut Midor Ledor" (Passover: And you came out of Slavery, Symbol of Freedom from Generation to Generation), *Kol Ha'am*, March 26, 1956.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ "Hapesah Hag HaHerut" (The Passover the Holiday of Liberty), *Kol Ha'am*, March 26, 1956.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

development"¹³⁰ in order to sound the "struggle for implementing socialism on the soil of an independent, peace-loving, democratic Israel."¹³¹

The young Communists shared this stress on freedom and nature, and both these elements of the holiday appear in a 1956 article,¹³² where they are connected to universal motifs like the *Spring of Nations* and the spring of all mankind "that was heralded to the world by the Great October."¹³³ Liberty was also associated with Jewish heroics like the Maccabean Revolt and the wars against the Romans.¹³⁴ In the Banki documents of the 1960s, the nature element is more pronounced. In a song booklet from the early 1960s, most of the songs (six out of eight) deal with subjects such as the turning of the seasons and the spring. Only two songs deal with the biblical narrative and freedom.¹³⁵ In another booklet from 1961, six out of ten songs deal with natural themes.¹³⁶ The emphasis on the nature elements of the holiday derived from the Zionist-Socialist culture, mainly as instantiated in the kibbutzim. The connection between youth and nature originated in Europe, in the romantic Free German youth movement, the *Wandervogel*, which had a profound influence on the Zionist-Socialist youth movement.¹³⁷ Thus practices imported from Europe were adopted into Banki's celebration of the holidays.

Passover did not inspire much ritualistic activity by Banki. Like *Rosh Hashanah* and *Sukkot*, the holiday was exploited mainly to tour the country. One news report from 1952

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² "El Hano'ar Hag Hapesah" (To the Youth Passover), *Kol Ha'am*, March 19, 1956: "The holiday has two aspects: the first a holiday of liberty, the second a spring holiday."

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ "Sefer Shirim, Brit Hano'ar Haqomunisti Ha'Israeli" (Song Book, Israeli Young Communist League), Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #3.

¹³⁶ Israeli Young Communist League, "Shir Nashira, Hoveret Alef, 1961" (Will Sing a Song, booklet A, 1961), Yad Tabenkin Archives.

¹³⁷ Yuval Dror, "Tnu'ot Hano'ar Be'veit Hasefer" ("Youth Movements in the School."), in *Tnu'ot Hano'ar 1920-1960* (Youth Movements 1920-1960), edited by Mordechai Naor (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1989), 161: "Those movements were influenced by two basic models of European movements: the German Youth Movement ('the Free'), which was much closer to the Eretz-Israel workers' movements; and the English Scouts, which is identified as a 'youth movement for the youth!'"

indicates that some of those travels were of a political nature. It refers to a group of "hundreds of Banki members and non-party youth who traveled on the last Saturday of the Passover."¹³⁸ Congregating in a place near Tiberias, the youths heard from Uzzi Bernstein, then Banki General Secretary, "his impressions of the 12th Leninist Komsomol Conference and the life of the youth in the Soviet Union."¹³⁹ The travelers apparently were harassed and prevented from passing through Safed by the police under the pretext of an "unlawful demonstration." A 1960 issue of *Kol Hano'ar* reported that the "Passover was characterized by the travels of the different district branches."¹⁴⁰ The districts of Tel Aviv and the *Shephelah* went south, to Eilat at the southern tip of Israel. The districts of Haifa, South and Jerusalem went north to the Galilee. While the trip to the south, which including bathing in the sea and sailing in a glass-bottomed boat over the coral reefs, was devoid of political content, the one to the Galilee, heavily populated by Israeli-Palestinians, was exploited to conduct an "enthusiastic meeting in Kfar Yasif."¹⁴¹

The Jewish Communists seem to have made no concerted attempt to create an alternative to the traditional interpretation of the main rituals of Passover, the Seder meal and the reading of the *Haggadah*. Nevertheless, two pieces of evidence suggest that Banki and MKI members did write a proletarian *Haggadah*. In a 1957 cultural section of *Kol Ha'am*, one page was devoted to a *Hagadat Pesah Begirsa Hamatima Leshe'ifot Hapo'alim Vekol Tomhey Hashalom* (Passover Haggadah in a Version Suited to the Aspirations of Workers and all Supporters of Peace), in the form of a *Masechet* drawn from various sources, ranging from the biblical to the Communist poets Penn and Kadmon. On the basis of the traditional *Haggadah* blessings, the Jewish Communists use the motifs of liberty and spring to create a Jewish Communist text. One piece

¹³⁸ "Hamishṭara Heṭrida Metaylim shel Banki Bagalil" (The Police Harassed Banki Travelers in the Galilee), *Kol Ha'am*, April 26, 1952.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ "Ṭiyuley Pesah, 1960" (Passover Hikes, 1960), *Kol Hano'ar*.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

states that "as the Passover is the spring of the year, so Communism is the spring of humanity."¹⁴² The message of freedom and justice is connected to a lineage of Jewish heroes ending with "Communists everywhere struggling to destroy the evil kingdom and free all the slaves in spirit and in body."¹⁴³

In an interview, Nissim Calderon recalled the use of such texts. Since he was a member of a unified Banki during 1962-1965, it may be speculated that under Yair Tzaban the cultural resemblance between Banki and the Zionist-Socialist culture reached its height, and this Zionist-Socialist practice previously unknown to Banki was borrowed.¹⁴⁴ Although uncorroborated and unattested to in the archives, such a custom would conform to the process of diffusion of Zionist-Socialist cultural practices into Banki. Furthermore, Shoshana Shmueli describes the performance of a *Masechet* in Banki's clubs. It included pieces revolving around the theme of liberty, with literary works by Pablo Neruda and Nâzım Hikem, Jewish popular stories dealing with class by authors like Shalom Aleichem and I.L. Peretz, and references to the Black American struggle for equal rights in America.

The main ritualistic activities connected with the holiday, then, were the field trips, which can be seen as rituals of *communitas* and liminality. Certain evidence suggests that the Jewish Communists continued the radical cultural experiment of the Zionist-Socialists in trying to rewrite the text of the *Haggadah*. However, this did not develop into an alternative to the traditional Seder ritual. This ritual was so ingrained in the matrix of family life, and in the community life of the kibbutzim, that a small group lacking in cultural recourses such as Banki could not replace it with its own version.

¹⁴² "Hagadat Pesah Begirsa Hamatima Leshe'ifot Hapo'alim Vekol Tomhey Hashalom" (Passover Haggadah in a Version Suited to the Aspirations of Workers and All Supporters of Peace), *Kol Ha'am*, April 15, 1957.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Nissim Calderon, interview by author, March 3, 2009.

The symbolic language of the holiday clustered around two main symbols.¹⁴⁵ The first, liberty, was invoked through both nationalist, popular themes and universal ones. The second, spring, was used as it was in Zionist-Socialist culture to stress nature motifs, but also as a symbol of political rejuvenation as exemplified by Communism. Once more like the Zionist-Socialists, the Jewish Communists took Jewish tradition and reinterpreted it in their own way. Thus they made Pharaoh a symbol of capitalism and posited the fight for liberty as part of a worldwide struggle, not just one for national freedom. The Jewish Communists used their own language, symbolism and myth to absorb Jewish traditions into their subculture. Other Communist movements confronted their own national traditions in similar ways.

2.2 Tradition and Communism in Europe and Israel

It was not just the Jewish Communists who faced ingrained religious or cultural traditions. European Communists in the Soviet Union and East Germany developed strategies to cope with traditions that were well established among a majority of their subjects. One of the ways devised by Communists to counter traditional symbols and rituals was to invent their own. This was common in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and in the post-Stalinist era. In response to the survival of religious beliefs within the Soviet citizenry, in the 1920s and again in the late 1950s Soviet cultural organizers and politicians tried to shape life-cycle rituals, and to reinvent and recast alternatives to the established church holidays like Christmas. The Israeli Communists never followed, or likely were unable to follow, such a course of action. Denied any real power,

¹⁴⁵ Symbol will be used in the context of this research as defined by Victor Turner. Turner, "Symbols in Ndembu Ritual," in *The Forest of Symbols Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, ed. Victor Turner (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 19-47, defines symbol as the basic unit of ritual. The ritual act clusters around one dominant symbol, which reflects the values and norms of a given society.

marginalized and often persecuted, they could not mount the resources to form an alternative Jewish ritual.

But the Soviet attempt at revising the calendar was not the only way to approach tradition, and in this matter the Jewish Communists' course bore a greater resemblance to the way the German Communists dealt with *Kultur*.¹⁴⁶ At first intensely anti-bourgeois, the German Communists rejected this middle-class concept. Nonetheless, from 1935 onwards the KPD adopted *Kultur*, making it part of the KPD ethos, later to become part of the East German state cult. The adaptation of *Kultur* was accompanied by a process attributing progressive value to German cultural figures like Johann Sebastian Bach and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. The Jewish Communists followed a similar path. They rejected Jewish and Zionist interpretations outright, only to later reinterpret and coopt them into the Communist subculture. The cultural heritage of Judaism and Jewish history was given progressive value. Jewish heroes like the Maccabees and Bar Kokhva, and Jewish myths like Passover and the ancient revolts against the Seleucid Empire and Rome, were incorporated into a revolutionary lineage that led up to and ended with the Communist Party. Thus the Jewish Communists asserted themselves as part of an alternative history of the Jewish people. Their version of events viewed Jewish history as not culminating in Zionism, but in the MKI. Much like the Zionists, they saw it as a continuing struggle for national freedom, but one carried on by the underclass against its oppressors, be they Jews or not. Thus the Jewish lineage they imagined was progressive, moving in Marxist fashion to a higher level of understanding and struggle and leading up to themselves.

This co-opting of tradition is clearly seen in Communist holiday practices. The gradual absorption of Hanukkah and its myth by the Communists from the 1920s was accompanied by a

¹⁴⁶ *Kultur* - German for culture, the notion that German art is not just exceptional on a human scale, but also manifests a unique German spirit.

process of re-evaluating the holiday's main elements. The Maccabees became a symbol of popular revolt. Their revolt itself was transformed from a fight for religious freedom into a people's war of the underclass for national liberation. In their practice of Purim, Banki members adopted the tradition of masquerading, which lent itself to political buffoonery (resembling similar practices in the Soviet Union in the 1920s), and the image of Haman as a political rhetorical tool. The Passover became a holiday centered on liberty. Its main text was reinvented in proletarian form. *Tu Bishvat* rituals such as tree planting became an act of national revival commemorating the victims of McCarthyism.

The Jewish Communists' attempt to create progressive Jewish cultural practices did not echo only Soviet and East German experiences. In another context it can be seen as part of continued attempts of European Jews, in Eastern and Western Europe, to create a secular, progressive Jewish political culture and identity. Although direct historical influence cannot be proven, looking at figures like Bernard Lazare and at a political party such as the Polish Bund (General Jewish Labour Bund of Lithuania, Poland and Russia, 1918-1939) in interwar Poland places the Jewish Communists and their endeavours in Palestine/Israel in a cultural context that is nationally Jewish, yet still, at the same time, anti-Zionist.

In *The Returns of Zionism*, Gabriel Piterberg conceptualizes the thought and politics of the fin de siècle French Jewish anarchist, Bernard Lazare. One of the early Dreyfusards, Lazare is framed by Piterberg as a "conscious pariah." This is a concept constructed out of Lazare's thought and biography, as well as Arendtian thinking. Piterberg defines it as the awareness that the process of the emancipation of the Jews, while being liberating, "inculcates the political consciousness of absence and incompleteness, of what is denied and what ought to be

achieved."¹⁴⁷ This awareness of absence compels the Jew, on the one hand, to discover his nationality but at the same time to engage in a progressive effort to liberate mankind. Thus, in his thinking and politics Lazare represents "a viable, progressive and at the same time anti-assimilation alternative to Zionism."¹⁴⁸

This progressive option opened up by Lazare is echoed by the progressive Jewish thinking of the Jewish Communists. Like him, they combined Jewish culture and, indeed, Jewish nationalism with progressive universal liberation. "Lazare's Jewish nationalism was a progressive foundation from which to challenge the nation-state's assumption of homogeneity."¹⁴⁹

Even more concrete than Bernard Lazare's anarchism and Jewish nationalism, the cultural practices created by the Polish Bund amalgamated progressive Marxism and Jewish nationalism. Paradoxically, the Bund, with its history of schism from early Bolshevism and hostility to Soviet Communism, presents surprising similarities and dissimilarities with the Jewish Communists in Palestine/Israel.

The Bund – founded in 1897 in Lithuania – worked among the Yiddish-speaking Jewish working class of the Western provinces in the Russian Empire.¹⁵⁰ After World War I, when the Russian section of the Party was liquidated by the Bolsheviks, the Polish Bund remained active in independent Poland, creating an extensive cultural infrastructure among the Jewish working class. This included several organizations and institutions, including SKIF (Socialist Children's Union), Tsukunft (the Bundist-oriented youth movement), TSYSHO (Central Jewish School Organization), YAF (Jewish working-class women), the *Kultur lige*, and the Medem

¹⁴⁷ Gabriel Piterberg, *The Returns of Zionism: Myths, Politics and Scholarship in Israel*, (London: Verso, 2008), 12.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, xiv.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁵⁰ For a short history of the Bund, see Jack Jacobs, ed. *Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe: The Bund at 100*, (New-York: New York University Press, 2001), and *Bunda'im*, a film by Eran Torbiner, (Israel, 2011).

Sanatorium.¹⁵¹ This counter culture was both secular Jewish, national Marxist and anti-Zionist,¹⁵² conducted in Yiddish.¹⁵³ Resembling practices used by the Jewish Communists in Palestine/Israel, Bundist teachers in the Yiddish educational system TSYSHO linked Jewish antiquity with the Bund Marxist ideology. The era of the Second Temple, when Jews encountered the Greek and Roman cultures, was likened by the TSYSHO educators "to present Jewish reality in Europe" and the sects of the times were presented as "reflections of contemporary Jewish society."¹⁵⁴

Despite the differences in scale – a small Party and a marginalized youth movement in contrast to the largest party among interwar Polish Jewry – the different ideologies – Anarchism in the case of Bernard Lazare, revolutionary Marxism and Jewish cultural autonomy in the case of the Bund, and the Marxism-Leninism of the MKI and Banki – the cultural practices of the Jewish Communists can be seen as part of a continuum of cultural alternatives to Zionist and Orthodox readings of Judaism.

2.3 The Jewish Progressive Communist

The Jewish Communist identity oscillated between two poles: rejection of Jewish religious and national culture and attraction to progressive motifs in Jewish history. This complex identity

¹⁵¹ Jack Jacobs, "Creating a Bundist Counter-Culture: Morgenshtern and the Significance of Cultural Hegemony," in *Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe: The Bund at 100*, ed. Jack Jacobs (New-York: New York University Press, 2001), 60.

¹⁵² For the anti-Zionist politics of the Polish Bund as well as its Marxism and place in the world Socialist movement, see Abraham Brumberg, "The Bund History of Schism," in *Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe: The Bund at 100*, ed. Jack Jacobs. (New-York: New York University Press, 2001), 81-90; Mario Kessler, "The Bund and the Labour and Socialist International," in *Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe: The Bund at 100*, ed. Jack Jacobs, (New-York: New York University Press, 2001), 183-97.

¹⁵³ For the contribution of the Bund to interwar Yiddish culture, see Nathan Cohen, *The Bund's Contribution to the Yiddish Culture in Poland Between the Two World Wars*, in *Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe: The Bund at 100*, ed. Jack Jacobs, (New-York: New York University Press, 2001), 112-30.

¹⁵⁴ Ya'ad Biran, "Be'erets-Isra'el Asher al Havisla" (In Eretz-Israel that is on the Vistula), in *Davka: Erets Yidish Vetarbuta* (Davka: the Land of Yiddish and its Culture) 7 (2010): 15.

crisis resulted from a social crisis resembling the one described by Clifford Geertz in his 1957 article, "Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example." There the change from village life and the rise of modern ideologies rendered the inhabitants of one Javanese village unable to perform their traditional funeral rites.¹⁵⁵ A similar crisis swept over Jewish communities in nineteenth century Europe and made them unable to perform Jewish rituals.

Jewish Communists were the heirs to two secular ideologies, which appeared among the Jews as part and parcel of the secularization crisis: Marxism and the Jewish Enlightenment (*Haskala*). The Marxist critique of religion and claims of scientific certainty¹⁵⁶ gave the Jewish Socialist a quasi-religious ideology, a substitute for the old certainties. The Jewish Enlightenment's criticism of the Jewish community released the first Jewish Socialists from the constraints of Jewish tradition. Nonetheless, these secularizing ideologies did nothing to alleviate their identity crisis. Some chose to assimilate into the world of revolutionary Socialism, disregarding their Jewish origins.¹⁵⁷ Others chose to reinvent their Jewish identity and became nationalist Jews, particularly Zionist. The Jewish Communists in Palestine were at the crossroads of this complex identity crisis: socialist and internationalist in spirit, but living in the heart of the Zionist nation-building project.

The Jewish Communists rejected Zionism as a nationalist, anti-internationalist ideology and at the same time discarded some Jewish traditions as unfounded fraud. Nevertheless, they did not utterly reject their Jewish origins. Using the cultural mechanisms of Zionist-Socialism,

¹⁵⁵ The secularization and the penetration into Jewish society of modern ideologies like socialism and the Jewish Enlightenment of the nineteenth century made secularized Jews unable to perform the rituals connected to the old religious belief systems. See Clifford Geertz, "Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example," in *American Anthropologist* 59 (1957): 32-54.

¹⁵⁶ Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in *Early Writings*, Karl Marx, (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Poalim, 1965), 33-63, and Karl Marx, "The German Ideology," in *Early Writings*, Karl Marx, (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Poalim, 1965), 223-80. For the Marxist pretension to scientific certainty, see Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1954).

¹⁵⁷ Shafran, *Farewell Communism*, 144: "When the only loyalty that Jews held in all their countries was lost to them... they had only one choice: to be citizens of the world."

they reinvented their Jewish identity and poured new content into the old vessels of Judaism. But they did not adopt the Zionist-Socialist secular identity, instead assimilating into their Communist identity Jewish motifs which they deemed progressive, popular and rebellious. A Jewish Communist was thus able to identify with Jewish heroes of antiquity and myths of Jewish heroism and feel as though they were his own. The rituals, symbols and myths extant among Communists from the 1920s to the mid-1960s were the manifestations of this Jewish progressive identity.

Hanukkah, the main Jewish holiday celebrated by the Jewish Communists, exemplifies the process of formation of this identity. At first, the myth of Hanukkah elicited from the Communists their ingrained rejection of Jewish culture, be it religious or Zionist. However, even then their interpretation of the holiday bore some resemblance to Zionist-Socialist discourse. From that point on, Zionist-Socialist and traditional Jewish elements, transformed and reinterpreted in accordance with political circumstances, gradually diffused into the Communist identity, bringing to the fore an attraction to particular elements of Jewish history. During World War II, the Jewish Communists accepted Jewish heroism as part of the Hanukkah myth, but applying only to Soviet Jews. By the late 1940s, they found themselves supporting the Israeli war effort and adopted the myth as an integral part of their identity. In the mid-1950s, isolated by their objection to the 1956 War, they finally became the true heirs to the holiday's legacy.

The high point of the assimilation of the Hanukkah myth into the Jewish Communist identity was in the 1950s to the mid-1960s. The growing influence of the "Left Men", mainly in Banki, prompted the evolution of the Hanukkah myth into a Communist ritual, integrating traditional Jewish symbols and customs with Marxist-style myth. The full integration of Hanukkah into Communist identity symbolized the end of the quest for a Jewish progressive

identity. Hanukkah came to be celebrated by the Communists very similarly to the Zionist-Socialists, indicating that by the time of the split-up in 1965 the Communist Jewish progressive identity had become very much Zionist-Socialist.

The same process can be seen with respect to other holidays, reflecting the changing nature of Communist identity. *Tu Bishvat* was celebrated by Zionist-Socialists as a nature holiday; its main ritual, the planting of trees recast as a rite of national revival, was adopted by the Communists. As of the mid-1950s, they devised their own planting ritual. It featured Zionist-Socialist elements, the planting of trees by young children and the use of a *Masechet*, highlighting the Communists' attraction to indigenous Israeli culture. However, their rejection of other elements of Zionist-Socialist culture is evident in their version of the holiday myth, which stressed Palestinian as well as Jewish agricultural traditions, not Jewish national revival. For them, the planting ceremony did not reconstitute the connection of the new Jew to the land, but became a commemoration ceremony for Communist martyrs, the Rosenbergs.

A final example, Passover, exemplifies the degree to which Zionist-Socialist elements penetrated Jewish Communist identity. During World War II, through the 1950s and into the early 1960s, the holiday's main theme was liberty. By the early 1960s, however, the young Communists of Banki, like the Zionist-Socialists of the 1930s kibbutzim, may have created their own *Haggadah*. As in the case of Hanukkah, Jewish Communist had become akin to Zionist-Socialist identity.

Jewish Communist identity eventually became simply too similar to Zionist-Socialist identity and lost its distinctive nature. The MKI and Banki were multicultural organizations, and behind the ideological unity diverse identities found expression. The Israeli Communist movement contained within it the Arab-Jewish identity of the Iraqi Communists, the Eastern

European, Jewish Socialist identity of the Party veterans, and the Palestinian national identity of its Palestinian members. Those diverse identities were held together by Arab-Jewish internationalism and their rejection of Zionism. The quest for cultural hegemony of the "Left Men", who tried to forge those identities into one Israeli identity, ended up violating this basic tenet. When that happened, the Party split.

The one issue that persisted throughout the history of the observance of Jewish holidays in Banki is the way the Palestinian Communists reacted to them. The process of diffusion of Zionist-Socialist elements into Banki members' identity was met with growing resistance. When in the late 1950s the "Left Men" suggested that the initiation rite of the Jewish members would be held during Hanukkah on top of Masada, the idea "was not to the liking of the Arab members. They argued that celebrating and stressing such a distinctly Jewish holiday would be detrimental to the ideological unity of the movement and bring out hidden tensions among the members."¹⁵⁸ In fact, the growing importance of the Jewish holidays and their observance created a "separate ritual experience for the Jewish and Arab members."¹⁵⁹ The ascendance of the Zionist-Socialist elements negated the search for a balance between the Jewish nationalist and the progressive; this, it must be assumed alienated the Palestinian members. The fact that the written and spoken evidence shows no attempt to incorporate the Muslim or Christian traditions of the Palestinian members, or to create a joint ritual for Palestinians and Jews, speaks to the growing gap between Palestinians and Jews in Banki.

¹⁵⁸ Markovizky, *White Shirt and Red Tie*, 152.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 156.

Chapter 3: Holocaust, Independence and Remembrance in Israeli Communist Myth, Symbol and Rite, 1919-1965

3.1 The Holocaust in Communist Consciousness and Narrative, 1933-1965

The Communist subculture emerging in Palestine since the 1920s was in constant contact with Zionism's national culture and inescapably confronted by the turbulent Jewish history of the twentieth century. The Holocaust memory of the Jewish Communists was shaped by a few primary motifs. The first, mirroring attitudes in Israel of the 1950s, was the emphasis on the armed resistance of Jews in Europe, mainly the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. The Jewish Communists stressed the Communist participation in the resistance, though they did not fail to extol the participation of Zionist-Socialists as well. The second motif was the role of the U.S.S.R. in fighting Nazism and saving Jews, and the third related to the political conflicts concerning the Holocaust prevalent in Israel in the 1950s. The 1960s saw a change in the Communist discourse about the Holocaust. As Israeli society moved towards greater identification with the "passive" Jewish victims of the Holocaust, so too the tone of Communist discourse started to change, expressing a greater empathy with the victims.

The Holocaust hit the Jewish Communists hard. Most of them were of Eastern European origin. The Nazi extermination of European Jewry wiped out the close family members of many Jewish Communists. The severity of the blow is all too evident in a short literary piece named *Grodno* by Eliyahu (Eliyosh) Gozansky, where the writer recalls his Polish hometown's tragic fate in a series of episodes portraying the life and death of the Jews of Grodno. In one of the last

episodes, Gozansky describes how his father Yitzhak Gozansky, a progressive minded lawyer, was marched to his death along with another 3,000 Jews, leading the death march dressed in a clown's hat while two Jewish minstrels played wedding tunes beside him. The morbid march was filled "with a chorus of thousands of voices, made up of hysterical outbursts, desperate cries, the wailing of mothers and their children, interrupted by the rasp of lashes and gunshots."¹ The book is written in a tone of nostalgic longing for the dead father and helpless horror at the barbaric treatment of the Jews of Grodno by their Nazi murderers, which well conveys Gozansky's pain at the loss of family and friends.²

Grodno exhibits many of the elements that would dominate the later perception of the Holocaust by the Jewish Communists. First of these is the element of revenge, which Gozansky talks about in almost mystical terms: the spilled blood "demands revenge,"³ which would be met upon the Nazi murderers by "millions of fighters who know how to hate, advancing – through Grodno and Lublin, through Bucharest and Paris, through Viborg and Belgrade."⁴ Another element is the joint fate of Jews and non-Jews. The Communists, as internationalists, rejected the conclusion that the Holocaust proved it was impossible for Jews and non-Jews to live together. In all their writing about the Holocaust, the Jewish Communists stressed the common cause of Jews and non-Jews. Gozansky expressed this element by saying "in the mass grave of Klabsin Jews and 'Gentiles' lie together. Jews and 'Gentiles' were murdered together, and together they fought the German."⁵

¹ Eliyahu Gojanski, *Grodna* (Grodno), (Tel Aviv: The Israeli Communist Party, 1979), 25.

² *Ibid.*, 27. "My father... my family, the whole of my Grodno. Twenty eight close and less close kin. All – murdered... were you burned in the Grodno holy temple? Were you drowned in the blue waters of the Nyman?"

³ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

As upon other occasions, the Jewish Communists preferred to disregard the complexities of history in favour of an ideologically based narrative. The historical reality of War World II in Eastern Europe was that many collaborated with or did not hinder the Nazi genocide. By the Jewish Communists, however, this phenomenon was confined to elements that were politically disfavoured in the new People's Democracies. They did not allow the fact that a grassroots anti-Semitism existed in many of the places occupied by the Nazis, as well as in postwar Poland, where it was manifested in the Kielce Pogrom, and in the U.S.S.R. of the late Stalinist era, as seen in the campaign against cosmopolitanism and the Doctor's Trial,⁶ to hold back their picture of an internationalist fight against Fascism. The stress on the joint fighting leads to another key element, the emphasis on active resistance. On this point the Jewish Communists shared a common idea with Zionist-Socialist culture, which commemorated its members' role in European resistance movements, mainly the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. Gozansky gives early expression to this element as he glorifies five Jewish partisan women "who for years were the eyes and ears of the avenger" and dealt "heavy blows to the German-Nazi scum."⁷

Gozansky glorifies the Red Army. The Jewish Communists praised the Red Army for saving the remaining Jews in Europe and defeating Fascism. Gozansky expresses this element together with the element of revenge, saying "on the mass grave in Klabsin the Soviet victories armies marched. Revenge and victory mean – death to the murderers."⁸ These elements, expressed in literary form in *Grodno*, found expression in many publications of the MKI and Banki from the mid-1940s to the 1960s. The admiration for the Red Army was not confined to the ranks of the Communists, as will be dealt with in detail in the next chapter, and Gozansky's

⁶ For late Stalinism and Stalin's views about Jews, see Simon Montefiore, *Stalin: the Court of the Red Tsar* (London: Phoenix, 2003), and Service, *Stalin*. For the Kielce Pogrom, see Sarah Bender, "Ke'ily Lo Hayta A'ushvits" (As if they had not Auschwitz), *Haaretz* April 7, 2006.

⁷ Eliyahu Gojanski, *Grodno*, 31.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

remarks were probably not out of line in Palestine during the 1940s. However, it is highly doubtful that the Red Army was perceived as the main tool of revenge by Zionist-Socialists. They were more preoccupied with building a Jewish fighting force under British tutelage.

As early as 1937, articles in *Kol Ha'am* called for free immigration to the democratic countries of the West for Jewish refugees from Germany.⁹ As the magnitude of the massacre in Europe became known to the *Yishuv*, the Communists' call for revenge became more pronounced. In a leaflet from 1942, as the Nazis were exterminating the majority of Jews in Warsaw,¹⁰ the Young Communist League urged the Jewish youth of Palestine to join the war effort. The young men of Palestine were called upon to join "the companies of the destroyers of the Ghettos" in order to pay back the Nazis: "Blood for Blood! Death for Death!"¹¹

Another handbill from June 1943, written after the Warsaw Ghetto uprising had ended, links the element of revenge to the joint struggle of Jews and non-Jews. It begins with the biblical phrase "thou shall not die but live" and states that "the guarantee for that is the joint fight of our people with all the nations fighting Fascism."¹² It calls on the *Yishuv* to give more help to the V League (the organization formed by various left-wing and liberal parties to aid the Soviet war effort) and for the opening of a Second Front, and demands "that every enlisted soldier and those who will be enlisted – will have the chance to land first on European soil to avenge the blood of the Ghetto fighters!"¹³

From the late 1940s and into the 1950s the main focal point of the Communist commemoration of the Holocaust became the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. An internal letter of 1946

⁹ *Kol Ha'am*, 1937.

¹⁰ For an account of the German annihilation of the Warsaw Ghetto, see Adolf Abraham Berman, *Miyemey Hamahteret* (The Jewish Resistance), (Tel Aviv: Hamenora Publishing House, 1971).

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

issued on the third anniversary of the uprising shows how elements that had appeared in earlier years were changed and added upon due to the events in Warsaw. The text was political in nature, informing Party members and its candidates of the Party's line in regard to the Warsaw uprising.

The letter develops the element of heroic armed resistance to the Nazi war machine. The importance of the uprising lay in "the defence of the national and human honour of the Jews, showing that the Jews would not be led like sheep to the slaughter"¹⁴ – a phrase lifted straight from Abba Kovner's famous manifesto, further connecting the Communist perception of the Holocaust to that prevalent among Zionist-Socialists. The text stresses that the U.S.S.R. saved the largest number of European Jews during the war, that the uprising came after the Battle of Stalingrad, which "no doubt encouraged the rebels,"¹⁵ and that the "Polish democrats called it [the uprising] 'little Stalingrad'."¹⁶ The text hails the cooperation between the Jewish underground in the Ghetto and the "democratic forces of the Polish underground."¹⁷ It praises the support lent to the Jewish Combat Organization (under its Polish acronym ŻOB) by the underground organizations of the Polish left, mainly the Armia Ludowa (People's Army).¹⁸ This support translated into political support of "the new Poland established on the ruins of Hitlerism and Polish reaction."¹⁹ The Jewish Communists disregarded the survival in Poland of anti-Semitism, which would resurface as a state policy under Gomulka in 1968.

The 1946 political letter expressed for the first time the anti-Fascist unity of all Jewish political parties in the Ghetto. It asserts that in the Ghetto there had been "a Jewish 'Workers

¹⁴ "Mikhtav Poliṭi Mispar Shalosh, 12 Le'April 1946" (Political Letter Number 3, April 12 1946), Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #20.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ For the relations between the Armia Ludowa (AL) and ŻOB, see Berman, *The Jewish Resistance*.

¹⁹ "Political Letter Number 3, April 12 1946".

Committee' that included the Communists, the two parts of *Po'aley Zion*, the Bund and the Zionist youth movements *HaShomer HaTzair* and *HeHalutz*. Next to the 'Workers Committee' there was a 'National Committee' that included the liberal-Zionist parties, *HaMizrahi* and the *Agudath*.²⁰ All of these diverse political forces had struggled together in the uprising. Another new element to appear was the contrast between armed resistance and passivity, later developed into one between the heroic underground and the treacherous Judenräte.²¹ The document informs the Party members "that in these days a Poland-Palestine Committee is being founded."²² The Poland-Palestine, later the Poland-Israel Friendship League, was to be the main front organization used by the Party to organize its Holocaust rite. In some of its elements, the emerging Jewish Communist narrative of the Jewish armed resistance during the Holocaust resembled the East German anti-Fascist myth, mainly the stress on the role of the Red Army and a politically diverse anti-Fascist underground led by the Communists.²³

In Israel of the 1950s Holocaust commemorations were sidelined. Israelis had a complex relation to events in Europe. Their image of passive victims who went to their deaths without resistance was complicated by guilt over the little help lent by the *Yishuv* to suffering European Jewry and the Zionist negation of the Diaspora, making Israeli society myopic to a more sensitive approach to the Holocaust.²⁴ This indifference, however, does not mean that the Holocaust was not debated politically during Israel's formative years. Israeli society during the 1950s was overtly political, to the point that the "politicization of various aspects of life... was

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Judenräte – The Jewish Councils set up by the Germans in the ghettos to self-rule the internal affairs of the Jewish community. The Judenrätes were meant by the Germans to facilitate control over the Jews and ultimately their annihilation as well.

²² "Political Letter Number 3, April 12 1946".

²³ For the anti-Fascist myth in the G.D.R., see Nothnagle, *Building the East German Myth*.

²⁴ Segev, *The Seventh Million*.

far-reaching."²⁵ One such aspect was the Holocaust and its victims. Far from being a source of unity, the topic elicited "unending political strife."²⁶ Three main issues stood at the centre of this political debate, including the reparations from West Germany, the shaping of the commemoration of the Holocaust, and the Kastner trial. (The latter involved Israel Kastner, a MAPAI official and one of the leaders of Hungarian Jewry during the war, who was accused by one Malchiel Gruenwald of dealing with S.S. officers to save around a thousand Jews at the expense of the mass of Hungarian Jews. Kastner lost his libel suit against Malchiel Gruenwald in 1953 when the judge determined "that he sold his soul to the devil."²⁷ He was assassinated by radical right-wing extremists in 1957. In 1958 the Israeli Supreme Court overturned the lower court decision and acquitted Kastner of the allegations against him.). The first and last were used by the MKI and Banki to mount a radical opposition to the MAPAI-dominated governments. The commemoration of the Holocaust was used as part of a political and cultural struggle to preserve the memory of Communist Jewish resistance in Europe within the Zionist-Socialist culture.

From the early 1950s, the Israeli government negotiated with the West German government over compensation for Jewish life and property destroyed during the war. The negotiations culminated in an agreement signed in September 1952 between the German chancellor Konrad Adenauer and the Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs Moshe Sharett. The agreement was opposed by both the extreme right and the extreme left. For the MKI, opposition to the agreement combined with both the Cold War rivalry between East and West and a development of the revenge motif into boycotting West Germany, in their eyes the successor of Nazi Germany. All through 1952 the Party ran an anti-German campaign in its organ and in the

²⁵ Yechiam Weitz, "The Political Dimensions of Holocaust Memory in Israel During the 1950s," in *The Shaping of Israeli Identity: Myth, Memory and Trauma*, edited by Robert Wistrich and David Ohana, (London: Frank Cass, 1995), 129.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 130.

²⁷ See "Psaq Hadin" (The Verdict), the Israeli State Archives, File Series 30.0.50, Jerusalem, Israel.

streets, alongside reporting on demonstrations and rallies against the negotiations with Bonn.²⁸ When the reparations issue subsided, the Communist press continued to attack West Germany and the Israeli establishment's growing ties with it. The main bone of contention for the Communists was the rearming of Germany as part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).²⁹ The Kastner trial also left an impression on the politics of the MKI. The Communists took a radical stand when Kastner lost the libel trial and demanded that the state prosecute him.³⁰ The Party press published the verdict in the trial and the MKI, together with the right-wing *Herut* party, delivered a vote of no confidence in the MAPAI-led government.

The political debate was not confined to the realm of the day-to-day politics of the Jewish Communists. It also influenced the Communist subculture and its commemoration of the Holocaust. The Jewish Communists commemorated the Holocaust as a way of criticizing Israel's predilection for the West and opposing the MAPAI political hegemony. Their memory of the resistance would serve to carve their own niche in the memorial culture of the Holocaust, which was dominated by the Zionist-Socialists, and towards that end they used their press.

The focal point of the Communist commemorative subculture was the Warsaw uprising of 1943. The yearly reminders of the day of the uprising in *Kol Ha'am* and in *Kol Hano'ar* at first hailed its importance as an uplifting experience. *Kol Hano'ar* explained "it was a great heroic battle of the Jewish fighters for their honour as Jews and people."³¹ In a document issued to mark the tenth anniversary of the uprising, stress is placed on the fact that the Jews "stood up

²⁸ See, for example, "The masses of the people expressed their protest against the criminal negation with the Bonn neo-Nazi government," *Kol Ha'am*, January 6, 1952. On the same page, a headline quoted Party Secretary Shmuel Mikunis saying at a rally in Haifa "that those who vote for the negotiation with the neo-Nazis will enter the people's blacklist"

²⁹ For example, "Atseret Hamonim Be'Tel Aviv Kenged Haḥlaṭat London Leyased Tsava Natsi" (a mass rally in Tel Aviv against the London decision on the founding of a Nazi Army), *Kol Ha'am*, October 14, 1954.

³⁰ "Hahamonim Dorshim Litbo'a et Kastner Meshatef Hape'ula im Hanatsim Behashmadat Yehudey Hungarya" (The masses demand the prosecution of Kastner the collaborator with the Nazis in the extermination of the Jews of Hungary, *Kol Ha'am*, June 26, 1955.

³¹ "Lezekher Mordey Geto Varsha" (In Memory of Warsaw Ghetto Rebels), *Kol Hano'ar*, April 1951.

with weapons in hand to defend their lives, to defend their human dignity."³² The text clearly expresses the elements present in Communist consciousness of the Holocaust since the 1940s. The uprising is said to have been inspired by the "Soviet Army – the encourager and liberator of the Jews of the Ghetto."³³ The Ghetto rebels were heartened by the victory at Stalingrad and gave an example of "solidarity and unity in combat, with no difference of political opinion."³⁴ The uprising was also an example of "the internationalist heroism of Jewish and Polish anti-Fascist fighters."³⁵ Whereas "the fighters of the Polish People's Army and the Polish Communists helped the Ghetto rebels,"³⁶ the Judenräte betrayed its own people and collaborated with the Germans. And the uprising also carried a contemporary political message, with young Banki members being told "that today when the American Imperialists are reviving Fascism, and the Israeli Government by agreeing to reparations is 'legitimizing' the neo-Nazis"³⁷, it is incumbent on them to fulfill the "legacy and example of the Ghetto rebels"³⁸ by increased agitation among the youth and denouncing the present day Judenräte.

The narrative of the Holocaust as portrayed by Banki was reflected in the MKI's *Kol Ha'am*. The Communist narrative of the Ghetto uprising starts with the establishment of the first underground groups at the initiative of Jewish Communists as early as 1941.³⁹ The first underground organization, the *Anti-Fascist Bloc*, was formed in February 1942 by two Jewish Communist activists, Pinkus Kartin (known by his underground name Andrzej Szmidt), a veteran of the International Brigades who was parachuted into Warsaw by the Soviets in 1941, and Josef

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ "In Memory of Warsaw Ghetto Rebels".

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ "Hahakhanot Lemered Geto Varsha" (The Preparations for the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising), *Kol Ha'am*, April 14, 1948. See also Berman, *The Jewish Resistance*.

Lewartowski, a veteran Communist activist.⁴⁰ The bloc was an example of political unity among different political parties. Andrzej Szmidt's lieutenant was Mordecai Anielewicz from *HaShomer HaTzair*, who would lead the uprising in 1943. The Communists took great pains to demonstrate their part in the uprising and complained bitterly when it was ignored. On the sixteenth anniversary of the uprising, Adolf Berman, one of the surviving leaders of the uprising and a Knesset member of the MKI, stated that "we must regrettably note... that the press of MAPAM and *Ahdut Ha'Avoda-Po'aley Zion* and their institutions are distorting the history of the struggle in the ghettos. In the rallies in Kibbutz Lochamey Hagetaot and Yad Mordecai, they do not tell the historical fact that the first organization of armed resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto was the anti-Fascist Bloc that was initiated by Communists and the PPR [Polish Workers' Party]."⁴¹

The stress placed on the Warsaw uprising and the central place it occupied in the Communist commemorative effort shows that the Jewish Communists wanted to integrate within the Zionist-Socialist commemorative culture rather than oppose it, as both political groups emphasized armed resistance in contrast to passivity. While on issues like the Kastner trial and the German reparations the MKI and Banki did not pull any political punches, in regard to Holocaust commemoration they stressed what united them with Zionist-Socialists. One glaring example is the cult the MKI developed around the figure of Mordecai Anielewicz, the ultimate Zionist Socialist hero, who was placed alongside the Communist founders of the resistance in the Ghetto.⁴² The same inclusive approach is noted by Yair Tzaban, who remarks that although the

⁴⁰ "Hagiborim" (The Heroes), *Kol Ha'am*, May 5, 1959.

⁴¹ "Lema'an Ha'emet Hahistorit" (For the Historical Truth), *Kol Ha'am*, May 3, 1959. On the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary Berman had written that "reactionary and opportunistic circles in Israel are intentionally trying to cover up the historical role the Anti-Fascist Bloc played in the Ghetto." "Hama'avak Lo Nigmar" (The Struggle Never Ended), *Kol Ha'am*, April 18, 1958.

⁴² See, for example, "Masoret Hama'avak Hameshutaf" (The Tradition of Joint Struggle), *Kol Ha'am* April 19, 1953; "Mismakhim Ve'uvdot: 11 Shanim Lemered Varsha" (Documents and Fact: 11 Years to the Warsaw

Party stressed the role of Communist resistance heroes, it still "treated Anielewicz with a great deal of reverence."⁴³

In contrast to the heroism of the Jewish rebels stood the Judenräte; for the Jewish Communists, those assigned to head them and the Jewish police were nothing short of traitors. The Judenräte were perceived by the Jewish Communists "as a tool for the extermination of millions of Jews."⁴⁴ Their effort to appease the Nazis is described as part of a long Jewish tradition of passivity leading to national betrayal.⁴⁵ There were class-related motivations behind this approach to the Judenräte. The Warsaw Ghetto is described in Marxist terms as having preserved the class differences of pre-war Polish Jewish society. Those who suffered in the Ghetto were "the masses of the people," while a "small minority of the wealthy – despite the walls of the Ghetto, despite the oppression – lived the good life at the expense of the people."⁴⁶ The basic class difference manifested during this period shows the "animalistic nature of the Jewish bourgeoisie"⁴⁷ and its institutionalized expression, namely "the community [the Judenräte] the entirety of whose activity is one injustice that cries to heaven, an injustice to the poor."⁴⁸ The collaborative behaviour of the Judenräte is opposed to the heroic underground: one exemplifies weakness and degradation, the other human and national dignity. A more sensitive stand toward the Judenräte was precluded by the one-dimensional narrative that the Jewish

Uprising), *Kol Ha'am*, April 16, 1954; "Beru'ah Ha'ahdut Halo'emet: 13 Shana Lemeret Varsha" (In the Spirit of Fighting Unity: 13 Years to the Warsaw Uprising), *Kol Ha'am*, April 13, 1956; "Ha'epus shel Hagvura Hayehudit" (The Epic of Jewish Heroism), *Kol Ha'am*, April 12, 1955 and "Yom Hazikaron Lasho'a Velagvura – Hagiborim" (Remembrance Day for the Holocaust and Heroism - The Heroes), *Kol Ha'am*, May 5, 1959.

⁴³ Yair Tzaban, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, February 12, 2009

⁴⁴ "Hama'avak Lo Nigmar" (The Struggle has not Ended), *Kol Ha'am*, April 17, 1953.

⁴⁵ Ibid .

⁴⁶ "Moreshet Mordey Geto Varsha" (The Legacy of the Warsaw Ghetto Rebels), *Kol Ha'am*, April 19, 1956.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Communists created. Even when a more balanced and redemptive approach to them emerged⁴⁹ after the poet Nathan Alterman called for their rehabilitation, igniting a public debate, the Jewish Communist stand remained simplistic and unchanged.

The narrative of the Warsaw uprising was targeted at both MKI and Banki members to instil a lesson of a political nature, concerning three main themes: the reparations, the Kastner trial, and Israel's blossoming relations with West Germany. The fifteenth anniversary issue of *Kol Ha'am* sounded "a voice of protest against the horrific plan of the ruling circles in our country to connect the state of Israel in political and military bonds with the Bonn government and the renewed Wehrmacht."⁵⁰ In a speech made at the founding of the Anti-Nazi Fighters Organization (ANFO), Avraham Berman denounced the "ruling elements in Israel"⁵¹ for cooperating with Hitler's successors for "thirty pieces of silver during the reparations."⁵² The Kastner trial was also addressed in Berman's speech, which asserts that of "all those who suffered in the camps and ghettos felt the crimes of the 'Kapos,' the 'Judenräte' and the Ghetto Police. The victims of Nazism in Israel must speak up and condemn Kastner and the policy of Kastnerism."⁵³ He accuses "the agents of government circles"⁵⁴ of attempting to produce witnesses from Europe in order to clear Kastner's name.

The contemporary messages of the uprising, as they evolved from the war years, are most clearly formulated in the Party's organ marking the uprising's seventeenth anniversary. The

⁴⁹ Tuvia Freeling, "Bezkhut Hamevukha" (In Defense of Confusion), *Kivunim* (Directions) 23 (1984); Stauber, *Lessons for This Generation*.

⁵⁰ "The Struggle has not Ended".

⁵¹ "Halohamim Ha'anti Natsim Yemalu et Shvuatam" (The Anti-Nazi Fighters will Fulfill their Vow), *Kol Ha'am*, March 4, 1955.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ "Nitsoley Hasho'a Hita'gedu" (Holocaust Survivors Unite), *Kol Ha'am*, January 21, 1956.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

uprising had been inspired by the "great victories of the Soviet armies."⁵⁵ It had been an exemplar of anti-Fascist unity, an act that "saved our national honour and at the same time was a historical contribution to the general struggle of the peoples."⁵⁶ From the rebels an injunction had been handed down to us to prevent another Holocaust and to remember the Nazi atrocities. The way to fulfill their command is to fight against the SA- and SS-infested Adenauer government that was reviving German militarism and Nazism, and against the Ben-Gurion government "which has crowned the Bonn realm as 'the other Germany,' 'Democratic Germany'."⁵⁷ This not only shamed the legacy of the Warsaw rebels, but was also "a symbol and expression of the adherence of the successors of the Judenräte to the policy of Kastnerism."⁵⁸

Banki also internalized the narrative of the Holocaust. In a speech to a youth rally on April 17th 1954, the uprising is portrayed as having been inspired by the victories of the Red Army. The handful of rebels "saved the honour of the people of Israel,"⁵⁹ in contrast to the Judenräte "that wished to buy Jewish blood from the Nazi murderers."⁶⁰ The rebels shared a common cause with "the anti-Fascist underground of the Polish People."⁶¹ The Judenräte are aligned with Kastner. The victims and rebels left after them the command "not to forgive and not to forget what was done to the Jewish people by German Fascism."⁶² This legacy would be fulfilled through political struggle by the youth against the rearming of West Germany and Israel's relations with it.

⁵⁵ "Al Hajenda: Hem Paqdu Aleynu Lehamshikh Bama'avak" (On the Agenda: They Commanded Us to Continue the Struggle), *Kol Ha'am*, April 19, 1960.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ "El Hano'ar. 11 Shanim Le'ahar Mered Geto Varsha" (To the Youth. 11 Years after the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising), *Kol Ha'am*, April 29, 1954.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

This one-dimensional and extremely judgemental stance with its overt political aim prevented the Jewish Communists from developing an alternative consciousness of the Holocaust. Echoing the East German anti-Fascist myth in which brave Communists battled the Nazis to the exclusion of all others, the Jewish Communists, instead of sympathizing with the Jewish victims, preferred to glorify the few cases of armed resistance. Instead of trying to understand more deeply the complexities of survival in conditions of a breakdown of civilized society, they adopted a one-sided dichotomy of resistance versus Judenräte. What motivated the Jewish Communists to construct such a narrative? One reason may be an inability to explain the unexplainable. An event of such magnitude cried out for explanation, yet the Jewish Communists found themselves at an ideological shortfall. The dichotomy of resistance vs. Judenräte is therefore understandable, as for them it represented some kind of Marxist explanation. The stress on the Red Army and the internationalist cooperation of Jews and non-Jews can be explained by the acute sense of weakness and victimization that the Jewish Communists as well as other Jews experienced in the wake of the Holocaust. But lacking the recourse of the Zionists to the creation of Jewish sovereignty in the form of the Israeli state, the Jewish Communists turned to their own sources of empowerment. The political legacy and involvement of the MKI and Banki in the politics of the Holocaust reconnected them to Israeli society of the 1950s. Even more so, it can be said that in the case of the Holocaust, unlike cultural and political issues like Palestinian-Jewish relations or the Soviet Union, the Jewish Communists mirrored the prevailing attitudes of a society that was ambiguous and conflicted with regard to the events in Europe. However, these societal attitudes were about to change, and the Jewish Communists changed with them.

The 1960s were marked by a change in the attitude of Israeli society toward the Holocaust. In a process that started in the late 1950s and culminated in the Eichmann trial, the

Israelis, who in the 1950s had been mostly indifferent to the Holocaust, opened up to the stories of survival and passive resistance that burst into the public sphere during the trial. The Jewish Communists' perception of the Holocaust started to change and a new tone started to emerge as the survivors' stories were told during the trial.⁶³

The Eichmann trial was covered intensely by *Kol Ha'am* press. From the first announcement of Eichmann's apprehension, through his arrival in Israel and trial, to his execution, the MKI demanded that the judicial process include the "many Eichmanns that exist in the world,"⁶⁴ namely ex-Nazis who, according to the Communists, held top positions in the West German establishment. Another criticism aimed at the trial was the fact that the proceedings did not sharply distinguish between Kastner's conduct and the armed resistance of the Jewish underground.⁶⁵

Just before Eichmann's apprehension in 1960, in the Communists' yearly commemoration of the Warsaw uprising upon its seventeenth anniversary, the same motifs from the war years are still evident. The ANFO issued a public statement that "the shameful meeting between Ben-Gurion and Adenauer that constitutes the desecration of the memory of the Ghetto fighters and the victims of Nazism... is an expression of the Judenräte policy that the Ghetto rebels fought against."⁶⁶ In the editorial on the same page, the uprising is described as having been inspired by the Soviet victory in Stalingrad. It "saved our national honour and at the same time was a historically important national contribution to the general struggle of the peoples."⁶⁷

⁶³ Segev, *The Seventh Million*.

⁶⁴ "Mishpat Aykhman" (The Eichmann trial), *Kol Ha'am*, June 1, 1962.

⁶⁵ Ibid.: "And almost wanted to show, in Kastner's way, a perfect policy, a Jewish one during the Holocaust. A parallel or alternative way to the struggle of the Ghetto fighters and the Partisans!"

⁶⁶ "Pniya Tsiburit shel Irgun Haloḥamim Ha'anti Natsim" (Public Appeal of the Anti-Nazi Fighters Organization), *Kol Ha'am*, April 19, 1960.

⁶⁷ "Hem Tsivu Aleynu Lehamshikh Bama'avak" (They Decreed to Continue the Struggle), *Kol Ha'am*, April 1, 1960.

However, beside the motifs of armed resistance, national honour, pro-Soviet glorification, the Cold War and Israeli politics, new voices could be heard. As Israeli society started to take a more subtle view of the Holocaust, so did the Jewish Communists. In that year's customary Holocaust Day issue of *Kol Ha'am*, beside the narrative of armed resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto, two new items appeared. The first was a segment of a diary describing life in Bergen-Belsen, devoid of any heroic content. The second was a poem called *The Butterfly* by a boy inmate in Theresienstadt.⁶⁸ Both gave expression, however small, to groups other than the partisans and Ghetto fighters, namely the camp inmates and children.

A real change in Communist consciousness came with the opening of proceedings in the Eichmann trial followed by the testimonies of the prosecution witnesses. The trial was accompanied by a wide range of public activities by the MKI and the ANFO. Two days before it opened, at the conclusion of the fifth conference of the ANFO, the participants marched through the Tel Aviv streets wearing armbands with yellow stars, some of them dressed in the striped uniforms of the concentration camp inmates.⁶⁹ This public display on the eve of the trial placed at its centre not the heroics of the Holocaust, but its passive victims. When the evidentiary stage of the trial arrived, the Israeli public was exposed for the first time to the stories of the witnesses. One of them was a leading Jewish Communist spokesman, Avraham Berman.⁷⁰ As one of the surviving leaders of the Warsaw uprising, Berman testified on the uprising and the events leading up to it. Nevertheless, a large part of his testimony dealt with the fate of the children of the Ghetto, most of them murdered in Treblinka. As head of CENTOS, an aid organization for

⁶⁸ "Melukhlakhey Bergen-Belzen" (The Bergen-Belsen Dirty Ones), *Kol Ha'am*, April 24, 1960; "Haparpar" (The Butterfly), *Kol Ha'am*, April 24, 1960.

⁶⁹ See "Alafim Lavshu et Hakokhav Hatsahov Vehefginu Berhovot Tel Aviv" (Thousands Wore the Yellow Star and Demonstrated in the Streets of Tel Aviv), *Kol Ha'am*, April 9, 1961; "*Ma'arakhot Bama'avaq beyn Shtey Ve'idot*" (The Campaigns of Struggle between Two Conferences, 1957-1961), (Tel Aviv: Amal Press, 1961).

⁷⁰ For his memoirs, see Adolf Abraham Berman, *Bamaqom Asher Ya'ad li Hagoral: Im Yehudey Varsha 1939-1942* (In the Place Where Fate Placed Me: With Warsaw Jews, 1939-1942), (Tel Aviv: Hakibutz Hameuchad, 1978). Detailed testimony in Berman, *The Jewish Resistance*, 221-230.

the Jewish children in the Warsaw Ghetto, he was able to shed light on the civic aid activities in the Ghetto besides the active resistance of the underground. At the emotional highpoint of his testimony, to the sounds "of sighs and quiet weeping,"⁷¹ Berman held up a pair of children's shoes found in Treblinka.

The change in the way the Jewish Communists perceived the Holocaust raises two questions. First, why did the Communist attitude change? Second, what were the implications of this change for the Jewish Communists' subculture and their perceived place in Israeli society?⁷² The Jewish Communists' change of tone can be explained by the change that Israeli society as a whole underwent from the late 1950s in regard to the Holocaust. Like all other Jewish-Israelis, the Jewish Communists heard and participated in the Eichmann Trial and the change this event effected was reflected in their subculture; the change to a more sensitive appreciation of the Holocaust beyond physical valour reflected the deep link between the Jewish Communists and their cultural social surroundings. Thus, the events of World War II that helped connect the Communist Party to the *Yishuv* from the early 1940s accomplished the same in the early 1960s.

