

## CHAPTER II

## KIBBUTZ EREZ

**Pacifism: Conscientious Objection to War**

The Palestinian intifada (since 1987) and almost a quarter of a century of international condemnation of the Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (since 1967) have made a great difference. Resistance to the draft in Israel today, namely rejection of military service in the post-1967 occupied territories, is no longer an individual expression of conscience. It represents a critical social movement at the margins of Israeli Jewish settler society of which *Yesh Gevul* (There Is a Border/Limit) is the best known organization in the West <sup>1</sup>.

In Israel, conscientious objection, pacifism, rejection of war as a crime against humanity remains an individual statement of conscience <sup>2</sup> as it was since the establishment of the state in 1948. But now it is no longer regarded as treasonable statement of conscience as it was earlier. In the mid-1950s when Amnon Zikhroni rejected the draft on the basis of conscientious objection, he had to declare and endure a hunger-strike for one month before the authorities would negotiate a settlement of his demand for exemption from military service <sup>3</sup>. When I took a position of conscientious objection to the draft in the early 1960s, I could negotiate a practical settlement without having to resort to measures to a prolonged hunger-strike to press my point. And I was not stigmatized as pseudo-psychiatrically 'permanently unfit for military service'. On the other hand, politically motivated resistance to the draft, as in the case of Giora Neumann who in 1972 resisted the draft on the grounds of objection to serve in the occupied territories, entailed prolonged terms of imprisonment <sup>4</sup>.

The progressive *de facto* acceptance in Israel of political draft resistance, and individual conscientious objection over four and a half decades since 1948 reflects the convergence of a number of developments. The establishment of the Israeli branch of the War Resisters' International drew support abroad for conscientious objectors and draft resisters. The cumulative effects of successful individual struggles, have made successive cases easier to fight <sup>5</sup>. There has been a progressive corruption of labour Zionist ideological fanaticism. And the truth about the establishment of the state of Israel and the expulsion of the Palestinian people from their homeland in 1948 has been publicized.

Israel emerged out from the 1948 war as a society and polity with a black hole of bad faith at its centre. The Palestinian Arab society was interwoven with the developing settler Jewish society throughout the years of the British Mandate administration (1922-1948). This remained the case despite persistent efforts by the Zionist settler institutions to institute segregation under the twin banners of 'Hebrew Labour' and the 'Conquest of Labour'. Everybody who was adult in 1948 knew why and how most of the Palestinian Arab population had disappeared. In the territories that came under Israeli sovereignty there had been some 900,000 old and young, men, women and children intermingled with the fabric of the Jewish society. They had been personal friends, neighbours and colleagues at work as well as enemies in all, or in almost all, walks of life. But most of them were no longer there when the cessation of hostilities was formalized by the 1949 armistice agreements between Israel and its four neighbouring Arab states. The Palestinian-Arab population of a dozen Arab and mixed Arab-Jewish cities as well as some 400 villages in the territories that came under Israeli rule and occupation after 1948 were gone. They had been forcibly expelled and terrorized by horrific repeated massacres and they had fled to protect their children and families. Allegation that they left on orders from their leaders is a lie (no such orders were issued, see footnote no 7 below).

On 29 November 1947 the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 181 by a two thirds majority recommending the partition of Palestine into two states. There was to be a Jewish State (approximately 57 per cent of the territory of British Mandate Palestine) and an Arab State (approximately 43 per cent), with economic union and Jerusalem as a *corpus separatum* under UN administration. The Resolution was careful to secure the legal status of both Arab and Jewish inhabitants in their prospective states. Resolution 181 included important constitutional stipulations, identical for both proposed states. They were to be bi-national states. All Arab inhabitants of the territories allocated to the Jewish state were to become Jewish state citizens and all Jewish inhabitants of the Arab state were to become Arab state citizens. In the territories allocated by the UN to the Jewish State there were in 1947 some 600,000 Jewish inhabitants and 600,000 Arab inhabitants. This demography was not acceptable to the Zionist leadership of the Jewish community in Palestine. Their struggle was to establish in Palestine a Jewish state with a guaranteed demographic Jewish majority - not a Jewish minority in an Arab state, nor a Jewish minority in a constitutionally binational (Arab or Jewish) state.

'Among ourselves', wrote Joseph Weitz, key architect of the

Zionist colonization in Palestine, in 1940, [It] must be clear that there is no place in the country for both peoples together ... With the Arabs we shall not achieve our aim of being an independent people in this small country. The only solution is Eretz Israel [the Land of Israel], at least the west part of Eretz Israel, without Arabs ... And there is no other way but to transfer the Arabs from here to the neighbouring countries, transfer all of them, not one village, or tribe should be left, and the transfer must aim at Iraq, Syria and even Transjordan ... (Joseph Weitz, 'A Solution to the Refugee Problem: the State of Israel With a Small Arab Minority', *Davar*, 29.9.1967, quoted in Davis & Mezvinsky, Documents from Israel: 1967-1973, Ithaca Press, London, 1975)

The establishment of the State of Israel was declared on the day the British Mandate ended in Palestine, 15 May 1948, despite Arab and Palestinian opposition. The Palestinian people and the League of Arab States failed to see the justice of UN General Assembly resolution 181 allocating sovereignty over more than half the territory of Palestine to a third of its Jewish population under Zionist leadership.

Under the leadership of David Ben Gurion and the coalition of labour Zionist parties the Israeli army used the 1948 war hostilities as a cover to implement the integrated strategic Plan *Dalet*. This was a national calamity for the Palestinian people, resulting in the radical changes in the demography of the territories under Israeli control and bringing the composition of their population closer to Zionist values. What happened to the Palestinian people in 1948 was a crime against humanity. An entire people were expelled from their homeland. They were terrorized by massacres such as Deir Yasin and *Duwayma* or were forcibly removed as in Bisan. Others fled, fearing for the lives of their children as in Safad.

