The Holon Project: In Search of a Mizrahi Heritage of 1948

Hilla Dayan

This paper is an attempt to digest some of the emotions and questions stirred by our study group on Mizrahim and al-Nakbah at Zochrot during the months of April-July 2015. I want to express my gratitude to Zochrot for initiating the group and for inviting me to the conference this year. The experience of being part of this group continued to linger in my mind long after it ended so thank you very much for that. The materials I am going to present are based on chronicles and memoirs of residents of the city. I want to thank city Historian, Rami Aharoni, who gave me these sources. The project in fact sprang from meeting a few years ago with the Palestinian American Prof. Mohammad Rabie who is a refugee from the village of Yazour. Together we ran a class session in Amsterdam on Holon/Yazour and the legacy of 1948. Another source of inspiration is my longtime friend Ihab Saloul, an expert on Palestinian heritage and descendent of refugees who fled Ashkelon to Gaza, who was always interested in the Mizrahi story. Last but not least I want to thank is Shoshana Gabay, a fountain of knowledge and wisdom and a sharp critic of the Mizrahi condition, my mentor. I am not a historian. The story of Holon interests me as someone who grew up in the city and as a contemporary political story. It is a story full of holes and questions marks. but I believe in it as part of the search for heritage not as historical practice but as an expression of what Gil Eyal calls "will to memory."[1] He is using this expression to highlight the problematic nature of the very concept of "collective memory." Whether there is too much or too little of it, collective memory is commonly seen as necessary for collective identity or to overcome collective trauma. But in fact, Gil Eyal contends, collective memory can hardly be thought of as something that has any kind of nature or pattern. It is an expression of a human will to memory. In this case, the nexus of Mizrahi heritage and al-Nakbah prompted a search that explored the issue of "collective responsibility"

[1] Gil Eyal, Identity and Trauma: Two Forms of the Will to Memory, *History & Memory*, Volume 16, Number 1, Spring/Summer 2004, pp. 5-36.

that was raised in our group. This search raises important questions that will continue to be relevant, so I believe, to the society of the future in Israel/Palestine after the return of the refugees. I will come back to this point in my concluding remarks.

1. Early Settlement: Mizrahi responsibility for colonial dispossession?

Holon sprang out of "nowhere." Does this sound familiar to you? It began with land acquisition in 1924 in an area the Yeshuv called "the southern dunes," but only in the early thirties Jewish laborers began to settle there and their colonies in the Zionist narrative survived "against all odds" in a hostile arab environment. Holon was the name given after the 1940 unification of the settlements. Hostility to Holon culminated, and the struggle to defend the city in 1948 ended in a costly victory. After the war, Holon developed rapidly to the relative prosperous city it is today. Triumph and redemption -- this is the story the city tells of itself, mirrored in its motto "even though and despite it all." The stories I grew up with as a child were mostly about the sand, sand all around till as far as the eye can see. This resonated well because we spent our childhood and youth playing in the huge sand dunes behind our building blocks, venturing from time to time further into Husmasa with its even wilder dunes and aura of danger. We grew up in ethnically mixed environments infused with a local patriotic pride. We were Holonim at a time when the ethos of the city, a bastion of the histadrut, was still "Ir Hapoalim" (city of workers) instead of today's marketing slogan "Ir Hayeladim" (city of children). We came of age in the 1980s when the basketball team of Hapoel Holon in purple and yellow uniforms modeled after the Lakers beat the invincible Maccabi Tel Aviv, but twice lost to it the national cup finals. We were the glorious losers from Holon!

Growing up I didn't know and I presume many of us growing up there didn't know that Holon was abandoned in the 1930s and that only in 1940 with the act of unification it appeared for the first time to have a more permanent presence. We never heard about

the fact that immediately after the war Holon was a Ma'abara city (Ma'abara is the name for transit camps for new immigrants that were erected to adsorbed mass immigration waves in the 1950s). In fact, it probably had the biggest ma'abara in the country. In Ariye Krishak's chronicle, a candid and original one, there are many more details that "we never knew." For instance, that the very first settler is described there as an odd man, Avremale Spieler, "Musikant Miyafo" (musician from Jaffa) who in 1931 rented residence "from the Arabs in the sands." Who were these "Arabs in the sand"? Not much is told further about the "Musikant" other than that he did not last there very long. But what a discovery: the "nowhere" area of sand dunes was not entirely unpopulated. It evidently had bedouin settlements. The veteran resident Dov Vinikov corroborates this in the following description:

> "you can imagine the picture of an endless sea of sand hills going up and down merging with the horizon. Black tents, An Arab suddenly appears up on the hills, standing still as a statue, motionless, this is a Bedouin herder looking after twenty to thirty very thin goats. This was Holon, that the Arabs called 'Husmasa' (57).

From this testimony, needless to say, we still have no idea who were the Bedouins, and what ever happened to them in this period of early settlement. We next hear about the adventures of two characters depicted as "levantinim" (Levantines) from Jaffa, Moshe Green and David Moyal who purchase land in the area in the 1920s. Moyal most likely is from the family of the Rabbi Aharon Moyal that came to the holy land together with 180 of his followers and settled in Jaffa in 1854. Others like him, the families of Shlush, Asulin and Elbaz, migrated in this period of the 19th century well before the first "Aliya" and played a key role in purchasing lands for Arabs on which Jewish neighborhoods outside of Jaffa began to be built, the Mizrahi founders of Tel-Aviv. David Moyal in any case, depicted by Krishak as a "quick wit and cunning lawyer" takes over an area in dispute where there is no clear ownership. Krishak reserves much more disdain to Shlomo Green describing him as a "marchant" and "khaper" that was "only interested in

the value of his investment" (23). Khapers dealt with "Khap lands," which were lands not registered in the Tabu (Khap is in Yiddish to steal, to grab). The land dealers technique is depicted as follows:

> "The dealers would buy each time small plots, between fifty to hundred dunams. Very often the sellers or buyers of plots tried to increase their territory with a Dunam or two more on their neighbors expanse. The land was divided to half a dunam-dunam plots, and these were sold through intermediaries to Jews abroad [...]. No property increased its value as much as urban land (26)."

