

began with the birth of their first child and brought on hallucinations and suicide attempts.⁶⁵

Kibbutz members often found the presence of the immigrants disturbing. "We can't see our own members for all the immigrants," some complained; they proposed setting up separate dining halls, "to distance them a little bit, so that we can live our own lives." At Kibbutz Alonim, the members were asked why the relationship between the two groups was so difficult. They listed the causes in the following order: the immigrants' unwillingness to adjust to kibbutz life; the shortage of girls among the immigrants; their lack of desire to live at the kibbutz; their impatience in the face of crises; the fact that most of the immigrants had arrived alone. The number of members who believed that they, too, were guilty of the lack of communication was much smaller. Only a few said the kibbutz might not be caring for the immigrants properly. Even fewer said that there was not a sufficiently welcoming atmosphere at the kibbutz or agreed that the kibbutz did not provide for the immigrants' minimal needs. Most of the members, then, tended to blame the immigrants themselves for their difficulties in adjusting to kibbutz life and often regarded them as a nuisance. At the same time, the members believed that they should continue to absorb more immigrants: it was their ideological duty, and it was essential for the future of the kibbutz.⁶⁶ Comparatively, the kibbutzim absorbed fewer immigrants than the rest of the country. A year and a half after the establishment of the state, 7 percent of the country's population lived on kibbutzim, but the kibbutzim absorbed only 4 percent of the immigrants.⁶⁷

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A year and a half after World War II ended, the Haganah commander in Europe, Nahum Shadmi, began to sign up young men from the DP camps for military training. The immediate goal was not to enlist them in Israel's fight for independence but to turn them from "human debris" into "upstanding" young people, to make them indistinguishable from the "sabras," the native Israelis. Only with difficulty did Shadmi convince his superiors, among them Ben-Gurion, to encourage this overseas enlistment (called *gahal* in Hebrew). But when the War of Independence broke out, the leadership changed its mind.⁶⁸ About two months before the declaration of independence, with the war raging, Ben-Gurion wrote to one of the immigration envoys:

The war depends on immigration, because the manpower in Israel will not suffice. The Arabs have huge reserves and we need people from overseas for the war now. Immigration that is not directed entirely, from start to finish, to the war's needs is no blessing. You must understand that your operation, like the life of the yishuv, must accommodate itself to those needs, and this means sending only people from the ages of 18 to 35 or, in exceptional cases, to 40, trained to carry arms.

“First [send] all the young people who can help us with the war,” demanded a member of the Jewish Agency executive. One haapala activist, unenthusiastic about the new order, told his men that the Jewish Agency had threatened to “cease funding our operation if the immigration does not serve the war.”⁶⁹ The envoys presented enlistment as the duty of every man and woman. “I require the Jews of the camps to enlist. They are like citizens of Israel,” Shadmi reported.⁷⁰ Haim Yahil wrote that there was “an atmosphere of enlistment” in the camps, noting that parents of enlistees won respect, and evaders were publicly disgraced. A young man who did not sign up had trouble walking through the camp. Later, Yahil would write: “The remnant's volunteering for the War of Independence was perhaps the most wonderful episode in its history.”⁷¹

A total of 22,000 Holocaust survivors took part in the war—one out of every three fighters. Most enlisted while they were in DP camps or detention camps in Cyprus. Some received basic training before arriving; but most were taken into the army within days of arrival, without proper training and without any knowledge of the country they were being sent to defend. Most did not know Hebrew and so could not be assigned to administrative roles, in the rear. Instead they were sent to the front. One out of three of the war's casualties was a Holocaust survivor.⁷² As a group, the survivors tended to be older than the rest of the soldiers. To the native-born men, they were refugees, foreigners, “of the Exile.” The army was not prepared for them.

It was frustrating. Army psychologists found the newcomers' morale poor and feared that their presence lowered morale among other soldiers as well. Low-ranking commanders often humiliated and insulted the new recruits, who had a reputation for being melancholy, cowardly soldiers, prisoners of their past. “The men fled at the decisive moment,” it was said of them. “Difficult, stubborn, and cowardly men.” In his war diary, Ben-Gurion quoted Yitzhak Rabin, who attributed the demoralization

in his battalion to the immigrants.⁷³ Many of them had enlisted in the war partly under the influence of agents from Israel who promised they would find a warm home in their new country. But they generally had trouble finding a place for themselves in the legendary brotherhood of arms—it was too Israeli, too closed. They differed conspicuously from both the sabra soldiers and the foreign soldiers who came to help the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). These foreign volunteers were not refugees; they came mainly from the United States, spoke English, not Yiddish, and were greatly appreciated.

