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**Recognition, immigration and divergent expectations: the reception of foreign volunteers
in Israel during and after the wars of 1948 and 1967**

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In a 2009 interview, the renowned late historian Martin Gilbert recalled his meetings with Israel's Prime Minister in the early 1990s, Yitzhak Rabin: "Rabin came to London often. And he always insisted on finishing his events early so that he could sit in a pub with his friends from the Machal unit".¹ A Brigade Commander during the war of 1948, Rabin fought alongside foreign volunteers such as David "Mickey" Marcus, a former Second World War Colonel in the U.S. Army.² In April 1993 Rabin attended the dedication ceremony of the memorial for the 115 men and 4 women of Machal (an acronym of the Hebrew *mitnadvey chutz laaretz*, "overseas volunteers") who died fighting for Israel's independence between 1947 and 1949. In an often cited speech, the Prime Minister declared: "They came to us when we most needed them, during those hard and uncertain days of our 1948 War of Independence".³ However, this image of recognition and mutual appreciation between foreign volunteers and their Israeli hosts is not a faithful representation of a much more complex relationship that evolved over the course of a number of decades.

This article examines two instances where thousands of foreigners – predominantly, though not exclusively, Jews – offered their services to the Israeli state in the context of a military conflict: approximately 3,500 volunteers went to Israel during the war of 1948; and

¹ Nadav Eyal, "The figure of Churchill that Netanyahu didn't know", *NRG*, 26 December 2009, <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART1/992/689.html> [Hebrew, accessed on 27 March 2015].

² Tuvia Friling and S. Ilan Troen, "Proclaiming Independence: Five Days in May from Ben-Gurion's Diary", *Israel Studies*, 3:1, 1998, 189.

³ "Focus on Israel: Machal – overseas volunteers", website of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1 May 1999, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/AboutIsrael/Spotlight/Pages/FOCUS%20on%20Israel-%20MACHAL%20-%20Overseas%20Volunteers.aspx> [accessed on 20 June 2015].

approximately 7,500 foreigners arrived there immediately before or soon after the war of 1967.⁴ Expatriates and other supporters also flocked to Israel during subsequent conflicts such as the war of October 1973 or the Gulf War of 1991, but the two cases discussed in this article stand out both in terms of the number of foreigners who made the journey and the policies Israeli authorities adopted to handle them.⁵ There is a growing body of work on the 1948 Machal volunteers, on the memory of the war of 1948 and on the impact of the Six-Day War of 1967 on Israeli society.⁶ However, questions relating to wartime encounters between foreign volunteers and their Israeli hosts, and the post-war reception of those volunteers who became immigrants, have only received very limited attention. Moreover, so far no attempt has been made to trace the ways in which Israeli attitudes towards in-coming foreign war volunteers have changed over time.

⁴ There is some debate about the exact number of foreign volunteers who took part in the war of 1948. The figure of 3,500 is used in the official history of Machal as well as in some correspondence from 1949. See: Yaacov Markovitzky, *Machal: Overseas Volunteers in Israel's War of Independence*, Tel Aviv: World Machal, 2003, 5; Israel Defence Forces Archive [hereafter: IDFA], 580/1956, file 240, "The reception of Machal members in Israel: report on the current situation", 12 April 1949. For the estimated number of foreigners in 1967, see: Central Zionist Archives [hereafter: CZA], S62/494, summary by Moshe Rivlin, February 1968.

⁵ For volunteers in 1973 see, for example: Irwin H. Krasna, "The Yom Kippur War: An American Volunteer Remembers", *Jewish Action*, 9 April 2013, https://www.ou.org/jewish_action/04/2013/the-yom-kippur-war-an-american-volunteer-remembers/ [accessed on 01 April 2015]; for an example from 1991, see: James Zogby, "Rahm Emmanuel and Arab Perceptions", *Huffington Post*, 15 December 2008, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/james-zogby/rahm-emanuel-and-arab-per_b_143976.html [accessed on 01 April 2015].

⁶ For the history of Machal, see: David J. Bercuson, *The Secret Army*, New York: Stein and Day, 1983; Henry Katzew, *South Africa's 800: The Story of South African Volunteers in Israel's War of Birth*, Ra'anana: Telfed, 2003; Benny Gshur, "Volunteers from North America in the War of Independence", PhD dissertation, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2009 [Hebrew]; Nir Arielli, "When are foreign volunteers useful? Israel's transnational soldiers in the war of 1948 re-examined", *Journal of Military History*, 78, 2014, 703-724. For the memory of the 1948 war, see: Emmanuel Sivan, "To remember is to forget: Israel's 1948 War", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 28:2, 1993, 341-59; Paul Scham, Walid Salem, Benjamin Pogrund (eds), *Shared Histories: A Palestinian-Israeli Dialogue*, Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2005, 154-220; Edward Said, "Afterword: the consequence of 1948", in Eugene L. Rogan and Avi Shlaim (eds), *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 248-61; Efrat Ben-Ze'ev, *Remembering Palestine in 1948: Beyond National Narratives*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. For the impact of the 1967 war, see: Michael Oren, *Six Days of War*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, 305-27; Anita Shapira, *Israel: a History*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2012, 295-325.

Needless to say, the thousands of encounters that the arrival of foreign volunteers in Israel generated differed from one another. However, by examining a broad array of sources (correspondence between different Israeli ministries and organizations, studies conducted on the volunteers' experiences, the contemporaneous press, retrospective accounts written by former volunteers and a number of oral history interviews), a few patterns can be discerned: the willingness of Jewish diaspora communities to mobilize for Israel in times of war, when the Jewish state seemed to be facing an existential threat; the almost inevitable tension between the foreigners and their hosts; the Israeli desire to transform the volunteers into immigrants; and the foreigners' aspiration to have their contribution recognized. These recurring patterns will be the focus of this article. The Israeli case study is included in this special issue, even though the events under examination happened outside Europe, for two main reasons. First, a large number of the volunteers who went to Israel came from Europe, and secondly, the Israeli example helps to set the articles dealing with European case studies within a broader global context.

