

# Meir Chazan

## THE EFFORTS TO REVIVE HASHOMER

*The Hashomer organization, established in April 1909 and officially disbanded in May 1920, had undertaken to guard Jewish settlements throughout Palestine. The former members of Hashomer were not easily reconciled to exclusion from the inner circle where decisions were made concerning the defence of Jews in Palestine and made repeated efforts from 1920 to 1938 to reclaim what they perceived as their destiny as individuals and pioneers within the labour movement: to lead security operations on the Yishuv. This article examines various aspects of those efforts, revealing the pattern of the actions taken over the years by the members of Hashomer. The central argument is that the efforts to resuscitate Hashomer had a common denominator: every practical programme the Hashomer veterans promoted remained an alternative channel of military activity, with implications for the use of force and relations with the Arabs that the labour movement chose not to implement.*

### Introduction

In July 1938, Alexander Zaid was killed at Sheikh Avreik, near present-day Kiryat Tivon. Zaid, a co-founder of the first security forces in the Jewish settlement in Palestine, Bar Giora (a secret defence order of workers, established in September 1907) and Hashomer ("The Watchman"), was a legend in his own lifetime. The eulogy delivered after his death by his colleague Pinchas Shneorson included two sentences that historians have not yet analyzed:

About six months ago some 30 of us, all former members of Hashomer, gathered in [Bar Giora and Hashomer leader] Yisrael Shochat's apartment. The conversation revolved around setting up an organization that would undertake to prepare members for settlement on the borders of the country (the dream of Hashomer members at the time). (Shneorson)

At that time the "border guard", as it was called, was already destined for a dusty corner in the archives of history. This article will examine the significance of the remarks quoted above in two contexts: the circumstances under which the secret organization was established, and its place in the wider spectrum of efforts to resuscitate Hashomer.

The quasi-military Hashomer organization was established in April 1909 to guard Jewish settlements against Arab attempts to damage Jewish property throughout the country. Close to the Po'alei Zion party, it restricted membership and numbered about 100 guardsmen at its peak. Hashomer was officially disbanded in May 1920, handing the job of defence over to the Ahdut ha'avoda party in June 1920, which in turn passed the torch to the Haganah, the military organization of the Histadrut (General Federation of

Labour) when the latter was established in December 1920. From the 1930s, the Haganah became a people's militia under the control of the *Yishuv's* governing organization.

Primary and secondary sources dealing with the history of Hashomer are varied and voluminous, including personal memoirs by Hashomer members, two volumes of reminiscences bearing the organization's official imprint, biographical sketches of selected Hashomer figures, studies of different aspects of the Hashomer experience and activities from the time of the Second *Aliyah* onwards, and research focusing on Hashomer as a unique phenomenon (*Kovetz; Sefar; Shva; Slutzky; Yanait Ben-Zvi; Goldstein, Baderekh el haya, 'ad*).

This article follows the trail blazed by the historian Yaakov Goldstein in his research on Hashomer in the years following its official dissolution in 1920. However, the article adds new sources and topics of discussion, and spans a wider time frame than that adopted by Goldstein. It also provides grounds for amending Goldstein's assertion that the Hashomer veterans' period of activity in Hapo 'el (Labour sport federation) until 1934 was their "swan song". It is true that from mid-1934 to the end of their lives the ex-Hashomer members no longer played any public role as a group and most of them were relegated to the sidelines (Goldstein, *Baderekh el haya 'ad* 93–198). However, this article will show that their deep, enduring determination to resume the mission they considered themselves destined to fulfill as individuals and pioneers within the labour movement — in short, to be major players in the security field of the *Yishuv* — was a stronger, more persistent ambition than what Goldstein describes.

On the subject of Hakibbutz (a secret military body that operated within Gedud Ha 'avodah [Labour Battalion] in the period from 1923 to 1926), he asserts that the organization did not see itself as an alternative to the Haganah but "as a galvanizing, goading element that filled gaps" (Goldstein, *Baderekh el haya 'ad* 110). This article will argue, on the contrary, that all the efforts to resuscitate Hashomer — including the establishment of Hakibbutz — were a function of the Hashomer veterans' aspiration to channel their energies into what they perceived as the critical arena for security. It will also consider the link between the Hashomer veterans' desire to return to security activity and their attitude to the Arab question.

The importance Hashomer attributed to the Arab issue was one of the principles that guided its patterns of action from the beginning. The attitude of its members was based on the assumption "that for the success of the Zionist enterprise [it was] vital to form neighbourly relations based on mutual respect" (Shochat, "Hashmira" 51). However, the Hashomer members would always have trouble bringing those involved in *Yishuv* security and politics around to the mind-set required to implement this principle. Their own adherence to it, as we shall see, was one of the factors motivating their repeated, but largely fruitless, efforts to play a central role in security.

The Arab violence that broke out early in May 1921 spurred the leaders of the Histadrut to embrace the views of Eliahu Golomb — one of the leaders of the Haganah, and its future commander — on its structure, character and *modus operandi*. Those who endorsed Golomb's approach wanted the Haganah to be a comprehensive militia constantly ready to rally in emergencies, open to all Histadrut members who wanted to join it, and directly answerable to the Histadrut institutions. The Histadrut leaders rejected the view represented by the leader of Hashomer, Yisrael Shochat, who wanted to create a scaled-down, autonomous, elite secret system that could be incorporated

into the framework of Gedud Ha 'avodah, and to limit civilian control over it to political issues (to ensure its independence on defence issues). Certainly, beyond the ideological and theoretical aspects of this difference of professional opinion lay a passionate personal battle for control of the Histadrut security force, waged between the respective followers of Golomb and Shochat (Tzahor, *Baderekh* 201–02).

The former members of Hashomer were not easily reconciled to their exclusion from the inner circle where decisions were made concerning the defence of Jews in Palestine. Accordingly, they made repeated efforts to lead security operations in the *Yishuv*. Throughout the period of their involvement in issues of defence and security (1907–1938), they participated to varying degrees in the establishment and operation of nine different bodies of a military bent: Bar Giora, Hashomer, the Jewish Legion, the Haganah, Hakibbutz, Hapoel, Agudat Hashomrim (Guard's Association), Plugot Hasadeh (Field Squads) and Mishmeret Hagvul (Border Guard).

This article will focus on the following milestones: the foundation of Hakibbutz in 1922, the effort to develop a guards' association in the aftermath of the bloody events of 1929, the Hashomer veterans' attempts to rejoin the leadership of the Haganah during the "Arab uprising" of 1936–1937, and the establishment of the Border Guard at the beginning of 1938. In each case, I shall concentrate on the Hashomer veterans' preparations for returning, as they hoped, to their former status, which they perceived as their essential contribution to the realization of Zionism. On each of these four occasions, they sought to recreate the Hashomer framework in a different way. My discussion of Hakibbutz will focus on a unique document from its early history. In examining the efforts to organize a guards' association, I shall try to reveal the internal politics in Mapai that contributed to the association's emergence outside the framework of Hashomer. The Hashomer veterans' desire to join the leadership of the Haganah will be examined in the context of their harsh criticism of the organization. My treatment of the Border Guard will go beyond the specifics of the organization to include an analysis of the political and security situation in which it took shape.

The following questions will be examined: First, what concrete defence needs were the organizational efforts discussed here designed to meet? Second, what were the particular characteristics of each organization? Third, what elements of the Hashomer approach to security were reflected in each organization? Fourth, what does analysis of the repeated attempts to revive Hashomer contribute to our understanding of its members' contribution to security? My central argument is that the efforts to resuscitate Hashomer had a common denominator: every practical programme the Hashomer veterans promoted always remained an alternative channel of military activity, with implications for the use of force and relations with the Arabs that the labour movement chose not to take. The labour movement's unwillingness to consider seriously the plans for action devised by the former members of Hashomer had, at bottom, nothing to do with the content of the plans. It was primarily a reaction to the people who supported those plans — people who had always refused to toe the party and Histadrut line.

The moving force in all the different organizational efforts to revive Hashomer were the Shochats — Manya and Yisrael — who, at the time, were living apart. In fact, the main thing that drew them together in the 1920s and 1930s was their common desire to reassume their central place in defence affairs. Some of the Histadrut leaders in Ahdut Ha 'avodah and, later, Mapai were not particularly worried about bestowing positions in the *Yishuv* administration on one former Hashomer

member or another. The Shochats, however, were another matter. In their case, the question was how to keep them out of influential or politically significant public positions. Various figures in the Histadrut administration were patently afraid of the Shochats' skills, their tendency to accrue power, not necessarily to bolster the movement's leadership, their American connections (with Hadassah organization and Louis Brandeis and his associates), and their refusal to bow automatically to the authority of Ahdut Ha'avodah and Mapai. The opposition to the Shochats was led by Golomb, Shaul Meirov (Avigur) and Dov Hos, who, throughout the 1920s and 1930s, saw them, with their underground-cell style of organization and their gift for mobilizing their old followers, as potential competitors for authority over security issues in the labour movement (Golomb 226–56, 280–90; Goren 146–52, 172; Boaz 41–45). I shall touch upon some key moments in the uncompromising struggle over the leadership of the *Yishuv* defence forces between these two groups in the course of examining the attempts to revive Hashomer.