Shlomo green establishes the Green neighborhood which is home to a few very poor day-labourers. It is somewhat of an exaggeration to call a few labourer's shacks and a well "neighborhood" but Green is mythologized as the first neighborhood of Holon. This is despite the fact that Moyal is also there in the same period, calling labourers from Tel Aviv to come and settle on his land. Not only few labourers heed his call - an entire community lands there. The encampment there is given the name "moledet" (homeland). By 1934 it is populated by one hundred Yemenite families, among them the families of Zubari, Nagar, Moshe and Zcharia.

Moledet was described by contemporaries as a "fiasco." Even though this was a lively, tightly knit religious community that had managed to preserve its cultural distinctiveness, it was struggling to survive in isolation further east, about two kilometers from the village Yazour:

> "Sand was everywhere: piles of sand on top of the shacks, inside them (coming through the windows), in the pots, on the beds, in the closets, in the food, in the access roads that would time and again disappear underneath sands, everywhere... There were heartbreaking scenes of people that sand simply took

over their house. They were hopeless in fighting it. Things came to a breaking point when the big floods started (42)"

In 1934 two "Russian Industrialists" establish the neighborhood Agrobank which was built to house laborers of the textile factory, Lodgia (named after the city in Poland where the six founding families of the business came from - Łódź). This is a private investment, and moving the factory from its Nahmani street location in Tel Aviv was stimulated and subsidized by the histadrut. We know from research published last year by Arye Krampf, that this period saw a major transition from the Zionist agrarian paradigm of development to another paradigm of development, rapid development through private property. The Histadrut sector of the Yeshuv gains privileges in terms of control and access to financial resources and in return it aids private entrepreneurs in line with the new paradigms: market economy. The neighborhood built by the industrialists is modern. The sand is flattened, roads are paved, and lighting, electricity and water infrastructure is erected, but hardly anyone can afford to reside there, while the other labourer's shack encampments barely survive.

This chapter of early settlement in Holon reveals that throughout the first decade of its existence, it was not at all clear what would be the future of this settlement or more accurately, this private mostly real estate investment, up to the point in which on behalf of her majesty Queen Elizabeth, the British governor Sir Robert Edward Harold Crosbie united the five first neighborhoods in 1940. These were autarchic, isolated, and disconnected from each other small encampments housing very different types of labourers populations. It was only as late as 1940 that Holon started to shape into a more permanent presence. Until then, we are speaking of a very tentative settlement, in part fictive, like the ghost neighborhood Agrobank, or under conditions of utter destitution like Moledet. During the 1936 Arab revolt all the neighborhoods are evacuated to Mikve Israel, the nearby historic agricultural school. Only Holon's Yemenite quarter does not survive this abandonment. The area of Moledet is to date

desolate and abandoned. One of Mikve's residents who was a child then, recollected that she could not figure out what the "refugees" were fleeing exactly, and where they are from:

> "I remember approaching one of them, an old Yemenite who looked sad and tired, and I asked him, where are you from? and he just waved his head in utter sadness and didn't reply. Someone replied: "from the Sand" and it felt as if they, everyone, must feel like they have no place to return to" (38).

The story of Moledet, Holon's historical Yemenite quarter, is of course connected to a particular history of Yemenite settlement in Palestine very early on. The Yemenites have a really exceptional place in the history of Zionism. This is depicted by a great and beloved old professor of mine, Yehuda Nini, who wrote about the failed attempt of a Yemenite community to settle in Degania on the Kineret. From his story of dispossession and displacement of the Yemenite community in Kineret as well as from the story of Holon's forgotten first neighborhood many questions arise about Mizrahi heritage as part of the Zionist project of settlement and colonization of land. To start with Moledet underlines that the history of Mizrahim does not start from "the zero hour" of the Ma'abarot. Mizrahi identity furthermore is rooted in an experience of dispossession, uprooting, and failure to become an integral part of the Jewish settlement landscape that has a very long genealogy. This spatial dislocation is a continuous trauma taking into consideration today's ongoing displacements through the gentrifying operations of "pinui-binui" (so-called "evacuate-build" operations) and the violent expulsions from public housing today. So the questions that I would like to pose in the wake of Moledet are, under what circumstances were communities of Yemenites displaced overall, and where did they manage to take root as distinct communities? what happened to the families of Moledet after the evacuation and was the Zionist establishment part in determining their faith? What is the meaning of this genealogy

today, whether the community was dissolved or stayed united in territories or Yemenite quarters, for its second and third generations?

As for the question of "responsibility" for the dispossession of Palestinians, and here I'm getting closer to the central nerve, the story of Moledet obviously testifies to power relations between a settling apparatus -- land speculators, capitalists, the Zionist agencies -- and the labourers. And if we insist on understanding this as a settler colonial project, how are we to understand than the non-Zionist interest in development and expansion of for instance the Mograbi community from which the lawyer-land-speculant David Moyal emerged? His story is important because at that point in time, as is beautifully depicted by historian Hillel Cohen, despite growing tensions, Arab Jews are still organically mixed with the local population. Up until the events of 1929 according to him, arab Jews are not forced to take side in a conflict that was not theirs in the first place, the conflict generated by Zionism. And another conundrum is the difficult question whether there should be a distinction, and whether this distinction is at all meaningful, between migrant labourers who were not settled but moved around as cheap work force and other types of settlers if eventually both are gradually Judaizing Palestine all the way leading to the "result" -- the catastrophe of al-Nakbah, or the miracle of the state of Israel? These are just some of the questions for which I would like to suspend our ready made answers. It seems in any case useful to recall what did eventually distinguish the communities of Arab Jews from "the Jewish Collective" of the period, and the facts speak for themselves: 1. They were struggling to preserve community life which was traditional and religious by moving around together in search for labour. 2. They were not absorbed as an integral part into the agricultural settlement of the Yeshuv and Holon's example suggest that it may have also been the case for the urban project of Zionism. 3. If they did manage to survive as distinct community, it was without the backing of the colonizing infrastructure of the Zionist project.

