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Nation building and war narratives for children: war and militarism in Hebrew 1940s and 1950s children’s literature

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This paper examines militarisation in child culture in Israel’s transition from a pre-state society engaged in the nation-building process to statehood. The paper studies children’s culture and the literary corpus for children created in the 1940s and 1950s in Jewish Palestine, before and after Israel’s establishment. It investigates the main stages in the rapid development of the militaristic narrative for children – from the beginning of World War II in 1939, through the War of Independence in 1948, and during the first decade of statehood. By examining the nature of the national-military children’s story, I demonstrate the extent to which militarisation in Israeli children’s culture was dictated from above. I also argue that society’s rapid change following the founding of the Israeli state in 1948 brought about a dramatic shift in the attitude of state institutions, and especially the education system, towards the militaristic narrative addressed towards children that was vigorously promoted prior to 1948.

Keywords: militarisation; nation building; Israeli children’s culture; Israeli children’s literature; intergenerational discourse

Introduction

“The Day’s Order (Carmi 1974)”
Make the children happy!
Make the children happy!
Make the children happy!

So they don’t hear the shrieks in our throats
So they don’t see the forest of antennas growing over our heads
So they don’t hear the ripping apart everywhere
Clothes, paper, bed-sheets, sky
So they don’t see the eyes of a neighbor alert behind the shutters
So they don’t see the camouflage colors under the skin of our faces
So they don’t hear the networks operating in our bodies

We need to invent a code for grownups
So we can talk about –

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This poem, written by T. Carmi (1923–1994), a prominent Israeli poet in a group referred to as the “generation of the state” poets, was published in Israel in 1974, soon after the 1973 Yom Kippur War. While this poem was neither meant for children nor published during the period studied here, it nevertheless addresses the key issue of this paper: the Israeli intergenerational discourse concerning the Jewish-Arab conflict, which originated a few decades before the poem was written. In response to the grave circumstances and aftermath of this war, and what is referred to in the Israeli discourse as the “Yom Kippur War trauma”, this ironic poem by Carmi calls for a dramatic shift in the Israeli heroic intergenerational discourse by advocating a protected cultural zone designated for children: a childhood sphere in which there are no wars and no national territorial conflicts.

In Jewish Palestine during the 1940s that safe zone was deliberately abandoned when influential writers for children, many of them also teachers and educators, chose to bring the war into the heart of the home front: children’s literature. This paper traces and analyses the intergenerational aspect of the Israeli military discourse – the role of the establishment and of the cultural hegemony in militarising child culture and then demilitarising it.

A methodological note

The focus on children’s literature as a means of examining intergenerational issues stems from the fact that children’s literature is the product of a parents’ generation writing for a generation of children. This feature of literary mentorship enables us to identify and isolate clear generational messages in the texts. This is particularly true regarding Hebrew children’s literature in the 1940s and 1950s, which was considered a particularly effective indoctrinating tool. Indeed, an indoctrinating association between the writers and potential readers was deeply ingrained into Jewish Palestinian hegemonic children’s and youth literature even in previous decades.
Children’s literature of the 1930s dealt intensely with constructing a new culture and advancing national-socialist values. During these years educators, authors, and political apparatus representatives created an indoctrinating literature for children and youth as part of the attempt to ideologically influence Zionism’s future generation. This mobilised literature described the Hebrew child in Palestine as a “native” within this new cultural world.4

Thus, by examining the nature of the hegemonic literary children’s narrative, I will demonstrate the extent to which militarisation in children’s culture was dictated from above and the cultural hegemony’s determination to assimilate children into the new militaristic code as part of the national and social preparation for the construction of a new nation.

All the texts I address were written by prominent writers, including some teachers, and were warmly accepted by kindergarten and preschool teachers. Thus, although they did not serve as official school books, we may assume that they were promoted in the pedagogical institutions of the time.