1948: Wartime interactions

The outbreak of violence between Arabs and Jews in Mandate Palestine in late 1947 and the subsequent war between the newly established State of Israel and the neighbouring Arab countries from mid-May 1948 onwards touched many diaspora Jews. Only three years had passed since the end of the Second World War and the discovery of the extent of the destruction of European Jewry. Now the fate of the Jews in Palestine was at stake. In a number of public and covert fund-raising campaigns several million dollars were raised in communities

in North America and elsewhere.⁷ Going beyond the donation of funds, approximately 3,500 volunteers from 43 countries went to Israel to take part in the war effort. Some veterans of the Second World War were sought out and recruited by representatives of the *Yishuv* (the pre-independence Jewish community in Palestine), but many volunteered spontaneously, without being approached. Coming predominantly from Western countries, these volunteers were afforded special treatment from the outset when compared to Israeli recruits or new immigrants who arrived from Displaced Persons camps in Europe or internment camps in Cyprus. While the latter groups were subject to conscription, the volunteers were promised that their return trip at the end of their service would be paid for by the state. During the war of 1948 foreigners served in a large variety of roles: as infantry and armoured corps soldiers and commanders, naval officers and sailors, medical personnel, secretaries and so on. The most notable contribution that overseas volunteers made was in the newly established air force, where approximately 70% of the personnel came from abroad.⁸

The recollections of *machalniks* (as many veterans call themselves) illustrate the pivotal role played by foreign volunteers in the creation of the air force and also bring to light some typical interactions with their Israeli hosts. Sol Jacobs, a Second World War flight engineer from Liverpool, Britain, described the state of the Israeli air force, which he first encountered in summer 1948, as "very haphazard". "First of all, when I got out of [the base in] Ekron, I found that there were ... senior officers that didn't know their arse from a hole". He recalled the extreme workload that was placed on experienced foreign volunteers such as himself: "I had to give courses to crews, including some very senior officers... revision – refresher courses –

⁷ Yitzhak Greenberg, "Financing the War of Independence", *Zionism*, 13, 1988, 19 [Hebrew]; Derek J. Penslar, *Jews and the Military*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013, 245.

⁸ Markovitzky, *Machal*, 7, 22; Arielli, "When are foreign volunteers useful?", 710, 718-20.

and I was doing that as well as flying [bombing raids on Gaza and Al-Arish]. I never got much appreciation for doing it, but I had to do it." He initially trained Israeli ground crews and later on also future pilots. Courses were given in English, "[b]ecause there was nobody to give them the courses in any other language, at that time."⁹

Anita Koifman, who had spent the Second World War in Britain's RAF Fighter Command Headquarters, modestly commented on her service in the Israeli military:

...the only interesting thing is that I was a tourist, I didn't know one word of Hebrew – and I was an officer. [...] So it was very amusing, for me, and very disturbing for the people that I recruited. So I interviewed girls and men, to come into [the air force] operations [room] and, particularly the *kibbutzniks*, they resented me. [...] But, by the end of the course... I still have a little present that they gave me; we had great fun.¹⁰

Reflecting on the tensions between foreigners and Israelis in the air force, Harold Livingston, a former Second World War aircraft radio operator from Massachusetts, pointed out: "I think that we Americans believed ourselves above reproach. We, after all, were the veterans, the professionals, selflessly contributing our expertise to the struggling new nation. [...] So we expected, I suppose, to be treated accordingly. As saviors".¹¹

Having been raised in very different surroundings, it is unsurprising that the foreign volunteers and the Israelis found it difficult to adjust to one another. This universal facet of transnational encounters between guests and locals (varying levels of tension and resentment

⁹ The author's interview with Sol Jacobs, 22 December 2010.

¹⁰ The author's interview with Anita Koifman, 22 December 2010.

¹¹ Harold Livingston, *No Trophy, No Sword: An American Volunteer in the Israeli Air Force during the 1948 War of Independence*, Chicago: Edition Q, 1994, 146.

between foreign volunteers and their wartime hosts have also been recorded in other conflicts in the modern era¹²) was exacerbated by the lack of organization that the foreign volunteers faced, and the gap between their expectations and their experiences upon arrival. In 1948, some in the Israeli establishment worried that the friction caused as a result of the interaction between the foreign volunteers and their hosts might have serious implications for the Israeli war effort. In July the Israeli Foreign Ministry pointed out that:

Reports have reached our office that Jews and non-Jews who have come to this country recently to serve in the Army have been making complaints to their respective Consuls concerning the way they have been treated here. The French Consul in Tel Aviv has referred to the matter more than once [...]. It is to be feared that these complaints may influence Consuls' reports to their Governments concerning the authority of the Israeli Government and the prospects of success for Israeli arms. In a variety of other ways they may also affect first Jewish and then also non-Jewish attitudes abroad.¹³

Several complaints by foreign soldiers and officers, alongside recurring morale problems, prompted the IDF to establish the Machal department in September 1948. The department provided welfare assistance and tried to tend to the volunteers' special needs. However, neither the complaints nor the disciplinary problems which involved foreign personnel

¹² See, for instance: David MacKenzie, "Panslavism in Practice: Cherniaev in Serbia (1876)", *The Journal of Modern History*, 36: 3, 1964, 279-297; Fransjohan Pretorius, "Welcome but not that welcome: The relations between foreign volunteers and the Boers in the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902", in Christine G. Krüger & Sonja Levensen (eds), *War Volunteering in Modern Times: From the French Revolution to the Second World War*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011, 122-149; Judith Keene, *Fighting for Franco: International Volunteers in Nationalist Spain during the Spanish Civil War*, New York: Continuum, 2007.

