Partners and Adversaries:
Jewish and British Relations in the
Palestine Police Force, 1936-1945

Lior Yohanani

Introduction

Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire during the First World War, Palestine was recognized as a mandate territory by the League of Nations, and Britain, alongside its obligation to facilitate a Jewish National Home, was committed to the development of the land and its people in general. In many respects, Britain governed Palestine as a crown colony, establishing a functioning state apparatus staffed with local (Jewish and Arab) rank and file staff and governed by British personnel, most of whom had colonial service experience (Segev 2000: 62-3; Shamir 2000: 9).

The sociological phenomenon at the heart of the present paper is the generally ambivalent approach of Zionism to British presence in Palestine. I focus on cultural and identity aspects rather than political ones, although of course such categorical distinctions often fuse on the ground. In this respect, Zionism should not be regarded as merely a national project, but, as Khazzoom (2003) defines it, a "Westernization project", intended to associate the European Jews with what they believed to be a Western repertoire (see also Hirsch 2009; Raz-Krakotzkin 1993, 2005). In other words, Zionism, irrespective of internal political and ideological rivalries, had also been an identity and cultural project that

never ventured too far from enlightenment ideals and a Western self-image and sense of mission.

To a certain degree, the Jews of Palestine could not have asked for better mentors than the British from which to learn both the craft of state building and the meaning of European civility. Yet, as I will show, they displayed a complex and ambiguous array of attitudes toward the British officials: on the one hand, the Jews showed great admiration for British civil service, law, and state apparatus. They were more than willing to accept British guidance and assistance on issues of public security, policing, and the establishment of state institutions. On the other hand, they evinced suspicion of anti-Semitism, snobbery, and British working-class personnel. They often looked down on the British officers, regarding them as insufficiently educated and cultured.

The European background of Zionist Jews in Palestine posed a challenge to their relations with British officials. As inhabitants of the country, Jews were classified as natives, but at the same time enjoyed special privileges. Acquainted with European culture, notions, and dispositions, the European Jews could not be easily relegated to the status of indigenous natives that the British had encountered in former colonial expeditions. According to Shamir (2000: 19), at the most mundane level, the British were unsure whether to treat the Jews of Palestine (mainly Zionists of Eastern European descent) as "natives", like the "tradition-oriented Arabs", or in a more respectful way in light of the "modern dispositions" they had already acquired. On the other hand, for most of the British administration in Palestine, European Jews were far from being representative of European or Western values, and were often regarded and spoken of in degrading–anti-Semitic tones (Friesel 1993; Sherman 1997). In short, the relationship between the Jews and British officials became far more convoluted than the common "ruler" – "ruled" or colonizer-colonized relations.

Despite the impact of British presence on the course of Zionist history, and despite the inherent sociological significance in Zionist views on British presence and the complex Jewish-British relationship, relatively scant scholarly attention has been devoted to these issues specifically. Few scholars have addressed the role of the British Mandatory power in advancing Zionist goals (Kimmerling 2004; Knight 2011; Shamir

2000). Even fewer, if any, have offered a thorough "on the ground" investigation of Jewish-British relations.[1] Similarly, despite its historical importance, the Palestine Police has generated sparse historiography; Edward Horne's *A Job Well Done* (1982) is the only book exclusively dedicated to the Palestine Police.

Given this gap in knowledge, I have selected the Palestine Police as a major empirical site for the exploration of the Zionist attitude toward British colonial institutions, and the daily interactions between Jewish and British police officers. Staffed by Jewish, Arab, and British police officers, the Palestine Police force was one of the largest colonial institutions to facilitate regular encounters between different ethnic and national backgrounds. As such, it allows us to take a closer look at the everyday life of Jewish and British police officers. The focus of the present paper is therefore the everyday experiences of Jewish police officers, their perceptions of British officers, and their interactions with them — themes that are usually overlooked in the "grand" narratives of the time.

In addition, the study of the Palestine Police, or Mandate Police, presents substantial insight into how Jewish settlers not only established quasi-state institutions, but also effectively penetrated colonial ones. With the encouragement of Zionist institutions, thousands of Zionist Jews (mainly *Haganah*[2] members) joined the police force as either ordinary policemen or supernumeraries. They displayed dual loyalty both toward the British mandatory state (at least allegedly), and (perhaps primarily) to Zionist institutions, whether they were legal or not.

This paper will first draw upon the recollections of Jewish former

---

1   Exceptional in that sense is Yair Hakak's study (2013) on the Palestine Government's Department of Posts, Telegraphs and Telephones, in which he analyzes the failed British attempt to create a non-ethnic civil service based on a local, Jewish and Arab rank and file.

2   Established in 1920, the *Haganah* (Hebrew for defense) was the principal and largest Jewish-Zionist paramilitary organization operating in Palestine during the Mandate era, and had the support of the Jewish Agency, the Labour Movement, and the majority of the Jewish population. For further reading, see Slutzky (1978).

policemen who served during the 1930s and 1940s. The main intention of this discussion is to track the general tendencies and impressions of Jewish police officers, and tease out the essence of British-Jewish relations on the ground from the Jewish perspective. Next, the article discusses the 1936-1939 Arab Revolt and the collaborative British-Zionist response, as evidenced by the Supernumerary Police in general, and the Jewish Settlement Police (JSP) in particular. This section will explore the ways in which Zionist institutions penetrated the police force and harnessed British resources for their own national and military goals. In addition, I will argue that the British-Zionist collaboration was at once an expression of common interests and interdependence and a site of struggle over representations of culture, progress, enlightenment, and ultimately "European superiority" in Palestine. However, these arguments must be qualified, as this paper relies mainly on sources of Jewish-Zionist institutions that are written in Hebrew; therefore, it presents an incomplete account, which lacks the perspectives of non-Jewish players in general, and most notably those of British policemen and officers.

