

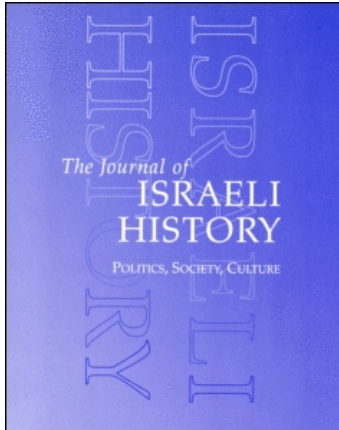
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# A Fighting Press: Reflections of Israel's War of Independence in Children's Newspapers

Meir Chazan

*The children's press during Israel's War of Independence sheds light on the way the home front dealt with a prolonged war in which there was no clear distinction between front and rear. The article surveys five newspapers, representing the gamut of political and ideological views in Israeli society at the time. Viewing themselves as nurturing the new generation of Hebrew readers in terms of loyalty toward homeland and the Zionist vision, these newspapers sought to instruct children in how they could take part in the heroic struggle. They provided little refuge from the wartime atmosphere, filling their pages with descriptions, information, and stories centering on the events of the war and the bravery of the fighters. The children's own contributions, their reports of their efforts to participate in the war effort and their expressions of sympathy and admiration for the fighting forces, reveal that the message of obedience, self-discipline, and patriotic commitment was, for the most part, well internalized.*

## Introduction

A poem that appeared in *Davar li-Yeladim* (*Davar* for children) in January 1948 ended with the following words: "With what shall I appease my country? Too young to enlist, only ten years old, helpless among fighter and builders." The author, ten-year-old Temima, penned these words at the outset of Israel's War of Independence. The words convey the feeling that children, too, are part of the raging war. A week later, the editor of the newspaper published a response to the poem. Children, he stated, should not view themselves as participants in the war at this time. Instead, they should enlist in

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the struggle to build and shape the culture of the fledgling state.<sup>1</sup> The editor's remarks were quickly disproved. As the war expanded in scope and duration, it transformed children into active participants in every material sense.

How does a civilian population cope with a protracted war forced upon it? How does it cope with a situation rife with tension, fragility, and instability, in which it has to marshal all its resources? This article focuses on Israel's War of Independence, which played a crucial role in molding the basic social frameworks and patterns of behavior in a war in which front and rear were intertwined. The responses of Jewish civilian society to the war will be examined through the prism of the children's press of the time. Children accounted for a considerable portion of the noncombatant population and were the axis around which much of its activity revolved. Furthermore, in terms of research, children are an easily defined element of civilian society, and the children's press is an accessible tool for this purpose. It illuminates and elucidates youngsters' feelings, thoughts, and actions and provides information with which we may describe one of the facets of society at that time.

At another level, the children's press offers a broad field for interdisciplinary research in educational, historical, sociological, and other contexts. Much of this field has not yet been fully explored, although a number of interesting studies have been published.<sup>2</sup> The notion of using the children's press in order to shed light on social behavior is not, of course, unique to Israel. Several studies have focused on the children's press in Britain, describing it as a useful source of information for analysis of social phenomena and processes. These studies tend to emphasize differences in sex, age, class, gender, and ethnic origin among the children; they concern themselves less with specific contents or a particular period, as this article does. Nonetheless, James Marten's detailed study of children during the American Civil War (1861–65) suggests that the view of children as active participants in war is not limited to Israel. These studies demonstrate that the children's press adapts itself dynamically to changing times, successfully identifies its readers' needs and mobilizes them to express patriotism. The most pervasive model of writing in the children's press, the tendency to draw an absolute distinction between "good" and "evil," is especially relevant in wartime, when identification with the state and uncompromising hostility towards the enemy must be stressed. In this context, the children's press guides its young readers towards the adult world and helps to impart the contents of this world to them.<sup>3</sup>

The discussion that follows is based on a study of children's newspapers that were published on a regular weekly basis between October 1947 and March 1949. I also examined several additional contemporaneous sources that expressed the vacillations of caregivers and educators about issues related to children's education amidst the upheaval of the War of Independence. The children's newspapers cited are: *Davar li-Yeladim* (edited by Aharon Ze'ev), the oldest and most popular children's newspaper at the time, published by the Histadrut (Federation of Jewish Labor) newspaper *Davar* and markedly influenced by the ruling Labor Party, Mapai; *Ha-Tzofeh li-Yeladim* (The watchman for children, edited by Avraham Bartenura and Moshe Tavyomi), published by the religious newspaper *Ha-Tzofeh*, the organ of the Mizrahi movement; *Mishmar*

*li-Yeladim* (Guard for children, edited by Mordechai Amitai, Rafael Eliaz and Binyamin Tenne), published by the newspaper *Al Hamishmar* (On guard) owned by the Socialist Mapam party; *Ha-Boker li-Yeladim* (The morning for children, edited by Ya'akov Horgin and discontinued at the end of July 1948), published by the newspaper *Ha-Boker*, identified with the General Zionist Party; and *Shai la-Yeled* (Gift for the child, edited by Shlomo Skolski and inaugurated in April 1948), published as a special supplement to the right-leaning *Yedi'ot Aharonot* (Latest news). Ideologically, politically, and culturally, these newspapers represented much of the spectrum of views held in Jewish public circles at the time. During this period, unlike earlier and later eras in the history of the children's press in Israel, these newspapers were not targeted at children as a whole, but only at those who were identified with certain class and religious outlooks that originated in the world of adults.<sup>4</sup>

The children's and adults' newspapers were overtly interrelated at this time, as evidenced by their names, their publishers, the ideological approaches they strove to instill and the political leanings they aimed to advance. This press was meant neither to develop and promote current cultural heroes nor to generate profits for its financial backers (although it may have indirectly and negligibly boosted the daily newspaper's circulation once a week). Basically, its main purpose was to take part in molding the children of that generation into players in the struggles, woes, and achievements of society and the nascent nation. Its editors and writers believed they were performing a national function as the mouthpiece of moral authority; they considered it their mission to cultivate a new generation of Hebrew readers that would be loyal to the homeland and the Zionist vision. They aimed to present real events in a way that was adapted to young readers' level of comprehension, and also to emphasize the bright and positive side of reality without disregarding the dark and negative side. Importantly, too, the editors and writers wished to provide children with an exciting, enjoyable, and entertaining experience by presenting them with popular news and scientific information, stories, poems, games, and pictures, in an aesthetic and attractive way. In a nutshell, the aims were to shape, to educate, to teach, and to entertain.<sup>5</sup>

Who were the readers? Judging by the ages of those who submitted pieces in the children's columns, one may infer a target population aged 7–14. This population, about 50,000 strong at the time, constituted the potential market from the publishers' standpoint. Obviously, younger and older children read the newspapers at different levels. The contents of the newspapers were adjusted to the diverse age levels by means of Hebrew vowelizing, font size, the phrasing and nature of the writing, illustrations, and the writers' identity. The paucity of alternative vehicles of entertainment and play during the war, due to restrictions on movement, the tense atmosphere and the absence of adults from the home, made the children's press even more widely read than it would have been otherwise. These factors were compounded by the youngsters' natural wish to know and to follow developments in a dramatic time that had a direct impact on their daily lives. Schools operated irregularly, some family members were in active military service, commodities were in perceptibly short supply, precautions had

to be taken in planning one's day, habits of play and leisure outside the home had to be renounced, and tension and anxiety were pervasive.

The principal claim in this article is that the children's press was perceived by its writers—both adult and young—and by its target readership as an active participant in the war and as one of the components that would assure victory over the Arabs and secure the country's existence. Research on the children's press helps to reconstruct the contemporaneous reality—ordinary life in wartime—and to produce a portrait of the civilian population, whose behavior and resilience had both a direct and an indirect effect on the war. To some extent, such research can also help to identify undercurrents in Israel's embattled society. From a broader perspective, the article offers a different point of view for examining national formation and political mobilization during the transition from *Yishuv* (the Jewish community in Palestine) to State and, concurrently, sheds light on diverse facets of the nativist "Sabra" image in the wartime public discourse.<sup>6</sup>

An essential feature of the War of Independence was the fact that the front was situated not only in the border areas, on the main roads, and the battlefields, but also in the towns and people's homes, amidst the noncombatant population and, to use a common coinage of the time, "in every Hebrew heart."<sup>7</sup> "The front," David Ben-Gurion explained with pathos, "is neither 'there' nor 'here'—but in the very midst of each of us. It is not this or that settlement or that point [on the map] that stands on the front but every man and woman, every boy and old man, every child and infant."<sup>8</sup> Ben-Gurion's stirring rhetoric reflected the belief in the sense of shared fate and supreme effort to overcome the hardships of the war so that the vision of Jewish sovereignty might be realized. Most circles in the *Yishuv* shared the wish to participate in strengthening the forces as a tool for assuring victory. In this context, the children's press was an essential vehicle for presenting diverse ways in which children could wholeheartedly take part in the fighting even though few of them were anywhere near the battlefield.

