The Russian Terror in Palestine:
The Bar Giora and Ha-shomer Associations, 1907–20

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Introduction

On 12 April 1909, the founders of Bar Giora gathered in Kfar Tavor in the Lower Galilee with the intention of expanding the ranks of their secret organization, which had been established a year and a half earlier, and to set up a new and legal organization called Ha-shomer (The Guardian). At that same meeting it was decided that the new association would absorb into its ranks members who had borne the burden of guarding and thus enhance its influence over the renewed settlement movement in Palestine. For this purpose they wished to create among the settlements appropriate conditions for the development of Hebrew guards and to provide them with the training needed to allow them to cope with the expected challenges. From the moment the Ha-shomer was established it enjoyed considerable success, and within three years had managed to gain a foothold in the colonies. During the peak period of this association there were no more than 300 hired guards and a limited number of permanent members. They replaced the Arab guards in the colonies, taking up their positions in vineyards, fields, and wherever they were needed, motivated by the desire to reduce dependence on the local population and assume responsibility for the fate of the Yishuv.

The history of the Bar Giora and Ha-shomer associations and the struggle over the dismissal of Arab guards and assumption of guardianship in the colonies has been transformed over the years into one of the great legends of the Yishuv. The idea of kibush ha-shmira (conquest of guardianship) was so revolutionary that some historians regarded the association as no less than the first core-group of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and its members as the first soldiers of the yet unborn state.¹ For the first time after centuries of exile, a handful of Jewish pioneers took upon themselves responsibility for their

fate, converting passivity into activity without fear of confrontation with the local population, even if it entailed the loss of life. The mystic link between blood, earth, and redemption became the formative ethos in the Yishuv, enduring long after the Ha-shomer Association disbanded and its members grew distant from the centers of political decision-making.

The Ha-shomer Association quite naturally gained a place of honor in the historiography of the Yishuv in general and of pioneer society in particular. Many articles and books were written about its activities and its stubborn struggle over the conquest of guardianship, most of them glorifying its members and giving high praise to their contribution in consolidating the Yishuv.2

Anyone who studies the primary sources that were at the disposal of researchers engaged in the history of the legendary association will find that most of these researchers based their work on the memoirs of members published long after the association had disbanded. The three editions of Kovtzei ha-Shomer (Ha-shomer Anthologies) that appeared during the 1930s and 1940s together with Sefer Ha-shomer: Divrei Haverim (The Book of Ha-shomer: Tales of the Members) and Sefer Toldot ha-Haganah (History of the Haganah), which appeared during the 1950s, were almost the sole source for understanding the methods used by the Ha-shomer Association during the period of the Second Aliya.3

The reason for the paucity of primary documents and sources lies in the disappearance of the Ha-shomer archive during the First World War. When war broke out the Ha-shomer Association was outlawed. Its members were forced to cease guarding the Jewish colonies, and most of them assembled at Tel Adash in the Jezreel Valley, bringing with them the archive of the association. After the exposure of the Nili spy network and because of members’ justified fear of Turkish soldiers coming in search of incriminating documents, it

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3 See Kovetz ha-Shomer (Tel Aviv: Archive and Museum of the Labour Movement, 1937, 1938, and 1947). See also Sefer Ha-shomer: Divrei Haverim (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1957).
was decided to burn the archive. The documents that were not burned were buried in Porijah; their precise location remains unknown to this day.\(^4\) Nothing was preserved of the protocols of the annual meetings, of the ledgers, guarded districts, or correspondence. Many questions are still unresolved, and for lack of the original archive more remains concealed than revealed.

In view of the Ha-shomer Association’s central position in Zionist historiography, the question arises as to how its history could be written and its members’ stories told in the absence of primary documents and sources. How could a comprehensive study be based on the memoirs of members written more than 15 years after the organization’s dissolution? This methodological problem has rarely been discussed, and the memoirs of Ha-shomer veterans have been accepted almost unchallenged. The picture that emerges is therefore one-sided; it does not allow for critical examination of memoirs recorded more than 30 years after the founding of Bar Giora, the original association, in September 1907.

In this article I intend to argue that the members of Ha-shomer imported into Palestine patterns of terrorist behavior characteristic of early 20th-century Russian revolutionaries. Their attitude towards the native Arabs and the colonists’ employers was influenced by their activities in the underground socialist cells of the Russian Empire and their participation in self-defense organizations during the period of the pogroms. In order to prove my argument the article will examine two historical events concerning the history of the Ha-shomer Association: the Zamooga incident, after which the Ha-shomer people were expelled from the Rehovot colony in 1913, and the strike in Sejera and the struggle between Ha-shomer and the Neta’im Company over Jewish work. These two incidents, although they took place at different times and were not connected, indicate behavior typical of Ha-shomer members in labor disputes.

However, before discussing these incidents and the importation of terror into Palestine, I would like first to focus on the historiography of the association and mainly on the methodological difficulties that emerge while attempting to trace its activities. My intention is to deal with the methodical aspects inherent in the Ha-shomer anthologies and the *History of the Haganah*. I argue that a historiography based on these books is defective and cannot provide a complete picture with all its angles and layers.

Criticism of the Sources: The Ha-shomer Anthologies and the *History of the Haganah*

In 1930, veteran members of the Ha-shomer Association gathered together and decided to publish the history of the Ha-shomer. Their hope was to bring out the anthology in 1934, the 25th anniversary of the association. Due to funding difficulties and the lengthy process of collecting and writing up the material, the book appeared only in September 1936. The publication of the book coincided neatly with a much more ambitious project that had begun to take shape at the time the initiative arose: to establish an archive for the labor movement and to commemorate its historic achievements. The Ha-shomer anthology was the first official publication of the “Archive and Museum of the Labor Movement.” A documentary work with memoirs, it was issued in 3,000 copies. Within a few weeks the book was sold out, and the publishing house prepared to issue a second edition of another 3,000 copies. As usual in revised editions, certain misprints present in the first edition were emended and additional pictures were inserted, as well as memoirs that were submitted too late for inclusion in the first edition. This edition was also successful and sold out, so in 1947, yet a third edition was published. In terms of the 1930s and 1940s—and even in those of our times—these anthologies can be regarded as a commercial success.

The success of the first two editions reflected the mood of the Yishuv at the end of the 1930s. The publishers hoped that “the anthology would find its well-deserved way to the Hebrew reader and to pioneer youth camps in Palestine and abroad, and would become a national book, a pathfinder and educational tool for the continued line of conquest, creativity, and defense of the country.” In view of the repeated editions of the anthology, these hopes, apparently, were realized. Those were the days of the Arab Revolt, and the Yishuv was in the throes of the struggle over Palestine. The stories of the early days of self-defense told by members of the founding generation faithfully reflected the events of the time, but also satisfied the emotional needs of the Yishuv during those years.

In the introduction to the third edition of the *Ha-shomer Anthology* we find: “Many of the readers of this anthology, and especially the younger generation, found the actions of the Haganah fathers

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8 On myths as supplying the emotional needs of the Yishuv, see Anita Shapira, *Heremo ha-Yona* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1993), 151.
to be landmarks for their own path. The anthology serves not only as interesting reading material about early stories of bravery close to us and heartwarming for many of the members and for the masses, but also a guidebook and directive for the spiritual development of our youth in this field of endeavor.  

The Ha-shomer anthologies have provided both inspiration for readers of the 1930s and 1940s and source material for historians attempting to trace the early beginnings of the association. In the absence of an organized archive, the three editions of the Ha-shomer anthologies became the central document upon which historical research was based: the letters of Mendel Portugali, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi’s “Im ha-Shomer” (With the Ha-shomer), Alexander Zeid’s “Pirkei Hayim” (Life Chapters), Moshe Giv’oni’s “Yamim Rishonim” (Early Days), and the recorded impressions of Israel Shochat, the “Ha-shomer,” which concluded the first anthology and was expanded into “Shlitut ve-Derech” in the second edition. The 1947 member memoirs were cited in research as the almost exclusive source of information about the association. Since the story of the Ha-shomer was told from the viewpoint of the guards, the picture received was monochromatic and naturally emphasized the heroic aspects of the members and of the period in general. Occasionally forgotten letters written by the guards would be found and published, but even they did not dispel the mystery that surrounded the legend.  