Documents were sourced from two archives: The Central Zionist Archive, herein the CZA, and the Haganah Historical Archives, herein the HHA. In addition, I utilize the recollections of Jewish former policemen who were interviewed as part of an oral history project conducted by the Middle East Centre (MECA), St. Antony's College at the University of Oxford.[3] I also rely on secondary sources including publicly available documents and newspapers for general reference.

Official Separation – Natives and Superiors

Ben Ze'ev, one of the few scholars to have hitherto used the Palestine Police materials collected by MECA, described the British policemen in Palestine:

---

3   For further reading about the project, see Rogan (2007), or visit: http://www.sant.ox.ac.uk/research-centres/middle-east-centre/mec-archive/meca-palestine-police-oral-history

They came from varied social backgrounds. Some described their working-class background, at times attesting to their "rough upbringing". One was the son of a sheet-metal worker, another of a millerite ("who is a person who looks after machinery"); a third was the son of a butler. Others were middle class, with mothers who were housewives and fathers who were "a dentist." "an engineer". or "a surveyor". There were also those who came from families associated with the colonial service (2011: 172-173).

Gross (1986), writing on the Palestine Police, stated that:

The vast majority of the British rank and file came from the middle and lower classes. They were generally looking for a nice and steady job. They regarded their job as temporary and lacking any special meaning, and themselves as short-term visitors in an Eastern country. A wall of alienation, in terms of language and lifestyle, was erected between them and their Jewish and Arab counterparts … they enjoyed a unique status: "When two Israeli policemen [namely Jews and Arabs] went to patrol, the senior one was in charge. However, if one of them was British – even in the case of a new arrival unfamiliar with the surrounding environment – he would act as the superior. A common sight was a British corporal with elementary education giving orders to an experienced local officer (Jew or Arab) of higher rank, and with a high school diploma or even higher education" (Cohen 1987: 9).

Overall, a clear distinction emerged between the British and local policemen, and promotion of the latter was in most cases limited to the rank of sergeant. Avraham Hermetz, a Jewish policeman who joined the force in 1936 and served in the investigation department in Jerusalem, recalled the following from his service:

Overall, relations with the British were fair … The British constables were in charge, regardless of their actual rank. For instance, I was assigned as an investigator in the Jaffa Gate Station right after I finished my training … There was a British policeman, who had the same rank as I had, yet, in practice he commanded the department. Despite the fact that the real Department Superior, (who was also

the police station commander) … [was] a Christian-Arab police officer named Chader. So, in effect, the British policeman was the commander of the department and gave us orders … his name was Downing … at the beginning we used to patrol together, both of us. He was an intelligent person, well educated. We had nice conversations … after two-three months he was promoted to be an officer. First, one star, then two stars, and after a while – three-star officer! … He told me once: "Look at us. We started together, at the same time, yet you are still an ordinary policeman while I have become a high officer in the same time".[4]

The British officially clustered the Jewish and the Arab civil servants of the mandatory state together as "the natives". Fittingly, British policemen were distinguished from local policemen by salary, appearance, and living conditions. The salary of a British policeman was almost twice that of a local (Reuveni 1993: 155). The British uniform was far more elegant; they wore a cap with a visor, while the locals had to wear a traditional Circassian tall sheepskin cap called *Kalpcak*, which some thought to be degrading (Gross 1986: 9). David Shmueli, a Jewish policeman, recounted that the British policemen used to ride impressive horses and wore gun holsters, whereas the locals had Sudanese horses, which walked crookedly, and had to tie their rifles to their arms.[5]

During the 1930s, an array of police fortresses was built throughout Palestine. Each fortress had two residential sections: an elegant section for the British constables, and a modest section for the locals. Baths and toilets were also segregated. Refael Ya'akobi, who joined the police in 1937, recalls:

[After training] we were assigned to different posts. At each post, a British sergeant, four British policemen, four Jewish policemen (two were drivers), and two Arab policemen. The British and the Jews lived inside the station – separately of course – but the Arabs,

---

4 Personal Communication, April 18, 1988, pp. 12-13. The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Oral History Division.
5 Personal Communication Summary, not dated.

in most cases, did not. The British had a cook and an assistant who served their meals, while we, the Jews, had to take care of our own (in Gross 1986: 20).

Menachem Gashri, who joined the force in 1939, also mentioned this issue: at his station in Tiberias, British policemen were catered to every morning with bacon and eggs, while the "natives" were not supplied with any food. However, continued Gashri, despite the British distancing themselves from the locals, he was able to maintain a friendly rapport with some of them and they used to play football together.[6] Policeman Max Muschenberg on the other hand, described solid working relations with both the British and Arab policemen, but stressed that friendship was not a part of it. There was a clear division between British policemen and locals. At his station in Kiryat Chaim, the British had a canteen in which they could eat, drink, and smoke. Local policemen were barred from entering.[7] Conversely, Avraham Almog, a constable in Netanya, noted that despite the anxious period that characterized his service, "We all (Jews, Arabs, and British) knew how to get along with each other and leave politics aside … we were like brothers." The British, he recalled, were alert to the fact that Jewish policemen were engaged with the Zionist institutions, both legal and illegal, but preferred to turn a blind eye.[8]

Policeman Moshe Belhorn described maintaining friendly connections with Arab policemen as opposed to relationships with the British. Belhorn joined the force in 1936 and was stationed in Sajra after completing a short training program. He recalls: "I was the only Jewish policeman along with five experienced Arab policemen. They embraced me as if I was their kid, despite the turbulent period." In January 1937, Belhorn was transferred to the Tzemach station:

Jews and Arabs shared bedrooms. We were all "Palestinians," i.e. inferior to the British … we [Jews and Arabs] were like brothers – it was the British arrogance which unified us … the British treated us

6   Personal Communication Summary, January 15, 2006.
7   Personal Communication Summary, not dated.
8   Personal Communication Summary, September 6, 2006.

as "natives", although I myself used to correct the English spelling mistakes of the desk sergeant.[9]

Naftali Aharoni, who served in the British Police Orchestra, was appalled by the British policemen:

> They sent the worst of the worst. They were utterly anti-Semitic and ignorant. They used to call us "bloody Jews". They did not know that Jesus himself was a Jew. There were some intelligent persons, but only few.[10]

Belhorn and Aharoni both raise an interesting point: although classified as natives, or "Palestinians", along with the Arabs, they both looked down upon their British superiors, disdaining their ignorance and patronizing ways. To a certain degree, it was the "native" who felt culturally superior.

Jewish Policemen as a Fifth Column

One recurring theme in all interviews is the engagement of Jewish policemen, regardless of their position, with illegal Jewish bodies, mainly with the *Haganah*. Tzvi Rodeen recalls:

> In September 1935, I was called to a meeting with the local commander of the *Haganah*. He told me that I had been chosen to serve in the Palestine Police for a period of two years … I agreed of course, as it was common back then … [he was placed in Safed] We had a constant communication channel with the *Haganah* commanders in the area, and reported everything: suspicious gang presence intended to harm the Jewish quarter, British plans against the Jewish community, planned missions against illegal immigrants. We did get some help from a CID British sergeant who delivered information, not out of greed, but rather in solidarity (in Gross 1986: 29-30).

---

9   Personal Communication Summary, September 9, 2006.
10   Personal Communication Summary, February 6, 2007.

Avraham Hermetz tells his story:

> I was drafted in 1936. It was part of a great recruitment. I was already a member of the *Haganah*. I was supposed to serve only one year but I stayed for 16 years … it's no longer a secret that my assignments along the way were dictated by the *Haganah*, which also made sure they would happen. I was also a member of the SHAI [the *Haganah*'s intelligence service] … Our job on the police force was to listen to telephone calls and report. Naturally, a copy was sent both to the SHAI and the Jewish Agency.[11]

"Of course we delivered information to the *Haganah,*" Mordechai Bitman affirms. "If I knew about something at 12:00, the *Haganah* knew about it at 1:00. The *Haganah* was our father." Regarding the British policemen, Bitman states: "You could definitely say that the British policemen supported the Arabs … they were far from our level, they could not match us. The talented policemen were left in London, they didn't send them to Israel. Perhaps they sent the ones who were talented in drinking."[12]

Yosef Rosenfeld joined the police in 1941, and served as a radio operator. He too, was an agent of the *Haganah*. According to his testimony, the British commanders were well aware of his ties – and those of others – to the *Haganah,* but chose to ignore it due to the positive relationship between the police and the Jewish Agency. One officer told him once, half-joking: "Rosenfeld, I know you're a bloody *Haganah* man". Rosenfeld also described how he and his friends assisted illegal Jewish immigrant ships: "Whenever we learned of the imminent arrival of an illegal immigrant ship on the shores of Herzliya, we invited the British policemen for some beers, to keep them distracted while abandoning their duties."[13]

Simcha Zehavi, who served in Tel Aviv, elaborated on his close relationship with Efraim Dekel, one of the *Haganah*'s top officers and

---

11   Personal Communication, April 18, 1988, pp. 2-5. The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Oral History Division.
12   Personal Communication Summary, September 4, 2006.
13   Personal Communication Summary, May 16, 2007.

commander of the SHAI in Tel Aviv. According to Zehavi, he used to "buy" British policemen with money and drinks in exchange for information, and sometimes even guns and rifles. Speaking about British policemen, Zehavi said: "There were two kinds of British: most of them were kind and easygoing, but there were a few who hated the Jews, just like the Arabs did."[14] Max Muschenberg also mentioned instances of bribery:

> The British used to drink plenty of beer. In order to pay for the alcohol, they used to stop ordinary cars and ask the drivers for their registration papers. The drivers knew that if they were being stopped for nothing, they should hand over some money with the documents.[15]

These accounts by Jewish policemen indicate a set of distinctions (at least from the perspective of Jewish policemen) between the Jewish and British policemen: from class and education to drinking habits and professional integrity. While a few mentioned friendly relations with the British, the majority highlighted institutional disparity in terms of service conditions, alongside the patronizing attitude demonstrated by their British counterparts. The Jewish policemen generally dismissed the British arrogance while emphasizing their ignorance, lack of integrity, affection for alcohol, and anti-Semitic views. In fact, the accounts present an interesting case of role-reversal, with the "natives" feeling superior to the colonizers. The Jewish policemen deemed themselves smarter, more sophisticated, more enlightened, and more honest; therefore, while Jews were considered "natives" and treated as inferior, they felt culturally superior. Ironically, all of the accounts above indicate that while they questioned British trustworthiness and motives, Jewish policemen delivered intelligence to Zionist institutions, mainly the *Haganah*, which appears to have played an important role in recruiting law enforcement and determining its assignments.

14   Personal Communication Summary, October 8, 2007.
15   Personal Communication Summary, not dated.

The 1936-1939 Arab Revolt and the Zionist-British Response

The Arab Revolt of 1936 was largely an expression of Arab disaffection with the Mandate Government policy, which was perceived as pro-Zionist. British policy allowed demographically significant waves of Jewish immigration into Palestine, and the corresponding acquisition of land.[16] Initially conceived as a general strike, the insurgency gradually developed into a full-scale armed struggle. At its peak in 1938, Britain was moved to deploy additional military power into Palestine, and the force culminated with twenty-five thousand servicemen in two army divisions (Hughes 2009: 314; Knight 2011: 524). At the same time, the British ratio in the Palestine Police exceeded half the numerical strength of the force, an unprecedented phenomenon in British colonial history (Reuveni 1993: 149; Smith 1992: 70).