2. The 1948 War: Mizrahi responsibility for al-Nakbah?

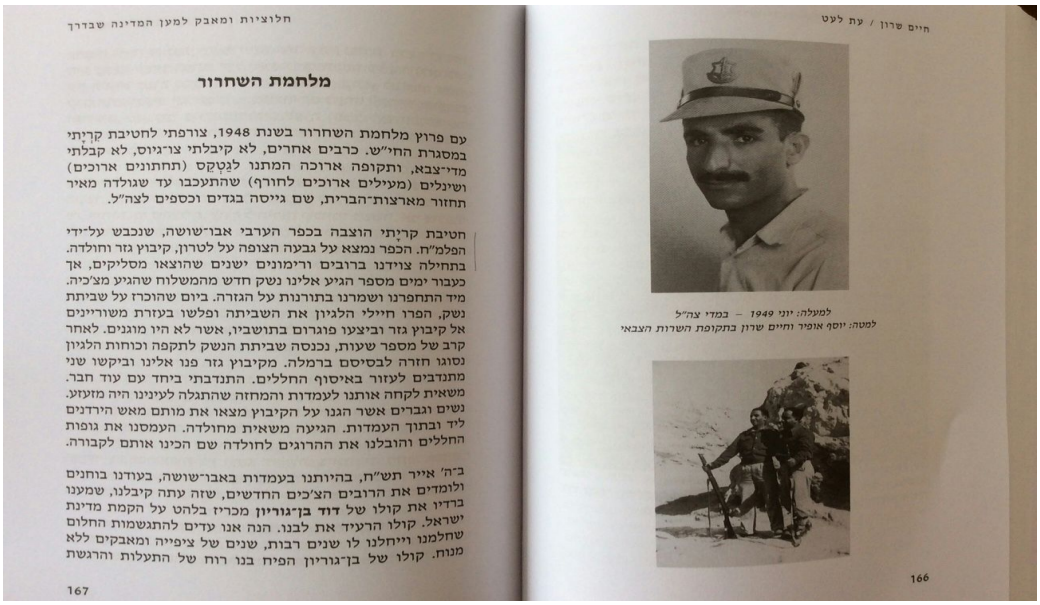
The memoir of Haim Sharon, a former mayor of Holon invites us to reflect on the pre-state role of Mizrahim in military operations and in the war of 1948. Sharon, whose original name Sha'rabi is only mentioned in passing, was born in 1925 in Tsan'a, Yemen and came with his family to Palestine in 1934. He was one of the first residents of Holon and lived there since 1937. He became a youth leader in the youth movement "Hanoar Haoved ve-halomed" and later on joined the Hagana and the Arab department of the Palmach. After the establishment of the state he served for 17 years in the Israeli secret service and after his retirement from the secret service he became a lawyer. In 1987 he was elected the mayor of Holon and was a known public figure in the city until his passing in 2011.

Sharon's account is a typical Zionist story almost without any glitches. I believe that although he was a proud Yemenite in his later days, it is highly unlikely that Sharon ever considered himself a Mizrahi the way we use this term now. But his activities in Ha'hagana and the Palmach Arab department were a typical career path reserved for hand picked Mizrahim in the military as we know from the works of Gil Eyal on "Arabs expertise," the so-called "Mizrahanut" in the service of security forces. It is interesting that this is a legacy of particular ethnic groups among Arab Jews, from Iraq and neighboring countries Syria and Lebanon, for instance. In any case, it is interesting to read his autobiography against the grain and beyond the heavy curtain of Zionist ideology.

Being hand-picked to serve in the Palmach arab department was a source of enormous pride to Sharon:

"'I am too a Palmachnik"! I thought to myself with pride' [...]

I understood [from my recruiter] that he had an order to recruit me to the Arab department. He recommended that I join it since as a member of the Hagana, son of the Arabic speaking Edot Hamizrach, I was found deserving to serve in this department... and he added that this department engages in undercover actions but didn't specify what kind. I understood that the department prepares itself for intelligence gathering within the Arab population in the country and in Arab countries. Without asking my parents permission, I immediately agreed... Today I sometimes wonder how was it possible that I took such critical decisions without thinking twice, and interestingly I have never regretted it." (148)



חלוציות ומאבק למען המדינה שבדרך

מלחמת השחרור

עם פרוץ מלחמת השחרור בשנת 1948, צורפתי לחטיבת קרְיָתי במסגרת החי"ש. כרבים אחרים, לא קיבלתי צו־גיוס, לא קבלתי מדי־צבא, ותקופה ארוכה המתנו לגֶטֶקס (תחתונים ארוכים) ושינלים (מעילים ארוכים לחורף) שהתעכבו עד שגולדה מאיר תחזור מארצות־הברית, שם גייסה בגדים וכספים לצה"ל.

חטיבת קרְיָתי הוצבה בכפר הערבי אבו־שושה, שנכבש על־ידי הפלמ"ח. הכפר נמצא על גבעה הצופה על לטרון, קיבוץ גזר וחולדה. בתחילה צוידנו ברובים ורימונים ישנים שהוצאו מסליקים, אך כעבור ימים מספר הגיע אלינו נשק חדש מהמשלוח שהגיע מצ'כיה. מיד התחפרנו ושמרנו בתורנות על הגזרה. ביום שהוכרז על שביתת נשק, הפרו חיילי הלגיון את השביתה ופלשו בעזרת משוריינים אל קיבוץ גזר וביצעו פוגרום בתושביו, אשר לא היו מוגנים. לאחר קרב של מספר שעות, נכנסה שביתת הנשק לתקפה וכוחות הלגיון נסוגו חזרה לבסיסם ברמלה. מקיבוץ גזר פנו אלינו וביקשו שני מתנדבים לעזור באיסוף החללים. התנדבתי ביחד עם עוד חבר. משאית לקחה אותנו לעמדות והמחזה שהתגלה לעינינו היה מזעזע. נשים וגברים אשר הגנו על הקיבוץ מצאו את מותם מאש הירדנים ליד ובתוך העמדות. הגיעה משאית מחולדה. העמסנו את גופות החללים והובלנו את ההרוגים לחולדה שם הכינו אותם לקבורה.

