

Od Lo Gamarnu - We are not yet finished:

Universalism and Particularism in the Ideology of Habonim Dror North America

1922-2024



Habonim Dror members, 1980s or 1990s. Source: Habonim Dror Archives

Rose Clubok

Department of History

Undergraduate Senior Thesis

Barnard College, Columbia University

April 15, 2026

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Introduction

When I was nine, my parents sent me to Jewish summer camp, against their instincts. They had not gone themselves, because their own parents believed that people only sent their children to summer camp if they did not really love them and wanted to get rid of them for a summer. But all my friends were going, and I begged, so they allowed me to join them. At camp, my friends and I worked in the *chava* (the farm), did *toranut* (dish washing rotation), and participated in *briut* (cleaning the bathrooms). We learned *rikkudei am* (Israeli folk dance) and sang songs with lyrics such as “Politically we’re socialists, culturally we’re Jews/We’re on our way to Zion with a Youth Movement for you!” When I returned from camp, I asked my parents if we were socialists. The ideological inspiration arising from my camp experiences continued throughout my childhood; when I was fifteen I cried when I discovered the Kibbutz movement was dead.



1975. Source: Habonim Dror North America Community Archives

This was, in fact, the point. Camp attempted to counteract the forces of capitalist assimilation at work among middle-to-upper class suburban Jews who were becoming increasingly affluent and increasingly alienated both from living a collective and agricultural lifestyle, as well as from the radical ideologies of the early twentieth century Jewish working class. Another song's lyrics went: "Goodbye America, Goodbye Assimilation/We're going to Israel to build the Jewish nation!" The movement's goal of shaping us was explicit: we were building and being built by a specific ideology of Zionist-Socialism in order to form a new and better world in its image.

My camp is a part of Habonim, a Labor Zionist youth movement that grew out of the Poalei Zion (Workers of Zion) Party, founded in 1903.¹ In 1920, the youth movement Poalei Zion Yugnt (Young Workers of Zion) was created as "the official youth wing of the American Poalei Zion party," and spelled out its aims at its first *veida*, democratic decision making process.² Notably, this statement explained that Poalei Zion Yugnt would "prepare the Jewish youth" for "the emancipation of the Jewish working class together with the workers of all nations."³ It identified the movement's ideology as one of "progressive Jewish nationalism" and its language as Yiddish.⁴ In 1935, Habonim was officially created out of Poalei Zion Yugnt in order to "educate American boys and girls to the ideals of Socialist Zionism."⁵ In the eighties, Habonim merged with another Labor Zionist youth movement, Dror (another youth movement that arose out of Young Poalei Zion);⁶ to this day it exists in North America under the name Habonim Dror North America.⁷

¹ Mark Raider, *The Emergence of American Zionism*, (New York: NYU Press, 1998), 125.

² Mark Raider, *The Emergence of American Zionism*, 126.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Mark Raider, *The Emergence of American Zionism*, 126-7.

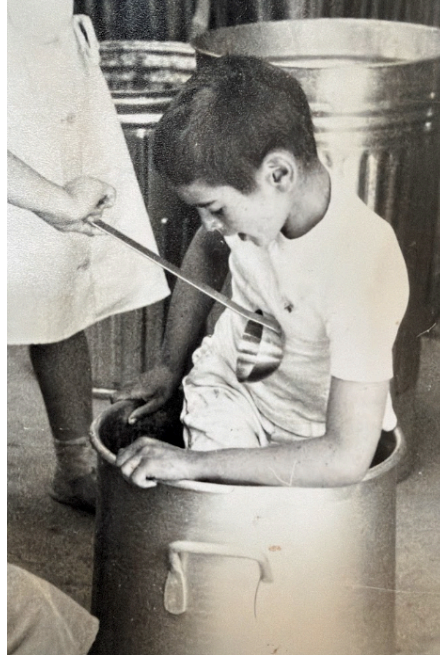
⁵ "Ideological Development of Habonim." n.d.

⁶ Mordechai Reicher and Yosef Magen-Shitz, eds., *Yad l'Yedinitz; Memorial Book for the Jewish Community of Yedintzi, Bessarabia (Edinet, Moldova)*, trans. Nina Schwartz (New York: JewishGen Press, 2023), 555.

⁷ "Habonim Dror." Accessed October 5, 2025. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/habonim-dror>.

Over the years, the youth movement has existed in different forms. There have been summer camps in different locations throughout North America, as well as children's programming in cities and training farms to prepare those moving to *kibbutzim*. Currently, there are six summer camps operated by Habonim Dror North America. They are located in Michigan, Pennsylvania, Maryland, California, Ontario, and Vancouver. At Habonim Dror summer camps, older movement members (ages eighteen to twenty-six) run programming for younger campers (ages seven to seventeen). Campers spend their time doing *avodah* (labor), participating in *peulot* (educational activities), learning ideological songs, and also participating in more typical summer camp activities like camping, swimming, playing sports, and doing arts and crafts. The summer camps are modelled to be like mini-*kibbutzim*, with counselors guiding campers through practice living collectively in order to be prepared for adult life on a *kibbutz*.

Much more than just the movement's name has changed from 1920 to today. Both the idea of "progressive Jewish nationalism" referenced in the founding document of Young Poalei Zion and the "ideals of Socialist Zionism" have evolved. For example, the "Goodbye Assimilation" song fell out of use in more recent years, as the tensions between an ideology of universalistic socialism and particularistic nationalism became increasingly apparent. Even before October 7th and Israel's response prompted intense debate within the American Jewish community about Israel, there was discomfort in the movement about the idea of continuing to participate in the project of building a socialist Jewish nation state. Barely anyone actually moves to Israel anymore.



California, 1967. Source: Habonim Dror North America Community Archives.

Habonim Dror's ideology has shifted in ways that have, at times, felt shocking and disruptive for movement members and alumni. At other times, the movement has been slow to change, prompting frustration from some members. Many people affiliated with the movement, regardless of ideological stance, like to say "the movement has always [or never] been this way." This raises the question: has it? In a youth movement, memory is inherently short, as members age out at twenty-six. For a movement member in the field of history, this raises the question of whether the recent memory of any given member really speaks for broader movement history, which spans a hundred years. When one looks at *veida* resolutions from 1922 to 2019, it becomes clear that most claims of the movement having "always" or "never" been a certain way are shortsighted. The movement has changed significantly multiple times, and the debates within Habonim Dror today are not essentially different from its past debates. The only way the movement has "always" been is in tension about these exact issues.

If it is true that the movement has changed in the past in similar ways to how it may be changing now, what can we say is constant? Is there something essential about the orientation and praxis of the movement that transcends these shifts in life path and ideology? Does Habonim simply retain the same name despite having entirely different components from when it was first built? I argue that while the ideology of the movement has changed over time, there are two inherent values that have stayed constant. Habonim has always been a movement attempting to work towards the particular liberation of the Jewish people alongside the universal liberation of all humanity.

This is not to say that the movement has always succeeded. At different times, the movement has leaned more universalist or more particularist in its orientation. The movement has, at times, worked towards the liberation of all people, and at other times justified the oppression of Palestinians. At times, the movement has considered abandoning working toward a specifically Jewish future in favor of universal liberation. However, efforts to change movement ideology to the point where it gives up either core goal have repeatedly failed. *Veida* resolutions consistently point to these two goals as reasoning for changing the movement to become more like it is “supposed to be.”



Ontario, Canada, 1993. Source: Habonim Dror North America Archives

I started my research journey in the Columbia Rare Books and Manuscripts Library with boxes from a former professor who grew up in Habonim. However, given the niche focus of this thesis, it was difficult to find sufficient material to fully answer my question at official American archives.⁸ Therefore, I traveled to Philadelphia to the movement's central office to find more sources. Habonim Dror's leadership graciously gave me access to the movement's archives, which were then housed in a storage unit on the outskirts of the city. They were kind enough to keep these archives local until I finished conducting my research. They are now on their way to the Yad Tabenkin archive in Israel, and will also be digitally archived at the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati.

Through a combination of materials from the Columbia Rare Books and Manuscripts Library and the Habonim Dror archives, I was able to find a complete set of the resolutions from the movement's democratic process from 1922 to 1965 as well as the vast majority of resolutions from 1980 to 2019. According to the movement's current leadership, when a group of Habonim Dror alumni made *aliyah* (moved) to Israel in the 1970s, they brought the movement's archives

⁸ I received much advice to inquire at the Yad Tabenkin archive, which happens to be in Israel.

from 1966 to the 1980s along with them. Fortunately, I gained access to an oral history project about movement members' experiences from the 1950s to the 1990s, which covers this period. The resolutions are useful in noting what was widely believed in the movement at any given time to have passed a vote at *veida*. On the other hand, personal records, including the oral history interviews and reflections compiled in *Builders and Dreamers*, are helpful for understanding debates between non-majority factions of the movement.

The democratic process of Habonim, *veida*, occurs about every two years. All movement members are invited to gather to propose resolutions that can change movement policy or programs. Over 50% of yes-no votes (not counting abstentions) is required for anything to pass *veida*. The institution of proposals passed at *veida* is dependent upon movement leadership, and can be inconsistent. Sometimes, whole sections of the movement decide not to follow proposals passed at *veida*. However, *veida* resolutions are the closest structure the movement has to official policy. More importantly for an intellectual history, is the fact that resolutions that pass *veida* have received the support of the majority of dedicated movement members. Therefore, *veida* resolutions that pass can be used as a metric of tracking majority opinion. Additionally, *veida* proposals do not pass can be used to track debates within the movement, as well as opinions of vocal minorities.

Literature Review

The Jews of Summer by Sandra Fox is the authoritative text on the structure and significance of summer camping on American Jewish youth culture. Her book signals that youth culture, while specific, can also be useful for analyzing wider trends in the American Jewish community. Walking in Fox's footsteps, I seek to explore an intellectual history created by and for Jewish American youth.

A key text in the intellectual history of American Zionism, *The Emergence of American Zionism* by Mark Raider (who is currently digitizing Habonim Dror's archive) details the relationship of American Jews to Zionism until 1949, when much of Jewish America was still unconvinced by Zionism as a necessary, positive, or realizable goal. Raider, who grew up in Habonim Dror, often comments directly on Habonim's involvement in this process of the Americanization of Zionism. His work was helpful in identifying some of the key debates of the era within the movement. However, his book focuses mainly on the Zionist facet of Habonim ideology, and less so about the interplay between Zionism and socialism. The book is also necessarily limited in scope, as it only discusses the years up to 1949. I hope to expand upon the history of Habonim's Zionism into the rest of the twentieth century (and into the twenty-first). I also hope to focus on the negotiations between Zionism and a more universalist socialism in Habonim's early years and its maturity.



Michigan, 1986-1989. Source: Habonim Dror North America Archives

Key to my discussion of Habonim's tension between universalism and particularism is the experience of movement members who are women. Women in the movement were often harmed by Habonim's fickle commitment to universalism. Habonim's patriarchal history accords with David Biale's account of the wider Labor Zionist movement's in *Eros and the Jews: From*

Biblical Israel to Contemporary America. Biale (also a former member of Habonim) argues that while Labor Zionists attempted to create an egalitarian liberatory community, the early Labor Zionists still often upheld gender norms and patriarchal systems. The 1980s appear to be a turning point in Habonim's history in its relationship to marginalized communities, as that decade marks an era of both increased education in stereotypes and an increased feminist consciousness that often turns its criticism onto the movement itself. This criticism is not limited to the movement's treatment of women, but also to Palestinians. Nira Yuval-Davis, in her book *Gender and Nation*, presents her analysis of the ways in which women are recruited as agents of nationalist projects and also how oppression (or selective liberation) of women often serves nationalist movements. In parallel opposite form, I argue that the deconstruction of patriarchy in the movement also served to deconstruct some of the movement's national chauvinism. Criticism of the movement by an internal other opened up the movement to criticism regarding its treatment of an external other.



Michigan, 1986-1989. Source: Habonim Dror North America Archives

This newfound self-criticism of the Labor Zionist movement developed as the Israeli government entrenched its occupation of Palestine and leftist movements like Occupy Wall Street increasingly criticized the State as an entity. Movement members began to redefine Zionism, often in anti-statist fashion. My analysis of these redefinitions follows in Geoffrey Levine's footsteps. In Levine's book *Our Palestine Question*, he argues that support among American Jewish organizations for Palestinians or for Israel has not always fallen on anti-zionist and Zionist lines. For example, in his chapter "Zionists for Palestine," he argues that Breira, an American Jewish pro-Palestinian and Zionist organization, built significant power in the 1970s. Their approach concerned Israel enough that it seems that the Israeli embassy leaked the information that leaders met with leaders of the PLO in Washington DC.⁹ The *veida* resolutions attempting to create a Zionism without statism are similar in their attempt to push the American Jewish community away from modern conceptions of Zionism. In fact, they recall earlier conceptions of Zionism, some of which are explored in Dmitry Shumsky's *Beyond the Nation-State: The Zionist Political Imagination from Pinsker to Ben-Gurion*, which discusses five examples of Zionists who envisioned something other than a nation state.