The new tone in the Jewish Communists' commemoration of the Holocaust did not oust the dominant discourse of armed resistance in the ghettos. Internal documents from the late 1950s to the early 1960s reveal that the veneration of physical valour persisted unchanged in Banki and *Bney-Amal*. In a handwritten document from the late 1950s entitled *Outlines and Bibliography for the Holocaust and Rebel Era*, the Banki instructor is encouraged to "clarify the concept of 'Holocaust' in its entire European scope, the international,"⁷³ The anti-Fascist struggle,

⁷¹ Avraham Berman, "Edut" (Testimony), *Kol Ha'am*, May 4, 1961.

⁷² For the changes in Israeli society's attitude toward the Holocaust, from shame and silence to a central element of a popular quasi-religious cult, see Segev, *The Seventh Million*.

⁷³ "Kavim Manhim Vebibliyografiya Letkufat Hasho'a Vehamered" (Outlines and Bibliography for the Holocaust and Rebel Era), Yad Tabenkin Archives File #27.

says the text, was to be learned as part of a wider Jewish and non-Jewish struggle headed by "the Communist movement and other left-wing forces since the Spanish Civil War."⁷⁴

The document stresses the class element. According to the text, it was from the ranks of the right and the bourgeoisie that "the 'Quislings', the 'Pétains' and the 'Judenräte'" came.⁷⁵ The text also stresses the "guiding role of the Communists" in the struggle and "the great liberating role, mainly for the Jewish people, of the Red Army."⁷⁶ A 1960 *Masechet* dedicated to the ghetto uprisings revisits elements seen in the 1940s, lauding the cooperation between the Polish and Jewish undergrounds and the left-wing makeup of the Jewish resistance: "On July 28th 1942 the fighting organization was established; it was made up of 22 combat groups consisting of the various workers' organizations in the Ghetto. At that time there was only one pistol, [symbolizing] the unity of Jewish fighters in the Ghetto and the Polish underground fighters."⁷⁷

The final instructor's brochure from 1963 crystallizes all the elements of the Communist narrative of the Holocaust. It provides a jumble of readings and scout activity – mainly a version of the Hare and Hounds game, the object of which is to find Mordechai Anielewicz's bunker and read his final letter – fun-filled activity, no doubt. The brochure sought to instil in the young *Bney Amal* the true meaning of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising as part of the anti-Fascist struggle, or in the words of the text: "To inspire in them a hate of Fascism, and instil in their hearts respect and appreciation of the Ghetto fighters and partisans and hate and contempt of the Judenräte... to fight against the renewed danger of Fascism and war and struggle against the relations between the Israeli government and the neo-Nazi government in Bonn."⁷⁸ The brochure concludes by

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ *Yaldey Amal* (Children of Amal), March 1960, brochure, courtesy of Tamar Gozansky,

⁷⁸ "Mered Geto Varsha, Alon Lamadrikh, Merts 1963" (The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Instructors' Brochure, March 1963), Lavon Institute for Labour Research, IV-104-85-7.

listing the points that need to be emphasized to the members. Under "the Ghetto class struggle," the Ghetto is described as having been torn by class warfare between the Jewish bourgeoisie and the Judenräte and the Jewish left-wing organizations. The text stresses the "initiating role of the Communists"⁷⁹ in forming the "anti-Fascist Bloc" and the cooperation between the Polish left and the Ghetto fighters. The U.S.S.R. is also glorified, especially for the emancipatory and liberating role of the Red Army.⁸⁰ The text ends with the customary political edict "to denounce the policy of forgetting the Nazis crimes, of whitewashing the neo-Nazi regime in West Germany and the relations 'of trust and friendship' with war criminals and the infested Adenauer government."⁸¹

The conflicting attitudes towards the Holocaust are a strong indication of the change that was occurring, even as the Jewish Communists clung to their old belief system regarding the Holocaust. The narrative that Jewish Communists had created since the 1940s was being subverted by a new discourse. What relation there was between the new narrative of the Holocaust and pro-Soviet, internationalist and heroic elements of the old narrative awaits further examination.

3.2 The Communist Holocaust Rite

The Communist subculture sanctified its narrative of the Holocaust through a yearly ritual commemorating the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. The choice of date for the ritual – April 19th, the day the uprising broke out – and the emphasis it placed on armed resistance reflected the influence of Zionist-Socialism on the Jewish Communists, while the outward form it took reflected the influence of the Russian and later Soviet revolutionary rally. In much the same way

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

they used to celebrate November 7th, the Jewish Communists produced in large spaces a tradition of mass rites, made up of speeches with a short artistic presentation afterwards, which promoted their narrative of Holocaust and heroism. The rites were mostly not organized directly by the Communist Party but by its fronts, the Poland-Israel Friendship League and, from 1955, the ANFO. The Poland-Israel Friendship League was formed in 1946 for the purpose of advancing relations with Poland, then in the midst of becoming a people's democracy. From the mid-1950s, the ANFO took a central role not just in conducting the rites in memory of the Warsaw uprising, but also in the cultural-political effort of the Jewish Communists to commemorate the Holocaust.⁸²

The earliest ritual commemorating the Holocaust and glorifying the ghetto uprisings was conducted on April 19th 1946. The rally assembled in the Mograbi theatre, then in the heart of Tel Aviv. The ceremony began with a few opening words after which "the audience stood up in memory of the Jewish people's victims in the war while Chopin's funeral march was played."⁸³ Then Ruth Lubitz, a prominent Party member, made a speech that followed the fundamentals of the Communist narrative. Lubitz drew a contrast between capitulation and resistance, stressing the unity of all the political parties in the Ghetto and the help given to the rebels "by the Polish democratic forces."⁸⁴ In conclusion, she said that only an alliance with "the forces of freedom,

⁸² The ANFO was established on the twelfth anniversary of the uprising in 1955. It was made up of representatives of Jewish soldiers from the Allied armies, the Spanish Civil War and the anti-Nazi underground. The organization was headed by Avraham Berman, then a MKI Knesset Member, and was controlled by Party members. The Communist nature of the organization was also evident in its founding resolutions, which called on all Israeli citizens "to mobilize for the holy struggle against the revival of the Nazi Wehrmacht" (The Founding Resolutions of the Anti-Nazi Fighters Organization in Israel, *Kol Ha'am*, April 19, 1955). The ANFO was involved in a wide range of activities: agitating against West Germany and Israeli polices, sponsoring memorial rites commemorating the Warsaw uprising and exhibits dealing with the Holocaust, holding meetings to explain such issues as the Eichmann's trial, demonstrations, and sending delegates to memorial services in Eastern Europe. In Western Europe, mainly France, Belgium and the Netherlands, the organizations affiliated with the Communists and the left were the only ones open to the Holocaust survivors who were rejected by the established anti-Communist organizations (Lagruo, "Victims of Genocide and National Memory," 383-421).

⁸³ "Atseret Be'Mugrabi' Be'Tel Aviv" (A Rally in 'Mograbi' in Tel Aviv), *Kol Ha'am*, April 26, 1946.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

first and foremost the Soviet Union,"⁸⁵ would fulfill the legacy of the Ghetto fighters. The evening ended with the workers' choir singing Jewish folk songs and Soviet songs.

The following year's ritual was not directly conducted by the Party, but was sponsored by its publishing arm *Kedem*, showing the Party's intention to broaden the appeal of its message. The main speaker at the ceremonies was Shmuel Eisenstadt, who was identified with the Party but not a member. His speech reflected the Party's views, although it stressed "the complete and great democratic unity that was established in the Ghetto,"⁸⁶ as well as the fact "that in this uprising all the people's classes cooperated with their brothers-in-arms, the Polish anti-Fascists."⁸⁷ The ceremony ended with the reading of a poem and the performance by the Ron choir of "various Partisan and Ghetto songs."⁸⁸

The tenth anniversary commemoration of the Warsaw uprising was sponsored by the Poland-Israel Friendship League and the Public Committee for Celebrating the 10th Anniversary, an ad hoc organization established for the event. It was marked by rallies similar to those of previous years and a torchlight parade of Banki and the Left party youth wing. The parade started with a roll-call on the seashore of Tel Aviv, complete with fire-drawn slogans. After the opening speeches, the youths marched through the main streets of Tel Aviv. The banners raised in the parade reflected elements of the Communist perception of the Holocaust, with slogans like "Long live the eternal alliance of the Heroes of Ghettograd and the Heroes of Stalingrad' [and] 'Long live the anti-Fascist struggle'."⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ "Ahdut Anti Fashistit – Moreshet Mordey Hageto" (Anti-Fascist Unity - The Legacy of the Ghetto Rebels,) *Kol Ha'am*, April 21, 1947.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ "Mitsad Lapidim Likhvod Mordey Hageto" (A Torchlight Parade in Honour of the Ghetto Rebels), *Kol Ha'am*, April 12, 1953.

The tenth anniversary rallies followed the same basic outline shaped in the 1940s. In Tel Aviv and Haifa the speeches were followed by poetry readings and choral singing. The rally in Jerusalem was held in a local cinema; seated on the front stage were the Polish consul and representatives of various Communist fronts, the Peace Committee, the Soviet-Israeli Friendship League and the Poland-Israel Friendship League. The speakers Avraham Berman and Meir Vilner gave voice to the Communist doctrine regarding the uprising. Berman, not yet a Party member but an MK from the Left, stressed that "the Ghetto fighters were workers, the youths and the common folk that raised in unison the rebel banner. The united anti-Fascist front of the Communists and the progressive elements of the pioneering organizations – were a condition and basis for the heroic struggle of the Ghetto fighters."⁹⁰ Vilner reminded the audience that while the Jewish Police and the Judenräte cooperated with the Nazis, the Jewish fighters "in alliance with the Polish anti-Fascist forces headed by the Communists"⁹¹ fought a heroic battle. The assembly dispersed after the reading of a poem and the singing of the national anthem and the *Internationale*.

The eleventh anniversary of the uprising saw the same rites performed by both Banki and the MKI's front, the Poland-Israel Friendship League. There were public rallies, with speeches followed by an artistic presentation (in one case in Ramat HaSharon, for the first time a Polish film named *Warsaw* was screened). In the streets a torchlight parade was held to protest against the rearming of West Germany. Its participants included a car "decorated in the national flag and

⁹⁰ "Mered Geto Varsha Uzkar Be'atseret Beyerushalayim" (The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was Commemorated in a Rally in Jerusalem), *Kol Ha'am*, April 26, 1953.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

a big picture of a Ghetto fighter."⁹² Short speeches were made "where the audience was reminded of the bravery of the Ghetto fighters."⁹³

By the end of the 1950s the Banki torchlight parade was no longer practiced and the basic form of rite was the rally composed of speeches ending with an artistic performance or an appropriate movie. But the new tone subverting the pre-eminence of the heroic narrative of the struggle had started to appear in the Communist rite. In the 1958 Tel Aviv ceremony, in-between the now customary glorification of the rebels' heroism and condemnations of the Judenräte, West Germany and Kastnerism, Avraham Berman talked about "the tragic fate of more than a million Jewish children."⁹⁴ Holding up a pair of children's shoes from Treblinka, he brought tears to the eyes of his audience. The ceremony itself became more elaborate, including, beside the artistic section, a Polish film *The Final Stage* dealing with the "horrors of the Auschwitz death camp"⁹⁵ and an exhibition.

Between the early 1960s and mid-decade, the Communist rite settled into a standardized mould of Holocaust rite based on the revolutionary rally. By the twentieth anniversary of the uprising, the content of the rite was also set. In drafts for a speech on April 20th 1963, Shmuel Eisenstadt compares Stalingrad to Ghettograd and calls for "integration in the peace camp headed by the U.S.S.R."⁹⁶ In the ceremony in Bat Yam, he once more stressed that in the Ghetto all the parties, both Zionist and non-Zionist, had fought shoulder to shoulder. He also stated that

⁹² "Hafganat No'ar Berehovot Tel Aviv Veyafa" (A Youth Demonstration in the Streets of Tel Aviv and Jaffa), *Kol Ha'am*, April 19, 1954.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ "Atseret Hamonim Likhvod 15 Shana Lemered Geto Varsha" (A Mass Rally for the 15th Anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising), *Kol Ha'am*, April 17, 1958.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ "Hartsa'a Leyom Hasho'a, 20 Le'april 1963" (A Lecture for Holocaust Day, April 20, 1963), Lavon Institute for Labour Research, IV-104-13-32.

with the "fight that was started by the heroes of the Ghetto, who fell on their swords, saving our people's honour did not end."⁹⁷

Although attitudes toward the victims of the Holocaust had started to change, Communist rite and consciousness were still locked in the language of armed resistance and heroism. Was the change in discourse so minute as to be insignificant? Why did the Jewish Communists hold to the notion of heroism at the expense of a more sensitive view of the Holocaust in their rites into the 1960s? The answer lies in the fact that social changes are at times long-term. Israeli society as a whole took time to express the new place the Holocaust occupied in the social fabric. In this sense, once more the Jewish Communists, politically and socially rejected by Israeli society, at the same time ironically reflected their social surroundings. Once more this rejection by mainstream society, even as they were reflecting some of its attitudes, shows to what extent they were part of Israeli culture of the 1950s and 1960s.

What was the effectiveness of these rites in the commemoration culture that started to evolve around the Warsaw uprising? The sources are silent in regard to the audience's reaction to the ceremony unfolding in front of them. However, as demonstrated by the commemorative rites performed in the kibbutzim of the various Zionist-Socialist movements, with their physical focal point in Kibbutz Lohamei HaGeta'ot and Kibbutz Yad Mordechai, an assembly consisting of speeches and artistic performances could occupy a central place and effectively move its audience.

If marginal and less effective than the Zionist-Socialist rituals, what did the rituals performed by the Jewish Communists achieve? In one of his definitions of the term liminal, Victor Turner defines a liminal or quasi-liminal state as "terms describing the many genres found

⁹⁷ "Atseret Hamonim Bebat Yam Likhvod 20 Shana Lemeret Geto Varsha" (Mass Rally in Bat Yam Marking 20 Years to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising), *Kol Ha'am*, April 16, 1963.

in modern industrial leisure that have the features resembling those of liminality."⁹⁸ Turner thus defines other kinds of human states besides liminality as being created by modern leisure. For our discussion here, the important aspect of this definition is the fact that the quasi-liminal state can be manufactured and was indeed manufactured by the Jewish Communists' Holocaust rite. The Jewish Communist rite developed outside the political cultural process of the Zionist-Socialist commemorative effort; this meant that it assumed the idiosyncratic nature of the quasi-liminal state. This imitative character of Jewish Communist Holocaust ritual explains why it never materialized into fixed elaborate rite.

3.3 Independence and Remembrance in the MKI and Banki, 1919-1965

Israeli independence and the 1948 War posed a dilemma for the Jewish Communists. The support they lent to the creation of a Jewish state contradicted their anti-Zionism and the Palestinian-Jewish character of the Party. In order to settle the contradiction, the Jewish Communists accommodated Israeli independence by composing it into an anti-imperialist ideological and cultural narrative. That narrative in turn sustained Communist critical loyalty to the state of Israel and spawned an entire range of cultural practices, from hero cults to mass rites that created and reflected an anti-Zionist Israeli patriotic identity.

From its formative period in the 1920s, the Communist Party was anti-imperialist. Ideologically influenced by Leninism, the Jewish Communists developed a militant anti-imperialism, its discourse at first aimed against the British Empire. The Jewish Communists stressed the connection between Zionism and imperialism. They suggested a joint Palestinian-Jewish struggle to throw off the yoke of British imperialism and achieve independence. Thus the

⁹⁸ Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 253.

concept of independence was immanently connected in Communist discourse to anti-imperialism. In the 1930s and 1940s, as the Jewish Communists increasingly were co-opted into the *Yishuv*, they started to emphasize the role of the U.S.S.R. in achieving independence. British imperialism was replaced by the growing American presence as the nemesis of Israel's newfound independence. In the 1950s and 1960s, the anti-imperialist discourse was further elaborated as the Communists attacked Israel's growing tendency to lean on Western powers, thus reshaping their attack on Zionism's connection to imperialism. The Communists constructed, through their anti-imperialist stands, a narrative of Israel's independence as an unfinished revolution and vied for position as true patriots. The Palestinian-Jewish anti-imperialist struggle was reshaped into a call for Israeli-Arab peace and the implementation of the U.N. resolutions for the creation of a Palestinian state.

The anti-imperialist stand is evident in the early written manifestations of Communism in Palestine. A 1923 pamphlet points to the organic connection between the "British occupiers"⁹⁹ and the Zionist bourgeoisie, asserting that in order to "sway the Jewish worker from revolution,"¹⁰⁰ the latter was using British imperialism to establish a Jewish state. In 1924, in an internal memo sent to the Eastern department of the Comintern, British rule in Palestine is defined as a "military colony, meaning strategic colony, which ensures the land route to India."¹⁰¹ In 1929 British imperialism, backed by British capital, is said to be trying "to turn Palestine into an open colony of the British Empire."¹⁰² Pointing to the growing economic

⁹⁹ "Lepo'aley Paleština" (To the Workers of Palestine), in Zahavi, *Apart or Together*, 42.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ "Tazkir Pnimi Hatum al Yedey Haboza'im" (An Internal Memo signed by Abozaim), in Zahavi, *Apart or Together*, 43.

¹⁰² "Mikhtav Mehava'ad Hamerkazi shel Hapekape Lava'ad Hapo'el shel Haqomintern" (A Letter from the PKP Central Committee to the Comintern Executive), in Zahavi, *Apart or Together*, 168.

interests of British companies in Palestine, the Party saw it as "its historic role to organize the Jewish and Arab toilers for a joint struggle against British imperialism."¹⁰³

In the 1930s, which saw the increased Arabization of the Party, there was no lessening of the anti-imperialist discourse. In the 1930 Party conference resolutions, the Jewish members of the Party were ordered "to expose the true aim of the Jewish bourgeoisie, and the fact that together with the Jewish minority in Palestine under its influence, it is the main instrument of oppression by the British occupiers against the native Arab population."¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, the increasingly Palestinian nationalist stand of the PKP, looking upon the Palestinians as the revolutionary force in Palestine, was not received well by the Jewish members of the Party. While the Arab Revolt of 1936 was defined as anti-imperialist, by the end of the 1930s the Jewish Communists were arguing that immigration to Palestine and the growing displacement of Palestinians made the *Yishuv* a national minority. From that ideological stand, the Jewish Communists demanded an end to the British Mandate in Palestine and the creation of a unified binational democratic country. Increasingly participating in the Jewish *Yishuv* politics and culture, they became involved in the escalating confrontation between the British and the Jews of Palestine.

A wall poster issued by the Young Communist League in 1946 expresses the growing affinity between the *Yishuv's* demands and those of the Jewish Communists and their anti-imperialist discourse. It also points to the internalization of the anti-imperialist discourse in the formative stage of Banki in the 1940s. The poster, issued for the November 7th anniversary, describes British behaviour in Palestine as being driven by imperialist interests "to strengthen their power to turn our country into a British military base to oppress the *Yishuv* and the peoples

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ "Haḥlaṭa Benoge'a Lashe'ela Hale'umit Veba'emda Hapoliṭit Ha'akshavit" (Resolution Regarding the National Question and the Current Political Stand), in Zahavi, *Apart or Together*, 259.

of the Middle East and the Soviet Union."¹⁰⁵ In order to achieve these aims, "British imperialism, helped by its agents, wishes to sow dispute between Arabs and Jews."¹⁰⁶ The leadership of the *Yishuv* was accused of capitulating to British terror, preferring cooperation with imperialism and offering "military bases to the expellers of refugees."¹⁰⁷ The Zionist right and its underground organizations, involved at the time in an armed campaign against the British, are accused of "their political plan of taking over. They disregard the existence of the two nations in the country."¹⁰⁸ The way to win the struggle against British rule is "a Jewish-Arab agreement for making our country independent and democratic, where Arabs and Jews rule on the basis of equal national rights."¹⁰⁹

Identification with the *Yishuv* reached a new height with the Gromyko speech. In a pamphlet named *End the British Mandate!*, the Party accuses the "Anglo-American Imperialists"¹¹⁰ of trying to prevent the appearance of the Jewish delegation at the United Nations. The Zionist leadership of the *Yishuv* is attacked for "grabbling for years in the corridors of Anglo-American imperialism"¹¹¹ and offering support to the Western military presence in Palestine. The way to struggle against imperialism is to "establish an independent democratic Arab-Jewish state, based on equal rights for both nations."¹¹² A new motif was glorification of the U.S.S.R.'s role in the process of independence, as opposed to the penetration of American imperialism into the region. The U.S.S.R. is hailed for selflessly aligning itself with the oppressed of the world, with the Palestinians and Jews in Palestine. As the pamphlet phrases it

¹⁰⁵ "No'ar", (Youth), Yad Tabenkin Archives, Files #17, 18.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ "Saymu et Hamandaḥ Habriṭi" (End the British Mandate!), Lavon Institute for Labour Research, IV-425-32.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

simply, "our allies are the Soviet Union and the 'Democratic countries'! Our enemies are the Anglo-American imperialists!"¹¹³

In the midst of escalating violence between Palestinians and Jews, the Jewish section of the Party and its youth movement identified completely with the *Yishuv's* war. The new motifs are evident in a handbill from 1948 calling on the youth to enlist in the war. The U.N. resolution of November 29th is described as a "victory achieved by the *Yishuv* due to the great help of the U.S.S.R. and the Peoples' Democracies."¹¹⁴ The war raging all over the country is said to be the result of a conspiracy by the British government, Arab gangs, the remains of Anders army "and German Nazi agents,"¹¹⁵ banded together by imperialism to prevent Jewish as well as Palestinian independence and restore British rule. The handbill warns against a return to foreign rule or the substitution of an "American protectorate" for real independence.¹¹⁶ The Palestinians, until then partners in the fight against imperialism, are now presented as the victims "of the foreign ruler and its accessories – the men of Arab reaction with their gangs of killers."¹¹⁷

The change of attitude towards support for the creation of a Jewish state was not just the result of the Soviet policy change. It reflected a long-term process in which the Jewish Communists, internalizing the idea through anti-imperialist terms, recognized the existence of a Jewish nation in Palestine as well as a Palestinian one. This recognition came just as Palestinian society was being destroyed in the 1948 war. The paradigmatic change in politics was therefore correlated to a new view of the Palestinians as victims of imperialism, mirroring the complexities of the MKI's stand during the 1948 war. The Party explained the plight of Palestinians as being due to the evils deeds of imperialism, and in part the historical reality since 1917 justified this

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ "No'ar Hitgayes! 1948, Tel Aviv" (Youth Enlist! 1948, Tel Aviv), Yad Tabenkin Archives.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

stand. At the same time, the destruction of Palestinian society in 1948 was as much the fault of Zionism. But the MKI, as part of the new state with Zionism at its centre, could not offer that explanation.

As the fighting intensified into open warfare with the regular armies of the Arab states neighbouring Israel, the anti-imperialist discourse became more pronounced.¹¹⁸ In the editorial for the first State Day in July 1948, *Kol Ha'am* stated that independence had been achieved due to the efforts of the soldiers at the front and the "forces of peace and progress that were the first and only ones that sent us the tools of victory."¹¹⁹ The text goes on to glorify the political help lent to the young state by the U.S.S.R. The invasion of the Arab states is described as having been "ordered by British imperialism."¹²⁰ However, it wasn't just British imperialism conspiring against Israel, as the article put it, but "many dangers lurk in our young state. American imperialism is sending its army against us. It conspires to take the place of British

¹¹⁸ Communist support for the state and the war effort was not just verbal. Party members enlisted in the Haganah and the IDF, as described in an interview with Eliyahu (Alyosha) Gozansky to a reporter in Poland: "the great majority of the Party members fight in the ranks of the Haganah... four out of five members of the Young Communist League were wounded in the battlefield." ("Hakol Lema'an Hahazit! Hakol Lema'an Hanitsaḥon" All for the Front! All for Victory!, *Kol Ha'am*, August 20, 1948). The Party leaders used their connections in the new regimes in Eastern Europe to facilitate the procurement of arms and manpower for the Israeli war effort. The first feelers by the Party started as early as 1947. Eliyahu Gozansky, a member of the Party Secretariat, and Ruth Lubitz were sent to "Bulgaria and other Socialist countries to feel the pulse regarding the possibilities of helping *Mapilim* (illegal immigrants to Palestine – my comment ALB)." ("Pe'ilut Hamiflaga Haḥomunistit shel Erets-Isra'el Legiyus Ezra Politiit Vetsva'it Lemilhemet Ha'atma'ut, Edut Shmu'el Mikunis" The Activity of the Eretz-Israel Communist Party to Mobilize Political and Military Aid for the Independent War, Shmuel Mikunis Testimony, Lavon Institute for Labour Research, IV-85-47). Another initial contact was made by a Communist Youth delegation that participated in building a railroad in Yugoslavia. During the war, both before and after the proclamation establishing Israel, the Party was active in sending arms and men from Eastern Europe. For example, in February 1948 Mikunis sent 400 volunteers from Yugoslavia, and in Poland he was authorized by Gomulka to send recruits to officers' school. After May 1948 he arranged for Jewish volunteers to be sent from Czechoslovakia to Israel and secured the purchase of heavy mortars by the Yugoslavs for Israel. The anti-imperialist discourse is apparent even in Mikunis' remarks; reporting on his talks with Slánský, he says he convinced him to support the *Yishuv* "because it is an anti-imperialist need to resolve an important issue in the Middle East that has become a focus of bloodshed... that there is a comprehensive strategy to drive out British imperialism from the region"(Ibid.). Apart from their political and military aid, the Jewish Communists recruited their subculture resources for the war effort, sending the Party's choir to cheer the soldiers at the front ("Hahofa'a shel Maḥelal 'Ron' Bamaḥane Hatsva'i" The Performance of the 'Ron' Choir in the Army Camp, *Kol Ha'am*, April 2, 1948 and "Maḥelal Hapo'alim 'Ron'" 'Ron' Workers Choir, *Kol Ha'am*, November 30, 1948).

¹¹⁹ "Al Ha'ajenda Leyom Hamedina" (On the Agenda, For State Day), *Kol Ha'am*, April 27, 1948.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

subjugation."¹²¹ The Palestinian side also has anti-imperialists in its midst.¹²² The editorial sends "a greeting of encouragement to the democratic Arab circles, headed by the National Liberation League, who have fought in conditions of terror and underground against the invading armies."¹²³

By the end of the 1948 war and into the 1950s and 60s, the Jewish Communists developed their anti-imperialist discourse into a narrative of an unfinished revolution. According to them, the events of 1948 were by their nature anti-imperialist. The Jews of Palestine had thrown off the yoke of British rule and achieved independence. Yet Anglo-American imperialism was not ready to grant Arabs and Jews their freedom. Using the local Palestinian reaction at first and then the armies of the Arab reactionary regimes, British imperialism had tried through war and invasion to destroy the new state. American imperialism on its part had attempted to prevent independence or diminish it by political means. But with the political help of the U.S.S.R. and military aid from the Peoples' Democracies, the state of Israel had prevailed and achieved its independence. This independence, however, was not full. The tendency of the Zionist leadership to lean on imperialism, British at first and then American had estranged

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² The 1947 U.N Partition Resolution split the NLL. Most of its leadership had supported the creation of two states. They opposed the Arab armies' invasion of Palestine and taking over parts allocated for the Palestinian state. The NLL requested the Palestinian masses "to understand the war in Palestine as part of the global struggle against Western imperialism" (Avner Ben Zaken, *Qomunizem Ke'imperyalizem Tarbuti: Haziqa eyn Haqomunizem Ha'erets- Isra'eli Laqomunizem Ha'aravi 1919-1948* (Communism as Cultural Imperialism: the Affinities between Eretz-Israeli Communism and Arab Communism, 1919-1948), (Tel Aviv: Resling Publishing, 2006), 174). In a handbill named *Nada Lgon'd el-Arab* (Call to the Arab soldiers), the Arab soldiers of the invading armies were called upon "to go back to your countries, aim your fire at the heart of imperialism and its servants" (Ibid., 178). The text argues "that the war did not serve the Arab interest, but the interests of Western imperialism." The anti-imperialist ideological language seen here was shared by Palestinian and Jewish Communists and used by them to justify their political decisions. As for the Palestinians, who were losing a war against a far superior enemy, their society disintegrating, "those elements were for the most part Arabs disconnected from reality and outrages" (Ibid., 174). The Palestinian Communists did not directly support the Jewish Communists' efforts on behalf of the Israeli war effort; however, they did see the forces of the IDF "not as enemies but as allies in the struggle to achieve a shared goal – two states for two nations" (Ibid., 180).

¹²³ " On the Agenda, For State Day". .

Israel's one true friend, the U.S.S.R., and as a result the country's freedom had been sold out to foreigners.

This anti-Imperialist narrative was evident as early as 1948-9. An article in *Kol Ha'am* on the occasion of Israel's first Independence Day states that the country's independence is a "progressive and anti-imperialistic act in essence" due to the mere fact that the "defence of the new state was conducted as an active struggle against an imperialist coalition directed by British imperialism."¹²⁴ However, Zionism's tendency to lean first on British and then on American imperialism had hampered this independence, which was achieved "thanks to the support of the Soviet Union."¹²⁵ After its first year of independence, Israel is, according to the writer, at a crossroads, and he poses the question: "Will Israel be dragged... into an imperialist axis or stay outside it?"¹²⁶

By 1955, the seventh year of independence, the Jewish Communists were certain that Israel had made its choice. In a dramatic tone a Party pamphlet states that "the holy legacy of those who fought for Israel's independence has been defiled and trampled on."¹²⁷ The country's economic resources had been sold to strangers and "the American magnates took over the most important economic posts."¹²⁸ The result was an ever growing social and economic crisis and an attempt to "bind Israel to an aggressive anti-Soviet bloc."¹²⁹ The pamphlet calls for the dedication of Independence Day to intense struggle on behalf of Israel's independence.

The same motifs are evident three years later on the tenth Independence Day. Analyzing the deterioration in Israel's international standing as a result of its growing affiliation with

¹²⁴ "Atsmaut Isra'el" (Israel's Independence), *Kol Ha'am*, May 4, 1949.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ "Lehamoney Isra'el" (To the Masses of Israel), Lavon Institute for Labour Research, IV-425-32.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

colonial rulers on the world stage, an article in *Kol Ha'am* ascribes the initial support for the state to "democratic, Socialist and Communist elements."¹³⁰ The creation of the state is seen as part of the global postcolonial wave that swept the world after World War II. However, despite the anti-imperialist nature of the Israeli independence struggle, "the world confronts the paradoxical phenomenon that the government of the state of Israel that was established as part of the breakdown of the colonial system is standing by the doomed colonial forces."¹³¹ The text goes on to demand that Israel amend its relations with the U.S.S.R. by ascribing to a policy of non-alliance. The calls for improving relations with the U.S.S.R. came against the background of worsening relations between the two countries from 1949 to 1955. Israel aligned itself more and more with the West, while Soviet policy became more and more pro-Arab, as the Soviets found the new regimes in the Arab world more ready to receive Soviet aid. The pro-Arab Soviet stand was cemented in 1955 by the Czech Arms Deal, where the Soviets modernized the Egyptian army, and by the Soviet loan to Egypt for building the Aswan Dam.

Three years later on the fourteenth Independence Day, the MKI's official announcement revisits the theme of unfinished revolution. It asserts that the Ben-Gurion government, by implementing a "pro-imperialist and anti-popular policy,"¹³² was betraying the legacy of the fallen in the 1948 war. The rest of the text contrasts the wishes of the masses for independence and government policy. By this means it glorifies the people's desire for a state friendly to the Soviet Union and all Socialist countries "that helped so much to gain Israel's independence,"¹³³ in contrast to the anti-Soviet policy of the government.

¹³⁰ "Isra'el beyn Ha'umot" (Israel among the Nations), *Kol Ha'am*, April 25, 1948.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² "Te'hi Yom Ha'atma'ut! Hava'ad Hamerkazi shel Hamiflaga Ha'komunistit Ha'Isra'elit, Tel Aviv, May 1961" (Long Live Independence Day! The Central Committee of the Israeli Communist Party, Tel Aviv, May 1961), *Kol Ha'am*, May 8, 1962.

¹³³ Ibid.

The anti-imperialist discourse was not limited to the older MKI members, but well ingrained in the consciousness of Banki members as well. In a document intended to provide background to discussions of independence for the young and mid-age levels of the movement, the anti-imperialist discourse is intertwined into the text. Independence from Britain is viewed as a result of the Soviet victory over Germany and the weakening of British imperialism. The 1917 Balfour Declaration, where Britain promised a *National Home* for the Zionists, is perceived as a way "for Britain to take control of Eretz-Israel."¹³⁴ The Zionist leadership "recognized Britain's intentions" and implemented a policy that "built a barrier of hostility between Arabs and Jews."¹³⁵ From the 1930s, the Jews of Palestine became a nation developing on a capitalist foundation. At the same time, the British Empire was interested in on "the one hand exploiting the Eretz-Israeli industry, and on the other hand stopping it from developing in unwanted directions or going into competition with British economic elements."¹³⁶ On that economic basis the antagonism between Britain and the *Yishuv* developed, resulting in the U.N. resolution that ended, with the help of the U.S.S.R., British rule in Palestine.

But imperialism did not abandon its attempt to deny the Jews their independence. The British "wanted to throw the country into bloodshed and to prevent the possibly of founding a Jewish state."¹³⁷ While the British provided weapons to the Arab states, the Americans embargoed arms to the Middle East. In the war, "the Jewish people fulfilled its right to its own independent state... The state of Israel was formed in the midst of a bloody struggle with British imperialism and its dependants in the Arab states."¹³⁸ Yet political independence would not be complete while the Israeli-Arab conflict remained unresolved. As long as the conflict continues,

¹³⁴ "Milhemet Ha'atsma'ut" (The War of Independence), Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #2.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

"Imperialism will exploit it and meddle with it." Peace is dependent on "saving Israel from the dependency on imperialism."¹³⁹

In a 1958 Banki document outlining talking points for a discussion of independence, the same motifs appear in even sharper focus. After asking what had been achieved in 1948, the text answers: "the liberation of our country from the rule of colonialism and the establishment of political independence."¹⁴⁰ This independence was not full, however, due to the fact that "the government of Israel did not take advantage of the historic occasion of liberation from the yoke of British colonialism and enslaved the state to American imperialism."¹⁴¹ This enslavement was based on economic and political dependency on American capital "that streams into the country for the benefit of a class of Israeli millionaires, and to bribe a class of MAPAI *Histadrut* bureaucracy."¹⁴² That capital was financing a nationalist, anti-Communist, anti-Arab expansionist policy that could not be carried out without imperialism. The history of dependency on imperialism began, according to the text, with the connection between Zionism and British imperialism during the latter's thirty years of rule in Palestine. Imperialism was also the root cause of the Israeli-Arab conflict, having encouraged the reactionary rulers of Egypt and Jordan and the Ben-Gurion government to slice up the territories meant for a Palestinian state.

The young Jewish Communists of Banki internalized cultural motifs of the 1948 war identified with the *Palmach*¹⁴³ as well as the anti-imperialist dictates of Party ideology. This reflected the growing cultural and political influence of the "Left Men", many of them veterans of the *Palmach* which, despite being identified with the kibbutzim and Zionist-Socialism,

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Brit Hano'ar Haḳomunisti Ha'Isra'eli Va'adat Hīnukh (The Israeli Young Communist League Education Committee), courtesy of Tamar Gozhansky.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ *Palmach* - Strike Force, the *Yishuv's* pre 1948 elite units. It was formed with British aid in 1941 in order to fight a guerrilla campaign against the Germans in case they overran Palestine. In 1948 the units bore the brunt of fighting in the first stages of the war.

consequently gained increasing popularity among Banki members. Banki's instructors' brochures clearly show the cultural mix of Israeli Communism and *Palmach* culture. The 1964 brochure, entitled *Artsenu Hayafa – Zar Lo Islot Ba* (Our Beautiful Land – a Foreigner won't Rule it), opens its selection of materials with the exchange of telegrams between Moshe Sharett, the Israeli foreign minister, and Vyacheslav Molotov, a text meant to remind the young Communists who supported Israel in 1948. The brochure ends with excerpts from the words of the fallen in the war and a poem by Haim Gouri, a poet closely identified with the culture of the *Palmach*. The song booklets also express this fusion, featuring Soviet songs and May Day songs alongside songs about Dudu from the *Palmach* and a love poem to Eretz-Israel by the poetess Rachel.

The fusion between the *Palmach* culture and the Communist subculture is most evident in Banki members' veneration of the figure of Yitzhak Sadeh and use of his writings. Sadeh, the founder of the *Palmach* and one of the most able commanders of the 1948 war, was ideologically identified with MAPAM, making him acceptable to the Communists, if not very easily for veteran Party members.¹⁴⁴ In his personality, Sadeh merged not just military skills but those of an educator and a writer. Shoshana Shmuely recalled that his writings were used as part of the cultural mix designed for Independence Day as well as other holidays.¹⁴⁵ Despite his Zionist-Socialist views, his figure was memorialized on the pages of *Kol Ha'am* where his defence of the Soviet Union and his humility were stressed.¹⁴⁶ An anti-imperialist impulse was ascribed to him as well in the portrayal of his figure, thus connecting him to the Communist subculture.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Shoshana Shmuely, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, February 22, 2009. The "'left men'" also named the youth section of their party after him.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ "Yitshak Šade Ha'ish" (Yitzhak Sadeh the Man), *Kol Ha'am*, September 19, 1952, and "Shalosh Shanim me'az Moto shel Yitshak Šade" (Three Years since the Death of Yitzhak Sadeh), *Kol Ha'am*, August 22, 1955.

¹⁴⁷ "Lezikhro shel Yitshak Šade" (In Memory of Yitzhak Sadeh), *Kol Ha'am*, August 29, 1952: "In his struggle for Israel's national independence, against its dependency on the American imperialism that inherited the British imperialism"; and in another place, "Yitshak Šade Lemenuhat Olamim" (Yitzhak Sadeh to Internal Rest), *Kol*

The anti-imperialist myth created by the Jewish Communists served a number of political and cultural purposes. It enabled them to give an ideologically acceptable reason for the foundation of the state of Israel. Rejection of Jewish nationalism ran deep in the history of Soviet Communism. It began in the early days of Bolshevism, when Lenin debated against the Bund demand for separate representation within the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP), and later its claim to represent the Jewish workers in the Russian Empire and secure them cultural national rights. From the time of that debate, Soviet Communism rejected Zionism.¹⁴⁸ The Jewish Communists in Palestine inherited these ideological concepts and the harsh negation of Zionism and its drive for a Jewish state in Palestine. But then the imperial interests of the U.S.S.R. changed, as did the Jewish Communists' approach to Jewish nationalism, and it supported the founding of Israel.

The Iraqi Communists faced a similar problem when they came to formulate their ideological stand toward 1950s and early 1960s Arab nationalism. The growing tendency of the ICP toward *Wataniyya* (local nationalism) in the context of Abd-al Karim Qasim's rift with Nasser compelled the ICP to clarify its ideological stand toward Arab *qawmiyyah* (Pan-Arab nationalism). In its 1960 National Charter the CPI adopted the language of Arab nationalism, explaining that "Iraq... was part of the 'big Arab Homeland', and the Iraqi people were tied to the 'peoples of the Arab nation'."¹⁴⁹ The Iraqi Communists moved to explain the reasons behind the split of the Arabs into smaller nation-states; resembling the Jewish Communists, the ICP turned to imperialism in order to link Communism with nationalism. "Claiming it tackled

Ha'am, August 12, 1952: "Yitzhak Sadeh showed solidarity with the anti-imperialist struggle of the nations of the Middle East."

¹⁴⁸ On the polemics that the two Communist leaders conducted against the Bund, see V. I. Lenin, *One Step Forward Two Steps Back: The Crisis in our Party*, in, V. I. Lenin, *Selected Writings Vol.1* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Haarzi Publishers, 1952), 236-418 and J. V. Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question*, in J. V. Stalin, *On the National and Colonial Question* (Published by The Central Committee of the Israeli Communist Party: Tel Aviv, 1954), 28-82.

¹⁴⁹ Franzén, *Red Star Over Iraq*, 102.

Arab unity 'on the basis of the material reality in which the Arab nation lives,' the party explained that it was 'well known that the partition¹⁵⁰... imposed on the Arab nation' was an 'outcome of the long domination of imperialism.'....The focus of anti-imperialism was the key to the ideational merger of Arab nationalism with Communism in ICP ideology."¹⁵¹

The Egyptian Communists faced similar problems as the Free Officers took power in 1952. Relations between Egyptian Communism and the new military regime were strained as the officers suppressed a workers' strike at Kafer al-Dawwar, hanging two of the strike leaders.¹⁵² The repression of the labour movement alienated the support that the Democratic Movement for National Liberation (DMNL), the largest faction of Egyptian Communism, gave the officers at first. However, as of 1955, when Nasser's policy became more clearly pro-Soviet and anti-imperialist, culminating in the Suez crisis, the Egyptian Communists applauded the government "for its anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist policies."¹⁵³ From that moment on, the Egyptian Communists, despite a wave of repression in the late 1950s because of their objection to Syrian-Egyptian unification, did not radically challenge the Nasserist regime. The adoption of the nationalist discourse of Nasserism was so pervasive that by 1965 the Egyptian Communists dissolved themselves and were co-opted as individuals into the Egyptian Socialist society created by Nasser.¹⁵⁴

As in the Iraqi and Israeli cases, anti-imperialism was the ideological concept that enabled the adoption of nationalism into Communist ideology and practice. In the Egyptian case "the Marxist conception of imperialism gained widespread currency among the intelligentsia."¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ Partition meaning the partition of the Arab world by Western Imperialism

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 103 (Quoting the *ICP National Charter, 1960*).

¹⁵² For a detailed portrayal of the strike, see Botman, *The Rise of Egyptian Communism*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1988).

¹⁵³ Ibid., 140.

¹⁵⁴ Beinun, *Was the Red Flag Flying There?*, and Botman, *The Rise of Egyptian Communism*.

¹⁵⁵ Beinun, *Was the Red Flag Flying There?*, 2.

However, organizationally fractured and lacking mass support, the Communists were not able to lead the national movement; that was done by the Free Officers.

3.4 Heroes of the Anti-Imperialist Struggle

The years of underground activity against British colonial rule in Palestine and the 1948 war left the MKI and Banki with a legacy of Party heroes. Held up as paragons of proper Communist behaviour, Yael Garson, Siyoma Mernonynski and Eliyahu (Alyosha) Gozansky were to become a focal point of Communist rite and myth.¹⁵⁶

The earliest hero to emerge from the underground years was Yael Garson.¹⁵⁷ Born in Palestine, Garson from an early age showed an inclination toward social activism. At the age of twelve in 1927 she "led children that demonstrated against the closure of the elementary school's eighth grade."¹⁵⁸ Harassed by the British police, Garson went to France in 1936 and was active in aiding the Spanish Republic. In 1940 she came back to Palestine and was arrested by the British authorities. She was incarcerated in the Bethlehem prison where she contracted pneumonia that

¹⁵⁶ There is no evidence that the Jewish Communists enshrined Palestinian members as anti-imperialist heroes. The PKP denounced the hanging of Palestinians who participated in the 1929 Riots, calling them anti-imperialist martyrs (Dothan, *Reds*, 150). In the early 1930s the PKP defended its Palestinian leaders Sadki Naghti and Muhammad Mograbi, who had been arrested ("Halha Hamishpat Ha'imperyalisti Ha'akhzari! Tehi Haḥaverim Najati Vemuḥama! Halha Ha'imperyalism! (Down with the Cruel Imperialist Trial! Long Live Comrades Naghti and Muhammad! Down with Imperialism!) Ibid, 155). However, by the 1950s and 1960s none of the above had been commemorated as heroes. Most of the Palestinians that fought the British were not Communists, and those Communists that did fight actively fell out with the Party, as in the case of Nemar Awoda. He was the liaison between the Palestinian leadership of the Arab Rebellion and the Party and was dismissed from the Party because of his anti-Jewish terrorist actions (Dothan, *Reds*; Farah, *From the Ottoman Rule to the Hebrew State*). Another contributing factor is the fact that the Jewish Communists sought to acquire some of the prestige accruing to the Jewish undergrounds that fought the British in the late 1940s. For the MKI's attempts to be part of the narrative of anti-British struggle of the *Yishuv*, see Miron, *A Red Star in the Israeli Flag*.

¹⁵⁷ For a description of the Communist underground in Tel Aviv of the 1920s in which Yael Garson took an active part, see Leah Trachtman-Falhan, *MiTel Aviv Lemoskva (Zikhronot Yaldut)* (From Tel Aviv to Moscow (Childhood Memoirs)), (Tel Aviv: Saar Publishers and the Author, 1989).

¹⁵⁸ "Yael Garson" (Yael Garson), *Kol Hano'ar*, February 4th, 1942. For the children's strike, see Leah Trachtman-Falhan's memoirs.

was badly treated by the prison authorities. Complications of the disease resulted in her death on February 9th 1941 at the age of 26.

The figure of Garson, and the myth and rite that developed around her would be the prototype for local Communist Israeli heroes to come. From the very first eulogies of Yael Garson in the 1940s, she was depicted as a tireless Communist activist, "dedicated beyond measure to the cause of the Communist movement and the working class."¹⁵⁹ Her death had not been in vain, the text promises, as she died "for a free Socialist Palestine,"¹⁶⁰ and the Party would respond to her death with increased struggle against "imperialism and Zionism."¹⁶¹ In the 1948 eulogy for Garson, the anti-Imperialist discourse of the Jewish Communists is reasserted. Garson understood "the necessity of cooperation between Arabs and Jews in their struggle against imperialism."¹⁶² Her figure was also held up as the model of a devoted Party member. Her "devotion and humble and quiet character won her everyone's love, making her a success in her Party work." Furthermore, the text asserts that Garson was "one of the first victims on the altar of the war for freedom, independence and fraternity."¹⁶³ In the 1957 eulogy for Garson, she is lauded as "an example of discipline and punctiliousness" and, in the words of the text, "will forever be a symbol and model of the revolutionary, to all members of the Communist youth."¹⁶⁴ In the early 1960s the MKI's press began taking less notice of Garson, and as her cult was not supported by living family members it was somewhat forgotten, which did not reflect the place she held in Banki. Evenings in memory of Yael Garson were still being held in 1964 and one of the movement's clubs was named after her.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁹ Ibid..

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² "Lezikhra shel Ya'el Garson" (In Remembrance of Yael Garson), *Kol Ha'am*, February 8, 1948.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ "Ya'el Garson" (Yael Garson), *Kol Ha'am*, February 8, 1957.

¹⁶⁵ Markovizky, *White Shirt and Red Tie*, 157.

The ritual that developed around Yael Garson became the basic model for other Party heroes. As early as 1942, members of Banki visited her grave and in a simple ritual echoing the early Russian revolutionary funerals laid a flower wreath on her grave emblazoned with the slogan "Yael Garson, the brave anti-Fascist fighter – the victim of police terror" and made "modest speeches filled with pain and deep love."¹⁶⁶

The next hero of the Jewish Communists' anti-imperialist struggle was Siyoma Mernonynski. Mernonynski was born on March 12th 1908 in the city of Tiraspol in Moldavia, then part of Romania. He was radicalized already in Romania and banished from the university in Bucharest after his first year. In Palestine he became a worker and joined the underground PKP. At first he was active in Antifa, the organization established by the Left in Palestine to aid Republican Spain; later he joined the underground cadre of the Party and became the secretary of the Tel Aviv branch. In this capacity he was arrested in the summer of 1941 by the Criminal Investigation Department and taken to its headquarters in Jaffa. There he was beaten to death and his body thrown into the sea near Bat Yam.¹⁶⁷ Since a grave was lacking as a focal point for the commemoration of Siyoma Mernonynski, most of it was conducted on the pages of *Kol Ha'am*.

The main element in the image of Siyoma Mernonynski portrayed by the Party was that of an all-round Communist "who was a guide to workers in the class struggle."¹⁶⁸ As with Yael Garson, the motif of the tireless Communist was reasserted, the 1947 eulogy for Mernonynski

¹⁶⁶ "Yael Garson".

¹⁶⁷ After the establishment of Israel, Siyoma Meronyanski's death was the subject of an investigative committee convened at the MKI's insistence. The committee, the first of its kind in the State of Israel, found that Meronyanski had been beaten to death by the Jewish CID detectives who interrogated him "since he was not willing to reveal information about himself and his actions" ("Maskanot Va'adat Haḥakira Le'inyan Retsihato shel Siyoma Meronyanski" The Conclusions of the Investigative Committee in the Matter of Siyoma Meronyanski's Murder, *Kol Ha'am*, September 4, 1949). Meronyanski's death caused confusion among his murderers and they disposed of his body. The officers involved, now in the service of the Israeli police, closed ranks and would not admit their guilt, so no criminal charges could be brought against them; however, the committee recommended "to the management of the service employing them to seriously consider whether they are worthy to stay in service in light of the committee's conclusions" (Ibid.). The officers involved were fired but later reinstated, rising to high ranks in the Israeli police.

¹⁶⁸ "Siyoma Meronyanski" (Siyoma Meronyanski), *Kol Ha'am*, August 1941.

stating that "his devotion to the Party was tireless and boundless."¹⁶⁹ Again like Yael Garson, he was elevated to the status of a martyr on the altar of independence and the anti-imperialist struggle. In the 1951 eulogy for Mernonynski, he is memorialized as a hero of independence,¹⁷⁰ his death charged with meaning as having been part of the popular struggle against "the murderers of our sons and daughters – the imperialists and their servants."¹⁷¹ His example should serve, it says, to strengthen the people's ranks for the "battle with the imperialist enemy at the gates."¹⁷²

The commemoration of Mernonynski continued to be marked by anti-imperialist discourse well into the late 1950s and early 1960s. In the 1957 eulogy, the writer states that "we celebrate the day of his murder by savages and servants of imperialism as a day of battle against present day imperialism and its servants."¹⁷³ In 1961, his death was linked to the anti-imperialist struggles worldwide, for "imperialists will not be able to sustain their rule by spilling the blood of the freedom fighters – not in Algeria, not in Angola, nor in any other colonial country."¹⁷⁴ While Yael Garson was held up as a model for Banki, Siyoma Mernonynski was considered a hero of the Party. One of the Party's clubs in Tel Aviv was named after him. In Banki his name too was memorialized.¹⁷⁵ However, in both the MKI and Banki no ritual tradition developed around him. The absence of a known grave and the fact that the Party could not find the

¹⁶⁹ "Siyoma Meronyanski" (Siyoma Meronyanski), *Kol Ha'am*, July 12, 1947.

¹⁷⁰ "Zikhro Yihiye La'ad" (His Memory will Live Forever!), *Kol Ha'am*, July 6, 1951: "In every corner of our young country the graves of the fighters for Israel's independence shine in the light of bravery and devotion. Among them – a special place is reserved for the unknown grave of the independence fighter Siyoma Meronyanski."

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² "Im zikhro shel Siyoma Meronyansk" (With the Memory of Siyoma Meronyanski), *Kol Ha'am*, July 9, 1954.

¹⁷³ "Anu Lo Nishtokh Velo Nanu'ah as asher Rotshey Siyoma Meronyanski Yu'amdu Ladin" (We will not be silenced and we will not rest until the murderers of Siyoma Meronyanski are brought to Justice), (*Kol Ha'am*, July 5, 1957).

¹⁷⁴ "Ruho Haya Imanu, Tihye Imanu La'ad" (His Spirit Lives among Us, Will Live among Us Forever), *Kol Ha'am*, July 7, 1961.

¹⁷⁵ Shafran, *Farewell Communism*, 90.

resources to erect a monument in his name contributed to the relatively smaller place Siyoma Mernonynski occupied in the Communist memorial culture.

The third Communist hero of independence was Eliyahu (Alyosha) Gozansky, one of the most gifted workers' leaders that the PKP produced in the 1930s and 1940s. He was born in Petrograd (Leningrad) on August 1st 1914 to Freda and Yitzhak Gozansky, the latter a progressive lawyer. The family moved to Grodno (Poland) in 1917. As a young secondary school student, Gozansky revealed both a tendency to "take the side of the weak"¹⁷⁶ and an emerging political awareness, arguing with his history teacher about anti-Semitism. At that stage, like many future Communist leaders, he joined *Hashomer Hatzair*. In 1930 Gozansky immigrated to Palestine. After a short stay in Kibbutz Glil-Yam, he started to study at the agricultural school *Mikve Israel*. There he was radicalized and joined the underground Communist Youth.¹⁷⁷ In 1936 he came back to Grodno to learn to be a surveyor, and there he joined the Polish Communist Youth. As an activist in the Polish Communist Youth, he was caught by the Polish authorities and sentenced to eight years in prison. Acting on his father's advice, he exercised his Palestinian citizenship and was deported back to Palestine.

In Palestine Alyosha became an activist of the underground PKP. Under the cover of his work as a surveyor, he spread Communist propaganda in the army camps and among workers. In 1941 he was arrested by the British police. After his release, he started to work as a diamond polisher. Having worked in this industry for less than a year, he organized a strike and from then on became a union organizer involved in all union conflicts in Palestine in the 1940s. The union

¹⁷⁶ Tamar Gozansky ed., *Kum Hitba'era: Eliyahu Alyusha Gojanski Alav Vektavav (1943-1948)* (Arise, ye Workers from your Slumber: Life and Collected Works of Eliyahu (Alyosha) Gozansky (1943-1948)), (Haifa: Pardes Publishers, 2009), 7.

¹⁷⁷ Together with the Zionist youth movements, the agricultural schools were the *Yishuv's* equivalent of the British public schools, where the future leaders of Israel were made. Gozansky's conversion to Communism shows to what extent the Jewish Communists were at odds with the society around them, while being at same time participating in the institutions of that society. For the place of the agricultural schools in the Zionist elite-building effort, see Almog, *The Sabra*.

work uncovered in Alyosha his organizational skills and ability to mobilize workers from different backgrounds and of divergent political stripes to fight for their rights. Apart from his union work, Gozansky was also active within the Party. "In 1946 Alyosha initiated the Communist Party Central Committee's resolution to change *'Kol Ha'am'* from a weekly to a daily."¹⁷⁸ As the conflict between the *Yishuv*, including the PKP, and the British escalated, Gozansky's attention, as well as the Party's, turned to forging connections abroad. He traveled in the newly established People's Democracies in Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and his homeland Poland, cultivating contacts with the new regimes. With the breakout of the 1948 war, Gozansky was active in support of the Israeli war effort, giving interviews to Eastern European media and public speeches in Jewish communities. His last public appearance was at the unification conference of the Polish Socialists and Communists in December 1948. On 21 December 1948, he died in a plane crash over Greece at the age of 34.

Gozansky's death marked the start of a ritual tradition that would last through the 1950s until the schism of 1965, presenting Alyosha as the symbol of the Party's patriotic stand in the 1948 war. The veneration and association of Gozansky with the independence struggle started with his funeral. News of his death was announced in an obituary on the front page of *Kol Ha'am*, stating that Gozansky "died at his post in the service of the Party and the people."¹⁷⁹ The obituary briefly described Alyosha's life, stressing that he "worked hard to mobilize sympathy and aid for the *Yishuv's* war for independence," going on to say that "on his third visit to Eastern Europe Alyosha very successfully worked toward organizing material help and fighters to repel the invaders."¹⁸⁰ The first ritual connected to Gozansky's hero cult was a wake in his memory

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 27.