ב־ה' אייר תש"ח, בהיותנו בעמדות באבו־שושה, בעודנו בוחנים ולומדים את הרובים הצ'כים החדשים, שזה עתה קיבלנו, שמענו ברדיו את קולו של **דוד בן־גוריון** מכריז בלהט על הקמת מדינת ישראל. קולו הרעיד את לבנו. הנה אנו עדים להתגשמות החלום שחלמנו וייחלנו לו שנים רבות, שנים של ציפייה ומאבקים ללא מנוח. קולו של בן־גוריון הפיח בנו רוח של התעלות והרגשת

167

חיים שרון / עת לעט

למעלה: יוני 1949 – במדי צה"ל
למטה: יוסף אופיר וחיים שרון בתקופת השרות הצבאי

166

Sharon joins those who are "selected to be seen as Arab with only light camouflage," the majority of which were as said Syrians and Iraqis who receive intensive training in local arabic. During Arabic lessons, his Yemenite dialect proves not to be particularly useful. This is of course one of the historical ironies of the arab-Jew who's arabness is

simultaneously threatening and useful, both authentic and not authentic enough. It is arabness that needs adaptation to a different arab space and this adaptation takes its course under the predominantly Ashkenazi Zionist pre-state militias.

Sharon says further virtually nothing about covert operation within the Palestinian population or in neighboring countries and maintains decades after strict censorship about it. This is probably the Mizrahi heritage of al-Nakbah that we will never know much about since Sharon and probably many other man of his generation left no record of it in their memoirs. Sharon tells us nevertheless about other clandestine operations, for instance, that the Arab department participated in operations to smuggle Jews from Lebanon and Syria during 1944-1946. This activity is depicted under the section heading "Haluziut and the struggle towards the state in the making." Sharon's work smuggling illegal immigrants to Kibbutzim has brought him into contact with Kibbutz life. However, the department is located not inside the Kibbutz premises but at a safe distance from it, and its members are not allowed to come into contact with members of the Kibbutz. He recalls a particular incident:

> "In the Kibbutzim [...] we were isolated and stayed on the edge of the settlement to minimize contact with Kibbutz members, and if we did come across them, we were not allowed to speak to them at all about our activities [...]. Because of the field condition we were in, it was decided that we'll shave our hair. So, already in the first night [in Kibbutz Yagur], we showed up to the dining hall head shaved. Our entrance was so dramatic, a bunch of hairless darkies sitting and dining in good company. The members of the Kibbutz were in shock and the next day we were the talk of the Kibbutz, and if we were not Palmachnikim, we would be 'thrown out the next day to the place where we came from' [p...].

This is a rare moment in the autobiography where there is "glitch," a rare awareness of being a "darky," so not just any palmachnic. I would not have made much of this if it

wasn't for the strange quotation marks that frame the sentence starting with "thrown out." I interpret it as Shraon's inability to say it himself, or as an attempt at distancing himself from what has been said or could have been said about him and members of the department. Piping behind the heavy ideological curtain we encounter here the otherness of the Mizrahi and its famous paternalistic rejection. It is not clear at all where is "the place where we came from" to which they are supposed to be "thrown out."

Another telling gap is the fact that Sharon says practically nothing about the refugees he helped smuggle from Lebanon and Syria, while he does recall the encounters with holocaust survivors and refugees coming from Europe:

> "They were wearing what they used to wear in those places, and usually several layers of clothes at a time. Women were wearing high heels, and they held all sorts of documents, money and precious things, all kinds of things that could have incriminated them [if caught by the British], so we were forced to ask them to give away all these things [...] and that led to all kinds of resistances and unpleasant situations (156)."

We can speculate that the unpleasantness in the encounter with the refugees from Europe is generated not only from the concrete situation of clandestine smuggling but from an encounter with a European other that leaves a significant trace in the autobiographical memory. This encounter is memorable enough to include in the life story while the encounter with the Syrians and Lebanese is not.

In 1947 Sharon returns to Holon, this time as a "Noter." The notrim were an official Jewish police force that was formed and armed by the British, but effectively functioned under the command of the Hagana. Sharon participated in that capacity in the defence of Holon. In the city chronicles the situation of Holon as early as 1947 is depicted as particularly dire because it was surrounded by hostile Palestinian villages and exposed

to snipers fire. Jewish convoys were subject to attacks on the critical traffic arteries to and from the city. Sharon participates in the famous battle on the Pillbox hill of the Palestinian village of Tel El-Arish, and he recalls:

> "overnight, the Arabs erected a pillbox on the hill. One morning we discovered it and were astonished by the secrecy and speed by which it was erected. From the pillbox there was shooting to every corner of Holon, especially to all traffic going in and out of it [...] the hagana commanders decided that we must eliminate it immediately [...] our role was to carry explosive materials to where the operation is to take place, and in the dark we infiltrated the area towards the houses. The arabs noticed us and started shooting at us, but we managed to arrive at the destination. We bombed two houses and and damaged them heavily." [p.]

This battle on this hill has been mythologized in the memory of Holon's townspeople as "against all odds" triumph that saved the city. Twenty one young lives were lost in this battle which is why it was renamed "Tel Giborim" (hero's hill). The Pillbox is today a large and beautifully maintained commemoration site and city park. It is important to underline that Holon was isolated and was under attack, this was not a myth or a lie. But as Hillel Cohen aptly pointed out in both Israeli and Palestinian minds all acts of violence and aggression are always defensive in nature. We know, in any case, that the operation in Tel A-Rish was part of a larger offensive planned by the Hagana, that went by the name Plan D (Mivtza Hametz). The operation began on April 28, 1948 and all Palestinian villages in the area were attacked simultaneously. Operation commands included the mission to "cleanse" the area [Tihur Shetach]. Jaffa was still under British control and part of the territories designated to be part of the Arab state. The Hagana strategy was not to attack Jaffa directly but to gradually put a siege on it in a swiping pincer movement disconnecting it first from its satellites. Jaffa falls on April 30 and Sharon describes his part in the occupation laconically:

> "I participated in the occupation of Jaffa, which was in fact an occupation without combat, since when we arrived we found empty houses. The Arabs of Jaffa ran away mostly via the sea and some through the main road heading south towards Gaza" (164).