### The first attempt: Hakibbutz

In 1921–1922, following the 1921 riots, Hashomer members helped arrange arms purchases in Vienna for the Haganah. At the same time, they managed to establish their primacy in security matters in Gedud Ha'avodah. One of the first steps they took in this organization was to attempt to set up a defence branch. The plan for this was written by Zvi Nadav, a prominent Hashomer veteran who, with Yisrael Shochat's blessing, went to the Galilee and submitted it to the high council of Gedud Ha'avodah.<sup>1</sup>

Within the framework of Gedud Ha'avodah, former members of Hashomer set up a secret group based on separate activist cells and known as "Hakibbutz", which dealt with security-related issues from 1923 to 1926. The history of Hakibbutz has already been reviewed in a number of works (Slutzky 68–71, 147–53, 219–41; Teveth 190–93, 280–97; Goldstein, "Baderekh el haya'ad" 93–131). The scarcity of direct documentation makes it difficult to identify the goals and roles that the founders of Hakibbutz established for themselves. Hence, a document in the handwriting of Manya Shochat, found in Zvi Nadav's archives, sheds some light on the principles that guided the leaders of Hakibbutz in its early days as a secret organization. The document is undated, but a note at the end of it says that it was found in an envelope containing items from 1919 to 1922. On the basis of what we know from other sources about the date that Hakibbutz was founded, we can date the document to the second half of 1922. It was apparently written before the founding assembly of the organization, which took place at the end of 1922 or the beginning of 1923, and it can be assumed that the principles it laid down provided the basis for the character and goals of Hakibbutz — as perceived by the small nucleus of founders. The document reads as follows:

1. The goal: An autonomous national government and the creation of a communist regime in the country.
2. The means: a) constructive b) revolutionary.
3. Processes: a) building the national economy b) building the collectivist economy c) national socialist revolution.
4. The historical forces that enable the processes to take place:

- a. Immigration to Palestine constituting a Jewish majority.
  - b. Class warfare by Jewish workers in Palestine.
  - c. Conflicts on the world historical stage in general and in the Near East in particular (they are conditioned by the clash of interests between various imperialistic countries, by class war, which turns into civil war within those countries).
  - d. The solidarity of the revolutionary world proletariat.
5. The roles played by the organized forces of the working class which consciously carry out our goals:
- a. The kibbutz movement among the workers must perform the tasks of building the national economy and creating a communist society.
  - b. The Histadrut Klalit [General Federation of Jewish Labour] must take an active part in carrying out the national-socialist revolution.
  - c. Hakibbutz must be the pioneer that organizes the revolutionary enterprise in general, and the military force in particular.
6. The changes Hakibbutz must undergo in order to perform its role:
- a. A clear social awareness.
  - b. Increased Hakibbutz membership.
7. Special tasks devolving on Hakibbutz during the battle:
- a. Training experts and instructors for the development and organization of a military force.
  - b. Gaining influence among workers in the vital economic fields by organizing activist cells.
  - c. Taking a position and gaining influence in all workers' organizations and youth unions that might play a practical role in achieving our goal (defence, etc.).
  - d. Creating an external revolutionary centre.<sup>2</sup>

The document reverberates with the Bolshevik Revolution, the proletarian struggles at the end of the First World War, and the dream of establishing a classless society. The faith in willpower and the value of the avant-garde, and the pervasiveness of the concept of "revolution", in this document reflect the political and ideological climate in which it was written. It was a period filled with the messianic hope that individuals could challenge the ways of the world by grasping reality as it was, seeing clearly how it could be changed, and showing resolve in engineering those changes.<sup>3</sup> The name of the new organization, Hakibbutz, was mentioned over and over in the second part of the document. The most significant sentence is 5(c), which succinctly defined the reason for organizing. It identified the military force, its control and its operation in accordance with the needs of the revolutionary enterprise as the determining factors in establishing the path and destiny of the *Yishuv* in Palestine. The key word here was "the pioneer". It meant that the role of the vanguard responsible for directing the revolutionary enterprise was supposed to be entrusted to discreet, doggedly diligent professionals. It was not the job of mass partisan bodies, which were rife with varied and occasionally conflicting, interests. The *Yishuv's* obliviousness to the Arab question — an obliviousness evident throughout the 1920s — is conspicuous in this text, too. Particularly notable is the hyperbole used to describe the desired society and the ways to achieve it, with its sweeping disregard for the existing reality in *Eretz Yisrael*.

Hakibbutz based its actions on the concept of the vanguard working discreetly to develop the military force that would serve the revolutionary enterprise — an idea that went back to the days of Bar Giora. The most famous examples of such actions were the assassination of Tuwfiq Bey (an Arab officer who served in the Jaffa police force and was thought to be responsible for the May 1921 massacre in the immigrant hostel in Jaffa); an operation in which smugglers were robbed to finance the organization; the construction of a large arms depot in Kfar Giladi; and the establishment of a military school in Tel Yosef.

Quite apart from the power struggles that resulted in their exclusion from the Haganah, the ex-members of Hashomer assigned to Hakibbutz the role of developing and nurturing an awareness of the vital importance of defence. This role was especially necessary in light of the great number of missions that workers took upon themselves in a period that, in retrospect, was uneventful in terms of security. The Hakibbutz approach, which advocated building up a secret military force that would operate under the aegis and pioneer mantle of Gedud Ha 'avodah, fell victim to a series of struggles over control of the workers both within Gedud Ha 'avodah and between it and the Achdut Ha 'avodah Party. After the Histadrut commission of enquiry, established at Ben-Gurion's initiative, unequivocally decreed the dissolution of Hakibbutz in January 1927 (Tzahor, "Va 'adat haberur" 128–54), the Hashomer veterans played a less active part in defence matters until August 1929. Upon the return of the Hashomer veterans to the Histadrut fold following their assistance in defending the *Yishuv* during the bloody events of August 1929, they consented to allocate the weaponry they had collected in their arms cache at Kfar Giladi for use in the localities under attack.<sup>4</sup>

### **The second attempt: The Watchmen's Union**

Publicly acclaimed for their conduct during the 1929 disturbances, the Hashomer veterans were in their element again, and showed themselves willing and eager to rejoin the forces charged with defending the *Yishuv*. Their initial intention was to expand the ranks of Haganah officers. At the same time, however, as a result of the disturbances, the Histadrut decided to tighten up its supervision of the Haganah. Yosef Hecht was then acting as coordinator of the military organization, and for all practical purposes enjoyed exclusive control over what happened in it. As he confided to Ben-Gurion, he was worried about admitting people who "would introduce personal conflicts and 'politics'" — an allusion to past power struggles between Golomb's and Shochat's respective factions in the Haganah in the early 1920s. In fact, however, peace seemed to be reigning on that front for the time being, Golomb expressing his opinion:

There is no fear that [the former members of Hashomer] will keep working separately. They have realized that without the Histadrut they will not be able to work, and from now on we must rely on their promise that they will submit to public discipline.

Even Ben-Gurion renewed his ties with Yisrael Shochat, meeting with him for the first time since the dissolution of Hakibbutz two years earlier.<sup>5</sup>

Hecht, seeking to preserve both his autonomy and his position, tried to manipulate the members of Hashomer; he told Manya Shochat that he was ready to take the Hashomer people into the Haganah, on condition that their participation would not be under the aegis of the Histadrut. Her response was "action is not possible without the Histadrut and Histadrut supervision, and . . . they had made this mistake once already".<sup>6</sup> The only contemporary source we have for this is Ben-Gurion's diary. In the absence of corroborating testimony from Hecht or the Hashomer veterans, we should keep in mind that this is a biased perception of the dispute. For our purposes, however, the significant fact here is that the heavy cloud of mistrust that had hovered since the days of Hakibbutz had subsided, at least to a level that permitted renewed cooperation between the Hashomer veterans and the leaders of the Histadrut, headed by Ben Gurion.