Horne, a British historian and former CID investigator in Palestine, claims that the eruption of the 1936 Arab Revolt caught the British by surprise (Horne 1982: 205). One main concern was that the police force was too "Arab"; Arab policemen comprised 60 percent of its manpower[17] and the British questioned their will and ability to suppress their brethren and defend Jewish settlements. The institutional response was the establishment of the *Notrim* para-police force.

The *Notrim* (guards), or the Supernumerary Police, was a Jewish police force established by the British during the Arab Revolt.[18] However, it was not a strictly British initiative. In fact, it was the *Haganah* Central Command that advised the Jewish Agency to present British authorities with an initiative to establish a Jewish police force as Supernumerary

---

16 Roughly 200,000 Jews were allowed into Palestine between 1932 and 1936. Under British immigration regulations, the Jewish percentage of the total population was boosted from 19 percent to 30 percent (Government of Palestine 1946: 141, 185).

17 In 1935, the force comprised 1,472 Arab policemen, 365 Jews, and 744 British (Gross 1986: 9).

18 Not all supernumeraries were Jews, but during the Arab Revolt they constituted a significant majority; of 4,000 recruited supernumeraries, 75 percent were Jews (Townsend 1988: 931).

Police in accordance with the 1926 Palestine Police Orders.[19] Members of the *Notrim* were recruited almost exclusively from the ranks of the *Haganah*, of which the British administration was well aware (Horne 1982: 537; Knight 2011: 524). Active supernumeraries were armed, paid, and trained by British authorities; this eased the *Haganah*'s economic distress, and provided it with access to legal weapons (Rivlin 1962: 18). On the British side, by employing supernumerary forces mandatory authorities saved the expense of employing regular troops or police (Knight 2011: 536). The supernumeraries were stationed in train-stations, along railway tracks, in airports, at the seashore, etc.

In 1937, the Jewish Settlement Police (JSP) was established as a permanent division of the Supernumerary Police, and soon became the largest and most important unit for advancing the military goals of the Zionist movement, while at the same time supposedly serving the colonial regime. At the time, the supernumeraries were limited to operating inside the settlements, but the JSPs, with their light trucks and machine guns, were allowed to control sections of land around the settlements and their pathways (Rivlin 1962: 27). The *Notrim* force grew rapidly. In September 1936, there were approximately 2,800 *Notrim* (not including the "reservists"), which increased to 3,700 by November 1938 and included 1,300 JSP members (Rivlin 1962: 459).

Nevertheless, British-Zionist collaboration cannot be viewed solely through a security lens, as it was also anchored in cultural and ethnic assumptions, which defined Jews as modern Europeans by nature and Arabs as underdeveloped and rebellious natives. A memorandum written by a senior British official describes the British attitude toward these groups at the time. Despite being written as early as August 1930, it underscores British assumptions regarding the nature of the *Haganah* organization and Arab violence:

> The disarming of the Jewish minority insofar as they might be in possession of arms would perhaps be a fair and reasonable measure if

---

19 According to the 1926 Police Orders, in times of crisis the police could recruit "Supernumerary Constables" as permanent employees and train special constables (informally known as "reservists") as a reserve force for ad hoc needs. For further reading, see Reuveni (1993: 145-146).

and when the government were [sic] satisfied that the Arab majority had no longer either the will or the means to attack the Jews. Until then, any such measure was both unwise and unjustifiable … This [the *Haganah*] was not a regularly organized force with officers, N.C.O.s and men, but rather, as the word *Haganah* implies, a movement for self-defence [sic] in the event of attack on the part of a small European minority living amongst the preponderantly Arab population whose hostility and addiction to violence had been shown on three occasions within ten years.[20]

The Jewish Supernumerary Police as a Case of Dual Colonialism

Post-colonial literature has often treated the Jews in Palestine as mere colonizers (Kimmerling 1983; Shafir 1989); intruders from Europe who, under the aegis of British colonial powers, dispossessed the native colonized Arabs of their lands. However, in order to conduct a thorough investigation of the case in question, I believe that one cannot overlook the Jewish experience as a colonized and Orientalized people, both in exile among the surrounding gentiles in Europe, and subsequently in Palestine under British rule. Hence, the Jews of Palestine should be regarded as both the colonizers and the colonized. I believe it is necessary to establish this theoretical position in order to fully grasp the motivations that drove Zionist Jews (and to some degree the British), and to analyze the friendly and collaborative, yet rivalrous and tense, relationship between the Jews and British in sufficient detail.

For this purpose, I wish to discuss Shamir's concept of *dual colonialism*, which seeks to capture the phenomenon of two colonizing powers in Palestine:

Dual colonialism serves as a conceptual framework for understanding Palestine as both a Jewish settlers' colony and a British crown colony. While the former population was active in the concrete

20   HHA 9/Zionist/87/8.4.1930, 2-3.

material practices of colonization, the latter provided the political, legal and administrative colonial umbrella. Yet this does not mean that the latter may be treated as a mere superstructure, reflecting or perhaps responding to practices at the base (Shamir 2000: 19).

Disputes and disagreements arose frequently between the two colonizers who, at the end of the day, sought to achieve different political ends. Shamir continues:

> It does not follow, moreover, that the two projects harmoniously complemented each other, combining to produce a functional-division-of-colonization-labor. On the contrary, relations between the political and the social colonizers of Palestine fluctuated between cooperation and animosity, were marred by suspicion and hostility, and were, in general, ambivalent and conflictive.