In city chronicles and memoirs the epoch of the war is as said one of heroic overcoming and defense and not a single reference can be found there to what brought about the disappearance of the massive Palestinian population of the area. In the chronicles the "arabs" are always "hostile arabs." The Palestinian villages are frequently depicted as "snakes dens," especially Yazour which was hated for the attack on the convoy of Notrim in 1947 when seven were killed and their bodies mutilated. Even though Sharon's autobiography is relatively to other memoirs of Holon veterans clean from expressions of hatred and hostility to "arabs," there is no mention or reflection on what had happened to the Palestinian villages during the war, and needless to say, no expressions of responsibility or regret about their departure.

The lion share of Sharon's autobiography is devoted to establishing his record as taking part in key Zionist pre-state major operations including the 1948 war. Although Sharon was an establishment man, it is interesting to point out that later in life after he retired from the secret service, were mostly spent as a prosperous private lawyer, and he was propelled to public life quite coincidentally later on in 1987. What enfolded was unfortunately tragic. Sharon was ousted after two years in office, and his resignation from political life was a humiliation from which he probably never recovered to judge from later chapters in his autobiography. This gives extra weight to the reading of his autobiography as "Mizrahi." Holon had its very own Teddy Kollek and Aba Houshi, its mythological mayor Pinchas Ayalon that ruled the city for 34 years. Dr. Kugel before him led it from the day of its founding until his sudden death in 1953. So Sharon's brief mayorship following the footsteps of Pinchas Ayalon must be seen as entirely determined by the towering shadow of his predecessors, the greater than life figures of

the historic ruling party Mapay. We can draw an interesting analogy here to the "fiasco" and brief life of the neighborhood of Moledet, both the neighborhood and Sharon had hardly left a mark in the city's collective memory.

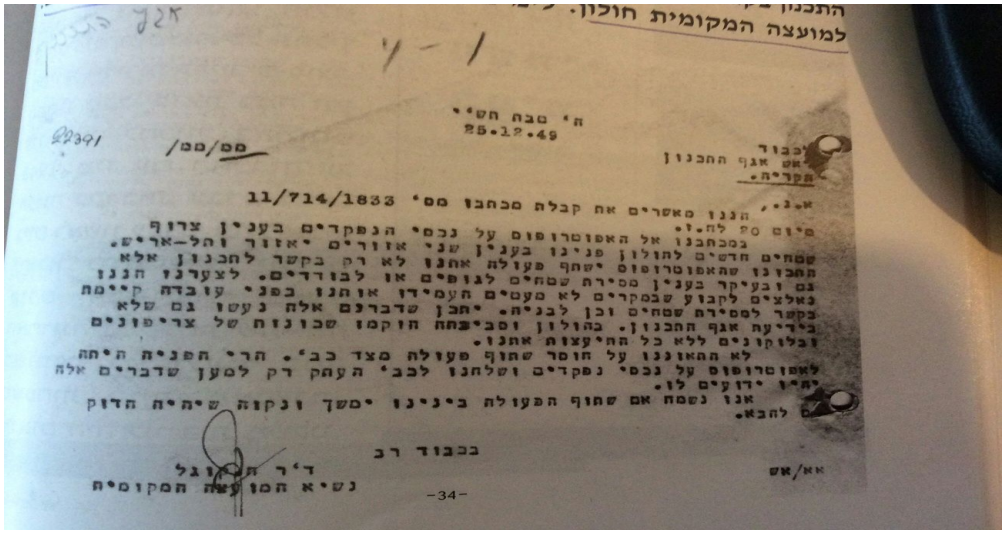
That being said, I am painfully aware that reading the autobiography as "Mizrahi" undermines the story that the person himself tells us about his private life, and he is no longer with us to protest this. The point here is not the life story itself. It is definitely not my intention to posthumously charge Sharon with "responsibility" as if he was a representative of all Mizrahim or worse, the entire "Jewish collective." The purpose of re-reading the story behind its heavy ideological curtain is to articulate a deep current genealogy that is relevant today and will continue to be relevant to the future society of Israel/Palestine. By deep current genealogy I mean first and foremost the practice of "mista-arvut," of Jews as Arabs "in light camouflage" from current day through the first Duvdevan units in the 1980s through the Arab department Palmachnik in the pre-state period. We have to ask, what impact does the role designated to Mizrahim in mechanism of social penetration aimed to destroy a society from within has not only on Palestinian society but also on the Mizrahi mind. The impact and multi-generational damage here can only be compared to the phenomenon, much more massive than we would like to admit, of Palestinian collaboration with Israeli security forces. Maybe this comparison is not in its place but it seems to me that such intimate and tortuous crossing over, and not just the horrors of 1948 and ethnic cleansing are some of the most explosive minefields of memory that will be hardest to dismantle in the society of the future in Israel/Palestine.

Another generalization that can be drawn here is, very simply put, the built-in flaw in the Zionism of Mizrahim as is reflected in this life story. It is fascinating to see how even when the record is ultra-Zionist, there is a conscientious effort to represent it as such, which means that the Mizrahi Zionist subject never really achieves the status of being self-evident even to himself. This is not to say that Mizrahim are not Zionists but merely

to point out this persistent failure. It is in this light, and I'm not going to be able to say much about it here further, that we need to understand the third generation Mizrahi move away from the pursuit of belonging to the "Jewish collective" and their wish to see Israeli identity shaped in their own image. Their struggle to redefine it on their terms is another more recent expression of the failure of self-evident Zionism.