... We did not always successfully face the test of Jewish ethics, of which we were proud: the purity of arms. Recently I ran across a letter dated 8.11.1948 which reads as follows:

I wish to submit to you an eye-witness report given to me by a soldier who was in *Duwayma* on the day following its occupation ... The man is one of us [member of the United Workers' Party - *Mapam*] ... He opened his heart to me because



there are not many hearts these days that are willing to listen. He arrived in Duwayma immediately after its occupation. The conquering army was Battalion 89 ... They killed some 80-100 Arabs, women and children. The children were killed by smashing their skulls with clubs. There was not a single house without dead. The second wave of the army consisted of the Battalion of the soldier who gave this eyewitness report ...

In the village there remained Arab men and women who were put in the houses without food or drink. Then the sappers came to blow up the houses. One officer ordered a sapper to put two old women into the house he was about to blow up. The sapper refused and said that he would obey only such orders as were handed down to him by his immediate commander. So the officer ordered his own soldiers to put the old women in, and the atrocity was carried out. Another soldier boasted that he had raped an Arab woman and then shot her. Another Arab woman with a day-old baby was employed in cleaning jobs in the yard ... She worked for one or two days in the service, and then she was shot, together with her baby ... Cultured and well-mannered commanders who are considered good fellows ... have turned into low murderers, and this happened not in the storm of the battle and blind passion, but because of a system of expulsion and annihilation. The fewer Arabs remain, the better ... (Eyal Kafafi, 'A Ghetto Attitude in the Jewish State', *Davar*, 6 September 1979, quoted in Uri Davis, *Israel: An Apartheid State*, Zed Books, London, 1987, pp 7-8) \*.

The Israeli political and military leadership knew of the overall and pervasive scale of the crime. Military units knew of the crimes committed in their area of operations. Civilians learned of the crime through the narrative of friends and relatives and through the appropriation of the spoils of the crime. Kibbutzim appropriated the farming lands of their neighbouring Arab villages. Private citrus plantation owners took over the orange groves of their former Arab partners. Jewish shop owners appropriated the shops of neighbouring Arab shopkeepers. New Jewish immigrants and veteran residents occupied Arab homes and flats and seized furniture. Most of the appropriation was done officially through the Custodian for Absentees Property and distributed among various institutions of Zionist settlement: the Jewish Agency, the Jewish National Fund and the

*Histadrut*. A lot was taken by kibbutz settlements, individual farmers and city dwellers and sanctioned legally after the event.

Everybody, or almost everybody, knew. And almost everybody joined a covenant of silence, which became the institutional advocacy of the Platonic 'Big Lie'. This lie was closely associated with the oratory of Abba Eben as Israel's Representative at the UN and subsequently Foreign Minister. He insisted that the Palestinian people were not criminally expelled by the Israeli army from their homeland and alleged that they departed at the behest of their leaders<sup>1</sup>.

At the most basic moral level pacifism has a legitimate argument. If war is a crime against humanity, is it not the case that every individual is morally obliged not to support any kind of war and to strive for the removal of all causes of war? But in Israel less than two decades after the 1948 war during which approximately 1 per cent (6,000) of the Jewish population (650,000) were casualties, pacifism was regarded not just as heresy but as outright treason. If all Jewish citizens of new Israel became pacifists who would defend the state against the Palestinians and neighbouring Arabs countries? A pacifist in Israel was either an unprincipled moral coward or an ideological traitor. An unprincipled moral coward because he or she, in the view of the detractors, could afford the 'luxury' of pacifist convictions only because others were guarding and defending the borders and ensuring his or her safety against the Arab enemy. Moreover, so the misguided argument goes, any pacifist who was a morally principled person, would be unable to ignore the self-evident truth of the case against pacifism in Israel. Thus, the only remaining explanation is ideological treason. Needless to say that in terms of this argument, any suggestion that pacifism may be a legitimate point of view in a democratic society was dismissed without a second thought.

I knew that I was not unprincipled. I had arrived at a position of conscientious objection to war, precisely because I followed the line of principle consistently. I knew that I was not a moral coward. I had stuck to my principles against considerable opposition at home, against ridicule and occasional verbal abuse at school, and against the real threat of long-term imprisonment in military jail. I also knew I was not an ideological traitor. I was not opposed to the existence of the state of Israel, neither was I opposed to the continued existence of the state of Israel as a Jewish state. For my generation of Israeli Jews, the first generation to begin their education in Israeli elementary schools, history began with the establishment of the State of Israel. It was a direct extension of the sovereign

kingdoms of Judeah and Israel 2000 years before. Almost 2000 years of Jewish diaspora history, as well as 2000 years of Palestinian Christian history, and nearly 1500 years of Palestinian Muslim history were portrayed in our official and unofficial education in terms of the 'present-absentee'. They were there and then they were not there. They had no viable existence in their own right. They existed only as vehicles for the historically inevitable establishment of the modern State of Israel as the state of the Jews. The existence of Jewish diaspora communities made sense in Zionist historiography only as human resources for the future Jewish state. The indigenous Palestinian people were viewed only as 'temporary' custodians of the land until such time as the 'true' owners arrived to resume possession.

I was in no way intellectually or otherwise equipped to question or challenge all this. But since the Zionist ethos presented in this way was so patently positive, there remained the question of why the Arabs had become the enemy of this laudable and manifestly good thing, the state of Israel, the 'only democracy in the Middle East'.

I found it impossible to accept the standard Zionist answer that the Arabs, like all gentiles, were inherently anti-Semitic and sought to destroy anything Jewish, especially everything that was good and Jewish. This was contrary to the basic and fundamental values inculcated into my moral awareness by both my parents that all human beings are human beings. There are good and bad Arabs, 'just as' there are good and bad Jews, good and bad Germans and good and bad people in every society.

So if the Arabs were just as bad and good as the Jews - why were they so opposed to the Jewish state?

And it was at that point that I was compelled to read up on the early history of the state of Israel and pick up the critical leads closest to me which were bequeathed to me by my father. These were the writings of the *Berit Shalom* dissenting group and the work of Mahatma Gandhi. This was reinforced by the coincidence of having as a family neighbour in Herzliyah-Pituah former pacifist Aubrey Hodes, a Zionist disciple of Martin Buber and contributing editor to *New outlook* at the time. He first introduced me to the philosophical writings of Martin Buber. His home with Rhoda and their children was my first intellectual station. I was not totally isolated<sup>4</sup>.



