

Scattered Nation

The “Ingathering of Exiles” in Trilateral Relations
between the Israeli, American, and Yemeni Jewish
Communities during Operation *On Eagles’ Wings*

By

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to understand the nature of the trilateral relations between the Israeli, American, and Yemeni Jewish communities during Operation *On Eagles' Wings*, through the lens of the idea of an “ingathering of exiles” (Heb. *Kibbutz Galuyot*). The operation would not have been possible without the participation of the Israeli state, American Jewish institutions, and Yemeni Jewish leaders and *'olim*. Despite a weak economy and significant difficulties in absorbing and settling new *'olim*, Israeli leaders decided to support the mass *'aliyah* from Yemen and *'Aden* because they felt compelled by the Zionist mission of “ingathering” all “exiles” – that is, incorporating Jews from all of the world into the new Jewish state. For figures like David Ben-Gurion, this meant not only helping Yemeni Jews to immigrate to Israel, but also persuading American Jews to make *'aliyah* as well.

American Jewish leaders like Jacob Blaustein took issue with the mainstream Israeli conception of *Kibbutz Galuyot*, and both the American Jewish Committee and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee voiced substantive disagreements with Zionists in both the United States and Israel over that idea. As those organizations and other mainstream American Jewish leaders fundraised for and facilitated Operation *On Eagles' Wings*, they were forced to reconcile their support of an Israeli *Kibbutz Galuyot* operation with their vocal opposition to that operation’s ideological underpinnings. This study finds two primary tactics employed by American Jewish leaders to evade this apparent contradiction. Some articulated a softer form of *Kibbutz Galuyot* than that promoted by Ben-Gurion, which accepted the status of certain countries, including Yemen, as *Galut* but rejected the characterization of the United States as exilic. Others wholly rejected the idea of *Kibbutz Galuyot* in any form and claimed that Operation *On Eagles' Wings* was a purely humanitarian affair, directing Jews from Yemen to other lands that included, but were not limited to, Israel.

Finally, this study also addresses the relevance of *Kibbutz Galuyot* to relations between the Israeli political establishment and the Yemeni Jewish community. As an idea with biblical and religious roots that evolved into a component of secular Zionist political thought, *Kibbutz Galuyot* was a useful tool for both communities in communicating with the other. Zionist emissaries to Yemen, many of whom were themselves of Yemeni Jewish origin, appealed to the Yemeni Jewish populace to make *'aliyah* with messianic *Kibbutz Galuyot* language. Meanwhile, Yemeni Jewish activists in both Yemen and Israel, some of whom served in the *Knesset*, learned to use the idea of *Kibbutz Galuyot* as part of their arguments for Israel to support Yemeni Jewish *'aliyah*. Compounded with various social, economic, and political factors that made life in Yemen difficult, it was the idea of *Kibbutz Galuyot* that eventually motivated many Jews to migrate from Yemen to Israel, both before and during Operation *On Eagles' Wings*. In all of these ways, *Kibbutz Galuyot* was crucial to Israeli-Yemeni Jewish relations (including where those two communities overlapped) in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Introduction

This study explores the relations between the Israeli political establishment, American Jewish leaders, and the Yemeni Jewish community in both Israel and Yemen during the mass migration of Jewish civilians from Yemen to Israel between 1948 and 1950. In particular, it examines how contested tenets of Zionist ideology, especially one of Zionism's mainstays, the idea of an "Ingathering of Exiles" (Heb. *Kibbutz Galuyot*), affected those relations.

The Yemeni Jewish mass migration was made possible by a complicated international effort dubbed Operation *On Eagles' Wings*, which is often referred to as Operation *Magic Carpet* (a term that I have chosen not to use further in this study because of its orientalist connotations). This operation brought official Israeli state organs, such as the Jewish Agency, into contact with Yemeni Jewish activists in 'Aden, northern Yemen, and Israel and with major American Jewish organizations, such as the American Jewish Committee and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. Those parties raised funds, negotiated with British colonial and Yemeni imamate figures, and chartered planes (piloted by American employees of Alaska Airlines) in a massive project to airlift some 50,000 Yemeni Jews from Yemen and 'Aden to Israel, where they were granted citizenship and gradually integrated into Israeli society.

The American Jewish community, through funding and logistical involvement in Operation *On Eagles' Wings*, enabled Israeli leaders to put the "Ingathering of Exiles" idea into practice in one part of the world. Nevertheless, many American Jewish leaders,

especially those of the American Jewish Committee, were not Zionists, and tended to oppose the “Ingathering of Exiles,” at least as Israeli officials articulated it. The Zionist movement’s idealization of the liquidation of Jewish diaspora life was seen as a challenge to the legitimacy of the American Jewish community, and American Jewish leaders often spoke against that Zionist principle. This study seeks to explain how American Jewish leaders attempted to reconcile the apparent tension of assisting in an operation that Israeli leaders viewed as an act of “Ingathering of Exiles” while vigorously opposing the ideological underpinnings of that very operation.

Meanwhile, although the idea of an “Ingathering of Exiles” was a point of tension between the American and Israeli Jewish communities, that same concept served as a bridge between the largely secular Ashkenazi (a term that refers to Jews who for centuries made their homes in Central or Eastern Europe, and especially, in the early Israeli case, migrants from Eastern Europe) Israeli community and government and the largely traditional and religious Yemeni Jewish community. As an originally messianic prophecy that was later adapted into a key principle of even the most secular forms of political Zionism, *Kibbutz Galuyot* provided common ground for Yemeni Jewish activists to represent Yemeni Jewish needs to the Israeli political establishment and for Zionist emissaries and leaders from the *Yishuv* and Israel to connect with Yemeni Jewish rabbis and laypeople.

Some studies have been conducted dealing with the “Ingathering of Exiles” as a point of tension in Israeli-diaspora relations in the abstract, and others have dealt with Operation *On Eagles’ Wings* as a historical event. Up to this point, however, no studies

have synthesized the two issues to examine the concrete ways in which the tension over the “Ingathering of Exiles” played out during this significant moment of Israeli-American-Yemeni Jewish partnership, and few studies have seriously considered Yemeni Jewish perspectives on the operation at all. Those are the research problems that this study attempts to resolve.

This study argues that the Israeli government and its affiliated institutions did understand Operation *On Eagles’ Wings* as one stage in an “Ingathering of Exiles” process that was eventually to include immigration from the American Jewish community as well, and that American Jewish leaders were only able to work with Israeli officials by constructing alternative narratives of the operation and of the “Ingathering of Exiles” ideology. Meanwhile, the “Ingathering of Exiles,” as a religious idea embedded within a political ideology, served as a bridge between the largely secular Zionist Israeli political establishment and the more religious and traditionalist Yemeni Jewish community.

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer four primary research questions. The first question is: to what extent did the Israeli government understand Operation *On Eagles’ Wings* in a context of the “Ingathering of Exiles?” This study makes the case that Israeli leaders did, indeed, view the operation as part of the “Ingathering of Exiles,” and moreover that they defined the “Ingathering of Exiles” as a process that included, or should include, not only Yemeni Jews but also American Jews.

The second question is: to what extent were American Jewish leaders willing to participate in Operation *On Eagles' Wings* despite their opposition to the "Ingathering of Exiles?" This study follows American Jewish involvement in Operation *On Eagles' Wings* and argues that the operation would not have been possible, at least in its actual extent and timing, without American Jewish support. The reality that American Jewish institutions were indispensable suggests that American Jewish leaders chose to allow the operation to be carried out. Given that Operation *On Eagles' Wings* was a crucial step in the process of the "Ingathering of Exiles," and given that American Jewish leaders were presented with a choice of whether or not to enable Israel to take that step, American Jews' ability and willingness to rationalize their participation in *On Eagles' Wings* was historically significant.

The third question is: in what ways did American Jewish leaders attempt to reconcile their public statements about the "Ingathering of Exiles" as an idea with their participation in the operation? Relatedly, why did American Jewish leaders choose to participate in *On Eagles' Wings* despite their opposition to the "Ingathering of Exiles?" This study seeks to understand and articulate the narratives generated by American Jewish institutional leaders around this issue.

The fourth question is: what role did the "Ingathering of Exiles" idea play in the Yemeni Jewish community's understanding of Operation *On Eagles' Wings*? Yemeni Jews were active agents throughout the operation, and their motives and perspectives are also relevant, although they have been underrepresented in previous scholarship on this issue. This study, therefore, will examine the ways in which the "Ingathering of

Exiles” was a present idea in Yemeni Jewish discourses on the operation, and, moreover, how that idea affected relations between Yemeni Jewish leaders and both the Israeli political establishment and the American Jewish figures involved in the operation.

Goals and Motives

In conducting this study, I have three primary objectives. The first is to explore the tension between Israelis and American Jews over the “Ingathering of Exiles” in an applied way. Scholars of this field have written extensively about this topic in the abstract but have rarely used it as a lens to study the concrete events of mass migrations like that of Jews from Yemen to Israel. I hope that this study will contribute to the understanding of both that tension and this particular event.

My second objective is to begin to tell the stories of some Yemeni Jewish figures who were active participants in Operation *On Eagles’ Wings*. Yemeni Jewish actors, as members of the *Knesset* (Israeli parliament), employees of Israeli state institutions, and community leaders in ‘Aden and Yemen, played a crucial role in *On Eagles’ Wings*, but their stories and perspectives are rarely highlighted. This study makes an intentional effort to include Yemeni Jewish voices, going beyond relations between the majority-Ashkenazi Israeli political establishment and the majority-Ashkenazi leaders of major American Jewish organizations in an examination of the *trilateral* relationship between Jews in Israel, the United States, and Yemen. I hope it will serve as a call for further research into these Yemeni Jewish figures.

My third objective is to shed light on the broader scholarly questions raised by the study of this historical moment, many of which are relevant to current-day issues. This thesis raises, for example, the still-relevant question of how American Jewish and Israeli communities have worked together across ideological differences. In the present day, like in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Israeli and American Jewish leaders often disagree sharply on both ideological and practical issues. Nevertheless, the Israeli and American Jewish communities have repeatedly found ways to collaborate on key international projects. I hope that this study, by highlighting the ways in which the two communities have succeeded in working through their differences to some extent, and have also sometimes failed to do so, will also help to look at questions in current-day relations.

Another such issue is the extent to which Zionist ideology played a role in early Israeli policy-making. That Israel did, after some hesitation, invest in facilitating the immigration and absorption of *'olim* (Jewish immigrants and refugees to Israel) from Yemen, despite the economic and cultural hardship that doing so entailed, suggests that Zionist ideology and its effects sometimes outweighed, or at least competed with, practical, state-building concerns. Introducing the ideological components of this operation allows for a discussion of the extent to which Zionism influences Israeli state policies in general, a topic that is certainly relevant to studies of present-day Israeli policy-making as well.