¹³ Israel State Archives, G-12/3937, D.T. to Abe Herman, "Foreigners in the Hagana", 14 July 1948.

disappeared overnight. In the so-called "Anglo-Saxon Battalion" of the army's Seventh Brigade, for instance, morale problems seem to have been endemic.¹⁴

In autumn 1948 the IDF tried to introduce procedures to increase discipline and standardize military service, a move that was unpopular among some of the foreign volunteers. In the air force, this brought the tension between foreign airmen and their Israeli hosts to a new peak. 42 airmen sent a letter to Aharon Remez, the chief of staff of the air force, protesting the intention to draft the whole Air Transport Command into the air force. Up to that point, the volunteers were not required to take an oath of allegiance to the State of Israel, an act which - for the Americans among them - could have resulted in losing their U.S. citizenship.¹⁵ In response, Remez threatened to immediately repatriate any airmen who refused to retract in writing the ultimatum they submitted. The stand-off between the foreigners and the Israeli commanders was eventually settled by the Prime Minister and Secretary of Defence, David Ben Gurion. According to Al Schwimmer, in many respects the leader of the volunteer American airmen, "[t]he old boy said he'd struggled forty years to bring Jews into this country, and he sure as hell wasn't about to throw one out!"¹⁶ Ben Gurion's preference for keeping as many Jews as possible in Israel became even more pronounced after the war ended.

Postwar transition: from volunteers to immigrants

Encouraging the immigration of Jews to the Land of Israel was one of the central tenets of the Zionist movement ever since its establishment in the late nineteenth century. The overwhelming majority of Machal volunteers were Jews and, as soon as the 1948 war ended,

¹⁴ Bercuson, *The Secret Army*, 177, 195-96.

¹⁵ The U.S. Nationality Act of 1940 prohibited American citizens from formally entering the armed forces of a foreign state. Arielli, "When are foreign volunteers useful?", 707.

¹⁶ Livingston, *No Trophy, No Sword*, 249

those individuals and organizations that dealt with the veterans strove to help them remain in the country. "The many difficulties that came up in the [volunteers'] settling in and absorption in the IDF are probably better known to you than to us", wrote Rafi Thon, a representative of the Israeli Ministry of Defence in London, to Ben Gurion. "I believe that [we] should hurry and start on a broad activity that would ensure possibilities of absorption into the country's economy for [these] people", he added. Thon highlighted accommodation and employment as the key issues, determining whether veterans would choose to remain in Israel. He pointed out that these were skilled individuals and, unlike many of the other immigrants that were reaching Israel at the time, the *machalniks* had other opportunities available to them in their country of origin.¹⁷ Selig Brodetsky, the most prominent Zionist leader in Britain, agreed with Thon's comments, noting that "this is a matter of great importance not only for Zionism in this country, but also for the State of Israel."¹⁸

The IDF gathered data on the task at hand. An institute for the study of public opinion, working alongside the IDF's psychological research unit, surveyed 387 Machal soldiers still in service in March 1949 (some of the sociologists and statisticians who conducted the survey had previously worked in the psychological research unit of the U.S. Army during the Second World War).¹⁹ 90% of the respondents were male, 59% came from Anglophone countries and 71% were unmarried. 15% were 20 years-old or younger, 68% were in their twenties and 12% were in their thirties or older (5% did not disclose their age).

The underlying yet unstated assumption behind the survey was that the foreign volunteers ought to remain and settle in Israel. Hence, the five results which were highlighted in the

¹⁷ IDFA, 580/1956, file 240, Thon to Ben Gurion, 28 January 1949.

¹⁸ IDFA, 580/1956, file 240, Brodetsky to Ben Gurion, 31 January 1949.

¹⁹ "Machal ba LeYisrael" [Machal comes to Israel]: a survey on the adaptation of overseas volunteers to Israel and its inhabitants, [1949]. The survey is available through the website of the Israel Democracy Institute: <http://www.idi.org.il/>.

opening page of the report were: 75% want to settle in Israel; 65% believe they did not receive enough information about economic possibilities in Israel; 55% believe they did not have an opportunity to get acquainted with the country; 58% did not get a chance to learn Hebrew; and 55% held negative opinions about the country and its inhabitants. Conducted shortly after the war ended, the survey did not sample the opinions of those volunteers who had already left the country. This would, in part, account for the high number of individuals declaring their desire to remain in Israel.

For the question "what shortcomings did you encounter in Israel and its inhabitants", the most common complaints were about the constant need for contacts and connections to get ahead in life as well as the locals' rudeness, closed-mindedness and lack of hospitality. Among the answers cited were: "In England I was considered a Jew – in Israel I am considered English"; "we are not thanked for having come to help", and "[Israelis] like the [concept of] *aliya* [i.e. immigration of Jews to Israel] but not the immigrant." On the other hand, a number of respondents pointed out that "after all – it is our state", "a person feels at home here", "[this is] the only place where a Jew can live a life of freedom", and "the enthusiasm [here] sweeps you along". In general, the opinions of officers were more favourable than those of the rank and file. When asked about their opinion on Israeli society, female respondents expressed more positive views than males.