The Supernumerary Police in general and the JSP in particular represent an interesting case of dual colonialism, as they constitute legal collaboration between British police and military authorities on one hand, and legal and illegal Zionist institutions on the other, that were working against the Arab population. Evidence for this can easily be found throughout historical Zionist literature, particularly among historians that focus on mainstream Zionism, i.e., labor movement institutions like the *Haganah*, and the way they sought to simultaneously cooperate with and co-opt British personnel and resources. To that end, the following section will mostly draw on the works of Rivlin (1962) and Slutzky (1978) on the *Notrim* and the *Haganah*, respectively.

The JSP's Commanding Board comprised a senior British police officer, a senior British military officer, and a representative of the Jewish Agency. Each of the JSP's ten regiments were commanded by a British police officer and supported by a regiment inspector appointed by the Jewish Agency (Slutzky 1978: 202).[21] The Agency also supplied volunteer lists of potential supernumeraries, allowing for pre-approved future recruits. David Ben-Gurion, Chairman of the Jewish Agency, did not conceal the Zionists' motives; in a speech at a training course for JSP

---

21 See also in the recollection of Aryeh Ben-David, HHA 189.36.

sergeants, he encouraged the trainees: "You are the first officers of the future Hebrew army" (in Rivlin 1962: 113).

Over time, an array of designated training programs was created for new and existing supernumeraries. British officers provided new recruits and special constables with basic training; qualification courses were held for sergeants, as well as first aid training, gas mask practice, and so on. The courses were conducted by British officers and sergeants along with Jewish sergeants and outstanding former graduates. Jewish Agency representatives were informed daily and visited the trainees regularly. In general, the trainees were satisfied with the respectful and professional attitude displayed by the British commanders, as well as with the amenities at the camps.[22] Close friendships were formed between Zionists and British officials, and the general relationship between the two parties was underpinned by mutual respect. Major Harrington, a British senior officer in the JSP, delivered a speech at the graduation ceremony of the Special Constables training in August 1942. A *Haganah* member reported:

> He [the Major] highly extolled the cadets for their qualities and knowledge. He emphasized his admiration for the volunteers who dedicated six weeks to learn the job. Just before he was done, he asked everybody to stand in honor of Yehoshua Gordon,[23] "an ally, and one of my closest friends … we will always commemorate him as the founder and architect of the Jewish Settlement Police."[24]

22 For elaboration on the various courses, and on Jewish and British impressions of each other see reports: HHA 87/Zion/39/1.4.1940; HHA 87/Zion/39/1.11.1940; HHA 87/Zion/39/1.23.1941; HHA 87/Zion/39/4.23.1941; HHA 87/Zion/39/6.29. 1941; HHA 87/Zion/39/11.11.1941; HHA 87/Zion/39/2.4.1942; HHA 87/Zion/39/ 2.5.1942; HHA 87/Zion/39/5.3.1942; HHA 87/Zion/39/8.30.1942; HHA 87/Zion/ 39/6.29.1942; HHA 87/Zion/39/6.18.1942; HHA 87/Zion/39/5.25.1942; HHA 87/ Zion/39/8.30.1942; HHA 87/Zion/39/9.15.1942.

23 Gordon was a Jewish Agency official who served as a middleman between the British Police and the *Notrim*. He is regarded as the initiator and designer of the force.

24 HHA 87/Zion/39/8.30.1942.

Despite the amicable relationship depicted above, as mentioned, the Zionist-British cooperation through the Supernumerary Police and the JSP was far from complementary and harmonious. While both sides were willing to cooperate with each other, they also sought to utilize each other for their own means. From a Zionist point of view, British resources could be manipulated for Zionist goals. While playing the role of British allies, Jewish Agency officials routinely corresponded with *Haganah* officers. In fact, the interests of the *Haganah* and the Jewish Agency cannot be distinguished from one another to any meaningful degree, and no thorough inquiry regarding the *Notrim* could overlook the *Haganah*'s role in its operations.

The *Haganah* was able to establish an intricate and functional network deep within the British police. Arranged meetings between Jewish Agency coordinators, *Haganah* officers, and JSP sergeants (*Haganah* men) took place regularly, and the volunteer lists, supplied by the Jewish Agency, were in fact compiled by the *Haganah* Central Command (ibid.: 20, 35). When drafted, thousands of *Haganah* members obtained weapons, training, and a salary at the expense of the British. Moreover, *Haganah* involvement was so profound that almost every repositioning and promotion depended on its initial approval (ibid.: 50).

Structurally, the *Haganah* Central Command divided Mandate territory into different districts that overlapped with the ten JSP regiments almost completely. *Haganah* members who served with JSP had equivalent roles in *Haganah* districts, and *Haganah* divisions were enlisted and functioned as JSP units while utilizing their official costume to disguise their private ends (ibid.: 123). For instance, members of the FOSH, an elite *Haganah* strike force, were listed as JSP organic units and used British trucks for their own needs, such as transporting illegal arms, conducting autonomous training, and carrying out ambush missions against Arab villages (Slutzky 1978: 217).

The *Haganah* leaders were concerned with maintaining the supernumeraries under their supervision, though theoretically they were subordinated to British commands. Yisrael Galili, one of the *Haganah* leaders, stressed:

> The [*Haganah*] members who serve in the legal defense forces [the Mandate Police] take orders from the independent forces [the *Haganah*]. In the case of a contradiction between orders ... the member's commitment to the Jewish authorities will be prioritized, making him forgo any other engagement. The strength of the *Notrim* forces is their ability to extract power from the independent forces and serve them to an equal degree (in Rivlin 1962: 50).