¹⁷⁹ "Eliyahu Gojanski" (Eliyahu Gozansky), *Kol Ha'am*, December 26, 1948.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

immediately after the news of his death. It was a simple rite, attended by Alexander Penn, at which the Party's Ron choir sang and MKI secretary Shmuel Mikunis delivered a eulogy.¹⁸¹

From the very first speeches, obituaries and rites, the image of Gozansky, as projected by the MKI, was already taking shape. Again the element of the tireless Communist appears, Gozansky being praised for having "above all a boundless and diverse capability for work."¹⁸² The connection to the struggle for independence is not neglected either. Gozansky had been picked by the Central Committee to head the Party delegation to Eastern Europe "to mobilize material and political help,"¹⁸³ working tirelessly to get it to Israel. Gozansky's funeral was the starting point for the rites that would enshrine his name as the Communist hero of the 1948 war. It was also a way for the MKI to project its own image at that historical moment.

After the body was flown in from Greece, the coffin lay in state in the Party club in Tel Aviv, draped with the MKI flag. The walls of the club "were covered in red flags and the white and blue flag. A big picture of the late comrade Eliyahu Gozansky was hung on the wall. The picture was taken from comrade Gozansky's last speech in Eastern Europe, to mobilize help for Israel's war."¹⁸⁴ The funeral procession started from the Party's club, led by a company "of soldiers, officers of the Israeli Defence Force."¹⁸⁵ The coffin was carried by MKI Central Committee members. The procession was made up of Palestinians and Jews, representatives of the *Histadrut* and various unions, representatives of the workers parties and workers and representatives of the newly established Czech and Polish People's Democracies. Marching in

¹⁸¹ "Atseret Lezikhro shel Eliyahu Gojanski" (A Rally in Memory of Eliyahu Gozansky), *Kol Ha'am*, November 29, 1948.

¹⁸² "Dorot shel Komunistim Yilmedu et Ma'ašav" (Generations of Communists will Study his Deeds), *Kol Ha'am*, December 31, 1948.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ "Hayom Beshalosh – Hahalvaya shel Haḥaver Gojanski" (Today at 3 – The Funeral of Comrade Gozansky), *Kol Ha'am*, January 13, 1949.

¹⁸⁵ "Hamonim Livu et Haḥaver Eliyahu Gojanski Lemenuḥat Olamim" (Multitudes Accompanied Comrade Eliyahu Gozansky to his Eternal Rest), *Kol Ha'am*, February 14, 1948.

the rear were "the ranks of the pioneers, the Young Communist League and members of the Party."¹⁸⁶ The funeral march stopped in two symbolic places, at the Workers Council of Tel Aviv in Brenner House and at the *Histadrut* Executive. At each point, eulogies were delivered by prominent Party members. The connection between Gozansky and the struggle for independence was reasserted, Meir Vilner stating "that many who are present here – are here thanks to the recruitment of comrade Gozansky in the People's Democracies for Israel's Independence War."¹⁸⁷ The ceremony ended in the graveyard with a eulogy by the MKI's General Secretary and the laying of wreaths.

The funeral march embodied the Jewish Communists' conception of themselves and their Party. MKI was a single entity made up of Arabs and Jews, symbolizing the internationalist solidarity of Party ideology and practice; it consisted of two main bodies, the Party and its youth movement. It was rooted in the Israeli working class and part of its centre of power, the *Histadrut*. The Party was also a participant in the patriotic struggle for independence and in the main tool for its attainment, the army. In essence, this symbolic procession expressed the ideal self-conception of the Jewish Communists for the years ahead. It also reflected the symbolic centers of power the MKI drew upon: the Israeli working class, both Palestinian and Jewish, world Communism and the Israeli state.

From the start, the cult surrounding Gozansky was characterized by a stress on the association between his deeds and the struggle for independence. The inscription on his gravestone noted that he'd died "on a mission to recruit help for Israel's independence war at the age of thirty four."¹⁸⁸ The sign of the Hammer and Sickle hung from the stone.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ *Kol Ha'am*, 10.24.1949.

The first anniversary of Gozansky's death was marked by a memorial that consisted of speeches by MKI leaders, the reading of poems devoted to Alyosha, and choral singing. The speeches about Gozansky's life stressed, among other things, "his great and important enterprise in recruiting comprehensive help in Eastern Europe on behalf of our Party, for Israel's war of independence."¹⁸⁹ The memorial rally would become the main fixture in Gozansky's cult for years to come. In a long speech, Meir Vilner sketched Gozansky's image as the Communist hero of independence and a paragon of the Jewish Communist, portraying Gozansky as the "driving force of the Party,"¹⁹⁰ a political activist who was behind every major Party enterprise, and the "theoretician and the leader of our Party in its union-class struggle."¹⁹¹ He went on to praise the fallen Party secretary for having been "a true Marxist and revolutionary... devoted to the cooperation between the Jewish and Arab workers."¹⁹² Vilner glorified Alyosha's hatred of Fascism and imperialism, stressing that he'd been loyal "to the land of Socialism, an admirer of the Bolshevik Party and comrade Stalin."¹⁹³ His trips to Eastern Europe to aid the Israeli war effort and his support of Israeli independence are described in accordance with the MKI's anti-imperialist discourse, Vilner stating that Gozansky "headed our Party activity to recruit comprehensive aid to Israel's war of independence in the People's Democracies."¹⁹⁴ Gozansky's patriotism grew from his internationalism: "he embodied the patriotism of the Communist-internationalist."¹⁹⁵ Though he understood that the Zionist leadership of the new state was "pro-imperialist," he knew that "objectively this is a justified anti-imperialist war."¹⁹⁶

¹⁸⁹ "Azkara Be'Tel Aviv Leyom Hashana Lemoto shel Alef Gojanski" (A Memorial in Tel Aviv on the First Anniversary of A. Gozansky's Death), *Kol Ha'am*, January 1, 1950.

¹⁹⁰ Gozansky, *Arise, ye Workers from your Slumber*, 428.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 428.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 429.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 431.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 428.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 428.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 428.

The Jewish Communists' use of this characterization of the 1948 War was meant to alleviate, through the image of Gozansky, the contradiction between their anti-imperialism and the need to rationalize their participation in the state-building enterprise.

In the following years, the cult surrounding Gozansky's figure was standardized in a way similar to the commemoration of Yael Garson. On the third anniversary of his death, "delegations on behalf of the Communist Party, Banki centre, and the local committee of the Party's branches in Tel Aviv and Jaffa"¹⁹⁷ laid wreaths on his grave. The keynote speaker, MKI General Secretary Shmuel Mikunis, emphasized Gozansky's "fearless struggle for the independence of the country" and urged the participants "to continue in the spirit and way of Alyosha for the independence of the state of Israel."¹⁹⁸

In the 1950s an attempt was made to celebrate Gozansky's memorial closer to Israel's Independence Day,¹⁹⁹ but by the 1960s it was set on 21 December, the date of his death. The motifs established in the formative stages of the cult did not change as the years passed. In the notes for a speech by Shmuel Mikunis on the tenth anniversary of Gozansky's death, the comprehensive image of him as the embodiment of a perfect Communist persists.²⁰⁰ He is lauded for, among other things, his "mission abroad – aid to the independence struggle and denunciation of the Zionist leadership in Eretz-Israel."²⁰¹ Miknis depicts Alyosha as someone whose

¹⁹⁷ "Azkara Leyhom Hashan Hashlishi Lemoto Hatragi shel Alef Gojanski" (A Memorial on the 3rd Anniversary of the Tragic Death of A. Gozansky), *Kol Ha'am*, November 24, 1951.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ The memorial at the gravesite in 1952 was held on April 29th and the announcement in *Kol Ha'am* made the connection to independence clear when it stated that Gozansky died "on a mission of the Party to the People's Democracies to recruit aid for Israel's independence war" (*Kol Ha'am*, April 29, 1952).

²⁰⁰ "Yom Hashana Ha'asiri Lemoto Hatragi shel Haverenu Hayaqar Alyosha" (The 10th Anniversary of the Tragic Death of our Dear Comrade Alyosha), Lavon Institute for Labour Research, IV-104-85-144.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

Communist ideology and ideals prompted him to integrate "a) anti-imperialist struggle in its local and international meaning with b) patriotism and internationalism."²⁰²

On the fifteenth anniversary, the ritual at the grave was preceded by a memorial rally at the Party's club. The ceremony was moulded after the revolutionary rally and dominated by speeches. Above the stage hung a picture of Gozansky and his famous saying "How hard it is to be a Communist, how good it is to be a Communist."²⁰³ A dirge was played, followed by speeches. The rally ended with readings of excerpts from Gozansky's articles, more dirges and the singing of the *Internationale*. Then the traditional memorial at the gravesite was held, with the laying of wreaths and a speech by a member of the Central Committee. The speeches, at both the rally and the gravesite, stressed Alyosha's all-round perfection as the embodiment of a Jewish Communist and his importance to Israel's independence. Zvi Breidstein noted that upon his death Gozansky had been "on his way to Israel, from his mission of recruiting aid in the People's Democracies for the people of Israel's independence war and a mission on behalf of the Communist Party to the unity conference of the United Polish Workers Party. These two tasks are symbolic of the combination of Israeli patriotism and proletarian internationalism in Alyosha's personality and politics."²⁰⁴ At the gravesite the same emphasis on the integration of the two elements was made by Berl Balti.

Banki members participated in the rituals that were organized by the MKI and commemorated Gozansky's name as well in evenings that were devoted to all three heroes of the anti-imperialist struggle.²⁰⁵ Still, despite the calls by Party leaders to learn from Gozansky, the

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ "Moreshet Gojanski – Nekhes Lema'avakey Maki" (Gozansky's Legacy - An Asset in MKI's Campaigns), *Kol Ha'am*, December 22, 1963.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ "Artsenu Yafa – Zar lo Yishloṭ Ba" (Our land is beautiful – a foreigner will not rule it), Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #25.

evidence does not point to any widespread cult around his figure. The image of Alyosha that Banki members internalized was in essence the one the MKI propagated, as one of the movement's ex-members testifies.²⁰⁶ The fact that Banki did not develop its independent cult around the fallen Party secretary points to the movement's organizational independence. At the same time, it relates to the cultural similarities between Banki and its mother party, as the figure of Gozansky projected by the MKI was shared by its youth movements.

The cult that developed around the martyrs of the anti-imperialist struggle validated the anti-imperialist myth that lay at the heart of Jewish Communist patriotism. Garson and Mernonynski, who had been victims of anti-Communist repression, were at first portrayed as above all Communists and anti-imperialists, the independence of the country as only a byproduct of their sacrifice. They were portrayed as tireless, well organized revolutionaries to be emulated by the young and adult Party members. This portrayal of the tireless, punctilious Communist and anti-imperialist was transferred to Gozansky and expanded to include all his life's work. However, despite the continuity both in content and ritual, Alyosha's cult exhibited a new element: Gozansky was not just a model Communist and an anti-imperialist, but a patriotic hero of the War of Independence.

This new element was integrated into the ideological codes of the Tel Aviv Jewish Communists. Alyosha's patriotic national image was framed in the language of two ideological principles: anti-imperialism and internationalism. Connecting his figure to the anti-imperialist myth meant that the Jewish Communists attributed to Gozansky a proper understanding of the 1948 war as anti-imperialist by nature. Gozansky could be both an Israeli patriot and an internationalist. He could be nationalist and Communist. He could assist the Israeli war effort and work for Arab-Jewish unity.

²⁰⁶ Shafran, *Farewell Communism*, 91.

On the face of it, the contradictions in the figure of Gozansky and the clash between internationalism and nationalism that he represents are hard to reconcile. However, looking at the practices of other Communist parties in Europe and the Third World and the ideological tenets of the Jewish Communists may place the actions of the latter in context. The German Communists, mainly in the years after 1945, adopted German nationalism and sought to present themselves as the force that led modern German nationalism.²⁰⁷ In Indo-China, later Vietnam, the Communist Party became the personification of Vietnamese nationalism and the national war of liberation against the French and, after 1954, South Vietnam and the U.S.²⁰⁸ In that sense, the Jewish Communists' actions in the late 1940s and afterward were justified in the context of world Communism. To the Jewish Communists themselves, there was no contradiction between their internationalism and nationalism, as Nissim Calderon phrased it: "Nationalism was welcomed not as a negative phenomenon: we accepted it. There was a Communist tradition of the move of the Soviet Union to accept nationalism and, moreover, pride that the Bolsheviks gave freedom to the peoples that had been under the Tsarist yoke".²⁰⁹

Developing a non-Zionist Jewish nationalism and manifesting it through anti-Zionist patriotism enabled the Jewish Communists to settle the clash between nationalism and internationalism. They could thus present Gozansky as both an Israeli patriot and an internationalist at the same time.

It is hard to determine to what extent the participants in Gozansky's commemoration truly believed in the myth created around him. However, the centrality he occupied in the MKI

²⁰⁷ For the way the SED adopted German nationalism, see Nothnagle, *Building the East German Myth*.

²⁰⁸ James DeFronzo, *Revolution and Revolutionary Movements* (Philadelphia: West View Press, 2011), 149-83; Xuan Phuong, "Vietnam: on Her Attraction to Vietnamese Communism," in *The Communist Experience in the Twentieth Century: a Global History through Sources*, ed. Glennys Young. 21-26 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

²⁰⁹ Nissim Calderon, 3.3.09.

commemoration culture suggests that he truly presented a figure that resolved the Party's ideological and political contradictions regarding the 1948 War. It is telling that Gozansky was memorialized in an NLL (National Liberation League)²¹⁰ obituary in *Kol Ha'am* "on the death of the dear comrade Eliyahu Gozansky."²¹¹

Around twenty-five MKI and Banki members were killed in the 1948 war. The Party and Banki never developed a cult around them. In a reflection of the strength of the state memorial that developed around the fallen, they were only memorialized in a yearly obituary in *Kol Ha'am*.²¹² Gozansky, who had been a civilian and not directly involved in the fighting, became the independence hero of the Party. In part, that may be explained by the fact that he was a leading figure in the Party. The cult created around Gozansky, at least in Tel Aviv, was in a long tradition of commemorating Communist leaders in order to legitimize the Communist political and social order, most notably Ernst Thälmann and V. I. Lenin.

Lenin's cult was the first model for the commemoration of a major Communist leader on a grand scale. The veneration of Lenin started after the 1918 assassination attempt. It became a nationwide campaign after his death in 1924, only to be eclipsed by the Stalin personality cult in the 1930s. It was revived again after the 20th Congress and continued until *perestroika*. The

²¹⁰ NLL – National Liberation League, was founded in 1943 after the split of the bi-national PKP. The organization was active among the growing Palestinian working class and its unions. With the 1947 Partition the organization split between those who supported the UN plan and those who objected to it. While the fighting and the deportation of most of the Palestinians broke its base of power. For a detailed history of the NLL and a debate on its nature see Yehosua Porat, *The National Liberation League: Its Rise, Its Essence and Fall (1943-1948)* *The New East* 14 (1968); Budeiri, *The Palestine Communist Party 1919-1948*.

²¹¹ *Kol Ha'am*, October 28, 1948. Quoted in Ben Zaken, *Communism as Cultural Imperialism*, 180.

²¹² The obituaries began to appear in the late 1940s, commemorating a young Communist who was killed in clashes with the British ("Lezikhro shel Yud Tehomi" In Memory of Y. Tehmy, *Kol Ha'am*, February 27, 1946). They usually included a picture of the dead and a short text written by a friend or family. They multiplied during the 1948 war, culminating in an entire page devoted to all the fallen Communists, their names framed in black as is customary in Israeli obituaries, and some of them with pictures. At the centre of the page Gozansky's name appeared most prominently ("Kavod Vetehila Leloḥamey Tsava Isra'el Shenafu Bemilhemet Ha'atsma'ut" Honour and Glory to Heroes of Israel's Army that Fall in the War of Independence, *Kol Ha'am*, May 4, 1949). The obituaries continued to be published well into the 1960s ("Lezikhram shel Ne'edarim Volodya" In Memory of Absentees Voldeya, *Kol Ha'am*, May 4, 1964).

Lenin cult grew out of the peasants' naïve monarchism, the cult of the of the genius writer among the Russian intelligentsia of the nineteenth century, and early Bolshevist god building,²¹³ in which some non-Leninist Bolsheviks, most notably Alexander Bogdanov and Anatoly Lunacharsky, aspired to create a proletarian religion and culture. The god-builders fused Marxism with other philosophical methods, mainly those of Ernst Mach and Richard Avenarius. Lenin was opposed to the god-builders, inducing him to write his major philosophical work *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*.²¹⁴ In the 1920s it evolved into a pseudo-religious cult, many of its cultural practices borrowed from Russian Orthodoxy. Lenin was memorialized by everything from Lenin corners that replaced the traditional icons to children's books that extolled his exemplary life. The dead leader's embalmed body became the physical centre of the cult. Appealing to Russian Orthodoxy's belief in the incorruptibility of the saintly body, hailed as a stunning achievement of Soviet science, it became the shrine of the cult of Lenin. In the 1920s the main ritual was conducted on January 21st, the date of his death, and quickly standardized into a combination of speeches and "music, which was a standard part of these memorial gatherings."²¹⁵ The main theme of the early and late Lenin cult was the immortality of the leader. Whether through his writings, which became sacred, or his embalmed body, Lenin was used to legitimize the rule of the Communist Party after his death.

The Ernst Thälmann cult was first developed in the late years of the Weimar Republic as the KPD tried to counter the growing Hitler cult.²¹⁶ He was first presented as a Marxist-Leninist *Führer*, "but the real model for the Thälmann cult was, of course, the Lenin cult in the Soviet

²¹³ Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives: the Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

²¹⁴ Vladimir Lenin, *Materialism and Empiriocriticism: Critical Comments on a Reactionary Philosophy*, In V. E. Lenin, *Selected Writings Vol. 3* (Sifriat Poalim: Merhavia, 1950).

²¹⁵ Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives*, 147.

²¹⁶ Nothnagle, *Building the East German Myth*, 116.

Union."²¹⁷ From the late 1940s the SED sanctified Thälmann's memory, in the same way the Soviets sanctified Lenin's, as a quasi religious figure to legitimate the rule of the SED in the eyes of East German youths. "Thälmann's life and death were made into a veritable children's religion in the Young Pioneers."²¹⁸ At first he served as a sort of cozy substitute father to a generation of East German war orphans, but at a later stage his un-avenged death became the main element of his cult. Like the Lenin cult in the U.S.S.R., the East German Thälmann cult stressed its subject's immortality, as clearly indicated by the opening lines of the "Thälmann song," adapted from Max Zimmering's poem "Legacy": "As if Ernst Thälmann could ever die/ Thälmann died yet did not die."²¹⁹ However, despite the overtly religious overtones of Thälmann's cult, his figure did not achieve Lenin's godlike status. To the Young Pioneers he was presented from the early 1950s as *parteilich*,²²⁰ a Christ-like figure, and in children's books as "sweet Jesus," known from the Lutheran Sunday school sermons.

The Thälmann cult found expression in a series of rites that were inaugurated by the 1952 naming of the East German Pioneers after him. From the 1950s to the 1960s, East German children engaged in solemn "arcane rituals and incantations surrounding their pennants and blue neckerchiefs... 'the pioneer salute,' the ceremonial kissing of the red flag, the decoration of red-draped, altar-like Thälmann 'tradition corners' in their club houses."²²¹ In contrast to the Lenin cult, the Thälmann cult had no physical focal point, and it was performed in schools and FDJ clubs.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 121.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 117.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 121.

²²⁰ *Parteilichkeit* in German means partisanship or more accurately taking sides. In the jargon of East German Communism, it meant that one should view all social, cultural and economic questions from the perspective of the working class struggle according to Marxist-Leninist ideology. In simple terms, it meant that the SED was always right as the only interpreter of Marxism-Leninism through *Parteilichkeit*. Ibid., 15-20.

²²¹ Ibid., 119.

The Gozansky cult was targeted at a much smaller audience than those of the Lenin and Thälmann cults. The MKI was not a ruling party and lacked the resources of state machinery to mount a full-scale cult. Gozansky himself was not a national figure before his death.²²² It was therefore the cult of a small, perhaps mostly Tel Aviv centred group with no real influence outside Communist circles. The cults of Lenin and Thälmann were meant to transmit to the population the message of the political immortality of the dead leader. By contrast, the Gozansky cult was not built on the immortality of its subject. Like Lenin, however, Gozansky was presented as a perfect Communist who embodied in his actions the Party itself. And as in the case of Lenin, adherence to Gozansky meant loyalty to the Party.

The Lenin and Thälmann cults functioned as legitimizing cults. Since their subjects were the personification of the Party, mass participation in the cult legitimized the regime. Gozansky's cult served a similar function. Gozansky being the personification of the MKI's policies, participation in his cult meant that the Party rank and file recognized the legitimacy of the Party's policies and values.

The creation of the Lenin and Thälmann cults was prompted by crises such as war or the death of the revolution's central figure. Lenin's figure was invoked by his successors to mobilize the Soviet people in the wake of the revolution and the civil war, and Thälmann's by the SED to recruit the loyalty of a reluctant East German populace. Gozansky's cult was also motivated by a

²²² The *Histadrut* organ *Davar* mentioned Gozansky twice in 1948 and 1949. The first time the newspaper quoted the resolutions of the MKI's Central Committee to send him to Eastern Europe. The second time it quoted his testimony before the Meronyanski investigative committee, also noting his death. It may be speculated that the MAPAI-controlled newspaper, which had no liking for Communists, was not inclined to memorialize Gozansky's name. However, he was also a delegated official of the union and active in its Tel Aviv Workers Council, which makes the almost complete disregard of his death a little puzzling. At the same time, it need be kept in mind that Gozansky's death occurred in the midst of a war with thousands of youngsters killed at the front, which may have sidelined it. His absence from the pages of *Davar* points to the fact that Gozansky was not a national figure. See "Mehaqlaṭot Hava'ad Hamerkazi shel Hamiflaga Haḳomunistit Ha'Isra'elit" (From the Resolutions of the Central Committee of the Israeli Communist Party), *Davar*, July 19, 1948, and "Hamshekh Ha'edyot beinyan Meronyanski" (The Continued Testimonies in the Matter of Meronyanski), *Davar*, January 31, 1949.

crisis, that of the 1948 war. As a Communist hero of independence, Gozansky was used to justify the Party's patriotic stand during the war. The contradiction that support for the creation of a Jewish state posed to the Palestinian-Jewish character of the MKI was resolved through Gozansky's image. Thus, a crisis that might have ripped the Party apart was averted and the Jewish Communists were able to develop an Israeli patriotism²²³ based, among other things, on Gozansky's image.

The cults of Lenin and Thälmann were rife with religious practices and symbolism derived from Russian Orthodoxy and Lutheran Protestantism. By contrast, Gozansky's cult was devoid of any quasi-religious elements. It may be assumed that the overall secular character of the MKI and its Jewish members contributed to the absence of this element. Another cause might be the fact that the national cult of the fallen itself featured pseudo-religious elements²²⁴ that the Jewish Communists were reluctant to adopt into their own rites commemorating a civilian and political figure.

The cults of Lenin and Thälmann were in large part aimed at children and the young. Thälmann's figure was used heavily to indoctrinate the young. From 1950 onwards Thälmann held an ever increasing place in the FDJ. In 1952, "following the tradition of the 'pioneer organization V. I. Lenin' in the Soviet Union,"²²⁵ the Young Pioneers were named after him. Lenin also became a role model for Soviet children, as "the propagation of Leninism" became "an increasingly important focus of the cult after Lenin's death."²²⁶ When Lenin's cult was revived in the late 1950s and 1960s, after having been eclipsed by Stalin, "the highlight of the

²²³ The concept of anti-Zionist patriotism is derived from the words of Dani Peter-Petziel, a former "Left Man" and one of Banki's leading instructors (Peter-Petziel, *Heart on the Left on Education and Society*, 78-79). This concept is meant to explain the fact that the Jewish Communists could see themselves as loyal Israeli citizens while negating the Zionist content of the state.

²²⁴ For the Israeli cult of the fallen and the development of Remembrance Day, see Ben-Amos, "In the Circle of Singing and Dancing" and Azaryahu, *State Cults*.

²²⁵ Nothnagle, *Building the East German Myth*, 118.

²²⁶ Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives*, 227.

yearly birthday celebrations were the parades of the Young Pioneers," as "the Lenin cult of the Sixties placed special emphasis on the propaganda of Leninism for children."²²⁷

In contrast to these cults, the Gozansky cult was not targeted at Banki. For example, in draft notes for a speech on the tenth anniversary of his death, emphasis is placed on different elements of his figure. However, there is no special appeal to the Communist youth to follow in his footsteps, only a vague call for all Communists "to save Party unity."²²⁸ It may be assumed that Gozansky, a Party leader and union organizer, was less relevant to Banki members, whose hero cults were more focused on fallen Communist youth members like Mark Milman and Yael Garson.²²⁹ It may be assumed that Banki members found little to attract them in a figure that did not have some underground or military lure. This relative lack of attraction might also be explained by the age difference between Gozansky and the young Banki members: as a family man, he probably held little attraction for youth members. It is also clear that the MKI invested little in the dissemination of Gozansky's figure among its younger generation, furthering his absence from their daily activity.

The Thälmann and Lenin cults were disseminated through a large variety of rituals. Young Pioneers were inducted into the Communist youth movement under the names of both leaders, which were also commemorated in countless Lenin and tradition corners. Most of these rituals did not exist in Banki practice, in regard to Gozansky or any other hero. However, the Jewish Communists did adopt one form of ritual, namely the Lenin evenings combining speeches and artistic performances. There was one other ritualistic resemblance, in that the Lenin cult was centered on the Mausoleum and the Gozansky cult on the grave. However, the embalmed body of Lenin, which became the symbolic focal point of world Communism, was predicated on the

²²⁷ Ibid., 260.

²²⁸ "The 10th Anniversary of the Tragic Death of our Dear Comrade Alyosha".

²²⁹ Yoram Gozansky, interview by author, February 22, 2009.

idea of the leader's immortality. Gozansky's grave did not become the site of a mass cult and was but a humble monument to a devoted servant of the MKI and national independence. While Lenin lived, Gozansky was very much dead.

The Gozansky cult was not as intense and widespread as those of Lenin and Thälmann. It was, in fact, a pale shadow of these meta-cults and in many cases bore little resemblance to them. Above all, it reflected the time of its inception during the 1948 war when the Jewish Communists needed a hero to legitimize Party policy and later a figure to resolve the contradictions that policy raised. It reflected the state of the MKI in society at large, as the Jewish Communists were a small minority on the margins of Jewish Israeli politics and culture. It can be seen as an embryonic mass cult of the fallen leader, and it is intriguing to speculate how it might have developed if the MKI had attained a more central place in Israeli politics.

Apart from the rites connected to the fallen Communist heroes, the Jewish Communists, like most Israelis, took part in the mass celebrations of independence in the streets of Israel. These celebrations were described by Maoz Azaryahu as creating "a framework that enabled the participants to experience a feeling of closeness and solidarity."²³⁰ As for the connections made in the ensuing spontaneous atmosphere of the public sphere, "... some of them look unlikely and even impossible in the rigid structure of day-to-day life."²³¹ This *communitas*, with its accompanying liminal state, allowed even the marginalized Jewish Communists and Banki members in particular to take part in the celebrations. This did not mean, however, that the young Communists blended in with the crowd. For even as they participated in the gatherings and group dancing typical of the evening, they stood out in their white shirts and red ties.

²³⁰ Azaryahu, *State Cults*, 220.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 220.

A photograph taken by Teddy Brauner on Independence Day in 1950 shows MKI and Banki members standing on a truck, some of them dressed in the Banki uniform, holding up the national and class flags in their clenched fists. The dancing of Banki members in the Mograbi square, then the centre of Tel Aviv, is documented in Ron Barkai's semiautobiographical book *Like an Egyptian Movie*. As the protagonist of the book approaches the square, he sees the members of the Zionist-Socialist youth movements in their blue uniforms "form circles, every movement to itself, dancing and singing."²³² Then some confusion breaks out at the edge of the square and draws him over to a new circle of dancers. In the face of the audience's hostile reaction, "boys and girls in white shirts with red ties around their necks"²³³ dance, singing a revolutionary song.

While Barkai's book describes a hostile and violent reaction by the audience, and it is likely that in the 1950s the reactions to Banki's appearances were hostile, by the 1960s the communitas formed during the mass celebrations included the young Communists too. One ex-member of the movement recalled that while Banki members were seen as a bit odd, they still were "absorbed by the size"²³⁴ of the massed crowds. The dances were performed with great enthusiasm by the young Banki members, eager to show off their nationalist zeal and to surpass the rival youth movements. In Tel Aviv the celebrations ended with a bonfire on the seashore or the banks of the Yarkon.²³⁵

²³² Ron Barkai, *Kmo Seret Mitsri* (Like an Egyptian Movie), (Tel Aviv: Xargol Publishers, 2001), 192.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 193.

²³⁴ Nissim Calderon, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, March 3, 2009.

²³⁵ Yoram Gozansky, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, February 3, 2009.

3.5 Ritual, Narrative, Discourse and Identity

From the 1920s and 1930s, the Jewish Communists developed their own rites, as well as a discourse around the two defining events in modern Jewish history: the Holocaust and the establishment of Israel. In the process of developing this side of the Communist subculture, they shaped a Jewish Israeli identity uniquely their own. Their comprehension of the Holocaust and independence was dominated by two meta-narratives of heroic resistance and anti-imperialism. The Holocaust became part of a narrative of heroism and resistance, posing an example of total self-sacrifice which the Jewish Communists were supposed to follow. The rituals commemorating the Warsaw uprising reinforced the heroic narrative through the spoken word. The Jewish Communists ignored the overwhelming majority of Jewish victims and concentrated only on the minority of cases of armed resistance. At the same time, they did not shy away from imparting to Party and Banki members their own unique motifs. The uprising in Warsaw was connected to the victories of the U.S.S.R in Stalingrad. The Soviet aid to European Jewry was emphasized. The help the Jewish underground received from the Polish left was praised as an example of internationalism, and the cooperation between Communists and Zionists was stressed.

The Communist narrative of the Holocaust was meant to create an identity that integrated Jewish pride and internationalism. It did not differentiate between Jews and non-Jews, unless the latter belonged to the wrong political party. There is no evidence that internationalism, so fundamental to Communist thinking, became blurred when a more victim-oriented narrative started to emerge. First, the heroic narrative was still the dominant one in the early 1960s and internationalism was an important element of it. Second, the new narrative was just forming and

its elements were still in flux. One can only speculate what shape Jewish Communists who stayed in the RAKH after 1965 gave to their view of the Holocaust.

The Jewish Communist narrative of the Holocaust was constructed around a basic dichotomy of good versus evil. The ultimate evil was Nazism; the Jewish Communists' Other was the Judenräte. Reflecting attitudes common in Israeli society, the Jewish Communists viewed the Judenräte as collaborators with the Germans. As Marxists, they described them as a class manifestation of the Jewish bourgeoisie, in contrast to the Jewish resistance that was identified with the Jewish working class. The emphasis on the class nature of the Ghetto and the hatred of the Judenräte were meant to reinforce in the Jewish Communist identity the premise of a basic Marxist category such as class warfare. When it came to explaining the Holocaust, the Jewish Communists turned to their ideological tenets, rejecting religious and nationalist Zionist explanations.

For the Jewish Communists, independence from the British was closely connected with anti-imperialism. From the late 1930s onwards, they were increasingly integrated into the political culture of the *Yishuv*, this process reaching a high point at the end of the 1940s. As the relations between the *Yishuv* and Britain broke down, Jewish Communists identified the struggle as being objectively anti-Imperialist. Influenced by the Marxist-Leninist stress on imperialism and the Soviet support for Jewish nationhood in Palestine, they supported the *Yishuv's* anti-British struggle and joined the Israeli war effort in the 1948 war.

According to the narrative constructed by the Jewish Communists, the 1948 war was the result of conspiring British and American imperialism. British imperialists had sent the armies of the reactionary Arab regimes to invade the newly established state of Israel. American imperialists had tried to prevent complete independence by embargoing weapons shipments to

Israel and by political manoeuvrings in the United Nations. Israel's only true friends were the anti-imperialist U.S.S.R. and the People's Democracies that had provided the new state with arms and political aid. While the struggle for independence was anti-imperialist, Israel's leadership was not. The Zionist leaders very quickly sold out hard-won independence to American imperialism, subjecting the new state politically and economically. The Jewish Communists saw the 1948 war as an unfinished revolution, which would be completed only when Israel threw off the American yoke and aligned itself with the Eastern Bloc. The "independence" narrative was used to instill in MKI and Banki members a Communist version of Israeli patriotism. The stress on anti-imperialism enabled the Jewish Communists to remain loyal to the state, while at the same time negating its leadership, ideology and policy. Independence, maintained the Communists, had been achieved by the masses, and with that act of creation the Communists could identify.

The anti-imperialist discourse produced its own local Israeli heroes and a tradition of rituals connected to them. Their lives and deaths were to inspire in Banki and MKI members a devotion to the Party and instil in them a militant anti-imperialism. In Tel Aviv, at least, the most extensive and prolonged hero cult was the one that developed around Eliyahu Gozansky, partly modeled on the cults of other fallen Communist heroes like Ernst Thälmann and Lenin. His image as the perfect Jewish Communist and the hero of independence was meant to resolve the contradictions that the MKI's stand in the war had created. Gozansky was able to be an Israeli patriot and a Jewish-Arab internationalist at the same time.

The identity that emerged from the Jewish Communists' preoccupation with the Holocaust was underlain by a dialectics of opposing elements: identification with the Jewish victims of the Holocaust versus idealization of armed Jewish resistance, Jewish pride with its

attendant drive for vengeance and refusal to compromise with the Germans vs. an internationalism that encompassed Jews and non-Jews. The narrative and rites surrounding the 1948 war and its heroes were meant to establish in the Jewish Communists a militant anti-imperialism, and consequently a Communist version of Israeli patriotism. These two layers of identity spoke to two of the core values of Communism in Israel, loyalty to the Soviet Union and to Marxist-Leninist ideology. At the same time the Jewish Communists, like sections of the *Haredi* community, shaped a form of limited loyalty to the state of Israel. In contrast to the *Haredim*, however, whose limited loyalty to the Zionist state earned them a political stake in shaping it, the Jewish Communists did not influence the state, staying on the margins of its politics and culture.

At the heart of the Jewish Communists' approach to Jewish nationalism lay not a conflict between Zionism and Communism, Jewish identity and Red assimilation, but the harmonization of Jewish and Israeli identities and internationalist and class approaches. Remarks by Dani Peter-Petrziel, an ex-"Left Man" and still an active Communist in 2013, express this point well:

In the Party we received... with the internationalist and class approaches – also Israeli patriotism. At the 11th Party conference held in 1949, Meir Vilner delivered – and it is important to stress that it was him – the main ideological lecture, in which he stressed the Israeli patriotic aspect. It was not in contrast to the other two approaches, but part of them.²³⁶

He also adds that the Party was anti-Zionist at its core, regardless of its actual politics. He justifies those statements by using Stalin's definition of nation, which was used also by Sneh:

In my opinion the Party was ideologically anti-Zionist because it was Stalinist to both its Arab and Jewish audiences; it was Stalin who defined what a nation is

²³⁶ Peter-Peterzeil, *Heart on the Left on Education and Society*, 78.

and what an ethnic entity is... ethnicity according to him has four hallmarks:
common language, common territory, common history and common economy.

According to these hallmarks, it is obvious that the Jews are not a nation.²³⁷

He did not exclude the Palestinians from the anti-Zionist tenets of the Party. When asked "could it be that it (the Party) was anti-Zionist when approaching the Arabs, and not Zionist or a little more Zionist when approaching Jews?" he answers unequivocally: "No. It was anti-Zionist when it approached Jews."²³⁸

²³⁷ Ibid., 79.

²³⁸ Ibid., 79.

Chapter 4: Workers Utopia and Reality among Tel Aviv

Communists, 1919 to 1965

Communism among the Jews in Palestine never matured into a mass workers movement. The Communists were alienated from the well organized Jewish working class due to their anti-Zionism, their organizational weakness, their preference for dealing with the U.S.S.R. and resolving Palestinian and Jewish relations rather than class war, and their exclusion from the *Histadrut* by the Zionist-Socialists who controlled it. These factors made the Jewish Communists a small minority that in most cases operated at the margins of workers politics in Palestine and later Israel.

In contrast to that reality, Jewish Communist subculture made the militancy of the working class an imperative. May Day was celebrated as one of its central holidays. When the MKI and Banki members marched in the main *Histadrut* parade, they were engaging in a longstanding ritual from the early 1920's that expressed their cultural affinity with the working class. What had started as a revolutionary counter-ritual was transformed into a militaristic parade as the Jewish Communists, elaborately displaying Soviet and European left-wing symbols, enacted a marching Socialist vision of their society

4.1 The Working Class and the Jewish Communists

The Jewish Communists never controlled the main Jewish union in Palestine, the *Histadrut*. In the early stages of the formation of Communism in Palestine, the MPSA (Party of Socialist Hebrew Workers) enjoyed relative success in union and class politics. The first groups of Jewish

Communists participated in the founding of the *Histadrut*. In the elections to the founding conference, they won "303 votes out of 4,433 (about 6.8% of the electorate)."¹ Although it represented only a small minority outside the mainstream of Zionist workers parties, the M.P.S.A. achieved influence in a few trade unions: "the base of activity was in the tailors union and the sand-workers union that were funded by M.P.S. men."² The nascent Communist movement also tried to penetrate the most advanced group of workers in Palestine, the railroad workers,³ presenting radical demands, such as the inclusion of Palestinian workers in the union, and objecting to connections with the international Zionist movement, which was controlled by the Jewish bourgeoisie.⁴

Worried about the influence the Jewish Communists were gaining, the Zionist leadership of the *Histadrut* broke it by force. The M.P.S.A. club in Haifa and its cultural circle in Tel Aviv were attacked. By inserting loyal workers, the *Histadrut* took over Communist-controlled unions. By 1921, the M.P.S.A.'s hopes of a wide-scale class struggle spearheaded by the *Histadrut* were dashed, and they left it. By the mid-1920s, as they became increasingly anti-Zionist, so the influence of the Jewish Communists within the Jewish working class diminished. However, they continued to maintain their presence within the *Histadrut*. At the second *Histadrut* convention in 1923, the PKP ran a non-Party list named "the Workers' Faction". The Faction was controlled by Communists and was essentially a front of the PKP. It won 250 votes and sent 3 delegates to the conference.⁵ The marked decline in voting for the Communists can be attributed to their internal divisions. The expulsion of the Fraction from the *Histadrut* signalled the pariah status of the

¹ Slozski, "M.P.S.A. in the Founding Convention of the Histadrut," 149.

² Dothan, *Reds*, 58.

³ For the history of the Palestine railroad workers and Communist activity among them, see Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*.

⁴ For the growing connection between the *Histadrut* and Zionist Socialism and the Zionist middle class and the preference for nation over class in its thinking, see Sternhell, *Nation-Building or New Society?*.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 82.

Jewish Communists, and at the margins of Zionist-Socialist culture and organization they remained.

As the Party lost influence among Jewish workers, it turned more and more to the difficult task of recruiting Palestinians. Despite the relatively few inroads the PKP made among the Palestinian peasants of Palestine, it did manage to gain a foothold among the Palestinian working class. These contacts later served as the basis for the mass recruitment of Palestinian workers to the NLL-controlled unions during World War II.⁶

The World War Two years opened up new prospects for Communist union work, even among sections of the Jewish working class. The dislocation of the polishing diamond industry from its traditional centres in the Netherlands and Belgium, the inaccessibility of European polishing centres to the raw diamond cartel De Beers, combined with British influence and interest in this industry, vital to financing the war and to local initiative in Palestine, led to the foundation of an extensive polishing industry.⁷ Its founding by Jewish capitalists ensured that the venture would employ Jewish workers, in accordance with the Hebrew work policies of the Zionist establishment in Palestine. The Jewish character of the industry did not mean, however, that the *Histadrut* penetrated it. It was in the hands of private owners who shortened the time of internship of the largely youthful workforce, and the *Histadrut* influence — traditionally exerted on workers and interns through its work bureaus — was limited. That meant that all the different political unions, from the Revisionist right to the Orthodox, organized the workers. It also meant that workers from "groups that can be termed 'marginalized', meaning those who had trouble

⁶ Typical of the Palestinian recruits to the PKP at that time was Bullas Farah, a young print and railroad worker who was recruited to the Party in the late 1920s and early 1930s (Farah, *From the Ottoman Rule to the Hebrew State*).

⁷ An interview with D. De. Vries, "Why did the Diamond Workers Strike so often During World War Two" in *Arise, ye Workers from your Slumber*, ed. Gozansky, 35.

finding work through the *Histadrut* work bureaus,"⁸ were able to find work. As a result, a relatively large number of right-wingers and Communists were employed in the diamond polishing industry. Divided into different unions and paid by the piecework method, unusually young and restless, the diamond workers were more predisposed to strike than other workers in Palestine.

A leading Communist activist was Alyosha Gozansky, probably the most capable organizer the Party ever had among Jewish workers. A diamond worker himself, Gozansky led the workers in the industry in their struggles during 1942-1946. Some describe him as endowed with boundless energy and an uncanny ability to work with workers of different stripes. He became a voice of Jewish workers. During the 1940s Gozansky was also involved in the struggles of the British camp workers who worked for the British army and the civil servants' struggles. In his union work he stressed the "high priority of Communist Party members to integrate in activity... in the unions and *Histadrut* institutions."⁹

In 1944 the Jewish Communists got their first chance to do just that. For the first time since its expulsion from the *Histadrut*, the PKP was allowed to work openly as one of the union's parties. Re-admittance to the *Histadrut* marked the start of a flurry of activity by the Jewish Communists. In a *Haganah* secret agent report on a conference of committees of the PKP in June 1945, Alyosha is quoted as saying that "when the Party wished to participate in the election to the *Histadrut* convention (1944) it was able to collect, in two days, 300 required signatures of *Histadrut* members."¹⁰ He also called on Party members to join the union and organize, and he announced that a special Party department was being established for *Histadrut* activity and was going to be the mainstay of Communist work. The hectic activity among Jewish workers

⁸ Ibid., 38.

⁹ Ibid., 20.

¹⁰ Ibid.

culminated in the report delivered by Alyosha in the name of the Central Committee to the September 1945 PKP conference.

The report is the most methodical attempt by any Jewish Communist to understand Palestine's working class and its economic surroundings. Its analysis is based on statistical data charts, the industrialization of the country during the war, and the policies and behaviour of private capital and the British colonial government. It also describes the conditions of life and work of Jewish and Palestinian workers, arriving at the conclusion that "the foreign monopolies, in partnership with the local and big bourgeoisie helped by the colonial government"¹¹ were lowering workers' living standards and impairing Palestinian industry's ability to compete in both the local and foreign markets. The report is imbued with Marxist ideology, but at the same time Gozansky's practical experience in the diamond industry is evident.

The upsurge in the Jewish Communists' involvement in and leadership of union struggles was short-lived. As the conflict between Palestinians and Jews deteriorated into open warfare from the mid to late 1940s, the Jewish Communists' attention was diverted to it. Even Gozansky's relentless efforts were redirected to the Party's connections with the new Communist regimes, and later to helping the *Yishuv's* war effort. When he died at the end of 1948 the Jewish Communists felt they had lost one of their most gifted leaders. The Palestinian Communists fared no better. The war ruined their unions and the Party.

Many of the Palestinians were expelled and displaced with the founding of the state of Israel. Even the gains of Jewish Communist union activity in the 1940s remained limited. Communist involvement in the diamond industry stemmed from the special position the workers in this sector occupied in Palestine's economy during the war. When those circumstances ceased to exist after 1945, Communist influence evaporated. During the 1950s and early 1960s, the

¹¹ Ibid., 165.

Jewish Communists maintained their representation in the *Histadrut* and became a permanent opposition to the long-time hegemony of MAPAI. The main struggle they engaged in was opening the union ranks to Palestinians with Israeli citizenship. This campaign can be seen as part of the struggle for equality of Palestinians within Israel and not just purely class-based.

The only purely class-based struggle the MKI was involved in was that of the merchant marine sailors. In 1950, when Israeli sailors rebelled against the *Histadrut* and its powerful Haifa machinery, electing their own separate representation, they were broken by the union and the MAPAI establishment. Many of the strikers, ex-members of the *Palmach* naval unit, found their way to Sneh's men and the MKI. Aside from that, the Communist Party developed intense activity among the new immigrants that were coming into the country. To the distress of these newcomers, separated from the mainstream of Israeli society of the 1950s by cultural and language barriers and the pains of immigration, the MKI and Banki gave voice.

Again, however, neither the Party's gains among the new immigrants or its participation in the sailors' struggle were long-lasting. The sailors' strike never materialized into a large-scale revolt against the hegemony of the *Histadrut*. In regards to the new immigrants, every "step up the economic ladder, leaving the overcrowded immigrants' towns, getting out of the swarming slums,"¹² meant also that they were abandoning the Communist Party. The Party was ideologically and culturally committed to working class militancy and struggle, but in practice, its agenda was aimed at "the Soviet Union, the Arab population, and only after them – the class struggle."¹³ The one dispossessed population whose mass support the MKI won in the 1950s and early 1960s was the Palestinians in Israel.¹⁴ The question as to which segment of that population,

¹² Shafran, *Farewell Communism*, 25.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁴ In one of its best electoral showings, the MKI tapped into "growing Communist strength which reached its peak in the elections of 1961" (Czudnowski and Landau, *The Israeli Communist Party and the Elections for the Fifth*

which was fast becoming proletarian, was attracted to the class messages of the Communist Party awaits further research.

The history of the MKI as a marginalized minority within the predominantly Zionist-Socialist Labour movement in Palestine/Israel is not different from that of other western Communist parties, including the American Communist Party (CPUSA). In the 1920s the CPUSA wavered between attempting to create its own unions and joining existing non-Communist unions. In the 1930s, with the onset of the Depression and the New Deal, American Communists became active and effective trade unionists in the newly organized auto industry and the miners union. Even though Communists held control in certain locales, their strength was dependent on alliances with non-Communist unions. When in the late 1940s and 1950s McCarthyism swept over the American labour movement, the Communists were purged from the unions and even further marginalized, as the American state turned to destroying the CPUSA.¹⁵

The relatively few inroads made by the Jewish Communists into the working class bear some similarities to the Egyptian Communist movement. In the early years of Egyptian Communism the Egyptian Communist Party (ECP) could claim (by 1923) "influence over a confederation of twenty or more labor organizations, many of which engaged in militant strike action." The ECP, much like the MPS in this period, "considered the development of the trade unions and the leadership of the class struggle as its most important challenges."¹⁶ Like the MPS, which was suppressed by the *Histadrut* in the autonomous Jewish community in Palestine, the trade union activity of the early Egyptian Communists met with a crackdown by the Wafd

Knesset, 90). For example, in Acre, a mixed Palestinian-Jewish city, the Palestinian vote constituted 42.9 percent of all ballots in the city. In the six ballots used primarily by Palestinians, the MKI received 88.6 percent of the votes (Ibid., 59).

¹⁵ Theore Draper, *American Communism & Soviet Russia* (New Brunswick: Viking Penguin, 1960), Roger Keeran, *The Communist Party and the Auto Workers Unions* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), and Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism: the Depression Decade* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1984).

¹⁶ Botman, *The Rise of Egyptian Communism*, 3.

government; the nascent ECP was curbed and Communism was eliminated from the Egyptian politics until after World War II.

When Communism was "resurrected" in Egypt after World War II, the Egyptian Movement for National Liberation (EMNL) was headed by Henri Curiel, the most prominent figure in the faction-ridden Egyptian Communism until his deportation from Egypt in 1950. Curiel had, from the start, "concentrated his efforts on establishing links with the more disenfranchised members of society"; thus, "from the beginning, there was worker activity in the EMNL."¹⁷ But like in the case of the MKI, the Egyptian Communists failed to lead the workers' movement. Finally, they were co-opted by the Naaserist regime state-unions and failed to effect a mass movement that would lead to a social transformation of Egypt.

Despite the Jewish Communists' modest achievements among workers, their symbols, rituals and myth did not reflect that reality. Like other Communist parties worldwide, the MKI perceived itself as the vanguard of the working class. In Banki one of the main points of the movement's education was to instil in the young Communists an understanding of and sympathy toward the workingman.¹⁸ This identification with workers was reflected in the holiday connected with workers' militancy, May Day.

The main ritual connected with workers was the May Day march that the MKI and Banki performed as part of the *Histadrut's* central march. The march was accompanied by a plethora of rallies and parties that spread the MKI's messages nationwide. It was steeped in symbolic and mythological motifs taken from Soviet traditions but also showing local influences.

¹⁷ Ibid, 40.

¹⁸ Draper, *Roots of American Communism*, 57.

4.2 May Day

May Day was celebrated in Palestine for the first time in 1906 by members of the *Po'aley-Zion* (Hebrew – Workers of Zion) party. Its symbols came from International Socialism, mainly the Red Flag, the workers' march, and the singing of the *Internationale*. Alongside the borrowed Socialist symbolism, the Zionist Socialists tried to integrate Zionist symbolism into May Day as well: "The White-Blue flag was raised alongside the Red Flag, national slogans were added to the class ones, and two anthems, the national and that of the Labour Movement, were sung together with the *Internationale*."¹⁹ In the kibbutzim there was an attempt to bestow upon May Day the sanctity of Jewish traditional holidays. The holiday was institutionalized from the 1920s by the *Histadrut*, which turned it into a display of its growing power within the *Yishuv*.

From the early 1920s the Jewish Communists marched on May Day. But since they were nevertheless operating at the underground margins of workers politics, it was for them a day of protest, an incursion into a hostile public sphere, an occasion when, like the revolutionary movement in Tsarist Russia, they burst out into the open. There they violently encountered their political rivals and the forces of the British colonial state. In 1921 the M.P.S. parade became embroiled in a skirmish with the participants of the *Ahdut HaAvoda* march. By a dismal coincidence, the brawl in Tel Aviv occurred just as Jaffa Palestinians began to attack Jews in what became known as the "1921 Riots". The Communists were wrongly accused of provoking the riots giving the Mandate police justification to persecute them.²⁰

The testimony regarding later May Day demonstrations during the 1920s stresses their underground nature. Nachman List described the PKP May Day demonstration in Tel Aviv as an exercise that involved sending a group of members to lure the police away from the intended

¹⁹ Rachel Sharabi, "May Day Rituals in the First Decade of Israel: From a Sectoral Holiday to a State Holiday," *Megamot Behavioral Science Journal* 44-1 (2005): 108.

²⁰ Dothan, *Reds*, 67-70.

site. The decoy was so successful that when the demonstration started only one policeman, the one responsible for fighting Communism, chased after the demonstrators on his bicycle, whistling and shouting "Disperse". The rituals accompanying these raids into the public sphere were simple: the demonstrators waved "the Red Flag and marched singing the *Internationale*,"²¹ and the singing was accompanied by a speech. The demonstration ended with arrests.

A less humorous tone is to be found in the testimony of Bullas Farah regarding the same May Day in 1925, but in Haifa. The Communist-led parade clashed with the police, as the "security men tried to disperse the demonstration and grab the Red Flag from a young man carrying it at the head of the marchers."²² When the flag-bearer punched the officer in charge, it only provoked the police into violently attacking the marchers. The same elements featured already in the Tel Aviv May Day demonstration are seen again in Haifa: the Red Flag as the main symbol, and the clash with the forces of the state.

In the Comintern English-language publication, one Abu Siam from Jerusalem described the May Day of 1926. Struggling against mounting police repression and the threats of "reformist trade union bureaucrats," the Party organized a demonstration "by great masses of workers."²³ The Communist marchers "marched under the Red Flags with Communist slogans," and the march ended in "fierce skirmishes with the police who had to be reinforced by the Irish-English officers division."²⁴ Leaving aside the exaggeration of the number of participants, again the same elements reappear: the Communists emerged into the street to encounter their political rivals and the forces of the state, in a counter-ritual symbolically clustered around the Red Flag. It was an

²¹ Nachman List, "Tsadaq Haqomintern [Alef]" (The Comintern was Right [A]) *Keshet* 5-B Booklet B (1963), 147.

²² Farah, *From the Ottoman Rule to the Hebrew State*, 22.

²³ Abu Siam, "The First May Day in Palestine," in *Inprecor* (*Marxist magazine of the Third International*), May 27, 1926.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

occasion to voice rage and indignation against the backdrop of inhospitable and hostile surroundings.

In the streets the PKP activists clashed with Zionist-Socialists and the forces of order. The handbills clandestinely distributed by the Party were imbued with the same militant spirit. From the start, the Jewish Communists defined May Day in universalistic terms. Psychologically compensating for their weakness and small numbers, they used May Day to demonstrate their belonging to the "world proletariat"²⁵ headed by the "magnificent edifice of the Soviet Socialist Federation."²⁶ In a 1921 pamphlet, the Jewish Communists call upon the Hebrew workers to celebrate "your combat holiday May Day" in the "hard times" of "the birth of the working class government around the world."²⁷ The Zionist-Socialist parties are accused of betraying the Jewish workers of Palestine by collaborating with the Jewish bourgeoisie and the British. Still nominally Zionist-Socialist, the Jewish Communists accuse their political rivals of betraying the "workers' Zionist Communist ideal."²⁸ The pamphlet calls for joint action with the Palestinian workers. The class struggle will help create, in a Borochovist manner, "a territorial work centre" for the Hebrew worker. The pamphlet cites struggles ranging from "the countries of the East – gigantic China, great India, Egypt, Syria and Lebanon" to "countries with a large working class"²⁹ like England and France.

As the PKP became increasingly anti-Zionist, as it moved more and more to the margins of workers politics in Palestine, so the language of its pamphlets became more radical. Well into

²⁵ "La'eḥad BeMay" (For May Day), Lavon Institute for Labour Research, IV-445-2.

²⁶ "Hava'ad Hamerkazi shel Hamiflaga Haḥomunistit Be'erets-Isra'el, Berlin, April 1923" (The Central Committee of the Communist Party in Eretz-Israel, Berlin, April 1923) Lavon Institute for Labour Research, IV-445-2.

²⁷ May Day Manifesto of MPSA distributed in Jaffa, 1921, in Suliman Bashear, "The Arab East in Communist Theory and Political Practice, 1918-1928" (PhD diss., Birbeck College, University of Londong, 1976

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

the early 1940s the Jewish Communists continued to embellish the militantly working-class, universalistic and pro-Soviet terms that they had been using already in the 1920s.