Literature Review

I examined two broad categories of scholarly literature for my study. The first is the literature related to the idea of the “Ingathering of Exiles” in theory and in practice, especially as a source of tension between Israel and diaspora Jewish communities. This category includes a broad literature, as many books have been written by both Israeli and diaspora academics to discuss the relationships between Israel and the American Jewish diaspora (as well as other diaspora communities). The scholarly works in this category that I found most useful were those that delve specifically into Israeli-diaspora tensions over questions related to the “Ingathering of Exiles” and migration to Israel. Naomi Cohen, in her books on *The Americanization of Zionism, 1897-1948*¹ and *Not Free to Desist: The American Jewish Committee 1906-1966*,² articulates the tension between the Zionist principle of an “Ingathering of Exile” that includes the liquidation of the *Galut* (“Exile” – Jewish existence outside of Israel), on the one hand, and American Jewish assimilationism, on the other. She writes about the ways in which pre-state Zionists tried to craft their message to fit American Jewish sensibilities, and about the clashes between Zionism and America’s assimilationist Reform Movement and American Jewish Committee. Dvora Hachohen explores the influence of *Kibbutz Galuyot* on Israeli governance in her book, *Immigrants in Turmoil: Mass Immigration to Israel and its*

¹ Naomi Cohen, *The Americanization of Zionism, 1897-1948* (London: Brandeis University Press, 2003)

² Naomi Cohen, *Not Free to Desist: The American Jewish Committee 1906-1966* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1972)

Repercussions in the 1950s and After, a path-breaking historical study presenting Israeli immigration policies and their problems.³

Other scholars have compiled anthologies of essays written by significant Israeli and American Jewish leaders and academics. These include Étan Levine's *Diaspora: Exile and the Contemporary Jewish Condition*⁴ and Carol Diament's *Zionism: The Sequel*.⁵ In those pages, key figures such as David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister (who held office during Operation *On Eagles' Wings*), and Rose Halprin, who headed the Hadassah Women's Zionist Organization of America, articulate their views on the "Ingathering of Exiles" and its significance in Israeli-diaspora relations. Moshe Behar and Zvi Ben-Dor Benite also compiled an anthology of essays penned by prominent Mizrahi and Sephardi figures, some of which discuss the "Ingathering of Exiles," entitled *Modern Middle Eastern Jewish Thought: Writings on Identity, Politics, & Culture, 1893-1958*.⁶ Arthur Hertzberg edited a crucial volume as well, entitled *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader*,⁷ which covers a broad range of (especially pre-state) Zionist thought.

Also present and noteworthy within the body of more recent academic literature on the "Ingathering of Exiles" is the work by some scholars arguing that the Israeli state

³ Dvora Hachohen, *Immigrants in Turmoil: Mass Immigration to Israel and Its Repercussions in the 1950s and After* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003) – translated from the original Hebrew by Gila Brand

⁴ *Diaspora: Exile and the Contemporary Jewish Condition*, ed. Étan Levine (New York: Shapolsky Books, 1986)

⁵ *Zionism: The Sequel*, ed. Carol Diament (New York: Hadassah, 1998)

⁶ *Modern Middle Eastern Jewish Thought: Writings on Identity, Politics, & Culture, 1893-1958*, ed. Moshe Behar and Zvi Ben-Dor Benite (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2013)

⁷ *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader*, ed. Arthur Hertzberg (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997)

manipulates that concept to justify systems of state violence against Palestinians. Some academic books and articles have been written about this theory, and several particularly important and critical pieces have been written to discuss the practical impact of the “Ingathering of Exiles” ideology on Jewish immigrants and refugees from Arab and Islamic countries and on Palestinians. Examples of such work include Oren Yiftachel’s *“Ethnocracy” and Its Discontents: Minorities, Protest, and the Israeli Polity*⁸ and Ella Shohat’s *The Invention of the Mizrahim*.⁹

The second category of literature focuses on studies of Yemeni Jewry and the migration of Jews from Yemen to Israel. One significant gap in this category is that few texts focus on Yemeni Jewish perspectives or the Yemeni Jewish role in Operation *On Eagles’ Wings*. Books on the topic of Yemeni Jews in general tend to frame the histories and cultures that they recount as building toward the climactic conclusion of the evacuation from Yemen. One particularly emblematic title is Tudor Parfitt’s *The Road to Redemption: The Jews of Yemen 1900-1950*,¹⁰ which discusses the migration process at length. Reuben Aharoni, in his *The Jews of the British Crown Colony of Aden: History, Culture, and Ethnic Relations*,¹¹ positions the migration to Israel within a context of anti-Semitic violence that broke out in southern Yemen in 1947. Bat-Zion Eraqi Klorman, in

⁸ Oren Yiftachel, “‘Ethnocracy’ and Its Discontents: Minorities, Protests, and the Israeli Polity,” *Critical Inquiry* 26 (2000)

⁹ Ella Shohat, “The Invention of the Mizrahim,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29 (1999)

¹⁰ Tudor Parfitt, *The Road to Redemption: The Jews of the Yemen 1900-1950* (Leiden: Brill, 1996)

¹¹ Reuben Aharoni, *The Jews of the British Crown Colony of Aden: History, Culture, and Ethnic Relations* (Leiden: Brill, 1994)

her *Traditional Society in Transition: The Yemeni Jewish Experience*,¹² traces waves of Jewish migrations from Yemen to Ottoman-occupied Palestine before the mass migration facilitated by Israel. Eraqi Klorman's work explicitly challenges Zionist ideas about the ways in which Yemeni Jews understood and thought of Israel, and is therefore an especially useful source in examining the "Ingathering of Exiles" issue as a multilateral conversation that includes not only Israeli and American Jews but also communities migrating to Israel, among others. Esther Meir-Glitzenstein also wrote a crucial book on Operation *On Eagles' Wings* in 2012, republished in English in 2014 with the title, *The "Magic Carpet" Exodus of Yemenite Jewry: An Israeli Formative Myth*,¹³ which challenged the normative Israeli historiography of that operation.

Meir-Glitzenstein's book is, in some ways, the starting point for this study. It outlines the American Jewish community's role in Operation *On Eagles' Wings* as part of a larger argument that the retroactive glorification of those events in the popular Israeli imagination is inconsistent with the more dismal reality: that the operation was only partially successful and was carried out at the cost of many Yemeni Jewish lives. Meir-Glitzenstein makes that case compellingly and opens the way for further critical studies dealing with cooperation between the Israeli state and American Jewish communal institutions.

¹² Bat-Zion Eraqi Klorman, *Traditional Society in Transition: The Yemeni Jewish Experience* (Leiden: Brill, 2014)

¹³ Esther Meir-Glitzenstein, *The "Magic Carpet" Exodus of Yemenite Jewry: an Israeli Formative Myth* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2014) – translated from the Hebrew study originally published in 2012

The present study draws significantly on Meir-Glitzstein's account of problematic Israeli-American Jewish cooperation during Operation *On Eagles' Wings*, Eraqi Klorman's analysis of the role of Zionist narratives in that operation, and the various compendia of essays and analyses of the "Ingathering of Exiles" and Israeli-diaspora relations. It uses the basic model that Eraqi Klorman employed in the chapter of her book on "Challenging the Zionist Enterprise and Ethos" to analyze the events recounted by Meir-Glitzstein through a lens of the tension highlighted by Levine, Diamant, and others.

Primary Sources

This study draws on a wide range of primary sources. These include English- and Hebrew-language archival material, as well as memoirs. For the Israeli perspectives, this study uses primarily the Israeli State Archive, which includes speech transcripts and correspondence among Israeli leaders, and the Knesset Archive, which includes transcripts of Knesset meetings. Those materials are supplemented by separate pamphlets issued by Israeli state organ Keren ha-Yesod (UJA) for an American Jewish audience.

Many Yemeni Jewish perspectives represented in this study come from speeches in the Knesset Archive and the Israeli State Archive. Other perspectives are drawn from the Central Zionist Archive (which I visited in person), and in particular from Jewish Agency files and collections of letters written by Yemeni Jewish *'olim*.

Sources for the American Jewish perspectives include reports on immigrant absorption, correspondence between American, Israeli, and British officials and community leaders, notes on meetings of American Jewish organizations, transcripts of speeches, and more. These sources come mainly from the extensive American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archive and the American Jewish Committee Archive.

In addition to these archival sources, this study uses newspaper articles and books written by people who took part in Operation *On Eagles' Wings*. These include articles in Israeli and American Jewish publications and books by key Yemeni Jewish leaders, including Haim Tzadok and Yosef Qafih.

Methodology and Study Structure

This study is an analytic historical work. It is based on a broad range of primary sources, as described above, which I analyzed against the background of a significant scholarly literature, both on Zionism and Israel and on Yemeni Jewry.

This study is organized into three empirical chapters, a synthesis and analysis chapter, and a brief conclusion.

The first chapter traces the idea of an “Ingathering of Exiles” and discusses mainstream Israeli Zionist understandings and representations of Operation *On Eagles' Wings*. It follows the idea of *Kibbutz Galuyot* (“Ingathering of Exiles”) from its biblical origins to Israeli state policy. It then situates the mass migration from Yemen in the *Kibbutz Galuyot* discourse. It demonstrates that Israeli politicians and state-affiliated institutions understood their participation in this migration as an ideological endeavor

(in many ways in tension with Israel's more immediate, practical needs), as part of an "Ingathering of Exiles" process that was expected to affect the American Jewish community in the future. This chapter also includes an analysis of Israeli news media reports on Operation *On Eagles' Wings*, contrasted with American Jewish news media.

The second chapter deals with American Jewry's place in the operation. It investigates the specific historical role of the American Jewish community in facilitating the migration, drawing upon both primary and secondary sources to demonstrate that American Jewish leaders were crucial to Operation *On Eagles' Wings*, that the operation could not have happened as it did without American Jewish participation, and that American Jewish leaders understood the significance of their role. It then points out two different ways that American Jews tended to understand the migration from Yemen in which they were participating, and how they reconciled those with their view that the American Jewish community was legitimate and should not be expected, at any point, to migrate *en masse* to Israel. It discusses some American Jewish leaders' attempts to find nuance within the "Ingathering of Exiles" by differentiating between "free countries" (like the United States) and "countries of oppression" (like Yemen), defining only the latter as "Exile" (in opposition to the mainstream Israeli view that all Jews outside of the land of Israel were necessarily in "Exile"). It also examines other American Jewish leaders' attempts to separate the migration from Yemen from the "Ingathering of Exiles" as an idea, rejecting *Kibbutz Galuyot* altogether and discussing the migration from Yemen as a purely humanitarian, and not at all ideological, process.

The third chapter introduces Yemeni Jewish perspectives on Operation *On Eagles' Wings*, exploring the ways in which the “Ingathering of Exiles” was and was not a relevant idea to the actual migrants. It includes appeals by Yemeni Jewish activists to the Israeli/Zionist establishment to facilitate the operation and those figures’ use of the “Ingathering of Exiles” narrative in making their case. It also includes the appeals by engaged Zionist Yemeni Jewish figures to the rest of that community in an attempt to discern the extent to which the “Ingathering of Exiles” may have been a motivating factor for the migrants themselves. Ultimately, this chapter illustrates the role of the “Ingathering of Exiles,” as a messianic religious idea adopted into a secular political ideology, in bridging the divide between the largely secular Zionist Ashkenazi Israeli political establishment and the Yemeni Jewish community.

The study ends with a shorter synthesis and analysis chapter and a conclusion.

I hope that this study will shed significant light on not only complications in Israeli-American Jewish cooperation throughout Operation *On Eagles' Wings*, but also current-day obstacles in Israeli-diaspora relations and the need for further scholarship emphasizing Yemeni Jewish voices. Primarily, however, the following study seeks to explain how Israeli, Yemeni, and American Jewish leaders both succeeded and failed at collaborating throughout Operation *On Eagles' Wings*, given the very real ideological and cultural differences between the groups.

Chapter One:

Israeli Understandings of *On Eagles' Wings*

This chapter examines the idea of *Kibbutz Galuyot*, or “Ingathering of Exiles,” as it relates to both Zionist thought in general and Operation *On Eagles' Wings* in particular. It begins by tracing the concept of *Kibbutz Galuyot* from its biblical origins to its place in modern Zionist ideology and practice. Then, it examines the ways in which Israeli leaders drew on *Kibbutz Galuyot* as a framing idea for Operation On Eagles' Wings. It argues that the Israeli decision to facilitate mass immigration from Yemen was motivated by *Kibbutz Galuyot*, both as a Zionist ideological concept and as a practical demographic concern.