The Regional Sergeants Forum played an important role in this regard, as it regularly dealt with issues related to appropriating funds, arms, and training. All regional sergeants were *Haganah* members, and they consistently provided evidence to their British commanders that intentionally corroborated *Haganah* plans with British government interests (ibid.: 114). It seems that Zionist institutions ran the show behind the scenes; as one regional sergeant observed:

> There was a great deal of fraud and deceit as far as the Mandate laws were concerned. Everything was manipulated and shaped to fit *Haganah* needs: station logs, manpower and where it was sent to, the use of arms and uniforms – it was all in service of the *Haganah* (ibid.: 117).

Horne (1982: 535) has argued that British officers were fully aware that their control was more theoretical than actual, but reluctantly conceded to this, at least while the Arab Revolt continued and Jewish lives were in danger. However, as the Arab Revolt declined and the Second World War began, claims Horne, defiant actions against the British gradually became characteristic of Zionism. Paradoxically, although British administrators became increasingly aware of the abuse of British resources as well as the minimal need for a force such as the JSP, once they were armed and trained it became politically impossible to disarm Jews without provoking a tremendous outcry.[25]

---

25   This is not to say the British completely lost control over the JSP: despite Zionist dissatisfaction, the JSP's influence waxed and waned in accordance with British needs. This was the case when 1,130 supernumeraries were fired in the first few months of the Second World War, or, conversely, when the British decided to expand the JSP immediately and recruited over 1,500 new

"Police Failures and Negligence"

As a result of the emergence of the *Notrim*, the *Haganah*'s semi-professional intelligence service was inundated with daily reports, as thousands of its members began working in police stations as part of their JSP service. As a result, the *Haganah* established a new department of intelligence service, the SHAI. Besides pragmatic security reports, the SHAI also sought to collect evidence on British mistreatment and immoral activity toward Jews. The SHAI filed these under the category "Police Failures and Negligence" in an attempt "to prove, when the time comes … how immoral the police really is, to such extent that it cannot supervise and enforce the law".[26] This was not the *Haganah*'s initiative, but rather that of the Jewish Agency's Political Department (as much as the two can be distinguished from one another), which in 1941 asked the SHAI to gather information on British misconduct.

The accounts often describe incidents of police brutality, looting, harassment of women, excessive alcohol consumption, and bribery. Indeed, these reports had a practical significance in that the *Haganah* disseminated the relevant information both to British authorities so they could address lawless officers, and to the general Jewish public in order to raise awareness and urge caution. Yet the declared goal was to tarnish the idealized image of British serviceman as moral and decent.

In the context of this article, these reports play a double role. First, they allow us to probe Jewish perceptions of the British. Second, they provide further support for the previously presented argument regarding the paradoxical nature of dual colonialism: the "natives" (self-perceived as the legitimate colonizers) "looking down" upon "foreign colonizers" and collecting degrading intelligence about them, while in a parallel context, "looking up" to British ways as a "civilized" source of identification. This is corroborated by the following examples of Jewish reports on the British:

members, as Germany marched on and gained control of East Europe and North Africa – which could have prompted a new Arab disturbance (Rivlin 1962: 52-53).

26   HHA 115/24/7.27.1941; HHA 115/24/8.20.1941. See also Gelber (1992: 563-566).

Two unfamiliar British Sergeants, one armed with a pistol, attacked Ya'akov Shor from Tel Aviv while sitting in Aharoni Café in Rehovot. They stole 30 Palestine pounds, and escaped in a nearby army vehicle. The police was not able to trace them.[27]

In another incident from October 1941, a *Haganah* member reported on British deceit and laziness:

On the basis of an intelligence report regarding a gang of six armed [Arab] men in the area of Rosh Ha'Ayin, Officer Middleton and four of his men went to explore the area. As it later turned out, the policemen were sitting near Rosh Ha'Ayin the whole time and at 1:00 AM went back to Petah Tikva. According to the police station log, they searched an area of 20 kilometers, alongside searches in specific locations. The Arabs near Rosh Ha'Ayin say they saw no policemen and no searches were done during the night.[28]

Another report from March 1942 described British incitement against the Jews during a Jewish demonstration in Petah Tikva:

A few attempts were made by British policemen to incite Australian soldiers there against the Jews. On one occasion, after a rally passed by, one policeman told the Australians: "You see, instead of joining the army and helping us, they demonstrate against us." On another occasion, a different policeman told Australian soldiers that Jews murdered an Australian in Tel Aviv. The incitement made some impact, as some drunken Australians began beating a Jewish bystander.[29]

Finally, the next incident, reported by a JSP member in August 1941, displayed the friction on the ground between Jewish JSPs and British policemen:

Tonight, at approximately 1:00 AM, four British policemen in civilian clothes entered Café Fiedler in Kfar Saba. They asked for

---

27   HHA 115/24/9.24.1941.
28   HHA 115/24/10.10.1941.
29   HHA 115/24/3.5.1942.

beers and asked to put it on their tab, and got angry when they were refused by the owner. At the same time, the German anthem started playing on the radio. Although the owner immediately switched it off, the policemen took advantage of it and started to hit him. One of them punched the owner twice in the face and then hit his wife. Somehow the owner informed the police about it. Another guard and I patrolled the area … We were close by and were able to hear Ms. Fiedler shouting. When we entered the Café we saw what had happened. Throughout the incident the policemen continuously made offensive jokes and laughed about the Jews. After their tempers subsided a bit, we went out to the balcony and they decided to pick a fight with us … we tried to keep away and avoid it but they followed us and caught up. One of them punched me in the nose until I started to bleed and then hit me on the chest. We were able to escape somehow and called the police … I felt like the British were starting to gloss it over, so I told them that unless they come here as soon as possible, I'm going to inform Officer Middleton about it. I guess it affected them … after fifteen minutes a truck with British sergeants arrived … the sergeant said that they would summon the four policemen for interrogation first thing tomorrow morning. Meanwhile, the four had long gone.[30]