The 1940s: preparing the Zabar for war

The 1940s marked the first appearance in Hebrew children’s literature of a national military tale that shaped children into soldiers.5 This new war story developed quickly and crossed political boundaries. Within a few years it became a mainstream narrative in the literary repertoire for children.

The 1940s were a turbulent time for the Yishuv (the Jewish settlement in Palestine). The public debate revolved around two main narratives: the first was an existential narrative about World War II’s advance toward the country’s borders and the Holocaust that was occurring in Europe. The second was a national resistance narrative concerned with the continued advancement of the Zionist project despite the limiting decrees of the White Paper, outlining the British mandatory policy in Palestine. The young generation, “the generation of the future”, was allocated a central role in both these narratives.6

It is not surprising, therefore, that these two issues clearly reverberate in Hasamba,7 one of the most popular literary series of the time for children between the ages of eight and twelve, launched in Israel in 1949. The series describes the adventures of an incredibly courageous group of fighting children. In the first instalment, published in Mishmar LiYladim – a left-wing labor party periodical for children that inaugurated in 1945 – its young protagonist, Yaron Zehavi, asks his

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4See Tmira Arbel, “The Poetics of ‘Settlement Literature’ for Children in the 1930s and its Ideological Manifestation” (master’s thesis, Tel Aviv University, 1994), 103; see also Yael Darr, “The Legend of an Evolving Nation: Writing for Children and Youth by Bracha Habas During the Years 1933–1940” (master’s thesis, Tel Aviv University, 1997), 130 for analyses of the ideological writing for children by educators who represented the ruling Labor Party during the 1930s. For more on the dominance of the mobilised tendency in the 1930s in general, see Nurith Gertz, Literature & Ideology in Eretz Israel during the 1930s [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: The Open University, 1988), 296.

5Zabar: a term for young, native Israelis.


father to accept him into the ranks of the *Hagana* (the military organisation in pre-state Israel), explaining:

But the children of illegal immigrants also participate in the struggle. They come by ship and suffer want and hunger. I read in the newspaper that in the port of Haifa soldiers threw gas bombs into the bottom of one such illegal immigrant ship and also children were hurt. Why, then, should only children of the Diaspora fight? Why should we not join them?8

Yaron Zehavi’s words, promoting the enlistment of children into underground activity in the ranks of the *Hagana*, offer a rationale for the militaristic story for children that *Hasamba* epitomises. In fact, World War II resulted in a new willingness by writers to mobilise children in favour of the war. That tendency was manifested on two levels: on the textual level – by presenting combating children who kill and are killed in battle; and on a practical level – by mentally recruiting “real” children, that is, the readers, for battle.

Indeed, during World War II and the Holocaust, a dramatic change occurred in the hegemonic children’s literature written in Jewish Palestine. Instead of trying to delineate and shape a native Hebrew child (a *Zabar*) according to the desirable Zionist perception, a new task materialised: to prepare the *Zabar* for a possible war and give him a battle-oriented heritage.9 And so, within less than a decade, the children, the stories’ protagonists, changed from characters personifying the success of the Zionist enterprise to fighters protecting that enterprise and their homeland.

For this purpose, a new narrative was written during the 1940s about the military-existential dispute over the land, which positioned the child at its core as a war hero. The new narrative entailed the appearance of novel concepts: “enemy”, “army”, “weapons”, “wound”, “young casualty”, and “sacrificing for the homeland”.

### Stage I: the son idolises the enlisted father

The militaristic national narrative for children, which peaked with the War of Independence (and later with the Six-Day War tales of 1967), was created at a time when the conflict with the Israeli Arabs was not at the centre of the public debate. Its beginnings can be found, rather, in the early 1940s, with stories that reacted to the threat that German armed forces, headed by German Field Marshal Edwin Rommel, would conquer Palestine.