Before the reform of Israeli education in the late 1960s which introduced the intermediary division for 12 to 15-year-olds into the state school system, Israel followed the standard European classification of elementary (seven to 14 years) secondary (14 to 18 years) and tertiary (higher education at universities and other institutions). I was a precocious pupil and moved from the sixth form at Brandeis elementary school straight to the final eighth form. Our neighbour was Shulamit Aloni, then a teacher and subsequently a lawyer, Knesset Member, leader of the Movement for Civil Rights and Peace (Ratz), and cabinet minister. She coached me during the summer of that year to facilitate my entry from sixth to eighth form. Having skipped one year at elementary school, I entered secondary school Tikhon Ironi A (Municipal Secondary School A) in Tel Aviv one year younger than the rest of my class.

The move to the secondary school in Tel Aviv separated me from my sixth form school love, Rachel Kutner, who lived in the neighbouring settlement of Nof Yam. We continued seeing each other while I did my last (eighth) form at the local Brandeis elementary school, kissing secretly (she had wonderfully developed breasts) in the pine wood next to the school. Once I was at Tikhon Ironi A we ceased to be an 'officially' recognized couple but I still loved her desperately. A year later she moved to Tikhon Hadash (The New Secondary School) also in Tel Aviv, and we often took the same bus. I used to look for her and make eye contact. I would save her a seat next to me on the bus. We became an 'official' couple again in my last, or next to last year at secondary school. We used to meet at my home (I had my own room) or at her home (she had her own room). We would make excursions to the Wadi Faliq nature reserve to look at the rare Purple Iris, a protected flower found in the Wadi Faliq dunes. But our favourite spot as a teenage couple was in a hidden narrow ravine carved by the rainwater from the soft sandstone (*kurkar*) ridge overlooking the white strip of Sayyidna Ali sand beach. We spent hours there in our swimsuits, hidden from the world. We traced with our gaze the exquisite and complex fine horizontal patterns of the fragile sandstone ribs. They were like the under-side of a mushroom, sculpted in the walls of the ravine by water and wind. We admired the delicate glistening spider webs. We teased the ant-eating insects (neuroptera) out of their coneshaped depressions in the sand. We kissed. We necked. We petted. But we did not have sex.

In the second or third year of secondary school all classes were sent for one month of national service (Sherut Leumi) to help with agricultural and farm work on border kibbutz settlements. My class in Tikhon Ironi A was sent to

Kibbutz Gadot on the northern border with Syria. We worked, weeding out and thinning the cotton fields. Rachel Kutner's class in Tikhon Hadash was sent to Kibbutz Irez, on the border of the Gaza Strip. There she had an affair with a veteran kibbutz member. I believed the affair had involved full sexual relations and I was crestfallen. It wasn't. Many years later I learned from her that she had run away from sex on that occasion. I developed a strong interest in biology, biological science and discoveries. I read voraciously the biographies of scientific discoverers like Pasteur and I sought to follow their example. I took the biology option in secondary school.

Most Jewish pupils take their final secondary school matriculation (*Bagrut*) examinations at the age of 18 before immediate recruitment to compulsory military service. I graduated from secondary school with distinction at the age of 17 " and announced that I would resist the draft as a conscientious objector. Parental agreement in writing was needed for early recruitment to the army at 17, and I had made clear, both in interviews with the Manpower Division at the Ministry of Defense and in writing, my intention to resist the draft. Predictably I was not recruited immediately after my graduation and I registered instead to study biology at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. I was given student accommodation at the University 'Salisiana' student hostel in Musrara <sup>12</sup>, a stone's throw from the concrete wall which had divided the city since the 1949 armistice agreements between Israel and Jordan. I successfully completed my first year at the Department of Biology at the Hebrew University. To continue I had to apply for deferment of compulsory military service. The army had a scheme known as *Atudat Akademat* (Academic Contingent) which allowed secondary school graduates at the age of 18 to go directly to university. But they had to give an undertaking to serve in the army as professionals in the officer corps.

I was a pacifist, opposed to military service on principle. There was no way I could apply to continue my studies at the Hebrew University against such an undertaking.

After completing my first year of biology I began a series of interviews and negotiations with Mr Zvi Cohen [11] at the Manpower Division of the Ministry of Defense in ha-Qiryah, Tel Aviv. I agreed to a compromise. I was a pacifist, but not a vegetarian. I was in principle opposed to war, to violence and to killing people, but not to shooting and killing of animals for food. I was not opposed to guns themselves, but to the gun as an instrument of war. Under the terms of the compromise, I would submit to the law and do two and a half years' of national



service. Moreover, I would wear uniform as a soldier in the IDF. The army authorities, for their part, would recognize that for reasons of conscience I was opposed to the gun as an instrument of war, and I would therefore be exempt during my basic training from drilling involving use of human-shaped targets. After basic training, I would train as a medic.

#### **In Uniform**

I was mobilized in the summer of 1961. My basic training caused no particular problems. My exemption from drilling was officially sanctioned, and so was accepted by both commanders and fellow recruits. Mine was the only gun without a bayonet, and I vividly recall how appalled I was by the savagery of bayonet training against straw dummies, from which I was exempt. I was nonetheless a conscientious soldier. I prided myself on being tough and I did well in exercises and long treks on foot. I was respected by commanders and fellow recruits despite my pacifism. And I liked gun training against square targets.

Towards the end of two months basic training at Training Base (*Bahad*) 4 in Sarafand, I asked for an interview with my Commander. Graduation from basic training is symbolically loaded and is centered around the taking of an oath of allegiance on the Bible and the gun. I asked to be exempted from the ceremony, explaining that I could not, as a pacifist, swear allegiance to the army and to the state. I was refused and ordered to join my unit. The ceremony is held at night. It was 1961. It would be six years before the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem expelled the hundreds of families from the Mughrabi quarter and razed their homes to the ground in order to clear the massive plaza before the Wailing Wall where the Israeli paratrooper graduation ceremonies would take place. My graduation was held in the drilling grounds of the Sarafand army camp. The grounds were lit by torches - large cans stuffed with cloth and soaked with oil. I was to march in with the rest.