The results of the Machal survey were more positive than those obtained from a similar one that was conducted among Gachal (an acronym of the Hebrew words *Giyus Chutz La'aretz* – "overseas recruitment") soldiers in September 1949. The latter were immigrants, many of them Holocaust survivors, who were drafted into the IDF upon arrival. 72% of the participants in the Gachal survey had a negative opinion of Israel and its inhabitants. 88% of them believed they were not given enough information about opportunities in Israel and 81% stated that

they did not get a chance to become acquainted with the country.²⁰ It should be noted that while Machal volunteers were promised that their return trip at the end of their service would be paid for, the much more numerous Gachal recruits often had no alternative homes to go back to.

The Israeli leadership recognized the collective contribution made by both Machal and Gachal during the war. However, facing various challenges and preoccupied with other concerns, it had little time for or interest in recognizing the contribution of individuals. Addressing the Zionist General Council in Jerusalem on 5 May 1949, Ben Gurion told his audience that "[w]e will guarantee our safety by three means: with military force, with a policy of peace towards our neighbours and through immigration and settlement". In this context, he sought to maintain strong links between Israel and Jewish diaspora communities. In addition to encouraging the immigration of Jews to Israel, he considered the support of world Jewry crucial for the survival of Israel. With regard to the foreign volunteers, "in terms of both quantity and quality", they "had played no small part in our war of liberty this year". He stressed that the task of defending Israel must be borne first and foremost by Israel's citizens. However, "the Zionist movement must be aware that world Jewry must also carry part of the security burden" which the newly established state would not be able to sustain on its own. To this he added:

This year we received assistance without which, perhaps, we would not have been able to stand (by this I do not mean the volunteers; we might have stood even without these volunteers). Of the wonderful things that happened this year in our

²⁰ "Gachal members and the State of Israel", IDF Psychological Research Unit, September 1949. I am very grateful to Chanan Cohen of the Guttman Center for Surveys at the Israel Democracy Institute for sharing this material.

struggle, the most wonderful thing perhaps, was not the establishment of the army [...] but the arming of our forces on the ground, in the air and in the sea. The time has not yet come to tell the details of this tale...²¹

What Ben Gurion was reluctant to disclose was the overwhelming importance of funds that were raised in North America, Europe and elsewhere in the efforts to purchase weapons, ammunition and arms-manufacturing equipment for the IDF. Ben Gurion, therefore, envisaged the diaspora as a source of financial support and of potential immigrants. The contribution of foreign volunteers was welcomed, but what Israel needed, according to the Prime Minister, was long-term commitment that would lead to the country's modernization and development.²²

How were those volunteers who decided to stay in Israel treated? An office of the IDF's human resources department, which replaced the wartime Machal department, was tasked with assisting in the absorption of the volunteers. In its six months of operation, between January and July 1949, some 1207 former volunteers – just over one third of the total number – registered with the office to receive various forms of assistance. The office helped to secure jobs for 254 veterans and assisted in bringing to Israel the relatives of 127 volunteers. Within the context of mass migration to Israel, raising money locally to tend for the needs of the *machalniks* proved extremely difficult. Instead, the state tried to raise money from Zionist organizations abroad for this purpose.²³ In August 1949 the military office was replaced by a

²¹ David Ben Gurion, *David Ben Gurion: The First Prime Minister, Selected Documents (1947-1963)*, Jerusalem: Israel State Archives, 1996, 517 [Hebrew].

²² For more on this strand in Ben Gurion's approach, see: C. L. Sulzberger, *A Long Row of Candles: Memoirs and Diaries 1934-1954*, Toronto: Macmillan, 1969, 507.

²³ CZA, S41/436, final report on the activities of the office for the absorption of the volunteer, 11 January – 15 July 1949.

civilian Overseas Volunteer Settlement Committee, which worked alongside the Ministry of Defence and the Jewish Agency. The Committee was able to secure for *machalniks* who wished to remain in Israel a special clearance from customs duty, which enabled them to bring into the country certain goods free of tax.²⁴ Like its military predecessor, the civilian Committee enabled 95 volunteers to use the money they were offered for their return trip to their country of origin to bring family members over to Israel instead.²⁵ In 1949 and 1950 former Machal volunteers were eligible for loans to help them purchase houses, pursue academic studies or receive professional training. The funding for these loans came from the Israeli government, the Jewish Agency, the United Israel Appeal and from donations from Jewish communities in Britain, the U.S., Canada, South Africa, Scandinavia and the Netherlands (money from the communities was earmarked for volunteers from these countries).²⁶ However, the funds promised did not always materialize, causing a great amount of frustration for the staff of the Overseas Volunteer Settlement Committee.²⁷

Roughly 1,500 Machal veterans remained in Israel in the immediate post-war years. The largest contingents came from Britain – 500, one third of the total – followed by Latin America and South Africa.²⁸ Quite a few veterans sought housing schemes which would enable them to live together in the same communities. 120 British and South African volunteers settled in Moshav Habonim and 70 others settled in what would soon become Kfar Daniel (both communities were established on ruins of Arab settlements that remained empty after the

²⁴ CZA, S46/754-2, 'Absorption of Machal 1949-1950'.

²⁵ CZA, S41/436, first quarterly survey of the activities of the Overseas Volunteer Settlement Committee, 1 August – 1 November 1949.

²⁶ CZA, KH4/11650.

²⁷ See, for instance: CZA, J24/132, Lee Harris to J. Voet (Jewish Agency in Amsterdam), 27 June 1949.