Adults were concerned about the mental and spiritual health of the youngsters they were responsible for. After all, the young were not only hearing reports of the war, some of them were also experiencing gunfire, bombings, and the death of loved ones. Educators and parents were guided by the awareness that these young people constituted the first native generation in the independent homeland and that their nature and views would do much to determine "our fate and comportment as an independent people—not for one generation only but for [many] generations."<sup>9</sup> Hence, an investigation of the contents of the children's press can also illuminate some of the elements that shaped the first generation of Israeli children, the young people whose image played a part in the formation of the country.

Most writing in the children's newspapers was by adults. Each paper, however, reserved a special place for children's writing. This article will examine three main questions: (1) What information and messages did the adults wish to impart to children by means of the children's newspapers? (2) How did children perceive the war in view of what they read? (3) What may the material published in the children's

newspapers teach us about the way civilian society lived and functioned during the War of Independence? The discussion will first present the patterns and contents of writing that were typical of adults and children in children's newspapers during the War of Independence. It will then describe and analyze various themes that appeared in the children's press during the period, giving greater attention to materials written by children even though their contributions were a relatively small part of the material published. Nonetheless, their writing often expresses, more accurately than that of the adults, states of mind, uncertainties and feelings uninhibited by self-censorship and didactic or educational considerations, even though the material actually published was obviously cleared by the adult editors of the newspaper, who must have polished the writing, made various deletions and rounded rough edges. Hence, the children's press cannot be seen as an unmediated reflection of the actual realities of children's lives during the War of Independence. The children's world and culture depicted by this press underwent a process of filtering and reworking by adults. The resulting image was one that the adults regarded as worthy and which, for reasons of their own, they chose to attribute to children.<sup>10</sup>

Both children and adults reiterate several main motifs: we have always been the few against the many; a homeland cannot be achieved without sacrifices; the idea of independence gives courage in times of crisis and for its sake it is worth fighting to the last drop of blood; we are all united in the joint effort; the children are mobilized for the battle; we hope for better days, when it will be possible to lay down our weapons and return to ordinary life. These motifs reflect an ardent wish to be inextricably involved in the momentous event of the creation of the State of Israel. The unifying factor in the plethora of motifs, and the one that constituted the dominant characteristic of the children's press during the War of Independence, was explicit, unwavering, and unconditional patriotism. The Israeli children's press at this time, like its counterparts in other places and at other times and, like writing aimed at older readers, was thus an important agent in instilling identification with the fulfillment of the national vision and willingness to pay a painful price for national independence. Moreover, the children's press served as a vehicle for the dissemination of patriotic ideas by means of children with the aid of feedback provided by the youngsters' submissions.<sup>11</sup>

### **Adult Writers**

The writing of adults in the children's press expresses several salient messages that form a didactic set of instructions. Their underlying premise is that since the front and the rear are intertwined, every child must ask him/herself how to do what is best for the nation. These demands, culled from various sections in the children's press, are phrased in clear and decisive terms: continue your studies and normal occupations; do not loiter outside and do not push your way into a crowd; refrain from wandering about near the front; do not pick up bullets and cartridge cases; do not spread false rumors as superfluous talk can help the enemy; rush to the shelter when you hear

the air-raid siren; make sure to buy domestic produce; redouble your efforts for the Jewish National Fund; help your parents to be healthy, brave, and patriotic. The main desideratum in these directives, which appear regularly in various formulations, is that children should bear in mind that even in battle there is discipline and a division of roles. Lack of discipline is criminal. A child who does not do his share for the overall effort not only fails to impede but also, inadvertently, helps the enemy, no less. When the hoped-for victory arrives, the children, who today are suffering just as the adults are, will know that their conduct helped to bring the glorious day closer. Therefore, they must accept the imperatives of wartime discipline now. Front-page editorials stressed two behavior patterns that the children were expected to display: composure and restraint. The editors also wished to steer the children toward active ways to feel and behave like partners in the success of the war effort (see Figures 1 and 2).<sup>12</sup>

Another mission that the adult writers undertook was to expose children directly to the conceptual world and the political point of view of the parent newspaper. Since the children's press was another way of disseminating the daily newspapers' ideologies, the views of the parent newspaper, sometimes unwittingly and sometimes deliberately, infiltrated the young people's editions. Thus, for example, although politicians' doings and stances were usually absent from the children's newspapers, an exception was made in the case of Moshe Shertok (Sharett), director of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency and first foreign minister of the State of Israel, who by dint of his achievements in ensuring the adoption of the Partition Resolution by the UN General Assembly was mentioned by name quite frequently in *Davar li-Yeladim*, which was closely associated with Mapai.<sup>13</sup> *Mishmar li-Yeladim* waxed ecstatic about personalities from the Communist recent past, with Amos Elon likening Jerusalem to "our Stalingrad... a symbol of heroic steadfastness against a mighty enemy." The editor of that paper reassured his young readers by noting that whereas Britain, France, and the US had turned over country after country to the clutches of the Nazi predator, the peace camp, headed by the Soviet Union and its allies, had stood "at our side."<sup>14</sup>

From the opposite end of the political spectrum, *Ha-Boker li-Yeladim* joined *Mishmar li-Yeladim*'s vituperative remarks against the British, depicting them as filthy bandits, bloodthirsty murderers, and imitators of Nazi Germany in the uniform of a civilized country. Comparisons of the *Yishuv*'s steadfastness against the Arab enemy to World War II reflected the widespread fear that the *Yishuv* would share the fate of European Jewry. Concurrently, *Ha-Boker li-Yeladim* preached against civil war and in favor of unity of the fighting forces.<sup>15</sup> i.e., against the Haganah's efforts to limit the autonomy of Etzel and Lehi, the underground military organizations. Both this paper and *Ha-Tzofeh li-Yeladim* mobilized the weekly Torah portion and appropriate Biblical verses for political-education purposes. For example, Abraham's decision to banish Hagar and her son, depriving the latter of a portion in the blessing and in the Land of Israel, was interpreted in no uncertain terms as an example from the Patriarchs for their offspring to follow. Readers were informed that every young man who joined the combat forces recited Psalms 144:1 ("Blessed is the Lord, my rock, who trains my hands for battle, my fingers for warfare") as a prayer.<sup>16</sup> Writers in

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# צְבִיחַ הַיְלָדִים



Figure 1 "To the aid of the people." Illustration by Nahum Gutman for the front cover of *Davar li-Yeladim*, 15 April 1948.

*Ha-Tzofeh li-Yeladim* refused to accept the array of forces at the end of the fighting and admit that half of western Palestine, including the Old City of Jerusalem and Hebron, remained in non-Jewish hands. "Just as we pummeled the enemy in the Negev and in the Galilee, so will the entire country be ours. Our souls shall know no respite until the entire Holy City returns to its true owners. Much blood will be



מחיר החוברת 40 מיל

# בְּיָדֵינוּ הַיָּמִים



בְּיָדֵינוּ הַיָּמִים



**Figure 2** “My brother—the soldier.” Illustration by Nahum Gutman for the front cover of *Davar li-Yeladim*, 26 August 1948.

spilled if they attempt to hand over the Holy City to aliens.”<sup>17</sup> The Haganah’s sinking of the Revisionist weapons ship *Altalena* in June 1948 prompted the editors of *Davar li-Yeladim* to run a lengthy and reasoned article explaining that the incident had been motivated by the infringement of the authority of the state institutions. In *Shai la-Yeled*, in contrast, the editor thundered against those who “raise a hand against his brother and shoot him in the heart.”<sup>18</sup>