9 Ha-shomer Anthology (1947), on the publication of the third edition. The attempt to use stories of the bravery of Ha-shomer Association members to educate Jewish youth in Palestine was not the first, as evidenced by the 1911 Memorial Book for the Fallen Jewish Workers of Palestine. However, unlike the Ha-shomer anthologies of the 1930s, the memorial volume found no response in early 20th-century Palestine, and the “Ha-shomer myth” did not penetrate the depths of the Yishuv’s collective memory. During the First World War the memorial volume was translated into Yiddish. Two editions appeared in the United States (1916 and 1917), and one in Lodz (1918). These editions—unlike the editions published in Palestine—were highly successful and sold out. Nakdimon Rogel notes that the 1917 edition sold 14,000 copies. See Nakdimon Rogel, “Mi Harag et Avraham Yosef Berl,” Cathedra 69 (1994): 165.  

10 See Aviva Oaf, “Dyokanot shel ish Ha-shomer—be-ikvot tsror michtavav shel Mendele Portugali,” Cathedra 48 (1988): 73–89. See also the recorded impressions of Pinchas Schneerson collected by Shlomo Sheba: Pinchas Schneerson, be-Shura Rishona (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Ha-poalim, 1978). Only rarely did historical research probe the memoirs in the Ha-shomer anthologies and raise questions regarding their manner of presentation and degree of reliability. See, for example, Rogel, “Mi Harag et Avraham Yosef Baral,” 165–74. In this article, Rogel traces the story of the death of the guard Baral and the expulsion of his fellow guard, Eliahu Kaminski (Eitan), from the Ha-shomer Association. Rogel’s research indicates a circumstantial link between the death of Berl and the expulsion of Kaminski, who apparently shot him by mistake during the course of their joint guard duty, failed to report this to the association committee, and blamed neighboring Arabs for Berl’s death. Some think this was not an accident but a murder. Shaul Avigur notes in impressions he recorded just before the writing of the History of the Haganah that there were cases in the Ha-shomer where members were wounded or
In 1954, the first volume of the *History of the Haganah* appeared. The chief editor was Ben-Zion Dinur; the editorial board included Shaul Avigur, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, Eliezer Gallili, and Yehuda Slutzky. The aim of the book as defined by Dinur was to recount the “faithful story, based on authentic documents and verified evidence, of the entire history of Israel’s resistance in this country....” Naturally, the Ha-shomer Association received prominent place and wide coverage in the first volume. However, the editors of the Haganah history also found it difficult to find primary sources that would shed light on the history of the association during the period of the Second Aliya, and the worker newspapers *Ha’achdut* and *Hapoel Hatza’ir* as well as the Ha-shomer anthologies were the chief sources of information. The material collected was collated with contemporary interviews or random documents found in private homes or forgotten archives.

Because many Ha-shomer members were still living in the 1950s, the writing of the book and the association’s history was a complex and delicate matter. Correspondence among the editors and proofs of the first volume, prepared by the editors—primarily Shaul Avigur—reveals a struggle between Ha-shomer veterans and Yehuda Slutzky, Yehuda Harshelag, and Shaul Avigur over the chapter concerning the Ha-shomer Association and the image to be shaped in the public’s collective memory. It appears that Yitzhak Ben-Zvi and Israel and Manya Shochat often disagreed with what Slutzky wrote and the way he presented the association. On the other hand, Shaul Avigur refused to submit to their pressure and tried to stick close to the facts even if they did not correspond with what was written in the Ha-shomer anthologies. This tension first arose when Slutzky referred to the connection between Manya Shochat and the chief of the Moscow secret police, Zubatov. Israel Shochat was opposed to mentioning the affair, while Avigur, in his letter to Slutzky, wrote, “It is not our intention to describe monuments to perfection in our book,” and that Manya’s image would not be harmed. For Avigur this was a matter of principle far beyond the Zubatov affair:

If we follow this path, what will come of us? We are liable in any case to face pressure groups.... The Ha-shomer wrote the book *Ha-shomer* and is about to issue volume 2. Of course, he [Israel Shochat] is foll-

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11 *Sefer Toldot ha-Ha-haganah*, 1:3.
12 See, for example, Avigur’s letter to Yehuda Slutzky of 21 January 1954, in the Haganah Archive, section 80, private archive, 299, file 28, p. 7. On the same affair, see also the letter of 29 March 1954 (ibid., file 27, p. 1).
lowing the path of “seeing no evil and Jacob” (or Ha-shomer). The world is divided into two, “black” and “white,” and he is “totally” white. This way seems to me to be completely flawed for a history book. I am prepared to accept willingly any correction of my work by Israel S[hachat] or others, but am not prepared in any way to accept “my viewpoint” in this field. Even from the educational point of view the book seems to me to be ignoring evident historical truths—as a book that will not fulfill its purpose…. Excuse me for going on at length over this matter, but in my view it is a matter of principle. A book that deprives itself of a critical approach will be deprived of its main value. I entreat you to give me your final opinion and also to discuss this matter in your coming conversation with Professor Dinur. (Emphases and misprints exist in the original text)\(^\text{13}\)

In a letter to Slutzky of September 1954, Avigur repeated his argument, and it seems he was greatly troubled by the intervention of President Ben-Zvi. He notes in his letter that Ben-Zvi was interfering with the writing and was placing his full weight on the way in which Ha-shomer was being portrayed in the History of the Haganah: “Regarding the president’s demand to give prominence to the Ha-shomer in volume 3, your proposal to the president is acceptable to me on one explicit condition … I stress that the correction be purely literary and make no change to the transmission of fact.”\(^\text{14}\) The chapters of the History of the Haganah were sent by Slutzky and Harsheleg to Avigur, who read the chapters carefully, corrected them, and transmitted his comments, reservations, and conclusions to Slutzky and Harsheleg. Since the editorial board’s internal correspondence and page proofs have been preserved, one can trace the evolution of the book in general and the matters concerning Ha-shomer in particular, and compare what was inserted and what remained unpublished. Avigur’s comments remained in the margins of the draft, and his long and detailed letters to Slutzky shed new light on the association, revealing hitherto unknown information that does not correspond with what is described in the Ha-shomer anthologies and in the published version of the History of the Haganah. Although Avigur wanted to be as faithful as possible to “historical truth,” it seems that in certain cases his efforts to resist pressure from the Ha-shomer veterans were in vain. The book—as we shall see—contained nothing that might mar the association’s public image. Avigur’s remarks on Slutzky and Harsheleg’s manuscript—and not only the published version—constitute a very important source for understanding the two incidents discussed in this article.

\(^{13}\) Shaul Avigur to Yehuda Slutzky, 28 March 1954, Haganah Archive, section 80, private archive 299, file 27.

\(^{14}\) Shaul Avigur to Yehuda Slutzky, 15 September 1954, Haganah Archive, section 80, private archive 299, file 27.
The Zarnooga Incident

"Ha-shomer would not aspire to battle or enjoy fights. On the contrary, it educates its members to be very careful in their attitude towards their Arab and Bedouin neighbors. It should be noted in its favor that its best efforts have been made to know the Arab environment and its customs, its language and its tendencies, and it strives to nurture a relationship of respect and peace with the villagers and tribes among whom it acts."  

In the History of the Haganah, Slutsky notes that Ha-shomer aroused opposition among the colonies of the First Aliya. He cites three reasons for the farmers’ opposition to the association. The first was the high cost of its services, which was sometimes beyond the means of the settlements. The second was Ha-shomer behavior towards the Arab population and the fear that excluding the Arab guards from the protection work would create tensions and endanger the peace of the colony. In this connection, Slutsky emphasizes that this fear was unjustified and that the Ha-shomer usually knew how to find the right line “of protecting the property and honor of the Jew without inadvertent injury and without humiliating Arabs.” The third reason involved the way in which Ha-shomer was organized and acted. Since it was a closed and secret association with a proletarian world view it alienated the youth of the settlements who found it hard to identify with its aims.

A comparison between the History of the Haganah and the Ha-shomer Anthology regarding the attitude of Ha-shomer members towards the Arabs in the settlements and their farmer employers shows that Slutsky, Harsheleg, and Avigur accepted the Ha-shomer Association’s claim “that [it] did not aspire to battle or enjoy fights.” An examination of the Zarnooga affair and Sejera strike from the viewpoint of the Rehovot colonists rather than from that of the Ha-shomer Anthology and the History of the Haganah reveals that the reality differs from what is presented in those texts.