In addition to the memories of the previous war that plagued the immigrants, they also agonized over not having had time before enlistment to locate their relatives; neither did they know what they would do with themselves after being discharged. An internal IDF report stated, in a tone of concern, that many described themselves as “cannon fodder.” This was a widespread expression.⁷⁴ Soon thereafter a myth was born:

Ben-Gurion threw human debris
 Into the enemies' eyes.
 On the bones of boys from the Holocaust
 A new road to Jerusalem was built.

Statistical evidence indicates that there is no foundation to this claim.⁷⁵

The IDF was aware that its Holocaust-survivor soldiers needed special help, both material and psychological, and it formulated various plans to make it easier for them to locate relatives, learn Hebrew, tour the country, and visit in the houses of other Israelis. In July 1948, the chief enlistment officer ordered that the soldiers be called out immediately and that the commanders should “explain the special approach to new immigrants who come from the Nazi inferno and from long years of life in concentration camps. . . . The immigrants should be treated generously and considerately and be given the feeling that they are coming home.”⁷⁶ Another document states that, to raise their morale, “it is imperative to eliminate the feeling that they are meant to be no more than cannon fodder.”⁷⁷

Military service gave the soldier who had survived the Holocaust a part in the victory, compensating him at least for some of what he had endured in Europe. In the army he gained a certain acquaintance with the country and its people and a sense of belonging. The army did little, however, to advance the immigrants' social integration. The general opinion was that the human quality of the natives was higher than that of the im-

migrants, that the natives, not the immigrants, were making the Israeli revolution. This perception was the "strange wall" between the Holocaust survivors and the native Israelis diagnosed by a member of the Jewish Agency executive. Ben-Gurion called it "a barrier of blood and silence and agony and loneliness."⁷⁸

On top of all this, there was the ideological dispute. The yishuv was permeated with a deep, almost mystic faith in its superiority, as symbolized by a hardy cactus whose fruit was spiked on the outside and sweet inside—the prickly pear, the sabra. Author Yehudit Hendel once said on Israeli television:

To put it bluntly, there were almost two races in this country. There was one race of people who thought they were gods. These were the ones who had had the honor and privilege of being born in Degania, or in the Borochov neighborhood of Givataim, and I belong, as it were, to those gods. I grew up in a workers' neighborhood near Haifa. And there was, we can certainly say, an inferior race. People we saw as inferior who had some kind of flaw, some kind of hunchback, and these were the people who came after the war. I was taught in school that the ugliest, basest thing is not the Exile but the Jew who came from there.⁷⁹

"This people is ugly, impoverished, morally suspect, and hard to love," Leah Goldberg said in a meeting Ben-Gurion held with a group of writers. Like Dostoevsky and Gorky, who were unafraid of ugliness, stench, and lowness, the poet added, the Israeli writer had to see in the Holocaust survivor the human image, and not only the man hiding dollars in his belt. Of course, she said, this was a task that required "a tremendous effort."

Itzhak Sadeh, commander of the Palmach elite militia, wrote an often-quoted essay called "My Little Sister." He describes meeting a young woman who has just arrived from Europe. Her body bears a tattoo "FOR OFFICERS ONLY." It later emerges that the Germans not only forced her into prostitution but also sterilized her. "Why am I here? Do I deserve to be rescued by these strong, healthy young men, who risk their lives to save mine?" she asks. Sadeh responds: "Be our sister, be our bride, be our mother," and he sums up: "For the sake of my sisters I'll be brave. For the sake of my sisters I'll also be cruel: everything, everything!" It was no coincidence that the Holocaust was symbolized by a prostitute; the metaphor was a continuation of a common stereotype that depicted

the Exile as weak, feminine, and passive, and the yishuv as strong, masculine, and active.⁸⁰

The sabra represented a national ideal, and the Holocaust survivor its reverse. Moreover, the survivors threatened that ideal at a time when sabras were still fighting their parents' generation for preeminence in Israeli society. The country fostered the sabra image, seeing in it the fulfillment of the Zionist and labor movement dreams of national renewal and return to a "healthy" social structure. Yet most people could not live up to this ideal. They had not lived long in the country, and many had not yet rid themselves of their "Diaspora mentality." Holocaust survivors imposed on earlier immigrants a past that many had not yet succeeded in putting aside, and their disdain of the survivors often reflected a desire to distance themselves, to deny what they themselves were. The survivors forced the Israelis to realize that the vision of the "new man" was not to be. Most came as refugees, not as visionary Zionists. "Many of them are nothing but migrants who have come because they have nowhere else to go," wrote a *Haaretz* reporter scornfully.⁸¹ The same was true, of course, of many who had come before.