The entire unit was assembled and our commanders stood facing us next to a table stacked with bibles. The torches were set alight. The unit was ordered to attention. The oath was read out loud and clear, and the name of each recruit was then read out one by one in alphabetical order. As the names were read out, each soldier replied 'I swear' or, if they chose, 'I declare'. As my turn approached I was white with tension and must have been shaking like a leaf. I had asked for exemption to evade catastrophe. But it was denied and I knew what I had to do. I expected everything to collapse about me.

My name was called. '*Eineni yakhol le-hishava*' (I cannot take the oath) I replied clearly. I waited for all hell to break loose and total pandemonium. Nothing happened. After a brief hesitation, the next name was called. The ceremony continued undisturbed. We all lined up to take our Bibles, and I was handed mine without comment. I still have it, with the emblem of the IDF printed in gold on its black plastic cover and my annotation on the inside cover dated 9 November 1961.

After basic training I was sent to the *Gadna* military Headquarters for posting. Given my record of pacifism and opposition to gun training at secondary school, I was unlikely to be posted to paramilitary training at a secondary school. The next training course for medics began in a few months. Meanwhile I was posted to the *Gadna* supply branch and was sent as canteen master to the *Gadna* tent camp operation for secondary school pupils at the construction site of the new development town of Arad.

I loved it. I enjoyed the routine trips with the army supply trucks to Beer Sheva. I liked the trips with *Gadna* secondary school campers to Ein Gedi on the shores of the Dead Sea. I invited my mother on one trip. She would love to come, she said. We picked her up in Beer Sheva and took the bumpy patrol road to Arad, continuing on to Ein Gedi. My mother sat in the front cabin of the supply truck, I sat at the back with the provisions. Mother brought me a present of my favourite poppy-seed cake. I gobbled it down to her delighted protests before we arrived in Ein Gedi. She climbed all the way up to the Ein Gedi head waterfall regardless of her arthritic knee.

Knowing that my job as canteen master was temporary enabled me to enjoy it to the full. I do not know if I would have liked it had I been assigned to it for the entire term of my compulsory service. I pressed to join the first available medical training course and I was duly sent to the two-months course at the Sarafand army camp. With my background in biology, I did well. After finishing the course in August 1962, I was assigned as a medic to *Gadna* Headquarters and sent to run the clinic at the *Gadna* training base at Sedei Boqer in the Negev.

In Sedei Boqer I pursued my interest in botany, which had developed during my first year as a biology student at the Hebrew University. I began a collection of dried desert flora (which I still have). A fellow serviceman who had a keen interest in desert zoology set up a small reptile zoo in the base and I

enthusiastically helped him. I used to visit my second cousin twice removed, Rafi Rotem (Roth). He had left Kibbutz Magal with his family to join the experimental desert agricultural farm headed by Hebrew University Professor Michael Even-Ari at nearby Shivta. I often went for a swim, alone or in company, at the fresh water fountain of Ovdar in the Wadi Tzin below Sedeh Boqer. All this, punctuated by trips to Beer Sheba, desert tours to Makhtesh Ramon and driving the base command car (without a licence), all combined to make my seven months' service as a medic in Sedeh Boqer very enjoyable.

But the irony of my situation did not escape me. I was serving as a medic in the *Gadna* army unit. This was the unit assigned to running para-military training at Jewish secondary schools in Israel - the very training from which I had been exempted at the demand of my father.

While I was in Arad I first read Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead* and subsequently *Atlas Shrugged*. I was deeply affected by her writings, and especially by her emphasis on moral consistency and individual ethical integrity. It was reading Ayn Rand that made the contradictions inherent in the compromise of being a pacifist in uniform and a medic with the *Gadna* increasingly transparent. This was made even more evident when I became formally affiliated to the Israeli Branch of the War Resisters' International. While at Arad I wrote to the Manpower Division at the IDF Headquarters (copy to Mr Zvi Cohen at the Ministry of Defense) asking to replace my service in uniform with alternative civilian service. I pressed my case. I was interviewed and persisted with reminders. Finally a reply came sometime after I was transferred to Sedeh Boqer. The IDF refused to replace my service in uniform with alternative civilian service.

I knew what I had to do. I packed my military gear and asked for an interview with the base Commander Seren Uri Shalitin. I handed him a formal letter with my Kefar Shemaryahu address and told him that the army could always reach me there. I then walked out of the base.

The following four weeks were the most difficult in my life up till then. I stayed at home, pottered around the garden and kept myself busy with various chores such as putting a fresh coat of paint on my mother's wooden bedroom cabinet. I lived in a state of constant terror, dreading every sound of approaching footsteps in case it was the military police coming to pick me up. Every time I called Zvi Cohen at his office in the Manpower Division of the Ministry of Defense I was



advised to return to Sedei Boqer. My mother thought that this was precisely what I should do. An agreement is an agreement and should be honoured. If I was unhappy with the compromise, it was too bad. This was no reason to break it, she argued.

The army let me stew at home for a month after which I technically became a deserter. The military police then came to take me to the military detention station at the Headquarters in ha-Qiryah, Tel Aviv. I was remanded for 24 hours.

I was taken to Zvi Cohen and informed that Kibbutz Erez on the border of the Gaza Strip was willing to take me on a civilian *Shalat* basis. *Shalat*, acronym for *Sherut le-lo Tashlum* (Service without Pay), was a general arrangement the IDF had made with kibbutz settlements and other establishments deemed to be of national importance. To assist with their manpower requirements, the IDF agreed to place quotas of soldiers with them. The salary of the recruit was paid by the army at the usual army rate which, for men and women on compulsory military service, was a token sum at that time.

The next day I was on the bus for Kibbutz Erez.

#### **Kibbutz Erez**

There was a personal connection between Kefar Shemaryahu and Kibbutz Erez. Ruth Elsasser of Kefar Shemaryahu had married one certain Zvi Nishri and joined Kibbutz Erez some years earlier.