3. the epoch of the Ma'abarot: Mizrahi sharing in the loot?

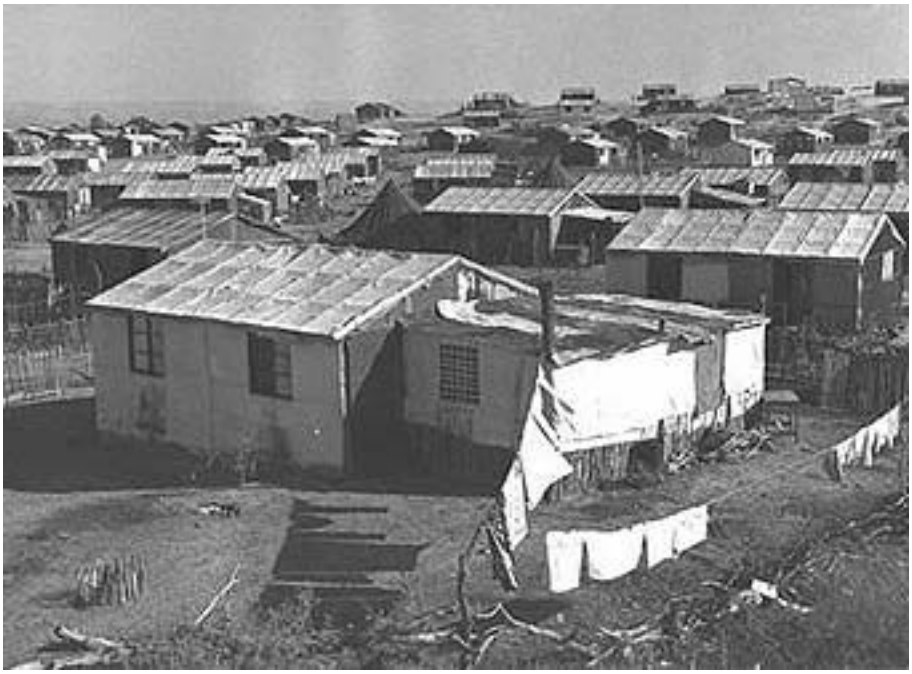
At the day of Holon's founding of its first city council in a meeting held on July 8 1940 in the mythological cafe Savoy at the heart of the city, the city was spread over 16,000 donams. The transfer of Palestinian territories to Holon is documented in one of the city chronicles (Schwartz-Danon) in a letter sent by Dr. Kugal to the department of planning. On December 25, 1949 Dr. Kugel writes:



"In our letter to the apotropous for absentees-properties with regard to annexation of new territories to Holon we raised the issue of two areas Yazour and Tel-Arish. We were hoping that the apotropous for absentees-property will cooperate with us not only about planning but also and principally about the

> transfer of territories to bodies or individuals. Unfortunately we are forced to determine that in a number of cases we were faced with facts on the ground about properties given to people or for construction. This may have not happened with the full knowledge of the department of planning. In Holon and its area shack neighborhoods and "blokonim" were erected without any consultation with us" (34).

From the letter we can conclude that before the city municipality had the chance to decide the destination of the territories, already land was handed out to private hands, and someone, it is not clear who, "gave" absentee properties to construction companies without city authorization. I have no further information about it and this grab is certainly interesting to continue to investigate. In any case, the city took charge pretty soon after and three huge ma'abarot were erected, at least two in the annexed areas of Yazour and Tel-Arish. Between December 1950 to 1952 the population of ma'abarat Holon grew from 1400 to 7000 and it became one if not the biggest ma'abara in the country. Within a few years Holon grew to become the 16th in size city in Israel.



According to the researcher Prof. Dalia Gavrieli Nouri who is also an expert on Holon, the conditions in ma'abarat Holon were tough and some of the testimonies that she has collected on Ma'abara life are heartbreaking. They appear in her op-ed published most recently in Ha'aretz in November 2015. Indeed in the chronicles the problem of lack of infrastructure for water, sewage and electricity are mentioned. However, in people's recollections the ma'abara at the same time seemed to have acquired a good reputation among its residents. It had social work services, a post-office, bank and municipal services, including services for children. Holon's educational institutions absorbed all the children of the ma'abara. Veterans of the city, professionals, doctors, nurses and others tell stories about volunteering on a daily basis to assist the new residents. Holon that already had infrastructure for industry encouraged small businesses and factories so finding work in the vicinity was possible. And needless to say, its location nearby Tel Aviv in particular drew new immigrants to it. Yosef Cohen recounts:

> "my family was among the first families to settle in ma'abarat Holon. Because it was close to Tel Aviv many of the olim aspired to get to ma'abarat Holon and not to any other ma'abara. The privilege to get there was difficult to obtain. Fortunately, I could thanks to my Zionist activities in Iraq" (35).

Another resident, Yosef Yavin, tells about the circumstances of his family's migration from Iraq soon after the events of the Farhood, the pogroms against the Jews in 1941. The family split and some of his brothers arrived in Palestine and only reunited a decade later when he and his parents arrived in 1950. The refugees from Iraq land in Sha'ar Aliya absorption camp and there:

> "We were notified that we will be sent to Kiryat Shmona to Halasa ma'abara. I consulted friends about the ma'abara in Kyriat Shmona and they told me immediately: "don't dare [going there] try to get to ma'abarat Holon.' I came to

> the station chief and told him: 'we are not going.' He started shouting and threatening, and then I remembered the little note I got. I went to the Histadrut workers council and looked for the man whose name was in my note. He gave a note to the station chief and from note to note we were sent to Holon" (36).