The “Ingathering of Exiles”: from Biblical Prophecy to Israeli State Policy

The “Ingathering of Exiles” was originally a religious concept. In the messianic future, according to Jewish religious texts, all Jews living in the diaspora would coalesce around the Land of Israel (*Eretz Yisrael*) and live there. That religious dream was adapted by the Zionist movement and became part of the Zionist political agenda. Rather than waiting for divine intervention, the Zionists would pursue mass *'aliyah* (“going up”: the movement of Jews from the diaspora to the Land of Israel) as an immediate political objective. State resources would be devoted to encouraging Jews to migrate from around the world to form a single community in what the Zionists regarded as the true Jewish homeland. For them, the “Ingathering of Exiles” – or, in

Hebrew, *Kibbutz Galuyot* – was not only a religious idea, but also a practical necessity to ensure the longevity of the Jewish nation. It was through the lens of the “Ingathering of Exiles” as an ideological Zionist principle that the Israeli government understood the migration from Yemen.

The roots of *Kibbutz Galuyot* terminology are biblical. Throughout the book of *Neviim* (Prophets), predictions of divine punishment and exile for the Jews’ sins are ameliorated with the promise of an opportunity for redemption and return to *Eretz Yisrael*. The *Kibbutz Galuyot* idea is present in Isaiah (11:11-12), Jeremiah (29:14), Ezekiel (20:41-42), and Psalms (106:47). The phrase “*Kibbutz Galuyot*” itself first appeared in rabbinic literature.¹⁴ Beyond its mention in those texts, the idea of a messianic redemption coupled with a migration of Jews worldwide to Jerusalem (“Zion”) was present in the daily lives of observant Jews through the *‘Amidah*, one of the most central prayers in the traditional Jewish religious service.¹⁵

In the wake of the 1840 Damascus blood libel incident, before Zionism existed as a social and political movement, Yehudah Alkalai, a Sephardi rabbi from Sarajevo, began to write about Jewish “self-redemption.”¹⁶ In *The Third Redemption* (1843), Alkalai called on the Jews to “return to the Holy Land” as part of their preparation for the messiah. He crafted a plan by which some Jews would migrate to Palestine and others would remain temporarily in the diaspora to provide aid before they, gradually,

¹⁴ American-Israel Cooperative Enterprise, “Ingathering of the Exiles”: *Jewish Virtual Library*

¹⁵ *The Koren Siddur*, trans. Jonathan Sacks (Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, 2015) 120

¹⁶ *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader*, ed. Arthur Hertzberg (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997), 104

followed.¹⁷ “Undoubtedly our greatest wish,” he wrote, “is to gather our exiles from the four corners of the earth to become one bond.”¹⁸ Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer, in his *Seeking Zion* (1862), articulated a similar idea,¹⁹ arguing that Jews would be required to initiate their own redemption by migrating to Palestine as part of a divine “trial.”²⁰ Similar ideas reappeared in the writings of certain members of *Hibbat Zion*, a collection of organizations that initiated the first Zionist immigrations to Palestine. Although Leon Pinsker himself, in his famed *Auto-Emancipation* (1882), declared his support for Jewish nationhood in any land available, and so did not use Jerusalem-specific messianic imagery,²¹ figures such as Moshe Leib Lilienblum²² and Eliezer Ben-Yehudah did.²³

In fact, it was another *Hibbat Zion* leader, Rabbi Samuel Mohilever, who brought the idea of contextualizing Zionism within a messianic vocabulary to the First Zionist Congress in 1897.²⁴ In a letter that he sent with his grandson to the Congress, he dismissed claims that Zionism was at odds with messianic theology, declaring that, “the

¹⁷ Y. Alkalai, “The Third Redemption,” in *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader*, ed. Arthur Hertzberg (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997), 105

¹⁸ *Ibid* 106

¹⁹ Z. Kalischer, “Seeking Zion,” in *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader*, ed. Arthur Hertzberg (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997), 111

²⁰ *Ibid* 112

²¹ L. Pinsker, “Auto-Emancipation: An Appeal to His People by a Russian Jew,” in *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader*, ed. Arthur Hertzberg (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997), 194

²² M. Lilienblum, “Let Us Not Confuse the Issues,” in *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader*, ed. Arthur Hertzberg (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997), 170

²³ E. Ben-Yehudah, “A Letter of Ben-Yehudah,” in *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader*, ed. Arthur Hertzberg (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997), 164-5

²⁴ *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader*, ed. Arthur Hertzberg (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997), 399-400

resettlement of our country. . . is one of the fundamental commandments of our Torah”²⁵ and referring to the prophecy that the messiah would “redeem us from our bitter exile” and “gather our scattered brethren from all corners of the earth to our own land.”²⁶

Kibbutz Galuyot was not a significant framework for Theodor Herzl, who called the Congress and who is commonly known as the founder of political Zionism. He did not cite it as a motivating factor in any of his major public writings.²⁷ Herzl, like Pinsker, often referred to lands aside from Palestine as possible locations for a Jewish nation-state.²⁸ Soon after Herzl’s death, however, Max Nordau wrote about “Messianism and Zionism” in his 1905 survey of Zionist history. “Messianism and Zionism were actually identical concepts for almost two thousand years,” he wrote, and the Jews’ suffering, according to both ideologies, “will cease only when the Nation will again be gathered together on the sanctified soil of the Holy Land.” The key difference, he elaborated, was that Zionism requires the Jews to bring about their “deliverance” through practical work.²⁹ Thus by 1905, the link between the messianic narrative of *Kibbutz Galuyot* and the modern political Zionist movement had been firmly established.

²⁵ S. Mohilever, “Message to the First Zionist Congress,” in *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader*, ed. Arthur Hertzberg (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997), 402

²⁶ *Ibid* 404

²⁷ Theodor Herzl, *Zionist Writings: Essays and Addresses, Volume One* trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Herzl Press, 1973) and Theodor Herzl, *Zionist Writings: Essays and Addresses, Volume Two* trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Herzl Press, 1975)

²⁸ Guy Alroey, “‘Zionism without Zion’? Territorialist Ideology and the Zionist Movement,” *Jewish Social Studies*, no. 1 (Fall 2011), 5

²⁹ M. Nordau, “Survey of Zionism” from American-Israel Cooperative Enterprise, *Jewish Virtual Library*

That idea became a fundamental component of Israel's national self-conception under the auspices of the country's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion. It was emblazoned in the Israeli Declaration of Independence: "The State of Israel will be open for Jewish immigration and for the Ingathering of Exiles," and "the Jewish people throughout the Diaspora [are called upon] to rally round the Jews of Eretz-Israel in the tasks of immigration and upbuilding."³⁰ A crucial 1950 law, the "Law of Return," endowed that principle with legal authority: "every Jew has the right to come to this country," and all Jewish immigrants would be granted citizenship.³¹

Ben-Gurion himself, in some ways, embodied this state ideal. The absorption of immigrants was, to him, a very high priority.³² In his eyes, according to Anita Shapira, the time after the Israeli War for Independence was, "the time of the true revolution of ingathering the exiles and creating a nation."³³ This project was at once ideological and practical. Ben-Gurion viewed Israel as the true home of the entire Jewish people, and viewed it (and widespread immigration to it) as the necessary center for large-scale social change.³⁴ At the same time, Ben-Gurion was acutely aware of the demographic challenges of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine – Arab Palestinians constituted nearly half of even the proposed Jewish state outlined in the 1947 United Nations

³⁰ *Israel: The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel*, 14 May 1948: https://www.knesset.gov.il/docs/eng/megilat_eng.htm

³¹ *Israel: The Law of Return*, 5 July 1950: <https://www.knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/return.htm>

³² Anita Shapira, *Ben-Gurion: Father of Modern Israel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 176-7

³³ *Ibid* 179

³⁴ Dvora Hacoen, *Immigrants in Turmoil* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 42

partition plan. *Kibbutz Galuyot* was his way of ensuring that Israel would be viable, not only as a self-sustaining society but also as a country with a clear Jewish majority.³⁵ He was also concerned that a small national population would be unable to defend itself against military threats from its neighbors. As a result, he for years advocated an official policy of nonselective immigration – that is, the maximum promotion of *'aliyah*, without barring entry to any Jewish immigrant regardless of health, wealth, or age.³⁶ It is in this ideological and political context that David Ben-Gurion, and, indeed, the Israeli political and cultural establishment in general, understood Operation *On Eagles' Wings*.

Operation *On Eagles' Wings* in Israeli/Zionist Discourse

This section will argue that the Israeli political establishment generally portrayed Operation *On Eagles' Wings*, and the flow of Jewish migration from Yemen to Israel in general, as part of the process of *Kibbutz Galuyot*. The absorption of Yemeni Jewish immigrants (and many others from Southwest Asia and Europe) took a serious economic toll on the fledgling country, a reality that likely spurred Israeli state officials to articulate that absorption in ideological terms for public consumption. The Israeli political and cultural establishment crafted a narrative around Operation *On Eagles' Wings* (and similar operations at the time) that rested on the idea of *Kibbutz Galuyot*. Both the transportation of migrants from Yemen to Israel and their integration into Israeli society after their arrival, projects in which Israeli state institutions were

³⁵ *Ibid* 45

³⁶ *Ibid* 47

significantly involved, fit smoothly into the Zionist discourse and the principles upon which the state had been founded in May of 1948. Crucially, that discourse understood *Kibbutz Galuyot* to be a global project that included the encouragement of *'aliyah* from all Jewish communities, including that of the United States as well as of Yemen. The liquidation of the Yemeni *"Galut"* was part of a process that, according to the mainstream Zionist view, should include immigration from the American *"Galut,"* and all others, as well. This viewpoint was articulated and implied by official publications and reports of Israeli state-affiliated institutions and by statements of Israeli politicians. In some cases, possibly as a result of American Jewish leaders' stern warnings against Israeli advocacy for American Jewish *'aliyah*, Israeli leaders disguised their intentions. In other cases, however, they spoke about American *'aliyah* openly and unapologetically and encouraged American Jews to follow in the footsteps of the majority of Yemen's Jewish community.

The Yemeni Jewish case epitomized what Dvora Hacoen calls "a constant pull between ideals and activism, between utopianism and reality"³⁷ in Zionism. As Hacoen notes, *Kibbutz Galuyot* as an ideological mission came into frequent tension with the practical needs of the *Yishuv* and the early Israeli state, the economy of which buckled under the pressure of enormous immigrant influxes from all over the world.

An October 1951 American Jewish Committee Report from Israel³⁸ detailed the immensity of the challenge to Israelis of absorbing so many new *'olim*: "They have to

³⁷ *Ibid* 5

³⁸ The AJC's Correspondent in Israel, Report from Israel, 31 Oct. 1951, American Jewish Committee Archive.

feed, cure, transport, house, and educate them – live with them and shape their social life.” The report raised the issue of cultural tension between “the Jews from Iraq, Iran, Yemen, Morocco” and “the Jews from Europe and the northern Mediterranean” and argued that “the intake of the last year’s immigrants was far from being a good ‘bargain’” because most new *olim* were poor, sick, elderly, disabled, or very young. The report referred to a preference among Israelis for “good immigration,” which is to say, “young, bright, eager, productive people, from the West and from Europe, people who can work and want to work.” A similar report in October 1949³⁹ even referred to immigration as “the main problem, overshadowing all others,” in Israeli society, especially as immigrants from Yemen and other Arab countries arrived destitute. A report the following month mused that:

The distance in time between the home of the Yemenites and ourselves is 3000 years. To bridge this gap of civilization and background, a million things, big and small, have to be taught to the Yemenites before they are ready to take their place in Israeli life.⁴⁰

Although the language in these documents is clearly patronizing, orientalist, and derogatory, the reports do highlight the challenges of absorbing immigrants in general, and particularly immigrants from Yemen. Israel faced seemingly insurmountable economic obstacles, and the cultural gulfs between different Jewish communities exacerbated the tensions in the already complex endeavor of state-building. It is

³⁹ H. Lowenberg, Report from Israel, Oct. 1949, American Jewish Committee Archive.