The *Haganah* and the Jewish Agency continued the practice of gathering reports on British misconduct in later years as well, and as time went on the accusations grew harsher. In February 1944, for instance, Itzhak Shraiber experienced a frightening near-death encounter with British law enforcement officers. On his way home, he ran into six policemen. One of them shouted at him to raise his hands and another one searched him. He recounted:

After the search was over the policeman who held the revolver said, "Go stand behind the wall" … I asked, "Why"? And he answered "Don't be afraid..." I was frightened as I remembered that on the previous night Englishmen had been killed, and I suspected they

30   HHA 115/24/9.24.1941.

intended to shoot me. I refused to go. Two British policemen came and pushed me towards it while the one with the revolver had it pointed at me the entire time … I wanted to shout, but then I heard steps approaching. The Englishman who had his revolver pointed at me turned his head toward the steps. He then put his revolver back into its container and ordered me to go away … The moment I opened my door I heard three shots.[31]

Incidents recording the harassment of women were not uncommon. During a curfew on Tel Aviv, a *Haganah* member reported:

A barbershop on the corner of Yehuda Halevi St. and Allenby St. has been looted and vandalized. The neighbors said that on Saturday, June 29, 1946, a group of soldiers dragged a young Jewish woman into the store and raped her. The following day, the barber found bloodstains on the floor and the girl's underpants stained with blood.[32]

In summary: setting aside the influence of these reports and whether they really affected the course of events or not, they should serve as an indication that Zionist leadership was both aware of the code of conduct expected from the Western colonizers, and willing to use it against the British for their failure to comply accordingly. The idealized image of Western rule delineated it as impartial, moral, and decent, serving the backward local inhabitants and striving to "civilize" and "enlighten" them. The SHAI reports do not deny this formulation, but they do emphasize the contrast between this idealized image and the facts on the ground. In a broader sense, the Jewish policemen and supernumeraries, an integral part of the Zionist Movement in Palestine, repudiated British superiority and challenged them over their presumed "European superiority" in Palestine. As evidenced by their recollections, Jewish policemen frequently observed their British superiors and counterparts "from above", disdainful of their supposedly ignoble traits and mediocre abilities. In a way, Zionist servicemen deemed themselves more Western

---

31   CZA/S25/6286/No date.
32   HHA/115/100/7.1.1946.

than the British.

Some reports, like the one from Café Fiedler, not only relay British bullying toward ordinary bystanders, but also indicate a degree of failure on the part of British rulers to acknowledge the distinction between their image as moral and professional superiors, and that of the local policeman as amateurs who needed to be educated and supervised. This reveals a significant gap between the desired, dichotomous ruler-ruled relationship, and the disorderly and mixed roles undertaken by Jewish and British policemen. Nonetheless, thousands of Zionist-Jews (mainly *Haganah* members) approved of British superiority by participating in police training programs under British guidance, seeking not only to exploit British resources but also to learn and imitate British ways in terms of security skills and organization.

Conclusion and Discussion

In line with the dual colonization model, the British-Zionist cooperation under the Supernumerary Police and the JSP illustrates a complex array of partnerships and rivalries, shared responsibility alongside mutual exploitation, comradery in arms undermined by subversive deeds, friendships and hostilities, rejection, arrogance, and imitation. While *Haganah* members enlisted intentionally and in large numbers to the British Mandate Police apparatus and harnessed British resources for their own military, economic, and political ends, the British and the Jews were simultaneously fighting side by side against a common non-European enemy. While the SHAI collected intelligence on British forces and evidence of their immorality, British and Zionist institutions established an impressive array of training programs, an indication of their mutual appreciation and readiness to cooperate despite common friction.

Furthermore, the convoluted relationship between the two sides, an outcome of the multiple facets of Jewish and Zionist identity – and the inconsistent British response to them – reveals the capricious and fluid nature of social-cultural catergories that are predominantly characterized as rigid and even dichotomous (such as colonizer-colonized, East-West, Zionism, British colonialism). In this sense, exploring everyday life

"on the ground" – contrary to more commonplace grand narratives – reveals that ethnic-cultural attributes and hierarchies, which are subject to pervasive assumptions, are in fact full of contradictions and vary based on context and observer. British institutional skills, for instance, along with British manners, were perceived as the epitome of general Western cultural superiority, and were highly valued by the Zionist movement and by Jews of European descent in general. Concurrently, however, Jewish policemen expressed disappointment in the general socio-cultural level of British personnel posted to Palestine, dismissing them as undereducated and undercultured. In other words, imagined and prevalent views of ethno-cultural hierarchy are challenged by cultural capital and educational background upon close examination, particularly when scholarly emphasis is applied to everyday, street-level interactions.

The Jews of Palestine were not the only subjects of British colonial rule who expressed disappointment over their engagement with British colonial representatives. Similarly, despite considerable differences (after all, Jews of European descent were not true "natives"), the Indian writer Amitav Ghosh has described the reaction of his father and his colleagues, British army officers in colonial India, to the racist and discriminatory approach of the British institutions:

> The discovery of invisible barriers and ceilings disillusioned them to their immediate superiors, but it did not make them hostile to Western institutions. Rather, these encounters with racism served to convince them – as they had an entire generation of Westernized Indians – that the British colonial regime was not Western enough, not progressive enough (in Shamir 2000: 23).