I hope to add to the scholarly conversation about the legacy of Labor Zionism by analyzing its internal negotiations and tensions, specifically in regard to its universalistic values. Although Habonim Dror North America is only one (at the moment) relatively small movement,¹⁰ the history of its debates has significance for broader conversations about the American Jewish left and American Jewish Zionism.

⁹ Geoffrey Levin, *Our Palestine Question*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023), 209.

¹⁰ In 1939 and 1940, "there were about three thousand members enrolled in the movement," J.J. Goldberg and Elliot King, eds., *Builders and Dreamers: Habonim Labor Zionist Youth in North America* (New York: Herzl Press, 1993), 47.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter one begins with a discussion of Habonim Dror's initial commitment to Labor Zionist theorist Ber Borochov's maxim: "Our ultimate aim, our maximum program, is socialism... Our immediate aim, our minimum program, is Zionism."¹¹ I explore how these minimum and maximum goals were negotiated among movement members, especially in response to the Holocaust, Stalin's crimes, the creation of the State of Israel, and McCarthyism. While socialism and Zionism were prioritized and de-prioritized at different points in movement history, the movement retained a commitment to both socialistic liberation of the workers of the world and an expressly Jewish national liberation.

Chapter two focuses on patriarchy and feminism in Habonim spaces from the 1950s to the 1990s. As education began to focus on identifying stereotypes in American culture, women members began to identify the movement itself as a perpetrator of sexism. In demanding self-reflection and self-criticism from the movement, women also opened it up to a general culture of self-criticism that could be extended to Palestinians who had previously been excluded from Habonim's fight for universal liberation. The presence of an internal other allowed the movement to become aware of its own hypocrisies. Habonim Dror was then able to apply the same kind of self-criticism to its treatment of an external other.

Chapter three discusses Habonim's increasing criticism of Zionism throughout the early 2000s and the 2010s. Because of Israeli state actions, the anti-hierarchy bent of that era of activist politics, and an increasing awareness of Palestinian experiences, Habonim members attempted to redefine Zionism as being divorced from nation-statehood. The debate about Zionism shifted: instead of debating whether Habonim should focus on general socialist concerns or on expressly Jewish ones, movement members began arguing about whether Zionism as a

¹¹ Mark Raider, *The Emergence of American Zionism*, 127.

movement could be reclaimed. As the results of the modern Zionist movement became more and more irreconcilable with the movement's values of universal liberation, the focus of the debate has shifted from redefining Zionism to questioning if the movement should be Zionist at all.

Conclusion

Ultimately, this is a story about a movement's vision of the future of humanity. For the past one hundred years, Habonim Dror has channeled its hope for the future into education in order to shape "builders and dreamers" whom it believes have the potential to actualize this vision. In their training, counselors-to-be still read "The Right to Educate" by Yitzchak Tabenkin, one of the founders of Poale Zion.¹² I do not know who capitalized Tabenkin's text, but every version I have found in movement lesson plans and shared documents reads: "THE RIGHT TO EDUCATE BELONGS TO THOSE WHO ARE CONCERNED WITH THE FUTURE OF HUMANITY: the future of humanity is the primary educational goal." What has Habonim Dror wanted the future of humanity to be? Toward what goal has it educated its youth? The movement began with a vision of universal worker liberation and a renewed Jewish civilization, to be realized through the ideologies of socialism and Zionism. But these ideologies were embedded with contradictions from the beginning, and as the contradictions became clearer, the movement's vision blurred.

¹² Jewish Virtual Library. "Yitzhak Tabenkin." Accessed October 17, 2025.
<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/yitzhak-tabenkin>.

Chapter 1

"Politically we're socialists"

In summer 2022, in the dead of night at a Habonim Dror sleepaway camp in Michigan, the art specialist painted Shrek over a mural of an Israeli flag. When the children and staff (Tzevet) woke up the next morning, some were upset by this explicit rejection of Zionism, while some were glad that they did not have to confront the Israeli flag daily at breakfast. There was confusion and amusement. But everyone held their breath to see if this would prompt an eruption in the debate over Zionism that had overtaken camp discussions.

In order to avoid similar instances, which go against the camp's method of collective decision making, the summer 2023 education director introduced a new framework for talking about Zionism:

Tzevet [staff] does not agree about zionism. Tzevet also does not agree on what about zionism at camp should change. For the past couple years people have expressed a need for how to decide on change collectively and responsibly, but we haven't had the opportunity to do so. Let's talk about it now.

The past few years had been marked by late-night arguments among staff about how Zionism is presented at camp. Songs like the ones mentioned in the introduction were purged altogether, or their connections to Israel literally crossed out on song posters. The poster now reads: "Politically we're socialists, culturally we're Jews/We're on our way to ~~Zion~~ Tavor with a youth movement for you." This educational program attempted to create a more constructive method of working through ideological changes. But while it was clear that the majority of Tzevet wanted a break from the Zionism of their youth in the movement, there was no escaping it in totality. The erasure of a different line of the song had never even been attempted: "We built the Kibbutzim/and when they ask us who we are we say we're Habonim."

In this chapter, I track the historical synthesis of socialism and Zionism in Habonim (and before Habonim existed, in Young Poalei Zion). I argue that prior to the 1930s, socialism and Zionism were two elements of the Labor Zionist ideology of Young Poalei Zion (YPZ). In fact, there was a higher moral weight given to socialism, as Young Poalei Zion was a movement with Marxist heritage which saw Zionism as a step on the way to the realization of world socialism. However, with the founding of Hechalutz (the Zionist pioneering organization), *chalutziut* (pioneering) became the method of realizing the goals of socialism and Zionism: *chalutziut* itself became the end. At this point, the goal of YPZ (and later, Habonim) became focused on preparing the perfect *chalutz*, the perfect pioneer. As *chalutziut* became the end as well as the means, socialism and Zionism synthesized to become Socialist-Zionism, which lacked the same kind of moral weighting that identified world socialism as the end goal of Labor Zionism.

The next turning point in this saga of Socialist-Zionism occurred in the 1950s, when, for Habonim, Zionism had, for the first time in modern history, finally been achieved in the form of the nation-state of Israel. At the same time, McCarthyism and the authoritarianism of the Soviet Union threatened Habonim's commitment to socialism. In this changed world, Zionism was emphasized as the ideology that could be actualized in order to build a better world. This belief was undergirded with certain justifications and rationalizations, especially in regard to the settlement of the land and the displacement of Palestinian peasants. Additionally, movement members did not necessarily act on this ideology, as they did not make aliyah, and it was a struggle getting staff for the summer camps.¹³ While Zionism was emphasized in ideology (at least in comparison to socialism), this was a depoliticized era in the wake of the Holocaust and McCarthyism.

¹³ Goldberg and King, *Builders and Dreamers*, 193.

The emphasis of universalistic socialism or particularist (and even chauvinistic) nationalism at different periods of time was historically contingent and in flux. This flux reflected larger cultural and political changes in what seemed feasible at the moment. The American Young Poalei Zion was founded in 1922 with a commitment to the goal of socialism, with its commitment to Zionism a means to an end at the same time that communism was embraced by a large section of the American left. With the revelation of the horrors of life under Stalin, the movement shifted to Chalutzism in the 1930s and its ideology began to blend Socialism and Zionism. The McCarthyite era of the 1950s emphasized Zionism as the more important of the two ideologies, as communism was increasingly seen as dangerous and the Cold War pitted the democratic West against the authoritarian East. Even in the midst of these different ideological eras, the movement's commitments to each of its two core ideologies were in flux, with movement members, at times, hotly debating the socialist and Zionist legacies of the movement. Movement members had to justify their commitments to each ideology and often had to explain how their commitment to one did not conflict with the other.

I argue that while socialism and Zionism as ideologies were never held consistently in the same way across time, the values that led movement members to see Zionism and socialism as methods of achieving a better world were consistent. Habonim was founded on (and maintained) a commitment to universal liberation of the working class and the particular liberation of the Jewish people. At times, depending on the political and cultural moment, the movement saw the best reflection of these values in Marxism or democratic socialism, nationalism as a means to world socialism, or the national state as an example of a perfected society. Seeing universal liberation as being achievable through the means of a national state required justifications and rationalizations, specifically around how the movement related to the Palestinian people. But

while the debate over the movement's emphasis on Zionism versus socialism has existed as long as the movement has, it will not be ended without an understanding of the core values of the movement. The debate will not be satisfied by a universal liberation that does not expressly include Jewish liberation, or a national Jewish liberation which does not include universal liberation.

Socialism, Zionism, or Socialist-Zionism?

When the education director at camp in the summer of 2023 introduced a new framework for making decisions around Zionism, he introduced a “movement text”¹⁴ called “Getting the History Right - 'Socialist-Zionism' NOT 'Socialism' and 'Zionism.'” “Getting the History Right” argued that before the theories of Borochov and Syrkin, the main Socialist-Zionist thinkers who inspired Poalei Zion and Habonim Dror's efforts,

...there were separate 'Socialist' and 'Zionist' ideologies, separate 'Socialist' and 'Zionist' movements and separate 'Socialist' and 'Zionist' youth movements. Only afterwards was there a distinct and separate 'Socialist-Zionist' movement, which attempted to unify the Jewish people behind this combined ideology of making a new egalitarian Jewish State in Israel.

Instead of Socialism and Zionism each being aspects of the movement's ideology, the author of “Getting the History Right” argues that Socialist-Zionism was developed in direct opposition to the universalist Socialism and the entirely particularist political Zionism for which other theorists advocated at the time.

Looking back on Young Poalei Zion (YPZ) and then Habonim's foundings, it is true that there was never originally an entirely separate commitment to socialism without one to Zionism, and vice versa. In its founding document from 1922, YPZ was committed to both socialism and Zionism:

¹⁴ “Movement texts” are texts used over and over in movement educational programs (and have essentially been canonized), whose origins are often unidentifiable. These texts are frequently quoted by movement members and represent the basis of movement ideology

The aim of the Young Poale Zion Movement is to educate and prepare the Jewish youth for the struggle for the liberation of the Jewish nation, for the upbuilding of the National Homeland in Eretz Yisrael [the biblical Land of Israel], for the emancipation of the Jewish working class together with the workers of all nations.¹⁵

The “upbuilding of the National Homeland” was “for the emancipation” of both the Jewish and the universal working class. To the founders of YPZ, Zionism was a precondition for the establishment of universal socialism. In “The Modern Janus,” Tom Nairn, a historian of Marxism and nationalism, argues that this is a common belief among Marxists, who have often seen nationalism “as an internally-determined necessity,” required for “the creation of a national market economy and a viable national bourgeois class.”¹⁶ Only after this stage of nationalism and capitalism, these Marxists believed, could the proletariat revolution occur.

Although the author of “Getting the History Right” is correct that there never was a separate socialism or Zionism in Habonim, it is not the case that these two elements were so blended that there was no distinction in emphasis or importance. In seeing particularist nationalism as a vehicle for universal socialism, the founders of YPZ implicitly ranked these two ideologies. This moral ranking can also be seen in a major theoretical inspiration for Habonim, Ber Borochov, who was a Marxist and a Zionist. Borochov maintained: “Our ultimate aim, our maximum program, is socialism... Our immediate aim, our minimum program, is Zionism.”¹⁷ To the founders of YPZ, Zionism was a step on the way to an ultimate goal of world socialism.

The American Jewish Bourgeois

From the beginning, class elements among the membership of YPZ impacted this balance of ideology. It was not a clash between the socialist and Zionist aspects of YPZ’s ideology, but a discrepancy between the immigrant, working class segment, which was fervently socialist and

¹⁵ “Principles First Convention,” Document 1 in “The Ideological Development of Habonim,” Box 61, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

¹⁶ Tom Nairn, “The Modern Janus,” *New Left Review*, I, 94 (1975): 6.

¹⁷ Mark Raider, *The Emergence of American Zionism*, 127.