Unexpectedly, perhaps, younger children aged three to five were actually the first to be exposed to echoes of the front, mainly through tales of fathers who joined the British army. At the end of 1940 *Davar LiYladim*, the hegemonic Labor Party’s periodical for children and the only large children’s periodical operating at that time, commented on the fathers’ absence from home following their enlistment. The texts justified the mobilisation by presenting the war as a battle to protect the home and family. At this stage, a clear dichotomy still existed between the private sphere, i.e. the home, and the battle field that was located far away.

The numerous texts that mobilised the fathers marked enlistment into the British army as a central issue of the World War II era in Jewish children’s lives in Palestine. These texts usually presented the young children in a position of longing

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8Ibid., 5.
9Children’s literature at the time all but ignored girls. The vast majority of protagonists were boys. When they were given a role, girls were left on the margins of the war narratives.
for, worrying about, and admiring a father soldier positioned far away. Child characters played a dual role in the texts. They were meant to indicate to the young readers that they should be admiring enlistment. In addition, the young child in the text signified the good and the innocent that must be protected at all costs.

One of the first poems that reflected this spirit was published in Davar LiYladim and is entitled “Father Has Gone Away”. The speaker is a young child who asks his mother where his father has gone: “[...] Mother answered: He has gone far away, / Where there is a great evil man, / Who wants to harm you, too, my child, / Father has gone to strike that evil man, / And then he will return to our home.”

The reason given for joining the army, in this poem, is to protect the home and family. The innocent childhood sphere represents the homeland, as do many other children’s poems of that period. In 1942, the most intensive year of recruitment of Eretz Israel Jews into the British army, Davar LiYladim published a myriad of literary texts about Hebrew soldiers from Eretz Israel. The texts consistently presented the positive value in enlistment to the ranks of the British army, justifying it by the need to protect the child’s innocence and vulnerability.

At the same time, literature for young children also presented them with the wish to become soldiers themselves when they grew up. At this stage, the front was both geographically distant from the child’s world and remote in terms of time. Three main messages were stressed in these texts:

1. War is a central part of children’s life.
2. All children (or all boys) want to become soldiers like their fathers.
3. In order to become soldiers, the children must first grow up.

A good example of this new narrative is the book Father Enlisted (1942) by the prominent children’s writer Levin Kipnis (1894–1990). The book, aimed at children between the ages of four and seven, was modelled after the “holiday books” that were very familiar at that time. This holiday literature was utilised as early as the 1920s and 1930s in a debate about the pantheon of Hebrew heroism. During the 1940s the holiday debate on heroism was adapted into a debate about contemporary heroism in Eretz Israel. The revised holiday stories presented the recruitment, as part of the described holiday, in its dual manifestation: as a familial-private issue and as a quintessentially national ceremony.

Father Enlisted presented the Jewish holidays, one after the other, through stories, poems, and colourful illustrations. Beginning with the page dedicated to Rosh Hashana (the Jewish New Year), the children’s role was altered: their

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11 Ibid., 8.
12 Levin Kipnis, Father Enlisted, (Tel-Aviv: Yavne, 1942), n.p. [in Hebrew]. Kipnis wrote many holiday books in the 1920s which formed part of the project of developing the Hebrew culture in Eretz Israel. These books were widely read in kindergarten classes. In this case, Kipnis used a model from the repertoire for young children to introduce a new matter: enlistment into the British army. Presenting the recruitment through this indoctrinating model served to indicate the importance attributed to the matter.
behaviour no longer coincided with the typical behaviour during the holiday, but rather was modified as a result of the enlisted father’s absence:

Eitan and Efrat’s father enlisted into the army. He wore a uniform. He put on a cap with a badge. He shouldered a gun and went off to war. Eitan and Efrat are proud of their father who is a soldier! On the eve of Rosh Hashana, they sent him a holiday greeting card.

On the page dedicated to Hanukkah, however, it becomes clear that the book is not merely about the father’s recruitment. Here, the text recruits the children themselves:

On Hanukkah Eve Eitan had a dream: he is standing and lighting his Menorah – and from the flame a little dwarf comes out and right before his eyes grows and grows until he becomes a giant, with a wondrous sword.