The disappointment of Jews in Palestine over their engagement with representatives of the British colonial order is consistent with that which Ghosh describes; it did not lead the former to question the Western values presumably represented by the British, but rather drove Zionists to label British colonial rule as inadequately "Western" and enlightened. In doing so, Zionism sought to undermine the *raison d'être* of British control, while simultaneously posing a serious challenge to the supposed cultural superiority of the British in Palestine.

Overall, British-Zionist security collaborations created a strong and

firm alliance between two European powers, resilient enough to endure divisive elements such as Zionist subversiveness on one hand, and the racially and politically charged opinions of British personnel on the other. This alliance revealed the colonized perspective of Jews of European descent, as well as their desire and willingness to reemerge as Western people, assimilated into European civilization. In order to extricate themselves from the colonized position, become "full-fledged Europeans" (in both external recognition and self-definition), and claim their right over the land, the Zionists in Palestine sought to simultaneously absorb European ways and reject British colonial presence and its alien culture.

Due to the scope of this article, and primarily due to difficulty in accessing offline sources outside of Israel, the present study relies mainly on Jewish-Zionist institutional sources written in Hebrew. As a result, the present paper presents an incomplete account, lacking the perspective of British officials of various levels. It is possible that the Jewish interpretation of British attitudes and intentions can stand on its own, sufficiently illuminating the subjects discussed. However, introducing the voices of other players through primary sources would allow a more complete, coherent, and perhaps reliable and balanced investigation. Follow-up research that explores the experiences and interpretations of British policemen, and takes into account other players in the Palestine police (such as Arab policemen), could shed more light on the issues discussed in this study, and most likely reveal new research leads.

References

Ben-Ze'ev, Efrat, 2011. *Remembering Palestine in 1948: Beyond National Narratives*, Cambridge University Press, New York.

Friesel, Evyatar, 1993. "Through a Peculiar Lens: Zionism and Palestine in British Diaries, 1927–31," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 29 (3), pp. 419-444.

Gelber, Yoav, 1992. *Growing a Fluer-de-Lis: The intelligence Services of the Jewish Yishuv in Palestine 1918–1947*, Israel Defense Ministry, Tel Aviv [Hebrew].

Government of Palestine. 1946. *A Survey of Palestine*, vol. I, Government Printing Office, Jerusalem.

Gross, Nitza, ed., 1986. *Memories of Jewish Policemen from the Palestine Police*, Ministry of Public Security, Jerusalem [Hebrew].

Hakak, Yair, 2013. "Postal Control: The Mandatory Department of Posts, Telegraphs, and Telephones," Master's thesis, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv.

Hirsch, Dafna, 2009. "'We Are Here to Bring the West, Not Only to Ourselves': Zionist Occidentalism and the Discourse of Hygiene in Mandate Palestine," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 41(4), pp. 577-594.

Horne, Edward Porter, 1982. *A Job Well Done (History of the Palestine Police Force 1929–1948)*, Book Guild, Sussex.

Hughes, Matthew, 2009. "The Banality of Brutality: British Armed Forces and the Repression of the Arab Revolt in Palestine, 1936–39," *The English Historical Review*, 124 (507), pp. 313-354.

Khazzoom, Aziza, 2003. "The Great Chain of Orientalism: Jewish Identity, Stigma Management, and Ethnic Exclusion in Israel," *American Sociological Review*, 68(4), pp. 481-510.

Kimmerling, Baruch, 1983. *Zionism and Territory: The Socio-territorial Dimensions of Zionist Politics*, Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkeley.

—, 2004. *Immigrants, Settlers, Natives: The Israeli State and Society between Cultural Plu-ralism and Cultural Wars*, Am Oved, Tel Aviv [Hebrew].

Knight, John, 2011. "Securing Zion? Policing in British Palestine, 1917–39," *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire* 18(4), pp. 523-543.

Raz-Krakotzkin, Amnon, 1993. "Exile within Sovereignty: Toward a Critique of the 'Negation of Exile' in Israeli Culture," *Theory and Criticism*, 4, pp. 23-56 [Hebrew].

—, 2005. "The Zionist Return to the West and the Mizrahi Jewish Perspective," in: Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek Jonathan Penslar (eds.), *Orientalism and the Jews,* 24, University Press-New England, Lebanon, NH, pp. 162-181.

Reuveni, Jacob, 1993. *The Administration of Palestine under the British Mandate, 1920-1948: An Institutional Analysis*, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan [Hebrew].

Rivlin, Gershon, ed., 1962. *To Serve and Protect: The History of the Hebrew Notrim*, Maarachot Publishers, Tel Aviv [Hebrew].

Rogan, Eugene, 2007. "The Palestine Police Oral History Project," *Bulletin for the Council for British Research in the Levant*, 2 (1), pp. 35-40.

Segev, Tom, 2000. *One Palestine, Complete*, Henry Holt & Company, New York.

Shafir, Gershon, 1989. *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914*, University of California Press, Berkley.

Shamir, Ronen, 2000. *The Colonies of Law: Colonialism, Zionism and Law in Early Mandate Palestine*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.

Sherman, Ari Joshua, 1997. *Mandate Days: British Lives in Palestine, 1918-1948*, Thames and Hudson, New York.

Slutzky, Yehuda, ed., 1978. *The History of the Haganah,* Ministry of Defense, Tel Aviv [Hebrew].

Smith, Charles, 1992. "Communal Conflict and Insurrection in Palestine, 1936-48," in: David M. Anderson and David Killingray (eds.), *Policing and Decolonisation: Politics, Nationalism and the Police, 1917-1965*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, pp. 62-83.

Townsend, Charles, 1988. "The Defence of Palestine: Insurrection and Public Security, 1936-1939," *The English Historical Review*, 103/409, pp. 917-949.