Zionist, and the middle class American segment, which was largely non-ideological. According to Jacob Katzman, a member of Habonim in its early years, those who came from working-class homes “imbibed the passion of the trade union struggle and an ideological commitment to socialism and against fascism.”¹⁸ It would be much harder to convince the comfortable American Jewish bourgeois. In 1922, YPZ launched Yungt, a Yiddish-English publication. The Yiddish and the English parts of the publication were really for two different audiences: “the Yiddish written for a working, class-conscious, and revolutionary element; the English for liberal American youth, who knew little of Jewish national problems and still less of social problems.”¹⁹ Because each section was for a different class of Jewish youth, the Yiddish section was “militant and socialistic,” while the English section treated socialism “with kid gloves,” and “the revolutionary tone was absent.”²⁰ Due to the lack of ideology among the English-speaking segment, activism was mainly focused on the Yiddish speaking segment, fundraising for the “Palestine Workers Fund,”²¹ and striking and picketing with trade unions.²²

The general feeling among both Yiddish immigrants in America and kibbutzniks in Israel was that assimilated American Jews were bourgeois. Golda Meir (who would go on to become Prime Minister of Israel) expressed this sentiment in a reflection of her experience making *aliya* (immigration to Israel) to a kibbutz with Habonim from Wisconsin. In 1921 Meir moved to a kibbutz, whose members “could not imagine that an American girl would do the hard physical work required,” which ultimately resulted in Meir and her husband being rejected from the first kibbutz they applied to join.²³

¹⁸ Jacob Katzman in *Builders and Dreamers*, 47.

¹⁹ Katzman in *Builders and Dreamers*, 55.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ a fund supporting Jewish workers in Palestine

²² Katzman in *Builders and Dreamers*, 55.

²³ Golda Meir in *Builders and Dreamers*, 42.

In 1932, a number of Zionist youth movements which attempted to prepare their members for *chalutzit* (pioneering) joined together to form Va'ad Lema'an Hechalutz (the Committee for the Pioneer). Hechalutz helped the youth movements to establish training farms for the purpose of preparing members for a collective agricultural life in Palestine.²⁴ YPZ's desire to make the Jewish people into agricultural workers could be seen as an attempt to blend both parts of its ideology. If Jews were the workers, then the liberation of Jews and the working class would be one. This was at a time when "The Communist Party was enjoying its heyday," whose ideas strongly appealed to the Jewish working class.²⁵ However, the Communist Party did not focus particularly on antisemitism or Jewish liberation, which did not satisfy many Jews as antisemitism was rising in Europe and America. To YPZ, an organization for Jewish national liberation and the liberation of the entire working class was the answer.

"Chalutzit is the realization of our Socialist-Zionist ideology"

The new methods of YPZ to work toward socialist-Zionism were expressed explicitly in *veida* resolutions written at the time, which outline YPZ's educational program and goals. In 1934, movement member Baruch Zuckerman addressed the assembly, saying:

The education of our youth between the ages of 10 and 18 shall be conducted in the spirit of Chalutzism. Chalutzism as employed here, is both a method of education as well as the ultimate aim.²⁶

The educational method of practicing agricultural labor was also the ultimate goal: that the American Jewish youth would make that practice permanent when they joined a kibbutz as an adult. Preparing them for this life path, according to Zuckerman, required molding and shaping the youth in order to "develop a Socialist Zionist character."²⁷ Zuckerman presented a resolution

²⁴ Goldman and King, *Builders and Dreamers*, 46.

²⁵ Goldman and King, *Builders and Dreamers*, 52.

²⁶ "21st National Veida," Document 2 in "The Ideological Development of Habonim," Box 61, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

²⁷ Ibid.

to the *veida* to establish an educational program that would lead “unconditionally to Chalutzism.”²⁸ The *veida* passed his resolution without any dissenting voices to recognize chalutzism as “the realization of our Socialist Zionist ideology.”²⁹ The resolution also affirmed

That both the struggle of the Jewish masses for social, economic, and cultural rehabilitation of the Jewish nation, and the struggle of the working class against Capitalism, Fascism, and oppression, and for the establishment of Socialism, are integral parts of our Socialist Zionist ideology which cannot be isolated one from the other.³⁰

This was the moment when the socialist aspects and the Zionist aspect of YPZ’s ideology became inseparable. For YPZ in 1934, chalutzism was the manifestation of the entirety of its ideology, which could not separate “rehabilitation of the Jewish nation” from the “struggle of the working class against Capitalism...”³¹ And the realization of chalutzism lay in the changing of Jewish youth from bourgeois Americans and Jewish factory workers into *kibbutzniks*.

A question that must be asked at this point, and will be asked again, is why did this agricultural, collective life need to be realized in Palestine? Why couldn’t the training farms have become full-time communes? Zuckerman argued in his speech that the idea that Jewish youth “will find salvation in an industrial cooperate center in America leads to resignation.”³² Perhaps what was bleak was not America’s natural environment, but America’s exploitative factory system. Zuckerman believed that “the practicality of agro-industrial Kvutzah [collective] life in America is rather doubtful.”³³ Zuckerman did not explain his reasons for his doubt. However, his doubt seems less to do with the specific nature of the Land of Israel than about the practicality of collective agricultural and industrial living in America.

²⁸ “21st National Veida,” Document 2 in “The Ideological Development of Habonim,” Box 61, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ “21st National Veida,” Document 2 in “The Ideological Development of Habonim,” Box 61, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

The Establishment of Habonim

In 1935, only one year after Zuckerman's resolution passed, YPZ created an expressly educational movement in the establishment of Habonim. The purpose of Habonim was declared to be: "to educate American boys and girls to the ideals of Socialist Zionism."³⁴ This designation as an educational movement meant that Habonim's method for changing the world was through shaping individuals. Habonim was where "the American Jewish child" could "acquire a wide cultural background and an array of desirable personal habits and social attitudes."³⁵ Habonim's program was designed "to produce an all-around Jewish youth" and "to rear a well equipped individual prepared for purposeful action in our dynamic world."³⁶

This focus on the individual American Jewish child was a logical conclusion from the focus on *chalutzit*, which required personal sacrifice and character development. The "Central point" of Habonim was, in fact, to be Chalutzit, and the program was to emphasize a regard for Jewish and General socialist problems."³⁷ In keeping with its concern for "General socialist problems," Habonim's educational program used Marxist language to describe chalutzism. In its educational platform, chalutzim (pioneers) are described as "the vanguard of the workers in Palestine."³⁸ In Habonim's Prospectus, written in the same year, chalutzim are described as "the vanguard of the Jewish people."³⁹ Because "Chalutzim are workers," Habonim believed they would "feel bonds of brotherhood with the working masses of the world."⁴⁰ At the same time,

³⁴ "On Habonim," Document 3 in "The Ideological Development of Habonim," Box 61, Habonim Dror North America Archives

³⁵ "Habonim Prospectus," Document 4 in "The Ideological Development of Habonim," Box 61, Habonim Dror North America Archives

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ "On Habonim," Document 3 in "The Ideological Development of Habonim," Box 61, Habonim Dror North America Archives

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ "Habonim Prospectus," Document 4 in "The Ideological Development of Habonim," Box 61, Habonim Dror North America Archives

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Habonim expressed a commitment, in chalutzic Socialist-Zionism, to a utopian-socialist (distinctly not Marxist) vision of communal life:

Chalutzim are pioneers in the field of social justice, and are anxious that new social forms established on the basis of cooperation and free labor become universal. Habonim includes elements upon which a worldview can be constructed”⁴¹

These “elements upon which a worldview can be constructed,” are clearly the elements of the Kibbutz movement, which Martin Buber believed to be the one experiment of utopian socialism that did not fail.⁴² A large part of the educational program of Habonim was realizing utopian socialism: “Habonim will study the methods of social change, and will prepare to become active agents for the introduction of the cooperative social forms in Palestine and in all countries.”⁴³ Although Borochoy wanted revolution (and so wanted a capitalist state against which the proletariat would rebel), here, Habonim seemed to side with Labor Zionist theorist Nachman Syrkin, who argued that “only by fusing with socialism [that] Zionism [can] become the ideal of the whole Jewish people.” In other words, socialism was “the only means of completely solving the Jewish problem,” because “there can be no Zionism except Socialist Zionism.”⁴⁴ The original stepping stone order was reversed. Instead of Zionism being a step on the way to world socialism, socialism was now necessary for the establishment of Zionism.

According to Jacob Katzman, who was a member of Habonim at the time, this embrace of *chalutzit* arose out of an explicit debate over which ideology to emphasize. He wrote that “Some chaverim [comrades] put the primary stress on Zionism,” while “Others held that to strive for a socialist society in the land of Israel was not enough; we must address ourselves to the

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Martin Buber, *Paths in Utopia* (Beacon Hill: Beacon Press, 1960), 141.

⁴³ “Habonim Prospectus,” Document 4 in “The Ideological Development of Habonim,” Box 61, Habonim Dror North America Archives

⁴⁴ Yosef Criden and Saadia Gelb, *The Kibbutz Experience: Dialogue in Kfar Blum* (New York: Schocken Press, 1987), 6.

social ills of the United States, Canada, and the world.”⁴⁵ Katzman argued that the embrace of *chalutzit* was the compromise between these two factions, and represented the belief that “The struggle for the rebirth of the Jewish homeland could not be isolated from the struggle for socialism - or vice versa.”⁴⁶

Embrace of Nationalism

In the same year, 1935, Habonim embraced a more forceful nationalism. It was now two years into the rule of the Third Reich. According to Katzman, many members of Habonim believed that because of rising fascism, “Jewish youth must concentrate on Jewish national needs” because “No one else would.”⁴⁷ Around this same time, there were more references in *veida* resolutions about national rebirth: “Habonim gives its members reason to be devoted to the ideals of national rebirth, and in the process makes them more fit for their role in it.”⁴⁸ Nairn argues that a fundamental result of nationalism is “an imperialism of the centre over the periphery; one after another, these peripheric areas have been forced into a profoundly ambivalent reaction against this dominance, seeking at once to resist it and to somehow take over its vital forces for their own use.”⁴⁹ At the same time that Habonim embraced a utopian, non-revolutionary, nonviolent socialism, Habonim also embraced a revolutionary nationalist movement as a reaction against violent German nationalism. Habonim did not embrace this type of nationalism only theoretically: Habonim members were involved in militant expressions of Zionism. Graduates of Habonim, when they arrived in Israel, established kibbutzim with the goal

⁴⁵ Katzman in *Builders and Dreamers*, 55.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Katzman in *Builders and Dreamers*, 75.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Tom Nairn, "The Modern Janus," 6.

of pushing “forward the borders of Jewish settlement.”⁵⁰ In addition, they joined the Palmach (what would become the Israeli army).⁵¹

Shlomo Grozensky, a member of Habonim, tracked this shift. He wrote that, “until Britain’s 1938 Munich agreement with Hitler, they [Habonim] were under the illusion that the world was on the eve of the inevitable socialist revolution.”⁵² Because of this belief, members of Habonim suffered “from a constant fear that it was not socialist enough.”⁵³ But by the forties and fifties, Grodzensky argued that because of the movement’s commitment to *chalutzit* there was no longer a “prolonged debate.”⁵⁴ Instead, the aim of Habonim had become deepening



1936, “The first camp.” Source: Habonim Dror North America Community Archives.

“knowledge and understanding of what is happening in the Jewish world.”⁵⁵ Grodzensky believed that the reason for this shift was the Moscow Trials and the Hitler-Stalin pact which both served to discredit communism.

⁵⁰ Criden and Gelb, *The Kibbutz Experience*, 19.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Shlomo Grozensky in *Builders and Dreamers*, 86.

⁵³ Grozensky in *Builders and Dreamers*, 87.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Grodzensky in *Builders and Dreamers*, 87.

The 1946 and 1947 *veida* proposals similarly focused on national liberation in the form of *aliya*. The “Aliya Policy” finalized in 1947 stated: “Habonim identifies with all forms of settlement, educates toward all forms, and strives for the unity of the settlement movements.”⁵⁶ The training farms were not going to turn into communes, instead they would churn out movement graduates ready to go live on a kibbutz.

After the establishment of the State of Israel, the movement’s focus on Zion only grew. 1949 was the first *veida* after the establishment of the State. A resolution expressed: “our deep sense of fulfillment with the realization of the State - and our sense of pride in the role which our chaverim [comrades] played in the actual realization of Medinat Yisrael” (the State of Israel).⁵⁷ Among these roles played by their comrades were members of the Tzva Haganah,⁵⁸ the pre-state military militia and arms smugglers.⁵⁹ With the founding of the State, Habonim doubled down on its commitment to Socialist-Zionism: “Recognizing the needs of the State, we of Habonim rededicate ourselves to the chalutzic ideal embodied in the attainment of a democratic socialistic society in Israel.”⁶⁰ Before, the ideal of the movement was world socialism. Now, the chalutzic ideal was to be “embodied in the attainment of a democratic socialistic society in Israel.” Where Israel and the kibbutz was once a step on the way to world socialism, now the ideal had become the State of Israel in and of itself. The coalescence of Habonim around Syrkin’s approach to Zionism (that socialism was necessary for Zionism and not the other way around), as opposed to Borochoy’s, had been completed. This was reflected in the priorities of contemporary members

⁵⁶ “Aliya Policy,” Document 9 in “The Ideological Development of Habonim,” Box 61, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

⁵⁷ “20th National Veida,” Document 11 in “The Ideological Development of Habonim,” Box 61, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

⁵⁸ Criden and Gelb, *The Kibbutz Experience*, 27.