In the formative stage of Communism in Palestine, three distinct elements of a Communist May Day emerged. The first was its nature as a counter-ritual where the Communists emerged into the public sphere, violently clashing with their political rivals and the forces of the British colonial state. The second was the core meaning of the holiday as the day of international working class militancy. The workers of Palestine were called upon to join a global class struggle in which Palestine was merely one small front. The third was the pride of place held by the U.S.S.R. in Jewish Communist awareness. In the context of May Day, the Soviet Union was perceived as a workers' paradise, a place where the workers held political power and solved national and economic problems. The emphasis on the international working class and the U.S.S.R. was undoubtedly compensation for the realities of Palestine: the PKP was a small and oppressed minority, with few gains among the only substantial working class in the country, the Jewish one, which stayed staunchly loyal to Zionism.

The turning point in the form and content of May Day came with the legalization of the PKP on June 22nd 1941. For the first time, the Jewish Communists' counter-ritual was allowed into the public sphere. Visual evidence of the 1944 May Day parade shows that it had been transformed from a counter-ritual into an orderly, militaristic parade. Emulating Soviet parade practices, which had frozen into a rigid militaristic format since the early 1930s, the Jewish Communists in late-1940s Palestine marched in orderly military fashion. The first photograph³⁰ shows the Communist marchers marching in three columns, headed by a flag-bearer dressed in Banki uniform. They are carrying the Red Flag, the symbol of working class militancy. A second

³⁰ Photograph courtesy of Yoram Gozansky.

photograph³¹ shows the same march passing along Tel Aviv's seashore promenade. As in the earlier photo, there are three rows of marchers, made up of Banki members dressed in their white shirts and red ties and older Party members dressed in civilian clothing. At their head, under the Red Flag, march Party leaders Alyosha Gozansky and Uzi Borshtain.

Legalization also broadened the scope of the Communist May Day ritual, adding public rallies to the day's events. The main rally for May Day 1944 took place at the Allenby cinema on the eve of April 28th and was accompanied by smaller rallies in various towns.³² Like the party rallies meant to mark events like the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, this event featured mainly speeches and at times some artistic performances. The main rally in Tel Aviv boasted 1,000 participants and was adorned with pictures of Lenin and Stalin and "slogans calling for international unity of the working class and Jewish-Arab workers' unity."³³ Three speeches were delivered, and the rally began and ended with the singing of the *Internationale*. The main issue stressed in the speeches was the war. Although the internationalist flavour remained, the militant language that had characterized PKP publications and rites in the underground years was replaced by a more conciliatory tone toward the *Yishuv*. Thus, instead of talking about class struggle, the speakers alluded to "the war of all progressive, freedom-loving humanity."³⁴ The 1945 rallies saw the first artistic performances, such as characterized the May Day rallies of the *Histadrut* and mostly included the reading of chosen texts and choral singing.³⁵ The Communists

³¹ Gozansky, *Arise, ye Workers from your Slumber*, 142.

³² "Ha'ehad Be'May 1944" (May Day 1944), *Kol Ha'am*, April 27, 1944; "Me'atsrot Hamiflaga Ba'ehad Be'May" (From the Party's Rallies on May Day), *Kol Ha'am*, May 11, 1944.

³³ "From the Party's Rallies on May Day".

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Sharabi, "May Day Rituals in the First Decade of Israel," 123.

followed suit, and in 1945 in Jerusalem "comrade Etta recited" and then gave an encore in Haifa, accompanied by "comrade Rachel who sang the partisan song"³⁶ and a choir.

The new, open way in which May Day was celebrated in the mid-1940s may point to the changes in the Party's status, but also to the persistence of a hampering reality. Now legalized, having participated in labour struggles during the war, prompted by the need to work with Zionist-Socialists to aid the U.S.S.R. and their identification with the plight of European Jewry, the Jewish Communists discovered a growing affinity between them and the *Yishuv*. At the same time, this new openness did not change the basic fundamentals of the reality in which they operated. They were still a small minority within the Jewish working class. They were still suspect to most parties in the *Histadrut*, and the gains they had made among workers during the war were not long-lasting; although legalized, in many ways they remained marginalized.

The Jewish Communists' continued marginalization also explains the internationalist tone of their language, even when tempered by the war. If in the 1920s to the early 1940s they had compensated for their small numbers by assimilating into the struggle of the world proletariat and the U.S.S.R., during the war years they wished to be assimilated into the global struggle against Nazism, mainly the one waged by the Soviets.

The changes in the form of the May Day march can also be explained by the change in the activity and legal status of the Party. The counter-ritual had been the product of the underground circumstances of a small sect of believers exploding into the open public sphere in a revolutionary rush. Legalization meant that the PKP became one of the parties of the *Histadrut* and a participant in the political system created by the *Yishuv*, both in the *Histadrut* and in the instantiations of Jewish autonomy in Palestine. It meant that the Jewish Communists had to

³⁶ "Pe'iluyot Hamiflaga Ba'ehad Be'May 1945" (The Party Activities for the First of May 1945), *Kol Ha'am*, May 2, 1945.

persuade people of the validity of their ideology and political stands, and not just violently agitate for a workers' revolution. In this new reality, a dynamic but orderly and disciplined ritual was needed.

The new, orderly form the Communist May Day took, from the early to mid-1940s, did not mean that the holiday entirely lost its counter-ritual character. While Communists did not directly encounter the forces of the state, which did not prevent them from marching and intervened only to maintain order, they still confronted their political rivals. May Day was a contentious issue between left-wing and right-wing Zionists. "Those sectors disregarded the sabbatical the Labour movement enacted on May Day, their schools stayed open and their papers appeared on that day."³⁷ For Zionist rightists the holiday was especially an abomination and, as early as 1928, they skirmished with Communist May Day marchers.³⁸ The street skirmishes with the right are the background to the persistence of May Day's countercultural nature even after legalization.

In an article commemorating Alyosha Gozansky, the writer describes how the activists of the PKP in Tel Aviv were ordered on May Day 1943 to "hang large cloth placards in central spots in the city."³⁹ One such spot was a school located in the old heart of the city near Allenby Street. The task fell to some young Communists who hoisted a red banner bearing portraits of Lenin and Stalin and the Hammer and Sickle. That ignited a protracted street battle between *Beytar*⁴⁰ members and the Communists. This incident bears all the hallmarks of the Communist counter-ritual of the 1920s. The Communist youths and older Party members burst into the

³⁷ Sharabi, "May Day Rituals in the First Decade of Israel," 108.

³⁸ "Lano'ar Ha'oved shel Palestīna! Ha'eḥad Be'May 1929!" (To the Working Youth of Palestine! May Day 1929!) Lavon Institute for Labour Research, IV-445-208.

³⁹ Avraham Myling, "Kakh Haya Alyusha" (So was Alyosha), in *Arise, ye Workers from your Slumber*, ed. Tamar Gozansky, (Haifa: Pardes, 2009), 401.

⁴⁰ *Beytar* - Acronym of The Alliance Yosef Trumpeldor and the last Jewish city to fall to the Romans in the Bar Kokhba Rebellion. This youth movement was established in Riga in 1923 and was identified with the Revisionist movement and after 1948 with *Herut*.

public sphere with the symbols of the Soviet Union painted in the red of the working class. Their incursion led to a clash with their political rivals and the forces of order, and the police tore up the placards that caused the ruckus.

The most important development in the evolution of the Communist May Day in the era after legalization was the inclusion of the Party in the *Histadrut* procession. As early as 1944, the *Histadrut* lifted the ban on accepting Communist members to its ranks, in fact recognizing the PKP as one of the union's parties. In late March 1946 the Party sent to the *Histadrut* executive a telegram demanding "the participation of our representatives in the performances and rallies of the *Histadrut*"⁴¹ on May Day. The demand was granted, but not fully. In Tel Aviv the main procession went smoothly, but in Haifa *Kol Ha'am* reported that the members of the Communist youth movement were not permitted to march with the rest of the union.

The main parade in Tel Aviv, where both the Party and its youth movement marched, featured the elements that had come to characterize the Jewish Communists' May Day since legalization. The PKP and the Communist youth marched in separate blocs. The march was headed by a truck "decorated with Red Flags and a big star made out of vegetation and flowers."⁴² The first bloc consisted of youth movement members "dressed in white shirts and red ties, marching in uniform lines."⁴³ The second bloc consisted of the Party's Central Committee and veteran members, with the flag of the Tel Aviv PKP branch waving at their head. The rest of the marchers were war veterans and the veterans of the International Brigades. It is noteworthy that a separation continued to be maintained between the Party, which marched together with the rest of the *Histadrut*, and its youth movement, which marched with the other Zionist-Socialist

⁴¹ "Lehishtatfut Behag Ha'eħad Be'May" (For Participation in May Day Holiday), *Kol Ha'am*, April 10, 1946.

⁴² "Hamitsad shel Hamiflaga Haķomunistit Be'Tel Aviv Likhvod Ha'eħad Be'May" (The Communist Party March in Tel Aviv in Honour of May Day). *Kol Ha'am*, May 16, 1946.

⁴³ Ibid.

youth movements. Visual evidence of the 1946 march shows marked differences between the two: The young Communists marched in three uniform straight lines, carrying flags and a single placard,⁴⁴ while the Party bloc is an unorganised mass carrying placards in no apparent order.⁴⁵ The separation of Banki and the MKI was a result of the form that the *Histadrut* gave to its May Day procession, where the workers' parties preceded the youth movements that closed the parade. The evidence at hand does not show that this separation had any meaning beyond the organizational structure of a pre-existing ceremony that the Communists entered into.

One element that was carried on from the 1920s was the use of working class and Soviet symbolism, pre-eminently the Red Flag. The Red Star made of vegetation expressed the spring motif of the holiday and echoed the first parades of the Russian Revolution where flora had been used to decorate the horses of the Red Army. Another Soviet element straight from the Stalinist vocabulary was the carrying of leaders' portraits and the "portraits of the great leaders Lenin and Stalin."⁴⁶ The quasi-Stalinist symbolism and rigidity of the youth march especially were accompanied by carnival-like elements, as for example when the bloc of soldiers and veterans carried cartoons mocking the veterans' sad state. This element was more akin to the first revolutionary festivals in Russia and the U.S.S.R. of the 1920s.

The content of the holiday remained internationalist, militantly working class and pro-Soviet, as in the 1920s. In the Party's holiday slogans one finds, side by side, "Long live the Soviet Union!" and "Long live the freedom and independence struggle of the peoples of Indonesia and India and all colonial peoples!" Another slogan calls for "progressive work and

⁴⁴ "Hafganat Hamiflaga Haqomunistit Ba'eḥad Be'May – Gush Hano'ar" (The Communist Party Demonstration in May Day – the Youth Block), *Kol Ha'am*, May 8, 1946.

⁴⁵ "Hafganat Hamiflaga Haqomunistit Ba'eḥad Be'May – Gush Hava'ad Hamerkazi" (The Communist Party March in May Day – the Central Committee Block), *Kol Ha'am*, May 6, 1946; same issue "Mitsa'ad Ha'eḥad Be'May shel Hamiflaga Haqomunistit Be'Tel Aviv" (The Communist Party May Day March in Tel Aviv).

⁴⁶ "Mitsa'ad Hamiflagag Haqomunistit Be'Tel Aviv Likhvod Ha'eḥad Be'May" (The Communist Party March in Tel Aviv in Honour of May Day).

social laws."⁴⁷ Overall, May Day was used to showcase everything the Jewish Communists stood for. In slogans and in symbols, they showed their loyalty to the Soviet Union and Arab-Jewish fraternity, and the Party's sympathy for anticolonial and working class struggles, local and international.

After 1948, May Day was characterized by an increased effort on the part of MAPAI which dominated the *Histadrut* to "direct its ceremonies from above and to shape the holiday patterns so they will contribute to the advancement of its values and the strengthening of its position."⁴⁸ That called for the regimentation of the preparations for and execution of the holiday. At the same time, MAPAI tried to nationalize the holiday and create a symbolic identification between it and the state. Those tendencies were partly absorbed by the Jewish Communists. While the Communist holiday was already self-regimented ideologically and organizationally, they refused to bow to MAPAI's demands. In that sense, May Day maintained some of its counter-ritual spirit, as the Communists clashed with their political rivals inside and outside the *Histadrut*.

During the 1950s the elements of Communist May Day, which had first appeared in the 1920s, became entrenched. The holiday march displayed a mix of Soviet elements and features of local Israeli origin. The Communists took part in well structured rites; the eve of May Day was marked by rallies consisting of short speeches and artistic performances that included a *Masechet*. The Party rallies prior to the May Day holiday of 1950 included a choral performance in one locality. The main rally in Tel Aviv in 1951 featured a speech by the MKI General Secretary and singing by the Ron choir. Almost every rally that year, as their schedule indicates, included a speaker and an artistic performance, ranging from a Soviet play or movie to humble

⁴⁷ "Sisma'ot Hamiflaga Haḳomunistit Hapaleština'it La'eḩad Be'May" (The Slogans of the Palestinian Communist Party for May Day), *Kol Ha'am*, April 26, 1946.

⁴⁸ Sharabi, "May Day Rituals in the First Decade of Israel," 115.

singing accompanied by an accordion.⁴⁹ Another major event on the eve of May Day was the flying of the Red Flag above the *Histadrut* headquarters in Tel Aviv and its local Workers Councils across the nation. There is no evidence that the Communists had any alternative to this ceremony, and in all probability they participated in it as individual union members.

The main event of May Day was without a doubt the mass march and the assembly. Like the other holiday events, they too were tightly organized by the *Histadrut*.⁵⁰ The Communists participated in the march in two blocs, the one reserved for the workers' parties and the closing bloc of the parade made up of the youth movements. The main demonstrations were held in "Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Nazareth and Haifa."⁵¹ While the MKI members marched in relatively loose fashion,⁵² Banki's march was an exercise in orderly discipline. All through the 1950s until the mid-1960s, the youthful marchers served as the showcase of the Party and the entire movement, it being noted that "their fighting character and fair form... are respected by the crowds."⁵³ Already in 1944 the Communist march had showed signs of militaristic order, but from the 1950s this element was increasingly evident. Further to the process of cooptation of the Jewish Communists into the political system of the *Histadrut*, it marked the Communist subculture's internalization of motifs from statist and Zionist-Socialist culture.

There was a grassroots mobilization of Banki members to create the most aesthetic march. In many ways, the marked change in the appearance of the May Day march was the result of the collective work of Banki members, mainly Yoska Valershtiean, a survivor of

⁴⁹ "Hagigot Likhvod Ha'eḥad Be'May Bama'avak Le'aḥdut Veleshalom" (Celebrations in Honour of May Day for Unity in the Fight for Peace), *Kol Ha'am*, April 25, 1951.

⁵⁰ Sharabi, "May Day Rituals in the First Decade of Israel," 121.

⁵¹ "Ha'eḥad Be'May – Yom Hapo'alim Habeynle'umi!" (May Day- The International Workers Day!), Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #1.

⁵² In photographs of the May Day demonstrations in 1959 and 1961 in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, the older Party members are seen marching holding banners in their hands in a loosely coordinated column or in groups (*The Campaigns of Struggle between Two Conferences, 1957-1961*).

⁵³ "May Day- The International Workers Day".

Theresienstadt and Auschwitz who was sent to Palestine as part of a unit recruited by the Czechs and the MKI to aid Israel in the 1948 War.⁵⁴ A devout Communist and a graphic artist, he used his talents in the service of the Communist movement. On May Days he was responsible for the design of the slogans and displays carried by the marchers: handheld placards showing the detonation of an atomic bomb, peace doves with their wings flapping, and a globe four meters in diameter highlighting the Eastern Bloc and the U.S.S.R.⁵⁵ Valershtiean's ideas were executed by the members of the Tel Aviv branch of Banki, who would turn the movement's club into a workshop where they made the displays for the march and even trained drummers and trumpeters.⁵⁶ It was a grassroots effort similar to that which accompanied the revolutionary marches in NEP-era Russia.

While the mobilization of Banki members may have echoed early Soviet models, the Banki marches came straight from the visual world of Stalinism and the post-Stalinist U.S.S.R. Yoska Valershtiean admitted as much, saying that "I put all my experience from the Czech Republic and my impressions from the May Day demonstrations in the Socialist countries and the U.S.S.R."⁵⁷ into the design of the marches in Tel Aviv. Another ex-member makes the connection even clearer: "Look at the marches in the U.S.S.R. of November 7th or May Day. Clearly it is not to the same extent, and without the arms it is only a small fraction of that."⁵⁸ The orderliness and discipline of the parade earned the respect of even the non-Communist press, as *Kol Hano'ar* was happy to report: "The impression that the Banki demonstration in Tel Aviv left can be estimated from the article in '*Maariv*' which had to report (much to his regret, in his

⁵⁴ For Yoska Valershtiean's personal history, see "Ani Ma'ashim et Adolf Aylman" (I Accuse Adolf Eichmann), *Kol Ha'am* February 9, 1961; Yoska Valershtiean, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, November 14, 2005.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Daliya Vintrob and Manheam Vintrob, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, May 29, 2005.

⁵⁷ Yoska Valershtiean, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, November 14, 2005.

⁵⁸ Daliya Vintrob and Manheam Vintrob, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, May 29, 2005.

words) 'the most impressive performance was that of the Communist youth – Banki... it was a colourful march with its big displays and devices.'"⁵⁹ However, there is no evidence that the Soviet-inspired parade garnered any direct political benefits for Banki or the MKI.

Marching publicly in the streets, the Communists met a certain level of resistance and violence. Jacob Markovizky asserts that most Communist May Day demonstrations "ended with no bloodshed or violent confrontations,"⁶⁰ but a closer look reveals a more complex reality. First to erect barriers to the conduct of the marches was the *Histadrut*. Anxious to imbue May Day with Zionist content, the MAPAI-dominated union tried to disqualify the slogans proposed by the MKI.⁶¹ On one glaring occasion in 1960, the *Histadrut's* nationalization of May Day came into direct confrontation with the MKI's Socialist principles. Claiming that the holiday overlapped with Remembrance Day, *Histadrut* secretary-general Pinhas Lavon passed a resolution in the *Histadrut* institutions annulling it. For the MKI this was sacrilege. In an angry open letter, the MKI fraction in the *Histadrut* accused Lavon and the union leaders of a "far reaching plan to deny from it [May Day] its character as the holiday of struggle against the capitalists and the danger of war."⁶²

Other harassments were of a more violent nature. The main focal point of hostility towards the Communist marchers was in Haifa. Ruled by MAPAI boss Abba Hushi, Red Haifa welcomed the Communist marchers with physical and verbal abuse. Bottles were thrown at the marchers, and Hushi's and the *Histadrut's* strongmen attacked them.⁶³ In Tel Aviv the Banki demonstrators clashed with *Beytar* members when the procession of the former passed one of the

⁵⁹ *Kol Hano'ar*, May-June 1960.

⁶⁰ Markovizky, *White Shirt and Red Tie*, 145.

⁶¹ Yair Tzaban, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, February 12, 2009

⁶² "Ma'amad Hapo'alim Yahgog et Yom Hashana Hashiv'im La'ehad Be'May!" (The Working Class will Celebrate the 70th Anniversary of May Day!), Lavon Institute for Labour Research, File IV-425-44.

⁶³ Zafreera Kalorman, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, November 6, 2005; Markovizky, *White Shirt and Red Tie*, 145.

strongholds of the latter near where the Banki club was located.⁶⁴ Clashes with political rivals were frequent in the formative stage of Communist May Day in the 1920s and continued after legalization. This aspect of the holiday seems to have persisted, at least to the 1950s.

The visual evidence remaining of the Banki processions also points to the Soviet influence on May Day. The photographs of successive events reveal elaborate visual effects that the displays were planned to create. The parade included everything from abstract displays to graphically sophisticated placards, illustrating such themes as nuclear war, workers' solidarity, the Eastern Bloc, and Arab-Jewish fraternity. Other important elements are the written slogans, marching bands, and the extensive use of national flags side-by-side with the Red Flag. Vehicles carrying displays also participated in the marches.

What was the purpose of the Jewish Communists' elaborate display? Clifford Geertz maintains that ritualistic processions are displays of symbols of power emanating from symbolic centres of power. In that sense, the use of Soviet symbols and practices is understandable. The militaristic uniformed procession, the profiles of Lenin and Stalin, the Hammer and Sickle and the oversized displays all derived from the Soviet Union; they were the trappings of power that the Jewish Communists wished to present. The Jewish Communists also resorted to the symbolic system of the international working class, mainly the Red Flag. Hoisted at Communist May Day demonstrations since the 1920s, it was prominent as the symbol of the international working class and can be considered a dominant symbol,⁶⁵ connecting the Jewish Communists with another symbolic centre of power, the international and local working class. These symbols of power were clearly in contrast to the reality of the Jewish Communists as a small, sometimes

⁶⁴ Tamar Gozansky, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, February 21, 2009; Yoram Gozansky, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, February 22, 2009.

⁶⁵ Dominant symbol was defined by Victor Turner as "presiding over the whole procedure, sometimes over particular phases. Their meaning is highly constant and consistent through out the symbolic system" (Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture Anthropological Perspectives*, 245).

persecuted minority with little representation in the mainly Jewish working class. They were meant to alleviate this contradiction by identifying them with a worldwide class and a superpower.⁶⁶

At the same time, the Banki parades also had a local symbolic aspect. Two local symbols were used foremost, the Israeli flag and the Arab-Jewish duo. There is no evidence as to when the Jewish Communists started to use the national flag, with its obvious Zionist context, in their May Day procession. The scant visual evidence from the mid to late 1940s gives no indication that the Blue and White was used before 1948, but since it does appear from as early as 1958,⁶⁷ it may be assumed that it was in use at least since 1948. In carrying the two flags together, the Jewish Communists were following the practice of the other Zionist workers' parties that "waved the Red Flag with the state flag."⁶⁸ The existence of this practice manifestly shows the growing affinity between Zionist-Socialist culture and the Jewish Communist subculture subsequent to legalization. However, the use of the flag was not indicative of an outright Zionization of Banki. Jewish Communist subculture was permeated with local forms of Israeli nationalism that critiqued Zionism as the manifestation of the Jewish bourgeoisie, and which did not recognize the Zionist nationalization of Jewish communities worldwide. In that context, the raising of the

⁶⁶ This feeling of empowerment is abundantly evident in Banki's pamphlets for May Day. One pamphlet proudly declares that since 1889 organized labour has grown "from tens of thousands... to 33 million Communists organized in Communist Parties and 160 million workers unionized" "Teḥi Ha'eḥad Be'May – Ḥag Ha'aḥdut shel Hano'ar Vehapo'alim" (Long Live May Day – The Holiday of Youth and Workers Unity), Yad Tabenkin Archives (Ramat Efal, Israel). Another handbill proclaims that "the Socialist camp headed by the Soviet Union is marching from one victory to another." It asserts that the Soviet youth was already working only six hours a day ("Teḥi Ha'eḥad Be'May – Ḥag Ha'aḥdut shel Hano'ar Vehapo'alim" Long Live May Day – International Solidarity Day of the Workers and the Youth, Yad Tabenkin Archives).

⁶⁷ May Day 1958 where two distinct rows of flags, the Red Flag and the national flag respectively, can be seen; photograph courtesy of Yoram Gozansky.

⁶⁸ Sharabi, "May Day Rituals in the First Decade of Israel," 120.

Blue and White may not have been Israeli nationalism so much as recognition of the power of the State.⁶⁹

The other symbol used by Banki members, the Arab-Jewish duo, was borrowed directly from the symbolic vocabulary of Israeli Communism. Widely used to symbolize Arab-Jewish fraternity, one of the MKI and Banki's core identity values, it played an important role in May Day. The Communist May Day demonstrations manifestly stressed their Arab-Jewish identity. The Palestinian members of Banki dressed in the traditional *keffiyeh* and marched side-by-side with their Jewish comrades.⁷⁰ Yoska Valershtiean recalled that Banki members insisted that the Palestinian members wear the *keffiyeh*, thus deliberately identifying them as Palestinians and stressing the Arab-Jewish character of the march.⁷¹ These practices seem to have had obvious Orientalist undertones; however, they were not used as a way to stereotype the Palestinian. The Jewish Communists wanted to stress the presence of Palestinians in their midst to a wider audience, and the wearing of the *keffiyeh* served that purpose. The representation of Palestinians in the march marked them all as a dynamic modernized collective.⁷² Still, it is interesting to note that this practice may be particular to the Tel Aviv and Nazareth Communists as in other areas, such as in Haifa, Palestinian members wore red ties and white shirts alongside their Jewish

⁶⁹ Although it must be recognized that the Galilee area was under military curfew and surveillance, in an interesting image from May Day 1951 in Nazareth, the marchers, most of them Palestinians, had Blue and White flags in their hands. Tawfik Toubi is photographed addressing the rally under the Israeli national flag. Shmuel Mikunis is photographed making his speech under a Red Flag. This image reinforces the fact that the flag was used outside of its Zionist context (*Mima'arakhot Hama'avak beyn Ve'ida leVe'ida*. (The Campaigns of Struggle between Conference and Conference, May 1952-May 1957), (Unspecified printer, 1957)).

⁷⁰ A photo of Banki members dressed in *keffiyehs*, holding aloft the symbol of the movement, alongside Jewish Communist Party members of mixed gender (*The Campaigns of Struggle between Two Conferences, 1957-1961*).

⁷¹ Yoska Valershtiean, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, November 14, 2005.

⁷² A Palestinian member of Banki is depicted in May Day 1959 wearing the Banki uniform and a *keffiyeh*, marching with the Red Flag in hand together with female Banki members. There is nothing traditional or exotic in his appearance, and other than the headscarf he is wearing European clothing. The garment is only used to proclaim his nationality (Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #18/2). In another example from 1957, a *keffiyeh*-clad Banki member is once again marching in a mixed-gender group, Red Flag in hand (picture courtesy of Yoram Gozansky). It is also interesting to note that in a picture of May Day 1951 in Nazareth, of the youngsters in Banki uniform among the audience, which was probably mostly made up of Palestinians, there are many wearing *keffiyehs*, see *The Campaigns of Struggle between Conference and Conference, May 1952-May 1957*.

compatriots. It is in this context that the Arab-Jewish duo emerges in the May Day Banki procession. In a photograph from the 1957 May Day march, we see a vehicle mounted with a display of two youths, one Palestinian, the other Jewish. Both figures are in Red Banki ties and one of them is clad in a *keffiyeh*. Beneath them a caption reads "Long live Jewish-Arab fraternity!" flanked by the Banki logo, which incorporated the national flag with the Red Star, the Hammer and Sickle, and a sheaf of wheat. At either side of the display, the Red Flag and the Blue and White flag are waving. The entire display, bedecked with the Jewish Communists' symbolic plethora, points to the set of cultural traits that Banki wished to convey to the spectators and other marchers. Without access to Palestinian perspectives, it is difficult to know how they felt about these events.

Geertz asserts that royal processions and political rituals were codified with cultural signifiers that portrayed an idealized view of the universe, the nature of the ruler's charisma, or the expectations of the ruled from the ruler. The symbolic language used by Banki members was codified in symbols of Soviet Communism, working class militancy, Arab-Jewish fraternity, international peace and liberation struggles.⁷³ It depicts a Socialist utopia, one where Israel would be "independent, democratic, and peace-seeking,"⁷⁴ a land that gave "happiness to its builders-workers and Jews and Arabs, Ashkenazi and Sephardic [...] living together in equality and fraternity with no military government and no discrimination."⁷⁵ In fact, the young Banki members' march represented a veritable Socialist utopia.

⁷³ May Day was used to outwardly show the Communists' support for liberation movements, anti-Imperialism and pacifism. One sign from the 1957 march proclaimed "Ameḳ Afriḳa Mashlikhim et Ol Hazarim" (The Peoples of Africa Throwing off the Yoke of Foreigners). Another sign showed an atomic mushroom rising from a burring city (Yad Tabenkin Archives, File # 17/2).

⁷⁴ "Teḥi Ha'eḥad Be'May – Yom Hasolidariyut Habeynle'umit shel Hapo'alim Vehano'ar" (Long Live May Day – International Solidarity Day of the Workers and the Youth).

⁷⁵ "No'ar! Ne'arim Vene'arot!" (Youths! Young Men Young Women!), Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #2.

Since the early 1920s, the Communist May Day had been phrased in militantly internationalist working class terms. This language is clearly evident in Banki's instructors' brochures dedicated to May Day. Like much of Banki's instructional material, they were constructed as a *Masechet* of literary and educational segments. One text from the late 1950s is made up of articles on the origins of May Day, plays and poems. A central theme in the brochures is the history of May Day. The young Communists were taught that its origins lay in the Haymarket Massacre, where clashes in Chicago between the police and workers demanding an 8-hour workday gave birth to May Day, and the Second International resolution of 1889 that established May Day as the day of struggle and celebration of the working class. The historical sections of the instructors' brochures contained a detailed history of the holiday. The historical narrative was meant to instil in the young Communists a militant identification with the international working class. "For 70 years May Day has been calling the workers of the world to its banners. It cannot be liquidated or stolen."⁷⁶ The identification with the workingmen was, from the 1920s, couched in an internationalist language. Quoting Lenin, Banki members proclaimed that "Jew and Christian, Armenian and Tatar, Pole and Russian, Fins and Swedish, Latvian and German, all march together under the joint banner of Socialism."⁷⁷ The internationalist language was also inculcated in the younger age group of *Bney Amal*. In one recommended activity, the instructor is told to "ask the children about social and national struggles being fought at this time," and to summarize the talk with the "struggle and achievements of the Cuban people, the great achievement in the fight for independence of the

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ "Homer Lemesibot Ehad Be'May Ve'arvey Kvutsot" (May Day Material for Parties and Group Evenings), Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #4.

Algerian people, the growing power of the revolutionary workers movement in countries like Italy and France... the struggle for national liberation of Africa and Asia."⁷⁸

The poems, plays and allegorical stories abounding in the brochures were used to get the young Communists to internalize the day's values. The literary segments included antiwar sections, stories about the sufferings of Israeli workers, anti-capitalist allegories, and poems by Haya Kadmon, Alexander Penn and Nâzım Hikmet as well as other Communist poets⁷⁹. The literary pieces, together with the historical parts, instilled in Banki members the identification with workers and their plight and with national and class liberation struggles. The Soviet Union, ever present in the Jewish Communist mind, was not denied a place either. One booklet stressed the fact "that since October 1917... the workers of Russia started celebrating in their own state."⁸⁰ An internal memorandum of Banki's Education and Culture Department, in the wake of the 20th Congress, asserts the "achievements of the Soviet Union and all the Socialist camp"⁸¹ in the face of all criticism. The memorandum represents the image as the U.S.S.R., held by the Jewish Communists since the 1920s, of a fulfilled utopia. By 1960, the text boasts, the U.S.S.R. will have moved to a six hour working day for young workers (which in fact happened only in 1967) and free education.⁸²

The 1962 *Bney Amal* booklet claims that the "Red Flag will celebrate its victory worldwide."⁸³ The Red Flag, part and parcel of Communist subculture since the 1920s, is emphasized in the instructors' booklets of the 1950s and early 1960s. In The 1962 *Bney Amal* booklet, in a section named "suggestions for diversifying activity," the Red Flag takes a central

⁷⁸ "Alon Bney Amal, Ha'eḥad Be'May 1962" (Bney Amal brochure, May Day 1962), Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #25.

⁷⁹ Notably Iraqi writers are absent.

⁸⁰ "May Day Material for Parties and Group Evenings".

⁸¹ "Maḥleket Hinukh Vetarbut: Homer Lemesibot Eḥad Be'May" (The Department of Education and Culture: Material for May Day Parties), Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #4.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ "Bney Amal brochure, May Day 1962".

role and is connected to workers' militancy. The instructor is advised to connect the talk with the young Communists to stories about the Red Flag, to collect newspaper clippings on the background of the Red Flag, a map of the Socialist countries marked with Red Flags, and "essays and songs on the subject – *what does the Red Flag tell me?*"⁸⁴ Furthermore, the Red Flag was also internalized by means of poems and allegorical stories. One booklet featured a song named "Red Flag," while another contained songs that were well known among the Zionist-Socialist youth movements such as "On Barricades," "Onward Flame," and "Forward, Forward." The stress on the Red Flag represented both influences of European origin and local influence. On May Day Zionist-Socialists "made a special place in the *Masechet* for the Red Flag."⁸⁵ It was supposed to generate identification with the union and the workers. The Communists allocated no place in the booklets to Zionist national elements beside the Red Flag, emphasizing even more their identification with international and local working class struggles.

The Communist May Day posed a sharp contrast to reality. MKI and Banki members had almost no influence on the masses of Jewish workers, who remained deeply committed to Zionism. The Palestinian workers who flocked to the MKI in the 1950s were driven more by nationalist than class motivations.⁸⁶ The young Jewish Banki members were encouraged by their

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Sharabi, "May Day Rituals in the First Decade of Israel," 120. (emphasis in the original)

⁸⁶ According to Reches, the Palestinian vote and support of the MKI in the 1950s was based on "three main reasons: a) its hostility to the Zionist idea and its sharp critique of Israeli policy; b) its sympathetic pro-Arab platform both in regard to the overall Arab-national question and the national specific aspects of the Arabs within Israel; and c) being a political organization active within the legitimacy of the Israeli parliamentary system" (Reches, *The Arab Minority in Israel Between Communism and Arab nationalism*, 29). The vote for the MKI became for Palestinians "an expression of Palestinian national identity and a protest against the discrimination of Israeli Arabs" (Markovizky, *White Shirt and Red Tie*, 45). In the wake of the 1948 War and the military government, the Palestinian community underwent demographic, numerical, educational and vocational changes; for details see Reches, *The Arab Minority in Israel Between Communism and Arab nationalism*, 18-24. One of those changes was the modernization of Palestinian agriculture and its decline as the main source of employment. As a result, "between the years 1961-1983 there was a large increase in the number of factory workers from 13% to 20%, mainly in clothing, food and metal industries, Palestinian workers gradually took the place of Jews that moved to other industries" (Ibid, 19). This process of proletarianization and growing Palestinian national awareness point to the fact that the Palestinian working class had joined the Party not because of its class ideology, but because of its national platform.

parents to become intellectuals rather than workers. Their few attempts to make contact with Israel's underclass failed dismally.⁸⁷ Nonetheless, despite the flaws in the Jewish Communists' day-to-day contact with workers, their May Day represented the possibility of a different Israeli society, one that respects its workingmen, where Palestinians and Jews could live and work free of nationalism and exploitation. It was a direction that Israeli society never took.

Working class militancy, symbolized through Soviet and local motifs, ritualized in what was undoubtedly the main rite of the MKI and Banki, had a profound effect on young Communists. Marching through the main streets of the cities left diverse and conflicting impressions on the participating youngsters. As in other public appearances of the Communists, mainly in the 1950s, the reaction to them was abusive and sometimes violent. Some, like Carmit Gai, recall the exposure to the hostility of the crowd as a negative experience: "May Day marches, in white shirts with blue and red ties, are engraved in my memory as a terrible nightmare. Marching in step left-right, the national or the class flag in hand, or some slogan in favour of fraternity, freedom and peace, shouting slogans in unified, confident chorus in the city street, to the sound of shouts of scorn and the cursing of passers-by, added to the activity in the movement a dimension of exposure that I could not bear."⁸⁸

In a gentler tone, Nessia Shafran recalls, in contrast to her friends, that "May Day demonstrations were for them a great release, a sort of yearly catharsis," and that she felt "held back in such collective shouting."⁸⁹ At the same time, Shafran admits to being excited, as a child, as she watched her father marching in the main street of her hometown. Nissim Calderon fondly remembers the youthful enthusiasm that accompanied the preparations for the march. Yoram

⁸⁷ Shafran, *Farewell Communism*, 55-68.

⁸⁸ Gai, *Back to Yad-Hannah*, 219.

⁸⁹ Shafran, *Farewell Communism*, 114.

Gozensky also recalls the hard work and the pride that the young Banki members felt when the other Zionist-Socialist youth movements passed by.⁹⁰

Whatever the young Communists' feelings and doubts about May Day, the MKI and Banki used the holiday to further the movement's indoctrination and instil in them a sense of identification with the workers' struggle. "All the songs that I heard in the movement, all the books that I read in those years, everything I heard from my father and the instructors in the movement were supposedly enough to develop in me a deep sympathy toward the working class."⁹¹ The stress on the symbols and myths of working-class struggle was intended precisely, despite the personal ambivalence some Communists may have felt, to develop that sympathy toward workingmen.

Sympathy did not translate, however, into a sense of belonging. The Jewish Communists never managed to recruit a large enough number of workers to develop a proletarian identity (in contrast to the American Communists, who developed a strong proletarian identity and ties with workers taking part in the union drives of America in the 1930s).⁹² Their contacts with the underclass of Israel in the 1950s, made up mainly of non-European Jews streaming into the country after 1948, were limited and short-lived. The "attempts to work among the youths in Kfar Yona Bet did not go well," recalls Carmit Gai. The young Banki members from Yad-Hanna approached the unemployed youngsters of the slum with real enthusiasm, intent on introducing them "to the principles of Socialism, peace and international solidarity." Nonetheless, when those youngsters hinted at a romantic interest in the girls, "we were startled and clammed up like

⁹⁰ Nissim Calderon, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, March 3, 2009; Yoram Gozensky, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, February 22, 2009.

⁹¹ Shafran, *Farewell Communism*, 57.

⁹² Vivian Gornick, recalling her childhood in a Jewish American Communist house, says "before I knew that I was Jewish or a girl I knew I was a member of the working class" (Gornick, *The Romance of American Communism*, 3). In the words of one her interviews, as an active Communist in the 1970s she refused a Party offer to become a functionary: "'I wanted to remain a worker... I did not want to become a functionary'" Ibid., 113.

a hedgehog."⁹³ Nessia Shafran describes her group's attempts to connect to the local juvenile garage workers as driven by good but impractical intentions. She claims that "we felt sympathy for the garage boys in Bar-Kokhba Street, but we came from above, not from among them."⁹⁴ The lack of a proletarian identity was reflected in the MKI as well as in Banki. The history of the Party shows a tendency to deal more with the national question and relations with the Soviet Union than with the class struggle. A glaring example of that is the fact that Yair Tzaban was reprimanded by the Party for allocating too much space in an article in *Kol Hano'ar* to the exploitation of young boys picking cotton, and for not giving allocating more space in the issue to the October Revolution.⁹⁵

Why did the Jewish Communists lack a proletarian identity? Above all, there were objective reasons. Since the 1920s the Communist Party had been forcibly marginalized within the Jewish working class. The PKP's inability to propagate its views openly certainly contributed to its inability to recruit workers in such numbers as to give it a proletarian character and identity. By the time the Party was allowed to operate openly among the Jewish working class, the Zionist *Histadrut* was already entrenched, giving the Jewish working class a Zionist-Socialist identity. Thus, the PKP and later the MKI were unable to emplace an alternative working class identity.

The structure of the *Histadrut* itself prevented the Jewish Communists from attaining a meaningful place within the ranks of Jewish workers. The *Histadrut* wielded a combination of economic and ideological powers that were vital to the Zionist project. "The organizational tools created in the *Histadrut* alongside the trade union – the workers' society and the economic enterprises, the collective settlements, workers' education, the pioneering youth movements, the

⁹³ Gai, *Back to Yad-Hannah*, 219.

⁹⁴ Shafran, *Farewell Communism*, 64.

⁹⁵ Yair Tzaban, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, February 12, 2009

welfare institutions, all those... were tools in the national struggle."⁹⁶ The potent combination of Zionist nationalism with a Socialist ideology that was meant to serve it made the *Histadrut* a powerful body. It organized the workers to such a degree "that there was no space that would enable the Communist Party to penetrate industry and develop in it diverse trade union activity."⁹⁷ This factor clearly prevented the development of a true Jewish Communist workers' identity. The lack of a Communist union organization during the formative stage of the Jewish working class in the 1920s and the Communists' subsequent inability to penetrate the highly organized Zionist union contrasts sharply with the efforts of the Palestinian Communists. The NLL,⁹⁸ exploiting the absence of a modern polity, used the emergence of a working class from the peasantry to mobilize workers en masse. The Palestinian Communists managed to do exactly what their Jewish comrades were unable to. In the absence of a powerful anti-Communist union, they developed union activity. The question as to what kind of working class identity beyond the national one the Palestinian Communists subsequently developed awaits research.

A last factor that prevented the Jewish Communists from forming a proletarian identity was the nature of political culture and conflict. Palestine's political culture evolved around the conflict between the Zionist immigrants' society and Palestinian nationalism.⁹⁹ The Jewish Communists were more preoccupied with the fight against Zionism and dealing with the sway that nationalism had over them, than with diverting their energies to class warfare. Thus another barrier was erected to the creation of a proletarian identity among Jewish Communists.

⁹⁶ Yosef Gorny, Avi Bareli and Yitzhak Greenberg eds., *Maḥberet Avoda Le'irgun Ovedim: Leḳet Ma'amarim al Hahistadrut Beyemey Hayeshuv Vehamedina* (The Histadrut: from a Workers Society to Trade Union, Selected Essays on the Histadrut), (Beer-Sheva: The Ben-Gurion University Press, 2000), 2.

⁹⁷ Shafran, *Farewell Communism*, 63.

⁹⁸ For the trade union activity of the Palestinian Communists in the NLL, see Farah, *From the Ottoman Rule to the Hebrew State*; Dothan, *Reds*; Porat, "The National Liberation League"; and Budeiri, *The Palestine Communist Party*.

⁹⁹ Kimmerling, *Immigrants, Settlers, Natives*, 90: "Since the Jewish community was an immigrant society, the conflict between it and the local Arab community was built into the situation."

The lack of a working-class identity does not detract from the cultural importance of the Jewish Communists' identity structure, as is evident from the amount of educational and other materials dedicated to May Day. The Jewish Communists identified with the plight of working people. The mythical, symbolic and ritualistic dimensions of that identification played an important role in shaping Jewish Communist subculture. The Jewish Communists' presence within the Jewish working class may have been small, but it was there. The struggles of people like Alyosha Gozansky and countless unknown others wrote an unknown page in the history of the Israeli working class. Theirs certainly was not the hegemonic Zionist narrative that preferred to forgo class distinctions in favour of class harmony in building a Zionist state and nation.

Chapter 5: Revolution and the Soviet Union among Tel Aviv Communists, 1919 to 1965

5.1 The Jewish Communists, the Philo-Soviet Community and the U.S.S.R

The link between the Soviet Union and the Jewish Communists assumed a vital political, organizational and cultural role in the MKI and Banki.¹ The myth that legitimized this link was based on two historical events: the October Revolution and the Soviet-German War of 1941-1945. In ritual, myth and symbol, the Jewish Communists shaped their identity and subculture around a pseudo-religious perception of those events. Glossing over Stalin's horrendous crimes and the excesses of the Revolution, they created a myth of the U.S.S.R. consecrated in ritual that was both Soviet and local at same time.

From its formative stages in the 1920s, Communism in Palestine and later Israel was based on loyalty to the Soviet Union. The first contacts between Bolshevik Russia and the fledgling Jewish Communists were formed between 1920 and 1922. The *Po'alei-Zion* Left party tried to join the Comintern, presenting a political program with mixed Zionist and Communist elements. This first contact ended in failure, as the Comintern rejected the overtly Zionist

¹ The link to the Soviet Union was also vital to the CPUSA and hotly debated in American historiography. The old guard of American historians claimed the CPUSA was no more than a stooge of Soviet policy, following every Soviet whim. The new historians who have emerged since the 1980s claim that the link with the U.S.S.R. was more complex and that the CPUSA acted on its own in many issues. In this regard, the words of an ex-party member convey an authentic portrayal: "it's perfectly true that the Soviet Union was a tremendously important factor in our lives, but it was most important in rather intelligible ways. It was an inspiration, it created faith in the future, it legitimized optimism, and it gave us a feeling of a worldwide comradeship and a sense of participating in world history" (Anette T. Rubinstein, "The Cultural World of the Communist Party," in *New Studies in the Politics and Culture of U.S. Communism*, ed. Michael E. Brown, et al. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1993), 241. The Jewish Communists' link to the Soviet Union performed a similar function, as will be seen in the following pages, developing into a pseudo-religious cult.

Po'alei-Zion Left.² Contacts between the Jewish Communists in Palestine and the Soviet Union were resumed in February 1924 when the Comintern recognized the PKP as a section of the Third International. A letter from the Palestinian subcommittee says: "[I]t was resolved: to acknowledge the PKP as a section of the Comintern."³ From then on the Jewish Communists took their orders from Moscow; nonetheless, their obedience was not as blind as Zionist historians portray it.

From the moment the PKP became part of the Comintern in 1924, Moscow, trying to firmly implant the Party in the majority population of Palestine, demanded the Arabization of the Party. For ideological justification, the Comintern quoted Lenin's edict regarding Soviet Communist work in the East, namely that the Russian Communists should be the helpers and not the leaders of their Central Asian comrades. That process culminated in the aftermath of the 1929 Riots when the Jewish leadership of the Party was disbanded on Moscow's orders and a new Central Committee with Moscow-trained Palestinian activists was installed. Although the Party had been making efforts to penetrate the Palestinian masses of Palestine, its Jewish leaders were reluctant to give up their control. The clash between Moscow and the leadership of the PKP came to a head after the 1929 Riots when the Comintern compelled the Jewish Communists to Arabize.⁴ By the 1930s, the now Arabized PKP was operating under Soviet tutelage in the shape of the Comintern. However, from 1937 the Party had no further contact with the Soviet Union until the first Soviet delegation to Palestine in 1942. In a report to that delegation on PKP inner

² For the contacts between the Comintern and the *Po'aley-Zion* Left, see Elkana Margalit, *Anatomya shel Šmol: Po'aley Tsiyon Šmol Be'erets-Isra'el (1919-1946)* (The Anatomy of the Left: the Left Po'alei-Zion in Eretz-Israel (1919-1946)), (Tel Aviv: The L. L. Peretz Publishing House, 1976); Mario Kessler, "HaKomintern Vepo'aley Tsiyon Šmol, 1919-1922" (The Comintern and Left Po'ale Zion, 1919-1922), in *Kaneged Hazerem! Hamiflaga HaKomunistit Ha'Israelit 1919-2009* (Against the Mainstream! The Communist Party of Israel (CPI) 1919-2009), ed. Tamar Gozansky et al. (Tel Aviv: Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, 2009).

³ Zahavi, *Apart or Together*, 51.

⁴ The clash between the Comintern and the PKP leadership and the Arabization are very well documented in the literature on the early history of the Communist Party in Palestine: Dothan, *Reds*, 133-195 and Zahavi, *Apart or Together*, 168- 245.

politics by one Sash Philosoph, the writer states that "for several years the Party has had no contact with the Communist International," adding that "a detailed report, referring to the period up until September 1939, was sent to the Comintern committee in April 1940 by a messenger... but it never arrived."⁵

From the early 1940s, the reconstituted contacts between the Communists in Palestine and the Soviet Union were severed once again; after the split of 1943, "direct contact was made only in 1947... the first feelers were made from our side, first by sending Alyosha Gozansky, a member of the Party Secretariat, and Ruth Lubitz to Bulgaria and other Socialist countries... second by sending a delegation of members of the Young Communist League, who participated in building a railroad track... in Yugoslavia."⁶ Besides their sputtering relationship with the U.S.S.R., during World War Two the Jewish Communists laid the foundations of a larger philo-Soviet community,⁷ made up of Jewish Communists, Zionist-Socialists and unaffiliated intellectuals. While the Communist Party was linked to the Soviet Union, ideologically as well as culturally, the philo-Soviet community was not necessarily ideologically reliant on the U.S.S.R. It fostered a wider system of cultural ties that were captioned as Soviet-Israel Friendship.

During World War Two the Jewish Communists and the growing philo-Soviet community in Palestine sought to institutionalize the aid to the U.S.S.R. An internal document of the Young Communist League asserts that "there's a need to develop a wide movement of

⁵ Zahavi, *Apart or Together*, 399.

⁶ "Hape'ilut shel Hamiflaga Haḥomunistit Ha'ereṣ-Isra'elit Legiyus Ezra Poliṭit Vetsva'it Lemilhemet Ha'atma'ut" (The Activity of the Eretz-Israeli Communist Party to Recruit Political and Military Aid to the Independence War), Lavon Institute for Labour Research, IV-104-85-47.

⁷ The term "philo-Soviet community" represents circles of people who for various reasons were sympathetic toward the Soviet Union without being MKI members. It is a more flexible and less biased concept than the Cold War notions of fellow travelers or sympathizers. The philo-Soviet community changed after War World Two. At first it included Zionist Socialists that identified with the Soviet war effort as well as Communists and even whole parties that supported the U.S.S.R., namely MAPAM. From the mid-1950s, as the Zionist Socialists lost their illusions about the Soviet Union, it included people closer to the MKI. Nonetheless, it still included many unaffiliated leftists that were not Party members.

sympathy toward the Soviet Union."⁸ Russian culture and the Russian Revolution had long been incorporated into the culture of the *Yishuv's* workers and youth movements,⁹ and World War II added to the existing cultural and political ties between the Zionist-Socialist left and the U.S.S.R., stimulating the growth of the philo-Soviet community within the *Yishuv*. On 18 October 1941 the V League was established by a group of Haifa-based intellectuals, led by the author Arnold Zweig. In parallel to it, a group led by the Communist poet and writer Mordechai Avi-Shaul was formed in Tel Aviv. On May 2nd 1942, the Haifa and Tel Aviv groups were united to form the V League for Soviet Russia (i.e., the V League).

The V League had three stipulations in its platform, stressing its wide appeal: "1. The League is a nonpartisan organization. 2. Its role is to provide help to the Red Army. 3. It should foster a mutual understanding between the U.S.S.R. and the Jewish and Arab communities in Eretz-Israel."¹⁰ The League immediately undertook extensive activity on behalf of the Soviet war effort. In a series of fundraising events, it collected mainly medical aid, including field ambulances and money. The aid was delivered to the U.S.S.R. by a delegation to the Soviet ambassador in Teheran.¹¹ Posters of the V League reveal the nature of its activity.¹² Alongside drives to purchase bandages and ambulances, it held a Russian art exhibition, celebrations of the

⁸ "Tokhnit La'avoda Bano'ar, Detsember 1941" (A Plan for Activity among the Youth, December 1941), Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #3.

⁹ In an interview Tamar Gozansky clearly described the cultural affinity between the Communists and the *Yishuv's* Zionist Left, saying "in that period not only the Communists supported the U.S.S.R, but the Zionist parties as well. Hashomer Hatzair also talked about Socialism and peoples' fraternity, and also in the day-to-day culture of the youth movements all of them sang Russian songs... there were many joint cultural characteristics" (Tamar Gozansky, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, February 21, 2009).

¹⁰ Ruth Lubitz, *Koroteha shel Yedidut* (History of a Friendship), (Tel Aviv: the Movement of Friendship Israel – U.S.S.R., 1984), 19.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹² The posters are from the Lavon Institute for Labour Research, IV-519.

foundation of the Red Army and the Revolution, and even a soccer match whose proceeds went "to aid the Red Army."¹³

Though the first impulse behind the V League was immediate help to the Soviet Union, by the end of the war it had become a cultural agency of the Soviet Union in Palestine, and the foundation of a cultural political philo-Soviet community. The change in the character of the V League was accompanied by a change in its makeup. As late as November 1945, the national conference of the organization was attended by prominent Zionist-Socialist politicians. Men like David Remez from MAPAI and Yitzhak Tabenkin from *Ahdut HaAvoda* participated in the conference alongside PKP secretary-general Shmuel Mikunis. But as the tensions of the Cold War mounted and Israel increasingly allied itself with the West, the Zionist-Socialists left, MAPAI's representatives in 1949, and those of MAPAM, its loyalty to the Soviet Union shaken by the Communist regime's anti-Zionism and the 1953 Doctors Trials, where the Jewish doctors of the Kremlin elite were accused of a plot to assassinate the top Soviet leaders, probably in preparation for a mass expulsion of Jews from European Russia to Central Asia.

With the Zionist-Socialist parties gone, the renamed Friendship Movement Soviet-Israel Union (i.e., the Friendship Movement) became more closely connected to the MKI. Nonetheless, the Communists, now at the helm of the Friendship Movement, tried to leave it open not necessarily to Party members. The platform of the reconstituted organization reflected that: "The Friendship Movement is open to people with different worldviews and is nonpartisan."¹⁴ The Friendship Movement became the principle channel through which the Jewish Communists and the philo-Soviet community publicly maintained their contact with the U.S.S.R., primarily in the form of a constant stream of delegations to the U.S.S.R.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Lubitz, *History of A Friendship*, 82.

Wall posters from the 1950s and early 1960s demonstrate the Friendship Movement's activity. One poster offers a 30-day tour in the U.S.S.R., including four days on a Soviet passenger vessel.¹⁵ Another poster from 1964 announces a raffle to raise money for the conference of the Israel-U.S.S.R Friendship Movement, the first prize a return ticket to the U.S.S.R. Besides tourism, the Friendship Movement sent delegations to Soviet scientific and youth gatherings. Soviet and Russian culture also had its place in the activity of the Friendship Movement. A poster of the Haifa Friendship House from 1963 announces a lecture marking the hundredth anniversary of Constantin Stanislavski's birth. A 1962 poster from Tel Aviv proclaims an evening in honour of Pushkin's hundred and twenty fifth anniversary. Alongside the activity of the more broadly based Friendship Movement, the MKI and Banki sustained their own contacts with the U.S.S.R. A 1950 poster proclaims a "V. E. Lenin Evening" to mark the twenty sixth anniversary of his death. Meir Vilner's speech at that event was dedicated to the publication of *The Short Course*. A 1963 postcard shows the Arab-Jewish delegation on a truck holding the Israeli flag amid cheering crowds. The 1957 delegation is made up of *keffiyah*-clad and European-clad members, reinstating the motif of the Arab-Jewish duo.¹⁶ Like the Friendship Movement, Banki sent delegations to the U.S.S.R. In a 1964 pamphlet, signed by Banki, the public is encouraged to "hear live impressions from an interesting mission to the Soviet Union."¹⁷

The bond between the Jewish Communists, the philo-Soviet circles around them and the U.S.S.R was not without its darker sides. Any criticism of Soviet policies was branded anti-Soviet incitement. At times the Jewish Communists and other pro-Soviet circles were in the right, as in the case of the 1953 bombing of the Soviet embassy in Tel Aviv by right-wing

¹⁵ Banki and MKI poster collection, Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #17-18.

¹⁶ "Yad Beyad Beyedidut Na'amod" (Hand to Hand in Friendship we will stand), Yad Tabenkin Archives.