— Who are you? Asked Eitan.
— I am Yehuda Maccabee. I came to ask you: Why don’t you join my regiment?
— But I am small! Answered Eitan. My father was drafted. But I am still a child!
— Children have to join too! Called Yehuda Maccabee. Here, take my sword, go gather all of the children of Israel and become “Little Maccabees”. [...] Eitan took the sword, gathered all of Israel’s children and led them to war singing: “Little Maccabees are we [...]!”

Suddenly he woke up – it was just a dream. What a shame!

The dream setting naturally indicated that the recruitment was not real, but the message was, nevertheless, successfully transmitted: participation in the military was something to be coveted, even if at the moment it could not be achieved.

It is interesting to note that although this mental and emotional recruitment of young children through the description of their fierce desire to become soldiers when they grow up was a novel idea in literature for toddlers, it was very positively received by the educators and rarely criticized. In a review of Father Enlisted published in 1943 in the pedagogic journal Hed Hagan (Echoes from Pre-School), children’s enlistment was presented as a natural and appropriate matter for young children:

These are pages from the reality that the child actually experiences [...] On Hanukkah the children dream that they join the army, On Tu B’shvat they plant a tree in the Soldiers’ Woods [...] On Passover they tell of a new exodus from Egypt, “How the English drove the enemy away from the Egyptian border” [...] Such exciting, appealing material; so simple and understandable.

Enlisting young children through a combined appeal to their desire to be “grown up” and their wish to become a soldier, in fact, forms a later stage in the crystallisation of the recruiting narrative which began with the recruitment of the fathers. Such literature still represented, of course, only mental preparation and not direct

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14 Kipnis, Father Enlisted. No page numbers in original.
15 Ibid. Quotation marks absent in original.

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send-off of children to the front. But it is interesting to note the historical context, wherein just several years earlier during the Arab Rebellion of 1936–1939, fierce debate was sparked in the Jewish community of Palestine regarding the level of aggression that should be used to counter the Arabs’ attacks.17 The book Father Enlisted, written by one of the Hebrew Yishuv’s main children’s authors, with the intention of remaining politically unidentified, demonstrates how much the concept of recruitment had gained consensus during these years.

**Stage II: recruiting the young child**

The recruited father introduced the war into toddlers’ and young children’s books as a legitimate and relevant topic. Young boys’ wish to become soldiers brought the front (with a slight wink of forgiving humour) to the children’s world of play and desires. Within a short time, some literary works completely abandoned the father figure and took the recruitment issue one step further, concentrating only on the young boy – as today’s rather than tomorrow’s soldier.

These works provided the first signs of an explicit statement concerning children’s recruitment potential. Again, two levels existed concurrently: on the textual level, the stories’ protagonists were really children-soldiers; simultaneously, they served as role models for the young readers to strive to emulate in reality.

Because of the emotional difficulties involved in the idea of sending sons to the front, it is not surprising that this charged issue was first addressed not through a direct appeal to adolescents, who were indeed capable of soon going off to war and fighting real battles, but rather through the imagined recruitment of younger children. In other words, this toddler and children’s literature marked the beginning of the willingness to recruit the children’s generation, and yet, at the same time, it expressed the ambivalence involved in such an act. The little ones’ mobilisation introduced the idea while also postponing it by several years to a later, far-away time, when the young children would grow up. To that end, the recruitment was presented in a slightly humorous manner, in the guise of a secret, childish dream or prayer.

The following texts provide two short examples of the idea that the young boy can be transformed into a soldier. Both were aimed at young children between the ages of three and five and published in Davar Liyladim. The first example is well known: “In Lilliput Land”, the poem written by Ella Amitan Vilensky (1900–1995) in 1940.

In Lilliput Land,
there’s a big uproar and more; —
the uniformed army is at hand,
going off to war.