⁵⁹ David Glassman in *Builders and Dreamers*, 124.

⁶⁰ “20th National Veida,” Document 11 in “The Ideological Development of Habonim,” Box 61, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

of Habonim, like Saadia Gelb, who wrote that in choosing between socialism and Zionism:

“Unquestionably the more important of the two is Zionism.”⁶¹

The State of Israel and the Cold War: the Era of Liberal Zionism

The next *veida* in 1950 marked another turning point in Habonim’s commitment to Socialist-Zionism, as the movement believed that “the future of humanity [was] in the balance.”⁶² This was the first *veida* to address the brewing Cold War. The Twenty-First National Veida saw “the world divided into power blocs, a world threatened with the possibility of a devastating war.” In the midst of this rising conflict, Habonim “must take our stand.”⁶³ A socialist movement located within the power bloc fighting communism could not stay neutral and expect to avoid consequences. According to Leonard Fein’s reflections on his time in Habonim, “as McCarthyism took hold, we debated endlessly the question of how explicit we ought to be in declaring ourselves socialists.”⁶⁴

Habonim ultimately came down on the side of “Western democracies,” which they believed had many “evils and imperfections,” yet still “represents, today, at least the potentiality for the improvement of society and the enhancement of human dignity and freedom.”⁶⁵ Throughout the fifties, Habonim continued to attempt to distinguish itself from Communism. In 1952, they referred to themselves for the first time as “Democratic socialists.”⁶⁶ In 1953,

⁶¹ Criden and Gelb, *The Kibbutz Experience*, 27.

⁶² “Committee on the Habonim Manuel,” Document 7 in “The Ideological Development of Habonim,” Box 61, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

⁶³ “21st National Veida,” Document 13 in “The Ideological Development of Habonim,” Box 61, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

⁶⁴ Leonard Fein in *Builders and Dreamers*, 142.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ “22nd National Veida,” Document 15 in “The Ideological Development of Habonim,” Box 61, Habonim Dror North America Archives

Habonim reaffirmed “its stand against Communism,” which they argued used “lying, murder, coercion and the suppression of freedom, in order to achieve its ends.”⁶⁷

At the same time, in 1953 Habonim began to express fear about the consequences of McCarthyism on the suppression of American freedoms. At the 23rd National Veida, a resolution read: “The forces of reaction are exploiting the fear of the Communist menace to suppress every liberal thought and every progressive idea irrespective of its inherent value.”⁶⁸ At the same *veida*, they issued this imperative to the movement:

“Liberals must fight the threat of Communist subversion at home for Communism threatens our basic freedom. But they must fight McCarthyism as well — or lose all we are fighting to preserve”⁶⁹

This is the first time Habonim had referred to itself as “liberal.” Gone was the language of Marxism - instead Habonim unequivocally sided with the West, even as they fought McCarthyism.

While Habonim ultimately sided with the West (like their counterparts in the Labor party in Israel did in Mapai),⁷⁰ they made it clear that “the way of life we seek can be found neither in the West, nor in the East.” And, the capitalism of Western democracies would not ensure peace, only “that better world, that socialist society” would. While Habonim would fight to defend Western-style democracy, they refused to “accept the inevitability of war.”⁷¹

What was Habonim’s plan of action, if they believed that war was not inevitable and a better, socialist society could be built on the foundations of Western democratic capitalism? In 1950 Habonim answered: “we reaffirm our belief that chalutzit in Israel is the medium of

⁶⁷ “23rd National Veida,” Document 16 in “The Ideological Development of Habonim,” Box 61, Habonim Dror North America Archives

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ “Aliya Policy,” Document 9 in “The Ideological Development of Habonim,” Box 61, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

⁷¹ “21st National Veida,” Document 13 in “The Ideological Development of Habonim,” Box 61, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

meaningful personal action in our moment of history.” Building kibbutzim in Israel became Habonim’s answer to the flaws of American capitalism and the authoritarianism of Soviet communism. In other words, the answer was Labor Zionism, a project Habonim still believed to be incomplete. In 1952, Habonim stated this outright:

“We submit that the Zionist program has not yet been realized. The State of Israel in itself is not the end-purpose of Zionism but rather one stage in the achievement of our goals.”⁷²

What was “the end-purpose of Zionism” if not the State of Israel? The resolution goes on to explain why statehood is a necessary stage:

“For the Jewish People, a prime condition for survival is the existence of a strong and progressive Israel. The development and security of Israel rests on widespread land settlement, particularly settlement in sparsely populated and border areas.”⁷³

Now, the ultimate goal of Habonim’s Zionism was not a step to world socialism, nor an end in and of itself, but the assurance of Jewish survival. While Jewish survival was always a facet of the Zionism of Habonim, the shifting of the ultimate goal from universal liberation to national survival, while an understandable response to the Holocaust, uncovers a tension between the movement’s commitments to both Zionism and Socialism. In rejecting Communism in 1953, Habonim wrote that the “criterion for testing the validity of all political and economic frameworks” is a society’s commitment to “the worth of every individual person which must be the center of a just society.”⁷⁴ They wrote in universalistic terms: “Our goal is the emancipation of man and the recognition of his inherent dignity. Men the world over are entitled to a decent standard of living, a right to think for themselves and determine their own future.”⁷⁵ In the very same resolution, Habonim described its neighbors in blatantly dehumanizing terms, as having

⁷² “22nd National Veida,” Document 15 in “The Ideological Development of Habonim,” Box 61, Habonim Dror North America Archives

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ “23rd National Veida,” Document 16 in “The Ideological Development of Habonim,” Box 61, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

“fear and jealousy [that] transcend the bounds of reason and humanity.”⁷⁶ Clearly, in the wake of the Holocaust, Habonim, like much of world Jewry, reacted with fear to what they saw as threats to the safety of world Jewry.⁷⁷ In choosing nationalism over socialism, however, Habonim sacrificed its commitment to humanitarianism and set the stage for deepening ideological fissures.



September 1956, “Camp Habonim Flagpole.” Source: Habonim Dror North America Community Archive

In 1957, resolutions were proposed to the *veida* to take out socialism from the movement - literally to remove the “Labor” from Labor Zionism.⁷⁸ The resolutions did not pass; instead the *veida* “reaffirmed Habonim’s commitment to progressive social justice,” even though they did not mention socialism.⁷⁹

Although Habonim did not disavow its socialism, by 1959, Habonim’s statement of goals solely focused on Zionism. The summary of the *veida* listed the movement’s goals as: “Kol

⁷⁶ “23rd National Veida,” Document 16 in “The Ideological Development of Habonim,” Box 61, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Goldberg and King, *Builders and Dreamers*, 177.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Acheinu” (representing the ideal of unity of Jewish youth), “Hamchon’nim” (Jewish education), “Afrot Artzeinu” (personal aliya to Israel), and “Ba’ashar Heim Sham,” which means: “Our primary goal is aliya, but this fact does not mean that we can ignore our existence within and responsibilities to American Jewry.”⁸⁰ Responsibility to diasporic life was solely a responsibility to other Jews. There was no mention of socialism or socialist ideals. The anti-socialist members of the movement had not succeeded in removing “Labor” from the movement’s name nor erasing its socialist legacy. But the movement was clearly uncomfortable with the ideology in whose name the Soviet Union justified their crimes.



1950s-60s, “Girl Standing in front of a structure (possible workshop) with Camp Habonim painted on it.”

Source: Habonim Dror North America Community Archive

Conclusion

The author of “Getting the History Right,” is incorrect that the movement has always embraced Socialist-Zionism, and that it has completely fused the ideologies of socialism and zionism. In fact, the emphasis of each of these ideologies has always reflected the current

⁸⁰ “Summary Statement of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Veida,” Document 24 in “The Ideological Development of Habonim,” Box 61, Habonim Dror North America Archives

political moment. The movement began with an ideology of Marxism, believing that nationalism was a means to world socialism. As fascism rose in Europe and Stalin allied with Hitler, YPZ (and then Habonim) began to identify Socialist-Zionism as the ultimate goal, with chalutzism as an end in itself. With the establishment of the State of Israel and the onset of the Cold War and McCarthyism, the State of Israel became the beacon of hope for Habonim, a place to realize their values of universal liberation (by building a “democratic socialist” society) and national liberation (with the institution of a Jewish nation state).

Chapter 2

“He’s so gorgeous, I am dying/All I want to do is fly to Zion”

Before around seven years ago, the dining hall at camp was full of children, teens, and young adults, standing on benches singing. The song went like this:

*“I really like Israeli guys
With dark brown hair and deep brown eyes
He’s so gorgeous, I am dying
All I want to do is fly to Zion*

Love is real not fade away (x3)

*He wears his jersey really tight
I think his body’s dynamite
He’s so gorgeous, I am dying
All I want to do is fly to Zion*

Love is real not fade away (x3)

*I really like Israeli girls
With dark brown eyes and deep brown curls
She’s so gorgeous, I am dying
All I want to do is fly to Zion.”*

“Love is real,” of course, was a pun for “love Israel.” Since then, the song has been retired on a camp-wide level, and only sung by counselors ironically. Counselors sing and exchange looks that say: “can you really believe we used to sing this seriously?”

In this chapter, I discuss the relationship between Labor Zionism and gender norms in Habonim spaces from the 1950s to the 1990s. 1950s Habonim was characterized by unacknowledged sexism, as leadership subconsciously questioned the capabilities of girls and women in the movement. Women in the movement in the 1960s and 1970s reported feeling empowered by their movement education and experience. However, a *veida* resolution in 1980 about educating about stereotypes seems to have prompted a shift in the acknowledged sexism in the movement. Women who were in the movement in the 1980s and 1990s identified sexism as a

site of the movement's hypocrisy. Furthermore, this shift in criticism of the movement itself in relation to its treatment of women seems to have paralleled increasing criticism of the movement's relation to Palestinians. I argue that this parallelism is not random. Rather, the existence of women in the movement as an internal other who were able to criticize the movement's hypocrisies created a culture of self-criticism and self-reflection that was then able to be extended to Palestinians, an external other.

The merging of sexualized gender norms and Zionism has a long history in Labor Zionism. Sharon Katkow, the author of "In Our Own Voices," an oral history project from 1999 about Habonim, paraphrased Dan Alter, explaining that "Labor Zionists of the second and third waves of aliyah [immigration to Israel] cultivated a myth of Zionism as a sexual liberation: 'a return to nature, youth and the body, and a romanticizing of free love.'"⁸¹ But this idea of "Zionism as a utopian movement of erotic liberation," was a myth, as Alter referenced, and as David Biale discusses at length in his chapter "Zionism as an Erotic Revolution" in *Eros and the Jews*.⁸² This myth incorporated "the creation of a virile New Hebrew Man but also the rejection of the inequality of women found in traditional Judaism."⁸³ This tension between idealized nationalistic masculinity and full equality meant that often, women on the kibbutz were seen as only potential mothers, or as sexual objects that were vehicles for men's self-realization, and were not actually treated equally as laborers, despite an ideology of egalitarianism.⁸⁴

Despite the tension between professed egalitarianism and patriarchal structures, many women found Habonim to be a place of significant growth as a person and as a woman. "In Our Own Voices" documented interviews of forty women of various ages on their opinions about

⁸¹ Sharon Katkow, "In Our Own Voices - An Oral History Project of Women from the Labor Zionist Youth Movement Habonim," page 54, Folder "Women," Box 102, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

⁸² David Biale, *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 176.

⁸³ Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, 176-177.

