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The other radicals: Zionist-socialist youth in apartheid South Africa, 1948–1970*

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The relationship between Jewish South Africans and anti-apartheid radicalism has fascinated scholars and activists for decades. Scholarly texts about this topic started in the 1950s but peaked a few years after South Africa's democratization, especially in the late 1990s and early 2000s.¹ Central to this conversation is the apparent disparity between the striking over-representation of Jews in radical circles and the fact that the vast majority of Jewish South Africans remained silent in the face of apartheid.² Scholars have devoted substantial attention to Jewish radicalism, not only in the South African context.³ Usually, they root

1 Some major contributions were Mark Israel and Simon Adams, "That Spells Trouble': Jews and the Communist Party of South Africa", *Journal of Southern African Studies* 26, no. 1 (March 2000): 145–62; James T. Campbell, "Beyond the Pale: Jewish Immigration and the South African Left", in *Memories, Realities and Dreams: Aspects of the South African Jewish Experience*, ed. Milton Shain and Richard Mendelsohn (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2002), 96–162; Gideon Shimoni, *Community and Conscience: The Jews in Apartheid South Africa* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England; Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 2003).

2 About the Jewish over-representation in anti-apartheid circles see Campbell, "Beyond the Pale", 98; Shula Marks, interview in Immanuel Suttner, *Cutting through the Mountain: Interviews with South African Jewish Activists* (London: Viking, 1997), 322; Shimoni, *Community and Conscience*, 56, 60; David Yoram Saks, 'Jews and Communism in South Africa', in *A Vanished Ideology: Essays on the Jewish Communist Movement in the English-Speaking World in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Matthew B. Hoffman and Henry F. Srebrnik (New York: SUNY Press, 2016), 227–8.

3 Percy S. Cohen, *Jewish Radicals and Radical Jews* (London: Academic Press, 1980); Marjorie N. Feld, *Nations Divided: American Jews and the Struggle over Apartheid* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Alain Brossat and Sylvie Klingberg, *Revolutionary Yiddishland: A History of Jewish Radicalism* (Verso Books, 2016); Daniel Renshaw, *Socialism and the Diasporic "Other": A Comparative Study of Irish Catholic and Jewish Radical and Communal Politics in East London, 1889–1912* (Liverpool University Press, 2018); Sebastian Kunze and Frank Jacob,

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this phenomenon in a Jewish historical experience of persecution and marginalization, as well as the influence of socialist and other radical ideologies in Eastern Europe.⁴ Without rejecting existing explanations, this article highlights the profound and enduring influence of Zionist-socialist youth movements on Jewish South Africans coming of age during apartheid. Membership in these youth movements introduced Jewish South African youth to a form of leftist radicalism, but at the same time, it worked to direct this radicalism to non-domestic concerns. Nevertheless, members of these youth movements internalized this blend of radicalism and escapism in diverse ways. As this article illustrates, some came to view the Zionist-socialist imperative as a distinctive radical trajectory that held implications for South Africa's domestic realities as well.

Radicalism, in its apartheid-era context, is typically defined as leftist thought or activism that sought actively and fundamentally to defy the existing racist system, including through unlawful means.⁵ South African radical activists and the common historiography of South African political movements have tended to present radicalism and Zionism at two opposing edges.⁶ Scholars do not typically emphasize the lingering influence of youthful Zionist-socialism on individuals who formulated anti-apartheid stances.⁷ This study, however, situates Zionist-socialist youth movements in relation to the various traditions of South African radicalism. It suggests that opposition to apartheid might have taken

"Introduction: Thoughts on Jewish Radicalism as a Phenomenon of Global Modernity", in *Jewish Radicalisms: Historical Perspectives on a Phenomenon of Global Modernity*, ed. Sebastian Kunze and Frank Jacob (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019), 1–22.

4 Saks, "Jews and Communism in South Africa", 230–31, summarizes some of these explanations; see also Israel and Adams, "That Spells Trouble"; Gideon Shimoni, "Accounting for Jewish Radicals in South Africa", in Shain and Mendelsohn, *Memories, Realities and Dreams*, 96–162. From a global perspective see Kunze and Jacob, "Introduction"; Cohen, *Jewish Radicals*.

5 For the distinction between "radical" and "liberal" opposition to apartheid see Joshua N. Lazerson, *Against the Tide: Whites in the Struggle against Apartheid* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 6–8; Shimoni, *Community and Conscience*, 74–5.

6 Joe Slovo and Helena Dolny, *Slovo: The Unfinished Autobiography* (Randburg: Ravan Press; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995), 22, 31; Baruch Hirson, *Revolutions in My Life* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1995), 133–7.

7 Shimoni, "Accounting for Jewish Radicals"; Baruch Hirson, *A History of the Left in South Africa: Writings of Baruch Hirson* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 103; Hirson, *Revolutions in My Life*, 94; see also Feld, *Nations Divided*, 37; Chaim Shur, *Ha-Shomer ha-tsa'ir be-erets ha-apartheid: sipur ha-Shomer ha-tsa'ir bi-Derom Afrikah, 1935–1970* (Giv'at Havivah: Yad Ya'ari, 1999). Former members of movements wrote virtually all the histories of Jewish youth movements in South Africa.

different forms within Zionist frameworks without necessarily resulting in a rupture between Zionism and radicalism.⁸

From the 1930s, Zionist-socialist youth movements introduced thousands of young Jewish South Africans to socialist ideas largely unfamiliar to them until then. These movements offered and legitimized a discursive framework that allowed young people to explore radical thought, otherwise rarely available (or legal) after the establishment of apartheid in the late 1940s. As a result, several members of these movements joined anti-apartheid groups, some of whom even gained prominence in the liberation struggle. Others chose to focus on more moderate activism – often called “liberal” – to bring change to South Africa. But apart from the few who redirected their attention from Zionist imperatives to domestic South African activism (whether in the “liberal” or the “radical” forms), other members regarded the Zionist-socialist message as a radical option to disrupt their communal and personal relationship with apartheid.

True, the Zionist-socialist agenda diverted youth efforts away from the South African context and anti-apartheid activism. To some extent, Zionism provided Jewish youth with a path to evade moral dilemmas regarding their roles in South Africa’s racial order.⁹ However, many young South African Jews truly believed that Zionist-socialism, with its emphasis on *aliyah* (immigration to Israel) and a collectivist lifestyle on a kibbutz in Israel (*Chalutzit*), was their most effective way to change realities radically, defy apartheid, and assert a form of generational insubordination, while minimizing harm to their families and communities, who deeply feared the antisemitic potential of Afrikaner nationalism. This path was not without a price. The movements’ Zionist-socialism demanded that they give up their privileged and comfortable life in South Africa for far harsher material conditions in Israel, sometimes putting their own lives in danger by joining the Israeli army or living in the Israeli periphery.¹⁰ *Aliyah* was

8 For the U.S. case see Tal Elmaliach, “Jewish Radicalism as Liminal Space: HaShomer HaTza’ir between Zionism and the New Left, 1967–1973”, in Kunze and Jacob, *Jewish Radicalisms*, 181–210.

9 Robert G. Weisbord, “The Dilemma of South African Jewry”, *Journal of Modern African Studies* 5, no. 2 (1967): 233–41.

10 It seems that 39 South Africans were killed in action or during service in the IDF (Israeli Defence Force) in 1948–73; this does not include death caused by terror attacks and may exclude soldiers who did not join the IDF as volunteers from abroad; see Henry Katzew, *South Africa’s 800: The Story of South African Volunteers in Israel’s War of Birth* (Ra’anana, Israel: South African Zionist Federation, 2003), 7–8.

hardly an easy and safe way out, as some observers assumed.¹¹

Yet even some of those who turned their energies towards Israel still found ways to articulate their resentment of the system they despised. This study identifies a set of youth behaviours as “petty acts of defiance” against the apartheid system, drawing on the growing scholarly understanding that resistance to oppressive regimes may typically take “everyday forms . . . [that] avoid any direct, symbolic confrontation with authority”.¹² Rarely supported from “above”, these acts were how some Zionist-socialist youth, inspired by the values taught in their movements, bridged their anti-apartheid sentiments with Zionism.

Based on oral and textual sources, this article explores the process of politicization in these youth movements. It contextualizes the choices and dilemmas young Jewish South Africans faced in constructing their political identities, and explores how and why they viewed Zionist-socialism as a radical path. The publications of the movements’ leadership and *chanichim* (members) reveal power dynamics and struggles within these movements, whose ideologies were never entirely stable or uniform. Their magazines, for example, were platforms for debates and criticism including of the movements’ approach. Correspondence between the movements and their headquarters in Israel was also invaluable, as were dozens of oral interviews, conducted by the author and others.¹³ Naturally, histories of ordinary youth are often under-documented, especially in repressive regimes and in anxious communities. Zionist-socialist youth used written materials carefully and usually discussed many politically sensitive issues behind closed doors. Additionally, youth radicalization in the movements was not necessarily a top-down process of indoctrinating passive *chanichim*. The movements absorbed Zionist-socialist ideas and

11 Shur, *Ha-Shomer ha-tsa’ir*, 74, implies this: “to some extent, going on Aliyah and realizing oneself in the kibbutz, despite the difficulty and the disconnection . . . was easier” than opposing apartheid.

12 James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), xv–xvi. Subaltern studies scholars use “petty acts of defiance” in order to complicate a narrow view of resistance in the colonial context; see Frederick Cooper, “Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History”, *American Historical Review* 99, no. 5 (1994): 1532.

13 While these movements consisted of both young men and women, the interviews primarily involved male participants. However, both male and female interviewees held similar perspectives on the topic under investigation. Gender dynamics in these youth movements remain a captivating and largely unstudied area, an opportunity for future research.

models from outside, primarily from Israel, but gave them new meanings and local interpretations. Nonetheless, interviews conducted or memoirs written after the demise of apartheid risk apologetics and glorification of the youth's past. Capturing these complex historical realities and dilemmas required the combination of sources in order to offer a broader picture of a generation full of anxieties and dreams, restraints and privileges.