The Zarnooga incident occurred on 23 July 1913 (18 Tammuz 5673) in Rehovot after the Arabs of the nearby village of Zarnooga were caught stealing grapes from the settlement vineyards. The confrontation between the guards and the villagers sharpened and resulted in bloodshed. Two guards and an Arab were killed. When the commotion died down, the settlement committee

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15 Ha-shomer Anthology, 3rd ed., xv.
17 Ibid., 238–39.
18 Shaul Avigur to Yehuda Slutsky, 2 January 1954, Haganah Archive, section 80, private archive 299, file 28.
decided to set a precedent by not renewing Rehovot’s connections with the Ha-shomer Association and to expel them from the colony, claiming that the damage inherent in having Hebrew guards was greater than the benefit. The Zaronoega incident was documented in all three editions of the Ha-shomer anthology by the guardian Meir Spector as a being a particularly violent clash between village residents and settlement guards.19

According to the testimony of Spector, the incident began when a caravan of camels was passing near the settlement, and some of its men entered the vineyard in order to steal grapes. When the guard approached, threatening them with his stick, the Arabs mocked him and continued stealing grapes. At this point, the guard took out his gun, but the result was the opposite of what he expected. The Arabs surrounded him, jumped him, stole his weapon, and fled the settlement with their camels. After the humiliated guard recounted what had happened in the vineyard, Spector mounted his horse and pursued the caravan. When he caught up with the men, he asked them to return the gun that they had taken, but his request fell on deaf ears. The men of the caravan surrounded him as well, threatening him with their sticks, and one of the men, “a sturdy, broad-shouldered young man, took out the gun from under his clothes,” pointed it at Spector, and said, “If you want the gun, come closer and take it. The first bullet will strike the mare—and the second one will strike you.” Spector retreated and returned to the settlement to bring reinforcements. This time Spector and four other riders caught up with the caravan near Nes Ziona, surrounded the Arab, and fired a number of rounds into the ground to frighten him, but the fellow managed to escape into one of the surrounding orchards. Meanwhile, it had become clear that the men of the caravan were from the Arab village of Zaronoega, “which was famous in Judaea as a lawless village” that had intimidated the surrounding settlements. Spector and the guards set out after the caravan a third time, now accompanied by still more guards and men from the settlement. As they approached Zaronoega, they were met by an armed force mounted on horses and waving swords in the air, primed and ready for a confrontation. The violent encounter, according to Spector, took place on a hill near the settlement with the villagers storms towards the Rehovot guards:

They charged with cries and shouts, their swords glittering in the sunlight, and shots flew in the air. The explosion of the bullets, the screams of the men, the galloping of the horses, the rattling of swords, and the wild storms of the hill gave it the appearance of a

killing field. The guards stood firm. After a number of horses among the Arab ranks fell to the earth, the entire camp retreated.\footnote{Ha-shomer Anthology, 3rd ed., 233.}

The battle resulted in wounded fighters on both sides, but at this stage no report was made about fatalities. When the guards returned to the settlement, fears of a retaliatory mass attack mounted. The anticipated attack did not take place, but shortly after the incident it was reported that the guard Shmuel Friedman had been killed at his post near the Nes Ziona settlement.

Spector’s memoirs were written 20 years after the violent encounter between the villagers of Zarnooga and the residents of Rehovot, and his story focuses more on the attempt to recover the gun than on the theft of the grapes. The style of writing and the words used to describe the incident—“killing field,” “war”—suggests that the time of composition influenced the way Spector recalled the event. The intervening years had witnessed a number of violent encounters between Jews and Arabs, and apparently the riots of 1920, 1921, and 1929 seemed to Spector to be a direct continuation of the Zarnooga incident, the first swallow heralding what awaited the Jews of Palestine.

Rare and interesting evidence for the underlying causes of the violent confrontation with the residents of Zarnooga comes from a Jewish-Dutch tourist, Abraham Mossel, who had by chance been staying in the settlement when the incident occurred. On 16 July 1911 three young men and a young woman set out on a backpacking trek around the world. The four travelers—Abraham Mossel, Frans van der Hoorn, Gerard Perfors, and Marie Zwarts, who were vegetarians and socialists—arrived in Palestine at the end of March 1913. They traveled the length and breadth of the country, and when their money ran out they settled down in Rehovot to work in the farmhouses. Mossel kept a travel diary in which he devoted a special chapter to the “battle with the Arabs of Zarnooga.” Mossel’s account resembles Spector’s, but includes information that does not appear in the published version:

Near the large settlement of Rishon Le-zion, located about an hour’s walk from where we were staying, six camel riders dismounted from their animals and began to harvest the vineyard. This in itself was not serious, but none of them had asked permission to do so, and if they were allowed to behave in this way, then any passerby would feel free to steal fruit without protest. Very soon a young guard approached them and ordered the poachers to leave, and when they did not respond he lifted a stick and began striking right and left.\footnote{See Abraham Mossel, Sachir Yom me-Holland be-Eretz ha-Kodesh, 1913–1914 (Jerusalem: n.p., 2002), 69. Mossel’s memoirs were published immediately after the First World War in Holland (Als Daglooner in het Heilige). Frans van der Hoorn married Zila}
According to Mossel’s version, the guard not only threatened the Arabs with his stick but also beat them mercilessly, completely out of proportion to their misdeed. The events that led to the violent confrontation began to develop from the moment the guard’s weapon was taken. What is interesting in Spector’s story is not only what he remembered and wrote, but what he chose to omit, such as the death of David Levitan, killed ten days after the incident, the unjustified abuse of Arab workers by the guards in the days preceding the incident, the opposition of the settlement farmers to the Ha-shomer and their expulsion from the settlement, the establishment of a terrorist cell called “the grandsons of Pinhas,” and the threats against the lives of the colonists and the blowing up of their houses—none of these appear in Spector’s memoirs.

A reading of contemporary sources and primary documents independent of the Ha-shomer Association together with guards’ memoirs concerning the Zarnooga event creates a picture more complex and slightly different from that presented in the Ha-shomer Anthology. On 25 June 1913, a month before the Zarnooga incident, a Rehovot farmer named Semmy Tolgovsky sent the settlement committee an angry letter in which he lodged a severe complaint against the behavior of the guard Eliezer “Lazar” Finkelstein towards his Arab workers:

To the Committee of the Rehovot Settlement:

Dear Sirs,

It is my duty, as a man and as a resident of Rehovot, to strongly protest against a certain phenomenon that has recently prevailed in our settlement that has not only endangered our prestige, but above all constitutes a serious crime against humanity. I wish to draw your attention to the unforgivable violence of certain Ha-shomer guards who have used the whip against workers in the most trivial circumstances and sometimes without any reason at all, as if they were dogs and not human beings. It is just we Jews, who have suffered from persecution and mistreatment for thousands of years, we Jews in particular, whose backs are bent by the blows of nations, who must retain a measure of humanity and not whip unarmed and innocent people out of sheer caprice. An Arab worker owed a few bishlik to the guard Lazar Finkelstein. Since he would not or could not pay him, Finkelstein fell upon him two weeks ago and struck him cruelly with a whip which was more suited for wild animals than for human beings.

Cohen of Metulla and their descendants are living in Israel; Gerard Perfors and Marie Zwart married, were long-lived, and remained until the end of their lives in Holland; Abraham Mossel returned to Holland and was murdered by the Nazis near Auschwitz. Mossel refers at length to the Zarnooga affair and the reasons for the murder of the guard, Shmuel Friedman.
ings. At least this is what I was told. Last night my engine broke down and my Arab worker, a quiet and decent person, went to the colony to find Kaplan, my mechanic. The guard on duty noticed the Arab when he was about ten meters from Kaplan’s home and called out to him to stop. The Arab took a few more steps towards the house. But the moment he roused the neighbors the guard drew near and began to strike the Arab unmercifully with a whip. When Kaplan asked the guard why he was beating the man so wildly, the guard merely answered very rudely.

After describing these two incidents of abuse and humiliation to the settlement committee, Tolkovsky explains the significance of the guard’s behavior and the damage it could cause to the settlement:

Honorable Committee!

I understand no less than the “Ha-shomer” the necessity for discipline and to what extent it is important that the Arabs not only respect us but also learn to be afraid of us. But discipline does not mean rudeness, cruelty, lack of humanity, and savagery. What an example for our children! What better means to turn the whole world against us! What is the purpose of these unnecessary provocations, the bad outcomes of which we, the settlers, will have to pay for, and not those who are guilty of them? Honorable Committee! When the colony chose you, it not only entrusted to you the care for material benefit, but it also imposed upon you to care for the good name of our colony and to do everything that you can for its spiritual and moral progress. Will you allow those to whom we give the money we have earned with the sweat of our brows to keep order and enforce our laws? Will you let those men profane our Rehovot with scenes of shameful cruelty, men who do not behave as the servants of the settlement but as tyrants, in complete violation of human laws?