⁸⁴ Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, 187-188.

their experiences with Zionism and gender issues in the movement.⁸⁵ Many of the responses noted the profound positive impact the movement had on their lives, “Otherwise, how would I have been able to track down these women?” the author asks.⁸⁶ Amy (movement member in the 1970s), noted that Habonim “shaped the source” of her life, Judith (member in the 1960s), said that Habonim was the “seminal” experience of her life, Beth (member in the 1980s) said that Habonim made her a “more enriched person.”⁸⁷ Pnina (member in the 1990s), Beth, and Susan (member in the 1970s) all talked about Habonim “empower”ing them as women, Pnina noting that she felt empowered before she “knew what the word ‘empowered’ meant”⁸⁸ Habonim empowered these women by providing them with “strong women role models,” and encouraging them to participate in sports and understand and value their bodies.⁸⁹ Judith specifically said that the movement informed her feminism, and Amy said that it raised her consciousness.⁹⁰ Sara (member in the 1990s) said that the movement shaped her decision to make aliyah and Susan said it affected how she votes in Israel.⁹¹

However, neither the author nor the respondents were “satisfied with all aspects of Habonim.”⁹² The locus of dissatisfaction differed for different respondents, but there were some consistent themes of “sexism in the movement,” “Habonim ideology as propaganda,” and “disillusionment with Israel.”⁹³

⁸⁵ Katkow, “In Our Own Voices,” page 54, Folder “Women,” Box 102, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

⁸⁶ Katkow, “In Our Own Voices,” page 52, Folder “Women,” Box 102, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

⁸⁷ Katkow, “In Our Own Voices,” page 46-47, Folder “Women,” Box 102, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

⁸⁸ Katkow, “In Our Own Voices,” page 46-49, Folder “Women,” Box 102, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Katkow, “In Our Own Voices,” page 47-48, Folder “Women,” Box 102, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

⁹¹ Katkow, “In Our Own Voices,” page 49, Folder “Women,” Box 102, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

⁹² Katkow, “In Our Own Voices,” page 52, Folder “Women,” Box 102, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

⁹³ Ibid.

“A Darling of a Girl:” 1950s Habonim

In the 1950s, sexism was second-nature, even in the supposedly progressive Labor Zionist milieu. In correspondence among leadership of Camp Gesher in Ontario Canada in May of 1952, someone in charge of hiring for the summer wrote a letter reporting on the different candidates and their respective levels of responsibility. First, the writer turned to the boys, saying that this summer “we have a fairly dependably rather good staff of boys,” as they are “Movement boys of long standing.”⁹⁴ He identified five boys as being “quite responsible” and “mature for their age.”⁹⁵ One of these boys, Marv, however, was only “a conscientious charger as long as someone sits on him to do it.”⁹⁶ He may need “someone to keep an eye on him and to prod him,” but the author of the letter wanted the reader to know that the idea that he is lazy “is far from true,” despite the fact that he essentially needed to be babysat in order to complete tasks.

When the author turned to his discussion of which girls he was hiring, it became clear that the cultural sexism of the general 1950s not only existed in Habonim, but was perpetuated by leadership, despite the prevalence of the myth of Labor Zionism as an equalizer of gender roles. The author preceded the discussion of which girls he is hiring by saying that he doesn’t “like girls.”⁹⁷ Rather than praising the girls for their responsibility, the author wrote that they are “nice girls” or “a darling of a girl.”⁹⁸ The author emphasized their niceness, rather than their capabilities. He identified two of the girls through their romantic relationships with men (who their boyfriends are or who they are “going steadily” with).⁹⁹ One girl was not able to work this summer, because she was getting married.¹⁰⁰ When discussing the capabilities of one of the girls,

⁹⁴ “Dear Michel” Letter, Marvin I. Herzog Papers; Box 13, Folder 4; Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

the author wrote: “She may not have the technical skill to deal with children (i.e. on the theoretical basis) but she has been to camp long enough to know how to handle them.”¹⁰¹ In other words, the girls’ theoretical or intellectual knowledge of childcare was questioned, despite her long-term attendance of camp, and despite the fact that none of the boys’ theoretical or intellectual knowledge were similarly challenged. Even though both boys and girls were being hired for the same jobs in a coeducational camp environment, and despite the ostensible ideals of the kibbutz movement, there was a culture of sexism that viewed women as less responsible and capable than men and primarily defined them in the context of their romantic relationships with men.



California, 1967. Source: Habonim Dror North America Community Archives.

Darlene, one of the women interviewed in the “In Our Own Voices” project, was a member of the movement in the forties and fifties. She commented that she “found out that a lot of this ‘equality’ talk was just that.”¹⁰² However, she did not identify these hypocrisies as relating to gender roles, but just generally things that affect social capital in society, such as “good looks,

¹⁰¹ “Dear Michel” Letter, Marvin I. Herzog Papers; Box 13, Folder 4; Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

¹⁰² Katkow, “In Our Own Voices,” page 46, Folder “Women,” Box 102, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

money.”¹⁰³ Interestingly, women who were in the movement in the 1960s and 1970s identified fewer such hypocrisies. Shelly said that as a Habonim woman in the 60s and 70s, “you couldn’t mess with us!” and that “it didn’t matter what sex you were or how old you were.”¹⁰⁴ Shari, who was in the movement in the same time period, noted learning from Habonim women’s issues in the wider world, such as the ability to say that “women should have a stronger voice in the religion.”¹⁰⁵



California, 1967. Source: Habonim Dror North America Community Archives.

Beginning to Counter “Thoughtlessness”

Veida (the movement’s democratic process) of the 1980s passed its first resolution of women’s issues that I could find.¹⁰⁶ In the resolution “Women in Israel,” the Veida condemned two sectors of Israeli “society instrumental in continuing oppression of women.”¹⁰⁷ The proposal writers situated themselves “As products of an American feminist awareness and as members of

¹⁰³ Katkow, “In Our Own Voices,” page 46, Folder “Women,” Box 102, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

¹⁰⁴ Katkow, “In Our Own Voices,” page 47, Folder “Women,” Box 102, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

¹⁰⁵ Katkow, “In Our Own Voices,” page 34, Folder “Women,” Box 102, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

¹⁰⁶ “Resolutions of the 34th V’ida of Habonim,” Document 89, Box 60, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

a socialist t'nua seeking to effect change in Israeli society,” making this resolution relevant to Habonim.¹⁰⁸ The two sectors of Israeli society were: “The institutionalization of orthodox Judaism by the Israeli government, relegating women to a subordinate status to men” and “traditional feminine roles presented in education, media, role models, and culture.”¹⁰⁹ Neither of these sectors, it should be noted, were specifically Labor Zionist sections of society. Instead, the resolution writers singled out Orthodox Jews for sexist treatment of women along with the general media and culture. In response to these societal issues, Habonim committed to “actively support relevant feminist activities in Israel.”¹¹⁰



Veida in the 1980s. Source: Habonim Dror North America Archives.

The 34th Veida (1980) included another resolution which pointed fingers away from the complicity of Labor Zionists and directed blame towards the religious sector of Israeli society. The resolution entitled “Settlements” recalled the resolution of the 31st Veida, which called upon the Israeli government to end settlements “in all areas where local civilians are not granted full Israeli citizenship,” and “forbade” Habonim to support any kibbutzim in the occupied territories.”¹¹¹ The resolution from 1980 continued on, arguing that the settlements antagonize the

¹⁰⁸ “Resolutions of the 34th V’ida of Habonim,” Document 89, Box 60, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

“indigenous Palestinian population.” This is a marked difference from Habonim’s earlier discussion of Palestinians, which often denied their connection to the land. Although this proposal is a step toward the movement working toward equality for all people, it still cast the entire blame on Gush Emunim (the Orthodox settler movement), Kach (the supremacist Orthodox terror organization), and Likud (the right wing Israeli government at the time). While it is true that these organizations were primarily responsible for the settler movement and were agents of active dispossession and terror, it was under the Labor party that Israel first occupied the West Bank after the Six Day War in 1967. Like in the “Women in Israel” resolution, Habonim placed the blame for social issues squarely on the shoulders of the religious far right and avoided interrogating their own movement’s role.

In addition to the resolution pointing fingers away from Labor Zionist parts of Israeli society and toward religious people, there was one resolution which attempted to interrogate Habonim’s internal hypocrisies regarding equality. The Veida passed a resolution called “Stereotypes,” which stated that as “a progressive social movement,” Habonim needed to educate its members to the “growing need in America and the world to raise the consciousness of individuals to the inequalities which exist because of group stereotyping.”¹¹² The Veida resolved that Habonim would begin evaluating “its own values to determine whether Habonim has been following the same stereotypes dictated by the outside community.”¹¹³ This would include a “strong education program” which would educate on stereotypes, counter “thoughtlessness” and raise “the consciousness of its members.”¹¹⁴ Included among the inequalities that Habonim sought to abolish with this educational program were those “based on arbitrary distinctions such

¹¹² “Resolutions of the 34th V’ida of Habonim,” Document 89, Box 60, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

as sex, race, age, nationality, and sexual preference.”¹¹⁵ Here is Habonim’s first acknowledgement that the same problems that they blamed on external forces could be inside their own movement, too. However, in 1980 Habonim was still in the “consciousness raising” phase, where instances of the movement perpetuating inequalities were not recognized as such.

1980s Habonim: a “Baptism by Fire”

If the 1980s was when education interrogating the movement’s own problems with sexism began, then it follows that women who were in Habonim in the 1980s were the first generation to identify sexism specifically as a site of hypocrisy in relation to the movement’s values of social equality. Eden, who was in the movement in the 80s, said that the movement was where she “experienced the anger that is the baptism by fire for many feminists.”¹¹⁶ She recalled one woman calling attention to the fact that women were hesitant to participate in debates at Veida and being mocked. In remembering the incident, Eden said: “I had no idea why she thought women weren’t free to speak, especially in Habonim,” but that within a few years, she “knew exactly what she meant.”¹¹⁷ In 1986 or 87, she recalled, the male staff at Camp Galil “responded to a ‘Take Back the Night’ [activity] by all booking that night off and going to a strip club.”¹¹⁸

Eva, just one year older than Eden, said that Habonim’s atmosphere for women was “precisely” the reason that she was “unhappy with Habonim.”¹¹⁹ She also experienced a disregard for feminist issues.¹²⁰ Like Darlene, Eva “felt that the movement ‘talked the talk’ ... but it did not ‘walk the walk.’”¹²¹ Unlike Darlene, however, Eva identified the site of hypocrisy

¹¹⁵ “Resolutions of the 34th V`ida of Habonim,” Document 89, Box 60, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

¹¹⁶ Katkow, “In Our Own Voices,” page 47, Folder “Women,” Box 102, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Katkow, “In Our Own Voices,” page 50, Folder “Women,” Box 102, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Katkow, “In Our Own Voices,” page 50, Folder “Women,” Box 102, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

as the movement's commitment to feminism, as well as to more general equality.¹²² Eva called the movement "male oriented and male dominated."¹²³ The general daily sexist atmosphere of Habonim, where issues of harassment "were not taken seriously enough" was the most concerning materialization of the sexist culture for Eva.¹²⁴

In addition to sexist culture, both Eva and Eden identified in Habonim "a big emphasis on forming intense heterosexual relationships," as well as a homophobic environment where "Gays and lesbians were 'out' outside the movement, on their own time."¹²⁵ The author of "In Our Own Voices," Sharon Katkow, quoted Dan Alter, saying that "Habonim camp, at least since the '60s, was a site of intensified heterosexuality."¹²⁶

In a now (in)famous (among movement members) Mondoweiss article, Liz Rose, who grew up at Camp Tavor and was a part of the movement in the eighties and nineties, asked "How many more orgasms will be had for Zionism?"¹²⁷ "Sexual Zionism" (as some movement members call it today), impacted both the movement's explicit heterosexism and misogyny, and also the movement's difficulties recognizing where it failed to live up to its own principles of equality. Through reflections sparked by running into an ex-boyfriend from camp at Whole Foods, Liz Rose argued that her sexual coming of age was "inextricable" from her "deepened love for Israel," as "The boundaries and sense of place and person—of body and nation—merged seamlessly."¹²⁸ She described camp as a "space to experiment sexually under the nationalistic

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Katkow, "In Our Own Voices," page 47 and 50, Folder "Women," Box 102, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

¹²⁶ Katkow, "In Our Own Voices," page 54, Folder "Women," Box 102, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

¹²⁷ Liz Rose, "How many more orgasms will be had for Zionism," Mondoweiss, 2016
<https://mondoweiss.net/2016/01/how-many-more-orgasms-will-be-had-for-zionism/>.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

ethos of Zionism.”¹²⁹ In addition to the sexual exploration of camp as being informed by nationalism, Rose described the culmination of the nationalist ideology in going to Israel as a sexual completion: “The summer camp becomes a kind of foreplay, the anticipation builds for years, and landing in Israel is the ultimate fulfillment.”¹³⁰ At the same time, Rose (although she did not explicitly acknowledge it as such in her article), referenced a feminist exploration of her body, along with the nationalist one. She wrote that at camp she and her peers “read and discussed the groundbreaking book, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, like it was scripture.”¹³¹ The awakenings of the sexual, nationalist, and feminist kind all occurred in the same place with the same tight-knit group of peers. However, I would argue that Rose overstated her case in terms of causality—probably, none of the young people exploring sex really saw their endeavors as a part of nation building, and nation building similarly did not cause sexual exploration. There are many summer camps that are Zionist and do not have hookup culture (especially religious ones), and there are many summer camps with hookup culture that are not Zionist. However, it is the case that Labor Zionism had a specific attitude toward sexuality that influenced the culture at camp, especially the myth of freedom and egalitarianism that prevented movement members from reflecting on sexism in the movement. The most compelling part of Rose’s argument is the aporia between the egalitarian values of camp as a “simulated kibbutz” and the exclusion inherent in the construction of a nation-state. However, her discussion of this contradiction is a bit hyperbolic, as Rose claims that “in all my years at camp, I never once heard the word Palestine and I didn’t learn about Palestinians.”¹³² This may be true, although it is surprising considering the movement’s explicit acknowledgement of an “indigenous Palestinian

¹²⁹ Liz Rose, “How many more orgasms will be had for Zionism,” Mondoweiss, 2016 <https://mondoweiss.net/2016/01/how-many-more-orgasms-will-be-had-for-zionism/>.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

population” in the 1980 Veida resolution. The extent to which she is right about the exact nature of the hypocrisies could be contested. However, it is clear that her movement experience was intense and blended together hypocrisies related to sexuality, nationalism, and equality.