The dissonance between ideal and reality made the Israelis harsher with the new immigrants. The newcomers were expected to identify with the sabra stereotype and transform themselves in its image; the effort to do so was seen as a pledge of loyalty and a rite of entry into the tribe. Aharon Appelfeld wrote of a boy newly arrived from Poland whose fellows beat him because he could not get a suntan like theirs. He assured them that he was trying as hard as he could to make his skin darker, but they told him that, if he really wanted it, it would have happened long before. His pallor forced them to confront the Diaspora and the Holocaust, so they hit him.⁸²

Even Rozka Korczak, who had fought the Nazis in the Vilna ghetto and who was received as a heroine, found herself under attack. She arrived in Palestine in December 1944 and soon thereafter appeared at a Histadrut convention. She spoke in Yiddish. David Ben-Gurion complained that "Comrade Refugee" was speaking "a foreign language" (or, according to another source, "a foreign, discordant language") instead of speaking Hebrew.⁸³

Each new arrival was a reminder that the Zionist movement had been defeated in the Holocaust. The leadership could reiterate that the extermination of the Jews occurred before the Zionist movement had enough power to save them. It could repeat that the Holocaust was proof of the need to establish a Jewish state. It could recall that the British were to

blame for having blocked entry to the country, and that the Arabs were to blame for making them do so, and that the entire world was at fault for standing aside and not coming to the aid of the Jews. It could glorify and extol the few rescue attempts that were made. But none of this could change the fact that the Zionist movement had been helpless. Not only did the yishuv not come to the rescue, but it now found itself in a position where its existence and future depended on the willingness of the Holocaust survivors to settle in the country and fortify its army against the Arab threat.

There were those who were inclined to blame European Jewry itself for its extermination. If they had only recognized the truth of Zionism. "Did we not warn them?" wrote author Moshe Smilansky. "Build yourself a home in your country, your homeland, soon, so you will not be lost." But the warning did not help: "The people heard but did not act."⁸⁴ Avraham Shlonsky wrote:

The storm jolted them with a shower of sparks,
With a fiery rune,
Omens, omens, omens,
And the inferno had already engulfed the forest
And they fell deaf, they shielded their eyes.⁸⁵

Haim Yahil took this idea one step further: "After all, we cannot forget that the war against the Jews served the Nazis as a major springboard for capturing and maintaining control," he wrote; the implication was that if the Jews had come to Zion, the Nazis would not have gained power in Germany.⁸⁶ An article that appeared in *Haaretz* less than four weeks after the German surrender asked: "Did the Jews also have a hand in the horrible bloodshed committed against our nation?"⁸⁷ Such sentiments too were a way for native Israelis to defend themselves against the survivors' accusations and to save their consciences, tormented by impotence, complacency, and above all, psychological detachment from the Jews of Europe while the Holocaust raged.

Many survivors, for their part, resented, even blamed the yishuv. "You danced the hora while we were being burned in the crematoriums," said Yosef Rosensaft, a DP leader at Bergen-Belsen, who settled in America.⁸⁸ Usually such things were said only in private. But even unsaid, the accusations poisoned relations between the survivors and the yishuv. "The question lurks in our hearts," said Dov Shilansky, who would later serve as speaker of the Knesset. "What did our brothers outside of hell do?"⁸⁹