²⁸ IDFA, 580/1956, file 240, "The reception of Machal members in Israel: report on the current situation", 12 April 1949; CZA, S41/436, Gafni to Berl Locker, 10 April 1949

war).²⁹ Around 100 volunteers received assistance in purchasing purpose-built houses in the neighbourhood of Hadar Yosef in north-eastern Tel Aviv.³⁰

Entitled to such financial assistance and administrative support, the *machalniks* were a fairly privileged group of immigrants when compared to their contemporaries who had come to Israel from Middle Eastern countries or from Eastern Europe (in the years 1948-1951 Israel absorbed 687,624 immigrants; 239,954 arrived in 1949 alone).³¹ Nonetheless, almost 60% of the foreign volunteers who fought in 1948 left the country after the end of their service. Some volunteers never intended to stay on a long-term basis.³² Others left Israel after their demobilization only to return and settle there several years later.³³

The efforts of the IDF - and of the state more broadly - to stay in touch with *machalniks* who returned to their country of origin were rather limited in the first two decades after Israel's independence. Yona Ettinger, a member of the Overseas Volunteer Settlement Committee, explained to high-ranking state officials that contact with former volunteers abroad should be maintained "out of the hope that they would come back to the country should the need arise".³⁴ However, the disbanding of the Committee in spring 1950, within the context of state-wide austerity and spending cuts, did not help matters. In some places – such as Britain – the volunteers formed veteran associations on their own initiative, without waiting for Israeli assistance.³⁵ The first concerted effort to celebrate Machal took place in May 1968,

²⁹ CZA, S41/436, survey of activities of the Overseas Volunteer Settlement Committee, 1 August 1949 to 31 January 1950.

³⁰ CZA, L62/41, correspondence regarding housing schemes for discharged Machal Volunteers, 1948-49.

³¹ Arie Lova Eliav, "The absorption of one million immigrants by Israel in the 1950s", *Refugees*, 14:6, 1994, 11.

³² The author's interview with Norman Sapherson, Leeds, 03 May 2011; Livingston, *No Trophy, No Sword*, 148-49.

³³ The author's interviews with Moshe Feingold, 20 December 2010, and Avi Grant, 21 December 2010.

³⁴ IDFA, 28/1960, file 70, Ettinger to Avigor, Sapir and Merner, 15 March 1950.

³⁵ "Old Machalniks' forgather," *Jewish Chronicle*, 16 December 1949, 9; IDFA, 1000827/1958, file 101, Ettinger to Kagan, 11 April 1950.

around the twentieth anniversary of the declaration of Israel's independence. Some 750 former *machalniks* who lived in Israel were joined by 250 of their peers from abroad to take part in "Machal week", the first large-scale commemoration of the foreign volunteers' contribution to the war.³⁶ The rekindling of interest in the foreign veterans of 1948 owed much to the new wave of volunteers who went to Israel in 1967, before or soon after the Six Day War.

The 1967 generation

The recruitment of "specialists" and other foreign volunteers, primarily from South Africa, continued on a very small scale into the 1950s.³⁷ But it was not until the period of grave tension between Israel and Egypt in May and early June 1967 that a mass movement of volunteers re-appeared. Some diaspora Jews felt that Israel's existence was at risk. Pro-Israel rallies and spontaneous fund-raising campaigns were held in several cities across the world. In the midst of this 1967 moment, which was reminiscent of the 1948 moment, some wanted to take direct action. In various countries, Jews and non-Jews approached Israeli embassies and consulates and offered to volunteer for service in the IDF or to otherwise help Israel. In response, the Israeli Foreign Ministry set up dozens of emergency committees, in cooperation with local Jewish organizations, while Jewish Agency offices opened up volunteer recruitment desks. On the eve of the war a meeting was held between representatives of the Jewish Agency, the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign Ministry which decided on the following

³⁶ "A thousand Machal members came in 1948; 750 of them settled in Israel", *Maariv*, 07 May 1968, 7.

³⁷ "The story of the Machal Nachal volunteers", World Machal website: http://www.machal.org.il/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=124&Itemid=172&lang=en [accessed on 15 April 2015].

policy: a) the overseas handling of the volunteers would be led by the Jewish Agency; b) upon arrival, the volunteers would be sent to frontier civilian settlements; c) the IDF would recruit primarily "doctors, surgeons, anaesthesiologists and nurses (Jewish and also non-Jewish)"; d) the IDF would compile a questionnaire for the purpose of classifying the volunteers.³⁸

The war, which began on 5 June, ended very swiftly. Pre-war fears in Israel and the diaspora turned out to be exaggerated. The vast majority of the volunteers arrived in the country after the fighting was over. The overseas recruitment offices and emergency committees closed soon after the war ended, though the Jewish Agency continued to send organized groups of volunteers to Israel. The Agency also covered the travel costs of most of the volunteers, save for flights from South America.³⁹ Approximately 22,500 people registered their interest in going to Israel by early July 1967, 11,000 of them in Europe alone. Some 5,000 volunteers arrived in Israel by 5 July with the total number rising as high as 7,435 by the end of January 1968.⁴⁰ The largest contingents were, once again, from Britain⁴¹ (1,940), Latin America (1,500), South Africa (850), France (860) and the United States (750). Just under 4,000 volunteers promised to remain in Israel for at least three months, while the rest committed themselves to a period of six months or more. In terms of ages, the foreigners of 1967 were

³⁸ Moshe Naor, "Israeli mobilization and the overseas volunteers in the Six-Day War", *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, 13:3, 2014, 447; IDFA, 1687/1985, file 19, 'Summary of discussion on the subject of volunteers from abroad held on 2/6/67', 4 June 1967.

³⁹ IDFA, 1508/1993, file 418, Ara'el to Karni, 16 June 1967.