In Erez I was a sensation and quickly became a pariah. Erez was a typical Israeli border kibbutz. Palestinian incursions from the Egyptian-controlled Gaza Strip were a serious matter. Not all of them were armed guerrilla operations. Most were aimed at stealing valued agricultural equipment such as the collapsible aluminium irrigation lines used in Erez for sprinkler irrigation of their vast cotton fields [12]. I refused to take part in armed guard duties on the kibbutz. For me the eulogy of the late Moshe Dayan at the funeral of Ro'i Rutenberg killed by Palestinians at nearby Kibbutz *Nahal-Oz* in 1956, a few months before the Suez War, said it all:

Let us not today fling accusations at the murderers. Who are we that we should argue against their hatred? For eight years now, they sit in their refugee camps in Gaza, and before their very eyes, we turn into our homestead the land and the villages in

which they and their forefathers have lived ... We are a generation of settlers, and without the steel helmet and the cannon we cannot plant a tree and build a house. (Quoted in Uri Avneri, *Israel Without Zionists*, Collier Macmillan, London & New York, 1971, p154).

My presence in any circle, casual or otherwise, inevitably led to discussion about the topic of resistance to the draft. I was constantly drawn into interminable ideological discussions on the rights and the wrongs of adhering to pacifism in Israel. On one occasion, in response to my insistence that the Palestinians do not have to be our enemies, one veteran kibbutz member lost patience. He pulled me by the hand and said:

'Come, I'll show you why the Arabs have to be our enemies, must be our enemies, can only be our enemies ...', and he took me to the eucalyptus wood on the edge of the kibbutz. 'Do you know what this is?', he asked. 'This is a eucalyptus wood', I answered. 'No', he said, 'these are the remains of the Palestinian village of Dimra, over which the eucalyptus trees were planted. Do you know where the villagers of Dimra are now?' Without waiting or a reply, he went on, 'They are refugees across the border in the Gaza Strip. The only way they will not be our enemies is if we allow them to return ...'. 'Then why not let them return?', I asked in total innocence.

The glance he threw at me could mean only one thing: I was a hopeless case.

In Erez I really started to do some systematic reading: Gandhi, Fischer's biography of Gandhi, a lot of Buber and regular mailings from the War Resisters' International (WRI) head offices in London. Even before I joined the movement, I had contacts with leading members of the Israeli Section of the WRI. The Secretary of the Israeli Section, Yeshayahu Toma Sik<sup>15</sup> lived in another part of the country (he was the Secretary of the Alonei Yitzhaq youth village at the time). But I visited Nathan Hofshi (one of the founders of the Israeli Section) at his smallholding farm in Herzliyah, not far from my home village of Kfar Shemaryahu. I also visited Abraham Lisod at his home in neighbouring Moshav Rishpon, and Dr Jacob (Ernest) Jaros (Jaroslowsky), a homeopath who was my father's family physician and was active in the organization.

*Shalat* was only one channel through which the Israeli army support the

manpower requirements of nationally 'important' establishments. *Nahal* (*No'ar Hahutzi Lohem*) (Fighting Pioneering Youth) was another. All Zionist political parties have their separate youth movement organizations. Any member of a youth movement who wished to devote their lives to a Zionist pioneering career in border kibbutz settlements are recruited as discreet nuclei into the *Nahal* Command of the army at the age of 18.

They are given a combined military and agricultural training during their compulsory military service. For their agricultural training they are often placed with veteran kibbutz settlements affiliated to their political parties. After compulsory military service, *Nahal* nuclei of each Zionist party political youth movement are brought together to start a new kibbutz or join an existing new kibbutz on the front-line of Zionist colonization.

It is almost impossible to establish an independent kibbutz in Israel. Land for settlement is parcelled out according to party political criteria (key) in proportion to the relative strength of the Zionist parties in the Zionist Congress and the Israeli Knesset. The biggest Zionist party gets from the Israel Lands Administration the biggest portion of land for settlement. Kibbutz settlements on these lands are then populated by graduates of the Party's youth movement, and strengthened by *Nahal* groups drawn from of the same youth movement. Kibbutz Erez was affiliated to the Israeli Labour Party and its Kibbutz Federation (*Ihud ha-Kevutzot ve-ha-Kibbutzim* (Union of the Kevutzah and the Kibbutz Settlements), now renamed *Ha-Tenu'ah ha-Kibbutzit ha-Meuhedet* (*Ta'qam*) (United Kibbutz Movement). It drew its *Nahal* contingents from its youth movement *Ha-No'ar ha-'Oved* (Working Youth). There was a *Ha-No'ar ha-'Oved* club in Kefar Shemaryahu, and Ruth Elsasser of Kefar Shemaryahu may have come to Kibbutz Erez through this route.

A *Nahal* group arrived in Kibbutz Erez sometime after my placement there. My presence was (of course) an attraction, and one evening I was invited to join them at a *Kumsitz*, the Hebrew vernacular for campfire. Participants sit in a circle talking, singing and roasting potatoes, onions and sometimes illegally procured meat, pinched, for instance, from the kibbutz chicken batteries. Because I was there the conversation inevitably turned to pacifism. At one point in the discussion one particularly large and bullish *Nahal* soldier lost control and turned his big red bearded face to me :

"You seriously mean to tell me that you would not respond to violence by force



even if you were attacked?', he said threateningly. 'Yes', I answered. 'Well, let's see', he said.

He got up. I remained seated. He walked towards me. I still remained seated. I was determined not to fight back so it was no problem for him to pin my shoulders to the ground, sit on my belly, put his hands around my neck and begin to strangle me. I was resolved not to meet violence with force. Soon my legs and hands began shaking with the tremor of asphyxiation.

'What are you doing? Let him go!', the people in the circle screamed in panic. They jumped to their feet and pulled him off me.

I had won the argument (the power of non-violence compelled the others to intervene). The story spread like wild fire through the Kibbutz, and the incident gained me grudging respect with the amazed *Nahal* group and throughout the Kibbutz. I was definitely not a coward, and my pacifism not a rationalization for cowardice.