Apart from the *Altalena* affair, the newspapers refrained from dealing with domestic confrontations and chose to underscore common causes. The seventh anniversary of the establishment of the Palmah (the Haganah's elite force) was prominently noted. With this exception, however, direct references to military units and commanders are absent; the references usually pertain to anonymous fighters or members of the immediate family. Among all combat fatalities in the War of Independence, three merited special articles: Amos Tzoref (a member of the Palmah), Zohar Dayan (brother of Moshe Dayan) and the aviator David Sprinzak (son of Josef Sprinzak, chair of the Provisional Council of State).<sup>19</sup> All newspapers offered lengthy accounts of the swearing-in ceremonies of soldiers in the Israel Defense Forces and described them as immensely meaningful events. In the process of establishing the new military force, the newspapers had difficulties in adjusting to its name. Time and again the word "Defense" was omitted, possibly reflecting the political dispute at the time about whether to include this word in the name of the Israeli army as a declaration that force would be for defense purposes only. Even papers that were ideologically congenial to Mapai vacillated about the name of the army. The matter reached its climax in a special article that reviewed the results of the battles in July 1948, which referred to the "Israel Army" seven times and the "Israel Defense Forces" ten times.<sup>20</sup>

The children's press of 1948 abounded with descriptions of war experiences to the exclusion of most other facets of life. After the July battles, *Ha-Tzofeh li-Yeladim* ran a story in which a boy complained to the editor that he was tired of war coverage and wanted the paper to print "nice stories" instead.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the children's newspapers seem to have flooded their readers with war stories of every possible genre, thus failing to provide their readers with a haven from the fears that constantly accompanied them in their daily lives.

### Child Writers

That the children indeed internalized the messages and adopted the behavior patterns that were expected of them is demonstrated by their own contributions to the papers, in the ways they repeated and recycled the adults' formal instructions and described events and anecdotes from daily life in their writings. The editors probably filtered the children's contributions and published mainly texts that were consistent with the outlooks that they wished to propagate. The children declared, in various formulations, that they had to study and stay off the streets so as not to become targets for the murderers' bullets; to send books and newspapers to soldiers; not to foment panic; to donate to the Jewish National Fund and encourage others to do so; to study assiduously in order to produce a cultured generation that would be able to defend itself; to stand fast in the collective struggle and behave with composure, just as the adults did in their war against the Arabs; not to spread rumors; not to make life difficult for family members; not to wander around outdoors at night; and not to hamper the defense forces. The youngsters enthusiastically reported their good deeds

in defending the rear. They dug trenches for military positions, filled sandbags, helped to erect barbed-wire fences and camouflage, sent morale-boosting letters to children in beleaguered areas, made sure that shops did not engage in price-gouging, and cleaned up shops that were damaged in bombardments. They often expressed their sympathy for the fighting forces. Some did so in verse, such as “Poem to the Driver,” which expressed innocent admiration for those who risked their lives by traveling in convoys to besieged settlements. The most successful rhyme in this poem combined affection with sincere concern: “If you fall into a trench—oy, oy / If gangs set an ambush for you—oy, oy.”<sup>22</sup> The main thing the children noticed in their parents was immense fatigue. The hardships of the war, however, were balanced somewhat by the sweeping (although not absolute, as I show below) identification with its purpose. One of the most pronounced manifestations of this attitude appeared in a letter from a ten-year-old from Kfar Hasidim, published under the headline “Letter to the Hebrew Soldier ‘Somewhere.’”

Shalom to you, my brother the Hebrew soldier, wherever you are—on hills and in valleys, in outposts and on the front, and to all your fellow warriors with you, standing together against the Arab enemy who’s plotting to destroy our homeland. You’re fighting on the front and shedding your blood for the homeland. You’re fighting against desert savages and [British Foreign Secretary Ernest] Bevin’s mercenaries. Fear of the murderous bullet is with you always. I sit here in my village, complacent, at ease, not frightened. Please accept my letter to you, Hebrew fighter for the freedom of our homeland. I am well. Here in the village there is no danger of bullets from British and Arab brutes. Our lives in the village are tranquil and serene, but we have not forgotten you. We children are busy putting together a “Book for the Soldier,” to give books to the Hebrew fighting men so they can enjoy their leisure time. I hope we’ll meet at the end of this blood-drenched war. If I were big like you, I’d grab hold of a Sten gun and strike my people’s enemies. I can picture you, standing with your weapon in hand and smashing the enemy with it. My brother, Hebrew soldier, be strong and of good courage! Be not afraid, neither be you dismayed! [quote from Joshua 1:9]. Just be strong and of good courage to strike our people’s oppressors. I wish for you to return to us safely and quickly. From me in the rear, Eliezer Don-Yehiya.<sup>23</sup>

The author of the letter (later to become a professor of political science at Bar-Ilan University), stresses the distinction between “there” and “here,” front and rear, which hardly suited the actual conditions in Palestine, in which front and rear were physically close. This distinction also occurs in earlier letters written by children to *Yishuv* members who had enlisted in the British Army and, later, the Jewish Brigade.<sup>24</sup> This perspective on war was closer to the Russian experience of World War II and was deeply influenced by the overwhelming sympathy with the Red Army that was cultivated at the time by wide circles in the *Yishuv* and nourished by the publication of dozens of translations from Russian literature which appealed to the youth and expressed love of homeland, heroic patriotism, national unity and, no less important, hatred for the enemy and the desire for revenge. The pattern of relations between the rear and soldiers on the front that had been created in the Soviet Union was therefore

reverently adopted.<sup>25</sup> Don-Yehiya's letter, addressed to an unknown soldier "somewhere," unconsciously drew on this model, reflecting the division of roles that existed in children's minds during the War of Independence—between soldiers on the battlefield and young civilians, who also coped with the challenges of the war to the best of their ability.

### **Jerusalem in the War**

The children's press in 1948–49 gave more coverage to the battle for Jerusalem and, especially, for the Old City, than to any other story. The great drama that surrounded the fighting in Jerusalem in the first half of 1948 ended with only partial success. Jerusalem was a living symbol for children all over the country, one with which they identified easily. Even youngsters who had never visited the city were mindful of its importance as a sanctified center of religion and power in national history. The siege of Jerusalem also contributed to the depiction of the city as a living symbol. The concrete details of the siege could easily be conveyed to youngsters by describing the severe shortage of food and water, the heroic feats of young boys, aged 9–12, who helped the fighters in the Old City by risking their lives to transmit messages, load weapons, deliver food and bandages, and so on. Indeed, eight children perished in combat and others were injured or taken prisoner. The example of their intrepid willingness to dodge the bullets fired from all directions in order to carry out their missions made them epitomes of the heroism that even children had to display in extreme circumstances. This was palpable evidence that children could participate actively in the war when necessary. The "legend of the little Hebrew messenger in the war for the Old City of Jerusalem" was augmented by the mobilization of several hundred youngsters aged 12–17 as fighters in the Old City and, later, on other fronts around Jerusalem, as part of the army's Gadna ("youth battalions") program. They built fortifications, manned radios, assisted in hospitals, and even engaged in outright combat. The idealism and heroism of these young people, who were mobilized only because of the shortage of manpower for crucial tasks, was one of the most salient manifestations of the participation of youth as combatants in the War of Independence.<sup>26</sup> The wish to distance children from the immediate horrors of the war was canceled by the needs of the battle for survival in Jerusalem. Since the idea of evacuating thousands of children to places far from the front was out of the question in the realities of 1948, the "civilian rear" in Jerusalem became an inseparable part of the battlefield during the critical weeks of warfare in the city.