¹⁷ "Im Ata Rotse Lishmoa" (If you want to Hear), Yad Tabenkin Archives.

extremists.¹⁸ In other cases they refused to admit the existence of institutionalized anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union,¹⁹ and they invariably portrayed life in the Soviet Union as progressive and free.²⁰ The lack of freedom, continued persecution of dissenters, inability of the planned economy to provide a bounty equal to that of capitalist economy, and Soviet imperialism — these matters were not discussed at all. The denial of Soviet misdeeds was prevalent in other Communist parties, as one of Howard Fast's acquaintances admitted in the face of the 20th Congress's revelations: "I do not read the forgeries of the State Department or the flowery about the Soviet Union. Anyway, nothing can change my view of the Soviet Union and the Communist Party. I know both of them well."²¹

As the relations between the U.S.S.R. and Israel deteriorated and as Israel turned to the West, the MKI acted behind the scenes, trying to establish a parallel friendship league in the U.S.S.R. and to unite Soviet Jewish families with relatives in Israel. Though the Party leaders did not agree with every single policy of the Soviets, especially as regards the freedom of movement of Soviet Jews to immigrate outside the U.S.S.R.,²² they put on a show of complete loyalty and obedience for the sake of the Party rank and file and the philo-Soviet public. That took a toll on the MKI's public image, most notably during the 1953 Doctors Trials and the Purge Trials, costing the Party many Jewish supporters.²³ It was not until 1967 that the Jewish MKI broke with

¹⁸ See, for example, a poster by the League for Friendly Relations Israel-U.S.S.R, condemning the act and claiming it was caused by "the anti-Soviet incitement running wild in our country for months" (Yad Tabenkin Archives (Ramat Efal, Israel).

¹⁹ See a 1963 poster denying Anti-Semitism claiming that "Soviet Jews enjoy equal rights and hold important positions in all walks of life." "Hafsiķu et Hahasatā!" (Stop the Incitement!) Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #17-18.

²⁰ See posters for lectures about Soviet health care, culture, unions and schools. Yad Tabenkin Archives, File # 17-18.

²¹ Howard Fast, *The Naked God*, (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1959), 63.

²² Shafran, *Farewell Communism*, 187.

²³ Markovizky, *White Shirt and Red Tie*, 43.

the U.S.S.R. in the wake of its support for the 1967 War. The Palestinian-Jewish Rakah party remained loyal to the Soviet Union until 1991.²⁴

Two main historical events marked the importance of the U.S.S.R. to the Jewish Communists and the philo-Soviet community: the Soviet-German War and the October Revolution. Both stimulated the emergence of unique symbols, myths and rites to signify friendship with the Soviets.

5.2 The Colossus Triumphant

The celebration of the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany was above all a celebration of the U.S.S.R.'s military and political prowess and Soviet Friendship. The glorification of Soviet power took root early in the Communism of Palestine. In a 1925 handbill, the PKP threatened the British with an international "army of the world revolution."²⁵ In a 1940 issue of *Kol Ha'am*, dedicated to the twenty-second anniversary of the founding of the Red Army, it was described as the defender of Communism and the accomplishments of the Revolution.²⁶ The Red Army, the article proclaimed, "turned the Soviet Union from a weak country unable to defend itself into a mighty country in its defence capability."²⁷ The article did not mention the debacle of the Winter War. Glossing over the unpleasant aspects of Soviet policy and of the Red Army's behaviour during the war would come to characterize the myth of the war.

The myth of Soviet power was evident already in the first months of the war. In an article entitled "The Red Army in Battle," Soviet power is portrayed as defending the achievements of

²⁴ Rakah's absolute loyalty to the U.S.S.R. can be explained by an ideological loyalty to international solidarity, and the electoral benefits to the Party among the Palestinian electorate for being associated with a power friendly to Palestinian nationalism (Reches, *The Arab Minority in Israel Between Communism and Arab nationalism*, 47-51).

²⁵ Porat, "Revolution and Terrorism in the Policy of the Palestine Communist Party (PKP)," 255.

²⁶ "22 Shana Latsava Ha'adom!" (22 Years to the Red Army!) *Kol Ha'am*,

²⁷ Ibid.

the Revolution: "The Red Army stands on guard. The peoples of the Soviet Union stand on guard... the Soviet soldier and Soviet men are fiercely resisting the distraction of the happiness accumulated over 24 years of persistent struggle and hard work."²⁸ Soviet power has assumed an internationalist aspect in the global anti-Fascist struggle, as "in Germany and Italy, in France and the other countries occupied by Fascism, the masses are actively supporting the Red Army in its war."²⁹ The Jewish connection is not neglected, Jews being called on to join the fight, since "Fascist rule over the world means total physical annihilation for the Jews."³⁰ And Soviet failures in the war are glossed over, with *Kol Ha'am* asserting "that the Army of the Ukraine commanded by comrade Budyonny managed to prevent the encirclement in the Ukraine,"³¹ whereas in fact Budyonny, one of Stalin's favourites, was responsible for one of the great Soviet disasters of the war.

A March 1942 *Kol Hano'ar* article dedicated to the Red Army's anniversary has a different tone. Soviet power is still depicted in Marxist-Leninist terms, as the Party "succeeds in uplifting the political consciousness of the army to a higher degree by studying the doctrines of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin."³² Nonetheless, the Soviet soldier, the text asserts, was fighting out of "sincere Soviet patriotism."³³ This love of the motherland is defined as internationalist, as it is "based on deference for the small and enslaved peoples."³⁴ Jewish heroism is defined in terms of Soviet patriotism, as the Jews were fighting among "Russians, Ukrainians, Georgians, Azerbaijanis and Tartars [thus in the original]."³⁵ In a 1943 article devoted to the anniversary of the German invasion, expression is given to the "Soviet Union that was known for years as the

²⁸ "Hatsava Ha'adom Bakrav!" (The Red Army in Battle!), *Kol Ha'am*, August 1941.

²⁹ "Ma'avakenu Lema'an Hazit Amamit" (Our Struggle for a Popular Front), *Kol Ha'am*, August 1941.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ "The Red Army in Battle!"

³² "24 Shanim Latsava Ha'adom" (24 Years to the Red Army), *Kol Hano'ar*, March 1942.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ "Hadam Zo'ek min Ha'adama!" (The Blood Calls for Revenge!) *Kol Hano'ar*, October 1942.

main fighter against Fascism"³⁶ and the Jewish national connection in a poem of revenge and a lament for the rebels of the Warsaw Ghetto.

By the end of the war, the new patriotic tone of the discourse about Soviet power became more pronounced. In a booklet titled *The War of Liberation*, published as the end of the war was nearing, the young Communists gave an account of the war from their point of view. It had been motivated by the desire of the German bourgeoisie and Hitler to enslave the world. In reaction to Fascism's desire to enslave the world, a popular anti-Fascist front led by the Soviet Union fought to destroy it. While the war is described as an international anti-Fascist struggle, the Soviet soldiers are described as having been motivated by "love of motherland and hatred of the enemy."³⁷ It was not an international revolutionary war, but a "war against the foreign invader" where one fought "for his renewed homeland that enabled him to be the master of his land."³⁸ Fascism had been dealt a lethal blow by Soviet power, manifested in the Red Army, "which in the course of the war increased its power."³⁹ The war had opened the way for the Jewish Communists in Palestine to adopt Jewish national motifs. Here Jewish heroism was intertwined with Soviet patriotism: Soviet Jewry "hand in hand with the other Soviet peoples" had fought against Fascism, reflecting "the great tradition of the Maccabean, Bar-Kokhba and Rabbi Akiva."⁴⁰

The symbols used by the Jewish Communists in their pro-Soviet propaganda and those used by the V League also glorified Soviet power. Taking their cue from Soviet wartime propaganda, Communist and V League publications were decorated with images of Soviet soldiers. A postcard distributed by the Communist Youth shows Stalin and three figures of

³⁶ "Sbatayim Lemilhemet Hashihurur" (Two Years Liberation War), *Kol Hano'ar*, June-July 1943.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ "Milhemet Hashihurur" (The War of Liberation), Lavon Institute for Labour Research, IV-445-2.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid .

representatives of the Soviet army, air force and navy, seen against the background of the Soviet flag. The caption marries together Soviet power and Jewish plight: "The Salvation of the Jewish People Demands more Help to the Red Army!"⁴¹ A V League poster shows a Red Army soldier marching with a bayonet rifle in hand, carrying the Soviet flag, and stamping on a bestial figure of a Nazi beneath a sign that says "Ukraine."⁴²

The elements forged during the war sustained into the 1950s and mid-1960s. In the part concerned with World War Two in the *Bney Amal* booklet, the young Communists are taught to emulate the individual sacrifices of Soviet heroes. The war itself is called, Soviet style, "The Motherland War."⁴³ The children are encouraged to prepare "*a diary of the Motherland War* in which a Soviet soldier (or soldiers) writes during the course of the war" (emphasis in the original).⁴⁴ The patriotism of the Soviet soldiers is further stressed in a poem where a Soviet soldier says "all I want to do is deliver the motherland, crushed beneath the claws of beasts."⁴⁵

The cult of Soviet power found expression in the booklet in the form of a list of facts to be taught to the young *Bney Amal* members. In contrast to historical reality, the text diminishes the importance of Western aid to the U.S.S.R. In accordance with historical reality, it claims that the bulk of German forces fought in the East, specifically Stalingrad.⁴⁶ The connection between awareness of the Holocaust and the Soviet myth finds expression in the suggested activities, which the instructor is encouraged to construct around "the aid the Red Army gave to the ghetto fighters"⁴⁷ and the fact that the Soviet Union saved more Jews than any other country.

⁴¹ "Matnat Hano'ar Latsava Ha'adom" (The Youths' Gift to the Red Army), Lavon Institute for Labour Research, IV-445-2.

⁴² Lavon Institute for Labour Research, IV-519.

⁴³ Lavon Institute for Labour Research, IV-104-85-7.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

The heroes that the young Communists were encouraged to learn from were self-sacrificing, simple mannered, one-dimensional proletarian heroes. In a *Kol Hano'ar* article for the tenth anniversary of the victory, the Soviet soldier is depicted as carrying "his permanent accordion and radiant optimism"⁴⁸ as he liberated thankful East Europeans. This mixture of kitsch and heroism — although Russian patriotism and heroism and the weight of Soviet losses could not be discounted — veiled the darker sides of the Soviet war effort. The brutality toward soldiers and civilians, the rape and pillage committed by the Soviets outside the U.S.S.R., mainly in Germany, are completely absent from the Jewish Communist texts.⁴⁹ By the mid-1960s the myth of the Soviet victory was well fixed in the Jewish Communist mind. No dissenting voices were heard either publicly or privately, as the Jewish Communists engaged in a mass rite that the MKI, Banki and the philo-Soviet community had been developing since the early 1950s.

The *Yishuv* welcomed the news of the capitulation of Germany with a flurry of marches. On May 8th 1945 the Communist Party organized "a great victory march" in which "hundreds of Party members and members of the Young Communist League" participated.⁵⁰ There were flags, torches, and Soviet-style "pictures of the Coalition leaders headed by Stalin and Lenin."⁵¹ The next day the Communists participated in the *Yishuv's* general procession. More than seven hundred Party and youth movement members marched "in Communist uniform lines."⁵² There were two blocs, first the Communist youth dressed in their uniforms, and behind them the older Party members headed by the Central Committee. The high point of one Communist celebration of the victory in Europe came on May 12th 1945, in a massive march in Tel Aviv on the May

⁴⁸ "Ba'anu Le'Berlin im Herev Bikhdey La'aqor et ze La'ad Mi'Berlin" (We Came to Berlin by Sword in order to root it out Forever from Berlin), *Kol Hano'ar*, May 1955.

⁴⁹ For the Soviet war effort, see Richard Overy, *Russia's War* (St Ives: Penguin Books, 1997). For Soviet mass rape and atrocities in Germany at war's end and in its immediate aftermath, see Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

⁵⁰ "Hafaganot Hamiflaga Avur Hanitsaḥon" (The Party's Demonstrations for Victory), *Kol Ha'am*, May 10, 1945.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

Day model, attended by a thousand people. It consisted of four blocs. It was led by the Young Communists marching two abreast, headed by a drummer and trumpeter, carrying flags and a giant portrait of Stalin.⁵³ They were followed by a bloc of Party members and veterans, a bloc dedicated to the mourning of the fallen in the war and the victims of the Holocaust, and a last bloc devoted to Palestine. At the head of the parade drove the Party's own truck, decorated with flags and the Hammer and Sickle.⁵⁴

The militaristic parade, portraits of the leaders, Soviet symbols and Red Flags are all reminiscent of earlier May Day elements. Even the counter-ritual spirit of May Day was retained, as one of the Party's marchers was attacked by the right-wing Zionist movement founded by Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the Revisionists.⁵⁵ At the same time, the parade was imbued with the myth of the war, with its celebration of Soviet prowess and connection to consciousness of the Holocaust. Many Jewish national symbols were introduced to the parade as well. The marchers carried flags of the United Nations and of the Jewish Brigade, the Jewish unit in the British army which had fought under the Zionist flag – which later became the flag of the state of Israel – and the Star of David insignia. They carried with them a sign proclaiming "eternal glory to the heroes of the ghetto who sacrificed their lives for the honour and freedom of our people."⁵⁶ In what was called the mourning bloc, the marchers carried a tower with a sign on its first level that read: "Eternal Glory to the Ghetto Rebel."⁵⁷ The cult of Soviet power was symbolized by "signs in honour of the heroic cities Stalingrad, Sebastopol, Leningrad, etc.," together with slogans honouring "the heroic armies,"⁵⁸ the Red Army first and foremost among them.

⁵³ Photograph courtesy of Yoram Gozansky.

⁵⁴ Photograph taken from Gozansky (ed.), *Arise, ye Workers from your Slumber*, 427.

⁵⁵ "The Party's Demonstrations for Victory".

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ "Mitsad Hanitsahon shel Hamiflaga HaKomunistit" (The Victory Parade of the Communist Party), *Kol Ha'am*, May 16, 1945.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

The parade in Tel Aviv, despite being the founding event of the Communist celebration of May 9th, was discontinued and in later years replaced by a mass cult of a different kind. The Communists developed a mass cult in the Red Army forest which, from the early 1950s, became a focal point for the cult of the U.S.S.R, and the war.

At the end of the war, the V League initiated an enterprise to symbolically commemorate and pay tribute to the Red Army. The scheme reflected the League's new role as a cultural agency. The effort to raise money for planting a forest in honour of the Red Army was launched in an opening ceremony at the Mograbi Theater in Tel Aviv, where the nationwide sale of a victory badge was announced.⁵⁹ By July, the *Histadrut* Executive Committee, in a letter signed by Golda Meyerson, had adopted the campaign and set it for a period of two weeks.⁶⁰ In the national convention of the V League, its chairman L. Tarnopler stated that its aim was to raise "3,000 pounds in Palestine, enough to plant a forest of 100 dunams around Jerusalem." He also announced a plan "for the building of a victory monument"⁶¹ on the grounds.

After five years of fundraising and lobbying, on June 22nd 1950 a planting ceremony and dedication of the monument was held. In Zionist ritual, the planting of trees was an accepted practice symbolizing the re-rooting of the Jewish collective in its old-new land⁶². In the case of the Red Army forest, however, the practice was pressed into service to show gratitude to an army and state beyond the national territory. (In only one other similar case, a forest was planted in honour of the International Brigades in the mountains of Jerusalem.) The reason given for planting trees was the gratitude the people of Israel owed the Red Army. Yitzhak Gruenbaum, one of the principal Polish Zionist leaders before the war, expressed "his feelings of gratitude"

⁵⁹ "Ya'ar Be'erets-Isra'el Nikra al Shem Hatsava Ha'adom" (A Forest in Eretz-Israel Named for the Red Army), *Davar*, June 21, 1945.

⁶⁰ "Hava'ad Hapo'el" (The Executive Committee), Lavon Institute for Labour Research, IV-519-40.

⁶¹ "Have'ida Hale'umit shel Liga Vi" (National Conference of V League), *Davar*, July 13, 1945.

⁶² Herzl's *Altneuland* (Old-New Land) (Tel Aviv: Babel, 2002) was Zionism's constitutive text.

toward the Red Army and international understanding, and his hope that "the monument [may] be a symbol of mutual understanding between the two peoples."⁶³ Thus the celebration in the forest became a celebration of Soviet-Israeli Friendship. Already in the planting ceremony, the speakers reminded the audience of their obligation "not to be able to forget and not to want to forget" the "bloody struggle conducted in the Russian plains."⁶⁴ The edict not to forget was connected to the memory of the Holocaust, as the Jewish anti-Fascist Committee's "great proclamation of faith in the internal mission, 'Thou Shalt not Die, but Live,'"⁶⁵ was invoked.

The outstanding feature of the Red Army forest is the stone monument. From the late 1940s, Israeli national monuments increasingly became centres of the Israeli cult of the fallen. The Red Army monument was part of this cultural trend, in the sense that it became the centre of a ritual of commemoration; however, the content of the memory was different. The monument symbolically manifests local nationalist motifs and Soviet European ones that characterized the Soviet victory myth. It is a typical *galed* monument made out of one massive stone. In that respect, it poses a sharp contrast to the Soviet war monuments, which incorporate manlike figures, inscribed tombstones and battlefield weapons, most notably seen in the massive Soviet war monuments in East Berlin. Nevertheless, the stone visibly references the symbolism of the Soviet state, as "the symbol of the Soviet Union, the Hammer and Sickle, is mounted upon it."⁶⁶ The symbols of the workers state were shown against the background of the Red Star, another Soviet symbol.⁶⁷ The inscription at the top of the stone further clarifies that "this forest was planted by the people of Israel in honour of the Soviet Army,"⁶⁸ reaffirming the gratitude motif.

⁶³ "Niṭa 'Ya'ar Hatsava Hasovyeti" (The 'Soviet Army Forest' was Planted), *Davar*, June 23, 1945.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Photograph of the monument *Kol Ha'am*, June 26, 1950.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Communists participated in the planting ceremony, as *Kol Ha'am* showed a prominent Party member, Ester Vilenska, planting a tree.⁶⁹ However, true to their tactics since the formation of the V League, the Communists emphasized the broad multiparty nature of the support for the U.S.S.R. Therefore, known Communists did not speak at the opening event and all the main speakers were Zionist, some of them state officials. From the early 1950s, the ceremony started to evolve into a mass rally with speeches followed by artistic performances. The 1951 ceremony, under the now jointly MAPAM- and MKI-led Israel-U.S.S.R Friendship League, included speeches, poetry readings, choral singing and folk dancing.⁷⁰ Moshe Sneh from MAPAM brought up what would become a recurrent theme in the Communist independence myth, namely the help the Eastern Bloc and the U.S.S.R. lent to Israel in the 1948 War. Meir Vilner revisited the Communist consciousness of the Holocaust, proclaiming that on the Day of Victory "our people will not forget and will not let be forgotten the horrors of German Fascism in World War Two."⁷¹ The following year Ester Vilenska revisited the element of gratitude toward and prowess of the Red Army, lauding it as the "Army of Peace" that all "the peace-loving peoples of the world look to in gratitude."⁷²

The ritual at the foot of the monument in the Red Army forest was elaborated with waving of flags, speeches and the presentation of floral wreaths, followed by artistic performances, eventually evolving into a three-part ceremony. The first was the official part of the ceremony, which included symbolic acts like anthem singing, laying of wreaths at the foot of the stone, and the release of a flight of doves.⁷³ The second part consisted of artistic

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ "Atseret Amamit" (Popular Rally), *Kol Ha'am*, May 4, 1951.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² "5000 Anashim Nishba'im Lehagen al Hashalom" (5000 People Swear to Defend Peace), *Kol Ha'am*, May 10, 1952.

⁷³ "10 Shanim Lanitsahon al Hafashizem" (10 Years to the Victory over Fascism), *Kol Ha'am*, May 11, 1955.

performances that, more often than not, included the Party's choirs and poets.⁷⁴ The third part evolved into a popular celebration that included exhibitions, food-stands, raffle booths, and a mass family picnic.⁷⁵ The celebrations combined the solemn with the carnival-like, echoing the early Bolshevik rituals. The three-part structure of the ritual was meant to move the audience in a structured manner from the solemn to the carnivalesque. After the waving of flags, singing of the national anthem and speeches, followed by artistic performances, the celebration ended with the complete release of tension as the crowds enjoyed a mass picnic.

The annual preparations for the Victory celebration were complicated and demanded diligent planning and mobilization of the Friendship League and Banki. *Kol Ha'am* advertised the yearly event, reporting on "extensive preparations for the ceremony in the Soviet Army forest."⁷⁶ Most of the organizational work was done by the Friendship League, which registered the participants, distributed tickets through its branches and arranged for transportation.⁷⁷ The actual construction of facilities at the ceremony site was performed by Banki. As early as 1955, *Kol Ha'am* reported that the night before the mass rally "a youth rally was held commemorating the tenth anniversary of the victory over Hitler's Germany."⁷⁸ From then on, Banki members would gather at the mountain the night before the main ceremony in order to prepare the site to receive the crowds. By the nineteenth anniversary of the victory in 1964, the gathering had

⁷⁴ In a photograph from the ceremony, Haya Kadmon is seen reading her poetry on the main stage and a choir singing accompanied by a violin (*The Campaigns of Struggle between Two Conferences, 1957-1961*) and (Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #17-2).

⁷⁵ "A pamphlet for the fourteenth anniversary of the victory targeted at Party sympathizers," "Haver Ya'ar" (Dear Friend), Yad Tabenkin Archives.

⁷⁶ *Kol Ha'am*, 5.5.52, extensive preparations for the ceremony in the Soviet Army forest. More or less the same item was reported every year until 1965.

⁷⁷ "Atseret Nitsa'hon Beya'ar Hatsava Hasovyeti" (Victory Rally in the Soviet Army Forest), *Kol Ha'am*, May 8, 1953.

⁷⁸ "Alafim Hefginu Beya'ar Hatsava Hasovyeti" (Thousands Demonstrated in the Soviet Army Forest), *Kol Ha'am*, May 15, 1955.

evolved into a mass rite, including a bonfire, joint Palestinian and Jewish meetings, a film show, and singing and dancing.⁷⁹

Banki was following the common practice of the Zionist Left youth movements, which were influenced by the German *Wandervogel* with their hikes and gatherings in remote natural surroundings. In the culture of the Zionist Socialist youth movements, such hikes and gatherings bore a distinctively national-Zionist content of "knowing the land through the legs." The most notable such hike was the pilgrimage to Masada in the pre-state era.⁸⁰ Banki members engaged in similar activity, but they gave it their own exegesis. Instead of performing a Zionist pilgrimage to a site of mythological national heroism, they hiked to Palestinian villages or slums and promoted the myth of the U.S.S.R. and the Red Army.

The May 9th celebration was a ritual of the *communitas* type. The pilgrimage⁸¹ to the mountain, which became a shrine for the cult of the Soviet Union, invoked a feeling of *communitas*, as reports by Lillya Peter make evident. The feeling of unity erased the status distinctions between young and old: "Here are old friends whose friendship, solid and mighty, has withstood days and years confronted by waves of murky incitement; here are young friends who joined the great camp only yesterday."⁸² Echoing the words of Panfilov — "the motherland is you, your wife and your children, the motherland is him and me – we" — Peter includes in her version of the motherland those of low status: "The motherland is you, the simple worker who

⁷⁹ "Asefat No'ar Leylit" (Nightly Youth Gathering), Yad Tabenkin Archives.

⁸⁰ Dror, *The Youth Movements and the School*; Haim Schatzker, "Tnu'ot Hano'ar Hayehudiyot Begermanya beyn Hashanim 1900-1933" (The Jewish Youth Movement in Germany Between the Years 1900-1933), (PhD diss., Hebrew University, 1969).; Liebman and Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel* and Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*.

⁸¹ Victor and Edith Turner describe the ritual pilgrimage process as forming a normative *communitas*: "Religious systems and pilgrimage systems are exemplars of normative *communitas*, each originating in a non-utilitarian experience of brotherhood and fellowship, which the participating group attempts to preserve, in and by its religious, moral and legal codes, and its religious and civil ceremonies" (Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 135). The pilgrimage to the Red Army Forest exhibits the same characteristics, but in a secular system. As will be shown, the Communist pilgrimage created these feelings of sameness and brotherhood in order to reinforce Communist norms, in this case loyalty to the Soviet Union.

⁸² "Im Oley Haregel Leya'ar Hatsava Hasovyeti" (With the Pilgrims to the Soviet Army Forest), *Kol Ha'am*, May 13, 1955.

daily turns the wheels of toil of our country; the motherland is you the gray-haired mother who sighs at night, fearing for loved ones. The motherland is you the *fellah* whom they try to drive from your land... the motherland is the children who released white doves in the air! The motherland is everybody, everybody that yearns for peace."⁸³

Lillya Peter describes how, as the pilgrims departed at the end of the ritual, "above them the Ruby and White-Blue flags kiss each other in the spring wind."⁸⁴ This short sentence encapsulates the dominant symbol used by the Communists and the philo-Soviet community to represent Soviet-Israeli Friendship and the victory over Nazi Germany. The joined flags symbol made an early appearance in the war years. A postcard distributed by Banki during the years 1942-1943 shows a crowd depicted in silhouette holding up the Star of David alongside the Hammer and Sickle. The joined flags symbol reappeared in the late 1940s in a poster of the Friendship League welcoming the Soviet legation to the newly founded state, and again in the mid-1950s in a poster for the 1954 Soviet-Israeli Friendship congress.⁸⁵ It was a prominent element also in the victory rite. In a 1960 diagram of the site, the entire clearing facing the audience is lined with what are termed double flags, meaning the Israeli and Soviet ones. The Red Army monument was also decorated with the same flags, as well as the Red Star and the Hammer and Sickle.⁸⁶

This symbolic language alludes to symbolic power centers. For the Jewish Communists, lacking any real political power, both symbolic and real power lay in the U.S.S.R. Using the

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ "Ahdut Lema'an Hanitsahon" (Unity for Victory), Yad Tabenkin Archives; Gozansky, *Against the Mainstream*, 75; and "Congres Hayedidut Ha'Isra'elit Sovyetit" (The Israel-Soviet Union Friendship Congress), Yad Tabenkin Archives, File # 17-8. The joined flags symbol was so prevalent that it appeared on badges: "Teḥi Yedidut Isra'el Brit Hamo'atsot" (Long Live Israel-Soviet Union Friendship), Yad Tabenkin Archives.

⁸⁶ *Bema'arakhot Hama'avak beyn Ve'ida Leve'ida May 1952-May 1957* (The Campaigns of Struggle between Conference and Conference, May 1952-May 1957). An invitation to a show for the 40th anniversary of the Revolution, where the monument is seen decorated with the two flags and the Red Star in an olive-tree woodcut.

symbols of a state that, as a result of the war, was now a superpower empowered the small group of Communists in Israel. It also enabled them to be part of a wider cultural circle within the *Yishuv* and later Israel that sympathized with the Soviet war effort and state. Against that background, the use of the Israeli national flag and colors became possible. It represented the Jewish Communists' wish to unite their national loyalty with their loyalty to the U.S.S.R. and appeal to a wider audience. The use of the joined flag symbol in the central rite celebrating the World War Two victory points to the two poles of influence on which the Jewish Communists and the philo-Soviet worldview leaned: Soviet power and the Israeli state. The symbolic presence of both served to highlight their existence on the same continuum, making the stress on the U.S.S.R.'s being vital for Jewish survival and Israeli independence understandable. The symbol of the joint flag also came to symbolize the harmonization of the international Soviet element with local Israeli patriotism. At the same time, it was a way of mediating the tension between what basically were, and eventually openly became, ideological and political rivals: a Zionist Western state on the one hand, and an anti-Zionist, increasingly pro-Arab Soviet state, manifested in the 1955 Czech arms deal and the support of Iraq after 1958, the anti-cosmopolitanism campaign, the purge trials in the peoples democracies, and the doctors' trials of the 1950s in the U.S.S.R.

The Red Army and Soviet power were described as a force for peace. Moshe Edelberg, one of the prominent members of the Friendship Movement since the war, hailed the U.S.S.R. as "the fortress of peace and its glorious army which defends peace."⁸⁷ That notion was given physical expression in the May 9th rite. Photographs show a choral performance in the Red Army forest beneath a banner that reads: "Long Live the Soviet Army – The Army of Peace and

⁸⁷ "Atseret Beya'ar Hatsava Ha'adom" (A Rally in the Red Army Forest), Lavon Institute for Labour Research, IV-104-68.

Friendship." Such assertions precluded any criticism of Soviet policy that was, more often than not, aggressive and imperious, as in Germany, Poland and Hungary. Any criticism was dismissed as just another brick in a "wall of schemes, blasphemies, and plots built by Imperialism."⁸⁸ A combination of political expedience and genuine faith made blind believers of the Jewish Communists and the philo-Soviet community.

5.3 The Cosmology of Revolution

The shock waves sent out by the October Revolution sparked the founding of Communism in Palestine. For the Jewish Communists, as for Communists everywhere, the Revolution was an event of cosmological proportions, the opening of a new chapter in human history;⁸⁹ it was described as a popular uprising of the downtrodden, led by the omniscient Party.

In a 1920 manifesto issued for November 7th, the Russian Revolution is perceived as the popular uprising of the underclass. The day itself is "the great revolutionary holiday" on which the "workers of Russia throw off their shackles."⁹⁰ The Revolution marks not just a political change, but the start of "a new historical era" in which the "world proletariat is taking great strides toward its liberation."⁹¹ The manifesto is charged with a messianic expectation, for "the hour has come; the world revolution awaits its fighters," and the Jewish workers are exhorted to shake off their passivity and fight the British and the bourgeoisie "together with our exploited Arab brothers."⁹²

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ The October Revolution can be seen as part of an "Eternal Return" of the Jewish Communists, resembling archaic religions. Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*.

⁹⁰ Dothan, *Reds*, 48.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

The messianic revolutionary tone was soon replaced by one stressing the centrality of the Soviet Union. In a 1927 pamphlet for the tenth anniversary of the Revolution, the claim is made "that the balance of the last 10 years shows that the proletarian revolution and Socialist construction continue to march forward."⁹³

Three years later the centrality of the U.S.S.R.'s "Socialist construction" is much more pronounced. The U.S.S.R. is described as "the mighty fortress of the working class, standing firm against all attempts to eliminate it and blow it up."⁹⁴ It is said to be undergoing "great economic progress,"⁹⁵ despite being then in the midst of Stalin's collectivization program and gripped by repression. The destruction of the Kulaks is described, in the best Stalinist style, as the elimination of "the last crutch of the old regime."⁹⁶ The capitalist world is described as being beset by economic crisis and Fascism, as a wave of insurrections engulfed the colonial peoples. The shining example of the U.S.S.R is held up as an inspiration to a world revolution, as the workers "arrive at the recognition that they themselves need to establish a Soviet rule in their countries, to create a Soviet Germany, Soviet Poland, Soviet China, etc."⁹⁷

The same centrality of the U.S.S.R. accompanied by Popular Front rhetoric can be found in the late 1930s. The Soviet Union is described as the land where "capitalism was destroyed and Socialism is being built."⁹⁸ Under Popular Front policy, the U.S.S.R. is described as standing firm as a "solid rock" against the threats to world peace.⁹⁹ Accusing Britain of deserting Czechoslovakia, the Jewish Communists of the Jewish section call upon "the workers and the

⁹³ "Kol Asher Hušag al Yedey Mahapekhat Oktober" (All that was Achieved by the October Revolution), Lavon Institute for Labour Research, File IV-445-2.

⁹⁴ "Shlosh Ešre Shanim Me'az Mahapekhat Oktober" (Thirteen Years since the October Revolution), Lavon Institute for Labour Research, IV-445-2.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ "Teḥi Brit Hamo'atsot! Teḥi Hatsava Ha'adom! Teḥi Hashvi'i Be'November" (Long Live the Soviet Union! Long Live the Red Army! Long Live the November 7th!), Lavon Institute for Labour Research, IV-445-2.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

progressive section of the *Yishuv*" to join the "world anti-Fascist front, the peace front of the U.S.S.R."¹⁰⁰

The first years of World War Two saw a resurgence of the revolutionary internationalist rhetoric of the Jewish Communists. In a reflection of Soviet policies culminating with the 1939 pact with Germany, the conciliatory Popular Front rhetoric was dropped. The belligerent nations of the Allies and the Axis are belittled as two groups of imperialists fighting to redistribute the world's resources. Once again the Soviet Union is presented in the terms of Socialist construction: "The land of the Soviets has scored great achievements. Socialist industry and agriculture develop and expand from day to day. From one hour to the next, Socialist culture is taking root in every corner of the Soviet Union."¹⁰¹ The U.S.S.R. is described as a paragon of peace that has not only "succeeded in distancing the fire of war from its borders, but also enlarged the borders of peace and Socialism"¹⁰² by annexing new territories. The Jewish Communists conveniently disregarded the imperialist nature of this latter move, preferring to turn their anti-Imperialism against the European empires, where "the forms of the anti-Imperialist struggle in all the colonial countries are escalating."¹⁰³ Attacking the British war effort in Palestine, and the Zionist support of it, the Jewish Communists revived the old Bolshevik slogan: "War on the war."¹⁰⁴

The German invasion of the U.S.S.R. changed the Jewish Communists' perception of the October Revolution. A pamphlet on the occasion of November 7th 1941 reverts to revolutionary language, invoking the revolutionary traditions and vision, as follows:

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ "Teḥi Hashvi'i Be'November, Yom Mahapekhat Oḳṭober Hasotsyalistit Hagdola" (Long Live the 7th of November, the Day of the Great October Socialist Revolution!) Lavon Institute for Labour Research, IV-445-2.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

For thousands of years men have been exploited by men. For hundreds of years the best in humanity has been looking for a system where there will not be master and slave, exploiter and exploited. For generations the workers movement has been fighting for a Socialist regime where there will not be bourgeoisie and proletariat. Thousands have been killed and died in prisons, demonstrations and uprisings. Every time the ruling class prevailed. 24 years ago the Russian working class executed the undertaking that generations had fought for and dreamed of, the foundation was laid, the walls were built, and the Soviet people began to roof over the giant Socialist enterprise.¹⁰⁵

Two years later the language was more moderate. Once again in reflection of Soviet policies, the Jewish Communists replaced the anti-capitalist slogans with "Long Live the Anglo-Soviet-American Coalition Fighting against Fascism."¹⁰⁶ At the same time, the internationalist language was uplifted to cosmological heights again, as "all peoples of the world see how the October Revolution and its Socialist enterprise are saving humanity form the worst danger of enslavement in its history."¹⁰⁷ The Revolution is described as a popular uprising in which "26 years ago the Russian proletariat in alliance with the mass of peasants and oppressed peoples, led by the Lenin-Stalin Party, conquered a sixth of the earth."¹⁰⁸

In a manifesto for the thirtieth anniversary of the Revolution, it is again depicted as one in which the workers and peasants "defeated the rule of the landowners and magnates" and thus "opened a new era in the history of mankind, a fundamental turning point from the old capitalist

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ "Tehi Hashvi'i Be'November" (Long Live November 7th), Lavon Institute for Labour Research, IV-445-2.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

world to the new Socialist world."¹⁰⁹ But the disintegration of the wartime coalition and escalation of the Cold War had already sharpened the dichotomy between capitalism and Communism. The capitalist world is described as a "warmonger, ridden with crises and unemployment, infested with racial hatred and national and social oppression."¹¹⁰

The Revolution was just one, albeit central, element of a more comprehensive European revolutionary tradition with which the young Jewish Communists and Party members were made familiar. Like the Bolsheviks, the Jewish Communists looked at history as a string of progressive revolutions leading up to the 1917 Russian Revolution. Through instructors' manuals and the Party's paper the traditions of the Paris Commune, the Vienna Uprising and the 1905 Revolution were remembered. Each was seen as a steppingstone toward the next revolutionary event. Each was analyzed for lessons in accordance with Marxist-Leninist ideology. The message delivered to the young Communists was that only the Soviet model of revolutionary process could work, thus strengthening the image of the Soviet Union as the paragon of revolutionary success.

In Banki, the traditions of the Paris Commune and the Vienna Uprising were memorialized in two instructors' booklets. The instructor is told to pass on the narrative of the Commune through telling stories, drawing up a placard named the "Communards' Wall," and playing a symbolic game named the "Communards' Flag."¹¹¹ The subject of the Commune was directly connected to the October Revolution. In a section named *Why the Commune Was Defeated*, the young Communists are taught, straight from the Leninist handbook, that the Commune failed because the ideological diversity of the Communards "did not rest on the basis of Scientific Socialism." Only "a revolutionary party based on a Marxist-Leninist worldview,"¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ "Hakomuna Haparisa'it" (The Paris Commune), Yad Tabenkin Archives, File # 25.

¹¹² Ibid.

the text continues, could lead the masses to power. The connection becomes even more clearly evident, with Moshe Sneh's 1961 article *The Immortality of the Commune* being cited to the young Communists as saying "the word of Lenin has become reality. In the October Revolution the Paris Commune celebrated its victory."¹¹³

The Vienna Uprising of 1934 was also used to instil in the young Communists a sense of a historical revolutionary continuity. In a June 1964 booklet, the aim of the subject is defined in familiar revolutionary cosmological terms: "We will give them the understanding and knowledge that the road to the fulfillment of Socialism was long, hard and filled with sacrifice; that many heroic battles were fought and sacrifices made by workers in different countries, lost battles and glorious ones alike that marched humanity forward to the exciting achievements of Socialism."¹¹⁴ The lesson learned was clear, Georgi Dimitrov being quoted as saying "that the uprising was mistaken in not being organized and guided in a revolutionary Bolshevik manner."¹¹⁵ The failure is blamed, once more in a Leninist spirit, on the corrupting influence of Social Democracy.

The Party for its part also participated in the commemoration of the revolutionary past. The Paris Commune appeared on the pages of *Kol Ha'am* as early as 1940, being directly connected to the October Revolution in an underground issue of the paper: "From the Paris Commune the proletariat learned to win over the bourgeoisie and on the ruins of capitalism build a new liberated world of the workers and peasants, the world of liberated peoples, the world of Socialism."¹¹⁶ In a 1954 article, the abortive revolution of 1871 is again directly linked to the October Revolution. Quoting Lenin, the text asserts that "the Russian 1905 and 1917 Revolutions

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ "Mered Vina" (The Vienna Uprising), Yad Tabenkin Archives, File # 25.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ "Ha'komuna Haparisa'it Vehalekah Shela" (The Paris Commune and its Lesson), *Kol Ha'am*, March 1940.

continue – in different environments and conditions – the work of the Commune."¹¹⁷ The ninetieth anniversary of the Commune was marked by a special rite held by the Central Committee and a special edition of *Kol Ha'am's* cultural section. The Vienna Uprising was also commemorated in a 1964 article and its lesson correlated with the one Banki members were given: "The Vienna Uprising symbolized, on the one hand, the tremendous revolutionary power within a fighting working class and, on the other hand, the failure of the opportunistic way of Social-Democracy."¹¹⁸ Over the years since the 1940s, *Kol Ha'am* commemorated various episodes in the history of working class uprisings from 1789 to 1918.¹¹⁹ The common thread connecting them all was the fact that they were all part of a narrative ending in the Socialist revolution of 1917.

The Spanish Civil War loomed large in Jewish Communist consciousness. It had attracted around 600 volunteers from Palestine,¹²⁰ and the main hero to emerge from the war for the Jewish Communists was Mark Milman, a young Jewish student and Communist Youth member who died in Spain in 1938. Communist writer Mordechai Avi–Shaul wrote a book in Milman's honour, *Jewish Captain in Fighting Spain*. One of Banki's clubs in Haifa was also named after him.¹²¹ In the literary legacy commemorating him, Milman is described as coming from a working class background and, at the same time, being a sensitive poet. This echoes the way the International Brigades volunteers were memorialized in Europe, as young middle-class

¹¹⁷ "Haqomuna Huvsu - Haqomunizem Nitse'ah" (The Commune was Defeated – Communism Wins), *Kol Ha'am*, March 18, 1954.

¹¹⁸ "30 Shanim me'az Mered Vina" (30 Years since the Vienna Uprising), *Kol Ha'am*, February 16, 1964.

¹¹⁹ "Ka'asher Migdalim Naflu Leyom Habastiliya" (When Towers Fell to Bastille Day), *Kol Ha'am*, July 14, 1950; "50 Shanim me'az Hamahapekha Harusit Harishona" (50 Years since the First Russian Revolution), *Kol Ha'am*, January 21st, 1955; "Roza Luksemburg VeKarl Libknight" (Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht), *Kol Ha'am*, January 20, 1944.

¹²⁰ For the Palestine Jews that volunteered in the International Brigades, see Israel Centner, *MiMadrid ad Berlin* (From Madrid to Berlin), (Tel Aviv: Malam Publishing, 1966); Ruth Levin, *Hayesharim Hayu Ita: Sfarad 1936-1939* (The Righteous Were With Spain 1936-1939), (Tel Aviv: Afikim Publishers, 1987); and Dothan, *Reds*, 243-247.

¹²¹ "Lezikhro shel Hamefaqed Ha'erets-Isra'eli Mem Milman Shenafal Be hazit Sfarad" (In Memory of the Eretz-Israeli Commander M. Milman who Fell on the Spanish Front), *Kol Ha'am*, August 7, 1950.

intellectuals that fought for the ideals of international solidarity.¹²² But in contrast to the one dimensional figures devoid of any human traits such as Hans Beimler, the object of a cult in East Germany, Milman's character was portrayed as surprisingly human and sensitive, with a tender love of his mother.¹²³ The cult of Milman, propagated in the Party's press and in Banki, corresponded with local and Jewish elements. Milman had dispatched the duty of Jews to fight Fascism. As a true Jewish Communist from Palestine, he had reacted to the 1936 Arab Rebellion by calling for an international struggle against the common enemy, Fascism. He had even sung in Hebrew in Spain to his fellow soldiers.¹²⁴

The anti-Fascist myth of Spain was commemorated yearly by *Kol Ha'am*, which publicized the memoirs of veterans, interviews with La Pasionaria, and vows to continue the fight. The Spanish war was part and parcel of the European traditions of working class revolt that were instilled in the Jewish Communist mind. The foundation of the Republic was described as a working class revolt that ended "with the throwing off of the yoke of the monarchy."¹²⁵ Anti-Fascism is presented in terms of class war. The reaction, Avi-Shaul asserts in the name of an unidentified Spanish politician, would "have to climb on the human wall of the masses of the proletariat that will rise against it. It will be a life and death struggle."¹²⁶ Thus the Spanish struggle of the International Brigades became the war of middle-class intellectuals, of "workers that laid aside their hammers" and "farmers that left the plough."¹²⁷ Struggles had been fought by

¹²² George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 189-200.

¹²³ For Milman's description, see Mordechai Avi-Shaul, *Mefaked Ivri Besfarad Haloḥemet: Kapitan Mordekhai Milman* (Mark Milman: Jewish Captain in Fighting Spain), (Tel Aviv: published by the author, 1945); "Spain," Yad Tabenkin Archives, File # 3.

¹²⁴ Avi-Shaul, *Mark Milman*, 51.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

"thousands of unknowns... that knew how to fight and die for freedom, as did their forefathers in former generations and years: 1789, 1871, 1917."¹²⁸

The negative side of Communist and Soviet intervention in Spain was not discussed at all. The persecution of Trotskyites and Anarchists was ignored. The cold calculations that stood behind Soviet involvement in Spain and the Spanish Communists' de facto takeover of the Republic were not openly debated.¹²⁹ To the general public outside Communist circles, the commemoration of the Spanish war meant little. The Spanish Republic had been supported by all the Zionist Socialist parties, while the middle class remained largely uncommitted. Only a small minority at the extremes of the Revisionist right had supported the nationalists. However, sympathy for the Spanish Republic on the part of the Zionist Socialists did not mean sending men to fight Fascism in Spain; the Zionist project was far more important to them. In the 1950s and 1960s the memory of the Spanish war did not play an important part in their culture. The fact that most of the volunteers to Spain had been Jewish Communists contributed to the marginalization of their deeds. Thus the commemoration of the war was left mostly to the Jewish Communists, and any debate there may have been on the nature of the war in the Republican Zone did not change the status of the Party.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Ibid., 23.

¹²⁹ For Spanish history in the twentieth century, the repression within the Republican Zone and the Civil War, see Shlomo Ben-Ami, *Sfarad beyn dikṭatura ledemokratya 1936-1977* (Spain: From Dictatorship to Democracy 1936-1977), (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 1990); Gabriel Jackson, *The Spanish Republic and the Civil War 1931-1936* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967); Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1986); Anthony Beevor, *The Battle for Spain: the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006); Isaac Aviv, *Mahapekha Vemahapekha Shekeneged Bisfarad: Harepublika Hashniya Vemilhemet Ha'ezrahim (1931-1939)* (Revolution and Counter Revolution in Spain: The Second Republic and the Civil War (1931-1939)), (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defence Publishers, 1991); and Raanan Rein ed., *They Shall Not Pass: The Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (Tel Aviv: Zmora-Bitan Publishers, 2000).

¹³⁰ For the reaction of the *Yishuv* to the war, see Yosef Algazy, "Milhemet Ha'ezrahim Besfarad Vehishtakfuta Ba'itonut Ha'ivrit Be'erets-Isra'el/Palaština" (The Spanish Civil War as Reflected in the Hebrew Press in Eretz-Israel/Palestine, in *Hem Lo Ya'avru: Milhemet Ha'ezrahim Besfarad, 1936-1939* (They Shall Not Pass: The Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939), ed. Raanan Rein, (Tel Aviv: Zmora-Bitan Publishers, 2000), 272-305; and the film by Eran Torbiner, *Madrid before Hanita*.

At the end of the Jewish Communists' historical narrative of revolution stood the October Revolution. From the 1940s, the indoctrination among the Communist Youth followed the same lines as those of the mother party.¹³¹ In the 1950s to the mid-1960s, the October Revolution became a pillar of Banki's education. In a series of instructors' brochures and song booklets, the revolutionary tradition was transmitted to the young Jewish Communists. In a booklet from the late 1940s, it is stressed that "the children should know well the contents of the holiday and feel it as one of the great and beautiful holidays."¹³² It was to be celebrated with parties that included children outside the immediate members of the movement. The meaning of November 7th was to be conveyed to the children by the use of songs, plays, recitations and stories. Talks were to stress the principle elements of the Soviet myth, such as the Bolshevik Party and its organizational structure, Socialist construction after the Revolution, and World War Two. The Revolution was viewed, as it had been since the 1920s, as a popular uprising of peasants and workers led by the Party.¹³³

On the fortieth anniversary of the October Revolution, Banki issued an extensive amount of material about the U.S.S.R. and its revolution. A 1957 booklet entitled *The Soviet Union* defined its aim as being "to broaden and deepen the knowledge about the Soviet Union, to intensify the faith and confidence in our Communist rightness, to invoke in the hearts of the comrades pride in being part of the right and victorious camp headed by the Socialist motherland – the U.S.S.R."¹³⁴ The instructor is advised to teach the subject for four months in an exciting

¹³¹ *Kol Hano'ar* for November 7th 1940, 1941 and 1943.

¹³² "Shvi'i Be'November – Yom Hamahapekha Hagdola" (7th November – The Day of the Great Revolution), Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #3.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ "Hano'ose: Brit Hamo'atsot" (The Subject: The Soviet Union), Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #19.

and engaging way, while doing extensive reading himself. He is to engage the young Communists in a variety of activities such as "visiting a Soviet film, (sic) Soviet record night."¹³⁵

The way the subject is structured in the booklet reemphasizes the cosmological perception of the October Revolution and the history of the Soviet Union. As in a story of redemption, it begins with a section named *In the Darkness of the Tsar Days*, which is followed by *The October Revolution – the Dawn of Mankind*: light is contrasted to darkness, freedom to slavery. The remaining sections impart geographical and statistical knowledge of the U.S.S.R. alongside the achievements of the U.S.S.R. and the victory in the war.

In the early 1960s an effort was made to standardize the educational process concerning the October Revolution. In the first booklet sent to the *Bney Amal* and *Yasour* groups of Banki, the instructors are encouraged to start off the subject with a story, followed by a talk stressing Soviet peace policy, its fight against anti-Semitism, and Soviet achievements. In "groups that have never discussed November 7th – it is advisable to talk in a lively and exhilarating way about the Revolution."¹³⁶ For the more mature *Yasour* group, the discussion was to start with the question: "Due to what did the Soviet Union change... from a backward country into a great power?"¹³⁷ A September 1963 brochure uses the same dispassionate tone. It advises the instructor to keep the teaching of the subject within a timeframe of two months; it recommends accompanying the activity with record playing, etc. As opposed to the more passionate aims of the 1957 booklet, in 1963 the aim is "to provide an in-depth understanding of our relation to the

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ "45 Shanim me'az Mahapekhat Oktober" (45 Years since the October Revolution), Yad Tabenkin Archives.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

Soviet Union."¹³⁸ The brochure is organized almost like a teachers' manual with rehearsed questions, and it is even entitled "Educational Booklet No 1."¹³⁹

The standardization of the Russian Revolution in Banki's educational routine can be explained by three factors. First, by the early 1960s the October Revolution had become a distant event, far removed from the experience of the young Communists and their instructors, its glory somewhat dulled by World War Two. Second was the fact that Banki, by the early 1960s, was governed by the "Left Men", who at that point started to doubt the validity of their faith in the U.S.S.R.¹⁴⁰ The third reason was the standardization process already evident in the Jewish Communists' treatment of other holidays in the Jewish calendar, most notably Hanukkah. This standardization can be seen as part of the MKI's growing assertion of organizational control over Banki.

The clearest expression of the Soviet Union's and the October Revolution's place in Communist thinking was made by Moshe Sneh in a lecture to the MKI's Central Committee, which was published in *Kol Ha'am* as an essay on revolution and its effects. Following Marx, Sneh first defines revolution as the locomotive of history, asserting further that "the October Revolution is the biggest locomotive," one that, in eschatological terms, is taking humanity "to the Communist future – meaning towards peace, abundance, to happiness, to the heights of human progress."¹⁴¹ Like Lenin, Sneh describes the popular, almost Dionysian nature of the October Revolution as "the holiday of the exploited and oppressed."¹⁴² It is the "greatest holiday," as the people did not replace one oppressive class with another but "delivered the

¹³⁸ "Október 1917 Hamahapekha Hasotsyalistit Harishona" (October 1917 the First Socialist Revolution), Yad Tabenkin Archives.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Yair Tzaban admits that his doubts about the U.S.S.R. began in the early 1960s, as the reality he had seen on his visits to the U.S.S.R. did not accord with the more utopian and enthusiastic outlook of his younger days (Yair Tzaban, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, February 12, 2009).

¹⁴¹ "Kātar Hahistorya shel Hame'a Ha'ešrim" (20th Century History's Locomotive), *Kol Ha'am*, October 16, 1957.

¹⁴² Ibid.

wheel into the hands of the oppressed and exploited themselves."¹⁴³ From these fundamental points, Sneh extrapolates the changes brought about by the Revolution. In his long, detailed text, he invokes the different elements of the Soviet myth: the U.S.S.R.'s superpower status and its victory in the war, both the result of "the Socialist construction that made it, by 1941, a great industrial power."¹⁴⁴ He then goes on to analyze the effects of the Revolution, equated with decolonization, the creation of the People's Democracies and the possibility of preventing wars, concluding with the role played by the U.S.S.R. in Jewish history and the founding of Israel.

The observance of November 7th gave rise to public rallies and parties held in local MKI and Banki cells. A parallel system of rites was conducted by the Friendship Movement and aimed at the wider philo-Soviet community. On November 7th 1920 the MPS celebrated the October Revolution for the first time in Palestine. Unions that were under the party's influence participated in the march. On November 8th around a dozen young men carrying a Red Flag marched from Tel Aviv to Jaffa. On the afternoon of that day the MPS held a rally with speeches in Yiddish, Arabic and Hebrew. The official British report stated that "a rally was held in the open air... and around thirty to forty people heard the speeches."¹⁴⁵ The Communists tried to persuade workers to lay down their tools and attend rallies on that day. The demonstration and rally were the first major incidents of Communist propaganda in Palestine, and the British were quick to make arrests.¹⁴⁶ Through the 1920s and 1930s, as the PKP went deeper underground and was continuously persecuted by the British and Zionists, there is no evidence of any further celebration of November 7th.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ "20th Century History's Locomotive".

¹⁴⁵ Slozski, "M.P.S.A. in the Founding Convention of the Histadrut," 159.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

But a similar pattern of celebration resurfaced after legalization. In Haifa, Palestinians and Jews celebrated the day by attending a rally with speeches and a joint demonstration the following day.¹⁴⁷ In the following years, however, the Communist celebration became concentrated on public rallies and parties, on which *Kol Ha'am* was reporting by 1944. Those events followed a familiar pattern of speeches ending at times with an artistic show. In Haifa, a speech by Ester Vilenska was followed by the singing of Soviet songs.¹⁴⁸ In 1945 the V League joined the Communist Party and its organs in holding rallies for November 7th. As in other activities of the V League at the time, non-Communists were invited to participate.¹⁴⁹

By the 1950s, the pattern of celebrating the October Revolution was well established. The events commemorating the Revolution were held directly by the Party and its organs or the Friendship Movement. The two organizations were intimately connected, as revealed by a Central Committee memo dealing with the Revolution's fortieth anniversary, in which MKI members were ordered to help in a membership drive to expand the Friendship Movement.¹⁵⁰ The thirty-eighth anniversary of the October Revolution was celebrated in a series of public rallies and parties. The Israel-U.S.S.R Friendship Movement held the central event in Tel Aviv; the main speaker was Moshe Sneh. The Party held its main rally in Haifa where the main

¹⁴⁷ "Hashvi'i Be'November Be'Heyfa" (November 7th in Haifa), *Kol Ha'am*, November 1942.

¹⁴⁸ "Me'atsrot Hamiflaga Lashvi'i Be'November" (From the Party's Rallies for November 7th), *Kol Ha'am*, November 16, 1944.

¹⁴⁹ "Atseret Hagigit shel Liga Vi Likhvod Hashvi'i Be'November 1945" (A Festive Rally of V League in Honour of November 7th 1945), *Kol Ha'am*, November 11, 1945.

¹⁵⁰ "Tazkir Lehavrey Hava'ad Hamerkazi" (A Memo to the Members of the Central Committee), Lavon Institute for Labour Research, IV-104-812-379.

speakers were Meir Vilner and Emile Habibi.¹⁵¹ These major events were accompanied by a series of smaller parties, featuring Party speakers or an artistic performance.¹⁵²

In Moshe Sneh's speech one hears the same cosmological pseudo-religious undertones which accompanied the Jewish Communist perception of the October Revolution. An almost religious marvel is expressed: "Every year we look on in amazement, as if for the first time, at the wonderful and unique revelation that the holiday of one people, one country, has become the holiday for the masses of all people in all countries."¹⁵³ The U.S.S.R. is likened to "a mirror in which all nations see their future."¹⁵⁴ In another speech two days earlier, the cosmological language is even more prominent, the Revolution being described "as the greatest event in human history, a turning point from a regime of exploitation to a regime without exploitation, without classes."¹⁵⁵ The same motif appears in a 1963 speech, which asserts that the October Revolution "changed the face of the world, drove humanity onto a new path."¹⁵⁶

Another way of celebrating on November 7th was parties. These, however, were not just non-political expressions of joy, but politically oriented events. In a booklet issued by the Central Culture Department, "a selection of poems and prose for readings to branch, area, cells or sympathizers"¹⁵⁷ is presented to MKI members. From this material "every Party organization can

¹⁵¹ "Atseret Likhvod Mahapekhat Oqtober Vemesibot Ve'asefot Leyom Hashana Hashloshim Veshmone shel Mahapekhat Oqtober Hasotsyalistit Hagdola" (A Rally in Honour of the October Revolution and Parties and Rallies for the 38th Anniversary of the Great Socialist October Revolution), *Kol Ha'am*, November 4, 1955.