In Erez I was first put to work with the kitchen dishwashing machine, a massive conveyor belt which serviced the communal dining hall. Kibbutz dining halls in the early 1960s were run on a self service cafeteria basis. But as Kibbutz settlements became wealthier their dining halls were rebuilt to good hotel restaurant standards with corresponding menus. During my stay there, Kibbutz Erez must have had a population of a few hundred members and foreign volunteers. The kitchen required considerable management. It involved overseeing the purchase, supply and warehousing of perishable and non-perishable food, employing kibbutz member cooks and meeting mealtime deadlines. It was a branch industry, and the manager was Comrade Moshe Ephrati.

Comrade Ephrati could not reconcile himself to my pacifism and made his hostility clear from the start. As is often the case in small, ideologically intense groups, the conflict of views translated into personal animosity. In the confined space of the kitchen, working the dishwashing machine placed me for the whole working day under Ephrati's control. Harassment was inevitable. I tried to ignore it at first, then to reason with him. Finally I complained to the Kibbutz Secretariat, but all to no avail. His harassment would stop for a day or two and then resume with renewed vigour. I had to devise my own defense and I discovered a course of action which proved to be immediately effective.

Kibbutz Erez was a collective enterprise affiliated to the Israeli Labour Party, committed to socialist but not Marxist values. The ideological stumbling block of all labour Zionist kibbutz settlements was the question of hired labour. They were ideologically committed to self-sufficiency and socialist equality among kibbutz members. Hired labour was a flagrant violation of the principle of self-sufficiency, and opposition to it was a cornerstone of kibbutz official rhetorics.

Yet, all kibbutz settlements, after an initial period of self-sacrifice and ascetic pioneering poverty, wanted a middle class standard of living and lifestyle for their members. This could not be done without employing ('exploiting' in kibbutz socialist jargon) hired labour. The cheapest source of labour available to the kibbutz were volunteer workers. They worked in return for food, pocket money and shelter, often living in the poorly maintained housing discarded by kibbutz members who had moved to new flats. But volunteer labour has never been enough to meet kibbutz needs because it is not always in adequate supply. It has always been necessary for the kibbutz to recruit cheap wage labour from neighbouring underdeveloped Oriental Jewish towns and impoverished Palestinian villages. Often a kibbutz would hire labour from the same Palestinian villages whose expropriated lands the kibbutz was now cultivating.

The result in all kibbutz settlements was an inherent ideological double-bind with the inevitable underlying hysteria. In conformity to kibbutz labour Zionist ideology branch managers were called *Rakaz* or *Merakez* ('Coordinators'). The worst insult to a kibbutz branch manager was to call him (or her) 'Boss', precisely because this exposed the fundamental underlying lie of the kibbutz as a socialist enterprise. Far from being a socialist society, it is a settler society. It is not a self-sufficient community but a capitalist community run as a limited liability company where each shareholder (member) is entitled to one fictitious share [14].

In response to persistent harassment by Comrade Ephrati I decided to address him as 'Boss': *Adon Ephrati*: yes, Boss; no, Boss; please, Boss; may I, Boss.

Within a week I was asked whether I would like to work somewhere else on the kibbutz. I chose *falha* (outdoor farming), and I was placed with Shelomoh Elgavish, the Coordinator of the kibbutz cotton agribusiness.

Shelomoh was a Holocaust survivor. We quickly became personal friends, and kept in contact for many years after I left the kibbutz. He was single, and resisted

all subtle and less subtle match-Making attempts by the kibbutz formal social welfare managers and informal social do-gooders. The kibbutz urged him to have a major tooth repair job (at kibbutz expense) to improve his looks, which he stubbornly resisted. He was sexually very attracted to a good-looking brunette German woman volunteer who was at the kibbutz at the time, but I do not think she returned his interest, and she eventually left.

As Manager of Kibbutz Erez cotton agribusiness he was in charge of the implementation of the industry's business schedule: ploughing, sowing, irrigation, insecticide spraying and machine picking. I was soon placed in charge of irrigation. Shelomoh insisted supervising the aerial insecticide spraying personally. There was something macabre in seeing him clad in protective gear (and sometimes without it) directing the low-flying aircraft over the fields: a survivor of gas handling gas.

My ideological radicalization continued. I was deeply influenced by my reading in Erez, especially by Buber's article 'What Is To Be Done?'.  
 22

I decided to respond to Buber's call What is to be done? If you mean by this question, 'what is one to do?' - there is no answer. One is not to do anything. One cannot help himself, with one there is nothing to begin, with one it is all over. He who contents himself with explaining or discussing or asking what one is to do talks and lives in a vacuum.

But he who poses the question with the earnestness of his soul on his lips and means, 'what have I to do?' - he is taken by the hand by comrades he does not know, but whom he will soon become familiar with, and they answer (he listens to their wonderful reply and marvels when only this follows):

'You shall not withhold yourself'. (Buber, 'What Is to Be Done' (1919), *Pointing the Way*, (Edited and Translated with Introduction by Maurice Friedman) Harper Torchbooks, Harper & Row, New York & Evanston, 1963, p 109)

As a token of my resolution not to withhold myself, and to surrender myself completely to Truth, I embraced the name *Rodef Emet* (Truthseeker). I went



through the bureaucratic formalities of adding the name as a third official first name to the two given to me at birth.

Some 10 years later I heard the following story from writer and Member of the Palestine National Council, Edward Said, Professor of Comparative Literature at Columbia University, Manhattan, New York:

The Buber family were tenants of the Said's in Jerusalem. They rented their house in the wealthy mixed Arab-Jewish Talbiyya Quarter from Edward Said's father. Sometime towards 1948, a tenant-landlord dispute erupted between Mr Said and Professor Buber and the case was taken to the British Mandate court. Buber lost the case, and had to leave the premises.

At the door after returning the keys to Edward Said's father, Buber turned round and said: 'Mr Said, you just wait. I will be back'.

The 1948-49 war broke out. Talbiyya was ceded to Israel in the 1949 Israel-Jordan armistice agreements. The Said family became refugees in East Jerusalem and their properties in Israel were vested with the Israeli Custodian for Absentees' Property.

Immediately after the war, Buber was as good as his word. He returned to take residence in the Said house in Talbiyya, as a tenant of the Custodian. He lived there for the rest of his life. This may be why he wrote in 1958:

I have accepted as mine the state of Israel, the form of the new Jewish community that has arisen from the war. I have nothing in common with those Jews who imagine that they may contest the factual shape which Jewish independence has taken. (Martin Buber, 'Israel and the Command of the Spirit', *Israel and the World*, Stockmen Books, New York, 1963, p 257).