⁴⁰ The AJC’s Correspondent in Israel, Report from Israel, Nov. 1949, American Jewish Committee Archive.

perhaps because of the concrete challenges of taking in so many immigrants immediately after declaring independence that Israeli leaders so prioritized the ideological component of that absorption. The promotion of *Kibbutz Galuyot* as a Zionist ideological framework may have been an effort to compensate for the economic burden that the Israeli government was placing on the shoulders of the Israeli populace every time it facilitated a new mass *'aliyah*.

Whatever the reasons, institutions affiliated with the Israeli state and charged with facilitating immigration did contextualize *'aliyah* within the *Kibbutz Galuyot* mission. Moreover, they understood their mandate as including all Jewish communities, including those of both Yemen and the United States. Keren ha-Yesod, “the fundraising arm of the Zionist movement,” published pamphlets in the early 1950s that demonstrated this viewpoint. In 1950, the organization published *Ingathering of Exiles: The Exodus from Yemen*,⁴¹ an English-language text that told the story, in heroic terms, of “The Great Return” of Yemen’s Jewish community to Israel. The pamphlet was certainly geared toward an American audience – not only was it written in English, but it was also dedicated “to all those who participated in the redemption of the Jews of Yemen,” including “the thousands of generous donors throughout the world but particularly in the U.S.A.” On the introductory page was written, “Let the report speak for itself. Let each be his own judge of what action the message calls for.” The pamphlet quoted a letter from Avraham Tabib (a leading Yemeni Jewish Zionist who immigrated to Israel in 1907 and served as a member of the *Knesset*), in which he wrote that, “The

⁴¹ Keren ha-Yesod. *Ingathering of Exiles: The Exodus from Yemen*, Goldberg’s Press, 1950

truth is that the duty rests upon every Jew to go up and live in Eretz Israel wherever possible, as long as its gates are open.” In this way, Keren ha-Yesod used the immigration from Yemen as an American-oriented propaganda tool not only to raise funds but also to promote and glorify the idea of *Kibbutz Galuyot*.

Soon after publishing *The Exodus from Yemen*, Keren ha-Yesod released another pamphlet, similar in format and also in English, entitled *Ingathering of Exiles: From 74 Lands to the Land of Israel* (the precise publication date of which is not clear).⁴² The pamphlet began with an alphabetical list of 74 lands that were apparently the subject of “the Biblical prophesy of the Ingathering of the Exiles.” Among those lands were listed ‘Aden, Yemen, and the United States. The pamphlet listed five relevant World Zionist Congress resolutions, one of which was “that the task of Zionism is the encouragement, absorption and integration of immigrants.” This pamphlet thus declared the Zionist movement’s mandate to carry out *Kibbutz Galuyot* not only through the opening of borders but also through the “encouragement” of *‘aliyah*. The American Jewish community was explicitly listed among the objects of that encouragement, along with the Yemeni Jewish community and many others. As far as Keren ha-Yesod was concerned, the two were part of a single project. Between the two *Ingathering of Exiles* pamphlets described here, it is clear that Keren ha-Yesod had no qualms about writing, as an Israeli state-affiliated institution, about the idea of *Kibbutz Galuyot* as part of the Zionist mandate that included American Jewry.

⁴² Keren ha-Yesod. *Ingathering of Exiles: From 74 Lands to the Land of Israel*, Ha’aretz Press

Keren ha-Yesod, however, was not the only Israeli national institution promoting a *Kibbutz Galuyot* that included all Jewish communities. The Immigration Department of the Jewish Agency for Palestine submitted a report to the Zionist General Council that covered its activities from May of 1949 to April of 1950 and implied a similar perspective.⁴³ The introduction to that report stated that:

While being prepared to receive the immigrants who are knocking at our gates at the present day, we must also strive and exert our efforts to prepare for an immigration from those countries where the greatest majority of our dispersed brethren are now resident and where the greatest hopes for the future upbuilding of our country lie.

In April of 1950, while Operation *On Eagles' Wings* was ongoing, "the immigrants who are knocking at our gates at the present day" certainly included Jews from Yemen.

Meanwhile, the United States was home to between four and five million Jews (out of a global total of approximately 11 million, down from nearly 17 million before the Holocaust⁴⁴) – surely one of "those countries where the greatest majority of our dispersed brethren are now resident." In other words, even as the Jewish Agency was facilitating the mass *'aliyah* from Yemen, it was preparing to facilitate *'aliyah* from America as well.

⁴³ The Jewish Agency for Palestine Immigration Department, *Dapei 'Aliyah*, 1950, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archive. JER 44-52 / 3 / 1 / JER.382

⁴⁴ American-Israel Cooperative Enterprise, "Vital Statistics: Jewish Population in the United States, Nationally": *Jewish Virtual Library*

The same report also boasted of Jewish Agency emissaries “bringing the message of redemption” to Jews all over Yemen and facilitating “the glorious chapter of the liquidation of the Yemenite Jewish Community and their immigration to Israel.” Meanwhile, it announced the reorganization of Jewish Agency activities in the United States, describing its intention to “encourage immigration among American Jewry.” The progress of Israeli operations promoting *‘aliyah* all over the world, meanwhile, was celebrated with an “Ingathering of Exiles Day” in December of 1949.⁴⁵ The Jewish Agency, a key Israeli state-affiliated institution, thus understood *Kibbutz Galuyot* as a project that included not only facilitating, but also encouraging, *‘aliyot* from all corners of the diaspora, including both Yemen and the United States.

An article written by Jewish Agency deputy member Joseph Schechtman in *Jewish Affairs* in February of 1950,⁴⁶ entitled “The End of Galut [eng. Exile] Yemen,” although it did not call directly for American *‘aliyah*, similarly glorified the tale of On Eagles’ Wings and placed it within a context of *Kibbutz Galuyot*. The article, written in English in a New York-printed journal and riddled with American-centric references (describing Yemeni Jews as living in “Hoover Towns” after arriving in Israel and listing prices in terms of American dollars, for example), was certainly intended to appeal to an American Jewish audience. It boasted of the operation as marking the liquidation of the longest *Galut* in Jewish history and as a return to the Jewish homeland. It explained the

⁴⁵ The Jewish Agency for Palestine Immigration Department, *Dapei ‘Aliyah*, 1950, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archive. JER 44-52 / 3 / 1 / JER.382

⁴⁶ Joseph Schechtman, “The End of Galut Yemen,” *Jewish Affairs* IV, no. 1 (1 Feb. 1950), American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archive. G 45-54 / 4 / 29 / 3 / AD.13

determination of Yemeni *'olim* as a product of both harsh conditions in Yemen and “love for Zion” and described the activities of Israeli representatives in the transit camp as “spreading among the young and old a knowledge of Hebrew, the history and geography of Palestine, the socialist way of life, and the Zionist movement.”

Schechtman even mentioned that Yemeni Jews in the camp knew the story of BILU, the first-ever Ashkenazi Zionist group to settle in what was then Ottoman Palestine. He did not call directly for American *'aliyah*, but he clearly, writing as a representative of the Jewish Agency and in a way that was certainly directed toward an American audience, situated the *'aliyah* from Yemen within a context of *Kibbutz Galuyot* as a Zionist political project.

Aside from the official publications of the Jewish Agency and Keren ha-Yesod, Israeli officials also made public statements, of varying degrees of openness, before, during, and after Operation *On Eagles' Wings* that connected the *'aliyah* from Yemen and the potential for some *'aliyah* from the United States within the broader ideological framework of *Kibbutz Galuyot*. The *Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA)*, a major Jewish news outlet headquartered in New York and printed in English, reported on many of those statements for the American Jewish community. Sometimes, such statements were sweeping and dramatic, calling for a mass American *'aliyah* that the speakers could never have expected to come to pass. Perhaps those speakers were hoping that, if they called for mass *'aliyah* in their public-facing propaganda, American Jews would respond by either migrating to Israel in smaller numbers (and bringing with them American Jewish knowledge and expertise) or by donating to the new Jewish state's

ever-dwindling coffers. Whatever their intentions, the statements themselves contextualized American Jewish *'aliyah* in the same *Kibbutz Galuyot* process that also underpinned Yemeni Jewish *'aliyah*.

In November of 1949, for example, the *JTA* published a Daily News Bulletin in which it quoted Jewish Agency Immigration Chief (and signatory to the Israeli Declaration of Independence) Eliahu Dobkin. Dobkin called on “every Zionist to ask himself whether he is now prepared to immigrate to Israel,” emphasizing the need for Jews from English-speaking countries, especially the United States, to make *'aliyah*.⁴⁷ Dobkin’s reasoning, according to the article, was that immigration to Israel was at risk of slowing “as a result of the depletion of reserves in the Middle East.” With Operation *On Eagles’ Wings* and similar missions underway, Dobkin wanted immigration to Israel to continue after the *'aliyot* from Southwest Asia with *'aliyot* from English-speaking countries. In his eyes (or, at least, in his portrayal), as a leading Israeli figure, immigration from America and from Yemen were part of the same ongoing process, so that the completion of the *'aliyot* from Yemen and other Southwest Asian countries translated into the necessity of an increase in *'aliyah* from the United States to compensate.

Isaac Herzog, Israel’s Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi during Operation *On Eagles’ Wings*, was even more explicit in his statement on the same issue, reported in the *JTA* in April

⁴⁷ *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, “*JTA Daily News Bulletin*.” Nov. 8, 1949, Jewish Telegraphic Agency Archive. <https://bit.ly/2leuGlr>

of 1950.⁴⁸ In a message on Passover, the Jewish holiday commemorating the biblical exodus from Egypt that has so often been referenced as a cosmic precursor to the mass Jewish emigrations from other parts of the world (particularly Yemen), Rabbi Herzog “appealed to the Jews in democratic countries to do their utmost for the Jewish state.”

The *JTA* quoted Herzog as saying the following:

From the DP camps in Europe, from Yemen and from North Africa, our brethren stream to Israel in the tens of thousands. . . You, the Jews who know and enjoy freedom in the United States and in other countries, should come at least in the thousands.

Thus Herzog, like Dobkin, connected the immigration from other countries, including Yemen, to Israel to a direct call for American Jewish *‘aliyah*.

In an “Independence Day Proclamation” reported in the *JTA* later that same month,⁴⁹ Israel called the *‘aliyot* of the first two years of the country’s existence “the first phase of the realization of the ingathering of exiles,” naming as one example of progress to that point the liquidation of “the most ancient, oppressed of the diasporas in the Arab world, Yemen.” Nevertheless, among the challenges that the still-new Jewish state faced, according to the same statement, was the reality that “the great majority of our people are still on foreign soil.”

⁴⁸ *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, “JTA Daily News Bulletin.” 5 April, 1950, Jewish Telegraphic Agency Archive. <https://bit.ly/2pXU66z>

⁴⁹ *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, “JTA Daily News Bulletin.” 21 April, 1950. Jewish Telegraphic Agency Archive. <https://bit.ly/2li10di>

Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion himself also shared this understanding of *Kibbutz Galuyot*, at least in his public presentation. In April of 1950,⁵⁰ the *JTA* reported him calling for “mass immigration” to Israel. “Our generation must decide to what extent it is ready to take part in the great Jewish revolution,” he said. He mentioned Yemen explicitly as an area of progress, but called all past *‘aliyah* “only a small beginning as compared with the needs of the future.” He asked for “the total mobilization of all forces of the nation” toward this end. He viewed the *‘aliyah* from Yemen as one small part of a much larger project to absorb Jews from all over the world. Later, in a 1959 essay entitled *Zionism and Pseudo-Zionism*,⁵¹ Ben-Gurion elaborated on this idea, deriding “Jews who consider themselves a part of the American, the British, or the French people” for not making *‘aliyah*. According to his articulation of Zionism, the millions of Jews who chose to remain in America after the founding of the state of Israel were failing to truly fulfill the Zionist mission, which “was built on the conviction that we did not form part of the people among whom we lived, that we had no intention of remaining in exile, and that our deepest aspiration was to return personally to Zion.”