Unmistakable evidence that the air had not cleared completely can be found in the minutes of the Histadrut executive committee meetings of 10 and 17 February 1930. The discussion at these meetings revolved around two issues: Manya Shochat's plan to go to the United States to raise money for the stated purpose of financing activities in the Arab community, and the former Hashomer members' desire to resume their involvement in the defence of the country through a special organization founded for that purpose under the aegis of the Histadrut. Manya Shochat declared at the beginning of the first meeting that she intended to create a fund that would bring in some 5,000 Palestine pounds annually. Ben-Gurion, leading the opposition to her trip, declared flatly: "I want to say openly that Manya is not stable and is not a political person." He argued that only someone with a profound political understanding of the situation of Zionism would be able to operate in the United States. Manya responded that she did not want to deal with political matters: "I hate that and I can't bear politics." In support of Ben-Gurion, Golomb asserted: "Manya's reassurance is not reassuring at all. Sometimes it is actually because they hate politics that people take political actions" (all Labour Archives, 10 February 1930). The unspoken fear was that, while in the United States, Manya might take the opportunity to do some fundraising on the sly to finance a resumption of separate defence activities by the veterans of Hashomer and Hakibbutz. As it turned out, the only people at the meeting who favoured her mission were Chaim Arlosoroff, and Yitzhak Ben-Zvi (who was apparently equally suspicious of Manya's intentions, but was reluctant to oppose her openly because of their old Hashomer connections), and Yisrael Shochat. Having no alternative, Manya announced that she would accept the decision of the Histadrut. In the end, the committee decided to authorize her trip, but to wait a few more weeks to decide when she should go.<sup>7</sup>

About a week later, the Histadrut executive committee decided to set up a subcommittee to examine the former Hashomer members' idea of establishing a defence organization to guard the *moshavot* (agricultural settlements). The idea itself was born of Yisrael Shochat's plan to reintegrate the former Hashomer members in regular, publicly recognized defence work. However, the Histadrut and Haganah leaders were reluctant to establish a legitimate basis for a revival of Hashomer; they feared it would lead to the creation of a separate organization, financed by the National Council (Va 'ad Leumi) and the Histadrut, that would effectively circumvent the Haganah.<sup>8</sup> Essentially, the whole discussion was another round in the cycle of disputes concerning the nature of the Haganah: whether it should be an exclusive, professional society of the elite, or an umbrella organization designed to include everyone qualified to bear arms in the *Yishuv*. The basic issue was further complicated by the old grudges and relations of mutual

mistrust that were revived when it appeared that the Hashomer veterans as a group might become too powerful.

The readiness of the Hashomer people to accept their continued exclusion from the security field (since it was a well-known Mapai ploy to set up a committee, not intended to advance an issue but rather to pigeonhole it) stemmed primarily from their political weakness as a group. Their compliance was further reinforced by Kfar Giladi's<sup>9</sup> difficult financial and social straits (Tsur 36–37, 79–80; Brenner 27–28). In this respect, it is worth mentioning the internal political struggle that divided Kfar Giladi during 1930 to 1932 between the Mapai-identified majority and the minority whose sympathies lay with the Left Po 'ale Tzion Party. The tension between the two factions was so great that it threatened the settlement's very existence. Matters reached a point where the quarrel raged un-suppressed even in the kibbutz dining hall, the centre of daily life in those days. The Mapai people would sit on the western side of the hall, a portrait of Yosef Haim Brenner hanging on the wall above them, while the group who identified with Po 'alei Tzion–Left would sit on the eastern side of the hall, under the portrait of Ber Borochov (see *Anthology*). Yisrael Shochat tried in vain to mediate between the two factions. Despairingly, he lamented that the collapse of Hashomer's "last stronghold" would "bury in its fall all its soldiers, inside and out", and with it would be "destroyed that beautiful legend — Hashomer".<sup>10</sup>

In the meantime, Manya Shochat, while seeking to rejoin the Histadrut organization, continued, as in the past, to go her own way. She began to associate with members of Brit Shalom (Peace Alliance who supported the idea of a bi-national state), who had become virtually pariahs in the labour movement since the events of 1929. She was also a leading activist in the Ahvat Po 'alim (Brotherhood of Workers) organization, which sought to promote Jewish-Arab rapprochement on the basis of common economic interests. Manya's involvement in the latter organization elicited another sharp response from Ben-Gurion, who complained: "I won't be able to discuss anything political with her, because, despite all her good intentions, she is completely irresponsible in any question of politics."<sup>11</sup> Although from the Histadrut standpoint, her activity seemed adversarial in some respects, and certainly did not encourage any desire to reincorporate the Hashomer veterans in the *Yishuv* defence forces, Manya did not cease her involvement in Jewish-Arab relations. She considered them to be essential to the success of the Zionist enterprise. Eliahu Elath, an expert on Arab affairs and one of Manya's associates, later explained her views on this subject:

We must know our neighbours, come into contact with them — the sheikhs and the common people — know their minds, empathize with them. This is the key to Manya's attitude to Brit Shalom — motivated by a human response to human beings, by the understanding shaped during the period of Hashomer, she sought in the period of the Haganah as well to understand how to defend ourselves on one hand and establish neighbourly relations with the Arabs on the other.<sup>12</sup>

In a document apparently written towards the end of 1929, the establishment of a defence organization in agricultural settlements was linked to a series of proposals for dealing with the Arab question. Reflecting the traditional Hashomer outlook, the document explained that "the role of this organization is legally to preserve, in the simple sense of the word, life and property, and at the same time to create friendly ties with all



the Arab villages in the area". The document also detailed proposals for "cultural work among the Arabs", which included, among other things, the publication of a weekly newspaper in Arabic, the establishment of joint agricultural unions and professional clubs, the provision of medical aid through Hadassah, and, what was apparently the jewel in the crown, "the creation of a democratic (popular) Arab party".<sup>13</sup>

A few weeks after their failure to establish a guard organization under the aegis of the Histadrut, Yisrael Shochat and some of the other Hashomer veterans (such as Eliezer Krol, Manya Shochat, and Yosef Harit), having been denied the possibility of participating directly in the country's defence, accepted Ben-Gurion's invitation to join the management of Hapoel. During the Histadrut executive committee meeting at which Ben-Gurion told the Hapoel representatives that Yisrael Shochat had been asked "to take an interest in Hapoel", he also remarked that "there is no need to involve Hapoel in defence matters. Hapoel is a legal federation. Not only for entertainment, although that, too, is very important."<sup>14</sup>

On behalf of Ben-Gurion, the Hashomer veterans helped outfit Hapoel and the Hasadran organization associated with it as frameworks to prepare members to join the Haganah and help the labour movement and the Histadrut in their conflict with the Revisionists over organizing labour in the agricultural settlements (Goldstein, *Baderekh el haya 'ad* 168, 176–78). At the same time, even when Ben-Gurion wanted to give Yisrael Shochat the task of preparing Hasadran to serve as a paramilitary security body in 1933, he was careful first to show Dov Hos (one of the leaders of the Haganah and Mapai) and Eliahu Golomb the letter addressed to Shochat in which he had set down his instructions.<sup>15</sup> This essentially confirms that Ben-Gurion recognized the veto right that Hos and Golomb retained over Shochat's freedom of action.

The issue of a guards' association came up again at the end of 1932. The impetus was the increasing incidence of robbery, theft, and personal and property damage committed by Arabs against Jews. These attacks took place from time to time, especially in rural communities, and were not apparently motivated by nationalistic or political feeling. The gradual proliferation of rural settlements and the cultivation of fields distant from populated areas brought an increase in the number of attacks and the danger to Jews. At the same time, beginning in the early days of the British Mandate, recognition of the importance of security precautions — and, of course, the resources for them — dwindled. The number of trained guards gradually declined. Increasing numbers of people lacking appropriate professional training and proper understanding of conditions in the country were taking on the job of maintaining security. In 1932 the National Council, headed by Ben-Zvi (a leader of Mapai and a prominent Hashomer veteran), set up a central security committee, which sat with Haganah representatives to discuss ways of improving the security situation, but little was actually done.

Against this backdrop, guard organizations began to emerge spontaneously in various places. In the second half of 1932, a few regional guard assemblies were held, leading to the foundation of a guards' association (Agudat Hashomrim) in November–December 1932. Agudat Hashomrim set itself two goals: to organize all the Jewish guards in the country, and to remove the work of guarding from Arabs wherever Jews owned property, helping to establish Jewish ownership of those areas. The new organization's constitution was written with the assistance of Yisrael Shochat and Yitzhak Olshan (later president of the Israeli Supreme Court),<sup>16</sup> who brought to the task their training as lawyers and years of involvement with defence and security matters on the *Yishuv*.