It was apparently necessary to deploy all kinds of pressures to even get to the tents of a desirable ma'abara as Holon was! The researcher Gavrieli-Nuri called in her op-ed for understanding the heritage of the ma'abarot and for a revival of the collective memory of the period as part of the mainstream education of Israelis about a history of extreme poverty and dispossession. She rightly points out that we know very little about the ma'abarot and that there is very little physical evidence that they have ever existed. She describes her difficulties of documenting its traces, finding some on the premises of the agricultural farm. She recalls: "I know the city well, I grew up in it, and despite that, only after a long search I thought i found one tin shack from those days. It was a gobbled together rusty structure, held together with crooked nails that barely managed to survive in the passing of time." Indeed the destruction of the ma'abarot throughout the 1950s and 1960s had left no archaeological layer. Yet, Rami Aharoni the city historian did mention to me in an interview the existence of a Swedish wooden cabin that once belonged to the ma'abara. Together with Archeologist Gideon Sulimani, my buddy in the Zochrot group, we went to see it and documented this beautiful cabin in Neve Arazim neighborhood.

This is where 102 year old Nagwa Shalev (Shalo originally), a mother of nine, born in Iraq in 1912, still lives (!). We could not talk to her but got lucky and talked to her son who told us that the family arrived in Holon in 1952 after passing through many stations, including Sha'ar Aliya, Pardes Hannah, Ramat Hachayal, and Jaffa. The spacious cabin is one of several in this area which is a typical mish-mash of free standing villas of the upper middle class. Some I presume are Mizrahim, who knows how many offsprings of ma'abara dwellers.

In addition to these material remains that do exist, there are hundrads of photos of the ma'abara in the city website and the Zionist archives. I suspect that this documentation exists because Holon was such a model ma'abara, so government agencies flocked to it to document the project. All this is fertile ground for researchers that want to head Gabrieli-Nuri's call to revive the ma'abarot heritage.

To go back to Krishak's chronicle,a great source for poignant observations infused with his unique Zionist pathos, he summarizes the epoch:

> "the maabara… this temporary station (that threatened to become "permanent landscape"), is where the young country experienced its main melting pot - the shaping of the nation. […] where the maabarot a low point leaving a stain? were there injustices done that are unforgivable? These are difficult questions that have no simple or straightforward answers. One thing is clear beyond doubt: a city where there was a maabara was in permanent danger of being dragged behind […]. Holon was open to absorb, assist, and increase its population - *without any differences of origin and class* (his emphasis), and on the other hand it was the preferred destination of a mass of immigrants that had the aspiration, from all over the world, to arrive to this place, to the city called Holon." (p.)

It is of course a travesty bordering on hilarity to proclaim that the aspirations of Jews from around the world and the arab world in particular was to arrive to a ma'abara in Holon in the 1950s. But Krishak's insistence that Holon early on recognized the potential of the maabara for its own strength and growth is striking. The city chronicles suggest that the municipality responded to the challenge of absorption with particular vigour and efficiency. By 1958 there was no ma'abara to speak of. The city put pressure through direct contacts with the higher echelons of the Mapai government. Golda Meir herself, then minister of labor, made deals with housing companies Rasko and Amidar, and new Shikunim (projects) were built fast, replacing one dunam after the other ma'abara territory with housing. Mordechai Namir, the next minister of labor after Golda declared that Holon is the first town to eliminate the ma'abara in its area. This organized elimination process was fully controlled by the city council who even took charge of placements of the ma'abara population and spread them across 6-7 areas in the city. This is Holon: a city of lower and middle classes, where there is in principle no clear geographical delineation between classes and ethnicities. It's an average town, the most average you can get, ranking 5 out of 10 in Israel's socio-economic scale with the

average of Holon salaried resident standing on 8011 Israeli shekels when the national average is 8015 shekels (in 2011). This is how average it is.

There is a general sentiment that was expressed in Gabrieli-Nuri's op-ed that the epoch of the ma'abarot is a "ground zero" as Shoshana Gabay says, and that this trauma contributed significantly to the gaps between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim and to inequality that persists to date. On the basis of this assumption, Gabrieli-Nuri argues that Israelis who lived for many years in ma'abarot deserve compensation not just as recognition for the trauma, but to catch up "and take part in the culture, the society, the economy, the silver tray enjoyed by all to which the state of Israel has given much better starting conditions."

This of course directly brings us to the central question of responsibility, a shared responsibility of "the Jewish collective" as a whole for the loot of the 1948 war. The story of Holon's ma'abara may be framed as a story about those who enjoyed the spoils of the war. Any Mizrahi claims for compensation on the basis of ma'abara miseries can be also framed as expressions of greed, as people not being satisfied with their share of what was just before their arrival taken from someone else. This is a very dangerous framing, let's call it "the sylver try" framing, because it makes Mizrahi grievances an insult to the Palestinian heritage of 1948. Instead, we should consider the following in response to this difficult charge. This framing glosses over what Yehuda Shenhav called "the perfect robbery" in his book on Arab Jews. Jewish refugees from the Arab world, he argued have lost not only property. Their entire world collapse, never to be returned, and with it the dignity and social status they once had. They were robbed twice, by their homeland and by Israel. A series of question then arise: were these refugees that arrived at Holon's ma'abara indeed lucky to be absorbed in territories occupied in 1948, or were they just refugees who upon arrival just had to live somewhere? Can they be "responsible" for the result of the war, if they arrived in Israel because of the historical conjuncture, as Moshe Behar shows, of interests shared by the Zionist movement and Arab nationalists, which

basically left them no other choice? Did ma'abara refugees ultimately "looted" what was not theirs to take or not? We know that in most cases, the main beneficiaries of the property and land Palestinians left behind were not the destitute refugees that the state in the 1950s aggressively spread all over and housed in towns and peripheral zones close to the borders. In Holon for instance, the main beneficiaries were companies that had built subsidized factories in the huge industrial zone that was built on the lands of Yazour after the decimation of the ma'abara. On the other hand, can we really ignore the fact that the annexation of the territories of Yazour and Al-Arish had given Holon a big push forward, the opportunity to absorb massive population, and to maximize its potential and development, an opportunity it may not have had and that Jewish residents of Holon still enjoy its fruits till today? No, we cannot really ignore that.