And who is that?
Who’s the commander?
It’s the little helmeted man,
with a sharp pin in his hand […]18

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17For the transition from a defensive to an offensive ethos in the late 1930s, see Shapira, *Land and Power*, part 3.
The poem, which was later set to music and is still sung today in Israeli kindergarten classes, manifested the idea of the young child’s mobilisation. He becomes a small cute soldier eager for battle.

Vilensky’s reminiscences about writing her poem reinforce the notion that the dwarfs’ army is to be identified with the recruitment of the young children:

It was during World War II and I was a soldier in the British army. In one of my rare days off, I went for a visit to a friend’s house where I met a 15-month-old toddler. What caught my attention was the way he walked. Unlike other toddlers [..] this boy walked confidently, as if he were a commander. In the atmosphere of war of that time I imagined that, had war taken place in Lilliput, their commander would have marched like this boy. Two or three days later I wrote the poem *In Lilliput Land.*

In contrast, the poem “Prayer” by the prominent children’s poet Miriam Yalan Shtekelis (1900–1984) abandoned the humoristic approach concerning the recruitment of young ones and presented a serious and determined boy willing to give up his childhood in order to become a hero right away:

I don’t want a fountain pen.
I don’t want a soccer ball.
I don’t want a bicycle.
Lord in heaven, [..] make me a hero!
A fearless hero, afraid of nothing,
My sword in my right hand triumphs!
Make me like Matityahu,
Like Yehuda Maccabee,
Teach me, Lord, teach me
How to be a hero.

The process of graded recruitment began with the admiration for soldiers, was followed by a childish involvement in military scenes, and culminated in the imaginary inclusion of young children as actual soldiers in a war. A comic strip series created in collaboration by the poet Lea Goldberg (1911–1970) and the caricaturist Aryeh Navon (1909–1996) appeared in *Davar LiYladim* from October 1941 until October 1942. Its protagonist was “Ktina Ha’Gadol” (Tiny the Great), who clearly demonstrates this shift towards militarising young readers. The humorous spirit of the series introduced the idea of “back door” children’s recruitment. It presents a specific military conflict in which a child-soldier participates, and the traits he is required to have for battle are described.

The first instalment of “Tiny the Great” appeared on 10 June, 1941. The series’ title presents its main theme: a little boy’s attempt to become big. The first instalment introduced Tiny, a six-year-old child, in a good-humoured childish scene: he

21Lea Goldberg and Aryeh Navon, “Big Tiny” [in Hebrew], *Davar LiYladim*, June 10, 1941, 32.
22Ibid., 32.
tries to dress up like a grownup, but trips over a walking stick. The following episodes presented a mischievous, inventive child. The comic effect of the series is founded on the discrepancy between his small size and his great, stubborn ambition.

A crucial change in the nature of the comic strip can be discerned from Volume 31 onwards.²³ This shift is indicated by the replacement of the title “Tiny the Great” with “Tiny the Soldier”. The instalments of “Tiny the Soldier” emphasised Tiny’s desire to behave like a grownup, but the comic situations occur only in a military context. Tiny’s identifying trait – his wish to become an adult – is supplanted by a desire to become a soldier.

In the first chapters of the revised series, Tiny is depicted in non-dangerous military scenes, such as drills and parades. The humorous air was supposed to indicate to the reader that these are the early days, but when he does grow up, Tiny will be able to become a real soldier. In Volume 35,²⁴ a drastic transformation takes place: Tiny goes out to the front and meets the Nazi enemy; illustrations showing tanks with Hitler’s face painted on them make sure we don’t miss this. Up to this chapter, the series only depicted soldiers from Tiny’s army. Starting with this volume, however, dangerous (albeit stupid) enemies are portrayed, and Tiny is presented as a real soldier. An escalation in military activity that Tiny is involved in provides readers with suspense that spices up the comic effect. From a very unskilled soldier, Tiny becomes a brave and resourceful one. In his new capacity, his small size and childishness are not disadvantages; on the contrary, childlike creativity seems to be one of the primary characteristics required for military victory.