In many stories in the children's newspapers, the editors conflated imagination and reality to sketch for their young readers the hardships of daily life in besieged Jerusalem and the heroism of children who adapted to the demands of the hour.<sup>27</sup> Concurrently, the children of Jerusalem submitted reports from the front that documented the front/rear dichotomy from their perspective. The author of one of these pieces wrote, "You write me that you in Tel Aviv have everything—bread, kerosene, chocolate. Here we can only dream of kerosene and chocolate. I heard that

you people stroll down Allenby Street [at that time the main commercial street of Tel Aviv] until midnight. Here the shops are shut from morning to evening and only sometimes someone opens his shop.”<sup>28</sup>

The theme of the fighting in Jerusalem is interesting from an additional standpoint: how children were told that in battle there were also failures, forced retreats, heavy losses and, when there was no other choice, even the decision to renounce an important element in the vision of national independence. The children’s newspapers did mention two earlier defeats—the fall of the “Thirty-Five” on the way to the Etzion Bloc south of Jerusalem in January and the Arab conquest of that area on the eve of the declaration of independence—but only the surrender of the Old City exposed the children so strikingly to the painful territorial and symbolic price of the war. The valorous feats of the Jews of the Old City, described at length in the children’s newspapers, made it clear that the act of surrender took place only after fierce fighting and the exhaustion of all alternatives. This approach set an especially high threshold for the decision to surrender, evoked deep sympathy with the immensity of the sacrifice that had been made and, indirectly, strove to block possible expressions of despair on the part of young readers. Some papers saw fit to explain that the surrender of the Old City was not the last word: “Jerusalem fell—but it will surely rise in blood and fire.”<sup>29</sup>

This statement expresses military bravado that was usually absent in the children’s newspapers. *Ha-Tzofeh li-Yeladim*, however, often indulged in arrogant and unconstrained writing. After the Arab offensive against Kibbutz Tirat Zvi in the Beit She’an Valley was repelled in February 1948, the editor of this paper amused his readers by recounting how children there had burst into laughter when the commander told them that they had found 50 pairs of shoes in the marshes; the shoes had belonged to Arabs, who had taken them off and fled from the battlefield barefoot. He also reported that a pouch of sweets and almonds had been stuffed into every Arab’s ammunition belt.<sup>30</sup> A week later, the newspaper bragged: “The legend of the heroic Israelis circulates among the Palestinian Arabs. They say God is fighting for the Jews who believe in him. Arabs have attacked religious settlements three times (Kfar Etzion, Kfar Yavetz, Tirat Zvi) and were trounced every time.”<sup>31</sup> Needless to say, when Kfar Etzion surrendered about six weeks later, the paper did not reexamine its conviction that “God is fighting for the Jews who believe in him.” The “Accounts from the Front” section of *Ha-Boker li-Yeladim* also tended to be inflammatory in tone. Using a common idiom among Sabras at the time, the paper described the skill of Uzi the sniper, who wiped out an Arab in a position facing him and murmured to himself, “That’ll show ‘em once and for all what *avodah ivrit* [Jewish labor] means.”<sup>32</sup>

### Attitudes towards the Arabs

The “desert savage” metaphor that young Eliezer Don-Yehiya used in his letter was one of the most prevalent of the contemptuous expressions used to describe the Arabs, especially at times of violent incidents. The dilemma of how to protect children from manifestations of hatred toward the neighboring people was one of the principal issues

that concerned educators. They insisted that the dichotomy of “good guys” versus “not-good guys,” rather than that of “good guys” versus “bad guys” as found in Soviet pedagogical literature of the time, was more appropriate to the reality of Palestine, where even after the war Jews and Arabs would have to live side by side.<sup>33</sup> Children’s newspapers generally referred to the “bad” side in the war as “the Arab enemy.” References to “Arabs” did not distinguish between Arab countries and Palestinian Arabs, and the people against whom the struggle was being waged were certainly not termed “Palestinians.” Jewish fighters were called “men of labor and peace” (*Davar li-Yeladim*) or “men of Torah and labor” (*Ha-Tzofeh li-Yeladim*), who were always engaged in defense, as opposed to the Arabs, whose sole labor was to pillage and murder.

Although this dichotomy appeared consistently from the beginning of the war, *Davar li-Yeladim* and *Mishmar li-Yeladim* spoke in a conspicuously peaceful tenor during the first three months of the war (December 1947–February 1948) in both their news reportage and the children’s submissions. Reports about the rescue of a young Jew and a meeting of village leaders from both sides who concluded a regional peace alliance appeared alongside children’s writings that projected a mixture of naïveté and innocence. In one such piece, Nina makes it clear that the Arabs must be taught that they are an “uneducated people” who should watch the Jews and emulate their behavior. She adds, “We shouldn’t throw stones at Arabs who come into our neighborhood.” Another submission explained, “We ought to plant in the heart of the Arab people the need to compromise with the Jews and make peace with them.”<sup>34</sup> However, the tendency to reconciliation ebbed as the fighting intensified, the casualty toll climbed, and hopes for an imminent settlement faded. Ahead of Purim 1948 (25 March), children were ordered to refrain from dressing up as Arabs, shooting toy handguns and making explosive noises. A week later, city children were praised for the exemplary discipline that they had displayed.<sup>35</sup> By then, only the humor department was still inured to the realities of the war, with one exception: a joke submitted by Yael Hartman, eight and a half years old: “Girl: Mommy, I want to join the army, too. Mother: But you’re just a little girl; what’ll you do in the army? Girl: I’ll fight little Arabs.”<sup>36</sup>

An issue worth dwelling on is the way the children’s newspapers portrayed the Arab exodus from Palestine during the war. Neither their editorials nor their news coverage overlooked the phenomenon but the papers described it in different ways. *Mishmar li-Yeladim* wrote the following on the eve of the proclamation of Israeli statehood:

The Arab population of the country has been gripped with a frenzy of mass flight. Nearly 200,000 Arabs have fled thus far, including tens of thousands of inhabitants who, for the most part, were peace loving. The Arab flight is definitely a consequence of the Jewish *Yishuv*’s superior military strength, but it gives the enemies of Zionism a trump, [allowing them to] argue that the Jews are incapable of assuring the civil rights of the natives of their country. The British regime is well aware of this and, not coincidentally, moves with amazing speed to furnish more vehicles and military

escort whenever Arab localities in the Jewish zone show signs of wishing to evacuate. The British are afraid that Jews and Arabs might form friendly relations after they're liberated from British custodianship, so they're encouraging the masses to flee and fanning Jewish-Arab hatred.<sup>37</sup>

The question of British involvement and the wish to continue nurturing hope for Jewish–Arab friendship reflected the ideological stance of the parent newspaper (*Al ha-Mishmar*). Nonetheless, the implication in the foregoing account that the Arabs had fled at their own initiative from the territory designated for Jewish control was also prevalent in other children's newspapers. *Ha-Boker li-Yeladim* adopted an apparently matter-of-fact tone: "We have conquered about 200 Arab villages and about 250,000 Arabs have fled our territories in panic." At the beginning of the second cease-fire, *Ha-Tzofeh li-Yeladim* wrote: "Now the Arabs have a chance to reflect about whether the war was worthwhile or not. Tens of thousands of Arabs have fled in fear of the sword. As our army advanced, an escape from the rest of the Arab areas began. They brought death and flight, devastation and destruction upon themselves." Holding the Arabs responsible for their flight was also meant to absolve the Jews from the burden of guilt. In any event, the Arab exodus was treated with signs of satisfaction. It was portrayed not as a deliberate expulsion but as a consequence of the war that the Arab side had initiated.<sup>38</sup> However, children who referred to the issue refused to accept the claim that the Arabs were fleeing out of fear of Jewish revenge, which did not fit the moral attitude, to which they adhered confidently, that the Jews wanted nothing but peace with the Arabs.<sup>39</sup>

In contrast to the Arabs, Jewish civilians who fled the fighting to safer places were referred to as "refugees." The children's newspapers covered their experiences at considerable length, especially in the sections reserved for children's writings. Inhabitants of border areas, including thousands of children, had to leave their homes for safer places such as Tel Aviv, Haifa, and kibbutzim in the center of the country. In some locations, the evacuation was carried out in an organized and orderly fashion before the battles escalated, but in several places it was a panicky retreat under approaching fire. Many in the labor movement's settlements refused to acknowledge the need to draw a line between front and rear, as reflected in a vehement statement by the leader of Ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uhad (United Kibbutz movement), Yitzhak Tabenkin: "In my view, it is better for a child to live in an underground shelter in [Kibbutz] Ein Harod than [as a refugee] in a nice room in Haifa."<sup>40</sup>

Some children construed their evacuation as a sign of an Arab victory and became despondent when they reached the relative safety of the rear. Children whose families volunteered to take in young "refugees" and ease their distress expressed pride in being partners in the national effort. From the evacuees' perspective, however, their presence in the "rear" as opposed to their erstwhile accustomed place on the "front" instilled grave doubts about what they were really contributing toward the defense of the homeland. The evacuees were dispirited, as Dan Albinger (Almagor), who was forced to leave bombarded Rehovot with his family, admitted: "You're ashamed of having left the place where you live. But you console yourself: you'll be back soon!" Their mental

hardship was compounded by physical discomfort. They were packed into cellars, corridors and any vacant space, and endured great difficulties. The children's newspapers also noted that there were some unkind people who made the evacuees' lives even more burdensome.<sup>41</sup> Some children even planned to run away. An eight-year-old girl, asked by her mother to tidy up her play corner, took the opportunity to pack all her toys and dolls in boxes. When her mother asked in surprise what she was doing, the girl replied, "Maybe we'll have to run away and it's best to have everything ready and packed up."<sup>42</sup> This example points to a basic sense of insecurity that children absorbed from their parents and the tortuous progress of the war. The constant oscillation between lofty hopes of national independence and the difficulties of the war on an individual level elicited manifestations of doubt about the Jewish community's ability to withstand the ordeal, attain its goals and, worse still, to survive in the most elementary sense. The children's newspapers give indications of such "subversive" moods, which were initially expressed only on the fringes of society and which have remained on the margins of history because they did not come to pass and, in retrospect, were denied.