Yitzhak "Antek" Zuckerman, speaking at a Zionist conference in London, complained that several months had elapsed between the end of the war and the arrival of the first yishuv envoys in Poland. "How could we have gotten into Poland?" Moshe Sharett asked in self-defense. Zuckerman retorted that they could have entered the same way the refugees got out. "I will forgive you everything," he said, but "I won't forgive that for those last eight months you did not reach us."⁹⁰ Zuckerman spent the first thirty-two years of his life in Poland, but from the day he was old enough to think for himself, he knew he would live in Israel, on a kibbutz; yet, for his next thirty-four years, in Israel, up to his death in June 1981, he continued to live the Holocaust as if it had never ended. He settled at Kibbutz Lohamei Hagetaot, devoting most of his time to memorializing the Warsaw ghetto uprising; he had been the deputy to Mordecai Anielewicz, the uprising's leader. His comrades said he had a talent for raising their morale. Haim Guri, who described him as "a towering giant" and attributed to him "a rare combination of strength and beauty," wrote this of him: "More than once, in the middle of a meeting here, I saw that he was there, with the people that were and are no longer. He and the power that was in his silences, as if he refused to say outright what he would say some day and what was choked inside him." Zuckerman indeed had accusations to make against the yishuv, but as a loyal party and kibbutz member he remained silent. Only toward the end of his life did he record his testimony, on condition that it not be published while he was alive. "Israel did not search for us. We felt that we had been abandoned." When Zuckerman said "Israel," he meant the leadership of the kibbutz federation, Hakibbutz Hameuhad.

He was incensed that during the war the movement had made no real effort to send an envoy to Warsaw with greetings and words of encouragement. He spoke of smuggler-envoys who arrived from the Jewish rescue mission in Istanbul. They brought money, sometimes a letter. They were not Jews, not comrades; they brought no advice. He believed that the movement could have sent Jewish emissaries as well. The fact that fellow Jews did not come was, in his eyes, testimony to the psychological abyss between his party's leadership in Palestine and its members in Poland. Guri once asked Zuckerman what would have happened had the party sent 500 paratroopers to the ghetto. Zuckerman replied, according to Guri, that 490 would have been killed and the 10 remaining would have been an additional burden on the ghetto. "When Antek said

that the movement had abandoned the ghetto," Guri concluded, "he did not mean an operational failure. He was raising a metaphysical cry. They did not need 500 paratroopers. They needed only one man who would bring them a word of goodwill from the Land of Israel. Just one man. And he did not come."⁹¹

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A few days after he came home from his mission to Hungary, paratrooper Yoel Palgi went to a veterans' club in Tel Aviv. It was June 1945. Everyone received him warmly and with admiration, he later wrote. They all wanted to hear what had happened over there. But no one was interested in accounts of Jewish suffering. They wanted a different story, about the few who had fought like lions. "Everywhere I turned," Palgi wrote, "the question was fired at me: why did the Jews not rebel? Why did they go like lambs to the slaughter? Suddenly I realized that we were ashamed of those who were tortured, shot, burned. There is a kind of general agreement that the Holocaust dead were worthless people. Unconsciously, we have accepted the Nazi view that the Jews were subhuman. . . . History is playing a bitter joke on us: have we not ourselves put the six million on trial?"⁹²

The bluntest expression of this was in yishuv slang. At some point the word *sabon*, "soap," came to be used to refer to Holocaust survivors. There is some dispute as to when it first appeared, but there is no denying that it was widespread. It reflected the general belief that the Nazis used the bodies of murdered Jews to produce soap, a charge that was constantly repeated and became an accepted truth that also found its way into Knesset speeches, textbooks, and Israeli literature ("On the shelf in the store, wrapped in yellow paper with olive trees drawn on it, lies the Rabinowitz family," wrote Yoram Kaniuk in *Man, Son of Dog*). It seems unlikely that anything could better express the contempt that native-born Israelis felt toward the survivors.*

* The Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem, Yad Vashem, has received many letters from people asking about bars of soap left over from the war years. Some offered to contribute the soap to the museum, while others asked whether the soap ought to be properly buried. Yad Vashem always officially replies that the Nazis did not make soap out of Jews. During the war, Germany suffered a shortage of fats, and soap production came under government supervision. Bars of soap were imprinted with the initials RIF, a German acronym for "pure industrial fat." Some mistakenly read the letters as RJF, or "pure Jewish fat." The rumor spread quickly, particularly in the ghettos. There is evidence that senior officials

The attempt of the last Jews of the Warsaw ghetto to “die with honor” and leave a heritage of Jewish heroism, and to take some Germans with them, contradicted the stereotype of the Diaspora Jews going passively to their deaths. It robbed Israel of its monopoly on heroism. The embarrassing truth was that the rebels had not received any help from the yishuv. The yishuv envoys stationed among them before the war had all gone home in due course. Yishuv mythology took care of this problem in its own way—it adopted the uprisings as if they had been its own operations. “The initiative for active self-defense came from our movement,” Moshe Sharett said proudly.⁹⁴ Most of the rebels in fact belonged to Zionist youth movements, but that did not make their organizations “our underground,” as they were later termed in Israel.⁹⁵