In October 1942 the series was discontinued, and Davar LiYladim resumed its earlier form as a comic strip series without Nazis and battle fields. It seems that this change is related to the official news that became known in the Yishuv about the annihilation of European Jewry. The Germans turned from an army that threatens Eretz Israel into a force systematically annihilating Jews. Against such an enemy, the humorous spirit of the comic strip seemed inappropriate.

By the end of 1942 it became more difficult to joke with young children about easy triumphs over a stupid enemy. During these years, a greater emphasis on recruiting older children and adolescents can be discerned as part of the mobilisation of teenagers. This constituted both a mental process and an actual physical conscription for paramilitary organisations operating at the time in the Yishuv (Hachshara and Gadna – programmes preparing youth for agriculture and military service, beyond their regular youth movement activities).²⁵

**Stage III: recruiting the older children**

Toward the end of 1942 the militaristic national story was introduced into a new realm: literature for older children between the ages of eight and 10 – those who could actually go off to battle in the foreseeable future. While the stories that

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²³Ibid., April 23, 1942, 248.
²⁴Ibid., May 21, 1942, 280.
²⁵For more on the Gadna and the enterprise of recruiting youth “[t]o agriculture and arms”, see Raphael Gat, *The Political Involvement of the Socialist Youth Movements in Palestine 1933–1945* [in Hebrew] (PhD diss., Tel Aviv University, 1974), 396. For more on the connection between the civil socialisation frameworks for adolescents and the military frameworks operating in the Yishuv, see Oz Almog, *The Zabra – A Profile* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1997), 64–6.
addressed the younger children postponed their recruitment for a few years and emphasised the difference between them and the adults, the older children’s story blurred this gap and presented children who were real soldiers. In this respect, the military narrative for older children expressed an essential change in the role the parents’ generation allocated to the younger generation: to be recruited as soldiers in the approaching war.

With the end of World War II in 1945, in the few years leading to the establishment of the State of Israel, a new model appeared on the literary stage: the story of the fighting group. This new type of story for children implied:

1. That there was no longer a need to mediate and explain the front to children; contemporary children were well informed about all its secrets.
2. That the native children were “natural-born” fighters. Militarism was a kind of innate trait of this generation, and they exceeded the adults in their military prowess.

The prominent example of such a narrative is Yemima Tshernovitz’s (1909–1998) *Eight on the Trail of One*, published in 1945.26

The book is based on the literary model of the children’s group, which was very popular at the time in Europe. Renowned European examples of the model are Erich Kästner’s German children’s book *Emil and the Detectives* (*Emil und die Detektive*, 1929) and Enid Blyton’s English series, particularly *The Famous Five* (starting in 1942).

As we all know, Kästner and Blyton fashioned a type of children’s literature with an independent company of children at its core. The group operates in a children’s sphere where adults don’t tread, fighting the bad guys, usually criminals and crooks, and outsmarting them. The grownups typically get involved only at the last moment. In pre-state Israel, this model morphed into a military form: in fact, the success of *Eight on the Trail of One* was the result of transforming the group detective story into a contemporary war story.

The book features a self-reliant and competent group of children in a *kibbutz* on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, reinforced by Hagai, a visitor from bombarded Haifa. The group trails a suspicious adult, just like in *Emil and the Detectives*. Yet instead of child detectives, they become child soldiers, involved in a current military event. The group is organised as a military troop, headed by a commander and facing an enemy — a dangerous German spy, Dr. Barg. With the group codes taking on a military form, the military ethos itself is highlighted: secretiveness, comradeship, and self-sacrifice.

The children’s military operation involves an accelerated collective initiation process: the transition from childish war games to real risk-taking and understanding the potential of falling in battle. As such, the book was one of the first to present a war casualty in the children’s world: Lekesh, the children’s beloved dog, is killed by a bullet wound when trying to save the commander, Amos, who was captured by the German spy.