Zionist-socialist youth movements in the South African context

By the 1960s, the two Zionist-socialist youth movements in South Africa were Habonim and Hashomer Hatzair (HH, the Young Guard). Both were established in South Africa in the first half of the 1930s. Whereas HH remained small numerically (at its peak it had about 200 members),¹⁴ Habonim achieved rapid and decisive success. Shortly after its founding in the early 1930s, it had become the dominant Zionist youth movement in South Africa, surpassing others across the political spectrum. It absorbed smaller movements – most prominently the Zionist-socialist Dror (in 1959) and the liberal Bnei-Zion (1961) – and the South African government officially recognized it as a youth movement akin to the Boy Scouts.¹⁵ Each year during the 1960s, 3,500–5,000 of South Africa's 23,000 school-age Jews were Habonim members, a number that constituted 55–70 per cent of Jewish youth movement participation.¹⁶ By 1970, when Habonim celebrated its fortieth anniversary, about 35,000–40,000 young Jewish South Africans had passed through its ranks.¹⁷

Until the mid-1940s, Habonim and HH held different ideological stances. Habonim was a non-political, “mildly Zionist” Jewish scout

¹⁴ Shur, *Ha-Shomer ha-tsa'ir*, 127.

¹⁵ Gideon Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism: The South African Experience (1910–1967)* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1980), 261–2.

¹⁶ Norman Lourie, “The Beginnings in South Africa”, 1970; from Dave Bloom, personal archive; “Habonim celebrates”, *Sunday Times* (South Africa), 29 Nov. 1970, 81; Gideon Shimoni, “Ninety Years of Habonim-Dror SA: A Short History” (unpublished, personal archive, 2020), 8; Ichud Habonim Haolami, “Daf Informatsiya”, 6 Nov. 1962, 15, item 11-11/6/3, 306922, Habonim Collection, Youth Movements Archive, Yad Tabenkin Archives (hereafter, YTA), Ramat Efal, Israel; Shimoni, *Community and Conscience*, 117. Data for 1964 and 1966 exists in the Israel State Archive (hereafter, ISA), 00071706.81.D6.Co.C6, 3992/17. In 1969, a South African Zionist Federation commission found that there were 3,614 members in Habonim and 219 in HH; “Report of the Special Commission . . .”, 8 Feb. 1969, (8)117.31, Yad Yaari Archives (hereafter, YYA), Giva'at Haviva, Israel.

¹⁷ “Habonim celebrates”, 81.

organization with British origins.¹⁸ HH was fiercely Marxist, pro-Soviet, and proactively Zionist, representing Eastern European traditions of radicalism. HH compelled its alumni to go on *aliyah* and “realize themselves” on a kibbutz in Palestine. In the 1930s and 1940s, HH members frequently socialized with non-Zionist radical movements and groupings, such as the Young Communist League.¹⁹ As early as 1938, HH hosted *shlichim* (emissaries) from kibbutzim to facilitate these ideological ties and its members’ *aliyah*.²⁰ In the postwar years, however, Habonim gradually moved closer to HH, emerging as an avowedly Zionist-socialist movement that promoted *chalutzik aliyah* (“pioneering immigration” to kibbutzim).

Motivated by postwar utopianism as well as Israel’s independence in 1948 and the role of the labour movement in it, the generation that came of age in the mid- and late 1940s was a major force pushing Habonim in this *chalutzik* direction. Various groups of *chanichim* and *madrichim* (instructors) adopted Zionist-socialist symbols, values, and practices, urging the movement’s leadership to follow suit and adapt. In this period, Habonim inaugurated an older age group, *shomrim* (aged 16–18), aiming to produce “pioneers” for Israel’s kibbutzim. Zionist-socialist symbols were adopted: the blue shirt replaced the scout-like khaki uniforms for the older groups, and *Techezakana*, a song associated with the Zionist Labour movement, became the unofficial anthem, while some chapters also sang the *Internationale* at their meetings.²¹ To reinforce this new ideological direction, *shlichim* from Israel were invited to support the movement, and an agricultural *hachshara* (training farm) was established to prepare the members for *aliyah*.²² Although always fewer than had been hoped by Israeli Zionists and local youth leaders, by the end of the 1960s several thousand Habonim members travelled to Israel for varying

18 “Looking Back”, Yovel ha-20 (“the 20th anniversary”), 1951, 39, item 308602, 11-11/9/5, YTA.

19 Paul Joseph, *Slumbony from the Golden City* (London: Merlin Press, 2018), 233; Slovo and Dolny, *Slovo*, 22.

20 Nahum Snek to Gideon Shimoni, 19 May 1986, (24)7, Oral History Archive, Hebrew University. The most comprehensive history of HH in South Africa is Shur, *Ha-Shomer ha-tsa’ir*.

21 BC 785 A Habonim Archive (scan 4), 1951, UCT Special Collections. On singing the *Internationale* see Frankie Klaff and David Rothschild, interview with the author, 9 April 2022; see also Pogrund, *War of Words*, 36; Mickey Korzennik, *The Journey is the Teacher: The Artist and his Work* (Luipaardsvlei, South Africa: New Standard Printing, 1998), 170.

22 Shimoni, “Ninety Years of Habonim-Dror SA”, 4; “Looking Back”, Yovel ha-20, 39.

EDUCATIONAL AIMS

CHUD HABONIM aims at moulding the character of Zionist Youth, by promoting their Spiritual, mental and physical development; at making them aware of their responsibilities as citizens of the country in which they live; at educating them to a thorough appreciation of their Jewish heritage, and instilling in them an active interest in the State of Israel and particularly in the Hebrew language; at presenting them with the challenge of chalutz aliyah; at imbuing them with a spirit of friendliness towards all races and creeds and kindness towards all living creatures.

1 "Aims of Habonim", 1961. Yad Tabenkin Archive, Ramat Efal, Israel

periods of time.²³ Some of them settled in a handful of Habonim-inclined kibbutzim or volunteered for the Israeli army.²⁴ As part of this leftwards turn, Habonim integrated the principle of "imbuing [its members] with a spirit of friendliness towards all races and creeds" into its official "Aims of the Movement", a bold statement given the intensifying apartheid legislation.²⁵ By 1951, even the rival HH had admitted that Habonim was getting "closer to the original conception of Chalutzit", hoping for a future "creation of a United Chalutz Front [between the movements] in this country".²⁶ By the 1960s, HH observers noted that practically and theoretically there was no difference between the two movements in their orientation towards Zionism, and Habonim was "no less chalutzic" than HH.²⁷

While Habonim was moving left, HH had to disguise its revolutionary messages in response to developments in South Africa. Under the 1950 Suppression of Communism Act, South African authorities could criminalize anything loosely resembling or supporting communism. Purportedly, the state closely monitored HH until the movement's last days because of its members' past links to Trotskyist and communist

23 Rebeca Rajjman, *South African Jews in Israel: Assimilation in Multigenerational Perspective* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 72–4, estimates that about half of South African immigrants to Israel in the 1960s had been members of Habonim.

24 On the prominence of Zionist-socialist youth in volunteering in the IDF during the Suez Crisis see Feb. 1957, 00071706.81.D3.91.CD, 1-5560/15, ISA.

25 "Recommendations from the Hanhagah", 31 Aug. 1951, BC 785 A Habonim Archive, UCT Special Collections.

26 "Looking Back", Yovel ha-20, 1951.

27 Israel Ellman to Hanhagah Elyona (Supreme Leadership), 9 Sept. 1965, (38)111.31, YYA.

activities.²⁸ The anti-communist legislation spread anxiety among Jewish parents and community leaders, whose support and funding HH desperately needed. In response, it concealed its Marxism. In June 1950, HH “cleared [their] offices [in Johannesburg] of any ‘suspected’ material . . . and had to destroy a lot”.²⁹ Instructions from Israel dictated that the movement should work as usual but in regard to “certain obvious issues”, it would be “better to prefer the oral over the written”, and keep it “within the movement’s walls”.³⁰ Heini Bornstein, the *shaliach* (emissary) from Israel in 1954–57, attested that they “couldn’t communicate the uniqueness of HH’s socialist worldview to the *chanichim*, [since they] would tell everything to their parents who would instantly and undoubtedly forbid their children from participation in the movement”.³¹ This caution created a dilemma for HH *madrachim* and *shlichim*. Some worried that the post-1950 watered-down Marxism would produce “half-baked kibbutzniks”, and others were frustrated that they could not talk with *chanichim* about the more radical ideas that “distinguished the movement from Habonim”.³²

HH’s Marxist orientation was nonetheless still evident during the 1950s. The movement received Stalin’s writings and East German educational materials by post, it held commemorations to the late Soviet dictator, and it defended the U.S.S.R. during the Slánský Trial and the Doctors’ Plot when the local Jewish community was agitated by Stalinist antisemitism.³³ Throughout the 1960s, and to the chagrin of some *shlichim* who feared a state crackdown, HH received ideological material from Mapam (United Workers Party), an Israeli Zionist-Marxist (often pro-Soviet) party from which the movement claimed to be independent.³⁴ The movement’s *chalutzik* beliefs were firmer than Habonim’s, emphasizing anti-bourgeois

28 Shur, *Ha-Shomer ha-tsa’ir*; see also letters of 1969–70, 7-83.2(13), YYA.

29 Aryeh Gutelevsky (Johannesburg) to Hanhagah Elyona (Israel), 28 June 1950, (3)75.31, YYA; Mazkir [“Secretary”, probably Mickey Korzennik] (Johannesburg) to Hanhagah Elyona (Israel), 17 May 1950, *ibid.*

30 Hanhagah Elyona (Israel) to Gutelevsky (Johannesburg), 25 July 1950, (3)75.31, YYA.

31 Heini Bornstein, *Mi-Bazel ’ad Lahavot ha-Bashan: derekh hayim* (Israel: Moreshet Yad Ya’ari, 2011), 136.

32 Mickey (Johannesburg) to Hanhaga Elyona (Israel), 5 Nov. 1950, (3)75.31, YYA; Avri Shefts (Cape Town) to Hanhagah Elyona (Israel), 18 April 1966, (32)111.31, YYA.

33 Dov Futeran (Johannesburg) to Hanhaga Elyona (Israel), 24 July 1953, (6)142.31, YYA; correspondence between Johannesburg and Israel, February–April 1953, *ibid.*; Gutelevsky (Johannesburg) to Hanhagah Elyona (Israel), 18 May 1951, (3)75.31, YYA.