Abraham Abbas – a Syrian Jewish Zionist leader who came to pre-state Israel in 1929, became a member of *Kibbutz* Kfar Gil’adi, served as a Member of the *Knesset*, and in 1949 became a “member of the Executive Committee of the Histadrut” and was

⁵⁰ *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, “JTA Daily News Bulletin.” 10 April, 1950. Jewish Telegraphic Agency Archive. <https://bit.ly/2GmuxSF>

⁵¹ D. Ben Gurion, “Zionism and Pseudo-Zionism,” in *Zionism: The Sequel*, ed. Carol Diamant (New York: Hadassah, 1998), 45

charged with leading the organization's "Mizrahi wing"⁵² – also positioned immigration from Yemen within a context of *Kibbutz Galuyot*. In a 1959 essay entitled "From Ingathering to Integration: The Communal Problem in Israel,"⁵³ he argued for better treatment of Mizrahi and Sephardi Jewish immigrants "so that at the end of the second decade of the State we might be able jubilantly to proclaim that the vision of the integration of all exiles has become a reality." Abbas even began his essay with a messianic quote from *Isaiah 43* alluding to *Kibbutz Galuyot* as a religious ideal: ". . .Bring my sons from far and my daughters from the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 43:8). For Abbas, too, Operation *On Eagles' Wings* was part of a larger, ideological Zionist project. His perspective, and his decision to contextualize Operation *On Eagles' Wings* within *Kibbutz Galuyot*, is especially noteworthy because of both his particularly relevant position within the *Histradrut* and his status as a member of Israel's political establishment who had himself immigrated from an Arab country.

Also instructive in gauging the importance of the idea of *Kibbutz Galuyot* in Operation *On Eagles' Wings* is an examination of the terminology employed by Israeli media sources to describe those events. Israeli newspaper reports are especially significant for the purposes of this study because they represent the perspectives of Zionist elites and political party leaders. Several of the major publications in early Israel,

⁵² *Modern Middle Eastern Jewish Thought: Writings on Identity, Politics, & Culture, 1893-1958*, ed. Moshe Behar and Zvi Ben-Dor Benite (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2013), 224

⁵³ A. Abbas, "From Ingathering to Integration: The Communal Problem in Israel," in *Modern Middle Eastern Jewish Thought: Writings on Identity, Politics, & Culture, 1893-1958*, ed. Moshe Behar and Zvi Ben-Dor Benite (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2013), 225

like *Davar*, were organs of political entities, while others, like the *Palestine Post* and *Maariv*, were independent but still operated within a Zionist media environment shaped by the state. Together, the publications examined here represent a broad cross-section of Israeli intellectual elite opinion and a significant array of material read by Israeli citizens. All of these publications, partisan and independent, left-wing and right-wing, religious and secular, use some variant of the terminology of *Kibbutz Galuyot* in describing Operation *On Eagles' Wings*.

Popular independent newspapers were in some ways the most direct in contextualizing the operation within the project of *Kibbutz Galuyot*. *Maariv*, the most widely read newspaper in Israel at the time, published a major article on November 8, 1949, headlined "In That Way the *Galut* of Yemen Made 'Aliyah," describing the journey of Yemeni Jews to 'Aden and then to Israel.⁵⁴ In a commentary beside the article, entitled *Maariv Conversations*, the following was written:

A great Messianic movement happened before our eyes. The *Kibbutz* of an ancient Jewish [community], immersed in a far-flung corner of Arab *Galut*, was liquidated and transferred to Israel. Humiliated and persecuted Jews that had been forbidden to ride on donkeys [by *Dhimmi* laws] were flown on airplanes, young and old, in very dramatic fashion.⁵⁵

Maariv employed a specific vocabulary, including words like *Galut* (Exile), *nidachat* (far-flung), and *kibbutz* (ingathering), to describe Operation *On Eagles' Wings*. Those terms

⁵⁴ *Maariv*, "Kach Hoaltah Galut Teiman." 8 Nov. 1949, National Library of Israel.

⁵⁵ *Maariv*, "Sichot Maariv." 8 Nov. 1949, National Library of Israel.

come from Jewish religious liturgy: one of the blessing of the *'Amidah*, for example, asks for “*nes l'kabetz galuyot*” – “the miracle of ingathering exiles,” and praises the divine for “*m'kabetz nidchei 'amo Yisrael*” – “ingathering the far-flung of the people of Israel.” The parallels between the concepts and terminology in the two texts, one a centuries'-old prayer and one a modern Zionist media publication reporting on current events, are striking.

The *Palestine Post*, now called the *Jerusalem Post*, was also independent, although it had very close ties to the Israeli state (the publication's founder and editor, Gershon Agron, was on leave in November of 1949 to head Israel's Government Information Service). In the paper's issue on November 8, 1949, a series of articles described Yemen as a “bitter exile” and lauded Operation *On Eagles' Wings* as a moment of “redemption” for Yemeni Jews. An editorial⁵⁶ described the operation as “proof. . . of a messianic age.” “Israel has won its independence on the battlefield and justified its existence in the council room,” the editorial read. “But it is the reception camps which are giving validity to the victories.” Operation *On Eagles' Wings*, then, was a fundamental element of the Zionist program, exemplifying the very reason that a Jewish state was founded.

Partisan publications drew on similar themes and terminology. The *Histadrut* organ, *Davar*, described Operation *On Eagles' Wings* as the “liquidation” of the Yemeni

⁵⁶ *Palestine Post*, Editorial. 8 Nov. 1949, National Library of Israel.

Galut.⁵⁷ The right-wing nationalist *Herut* used the same terms.⁵⁸ The national religious organ, *haTzopheh*, termed the operation “a glorious and daring act of *Kibbutz Galuyot*.”⁵⁹ Even the communist *Kol ha’Am* described the process as a “*Kibbutz*” as well.⁶⁰

All of these publications, to some degree, used terminology that situated Operation *On Eagles’ Wings* within the framework of *Kibbutz Galuyot*. Across the political spectrum, the political parties and journalists that conveyed the news of this event to the Israeli populace did so through this lens.

Publications by the Jewish Agency and Keren ha-Yesod, statements by Israeli political and religious leaders, and the reports of Israeli news media all suggest that the mass *‘aliyah* from Yemen was understood in the mainstream Israeli political discourse as part of the Zionist project of *Kibbutz Galuyot*. Moreover, Israeli leaders portrayed the American Jewish community as subject to *Kibbutz Galuyot* as well, so that, in the Israeli estimation, *‘aliyah* from Yemen and *‘aliyah* from the United States were connected within the same ideological framework. It is possible that the use of such ideological terms was meant to compensate for the practical burdens of absorbing so many immigrants, and it is also possible that Israeli leaders knew, even as they called for American Jewish *‘aliyah*, that the most they could hope for was a handful of *‘olim* and a

⁵⁷ *Davar*, “Golot Teiman Mitchaselet.” 8 Nov. 1949, National Library of Israel.

⁵⁸ *Herut*, “Hagalut Hamitchaselet’ hi Galut Teiman.” 8 Nov. 1949, National Library of Israel.

⁵⁹ *HaTzopheh*, “Aliyat Teiman ‘al ‘Kanfei Nesharim.” 8 Nov. 1949, National Library of Israel.

⁶⁰ *Kol ha’Am*, “Hamshech ha’Tzena’ Lifo’al Uhakalot Lb’alei-hon.” 8 Nov. 1949, National Library of Israel.

surge in donations. Whatever their motives, however, they did clearly promote *Kibbutz Galuyot* as a framework for understanding Operation *On Eagles' Wings* and other operations like it.

As this chapter demonstrates, at least within Israel, *Kibbutz Galuyot* was the dominant ideological framework for understanding Operation *On Eagles' Wings*. Israeli leaders contextualized Operation *On Eagles' Wings* in a larger Zionist project to absorb the Jewish diaspora into the Jewish state.

This framework, however, did not go unchallenged. As the next chapter will demonstrate, leaders in the American Jewish community, which also played an indispensable role in facilitating the mass *'aliyah* from Yemen, regarded the idea of *Kibbutz Galuyot* with great ambivalence and, in some cases, outright disdain. *Kibbutz Galuyot* would become a major point of tension between the Israeli state and the American Jewish leadership.

Chapter Two:

American Jewish Perspectives on *On Eagles' Wings*

The previous chapter explained the ways in which the mass *'aliyah* from Yemen was incorporated into the Zionist discourse of *Kibbutz Galuyot* and argued that Israeli leaders regarded the facilitation of *'aliyah* from Yemen and the encouragement of *'aliyah* from the United States as linked. American Jewish leaders, who had long been reluctant to embrace Zionism because of the threat it seemed to pose to American Jewry's very legitimacy (as the world's largest diaspora Jewish community), was swift to reject this mainstream Israeli interpretation of events.

In this chapter, I will demonstrate, however, how American Jewish leaders did participate in Operation *On Eagles' Wings*. Moreover, American Jewish institutions played several indispensable roles, to the point that the operation likely could not have been carried out without American Jewish support. That American Jewish leaders did choose to help despite their ideological differences with their Israeli counterparts raises a key question: how did they reconcile their ideological and practical opposition to *Kibbutz Galuyot* with their facilitation of Operation *On Eagles' Wings*? This chapter seeks to answer that question.

The American Jewish Committee and the Zionist Movement

The American Jewish Committee held its first meeting in 1906 as an elite assembly of philanthropists and community leaders, conservative in approach, with the

aim of advancing the civil liberties of Jews around the world⁶¹ and representing Jewish needs to the American government. By the time of Operation *On Eagles' Wings*, the Committee had already proven its efficacy in advocating for the Jews on a number of fronts. The organization was particularly invested in the battle for unrestricted Jewish immigration to the United States,⁶² and it also pushed hard for the abrogation of a treaty between the United States and Russia that had allowed the czarist regime to apply its anti-Jewish laws against American Jewish citizens on Russian soil.⁶³ It was also involved in the formation and leadership of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, leading a joint project of three Jewish organizations to support Jews in distress overseas,⁶⁴ and it fought tooth and nail to spur America into action during the Holocaust.⁶⁵ As this chapter will discuss, the American Jewish Committee and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee that it had played an integral part in forming would become staples of American Jewish support for *On Eagles' Wings*.