While eulogising the dog-victim, the children indirectly refer to the Holocaust victims. In contrast to the children’s literature written at the beginning of the war, here the children take the vengeance mission upon themselves:

Children – said Amos – we will also avenge Lekesh’s death. We, the children of this country, have a large bone to pick with these assassins. And we will hand them the bill when the time comes . . . We will retaliate for everything . . . everything!27

The book culminates in the heroic self-sacrificing act of Hagai, the narrator, who is wounded while attempting to protect his friend Amos from the German spy’s knife.

Thus, unlike stories that attempted to recruit young boys while forgivingly hinting that it would be best to wait several years, here the message has become immediate: the front is here, and children are the ideal fighters. They act independently and take risks, up until the moment when it is time to arrest the dangerous spy. Only then are the grownups included in the scene, appreciating the military potential embedded in the children: “We guard and patrol around the neighborhood, and you catch the spies . . . indeed you did our job. And perhaps we should switch places: you guard and we attend school.”28

On the book’s last page (127), Nachum Gutman (1898–1980) illustrated a fistèd hand holding a heavy hammer that smashes a swastika. In this story, Eretz Israel children defeated the Nazis in the fight for the country’s defence. The children in Eight on the Trail of One succeed thanks to their initiative, courage, comradeship, and self-sacrifice. Thus, they avenge the fate of the Jews in Europe while indirectly preparing for the next war.

The state era: official withdrawal from the militaristic narrative for children

The transition from a society engaged in a national conflict and strife to a civil society is always a difficult one. The Israeli case involved, among other efforts, the leadership’s attempt to restrain and disband the paramilitary forces (particularly the Palmach and the Hagana) that had fought during the Yishuv era and replace them with national armed forces (the Israel Defense Forces – IDF).29

This process dictated the formation of a new military ethos in children’s culture as well: a state ethos that shies away from blatant militarism. Yet the militaristic narrative, which prior to the establishment of the state had been vigilantly promoted in the official children’s literature, did not disappear from children’s culture. On the contrary, under the new title of “cheap literature”, its popularity, in fact, escalated. In many respects, it is particularly because this genre had been “outlawed” that it prospered for many more years. Eight on the Trail of One enjoyed unprecedented success and was a source of influence for children fighting groups’ harsh militaristic stories, which popped up at the end of the 1940s and flourished during the 1950s and 1960s. The most characteristic is the aforementioned Hasamba series (Mosinzon) that began in 1949.30

27Ibid., 111.
28Ibid., 115–6.
30“Hasamba” Mishmar LiYladim, June 30 1949, 3–5. The Tales of the Old-City Children, which was published from 1952, can also be mentioned in this context: Haim Eliav, The Tales of the Old City Children (Tel Aviv: Yesod, 1952 onward). In that series, the protagonists are yarmulke-wearing children from Jerusalem’s old city, who bravely fight the Arabs during the 1948 war. Other books of this type by Avner Karmeli, Shraga Gafni, On Sarig, Eitan Dror, or Yigal Golan were published from 1953 onwards. In The Young Detectives and The Young Sailors, the young protagonists were sent on daring military missions.
Mishmar LiYladim, featured a secret band of children who helped the Hagana members in their fight against the British by assisting in the illegal immigration (Ha’apala) operations and in defending the weapons arsenals for the approaching struggle for national independence. The episodes were replete with suspense and adventure, and the level of the children’s risk increased considerably. As opposed to Eight on the Trail of One, in these books, when the protagonists went out to battle, they killed and were killed.