### **Subversive Writing**

Meticulous examination of the children's newspapers reveals a fascinating corpus of subversive writing that apparently percolated into the papers inadvertently and clashed with the basically optimistic and resolved spirit that typified the climate of the time. Ya'akov Ramon's poem "Moses on Mt. Nebo" can serve as a point of departure for investigating this dimension. Although the poem was published on the occasion of the traditional anniversary of Moses' death, it was influenced by the immediate situation. One of its stanzas reads, "His newly bereaved sons pound at the gate; [the land is] 'before them'—will this be forever? Will they be rent asunder in the tempest?"<sup>43</sup> The fear that fate would let them down and that they would not succeed in attaining their national goal—a fear that surely plagued people at that time even if they preferred to conceal it in their public writings—surfaces here in a poem that is ostensibly about the end of a national leader who had been prevented from entering the Promised Land. Such issues as the course of the fighting, the balance of military forces, the equation of strategic opportunities and risks were themes that, naturally, surpassed children's comprehension.

Examples of subversive writing can be found mainly in pieces written by children about their friends' states of mind and doings. There are descriptions of how children raced to the battlefield to "punish the Arabs." Children in Jerusalem reportedly deviated from their customary exemplary behavior by "removing" (i.e. pilfering) bullets and spent cartridges from members of the defense forces, for sport. Other children were denounced for holding birthday parties in the middle of the war.<sup>44</sup> These critical remarks illuminate a reality different from the usual portrayal of a society in the throes of a feverish effort to secure its existence and independence. However, the subversive writings not only described unworthy actions. They also noted that in view



of the casualties' sacrifices, "the proclamation of Jewish statehood has made some children sad. Such children are cowardly and afraid to the depths of their souls."<sup>45</sup> Such public expressions of doubt about the wisdom of the decision to establish the state and the price in blood that was being paid for that decision were not acceptable at the time. It is reasonable to suppose that children absorbed these reflections and doubts from adults. The daily press disregarded, or to be more precise, meticulously stifled, pessimistic thoughts as long as the war raged. Although the children's press also refused to share such feelings with its readers, it was willing to publish criticism of them, evidently for the didactic purpose of urging the youngsters to desist from cowardly behavior and muster the courage required by a war for survival.

The furious fighting that took place around Kibbutz Mishmar ha-Emek in April 1948 gives us another opportunity to observe the range of attitudes toward the war. The children's press gave prominent attention to a letter from children of the kibbutz after they had been evacuated to Kibbutz Merhavia. The youngsters protested their evacuation, arguing that they could be helpful in the fighting. Furthermore, they reasoned, only if they were allowed to fight for the place where they would have to build their lives could they feel that it was really theirs. Although the letter was addressed to kibbutz members who had stayed behind to fight, the children or the adults—it is hard to know which—made sure that it would reach the media, that is, they believed it should be made public.<sup>46</sup> In his article about the shelling of the kibbutz, Imri Ron, later a Mapam leader, expressed bewilderment: "Who could imagine that they'd attack Mishmar ha-Emek, this lovely, working kibbutz?"<sup>47</sup> This was a restrained expression of the collapse of an ideological education that preached imminent Jewish–Arab fraternity. However, the most important piece of writing in this context, if not the most important piece that appeared in the children's press during the War of Independence, described the battle of Mishmar ha-Emek from a different angle:

As I came to school one morning, a friend met me and told me, "It's over. Mishmar ha-Emek is going to be conquered." I got angry . . . How could a Jewish boy who yearned so badly for a Jewish state say that a Jewish settlement would be conquered by Arab armies? . . . Kids like that, kids who despair quickly, kids who want everything easy, will not be able to build our state. Did this boy think the Arabs would be silent when we declared the Jewish state? We knew that if we demanded a state, it would cost us a lot of blood . . . David Ben Gurion was right when he said, "The Jewish state exists and will exist if we know how to defend." I turn to all children in this country: "Don't despair, we'll know how to withstand the ordeal, to repel the enemy, and to set up our state."<sup>48</sup>

The victorious battle for Mishmar ha-Emek had become history by the time the letter was published. It was, however, the most critical time of the war. Statehood had been declared two weeks earlier, the Arab armies had invaded, and the country was engulfed in pitched battles. This made the imperative of "Don't despair," addressed to "all children in this country," doubly important. Its message transcended the specific battle at Mishmar ha-Emek; its purpose was to promote the belief that just as this part

of the conflict had ended successfully due to the decision to behave in the spirit of Ben-Gurion's vision, so must everyone respond to the current ordeals by behaving the same way and avoiding manifestations of despair that undermined steadfastness.

Most of those who displayed such despair, according to the children's press, were the mothers. Children often complained about their mothers' reactions. "There are mothers who open the newspaper in the morning and begin to wail," one girl asserted. "This affects the child and leaves him in a bitter mood all day. Mothers! Don't get scared for nothing." On another occasion, a boy in Jerusalem complained that his mother wept over his brothers who were fighting on the front, forcing him to listen both to her weeping and to the thunder of gunfire.<sup>49</sup> Generally speaking, women's behavior during the war was not portrayed in flattering terms in the children's accounts. This, of course, is hardly an objective depiction of the mothers, who had to maintain their households alone as their husbands and older sons fought at the front. Such women maneuvered between keeping their children busy, while having to restrict their freedom of movement, and anxiety over the fate of mobilized loved ones. One woman educator admitted outright that the protracted effort to present the mother as a "guardian of Israel"—an approach that had emerged in the days of Ha-Shomer (the earliest Jewish defense forces) and had intensified during the Arab uprising of 1936 and conscription to the British Army during World War II—had not succeeded, leaving the father, from the youngsters' standpoint, as the "agent of masculinity and heroism."<sup>50</sup>

Under these circumstances, mothers were an expedient and useful target for resentment against the difficulties of daily life and the period as a whole. The children did not hesitate to use this device in their writings. Since the wartime conditions placed children in situations with which they could hardly cope because of their inexperience and immaturity, some children's writings were indifferent to the emotional hardships of bereavement. A short story by a seventh-grade girl described a mother who sings a lullaby for her son and continues to sing at his bedside even after he has grown up and joined the army. Several weeks later, she receives the bitter news that he has fallen in battle but she continues to sing the lullaby anyway. The story ends: "Stupid woman, wretched mother, how long are you going to sit here? Your son is gone. He's dead, really dead. How long will this mother sit at the bedside and wait for her precious son?"<sup>51</sup> In contrast, the most anguished and moving letters that appeared in the children's columns were devoted to the commemoration, in eulogy and words of farewell, of older brothers who had fallen in combat.

### **Young Gideon Writes from Haifa**

One of the issues that has been neglected by the research is the internal censorship that the editors of the children's papers imposed on themselves. Censorship during the war presumably extended beyond purely professional considerations of producing a newspaper with appropriate educational and national messages. Between the lines, however, one may discern deliberate attempts to encourage children to adhere to

values and modes of writing that conformed to the paper's ideological line. This policy is especially evident in *Mishmar li-Yeladim*. For example, its editor, Binyamin Tenne, reproached a 12-year-old boy who had written in a poetic eulogy to the fighters: "They went to battle alive and came back, came back dead." Tenne insisted that children should give more thought to what they wrote, despite the bombardments and anxieties that belonged to the routine of that trying period.<sup>52</sup> When readers of the paper were asked to submit stories about "how children use their intelligence and courage to help save an endangered settlement," the editors were alarmed by the contents of the deluge of contributions. These included innumerable stories describing how children acted on their own, racing to a neighboring settlement and summoning help that saves their beleaguered settlement at the last moment, or firing weapons of all kinds, killing Arabs and destroying their homes. The editor responded by preaching against the inflated use of imagination. Yes, we need not have mercy on our attackers, he explained, but "Our war is a war of self-defense. You always use generalizations when you write about the Arabs. We know that many Arabs oppose all the acts of violence that are supposedly being committed in their names, and we have discussed this quite a bit." The public nature of his reprimand suggests that this message had not been received. He argued that true heroism is not necessarily that of the Sten gun and the pistol. A smart boy, he wrote, can uncover a plot against his settlement and warn those in charge. Despite this criticism, however, the same issue carried a story by a boy named Gideon that conveyed the very spirit and contents that had just been condemned.<sup>53</sup>