With all respect, and the blessings of Zion, Semmy Tolkovsky. 22

In Tolkovsky’s view the Ha-shomer, rather than “serving the settlement,” were behaving like “tyrants and boors.” His letter to the Colony Committee and his complaint against the guard Finkelstein reflect the position of many colonists. We have quite a few testimonies that cast doubt on what was written in the Ha-shomer Anthology about education and respect for the Arabs. Here are a few examples:

22 Semmy Tolkovsky to the Colony Committee, 25 June 1913, Rehovot Archive, file 12-20 (letters to the Colony Committee).
On the 7th of Sivan 5673 (12 June 1913), Mahmud Daudi, an Arab worker, complained to the Rehovot Colony Committee that one of the Ha-shomer members struck him in the field for no reason. In his letter, Daudi relates: “[A]nd suddenly a Jewish guard of your settlement came and fell upon me with blows and buffets for no fault of mine. As you know, I have been working in your settlement for more than sixteen years and have never had a fight or dispute with anyone. I restrained myself even when I was beaten, without reacting, and I request that the committee redress my shame and judge my case accordingly.”

The response of the committee was: “We requested the guard to appear before the committee and clarify the matter, but he did not comply with our request.”

The mudir [local governor] of Ramle, Ahmed Hamim, presented an allegation to the settlement committee that Mr. Arif Bey Alachi had complained to him that “the guards of the colony were obstructing the passage of his camels and servants through the road leading to his well, although this road belong to anyone passing through it without interference.”

The Arab worker, Ilwawi, complained that two guards confiscated his donkey and refused to return it because it had grazed in the vineyard, to which entry was forbidden. When Ilwawi wanted to speak to the “head of the guards” he was told that he had to pay the fine of a bishlik, and since the Sabbath was approaching he should come on Sunday to take it. But on Sunday his troubles did not end. The guards increased his fine and sent him to the chief guard, who told him his donkey was lost and they did not know where it was. “I looked for it for two days but did not find it. I therefore request the managers to make sure that the guards return my donkey to me.”

One of the demands of Ha-shomer was that the colony committee rent them a house for residence. In a letter dated in the month of Tishrei 5672

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23 Mahmud Daudi to the Rehovot Colony Committee, 7 Sivan 5673 (12 June 1913), Rehovot Archive, Container 3, Box 17. The letter of complaint was apparently written by Aharon Eisenberg, who presented his own letter of complaint. Eisenberg requested “a trial for this scandal” and monetary compensation of 40 francs for the damage caused.

24 Ibid.

25 The mudir of Ramle to the Settlement Committee, Rehovot Archive, container 3, box 18 (1913?).

26 Ilwawi to the Settlement Committee, 27 Nissan 5673 (4 May 1913), Rehovot Archive, container 3, box 65.
(September 1911), the committee members Yisrael Shochat and Yisrael Giladi requested that the settlement meet its commitments and that the guards be provided with “suitable apartments as was customary.” The settlement complied and rented a house for the guards in the center of the settlement. One year later, in Heshvan 5673 (October 1912), after Ha-shomer had left the settlement in anger, the owner of the house sent the following letter to the settlement committee:

I, the undersigned, rented my house last year to Ha-shomer, a well-built house and equipped with all that was necessary, and I made the condition that at the appointed time Ha-shomer should leave the house and return it to me in the same perfect condition as when they entered it. Now, when the time came, the house was completely wrecked, practically a ruin, without doors or windows, and more of it demolished than standing, to the extent that it will need extensive repair at great expense. I therefore request that the honorable committee order Ha-shomer to repair the house properly so that I can rent it later on to someone, since this is not possible in the present state of the house.

Beating Arab workers, blocking main roads, concealment of a donkey, imposition of fines and punishments on Arab workers, and vandalism were a routine part of the lives of the Rehovot colonists and their Arab workers. These cases are merely examples, and there are many more like them in the Rehovot archive files.

In 1911, the writer and literary critic David Frishman visited Palestine, and in his recorded impressions to the newspaper Hazeferi he described to its readers the behavior of the “Shomerim” (Guardians) towards the local population. “When we pass through the settlements of the country where the hand of Israel is in force, it appears that our brethren behave there forcefully, always with a strong hand and outstretched arm,” Frishman wrote in his article “Ha-yada’ta et ha-Aretz? Reshimot mi-Masa’i be-Eretz Yisrael” (Did You Know the Country? Impressions of My Travels in the Land of Israel):

The guards ride on horses, those youngsters with veins always afire, and they show off wonderful tricks and stunts with their horses, just like wild men of the desert, and they call this “fantasia”—these guards, rather than protecting themselves, are aggravating others. What is important to them is that others should know that the people

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27 Israel Shochat and Israel Giladi to the Settlement Committee, Tishrei 5672 (September 1911), Rehovot Archive, container 20-19.
28 David Battel to the Rehovot Settlement Committee, 6 Marheshvan 5673 (17 October 1912), Rehovot Archive, container 3, file 12.
living here are bitter and impetuous, awe-inspiring but not malicious. The threat is a preventive measure for quarrels. There are colonies in which they behave with such aggravation that an Arab who tries to pass through the settlement to another place cannot do so unless he first requests special permission; some kind of free pass to move freely will be given to him. When he passes through after the eighth hour of the evening, he must show this pass to anyone who demands it, and if not it is highly possible that he will not escape with all his limbs intact.29

During his brief visit to the country and his meetings with the Hebrew guardians, Frishman understood the complexity of the relations between the recently arrived Jews and the native population. His expectations were that the Jews, having been weak and persecuted in Russia and having experienced the harsh hand of Russian rule, would be sensitive towards their Arab neighbors. Like Ahad Ha’am, who criticized the colonists and their attitude toward the Arabs, characterizing them as “slaves who rule,” Frishman also regarded the once persecuted guards as persecutors and even foretold the day when the Arabs “who surrounded them would finally wake up, unite among themselves, and suddenly feel that they had strength and courage, and would then take their revenge.”30

The Ha-shomer Anthology itself contains an unusual report of a guard striking and humiliating an Arab without provocation. Moreover, the guard Zalman Asushkin noted in his memoirs that the incident troubled him even to this day. When Ha-shomer entered Rehovot and signed the agreement between the association and the settlement, access roads to the settlement were blocked and Arabs were no longer allowed to travel through them without the appropriate pass. The rules introduced by the Ha-shomer Association caused considerable friction in the daily lives of the farmers and the Arabs. One evening Asushkin saw “an Arab with a loaded camel behind whom a Bedouin boy was riding a donkey that was also loaded.” Asushkin’s impression was that they had not heard about the new arrangement, and when he asked them to stop and identify themselves, the old Arab ignored Asushkin, pushing him aside with a gesture of dismissal, and told the boy to lead the animals onward. Asushkin interpreted the old Arab’s disregard and refusal to follow orders as contempt, and he slapped the man’s face. When the Bedouin boy saw how the Jew had hit the old man, he drew out a thick stick and struck him on the head:

29 David Frishman, “Ha-yada’ta et ha-Aretz? Reshimot mi-Masa’i be-Eretz Yisrael,” Hazefirah, 1 June 1911, p. 3.
30 Ibid. See a similar approach by Yehiel Chelnov as quoted in the History of the Haganah, 1: 238.
My eyes suddenly darkened, and I tottered from the force of the stick that had struck my head. I recovered, and from that moment forth could not control my anger. I fell upon them with the whip I held in my hand and beat them fiercely. I took from the old man’s hands the sword that had once been strapped to his waist and grabbed the boy’s stick, and only after that did they obey me and leave the settlement [of Rehovot].

Judging by Tolkovsky’s letter and other complaints filed with the colony committee, it would seem that the actions of Asushkin, Finkelstein, and other guards were common, or at least unexceptional, in the sphere of protection for Rehovot. In this regard, one can understand the violent encounter between the Zarnooga villagers and the Rehovot guards. This was not a chance incident of a gun seized or grapes stolen, but a much wider struggle connected with travel passes, the blocking of roads, and other changes to the villagers’ way of life.