¹⁵² "Asefot Likhvod Yom Hashana Hashloshim Veshmone shel Mahapekhat Oqtober Hasotsyalistit Hagdola" (Rallies for the 38th Anniversary of the Great Socialist October Revolution), *Kol Ha'am*, November 4, 1955.

¹⁵³ "Asefat Oqtober, 4 BeNovember, 1955" (October Rally, November 4, 1955), Lavon Institute for Labour Research, IV-104-812-56.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ "38 Shanim me'az Mahapekhat Oqtober" (38 Years since the October Revolution, November 2 1955), Institute for Labour Research, IV-104-812-56, Tel Aviv, Israel.

¹⁵⁶ "Asefat Oqtober – Tnu'at Hayedidut, 15 BeNovember, 1963" (October Rally – the Friendship Movement, November 15, 1963), Institute for Labour Research, IV-104-812-39, Tel Aviv, Israel.

¹⁵⁷ "Hava'ad Hamerkazi shel Hamiflaga HaKomunistit Ha'Isra'elit" (The Central Committee of the Israeli Communist Party), Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #1.

choose as it sees fit... for an artistic program using local forces."¹⁵⁸ The booklet contained poems by the Party's poets Alexander Penn and Haya Kadmon, by Soviet poets, and literary pieces by John Reed and Romain Rolland. The poem by Penn, who witnessed the October Revolution, has the pseudo-religious tone typical of the Revolution myth, contrasting "rain, swamps, snow and frost" to "a fiery vision in the claws of fear / ...blood, quenching the earth, / a people and flag – a red rebirth: / 1...9...17!"¹⁵⁹ The poem progresses from red rebirth to a theophanic vision, "in words screaming for a victim / Light! Land! Bread! Freedom! / Words spoken in the voice of Vladimir Lenin. / The voice of one."¹⁶⁰

Like the events connected to May 9th, the commemoration of the October Revolution was draped in the symbols of Soviet power. The main difference between the two holidays was the latter's lack of a local symbol such as the joined flags. This difference can be explained by the day's more universal nature, lacking the dimension of Soviet-Israeli Friendship prevalent on May 9th.

From the 1920s and 1930s no visual evidence or written testimony remains concerning the symbolism used to celebrate the Revolution. Regarding the 1920 march, we are told only that a Red Flag was used. In that sense, the nascent Communists, like the rest of the Zionist-Socialists, used what had been the symbol of the European left since the nineteenth century. Soviet insignia were first used in the context of the Revolution's commemoration in the early 1940s. In two handbills from 1941, the symbol of the Hammer and Sickle appears at the top or

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

bottom of the page.¹⁶¹ From the 1950s onward, the use of Soviet symbols became much more prevalent in Communist publications for November 7th.

Communist posters from the 1950s reveal the way the Jewish Communists perceived November 7th through Soviet symbolism.¹⁶² One poster, captioned in Arabic, shows the Kremlin's Senatskaya Tower. To the left of the tower, which is bedecked with the Red Star and the Hammer and Sickle, a Peace Dove is flying above the faces of three youngsters, representing the three races of the world. Soviet power, born out of the Revolution, is thus symbolized as bringing peace to the people of the world. The poster reasserts the Jewish Communists' perception of the Revolution as not just Russian, but a model with internationalist appeal. A second poster from 1951 is in Yiddish. Beneath the profiles of Lenin and Stalin painted on the background of the Soviet flag, it shows urban surroundings, a complex of modern skyscrapers and neoclassical buildings being built above a giant dam. The urban construction is flanked by a small sheaf of wheat. The poster revisits motifs such as Socialist reconstruction and the alliance of urban and rural, essential to the portrayal of the Revolution. The use of the profiles of Lenin and Stalin and the Soviet flag connects the Jewish Communists to the symbols of global Communism fashioned during the Revolution.

The eschatological cosmology of the Revolution is again referenced in a 1957 poster issued for the fortieth anniversary of the Revolution. In the centre it shows a globe held up by the Hammer and Sickle. The visible part of the globe showcases Eurasia, alluding both to the centrality of the U.S.S.R. and the universality of the revolutionary idea. The caption at the top reads: "40 Years since the Great Socialist October Revolution." It is punctuated by another Soviet symbol, the Red Star, which has its own cosmological connotations. The caption at the

¹⁶¹ "Teḥi Hashvi'i Be'November Vehamoledet Hasotsyalistit Besakana!" (Long Live November 7th and The Socialist Motherland Is in Danger!), Institute for Labour Research, IV-425-26, Tel Aviv, Israel.

¹⁶² Gozansky and Timms, eds., *Against the Mainstream*, 76-79.

bottom of the poster has the most obvious utopian pseudo-religious meaning, repeating a line from the *Internationale*: "We have been nought, we shall be all."

Soviet symbols were commonly used and the international cast of the Revolution commonly emphasized in the November 7th rites.¹⁶³ A rare photograph of the ceremony for the Revolution's thirtieth anniversary shows the main stage decorated with portraits of Lenin and Stalin. In front of it sit Banki members in their uniforms, holding Red Flags. At a 1949 rally in Tel Aviv, the stage was bedecked with portraits of Lenin and Stalin and the Soviet state emblem. Soviet symbolism can be seen again at a 1952 rally, where Lenin's portrait hung on a red background. With de-Stalinization, and in reflection of the growing stress in the U.S.S.R. on the cult of Lenin, the Jewish Communists' rallies began to center on him. A 1957 photograph shows a Lenin portrait surrounded by a sheaf of wheat. The use of the portrait of Lenin continued into the 1960s when, in a clear expression of the internationalism of the Revolution, a "large map of the world demonstrated the territory of the Socialist camp."¹⁶⁴

The rites commemorating the October Revolution, with their cosmological and pseudo-religious undertones clustered around the U.S.S.R., were rites of ideological *communitas*.¹⁶⁵ Against that background, the reaffirmation of the cosmological world-creating power of the Revolution is understandable. The Jewish Communists saw in it a lost paradise, and in their rites they tried to recapture this feeling of *communitas*. The rites also connected them to a history of struggle, giving them the confidence to say that:

We the Israeli Communists are an inseparable part of the World Communist Movement; we are patriots of our homeland and internationalists. We are not a

¹⁶³ *Kol Ha'am* from November 10, 1948, November 7, 1952, November 7, 1957, November 9, 1961.

¹⁶⁴ "Atseret Maki Be'Heyfa" (MKI Rally in Haifa), *Kol Ha'am*, November 6, 1960.

¹⁶⁵ Victor Turner and Edith Turner define ideological *communitas* as "the formulation of remembered attributes of the *communitas* experience in the form of a utopian blueprint for the reform of society" (Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 252).

small force. We are the most important force in the country. To us, to our policies belongs the future. The future belongs to the forces of peace, freedom and Socialism... our flag, the flag of Marxism-Leninism is pure, and it is the flag of victory of the toilers of Israel, the flag of the victory of peace and Socialism worldwide.¹⁶⁶

The use of the symbolic system derived from the U.S.S.R. in the November 7th imagery and rite points to the Jewish Communists' perception of the world. At its centre stood the Soviet Union, representing the Revolution and its outcome. The U.S.S.R. was celebrated as the centre of revolutionary virtue in the speeches made by Party notables and in the articles that appeared in its organ: "The great achievements of the Soviet Union that built Socialist society with a thriving Socialist economy and culture... are a source of encouragement and a guide to the mass of toilers everywhere,"¹⁶⁷ and "all the good and honest in humanity turn towards Moscow."¹⁶⁸

The Soviet Union was one of the central pillars of Jewish Communist identity. The continued indoctrination about the U.S.S.R. in both respects — World War two and the October Revolution — propped up their belief. The pseudo-religious pilgrimages, the myth of 1917 as a cosmological event and the rejection of any criticism as almost blasphemy are all reminiscent of religious thinking and practice. Nissim Calderon gives this aspect of identity clear expression: "It was in fact a cult. I would say that the Soviet Union was a replacement for the synagogue. It was not God, Communism was God, but it was the substitute for synagogue. It was where the thing is fulfilled and that was very important to us. We did not have only ideology; we had a living

¹⁶⁶ "Hade'gel shel O'ktob'er Yenatse'ah Be'artsenu" (The Flag of October will win in our Land), *Kol Ha'am*, November 6, 1960.

¹⁶⁷ "Al Ha'ajenda: Hahigayon, Hamatspun Vehakavod shel Zmanenu" (On the Agenda: the Reason, Conscience and Honour of our Time), *Kol Ha'am*, November 7, 1955.

¹⁶⁸ "Te'hi Yom Hashana Hashloshim Veshmone Lemahapekhat O'ktob'er Hasotsyalistit Hagdola" (Long Live the 38th Anniversary of the Great Socialist October Revolution), *Kol Ha'am*, November 4, 1955.

example that a third of the world's surface was red... We thought of the U.S.S.R. as the Holy Temple, really in terms of sanctity."¹⁶⁹ He goes on to liken the ideological repetition of the narrative of the Revolution to a prayer. Yoram Gozansky also terms the Soviet Union as "the fulfillment of our dream."¹⁷⁰

Still, the dream was in many respects a nightmare. The Jewish Communists could not bring themselves to see the terrible repression overshadowing the Soviet Union's immense accomplishments. Abandoning their faith in the U.S.S.R. would have meant a rupture of their identity as Communists. In that respect, the "Left Men" found it easier to doubt their belief in the Soviet edifice. Yair Tzaban claims to have started doubting the Soviet reality in the early 1960s, and Shoshana Shmuely claims that the prime motivation in her joining the MKI and Banki was not the U.S.S.R., but a vision of social justice. Yair Tzaban has eloquently expressed the depth of the attachment to the U.S.S.R., saying that it was "an intellectual addiction to a certain kind of Marxism."¹⁷¹ Nessia Shafran pointedly asserts: "The faith in the Soviet Union was no different in essence from any other faith in which men have believed throughout history, and like many faiths people held to it with a strong and desperate strength, until at one point faith became stronger than any reality that contradicted it."¹⁷² Tzaban's and Shafran's remarks point to the limitations of Israeli Communism, indeed of every Communist movement outside Soviet Russia since the 1920s: once Communism had become immanently connected with the U.S.S.R., without loyalty to that model nobody could be a Communist. Not even Trotsky, the main rival of Soviet Stalinist Communism from the late 1920s, claimed to be loyal to Lenin's teachings and the early Soviet state. But he was persecuted, exiled, and eventually assassinated. Not until the

¹⁶⁹ Nissim Calderon, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, March 3, 2009.

¹⁷⁰ Yoram Gozansky, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, February 23, 2009.

¹⁷¹ Yair Tzaban, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, February 12, 2009. Shoshana Shmuely, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, February 22, 2009.

¹⁷² Shafran, *Farewell Communism*, 179.

schism in world Communism between China and the U.S.S.R. and the emergence of Euro-Communism and the New Left in the West did other Marxist models appear. However, with the MKI and later Rakah remaining staunchly loyal to the U.S.S.R., no other model ever really took root in Israel until the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Chapter 6: Jewish-Arab Fraternity – Language, Perception, Symbol and Ritual, 1919-1965

6.1 Language – The Language of Arab-Jewish Fraternity

Arab-Jewish fraternity lay at the core of Jewish Communist ideology, differentiating the Jewish Communists from the rest of Israeli society. From the early 1920s, the Jewish Communists developed cultural practices enabling them to engage with the Palestinian Other in a way unlike any other Jewish Israelis. As the relationship between the two peoples deteriorated into ever-escalating conflict, the Jewish Communists developed a language that described the Palestinians in terms of Marxist-Leninist thinking, civic rights and Jewish historical traumas. This language was accompanied by symbols and rites that were uniquely Jewish Communist and primarily meant to create a bond between Jewish and Palestinian youths. As affirmative as it was, the Jewish Communist understanding of Palestinians was in terms that made Palestinians the object of civic and human rights struggle. Their understanding of Palestinian national agency was more lacking. The Jewish Communists failed to fully appreciate or consider Palestinian experiences of Zionism and the wide-ranging effect of the establishment of the state of Israel.

In this chapter, more than any other, I rely on secondary sources – such as work by Shafran and Budeiri – as well as interviews with Jewish members of the Party for my interpretation and analysis of the Palestinian and Iraqi perspective. However, no Palestinian or Iraqi members of the Party were interviewed for the purposes of this thesis; its focus is from the perspective of Communists who were Jews of European descent.

Interaction between Palestinians and Jews was one of the vital aspects of Communism in Palestine from its formative stages. Arab-Jewish fraternity was the one major difference between Zionist-Socialist practice and culture and the Communist subculture. Zionist-Socialists increasingly practiced the exclusion of Palestinians from the labour market and their removal from lands marked out for Jewish settlement, culminating in the ethnic cleansing of the 1948 War and the military government that followed it. The Jewish Communists, on the other hand, had been advocating for Arab-Jewish joint action and mutual interests since the 1920s. After 1948 they defended Palestinians' human, civic and national rights, struggling for fair treatment and justice toward the Palestinian citizens of Israel, those left in the country after the 1948 War.

The relations between Palestinians and Jews in the Communist Party were not nearly as perfect as Communist propaganda described them. Palestinians were welcomed into the PKP from the 1920s. The Party remained, however, for most of its history until the 1965 split, mostly Jewish. As the existing evidence shows, in 1948 the MKI numbered 750 Jews and 300 Palestinians. In 1961 the Central Committee reported that the party had 1,600 members, 74.3 percent of them Jews and 25.7 percent Palestinians. These figures put the number of Jewish members at about 1,200 and the Palestinians at around 400.¹ Despite their small numbers, the Palestinian members of the Party had a special place in it. As natives of the land, victims of Zionist colonization in the pre-state era and a persecuted minority after 1948, they used the Party to express their national identity and interests². This vocalization of Palestinian nationalism led

¹ Markovizky, *White Shirt and Red Tie*, 93.

² The Communist Party managed to exploit Palestinian national feelings to its own advantage and integrate them with Communism by allowing national and religious elements to be expressed unhindered by Communist ideology; "an Arab Communist could also be a devout Muslim" (Shafran, *Farewell Communism*, 161). The Communists were able to appeal to the Palestinian vote by using their pro-national platform. As early as 1949 the Party recognized "the justified hopes of the Arab people in Eretz-Israel for political independence and its natural right to determine its own fate." It also determined that "we are struggling for the establishment of an independent, democratic Arab state in the other part of Eretz-Israel." (The 'other part' refers to the parts of the country that were allocated to the Palestinian state under the 1947 Partition plan). At its 12th and 13th conferences, the MKI went even further in its recognition of

to the Jewish members' discomfort with what they perceived as the prominence of Palestinian nationalism. This tension erupted twice in Communist history, in the 1943 and 1965 splits, which were partly motivated by ideological differences between the Palestinian and Jewish members.³

Many ex-members of the MKI and Banki claim that the Party always favoured Palestinian nationalism. According to Yair Tzaban, one of the "Left Men", "what became clear over the years to both Arabs and Jews was that the struggle against Jewish nationalism was to be mounted forcefully and without compromise, but the approach to Arab nationalism was lenient."⁴ Since no Palestinian member of the Party was interviewed I can assume that this opinion was limited to the Jewish members of the Party, mainly from Tel Aviv. Nessia Shafran, the daughter of a Jewish Party member, states that Palestinian victimization by Zionism resulted in a preference for Palestinian members: "Formally there was complete equality between Arabs and Jews in the Party and in the movement, however on the moral level there was never any such parity – the Arabs were valued much more."⁵ It is certain that this perception of being valued

Palestinian nationalism, asserting "that the State of Israel must recognize the right to self-determination to the point of separation of the Arab people in Eretz-Israel... and the right of refugees to come back to their native land and receive compensation" (Reches, *The Arab Minority in Israel Between Communism and Arab nationalism*, 29-30). The recognition of the basics of Palestinian nationalism – statehood and the right of return – was accompanied by the ability of the MKI to be identified with Moscow aid to Egypt after the 1955 Czech arms deal. The growing relations with Nasser, the pan-Arab hero of Palestinians who were citizens of Israel in the 1950s and early 1960s, enabled the MKI to "incorporate into the local national movement" (Ibid., 32). However, despite its achievements, on some occasions the MKI's Communism revealed its inherent contradiction to Palestinian nationalism. When Moscow and the Arab Communists fell out with Nasser in the late 1950s and the Party supported Moscow's stand, it was punished by its Palestinian voters in the 1959 elections, only to recover and increase its Palestinian vote after Soviet-Egyptian relations improved in 1961. Even though the Party was not appreciative of the rise of modern Palestinian nationalism, "the years 1959-1964 were the formative era in the resuscitation of the Palestinian entity that led to the formation of the PLO" (ibid., 33). Palestinians who were citizens of Israel were influenced by this new Palestinian activism, manifested by the establishment of Al-Ard (Arabic: the Land) that called for a "just solution to the Palestinian problem as an undivided whole" (Ibid., 31). The MKI's mainly Jewish members still viewed the problems of Palestinians in Israel more as a struggle for rights and not as the concerns of a national minority. Only after the split and the 1967 War was Rakah able to form an alliance with the PLO, thus cementing its leading role among Palestinians in Israel in the late 1960s and 1970s.

³ The national tension within the Communist Party was regularly described by both Zionist and Palestinian historians of the Party. Both groups saw it as the main motif in the history of Communists in Palestine/Israel. See Budeiri, *The Palestine Communist Party*; Dothan, *Reds*.

⁴ Yair Tzaban, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, February 12, 2009

⁵ Shafran, *Farewell Communism*, 165.

was not shared by the Palestinian Communists; had it been perhaps the Party would not have split.

However, the political reality of the Communist Party was more complicated than as described by the "Left Men" and other ex-members of the MKI and Banki. The Party took action against Palestinian nationalism as well. It chastised one of its Palestinian leaders and ideologists, Emile Touma, for Palestinian nationalism. Touma, who opposed the official Party line on Partition, which recognized Israel's existence alongside a Palestinian state, was suspended from his Party positions in 1949, only to be reinstated after self-criticism.⁶ The Party was also suspicious of independent nationalist organizations outside its influence.

Relations between Palestinians and Jews were not confined to the political. The Party and its youth movement were one of the few places where Jews and Palestinians met as equals. The social interactions brought with them close friendships and love affairs and even long-term marriages. One of the more famous cases involved Arna Mer-Khamis, an ex *Palmach* member and the daughter of a well-known Israeli malaria researcher, who married Saliba Khamis, a prominent MKI member in Nazareth, bridging the divide between Palestinians and Jews. Some of the Palestinian Party leaders were married to Jewish women.⁷ Yoram Gozansky describes an intricate social network that included New Year visits to Nazareth, at times in open defiance of military government rules.⁸ While the social interaction between Palestinians and Jews was not without its tensions,⁹ Tel Aviv Jewish members who were interviewed for this project emphasized only close relationships.

⁶ Ibid., 162.

⁷ Shafran, *Farewell Communism*, 156; Sami Michael, *Hasut* (Refuge), (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1997).

⁸ Yoram Gozansky, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, February 23, 2009.

⁹ Shafran, *Farewell Communism*, 172-173.

From a historical perspective, the political and social interaction of Palestinians and Jews reflected the conflict between the two nations. It was a theatre of human feelings and reactions, resulting from the meeting of two socially and ethnically dissimilar groups, whose differences were exacerbated by the conflict between them. Considering these circumstances, the Jewish Communists were able to create a more open and welcoming environment for Palestinians and Jews to interact in than any other part of Israeli society of the 1950s and early 1960s could offer. However, the way the Palestinian members of the Party felt about their engagements with Jews and Jewish Communists awaits research into the Arabic written sources of the Party, which will reveal how nationalism and Communist ideology shaped their perceptive.

The Jewish Communists believed that beyond their national identities, both Palestinians and Jews had a mutual interest as workers against their respective ruling classes. This joint interest decreed that Palestinians and Jews could achieve a political understanding living in the same state, as the PKP advocated until 1947, or in two separate states, afterwards. The national conflict was perceived as not inherent to the two nations, but a result of the vile meddling of British imperialism, the Zionist bourgeoisie and Palestinian reaction.

The first contact between the then Zionist Communists of the MPS and Palestinians was in the early 1920s. The Jewish members of the MPS, driven by what they considered the Jewish proletariat's mission to bring the revolution to the toilers of the East, at first sought a leadership role. This perception is evident in a 1920 report by the MPS to the Comintern Executive Committee. Seeking recognition from the Comintern, it states that "among the Arabs we have begun distributing propaganda for solidarity and unity of the working class and the consolidation of unions."¹⁰ The budding Communist movement in Palestine, with its stress on the proletarians,

¹⁰ "Haprotoḳol shel Pgishat Hava'ad Hapo'el shel Haḳomintern 21.9.1920" (The protocol of the Meeting of the Comintern Executive Committee 21.9.1920), in Zahavi, *Apart or Together*, 26.

addressed a relatively small number of Palestinian workers on the railroads, to which it did not appeal, and the European Jewish Party members stated that they could not find "intelligent Arab workers"¹¹ to carry out Party work. Three years later, however, in a pamphlet from September 1923, originally written in Arabic, the Party central committee urges Palestinian workers to form an alliance of Palestinian and Jewish workers with the poor peasants. The pamphlet stresses the joint political action of Palestinians and Jews against Zionism and the British, stressing both groups' joint interest in fighting a common enemy.¹²

At the fifth Party conference in 1924, an unknown Palestinian worker appeared and talked about "the problems of the *fellah* and the prospects of activity among the Arabs."¹³ The joint struggle of Palestinian and Jewish youths was stressed in a 1932 booklet issued by the Palestine Young Communist League for the third convention of *Hano'ar Ha'oved*. It attacked the attempt to instil in the movement's members Zionist values beneath a Socialist veneer. It calls upon them to join forces with the Palestinian youth.¹⁴ The booklet reasserted the joint predicament of both Jews and Palestinians, attacking the ethnic class structure developing in Palestine and saying "that in the economic situation of Palestine's youth the Jewish youth constitutes the 'privileged' section, a happy carefree island? (Not posed as a question) No, in fact the Jewish youth in terms of its objective conditions is the closest among the Jewish working class to the situation of the – toiling Arab youth."¹⁵ Common interest decreed joint struggle, with the text posing a rhetorical question: "Is it true that the paths of the Jewish and Arab youths are

¹¹ Ibid., 26.

¹² "To the Workers of Palestine".

¹³ Dothan, *Reds*, 98.

¹⁴ "Milhamto shel Hano'ar Ha'oved: Brit Hano'ar HaKomunistit Hapaleština'it 13 Le'Oktöber 1932" (The War of the Working Youth: The Palestinian Communist Youth League October 13th 1932), Yad Tabenkin Archives, File # 2.

¹⁵ Ibid.

separate? ... The fate of the masses of toiling Arab youth is your fate, his struggle your struggle, and his victory your victory."¹⁶

The Party's documents did not mention the difficulties the Communists encountered trying to penetrate the Palestinian masses. Understandably, given the experiences of and threats of displacement, the mostly Jewish Party was met with suspicion by the Palestinian community. Jewish members of the Party also took issue with the Comintern's insistence on the Arabization of the Party in the aftermath of the 1929 Riots, which they saw as a pogrom, while Moscow's stance was that the riots were an anti-imperialist rebellion. Nonetheless, the Party did make a few inroads into the miniscule Palestinian working class.

In a series of anonymously written handbills from the 1930s, the Jewish section of the PKP called for understanding between the peoples. They were produced at one of the high points of the conflict between the Jewish *Yishuv*, the British and the Palestinians: the 1936 Arab Revolt. The handbills mostly contain slogans in reaction to the political issues of the moment, primarily the partition plan proposed by the British in 1937. One shows a map of Palestine across which two arms are shaking hands. The caption above the picture reads "Understanding between the Peoples," the caption below it "The Solution: Understanding between the Peoples."¹⁷ At the side of the map there are slogans calling for "Struggle for understanding between Jews and Arabs!"¹⁸ and for "Struggle against the alliance for Hebrew products!"¹⁹ Other slogans deal with workers' rights and fighting the Zionist Revisionist Right. The document is signed by the Palestinian Communist Party, the Jewish Section. Another handbill is no more than a collection of handwritten slogans, calling for "End the Bloodshed!", "End Racial Hatred!", "Down with

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ "Havana beyn Ha'amim" (Understanding between the Peoples), Lavon Institute for Labour Research, IV-445-2.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Partition!"²⁰ and "Understanding with the Arabs!"²¹ Both handbills feature two elements characteristic of the Jewish Communists' approach to Palestinians: the call for understanding between the peoples, and the advocacy of Palestinian rights, in this case condemning the attempt by the *Yishuv* to push Palestinian produce outside the Jewish economy.

A third handbill from 1939 condemns the St. James Conference convened in London in the aftermath of the Arab Revolt. It attacks British Imperialism for having assembled "the representatives of Arab feudalism and the Jewish bourgeoisie"²² in a false charade of making peace. True peace would be achieved, according to the Jewish Communists, by "the workers and peasants of both peoples who have mutual interests."²³

In similar fashion, in its first edition from the summer of 1937, the Party's organ *Kol Ha'am* calls upon the Jewish *Yishuv* to ensure its existence by casting in its fate together with the "Arab anti-Imperialist movement."²⁴ By ditching the protection of British Imperialism and the false illusions of Zionism, of providing Jews a safe haven in a Jewish state, and by recognizing the rights of the Palestinian majority, the *Yishuv* would ensure "equal political economic and cultural rights in the state and elected democratic rule that represents the entire population."²⁵

The 1930s were marked by an increase in immigration of Jews fleeing Europe to Palestine. The growing number of Jews and Palestinian fears of a radical change in the country's demography sparked the outbreak of the Arab revolt. The Communist Party penetrated the Palestinian labour movement and started to attract larger numbers of young Palestinian

²⁰ The Jewish Communists objected to the 1937 Peel Commission proposal, claiming that a Jewish state was not economically viable and would antagonize its Arab neighbors; see Dothan, *Reds*.

²¹ "Sof Lašina'a Hagiz'it" (End to Racial Hatred), Lavon Institute for Labour Research, IV-445-2.

²² "Po'aley Kol Ha'olam Hitahedu" (Workers of all Lands Unite), Lavon Institute for Labour Research, IV-445-2.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Organ of the Palestinian Communist Party, "Anu Na'ane Lakri'a! Lehavana Veheskem" (We will answer the Call! For Understanding and Agreement!)" *Kol Ha'am*, August 1937.

²⁵ Ibid.

workers.²⁶ The entrance of new Palestinian cadres into the Party came just as the Jewish members of the Party started to recognize the national existence of Jews in Palestine. This is reflected in the handbills of the 1930s. Growing realization that the country was now bi-national and the only solution to the conflict a political agreement prompted another change in the way the Jewish Communists viewed Palestinians, perceiving them now as a larger partner in an arrangement that would accommodate both nations. But the growing assertiveness of the Jewish Zionist *Yishuv*, which was trying to push Palestinians out of the job market, the economy and their land, brought out a new element: advocacy on behalf of Palestinian rights. As the Palestinians lost their hold on the country, becoming a minority after the 1948 War, this element would become prominent in Jewish Communist discourse about Palestinians.

Although the documents of the 1930s reflect the reality of Palestine at the time, they do not reflect the growing differences between the Palestinian Communists and their Jewish counterparts. When the Arab Revolt broke out in 1936, the PKP supported it as an anti-imperialist fight. This position of the Party's Central Committee alienated many of the Jewish Party members, who felt the Party did not take into account the existence of a new Jewish national group in Palestine. The Jewish members' ideological fissure with the Palestinian members split the party, but the split was temporarily mended in 1940 when the Jewish faction submitted to the discipline of the central committee. The reunification of the Party did not last for long. The national tensions that led to the 1937 split resurfaced in 1943, splitting Palestinian Communism into Jewish and Palestinian parties that operated separately for the next five years.²⁷

²⁶ For the story of one of these recruits, see Farah, *From the Ottoman Rule to the Hebrew State*. Bullas Farah was a print and railroad worker before joining the Communist Party, and typical of the new cadres that the Comintern installed in the Party after Arabization.

²⁷ For a detailed account of the splits in 1937-1940 and 1943, see Dothan, *Reds*; Budeiri, *The Palestine Communist Party*.

An internal document from 1940 of the Jewish *Emet* (Truth) faction of the Party discusses the approach toward the *League for Jewish-Arab Understanding*, an organization formed by moderate Zionist intellectuals and *Po'alei-Zion* activists in the midst of the Arab Revolt. The first part of the document describes the stand of the Jewish Communists toward Zionism and the Palestinian question. Imperialist policy, it states, is "helped by the division between the colonial peoples,"²⁸ and in Palestine it was using Zionism in order to maintain the divide between Palestinians and Jews, which blurred the real issues facing the two peoples like independence and class warfare. The control of the "Zionist ideology within the Jewish *Yishuv* is blurring the real interests of the two peoples."²⁹ The interest, on the Jewish side, was to overcome the division between Palestinians and Jews in order to fight imperialism.

In a newspaper article from April 1941, as the German armies seemed poised to overrun Egypt and Palestine, the anti-Imperialist critique was honed. For the Jewish Communists, both peoples of Palestine were in the grip of imperialism. The Palestinians, due to the weakness of their national movement as a result of British suppression, had fallen prey "to the demagogic propaganda of England's rivals, the Germans and Italians."³⁰ The Jewish *Yishuv* was held captive by the "almost monopolistic concentration of certain industrial and economic areas, the financial and banking business, transportation, organization and immigration and social and medical services"³¹ in the hands of Zionism. This control made the Jewish *Yishuv* a tool of British Imperialism and Zionism against its own interests and those of the Palestinian masses. The only solution for the Palestinian and Jewish masses "is to take their fate into their own hands, because

²⁸ "The League for Arab-Jewish Understanding 'Hamet' August 1940".

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ "Im Hitkarvut Hamilhama; Al Habe'aya shel Yahasey Yehudim Arvim" (With the Approach of War; On the Problem of Arab-Jewish Relationships), *Kol Ha'am*, April 1941, 7.

³¹ Ibid., 7.

their historical and daily interest lies in joint cooperation and struggle against their common enemy – imperialism and its various agents."³²

An even greater stress on the divisive role of Imperialism and the Palestinian and Jewish ruling classes appears in a May Day 1941 item. British Imperialism, according to the text, was aiming to enslave Palestine and its inhabitants for the sake of its imperialist war effort. The Zionist bourgeoisie had been enticed "to cooperate with Arab reaction and British Imperialism"³³ to increase its gains, for that reason "fanning the flames of national hatred"³⁴ by blaming the Palestinian workers for the difficulties of the Jewish workers. The only way the Jewish worker could achieve freedom was by "finding the way for a joint struggle with his brother in exploitation – the Arab worker."³⁵

A document from 1942 resurrects the perception among Jewish Communists, originating in the 1920s, that the Palestinians, in this case the Palestinian youth, are potentially revolutionary. It discusses the ways of increasing the support and recruitment of Palestinians to the war effort, asserting that "in the last 20 years the Arab youth have been the vanguard of the national liberation movement in Palestine."³⁶ This inherent revolutionary tendency was demonstrated, according to the text, in the struggles for their national rights in the 1930s. Zionism wanted to present "the Arab masses as one Fascist body,"³⁷ and it was therefore hiding "the principal revolutionary force in the country"³⁸ from the Jewish workers. The Jewish

³² Ibid., 7.

³³ "Hāshivut Vehekhre'ah shel Ma'avak Meshutaf shel Hapo'alim Ha'aravim Vehayehudim" (The Importance and Necessity of the Joint Struggle of the Arab and Jewish Workers), *Kol Ha'am*, May 1 1941, 4.

³⁴ Ibid, 4.

³⁵ Ibid, 4.

³⁶ "Tafkid Hamiflaga Vehano'ar Haqomunisti Barekhov Hafalaštini" (The Role of the Party and Communist Youth in the Palestinian Public), Lavon Institute for Labour Research, IV-445-2."

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

Communists alternately represented Palestinians as allies of the Jewish working class and as a revolutionary force.

At the end of World War II, the bi-national PKP split into the Palestinian NLL and the Jewish PKP. The Jewish Communists, more integrated into the political system of the *Yishuv*, recognized the national rights of the Jewish minority in a bi-national state. Nonetheless they continued to call for understanding between the peoples. A 1945 pamphlet, once again issued for a convention of *Hano'ar Ha'oved*, was subdivided into sections dealing with the Jewish people, the *Yishuv's* youth and Arab-Jewish relations.³⁹ The end of the war, it asserts, should have reemphasized for the young Communists the fact that the true rulers of the country were "the British capitalists... who are helped by the Jewish and Arab capitalists."⁴⁰ Against them stood the oppressed "Arab and Jewish masses."⁴¹ This state of affairs would end and the future of the *Yishuv* be secured only when "our country will be ruled by elected, democratic, existing and legislative bodies, which will determine the bi-national character of the land."⁴² It was essentially a call for a bi-national state, a democratic state where the national rights of both peoples would be recognized. Although the tone of the document is more conciliatory than those of earlier years, it still emphasized the mutual interests of Palestinians and Jews. For the Communists, since their early days, the main struggle was mostly anti-imperialist and less so national.

The 1940s, mainly after the U.S.S.R. entered the war, were the catalyst for the PKP's first major breakthrough into a substantial section of the Palestinian populace of Palestine. Drawn to the Soviet Union's anti-imperialist ideology and impressed by its stunning victories over Fascism after 1943, a group of young Christian Palestinians became intellectually and politically engaged

³⁹ "Lehavrey Hano'ar Ha'oved" (To the Members of *Hano'ar Ha'oved!*) Lavon Institute for Labour Research, IV-445-2.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

as Communists. Men like Emile Habibi, Tawfik Toubi and Emile Touma found in Communism a way of political expression and the modernization of Palestinian politics. They differed from the young workers drawn to the Party in the 1930s by its class ideology, and became active among the expanding Palestinian working class. The new recruits to Communism in Palestine brought with them a greater stress on Palestinian nationalism and reignited the tensions of the 1930s, leading to the Party split between Jews and Palestinians in 1943.⁴³

Ever since the 1920s, the Jewish Communists had shaped their own view of Palestinians. Idealizing a complicated and sensitive reality in which Palestinians and Jews mixed socially and politically, they developed a positive stereotype of Palestinians: as partners in the Marxist struggle against Imperialism, as political partners to a bi-national solution to the Palestine problem, and as inherently revolutionary. But this conception could not mask two facts. First, establishing itself among the Palestinian masses was for the Party a long and difficult process, which actually came to fruition only in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Second, the Party could not accommodate the national feelings of both Palestinians and Jews. Nonetheless, the Communist Party and later its youth wing managed to maintain a constant and firm framework where Palestinians and Jews together resisted the growing Zionist takeover of Palestine, all in the name of an internationalist ideology.

The 1948 War changed the demographic makeup of Palestine. The Palestinians, most of them ethnically cleansed during the war, became a minority in a Jewish state. The Palestinian

⁴³ Bullas Farah described the new recruits to the Party after 1936 as follows: "The comrades that came from the national movement with no fixed world view and no clear ideology were only revolutionary patriots. It was not possible to see in them the social facet and they were not interested in social problems. Most of them came from the middle class... They had only heard about Marxist ideology and the Soviet Union, but knew nothing about Marxism and the social, political and social structure of the Soviet Union" (Farah, *From the Ottoman Rule to the Hebrew State*, 68). Budeiri described the members of the Palestinian intelligentsia that were attracted to the Party in the war years as "disillusioned with the traditional leaders and were drawn not so much by the party's advocacy of communism, but by its support of the Arab independence struggle, its modernity and methods of organization" and by "the identification of the party with the Soviet Union whose growing prowess in the war was attracting enthusiastic admirers among the educated youth" (Budeiri, *The Palestine Communist Party*, 97).

Communists, members of the NLL, lost their base of power within the Palestinian working class, most of whom became refugees in the neighbouring Arab states. Loyal to the Soviet Union, the Palestinian Communists had supported the UN Partition Plan and objected to the Arab states' invasion of Palestine. For that stand they were persecuted in the territories under the Arab armies' control.⁴⁴ They fared no better at the hands of the new Israeli authorities. The IDF did not distinguish between Palestinian political leanings and arrested Palestinian Communists, at times re-arresting those who had been detained by the Arab armies.⁴⁵ Its newspaper closed by the British, its power base dispersed, branded as traitors by the Palestinians and suspected by the Israelis of subversion, the NLL sought to reunite with the Jewish Communists. The Jewish Communists who took part in the Israeli war effort were now willing to restore the bi-national makeup of the Party.

The October 1948 reunification of the Palestinian and Jewish Communists was couched in the language of international Marxism-Leninism. The speakers at the festive Central Committee meeting marking the union all devoted their remarks to Western imperialism. The *Kol Ha'am* issue on the day of the union featured verbal attacks against imperialism using similar Marxist internationalist language.⁴⁶ In an editorial named *On the Agenda*, the union of

⁴⁴ For the NLL's stance (the Palestinian Communist faction that the Palestinian Communists all belonged to) regarding the 1947 Partition Plan, see Reches, *The Arab Minority in Israel: Between Communism and Arab nationalism* and Farah, *From the Ottoman Rule to the Hebrew State*. Farah describes how the NLL's central committee was split between a minority that opposed Partition and a majority that supported it (103-112). Avner Ben-Zaken, relying on the archival material from the Israeli archives, describes how the Palestinian Communists conducted propaganda among the soldiers of the Arab armies to turn their weapons against their own regimes. The regional commands of the Egyptian and Trans-Jordanian armies that controlled parts of Palestine persecuted Communists and confined them to detention camps. When those camps were liberated by the IDF, it rearrested those Palestinian Communists, who were later liberated after a campaign by the Jewish Communists that pressured David Ben-Gurion to reward the patriotic stand of the Party in the war by releasing them. For details, see Ben-Zaken, *Communism as Cultural Imperialism*, 173-184.

⁴⁵ For a detailed account of the persecution of the NLL and other Arab Communist Parties and their support for Partition, see Ben-Zaken, *Communism as Cultural Imperialism*, 153-214.

⁴⁶ It is interesting to look at the way the Iraqi Communists dealt with the Kurdish problem. The CPI like the MKI had a problem to accommodate Kurdish nationalism "Kurdish nationalism... ultimately rested on assumptions of ethnic homogeneity, which for a communist party undoubtedly were perilous concepts" (Franzén, *Red Star Over*

Jewish and Palestinian Communists is compared to the Zimmerwald Congress held in Switzerland in 1915 by the antiwar Socialists, and the 1948 War is blamed on the "British and American Imperialists, served by the reaction of the invading Arab states."⁴⁷ The act of unification is celebrated as a manifestation "of the great idea of international unity of the working class"⁴⁸ and not a simple political act, but part "of a joint and coordinated political struggle against the external imperialist enemy."⁴⁹ The present bloodshed is said to stand in contrast to the "daily and historical interest of both Peoples."⁵⁰

The same Marxist-Leninist language was used by the Jewish Party leaders in their speeches at the Central Committee Plenum. In her opening speech, Esther Vilenska states "that across the deep abyss that British rule opened between the peoples in Eretz-Israel an iron bridge of Arab-Jewish fraternity is being built today."⁵¹ The unification of the Jewish and Palestinian Communists is, for Vilenska, "symbolic of the great chance of Jewish- Arab victory over the imperialist enemy."⁵² It also proves "that there is no conflict of interest between the Jewish people and the Arab Eretz-Israeli people."⁵³

In a lengthy speech entitled *The Road to Victory*, Party secretary-general Shmuel Mikunis placed the struggle in Palestine/Israel in its international context as part of the struggle between

Iraq, 117). Thus the CPI like MKI found in imperialism the cause of the division of the Kurdish nation. The Iraqi Communists much like the Jewish Communists argued that the historical "situations of both Palestinians and Kurds" being subjected to the old regime in the service of imperialism developed relations of brotherly love (Ibid, 117).

⁴⁷ "Al Ha'ajenda, im Ha'iħud" (On the Agenda, with the unification), *Kol Ha'am*, October 22, 1948.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ "Va'adat Ha'iħud Ha'internatsyonalistit shel Hamiflaga Haķomunistit Ha'Isra'elit, Heyfa, 22.10.48" (The Internationalist Unification Convention of the Israeli Communist Party, Haifa 22.10.48), "Ne'um Ptiħa" (Opening Speech), *Kol Ha'am*, October 24, 1948.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

"the black forces of imperialism"⁵⁴ and the "representatives of victorious Socialism and popular democracy."⁵⁵ As for the 1948 War, "the events in Eretz-Israel from November 29th 1947 prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that Anglo-American Imperialism bears direct responsibility for the violation of peace and bloodshed."⁵⁶ To Party leader Meir Vilner, the "division in the Middle East and Eretz-Israel is not between Jews and Arabs, but between the forces of pro-imperialist, anti-popular reaction on one side, and the democratic popular forces on the other."⁵⁷ In the best Marxist tradition, he states that restoring the unity of the Party would deal a fatal blow to racial and chauvinistic ideologies, both Palestinian and Jewish.⁵⁸

Despite the continued use of Marxist terminology to describe the relations between Palestinians and Jews, the 1948 War changed this discourse. The first element to be added was advocacy on behalf of the Palestinian minority. The Communists in Palestine had been involved in advocating Palestinian's rights since 1924.⁵⁹ In the 1930s the Party had objected to the attempt by the Zionist movement to push Palestinians out of the labour market under the slogan of

⁵⁴ "Va'adat Ha'ihud Ha'internatsyonalistit shel Hamiflaga Haqomunistit Ha'Isra'elit, Heyfa, 22.10.48" (The Internationalist Unification Convention of the Israeli Communist Party, Haifa, 22.10.48), "Haderekh Lanitsaḥon" (The Road to Victory), *Kol Ha'am*, October 24, 1948.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ "Va'adat Ha'ihud Ha'internatsyonalistit shel Hamiflaga Haqomunistit Ha'Isra'elit, Heyfa, 22.10.48" (The Internationalist Unification Convention of the Israeli Communist Party, Haifa, 22.10.48), and "Al Haḥzarat Ha'aḥdut Ha'internatsyonalistit shel Hamiflaga Haqomunistit" (On the Restoration of Internationalist Unity to the Communist Party), *Kol Ha'am*, October 24, 1948.

⁵⁸ The Palestinian leaders of the unified Party, Emile Habibi and Tawfik Toubi, used the same Marxist-Leninist and internationalist language, showing how this discourse was shared by Palestinian and Jewish Communists ("Va'adat Ha'ihud Ha'internatsyonalistit shel Hamiflaga Haqomunistit Ha'Isra'elit, Heyfa, 22.10.48" (The Internationalist Unification Convention of the Israeli Communist Party), Haifa, *Kol Ha'am*, October 22, 1948; "Al Haḥzarat Ha'aḥdut Ha'internatsyonalistit shel Hamiflaga Haqomunistit" (On the Restoration of Internationalist Unity to the Israeli Communist Party), *Kol Ha'am*, October 24, 1948; "Ve'idat Ha'aḥdut Ha'internatsyonalistit shel Hamiflaga Haqomunistit Ha'Isra'elit, Heyfa" (The Internationalist Unification Convention of the Israeli Communist Party, Haifa), *Kol Ha'am*, October 22, 1948; "Brakhot Haliga Leshihḥur Le'umi Baḥalaqim Ha'aravim shel Erets-Isra'el" (The Greetings of National Liberation League in the Arab Parts of Eretz-Israel), *Kol Ha'am*, October 24, 1948.)

⁵⁹ On the attempt by Zionist colonizers to colonize Palestinian lands near Afula and the assistance the Communists gave the Palestinian peasants, see Israeli, *MPS-PKP-MKI*, 31-34; Dothan, *Reds*, 102; and Budeiri, *The Palestine Communist Party 1919-1948*, 23.

"Hebrew Labour."⁶⁰ Yet until 1948 this advocacy had been on behalf of a majority of the country's inhabitants, albeit one struggling against an increasingly powerful minority. The Palestinians left in Israel after the *Nakba* were reduced to the status of a humiliated minority ruled by a military government. While the Jewish Communists justified the 1948 War as an anti-imperialist war of independence, they attacked the treatment of the Palestinians left under Israeli rule. Already in the early stages of the 1948 War, in a pamphlet published in the wake of the Jewish occupation of Haifa and the exodus of its Palestinian population, the Party Central Committee warned that the "mass departure of tens of thousands of Arabs from Haifa was meant as an incitement by British agents in the Middle East to provoke the Arabs in Eretz-Israel and the neighbouring countries against the Jews."⁶¹ The victorious Jewish side was encouraged to make peace with those Palestinians who desired it and "to win over the Arab population in the Jewish state's territory!"⁶² Again anti-imperialist internationalist language is used, but this time it inadvertently masks the hard reality of ethnic cleansing. By justifying the Jewish Communists' support for the founding of Israel, anti-imperialism enabled them not to engage fully with the Palestinian calamity. Thus, the call for "a Jewish- Arab alliance against foreign rule, against American penetration"⁶³ serves to lessen the Israeli blame for the fate of the Palestinians. Saying that does not discount the civic bravery of the Jewish Communists, who even in the midst of Israeli victory continued to fight for democratic values that were proclaimed during the founding of Israel.

⁶⁰ In Zionist jargon and ideology, "Hebrew Labour" meant the employment of Jewish workers instead of and in preference to non-Jewish workers, mainly Palestinians.

⁶¹ "Lamaganim! Lano'ar! Lehamoney Hayeshuv!" (To the Defenders! To the Youth! To the Masses of the Yishuv!), *Kol Ha'am*, April 26, 1948.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

This advocacy of Palestinian rights also featured in the speeches made at the unity conference in Haifa. Resorting to the language of democratic civil rights, in her opening speech Vilenska vowed, in the name of all true Israeli patriots, "to fight so the new state will wipe away every manifestation of discrimination from its boundaries, and will be a home and motherland to all its citizens regardless of race, nationality and faith."⁶⁴ Although Mikunis blamed the Palestinian leadership for the disaster that had befallen its people, he did not shy away from condemning the Israeli government's "antidemocratic policy against Israeli-Arabs... meaning the large-scale robbery, looting and destruction of Arab property performed by thousands of soldiers and civilians without intervention; the liquidation of entire villages by demolishing their houses for no military purpose; the mass arbitrary arrests and deportations beyond the front lines; the ghettos for Arabs in the cities and the discriminations against them."⁶⁵ Vilner, in his remarks, laid the blame for the discrimination against Palestinians on the Jewish bourgeoisie and MAPAI. The collusion of those forces with Abdullah and his Western Imperialist masters led "to the antidemocratic policy regarding the Arab population."⁶⁶

The 1950s and early 1960s were marked by an intense public struggle by the MKI and Banki for the rights of Palestinian citizens in Israel.⁶⁷ The Jewish Communists' main aim was to end the military government imposed on the Palestinian after the 1948 War, and toward that end they sustained a persistent campaign against the persecution of Palestinians and discrimination

⁶⁴ "Ve'idat Ha'ihud Ha'internatsyonalistit shel Hamiflaga Ha'komunistit Ha'Isra'elit, Heyfa, 22.10.48" (The Internationalist Unification Convention of the Israeli Communist Party, Haifa, 22.10.48), "Ne'um Ptiha" (Opening Speech), *Kol Ha'am*, October 24, 1948.

⁶⁵ "Ve'idat Ha'ihud Ha'internatsyonalisti shel Hamiflaga Ha'komunistit Ha'Israelit, Heyfa, 22.10.48" (The Internationalist Unification Convention of the Israeli Communist Party, Haifa, 22.10.48), "Haderekh Lanitsaon" (The Road to Victory), *Kol Ha'am*, October 24, 1948.

⁶⁶ "The Internationalist Unification Convention of the Israeli Communist Party, Haifa, 22.10.48", "Al Ha'zarat Ha'ahdut Ha'internatsyonalistit shel Hamiflaga Ha'komunistit" (On the Restoration of Internationalist Unity to the Communist Party), *Kol Ha'am*, October 2, 1948.

⁶⁷ Markovizky, *White Shirt and Red Tie*, 93: "From its first day the MKI became a fighting opposition struggling for the defense of the civic rights of Israeli-Arabs."

against them. Seeking to attract audiences outside the MKI and Banki,⁶⁸ and abiding by the rules of the Israeli political democratic system they were part of, the Jewish Communists phrased their appeals for Arab-Jewish fraternity in the language of civic rights. In that sense, the Communists struggled to instil democratic values within Israeli democracy. At the same time, they also used class language and appealed to Jewish morality and historical sensibilities after the Holocaust.

Wall posters and handbills from the early 1950s to the mid-1960s reveal the use of similar language in the day-to-day struggles of Banki and the MKI. In two wall posters from the early 1950s the language of democratic equality is intermixed with the class interests of Palestinian workers. A 1952 poster states that "different wage levels for the Jewish and Arab workers are in the interest of employers and contrary to the interest of Jewish and Arab workers alike."⁶⁹ A wall poster entitled "We will Defend the Freedom to Strike in Israel!"⁷⁰ offers support to the striking city workers of Nazareth, telling the story of the attempts by the military government to break the strike by arresting its leaders and employing scabs. It ends with the slogan "Long live the unity and solidarity of Jewish and Arab workers in the struggle to fend off the attack against the striking workers!"⁷¹

Democratic sensibilities were appealed to in handbills describing the arbitrary arrests of Palestinians and disruption of their activities. A 1955 handbill of the Israeli Young Communist League tells the story of Reziek Abdu, a 20 year old from Nazareth, who was arrested, not given a trial at first, and remained incarcerated even after a court found him not guilty.⁷² The handbill

⁶⁸ Ibid., 97: "the movement needed to act as part of a wider protest front, which would be shared by intellectuals, social and economic figures, who were not necessarily identified with the views of the Communist Party."

⁶⁹ "Leptiḥat Hahistadrut Velishkat Ha'avoda La'oved Ha'arvi, 3 Le'Ogust 1952" (For the opening of the *Histadrut* and the Work Bureau to the Arab Worker, August 3 1952), Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #17-8.

⁷⁰ "Anu Nagen al Zkhut Hashvita Be'Isra'el!" (We will Defend the Freedom to Strike in Israel!) Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #17-8.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² "Brit Hano'ar Haḥomunisti Ha'Isra'eli, 13 Le'Yuni 1955" (The Israeli Young Communist League, June 13, 1955), Yad Tabenkin Archives.

sharply criticizes the use of the British Emergency Laws to put down the "struggle of the masses of the people and youth against the British mandate government."⁷³ It warns of a process of infiltration of Fascism into Israel, stating: "Just as freedom cannot be divided, so too democracy cannot. Start with the Arabs and you'll end with the Jews. Start with the Communists and you'll end with MAPAM and '*Ahdut HaAvoda*'."⁷⁴

In a January 1956 memo sent by the Party's Central Committee to the Committee for Military Government appointed by the Prime Minister, the Communists clarified their stand. First describing in detail the methods of the military government, the memo goes on to refute the official logic justifying it on security grounds and assert that the real reason for it was a "desire to expel the Arab population from Israel... [and] create favourable conditions for the Jewish magnates to rob the property of the Arab population and economically exploit the Arab population more easily."⁷⁵ The concepts used are those of democratic sensibility⁷⁶ and allusion is made to the recent Jewish history of oppression, Israeli racists being compared to the Black Hundreds.⁷⁷

One of the high points of the Communist struggle on behalf of the Palestinians came at the time of the Kafr Qasim massacre in 1956. The massacre was disclosed to the public by Tawfik Tubi in a Knesset speech, of which tens of thousands of copies "were distributed by

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ "Tazkir Lava'ada shel Hamimshal Hatsva'i - Ba'lu et Hamimshal Hatsva'i! Mugash al Yedey Hava'ad Hamerkazi shel Hamiflaga Ha'komunistit Ha'Isra'elit, Yano'ar 1956" (Memo to the Committee for Military Government - Abolish the Military Government! Presented by the Central Committee of The Israeli Communist Party, January 1956), Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #20.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 3: "It is no wonder that the heart of every Israeli patriot and democrat is filled with anger and protest against the shame of the national operation."

⁷⁷ The Black Hundreds - a Russian nationalist, anti-Semitic and conservative organization that was active in Russia in the early twentieth century, mainly in the aftermath of the 1905 Revolution. The Black Hundreds were responsible for pogroms against Jews and terrorist acts against liberals and Socialists.

Banki members across the country, in houses and public places."⁷⁸ A wall poster a year later calls for a public rally in commemoration of the massacre. The massacre was used by the Communists to highlight other wrongs done to the Palestinian. A handbill of the Israeli Young Communist League entitled (in allusion to the biblical story of Cain and Abel) *The Blood Cries out from the Ground* condemns the government's failure to investigate a series of Palestinian children's deaths from discarded ammunition and denounces the sending into exile and arbitrary arrests of "14 public figures from Nazareth,"⁷⁹ all against the backdrop of "the horrible murder trial in Kafr Qasim."⁸⁰ It ends with a call to the Jewish youth in Israel to stop "the oppression, humiliation and abusive policy of the Ben-Gurion government towards the Israeli-Arabs, which trample upon Israeli morals and the humanistic tradition of the Jewish people."⁸¹

The May Day 1958 clash in Nazareth between Palestinian demonstrators and the Israeli police was another notable event in the Communist struggle for Palestinians' rights. The mass arrests and widespread repression that followed it were strongly condemned by the Jewish Communists, again using the language of democratic rights and Jewish morality in the struggle against the military government.

A wall poster from May 1958 tries to debunk the official version of the events in Nazareth, quoting supportive testimony of *Haaretz* reporter Shabtai Teveth and the poet Natan Alterman. It ends with a cry appealing to Jewish collective memory and national pride: "Jews! Will you sit quietly while the persecution of the Arabs continues? Will the Jewish people who came out of the ghetto – agree to a ghetto for the Arabs? The detainees must be returned to their families! The military government that shames our national honour must be abolished! Jew,

⁷⁸ Markovizky, *White Shirt and Red Tie*, 103.

⁷⁹ "Hadam Zo'ek min Ha'adama, 17 Be'November, 1957" (The Blood Cries out from the Ground, November 17, 1957), Yad Tabenkin Archives.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

speak up!"⁸² What should we make of the clear turn to Jewish empathy in these documents and in others? First is the fact that the Jewish Communists used the basic elements of the evolving discourse in Israel around the Holocaust and Jewish history. Second is the fact that using this discourse was a powerful rhetorical weapon in the hands of the Jewish Communists, which made the plight of Palestinians understandable to Jews, still imbued with the memories of the Holocaust, and provoked many Jews to action to prevent similar actions by their own government. Third is the identification of the Jewish Communists themselves with the Jewish historical narrative. But it was far from just a rhetorical propaganda tool, as the Jewish Communists authentically identified with the Jewish sensitivities they used in order to end the military government and the discrimination against Palestinians.