On a previous occasion the editor had told young Gideon that he had been informed several times that the paper would not tell him what became of every piece he submitted. Good pieces would eventually be published; bad ones would be thrown out. Author of Gideon's submissions, which for some reason was not given the latter treatment, which it certainly merited because of its blatantly racist overtones, was proudly headed "Haifa Resurrected." "A few months ago," Gideon wrote, "all the Arab neighborhoods in Haifa—Khalisa, Rushmiya, etc.—were full of trash, squalor and filth. Bleary-eyed Arab children walked about barefoot and naked babies rolled in the muck." After Israel conquered the town, however, "A maternity home was set up in the very house where snipers used to live and a synagogue was established in the building where the gangs had had their headquarters. The streets have been cleaned and now they gleam. Model neighborhoods have been added to Jewish Haifa. Any Jew who sees it will feel happy and content."<sup>54</sup> After a year of fighting, the editors' sensitivity to what they published had become dulled. The establishment of the state, which from vision had become reality, and the pride in the enormity of the achievement, overrode, at least temporarily, the need to promote a humanistic attitude towards the other side.

### Child's Play

The children quickly internalized the fact of the establishment of the state and its inseparable side effect, the war. They did their best to look like participants in the general effort in both respects. Notwithstanding the educational aspects of their

actions, which were regularly reported in the children's press, it is evident that their willingness to mobilize for the assurance of victory also took the form of a game. Thus, for example, their donations to the national-security fundraising campaign and, later on, to a "defense tax," were reported regularly in every edition. Children frequently donated generously to various causes that were consistent with the national struggle. One boy, for example, vowed that if a clandestine immigrants' ship arrived, he would donate some of his savings to the Jewish National Fund to plant trees. Some children pledged to contribute on behalf of young refugees in the displaced persons' camp on Cyprus, among many other causes. It is hard to know whether the donations reached their destinations; the pledges contain discrepancies in regard to the size of the children's (and their parents') sacrifices for the homeland. Some donated on the occasion of a birthday, others instead of a birthday party, and still others in lieu of a birthday present from their parents. In December 1948, *Mishmar li-Yeladim* reported that children from Kfar Masaryk had donated one Israel pound to striking workers in France.<sup>55</sup> Since the Arab-Israeli war was obviously drawing to an end by then, the value of giving could be redirected to the alleviation of other social ills. Proposals for Israeli postage stamps also became a kind of game. Pastoral stamps such as those featuring the "seven species" (plants listed in the Bible as particularly associated with the Land of Israel) were proposed at first, but with the outbreak of war national symbols—the early settlement hero Joseph Trumpeldor, a clandestine immigrants' ship, a man plowing a field with a rifle over his shoulder, and so on—were increasingly suggested.

Sections devoted to entertainment, with crossword puzzles, riddles, and jokes, continued to appear in the children's press despite the ongoing battles. *Davar li-Yeladim* published a "war crossword," explained how to make a tank out of matchboxes and showed how to assemble a Hanukkah menorah from empty cartridges.<sup>56</sup> Apart from these instances, however, the games in the children's press were free of belligerent themes. Things were different in the section at the back of *Davar li-Yeladim* which many children read first. The paper concluded with a comic strip called "Uri-Muri," illustrated by Arye Navon and accompanied by verses by the poet Leah Goldberg. The title of the department was not chosen at random. "Uri" was a particularly "Sabra" name.<sup>57</sup> His sidekick, Muri, was added in order to make it clear, by means of the rhyme, that the readers were being presented with a tongue-in-cheek but empathetic view (free of derision and ridicule) of the patriotic virtues of the Israeli child. It was an island of goofiness, optimism, and conciliation in the ocean of militarism that the war had imposed. During 1948, Uri and Muri added up their ages in order to be old enough to join the army, did target practice, practiced military-style marching and military signal protocol, placed pots on their heads as substitutes for steel helmets, joined the military police, put helmets on the roofs of building to protect them from aerial attack, invented a mobile shelter (by filling two sandbags, tying their ends together and pulling them over their heads like a robe), enforced blackouts in their homes, visited the Negev, sporting beards, and transformed a scooter into an armored vehicle.

War-simulation games became popular among “the children of 1948.” The youngsters themselves seldom reported it in the children’s papers, and the papers’ editors made sure that it did not appear in their writing. Professional journals for teachers, however, frequently noted the phenomenon. With concern they noticed how children longed to be soldiers and heroes defending the homeland. Children reveled in destructive and violent acts, played at manufacturing tanks, setting up military positions, barking orders, wailing like sirens, bandaging dolls, destroying dummy aircraft and, of course, imitating the sound of gunfire and explosions. One of the fields they specialized in was the construction of bomb shelters out of building blocks. On hearing a suggestion that the children go into hiding at the bottom of a four-story building that they would erect with whatever they could find, a boy responded: “Four stories isn’t much; in America there are buildings with a thousand and a million stories and that’s why America isn’t bombed”—a learned assessment that has since been disproved. The ubiquity of war games prompted educators to demand countermeasures “to give children back their childhood.”<sup>58</sup> This entreaty had no chance in the reality of 1948 as the *esprit de guerre* transformed sympathy for the defender-warriors into the most important element in the children’s lives.

The children’s games were linked to life. Boys and girls chased draft evaders and profiteers, were urged to change their foreign names into Hebrew ones and collected emblems of army units. As part of that aspect of the struggle that always piques children’s imagination—espionage—they were told to stick “Seal Your Lips” stamps on telephones, the mezuzas on their doorposts, the restaurants near their home, on cars, letters, and books given to friends as a gift. This isn’t a game, the editors of the children’s newspapers explained; it’s an important political mission.<sup>59</sup> From the children’s perspective, play and war were two complementary aspects of the one reality of the War of Independence.

## Conclusion

An examination of the way the War of Independence was reflected in the children’s press should not overlook a seemingly banal aspect. Everyone likes to share success and, naturally, children display this craving more blatantly and overtly than adults. The War of Independence was a successful war. It is true that the Israeli side lost an occasional battle and incurred many casualties. However, even a hasty glimpse at 1948 suffices to determine that the Jews recorded many victories that year. The situation was dynamic; changes—mostly for the better—occurred with great frequency and the thrill of accomplishment and success overshadowed the daily hardships, which were perceived as fleeting.

From the children’s standpoint, however, the immediate concrete reality of the War of Independence included alerts, bombardments, severe tension, a plethora of prohibitions and, most notably, the absence of fathers and brothers. The children’s

press helped its young readers to cope with these conditions, and especially with fear and anxiety, two of the most salient emotions that arise in dangerous and uncertain situations in general and in wartime in particular. The children's press knew how to endow war situations sometimes with a comical and humorous dimension and persistently conveyed the message that order would eventually be restored and a better future was on the way. From this standpoint, it played an important role by satisfying its readers' specific psychological needs. This press, like its American and British counterparts during fateful wars,<sup>60</sup> invested much of its space in pointing out appropriate alternative ways of releasing the stressful and aggressive urges that erupt in times of anxiety. Its assistance in identifying effective ways of co-opting children into the war effort—tailored to their age, level of comprehension and abilities—served a purpose that was perceived as lofty: proud, patriotic steadfastness against the vicissitudes of wartime.

The children's press helped its readers to feel connected with the events of the time, events that adults constantly described to them as historic, exalted, and vastly important. It was common at the time to depict children as "little witnesses to a big history." However, the children's press shows that this expression was mistaken: the children in fact were regarded as, and felt themselves to be, "active participants in making history."<sup>61</sup> Despite the suffering, the upheaval and the psychological hardships that were integral parts of the war reality, the prevailing view among educators and the children's press was that children should be exposed as much as possible to the experience of living in a heroic era, so that, among other things, they might eventually look back and say, "I was young then but I was there, too!"<sup>62</sup>

The dominant characteristics of the children's press in Israel's War of Independence were restraint in the face of losses, a composed and factual style of writing and few manifestations of contempt for the enemy. The children's own writings indicate undercurrents that attest to the deep insecurity that accompanied the period of the fighting. The most conspicuous characteristic of the published writings, however, was absolute confidence in the justice of the cause, a sense of shared fate and clear awareness of what was at stake and for what the sacrifices were being made.