The Zarnooga affair did not end with the return of the wounded to the settlement, and there were far-reaching implications for the delicate web of relationships between the Ha-shomer Association and the colonists. The complications ensuing from the affair as described below were documented neither in Spector’s memoirs, nor the Ha-shomer Anthologies, nor the History of the Haganah—although they were known to its editors—and are known mainly from a memorial booklet that turned up in the Pinhas Lavon Institute for Labor Movement Research. The booklet is dedicated to Michael Avner Shpal, one of the guards involved in the conflict. A reader of the Ha-shomer Anthologies will not find his name on the list of Ha-shomer members published in Sefer Ha-shomer: Divrei Haverim (The Book of Ha-shomer: Tales of the Members). Shpal vanished from the collective memory of the Ha-shomer as if he had never existed, even though he had been a member and played an active role in its development. The reason for this is, of course, not fortuitous. Shpal left Palestine after the First World War, was hospitalized in an institution for the insane in Vienna, and later ended his own life by hanging. The tragic story did not suit the character of the anthology, and the time that had passed since his suicide rendered his story irrelevant.

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31 Ha-shomer Anthology, 3rd ed., 178.
32 On the events concerning Shpal in the psychoanalytical clinic in Vienna, Haganahh founder Eliahu Golomb’s attempts to care for him, and his tragic suicide, see Ahuvia Malkin, Ha-aktivist (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2007): 402–26. Malkin relates that during Golomb’s visit to Europe, he made a great effort to find Shpal a suitable hospital, especially after Shpal’s first suicide attempt. It should be noted Golomb never regard Shpal as a member of the Ha-shomer Association, and the impressions he received from the Shochats and other Ha-shomer members did not influence his efforts to assist him.
Eleven days after the death of Shmuel Friedman in the Zarnooga incident, David Levitan was killed. The death of the two guards and the Ha-shomer’s exacerbation of tensions with the neighboring village led the settlement of Rehovot to reconsider the association’s continued employment. The damage caused by the guards to the neighborly relations between the farmers and the Arab workers was greater than the benefit they brought. For this reason the settlement committee decided to cancel the contract and expel Ha-shomer. The latter did not receive this unilateral decision with equanimity, and they began to retaliate against those who had supported the cancellation of the contract. One of the guards who opposed the Rehovot settlement committee and the anti-association farmers was Michael Avner Shpal. In a speech addressed to fellow members of Ha-shomer in Rehovot and targeting the farmers and their criticism, he said:

We always aspired to raise our national value, to demonstrate to our neighbors that there is no valad el mot [child of death] before them. And today we can say with assurance that, as far as it depends on us, we have fulfilled our duty in the fullest sense of the word, and what have we achieved for this? We achieved ... that the theft of an animal or even of a bunch of grapes from the vineyard of a Jewish settlement is regarded by our neighbors as a matter of real danger—the danger of death.

The equation that the Ha-shomer Association sought to create was harsh and uncompromising—a thief caught in the vineyards of the settlement would be put to death. Stealing a bunch of grapes was not only theft from the farmers of the settlement but also—and perhaps mainly—from the fruits of labor of the Jewish people. In his speech, Shpal emphasized the idealism of the Ha-shomer in contrast to the pragmatism of the farmers:

In former days they came here as idealists going to sacrifice themselves for the sake of the country and the national future. But the poison of events eroded their souls little by little, weakened their energy, and killed their spirit! And now a new element has come, young, fresh, full of life and ideals and commitment, desiring to wrest the life—the flag of our nation’s revival in our land—from their cold and dead hands.

If Shpal had limited himself to talk, it might be possible to claim that his words corresponded very well—both rhetorically and thematically—with the

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34 Ibid.
criticism that the pioneers of the Second Aliya leveled against the colonists of the First Aliya. But Shpal was not satisfied merely to censure the Rehovot colonists. He established a terrorist cell called the “Grandsons of Pinhas” and distributed flyers in which he threatened the farmers with murder and warned them “not to anger the people too much or their end would be that of Zimri ben Kozbi.” To judge by his speech it seems that the guards represented Pinhas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, while Zimri Ben-Salu and his Midianite wife Kozbi Bat-Zur represented the settlement farmers. The colonists’ employing of Arab workers was compared to the Israelites’ whoring with the daughters of Moab; therefore, the “Grandsons of Pinhas” were justified in taking a “spear” and impaling the Arabs’ employers. The religious fanaticism of Pinhas the priest was replaced by the national zealotry of the Ha-shomer members. “For us the question of work is not a question of workers but a national question,” Shpal wrote in his flyer. “If we give our country into the hands of strangers and let it slip from us forever—this is an act of treason for which the death penalty is due. If your ears are deaf to the voice of God speaking from the best of our writers, the explosive sound of the first bomb will be heard.”

Even if no bombs were ever thrown, the rhetoric of blood, land, treason, murder, and national honor raised the Jewish–Arab dispute from a local dispute between Jewish and Arab farmers to national and even nationalistic levels.

On the eve of their departure from the settlement, the Ha-shomer members conducted a procession and marched towards the houses of the farmers who had rejected their work and protection. Under the windows of their houses they sang Avraham Reisen’s “Hulyet, Hulyet Bayze Vinten, Haynt is Ayer Tsayt” (Arise, arise evil spirits! Today is ours). They then marched towards the houses of their supporters and sang the anthem of the Poalei Zion Party, “Hashevu’e” (The Oath): “We swear to break the chains of our people /

35 The workers’ press reported the incident at Zarnooga and its implications. It did not go into details but did censure the use of Arab workers in the settlements. See, for example, Tmidi, “Inyanet ha-Sha’ah,” Hapoel Hatzair, 1 August 1913, pp. 1–2. In that article it was noted that “a flood of terrible words of rebuke was poured upon the members of the settlement—words that should shame and hurt the listeners to their depths.” But at the same time the author wrote that “one cannot blame a person in distress,” and therefore lenience should be shown to what was said (ibid., 1).


to release their hands, wounded and shackled / to remove the burden of evil from our necks / to shatter to its foundations the walls of exile.” These songs are part of the world experience of the Jewish workers’ movement in Eastern Europe and the struggle between Poale Zion and their rivals in the Bund. The farmers of the colony who supported their expulsion were perceived by the Ha-shomer men, members of Poale Zion, as bitter rivals, like their Bundist opponents in tsarist Russia. On the other hand, the colonists who opposed their expulsion were regaled with the words of ‘Hashevu’e’ even though the words of the song were far from representing their world view and their bourgeois style of life. The revolutionary and threats against the farmers were an East European importation unsuited to the realities of Palestinian life. Their struggle for Jewish labor took on a revolutionary coloring, the guards being likened to exploited workers and the farmers to their cruel exploiters. As said before, the Ha-shomer Anthology chose not to refer to the “Grandsons of Pinhas” terrorist cell and the expulsion of association members from the settlement, and completely ignored the events that took place after the incident. Likewise, the History of the Haganah also did not mention these events, even though Avigur referred to them when he began collecting the material and constructing the first chapters of the book in May 1951. Avigur himself wrote in remarks for the card file organization entry that “it would be interesting to trace the attempts to solve the internal settlement problems by physical force and terror,” noting “that affair associated with the guard named Avner.”

A comparison of accounts of the Zarnooga affair as described years later in the Ha-shomer Anthologies with contemporary documents that refer to it indicates a large gap in understanding the event and its implications for the triangular relationship among farmers, workers, and Arabs. In view of the high number of violent incidents against Arab workers in Rehovot, the question arises as to whether the pattern of behavior shown in the Zarnooga affair and events that preceded it was local in characteristic or was an expression of a general pattern visible in other places in the country. The dispute between Ha-shomer and the Neta’im Association in Sejera that took place half a year after the Zarnooga affair (January 1914) indicates a similar pattern of behavior on the part of the Ha-shomer Association towards the farmers and towards the Arab population.