34 Baruch Reitstein (Johannesburg) to Hanhagah Elyona (Israel), 19 Jan. 1970, (13)83.2-7, YYA.

values and compelling members to emigrate to kibbutzim. In 1953, a letter from the HH Supreme Leadership in Israel instructed Johannesburg that “most strictly we [should] maintain our loyalty to *chalutzik* Zionism . . . and to revolutionary socialism, with the USSR marching at its forefront”.³⁵

It was easier for Habonim, officially a scouting movement, to conceal radical ideas behind its public facade. Officially, its socialism was mild and vague, hidden by elusive “pioneering” terms, usually in Hebrew. Striving to protect its mainstream status, Habonim opposed association with HH, rejecting several offers to merge.³⁶ Habonim’s success under apartheid was largely due to the movement’s cautious approach to politicization, which was radical enough to attract youth but not too radical to threaten their wellbeing or the community’s safety. In an era of rising government oppression, redirecting young radical energy to the ideas of *aliyah* and kibbutz did not seriously challenge South Africa’s domestic system, and thus was often tolerated. As the following pages show, it was Habonim that could best serve Jewish youth’s need to express rebellious tendencies without undermining their apartheid-era privileges as whites.

Becoming Zionist-socialists: radicalizing youth

Most Jewish South Africans lacked strong leftist convictions before joining Zionist-socialist youth movements. By the 1950s, the community was increasingly middle class; few were growing up in working-class immigrant neighbourhoods. The atmosphere in which they grew up – family, schools, religious institutions – was often apprehensive of radical discourse, especially as the crackdown on “communists” intensified. The few youths who held strong radical convictions, usually those born to communist parents, tended not to join Zionist institutions in the first place.³⁷ Most young recruits to Zionist-socialist movements were driven by social and emotional motives, such as the desire to socialize with peers and especially the other sex, Zionist sentiments, and Jewish identification.³⁸ In the 1930s and 1940s, the fear of antisemitism from pro-

35 Hanhagah Elyona (Israel) to Johannesburg, 19 April 1953, (6)142.31, YYA.

36 Correspondence between Ian Browde and Baruch Reitstein, 1970, 7-83.2(13), YYA.

37 See Tom Lodge, *Red Road to Freedom: A History of the South African Communist Party 1921–2021* (Rochester, NY: James Currey, Boydell & Brewer, 2022).

38 For social reasons see Hirson, *Revolutions in My Life*, 88–102; Hosea Jaffe, *L’apartheid intorno a me: autobiografia* (Milan: Jaca Books, 2018), 53; Steven Aschheim, interview in Hellman and Talmud, *Ideally Speaking*, 114; Arnie Friedman, interview in *ibid.*, 146; Gideon Shimoni, in *ibid.*, 261; Anton Harber, interview in Suttner, *Cutting through the Mountain*,

Nazi and nationalist Afrikaner groups and the news about the Holocaust also played a role in joining Zionist-socialist movements.³⁹ South African Jewry, including the youth, were deeply aware of the antisemitic tendencies among the Afrikaner nationalists propagating apartheid, and viewed the prospects of local anti-Jewish persecution as a real threat.⁴⁰ Accordingly, Habonim and HH members who grew up in the 1930s and 1940s tended to highlight Nazism (and local pro-Nazi manifestations) and the Holocaust when giving their reasons for joining these movements, believing that with a Jewish state, “antisemitism would be laid to rest”.⁴¹ In the postwar years, Israel’s establishment sparked a Zionist fervour in South Africa’s Jewish population, profoundly influencing the younger generation. Tzvi Pantanowitz recalled that when the State of Israel was declared, he “thought [Jews] would all rise up . . . in the Diaspora, hold each other’s hands, and march across the border to Palestine”, a notion that led him to join Habonim.⁴² Later Israeli wars, and especially the Six-Day War (1967), were similarly influential for young Jews.⁴³ Joining HH was more often motivated by leftist inclinations, but many still lacked a strong socialist background at the moment of joining.⁴⁴ Sometimes, HH was a second movement for youngsters already exposed to some socialist and *chalutzik* ideas in other Zionist movements.⁴⁵

Habonim and HH introduced their members to more sophisticated ideological education when they were 12–14 years old, culminating in a more intense phase when they were 15–16. Then, deeper discussions

164; Daniel Browde, *The Relatively Public Life of Jules Browde* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2016), 273–4; Steve Blass, interview with the author, 19 April 2021; Leon Fine, interview with the author, 13 Nov. 2020.

39 E.g. Ytzhak Ben-Hurin, “Haolam Be’Shachor Lavan”, *Maariv*, *Sof Shavua*, 31 Jan. 1986, 10–13; Zvi Elhyani, ed., *Goldreikh deh Shalit: makom* (Herzliya: Babel, 2020), 40–41.

40 Shirli Gilbert, “Jews and the Racial State: Legacies of the Holocaust in Apartheid South Africa, 1945–60”, *Jewish Social Studies* 16, no. 3 (2010): 32–64; Milton Shain, *A Perfect Storm* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2015); Roni Mikel-Arieli, *Remembering the Holocaust in a Racial State: Holocaust Memory in South Africa from Apartheid to Democracy (1948–1994)* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2022).

41 Hirson, *Revolutions in My Life*, 89; see also Browde, *Relatively Public Life*, 273; Ben-Hurin, “Haolam Be’Shachor Lavan”, 10–13; Elhyani, *Goldreikh deh Shalit*, 40–41.

42 Tzvi Pantanowitz, interview in Hellman and Talmud, *Ideally Speaking*, 245.

43 Johnny Copelyn, interview in *ibid.*, 39.

44 See Hirson, *Revolutions in My Life*, 92–3.

45 Hirson moved to HH from a centrist movement; see also Moshe Ben-Ami, interview in Hellman and Talmud, *Ideally Speaking*, 120–21; Arthur Goldreich, interview with Gideon Shimoni, 1972, 16–17, Oral History Archive, (24)3, Hebrew University.

about Zionist-socialist ideals became prevalent. Many members claimed that membership in the youth movement was the most enriching experience in their adolescence, considering the dearth of intellectual stimulation in apartheid-era schools or the narrowmindedness of the traditional *cheders*. Jules Browde remembered Habonim as the first place where he discussed “ideas about the world and the future”, and decades later he still listed his first Habonim instructor as one of the three most influential people in his life (next to his father and his wife).⁴⁶ Manie Kagan noticed that his “intellectual awakening began when I joined Habonim”.⁴⁷ David Rothschild noted that it was the only forum where youngsters could get a “sense of ethics and morality” in the grim realities of apartheid.⁴⁸ Sylvia Schrire, who later dedicated her life to the education of black South Africans, noted that Habonim was “where [she] learnt how dreadful the apartheid regime was”.⁴⁹ Many heard about socialist thought for the first time while in the movements. Baruch Hirson’s HH experience turned him, and the other *chanichim*, into “revolutionary socialist(s) with a well-shaped world outlook”, introducing them to “a wide range of topics, embracing everything from politics to philosophy and psychology”.⁵⁰ Gideon Shimoni remembers that his “first reading of the Communist Manifesto” was in Habonim, and it “made a tremendous impact” on him.⁵¹ For Anton Harber and his peers, Habonim was where one first “heard about socialism and what it meant”.⁵² These movements’ Zionist-socialism suited the youth’s postwar *zeitgeist*. Vivian Rakoff of HH recalled the “utopian sense of possibility” during the second half of the 1940s, and a notion that “out of the ashes of the war there was this dream[:] the totally utopian vision of a... never-never land – the kibbutz”.⁵³

Habonim’s shift towards *chalutzik aliyah* was strengthened in the 1950s as more *madrichim* attended the Machon l’Madriceh Hutz La’Aretz (Institute for Youth Leaders from Abroad, Machon for short) run by the

46 Browde, *Relatively Public Life*, 274.

47 Manfred Kagan, interview in Hellman and Talmud, *Ideally Speaking*, 300.

48 Rothschild, interview with the author, 9 April 2022.

49 Jonathan Ancer, *Mensches in the Trenches: Jewish Foot Soldiers in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle* (Johannesburg: Batya Bricker, 2021), 170.

50 Hirson, *Revolutions in My Life*, 100–06.

51 Gideon Shimoni, interview in Hellman and Talmud, *Ideally Speaking*, 262. The Communist Manifesto was also read in HH during the 1950s: Latifa (Johannesburg) to Hanhaga Elyona (Israel), 9 June 1953, (6)142.31, YVA.

52 Anton Harber, interview in Suttner, *Cutting through the Mountain*, 164.

53 Vivian Rakoff, interview in Hellman and Talmud, *Ideally Speaking*, 326–8.

Jewish Agency in Jerusalem. The months at Machon were formative, “the best propaganda machine ever invented”, as Colin Kessel remembers it.⁵⁴ Machon graduates often became influential Habonim functionaries throughout the 1960s. Their strong progressive bent encountered deepening political repression in South Africa during this period. As domestic oppression intensified, movement leaders had to conceal documented references to radical thought, including the word “socialism”. Often without a written trail, older age groups and *madrichim* criticized apartheid in closed-door discussions.⁵⁵ “There was never a question of who’s bad and who’s good” when discussing apartheid, says Habonim’s Colin Kessel.⁵⁶ Out of caution, discussions about apartheid were indirect, focusing on general anti-racist values. They “talked about apartheid without talking about apartheid”, remembers Habonim’s Erroll Hackner.⁵⁷ Activities officially dedicated to antisemitism, for example, were a convenient platform for discussing domestic anti-black racism.⁵⁸ HH delved deeper into anti-colonial thought: for example, in the 1950s it taught about Ghandism, the Chinese Revolution, “Stalin’s and Lenin’s theory of the national and colonial questions”, and held a “two-day seminar about colonial peoples’ struggle against capitalism”.⁵⁹ Haim Shur, a late 1940s *shaliach*, claimed that in HH *chanichim* “learned – slowly – how to treat black people as equal people because they read there the right books of the great men of socialism, and they internalized what they read, and started to understand that the blacks in South Africa are ‘the working masses’”.⁶⁰ Indeed, statements including “there is no such thing today as a pure race . . . there is no basis for the fascist race theory . . . the value of man is not determined according to his race” appeared in the HH seminars’ curricula.⁶¹

54 Colin Kessel, interview with the author, 13 April 2021; see also Jack Sobel, interview with the author, 16 Nov. 2020. *Aleh*, Oct. 1967, 11, item 308651, 11-11/14/1, YTA, states that 65% of Machon attendees ended up going on *aliyah*.