Despite the American Jewish Committee's presumption to represent American Jewry as a whole, it had famously strained relations with the ever-growing Zionist movement. It should be clear, therefore, that although this study refers to the American Jewish Committee and its members as "leaders" among American Jews, their legitimacy was contested, and they could at no point legitimately claim to be the only, or likely

⁶¹ Naomi Cohen, *Not Free to Desist: The American Jewish Committee 1906-1966* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1972), 16-7

⁶² *Ibid* 37

⁶³ *Ibid* 54-5

⁶⁴ *Ibid* 85

⁶⁵ *Ibid* 154-5

even the primary, leaders of the American Jewish community. Most Committee members held serious ideological reservations about Zionism, primarily because they viewed America as a long-term home for millions of Jews and did not see Jews as a separate national group. They feared that the Zionist campaign for Jewish nationalism and a Jewish state would undermine the legitimacy of emancipated Jewish communities elsewhere in the world.⁶⁶ They also were afraid that Zionism would lead to suspicions of dual loyalty. Committee leaders were wealthy German Jews who generally felt securely positioned in the United States,⁶⁷ but they worried that Zionism might jeopardize their place in American society. These tensions were manifested in several ways. For example, the American Zionist publication *The Maccabaeon* attacked the testimony of one American Jewish Committee representative and one Reform Movement representative before the United States Immigration Commission because, in their defense of Jewish immigration, they had argued that Jews did not constitute a “race.”⁶⁸ One sharply divisive issue was the question of an American Jewish Congress – the Zionists advocated for a democratic American Jewish leadership, whereas the leaders of the American Jewish Committee viewed such a proposal as a challenge to their representative authority.⁶⁹ Some of those people who had taken part in earlier

⁶⁶ *Ibid* 104

⁶⁷ *Ibid* 193

⁶⁸ *Maccabaeon*, “There is no Jewish Race!” in *Jews & Race: Writings on Identity & Differnece, 1880-1940*, ed. Mitchell B. Hart (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2011) 226

⁶⁹ *Op Cit*: Cohen 105

American Jewish Committee deliberations, but who harbored Zionist leanings, resigned over this issue.⁷⁰

It would be a simplistic generalization, however, to characterize all relations between the American Jewish Committee and the Zionist movement as negative. Officially, the Committee branded itself as “non-Zionist,” but it frequently collaborated with Zionist activists in the United States and, later, with the Israeli state. Committee members recognized Palestine as a potential refuge for Eastern European Jews⁷¹ and sought to distinguish between acknowledging Palestine as one destination among several for Jewish immigrants and refugees (but not as a political entity) and promoting Palestine as *the* destination where Jews worldwide should make their homes.⁷² During World War I, the American Jewish Committee successfully answered Max Nordau’s request for assistance in averting a Turkish massacre of Jews in Palestine.⁷³ The Committee also released a reserved statement expressing “profound appreciation” for the Balfour Declaration, while reiterating the unquestioning loyalty of American Jewry to the American state and predicting pointedly that the majority of the Jews would continue to live in the diaspora.⁷⁴ Thus relations between this major non-Zionist group and the Zionists, although often strained, were not uniformly antagonistic.

Particularly after Israel was founded, the tension that did exist between the Committee and the Zionists was focused on one issue: *Kibbutz Galuyot*. That Zionist

⁷⁰ *Ibid* 95

⁷¹ *Ibid* 150

⁷² *Ibid* 188

⁷³ *Ibid* 87

⁷⁴ *Ibid* 109

principle, as described in the previous chapter, included the negation of the diaspora and a call for mass American Jewish immigration to Israel – a serious challenge to the legitimacy of the American Jewish cultural elite represented by the Committee. This issue was discussed and officially addressed in 1950 in an agreement between American Jewish Committee President Jacob Blaustein and Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, by which the latter stated that “any weakening of American Jewry. . .is a definite loss to Jews everywhere and to Israel in particular”⁷⁵ and clarified that “the decision as to whether they wish to come [to Israel] – permanently or temporarily – rests with the free discretion of each American Jew himself.”⁷⁶ Blaustein promised American Jewish support to Israel in exchange for Ben-Gurion’s renouncement of efforts to apply *Kibbutz Galuyot* to American Jewry.

Neither Ben-Gurion nor other members of Israel’s political elite, however, consistently abided by the agreement. The issue of *Kibbutz Galuyot* continued to be a crucial point of tension between the American Jewish Committee and the Israeli government for years to come, and certainly it was a hotly debated topic as Operation *On Eagles’ Wings* was unfolding.

American Jewry’s Indispensable Role in the ‘*Aliyah* from Yemen

Despite the enormous gulf between the American Jewish non-Zionist and the Israeli Zionist discourse on the issue of *Kibbutz Galuyot*, major American Jewish and

⁷⁵ *Ibid* 312

⁷⁶ *Ibid* 313

Israeli institutions collaborated throughout Operation *On Eagles' Wings*. American Jewish donors funded, and American Jewish staff managed, the Hashed displaced persons camp in 'Aden. The American Jewish Committee and the United Jewish Appeal raised the money necessary to run the camp and to transport tens of thousands of Jews to Israel, and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (AJJDC, or JDC) even chartered American planes for the airlift itself. All the while, these American Jewish organizations were fully aware of how indispensable their participation was to Operation *On Eagles' Wings*. American Jews did not halfheartedly assist in an Israeli operation over which they had no control – rather, they made a choice to enable an operation that otherwise may well have been impossible.

The first crucial, albeit extremely problematic, way in which the JDC became involved in the affairs of Yemeni Jewry was through the management of the Hashed Camp in 'Aden, a task that the organization took on in 1946.⁷⁷ In many ways, the JDC failed to maintain the camp as a suitable living space for human beings, allowing it to slip into incredible poverty and appointing as directors a series of racist, oppressively secularist, and sometimes violent Ashkenazi medical doctors, who severely mistreated the Yemeni Jewish displaced persons.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, it was only because of the camp and its JDC funding and administration that many of Yemen's Jews were able to reach 'Aden at all, let alone remain there for months or years waiting for the opportunity to travel to the Land of Israel. Before Hashed's founding, the streets of 'Aden were

⁷⁷ Esther Meir-Glitzstein, *The "Magic Carpet" Exodus of Yemenite Jewry: an Israeli Formative Myth* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2014), 60

⁷⁸ *Ibid* 63-64

becoming so saturated with Jewish migrants from northern Yemen that tensions between northern Yemeni Jews, local 'Adeni Jews, the 'Adeni Muslim population, and the British authorities who ruled 'Aden were mounting. Because the JDC stepped in when it did, despite all of the ugly issues associated with its mismanagement of Hashed, outbreaks of actual violence were somewhat limited and, often, neither the imam of northern Yemen nor the British authorities in 'Aden were sufficiently concerned with the southward flow of Jews to invest in securitizing the border.⁷⁹ In that sense, the JDC's role in managing Hashed made the mass *'aliyah* from Yemen possible.

Aside from the Hashed camp, the JDC was also responsible for several key aspects of the airlift itself. It played a dominant role, even above that of the Jewish Agency. It was the JDC that organized the logistics of the operation, that liaised with British authorities, that managed operational expenditures, and that sent representatives to negotiate with various Arab Muslim leaders to provide some degree of safety to Yemeni Jews heading toward 'Aden. It was even the JDC that entered negotiations with Alaska Airlines and chartered planes, with American pilots, to transport Jews from 'Aden to Israel.⁸⁰ In all of these ways, this major American Jewish institution was not only involved with, but also at the helm of, Operation *On Eagles' Wings*.

⁷⁹ *Ibid* 58-60

⁸⁰ *Ibid* 107

Moreover, funding of the operation was an almost entirely American Jewish affair. The United Jewish Appeal took the lead on finding the \$3,500,000⁸¹ necessary to pay for the 420 airplane flights and other expenses. According to an American Jewish Committee report from Israel in October of 1949, moreover, the JDC continued to allocate funds to the *'olim* after they arrived in Israel, in partnership with the Jewish Agency, to help provide food and shelter.⁸²

Along with similar operations to transport Jewish displaced persons from Europe and from elsewhere in Southwest Asia, the American Jewish community as a whole expended significant effort to raise the money necessary to airlift most of Yemen's Jewish community to Israel. In June of 1949, a United Jewish Appeal press release implored the American Jewish public to provide the necessary financial resources.⁸³ General Chairman Henry Morgenthau said that Jewish displaced persons were "wholly dependent on the generosity of the Jewish communities of the United States for homes and a livelihood" and that "the officers of the United Jewish Appeal turn, in all solemnity and humility, to the Jews of America to ask them to undertake every action to meet this grave situation."

As the UJA scrambled for funds to deliver to the JDC and to spend on affordable housing in Israel, even Jacob Blaustein, the president of the American Jewish Committee

⁸¹ Tudor Parfitt, *The Road to Redemption: The Jews of the Yemen 1900-1950* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 283

⁸² H. Lowenberg, Report from Israel, Oct. 1949, American Jewish Committee Archive.

⁸³ K. Steinglass, 151,000 Immigrants Entered Israel during First Six Months of 1949 with Aid of U.J.A., 30 June 1949, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archive. NY AR194554 / 4 / 43 / 14 / 524.E

(which was itself founded in large part as an organ for American Jews to support Jews in need overseas⁸⁴) and perhaps the single most vocal opponent of the *Kibbutz Galuyot* idea, called for donations. In a May 1949 address through the National Broadcasting Company, entitled “Israel through American Eyes,” he appealed to America for financial support of the Jewish state.⁸⁵ He described his encounter with Yemeni Jewish *’olim* as an example of Israel acting “like America,” as a “melting pot” and a “humanitarian haven for the persecuted and the oppressed,” and also as an example of the sort of mass immigration project that required outside funding. “In addition to large voluntary contributions from the United States and other countries, such as through the United Jewish Appeal,” he said, “help must come in the form of additional foreign governmental loans.” Even Blaustein, who had great misgivings about Israeli immigration policy and the way that the Jewish state interacted with the Jewish diaspora, committed his voice, his effort, his time, and his name to rallying funds for the absorption of *’olim*.

The JDC in particular was very aware of its importance to the operation. In its archive, for example, is a flier that proclaims that “our organization is the ONLY source of relief for the Jews in Yemen” (emphasis in original) and that its goal was to rescue 40,000 Yemeni Jews.⁸⁶ Thus the JDC acknowledged its unique position as a funder of efforts to aid Yemen’s Jewish community. The minutes of a meeting of the JDC country

⁸⁴ *Op Cit*: Cohen 4

⁸⁵ J. Blaustein, Israel Through American Eyes, 4 May 1949, American Jewish Committee Archive.

⁸⁶ Our Organization is the Only Source of Relief for the Jews in Yemen, 12 Nov. 1947, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archive. NY AR194554 / 4 / 1 / 1 / 4

directors in October of 1949,⁸⁷ meanwhile, included an address by J. J. Schwartz in which he pointed out that the majority of American Jews “are not interested in the Yemenites,” because they could not relate to them as easily as they could Ashkenazi Jews coming from Europe. In the absence of a strong contingency of American Jewish donors or activists advocating for aid to Yemeni Jews, the JDC’s decision to support those Jews could not have been the result of grassroots pressure. Without any natural groundswell of support from the American Jewish public, it was only the active urging of the JDC and other Jewish institutions that could facilitate any American Jewish support for the Yemeni Jewish community. Groups like the AJC and the JDC, which were founded primarily to aid distressed Jews outside of the United States, took on the mobilization of American Jewry in support of Yemeni Jewry as a major project.

Later, in the minutes of a similar meeting in October of 1950,⁸⁸ an address delivered by high-ranking JDC staff member Charles Passman was recorded. Passman described Operation *On Eagles’ Wings* as “to the greatest credit of the JDC.” In his words, “if it would not have been for the JDC, tens of thousands of people would have fallen by the wayside. We have brought them all to Israel. . .” Before that assembly of JDC leaders, Passman took an almost gloating tone when describing how crucial the organization was to that effort.

⁸⁷ Minutes of Conference of JDC Country Directors, Oct. 1949, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archive. G 45-54 / 1 / 1 / 1 / ADM.3

⁸⁸ Minutes of Conference of JDC Country Directors, Oct. 1950, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archive. G 45-54 / 1 / 1 / 1 / ADM.5

At least for the JDC, then, there was no question that the fate of Yemen's Jewish community was in the hands of American Jewish leaders. Therefore, the decision to play such an involved role in *On Eagles' Wings* was also a determination that the operation (even though Israelis regarded it as part of *Kibbutz Galuyot*) was within American Jewish organizations' mandate.