The Strike in Sejera

Like the confrontations between the Rehovot colonists and the Ha-shomer Association, Sejera was a focus for the bloody disputes that sullied the atmosphere and created tension between the colonists and the guards. The entry of

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38 Remarks for the Ha-shomer file between the beginning of the Second Aliyah and the British conquest, 1903–18, Haganah Archive, section 80, private. Archive 299, file 4.
the Second Aliya pioneers into the settlement began a short while after their
arrival in Palestine, when Manya Shochat set up the “collective” and received
permission from the director of the Sejera farm, Krauzeh, to manage the agri-
cultural work. The main condition in the agreement was that field cultivation
would be handed over to the workers, who would conduct the work independ-
ently and would receive half of the net profit. When he heard about the
agreement between Eliahu Krauzeh and Manya, Israel Shochat, who had been
staying at that time in Jaffa, began sending the founders of Bar Giora to the
farm, where they gradually arrived to participate in the agricultural work.
Their arrival at the farm is described by Shlomo Zemach years later as an un-
pleasant experience; this position is shared by others who years afterwards
took the trouble to write it down:

The gloomy local hall filled up with strange and loud-mouthed peo-
ple with the faces and behavior of a regiment of conquerors, and their
manners as well. They tapped their feet as they walked, their chests
thrust forward, their necks outstretched, showing off their leather
satchels on their hips, and flipping their whip on their boots for pleas-
ure. Their leader, commanding and excitable, held a whip of high
quality, slender and short, Circassian, silver-plated at its upper end
and decorated with etchings of towers and mosques. I rose up in the
middle of the night, secretly fleeing for my life, and went down to
Tiberias.\(^{39}\)

A similar description of the wild bunch, noisy and crude-mannered, can also
be found in the writings of Avigur: “The language of the guards—a melange
of Yiddish, Hebrew, and Arabic, a kind of spluttering and peculiar jargon
typical of the Ha-shomer experience. It was a mixture of rudeness and coarse
expression as well as scorn for any form of intelligent interests, including
books, a style of clownishness, sarcastic witticisms, and even provocation of
others, even of colleagues, and derision towards anyone who was not a
member.”\(^{40}\) Elsewhere Avigur notes that “one should remember that these
men, many of them single, were mostly stubborn people, ambitious, and
hardly given to inhibition or discipline.” This was a chauvinist group of peo-
ple, which more often than not was rude towards women, using expressions
such as \textit{dinst maydekh} (servant girl).\(^{41}\)

From the moment the collective took the farm work upon itself, it was
only a short time before its protection also passed into Jewish hands. The

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\(^{39}\) Shlomo Zemach, “Kibush ha-Avodah,” \textit{Luach Haaretz le-Shnat} 1951 (Tel Aviv:

\(^{40}\) Shaul Avigur to Yehuda Slutsky, 19 January 1954, Haganah Archive, section 80,
private archive 299, file 28, p. 6.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 1 and 4 respectively.
presence of armed Jewish guards in the Lower Galilee was part of the human landscape of the area and sometimes led to conflicts between the farmers and the guards, conflicts which more than once ended in the presentation of complaints to the Ha-shomer committee. In the book Mishpahat ha-Portugali (The Portugali Family), Yaakov Portugali relates that while working at Sejera, Mendel Portugali—a prominent Ha-shomer leader—heard one of the colonists speaking rudely about Ha-shomer, and since “by nature he could not bear insults,” he slapped the colonist’s face. Because the colonists employed the guards as hired hands in the settlement, a complaint was lodged with Yisrael Shochat. Shochat was afraid this incident would hurt the interests of the Ha-shomer Association, and so he chose to remove Portugali from the settlement and send him to organize the protection at Metulla:

As soon as he arrived, his first act was to ask the Arabs sleeping there at night not to sleep in the barn. But the Arabs did not agree and continued to sleep there. So Mendel went out at night with a kurbatch, which is a special kind of whip, to beat the Arabs. He struck at them one by one and chased them off so that they no longer slept in the barn, and by doing so he solved the problem of the thefts.  

Portugali’s behavior towards the Arab workers resembled the behavior of Lazar Finkelstein and Zalman Asushkin in Rehovot. In the Ha-shomer’s struggle for the sake of Jewish labor, the end justified the means, and the show of force towards farmers as well as towards Arab workers was an accepted pattern of behavior. The behavior of the Ha-shomer was well known to Kauzeh, the director of the farm, who often considered whether it was worthwhile to employ them. “With regard to handing over the first guarding to Ha-shomer, there was doubt because of complications between the Jews and the Arabs,” Kauzeh noted frankly. “I was afraid to get involved in serious conflict with the neighbors, but in the end I yielded. Indeed, the atmosphere of enmity that was created led to bloodshed.”

The confrontation that Kauzeh anticipated occurred when the management of the Sejera farm passed from the ICA (Jewish Colonization Association) to the Neta’im Association. Kauzeh was replaced by Kantarovich, who was apparently less sensitive to the issue of Jewish labor and, despite protests, increased the number of Arab workers on the farm. The timing with regard to the workers was very poor, since in the months leading up to the strike, Ha-shomer had suffered heavy losses. During the months of Heshvan–Kislev 5674 (November–December 1913) Moshe Barasky was killed on the

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42 See Yaakov Portugali, Mishpahat ha-Portugali (Tel Aviv: Poraz, 1979), 42–43.
43 Ever Hadani, Ha-hityashvut ba-Galil ha-Tahton: Hamishim Shmot Koretziha (Ramat Gan: Masada, 1944), 330. Hadani adds that the enmity and bloodshed are what created the “Zohar Sejera” (Fame of Sejera).
Milhamia-Degania road, Yosef Zaltzman a short while afterwards near Sahne, and the guard Yaakov Feldman in Sejera. The Second Aliya pioneers in the Lower Galilee could not tolerate these murderous acts and Kantarovitch’s policies, and the first to pay the price were not the murderers but the Arab workers employed in the colonies. Ha-shomer demands for the expulsion of the Arabs from the settlements in general, and from Sejera in particular, were rejected outright. Kantarovitch refused to yield, and the strike broke out in full force, with the Ha-shomer Association being the first to act. The longer the strike continued, the more inflamed emotions became, and in Sejera, as earlier in in Rehovot, an ultimatum was issued to the director of the farm:

To Mr. Kantarovitch, Manager of Sejera Farm,

We inform you herewith of the following demands. You must dismiss all the foreign workers and guards who are on the Sejera farm, and if you are unable to do so, you must resign from this position, and if you do not fulfill our demands you will die and the farm will be blown up. We give you twenty-five days from today when this letter was written. Sunday, 6 Tevet [5674] [4 January 1914]. [emphasis in the original]44

The letter aroused tumult both among the farm management and in the workers’ camp. A short while after the letter was sent to Kantarovitch, Yosef Baratz, who was then head of the Galilee Workers’ Committee, and Berl Katzenelson, head of the Poale Yehuda Committee, received a letter from the Palestine Bureau requesting that they investigate the matter and find the intimidators. “We are sending you a copy of an anonymous letter to the management of Sejera. We are sure that this letter was sent by one of the lads and has no connection with the official association.” What Arthur Ruppin, head of the Palestine Bureau, and his deputy, Yaakov Thom, most feared was that this rash act was liable “to be ammunition in the hands of those opposed to Jewish labor” and could be detrimental to the workers’ interests. The letter sent to Baratz and Katzenelson states: “We were told that the Neta’im Association informed the ICA management they had to get out of Sejera since they could not work under such conditions. We find it necessary for you to conduct an inquiry and investigation in order to find the guilty party and remove blame from all the workers.”45

Katzenelson’s reply soon arrived. His position was that it was not Kantarovitch and the colonists who were being threatened but the entire workers’ camp. He cast doubt on the very existence of the letter and suggested that it was perhaps invented by opponents of Jewish labor in the settlement:

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44 See Central Zionist Archives, section L2, file 66II.
45 Ibid.
Your letter regarding the affair in Sejera and your request to find the guilty person so as to remove the blame from all the workers has greatly distressed and insulted us. It is already ten years since Jewish workers began to arrive in the country. Throughout these years we have fought for one thing, for the necessity of Jewish labor with all its honor and value. We fought with devotion, with exuberance, with extreme intensity—but during all those years none of us ever did a single deed that could allow anyone to accuse us of violence. During that time they also fought against us, we suffered persecution from various sides, bans and boycotts both open and secret, punishments of different kinds by farmers, officials, and settlement committees. And who knows whether the Sejera letter was the invention of our adversary or if there really is someone so bitter after all the recent events in Galilee, after the six victims who fell in Sejera for no reason at all, after the entire Galilee and even the settlement committee demanded Jewish labor from the Sejera management and it treated public opinion with total contempt—that his heart became embittered and he wrote what was written....  

In his memoir “Shlichut ve-derech” (Mission and Path), published in Sefer Hashomer, Israel Shochat recalls the threatening letter, but notes that it was the product of “a few hotheads who tried to influence Kantarovich by threats.” The letter of ultimatum has been viewed as an aberration in the association’s history that does not reflect the behavior of the guards as a group. Yet if we connect Shpal’s threats against the settlers in Rehovot half a year earlier with the threat on Kantarovich’s life, we see that this was not an exceptional act. Violence in pursuit of a goal was not strange to the consciousness of Hashomer members. Most of them had come from the Pale of Settlement in the Russian Empire and had been involved at one time or another in underground political activities, where terror was an inseparable part of daily life. The years 1905–06 were the peak years of Russian terror, during which scores of terrorist events took place and attempts were made to assassinate government officials.  