A poster issued by the MKI's Central Committee begins with a portrayal of the aftermath of the riots in Nazareth, demanding an end to the military government, and goes on to state that "the same whip that lashes the Arab workers is also lashing the Jewish workers."⁸³ It ends by calling on "democratic public opinion in Israel"⁸⁴ to help end the military government and release those arrested in Nazareth. A handbill of Banki's Central Committee, devoted to a youngster named Taofik Ebrahim who had been sentenced to four years in prison for allegedly throwing stones at the police and shouting "Long Live Nasser!", again resorts to testimony from non-Communist writers and Zionist newspapers to support its claims. It ends by calling on the Jewish youth to "join their voices to the human, national and democratic claim."⁸⁵

⁸² "Ha'emet al Netseret, Tel Aviv, May 1958" (The Truth about Nazareth, Tel Aviv, May 1958), Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #17-18.

⁸³ "Shaḥreru et Atsurey Ha'eḥad Be'May, Hamiflaga Haḥomunistit Ha'Isra'elit, Tel Aviv" (Release the May Day Detainees, The Israeli Communist Party, Tel Aviv), Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #17-18.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Israeli Young Communist League, "Asirey Hamimshal Hatsva'i Ḥayavim Lehishtāḥrer!" (The Prisoners of the Military Government Must Be Set Free!) Yad Tabenkin Archives.

The advocacy on behalf of Palestinians continued well into the late 1950s and the early 1960s. A 1962 handbill that calls for a meeting of Jewish and Palestinian youth asserts that "the campaign to end the military government is getting wider and stronger than ever."⁸⁶ By that point the Communists, using language that was shared by a wide range of Israelis, had managed to mobilize parties from the Left and Right to agitate for the abolition of the military government. Did the language shaped by the Jewish Communists since the 1920s, which was expressed in handbills, posters and other propaganda tools, have any impact on historical reality? By 1966 the military government was annulled. When the *Knesset* voted to abolish the military government in 1963, even *Herut* supported the motion. In a 1959 *Knesset* debate, Menachem Begin, addressing the newly formed MAPAI-led government, said "the military government is contrary to the principle of equality for all citizens, a principle that needs to be implemented in theory as well as in practice – in the state of Israel."⁸⁷ Indeed, the use of the language of civic rights for the Palestinian citizens of Israel by *Herut* indicates that this language, long present in the MKI's platform, shaped the political discourse around the military government, facilitating the wide public mobilization that enabled its abolishment. In contrast, the Marxist-Leninist anti-imperialist terms that the Jewish Communists used to describe their relations with their Palestinian comrades did not have currency beyond the MKI and Banki and were not used in non-Communist public channels.

6.2 Symbol – The Symbolism of Arab-Jewish Fraternity

The earliest symbol expressive of the Jewish Communists' comprehension of the Palestinian Other can be found in a 1937 pamphlet, which shows two arms shaking hands across the

⁸⁶ "Pniya Tsiburit Letalmidey Hatikhonim" (Public Appeal to the Secondary Students!) Yad Tabenkin.

⁸⁷ "Inyanim Bsisi'im Bekiyomenu Hale'umi, 16 Be'Detsember, 1959" (Fundamental Issues in our National Existence, December 16, 1959), *The Knesset Speeches* 25, 92-95, Jerusalem, Israel.

background of a map of Palestine.⁸⁸ The handshake clearly symbolizes mutual agreement and friendship. It is also a Communist symbol, signifying the coming together of two opposing sides, as for example in the symbol of the German Socialist Unity Party, which represented the coming together of Social-Democrats and Communists. The map of Palestine represents the local element. This early symbol is a precursor of the symbolic language used by the MKI and Banki to represent Arab-Jewish fraternity, language consisting of both local elements and the symbols of international Communism. More than a decade later, in an article in the Party organ the handshake motif reappears as the symbol of the joining together of the Palestinian and Jewish Communists, this time beneath the distinctly Communist symbols of the Hammer and Sickle and the Red Star. The captions, in Arabic and Hebrew, provide the local context: "*The Unification of the Jewish and Arab Communists.*"⁸⁹

The foremost symbol of Arab-Jewish fraternity from the 1950s to the mid-1960s was the Arab-Jewish duo, an image consisting of figures of an Arab and a Jew shaking hands or standing shoulder to shoulder. Its roots lie in Soviet Socialist realism,⁹⁰ one example of which is Vera Mokinah's statue (1936) *The Industrial Worker and the Kolkhoz Worker*.⁹¹ The statue juxtaposes two opposites, city and country, industry and agriculture, man and woman, uniting them under the symbol of the Hammer and Sickle. The Jewish Communist model adapted the same motif to the local Israeli landscape, depicting the Palestinian either dressed in traditional Palestinian peasant clothing or marked by just a *keffiyeh*, and the Jewish figure dressed in European style. The image of the Palestinian and the background against which it is portrayed might be

⁸⁸ "Lehavana bein Ha'amim" ("Understanding between the Peoples"), Lavon Institute for Labour Research, IV-445-2.

⁸⁹ "Al Ha'ajenda, im Ha'ihud" (On the Agenda, With the Unification), *Kol Ha'am*, October 22, 1948.

⁹⁰ There were an interchanges between Soviet Socialist-Realist art and Israeli art created in Leftist-Zionist circles and the kibbutzim, see Tami Michaeli ed., *Propaganda and Vision: Soviet and Israeli Art 1930-1955* (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1997).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

construed as paternalistic and Orientalist. However, this image of the traditional *keffiyeh*-clad Palestinian was to become part of Palestinian national iconography. For example, a 1980 PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) poster issued in Lebanon for Land Day depicts a Palestinian peasant traditionally wearing a *keffiyeh* holding a pickaxe; the background is a terraced village representing the landscape of rural Palestine.⁹² Although a direct influence is hard to establish, it is possible that some Communist images were shared between Palestinian nationalism and Communism.

As early as 1947, in a Banki poster for a youth meeting for Jewish-Palestinian joint action against the British, the Arab-Jewish duo appears. The Palestinian is dressed in traditional Palestinian peasant's garments. The Jewish figure is wearing European clothes. Both are hacking their way with an axe and pitchfork through a barbwire fence, guarded by a tank and a faceless crowd behind them. A May Day issue of *Kol Ha'am* features an image of two workers, one of them Jewish and the other Palestinian. The Jew is wearing a beret typical of Jewish workers in the early years of Jewish immigration to Palestine, the Palestinian the traditional *keffiyeh*. Above the two figures a white dove is flying over a background of fields and industrial buildings. The dove was a recurring symbol in the context of Arab - Jewish fraternity.

The dove was widely used in the Eastern European People's Democracies and adopted from the Soviet symbolic vocabulary.⁹³ It is also connected to the biblical narrative, with connotations of peace, safety and tranquility. Throughout the 1950s, it often appears in combination with the previous two elements, the symbols of international Communism and the Arab-Jewish duo.

⁹² Zeina Maasri, *Off the Wall: Political Posters of the Lebanese Civil War* (New York: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2009).

⁹³ For a detailed analysis of the development of the Soviet Bloc countries' rite and symbolism and the Soviet influence on it, see Andres Åman, "Symbols and Rituals in the People's Democracies during the Cold War," in *Symbols of Power: the Esthetics of Political Legitimation in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, ed. Claes Arvidsson et al. (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1987).

In a wall poster announcing Banki's national peace camp in 1951, the background consists of two flags, one blue and the other red. The blue flag is adorned with a peace dove holding an olive branch, the red flag with the Israeli national flag signifying the local, the Hammer and Sickle, the Red Star and two olive branches. Another Communist motif in the poster is a rising sun, its beams penetrating the red sky. The centre of the picture is occupied by three figures. Two are manifestly Jewish, and the third is a Palestinian wearing a *keffiyeh*.⁹⁴ The cover of Banki's organ from May 1953 shows two figures, a Palestinian and a Jew, dressed in the Banki uniform, the Palestinian wearing a *keffiyeh*. In the background again there are two flags, a blue flag adorned with a peace dove, and a Red Flag adorned with the national flag, the Red Star and the Hammer and Sickle with two olive branches. The Red Flag also carries the profiles of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, a Soviet symbol widely used in the Eastern Bloc.

A photograph taken in Ramla in 1951 provides another take on the motif of the Arab-Jewish duo. It shows two men, one a Palestinian wearing a *keffiyeh*, the other a Jew dressed European-style. The two are photographed from below, blowing trumpets, two Red Flags waving above them.⁹⁵ The influence of Soviet artistic motifs is evident in the heroic stance of the two figures, which is reminiscent of A. Rodchenko's Socialist-realist photograph (1930) of *The Pioneer – the Trumpeter*.

The fusion of the symbolic language of Arab-Jewish fraternity with the symbolism of Communism is most evident in images of the masses as perceived by the Jewish Communists. In a picture on the front page of the *Kol Ha'am* issue dedicated to the Party's Eleventh Congress, beneath a towering "11" in Roman numerals decorated with the national and Hammer and Sickle

⁹⁴ "Hikonu Lefestival Hashalom Hale'umi shel Banki al Har Hakarmel, 28 Be'September, 1951- 2 Le'Oktobor 1951" (Be Ready for Banki's National Peace Camp on Mount Carmel, September 28, 1951-October 2, 1951), Yad Tabenkin Archives.

⁹⁵ Photograph courtesy of Mr. Yoram Gozansky, 2.23.09.

flags, six columns of men and women are seen marching into the foreground from the background of a village with water tower typical of Jewish settlements and an industrial complex, symbolizing the alliance between village and city. The columns themselves represent the cooperating components of Israeli society, including men and women, soldiers and kibbutz members in short-sleeves and pants. One of the columns consists of Palestinians in traditional dress, making them also a component of the mass, which is holding up banners and Red Flags. In allusion to the mass parades in the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe, a group portrait of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin is also held aloft.⁹⁶ Similar motifs appear on the 1951 cover of *Kol Hano'ar* dedicated to the election, which shows a Jewish youth holding a Red Flag leading a crowd of youngsters of mixed gender. Immediately behind the leader are a Jewish girl and a Palestinian youth, identifiable by the *keffiyeh* he's wearing. They carry a banner in Hebrew that says: *We want peace*. The crowd is emerging from a background landscape of smokestacks and village dwellings, with a rising sun above them.⁹⁷

The fusion is perhaps best illustrated by a 1953 postcard that was distributed for the Bucharest Festival of Students and Youth. It shows a Palestinian and Jewish figure, contrasted by their dress. The Jewish youth is holding the national flag. Below them appear idealized scenes of settlements with water towers, tents and palm trees. The Arab-Jewish duo is stretching out their hands over a globe to a group of youths dressed in clothes representing the world's continents. Behind them wave flags adorned with the peace dove and the symbol of the WFDY, and banners with the words *Peace* and *Friendship*. Arab-Jewish fraternity had become an integral part of Communist internationalism.

⁹⁶ *Kol Ha'am*, 10.21.49

⁹⁷ "Hano'ar Lema'an Habhirot" (The Youth for Election), *Kol Hano'ar*, July 1951.

6.3 Palestinians in the Eyes of Jewish Communists

The Jewish Communists mostly neglected to speak to their Palestinian comrades in Arabic; however, they conversed culturally with their Palestinian comrades in the language of Marxist internationalism. To advocate the case of the oppressed Palestinian minority in Israel to wider audiences, they used the language of Jewish historical sensibilities. However, to the Jewish Communists, especially in Banki, the understanding of Palestinians was an important part of their educational work. In two instructors' brochures created in the aftermath of the 1956 War, in January 1957 and March 1957 respectively, the young Jewish Communists were encouraged to learn about and discuss the Palestinian and Egyptian peoples. Like many of Banki's instructors' brochures, they were constructed in the form of a *Masechet*.

The cover of the first brochure, entitled *We and Our Neighbours*, shows an Arab wearing a *keffiyeh* standing next to a Jew dressed in European style. They are holding each other's shoulders and shaking hands, symbolizing the unity of Arabs and Jews. The background consists of a Jewish settlement and an Orientalist rendition of a Bedouin desert dwelling. The brochure itself is made up of three stories dealing with Palestinian-Jewish relations from the pre-1948 period to the then-current struggle against the military government. Each story is followed by points for a discussion after reading it. The brochure ends with a discussion about the future way to peace.

The aim of the brochure was not only "to give deep and convincing explanations of the reasons for the conflict and the way to peacefully resolve it,"⁹⁸ but also "to root out from children's hearts the fear, hate and nationalistic arrogance toward the Arab people and nurture in

⁹⁸ "Alon Lamadrikh, Anu Veshkhenenu Ha'am Ha'aravi Ha'erets-Isra'eli" (Instructors' Brochure, *We and our Neighbours the Arab Eretz-Israeli People*), Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #24.

their hearts friendship, trust and the desire for peace,"⁹⁹ to be achieved by studying the history and current affairs of the Palestinians. In recounting the history of the clash between Palestinians and Jews in pre-1948 Palestine, the brochure reverts to the language of the early Jewish Communists in the 1920s and 1930s. Palestinian-Jewish relations in the pre-1948 era had been "neighbourly and friendly."¹⁰⁰ The conflict was not fueled by the peoples themselves, but by the "British who set Arabs and Jews against each other."¹⁰¹ As the two oppressed peoples' struggle for freedom intensified, a solution had been offered in the form of the UN Partition Plan.¹⁰² The 1948 War is described, again in anti-imperialist terms, as an attack "by the Arab states that were incited and organized by the British... that wanted to prevent the Jews and Arabs from establishing their own independent states."¹⁰³

As regards the massive ethnic cleansing of Palestinians during the war, imperialism and the Israeli government are the culprits. "Who caused most of Israel's Arabs to flee or be deported from the country during the war?"¹⁰⁴ the brochure asks, and in answer it lays the blame squarely on "the English and the Arab rulers who incited them to flee and leave the country, and also the government of Israel that was interested in their departure."¹⁰⁵ The mass deportation of Palestinians is perceived by the Jewish Communists as "a disaster for us Jews and for the Arab people"¹⁰⁶ that had created the refugee problem, a huge obstacle to Israeli-Arab peace. The assumptions that lay behind the Jewish Communists' narrative of the 1948 War reflected the way

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² This discussion alerts us to some of the ways in which Jewish members of the Party lacked an understanding of the Palestinian experience. For Jews the UN Partition Plan may have been a "solution", but the UN Partition Plan is the beginning of the end of Palestine.

¹⁰³ "Alon Lamadrikh, Anu Veshkhenenu Ha'am Ha'aravi Ha'erets-Isra'eli" (Instructors' Brochure, We and our Neighbours the Arab Eretz-Israeli People), Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #24.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

it was perceived in the Israeli official narrative, placing the blame on the Palestinian side and its rulers for inciting the flight of the Palestinians,¹⁰⁷ on the Jewish Communists' ideological tendencies – namely anti-imperialism, particularly British imperialism – and on the Israeli government. It is clear that by supporting the Israeli side in the war, the Jewish Communists failed to fully recognize the ethnic-cleansing nature of Zionist policies and practices during the war. They subsumed the colonial logic of Zionism, manifested in the displacement of the Palestinians, to a larger narrative of anti-imperialism and Arab cooperation with it. However, despite its obvious flaws, the Jewish Communist narrative subverted the Israeli narrative of the *Nakba*. The Jewish Communists rightly observed that most Palestinians did not take part in the battles. They recognized the dismal results of driving out the Palestinians, recognizing it as an obstacle to reconciliation. In those respects, the Jewish Communists' portrayal of the war was not the prevailing one.

The third discussion deals with the military government. Here, in an internal document that was not intended for public consumption, Banki members use the language of appeal to Jewish sensibility. The military government is called a ghetto, and the policy toward the Palestinian citizenry of Israel described as "oppression, terror,"¹⁰⁸ its contribution to Israel's security being refuted. The last discussion is concerned with peace, citing the conditions that would enable peace, the end of military government, and a "severing of the connections with the enslavers and oppressors hated by the peoples of the Middle East."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ This Israeli propaganda that became an article of faith of Zionist historians of the era was debunked by, among others, Benny Morris, *Leydata shel Be'ayat Hapliṭim Hafaleṣtinim 1947-1949* (The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949), (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 1991).

¹⁰⁸ "Alon Lamadrikh, Anu Veshkhenenu Ha'am Ha'aravi Ha'erets-Isra'eli" (Instructors' Brochure, We and our Neighbours the Arab Eretz-Israeli People), Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #24.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

A second instructors' brochure deals with Egypt. On the cover, against the background of a rising sun, two abstract figures, a Palestinian and a Jew, are holding hands and releasing a peace dove. The brochure is divided into four sections or activities, the first a discussion that follows a story, the second of a more geographical nature, the third presenting the history of Egypt, and the fourth on the theme of "Egypt in the struggle for liberation from the imperialist yoke."¹¹⁰ While the two brochures share the same basic structure, the one dealing with Egypt, despite its stress on peace and anti-imperialism, is more educational in nature, designed to impart to the young Jewish Communists an intellectual understanding of Egypt. The one dealing with the Palestinians is more passionate in tone, revealing a closer familiarity and a daily struggle that pitted the young Communists against the norms of Israeli society.

Both brochures are meant not just to educate the young Communists about the history and geography of their Arab neighbours, but to indoctrinate them with the Party line, and thus the two texts rely heavily on the anti-imperialist interpretation of the recent history of the Middle East. The Zionist-Palestinian conflict and Israel's wars with the Arab states are presented to the Banki members as part of a great historical drama, the struggle between imperialism and anti-imperialism, motivated by outside forces. This portrayal was indeed rooted in the Middle Eastern history of the 1950s and 1960s when the Big Powers still tried to exert control, as was the case in 1956 and in the Algerian war of independence. However, Egypt's anti-imperialist credentials and Nasser's anti-Zionist colonialism rhetoric masked the fact that Nasser built a one-party dictatorship that persecuted Egyptian Communists,¹¹¹ something that the MKI criticized before 1956. According to the brochures, both the Palestinians and the Egyptians had lost all agencies,

¹¹⁰ "Anu Veshkhenenu Ha'am Hamitsri" (We and our Neighbours the Egyptian People), Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #31.

¹¹¹ For Nasser's relations with the Egyptian Communists, which fluctuated between repression and cooptation, see Beinun, *Was the Red Flag Flying There?* and Botman, *The Rise of Egyptian Communism*.

becoming only heroic collective figures in the meta-historic struggle between imperialism and anti-imperialism. As much as Banki's perception of Palestinians and the Arab peopels was positive and motivated by a true desire to understand the lives and politics of Palestinians and the Aarb peopels as well as bridge the gap between the conflicting sides, they never delved deeply into the effects the 1948 War had on Palestinian identity and nationalism or the rise of populist dictatorship in Egypt.

6.4 Arab-Jewish Ritual

A 1962 Banki document states that "the big national festivals of Jewish and Arab youth have become a fine tradition; they demonstrate the desire for fraternity and peace."¹¹² Arab-Jewish fraternity was manifested, then, not only in the political struggle against the military government, but in ritual as well. Starting in the late 1940s in the aftermath of the 1948 War, Jews and Palestinians engaged in events that tried to bond together both peoples.

There is no evidence of ritualistic activity manifesting Arab-Jewish fraternity in the underground era and the years leading up to 1948. The first documented mass ritual concerning Palestinians and Jews was the unification ceremony in Haifa on October 22nd 1948. The ceremony itself was not elaborate, consisting of speeches made to applause from the audience, reminiscent of a revolutionary meeting in Tsarist Russia. The May theatre was bedecked with Red Flags; on either side of the stage stood the Israeli national flag and Red Flags. Between portraits of Lenin and Stalin stood the symbol of the convention, "a friendly handshake of brave hands – a symbol of friendly fraternity, the Hammer and Sickle."¹¹³ The hall was also decorated

¹¹² "Hafestival Hale'umi shel No'ar Yehudi Ve'arvi, Heyfa, 6-7 Be'Yuli 1962" (National Festival of Jewish and Arab Youth, Haifa, July 6-7 1962), Yad Tabenkin Archives.

¹¹³ "Nosda Ha'aḥdut Ha'internatsyonalistit shel Hamiflaga Haḥomunistit Ha'Isra'elit" (The International Unity of the Israeli Communist Party Founded), *Kol Ha'am*, October 24, 1948.

with slogans of Stalin and on various other issues "that set the appropriate atmosphere for the important historical event."¹¹⁴ The unification ceremony did not give rise to any ritualistic tradition among the Jewish and Palestinian Communists, despite its importance in the Party's collective memory.

The first Arab-Jewish youth festival took place in 1949 on Mount Carmel overlooking the Jewish-Arab city of Haifa. It lasted for five days and included sports events and exhibitions on such themes as Banki's history, the achievements of the U.S.S.R., and the fallen of the 1948 War. The high point of the festival was a joint march of Palestinian and Jewish youths, the biggest in the country to that date.¹¹⁵

The next well documented festival celebrating Arab-Jewish fraternity was held in April 1955 in Tel Aviv, against the background of escalating border skirmishes between Israel and its neighbours that led to the 1956 Sinai War. It was an elaborate enterprise whose aim was "to instil among the youth the idea of fraternity and friendship,"¹¹⁶ and extensive preparations took place. A series of artistic balls were held in Palestinian and Jewish towns, including choirs, dance troupes, singing and dancing, and local festivals that included sports events and artistic performances. The preparations included public meetings at workplaces and schools where the idea of the festival was explained. Organizers and Jewish youth also travelled to Nazareth and Palestinian villages, bags emblazoned with the festival symbol were distributed. The mass nature of the event is evident from the fact that around 12,000 people participated in the pre-festival balls and another 20,000 received the bags.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Leah Babko, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, February 12, 2009.

¹¹⁶ "Festival Hayedidut" (The Festival of Friendship), Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #1.

¹¹⁷ The numbers of participants are derived from the Communist organ *Kol Ha'am*, under the military government it is highly unlikely that they were that high. However, the sheer volume of press the festival was accorded in *Kol Ha'am* indicates that it was an important mass event.

The festival began on Monday, April 4th 1955, when the participants, Jews and Palestinians, congregated in Tel Aviv. A rally was held in the evening, to which torch relays came from the four corners of the country. The next day was dedicated to movies and an afternoon ball, consisting of artistic performances and songs by the Party's choirs. In the evening the festival participants sailed on the Yarkon River and held a bonfire party on its banks. The last day of the festival started with sports events followed by a symposium entitled *Culture in the Service of Peace*. The festival ended with a march to Independence Park.¹¹⁸

Two photos of the marches conducted during the festival stick to what had become the conventions of Jewish Communist representation of Arab-Jewish fraternity. The first shows a group of two young men and two women standing in front of banners. The men are wearing *keffiyehs*, and the women are garbed in European clothes. One man is holding a peace dove in one hand and the symbol of the festival in the other. The symbol consists of two profiled figureheads, one a Palestinian wearing a *keffiyeh*, the other a Jew. A second photo shows young men and women marching past watching bystanders. The group in the foreground consists of four young Palestinians, three of them dressed in traditional peasant clothing; the fourth is dressed in the Banki uniform and playing a flute. Behind them a group of Jewish girls are holding up a banner.¹¹⁹

However, the brochure produced for the festival made a conscious effort to avoid Communist language and demonstrate the wide-ranging support of artists and intellectuals. Although some of the signatories to the festival manifesto were identified Communists, others were not. The manifesto itself was worded in terms of Israel's enlightened self-interest "to break

¹¹⁸ "Festival Hano'ar Hayehudi Arvi" (The Jewish Arab Youth Festival), *Kol Hano'ar*, April 1955.

¹¹⁹ *The Campaigns of Struggle between Conference and Conference, May 1952-May 1957*.

the walls of isolation enclosing it."¹²⁰ The brochure stresses the historical cases of coexistence of Muslims and Jews. It also quotes a decorated Jewish 1948 War veteran and an Orthodox priest in support of the ideas of Israeli-Arab peace and Arab-Jewish fraternity. The Communist Arab-Jewish rituals were comprised of conventions that can be described as having Eurocentric undertones, as seen in the European appearance of the Jewish members in contrast to the traditional garments and *keffiyehs* of the Palestinian members.

One respect, however, in which the Jewish Communists were clearly Eurocentric, is their omission of the Iraqi Jewish Communists from Banki's Arab-Jewish ritual. The evidence does not indicate any conscious attempt to use the Iraqi Jewish members of the Party as intermediaries that might bridge the cultural gap between Palestinians and Jews. This omission can be explained by the fact that, like other parties in Israel of the 1950s and early 1960s, "the MKI leadership was purely made up of Eastern Europeans, and only in the lower echelons of Party cadres could oriental members be found."¹²¹ Thus, without considerable voice in shaping Party policy, they could not shape the ritualistic aspects or, indeed, the relations with Palestinians in general.

6.5 Arab-Jewish Communitas

The rituals that enshrined Arab-Jewish fraternity in the MKI and Banki were meant to bond together Palestinians and Jews. The symbolism of Communist Arab-Jewish fraternity was filled with representations of bonding. The Arab-Jewish figures so prevalent in it were often depicted shoulder to shoulder, holding each other's shoulders, or shaking hands.

The group bonding of Palestinians and Jews is clearly evident in a wall poster produced for the 1955 festival, which shows a group of Palestinian and Jewish youths of mixed gender.

¹²⁰ "The Festival of Friendship".

¹²¹ Shafran, *Farewell Communism*, 28.

The Palestinians are identified by their *keffiyehs* and head coverings. All are standing in a close group, bonded together as one.¹²² Another poster produced for May Day 1954 features three figures, two men and a woman. The two men repeat the motif of the often seen Arab-Jewish duo, one of them bareheaded, the other wearing a *keffiyeh*. In allusion to proletarian internationalism, all three figures are carrying work tools in their hands. Above them a banner in Hebrew and Arabic proclaims *Long Live May Day 1954*, a red Hammer and Sickle flag waving beside it. These posters show how the Jewish Communists codified the *communitas* of Palestinians and Jews: Jews and Palestinians were bonded together despite their external differences. This *communitas* also originated from the bond between workers, as codified in terms of proletarian internationalism.

The rituals that were performed and the language used to describe them also express Jewish-Arab *communitas*. A poster announcing an Arab-Jewish festival describes its aim as "bringing together the youth of both peoples."¹²³ The immediate *communitas* formed between Palestinians and Jews at the April 1955 festival is given enthusiastic expression: "Together we marched; together we sang; together we laughed joked, found joy in our youth; our arms came together in dance and our legs danced jointly at the same pace; looks of joy and enthusiasm infused with brotherhood were exchanged."¹²⁴ The ritual activity that took place during the festival was also meant to create *communitas* between the participants, the bonfire and regatta on the river serving as good examples, or in the words of *Kol Hano'ar*: "With the flow of the Yarkon, the tunes of our Arab-Jewish songs and the echo answered back in tunes that blended together."¹²⁵ The marches that opened and closed the festivities are also portrayed in terms of

¹²² Gozansky and Timms, eds., *Against the Mainstream*, 64.

¹²³ "Festival Hayedidut" (The Friendship Festival), Yad Tabenkin Archives, File #17-18.

¹²⁴ "Festival Hano'ar Hayehudi-Arvi" (The Jewish-Arab Youth Festival), *Kol Hano'ar*, April 1955.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

communitas: "There was joy in our joint march, a feeling of strength, pride and readiness; joy – for having we met like that, together, without barriers, excited, thrilled."¹²⁶

Communitas arises from a state of liminality between and betwixt the social hierarchy. Suitable conditions for such were created in the rituals surrounding Communist Arab-Jewish fraternity. The sites of the festivals in 1949 and 1955, Mount Carmel and the Yarkon River respectively, placed the participants at the liminal margins of the urban centres and outside the social order they suggested. The participants' status within Israel's social structure was also liminal. The Jewish Banki members were marginalized in Jewish-Israeli society, suspected and despised as the left-wing other. The Palestinian members of Banki were alienated from Israeli society as the Palestinian Other, presumed to be connected to the enemy beyond the territorial borders of the state. This meeting of the marginalized was meant to alleviate the continued tension between Palestinians and Jews within Israel and with the Arab peoples in the region. The escalating conflict along the borders was constantly contrasted to the festival atmosphere: "Night after night the borders are set on fire; the fire of guns and mortars, mines and grenades, the fire of hate and alienation... but on a spring day, a bright spring day, joyful and promising, on this day – another fire was lit along the land's borders, in all four directions: the fire of friendship and peace."¹²⁷

A rare photo from the 1949 Arab-Jewish Friendship Festival shows MKI secretary-general Shmuel Mikunis seated among a group of Palestinian and Jewish youths. To the unknowing onlooker, the participants may look the same. One boy is playing a flute. Others are dressed in the Banki uniform. One girl who's looking straight at the camera is wearing a

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

keffiyeh.¹²⁸ In many ways this is what the Jewish members of the MKI and Banki tried to create: a bond between Jews and Palestinians that would transcend the national identities of Palestinians and Jewish-Israelis.

6.6 The Jewish Communist and the Palestinian Other

The Jewish Communists' image of the Palestinians was in essence a positive one. Since the 1920s they had recruited, worked and socialized with Palestinians in a way that was exceptional among both communities in Palestine. In stark contrast to Zionist-Socialist culture, which very quickly abandoned Socialist internationalist claims and developed a workers' culture and institutions for Jews only, the Jewish Communists remained loyal to proletarian internationalism. It was through those ideological lenses that they formed their understanding of Palestinians.

In Marxist-Leninist terms, the Jewish Communists perceived the Palestinians as the direct victims of Zionist colonization and British imperialism, and those that would undertake the revolutionary mission the Jewish working class could not perform. They also fervently believed that Jews and Palestinians had common interests, as workers, that far exceeded their national identities. In their view, only British Imperialism and Zionism – as an expression of Jewish bourgeoisie profitmaking, thus dispossessing the Palestinians – were responsible for the conflict between Palestinians and Jews. From these basic tenets, it followed that the Palestinians were partners in a revolutionary, anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist struggle. Until 1948 this was the main perception of Palestinians by the Jewish Communists.

After 1948 this view was augmented by intensive advocacy for Palestinians within the Jewish state. The PKP had campaigned, from the 1920s, against the wrongs committed by

¹²⁸ Gozansky and Timms, eds., *Against the Mainstream*, 8.

Zionist settlers against Palestinians. After 1948, with the Palestinians – now a persecuted minority, the Jewish Communists defended them, engaging in a struggle for civil democratic rights. In this struggle, reflecting also the growing sensitivity of the Jewish Communists to their own Jewish identity, they used the language of democratic rights and appealed to the Jewish collective memory of persecution. In that sense, in one of the most universalistic aspects of their identity as an Arab -Jewish fraternity, the Jewish Communists acted as Jews.

In the novel *A Locked Room*, a young Palestinian Communist becomes disillusioned with the Party's stand on Palestinians. In an argument with his local branch secretary, which practically brings his membership in the Party to an end, he says: "The Arabs in Israel are not Blacks who want equal status with the white man!" He accuses the Party of "disregarding the national aspect; the Arabs in Israel are part of a people that were driven out of their land, whose lands were stolen, so that they became a people of refugees."¹²⁹

The literary depiction reflects how the Communists misunderstood the Palestinian tragedy and the way it shaped modern Palestinian nationalism. As in the 1920s and 1930s, the Jewish Communists were blind to the power of Jewish and Palestinian nationalism over Palestinians and Jews alike. Trained in gazing at Palestinians through the lenses of Marxist-Leninist ideology, they could not completely fathom the impact of the *Nakba* on the Palestinians. Instead of confronting the issue head-on, they blamed Western imperialism for the plight of the Palestinians. The role played by the inept elites of both the Israelis and the Palestinians in bringing the *Nakba* was only subordinate to the narrative of divisive imperialism, which pitted Jews and Palestinians against each other. The Palestinian calamity was discounted even in Banki's Jewish branches. One of the senior instructors of the Tel Aviv branch admits that its meaning was not discussed, even after visits to the destroyed Palestinian villages still seen in the

¹²⁹ Ballas, *A Locked Room*, 123.

Israeli landscape of the 1950s and early 1960s.¹³⁰ This myopic view of Palestinian nationalism skewed the Jewish Communists' perception of Palestinians. The Palestinians were the objects of empathy regarding their oppression as unequal citizens, and seen as partners in the anti-imperialist struggle and in any agreement on the fate of the country, with their own national identity. But as for that identity having been shaped by the national trauma of deportation and loss of homeland, it was not part of the perception of the Palestinian Other.¹³¹

Nonetheless, the Jewish Communist discourse of Arab-Jewish fraternity was not completely blind to the Palestinian experience of loss. The best example of that sensitivity is found not in political principles and statements, but in the realm of poetic expression. During the 1950s and early 1960s, Alexander Penn ran the literary section of *Kol Ha'am*. Besides his duties as a literary editor, he continued a practice that he had begun in the 1930s in the *Histadrut* organ *Davar*, writing a poetic column in reaction to the issues of the day under the pseudonym Yodh Het.¹³² At times, Penn chose to publish certain poems — apparently those he deemed politically important, like his great poem of the 1930s, *Against* — under his own name.

¹³⁰ Dani Peter-Petziel, interview by author, Tel Aviv, Israel, February 15th, 2009.

¹³¹ The CPUSA also had to deal with two antagonistic ethnic groups, namely African-Americans and white Americans, in the same political organization. In contrast to the Jewish Communists, the American Communists defined their initial policies toward Blacks in nationalist terms. Under Soviet influence, they called for Black self-determination in the southern Black Belt. This theory, formulated in 1928 by the Comintern and the CPUSA, claimed that "blacks in the Black Belt South constituted a nation with the right to self-determination" (Gerald Horne, "The Red and the Black: The Communist Party and African-Americans in Historical Perspective," in *New Studies in the Politics and Culture of U.S Communism*, Michael E. Brown et al (eds.) (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1992), 203). The idea was not completely devoid of roots among African-Americans, but the mainstay of Black struggle in the U.S. remained civil rights. Party policy in the 1930s and 1940s thus existed in tension between self-determination in theory and civil rights in practice (Ibid., 207). For a detailed discussion of Blacks and the CPUSA, see Draper, *American Communism & Soviet Russia*, 315-356; Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990) and Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression* (New York: Gove Press Inc., 1983). The CPUSA treated Black Communists in the Party, as did the Jewish Communists with Palestinians, with equality and dignity unheard of in racially segregated America. Nevertheless, Black Communists sometimes indulged in feelings of superiority and accusations of white chauvinism within the CPUSA (Gornick, *The Romance of American Communism*).

¹³² For this chapter in Penn's life, see Hagit Halperin, *Tseva HaHayim: Hayav Veyetsirato shel Alexander Pen* (The Color of Life: the Life and Works of Alexander Penn), (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishers, 2007), 131-181.

In a poem named *The Shame*, Penn reacted to a case of police brutality against an Palestinian. The poem starts with an appeal to Jewish collective memory "since the people's memory/ in the thick of his history will be kept."¹³³ It then moves on to a more explicit invocation of Jewish history's recent trauma, portraying the restrictions imposed on Palestinians' movement as "the boundaries of the hangar of the Ghetto."¹³⁴ Culminating in the thinly veiled verse "it is much known from Israel! It parallels history! We will not remind it's near past,/ crying out of smouldering walls.../ To its name in the nation's body, / will shudder in ashes it will run/ And affront of its grieving heart/ The years stand with their blood."¹³⁵ The poem expresses sensitivity to the Palestinians' plight using a Jewish history as its moral centre. The portrayal of the Palestinian Other in the poem — as well as in other Jewish Communist texts — through the lens of Jewish sensitivity is indicative of the Jewish Communists' growing compassion towards their own identity. Poignantly, the Jewish Communists perceived the Palestinian Other in their own cultural terms. That may be attributed to their inability to recognize Palestinian political agency outside the anti-imperialist narrative. It might also be attributed to an attempt to comprehend the Palestinian Other in positive cultural terms that would be familiar to the Jewish Communists, as well as to others outside the Party and Banki. It also points to the cultural differences between the Palestinian and Jewish Communists that were evident before 1948 and continued into the post-1948, ostensibly unified MKI.¹³⁶ The cultural misunderstanding was expressed in the political sphere. When the MKI, ever loyal to the U.S.S.R., in 1958 supported the Iraqi nationalist leader Abd al-Karim Qasim, who was backed by

¹³³ "Yud Het, Habusha" (Yodh Het, The Shame), *Kol Ha'am*, December 25, 1953.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ For the cultural differences between Palestinian and Jewish Communists, see Ben-Zaken, *Communism as Cultural Imperialism*. Many Jewish members of the Party did not read Arabic and for that matter did not understand the MKI messages to the Palestinian public transmitted through its Arabic daily *Al-Itihad* (Shafran, *Farewell Communism*).

the Iraqi Communist Party and the Eastern Bloc, against the highly popular Gamal Abdel Nasser, Palestinians, who like the rest of the Arab world were infuriated by that move, dealt the MKI a heavy electoral loss in the 1959 election, reducing its Knesset representation from six Knesset members to three.¹³⁷

In contrast to this example stand three short poems named, together, *A People's Songs*, published in the summer of 1958. The first poem, *Plundered Village*, describes a destroyed Palestinian village where "on the bent fence/ to the exploded of sighs of the house/ as flags of calamity/ silent in their blackness two *abayas* hang." The poem goes on to condemn "the burner/ Stand and inherent!/ on the living, in shod trample/ the plough man pass/ in the rubbed strangers' field." It ends with a biblical reference: "a voice is vociferously sound/ not *Rachel* is lamenting/ land, land/ it is *Hagar* mourning her sons!"¹³⁸ In the third poem, *Mother*, Penn turns to the Palestinian experience of loss and exile, appropriating the poetic self of the mother who is standing on the main road, "refusing to be consoled", watching as "on the main road the flower was plucked/ the daughter was expelled."¹³⁹ The mother and daughter metaphor is used to convey the Palestinian people's loss of their land. Penn does not give a poetic form to the imperialist explanation. In the short middle poem of the cycle, named simply 'Who?', he presents a series of poignant questions like "whom said to the well block/ the one that came with a stone on its edge/ that deliberately strangled whom is it?" His answer is at the same time explicit "the face of my brother who oppresses me I will remember." Hinting to the Jews that their relation with Palestinians was codified by the Communists as a brotherly one and inclusive, "the hate the

¹³⁷ For the Iraqi Communists' support of Qasim, see Franzén, *Red Star Over Iraq*. For the MKI's support of Qasim and its electoral fallout, see Shafran, *Farewell Communism*, 163, and Markovizky, *White Shirt and Red Tie*, 51-52.

¹³⁸ Alexander Penn, "Hakfar Haharev" (Plundered Village), Kol Ha'am, August 15, 1958.

¹³⁹ Alexander Penn, "Ima" (Mother), Kol Ha'am, August 15, 1958.

son of my father it is the hate."¹⁴⁰ Penn's alternative response to the Palestinian tragedy, subverting the Zionist narrative of the 1948 War and the narrative of his own Party, remained confined to the realm of poetry.

The Jewish Communists who participated in the 1948 War could not fully engage with the Palestinian tragedy. When the Party absorbed the "Left Men", many of them veterans of the war, the initial approach was reinforced. Thus, as in the 1930s, the Jewish Communists were unable to understand Palestinian nationalism. This blind spot alienated the Palestinian members, whose foundational experience was one of displacement and loss, connecting them to their brethren across the border. It was only in the 1970s, after the split and the 1967 War, when Rakah drew closer to the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) that a different understanding of Palestinian nationalism emerged.

However, one group of Jews could see beyond the positive stereotype that characterized the relation of the Jewish Communists to Palestinians. Rooted as they were in the culture of the Arab world and its language, the Iraqi Jewish Communists could develop an interaction with the Palestinians beyond the cultural practices of the MKI. Another reason for the closeness between the Iraqi Jewish Communists and the Palestinians was the fact that they had brought with them from Iraq a history of struggle with Arab Muslims.¹⁴¹ The contrast between the way European Jewish Communists and their non-European counterparts approached the Palestinians is plainly clear in Nessia Shafran's words: "For an ordinary member, for instance – my father, the Palestinians were comrades in struggle, but their image never went beyond a naturally positive

¹⁴⁰ Alexander Penn, "Mi? " (Who?), *Kol Ha'am*, August 15, 1958.

¹⁴¹ The main protagonist in Sami Michael's novel *Handful of Fog*, a young Baghdadi Jew, is active in the CPI along with Arab Sunni Muslims in one of the harshest neighbourhoods in the city which supported the pro-Nazi revolt of Rashid Aali al-Gaylani.

stereotype, through which a man born in Poland in the beginning of the century could understand people with a way of thinking and culture so different than his."¹⁴²

In contrast, Sami Michael, the Arab-Jewish intellectual "knows the Arabic culture and knows the Palestinian Party members."¹⁴³ The intimacy that the Iraqi members felt with the Palestinian Communists is obvious from their very first days in Israel. The young Shimon Ballas, just recently immigrated to Israel, participated in a Party seminar where the Jewish and Palestinian leaders of the Party lectured. While the lectures of the Jewish members were translated in a fragmented manner by an Iraqi member, "the lectures of Emile Habibi were an enjoyable experience for all participants."¹⁴⁴ In the breaks between classes the young Iraqi Communist even discovered that the Palestinian leader was an enthusiastic fisherman.

6.7 Colonialism and Imperialism in Communist Thinking in Palestine/Israel

What was the source of the Jewish Communists' misconception of their Palestinian comrades? Our suggestion here, is that this lacuna in fully understanding the national agency of Palestinians was rooted in the way the Jewish Communists conceptualized colonialism in Palestine and in the way they represented their Palestinian comrades and compatriots. The concepts of comparative settler colonialism will be used to describe the creation of a Jewish society and its interaction with the Palestinians in Palestine/Israel from the late 19th century. The colonial settler model will be contrasted with Marxist-Leninist thinking about colonialism and the expression of this thinking among the Jewish Communists. This contrast will be used to explore the internal contradiction that prevented the Jewish Communists from fully understanding Palestinian nationalism.

¹⁴² Shafran, *Farewell Communism*, 157.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁴⁴ Ballas, *First Person Singular*, 41.

Additionally, in order to understand the way the Jewish Communists represented the Palestinian Other, we will use the ideas first presented by Edward Said in *Orientalism* and elaborated in *The Question of Palestine*. Analysing texts written by the Jewish Communists will expose the way the Jewish Communists constructed the Palestinians as anti-imperialists while still disregarding their national agency.

6.7.1 Zionism as Settler Colonialism

What was the nature of the growing presence of Eastern European Jews in Palestine from the late Ottoman era and onwards? The Jewish Communists defined it as part of a global movement of European powers to grab the resources of the non-European world. Yet the Marxist-Leninist ideological formulation of the Jewish Communists, while reading part of the reality of Palestine correctly, was not a complete fit with the full picture of late 19th century to mid-1960s Palestine/Israel.

The growing penetration of Zionism into Palestine should be regarded, beyond its link to metropole colonialism,¹⁴⁵ as a case of a settler colonial society. Settler colonial comparative study¹⁴⁶ was adapted to the realities of late Ottoman Palestine by Gershon Shafir.¹⁴⁷ He described the historical process that resulted in the formation of "the protected hegemony of the labour movement, the close association of soldier and farmer, the cooperative forms of social and

¹⁴⁵ The term "metropole colonialism" is used to describe an imperialist project meant to subject a colonial people, usually with no large scale settlement of the metropole people. India is the most obvious example of this type of project. For use of this term, see Piterberg, *The Returns of Zionism*, 54.

¹⁴⁶ For a survey of the research field, see Piterberg, 54-61.

¹⁴⁷ Similar description of early Zionist colonization of Palestine can be found in Baruch Kimmerling's book *Immigrants, Settlers, Natives* and will also be utilized here.

economic organization but also the secondary status of Middle Eastern and North African Jews,"¹⁴⁸ as well as the continued exclusion of Palestinians.

Shafir, using models developed by D.K. Fieldhouse and George Fredrickson, describes "a four-way typology: the *occupation* and *mixed* models worked out by Spain, the *plantation* model of Portugal, and *pure settlement* of England." The occupation colony is defined as "the typical colonial state aimed at military and administrative control of a potentially strategic region," accompanied by an economic exploitation of this area without taking direct control over land and labour. The next three models are "based on settlement by Europeans." The plantation colonies were based on "indigenous or unfree or indebted labor force" thus requiring a small number of European settlers and labour. "By contrast, mixed and pure settlement colonies were based on substantial European settlement involving direct control of the land."¹⁴⁹ While the mixed colony "required labor coercively elicited from the native population," the pure colony model built on "an economy based on white labor" and the removal or destruction of the native populace, which enabled the settlers "to regain the sense of cultural or ethnic homogeneity identified with a European concept of nationality."¹⁵⁰

Adapting these models to late Ottoman Palestine, Shafier argues, following the Israeli critical sociologist Yonathan Shapiro,¹⁵¹ that the foundations for the Israeli state formation process were laid by elite that originated in the Second *Aliyah*. Initially, the first wave of Eastern European Jewish colonizers in Palestine, known in Zionist jargon as the First *Aliyah* (1882-1903), attempted to establish a pure colony in Palestine. However, early failures in establishing

¹⁴⁸ Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), xxii.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 8.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 9.

¹⁵¹ Yonathan Shapiro, *Ahdut-Ha'avoda Hahistorit: Otsmato shel Irgun Poliṭi* (The Power of Political Organization), (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 1975).

themselves in agricultural colonies in Palestine compelled the colonizers to appeal to the Rothschild banking dynasty for help. A member of the French branch of the family, Edmond de Rothschild, subsequently financed the Jewish *moshavaot* (farming colonies) in Palestine. Aided by French experts, Rothschild modeled the colonies on French colonization in North Africa that combined monoculture agricultural economy – mainly around vineyards – and the use of local seasonal labour. Thus, the First *Aliyah* "inhibited pure settlement drive...and reconciled itself to a plantation type colony."¹⁵² More specifically, the colonizers of the First *Aliyah* developed a type of ethnic plantation colony in Palestine, where a Jewish European class of landowners and overseers managed the work of a low-wage Arab labour force. The turning point came with the cessation of Rothschild's aid in 1900. Land purchase ended since the World Zionist Organization (WZO) was not interested in settling Palestine before achieving an international charter that would enable transferring Jews there. In fact, the Zionist colonization of Palestine seemed to stop dead in its tracks.

This state of affairs was changed with the arrival of the Second *Aliyah* (1903-1914) in Palestine. This *Aliyah* was composed of "young unmarried immigrants, devoid of any capital, with no profession and without living and production means other than their hands"¹⁵³ Coming from Russia they brought with them militant ideologies that combined "aggressive orientations both within (class war) and towards their Arab surroundings."¹⁵⁴ At first the new immigrants sought to replace the Palestinian labour force of the *moshavaot* by matching their pay and living standards to those of their Palestinian competitors.¹⁵⁵ The failure of this attempt endangered the very existence of the Second *Aliyah* Jewish workers; thus, "in order to prevent their undercutting

¹⁵² Ibid., 17.

¹⁵³ Kimmerling, *Immigrants, Settlers, Natives*, 69.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 58-59.

and potential displacement," in 1905 a group of Jewish workers formed the *Hapo'el Hatzair* (Young Worker) party.¹⁵⁶ The professed aim of the new party was the "conquest of labour" (*Kibush Ha'avoda*) – in essence, the transformation of Jews into workers that would wrestle the labour market from Palestinian labour. The crux of the struggle for Hebrew labour (*Avoda Ivrit*) was against the Jewish colonial planters in the *moshavaot*, who were required to hire Jewish workers and pay them European-level wages. The planters, however, resisted the pressures of the Jewish workers; although the Jewish workers managed to split the labour market, taking control over skilled jobs, they did not manage to take full control of the labour market. The inability by 1909 to take over the job market generated in the new *Yishuv* two alternative...paths of innovation. The first was the transformation of the plantation's labour force through the introduction of Jews from Yemen. The second was the bypassing of the labour market all through various organizational innovations¹⁵⁷

Exploiting the Yemenite Jews in order "to displace the unskilled Palestinian Arab labor force" meant these Jews were "relegated to the same menial or unskilled work"¹⁵⁸ done by Palestinians. This group was placed at the middle rank of wages, between the skilled Jewish European work force and cheap Palestinian labour. Nevertheless, the hopes that these Yemenite Jews would replace the Palestinians were laid to waste and, since most of them were artisans rather than agricultural workers, their inability to adapt to Palestine's conditions relegated them to a marginalized place in the labour market. Thus, this attempt to construct a pure settlement colony was condemned to failure.

The attempt of the Second *Aliyah* to create a pure Jewish settlement colony in Palestine coincided with a change in the WZO policies. The incapacity of the Zionist movement's

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 91.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 103.

diplomatic efforts, coupled with the Ottoman resistance to such efforts, compelled the Zionist movement to consider more gradual settlement work. "Thus the potential alliance between the second wave immigrants and World Zionist Organization was formed."¹⁵⁹ The instrument that enabled the creation of this pure settlement colony was the *Kvutza* (Hebrew – group), a small agricultural commune, first formed in the northern part of Palestine, in Degania, on the lands of the Arab village Um Djunni, and in Kinneret, in 1910 and 1913 respectively. The *Kvutzot*, which became post War World I the *Kibbutzim*, were a joint venture of the WZO settlement organizations in Palestine and the groups of Second *Aliyah* workers. The former (mainly the "Palestine Office") were staffed by German Jewish Zionists, most notabl of whom was Arthur Ruppin,¹⁶⁰ a German Jewish sociologist and Zionist leader. This group was impressed by the late 19th century German settlement program in the Ostmark city Posen (present day Poznań in Poland), where the Prussian government financed the transfer of German settlers in order to reduce the Polish majority of the region.¹⁶¹ The meeting of the WZO and the Second *Aliyah* laid the foundation of an alliance between the Zionist middle class outside Palestine and the workers using cooperative settlement methods; together they created the *Yishuv* as a pure settlement colony, where Palestinians were excluded and *Mizrahi* Jews were relegated to a subordinate status.

By the 1920s, as the British took control over Palestine as a military colony, the exclusionary institutions of the *Yishuv* were well in place. "The meaning of the creation of the pure settlement colony was the segmentation of the economy in Eretz-Israel. This strategy created a separate economy alongside the First *Aliyah* plantation economy and the Palestinian

¹⁵⁹ Kimmerling, *Immigrants, Settlers, Natives*, 70.

¹⁶⁰ For his biography and interest in German *Volkish*-style race theories, see Piterberg, *The Returns of Zionism*, 81-88.

¹⁶¹ For the development of the WZO's pure settlement theories, see Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 154-160.

economy. This was the hotbed within which the future Jewish state had grown."¹⁶² Zachary Lockman, in his book *Comrades and Enemies*, shows how, during the early Mandate era, Labour-Zionism denied the demand by "a small but vocal contingent from the Socialist Workers Party"¹⁶³ to use the *Histadrut* as a tool for bi-ethnic workers' solidarity. The mainstream of the Labour movement marginalized the Left within the *Histadrut*, sidelining the *Po'aley Zion Left* and completely driving off the Communists, thus preserving the pure settlement fundamentals of the *Yishuv*. By 1948 the campaign for exclusion of Palestinians from the land and from the labour market evolved into a full-fledged ethnic cleansing.¹⁶⁴ And, in fact, the establishment of the state did not mean that exclusionary organizations created in the pre-state era were gone. In parallel to the state educational and colonizing organizations, "the colonizing institutions of the Zionist movement and the Labour movement... continued their exclusivist roles in the service of the Jewish population. The most important ones were the Jewish Agency, the Zionist Organization, the JNF (Jewish National Fund) and the Workers' *Histadrut*."

What was the way in which the Jewish and Palestinian Communists perceived the settler colonial society created in Palestine before and after 1948? How did they respond to its effects and were their actions accompanied by a full awareness of it? What were the ideological formulations that they used to describe the relation between the nations in Palestine/Israel?

¹⁶² Gershon Shafir, "Land, Labour and Population in Zionist Colonization: Universal and Particular Aspects," in *Israeli Society: Critical Aspects*, edited by Uri Ram, (Tel Aviv: Brerot, 1994), 113.

¹⁶³ Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*, 66.

¹⁶⁴ "Demographically, during this period Israel enjoyed the greatest wave of Jewish immigration in its history, which paralleled the flight and deportation of most of the Palestinian population. For the first and only time, a Jewish majority in the territory under Jewish control was secured. It appeared that the pure settlement plan was once and for all realized" (Shafir, "Land, Labour and Population," 15).

6.7.2 Imperialism and Colonialism in Marxist-Leninist Thinking

The first fundamental conceptualization of European rule of non-Europeans was formulated by Lenin before the October Revolution. The second was the product of the political theoretical debate between Lenin and the Indian Communist M. N. Roy¹⁶⁵ in the second Comintern Congress in 1920.

In his 1916 theoretical text *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism* Lenin outlines the spread of European empires as originating in a change of the formation of capital itself. Basing himself on economic data, Lenin argues that concentration of production in the hands of the banks that deploy their control by granting or withholding credit created them as "powerful monopolies."¹⁶⁶ Thus, a new stage in the development of capitalism, different from the one in Marx's days was developed. Instead of "the old capitalism, when free competition prevailed" where "the export of *goods* was the most typical feature [... under modern capitalism, when monopolies prevail, the export of *Capital* has become the typical feature."¹⁶⁷ In place of the individual captains of industry and manufacturing, e.g., countries like England that traded goods with world markets, "in the last quarter of the nineteenth century... monopolist capitalist combines" in "a few rich countries"¹⁶⁸ proliferated. This re-forming of wealth and control resulted, Lenin argues, in "an enormous 'superabundance of capital'"¹⁶⁹ accumulated in the advanced countries. Such excess of financial capital is then exported into overseas colonies, as the big imperial powers divided the world between them. Thus Lenin's arguments, defining

¹⁶⁵ Born Narendra Nath Bhattacharya and known by his *nom de guerre* Manabendra Nath Roy, or in short M. N. Roy (1887-1954), Roy was a young Bengali nationalist revolutionary who converted to Communism in Mexico. Rising to high rank within the Comintern he was expelled from it after falling out with Stalin after the Chinese debacle. He later pursued an independent radical politics in India, finally departing from Communism altogether. See John Patrick Haithcox, *Communism and nationalism in India: M.N.Roy and Comintern Policy 1920-1939*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).

¹⁶⁶ V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (New York: International Publishers, 1985), 31.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 62.

imperialism as a product of the movement of finance capital from the metropolitan power to its colonies, demarcated colonialism and imperialism as a form of metropole colonialism. The main aspect of European expansion was the phenomenon of economic spoils accorded to the mother country from the colonies and its division of the world with other predatory powers. Lenin, however, in all his theorizing, did not account for the establishment of settler colonial societies whose logic of capital and labour at times went beyond the logic of market and surplus value. His portrayal of monopoly capitalism did not concentrate at all on the reaction of the colonial peoples. That was the subject of the debate between Lenin and M. N. Roy about colonialism – the debate that shaped Communist policies in the non-European world as well as the Communist view of anti-colonial politics and movements.