The paratrooper mission was similarly presented. The young men and women who parachuted behind the Nazi lines had in fact lived for a short while in kibbutzim, and some of them belonged to the Palmach. But most had arrived in Israel after the war began, when they were already over twenty years old. Their bravery was a product not of the yishuv but of the Diaspora. Only rarely was the role of the refugees themselves in the *haapala* given its due. Thus the poet Natan Alterman celebrated the heroism of “our boys, who carry the nation on their shoulders,” but described the *maapilim* as the Diaspora’s tailors, cobblers, and money changers, “a huddled and despairing throng,” “without a man’s face or a woman’s image.”⁹⁶

Palestine’s heroism during the war was also lauded. Yitzhak Gruenbaum told a group of survivors how the country had protected and strengthened itself in preparation for the fateful hour of decision. “Don’t think it was easy,” Gruenbaum said.⁹⁷ The yishuv had to believe this to be able to look the survivors in the eye, perhaps to look in the mirror, too.

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Within a short time after the survivors began to come, a kind of ideological-emotional compact was settled between the Israelis and the

in the Nazi regime, among them the governor of Poland, Hans Frank, also believed that the soap was indeed produced from human fats.

A few months before the end of the war, a laboratory in Danzig began conducting experiments to find out whether human fats could be used in food production. Yad Vashem has concluded that Jews were not murdered for this purpose. Here, then, is the history of a myth.⁹³

"remnants," built on four basic assumptions that united them during the war effort of 1948, the depression of the 1950s, and the mass immigration from the Islamic countries. The first assumption, enshrined in the Declaration of Independence, stated that the Holocaust had proven once again that the only solution to the Jewish problem was an independent state in Israel. The second assumption was that the rest of the world—literally every nation—was hostile and had done nothing to save the Jews during the Holocaust. "This is the most terrible lesson, perhaps, that we have learned in the present generation," wrote a columnist for *Haaretz*.⁹⁸ The third assumption was summed up in the phrase "Holocaust and heroism" and held that the two were of equal moment, "two flames burning in one heart." This assumption was also the ideological basis for the memorial culture that developed over the years.⁹⁹ The fourth assumption said that the less everybody talked about the Holocaust, the better. Thus the great silence was born; it continued for years and was broken only in 1951, at the time of the Kastner trial. The assumptions were not the product of conscious deliberation; rather, they arose spontaneously from a recognition that without a consensus of this sort, it would be very hard to live together.

In 1949 the composition of the incoming immigrants began to change. Instead of Holocaust survivors, Jews from Asia and North Africa arrived. The result was that the Holocaust survivors experienced what past immigrants had: they suddenly became "old-timers." Like the German Jews and the Holocaust survivors before them, the immigrants from the Islamic world had to deal not only with practical difficulties but also with a hostile atmosphere. "We need to teach them the most elementary things—how to eat, how to sleep, how to wash," a member of the Jewish Agency executive remarked.¹⁰⁰ Many of them were abandoned upon their arrival in miserable conditions, without proper housing, without education for their children, without medical care, without work. Many lived for a while in front yards, public parks, even on the streets; many went hungry. Their situation was so difficult that one Mapai leader who dealt with them said the worst thing any real Zionist could say: "Had I known what awaited them here, I would have voted in favor of leaving them in Syria."¹⁰¹ Their distress lasted for years, passing on to their children and even grandchildren, and has become a central, painful issue in Israeli history. Yet at base their experience was very similar to that of the Holocaust survivors.

With the arrival of the immigrants from the Arab countries, a new

kind of social struggle came into existence. It was no longer old-timers versus Holocaust survivors, sabras versus “debris,” but European Jews versus Oriental Jews, Ashkenazim versus Sephardim. Soon the survivors were part of the European establishment that ruled the country. Anticipating the arrival of more immigrants from Poland, the Jewish Agency executive in 1949 considered a proposal to house them in hotels, reserving the transit camps for immigrants from Arab countries. After all, explained one participant in the discussion, the Europeans belong to our tribe.¹⁰² Soon, the Holocaust survivors would begin receiving payments from Germany, compensation for their suffering and the property they had lost. This, too, widened the gap between them and the newcomers from the Islamic countries and helped bring them, finally, into the tribe.