American Jewish Understandings of *On Eagles' Wings*

Given that the dominant discourse regarding Operation *On Eagles' Wings* among Israeli and Yemeni Jews envisioned the 'aliyah from Yemen as part of *Kibbutz Galuyot*, American Jewish leaders felt a need to reconcile their indispensable role in Operation *On Eagles' Wings* with their general opposition to the Israeli conceptualization of that idea. Unlike the Israeli political establishment, mainstream American Jewish leaders did not regard the Yemeni 'aliyah as related to the possibility of any similar 'aliyah from the United States. Some differentiated between Yemen and the United States, accepting the Zionist discourse of *Kibbutz Galuyot* but modifying it from its traditional form to separate American Jewry from the category of "Galut" (which, in Hebrew, connotes a forced exile, as opposed to a voluntary diaspora). Others rejected the idea of *Kibbutz Galuyot* altogether, emphasizing the factors that drove Jews *from* Yemen (push factors) over those that pulled Jews *to* Israel (pull factors) and highlighting what they saw as the humanitarian (and thus apolitical) reasons for the American Jewish community to support that migration. These two viewpoints on the 'aliyah from Yemen, although different, amounted to the same thing: the American Jewish community could actively

participate in the facilitation of the migration of Jews from Yemen to Israel without legitimizing Israeli calls for the liquidation of the American Jewish community.

Many American Jewish leaders accepted the Zionist idea of *Kibbutz Galuyot* to some extent, but rejected the mainstream Israeli view that all land outside of Israel was necessarily exilic. According to this logic, “*Galut*” was defined not in contrast to the Land of Israel as a specific geographic location, but rather in contrast to freedom as a condition of Jewish existence. Global Jewry was divided not between Jews who lived in *Galut* and Jews who lived in Israel, but between Jews who lived in *Galut* and Jews who lived as free, emancipated people. America, then, because it offered legal freedom and equality to its Jewish citizens, was no more exilic than the Jewish state.

That distinction was drawn in a report by the American Jewish Committee (AJC) on the proceedings of the World Zionist Congress in August of 1951,⁸⁹ the site of a particularly contentious debate over the idea of *Kibbutz Galuyot*. Published approximately a year after the end of Operation *On Eagles’ Wings*, the report raised the question of “Zionists in non-persecution countries.” It explicitly differentiated between “Jews from the free countries and Jews from countries of oppression,” stating that the “countries of exile” and the “countries of oppression” were synonymous. The report emphasized remarks by Rose Halprin, then president of Hadassah, the Women’s Zionist Organization of America, who led the American Jewish faction at the 1951 World Zionist Congress in standing up to Eliahu Dobkin’s promotion of a *Kibbutz Galuyot* process that

⁸⁹ E. Greenberg, Report of 23rd World Zionist Congress Harasses Zionists and Distresses Friends 24 Sept. 1951, Berman Jewish Policy Archive. <https://bit.ly/2E8L8Y2>

included an aspiration to liquidate American Jewry. The report attributed to Halprin the viewpoint that,

The U.S. was no exile, and U.S. Jews did not want to help Israel by way of liquidating their homes and coming to live in it. They wanted to help Israel in every other way. The U.S. might be a part of the Jewish Diaspora, dispersal, but no exile, which meant punishment, banishment.

The AJC report and Rose Halprin distinguished between what they viewed as legitimate subjects of *Kibbutz Galuyot*, “countries of oppression” like Yemen, and the United States, which, as a “free country,” was exempted from that category and its implications.

The 1951 report was not the first time that the AJC had drawn that distinction. The organization’s report from Israel in September of 1950,⁹⁰ for example, praised Jacob Blaustein for his “public exchange of views with Ben Gurion,” which “set a landmark in the development of relations between Israel and world Jewries.” At the same time, the report took great care to “emphasize” that “a distinction must yet be drawn between U.S. Jewry and some other Jewries in other countries. Not everywhere can it be said to be for the good of Jews that Israel does not intervene.” Here, once again, the report drew a careful distinction between “countries in which Jews are persecuted or discriminated against, or which are of such backwardness. . .” (like Yemen) and “the great Jewry of America.”

⁹⁰ Report from Israel, Sept. 1950, American Jewish Committee Archive.

John Slawson, the Executive Vice President of the American Jewish Committee, made a similar distinction in an AJC Executive Committee Meeting in May of 1949,⁹¹ at the start of Operation *On Eagles' Wings* and soon after Slawson had participated in an AJC delegation to Israel. During that trip, AJC leaders had encountered all manner of immigrants, including "primitive immigrants from Yemen." According to Slawson, Israel had no mandate to call for mass '*aliyah* from the United States because, "at least in the Western world, the emancipation of Jews is a permanent reality." From Slawson's comments, it was not clear whether or not he opposed *Kibbutz Galuyot* as a concept, but he was unambiguous regarding the special status of Jews in the United States and in the "Western world" in general. That special status was derived from the condition of those Jews as emancipated – in other words, even if *Galut* was a legitimate concept, it would not include Jews living in countries that offered their Jewish populations legal equality. *Galut*, if such a thing existed, was defined not by geography but by legal conditions.

Arthur Hertzberg, the rabbi, scholar, and Jewish community leader who himself served as president of the AJC from 1972-1978, made a similar distinction, but with even more subtlety (and much later).⁹² He wrote that "Judaism" and "Jewishness" could be in *Galut* anywhere outside of the Land of Israel, but that "the individual Jew, biologically, is no longer in exile in democracy." In his view, the fact of living outside of

⁹¹ Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, May 1949, American Jewish Committee Archive.

⁹² A. Hertzberg, "The American Context of *Galut*," in *Zionism: The Sequel*, ed. Carol Diamant (New York: Hadassah, 1998), 135

Israel made practicing the Jewish religion and identifying with the Jewish people difficult and uncomfortable, but it did not necessarily constitute *Galut* for Jewish individuals themselves. He even explicitly distinguished between “the Jews who remain in Yemen,” who are “clearly. . .in exile,” and “the American situation,” which is “certainly” different. Hertzberg, who served during the 1970s as a leader in both the AJC and the World Zionist Organization, found nuance in the definition of *Galut*, but still maintained a hard distinction between the Yemeni Jewish experience and the American one.

By contrast with the equivocal attempts of some American Jewish leaders to differentiate between the diaspora and the charged status of *Galut*, other American Jewish leaders rejected the idea of *Kibbutz Galuyot* outright. The leading voice for this approach was Jacob Blaustein, the president of the American Jewish Committee during Operation *On Eagles’ Wings*. Blaustein was known for standing up to Prime Minister Ben-Gurion on the issue of Israeli interference in the American Jewish community, and he, perhaps better than anyone, articulated an American Jewish position that rejected *Kibbutz Galuyot* completely. Characteristic of this position was the depiction of the *‘aliyah* from Yemen as a purely humanitarian endeavor, with no political significance, and as the result of push-factors that made Yemen unappealing rather than pull-factors that drew Yemeni *‘olim* to Israel.

In April of 1950, while Operation *On Eagles’ Wings* was underway, Blaustein delivered an address to the AJC Executive Committee, which was subsequently printed

with the title “The Voice of Reason.”⁹³ In it, he spoke strongly against the very idea of *Kibbutz Galuyot*:

There are a few *unthinking* Jewish nationalists who appear to want to assign to Israel the role of “ingathering” Jews from all over the world, in the false belief that Jewish life outside of Israel – in *exile* as they put it – is without spiritual value, cultural significance, or hope of personal or group security. To them, Israel is important because they consider it stands as a potential refuge for Jews the world over; indeed, in their erroneous thinking, as a refuge for American Jews whenever persecution should drive us from this country. That, of course, is *not* Israel’s importance. [emphasis in original]

Although Blaustein elaborated extensively on the particular importance of American Jewry and on the American Jewish community’s commitment to the United States, he understood the mainstream Israeli perspective that *Galut* was defined by “Jewish life outside of Israel,” took that interpretation of *Galut* at face value, and rejected it unequivocally. He took issue not only with the categorization of the United States as part of the *Galut*, but with the very idea that any *Galut* existed.

This logic, unlike the subtle parsing of the term “*Galut*” by figures like Hertzberg, left no room for Yemen to be regarded as exilic any more than the United States. The AJC and other American Jewish organizations and figures, however, were actively facilitating mass *‘aliyah* from Yemen and elsewhere even as Blaustein was blasting the “extremist” mainstream Israeli/Zionist framework of understanding those migrations.

⁹³ J. Blaustein, Voice of Reason, 29 April 1950, American Jewish Committee Archive.

This apparent contradiction might have posed an ideological problem for American Jewish leaders, and certainly might have been viewed by Israeli leaders as hypocritical. Blaustein, however, preempted any accusations of hypocrisy through a reframing of the migrations. He resolved this contradiction between his professed rejection of *Kibbutz Galuyot* and his (and his organization's) crucial participation in a process of 'aliyah from Yemen that Israelis viewed as part of *Kibbutz Galuyot* by portraying the migrations as products of push-factors, and American facilitation of mass 'aliyah as an apolitical, humanitarian project.

According to Blaustein, "it is only anti-Semitism and political and social threats to their security that breeds separatism and nationalism among Jews."⁹⁴ In "The Voice of Reason," he claimed that Zionist encouragement of 'aliyah had been a constant phenomenon for decades, but had only borne fruit in the wake of disasters: "Zionist propaganda, the ideology of Zionism, did not change. Conditions changed." In other words, mass 'aliyah like the ongoing migration from Yemen had nothing to do with the pull-factors of Zionist ideology, Jewish statehood, or *Kibbutz Galuyot*. It had everything to do, instead, with the push-factors of deteriorating local conditions and anti-Semitism. American Jewish involvement in the facilitation of 'aliyah wasn't a political issue, but a humanitarian one.

By the May 1949 meeting of the AJC Executive Committee, Blaustein had already begun to make these points. According to the notes on that meeting,⁹⁵ although

⁹⁴ *Ibid*

⁹⁵ Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, May 1949, American Jewish Committee Archive.

Blaustein acknowledged that “our interest in Israel is particularly strong at this moment” because, at least temporarily, “historic events have made Israel a magnet for a large-scale migration,” he was careful to reiterate that support for Israeli efforts to absorb Jewish immigrants “represents no diminution of our efforts to aid Jews who are firmly settled in other countries integrating themselves fully into the life of the nations of which they are citizens.” Even as he acknowledged the importance of American Jewish support for migration to Israel in some cases, he paired that acknowledgement with a reminder that he did not consider *‘aliyah* to have intrinsic value that would make it a better option for diaspora Jews than integration into societies outside of Israel. During that meeting, Blaustein called directly for financial investment in Israeli immigration efforts and in the stability of the Israeli economy as the Jewish state sought to integrate hundreds of thousands of *‘olim* from Yemen and elsewhere, saying that, “not only tremendous voluntary contributions from the Jewish communities in this and other countries, but additional foreign loans and – not least – the attraction of private enterprise capital are indispensable.” At the same time, he stressed that “the basis of the immigration policy is purely humanitarian.” By defining immigration to Israel as a humanitarian issue, Blaustein was able to reconcile playing a direct personal and institutional role in support of Operation *On Eagles’ Wings* and similar mass *‘aliyot* from all over the world with his sweeping public denunciation of *Kibbutz Galuyot* as a Zionist political project.

The distinction between the mainstream Israeli view that the *‘aliyah* from Yemen was a political act of *Kibbutz Galuyot* and Blaustein’s view that it was an apolitical

humanitarian act can also be seen in the press releases published by the Israeli Foreign Press Division and the JDC in autumn of 1949, after the operation was apparently leaked to the American press. The Israeli press release,⁹⁶ published in October, presented the ideological element of the operation. According to that press release, all Yemeni Jews had “cherished the Zionist ideal in their hearts for centuries.” The JDC press release,⁹⁷ although it was longer, did not include any similar statement. It praised Israel for accepting the refugees, stating that “the decision [to absorb Yemeni Jews] exhibits the absolute determination of the new state to offer haven to distressed Jews despite all possible resulting hardships.” Whereas the Israeli press release saw Yemeni Jews as “Zionist,” the JDC press release about the same event viewed them primarily as “distressed.” Moreover, the JDC press release concluded with a note that not all of the Jews whom it had helped to transport had made *‘aliyah* – because its objective was “aiding distressed Jews overseas” rather than facilitating immigration to Israel, some 30,000 Jewish immigrants in the past year had been brought by the JDC to other countries.