⁴⁰ IDFA, 1508/1993, file 418, letter from Ara'el, 29 June 1967; CZA, S15\42103, "List of volunteers abroad who have reached Israel since the start of the war", 5 July 1967; Tamar Horowitz, Joseph Hodara and Meir Cialic, "Volunteers for Israel during the Six Day War: Their Motives and Work Careers", *Dispersion and Unity*, 13/14, 1971, 68.

⁴¹ The number of volunteers coming to Israel from Britain was, proportionally, very high in both 1948 and 1967, even though the Anglo-Jewish community was much smaller than others, such as the one in the United States. However, in 1948 the number of volunteers registered as coming from Britain was artificially high, as it included former refugees from Europe who had arrived in the United Kingdom before or after the Second World War. As Natan Adrian points out, in the years that followed 1948, the majority of British Jews looked upon Israel sympathetically, though few declared their intention of emigrating. This relatively favorable approach towards Zionism helps to explain the high number of volunteers from Britain in 1967. Natan Adrian, "Anglo-Jewry and the State of Israel: Defining the Relationship, 1948-1956", *Israel Studies*, 10:1, 2005, 151.

younger than their 1948 predecessors: 85% were between the ages of 18 and 25, and their median age was 20-21. Nearly half the volunteers were women.⁴²

The IDF was far more organized and better trained and equipped than it had been in 1948. It therefore had far less need for foreign volunteers. Up to 1,200 were sent, on a temporary basis, to civilian ancillary units in the IDF. These volunteers sorted captured enemy weapons, worked in military warehouses, served as drivers and mechanics, undertook cleaning duties and so on.⁴³ As far as long-term recruitment was concerned, numbers were much more modest. On 6 July 1967 the Minister for Labour, Yigal Allon, declared that Jewish foreign volunteers would be able to enlist for a two-year service if they met the health and age requirements. This would not only strengthen the IDF, he said, but also give the volunteers "educational value and psychological satisfaction".⁴⁴ The details of the procedure were ironed out at a meeting between officials representing the Jewish Agency, the Ministry of the Interior and IDF officers. Both Jews and non-Jews wishing to enlist would need to undergo medical examinations and, with regard to their immigration status, would have to become temporary residents of Israel. The IDF distributed forms to survey the profession of the volunteers, but was eventually able to recruit only a tiny number of foreigners. By the end of August 1967 a mere few dozen foreign men and women reported to the enlistment centres.⁴⁵

Instead, most of the foreign volunteers were used to plug holes in the labour market. The mass call-up of reservists by the IDF before the conflict meant that the Israeli economy was

⁴² CZA, S62/494, "From the lecture of Mr. E. Dobkin", 25 September 1967; summary by Moshe Rivlin, February 1968; Naor, "Israeli mobilization", 448-51; Horowitz, Hodara and Cialic, "Volunteers for Israel during the Six Day War", 85. The sources vary slightly on the number of volunteers from each country.

⁴³ Naor, "Israeli mobilization", 449; IDFA, 317/1969, file 125; Arnan Zafrir, *The Volunteers* (1967) [film].

⁴⁴ "IDF prepared to accept volunteers from abroad", *Davar*, 06 July 1967, 2.

⁴⁵ IDFA, 317/1969, file 125, "Volunteers from abroad – discussion summary", 8 August 1967. See also reports from enlistment centres to the Head of Personnel Division, 6 August and 30 August 1967.

in urgent need of working hands. Hence, 450 foreigners were sent to carry out agricultural work in *moshavim* (cooperative agricultural communities), 250 participated in reconstruction works at the Hebrew University campus on Mount Scopus, 150 were sent to archaeological excavations, 120 to work in forestation and 100 were used for educational work in various communities. 225 doctors and nurses joined the healthcare system.⁴⁶ By far the largest group – approximately 4,500 – were sent to work in *kibbutzim*.

There were a number of reasons why the *kibbutzim* were well suited to receive large numbers of foreigners: for socialist ideological reasons, many of the *kibbutzim* did not take on hired workers for either agriculture or industry. Yet during the 1960s the *kibbutzim* began to take on volunteers from Europe, North America and elsewhere – often non-Jews – who would stay for a number of weeks or months, receive food communally at the kibbutz dining hall, and in return work wherever they were needed (this form of kibbutz volunteering continued to flourish in the 1970s and 1980s, and still persists today, though on a much smaller scale). Therefore, when thousands of volunteers arrived in Israel in the summer of 1967, the *kibbutzim* already had some experience of employing foreigners and in some places also the infrastructure to host them. Kibbutz Gadot, where the author was born, serves as a useful example. With several of its buildings badly damaged during the skirmishes across the Israeli-Syrian border on 7 April 1967, which preceded the war, the Kibbutz received an unusually high number of volunteers – 57 – most of whom came from South Africa. Tents were erected to accommodate them and they were used as a substitute labour force.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ CZA, S62/494, summary by Moshe Rivlin, February 1968; Naor, "Israeli mobilization", 449.

⁴⁷ CZA, S15/42103, "Overseas volunteers project", July 1967; Zafir, *The Volunteers*.