46 Ibid.  

47 See Yosef Kruk, Teror, Mahapecha, Azma’ut (Tel Aviv: Mifleget Poalei Eretz Israel, 1952), 152. Kruk says that according to the statistics of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party, there were 202 assassinations of ministers, district governors, army officers, prison wardens, spies and provocateurs during the period of the 1905 revolution. See also Yisrael Bartal, “Kozak ve-Bedu’i: Olam ha-Dimuym ha-Leumi he-Hadash,” in Kozak ve-Bedu’i (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2007): 68–79. Although Bartal does not discuss terrorism, he does note that the majority of the Ha-shomer had absorbed positive images of the Slavic peasants. It is not unlikely that other influences coming from the years of social upheaval in Russia were incorporated into their worldview. On the life
Russian Jews, 1862–1917, Jonathan Frankel notes that the influence of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party on Ha-shomer members was far stronger than that of orthodox Marxism.  Derek Penslar, in his *Tichnun ha-Utopiya ha-Ziyonit* (Planning the Zionist Utopia), quotes Franz Oppenheimer, who in a 1912 letter to German Zionist leader Max Bodenheimer warned that “the exaggerated nationalism of the Russian terrorists will lead us into a dead end.” And Ber Borochov, a founder of the Agudat Ha-shomerim, wrote an article entitled “Ha-terrorist ve-Ha-shomer” (The Terrorist and the Ha-shomer Guard) in which he compares the two:

The Jewish terrorist who was executed has found an appropriate successor in the Jewish guard; much nicer than his predecessor. The terrorist denied his Jewish name and was hung with the Christian mark on his forehead, while his follower changed his secular ghetto name to a national one that indicates hope and the days of the past. Their heroes evolved from Velvels and Berls to Anthonys…. Our new heroes, the men of Palestine, appeared with new names from which waft the smell of earth and freedom—Shmueli, Ahduti, Reuveni—these are their names.

Borochov aptly noted the similarity between the assimilated Jewish terrorist of tsarist Russia and the Ha-shomer guard in Palestine, whom he regarded as the Russian’s successor. The difference between the two types of terrorist—the Russian Jew and the Palestinian Jew—is that the latter acted not only in the name of the socialist idea but also in the name of the national ideal.

Shaul Avigur, in the notes that he wrote for the *History of the Hagana*, was well aware of this aspect of the Ha-shomer. He argued that “the basic and essential problem was who made the decisions regarding political problems. The guard always wanted to reserve for himself the right to make the final decision…. Such conflicts existed between the fighting units and the political parties in revolutionary movements throughout the world (in Russia, for example, between the SR and the fighting units). After that came this opposition in principle to the sharp expressions in the disputes between Ha-shomer and Ahдут Ha’avoda and the Histadrut. And this problem—in both

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overt and covert form—exists at the very foundation of the Israel Defense Forces, and who knows if it has finally been resolved this time either.”

A contemporary who voiced his opinion on this issue was Yaakov Zerubavel, one of the editors of Ha’achdut and a leader of Poale Zion. In a letter to David Bloch-Blumenfeld, director of Kupat Ha’apim Eretz Yisrael (Palestine Workers Fund), on 7 Shevat 5674 (3 February 1914)—a month after the threatening letter was sent to Kantarovich—Zerubavel expressed his fear of terrorist leanings among the groups in the workers’ camp (especially in Galilee):

We mainly dealt with clarifying the situation of work and protection in the Lower Galilee. The number of workers has greatly increased, but this is due largely to the new centers that were built. Generally, one suffers here as well from a lack of work. Actually, migration here is gradually increasing … mostly coming not for the sake of settlement ideals but under the influence of the life that has already been constituted in the country. Palestine already has an attractive force for those abroad. But this is where the danger lies. The new immigrants lack a clear settlement outlook, they lack a settlement perspective, and therefore they do not know which way to go and what means to hold onto. The negative forecasts of which we have more than enough in our settlement influence the new immigrants in a terrifying way and arouse in them extreme ideas … resulting in all the terrorist tendencies that can be found circulating in the workers’ camp and that for the good of our settlement work demand we wage war on these views because despair and the extreme means of terror are both harmful to the Yishuv and its gradual socialist development. (My emphasis—G.A.)

In addition to the Palestine Bureau’s intervention and Arthur Ruppin’s request that Berl Katzenelson and Yosef Baratz examine the matter, members of the workers’ movement themselves regarded the affair with alarm. Bloch-Blumenfeld attempted a thorough examination of the issue of employing Jewish workers in the settlements and of their difficulty in becoming integrated into settlement life. After the threats against Kantarovich, he sent a letter to all

51 Comments for the Ha-shomer file between the beginning of the Second Aliyah and the British conquest, 1903–18, Archives of the History of the Haganah, section 80, private archive 299, file 4, notes dated 18 May 1951.

52 Yaakov Zerubavel to David Bloch-Blumenfeld of Kinneret, 7 Shevat 5674 (3 February 1914), Pinhas Lavon Institute for Labor Movement Research, IV 202 70/B. It should be noted that in his memoirs of the war period and the revolution in the chapter dealing with the strike at Sejera, there is no mention of the threatening letter and the terrorist methods used by some of the workers. See Yaakov Zerubavel, Bi-mei Milhama ve-Mahapecha (Tel Aviv: Y. L. Peretz, 1966), 71–79.
the First Aliya colonists, asking the farmers to answer three questions: a) What are the impediments to bringing Jewish workers into all branches of the farm economy?; b) How can Jewish workers be helped to acclimatize?; c) What is your view [about] the development and progress of our settlements if, as at present, most of the settlement workers are non-Jews?53

Colonists from Hadera, Zichron Yaakov, Yavne’el, Metulla, Rishon Lezion, Nes Ziona, Beer Yaakov, Rehovot, Petach Tikva, and Gedera responded to Blumenfeld’s query, explaining—from their point of view—the main reasons for their conflict with the workers. The picture that emerges differs significantly from that presented in the Ha-shomer anthologies and in the historiography of the Second Aliya. It appears that the economic aspect—the higher salaries commanded by Jewish workers in comparison with Arabs—was not the main reason for the farmers’ reluctance to employ Jewish workers. Although the respondents did mention this issue, they cited other, weightier concerns. For example, Zvi Botkovsky, secretary of the Hadera colony, noted the Jewish workers’ lack of commitment to their work. Their desire to explore their new homeland and tendency to move from one colony to another constituted a serious problem for the colonists, who wanted stable workers who knew their jobs. “You will find that among the farmers in Judea, most have never been in the Galilee or even in the settlements of neighboring Samaria,” wrote Botkovsky to Blumenfeld. “And among the farmers in Samaria and Galilee you will also find that most of them have never even visited Jerusalem. These farmers mentioned above only know their settlements and their work.” On the other hand, the situation among the recently arrived workers was completely different:

Therefore, the above-mentioned workers who are arriving in the country have only one idea, which is to tour Palestine, and for about half a year or more he works from Metulla to Ruhama for a few days in each settlement, and then leaves the work and also the country. Believe me, Sir, such a worker knows the names of all the cities and settlements he passed through and also the villages, and if he is learned he will compose a new geography book. In short, he will know everything, but not his work, especially that which the farmer is in need of.54

Botkovsky’s assessment was correct. A study of the memoirs of Second Aliya pioneers would find that they had a standard “backpack” route in Palestine. Jaffa (in one of the Haim-Baruch or Spector hotels), Rishon Lezion, Petach

53 David Bloch-Blumenfeld to the settlement committees, Labor Party Archives, section IV-202, file 70b.
54 Zvi Botkovsky to David Bloch-Blumenfeld, 17 Tevet 5674 (15 January 1914), Pinhas Lavon Institute for Labor Movement Research, section IV-202, file 70b.
Tikva, Zichron Yaakov, and from there to the Galilee and back to Jaffa, and a
walk on foot to Jerusalem. The colonist wanting stability among his workers
naturally preferred the local Arab.