The rear, as portrayed in the children's press, manifested steadfastness during the war and gave those on the front a supportive and unified staff on which to lean. It avoided internal controversies and knew where it was heading. Thus, it created a solid infrastructure for the fighting forces on the front lines, criticized phenomena that were adverse to the national effort but treated them as correctable flaws, viewed the surrounding reality optimistically and demonstrated an ability to surmount the hurdles erected by the constraints of the war. However, the war as a total phenomenon intruded on the daily lives of that generation's youngsters and left a permanent imprint on them. After all, it was the reality of their lives for months on end, irrespective of their proximity to the battlefield. Concurrently, adults sought, by means of the children's press, to make the war into the children's world too, to the almost total exclusion of everything else.

## Acknowledgements

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## Notes

- [1] Temima Port, 5th grade, “My Worry,” *Davar li-Yeladim*, 8 January 1948; Ze’ev, “Take It to Heart,” *ibid.*, 15 January 1948.
- [2] For the children’s press, see, for example, Ofek, *Sifrut ha-yeladim*, 2:582–620; Paz, “Hitpatehut shel motivim merkaziim”; Shavit, “Hitpatehut sifrut ha-yeladim,” 455–61; and Govrin, “Ram yitnofef degel Yisrael,” 9–10. For the War of Independence press, see Limor and Gabel, “Ir netzurah”; Almagor, “Shevu’onei 1948–1949.”
- [3] Cadogan and Craig, *Women and Children First*, 71–87, 213–37; Drotner, *English Children and Their Magazines*, 4, 213–15, 232–4; Tinkler, *Constructing Girlhood*, 108–12, 186; Marten, *The Children’s Civil War*, 21–39.
- [4] Ofek, *Sifrut ha-yeladim*, 582–620; Bareles, “Hirhurim,” 33–4. The front pages of children’s newspapers and the stories published in them deserve separate discussion, maybe spanning different periods of time and based on research tools from additional disciplines such as literature and art, which this article does not consider. For a discussion of militaristic fiction for children during the period preceding the War of Independence, see Dar, “Ha-ma’avar,” 111–213.
- [5] See sources in n. 2.
- [6] For the emergence of the ethos of the “Sabra,” the native-born Israeli, see Almog, *The Sabra*.
- [7] “Between Ourselves,” *Ha-Boker li-Yeladim*, 1 January 1948.
- [8] Minutes of Mapai Central Committee Meeting, 16 January 1948, Ben-Gurion Archives, Sde Boker. At the time, Ben-Gurion chaired the Jewish Agency Executive and held its security portfolio.
- [9] Yehuda Erlich, “With Our Children—Some Problems of Education in a Time of Emergency,” *Dvar ha-Po’elet*, 20 April 1948, 84; Haskina, “Be-oto boker,” 29–30.
- [10] Only a small portion of the children’s submissions was printed, due to limitations of space, quality of the material, and other factors. One aspect of this matter will be discussed below.
- [11] Cadogan and Craig, *Women and Children First*, 71–87, 213–37; Tinkler, *Constructing Girlhood*, 108–12; Marten, *The Children’s Civil War*, 23–4, 32–9; Almog, *Ha-tzabar*, 52–123; Zerubavel, “Krav, hakravah,” 61–8.
- [12] See for example “The Portion for These Days,” *Ha-Tzofeh li-Yeladim*, 25 December 1947 and 15 July 1948; Ze’ev, “Take to Heart,” *Davar li-yeladim*, 8 January 1948; “Between Ourselves,” *Ha-Boker li-Yeladim*, 5 February 1948; Binyamin, “The Children’s Part,” *Mishmar li-Yeladim*, 27 May 1948.
- [13] Hagai Kafri of Ein Ganim, 12, “Congratulations to Moshe Shertok,” *Davar li-Yeladim*, Saturday night after midnight, 30 November 1947; the section “What Happened Recently,” *ibid.*, 15 and 29 January 1948. After statehood was proclaimed, Shertok vanished from the pages of *Davar li-Yeladim*, and David Ben-Gurion naturally replaced him as the dominant leader figure.
- [14] Amos Elon, “Jerusalem—Our Stalingrad,” *Mishmar li-Yeldim*, 17 June 1948; A.M., “No Despair Allowed” *ibid.*, 1 April 1948.
- [15] “Between Ourselves,” *Ha-Boker li-Yeladim*, 16 October 1947, 18 December 1947, 1 January 1948, 11 March 1948.
- [16] “Greeting the Sabbath,” *Ha-Boker li-Yeladim*, 13 November 1947; “Portion for These Days,” *Ha-Tzofeh li-Yeladim*, 5 February 1948.

- [17] "Portion for These Days," *Ha-Tzofeh li-Yeladim*, 11 November 1948, 24 March 1949.
- [18] "What Happened Recently," *Davar li-Yeladim*, 1 July 1948; *Shai la-Yeled*, 25 June 1948.
- [19] A.Z., "Memorial to a Hero," *Ha-Boker li-Yeladim*, 29 January 1948; Malia Gitlin, "Zoharik the Soldier," *Davar li-Yeladim*, 22 July 1948; Yosef Rechtmann, 11, "About an Airman and an Airplane," *Mishmar li-Yeladim*, 22 October 1948.
- [20] "What Happened Recently," *Davar li-Yeladim*, 22 July 1948. See also "Between Ourselves," *Ha-Boker li-Yeladim*, 1 July 1948; "Day by Day," *Shai la-Yeled*, 2 July 1948, Hillel Bachrach, 10½, Borochov quarter, "The Underground Member and His Oath to the Defence Force," *Mishmar li-Yeladim*, 15 July 1948; Ora Siegel, 12½, "To the Israeli Army," *Davar li-Yeladim*, 22 July 1948.
- [21] K. Lorch, "Give Us a Little Peace," *Ha-Tzofeh li-Yeladim*, 22 July 1948.
- [22] Nitza of Beit Alfa, 8½, "Poem to the Driver," *Mishmar li-Yeladim*, 15 April 1948. This newspaper conducted a special poll among the children to solicit their views on the question, "In what way can every child contribute to the war effort?" It attracted many responses. See "Our Poll: For the Security of the Yishuv and the Nation," *Mishmar li-Yeladim*, 29 January, 5, 12, 19 and 26 February 1948.
- [23] Eliezer Don-Yehiya, 10, Kfar Hasidim, "Letter to the Hebrew Soldier, Somewhere," *Ha-Tzofeh li-Yeladim*, 8 July 1948.
- [24] See, for example, Malka Schneidermann, 5th grade, Borochov neighborhood, "To the Unknown Soldier 'Somewhere,'" *Davar li-Yeladim*, 19 October 1944. The similarity of the titles of her and Don-Yehiya's letters is instructive.
- [25] Ksenyah, "The Child in Russia and the War," *Dvar ha-Po'elet*, 11 July 1943, 86–8. This sentiment was also expressed in letters that children sent to soldiers and their chief commander "Comrade Stalin" (or "Grandfather Stalin") in which they swore to devote all their savings to war aims and to improve their level of studies so that when the time came they would be big and strong like the soldiers on the front, while urging Stalin "to kill the fascists to death" (*ibid.*). See also Shapira, *Herev ha-yonah*, 409–16.
- [26] S. Shmueli, "In Memory of the Children of Jerusalem," *Ha-Boker li-Yeladim*, 24 June 1948; Gavriel Tzifroni, "The Child Heroes of Jerusalem," *ibid.*; Yakhin, "The Young Messengers: Among the Heroes of the Old City," *Ha-Tzofeh li-Yeladim*, 15 July 1948; Arieli (ed.), *Gadna Yerushalayim*.
- [27] See for example Yona Cohen, "Naftali in the Besieged Old City of Jerusalem," *Ha-Tzofeh li-Yeladim*, 11 March 1948; Ben Yisrael Hadani (Shlomo Skolski), "Another One Has Fallen," *Shai la-Yeled*, 4 June 1948; Haya Kofman, "Tzvia of the Old City," *Mishmar li-Yeladim*, 17 June 1948; Yehuda Rotenberg, "Yankale of the Old City among the Fighters," *Davar li-Yeladim*, 2 September 1948.
- [28] Natan Bodadad, 13½, Jerusalem, "About Life in Besieged Jerusalem," *Ha-Boker li-Yeladim*, 15 July 1948. Children from other localities mobilized to help their counterparts in Jerusalem. The Hugim High School in Haifa, for example, sent a "spiritual gift" and a "practical gift" to the children of the Old City—an album with drawings about the era of the Prophet Jeremiah and several dozen tablets of chocolate. Reuven Markovitz and Yael Lichtenstein, "Letter to the Editor," *Mishmar li-Yeladim*, 26 February 1948.
- [29] "Between Ourselves," *Ha-Boker li-Yeladim*, 3 June 1948. In similar wording, *Ha-Tzofeh li-Yeladim*, 24 March 1949, predicted great bloodshed if a "foreign king" were to be imposed on the Old City of Jerusalem.
- [30] D. "The Portion of These Days; Gateway to Paradise," *Ha-Tzofeh li-Yeladim*, 26 February 1948. A poem published the following week proclaimed: "Ahmed will surely recount to his sons, and his son to his grandson / how this castle [*tirah*, i.e. Tirat Zvi] stood unflinching in the battle; how, O Allah, it emitted fire! / and how heroic Al Yahud [the yew] is; he fights—and the countryside trembles, / his land cannot be conquered, such a castle stands unflinching at all approaches" . . . Shlomo Skolsky, "Heroes of the Castle," *ibid.*, 4 March 1948.