As historian Moshe Naor aptly put it, "the manner in which the institutions of state, the Jewish Agency, and the kibbutz movement processed these volunteers sought primarily to channel the movement from volunteering to migration and to strengthen the bond between Israel and World Jewry".⁴⁸ Indeed, the effort to transform the volunteers into immigrants was more explicit in 1967-68 than it had been twenty years earlier. Addressing a volunteers' conference in late September 1967, Prime Minister Levi Eshkol called upon the volunteers "to come and settle in Israel".⁴⁹ Hanoch Rinott, who had served as Director-General of the Israeli Education Ministry, visited Jewish communities in Europe and North America to find out whether "the great awakening of June 1967" could have a long-term impact on the links between Israel and the diaspora.⁵⁰ Anticipating the great debate that would soon emerge about the fate of the territories Israel had occupied during the Six Day War, Avraham Herzfeld, a former member of the Israeli parliament and a veteran settlement activist, called on the "thousands of volunteers and recruits from abroad" to establish settlements in these areas.⁵¹

However, similarly to the *machalniks* of 1948, the majority of the 1967 volunteers were in no hurry to become immigrants. As one Israeli commentator pointed out, the volunteers had come to Israel "on the spur of a sudden decision and at times from a completely illogical impulse; sometimes out of a desire to see the world, a thirst for adventure, concern for the fate of the Jewish people and a dozen other motives the last of which was the possibility of settling in Israel".⁵² Furthermore, much like their predecessors twenty years earlier, the volunteers encountered several logistical difficulties. Reports about problems in the

⁴⁸ Naor, "Israeli mobilization", 443.

⁴⁹ "L. Eshkol at volunteers' conference", *Maariv*, 26 September 1967, 2.

⁵⁰ CZA, S62/494, "Summary of visits regarding the volunteers in New York, Detroit, Paris and London", October 1967.

⁵¹ Avraham Herzfeld, "A time to settle once again", *Davar*, 7 July 1967, 10.

⁵² Cited in: Horowitz, Hodara and Cialic, "Volunteers for Israel", 70.

organization of the hosting of volunteers began to appear in the press as early as July 1967.⁵³ Some of the volunteers who worked on the *kibbutzim* complained that kibbutz members were not interested in getting to know them and did not appreciate their work. For their part, kibbutz members complained that some volunteers would wander off to see the country and were subsequently absent from work. "They [kibbutz members] feel as if [the *kibbutzim*] were hotels for the volunteers who have no sense of belonging to the place".⁵⁴ Addressing the volunteers' conference in September 1967, Prime Minister Eshkol heard complaints about Israeli bureaucracy. One volunteer wrote to the *Jerusalem Post*, complaining that the Jewish Agency "cannot deal with prospective immigrants from the 'free world'. Their failure in 'Project Volunteer' illustrates this".⁵⁵

A team from the Henrietta Szold Institute, which interviewed 1,215 volunteers at the request of the Jewish Agency, concluded that the "Volunteer Movement was not an immigration movement". The team argued that while the volunteers "experienced a situation of conflict between their Jewish and civil identities", their decision to go to Israel was not seen "as a long-term solution to the problem of their status in their country of origin but as an attempt to release tension and overcome a feeling of discomfort in the short term whilst giving expression to their consciousness of Jewish identity".⁵⁶ Indeed, of the 3,500 volunteers who remained in Israel in early 1968, only some 1,200 had begun the formal process of permanently settling in Israel.⁵⁷

⁵³ Yoram Peri, "The volunteer does not like routine", *Davar*, 13 July 1967, 3; "Unforeseen problems in the hosting of volunteers", *Davar*, 23 July 1967, 4.

⁵⁴ Naor, "Israeli mobilization", 450; CZA, S62/494, report by Dvora Hornstein, 28 August 1967.

⁵⁵ "L. Eshkol at volunteers' conference", *Maariv*, 26 September 1967, 2; "Handling western immigrants", *Jerusalem Post*, 14 December 1967.

⁵⁶ Horowitz, Hodara and Cialic, "Volunteers for Israel", 113.

⁵⁷ CZA, S62/494, summary by Moshe Rivlin, February 1968.

Belated inclusion

In a compelling study of the way in which veterans of the International Brigades of the Spanish Civil War era were remembered in Israel, Raanan Rein has shown how a marginal group, composed predominantly of communists who were on the periphery of Jewish society in British-ruled Palestine in the 1930s, gradually made their way into the mainstream of Israeli consensus. In 1986 Israel's President, Chaim Herzog, gave a speech commending these "courageous men" and the same year saw the official inauguration of the so-called Forest of Peace and Friendship near Jerusalem, which honours the Jewish volunteers in the Spanish Civil War and their sacrifice.⁵⁸ Ironically, the foreigners who volunteered their services for Israel in its wars also had to wait a long time before their wartime contribution was recognized.

The wave of volunteers who arrived in Israel in 1967 left a very limited impression on Israeli collective memory. Most of them remained in Israel only a few months and they were used principally as a substitute work force rather than taking part in the fighting. The 1967 wave did, however, remind some Israelis of the military contribution of the Machal volunteers nearly twenty years earlier.⁵⁹ The Israeli government began to express its gratitude for the Machal fighters' contribution in the late 1960s. For instance, Norman Sapherson from Leeds in Britain, who had served in the air force, received his State of Israel Fighters Award in July 1969.⁶⁰ However, in 1976, when Rabin wrote the foreword for *Dual Allegiance*, the

⁵⁸ Raanan Rein, "A Belated Inclusion: Jewish Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War and Their Place in the Israeli National Narrative", *Israel Studies*, 17:1, 2012, 24-49.

⁵⁹ See, for instance: Shlomo Grodzinski, "The volunteers", *Davar*, 30 July 1967, 3.