Addressing Hypocrisies: the 1990s

This consciousness about the movement’s treatment of women and queer people continued in the generation of the 1990s. Ellen, who was in the movement in the 90s, echoed Darlene and Eva, saying that the movement was “not nearly as inclusive and progressive as we think we are.”¹³³ She described the Habonim attitude as saying: “well, we are progressive, we include gender equality as one of our aims, so if I talk the talk that’s enough.”¹³⁴ Like Eva, Ellen saw the movement as fostering male “hero worship.”¹³⁵



1990s. Source: Habonim Dror North America Archives

At the 1995 Veida, the movement took a more concrete stance to address “the sexual inequality pervading the world community as well as the consciousness of its own members.”¹³⁶

A resolution proposed “that the movement engage in a conscious struggle to eradicate sexual

¹³³ Katkow, “In Our Own Voices,” page 49-50, Folder “Women,” Box 102, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ “Conclusions from HDNA Veida #7,” Resource Binder 1995, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

inequality within the consciousness of its members” by educating on feminist issues in all movement programming and implementing leadership training “addressing sexual inequalities.”¹³⁷ In addition, the Veida resolved to add a new aim to Habonim Dror’s constitution (at this point Habonim had merged with Dror, another Labor Zionist youth movement), which said that an aim was: “To consciously struggle to overcome sexual inequality pervading the consciousness of its members as well as the world community.”¹³⁸ The resolution passed with 64 voting in favor, 16 voting against, and 5 people abstaining. It’s hard to imagine today why anyone would vote against this proposal. Notes from the discussion of the proposal said that some people did not understand why the movement would discuss feminism as separate from other social justice issues. Others wanted to know more about “the nature of gender inequality within the movement, and several examples were given.”¹³⁹ Around 1999, the Veida passed a resolution called “Heterosexism/Sex Education” which explicitly targeted the homophobic culture mentioned by Eva and Eden. The resolution began by stating that STD education should be improved in Habonim and that “many members feel that the movement is heterosexist.”¹⁴⁰ The proposal resolved that the movement “will strive to counter its heterosexist culture” and promote awareness of “sexual orientation as well as STDs.”¹⁴¹ The proposal passed with 67 in favor, 4 against, and 12 abstaining. The movement had finally begun to take responsibility for the heterosexist culture described by the women in the movement in the 1980s and 1990s.

In 1995, the movement also passed a resolution for a curriculum “dealing with the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.”¹⁴² The proposal references the fact that in 1988, Habonim Dror North America (HDNA) had officially supported the two state solution, and had written: “If this

¹³⁷ “Conclusions from HDNA Veida #7,” Resource Binder 1995, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ “Conclusions from HDNA Veida #7,” Resource Binder 1995, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

¹⁴⁰ “Veida #9,” Veida 25 Folder, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² “Conclusions from HDNA Veida #7,” Resource Binder 1995, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

movement is truly committed to supporting the rights and self determination of both Israelis and Palestinians, we need to formulate a North American *tochnit* [curriculum] that covers the issues.”¹⁴³ This resolution is the first I have found where the author questioned the movement’s commitment to the Palestinian people and argued for a change in the movement’s own policy, rather than blaming an external section of Israeli society.

In fact, the disillusionment with Israeli society seems to have paralleled women’s disillusionment with the movement’s attitude towards women. Nehoma and Perri, (members in the 60s), Cheri (member in the 70s), Heather (member in the 80s), and Hannah and Joanna (members in the 90s) all said that their movement education did not match the reality of Israeli society, which disappointed them.¹⁴⁴ Nehoma said that the movement presented Israel as “a collective society of self sacrificing individuals whose motivations were completely pure.”¹⁴⁵ Similarly, Perri was disappointed that Israel did not “embody the same ideals of democracy and social justice that were the tenets of Habonim”¹⁴⁶ Naomi, a movement member in the late 50s, said that on her Habonim gap year on kibbutz Kfar Blum she “became very disillusioned about Labor Zionism and the socialist life of kibbutz.” Because you got “extra cream, if you were friendly with Frieda,” Naomi lost her virginity and her “socialist idealism in the same place!”¹⁴⁷ Heather left during her gap year and never returned, saying that her year there “squashed all Zionist feelings I once had” and that Habonim’s ideology “was more harmful than beneficial.”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ “Conclusions from HDNA Veida #7,” Resource Binder 1995, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

¹⁴⁴ Katkow, “In Our Own Voices,” page 41, Folder “Women,” Box 102, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Katkow, “In Our Own Voices,” page 42, Folder “Women,” Box 102, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

¹⁴⁷ Katkow, “In Our Own Voices,” page 41, Folder “Women,” Box 102, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

¹⁴⁸ Katkow, “In Our Own Voices,” page 50, Folder “Women,” Box 102, Habonim Dror North America Archives.



1998. Source: Habonim Dror North America Archives.

The connection between feminist consciousness raising and consciousness raising about the movement's attitude towards Palestinians could have multiple sources. The consciousness raising of the feminist movement certainly influenced Habonim. It is also likely that the Peace Now movement, which became synonymous with the Israeli left in the early 1990s, impacted the movement's attitude towards the Palestinian people. While consciousness raising would certainly breed self-reflection and self-criticism of the movement's attitude toward women, it is not obvious that alignment with the Peace Now movement would lead to similar self-reflection and self-criticism. With the Palestinian issue, the movement could point fingers at other sectors of Israeli society and avoid accountability, because there were no Palestinians in the movement to call out its hypocrisy. But with the sexism issue, women were there within the movement to call attention to the aporia between the movement's stated values and its daily behavior. The movement's former defensiveness about its own complicity in unequal treatment of both Palestinians and women prevented a habit of self-criticism from forming. Therefore, the existence of an internal other (women) who were able to criticize the movement's hypocrisies

created a culture of self-criticism and self-reflection that was then able to be extended to an external other (Palestinians).

We no longer sing about the sexualization of Israelis and loving Israel. But we continue to sing another song, whose chorus is the exact words of Isaiah 2:4, which in English are: “Nation will not lift up sword against nation, they shall never again know war.” The verses continue with an adaptation of the Hebrew: “I’m gonna lay down my sword and shield down by the riverside.” The song’s use of the I pronoun signifies that the singers once held a sword and shield against another nation, but that they are giving up this animosity for the sake of peace. One verse incorporates explicitly feminist themes, saying: “I’m gonna lay down my capitalist cisheteropatriarchy down by the riverside.” Today, the movement sings about setting down both nationalism and patriarchy down by the riverside.

Chapter 3

“And end the vanity of nations”

At camp, we didn't only sing about Israel, the kibbutz movement, and sexy Israelis. Our repertoire also included classic union songs like “Solidarity Forever” and “Union Maid” and 1960s New Left folk like Phil Ochs’ “Draft Dodger Rag.” One classic leftist song we have sung as long as anyone can remember is Billy Brag’s version of “The Internationale.” Seven year olds and seventeen year olds alike march to the beat as we sing “Comrades, come rally, for this is the time and place!/the international ideal unites the human race.” Israelis who come to camp say that they sing it in Israel in Hebrew. A particularly anti-nationalist (some might say internationalist) verse goes like this:

*Let no one build walls to divide us/Walls of hatred nor walls of stone
Come greet the dawn and stand beside us/We'll live together or we'll die alone
In our world poisoned by exploitation/Those who have taken, now they must give
And end the vanity of nations/We've but one Earth on which to live*

What does it mean that Habonim has historically advocated for a nation state, while also singing to “end the vanity of nations?” The feminist consciousness raising of the 1980s and 1990s opened the door for internal movement criticism that ultimately led to criticisms of Labor Zionism’s relationship to Palestinians. The early 2000s and 2010s marked increasing criticism of Zionism within the movement. In addition to greater consciousness of the movement’s potential treatment of Others, which included study of the Palestinian experience, the Israeli political scene experienced a significant shift. The consolidation of Revisionist Zionist power in Israel’s government with the assassination of Yitzchak Rabin and the election of Benjamin Netanyahu in

1996 marked a clear rift between Israeli state policy and Labor Zionism's stated goals. As Israel leaned farther to the right throughout the early 2000s, American leftist politics became increasingly opposed to systems of hierarchy like nation-states and increasingly aware of Palestinian experiences. In this shifting political and cultural moment, Habonim members attempted to redefine Zionism multiple times as being divorced from nation-statehood, or at least being against the oppressive reality of the State of Israel. As the results of the modern Zionist movement become more and more irreconcilable with the movement's values of universal liberation, the focus of the debate shifted from redefining Zionism to questioning whether the movement should be Zionist at all.

The People of the “Land Without a People”

In the movement's early years, the movement's attitude toward Palestinians essentially mirrored that of the Israeli Labor Party. There was a conspicuous absence in the official resolutions of YPZ and Habonim throughout its early years: the Palestinian people, who then inhabited the land to be “settled.” For a movement whose goal was universal liberation, the ignorance of its impact on an entire population of people was egregious. Perhaps the members of the American movement believed that Palestine was “nothing but swamp and wilderness”¹⁴⁹ and therefore did not consider that there could be an existent population. On the other hand, members of Habonim, in their reflections of their time in the movement, did write about “Arabs.” Gelb and Criden, graduates of Habonim, in their dialogue-memoir used sweeping generalizations about the Palestinian population. For example, Criden wrote: “The Arabs never thought in terms of reforestation...”¹⁵⁰ As Edward Said wrote, much Zionist consideration of Palestinians has

¹⁴⁹ Criden and Gelb, *The Kibbutz Experience*, 25.

¹⁵⁰ Criden and Gelb, *The Kibbutz Experience*, 24.

been framed around “rigidly theologized fantasies about the other,” like the idea that the native population of the land abused it rather than caring for it.¹⁵¹

So, clearly members of Habonim knew there were Palestinians in the British Mandate, who needed to be defended against and whose land needed to be revitalized. Even though Gelb and Criden acknowledged the existence of a Palestinian population, they also denied that this population really existed. Gelb wrote: “we must remember that there were so few people in Palestine then that it was, for all practical purposes, a deserted and barren land.”¹⁵² Instead of the population being there already, Gelb argued that “as the Jews developed the country, Arabs from surrounding lands began to stream into Palestine. And so a conflict did arise, and exists today.”¹⁵³ He wrote that this must be remembered, “because if the Jewish pioneers would have had to displace an already existing native population, that would have conflicted with the second of the two principles on which the kibbutz idea is based - the humanitarian ideal of socialism.”¹⁵⁴ Gelb is right that displacing a native population would have conflicted with the humanitarian ideal of socialism, but he is wrong that the *chalutzim* did not have a hand in the *Nakba*, the displacement of Palestinians from their land in 1948. Members of Habonim like Zvi Brenner joined Orde Wingate, a British army captain who searched out and attacked “Arab bands before they could attack us.”¹⁵⁵

Gelb and Criden’s narrative not only contradicts the historical evidence,¹⁵⁶ it also contradicts itself. Criden tells a story that the anthropologist Margaret Mead “once visited our kibbutz and told us that America began to degenerate when the Americans finished killing off all

¹⁵¹ Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 232.

¹⁵² Criden and Gelb, *The Kibbutz Experience*, 28.

¹⁵³ Criden and Gelb, *The Kibbutz Experience*, 28.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ Zvi Brenner in *Builders and Dreamers*, 1993. p. 51.

¹⁵⁶ Anita Shapira, *Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Force*, (California: Stanford Press, 1993), 355.

the Indians. She wanted to know what we would do once we had solved our problems.”¹⁵⁷ A famous anthropologist visited their kibbutz and drew a direct parallel between the ethnic cleansing of Native Americans and the State of Israel’s relationship to the Palestinian population.