The founders of Agudat Hashomrim included a few Hashomer figures, such as Alexander Zaid; but their commitment to Yisrael and Manya Shochat was by no means certain, owing to past conflicts that are beyond the scope of this article. The Shochats were aware of the watchmen's need and desire to organize. They wanted to incorporate the new entity into Hapoel, thereby returning through the "back door" to direct involvement in security and defence. In this way, they hoped to surmount the obstacles to their efforts to establish a security organization in the *moshavot* and other agricultural settlements following the violent disturbances of 1929. Manya tried to obtain funds for this purpose with the help of Louis Brandeis, and alarmed Ben-Gurion with the possibility that Agudat Hashomrim's founders would retract their loyalty to the Histadrut, but her efforts were to no avail.<sup>17</sup>

Time and again the Hashomer veterans threatened to leave Hapoel, especially Manya Shochat. She was wont to voice such threats every time she felt that her group was being blocked in their efforts to create a power base with a military component within Hapo 'el. For example, in June 1933, she officially announced that she was leaving Hapo 'el because of the prohibition on creating "activist cells" in the branches of the organization.<sup>18</sup> Ultimately, these cells were set up after all, forming Hasadran, and Manya continued her work in Hapo 'el. However, in mid-1934, the question of who had authority over Hasadran precipitated a great crisis that led the Hashomer faction to inform the Hapoel central committee that they were leaving the organization. At the time, Hapo 'el's membership was expanding, which also helped strengthen it politically. This made Golomb, Meirov and Hos anxious about what they saw as the Hashomer veterans' excessively increasing influence. They shuddered at the danger that the Haganah would become the *Yishuv's* sole security force as Hasadran drew strength from the power struggles in the Jewish community between the labour movement and the Revisionist movement. In this respect, they enjoyed the support of the secretary-general of the Histadrut, David Remez, Ben-Gurion's successor, who refused to support Yisrael Shochat and his Hapo 'el colleagues any longer. The Shochats, pushed to the margins of the labour movement for the third time, gravitated towards the Left Po 'ale Tzion Party, joining other Hashomer refugees, such as Pinchas Shneorson and Zvi Nadav, who had become members of the opposition party some time previously (Goldstein, *Baderekh el haya 'ad* 186–91; Margalit 227–30).

### The third attempt: From revolt to anthology

The years 1936 to 1939 were a stormy period in terms of security as a result of the Arab revolt, which flared and subsided again and again. There was a lull for a few months towards the end of 1936 and the beginning of 1937, while the Peel Commission, appointed to investigate the causes of the riots, was touring the country. Coincidentally, the *Hashomer Anthology* (*Kovetz hashomer*) was published at the end of January 1937. The timing of the publication of this work, begun in the early 1930s, was due mainly to the difficulties of collecting and editing material — difficulties that had been resolved only now with the active assistance of the Labour Archives. The publication of the anthology indicated the Hashomer members' awareness that the time had come to set their own history down in the context of the general annals of the *Yishuv*. Their decision implied a covert acceptance of the fact that their public career had reached an end

and that the time had come to commemorate the past and to transmit their beliefs to the coming generations.

Two main emphases are notable in the ceremonies and articles that accompanied the publication of the book: a focus on the continuity between the heroic epic of old and the present-day defence of the *Yishuv*, and an insistence on the close correlation between the watchman's job and the tasks of building and settlement.<sup>19</sup> Most Hashomer veterans shared a sense of completing a chapter in their lives as they prepared to step off the public stage to go their own ways and pursue their own interests (Shva 394–95). The responsibility for security in the field gradually passed to *sabras* and recent immigrants to Palestine, including Yitzhak Landsberg (Sadeh), Shimon Koch (Avidan), Shlomo Rabinowitz (Shamir), Yigal Paicovitch (Allon) and Moshe Dayan.

With the renewal of attacks on Jews in 1937, *Bamifneh*, the organ of Left Po 'ale Tzion, published a series of articles by Pinchas Shneerson, a veteran of Hashomer, criticizing the management of the Haganah. Shneerson wrote that six months earlier, during the previous wave of attacks, Yisrael Shochat had submitted a proposal to the Histadrut leadership offering to organize, together with his Hashomer colleagues, squadrons of guards and groups of workers who would deal with the attackers. "The initiative was not welcomed, because the comrade who proposed it is not currently 'close' to the establishment in the *Yishuv* and the Histadrut and is not 'subordinate' to its leaders". According to Shneerson, the proposal elicited no response.<sup>20</sup> A few months later, during another wave of Arab aggression, he again excoriated the management of the Haganah, making the accusation that the eviction of Hashomer from Hapoel had prevented the training of young people, a circumstance that was now costing human lives. Shneerson added: "If only the Haganah were formed of better human material, if only instruction and supervision were in more skillful hands. If only its administration did not replace responsible tasks with ambition that adds to our already dire situation."<sup>21</sup> In fact, he was calling for the replacement of the Haganah leadership by a group of former Hashomer members led by Yisrael Shochat. Shneerson's criticism was not the protest of a private individual, but rather reflected the Hashomer veterans' bitterness over the fact that they were no longer being allowed to play a central role in the defence of the *Yishuv*.

At a meeting at Yisrael Shochat's house early in 1937, Eliahu Golomb, Yissachar Sitkov, Haim Sturman, Yosef Harit, Yitzhak Sadeh and other participants discussed a proposal to set up a national unit that, building on the experience of the "Hanodedet" (a mobile patrol unit used by the Haganah), would operate outside the towns and villages (Shva 395; Dror 138). This was not the first evidence of the Hashomer veterans' desire to return to the centre of the defence arena. Just a few months after the start of the Arab revolt, as Yisrael Shochat would later remind Ben-Gurion, he had presented in his own name and that of his comrades "a program to include all the forces trained and ready to devote themselves whole-heartedly to defence. There were many meetings, some of them at your house ... and nothing came of it".<sup>22</sup> Moreover, we know today that in the first year of the riots, Ben-Gurion was thinking about appointing Yisrael Shochat head of the Haganah, but changed his mind when he realized how strongly opposed the Mapai leaders were to the idea.<sup>23</sup>

The reverberations from this internal conflict were felt in the institutions of the Histadrut and Mapai throughout 1936. Time and again the heads of the Haganah, Golomb and Meirov, unable to offer an effective or acceptable response to the

murderous ambushes and burning of fields, were accused of abandoning the Hashomer tradition.<sup>24</sup> Ultimately, the Hashomer leaders' efforts to share responsibility for security decisions were firmly repulsed, even though their assessment of the fighting ability of the Haganah was by no means inaccurate. For example, Yisrael Galili (a member of the inner circle of the Hagana and later one of its leaders) remarked, apropos of the early 1930s, that guarding was "the monopoly of every scrofulous invalid" and that such people were ignorant of the role of a night watchman and unable "from sound or shadow to tell a jackal from a human being".<sup>25</sup>

The urgent need to reform the defence forces gradually permeated Haganah circles, despite Meirov's early doubts that the establishment of a "mobile military force" would help eliminate Arab violence. This concept began to be implemented by Hanodedet in Jerusalem, commanded by Sadeh, and, more extensively, with the establishment of the "Plugot Hasadeh" (commonly known as the FOSH) in December 1937. Such Hashomer veterans as Sturman and Nachum Horowitz, with whom Sadeh and Eliahu Cohen had consulted before setting up the FOSH, doubted that the young, who were not properly trained, were fit for the task, even though in principle they supported the idea of such units, which was congruent with their views on security. Yisrael Shochat, however, would later testify that he and Yosef Harit had rendered support to Yitzhak Sadeh in the days of the FOSH.<sup>26</sup>

Just before the FOSH was established, the main question in Haganah circles was whether the new units would answer to a special central command, as Sadeh wished — apparently with Shochat's backing — or the regional commanders in each area. Meirov, who doubted the wisdom of Sadeh's approach, would later justify his own position with these words: "After the experience of Hashomer, Yosef Hecht, the defence of the Gdud [in other words, Hakibbutz] and so on, I was very sensitive to such fears [regarding the command]" (Avigur; Pa'il 145–46).<sup>27</sup> Despite Meirov's reluctance, the needs of the time forced the Haganah to adapt to new circumstances, and the FOSH was born. Although the philosophy of defence espoused by Shochat was adopted for lack of an alternative, the Haganah leaders were still determined to keep him out of the organization. Under these circumstances, and in the context of certain discussions in the security committee of the Jewish Agency (which will be examined later), Hashomer veterans reached a decision to establish a border guard.