In conclusion of this last part of the paper I would like to reflect on this formative decade of the 1950s, and connect it again to the current impetus to revisit the ma'abarot epoch as part of a Mizrahi heritage and claim from the state. What are the possibilities that reviving a collective memory of the ma'abarot will open up and what openings will this revival foreclose or shun? It is pretty clear to me that any Mizrahi claim must express itself in terms of universal principles of distributive justice. Any other claim brings it in direct confrontation with Palestinian refugees and their descendents. My friend who ran the Democratic Mizrahi rainbow in the 1990s Galit Saporta tells that when they went to the High Court with a petition to demand the right of inheritance for third generation public housing residents, the Keshet asked the organization Addalah the Center for the Rights of the Palestinians in Israel to join this appeal. Addalah said no, we can't, these are absentee properties. The answer in the Israel/Palestine of our future society, however, must be a yes. Yes, we can claim this right not in the name of Mizrahi heritage or ma'abarot misery, that will be strictly "dividing the loot," but in the name of distributive justice to all the people of this country, including refugees and their descendents. Including, by the way, also the bedouins that was once here and disappeared along with Holon's magnificent sand dunes.

Conclusion

Already in our first group meeting my entire framework of assumptions approaching the nexus of Mizrahim/al-Nakbah was totally shaken by Omar Al-Ghubari from Zochrot. Omar, the only Palestinian in our study group, made clear that as far as he is concerned the only relevant goal of the group is to study "Mizrahi complicity" or "Mizrahi responsibility" for 1948. My first gut response was to protest his framing. My resistance was rooted in a strong belief in the erstwhile "innocence" of the two collectives that I had so far only perceived as victims of 1948. Palestinians first and foremost, of course, but Mizrahim too, the victims of a movement that had prompted their uprooting and resettling under conditions of permanent disadvantage. I had to understand what the hell is Omar talking about when he says "Mizrahi responsibility to al-Nakbah" and I hope that some of the materials I presented here and the questions that I raise are a humble beginning of addressing this.

In another session we met speakers who both wrote books about Wadi Salib in Haifa -- Yfat Weis and Eitan Cohen. Most of my fellow group members left this meeting unhappy about what they perceived as focusing too much on the Mizrahi-Ashkenazi agenda on the expense of 1948. I felt on the contrary that this mesmerizing session that centered on an argument about whether or not the Mizrhim should be considered just part of "the Jewish collective" of the time was very special since it brought us as close as we could get to what we wanted to investigate. Weis argued there, and my apologies for oversimplifying, that any attempt to connect '48 to the Mizrahi riots against the Zionist establishment in 1959 is disingenuous, that we have to maintain the analytical and historical distinction of 1948 and that the events of '59 should be understood squarely in the context of how the loot of the war was (unfairly) divided, since Mizrahim also enjoyed it as part of "the Jewish collective." This argument stayed with me for a long time and I kept pondering its serious implications. Is it really true that the Mizrahi

heritage is irrelevant to the Palestinian heritage? Is finding a common heritage indeed a manipulative or worse, “malicious” pursuit, the harsh expression that was used during the discussion? I hope that one thing is clear from the questions I raise in this paper and that is that the gordian knot of heritage of Palestinians and Mizrahim is impossible to untie. I believe that the heritage of Mizrahim will become even more important and visible in the coming period in the Israeli public domain and that it holds the key to eventually shape the future society of this country. The articulation of a will to memory, the passing through the battlegrounds of collective memory ought to be our joint effort. We must continue this exploration, continuing this search for our society of the future.

Biblography [In Hebrew]

משה בהר. ״פרשנות להיסטוריה הסוציו-פוליטית ה׳קדם ישראלית׳ וה׳פנים ישראלית׳ של יהודי ערב״, פוליטיקה, גליון 14, תשס״ה, עמ׳ 109-129.

שושנה גבאי, רשימות בהעוקץ: ״אנו הסנטימנטלים: המאבק המזרחי״ 16.1.2015 ו״שיר ידידות - ר׳ דוד בוזגלו: אני הוא זכרונכם״ 22.5.2015, ״הסדר שב על כנו. המזרחים שבו.״ 22.1.2013 ועוד...

דליה גבריאלי-נורי, ״לפצות את נפגעי המעברות,״ 29 בנובמבר 2015, http://www.haaretz.co.il/opinions/.premium-1.2787283

איתן כהן, המרוקאים - הנגטיב של האשכנזים, רסלינג, פטיש סדרת מקור לביקורת התרבות, 2002

איתן כהן, ואדי סאליב שלי, הוצאת ידיעות אחרונות וספרי חמד, 2009

הלל כהן, תרפ״ט - שנת האפס בסכסוך היהודי-ערבי, כתר, 2005

יפעת וייס, ואדי סאליב, הנוכח והנפקד, מכון ון ליר בירושלים והוצאת הקיבוץ המאוחד, 2007

אריה קרמפף, המקורות הלאומיים של כלכלת השוק, פיתוח כלכלי בתקופת עיצובו של הקפיטליזם הישראלי, י״ל מאגנס, האוניברסיטה העברית, 2015

אריה קרישק, נכתב בחול, סיפורה של חולון, רשפים 1986

מיכל שוורץ וסמדר ספקטור דנון, מכל וחול, התחלות בחולון - משנת 1929 עד שנות החמישים הראשונות, הוצאת עיריית חולון, הארכיון והמוזיאון לתולדות חולון, חולון 2005

מפראג לחולון, ד"ר חיים קוגל, מאה שנים להולדתו 1897-1997 בעריכת אשר שילוני, הוצאת עיריית חולון, 1997

ערך ויקיפדיה על חולון:

https://he.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D7%97%D7%95%D7%9C%D7%95%D7%9F

יהודה שנהב, היהודים הערבים: לאומיות, דת ואתניות. עם עובד, 2003.

חיים שרון, עת לעט, הוצאת עיריית חולון (שנה?)

ראיון עם חוקר חולון רמי אהרוני, 21 ביוני 2015

סיור בחולון עם גדעון סולימאני, 10 ביולי 2015