When Edward Said visited Talbiyya in 1992, 40 years after his family left as refugees in 1948, he found that the house served as a residence of the International Christian Embassy, and as a center of fundamentalist pro-Zionist Christian activity.

Joining the Israeli branch of the WRI made me aware of an anarchist pacifist tradition, of opposition to military service not just for reasons of conscience, but

because of opposition to the state and to any compulsory national service, let alone compulsory military service. I gradually came to accept the radical pacifist argument which opposed the right of the state to recruit any of its citizens for any service whatsoever, in particular military service.

In July 1963, I contacted Zvi Cohen for the second time in 12 months this time to inform him that I intended to violate the second compromise negotiated on my behalf. Propelled by my newly discovered anarchist pacifist radicalism, I planned to leave Kibbutz Erez before completing my term of alternative civilian service.

I go from worse to worst. I find that I systematically take seemingly accepted values whose truth and existence [are taken to be] axiomatic, dissect them to their component parts, break them and dissociate them from their context and re-assimilate them anew. Values whose truth I had accepted until hitherto without any question and enquiry, I now negate, at a very great cost to myself, including at the cost of violating agreements and submitting statements, which, a few months later I discover I cannot honour ... . The state has no right to impose upon its inhabitants through legislation specific work. If the state is truly interested in certain works, then this is done, in states that are not totalitarian, in one of two ways:

(a) To call for volunteers (accompanied by extensive educational action); (b) To offer such attractive conditions of labour that will draw people to these works (expressed primarily in improved pay conditions) ... At the time I accepted in full awareness the right of the state [to conscript civilian labour in lieu of military service]. Now I do not. [Excerpts from letter to Zvi Cohen, 23 July 1963 [15]]

My mother was furious. 'If you leave Kibbutz Erez before your time is up', she warned me, 'you cannot return home'.

I left five months before finishing my two and a half years' compulsory national service. I rented a room in the neighbouring town of Herzliyah and moved in there with my dog. I got a job as a manual worker at the Par-Am cotton ginner and linters mill in the Herzliyah industrial park. In the primary process, the

machinery at the mill separated cotton fibre from seed and packed the fibre in bales. In the secondary process, the fibre fluff was separated from the seed.

It was winter and in the factory yard large sheets of tarpaulin were spread over the mountains of bales and unprocessed seed to protect them from the rain. The tarpaulin was kept down with bricks. On one occasion I was on the top of the mountain catching the bricks thrown at me to place on the tarpaulin. I missed one brick. It hit me in the middle of the forehead, and I was taken to the nearby hospital for x-ray and stitches. I am still proud of the scar: the symbol of my worker's credentials.

This time I was sent to see the military psychiatric panel. To my surprise, I was not classified as mentally unfit for military service. The panel recommended that my service and compulsory reserve service should be postponed for two years. I was issued an end of compulsory military service certificate listing as the reason for release 'end of service' and rating my behaviour as 'satisfactory'. My military health profile remained unaltered (the highest 97). Eventually my file was transferred to RM70, the category, I later learned, for persons who are subject to compulsory annual reserve service and who are not called to do reserve service, such as Members of Parliament or senior government officials etc. That is where it was to stay. I was neither called to complete my compulsory military service, nor to do reserve service.

But these formalities were not concluded without the pain of another arrest, apparently in error. While my papers were being processed for the postponement, the Military Police were ordered to arrest me at work on the afternoon of Wednesday 13 November 1963. I was bundled out with the two books I had brought with me to work (Russell, *Has Man a Future?* and Magnes, *Like All Nations?*) and taken to the Military Police base in ha-Qiryah, Tel Aviv where I was detained for the night. Since I refused, as a pacifist, to make use of anything military, I refused to use the mattress in my cell, and spent the night on the cold floor. I also refused food (army rations) and drink. The next morning (Thursday) I was formally charged with desertion and sent to Military Prison No 4 in Sarafand. I was told that if I persisted with my boycott of army food and drink, I would be force-fed. All this, however, brought my case into sharp bureaucratic focus and I was informed that I had been arrested in error. I was given money so that I could eat at a civilian restaurant outside the compound. I agreed to ease my boycott of mattress and blankets while waiting overnight in



jail for my release papers the next day (Friday). The papers arrived and I was released.

I knew what I wanted to do. I wanted to study Arabic. But I also knew that I did not wish to commit myself to a three-year University degree course in Arabic. So I turned to Aubrey Hodes for contacts and advice. Aubrey knew of the imminent opening of the Institute for Asian and African Studies at the United Workers' Party - *Mapam* seminary at Giv'at Havivah (Havivah Hill was named after Havivah Reich [16]). It ran a 12 month programme in Arabic language and culture.

He approached Simhah Flapan, Editor of *New outlook* and head of the Arab section of *Mapam*, and arranged for my admission to the first November 1963 class at the new Institute. As I was not a party member, and did not intend to become a fellow traveller I insisted on paying for my fees and board. It was not cheap at IL700 for the three-semester course.

Within less than a year I had a good working knowledge of literary and spoken Arabic.

I had crossed the linguistic border.

Notes:

1 *Yesh Gevul, Gevul ha-Tziyut* (The Limits of Obedience), (Edited by Yishai & Dina Menuchin), Siman Qeriah Books, Tel Aviv, 1985.

2 See Uri Davis, Martin Blatt & Paul Kleinbaum, *Dissent & Ideology in Israel 1948-1973*, Ithaca Press, London, 1975.

3 Zikhroni, as other pacifists in the 1950s, was exempt on pseudo-psychiatric grounds as 'permanently unfit for military service' (known by its Hebrew acronym *Bet Kaf Taf* (acronym for *Bilti Kasher Temidi*) reducing his military health profile to 21 (on a scale of 100). In Israel, in addition to the stigma, such exemption entails untold practical misery. At almost every point of contact with the authorities it is necessary to produce one's military service ID. Reduced health profile on this ID entailed near insurmountable obstacles in obtaining a driving licence or getting gainful employment. Zikhroni studied law and opened his own legal practice in Tel Aviv. Ironically, after the 1967 war, Zikhroni became a Zionist and abandoned his pacifism. His military health profile was upgraded and he was recruited to the army where he did his reserve service in the army's legal department. He joined Uri Avneri as founding member with others of the Israeli Council for Israeli-Palestinian peace. The Council sought and obtained an Israeli court statement certifying its *bona fide* Zionist credentials.