### **The fourth attempt: The Border Guard**

The Border Guard (Mishmeret Hagvul) represented a final public initiative by the former members of Hashomer that was rudely terminated for unknown reasons. The brainchild of Yisrael Shochat, Manya Shochat and Yosef Harit, it was based on a double premise: the need to give priority to the security of the Jewish society developing in *Eretz Yisrael* and the vital importance of developing good relations with the neighbouring Arabs. It was widely acknowledged both within and outside Hashomer that the organization had been a pioneer in developing friendly relations with the Arabs. For example, at a Hakibbutz Hameuchad seminar in 1937, Yitzhak Tabenkin remarked: "It is a fact that Hashomer, which was the first to advocate defence against the Arabs, also pioneered rapprochement and relations with them." A common practice, which Tabenkin himself adopted further into his speech, was to reduce the topic of better

relations with the Arabs to the issue of “know thy enemy” and to focus on the folkloric aspects of Arab culture (Tabenkin, *Alha-Shmira*: 20). This was not the Hashomer way, as will be shown. No wonder, then, that Rachel Yanait Ben-Zvi later observed, concerning the importance of good relations with the Arabs: “Many outsiders did not appreciate this *statesmanlike aspiration* of Hashomer” (Yanait Ben-Zvi 129; emphasis added). Through the Border Guard, the Hashomer veterans hoped to take an active part in the preparations for establishing a Jewish state under the partition proposal of the Peel Commission published in July 1937. The first steps towards setting up the guard organization were taken in the early months of 1938.<sup>28</sup>

In 1961, the year in which Manya and Yisrael Shochat both passed away, the memorial prayer read at the traditional annual commemoration ceremony held in the Hashomer pantheon in Kfar Giladi was composed by Israel’s president, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi. To emphasize how resolutely the people of Hashomer had worked and watched over their homeland, Ben-Zvi quoted the famous passage from the Book of Nehemiah: “[E]very one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon” (“Yizkor”). This phrase, popular during the days of the Arab revolt, had been cited by Yisrael Shochat in an article (published at the beginning of 1938) relating his memories of the early activities of Bar Giora and Hashomer. Shochat asserted that this passage was a very common slogan among the members of Bar Giora, ignoring the slogan usually associated with Bar Giora (and Hashomer) — “in blood and fire Judah fell and in blood and fire shall Judah rise” (Shochat *Mif’alo*; Shapira 236–37). The fusion of the two elements in the new slogan — “work” and “weapon” (i.e., defence) — was key to the organization of the Border Guard, which was founded two weeks after Shochat’s article appeared, on 28 January 1938.

The founding meeting, held at Yisrael Shochat’s house in Tel Aviv, was attended by about 20 former members of Hashomer.<sup>29</sup> It was probably no coincidence that the meeting was held exactly one year after the publication of the *Hashomer Anthology*. Those present were aware that the true subject of the meeting was whether they had any real chance of resuming their activity as an organized, cohesive group seeking to promote its long-held beliefs in the spheres of security, settlement and relations with the Arabs. Besides this theoretical issue there was also a personal aspect, which one of the early members of Bar Giora, Moshe Goldstein, pointed out with blunt candour: “We have come here to find out whether we are still living and ready for action or whether our part is finished.” At the time, the old Hashomer veterans were in their forties and fifties, and the issue they were facing was not solely a national issue of principle. The personal, human aspect should not be underestimated — an aspect that each of them had to contend with somewhere beyond the lofty declarations and expressions of theoretical readiness to join the new organization. As it turned out, this occasion proved to be the last time that the Hashomer veterans tried to take a group position in the public arena. From then on they would be given no opportunity to play any significant role, as individuals or as a group, in either the struggle to create the State of Israel or the early years of statehood. In retrospect, it appeared that the answer to Goldstein’s question was that Hashomer was indeed finished for good. At the founding meeting, however, this possibility was resolutely ignored.

At the outset of the meeting, Yisrael Shochat presented the goals, programme and organizational framework of the proposed new body. The goals were to have the country’s borders guarded by a resident force, develop cordial relations on both sides of the

border, and pursue settlement action on both sides of the border. The programme of operations went into a little more detail concerning the way in which these goals were to be achieved. It discussed the need to collect information about the borders and those who lived there, the roads linking the border settlements, the acquisition of border lands and the establishment of settlements designed to defend the border. The last two points in the plan were both weighty and sensitive enough to merit special attention. The first of these concerned “neighbourly relations”. Emphasis was laid on the importance of developing ties with residents on both sides of the border, as well as learning Arabic and the customs of the Arab residents of the border regions. The significance of this point was that beyond the geographical, military and settlement implications of establishing the country’s borders, extra importance was to be attributed to the need to develop tools that would reduce hostility and competition between the neighbouring populations on both sides of the border and contribute as much as possible to mutual understanding.

The other point covered relations with *Yishuv* institutions with the aim of helping those involved in land purchase and establishing settlements, and facilitating the selection of the “human material” for settlement. Yet something was conspicuous by its absence; there was no mention of accepting the authority of the official institutions of the *Yishuv* — or indeed of any other connection to them — notably the Histadrut and the Haganah, which, as we know, were the two prime actors in the defence and settlement spheres. On the organizational level, two tracks for recruiting members to the Border Guard were noted: “uniting Hashomer members for the aforementioned purpose” and enlisting new members, especially young people, and training them for the purposes of the organization. This clause indicates very obviously one of the corollaries of establishing the new entity: reviving Hashomer. The one-page summary of the programme indicates that this was a preliminary outline that would have to be completely and thoroughly revised before it could be considered as a practical blueprint for concrete operations in the field.

In the discussion initiated by Shochat’s remarks, each participant expressed support for the idea of a border guard. Nonetheless, Sturman, Sitkov and Zaid were careful to warn against taking any measures that were not coordinated with the Haganah and the Histadrut. Yisrael Shochat received no support from his colleagues for his proposal to initiate activity in the arena of border settlement as a starting point for developing a wide-reaching public movement that would attract young people. He remarked bitterly that “in the Histadrut they tell us that each one of us is very good, but all of us together are dangerous” (Minutes, January 1938). Manya Shochat, too, stressed the importance of creating a major youth movement that would be a power to be reckoned with by the various institutions and their different wings. The Shochats’ remarks, supported by Shneorson, seemed to imply that the promise Manya had made back in early 1930, that she would not act alone, had expired. At the end of the discussion, Yisrael Shochat set a deadline of a few months for beginning activity in the field, observing that if “we don’t manage to start doing something, then we’re lost”.<sup>30</sup> The participants voted unanimously in favour of establishing the Border Guard. Despite essential differences between them concerning the pattern of relations that should be maintained with the *Yishuv* institutions — in addition, of course, to the difficulties of organization, administration and finance, and other practical matters — the idea of a border guard was not immediately dismissed, and a few first organizational steps were even taken. A council and an executive committee were set up.

The day after this assembly, the executive committee met for the first time. It was decided to share the secret of the new organization's foundation with two political figures who were considered to be on close terms with the Hashomer veterans: Yitzhak Ben-Zvi and Shlomo Kaplansky. Two more meetings were later held by the secretariat, which included Yisrael Shochat and Yosef Harit, both of whom lived in Tel Aviv. Manya Shochat, having taken a survey among the young people of Kfar Giladi determine their reactions to the initiative, reported to the secretariat that they thought it might be easier to attract young people if the new body had a clearer political profile. At that meeting, which took place on 8 February, one of the decisions made was that the leading members of the Border Guard needed to prepare themselves for their mission and that they should devote some of their time to studying the Arab question.<sup>31</sup> This, as far as we know, was the immediate factor that led to the closure of the organization a month after it was founded. It came as a result of Shochat and Harit's intention to exclude women from the course they were planning on the Arab question. Manya responded with a tempestuous letter:

I was astonished to hear that you are of a mind not to allow women on the course in Tel Aviv that you are planning. You and I have fundamentally different views, but they do not keep me from working together with you. In this matter you have reached such a line that if you do not change it I will have no alternative but to leave the organization. I do not understand this attitude at all. You know as well as I do that even the Arab leaders now let Arab women into politics in both the city and the village, and even they [the women] help the gangs. You know the part Englishwomen played in the East among Arabs, because they could enter places among women, where men could not operate and had no influence. You know that in a humble place like Kfar Giladi, Tova Portugali helped receive Arabs and create true good-neighbour relations no less than Moshe Elyovich, and sometimes even better. And now, when this seminar offers the possibility of expanding our ability to deal with the Arab question, and of creating a cadre of people better prepared than they have been until now, instead of realizing that we should actually be *looking* for some women among us to learn more of the language, who will prepare themselves for the role of [promoting] neighbourly relations, instead, here, you think there is no place for a woman in the seminar? I do not understand it at all. I simply must tell you that if you do not change your attitude, I will have to leave the organization so that I will not create internal strife.<sup>32</sup>

On both earlier and later occasions, Manya Shochat had no difficulty, in her own writing and in the way she spoke and acted, in defending the divisions established in Hashomer between men's activity and women's activity (Shochat 51). In matters not directly relevant to security issues, Manya advocated equality between men and women, though eschewing feminist struggles and manners, and she considered the Hashomer woman to be a pillar of the organization's existence and one of the secrets of its success (Reinharz 110–14). On this occasion, she decided to upset the applecart. Her abdication was critical, because without her organizational ability, the young organization was doomed. The documentation available on the Border Guard ends with this letter. In the absence of further evidence, it can only be assumed that the dispute over women's participation — probably together with other factors — helped precipitate

the end of the organization. Harit, for his part, soon answered Yitzhak Sadeh's call and joined the FOSH as a company commander.