The Roy-Lenin debate of 1920 originated in "a draft thesis on the national colonial question"¹⁷⁰ that Lenin composed in June 5th 1920. He framed his proposed policies in the colonies on the model of metropole colonialism, on which he had elaborated in 1916. The aim of Communist parties world-wide was to combat the colonial and financial enslavement of the vast majority of the world's population by an insignificant minority of the richest and advanced capitalist countries, a feature characteristic of the era of finance capital and imperialism.¹⁷¹

In order to break the link between the mother country and the colonies and effect a national liberation in those colonies Lenin suggested that "all Communist parties must assist the bourgeois-democratic liberation movement in these countries."¹⁷² Thus, the Communists in colonial and dependent countries, where the proletariat as a class and the Communist party are

¹⁷⁰ John Patrick Haithcox, "The Roy-Lenin Debate on Colonial Policy: a New Interpretation," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 23(1963): 93.

¹⁷¹ V. I. Lenin, "Draft Theses on National and Colonial Questions: For the Second Congress of the Communist International," in *Lenin's Collected Works*, trans. Julius Katzer (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), accessed February 13, 2013, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/jun/05.htm>.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

only emerging, must form temporary alliances with non-Communist bourgeoisie nationalists in order to achieve the minimal aim of anti-imperialist liberation. In his draft, Lenin invited his "comrades... to let me have their opinions, amendments, addenda and concrete remarks."¹⁷³ In response to this call, the young M. N. Roy challenged the draft. Roy attacked the basic assumption that an alliance can be struck between the Communists and progressive anti-imperialist forces within the colonies. With the Indian Congress Party in mind, Roy argued that those forces "might desert to the imperialist camp in a revolutionary situation."¹⁷⁴ Unlike Lenin, who was distrustful of grassroots activism, Roy resembled Marx "in his fervent faith in the class-consciousness of the proletariat."¹⁷⁵ In his mind the workers in the colonies were the ones who could carry the anti-colonial as well as the anti-capitalist revolution.

The crux of the Roy-Lenin debate was a dispute about revolutionary tactics, asking who were the groups among the colonized subjects who could execute the anti-colonial revolution. Thus, from early on, Lenin and the Comintern developed a distinction between completely reactionary classes, "the clergy and other influential reactionary and medieval elements in backward countries,"¹⁷⁶ namely big landowners and merchants, the national bourgeoisie, which was the main point of the Roy-Lenin debate, and the masses of workers and peasants. As was the case with the initial theoretical formulations of Lenin, the Roy-Lenin debate was wholly centered on the metropole colonial model. Roy had India in mind when he objected to Lenin's drafts – a colony that was never subject to any large scale British settler colonization. In similar fashion, Lenin did not accord any room for settler colonialism in his own thinking.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Haithcox, "The Roy-Lenin Debate." 94.

¹⁷⁵ Haithcox, *Communism and nationalism in India*, 16.

¹⁷⁶ V. I. Lenin, "Draft Theses on National and Colonial Questions."

These fundamentals of Marxist-Leninist thinking about colonialism, as formulated by Lenin and Roy, became the ideological bedrock of Communist parties' policies around the globe. Among those parties was the PKP.

6.7.3 Imperialism and Colonialism and the Jewish Communists

How did the Communists in Palestine/Israel perceive the presence of imperial powers and of a settler community in the country? By analysing texts penned by Moshe Sneh, Meir Vilner and Emile Touma, as well as earlier formulations of Party ideology, the ideological formulations of the Party will be examined vis-à-vis one practical case of party policy in confronting Zionist colonization in the 1924 Afula Affair.

In the main lecture for the 50th anniversary of the Communist Party, Meir Vilner, the secretary-general of Rakah, presented the history of Communism in Palestine/Israel. The lecture is built around a theme that can be summarized as the progressive development of the Party from its Zionist origins toward a full and correct ideological appreciation of the conditions of the country. "After many developments, advances and setbacks, a Marxist-Leninist, Communist and Arab-Jewish party was formed in the country."¹⁷⁷ When defining the British rule in Palestine, Vilner approaches it as a classic military colony: "The British mandatory rule in Palestine was a regular colonial rule, different only by name... British imperialism exploited all aspects, the political, agricultural and military, of the Zionist movement to implement its policies in the Middle East, in order to keep its economic positions (oil, markets) and strategic (the road to India) positions, and acted against the Arab anti-imperialist movement."¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Meir Vilner, "50 Years of Our Communist Party Struggle", In *50 Shana Lamiiflaga Hakomunistit Ba'aretz* (Fifty Years of the Communist Party in Palestine/Israel), (Tel Aviv: The Central Committee Communist Party of Israel, 1970), 19.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 17.

Zionism, in this formulation of classic metropole colonialism, is attacked not because of its settler colonial nature but for being a collaborator with British imperialism. Indeed, the disinheritance of Palestinians is not ignored by Vilner. Recounting the Party's struggle against the removal of Palestinian *fellahin* from their lands and their displacement from work places, he interprets it in anti-colonial and class terms.

Such was the analysis of the Party, that the Jewish settler themselves became colonial subjects. The resolutions of the Second Congress of the Party (1921) stated that "the present friendly approach of the English administration to the Jewish population is just a temporary expression of British imperial policy. With the first change in the political situation this policy will become hostile."¹⁷⁹ A 1930 letter from a Comintern executive to Party members shows that this sentiment was shared by the Soviets. "The main thing in understanding this question is that Palestine is a colony of British imperialism safeguarding its rule with the help of the Jewish bourgeoisie. The Jewish national minority that is in a state of subjection in relation to British imperialism stands as a privileged minority against the Arab masses."¹⁸⁰ Apart from identifying Zionism with the Jewish middle class and imperialism, the document accepts the fact that the settler society, albeit privileged, is also subject to colonization.

A more pronounced stress on the link between Zionism and metropole colonialism can be found in Moshe Sneh's words.¹⁸¹ Sneh first defines imperialism according to the basic Leninist outline, with the development of capitalism to its monopolistic stage, then to imperialism as the second phase of the national question. In this era, the Western nation-states, like England, France, Italy, or the U.S cast their rule on colonial peoples. National oppression at

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 30.

¹⁸⁰ "Lamiflaga Haḳomunistit Hafaleština'it, 23 Be'Oḳtober, 1930" (To the Palestinian Communist Party, October 23, 1930), in Zahavi, *Apart or Together*, 240.

¹⁸¹ Sneh, *On the National Question*, 23.

this stage is one of the forms of exploitation of finance capital that expands beyond its national borders, seeking more markets, raw materials and fuel, and more places in which to invest capital and land (export capital).

From this basic Leninist definition, Sneh continues to chart a historical narrative of the links between Zionism and imperialism. He argues for links between Zionism and the Ottoman, French, German, Russian and British empires. In his arguments about French imperial intentions in the Levant, he claims that the Baron de Rothschild, while in effect turning the Jewish colonies in Palestine into "under-developed farms or plantation farms built on cheap labour," meant to use these "as a channel for French capital and influence in Eretz-Israel and the Near East."¹⁸² Still the most "preferred of all other political links of the Zionist movement"¹⁸³ was the one with Britain. Recounting the history of Zionist-British relations, Sneh asserts that "the Zionist movement, from its origins, offered itself as tool to different imperialist powers, and became at the end of World War I and after a tool in the hands of British imperialism."¹⁸⁴ As British business interests moved into Palestine "the Zionist movement and its leadership merged as subordinates with British imperialism."¹⁸⁵ When the dependency was no longer possible, the Zionist movement "increased its links "with 'American imperialism', subordinating Israel to it after 1948."¹⁸⁶

The analysis of Zionism as a collaborator with various imperial powers in furthering their interests in Palestine places Sneh within the Marxist-Leninist interpretation of colonial societies. Perceiving Zionism as a manifestation of the Jewish bourgeoisie that is completely reactionary puts him in tandem with the categories formulated by the Comintern. Tellingly, however, in

¹⁸² Ibid., 94.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 108.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 116.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 117.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 120.

Sneh's narrative the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine are hardly mentioned. The only historical agents are Zionism and imperialism. And the only violence done upon colonial subjects is the one visited upon Jews, "the terrible oppression of the Jewish *Yishuv* in Eretz-Israel." ¹⁸⁷

How extensively was the portrayal of imperialism as metropole colonialism part of the theoretical vocabulary of the Palestinian comrades? A significant example would be the book by Emile Touma, *The Palestinian Movement and the Arab World*. Publishing in the 1980s, Touma charts the history of the Palestinian national movement from 1948 to the early 1980s. The historical trajectory of Palestinian nationalism, as Touma describes it, is made up of several historical players – Zionism and Israel, the Palestinians, the Arab world, and the imperial powers. Imperialism, however, is perceived as the prime mover of events. For instance, debating the causes of the 1948 War, Touma states "this war was not just a Palestinian or regional war; it was dictated by the rivalry between England and the United States." Loyal to the Leninist view of imperialism as the force behind local actors and of the inevitability of rivalry between imperial predators, Touma argues that in struggling for spheres of influence "Britain acted through the Trans-Jordanian King Abdullah to safeguard its holdings in the Arab East... the United States supported the Zionist leadership while courting the reactionary Arab regimes in Saudi Arabia and Egypt."¹⁸⁸

While Party ideologists were firmly planted in Marxist-Leninist discourse about imperialism and colonialism, one question still arises: what was the interaction between Party ideology and its political practices in the historical reality of Palestine/Israel. One revealing event is the Afula affair of 1924.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 120.

¹⁸⁸ Emile Touma, *Hatnu'a Hale'umit Hafalastinit Veba'olam Ha'aravi*, (The Palestinian National Movement and the Arab World), (Tel Aviv: Mifras Publishers, 1990), 10.

The acquisition of lands by the Zionist movement's land purchasing agencies dates back to the early Zionist colonization of Palestine in the late 19th century Ottoman Empire.¹⁸⁹ The combination of the Ottoman reform of land law, which enabled the registration of land in the hands of absentee landlords and thus created a capitalist market in lands, and the arrival of European settlers made the dispossession of the Palestinian tenant farmers and the creation of Jewish settlements in their place possible. However, the Zionist land purchases and colonization met the resistance of peasants living on the land. Furthermore, the opposition to the Zionist colonization drive put up a bridge between members of the urban elite, who started to articulate opposition to Zionism more freely after the 1908 Young Turks Revolution, and the previously muted peasant resistance.¹⁹⁰ As early as 1886, in the Petah Tiqva incident, which ended by the intervention of the Ottoman troops many *fellahin* were arrested and a Jewish settler was killed. Violent outbursts of resistance accrued during the pre 1914 era, in the Tiberias region in the first years of the century and in al-fula in 1909-1911,¹⁹¹ with the interaction between dispossession due to land acquisition and Palestinian national identity continuing into the Mandate era. " In the decade that began in 1933, for example, Jews bought more than 300,000 dunam of Arab land; still, the absolute numbers of dispossessed Palestinians were not "very large in relation to the whole of the population."¹⁹² Nonetheless, Zionist expansion in the countryside worsened the

¹⁸⁹ See Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, and Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

¹⁹⁰ "It is clear that the opposition to land sales to the Zionists, particularly sales by absentee landlords... was an important shared element in cementing the link between members of the Palestinian elite who opposed Zionism on grounds of principle, and the *fellahin* ... who tried desperately to cling to their land" (Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 114).

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁹² Baruch Kimmerling and Joel Migdal. *Palestinayim: Am Behivatsruto* (Palestinians: the Making of a People), (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing, 1999), 39.

state of the indebted Palestinian peasantry and reduced the reserves of land in the country, becoming an important element in the Palestinian political discourse of the time.¹⁹³

The 1924 Afula affair pitted the Jewish Communists against the crux of Zionist colonization, the accumulation of land and the removal of the *fellahin* living on it. The background to the Afula affair was the purchase of land by the JNF from the Beirut based Sursuq family, who had already sold lands to the JNF before World War I.¹⁹⁴ The land transfer met with resistance as "the women and children lay down on the ground and did not allow the tractors to plough the land."¹⁹⁵ In the course of the incident one *fellah* was killed by the British police. The PKP, at that stage only recently admitted to the Comintern, looked at the incident as an opportunity to recruit Arab support. However the struggle was formulated not in the language of Palestinian nationalism, but by appeal to the Jewish workers for a bi-national solidarity class war and anti-imperialism. The pamphlet of the Jaffa committee of the PKP clearly shows these elements.

No Jewish worker should go to Afula... it is not the business of the Jewish workers to rob the Arab workers. It is not in the interest of the Jewish workers to live in hatred with the Arab *fellahin*... our strength is not in national hatred but in international solidarity. Comrades! From the fresh graves of the dead and wounded in the Afula clash, which was caused by the Jewish and Arab

¹⁹³ The perception that Palestine is under threat from foreign, namely, European invaders preceded modern Palestinian nationalism and Zionism. Rashid Khalidi describes how "in 1701, the French consul in Sidon paid a visit to Jerusalem, an innovation never before permitted by the Ottoman authorities" (Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 29). This unusual act prompted the protest of the local Muslim community, petitioning the Sultan. "The petition recapitulates the idea of Palestine as a special and sacred land with Jerusalem at its focus." This sense of threat was the result of the "concern for Jerusalem and Palestine that followed traumatic episodes of the Crusades" (Ibid., 30). When a new invader from Europe appeared, the old sense of threat was heightened and contributed to the creation of Palestinian nationalism and discourse in late Ottoman and British Palestine eras.

¹⁹⁴ On the al-Fula 1911 land transaction and the resistance of the *fellahin* with the support they received from the *qa'immaqam* (Ottoman governor) of Nazareth, Shukri al-'Asali, see Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 107-109.

¹⁹⁵ Fainhauz, Pnina, "Parashat Afula Vema'avak HaKomunistim Neged Nishul Hafalaḥim" (The Afula Affair and the Communists' Struggle against the Dispossession of the *Fellahin*), *Arakhim – The Theoretical Journal of the Israeli Communist Party (MKI)*, 3: 1973.

bourgeoisie and the imperialist government, we raise our old slogans: Down with the false policy of the Jewish bourgeoisie and the imperialist government! Down with the Afula occupation! Long live the international solidarity between the Jewish and Arab workers! Long live the class war against our own and foreign bourgeoisie.¹⁹⁶

The 1924 Afula affair exhibits the ability of the Jewish Communists to engage with the wrongs that the Zionist colonization effected on the Palestinians. The Party and its members did so at a considerable price; they were expelled from the *Histadrut* and known Communists were beaten and banished from the workers' kitchens.¹⁹⁷ However, this is also an early example of the inability of the Jewish Communists to understand the plight of Palestinians in their own terms, those of an emerging national identity. Furthermore, the Afula affair also demonstrates the Party's inability to fully perceive the settler colonial reality of Palestine; nor was it ready to confront this reality by ideological tools that insisted on looking beyond national identities to a bi-ethnic class-based global struggle against the British Empire.

6.7.4 Representation of the Palestinian in Communist Thinking – The Assessment of the Progressive Anti-Imperialist

Ten Years after the Afula affair, a 1934 handbill signed by the central committee of the Palestine Young Communist League addressed the Palestinian youth. It called on them to organize "*with the older worker* (emphasis in source) and go out as one to a revolutionary war against the imperialist government – the main culprit in your state."¹⁹⁸ The cause of this revolutionary struggle was the Zionist exclusion of Palestinian workers from Jewish settlements. As in 1924,

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ See Dothan, *Reds*, 103, and Fainhauz, "The Afula Affair."

¹⁹⁸ "Down with the hooligan occupation of work," in Dothan, *Reds*, 172.

the way to fight it was not the national liberation of Palestinians but a joint anti-imperialist battle of Jewish and Palestinian youth "to lend an international proletarian hand to your brother, the Arab youth."¹⁹⁹ The language of anti-imperialist class-based struggle, that in 1924 was aimed at Jews, was now directed at Palestinians too, along with the inability to speak to Palestinians in the language of Palestinian national identity. The continuation of the language from the 1920s raises two questions: How did the Jewish Communists represent the Palestinians? And how did this representation reflect Palestinian nationalism and Party ideology? The concepts developed by Edward Said in *The Question of Palestine* will prove fruitful in answering these questions. It is here that Said develops the basic arguments he first generalized in *Orientalism*.²⁰⁰ There he argues that, in the intersection of academic knowledge and imperial power, the Orient was represented by European scholars – Orientalists who formulated the Gaze of Europe on the region and its inhabitants. In *The Question of Palestine*, Said applies this argument to a specific historical political case, that of Palestine. He shows that, as in the case of the European Orientalists, "the Zionists took it upon themselves as a partially 'Eastern' people...to explain the Oriental Arab to the West."²⁰¹ Thus, in a kind of intellectual blocking action, the Zionists shaped the understanding of Palestinians by Western liberals. Zionism is perceived, by Western intellectuals, as a "marvelous, admirable thing" which "corresponds so completely with Western ideas about society and man." The Palestinians, in contrast, "are nefarious, stupid, or morally indecent and – this is crucial – they are not heard from directly."²⁰² It is important to note that, in some respects, a similar process was manifested among the Jewish Communists. They also took it upon themselves to represent the Palestinian to Soviet audiences in the Comintern, and later to

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 172.

²⁰⁰ Edward. W. Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

²⁰¹ Edward. W. Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 26.

²⁰² Ibid., 29.

Israeli liberal public opinion. At the same time, there was one marked difference between the way Zionists represented the Palestinian and the way the Jewish Communists did. In the latter case, the Palestinian was presented as a progressive anti-imperialist or as the subject of a struggle for equality. In all cases his was an affirmative and positive image. Despite the fact that his *national* agency was denied in both cases, in the Jewish Communist case he acquired an anti-imperialist progressive agency.

A paradigmatic case of representation demonstrating these elements is the case of Hamdi al-Husayni and the *Istiqlal* Party. Born in Gaza Hamdi al-Husayni was a nationalistic journalist, active from the mid-1920s onward.²⁰³ Al-Husayni and the *Istiqlal* Party were in contact with the PKP from the early 1930s.²⁰⁴ The relationship intensified during the years of the Arab Revolt (1936-1939), when the Party passed on to the Comintern an offer from the *Istiqlalists* – most probably al-Husayni himself, since the Party dissolved by 1934 – to mount a military attack on Jerusalem with Soviet help. The link between the *Istiqlal* Party and the PKP was not just a political assiance; the Communists took it upon themselves to represent Palestinian nationalism to the Comintern. The offer was rejected flatly by the horrified Comintern.²⁰⁵

Indeed, as modern nationalist forces started to emerge among the Palestinians in the early 1930s, it was the PKP who represented them to the Comintern. In a document titled the *Treatment of the PKP to the Arab National Movement* the analysis is steeped with the ideological formulations that the Comintern established concerning the colonial question.²⁰⁶ First the writer analyzes the class makeup of the Arab national movement, conforming to

²⁰³ For a short view on his life, see Weldon C. Matthews, *Confronting an Empire, Constructing a Nation: Arab nationalists and Popular Politics in Mandate Palestine* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 268.

²⁰⁴ Matthews states that "at the end of 1932, Najati Sidqi, a Palestinian communist of Arab nationalist sensibilities" contacted the Party (*Confronting an Empire*, 157). The documents Leon Zahavi brings date the connections with al-Husayni to at least 1930. See Zahavi, *Apart or Together*, 227.

²⁰⁵ Zahavi, *Apart or Together*, 256.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 227.

Comintern definitions. The text begins with the most reactionary groups: "The leadership of the movement is in the hands of the executive of the 7th Arab Congress, which represents the upper bourgeoisie and the landowners." This group "has a conciliatory mode in regard to imperialism." After them come "the clerical group of the Pan-Islamics." Quoting the resolutions of the Second Congress, the text tasks the Party with liberating the masses "from the influence of the Pan-Islamic leaders and their ideologies" and with steering the masses in the proper anti-imperialist course. Then the text goes on to discuss Hamdi al-Husayni's group, which is characterized as "the left wing group based on the Muslim youth associations headed by Hamdi al-Husayni."²⁰⁷ The anti-imperialism of the group, the principal legitimizing factor in the eyes of the Jewish Communists, is well pronounced. "This group sharply demonstrates against English imperialism."²⁰⁸ Yet in accordance with the lessons of the Chinese debacle, the Jewish Communists warn that "this group is not able to raise social radical slogans...*national* (my emphasis) and religious elements are dominant in its ideology." Thus, the danger exists that it will turn into a Left Guomindang "that sooner or later inevitably will turn into an anti-Communist and anti-revolutionary organization." So the only "correct tactic in relation to *Hamdi Husayni's group is the struggle for the soul of the masses* (emphasis in source)."²⁰⁹ By disseminating its radical slogans and programs, then, the Communists could assert control over the national movement and move it towards a social revolution.²¹⁰ This statement had no hold on reality; the small numbers of the Party and the fact that it had not yet penetrated the Palestinian population in any meaningful way precluded such a possibility.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 228.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 228.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 229.

²¹⁰ "Only the Communist Party can lead a true national-revolutionary movement, only under the leadership of the Communist Party will this movement develop into a real Communist movement" (Ibid., 230).

The representation of Hamdi al-Husayni and his group, as well as the perception of the Palestinian national movement as a whole, demonstrate the limitations of the image the Jewish Communists created. The Palestinian was valued for his revolutionary potential, not for his national agency. The fact that Hamdi al-Husayni was one of a group of young Palestinians, who had started to express their national identity in terms of modernized mass mobilization, did not deter the Jewish Communists from characterizing them as a "nationalist clerical intelligentsia," with whom only tactical alliances can be struck.²¹¹

The conception of the Palestinians as being assessed by their level of anti-imperialism repeats itself in the 1933 demonstrations. As Ruth Lubitz witnesses the 1933 events in Jaffa she remarks, "the *al- Istiqlal* Party headed its program with the struggle to liberate the country from the British... it represented the petite bourgeoisie and radical intelligentsia. Its character was national-reformist. As such, it did not have a firm stand in social-class issues."²¹² The Jewish Communists, as evidenced since the 1920s, had chosen to represent Palestinians not by their national identity but by the terms of class and anti-imperialism formulated by Marxist-Leninist thinking. In all of these pronouncements, positive as they were, the Palestinians' authentic voice was not heard. As in the case of Hamdi al-Husayni and the *Istiqlal* Party, the Jewish Communist representation did not correspond fully with the political realities of Palestine. The Communists disregarded the precedence of the national element in Hamdi al-Husayni himself who, responding to accusations that he was a Communist "felt obliged to defend himself and denied being a Communist... In one uncharacteristically self-conscious article, he elevated Communism to the level of imperialism as a threat confronting Arab nationalism."²¹³ The Jewish Communists, immersed in their ideological concepts, could not fully comprehend "the

²¹¹ Ibid., 229.

²¹² Ruth Lubitz, *Baharti Lihyot Bema'avak* (I Chose a Life of Struggle), (Tel Aviv: Hasher Publishers, 1985), 112.

²¹³ Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, 112.

emergence of the Istiqlal Party as the first true nationalist political party in Palestine"²¹⁴ – a party that created, through its associations, schools, and the press, an authentic Palestinian, secular and Pan-Arab public sphere. For the Communists the only thing that counted was the level of anti-imperialist consciousness; anything else was branded as backward.

The representation of the Palestinian befitting his progressive anti-colonialism can explain the later expression of presenting the Palestinians citizens of Israel in the 1950s and 1960s. The changes in language, from progressive Marxism-Leninism to a language of civic rights and Jewish sensitivities, can all be explained as a change in the mechanisms of representation of Palestinians by the Jewish Communists. Throughout the historical changes and despite their positive intentions, were the Jewish Communists completely blind to the historical reality of settler colonialism? Were their representations of the Palestinians so wrong? The answer is more complex than a simple yea or nay. As a colonizing minority – both Jewish and ex-Zionist – most Party members could not distance themselves enough to proclaim that the Yishuv had no legitimacy. Taking this argument to its logical end would entail, perhaps, leaving the country and thereby putting an end to the Communist Party there. In order to deal with the moral problems created by Zionist colonization, resorting to the ideological tenets of Communism was imperative. This made them partners in an anti-colonial struggle with the Palestinians. And the representation of Palestinians as devoid of any independent national identity was not completely divorced from historical reality. As Rashid Khalidi shows through the life stories of notable Palestinians, in late Ottoman Jerusalem Palestinian identity overlapped with Arab cultural, Islamic and Ottoman identities.²¹⁵ Even the modernized Palestinian identity of the *Istiqlal* was phrased in the language of pre- and post-World War I, Pan-Arab nationalism

²¹⁴ Ibid., 3.

²¹⁵ Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 63-88.

as well as of a separate Palestinian identity.²¹⁶ After the string of devastating defeats from 1936 to 1948, Palestinian identity was considered all but gone: "[D]uring the 1950s and early 1960s there were few indications to outside observers of the existence of an independent Palestinian identity or of Palestinian nationalism."²¹⁷ Many Palestinians subsumed their identity in the waves of Pan-Arab nationalism that swept the Arab world in the 1950s and early 1960s. Palestinian nationalism was kept alive by student organizations whose ideology "reveals that they represented a continuation of the Palestinian national movement as it developed" in the pre-1948 era.²¹⁸ Only in the 1960s did this renewed Palestinian national movement burst unto the Middle Eastern political scene. These complex and nuanced historical realities make the lacuna of the Jewish Communists' representation of the Palestinians more clearly understood in its context. Notwithstanding the limitations of their approach to Palestinian identity and nationalism, one cannot deny the humanist, progressive and liberating content of their efforts – something that cannot be said about the other Israeli and Arab actors in the Palestinian tragedy.

²¹⁶ One of the early pamphlets of the party referred to "complete independence of Palestine within Arab unity on the basis of the alliance" (Pamphlet by Hamdi Al-Husayni, quoted in Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, 139).

²¹⁷ Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 178.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 180.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The years after the 1965 split saw the disappearance of the Jewish MKI from Israeli politics, as the loss of the Palestinian electoral base and the MKI's support of the Six Day War led to the cessation of Soviet tutelage. In parallel to the demise of the MKI, Rakah rose to become the most prominent party among Palestinians and the Soviet-recognized Communist Party in Israel. With the disintegration of the MKI, the importance of the cultural practices discussed here declined. The post-1967 Occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, together with the inherent anti-Zionism of both the Palestinian majority that now dominated the Party and the Jews left in it, signalled the decline of the attempt to incorporate Jewish and Israeli motifs into Communist identity. Thus the celebration of the Jewish holidays declined as well.

As Rakah and the reconstituted Banki veered away from the former anti-Zionist patriotism of the 1950s to the mid-1960s, the class and Soviet systems of holidays were mostly kept, as the Palestinian and Jewish members of Rakah marched on May Day and congregated in the Red Army Forest and commemorated the Russian Revolution. However, with the loss of most of the Jewish membership, the Jewish Communist subculture as it had existed since the 1920s was gone and the attempt to create a non-Zionist Jewish-Israeli identity failed. Based on local Israeli patriotic sentiments mainly linked to the 1948 War, on identification with the fate of European Jewry in Nazi Europe and with Jewish armed heroism of the era, and on a strong affiliation with the Soviet Union and the working class, the Jewish Communist subculture became untenable as these elements lost the anti-Zionist content that held them together. The MKI and Banki became Zionist organizations, but without the negation of Zionism they also lost their Communist content. From the ruins of the MKI, Rakah forged a more nationalist

Palestinian identity, reflecting the aspirations of the largely Palestinian membership and leadership of Israeli Communism. The new political cultural phase the Communists in Israel went through after 1965 awaits its researcher, and it remains to be seen what parts of the Jewish Communist subculture survived in Rakah among those Jewish members who chose to stay, numbering 15 percent of the cadre, most of them having joined the PKP before 1948.¹

In the course of the years 1919 to 1965 the MKI and Banki shaped a unique subculture that expressed European, Jewish and local Israeli elements in its cultural practices. Those practices reflected and created a unique Jewish-Israeli Communist identity, which was at the same time both a product of the Zionist nation-building project and diametrically opposed to its basic fundamentals. In ritual, symbol and myth the Jewish Communists constructed an identity uniquely their own, which joined together the national and the universal, the local and the European, the Communist and the Jewish.

The Jewish holidays constituted the basis of the Jewish traditional calendar, which had shaped the life cycle of the Jewish religious communities outside Palestine since antiquity. In its desire to effect the national revival of Jews in Palestine, the Zionist movement took the Jewish calendar and injected it with new nationalist and secular content. Reviving the myths of Jewish rebellions, both ancient and modern, Zionism sought to create a new Zionist culture and ritual.

In Zionist-Socialist culture in particular, these mechanisms were very evident. Zionist-Socialists turned *Shavuot* and *Tu B'Shevat* into national nature holidays symbolizing the re-rooting of the Jews in their land. They turned Hanukkah, a modest family holiday, into a public national holiday revolving around militaristic motifs of valour and national liberation. Zionist-

¹ For the makeup of the Jewish members that stayed with Rakah, see Shafran, *Farewell Communism*; Meir Edelstein, "The 1965 Split in Maki and CPSU," in *Soviet Jewish Affairs: Journal on Jewish Problems in the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe*, 3-4, (1973-1974): 23-38; and Meir Edelstein, "Towards the Split in MKI in 1965," *Ma'asaf* 5, (1983): 146-95.

Socialists described the Maccabean rebellion as the uprising of the lower classes against a foreign ruler. At its most radical, Zionist-Socialism even made an attempt to rewrite the Passover *Haggadah*, one of the most canonical Jewish texts, in the kibbutzim.

In parallel to the Zionist-Socialist effort, the Jewish Communists had their own cultural transformation project. In the early stages of Communism in Palestine, they initially took a radical negative stand against the emerging Zionist national cult. Their main criticism was directed against the celebration of Hanukkah. The Maccabees were described as representatives of a corrupt and parasitic class that had exploited the popular rebellion to its own ends. As negative as that portrayal was, however, it was still connected to Zionist-Socialist cultural discourse, portraying the uprising as a popular lower class revolt.

The negative approach toward Jewish tradition started to change with the legalization of the PKP in 1941. During the war a need was felt for models of Jewish heroism, and the Jewish Communist subculture began to be diffused by national Jewish motifs, mainly the myth of Hanukkah and the Maccabees. As the 1950s wore on, the process of diffusion gathered pace as the Left joined the MKI and brought with it its Zionist-Socialist practices and background. Thus the Jewish Communists developed their own versions of central Jewish holidays. This invented tradition had one feature in common with Zionist-Socialism, in that the Jewish Communists poured new wine into the old vessels of Judaism. Instead of Zionist content, though, it was progressive content with which they filled the Jewish holidays, in effect inventing a Jewish progressive tradition, a sequence of historical and religious holidays whose Jewish content was deemed ideologically acceptable to the Jewish Communists.

Thus, the nature holidays like *Tu B'Shevat* and *Shavuot* became full of Jewish popular class elements taken from such writers as Sholem Aleichem. *Sukkoth* was celebrated with motifs

of peace. On *Shavuot* stress was laid on joint Palestinian-Jewish agricultural traditions, and the *Tu B'Shevat* planting ceremony at Yad Hanna was dedicated to Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. Purim was not just an occasion for merriment and masquerading; the figure of Haman could be exploited to make political arguments, and the custom of masquerading itself was turned into a political counter-ritual mocking political rivals and their policies.

Hanukkah, the primary Jewish holiday celebrated by the Jewish Communists, rose in prominence during the 1950s to the mid-1960s. The myth of the Maccabees became imbued with Marxist and nationalist elements. The uprising in ancient Judea was portrayed as a popular rebellion of the masses motivated by social economic causes. The young Jewish Communists in Banki were taught to see themselves as the successors of the Maccabees and a long line of heroes in the progressive Jewish tradition. The growing significance of Hanukkah was expressed in the candle-lighting ritual. Like the Zionists, who'd changed it from a family ritual into a public political event, the Jewish Communists conducted the candle-lighting publicly in Banki's clubs and in kibbutz Yad Hanna. The blessings over the candles were changed from the traditional version and given Jewish-Israeli Communist content.

The other significant historical Jewish holiday, Passover, was the subject of a bold cultural experiment by the avant-garde of Zionist-Socialism in the kibbutzim. During the 1930s, when the kibbutzim were an arena of cultural innovation, the *Haggadah*, the holiday's principal text, was rewritten. Strong evidence indicates that the Jewish Communists followed a similar path and that, after the Left joined the MKI, a proletarian *Haggadah* existed and was used by Banki members.

The importance of the Jewish holidays in the Jewish Communist subculture reached a high point when in the early 1960s Yair Tzaban suggested moving the admission of new

members to Banki to Hanukkah. The proposal sent shockwaves through the Party's old guard, showing that the balance between the conflicting elements in the MKI and Banki's cultural configuration and identity had already been disrupted.

The invention of a Jewish progressive tradition created a Jewish progressive identity. The Jewish Communists were taught to take their place in a long line of Jewish heroes and heroics that had national as well as universal meaning. Born out of the crises of Jewish identity in the nineteenth century, which had rendered traditional Jewish identity and ritual meaningless, the Jewish Communists shaped an identity that was Jewish, progressive and non Zionist. They enshrined that identity in rituals of *communitas* that emphasized their uniqueness.

The creation of the Jewish state out of the storms of the Holocaust and the 1948 War gave rise to a Jewish-Israeli commemoration calendar. Towards the Holocaust the approach of Israelis in the first years after 1948 was complex. Zionism's negation of the Diaspora, the guilt felt over the little help given by the Jews of Palestine to their brethren in Europe and political causes all contributed to the sidelining of the Holocaust. The state did indeed establish a central commemorative institution, Yad Vashem, and fix a remembrance day for the Holocaust, but there was little official attention to this commemoration and it had little effect on the majority of Israelis. The commemoration of the Holocaust thus remained in the hands of the parties once constituting MAPAI. The Zionist-Socialists centered their memory of the Holocaust on the armed resistance of a handful of the various youth movements' members. The main commemorative event in the Zionist-Socialist culture marked the Warsaw Ghetto uprising.

The Jewish Communists were hit hard by the Holocaust. Many of them came from Eastern Europe, from the Jewish communities that went up in flames. The Jewish Communists took part in the Zionist-Socialist commemoration culture, stressing the armed resistance in

Europe and the actions and role played by both Jewish Communists and Zionist-Socialists. Exactly like the Zionist-Socialists, they memorialized the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. However, the Jewish Communist consciousness of the Holocaust did have its own unique elements. Since the 1940s, as the news from Europe hit the *Yishuv*, the Jewish Communists stressed the role of the Soviet Union in avenging Jewish blood. They also emphasized the common fate of Jews and non-Jews and the help the Polish Communist Party and its armed units the Armia Ludowa had given the Jewish resistance in Europe, all the while condemning the indifference and open anti-Semitism of the Armia Krajowa.

The Holocaust gave rise to Zionist-Socialist rituals, mainly at the kibbutzim affiliated with MAPAM and *Ahdut HaAvoda*. The Jewish Communists, lacking the considerable physical resources and political clout of the Zionist-Socialists, developed their own commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. Like the Zionist-Socialists, they honoured the rebellion in a rally on April 19th. The simple ceremony consisted of speeches and artistic performances. The same model was used for the November 7th and May Day rallies of the MKI and Banki, echoing the revolutionary meetings in Tsarist Russia that had become part of Soviet ritual. These were ceremonies of *communitas*. The speeches made by the Communist speakers emphasized the Jewish Communist consciousness of the Holocaust. The commemoration efforts of the Jewish Communists were institutionalized from 1955 by the ANFO, which expressed the Jewish Communist perception of the events in Europe.

In the late 1950s and increasingly in the early 1960s, as statist culture started to erode and a more Jewish-oriented political culture emerged, Israeli society changed its attitude toward the Holocaust. This change picked up pace during the Eichmann trial, as the voices of the mass of victims and not just the Ghetto fighters were heard, and started to make some headway into the

thinking of the Jewish Communists as well. In the early 1960s, however, the commemorative discourse of the Jewish Communists remained largely heroic. Due to that overemphasis, the MKI and Banki lost sight of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Like the rest of Israeli society, the Jewish Communists looked myopically upon one aspect, and that a small one, of the events in Europe. A more nuanced look at the lives and deaths of the Jews of Europe was precluded since the Ghetto rebels, the purported representatives of the masses, were portrayed as such in opposition to the Judenräte, the collaborating Jewish bourgeoisie.

Israeli independence was the object of intense cultural configuration in the first two decades after the founding of the state of Israel. The celebrations were centered on an official ceremony on Mount Herzl and mass festivities in the streets. Regarding the latter, there were persistent attempts to produce a spontaneous mass celebration with dancing in the streets. Despite the failure of those attempts, a feeling of *communitas* did arise among the masses flocking to see the artistic performances, as the youth movements dressed in their uniforms danced in circles.

The Jewish Communists framed the creation of the Israeli state in an anti-imperialist discourse. Anti-imperialism had been a basic fundamental of Party ideology since the formative stages of Communism in Palestine. In the context of Palestine, the PKP sharply objected to the British Mandate and mounted what was primarily a political struggle against it. Anti-imperialist discourse and practice shaped the Jewish Communists' perception of the 1948 War and Israeli independence as an anti-imperialist struggle against British influence in the region, a popular struggle that remained incomplete. This unfinished revolution was derailed by the Zionist leaders who preferred American imperialism over true sovereignty. The support of the Jewish Communists in the war effort had not been just verbal. The Party leadership utilized its

connections in the People's Democracies to aid the war effort. Party members joined the ranks of the Haganah and later the IDF, took an active part in the fighting, and even the party choir performed to boost morale.

The anti-imperialist Communist discourse was accompanied by its own hero cults. The Jewish Communists developed a hero cult around the lives and figures of Party members killed by the British during the Party's underground years. The cults around Yael Garson and Siyoma Mernonynski laid the foundation for the long-lasting cult around Alyosha Gozansky, who became, after his death in 1948, the principal Communist hero of independence. The Jewish Communists did not create any alternative to the state-sponsored rites of independence. Like most Israelis, they mainly took part in the yearly mass celebrations in the streets. There, dressed in their uniforms, they were absorbed into the *communitas* that allowed even the rejected Communists to be part of the national body.

The turbulent Jewish history of the twentieth century, with the tragedy of the Holocaust followed by the founding of the state of Israel, also shaped Jewish Communist identity. In regard to the Holocaust, the Jewish Communists developed an identity based on Jewish national pride on the one hand and internationalism on the other. These elements found expression in the simultaneous stress on armed resistance as well as internationalist cooperation with non Jews. Independence led to the creation of an anti-Zionist but patriotic identity that was grounded in an anti-imperialist discourse that legitimized it ideologically.

The public ritual most closely identified with the Jewish Communists was May Day. The Jewish Communist presence within the Israeli working class and the *Histadrut* was limited. Besides participating in the resurgence of union activity in the early 1920s and in the 1940s, Communism in Palestine was banished to the margins of working class politics, where its anti-

Zionism and the totality of *Histadrut* control barred it from effectively mobilizing the predominantly Zionist Jewish workers. The Palestinian Communists, who had made some headway into the Palestinian working class since the 1930s, and even mass mobilized it before 1948, saw all their accomplishments destroyed by the 1948 War. The MKI in the 1950s and early 1960s was mostly preoccupied with the issues sparked by the national conflict, and the class war was low on its priority list.

In contrast to the small impact of working class militancy, the symbols, myths and rituals linked to it were of enormous importance to the Jewish Communists. The high point of the identification with and cultural glorification of workers came in the yearly *Histadrut* May Day march. May Day had been brought to Palestine in the early twentieth century by Jewish Socialist immigrants. By the 1920s and 1930s it had been institutionalized by the *Histadrut*, which sought to add Zionist nationalist elements to it and closely supervise its content. The Jewish Communists celebrated May Day since the early 1920s as a counter-ritual. Like the Russian revolutionaries in Tsarist Russia, they burst into the public sphere on May Day to clash with the forces of the British colonial state and with their political rivals from the Left and Right. These counter-rituals were clustered around the dominant symbol of the Red Flag, which was brought from Europe.

The counter-ritual nature of the Communist May Day dissipated after the legalization of the PKP. By 1946 the Jewish Communists, now reinstated into the *Histadrut*, were participating in its official march. Their marches, heavily influenced by Soviet Stalinist dogma, became militaristic, from a desire to convey a self-perception that reflected Soviet and working-class symbolism of power. At the same time, the Communist marches featured a local motif, the Banki marchers in particular carrying symbols of Arab-Jewish fraternity and slogans referring to Israeli

current affairs. Above all, the Banki marches of the 1950s and 1960s became a marching utopia that projected an image of a classless and just Israeli society.

The marches were the main feature of Communist May Day, but the holiday was also the subject of an intense educational effort by Banki. Since the early stages of Communism in Palestine, it was couched in a militantly internationalist working-class language. Still, as intense as the identification of Banki and MKI members was with the struggles and plight of workers, they did not develop a working-class identity. The absence of such can be explained by the small number of workers in the Party itself, its inability to develop extensive union work and thus recruit workers, and the fact that from early on the political culture of the *Yishuv* and then Israel revolved around the Zionist-Palestinian conflict.

From the formative stages of Communism in Palestine, the U.S.S.R. was always part of Jewish Communist consciousness. World War Two, in particular the Soviet-German War of 1941-1945, gave rise to a mass cult in which the MKI and Banki and the philo-Soviet community celebrated such ideals as Soviet prowess and Soviet-Israeli Friendship. Admiration of the U.S.S.R. was not the province of the Jewish Communists alone, but shared by large sections of the Zionist Left from the 1920s to the 1950s. During the war this admiration was given organizational expression in the form of the V League. Established by Zionist-Socialists, nonpartisan intellectuals and Communists, the V League aided the Soviet war effort. In a gradual process, by the end of the war it became an agency managing Soviet-Israeli cultural relations.

Over the course of the 1950s, the Zionist-Socialist component of the philo-Soviet community, disillusioned by Soviet anti-Zionism and the failures of the Soviet system, retired from the now reconstituted Israel-Soviet Friendship Movement. Nevertheless, even though the Movement had become an MKI front, it maintained its inclusive nature, organizing wider philo-

Soviet circles. From the 1950s the Friendship Movement organized the mass ritual in the Red Army Forest, which featured a local Israeli monument in combination with Soviet symbols and the symbols of Soviet-Israeli Friendship. It was a mass rite of *communitas*, which combined, like early Bolshevik cults, the solemn and the carnivalesque. The MKI, Banki and friends of the U.S.S.R. laid wreaths, watched artistic performances and held a mass picnic.

The Jewish Communists began celebrating November 7th in the early 1920s, and from that early stage there were two main elements in their perception of the Revolution. They saw it as a cosmological, quasi-religious event that had ushered in a new era of human history, and as a secular salvation story, in which the poor and downtrodden, led by the all-knowing Bolshevik Party, had revolted and changed history. The day of the Revolution was at first celebrated by marches that resembled the May Day counter-rituals. However, this form of ritual did not survive the underground years. As the PKP emerged into legality, November 7th came to be celebrated with rallies and balls. The rallies featured the symbols of the Soviet state and its leaders and were modeled on the revolutionary rally, with speeches and artistic performances. The speeches made at the rallies reasserted the cosmological, quasi-religious terms in which the Revolution was perceived. The receptions conducted by the MKI and Banki were not merely apolitical fun, but political Soviet-oriented events. All of these November 7th activities were rites of *communitas* where the often despised Jewish Communists surmounted their lowly status by celebrating their association with the Soviet superpower. It was also a way of linking them to a European revolutionary lineage stretching from the French Revolution through the Paris Commune and the 1934 Vienna uprising to the Spanish Civil War. This revolutionary meta-narrative culminated in the Russian Revolutions of February and October 1917.

The cult the Jewish Communists developed around the U.S.S.R. was blind to the darker sides of Soviet reality. The deprivations visited upon the ordinary Russian as a result of war and the Revolution, the mass murders of the Stalinist era and the flaws of post-Stalinist society were not mentioned. Any criticism of Soviet policies, both foreign and domestic, was relegated to the rubric of anti-Soviet-propaganda and in fact considered sacrilege. The identity that this cult created and reflected was a quasi-religious believer's identity. The Soviet Union became a substitute shrine for the Jewish Communists, a place where their dreams of messianic salvation became living reality.

What ultimately set Israeli Communism apart from Zionist-Socialism was its Arab-Jewish character. The Zionist-Socialists quickly abandoned the international fundamentals of Socialism and closed their organizations to Palestinians. By contrast, the Jewish Communists made the joint political struggle and inclusion of Palestinians the most basic tenet of their ideology. The reality of relations between Palestinians and Jews knew many tensions and upheavals, as both Palestinians and Jews were pulled by their communities' respective nationalisms. Nonetheless, even when the Party split during the 1940s, the Jewish Communists stayed loyal to Arab-Jewish fraternity.

From the early stages of contact between Palestinians and Jews in the Communist Party, the Jewish Communists shaped their gaze on the Palestinian Other through language, symbol and ritual. From the 1920s until 1948, they described Palestine's Arabs in Marxist-Leninist terms as partners in an anti-imperialist, anti-Zionist struggle. From 1948 onwards the Palestinians inside Israel became a persecuted minority. The Jewish Communists conducted a political campaign to annul the military government, now using language that invoked civil rights and Jewish sensibilities.

The long-time relations between Palestinians and Jews did not give rise to any ritual tradition in the MKI and Banki. The only event of consequence that is connected to Arab-Jewish fraternity was the 1948 unity conference of the NLL and PKP. The ceremony and speeches marking the reconnection of the MKI's two national components were steeped in Communist symbolism and language and created a deep bond of *communitas*, but no ceremonial tradition. Other than that, several Arab-Jewish festivals were conducted by Banki, characterized as mass meetings of low status Palestinian and Jewish youth in secluded natural surroundings, also creating a bond of *communitas*. Arab-Jewish fraternity had its own unique symbolism. The Arab-Jewish duo was the dominant symbol repeated in many of the MKI and Banki's publications, giving figurative form to the bond of *communitas* the Jewish Communists expected to form with their Palestinian comrades.

Over the years, as the Jewish Communists developed their comprehension of the Palestinian Other, the stereotype they constructed was an affirmative one, but nonetheless a stereotype. They saw Palestinians as partners in their struggle and a minority that was being discriminated against. However, the Jewish Communists failed to attribute to Palestinians in Israel their own agency. Despite the goodwill of the Jewish Communists and the positive view they had of Palestinians, they were unable to see them beyond the anti-imperialist narrative. They viewed the Palestinian Other through their own cultural categories. Most notably, the discrimination against Palestinians in Israel was described in Jewish historical terms. The Jewish Communists were not fluent in Arabic and had difficulty understanding their Palestinian comrades in the larger pan-Arab context that swept the Arab world during the 1950s and 1960s. Although much more aware of the Palestinian *Nakba* than other Jewish-Israelis, they failed to understand its impact on Palestinians and their nationalism.

Tel Aviv Jewish Communists who organized in the MKI and Banki since the 1940s had developed their own version of Israeli Jewish identity, shaping and reflecting that identity symbolically and through ritual. It consisted of local Jewish elements, making it a dissident part of Zionist-Socialist culture, as well as Soviet and European elements, making it a part of world Communism and the tradition of the European left. It eventually (after the establishment of the state) became associated with a progressive Jewish identity that was patriotic if anti-Zionist. It was not a working class identity, although Communist in terms of its identification with workers. Many Tel Aviv Communists identified with it as one might with a religious identity. Lastly, it was an identity that allowed for and encouraged engagement and interaction with Palestinians. For Tel Aviv Communists interviewed here, it was a contradictory, delicately balanced and, by 1965, broken identity. At the end the Jewish Communists, the bearers of that identity,² had to choose between its Jewish-Israeli and Communist internationalist components. Most chose the Jewish-Israeli element, either by establishing a Jewish MKI or by leaving the Party altogether, and were proven wrong in doing so, being relegated to the dustbin of history.

² The motivations for staying in Rakah or the MKI are probably varied. Most of the Jewish members who stood behind the Sneh-Mikunis faction joined the Party after 1948. Most of them, mainly the “left men”, wanted to belong to the mainstream of Israeli society. They were also less familiar with the splits of the Party before 1948 and, as this thesis shows, were imbued with Jewish nationalistic, almost Zionist elements. Those Jewish Communists who sided with the Vilner-Toubi faction joined the PKP before 1948 and were experienced with Party infighting and splits. They were used to being marginalized and had no illusions about rejoining mainstream society without losing their political credo. This thesis claims that the “left men” overturned the balance between the local elements and the international elements in Jewish Communist identity. Thus, the centrifugal power of Zionism, mainly in its statist and Labour-Zionist versions, converted them from Communists to Zionists. In this state they could not maintain their organizational identity and gradually vanished from the political landscape. This explanation is in part based on remarks by Nessia Shafran in Shafran, *Farewell Communism*, 189-207.

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Appendix – Selected Posters and Photos



MKI Poster (in Yiddish) marking 34 years to The October Revolution
Gozansky and Timm - *Against the Mainstream*



MKI Poster (in Arabic) marking 33 years to the October Revolution
Gozansky and Timm - *Against the Mainstream*



MKI Poster (in Hebrew) marking 40 years to the October Revolution
Gozansky and Timm - *Against the Mainstream*



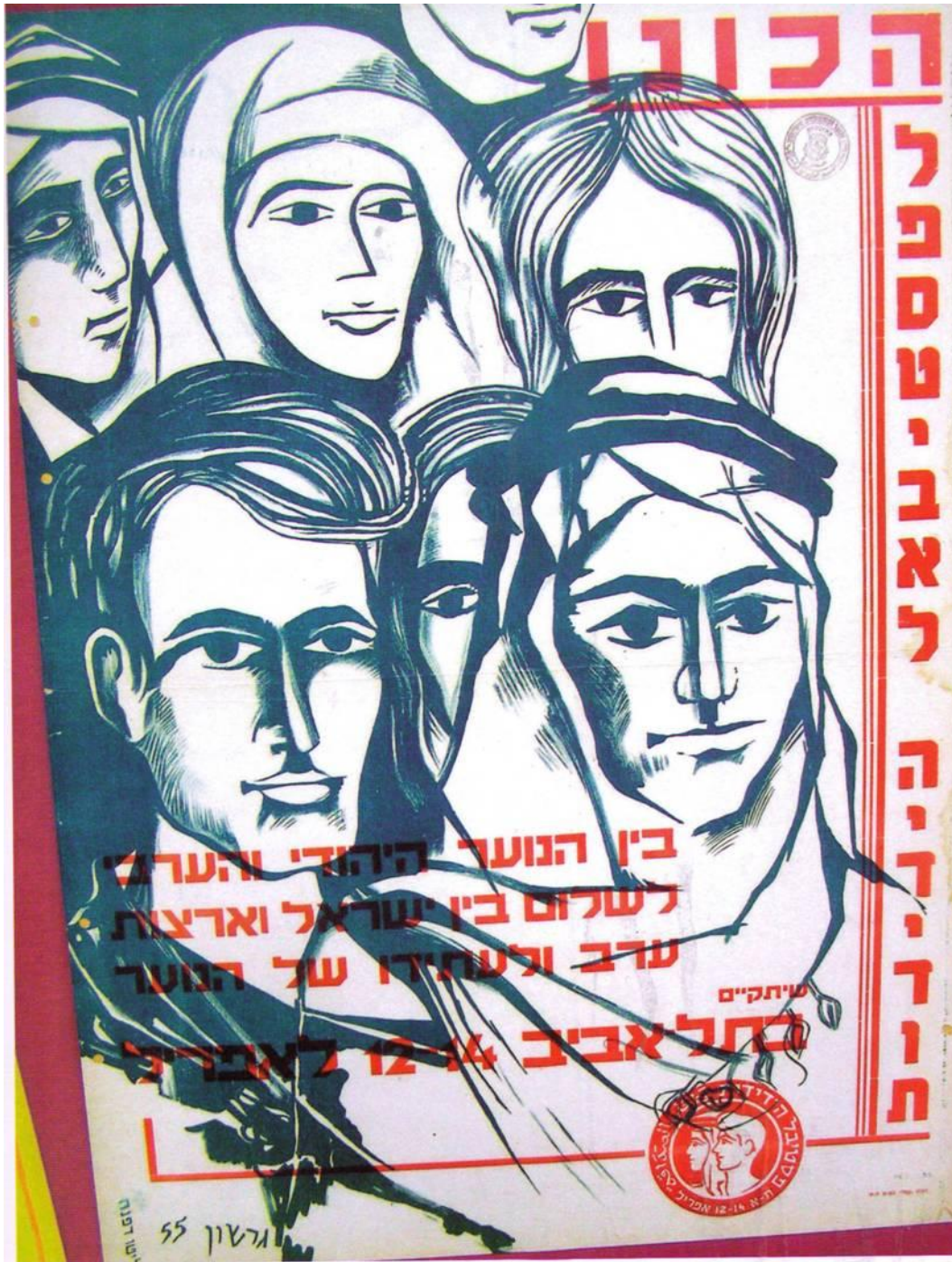
1 במאי 1954

International Workers' Day, 1954

Poster (in Hebrew and Arabic) May Day 1954
Gozansky and Timm - *Against the Mainstream*



Poster (in Hebrew) for Banki's National Peace Camp 1951
Yad Tabenkin Archives



Friendship festival of Jewish and Arab youth. Tel Aviv, 1955

טובל הידידות בין נוער יהודי וערבי, ת"א, 1955

Poster (in Hebrew) for Friendship Festival of Jewish and Arab Youth, 1955
 Gozansky and Timm - *Against the Mainstream*



V League Poster (in Hebrew) 1944
Lavon Institute for Labour Research



Israel Soviet Union Friendship badge
Yad Tabenkin Archives



Postcard (in Hebrew) of the Soviet Israeli Friendship Movement 1963, photo of the Israeli delegation at the 1957 Moscow Youth Festival
Yad Tabenkin Archives



May Day 1944 (Courtesy of Mr. Yoram Gozansky)



May Day 1957 (Courtesy of Mr. Yoram Gozansky)



May Day 1958 (Courtesy of Mr. Yoram Gozansky)



**Independence Day 1950
Israeli National Archives**



**May Day 1949
Israeli National Archives**



Ramla 1951
Kol Hano'ar



להקת דבקה מחוללת ברחובות ת"א, בשעת תהלוכת
פסטיבל הידידות, אפריל 1955



מסיבת חנוכה במועדון הנוער הקומוניסטי בת"א

Arab Jewish Youth Festival 1955

(Mima'arakhot Hama'avak – The Campaigns of Struggle: May 1952-1957)

Hanukah Party in Tel Aviv Banki Club

(Mima'arakhot Hama'avak – The Campaigns of Struggle: May 1952-1957)



Victory Day 1945 (Courtesy of Mr. Yoram Gozansky)



Arab Jewish Youth Festival 1949 (Courtesy of Mr. Yoram Gozansky)