55 Ian Lucas, interview with the author, 28 Oct. 2021; Shimoni, *Community and Conscience*, 118.

56 Colin Kessel, interview with the author.

57 Erroll Hackner, interview with the author, 6 Nov. 2020.

58 Raymond Kessel, interview with the author, 11 Jan. 2021; Klaff and Rothschild, interview with the author; see also curriculum from the 1960s, item 308609, 11-11/9/12, YTA.

59 Dov Futeran (Johannesburg) to Hanhagah Elyona (Israel), 10 Oct. 1953, (6)142.31, YYA; “Tochnit Avoda: Gedud Tzofim Bogrim”, 1955–56, (3)3.17-2, YYA.

60 Shur, *Ha-Shomer ha-tsa’ir*, 73.

61 “Anthropology: Tochnit Tzofim Tzeirim, Hashomer Hatzair South Africa”, June 1948,

The Sharpeville Massacre (March 1960) shook many young progressives in the country, and fuelled radicalization in Habonim. As hubs for progressive intellectual discussions, Habonim and HH were often the first sites where Jewish youth, otherwise usually apathetic to non-white experiences, grappled with the consequences of apartheid.⁶² Post-Sharpeville, Rabbi Ben Isaacson taught his Habonim *chanichim* in the conservative town of Bloemfontein that “racism is not ‘in’ for Jews. Or for anybody. But certainly not for Jews”.⁶³ He made his *chanichim* “think about the implications of living in a society based on discrimination”.⁶⁴ In 1962, *Aleh*, Habonim’s magazine, published an editorial by Woolf Mankowitz. It poignantly stated – without mentioning the words South Africa or apartheid – that “To claim that we must be neutral in a world of murder, injustice, hate and ugliness is tantamount to approval of these social evils. In any country the person who disassociates himself from the ruling regime on the grounds of political neutrality, in actual fact lends his support to the regime . . . he who is silent in an immoral world accepts that immorality.”⁶⁵

Yet the increasing repression in the post-Sharpeville era compelled the movements to conceal any potential evidence of “subversive” tendencies. Throughout the 1960s, the South African authorities closely monitored Habonim and HH, to the concern of Israeli diplomats and the Jewish communal leadership.⁶⁶ Habonim’s *hanhagah* in Johannesburg requested Bernie Stein, who oversaw Habonim’s Bloemfontein chapter, to remove any leftist literature from his office.⁶⁷ Ben Isaacson recalled receiving “instructions . . . to burn all documents and records because the security police were raiding Zionist Youth offices”, and especially “to destroy all our documents concerning the teaching of non-racialism at our seminars”.⁶⁸ During that time, direct references to socialism were lessened, although local instructors still retained some autonomy to go

9, item 110657, 3-2-13/000002/000002, YYA.

62 Ron Lapid, interview in Hellman and Talmud, *Ideally Speaking*, 219–20; Sobel, interview with the author.

63 Ben Isaacson, interview in Suttner, *Cutting through the Mountain*, 577.

64 Ben Isaacson, “Struggle Rabbi: My Story”, personal archive, 37.

65 Woolf Mankowitz, “Imperatives of our Education”, *Aleh*, Aug. 1962, 6, item 308651, 11-11/14/1, YTA.

66 Jerusalem to Johannesburg and Pretoria, 11 Jan. 1967, 00071706.81.D7.03.A4, °-12/2, ISA.

67 Bernie Stein, interview with the author, 19 Nov. 2020.

68 Isaacson, interview in Suttner, *Cutting through the Mountain*, 577; Isaacson, “Struggle Rabbi”, 38.

beyond the formal curricula. John Comaroff, a *madrich* in Cape Town's Habonim in the 1960s, taught his group Marxism, urging them to conceptualize apartheid in terms of labour control.⁶⁹ One of his *chanichim*, the future post-apartheid judge Dennis Davis, was first introduced to Marxist thought under Comaroff's instruction.⁷⁰

During this period, members of the movements tended to consider Zionism, Israel, and the kibbutz (terms they used interchangeably) as "the epitome of progress, equality . . . the very opposite of the South African experience".⁷¹ Arabs were seen as the aggressors in the conflict in the Middle East, and therefore interest in Palestinians or criticism of their treatment were virtually absent until long after 1967. Israel was imagined as a symbol of democratic socialism and collective redemption via labour, anti-materialism, and anti-individualism. "We were lefties", recalled HH's Mickey Korzennik; "we envisaged a new society based on the equality of man. The kibbutz was the vehicle for the synthesis of all these things".⁷² In a speech in 1964, Raymond Lipschitz encapsulated how Habonim members imagined the kibbutz as the opposite of the grim realities Jewish youth knew from South Africa:

[The kibbutz] is a society whose nature strives for the complete harmony of the individual and group . . . and the constant deepening of human ethical relations. It is a society – the only one in the world – where social equality is a complete reality. The sick and aged are provided for, there is no unemployment and everyone whether his father in Johannesburg is a millionaire or whether he himself fled to Israel without a cent, everyone has enough to eat, enough clothing and adequate housing . . . There people are judged not by the fashionableness of their clothing, or the size of their father's car or their vital statistics, but by the basic and natural values – tolerance, responsibility, attitude to life, work and other people. It is a society that has perhaps the most democratic form of government in practice in the world . . .⁷³

For the youth, the act of *aliyah* was the connection between reality and utopia. "Believing in social justice and equality of opportunity", Habonim

69 John Comaroff, interview with the author, 7 Feb. 2022.

70 Tor Krever, "A Life in Human Rights: A Conversation with Dennis Davis", *London Review of International Law* 9, no. 1 (1 March 2021): 138.

71 Aschheim, interview in Hellman and Talmud, *Ideally Speaking*, 117; Meir Jaffe, interview in *ibid.*, 183.

72 Korzennik, *Journey is the Teacher*, 169.

73 Raymond Lipschitz, in Minutes of Johannesburg Kinus, 12 Sept. 1964, Protokolim, item306895, 11-11_1_1, YTA.

“has rejected the way of the society which we see around us [in South Africa], and has accepted group living”, as several individuals preparing for aliyah declared.⁷⁴ HH members who were among the founders of Kibbutz Shoval in the late 1940s declared that their motivation for migrating to a kibbutz was “to become workers [and] prepare to take an active part in the class struggle”.⁷⁵

Zionist-socialism and intergenerational conflict under apartheid

In the 1950s and 1960s, youth Zionism was associated with the Jewish counterculture in various countries.⁷⁶ However, in South Africa, the Zionist-socialist message entailed a particularly sharp critique of Jewish mainstream social, economic, and political behaviours. Given the high living standards Jewish youth typically enjoyed as whites under apartheid, the youth movements’ attack against materialism and bourgeois lifestyle seemed especially radical.

For Jewish middle-class families, manual labour and rejecting academic study were almost subversive. Labour was rigorously racialized and Jewish youth was expected to seek a respectable and profitable professional path through higher education. As a local HH leader explained to her Israeli counterparts, “SA bred youth... have no conception of [physical] work”.⁷⁷ Indeed, much intergenerational friction revolved around the realm of labour.⁷⁸ Parents wanted their children to pursue higher education and careers rather than become agricultural labourers in Israel. Arnie Friedman’s parents were unhappy with his desire to learn “something useful” for the young State of Israel before his aliyah. Arnie became the sole white bricklayer in a company in Cape Town. His “dad would not hear of it”. During one family conversation, his father said, “I think you people are crazy. Look how difficult things are [in Israel], such a difficult life”, and his grandmother kept asking in Yiddish, “is there anything to eat there?”⁷⁹ Similarly, Meir Jaffe gave up his plan to study engineering to

74 Aleh, June–July 1959, 4, item 308651, 11-11/14/1, YTA.

75 “Towards the first South African Kibbutz”, n.d. (c. 1950), 8, (3)4.17-2, YYA.

76 For the U.S. see Feld, *Nations Divided*, 42–3.

77 Latifa (Johannesburg) to Hanhaga Elyona (Israel), 5 Oct. 1953, (6)142.31, YYA.

78 Wolfie [Woolf] Mankowitz, interview in Hellman and Talmud, *Ideally Speaking*, 227; interviews in *ibid.* with Aschheim, 108–9; Janina Kahn-Horwitz, 188; Sam Fanaroff, 292–3; Ronnie Miller, 84; Martin Kessel, interview with the author, 11 Nov. 2020; Sobel, interview with the author; Jules Milner, interview with the author, 17 Nov. 2020.

79 Friedman, in Hellman and Talmud, *Ideally Speaking*, 140–43. Similarly for the parents

become a diesel mechanic, believing that the “kibbutzim needed people with a trade”.⁸⁰ Edward Joffe’s parents insisted he earn an agricultural degree after his *aliyah*. “At least you will be a farmer with a diploma”, they said. Edward was killed in a terror attack in Jerusalem in 1969 while studying for that diploma.⁸¹

Parents were also apprehensive about Israel’s low standards of living and the loss of privilege that *aliyah* would bring. Steve Blass recalled that his father “was shocked that [Steve’s fiancé, Bini] was not going to settle for a big home, a pool and a car in South Africa, which he would have willingly given [the young couple], and that [they] chose to go and live on a kibbutz – in a wooden hut! He didn’t believe that he couldn’t tempt [Bini] to settle for ‘the better life’ like he thought [they] deserved”.⁸² Leon Shaskolsky’s parents feared that by joining a kibbutz when he went on *aliyah* in 1957 he would “waste his life on stubborn idealism”.⁸³ They were not receptive to Leon’s arguments that the idea of the kibbutz gave “validity to words such as equality, fraternity, mutual help, non-exploitation of the other, simplicity, creative work . . . the negation of money as a symbol for man’s value and status”, all values he thought contradicted the ethos of South African society.