### **Border defence: Good neighbours or good fences**

During the period that the concept of the border guard was taking shape, the announcement of the Peel Commission's partition plan made the issue of the country's borders particularly relevant. The name of the organization — "Border Guard" — indicated the basic role its founders assigned it: guarding the future borders of the Jewish State. At the same time, on the initiative of the Jewish Agency, feverish technical discussions were being held in various frameworks in an attempt to develop detailed, practical plans to be applied if the country were partitioned. Such preparations were required both for practical purposes and for presentation to the Woodhead Commission which the British Cabinet had appointed to examine the feasibility of implementing the Peel Commission proposals. In accordance with the instructions of the Jewish Agency, a security committee was created from the upper echelons of the Haganah. This committee worked on forming and developing the structure of the security forces of the future Jewish State, both military and civilian branches. The committee met over the months from November 1937 to February 1938.

Yissachar Sitkov, an ex-Hashomer man and member of the national command of the Haganah representing the so-called "Civic Sector" (not affiliated to the socialist Labour Sector), held the highest operational position among those present at the founding assembly of the Border Guard. He was right in the middle of what was brewing at that time in the innermost corridors of the political and security establishment through his membership of the Jewish Agency security committee. Sitkov reported to those attending the Border Guard founding assembly that in the committee's debates "two opinions are forming. One is about settlement on the borders of the state. And the other is about army and police."<sup>33</sup>

A proposal to establish armed settlements all along the border was introduced in committee discussions at the initiative of the sub-committee on police affairs, of which Sitkov was also a member. This proposal elicited strenuous objections from Ya'akov Dostrovsky (Dori, who would later be appointed Haganah chief of general staff) and Elimelech Zelikovich (the Haganah commander in Tel Aviv), who wanted to base defence of the border on a real partition in the form of a wall and a military force to defend it. Essentially, the dispute revolved around the question of whether the border defence force should be an autonomous body or part of the army. The plan that the committee completed in mid-May 1938 indicates that it preferred the latter option.

On the issue of border defence, the plan called for a paid border guard force. During the transition period and in the early days of the state, this force would have to be relatively big. As the security situation stabilized, its size would diminish accordingly, and security would be based on a small border guard and a line of border settlements that would be set up over time. This approach was based on the estimation that had appeared in the preamble of the committee report, according to which "the Arab population in general, at least in the first years, will constitute a hostile neighbourhood that will be a constant element of insecurity from within and from the rear". The committee was thus acknowledging that "the problem of guarding the borders [was] a central



problem in the whole tangle of questions concerning the security of the Jewish State".<sup>34</sup> However, the way it chose to respond to this tangle in practice denied the necessity of relying on a resident force to guard the borders, as proposed in the plan outlined by Yisrael Shochat. In fact, the committee report perceived the role of settlement in securing the country's borders as secondary, preferring professional military units under direct command of the future army of the Jewish state. The report rejected the idea of giving the settlers an active role from the outset in the defence of the borders — the idea that was the cornerstone of the Border Guard. Nor did it accommodate the idea of incorporating "neighbourly relations" as a tool to ensure quiet borders, except as a by-product of the calm achieved through military force. Beyond this, the former Hashomer members' endeavour to integrate, by means of the border guard scheme, into the future Jewish State's developing military forces, and perhaps even before that, in the conception and planning stage, was unsuccessful.

The border guard plan represented a continuation of the ideological line originating in Hashomer that aspired to combine working life with guarding outlying settlements as a means of realizing the Zionist dream. In accordance with this outlook, the Hashomer convention that took place in Tel Adash in June 1919 had decided, in a spirit that would later echo in the border guard idea, that it

recognizes the need to begin extensive settlement close to the borders for purposes of defending the country and providing national-revolutionary training and education. To that end it has decided to begin instituting special guard settlements on the borders of our country, in the spirit of the ideals and principles of Hashomer.<sup>35</sup>

The issue of border settlement and its political and security implications in the establishment of the country's borders took on great importance in *Yishuv* strategy, especially in light of the increasingly real possibility of partition from 1937 onward. From that time on, the *Yishuv* institutions, headed by the director of the Jewish Agency's Political Department, Moshe Shertok (Sharett), undertook to ensure, through "stockade and watchtower settlements", a Jewish presence and control in the areas considered strategically critical. These settlements had the potential to serve the pro-border guard trend; they had a markedly military character that derived from security requirements — as well as from a political urge to broaden the span of Jewish-held sites throughout the country and to realize ownership of lands acquired in the past (Shochat, "Shlihut" 78–79; Oren 22–37; Shiran 4–5, 14–15). Yet no effort was made to use the new settlements as bases for implementing the two components of the border guard plan: guarding the borders and developing friendly relations among the people living there.

Moreover, as Tabenkin noted, every village built in the framework of the settlement enterprise was considered in Zionist terms as a border settlement, since through each new settlement, the borders of Jewish rule throughout *Eretz Yisrael* were redrawn. With the partition plan, a different conception of border appeared — namely, the line between the two nations within the geographical area of *Eretz Yisrael*, an entity that was not based on the presence of settlements, but on their proximity to men in army uniforms. Tabenkin, one of the more prominent opponents of the partition plan, considered that "borders will become the main preoccupation of this state from the day it is born. Masses of young people will live in the dream of expanding those borders" (Tabenkin, "Le'ararat" 3). Tabenkin's hyperbole should not mislead us. He had already believed long time before

that war with the Arabs was the only reality in the country, and he reiterated this belief now (Tabenkin, "Besha 'a zo" 1; Shapira 125–26). However, this kind of thinking, the perception that conflict with the Arabs would be the practical outcome of the partition plan, was also evident in the plan developed by the Jewish Agency's security committee. That plan even explicitly stated the need to set up "an artificial partition, in the form of barbed-wire fences" along the border in places that lacked any natural barriers. The partition was intended to separate the Arabs on either side of the border for security purposes and to reduce their mutual influence on each other (Ofer, "Tokhnit" 86–87). However, the construction of such a barrier would also tend to undermine the possibility of cultivating neighbourly ties between Jews and Arabs living in the border areas. The attitude of the Haganah leaders on this issue was congruent with the military policy the British were implementing on the northern border at the time.

With the increase of Arab infiltrators from the northern border, who added fuel to the fire of the Arab revolt and actively fought against the British through planned operations and arms smuggling, the British had decided to construct a barbed-wire fence punctuated with reinforced posts, running along 75 kilometers of the border with Syria and Lebanon. This was a manifestation of the expanded British-Jewish cooperation that was supposed to frustrate the activity of the Arab rebels. The new barrier was called "the northern fence" or "Taggart's Wall", after the British military adviser, Sir Charles Taggart, who had pressed for its construction. The fence itself was built by the Solel Boneh Company during May to July 1938. Hoping to provide security for the workers on site, several former Hashomer members, such as Mordechai Yigal and Zvi Krol, assisted. However, less than a year later, the Arab revolt died out and the fence became a useless inconvenience for the local inhabitants (Slutzky 904–07; Bieger 111–19; Ofer, *Oyev* 71).

In this respect, the security principles underlying the establishment of the Border Guard were different. The main difference lay in the belief that an open frontier and dialogue between neighbours rather than physical barriers and obstacles could provide a basis for mending ties between Jews and Arabs and help calm the atmosphere. Support for this view as a viable approach grounded in reality came from a completely unexpected source — a leading article published in the British weekly *Great Britain and the East* and quoted prominently on the front page of *Davar* in June 1938. The article's author agreed that building Taggart's Wall had been necessary at the time to improve the chance of imposing law and order in *Eretz Yisrael*, but, citing the Jerusalem correspondent of the London *Times*, he explained that this was a strategic tool, not a political solution: "It will be some sort of tragedy if the future state or states [that were to be established according to the decision of the Peel Commission] will be able to exist only behind barbed wire." The weekly argued in this respect:

Such an existence is not living, and it could end in total destruction. After all, times have changed, and the old days are gone, when it was possible to separate cultured people from barbarians by means of a "wall" — without harming the culture and the possibility of creation. Western Asia needs to exist in internal harmony — if we keep hoping that from its future activities humanity will derive lasting good. No "wall" can abolish natural feelings of affinity, and no people that sits behind the wall will be able to create assets of any great value as long as it is filled with feelings of fear or suspicion.<sup>36</sup>

Presenting the wall as a factor in shaping the relationships between the people it separated (residents on both sides of it) focuses attention on the ideological-educational aspect of the border guard idea. The period during which that idea crystallized has been identified in historical research as a time when militaristic manifestations began to appear among Jewish youth, together with an increasing alienation from members of the neighbouring people. This was the case even in places such as the Ben-Shemen Youth Village where extensive educational efforts were made to minimize these tendencies. The same manifestations were prominent in the FOSH, at times creating the impression that despite the security benefits offered by the organization's activity, some of the deeds of its fighters were damaging and interfered with the proper course of neighbourly relations between Jewish and Arab settlements (Shapira 254–61; Ben-Eliezer 37–44). This raises two questions, to which any answer can only be hypothetical: First, in the early days of building and training the FOSH as the first armed military force of the organized *Yishuv*, would it have been possible to create a deeper awareness in the fighters of the vital need to foster neighbourly relations? Second, would that have helped moderate the developing national conflict and raise a generation with less militaristic tendencies?