The colonist Goldstein of Zichron Yaakov noted that in the cultivation of
fields—unlike the plantations—there was hardly any need for workers “and
because of this there is no constant work.” On the other hand, when they go
over to planting almonds and vineyards it will be possible “to find Jewish
workers to do regular work.”55 But the farmer Miltzen of Rehovot explained
that even plantations had a problem in employing workers since “in most
cases the planters do not have frequent work for a stated number of workers
on the farm throughout the year and also not for any known time. Work
among the planters is temporary.”56 Avraham Kastitzky of Yavne’el ex-
plained that “the Jewish worker has greater needs,” but noted another reason:
the farmer “who works with his sons does not need a worker except for a few
days at various intervals during the year.”57 Aharon Eisenberg, one of the
founders of Nes Zion and Rehovot and the director of the Neta’im Association,
claimed that the expulsion of the Arabs from the settlements would have
far-reaching economic and political implications, and the idea of work purely
for Jews was dangerous and inapplicable. He argued that Arabs had been em-
ployed in the ICA for 15 years already and that for moral, political, and
economic reasons it would be impossible to fire them. The solution to the
problem lay, therefore, in a mixed work force of Jews and Arabs, and not
“purely Jewish labor.”58 The workers’ camp adamantly opposed this arrange-
ment and demanded purely Jewish labor and protection without the presence
of Arabs. Two months after Yaakov Zerubavel sent his letter to Bloch-
Blumenfeld and protested the terrorist methods of behavior in the Ha-shomer
Association, he published an article in the newspaper Ha’achdut that attacked
the compromise suggested by Eisenberg:

And here come the owners of the Neta’im Association holding a
political fig-leaf. We are endangering the Yishuv by not giving work
to the Arabs, etc. They are worried about Zionism and therefore they
cannot oppose foreign work. And to escape from the difficult situa-
tion in Sejera they propose a system of percentages for Jewish and
foreign labor.59

55 S. Goldstein to David Bloch-Blumenfeld, 15 Tevet 5674 (13 January 1914), Pinhas
Lavon Institute for Labor Movement Research, section IV-202, file 70b.
56 Miltzen to David Bloch-Blumenfeld, 4 Tevet 5674 (2 January 1914), Pinhas Lavon
Institute for Labor Movement Research, section IV-202, file 79b.
57 Avraham Kastitzky to Ephraim Bloch-Blumenfeld, 28 Tevet 5674 (26 January 1914),
Pinhas Lavon Institute for Labor Movement Research, section IV-202, file 79b.
58 Hadani, Ha-hityashvet ba-Galil ha-Tahton, 337.
59 Yaakov Zerubavel, “Al ha-Shvitah be-Sejera,” Ha’achdut, 3 April 1914, p. 3.
The frank article by Zerubavel and his “secret” letter censuring workers who come without “settlement ideals” show first and foremost the difficulty of assessing the complexity and depth of the conflict that broke out in Sejera. From the letter it seems that the workers’ camp did not have a uniform stance and that there were extreme elements that took the struggle to undesirable lengths. This phenomenon is naturally not reflected in the article, and the Jewish workers are presented in it as victims, while the colonists are seen as the bearers of regressive ideals.

In contrast to the accusations of the Ha-shomer, the farmers’ motives for not employing Jewish workers were not ideological, reflecting opposition to the socialist pioneers, but the prosaic concerns of hardworking farmers. Aharon Eisenberg, for example, regarded the question of Jewish labor from a much broader perspective and pointed out the importance of employing Arabs in the Jewish-owned fields, plantations, and vineyards. He considered neighborly relations and the improvement of the economic situation of Arab farm workers to be in the best interests of the Yishuv as a whole and not—as the Ha-shomer argued—in the narrow economic interest of the farmers. The Ha-shomer, with its many and painful losses before the strike, could not accept this proposal and was the first to strike and to drag the other workers behind it.

**Conclusion**

In “Shlichut ve-Derech,” published in the Jubilee year of the founding of Bar Giora (1957), Israel Shochat wrote:

Special attention was given by Ha-shomer to peaceful relations with the Arab surroundings. Ha-shomer tried to display a new character in its relations with the Arab environment. We knew that the Arabs would be our neighbors and we would have to find a *modus vivendi* and to some extent to adapt our lives to theirs. Ha-shomer members learned the Arabic language, which helped them to reach an understanding with the Arab neighbors and wanted to learn from the Arabs what could be learnt from them and even to repay them for it. The guards strove not to be satisfied merely with visits to the effendis and sheikhs, but preferred the *madiyya* (village guest house) in order to meet the Arab farmhand, land tenant, or worker. The guards learned about the Arab world of experience and the forms of life in the Arab village. In every center of protection, Ha-shomer set up a guest room, and any Arab passerby, whether on foot or mounted, rich or poor, worker or farmhand—was received there pleasantly as was the accepted custom in an Arab settlement.60

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Israel Shochat’s idealized description of the relations between Ha-shomer members and their Arab neighbors was light years away from the reality as described in the archival documents and contemporary accounts examined in the present article. The Zamooga affair, the abusive treatment of Arab workers and villagers by Finkelstein, Asushkin, Portugali, and other guards, and Ha-shomer’s complex and problematic relations with the settlement farmers shine a new light on the legendary Ha-shomer Association. I have tried to read the memoirs of Ha-shomer members and the History of the Haganah in conjunction with primary sources contemporary with the Yishuv settlers who came into contact with these members—particularly the farmers who had hired their services. Since part of the Ha-shomer Association archive was burned and the other part lost, the historiography of the Yishuv, in general, and of the Ha-shomer, in particular, has of necessity been based on the Ha-shomer anthologies and members’ memoirs. In the course of the writing of the History of the Haganah, new documents came to light and testimonies were recorded that presented a view of Ha-shomer that matches accounts found in the settlement archives. Because the History’s editors were under pressure from Ha-shomer veterans, especially from the second president of Israel, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, they found it difficult to give prominence to information that would injure the image of the association. The dearth of primary documents, on the one hand, and editorial considerations, on the other, led to a situation in which even the viewpoint of the History of the Haganah was one-sided. This methodological problem, which has plagued the historiography of the Yishuv for many years, raises two central questions: What do we in fact know about the Ha-shomer Association? And is it possible to tell its story only on the basis of memoirs written so many years afterwards?

The attempt to examine two central affairs in the history of Ha-shomer in the light of external documents casts doubt on the reliability of the Ha-shomer anthologies and the History of the Haganah as sources on the history of the association. These books were published as part of a celebration commemorating the workers’ movement in Palestine, and their declared aim was to extol the deeds of the Ha-shomer. The colonists’ letters, the complaints of the Arab workers, the memoirs of a forgotten member, internal correspondence within the Labor Movement, accounts given by people who came into contact with the Ha-shomer, and Shaul Avigur’s comments on Slutzky’s manuscript show that the reality was far more complicated than what is reflected in the Ha-shomer anthologies and the published version of the History of the Haganah. It seems that there were Ha-shomer with extreme world views who wished to conduct a fierce struggle over Jewish labor using methods commonly employed by underground cells in the Russian Empire and unsuited to the realities of Palestine. At the same time it should be noted that the Ha-shomer Association was not a terrorist organization that cast fear over the colonies and the surrounding Arabs, but that there were certainly members who considered violence a legitimate means to achieve national-ideological
goals. These people naturally disappeared from the pages of the Ha-shomer anthologies and from the *History of the Haganah*, and could only be traced by means of supplementary primary sources external to the association.

Even the description of the Ha-shomer Association’s struggle over the “conquest of labor” and its demands, as articulated by Yosef Baratz, that labor be “purely Jewish” acquires another meaning in the light of the alternative primary sources. It appears that the uncompromising demand to replace Arab workers with Jewish ones was a kind of “rigorous pursuit of justice.” From the Ha-shomer point of view, the political and economic cost of expelling the Arabs from the colonies was of no significance. “Justice” must be done even at the price of intensifying the conflict between Jews and Arabs. The Bedouin-like appearance of the Jewish guard in a kefiyyah crowned with a black circlet, a shibriyeh in scabbard, and a bullet belt across his chest concealed the lordly attitude—at least among some members—of those who came to take possession of the natives’ land, not to be integrated among them. It was the colonists who understood the political and economic significance of employing Arab workers and the importance of maintaining good relations with them.

The present article has attempted to expose the conflicts in the Ha-shomer Association that were visible at the beginning of the 20th century but that vanished from the anthologies and memoir literature of the 1930s and 1940s. In the 1930s, when Ha-shomer veterans recorded their own history, they stressed their intention to become integrated in the area and to set down roots among the settlers of the country. Their lordly approach and harsh attitude towards the Arab fellah, the native of the country, vanished as though it had never existed. During the 1950s, when the *History of the Haganah* was written, most of the facts were known but it was not possible to print them. In light of these findings and of the gap between what is described in the Ha-shomer anthologies and the primary documents that contradict them, it may be said that the story of the Ha-shomer Association has not yet been fully written in all its aspects. Its archives were burned and lost, but since the association came into contact with many groups and personalities in the Yishuv, one can find additional, and sometimes even contradictory, documents that will make it possible to tell the story of the Ha-shomer—a hundred years after its founding—in all its aspects and stratifications.