Aside from *aliyah* and kibbutz life, parents and youth occasionally clashed over attitudes to apartheid’s political and racial order. Young Jews felt that their parents were generally grateful for the opportunities that being white in South Africa provided.⁸⁴ Yet, many parents believed their whiteness was contested and uncertain, and feared the resurgence of antisemitism which had flourished in the country during the 1930s and 1940s.⁸⁵ The Afrikaners “have another enemy to be obsessed with”, so they leave the Jews alone for now, one parent said.⁸⁶ Benjamin Pogrund’s

of Steve Blass, *Fragments from My Past*, ed. Dina Bookman (Kibbutz Yizrael: Mahut, 2014), 16.

80 Meir Jaffe, interview in Hellman and Talmud, *Ideally Speaking*, 184.

81 Basil Joffe, interview with the author, 23 Aug. 2021.

82 Blass, *Fragments from My Past*, 25.

83 Leon Shaskolsky (later Sheleff) to his parents, May 1958 (in Hebrew), <http://www.sheleff.com/index-53491.cfm> (accessed 19 Oct. 2023); my translation.

84 Hackner, interview with the author; Norman Schwab, interview with the author, 12 Oct. 2021; Sharon and Arnie Kagan, interview with the author, 20 Oct. 2021.

85 The most comprehensive histories of antisemitism in South Africa are Shain, *Perfect Storm*; Milton Shain, *Fascists, Fabricators and Fantasists: Antisemitism in South Africa from 1948 to the Present* (Auckland Park, South Africa: Jacana Media, 2022).

86 Fine, interview with the author.

father reprimanded him: “the Afrikaners have been good to us, why are you causing them troubles?”⁸⁷ Another father thought that South Africa was “heaven”, only for his Habonim son to reply that it was indeed “heaven – for the whites only”.⁸⁸ Aged twelve, another Habonim member confronted a pro-nationalist relative at the Passover Seder: “freedom is for everyone, not only the Jews”, only to be kicked from the dinner table.⁸⁹ The combination of gratitude and fear made parents wary of regime-challenging activities by their children. Socialist activity was especially suspect, as parents knew that Afrikaner antisemitism highlighted the assumed link between Jews and communism.⁹⁰ After the 1950 Suppression of Communism Act, many parents requested HH to remove them from their mailing lists, and community leaders asked the movement to lower its profile.⁹¹ The pressure was so heavy that in the 1950s, HH officials seriously considered moving their activities underground, and in 1971 they succumbed and disbanded the movement.⁹²

Israeli *shlichim* and visitors noticed the luxury and comfort in which South African Jewish youth lived, considering it remarkable within the Jewish diaspora. Accordingly, they deemed the average Jewish South African youth dependent, spoilt, and lacking in confidence, and spending too much time on “sports and entertainment”.⁹³ Reuven Ragolsky, Habonim’s *shaliach*, thought that South African parents were over-controlling since “they remember well what they [had] lacked in their [own less prosperous] childhood”.⁹⁴ Israelis were astonished to find out that most *chanichim* had servants. Heini Bornstein, HH’s *shaliach*, noticed that all *chanichim* in this Marxist youth movement arrived at meetings by car, usually driven by black drivers: “the convoy of cars with their drivers reminded me of footage from cabinet’s meetings”.⁹⁵ Another HH *shaliach*, Aryeh Gutelevsky, noted that “Jewish youth in [South] Africa, more than

87 Benjamin Pogrud, interview with the author, 15 Dec. 2020.

88 Lucas, interview with the author.

89 Ibid.

90 Campbell, “Beyond the Pale”, 117–18.

91 Gutelevsky (Johannesburg) to Hanhaga Elyona (Israel), 22 July 1950; Mazkir [probably Korzennik] (Johannesburg) to Hanhaga Elyona (Israel), 17 May 1950; Gutelevsky (Johannesburg) to Hanhaga Elyona (Israel), 15 Dec. 1952, all in (3)75.31, YYA.

92 Gutelevsky (Johannesburg) to Hanhaga Elyona (Israel), 28 June 1950, (3)75.31, YYA; Shur, *Ha-Shomer ha-tsa’ir*.

93 “Hitrofefut Hametah Hatsioni . . .”, *Davar*, 2 Dec. 1949, 19.

94 Memorial Booklet, 28–30, item 306932, 11-11/7/1, YTA.

95 Bornstein, *Mi-Bazel ‘ad Lahavot ha-Bashan*, 136.

any other place in the world, is educated on moral hypocrisy”, as their parents are “Jews who think of themselves as progressives but are no different [from non-Jews] in their exploitative attitude towards blacks”.⁹⁶ Against this backdrop, Zionist-socialist values of collectivism, being anti-bourgeois, simplicity, and manual labour could disturb local social norms.

Zionist-socialist *chalutzit* challenged intergenerational relations not only within families but also in the broader Jewish community. It caused friction between two generations who held two distinct visions of Zionism. The Jewish establishment in South Africa focused its efforts on fundraising for Israel. For decades, the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) ran the Israel United Appeal (IUA) with exceptional success.⁹⁷ The IUA usually received help from youth movements in these efforts. However, the older generation’s focus on philanthropy upset idealistic youth activists whose notion of *chalutzit* contradicted what they viewed as a capitalist, superficial, and hypocritical brand of Zionism.⁹⁸

HH, especially, criticized what one *shaliach* described as “get[ting] their Zionism done with [donating] a few pounds, and [wishing that] no one would bother them about it” afterwards.⁹⁹ In 1965, one HH member who attended the 29th South African Zionist Conference noted how local Zionism was “made up of Bobbas [grandmas] and Zeidas [grandpas]” who ignored the issue of *aliyah* as they were “merely interested in buying trees or spending Pesach in Israel.”¹⁰⁰ Some in Habonim also decried this approach to Zionism. The movements’ magazines occasionally criticized the so-called “professional Zionists”. Yehuda Lev contrasted them to Habonim’s ideals: “The Professional Zionist . . . is . . . a man who gives a second man money to send a third man to Israel. His friends are usually the second men, very rarely the third.”¹⁰¹ Habonim’s Benzie Segall took

96 Gutelevsky (Johannesburg) to Hanhaga Elyona (Israel), 15 Dec. 1952, (3)75.31, YYA. See similar in reports from Israeli diplomats in South Africa, e.g. 00071706.82.17.97.24, 73-2583/16, 1951, ISA.

97 Shimoni, *Community and Conscience*, 5.

98 Arthur Goldreich, interview with Shimoni, 1972, 22–23, Oral History Archive (24)3, Hebrew University.

99 Gutelevsky [Gilat] to Hanhagah Elyona in Israel, 21 Nov. 1951, in (3)75.31, YYA; Mickey, “An Open Letter to Chaverim of Habonim”, Hashomer Hatzair Special Anniversary Issue, 1951, 19, (3)4.17-2, YYA.

100 Eliezer, *Mishomer Le’Shomer*, Sept. 1965, 4–5, (3)4.17-2, YYA.

101 Yehuda Lev, “The Professional Zionist”, Aug. 1962, 9, item 308651, 11-11/14/1, YTA.

this criticism further, attacking the community's approach during his speech at the 1967 South African Zionist Conference: "For too long have [you] been content to measure the success of Zionist endeavour in this country in rands and cents. For too long, *aliya* has been relegated to a second place in the vast fundraising machine which is the South African Zionist Federation . . . Why is it that South African parents are so reluctant to send their children to the committed Zionist youth movements of this country? Why is it that so few of you at this conference have children in these movements or in Israel?"¹⁰²

Two years later, Habonim's leadership debated whether to help the SAZF fundraise for the IUA. Those who opposed participation in the IUA had the upper hand, arguing that "The idea of collecting money was abhorrent to a youth movement and was not our way of expressing our Zionism. The movement, as a revolutionary force, should not identify with the [Diasporic] attitude to Zionism, which was collecting money. The movement had a responsibility to uphold its definition of Zionism, which was *Aliyah* . . . The movement should, by virtue of its very nature, be anti-establishment and not allow itself to be drawn into the establishment by compromising."¹⁰³

Despite occasional friction, parents and community leaders usually tolerated youth's involvement in Habonim. Beyond their rebelliousness, most Jewish youth still acknowledged their parents' anxieties. Growing up in a close-knit community made young people aware of the sensitivities of being Jewish under apartheid. Given the external pressures and because their "Jewishness was at the very heart of their outlook", the movements' leadership usually maintained a solid relationship with the established community.¹⁰⁴ For example, Habonim's *tochnit* (programme) for its *shomrim* age group drafted in 1961 stressed the importance of ensuring Jewish "survival", and that "Jews [could not] cease to have . . . a special group relationship to each other". Thus, it warned that "when groups of Jews, or even single individuals, proclaim unpopular political ideas (e.g. Communism)" they might threaten the whole community.¹⁰⁵ The

102 Benzie Segall, "The Long Sleep", *Aleh*, Oct. 1967, 2-4, item 308651, 11-11/14/1, YTA.

103 "Minutes of the Hanhagah meeting", 13 Aug. 1969, 2, *Protokolim*, item 306895, 11-11/1/1, YTA.

104 Shimoni, "Accounting for Jewish Radicals", 171.

105 Shimoni, "Jewish Problem", draft of programme for the *shomrim* age group, 1961, personal archive.

smaller and more radical HH, however, struggled to gain legitimacy in the community, and some of its members blamed the Jewish establishment for bringing about its demise.¹⁰⁶

Other aspects of Habonim's ideological educational approach also helped alleviate parents' concerns. Unlike HH, Habonim did not compel its members to become *chalutzim*, and few of its members joined *kibbutzim*. By the mid-1960s, Habonim had conceptualized academic studies as another path to help nation-building and *chalutzit* in Israel.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, Zionist-socialism's mainstream political status in Israel made it easier for parents, community leaders, and the government to accept its legitimacy. Although Habonim was officially "independent", it was commonly associated with Israel's then ruling party, the socialist Mapai (Workers' Party of the Land of Israel).¹⁰⁸ Besides, the South African government preferred left-leaning youth to go on *aliyah* rather than joining the domestic opposition.¹⁰⁹ In other words, Habonim's "Zionism" legitimized its "socialism", allowing it to become one of the largest socialist organizations in South Africa after 1950.

The great debate: activism in Israel or in South Africa?

Given the radical tendencies within the two movements, Zionist-socialist youth faced a deep dissonance. Both Habonim and HH glorified progressive activism. On the one hand, they came to believe that the youth could change society. On the other hand, most of them decided not to get seriously engaged in attempts to reform the political and social order in South Africa. Although most members accepted the official line that "our real work only begins in Israel; what we do in the movement here is but preparation",¹¹⁰ debates and soul-searching were common.