Recent historiography has tended to support the theory that the enthusiasm for cultivating good relations with the Arabs reflected naïve nostalgia for an era that had ended forever. The security-political situation that developed after the outbreak of the Arab revolt gradually sharpened the recognition that friendly relations were destined to be sacrificed again and again to the growing national conflict. Since the early 1920s, the leading proponent of this view in the labour movement had been Moshe Shertok.<sup>37</sup> Although for two decades he continued to believe that insurmountable obstacles doomed the view that “friendly relations” were paramount, in 1940 he asserted:

every opportunity [must be taken] to strengthen the ties between us, for simple human reasons of fair neighbourly relations, *for security reasons*, because it reinforces security in the country, creates psychological deterrents in the Arab community, curbs the danger of a new outbreak . . . but also for *a political reason*, by which we build new bridges, which may lead to contact in the future. (Shertok; emphasis in original)

Even forty years later, this view of neighbourly relations with the Arabs as beneficial in terms of security and politics was voiced by Yigal Allon, once a young FOSH member, as an important part of Hashomer's legacy. At a ceremony commemorating sixty years since the founding of Bar-Giora he said: “Versed in the best of the socialist ideals, its members sought to see the Arab as a neighbour, not an enemy” (Allon 62).

## Epilogue

Yisrael Shochat wrote two angry letters to Ben-Gurion in March 1937 and July 1938 demanding that he and his Hashomer comrades be included in security activity. He asserted: “The masses won't save such a situation. A few hundred death-defying fellows of the sort I've told you about more than once will save the situation.” In other words, in the current circumstances the hundreds and thousands of people recruited into the various security frameworks (the Haganah, guards, police, *ghaffirs* [watchmen]) had no great value if the basic principle of the need to defend one's own life, property and

honour was not properly instilled and translated into action. Only a select force was fit to carry out this mission and would receive appropriate training from the veterans of Hashomer. Shochat told Ben-Gurion about the appeals he received for advice and assistance from the rank and file in the Haganah, but confessed with suppressed anger: "My hands are tied and my mouth is closed, the slightest word from Yisrael, the smallest action from Yisrael and he is a traitor ... a traitor to his people, the *Yishuv*, and the famous trial [the 1926 Histadrut commission of enquiry] will prove it!"<sup>38</sup>

Each of these letters was ostensibly prompted by a new wave of attacks against Jews in the days of the Arab Revolt. At the same time, however, it is worth noting synchronicities with internal developments in the old Hashomer circle. The first letter was written after the publication and warm reception of the *Hashomer Anthology*. The second letter was written just after the border guard plan foundered. The letters did no good. The day after the second letter was written, on 10 July 1938, Alexander Zaid was killed at Sheikh Avreik. Later that summer, Haim Sturman was killed in an ambush. The loss of two of Hashomer's exemplary figures had a considerable impact. Their comrades would, for the most part, remain outside the security forces of the *Yishuv* in years to come.

Behind the repeated efforts to revive the Hashomer organization under various names and in various forms was Yisrael Shochat's charismatic, compelling influence on his comrades. That influence allowed him time and again to overcome their initial resistance and persuade them that his ideas were right and could be implemented. Manya Shochat wrote that Yisrael had

a special, extraordinary talent for transmuting the boldest fantasy into reality, and finding the practical, mundane organization to fulfill the distant dream. ... The most important thing in the Hashomer organization was: the unceasing creative force in it; [its] search for new and different ways of implementing the ultimate goal; a special flexibility in adapting to the demands of the time. And that moving, constantly creating force was in fact Yisrael Shochat. (Shochat, "Zikhronot")

Indeed, time after time the veterans of Hashomer sought to follow a path that diverged from the usual political practice in the *Yishuv*, but in vain. Fate had dealt unkindly with them since 1920 on, and a sad end also awaited the border guard idea. One reason was that the partition plan, which had been the stimulus for the border guard plan, was jettisoned once the findings of the Woodhead Commission were published in November 1938. From a public perspective, our interest lies in observing the way in which the members of a group, once glorified for its achievements but now declining in power, were obliged to adapt to changing times. Their hope of making a "comeback" to the centre of the security field never materialized.

The organized activity of some of the old Hashomer group came to an end with the participation by Yisrael and Manya Shochat and a few other former members in the initiative to found the League for Jewish-Arab Coexistence in the first half of 1939. Yisrael Shochat was the opening speaker at the founding ceremony of the League, and it was the last time he was called upon to take an active part in political life. In his speech, Shochat mentioned that the duty of assiduously cultivating relations of mutual trust between Jews and Arabs had been a Hashomer principle, and he noted that even now most of those involved in missions to facilitate communication between Jewish and Arab towns were former Hashomer members (Shochat, Lemahuta).

The last attempt made by Manya, that child of the Russian Revolution, to turn the wheels of Jewish-Zionist history was in 1942. She was the first to place on the public agenda of the labour movement the objective of “bringing to *Eretz Yisrael* a million Jews over two or three years”, an objective that was later dubbed “the million project”. Energetically promoted by Ben-Gurion, it constituted a major element of the Zionist preparations for the end of the Second World War.<sup>39</sup> The fact that both Manya’s and Yisrael Shochat’s last significant moves on the public stage had no direct connection to security matters indicates their final exclusion from this field.<sup>40</sup>

The findings of this article support Goldstein’s claim that the activity of former Hashomer members in general, and Manya and Yisrael Shochat in particular, were not designed to gain power in the political and party sphere (see Goldstein, *Baderekh el haya ‘ad* 107–08). Throughout their lives, the members of Hashomer adhered to their basic orientation as a vanguard that worked discreetly behind the scenes. Nevertheless, the military bodies they established, or sought to establish, revealed a dynamic ability to develop and adjust over time to the changes taking place in *Eretz Yisrael*. This was evident in their recognition of the need to expand the ranks of those dedicated to defence, in their willingness to relax the tradition of conspiracy that they had imported from Russia, and their resignation to lowering the skill level required to join their group. This dynamism was, among other things, a result of the accelerated growth and institutional consolidation of the *Yishuv*, on one the hand, and the increase in basic security needs, on the other. As for Hashomer’s military character, many of the entities in which the Hashomer veterans had a hand differed widely in their security objectives. However, they were all infused with the warrior heritage refined in Hashomer, which focused on self-defence and shrank from wars to the death fueled by passion and primeval feelings of revenge. That philosophy stemmed from the basic assumption, the significance of which was assimilated in Hashomer after conflict and dispute (see, in this respect, Goldstein, *Baderekh el haya ‘ad* 32–33), that in *Eretz Yisrael* two peoples were ultimately going to live side by side, together.

This conception entered the spotlight with the establishment of the Border Guard, when Hashomer veterans provided political content for the more routine, well-known part of their activity: defence. The principles and values underlying the foundation of the Border Guard were eroded by the stresses of the time. Despite the originality of the scheme, power struggles in security and political circles doomed from the outset any real possibility of putting it to the test. No other opportunity would ever arise to determine whether the world view embedded in it was a caprice borrowed from another era or whether it could have served as a basis for cultivating less poisonous and explosive relations between the neighbours on either side of the border. A passage in *The Book of Hashomer* says of the relations between those neighbours:

When we discuss that affair today, after the establishment of the State, all those many efforts by the people of Hashomer and Kfar Giladi to cultivate and improve relations of friendship and neighbourliness seem to us something belonging to the distant past. So many things have changed since then, and even our preaching about friendly relations in the days of the riots and the world war seems out-of-date and old-fashioned to many. Nevertheless — we veterans, old hands in this field, still wonder whether we should not be studying even now the lessons of the past. (Elyovich, 371)

Besides reflecting potentially different, but ultimately unrealized, approaches to relations along the border and the education of the *Eretz Yisrael* generation of fighters, the attempt to establish a border guard had value as a manifestation of the Hashomer members' ambition to reorganize as a group. They intended revitalizing the tradition of settling the wilderness and wanted to join the general Zionist effort, but without renouncing autonomous activity outside the mainstream of the *Yishuv*. The belief that it was possible simultaneously to establish settlements, work towards sovereignty, defend that sovereignty by armed force while cultivating neighbourly relations, all while maintaining their usual conspiratorial *modus operandi*, turned out to be unrealistic. The circumstances and demands of the era did not permit it, and those who adhered to that belief were doomed to political extinction.