Two military rituals are described in the first chapter of Hasamba: the ceremony of accepting a badge of honour for bravery and a memorial ceremony for a fallen soldier. Unlike Eight on the Trail of One, here the fallen soldier is a child. This child was introduced into the story in the first chapter: there had been 10 children in the group, and now (after the establishment of the state), there remained nine. The fallen soldier is Elyahu Hermon, and his friends commemorate him in traditional ceremoniousness:

Kids – says Yaron – we will stand in silent attention in honor of our brave and dear friend, who was not fortunate enough to reach the present. To the memory of Elyahu Hermon. Tears are shining in Tamar’s eyes. Yemenite Menashe bites his lips and stifles a sob that threatens to erupt. They loved him, Elyahu Hermon. He was their friend, a member of “Top Secret Society”, and he was not blessed enough to witness the establishment of the State of Israel.31

And also:

Tomorrow we will pick wild flowers, interlace them and decorate the final resting place of our friend, Elyahu Hermon. He, like many-many anonymous others, have built the foundations for a free life in our country.32

With the establishment of the State, inhibitions concerning the militaristic children’s story were lifted. During these years, this very popular genre harnessed its young characters in a direct and blatant manner to the national struggle, glorifying their fight and despising the Arab enemy.

The explicitness of the recruiting message indicated a new relationship between the educational establishment and the militaristic national narrative for children. Although the military narratives had begun to appear only a few years earlier in mainstream publications for children, the educational establishment now began to object to Hasamba and similar literary works. The books were now presented as if they had “a life of their own”, thriving despite the disapproval expressed by teachers and parents.

Thus began an official de-legitimisation of the very same militaristic narrative that had previously been launched and promoted by the hegemonic periodicals and mainstream publishers for children. As part of this de-legitimisation, in 1955, the Committee for the Catalogue of Pupils’ Reading Books (appointed in 1953 by the Minister of Education Ben-Zion Dinur), recommended that the Hasamba books be placed on the “undesirable” list.33

32 Ibid., 5.
33 About Hasamba’s success and the establishment’s criticism of it, see Zohar Shavit, Just Childhood: Introduction to Poetics of Children’s Literature (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1996), 274–5. About Hasamba as a case study for non-canonical literature, see Ibid., 297–324.
This retreat from militaristic literature for children constituted a belated uneasiness with the same lessons that mainstream children’s literature had promoted only a few years earlier. The recruiting children’s literature was no longer perceived as texts written by adults within their capacity of shaping the future generation. Now, militaristic literature was presented by educators, librarians, and parents as literature written for profit without the approval of the establishment and against its better judgment. Militarism, according to this approach, evolved from the grassroots. The young generation, apparently without the mediation of the educating generation, had simply grown up to love war stories.

Conclusion
The poem by T. Carmi quoted at the beginning of the paper beseeches us, the grownups, to create a code that will protect the innocence of children. This position, in fact, represents a much later stage in the generational map of attitudes towards war. The personal and collective trauma of the 1973 Yom-Kippur War was a catalyst for this call for change. We have seen that Carmi’s generation of Israeli soldiers were not protected as children. In fact, there had been a deliberate blurring of generational differences regarding war. As children and youth, Carmi’s generation had been directly called to battle, to become soldiers participating in the most daring and dangerous missions, achieving adult admiration for their exploits.

This paper has examined the role of the Israeli establishment and of the cultural hegemony in militarising child culture during the period of accelerated nation building and then demilitarising it with the creation of the Israeli sovereign state. We have seen that before 1948 an intentional blurring of generational boundaries was created, in which the warriors’ age was dramatically lowered to include youth and even children. Soon after the State of Israel was founded, however, its pedagogical institutions perceived their role as the rebuilders of the generational division by “restraining” children and youth, excluding them from adult arenas and redirecting them toward typical children’s spheres, such as the home, school, and youth movements. This dramatic shift in the adult’s conception of the “Israeli Child” and his or her role in the national dispute over the land, calls for comparison to other societies undergoing a similarly rapid nation-building process. Such a study would contribute to a deeper understanding of the connection between nation building and the concept of the child.

Notes on contributor
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