Several assumptions discouraged anti-apartheid political activism. Young Jews generally accepted and echoed their community's anxieties about the vulnerabilities of Jewish existence under apartheid. They often linked it to the Zionist belief that Jews can exercise effective political power only in their own state. Members used historical and contemporary

106 Nahum Snek to Gideon Shimoni, 19 May 1986, Oral History Archive, (24)7, Hebrew University.

107 Leib Golan, "The Kibbutz and the Professional," *Aleh*, Sept. 1963, item 308651, 11-11/14/1, YTA.

108 See Shimoni, "Ninety Years of Habonim-Dror SA", 5.

109 Korzennik, *Journey is the Teacher*, 169-70.

110 "Editorial", *Aleh*, Aug. 1962, 1, item 308651, 11-11/14/1, YTA.



2 The dilemma of the Zionist-socialist youth: “Zionist Youth Movement”, undated. South African Union of Jewish Students Collection, University of Cape Town, D. BC 833

examples to substantiate this approach. Habonim’s Raymond Lipschitz in 1964 evoked the Russian Revolution and the recent war in Algeria to illustrate that after winning, the progressive forces in these conflicts eventually turned against local Jews, despite the latter’s support. He concluded that “Jews shouldn’t interfere in struggles of which they aren’t really part . . . I don’t believe that the Jew is really part of any struggle until he is in a country in which he is the majority.”¹¹¹ In the late 1960s, Jewish South African youth also absorbed the view that in the U.S. African-Americans had ejected Jews from the radical elements in the Civil Rights struggle. *Aleh* published an article by Baruch Reitstein arguing that it was a “classical example” of Jews being unwanted in non-Jewish struggles, and that “the struggle for human betterment must begin within our own people before we teach others how to live”.¹¹² Habonim’s Frankie Klaff summarized these feelings of non-belonging and political frustration: “for the whites we will always be Jews, and for the blacks we will always be whites”.¹¹³

Others worried that local activism could compromise the movements’ highest objective, *chalutzik aliyah*. Accordingly, Zionist-socialist youth

111 Lipschitz in “Minutes of Johannesburg Kinus”, 12 Sept. 1964, Protokolim, item 306895, 11-11/1/1, YTA.

112 Baruch Reitstein, “Youth’s Confrontation with Zionism”, *Aleh*, Aug. 1970, 3–6, item 308651, 11-11/14/1, YTA.

113 Klaff and Rothschild, interview with the author.

often perceived Zionism and anti-apartheid activism to be contradictory. Illegal activity could harm *aliyah* prospects.¹¹⁴ It would jeopardize individuals, distract them from their “real” aim, and worse, put the whole movement in peril.¹¹⁵ Yet, *aliyah* ambitions would undermine anti-apartheid activism. Habonim’s Steve Blass joined the Congress of Democrats (the radical white organization affiliated with the Congress Alliance headed by the African National Congress) in university, but realized that domestic activism was hypocritical because he would already be in Israel “when all hell breaks loose” in South Africa.¹¹⁶

Many felt that the situation in South Africa was hopeless and endless. Based on the glorified image of Israel, *aliyah* appeared as the only way to escape this frustration.¹¹⁷ Habonim’s Lyndall Gordon recalled discussing in the late 1950s “South Africa’s path to destruction” and concluding that “the kibbutz movement offers the best alternative to the decadence of this country”. She considered *aliyah* the only viable option to avoid the inevitable racial violence in South Africa.¹¹⁸ In 1961, Habonim’s Shimoni articulated this “internal contradiction” as a clash between the Jewish need to maintain “a passive position” for their own safety given the “reactionary regime” in South Africa, and the urge of “idealistic thinking youth” to oppose this regime. The solution to this contradiction was *aliyah*, as idealistic youth would “be able to fulfil [themselves] far more through participation in Israel’s upbuilding”.¹¹⁹ Post-Sharpeville, the difference between anti-apartheid activism and *aliyah* became even more pronounced, as non-violent opposition to apartheid was no longer deemed possible.¹²⁰ The prospects of a bloody racial conflict increased, and signs of escalating Afrikaner antisemitism appeared. Within this intense context, Jewish youth often concluded that, as one of them put it, “this is not my battle, this is not for me. I’m Jewish, I’m going to Israel”.¹²¹

114 Michael Belman, interview with the author, 19 Jan. 2021.

115 Stein, interview with the author; Milner, interview with the author; Dave Bloom, interview with the author, 22 Feb. 2021; Mankowitz, in Hellman and Talmud, *Ideally Speaking*, 229–31.

116 Blass, interview with the author; Blass, *Fragments from My Past*, 57.

117 Colin Kessel, interview with the author; Stein, interview with the author; Sobel, interview with the author.

118 Lyndall Gordon, *Shared Lives* (Cape Town: D. Philip, 1992), 82–3; see also Milner, interview with the author.

119 Shimoni, “Jewish Problem”.

120 Alan Hoffman, interview in Hellman and Talmud, *Ideally Speaking*, 168.

121 Ron Lapid [Raymond Lipschitz], in *ibid.*, 220.

Aliyah seemed to offer a way to save the Jewish community from inevitable disaster. Jewish youth saw similarities between European Jewry prior to the Holocaust and the South African community's mindset. By the time the community understood the risks of Afrikaner antisemitism, "it [would] be too late[,] six million Jews were murdered because they felt secure in their positions and believed that they could never come to harm". HH members attacked "the 'it can't happen here' gang [who] are as blind as their unfortunate counterparts in history". Those naïve Jews were "treading on thin ice", trying to be "appeasers of the Nationalists".¹²² Habonim's Wolfie Mankowitz felt that "we had to get ready to move as many young people out of South Africa [to Israel] as possible".¹²³ Shimoni recalled that "there was a sense that . . . the Jews of South Africa will start being persecuted and the crunch will come. Then it will become necessary to bring all the Jews to Israel . . . there was a sense . . . [of] a classic historical repetition of what happens to the Jews in the *golah* [diaspora]".¹²⁴

In the 1960s, Israel grew more alluring to progressive Jewish youth, and the distinctions between the Jewish state and South Africa seemed enormous.¹²⁵ When Jewish South African youth visited Israel, they were often astonished by the accessibility of radical literature unavailable to them back home.¹²⁶ The idea of the kibbutz became broadly idealized in the West during the 1960s.¹²⁷ Internationally, Israel started to promote anti-apartheid policies, making it easier for torn Jewish youth to see aliyah as both Zionism and anti-apartheid activism. Events including the Eichmann Trial (1961) underlined Israel's anti-racist and rebellious image.¹²⁸ Israel was even viewed as a venue to make global change, and specifically in Africa. Its pro-African policies and collaboration with the continent during the 1960s were noticed by Jewish South African

122 Miriam, "The Task of Hashomer Hatzair", *Niv Shoal*, Dec. 1959; Moshe, "South African Jewry", *Kinnus Bogrim*, March 1959, (2)4.17-2, YYA.

123 Mankowitz, in Hellman and Talmud, *Ideally Speaking*, 227–8.

124 Shimoni, in *ibid.*, 264. Shimoni also noted "the Congo's Jewish community's flight in 1960" as an example that might repeat itself in South Africa; Shimoni, "Jewish Problem".

125 Asher Lubotzky, "Before the Apartheid Analogy: South African Radicals and Israel/Palestine, 1940s–1970s" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 2023).

126 Dennis Davis, interview, 5 Sept. 2008, Legal Resources Centre Oral History Project, Historical Papers Archive, University of Witwatersrand.

127 Jérôme Bourdon, "The Export of Zionism?: Global Images of Israel in the 1960s", in *The Global 1960s: Convention, Contest and Counterculture*, ed. Tamara Chaplin and Jadwiga E. Pieper Mooney (New York: Routledge, 2018), 240–41.

128 Mankowitz, in Hellman and Talmud, *Ideally Speaking*, 227–8; Aschheim, in *ibid.*, 113.

youth.¹²⁹ When visiting Israel, they came in contact with Africans who had begun arriving in the country for training programmes and higher education.¹³⁰ It reinforced their notion that through becoming Israelis they would contribute to change not only within their own nation state but also globally, and specifically in regard to African emancipation.¹³¹ In other words, becoming Israeli allowed them to act against racism and colonialism more easily than they could if they stayed in South Africa.

Encapsulating this dilemma was a debate published in *Aleh*, Habonim's magazine for the *shomrim* age group, in May 1961. The magazine presented two opposing views on "a subject often debated" in Habonim: should members get involved in anti-apartheid activism? Barry Shenker of Cape Town argued for disengagement, citing radical activism's incompatibility with *aliyah* and the harm it posed to the community: "What is the point in creating imminent disaster for the Jews [through radical activism] . . . and then escaping from this danger before it affects you personally?" he wondered. Representing the other point of view, Deborah Epstein from Pretoria argued for political activism, as most Habonim members "disagree with the present government's policy". Epstein used particularist arguments, arguing that Jewish and personal interests should lead to anti-apartheid activism: "Racialism invariably expresses itself in anti-Semitism sooner or later", she claimed, and therefore, not acting "for the oppressed races" will "in the long run endanger Habonim and the Jews". However, according to Epstein, self-interest was not the only factor: activism was a Zionist imperative. First, Israel itself turned against South Africa because the Jewish State "realizes that freedom is indivisible". Second, Israel needed people of action who do not "turn a blind eye to events in South Africa". *Chalutzik* activism could not be confined to Israel. Rather, it was part of the preparation for *aliyah*: "If one faces these [realities in South Africa]", Epstein contended, "one will know how to deal with problems in [Israel] and it is people who can do this that Israel wants and needs".¹³² Connecting anti-apartheid activism with *aliyah* made Epstein's argument original, potentially bridging Zionism and domestic radicalism. More than a decade later, Arthur Goldreich, then

129 Ian Browde, "Zionism – a New Decade", *Aleh*, Aug. 1970, 12–15, item 308651, 11-11/14/1, YTA.

130 Avron Polakow, interview with the author, 15 Nov. 2022.

131 Shimoni, in Hellman and Talmud, *Ideally Speaking*, 265; Itz Stein, interview in *ibid.*, 273.

132 *Aleh*, May 1961, 5, 14, item 308651, 11-11/14/1, YTA.

already living in Israel – he avoided prosecution for his involvement with Nelson Mandela in organizing armed resistance by escaping from prison before the Rivonia Trial (1963–64) – made a similar argument: “my theory is that if [Jewish youth] do not make the commitment in South Africa, then I cannot see them making a commitment in Israel. I have doubts about the value of South African [immigrants to Israel] who haven’t ever made a commitment” against apartheid.¹³³ This Zionist-oriented intersectionality which connected both causes did not, however, take root in the movement.