## Notes

1. Zvi Nadav to Israel Shochat, 30 November 1920, Labour Archives, Tel Aviv, Israel, IV-112-49.
2. Undated, untitled document, no author given, Israel State Archives, Jerusalem [hereafter ISA], 160/2318f, file 58. The fact that it is in Manya Shochat's handwriting does not necessarily mean that she was its author. For the date of Hakibbutz's foundation and the minutes of the organization's founding convention, see Goldstein (*Baderekh el haya* 'ad 101–10, 300–12).
3. From an historical perspective, the initial contacts of Hakibbutz with the communist world turned out to be nothing more than a flirt, although Yisrael Shochat did try to enforce it, while the help that Manya received from the connections with her friends in the United States, such as Magnes, Henrietta Szold, Irma Lindheim and the "Brandeis group" were much more fruitful politically and, especially, financially.
4. The ex-members of Hashomer played an active part in defending the *Yishuv* during the violent events of 1929 (Goldstein, *Baderekh el haya* 'ad 145–50).
5. David Ben-Gurion, Diary, 7 September 1929, Ben-Gurion Archives, Sde Boker, Israel.
6. David Ben-Gurion, Diary, 13 September 1929.
7. Histadrut Executive Committee, Minutes, 10 February 1930, Labour Archives (see also Goldstein, *Baderekh el haya* 'ad 187). In the end, Manya did not leave for London until November 1930, continuing on to the United States at the beginning of 1931. In the course of her mission abroad, she devoted considerable effort to an additional purpose, mobilizing funds in order to buy land in the Bet She'an and Hula valleys.
8. Histadrut Executive Committee, Minutes, 17 February 1930, Labour Archives; Ben-Gurion, Diary, 30 September 1929, Ben-Gurion Archives; Slutzky, 419–420.
9. The kibbutz near the Lebanese border where many Hashomer veterans had settled.
10. Yisrael Shochat to Manya Shochat, 2 June 1931, private archive of Anna Shochat.
11. Ben-Gurion, Diary, 5 May 1930, Ben-Gurion Archives. On Manya Shochat's relations with Brit Shalom, see Goldstein ("Manya").
12. Interview by Rachel Yanait Ben-Zvi with Eliahu Elath, undated, Yad Itzhak Ben-Zvi, Jerusalem, 2/0/6/1. On the Hashomer attitude towards the Arabs, see Goldstein (*Baderekh el haya* 'ad 74–79).
13. "Hatza 'ot bekesher im hashe'ela ha 'aravit ...", n.d., ISA, 160/2316f, file 19. On the document is a handwritten notation dating it to October 1929, but it is hard to tell when this note was made, and the document may in fact have been written in the first months of 1930.

14. Histadrut Executive Committee, Minutes, 10 March 1930, Labour Archives.
15. David Ben-Gurion to Dov Hos and David Ben-Gurion to Yisrael Shochat, 3 April 1933 (Ben-Gurion 223–25).
16. The Hashomer veterans' hope that through the guards' association they would recapture the intimate spiritual unity they had once enjoyed was disappointed. Most of the guards who joined the organization saw it as a professional body and nothing more (Slutzky 592–93; Ben-Hur 23–37).
17. Manya Shochat to Louis Brandeis, 2 October 1932, Hashomer Archives, Kfar Giladi, Israel, 3/d; Manya Shochat to David Ben-Gurion, 5 November 1932, Labour Archives, IV-104-1052-8.
18. Manya Shochat to the members of the Board of Hapo 'el, 3 June 1933, Labour Archives, IV-244-150.
19. See, e.g., "Bizkhuta shel havgura hahi asinu et hahail haze," *Davar*, 31 January 1937; Mordechai Kushnir, "Im 'Kovetz Hashomer'," *Davar*, 5 February 1937.
20. Pinchas Shneorson, "Le 'inyane shmira uvitahon," *Bamifneh*, 19 November 1937; Pinchas Shneorson, "Shuv Le'inyaney shmira uvitahon," *Bamifneh*, 24 December 1937.
21. Ben-Yocheved (Shneorson), "Leshe'elot habitahon vehahagana", *Bamifneh*, 22 July 1938; Ben-Yocheved (Shneorson), "Od le 'inyaney habitahon vehahagana", *Bamifneh*, 21 October 1938.
22. Yisrael Shochat to David Ben-Gurion, 9 July 1938, Ben-Gurion Archives (emphasis in the original).
23. Testimony of Shaul Avigur, 3 October 1968, Haganah Archives, Tel Aviv, Israel, 170.35; see also Boaz (46).
24. See, e.g., the remarks by Shlomo Lavie in the minutes of the Histadrut Executive Committee, 11 May 1936, Labour Archives; remarks by Moshe Shertok, minutes, Mapai Central Committee, 9 June 1936, Labour Party Archives, Beit Berl, Israel [hereafter LPA].
25. Remarks by Yisrael Galili at the 11th Convention of Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2–7 October 1936, Yad Tabenkin Archives, Ramat Efal, Hakibbutz Hameuchad Archives, section 15, Y. Galili Archive, box 170, file 1.
26. Mapai Political Committee, Minutes, 16 June 1936, LPA [source of the quote from Meirov]; Remarks by Shaul Meirov at the end of the Haganah coordinators' course, 26 December 1936, Haganah Archives, 80/299/23; Ben-Hur (72, 104–05); Testimony by Yisrael Shochat to Aharon Megged, Yad Tabenkin Archives, Ramat Efal, Hakibbutz Hameuchad Archives, section 15, Yitzhak Sadeh Archive, box 4, file 3.
27. The FOSH reflected a compromise between the two viewpoints. Its units answered to the commanders of the village blocs and the urban districts, while the training of the unit commanders and the troops, and the establishment of a single operational doctrine was the responsibility of the national FOSH command headed by Sadeh and Cohen.
28. The decision to take these steps may have been catalyzed by the emergence of IZL and its retaliations policies in November 1937, although we did not find evidence for it.
29. Minutes of meeting of former Hashomer members to organize the Border Guard, 28 January 1938, Hashomer Archives, Yisrael Shochat file, Kfar Giladi, Israel.
30. Minutes of meeting of former Hashomer members to organize the Border Guard, 28 January 1938; Histadrut Executive Committee, Minutes, 10 February 1930, Labour Archives. Manya retracted that promise in a letter to Ben-Gurion dated 5 November 1932, in which she threatened to quit Hapo 'el. Labour Archives, IV-104-1052-8.
31. "Skirot 1 and 2 Lehavrei hava 'ad vehamo 'atza." Labour Archives, IV-112-29.

32. Manya Shochat to Yisrael Shochat and Yosef Harit, 27 February 1938, Yad Tabenkin Archives, Hakibbutz Hameuhad Archives, Division 15, Yosef Harit Archive, box 4, file 3 [emphasis in the original]. Tova Portugali and Moshe Elyovich were sister and brother, both members of Kfar Giladi. Both spoke Arabic and spent time cultivating relations between the Jewish residents and Arab villages in the central Galilee region.
33. Minutes of meeting of former Hashomer members regarding the Border Guard, 28 January 1938, Hashomer Archives, Yisrael Shochat file.
34. Security Committee meetings, Minutes, 10 November 1937, 21 November 1937, 28 November 1937, 7 December 1937, 12 December 1937, 6 February 1938, CZA, S25/244; Ofer (75-102).
35. For the decisions of the Hashomer convention, see Goldstein (*Baderekh el haya 'ad* 289–92). Similarly, at the founding meeting of Hakibbutz, the participants resolved that one of the means to achieve the organization's purpose was: "A way of colonization that helps our goal such as labour battalions and settlements on the borders" (Goldstein, *Baderekh el haya 'ad* 303).
36. "Homat Tagart' vehateror ba'aretz." *Davar*, 8 June 1938.
37. Moshe Shertok to David Ben-Gurion, 24 September 1921, Labour Archives, IV-104-29-6c.
38. Yisrael Shochat to David Ben-Gurion, 15 March 1937 and 9 July 1938, Ben-Gurion Archives.
39. Mapai Central Committee, Minutes, 28 January 1942, LPA. See also Minutes of the 5th Convention of the Histadrut, 19–23 April 1942 (Tel Aviv, 1942), 194; Manya Shochat to David Ben-Gurion, 5 December 1942, Ben-Gurion Archives. For more information about "the million project", see Hacothen.
40. Manya Shochat and Zvi Nadav were still active in the V League and the Israel–Soviet Union Friendship League during the Second World War and its aftermath, and Yisrael Shochat had time to serve as director-general of the Ministry of Police in the early years of the state — but no more than that.

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