⁶⁰ Zvi Cohen (Ministry of Defence) to Norman Sapherson, 24 July 1969. I am very grateful to Mr Sapherson for sharing this document with me.

autobiography of Canadian volunteer Ben Dunkelman, he began by saying: "The time is probably not yet ripe to tell the full story of that unusual and dedicated group of men and women who went by the name of 'Machal'".⁶¹ The Prime Minister was probably still wary of revealing too much about Israeli recruitment and arms procurement activities in 1948; activities which in some cases breached the laws of a number of countries. Works that were published in the 1980s on the role of volunteers from the diaspora in the establishment of Israel remarked on how their contribution had been forgotten.⁶² As Leslie Katz pointed out, "much to the chagrin of some *machalniks*, there was no formal recognition of Machal's contribution until 1993".⁶³

Indeed, the 1990s heralded a shift in the way Machal was remembered in Israel. Rabin's inauguration of the memorial for the fallen foreign volunteers set the tone. In 1997 a Machal stamp was issued by the Israel Philatelic Service. Featuring images of aircraft, a ship and a field gun, the stamp bears Rabin's words: "They came to us when we most needed them..." When the Israeli air force celebrated its 50th anniversary that year, veterans from abroad joined Israel's President and their former comrade, Ezer Weizman, for an official ceremony in Jerusalem. In April 2012 an exhibition at Tel Aviv's Diaspora Museum was devoted to the *machalniks* and to the foreigners who manned ships that brought illegal immigrants to Palestine between 1945 and 1948.⁶⁴ The Israeli air force now has a webpage dedicated to

⁶¹ Yitzhak Rabin, "Foreword", in Ben Dunkelman, *Dual Allegiance: An Autobiography*, New York: Crown, 1976, ix.

⁶² Bercuson, *The Secret Army*, 233; Murray S. Greenfield and Joseph M. Hochstein, *The Jews' Secret Fleet*, Jerusalem & New York: Gefen, 1987, xvii.

⁶³ Leslie Katz, "U.S. veterans of '48 war recall their Zionist passion", *Jweekly*, 5 June 1998, <http://www.jweekly.com/article/full/8389/u-s-veterans-of-48-war-recall-their-zionist-passion/> [accessed on 27 March 2015].

⁶⁴ Markovitzky, *Machal*, cover page; Katz, "U.S. veterans of '48 war"; Penslar, *Jews and the Military*, 257.

foreign pilots who were killed in 1948 and scenes for the documentary film *Above and Beyond* (2014), which traces the stories of Jewish-American pilots, were filmed in Israel.⁶⁵

The growth in displays of commemoration and recognition for the sacrifices made by foreign volunteers was the product of a number of reasons. As they grew older, the veteran volunteers and their association, World Machal, worked hard to increase awareness of their contribution in 1948.⁶⁶ Having supportive Israeli politicians like Rabin and Weizman, themselves veterans of the 1948 war, in positions of power in the 1990s certainly helped the foreign volunteers' efforts. Another reason relates to the aging and gradual disappearance of the generation that witnessed the Holocaust and the establishment of Israel. To better sustain the links between Israel and the Jewish diaspora at the turn of the twenty-first century, both Zionist activists abroad and the Israeli government had an interest in highlighting this historical example of mobilization and solidarity. More broadly, as historian Derek Penslar argues convincingly, "classic Zionist deprecation of the diaspora has gradually given way among Israel's political and cultural elites to an appreciation of diaspora Jewry's vitality, creativity, philanthropic innovation and generosity, and political clout".⁶⁷

Conclusions

There were a number of key differences between the foreign volunteers who went to Israel in 1948 and those of 1967. The former were, on average, older. Many of them were veterans

⁶⁵ "We Haven't Forgotten", <http://www.iaf.org.il/5642-36106-en/IAF.aspx> [accessed on 16 May 2015]

⁶⁶ For instance, the veteran Stanley Medicks lobbied for the creation of the Machal memorial that was dedicated in 1993. See: "The Memorial", *World Machal website*, http://www.machal.org.il/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=308&Itemid=532&lang=en [accessed on 15 December 2015].

⁶⁷ Penslar, *Jews and the Military*, 257-58.

of the Second World War and 90% were male. Their contribution to the Israeli war effort was first and foremost a military one. The 1967 volunteers were younger. In terms of gender, they were nearly evenly split (53.7% male).⁶⁸ Their military contribution was marginal and they were used essentially as a substitute work force. These differences aside, there were a number of similarities in their motivations and in the way they were received.

For the volunteers, the Israeli experience revolved around making a contribution and partaking in - or at least witnessing - a historical event. The generation of 1948 in particular, but also to an extent their counterparts in 1967, sought recognition and appreciation for their efforts. For the Israeli government, the Jewish Agency and the other organizations on the receiving end, the volunteers posed a challenge. Unlike Israeli citizens, who were subject to conscription, the foreigners chose to come to Israel and thus expected, and to a certain extent received, special treatment. Once the 1948 war was over, the tendency was to view the volunteers essentially as potential immigrants, in line with the basic tenets of Zionism. The 1967 volunteers were viewed in much the same way, and the ad hoc policies devised after each of the two conflicts reflected this tendency. However, in both cases, only a minority of the volunteers chose to settle in Israel permanently. While obviously concerned about Israel's fate, most of these foreigners saw their mobilization as tied to a specific political and military crisis, and therefore temporary.

Considering the difference in approach towards the question of migration as well as the divergent cultural outlooks and backgrounds, it is not surprising that tensions arose in the late 1940s and again in the late 1960s. The gap between the expectations of the foreign volunteers and their Israeli hosts began to close in the 1990s and early 2000s, when both the government

⁶⁸ Horowitz, Hodara and Cialic, "Volunteers for Israel during the Six Day War", 85.

and the IDF began to commemorate and celebrate the 1948 volunteers and their contribution. Whereas once Israeli society took for granted the willingness of the Jewish diaspora to mobilize in its defence, in recent decades a more appreciative approach seems to have emerged.