Petty acts of defiance in Habonim and Hashomer Hatzair

Only a minority of Habonim and HH alumni engaged in political activism in South Africa. Among this small group, some experienced a sharp rupture with their Zionist past, including the prominent radical leaders Joe Slovo, Lionel Forman, Baruch Hirson, Harold Wolpe, Ronnie Kasrils, and Esther Barsel. Others, such as Jules Browde, Ruth Weiss, and Benjamin Pogrud, decided to focus on more moderate anti-apartheid activism without disowning their Zionist beliefs.¹³⁴ Yet, while most Zionist-socialists avoided anti-apartheid activism, some found ways to demonstrate defiance. Scholars have noted how South African Jews who despised apartheid felt compelled to express their opposition through “soft” strategies, like welfare projects and legal aid.¹³⁵ Zionist-socialist youth movements were fertile ground for small acts of defiance that should be seen as part of this phenomenon of softer strategies to defy apartheid. These acts subtly challenged the apartheid system in everyday settings.

Participating in socialist movements in the apartheid era could itself serve as a form of defiance. Deep into the 1960s, HH members openly declared their socialist beliefs that dictated “equality among men . . . regardless of any race or colour”.¹³⁶ However, the movement also learned how to employ Zionist jargon to conceal their socialist

133 Arthur Goldreich, interview with Gideon Shimoni, 1972, 80, Oral History Archive, (24)3, Hebrew University.

134 Shimoni, *Community and Conscience*, 87–92; Ruth Weiss, *A Path through Hard Grass: A Journalist’s Memories of Exile and Apartheid* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2014), 156.

135 Louise Leibowitz, “The Politics of Pressure: Jewish Liberalism and Apartheid South Africa” (M.A. thesis, University of New South Wales, 2008), 4–5, 104; see also David Saks, *Jewish Memories of Mandela* (South Africa: South African Jewish Board of Deputies, 2011).

136 Jackie Stein, “Demand”, *Mishomer L’shomer*, 1963–64, 5–7, 4.17-2(3), YYA.

principles and values in a perilous environment. As apartheid repression increased, Habonim rarely mentioned the word “socialism” in its official publications. Rather, Zionist concepts codified leftist thought, using such terms as *chalutzit*, *kibbutz*, and collectivism. Similarly, HH tended to avoid the word “Marxism”, sometimes replacing it with the less suspicious concept of “Borochovism”.¹³⁷ Such concepts appeared in between dense programmes about much less problematic Zionist and Jewish topics. For example, HH could promote the Zionist-socialist idea that “land belongs to those who toil the soil”, clearly a radical concept in its South African context, without drawing too much government attention.¹³⁸ In curricula from 1961, for instance, Habonim taught its members (as young as 12 years old) units on “poverty”, “prejudice”, “the worker”, “exploitation”, and “injustice”, without formally emphasizing on paper their subversive potential.¹³⁹ Avoiding explicit language was especially common in smaller communities who dwelled in a conservative atmosphere.¹⁴⁰ These linguistic manoeuvres enabled the existence of socialist and other organizations under one of the world’s most anti-leftist regimes.¹⁴¹

Creative writing using fables and metaphors was another method of expressing petty defiance. Habonim’s Alan Hoffman remembers that in the mid-1960s, criticism appeared in the movement’s magazines via euphemism and irony, and when they were not vague enough, Habonim’s leaders would be questioned by the police’s Special Branch.¹⁴² Vivian Rakoff wrote a critical poem against racism in one of the HH magazines in the late 1940s. The poem compared South Africa to a chess game where white “kings” may move anywhere but black pawns are not allowed to move without permission.¹⁴³ Another HH member published a short story

137 “Bet Gideon Seminer”, July 1959, (2)4.17-2, YYA.

138 “Tochniet Mahane Hermanus, 1950–1951”, 25–6, (3)2.17-2, YYA.

139 Ichud Habonim Handbook, Aug. 1961, Pirsumim – Shichvat Habonim, item 306914, 11-11/5/6, YTA.

140 Sobel, interview with the author. E.g. Habonim’s Natal chapter erased the more “radical” ideas from its official Aims: “races” was substituted by “men” in “spirit of friendliness to all men, and kindness towards all living creatures”: Habonim – Twenty-Fifth Anniversary, 1933–1958, Yovel ha-25, item 308601, 11-11/9/4, YTA.

141 James Zug, *The Guardian: The History of South Africa’s Extraordinary Anti-Apartheid Newspaper* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press; Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2007), 106.

142 Alan Hoffman, interview with the author, 2 Jan. 2021.

143 Dr. Vivian Rakoff, interview with Naomi Raichyk, 24 Nov. 2016, Ontario Jewish Archives, UJA [United Jewish Appeal] Federation of Greater Toronto.

about a painter who separated white colour from black colour in their murals. This pattern “hurt my eyes and as I turned my head aside, I heard the calling of a thousand voices . . . The people of my land will rise and when they do the painting will be washed from off the wall . . . and do you know, I read the writing on the wall and I will tell you what it read there far above my head, it read . . . South Africa”.¹⁴⁴

Labour was another realm of petty defiance. Members of Zionist-socialist youth movements insisted on performing “inferior” tasks usually strictly reserved for blacks. Habonim members performed manual work at their *hachshara* and made it a point not to be assisted by the black labourers employed there.¹⁴⁵ Raymond Kessel remembers that he and his peers were “picking corn” with their hands, a spectacle that astonished black observers.¹⁴⁶ For idealistic Jewish South African youth, domestic labour was also a contested site. Even lower middle-class Jewish families often employed black domestic workers for everyday tasks. Baruch Hirson remembers that his first impression from HH was of young Jewish women sweeping the floors. Such a sight was “most unusual [as] such work was usually undertaken by black servants”,¹⁴⁷ increasing his attraction to the movement. Steve Blass attested that due to the socialist ideas he absorbed in Habonim, he “didn’t allow the maid to polish my shoes, (they remained unpolished) and I didn’t allow her to make my bed (although I didn’t make my bed, either)”.¹⁴⁸ Avron Polakow served as an assistant to Philemon, the black cook of Habonim’s summer camp. Polakow remembers feeling “proud that in the apartheid of South Africa as a white person I accepted the role of being the labourer to a black person”, an opportunity unavailable in any other social setting for these youths.¹⁴⁹ However, the desire to defy South African labour practices also highlighted these youths’ privileges and detachment from the black experience under apartheid. Raymond Kessel recalls that his family’s domestic worker was upset when Raymond wanted to take on domestic tasks, worrying about her employment. Kessel also remembers that one of the “most embarrassing days in [his] life” was when he and his peers requested the black *hachshara* driver eat lunch with

144 “The Writing on the Wall”, *Iton Mered*, 1952, 20, (3)2.17-2, YYA.

145 “Hachshara”, *Yovel ha-20*, 1951, 30, item 308602, 11-11/9/5, YTA.

146 Raymond Kessel, interview with the author.

147 Hirson, *Revolutions in My Life*, 97.

148 Blass, *Fragments from My Past*, 45. Lucas, interview with the author, recalls a similar decision, which “lasted exactly two months”.

149 Polakow, interview with the author.

them, defying apartheid's segregation. The driver was concerned lest it cause him trouble, yet the teenagers compelled him to join them.¹⁵⁰

Disrupting segregation was indeed another realm in which some idealistic youths tried to defy apartheid. Some *madrichim* invited black union leaders to talk with their *chanichim*.¹⁵¹ After Cape Town's buses were segregated, Habonim's Sydney Bloch deliberately "sat on the wrong [non-white] side of the bus", and only left after the driver threatened to take him to the police.¹⁵² HH's Aryeh Gutelevsky gave the family's black domestic worker a ride on the back of his bike, so he would not have to walk far, and the police stopped him for doing so.¹⁵³ On several occasions in the early 1960s, Habonim members made it a point to invite black workers to join in their camp's group photographs.¹⁵⁴ Culture and music were also realms of defiance. Some HH members went to mixed shows where they sat "side by side with Africans in the audience". Such experiences created an interracial "intimacy" in which "race, colour and creed [were] forgotten".¹⁵⁵ In Durban, several Habonim members defied segregation by attending black churches to listen to choir competitions.¹⁵⁶ Frankie Klaff and her peers used to listen to black music at home, a habit disliked by their parents' generation.¹⁵⁷ Meir Winokur started a mixed-race jazz band.¹⁵⁸ Avron Polakow also joined a mixed-race music group, and their concerts were dispersed by the police.¹⁵⁹ Steven Aschheim sang the anti-apartheid anthem *N'kosi Sikelel'* "in the kitchen with the servants". He thought of himself as "really radical" because of that, and his parents "thought it was verging on the subversive".¹⁶⁰ Arnie Friedman confessed that they used to sing *N'kosi Sikelel'* at Habonim meetings, although "very quietly" as it was considered "a very brave thing to do".¹⁶¹

150 Raymond Kessel, interview with the author.

151 Shur, *Ha-Shomer ha-tsa'ir*, 73; Meir Winokur, interview in Hellman and Talmud, *Ideally Speaking*, 276; Benjamin Pogrud, interview in *ibid.*, 251–2.