- [31] “The Four Corners of the Country,” *ibid.*, 4 March 1948.
- [32] David, “The Sniper,” *Ha-Boker li-Yeladim*, 25 March 1948.
- [33] Rotenstrein, “Ha-hinukh be-yamim eleh,” 276–7. For additional examples of the expression “desert savages,” see poem by S. Shalom, written in 1936, in Slutzky, *Sefer toldot ha-Haganah* 2, part 2, 648. On the day after the hanging of Shlomo Ben-Yosef, *Ha-Tzofeh* carried the following comment on its front page, “Atop the graves of our dead, those killed by desert savages, another casualty has been added, one killed on order of the [British] authorities.” “The Martyr Shlomo Ben-Yosef,” *Ha-Tzofeh*, 30 June 1938.
- [34] Nina, 4th grade, “News of the Day,” *Davar li-Yeladim*, 8 January 1948; Tzur Perlman, Tel Aviv High School, “Our Referendum,” *Mishmar li-Yeladim*, 29 January 1948.
- [35] *Davar li-Yeladim*, 25 March 1948, 1 April 1948 (the reports about Purim carry neither a headline nor a byline); Y. Cohen, “The Costume Competition,” *Ha-Tzofeh li-Yeladim*, 25 March 1948. The children, in turn, volunteered not to dress up as British police in view of the involvement of such police in a car bomb explosion on Ben-Yehuda Street in Jerusalem in February 1948.
- [36] Yael Hartman, 8½, Jerusalem, “Our Readers Write—A Joke,” Jerusalem, *Davar li-Yeladim*, 11 November 1948. The joke reflected a common state of mind among children. In another example, a boy pointedly asked his grandfather, “how he should ‘deal’ with it if a little Arab comes towards him on his way to kindergarten.” Karmi, ‘Tzav ha-sha’ah,’ 35.
- [37] “In the Land of Israel—the Arab Evacuation,” *Mishmar li-Yeladim*, 13 May 1948.
- [38] “What Happened Recently,” *Davar li-Yeladim*, 29 April 1948, 22 July 1948; “Between Ourselves,” *Ha-Boker li-Yeladim*, 24 June 1948; “Portion for These Days,” *Ha-Tzofeh li-Yeladim*, 15 July 1948.
- [39] Reuven Mendelson, 11½, “News of the Day,” *Davar li-Yeladim*, 12 February 1948; Efraim Kahane, 7½, “Why Did the Arabs Go?” *ibid.*, 13 May 1948.
- [40] Tabenkin, “Be-or medinat Yisrael,” 214–17; Emi, “Our Children upon the Evacuation,” *Mibifnim* 13 (March 1948–April 1949): 698–702; Tal, “Me-hazit ke-oref.”
- [41] Dan Albinger, 12½, “The Bombardment of Rehovot,” *Mishmar li-Yeladim*, 10 June 1948; Nili Gordon, 11½, Tel Aviv, “From Then to Now,” *Ha-Boker li-Yeladim*, 4 March 1948; Yehudit, 11, “Letter from a City Girl to Her Aunt on Kibbutz,” *ibid.*, 22 April 1948; Nehama Feigler, 6th grade, Haifa, “We’re Refugees, Too,” *Mishmar li-Yeladim*, 17 June 1948.
- [42] Erlich, “With Our Children,” *Dvar ha-Po’elet*, 20 April 1948, 84.
- [43] *Ha-Tzofeh li-Yeladim*, 18 March 1948. The lines evoke Deut. 32:52: “Yet thou shalt see the land before thee; but thou shalt not go thither.”
- [44] Joseph Dan, “The Children of Besieged Jerusalem,” *Mishmar li-Yeladim*, 8 April 1948; Nahum Egozi, 11½, Tel Aviv, “Our Referendum,” *ibid.*, 12 February 1948; Dalia Tzidkoni, 12½, Tel Aviv, “The Sadness within the Happiness,” *Ha-Tzofeh li-Yeladim*, 13 May 1948.
- [45] Avner Wollochewinski, 9¾, “News of the Day,” *Davar li-Yeladim*, 29 January 1948. An article published as the war was drawing to an end supports the contention that this was not an unusual statement. The author notes that since children did not know for what purpose they suffered during the fighting, their attitude to the Jewish state was “almost negative.” It was only after the armistice and, especially, during the first Knesset election campaign that children became ardent patriots and “the Jewish state became ‘worth it’ in their eyes . . .” Polshtinski, “Yeladim be-ma’agal ha-historiyah,” 53.
- [46] The letter was published prominently in *Davar li-Yeladim*, 29 April 1948, and in *Mishmar li-Yeladim*, 1 May 1948.
- [47] Imri, 11½, Mishmar ha-Emek, “The Strafing of Mishmar ha-Emek,” *Mishmar li-Yeladim*, 20 May 1948.
- [48] Azaryahu Krasnitz, 11, “News of the Day,” *Davar li-Yeladim*, 27 May 1948.

- [49] Sarah Efraimi, 5th grade, "News of the Day," *Davar li-Yeladim*, 19 February 1948; David Halbrich, 12, Jerusalem, "A Nightmarish Night," *Ha-Boker li-Yeladim*, 4 March 1948.
- [50] Rotenstrein, "Ha-hinukh be-yamim eleh," 275.
- [51] Ruth Rosenbrauch, 7th grade, "When Will the Son Come Home?" *Mishmar li-Yeladim*, 18 March 1948.
- [52] Binyamin [Tenne], "Mailbox," *Mishmar li-Yeladim*, 3 June 1948.
- [53] Matti (Mordechai Amitai), "Mailbox," *ibid.*, 26 February 1948; 18 March 1948; Gideon Reicher, 11, Haifa, "The Heroism of Two Boys," *ibid.*, 18 March 1948.
- [54] Gideon Reicher, 12, Haifa, "Haifa Resurrected," *ibid.*, 11 November 1948.
- [55] *Ibid.*, 9 December 1948.
- [56] *Davar li-Yeladim*, 1 July 1948; 29 July 1948; 23 December 1948.
- [57] Almog, *Ha-tzabar*, 149.
- [58] Haskina, "Be-oto boker," 29–30. See also additional articles in *ibid.*, 31–8; Polshtinski, "Me-havai ha-yamim," 32 (whence the quotation about America). See also preceding and following articles in the same volume; and Hava, "Im ha-yeladim," 385–7. Although the references in these sources focus on preschoolers, they also refer to the slightly older children who are of concern in this article.
- [59] *Ha-Tzofeh li-Yeladim and Mishmar li-Yeladim*, 10 March 1949.
- [60] Marten, *The Children's Civil War*, 21–5, 33–9, 50–51; Drotner, *English Children*, 232–4.
- [61] Polshtinski, "Yeladim be-ma'agal ha-historiyah," 53. Children in the American Civil War were described similarly as regarding themselves "not merely as appendages to their parents experiences but as actors in their own right in the great national drama." Marten, *The Children's Civil War*, 5.
- [62] Hava Karmi, "From the Problems of Our Children: Education in a Time of Emergency," *Dvar ha-Po'elet*, 20 April 1948, 85.

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