In addition to being in denial about the existence of the Palestinian people and at the same time dehumanizing them, members of early Habonim also saw in the Palestinians their old oppressors. David Breslau, in his reflection on his time in Habonim during the late 1930s and early 1940s, referenced “our struggle against Arab-German-Italian fascism.”¹⁵⁸ In conflating the Arab world with Germany and Italy, members of Habonim were including the Arab world with their age-old European oppressors. Psychologically this makes sense: if humanitarian socialists were going to be a part of a nationalist project, they needed to believe that either they were not hurting anyone, that the people they were hurting were their oppressors, or that the people they were hurting were not really civilized human beings. Habonim’s members in this period evidently convinced themselves of all three.

Not all members of Habonim were unsympathetic to the Palestinian people. Enzo Sereni, a *shaliach* (emissary) sent by the Histadrut (the Jewish Labor organization in Palestine) to Habonim in America in 1936, wrote that “the only way out of [the] impasse [created by conservative Jewish political forces] - the creation of a state power that will reconcile the interests of both nations.”¹⁵⁹ Sereni advocated for the creation of one state which would represent both peoples. Apparently this stance was “enthusiastically received” by members of Habonim, although it “provoked consternation within the Histadrut,” which eventually sent him back to Palestine.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Criden and Gelb, *The Kibbutz Experience*, 32.

¹⁵⁸ David Breslau in *Builders and Dreamers*, 1993. p. 74.

¹⁵⁹ Mark Raider, *The Emergence of American Zionism*, 144.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

Israel's Rightward Shift

Menachem Begin's win in the 1977 Israeli elections marked the end of three decades of Labor party rule.¹⁶¹ As Israel's government was now represented by an enemy of Labor Zionism, Israeli state actions were now not justified through Labor Zionist ideology. This shift in Israel's ideological orientation is reflected in movement members' anxiety for the future of Zionism. In 1981, movement leadership who were planning to move to Israel wrote to Prime Minister Menachem Begin on his plan to annex the Golan Heights: "Do you wish to see Zionism become the banner of those endorsing occupation, persecution, and suppression?"¹⁶² Here, Habonim leadership implied that Zionism had not yet been an ideology endorsing occupation or persecution, but it may well become one. The actions of the Israeli government had the potential to make Zionism into something other than what it was "supposed" to be.

This criticism of Israeli state action continued even when the Labor Party regained a position of power. In 2001, Shimon Peres, as head of the Labor Party, was the Israeli Foreign Minister, and allowed for the creation of new settlements since he was part of an emergency "national unity" government with Likud prime minister Ariel Sharon. At Veida 2001, a proposal calling for reparations for Palestinian refugees instead of the right of return (as apparently a previous proposal had affirmed) passed.¹⁶³ Part of this proposal suggested that HDNA cut ties with the Israeli Labor Party due to Shimon Peres's settlement plan. This part of the proposal failed.¹⁶⁴ However, the language of the proposal, which said "HDNA's connection to the Labor

¹⁶¹ "Begin's legacy," The Jerusalem Post, 2012.

¹⁶² "Letter to PM Menachem Begin from Maz Artzit of HDNA and Hashi," Box 61, Habonim Dror North America Archives.

¹⁶³ Veida 2001

¹⁶⁴ Veida 2001

Party is merely historic” and “both the ideology and practices of the Labor Party are in direct conflict with the ideology of HDNA” served to distance HDNA from Labor Zionism, a distance that would only grow.¹⁶⁵

“The occupation of Palestine”

Along with dissatisfaction with Israeli government policy, the movement’s desire for understanding the experiences of Palestinians themselves, in their own terms, increasingly impacted its ideology. Also in 2001, a proposal called “Wake up and Smell the Occupation,” proposed that movement education discuss “the occupation of Palestine.”¹⁶⁶ This proposal failed; however this language’s presence in *veida* resolutions, which echoes the way Palestinians describe their own experience, is significant. At the 2013 *veida*, a proposal suggested creating “a resource book on Palestinian perspectives on the Arab-Israeli War of 1948,” i.e. the Nakba.¹⁶⁷ The proposal argued that “a greater understanding of Palestinian narratives is fundamental” to working toward the movement’s stated goal of creating a “progressive, egalitarian, cooperative society.”¹⁶⁸ In 2015, a *veida* proposal stated an opposition to normalization, a hallmark of Palestinian diaspora organizing: “Efforts to support Palestinians should not be based on coexistence work that normalizes the occupation or that disregards the unbalanced power dynamic between Israelis and Palestinians. Rather, efforts to work with Palestinians should be done on the basis of ‘joint struggles,’ and solidarity.”¹⁶⁹

Redefinitions

At the 2002 *Veida*, Habonim Dror North America's definition of "Progressive Labor Zionism" acknowledged that some members "have expressed disillusionment with the term

¹⁶⁵ *Veida* 2001

¹⁶⁶ *Veida* 2001

¹⁶⁷ *Veida* 2013

¹⁶⁸ *Veida* 2013

¹⁶⁹ *Veida* 2015

'Zionism' and its ramifications on ideology."¹⁷⁰ It even went so far as to acknowledge that "there is a perceived contradiction between humanism and Zionism."¹⁷¹ The proposal acknowledged that this disillusionment had “deeply affected” the movement, “such that it is struggling to reconcile its own chalutzic Zionist narrative with Palestinian narratives of oppression and historical narratives of nationalism and colonialism.”¹⁷² Like how the 1980 resolution of increased education about sexist stereotypes led to a greater understanding of sexism in the movement, the 2002 proposal of more education on the *Nakba* seems to have led to a greater understanding of Palestinian experience, which the movement began to find often contradicted the view they had of Zionism. This contradiction between the lived experience of an oppressed people and the idealization of a nationalist ideology meant to liberate a different oppressed people seems to have motivated some of this effort to “redefine Zionism.”



“Boombamella 2002,” Movement members at an art and music festival.
Source: Habonim Dror North America Community Archives

¹⁷⁰ Veida 2002

¹⁷¹ Veida 2002

¹⁷² Veida 2015

The definition asserted that as a historically Zionist youth movement, Habonim Dror has "the right to a unique and self constructed definition of 'Zionism.'"¹⁷³ The definition clarified that Habonim Dror's Zionism "should not be fulfilled at the expense of other peoples' national or human rights."¹⁷⁴ Notably, redefinition inherently calls upon "the philosophies of Labor Zionism" as its basis.¹⁷⁵ Redefinition asserts that Zionism has not been what it is "supposed" to be, but that an idealized form still exists.

In response to the movement being "unsure of its own center and direction," two Veida 2015 proposals attempted to redefine Zionism.¹⁷⁶ In "It's All About Changing Our State of Mind," Zionism was redefined as divorced from (and even directly oppositional to) nation-statehood.¹⁷⁷ "No borders, no nations," the proposal read.¹⁷⁸ The proposal stated: "maintaining a State requires limiting the ability of diverse groups of people to govern themselves in the way they want to be governed and to be self-determined."¹⁷⁹ The proposal called upon another history of Zionism, one that "has not always been defined through the maintenance and upbuilding of a State."¹⁸⁰ The proposal acknowledged the reality of the State of Israel, which

Functions through a hierarchy of power and the centralization of power. Those running the state are more interested in maintaining this hierarchy than protecting and representing its people. Whereas in order to maintain and protect itself as a State, the State of Israel must oppress and limit the freedom of both people living within the State of Israel and people living within the Occupied Territories of Gaza and the West Bank. Whereas protecting the State of Israel requires the maintenance and deployment of the

¹⁷³ Veida 2002

¹⁷⁴ Veida 2002

¹⁷⁵ Veida 2002

¹⁷⁶ Veida 2015

¹⁷⁷ Veida 2015

¹⁷⁸ Veida 2015

¹⁷⁹ Veida 2015

¹⁸⁰ See *Beyond the Nation State* by Dmitry Shumsky for examples of Zionism that was not synonymous with nation-state building.

Israeli Defense Force and a police force. The Israeli Defense Force terrorizes Palestinians in the name of the State of Israel.¹⁸¹

The explicit acknowledgement of the State of Israel as an oppressive force, similar to any other state, and the IDF as an agent of terror, is the first of its kind in HDNA Veida history.

The proposal acknowledged the particularist past of the movement when it states that this new orientation “entails that we support groups that value equality and autonomy for all people, not just a specific group.”¹⁸² Here, the proposal may be referencing the movement’s previous connections to the Haganah and later the IDF, as the proposal elaborated that “This entails our own efforts to support, in a manner that is opposed to the state, the demilitarization of the Israeli people and Israeli society.”¹⁸³ This redefinition attempted to reconcile the pillar of Zionism with the universal value of Socialism by removing the particularist and exclusionary elements of the movement’s historical Zionism.

“It’s All About Changing Our State of Mind” did not pass. However, a second proposal, which also redefined Habonim Dror’s Zionism, did. “From the age of AIM to the age of Snapchat: a New and Improved Zionism,” (subtitle: “Tl;dr Zionism is complicated, but it’s RAD!”) redefined Zionism according to eight principles:

1. Israel is the central physical, cultural and spiritual space for the Jewish people.
2. Israel is an ongoing project for Jewish liberation that is in a state of constant revolution toward justice, pioneered by youth.
3. *Leumiut*, the full expression of peoplehood that does not come at the expense of other peoples, not *Leumanut* (the privileging of a nation-state over individual rights and over other nations)...recognizes that in the current reality, the state acts as an instrument of oppression of peoples.
4. The Socialist value of *shivyon erech ha’adam* (the equality of human value), which calls us to build a radically just and equal society in terms of race, gender, ability, sexual identity and economic class.

¹⁸¹ Veida 2015

¹⁸² Veida 2015

¹⁸³ Veida 2015 This didn’t pan out as current Israeli emissaries to Habonim Dror camps are often recent IDF soldiers.

5. *Kiyyum meshutaf*, or the idea of the deeply shared existences of peoples, which demands the joint liberation of both Israelis and Palestinians from the participation in the cycles of oppression and violence as agents and victims.
6. *Kehilliat Kehilyot*, the idea of a diverse and vibrant Israeli commonwealth made up of many distinct Jewish and non-Jewish communities.
7. Labor Zionism as our movement's historical and ideological foundation that we continue to learn from, critically interrogate and actively shape
8. Active and ongoing partnership with movements in Israel, and North America who share our vision.¹⁸⁴

In the introduction to the proposal, the authors identify the “two futures” they believe Israel is caught between: “a future where it is a state for the sake of being a state: existing only for Jewish citizens; and a future where it is a state that is Jewish because of its content and character.”¹⁸⁵

The Veida resolution resolved that HDNA would “refuse to give up the ongoing struggle towards building our vision of Israel out of Israel’s current oppressive reality, despite seemingly insurmountable obstacles and institutions.”¹⁸⁶ This “redefinition” is also a continuation of an “ongoing struggle” attempting to address a “current oppressive reality.” According to this language, Zionism has always been this struggle, and its current manifestation, which HDNA must oppose, should not represent the overall movement.

Anti-state Nationalism?

Although it did not pass, it is notable that “It’s All About Changing Our State of Mind” used framing and language that was more anarchist than the pro-state socialism of early Habonim. Perhaps Habonim in 2015 had been influenced by Occupy Wall Street (Habonim members were reported to be present at Occupy events in 2012), towards anti-hierarchy, anti-state anarchist politics.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ Veida 2015

¹⁸⁵ Veida 2015

¹⁸⁶ Veida 2015

¹⁸⁷ Josh Nathan-Kazis. “Occupy Camp Kinderland,” Forward, 2012.
<https://forward.com/opinion/155632/occupy-camp-kinderland/>.

It is significant that this proposal does not just use anarchist language, but language that many today would consider to be blatantly anti-zionist. The idea of a state as an inherently oppressive force, and the Jewish state as one such force, is a statement that would belong in many pro-Palestine organizing spaces today. The proposal stands explicitly against nation-statehood, including against the Jewish state: “Whereas true freedom will never come from a State.”¹⁸⁸ In addition, the proposal expresses support for a Palestinian state as “an immediate end to the oppressive nature of the current condition of the Palestinian people under the rule of the State of Israel and as a step along the longer movement towards a stateless society.”¹⁸⁹

It is interesting that the author of the proposal situated this political position from within the bounds of Zionism. Immediately after this proposal’s discussion of the oppressive nature of states, it continues to define Habonim Dror’s Zionism as

the up building of the Jewish people to create autonomous and self-determined communities built on radical and cooperative values that honors the autonomy and diversity of the Jewish people. Zionism supports the creation of these communities without the up building of or reliance on a State. Zionism supports Jews currently living in the land of Israel to be actively involved in a Peace Process with the Palestinian people with the common goal of a just and lasting peace. Zionism supports these autonomous and self-determined communities to be the physical and spiritual center of the Jewish people. Zionism supports the dismantling of all States and Nations.¹⁹⁰

“Autonomous and self-determined communities built on radical and cooperative values,” some of which just happen to be in Israel sounds like Bundism. However, the autonomous and self-determined communities in Israel being the “physical and spiritual center of the Jewish people” brings this definition back to Zionism.