152 Sidney Bloch, interview in Hellman and Talmud, *Ideally Speaking*, 284.

153 Aryeh Gilat [Gutelevsky], *Pirkei Chayai . . . Kefi Sheidaliti Mizichroni* (Hatzor: Aryeh Gutelevsky, 2003), 33.

154 Polakow, interview with the author.

155 Solly, "King Kong", *Mishomer Le'shomer*, July 1959, (2)4.17-2, YYA.

156 Erroll Hackner to the author, 6 April 2022.

157 Klaff and Rothschild, interview with the author.

158 Winokur, in Hellman and Talmud, *Ideally Speaking*, 276.

159 Polakow, interview with the author.

160 Aschheim, in Hellman and Talmud, *Ideally Speaking*, 112.

161 Friedman, in *ibid.*, 145.



3 Habonim camp-goers and instructors, 1961–62. Photograph courtesy of Veronica Belling

Another way in which youth movement members felt that they worked against the system was by training in self-defence. Facing a global and local wave of antisemitism in the early 1960s, Zionist youth movements and their associates in Israel investigated ways to promote Jewish self-defence. HH declared that “our answer to the swastikas and Jew-baiters will be two! Self-defence in the Golah!! And self-realisation through Aliyah!!”¹⁶² Around the same time, a special Habonim envoy from Israel arrived in South Africa. His task was to establish a Jewish defence apparatus in case of further deterioration in the country. On *hachshara*, a special military-style training zone was established. Wolfie Mankowitz recalled that he and his peers “spent many hours in a type of basic army training but without arms – how to move around at night, how to keep watch and even how to pish quietly. . . . Our reading was that the situation was threatening and that we had to move quickly”.¹⁶³ A month after launching this initiative, the Jewish community’s leadership decided to shut it down out of fear that certain Habonim members might use their new knowledge against the regime.¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless, some members continued to receive military instruction in Israel. In the 1960s, some Machon participants took part in a month-long military training on an IDF base. Allegedly, only South African and Argentinian Jews received this instruction because of the risk these two communities experienced in the

162 *Mishomer Le'shomer*, Johannesburg, Feb. 1960, (2)4.17-2, YYA.

163 Mankowitz, in Hellman and Talmud, *Ideally Speaking*, 228.

164 Raymond Kessel, interview with the author.

early 1960s. The training included grenade-throwing, shooting, covert information transfer, and other methods of self-defence.¹⁶⁵

There were sporadic contacts between individual members of the youth movements and more radical activists. Formally, both Habonim and HH discouraged any risky involvement in opposition activities. However, some individuals managed to harness their movement's resources to this end. In the late 1950s, when HH remained with no Israeli *shaliach*, members used the movement's facilities and funds received from the SAZF to help the ANC with office and printing needs. When the new *shaliach* arrived, he expelled some members for this behaviour.¹⁶⁶ In 1954, Itz Stein, a Habonim leader in Cape Town, actively participated in a communist-led operation to smuggle a black activist out of the country.¹⁶⁷ Some Habonim members wanted to participate in the bus boycotts of the 1950s, eventually doing so as individuals and not as representatives of the movement.¹⁶⁸ As Habonim members attended universities, some joined the Congress of Democrats, the Labour, Liberal, or Progressive Parties, and participated in campus activities including marches, leaflet distribution, and other segregation-defying activities.¹⁶⁹ Seldom, however, did members represent the movement at anti-apartheid events. One prominent exception was when uniformed members of Habonim participated at a Black Sash (a liberal white women's organization famous for conducting silent vigils against apartheid) demonstration in the early 1960s, "to provide physical defence against the security forces".¹⁷⁰

In May 1960, the question whether Habonim should participate in the 50th anniversary of the Union of South Africa was one of the most controversial moments in the movement's history. Habonim, officially recognized as the Jewish scout movement, was invited along with three other non-Jewish national youth movements to participate in official pageantry. There were some sleepless nights at Habonim headquarters in Johannesburg before the leaders reached a final decision. They decided that they could not risk a direct clash with the authorities, fearing that boycotting the event would jeopardize the precarious Jewish position

165 Comaroff, interview with the author.

166 Shur, *Ha-Shomer ha-tsa'ir*, 171.

167 Itz Stein, interview in Hellman and Talmud, *Ideally Speaking*, 272–3.

168 Shimoni, in *ibid.*, 264.

169 Michael Hayden, interview in *ibid.*, 297; Pantanowitz, in *ibid.*, 246; Sharon and Arnie Kagan, interview with the author, 20 Oct. 2021; Jack Franklin, interview with the author, 29 April 2021.

170 Colin Kessel, interview with the author.

in South Africa.¹⁷¹ Some members were dismayed by this decision to participate in national ceremonies. During the inauguration of the Republic of South Africa (May 1961), others refused to sing the Republic's anthem and others considered extinguishing the Republic's torch.¹⁷² They also refused to hang the Republic's flag (the Oranje Blanje Blou) in their chapters, sticking for the time being to the Union Jack and the Israeli flag.¹⁷³

Conclusion

In the early 1970s, Zionist-socialism in South Africa saw another transformation. The effective repression of radical opposition throughout the 1960s and the emerging *modus vivendi* between the Jewish community and the apartheid government lessened much of the youth movements' anti-apartheid tendencies. Habonim, enjoying its mainstream status and broad popularity, increasingly promoted a Zionist-socialism devoid of its radical implications. As a Marxist movement without the ability to discuss Marxism, Hashomer Hatzair struggled to create a unique identity in Habonim's shadow. Succumbing to community and state pressure, HH decided to disband its South African chapter in the summer of 1971. In August, Baruch Reitstein, an HH alumnus and its last *shaliach*, wrote to Rabbi Bernhard, an Orthodox rabbi critical of HH, in what was probably the last act of petty defiance coming from the movement. Rebuffing Bernhard's contention that HH was too radical for the South African reality, Reitstein castigated the established community:

The despicable system existing in this country has made it impossible for us to continue our activities openly and honestly . . . in terms of Jewish morality and values you as a Jew and a Rabbi should be in the forefront of the fight against these indignities which insult the human being and on which Judaism places such high values . . . God help the Jews of this country if they will not be aware of . . . this and I feel that you yourself will be failing in your duty as a Rabbi and teacher of Jewish values if you would not see fit yourself to condemn this system which gave rise to such a situation.¹⁷⁴

Actual contact with Israeli realities, nonetheless, caused disillusionment for some young Jewish South Africans. The idealized image of

171 Raymond Kessel, interview with the author; Shimoni, in Hellman and Talmud, *Ideally Speaking*, 264; Jules Browde, interview in *ibid.*, 20.

172 Fine, interview with the author; Comaroff, interview with the author.

173 Raymond Kessel, interview with the author.

174 Baruch Reitstein to Rabbi Bernhard, 17 Aug. 1971, (13)7-83.2, YYA.

the kibbutz gradually cracked, because of both broad economic and social challenges in Israel (paralleling the general decline of Zionist-socialism) and the personal negative experiences of some who settled in kibbutzim.¹⁷⁵ Some struggled to get used to Israeli living standards and moved away, usually to other English-speaking countries or back to South Africa. Some noticed Israel's inequalities and prejudices against Arabs and Mizrahi Jews, although most of them could probably have agreed with Irwin Manoim's words: "I don't think even in the late sixties that I understood there was a Palestinian cause; that there was more to it than an Israel versus Egypt and Syria thing."¹⁷⁶

While most Jewish South African youth still adhered to their strong Zionist convictions – and were intensely proud of the outcome of the 1967 Six-Day War – a minority were prompted to criticize Israeli militarism and occupation. By the late 1960s, Israel's shift away from its anti-apartheid position and its forging of ties with the apartheid regime further undermined Zionism's image as antithetical to apartheid. Among the disillusioned was Habonim's Shula Marks, who after 1967 became "appalled by the arrogance of Israel", and saw similarities between Israel and South Africa, an analogy radicals worldwide have drawn more often since the early 1970s.¹⁷⁷ Jean and John Comaroff volunteered in Israel after the Six-Day War and considered *aliyah*, but they witnessed Palestinians' plight and, as John observed decades later, became "dezionified".¹⁷⁸ From the late 1960s, former Habonim members such as Raphy Kaplinsky and David Ernst embraced a new type of student anti-apartheid radicalism aligned with the spirit of the emerging New Left and growing criticism of Zionism.¹⁷⁹ Nevertheless, many Habonim and HH graduates remained in Israel, holding on to some of the ideas they had absorbed and developed in their youth movement, even if lamenting Israel's changing politics.

This article has explored the role of Zionist-socialist youth movements in radicalizing Jewish youth during the first two decades of apartheid. This radicalization included political, socio-economic, and cultural

175 Henry Near, *The Kibbutz Movement: A History*, vol. 2: *Crisis and Achievement 1939–1995* (London and Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 1997), 333; see e.g. Aaron Klug's experience in the kibbutz: K. C. Holmes, *Aaron Klug: A Long Way from Durban. A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 59–65.

176 Irwin Manoim, interview in Suttner, *Cutting through the Mountain*, 146.

177 Shula Marks, interview in Hellman and Talmud, *Ideally Speaking*, 321.

178 Comaroff, interview with the author; David Walsh, "An Interview with Harvard Anthropology Professor John Comaroff, Part One", *World Socialist Web Site*, 3 May 2023.

179 "Student Leader hits at Zionism", *Hakiner*, April 1969, 1.

elements, leading to intergenerational friction. Introduced to intellectual stimulation and progressive activism, members of Zionist-socialist youth movements could have chosen several possible radical paths. As significant as they were, only a minority of members committed themselves to change in South Africa. The majority, the focus of this article, interpreted the Zionist-socialist message as a call to withdraw from domestic politics, and instead focus their radical energies on dreaming of emigration and socialist nation-building in Israel. This did not necessarily result in complete passivity in the face of apartheid, as many engaged in petty acts of defiance that allowed them to express their disdain for apartheid.

These youth faced two dissonances. First, the Jewish dissonance of being both a privileged group in a highly unequal society and a vulnerable minority in a country believed to be on the brink of bloody racial conflict. Second, the personal, intellectual dissonance of both despising the system and enormously benefiting from it. In South Africa, Zionist-socialism offered a solution that allowed them to be politically active without directly confronting their families, community, or the regime. The case of these Zionist-socialist youth movements provides insight into how individuals grappled with dilemmas under oppressive regimes, employing hybrid methods that combined thought and action, rebelliousness and discipline, nationalism and socialism, particularism and universalism. Their behaviours explain some of the paradoxes experienced by South African Jewry under apartheid: how socialist movements openly flourished under one of the world's most anti-communist regimes, and how many adolescents could simultaneously embrace radical-activist and passive-complicit positions in their society.