4 Martin Blatt, Uri Davis & Paul Kleinbaum, *Op Cit*.

5 See Uri Davis, Martin Blatt & Paul Kleinbaum, *Dissent & Ideology in Israel: Resistance to the Draft 1948-1973*, Ithaca Press, London 1975.

6 *Davar* is the official Hebrew daily of the labour Zionist controlled *Histadrut* General Federation of Workers in the Land of Israel. Dawayma, prior to its destruction in 1948, was a large Palestinian Arab village some 17 kilometers west of Hebron with a population of approximately 2700. In 1955 Kibbutz Amatziah was established on the site by a nucleus of Israeli-born Jews and new Anglo-Saxon Jewish immigrants. The settlement has since altered its status from a collective kibbutz to that of a co-operative Moshav. I am indebted to Rd Israel Shahak for the reference.

7 The lie had been exposed by Walid Khalidi and Erskine Childers already in the early 1960s, and had been totally demolished by publication of new research on the early history of the state of Israel:

Walid Khalidi, *From Haven to Conquest*, Institute of Palestine Studies, Beirut, 1971.

Erskine Childers, 'The Other Exodus', *Spectator*, 12 May 1961, reprinted in Walter Laqueur (ed.), *The Israeli-Arab Reader*, Penguin/Pelican, Hamondsworth, 1970, pp. 179-188.

Michael Palumbo, *The Palestinian Catastrophe: The 1948 Expulsion of a People from Their Homeland*, Faber & Faber, London, 1987.

Simha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities*, Croom Helm, London, 1987.

Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestine Refugee Problem, 1947-1949*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987.

Ilan Pappé, *The Making of the Arab Israeli Conflict*, I B Tauris, London, 1992.

Nur Masalha, *Expulsion of the Palestinians*, Institute of Palestine Studies, Washington DC, 1992.

8. Aubrey Hodes was a South African Jew who immigrated to Israel in the 1950s. He began his life in Israel as a pacifist. At the time I made his acquaintance he had abandoned pacifism. Obsessed by the thought that he might die before leaving behind him for posterity a solid literary heritage, Aubrey left Israel in the late 1960s to dedicate his life to what he considered to be his vocation: writing. I met the Hodes family in London in 1974 at their cosy middle class apartment in Hampstead. In Israel Aubrey earned his living as a Hebrew press monitor with the American Embassy in Tel Aviv.

In London he worked as a teacher at a special education school. He complained bitterly. He had left Israel to the UK to extricate himself from time consuming political commitment in order to write, and the limitations on his time in London were hardly reduced. Sometime after 1974 Aubrey left his family with a young woman, maybe in the hope that he would be freed of the limitations imposed by family life and would be able to devote more time to his writing. ◀



9 I still have in my library at Kefar Shemaryahu the complete set of 'Agnon's work given to me at the school graduation ceremony with the dedication:

Ironi A Secondary School  
Named after Dr. A Maroz  
Bikurei ha-Itim Street No 2  
The complete works of Sh Y 'Agnon  
Given as a prize  
Named after the late Dr. Yirmiyahu Frankel  
to Uri Davis  
Graduate of the 12th Grade  
Who distinguished himself  
In his studies, his industry and his behaviour  
Tel Aviv 14 July 1960.

10. I speculate that the building was probably leased by the University for student accommodation from the Salesian order, hence its name 'Salisiana'.

11. Zvi Cohen, Chief Assistant to the Director of the Manpower Division at the Ministry of Defence was in charge of dealing with cases of conscientious objection and draft resistance for almost two decades (early 1950s through early 1970s).

12. The current term for Palestinians crossing the border illegally into Israel at the time was '*Mistamenim*' ('Infiltrators'). Throughout the 1950s many thousands of unarmed Palestinians were assassinated in cold blood along the borders. For details on Israel's official 'shoot to kill' policy see Benny Morris, *Israel's Border Wars: 1949-1956*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993.

13. Hebrew acronym pronounced *Shiq*: *Shin Yud Quf - Shem Yisrael Qadosh* (the Name of Israel is Holy) or *Shelemim Yereim Qedoshim* (Whole, Godfearing, Holy) or *Shalom Yosher Qedushah* (Peace, Integrity, Holiness). An ideological Esperantist, he insists on the Esperanto spelling *Sik* as the official spelling of his name.

14. Kibbutz members do not own their kibbutz, nor any moveables or immovable of their kibbutz (other than their strictly personal belongings). The legal owners of all collective kibbutz and co-operative Moshav settlements is *Nir Shitufi*: An All Country Cooperative Association for the Settlement of Hebrew

Workers in Israel Ltd, which is, in turn, wholly owned by the *Histadrut* General Federation of Workers in the Land of Israel.

15 The letter mentions Nurit Baretzki and her influence on my decision. I met Nurit Baretzki, then of Even Yehudah, when she was a soldier in Sede Boquer, and we maintained contact sometime thereafter. I was still not ready for sex. Like many of my generation, though thoroughly secular, I was raised on Puritan values regarding sex. Netivah Ben Yehudah testifies that the majority of her male fighting comrades in the *Palmah* storm troopers in 1948 died sexually virgin (Netivah Ben Yehudah, *1948: Bein ha-Sefirot* (1948: Between Calendars), Keter Publishing House, Jerusalem, 1981, p 297).

16 Named after Havivah Reik, one of the 32 Jewish paratroopers from Palestine dropped by the British behind enemy Nazi lines in Europe in 1944 to establish contact with Jewish communities (in the Balkan and East European countries). Havivah Reich together with her friend Hannah Senes and five other paratroopers were captured (possibly betrayed) and executed by the Nazis.