¹⁸⁸ Veida 2015

¹⁸⁹ Veida 2015

¹⁹⁰ Veida 2015

Although popular understanding, both among Zionists and anti-zionists, is that this is an illustration of antizionism as opposed to Zionism (perhaps with a negligible reference to a “spiritual center,” whatever that means), this anti-state Zionism does have a historical legacy. *Beyond the Nation State* by Dmitry Shumsky tells of five examples of non- or anti-state Zionism. An especially big proponent of anti-state Zionism was Brit Shalem, a group in the British Mandate period whose members included Gershom Scholem, Henrietta Szold, and perhaps most notably for HDNA, Martin Buber, who is still read in the movement today. Brit Shalem was opposed to the Balfour Declaration and wanted to come to an agreement with the Arabs about what kind of governing structure should be implemented. An example of this anti-state sentiment is when Martin Buber chastised a fellow Zionist by saying: “Yes, I too have ‘overcome nationalism,’ but certainly not in favor of the idea of the state.”¹⁹¹

While “A New and Improved Zionism” was much less explicit in its criticism of the state than “It’s All About Changing our State of Mind,” it similarly identified Israel as a “spiritual and a cultural center,” but did not differentiate explicitly between the Land of Israel and the State of Israel.¹⁹² The new proposal did acknowledge that “in the current reality, the state acts as an instrument of oppression of peoples.”¹⁹³ This wording makes it seem like there could potentially be another reality where the State of Israel does not oppress people, which contradicts “It’s All About Changing Our State of Mind”’s anti-state orientation, but it does acknowledge the oppressive nature of the state. Like the previous proposal, this new proposal focused on “joint struggles” (as opposed to coexistence) when it “demands the joint liberation of both Israelis and Palestinians.”¹⁹⁴ This redefinition was part of a similar project as “It’s All About Changing Our

¹⁹¹ Paul Mendes-Flohr. *Martin Buber: A Life of Faith and Dissent*. (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2019), 110.

¹⁹² Veida 2015

¹⁹³ Veida 2015

¹⁹⁴ Veida 2015

State of Mind” of reconciling the pillar of Zionism with the universal value of Socialism, but used weaker and less radical language. Ultimately, Veida 2015 was significant in that the movement adopted a definition of Zionism directly opposing the current Israeli state and demanding joint liberation. However, it did not orient Habonim Dror’s ideology against statehood in general, and kept open the possibility of liberation for both peoples in the form of states.

Zionism as the Banner of Occupation

This multifaceted history of anti-state Zionism has been forgotten by most, including by most of the movement itself. In adopting the “New and Improved Zionism” definition at *veida* 2015, Habonim Dror opened itself up to the question of if Zionism means allegiance to a state, particularly an oppressive one, is it worth redefining at all? The “Zionism, our Amicable Ex-girlfriend” proposal of Veida 2019, which proposed removing Zionism as a pillar of the movement, argued that efforts to reclaim Zionism are "unproductive." Instead, the proposal suggested renaming

the pillar that is currently Zionism. It will be changed to something that signifies our continued commitment to Jewish peoplehood, including those in the current state of Israel, along with our recognition of the problematic history of Zionism and our desire for a more pluralistic movement culture.¹⁹⁵

Along with the removal of the pillar of Zionism, the proposal affirmed the belief “that Palestinian liberation is more important than the existence of a country with a manufactured 51% Jewish population” and support “for a binational one-state with equal rights and freedoms... and with guaranteed right of aliyah for all Jews and right of return for all Palestinians.”¹⁹⁶ While the Zionism pillar would not have been changed to antizionism, a section of the proposal denied the “conflation of antisemitism and Anti-Zionism” and welcomed “Anti-Zionists in our

¹⁹⁵ Veida 2019

¹⁹⁶ Veida 2019

movement."¹⁹⁷ As such, the proposal suggested that members of HDNA "should be made to feel comfortable identifying as Zionist, anti-Zionist, or anything in between. This tolerance ends at any extreme that includes disregard for a people's right to self-determination."¹⁹⁸

This proposal was split into six different proposals, one for each of the sections of the original proposal and one additional proposal. The first proposal, titled "The Question of Reclaiming Zionism" ended up being passed and resulted in "a year long educational process that would culminate in an emergency Veida at winter seminar 2020." The second proposal, titled "Anti-Zionism is not Antisemitism" was tabled. The leadership of the movement decided to table the rest of the proposals (which included sections like "Palestinian Solidarity" and "The Relevance of the Two State Solution") until the next Veida.

"The Question of Reclaiming Zionism," the proposal that passed, did recognize that "Zionism has historically meant many things, many of them moral and beautiful."¹⁹⁹ However, the proposal also asserted that

In addition to its many ideological iterations, Zionism is also a tangible political structure that has had many negative consequences. HDNA can WISH that we had the power to decide what Zionism means and how it is interpreted, but we do not. And regardless of our interpretations, we cannot ignore what Zionism has meant materially, for millions of Palestinians. This may be saddening, and we are allowed to be sad.²⁰⁰

In naming, the proposal argues, the material impact of Zionism is more important than what it historically has meant or what it could mean. Zionism is as Zionism does. Therefore, "Devoting our limited time/energy toward trying to redefine what Zionism means is an unproductive use of our time."²⁰¹ In addition to being endless and time consuming, continuing to identify with a

¹⁹⁷ Veida 2019

¹⁹⁸ Veida 2019

¹⁹⁹ Veida 2019

²⁰⁰ Veida 2019

²⁰¹ Veida 2019

redefined Zionism “alienates us from ideological partners committed to our collective liberation in the U.S. and Israel/Palestine.”²⁰² The proposal resolved to “value and recognize

the way socialist-labor-Zionism has informed the way we understand youth empowerment, the value of Jewish labor, and our ability to create and maintain structures of socialism within capitalism [and] that the socialist-labor-zionist movement accomplished great and revolutionary achievements and created radically socialist structures never seen before in the modern world.”²⁰³

Tangibly, the proposal resolved to make “moves to rename the pillar that is currently Zionism” to something signifying “our continued commitment to Jewish peoplehood, including those in the current state of Israel, along with our recognition of the problematic history of Zionism and our desire for a more pluralistic movement culture.”²⁰⁴ In addition, the proposal affirmed Habonim Dror’s efforts to “build toward the next generation of Jewish youth deeply invested in Israeli society” and “our solidarity with Palestinians and their fight for liberation.”²⁰⁵ The proposal did not see these as two opposing efforts, because the movement’s focus would continue “to be on social justice-centered Jewish communal development and educational change.”²⁰⁶

Educating toward a social justice-oriented Jewish future in the land of Israel/Palestine and the diaspora is not so different from “It’s All About Changing Our State of Mind.” The values, goals, and affirmations are basically the same. What is different, though, is that in 2015 movement members agreed that it was productive to redefine Zionism, and in 2019 they did not.

²⁰² Veida 2019

²⁰³ Veida 2019

²⁰⁴ Veida 2019

²⁰⁵ Veida 2019

²⁰⁶ Veida 2019

Conclusion

The pillars have been a consistent source of debate for the movement from 1922 to the present. In 1922, Young Poalei Zion was founded on the basis of the ideologies of Marxism and Zionism. The tension between a universalist ideology of worldwide socialism and a particularist ideology of national liberation has continued to this day. At times, the movement has been pulled more toward particularism, namely during the Cold War and the establishment of the State of Israel. At other times, the movement has been pulled more toward universalism, especially during the consciousness raising of the feminist movement of the 1980s and 1990s.



Michigan, 1986-1989. Source: Habonim Dror North America Archives.

The values held by Habonim have not changed, but the word used to express the ideology that is believed could actualize these values in the world has. In the 1950s, the movement switched from Marxist language of Communism to the language of Liberalism and Democratic Socialism, in the face of the oppression enacted by the Soviet Union and domestic McCarthyist repression. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, Israel's rightward shift prompted a rift between the ideology of Habonim Dror and that of the State of Israel. A greater

understanding of the ways in which Palestinians describe their own experiences and the anti-state turn of leftist politics both also led the movement to attempt to redefine Zionism multiple times. However, movement members questioned whether Zionism, an ideology with a varied history that has also resulted in particular political outcomes, could be redefined as something other than its current manifestation. The State of Israel is increasingly seen as another agent of oppression, and the belief that Zionism is the ideology capable of actualizing Habonim's values is waning.

This debate, like many of the debates described in this thesis, is not over. Since 2019, 2022 *veida* passed a proposal called "Maybe the real pillar is the friends we made along the way," resolved to stop "focusing on language" and instead "focus on concrete action, meaning that the pillar of Progressive Labour Zionism remains in place for the time being."²⁰⁷ But the debate over language was still not over. In 2024, a *veida* proposal attempted to change the Zionism pillar to be "Collective Liberation in Israel-Palestine."²⁰⁸ It did not succeed, but a new pillar, titled "Collective Liberation for the Peoples of Israel/Palestine" was added to the movement's previous five, in addition to maintaining the Progressive Labor Zionism pillar. In all likelihood, the next *veida* will see yet another renaming, recommitments to liberatory education, and exhortions to stop talking already and do something! Perhaps it is time for a new ideology: a new vision for the actualization of the values of Habonim.

Throughout this thesis, I have struggled with how to remind the reader that the actors in this drama are, in fact, young adults and children, between the ages of seven and and twenty-six. The intensity of the debates and the extent to which alumni cite Habonim as a seminal part of their lives elides the fact that any individual's affiliation with the movement only lasts for a short time. I believe that this is what is profound about Habonim Dror: that its education impacts the

²⁰⁷ Veida 2022

²⁰⁸ Veida 2024

trajectory of members' entire lives. In this way, its ideological debates are a kind of preparation. Where in most of American society, children become a part of the political conversation as they become adults and go to university, in Habonim, participation in the political begins as early as seven years of age. I remember my first summer, when I was nine, playing a game called "Capitalist Pig." I remember choosing which discussion session to attend at Chugei Ritzinim (meaning "serious special interest groups"). I came home from camp complaining to my scandalized parents about the occupation. But I felt, and I still feel, a part of something important — something concerned with the transcendental questions of: how to be a good person? How can we create a good society? How can we build toward the messianic future when no one shall know war anymore?



Ontario, Canada, 1993. Source: Habonim Dror North America Archives

Habonim Dror will continue to be a site of ideological development for *kvutzot* of young people. Those young people will grow up to write books and lead movements of adults. Their

youth will always be with them — they will be fundamentally changed by their experiences in the movement, and, in turn, they will have changed the movement themselves. They will call out hypocrisies in ideology, they will have fiery late-night arguments with their peers, and they will rail against the normative expectations of their society. And they will laugh and labor, and sing and dance. As the anthem of Habonim goes (my translation):

We are not yet finished.
And we have returned here again, why why why?
To be together another time.
Like a chain that connects from the past to the future
We are here, strong
We are Dror Habonim

We built a dream
We still do not see peace, why why why?
But it is also very close
And with the strength of the hope
That we will see good days again
We are not afraid
We are Dror Habonim

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Acknowledgements

This project was only possible because of the support from the faculty of the Barnard and Columbia History departments and from the faculty of the Jewish Theological Seminary.

Thank you to my advisor, Professor Thai Jones, for seeing this project through from spring 2025 to today. I appreciate the education you gave me in using archival materials to research radical movements.

Thank you to Professor Sandra Fox for thinking through my idea with me and for pointing me in the right direction toward my secondary sources. I can't thank you enough for entrusting your books to me throughout this year.

To Professor Shira Billet, thank you for so many long conversations. Learning from you has been a seminal part of my college experience. In regard to this project in particular, thank you for giving me multiple books which I used in my research.

I am so grateful for my thesis section classmates. It has been a joy to work with you!

To my family, thank you for putting up with my criticisms of capitalism at the Shabbat table. Mom and Dad, thank you for sending me to camp, for talking to me about politics whenever I came home after the summer, and for editing this thesis.

To my roommates, friends, and partner, thank you so much for being there for me throughout college and this year. You bring so much art, joy, and laughter into my life.

This project would not have been possible without the support of Habonim Dror North America, both over the past year and a half and throughout my life. Thank you to the current and past *mazkirut* of the movement for hosting me when I came to Philadelphia. Helen Landau, I especially appreciated your help sorting through the archive. Aitan Avgar, I have enjoyed working together on our projects over the past year. Thank you for being a thought partner. Thank you to my *madrichim*; I would not be who I am today without you. Thank you to my *chanichim* - you give me purpose. And, of course, thank you to my *kvutza*. You make me believe in the possibility for a new society.