The latter point was also emphasized in later *JTA* articles in which the JDC appealed for more funds from American Jews. JDC Chairman Edward M. M. Warburg, in his January 1950 appeal,⁹⁸ stated that the JDC sought to transport “Jews leaving certain

⁹⁶ Information Services of the State of Israel Foreign Press Division, Press Release No. 1, 7 Oct. 1949, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archive. JER 44-52 / 1 / 2 / 1 / JER.185

⁹⁷ R. Levy, JDC Flies 29,000 Jews from Aden to Israel, 10 Nov. 1949, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archive. G 45-54 / 4 / 29 / 3 / AD.13

⁹⁸ *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, “JDC Must Aid 48,000 Jews to Emigrate Before Summer” 9 Jan. 1950, Jewish Telegraphic Agency Archive. <https://bit.ly/2pRY00v>

Muslim areas under emergency conditions” and others “to Israel and other lands.” In a similar article a few months later,⁹⁹ the JDC’s European director, Joseph Schwartz, stated that the organization had transported “Jewish displaced persons” from all over the world, including Yemen, “to Israel, the United States and other countries.” Although 85% of those migrants were transported to Israel, the transportation of 45,000 such people to the United States and 30,000 people to other parts of the diaspora is instructive. Whereas the Jewish Agency, as the primary Israeli institution involved in Operation *On Eagles’ Wings*, regarded one of the primary objectives of that operation as an ideological process of *Kibbutz Galuyot*, which could only be accomplished through migration to Israel, the JDC, as the American Jewish institution most directly involved in the operation, viewed it as a purely humanitarian endeavor, and as a result was indifferent to the destinations of the displaced persons, as long as they could be safely resettled.

The American Jewish community was thus able to reconcile its participation in Operation *On Eagles’ Wings* with its general skepticism of the *Kibbutz Galuyot* idea. American Jewish leaders, including those affiliated with the American Jewish Committee, developed two logics to resolve this tension. Some, like Hertzberg and Halprin, modified the idea of *Kibbutz Galuyot* from its mainstream Israeli definition to exclude American Jewry, drawing a distinction between the non-exilic “free countries,” like the United States, and the exilic “countries of oppression,” like Yemen. Others, like

⁹⁹ *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, “J.D.C. Emigration Program May End Suddenly Because of Fund Shortage, Schwartz Warns” 26 Sept. 1950, Jewish Telegraphic Agency Archive. <https://bit.ly/2J8YbMU>

Blaustein (and many others), rejected the concept of *Kibbutz Galuyot* entirely, framing American Jewish participation in *On Eagles' Wings* and similar operations, which Blaustein himself encouraged, as apolitical, humanitarian endeavors. The JDC, as the American Jewish institution most directly involved with *On Eagles' Wings*, used Blaustein's framing (which fit the missions of both the AJC and JDC anyway) to understand the operation as an effort to aid "distressed" Jews by transporting them to anywhere they could be free, including, but by no means limited to, Israel. Therefore, even as Operation *On Eagles' Wings* took its place in the Israeli and Zionist discourse as an archetypical translation of *Kibbutz Galuyot* ideology into Israeli state policy, the American Jewish community was able to devote enormous resources to the operation without seeing its own legitimacy or longevity as being threatened or undermined.

Despite ideological differences between American Jewish and Israeli leaders, the American Jewish community involved itself deeply in Operation *On Eagles' Wings*, ultimately making the mass *'aliyah* from Yemen possible. American Jewish leaders pursued various strategies to reconcile their opposition to *Kibbutz Galuyot* with their work in support for Yemeni Jewish *'olim*. Those strategies insulated them from allegations of hypocrisy.

Chapter Three:

Yemeni Jewish Perspectives on *On Eagles' Wings*

It is crucial in gauging the importance of the idea of *Kibbutz Galuyot* in Operation *On Eagles' Wings* to examine Yemeni Jewish perspectives, voiced both in Yemen (and 'Aden) and in Israel. By the time of Operation *On Eagles' Wings*, *Kibbutz Galuyot* had already been established as the most relevant Zionist principle to 'aliyah from Yemen. The name of the operation referenced a messianic prophecy that the righteous will be carried to Jerusalem on the wings of eagles, and a displaced persons camp in 'Aden was labeled *Geulah* ("Redemption") Camp. This discourse became dominant in the Yemeni Jewish context several years before the operation itself.

As this section will argue, *Kibbutz Galuyot* and related ideas were useful in bridging the divide between traditional Yemeni Jewish religious culture and the then-dominant non-religious Zionist model of Israeli politics. The Zionist discourse that equated diaspora with *Galut* and 'aliyah with *Geulah* indexed a messianic discourse that was popular in Yemen's Jewish community, and that terminology became an important device for Yemeni Jewish political advocacy in Israel and for Zionist organizing efforts in Yemen.

Historical Background on Yemen's Jewish Community

Operation *On Eagles' Wings* was carried out during a turbulent time for the Yemeni Jewish community. In order to understand why the Yemeni Jewish community

was receptive to the idea of emigration from Yemen, regardless of destination, it is useful to briefly summarize some of the historical factors that prepared Yemen's Jewish community for such a large-scale migration.

Yemen is often cited as an example of a particularly anti-Jewish society within the Islamic world. In reality, however, conditions varied greatly across the centuries and across Yemen's various regions. Different leaders treated Jews in very different ways, according to their varied interests, and Jews living in urban centers occupied a different place in the social fabrics of their communities than did Jews living in Yemen's rural tribal regions. Nevertheless, by the middle of the 20th Century, most Yemeni Jews were prepared to leave their homes and travel to Israel. Operation *On Eagles' Wings*, for them, was in part the culmination of centuries of historical oppression and deteriorating Jewish-Muslim relations.

One of the most traumatic events in modern Yemeni Jewish history was the Mawza' Exile,¹⁰⁰ a 17th Century series of expulsions that forever reshaped the Jewish community's relations with its Muslim neighbors. In 1679, the ruling Zaydi imam, al-Mu'ayyad Ahmad, ordered the confiscation of Jewish property, the destruction of synagogues, and the forced displacement of the entire Yemeni Jewish community to the barren region of Mawza'. That event changed the Yemeni Jewish community in several fundamental ways. The majority of Yemen's Jewish community perished or disappeared during the period of the exile, leaving Jews a much smaller minority in Yemen than they

¹⁰⁰ Yosef Tobi, *The Jews of Yemen: Studies in Their History and Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 6-7

had been previously. The Jews' ties with their ancient homes and institutions (Jews had lived in Yemen before Islam even emerged as a religion) were severed, and, when the Jews were eventually allowed to return to settled society, they were often segregated into isolated, peripheral neighborhoods of Muslim cities. Those who survived would never forget the ease with which their protected "*dhimmi*" status had been stripped from them, and their descendants would carry with them a suspicion of their Yemeni Muslim neighbors for centuries.

The legacy of Mawza', and ever-present anti-Jewish oppression thereafter (although it fluctuated in form and intensity), compelled Yemeni Jews to support foreign intervention in Yemeni affairs. Yemeni Jews knew of the Ottoman *Tanzimat* (reforms that included the legal emancipation of non-Muslim Ottoman subjects) and of the British human rights regime (in theory, Britain did not support legalized anti-Jewish discrimination either), and thus some Jews aided British incursions into the southern port city of 'Aden and Ottoman incursions into northern Yemen in the 19th Century.¹⁰¹ Arab Muslim Yemenis, who held a privileged status in Yemeni society prior to those incursions, tended to resent Yemeni Jews all the more for their role in those invasions. The British and Ottoman authorities, however, generally chose to appease the majority Yemeni population by refraining from protecting the Jewish minority. Ottoman rule, for example, shifted the enforcement of anti-Jewish laws and practices from the central government to the Yemeni Jewish leadership, but it did not abolish those discriminatory

¹⁰¹ *Ibid* 86

measures.¹⁰² Arbitrary arrests of Jews and their forcible conversion to Islam continued under Turkish rule.¹⁰³ Thus Ottoman rule did little to repair Jewish-Muslim relations in Yemen, and, if anything, because of many Jews' initial support for Ottoman advances, even exacerbated tensions.

One important change that did occur as a result of Ottoman rule was the union of Yemen and Palestine under a single imperial domain. Although the Ottomans were generally hostile to *'aliyah* from Europe, they did not prevent migrants from traveling from province to province under the Ottoman umbrella, and therefore took no issue with Jewish movement from Yemen to Palestine.¹⁰⁴ Spurred primarily by messianic idealism, Jews began to leave Yemen for Palestine in the 1880s, the first of them arriving shortly before the first Ashkenazi Zionist settlers (a group of students calling themselves *BILU*). These earlier waves of Yemeni Jewish *'aliyah* established a community in Palestine that would later play an integral role in the State of Israel. Eventually, such migrants would also agitate for the Israeli government to invest in Operation *On Eagles' Wings*.

All of these factors – the legacy of the Mawza' Exile, the Ottoman failure to protect Jewish rights, and the beginnings of *'aliyah* from Yemen – affected the Jews' status in early 20thth Century Yemen, but ultimately the legal and social regime under which most Jews (outside of 'Aden) lived at the time of Operation *On Eagles' Wings* was

¹⁰² *Ibid* 88

¹⁰³ *Ibid* 89

¹⁰⁴ Bat-Zion Eraqi Klorman, *Traditional Society in Transition: The Yemeni Jewish Experience* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 89

formulated under Imam Yahya Muhammad Hamid al-Din. Imam Yahya, who waged war against the Ottomans and established his own autonomous kingdom even before the formal Ottoman withdrawal from Yemen, instituted an extreme brand of *Shari'a*. The judicial system enforced the Jews' second-class legal status, as courts refused to accept Jewish testimonies in cases that involved both Jews and Muslims. Jews were forced to wear distinguishing clothing and *pe'ot* (sidelocks).¹⁰⁵ Land-ownership was legally prohibited to Jews, although that restriction often was not enforced.¹⁰⁶ A particular group of Jews was also forced to engage in what was considered the lowliest work in Yemen: clearing excrement from city and town streets and in some cases also disposing of animal carcasses and burying the bodies of Christian outsiders who died while in Yemen. Jews were also regularly the victims of taunts, assaults, and stone-throwing.¹⁰⁷

Of the many forms of legal and social oppression faced by Jews in Yemen, however, the one that most deeply affected the Yemeni Jewish community was the forced conversion of Jewish orphans to Islam. The "Orphans Decree" was implemented through the arrests and sometimes torture of Jewish children, who, once converted, were often forced into child slavery or conscripted into the military, in the case of boys, or absorbed into harems and forced marriages (that is to say, raped), in the case of girls. Zachariah Gluska brought this issue to the attention of the global Jewish community (although there was little international response) and it eventually became the basis of

¹⁰⁵ *Op Cit*: Parfitt 91-97

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid* 112

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid* 87-88

his first serious appeal, at the 14th Zionist Congress, for the Zionist movement to dedicate resources to the facilitation of a mass *'aliyah* from Yemen.¹⁰⁸

In addition to the deterioration in the Jews' legal and social status in Yemen, two major push-factors spurred mid-20th Century emigration. One was the decline in the Jews' economic position, which was more a product of modern technological advances and the opening of Yemen to international trade than of anti-Jewish sentiment. The advent of mechanical water delivery systems eliminated Jewish-held well-digging jobs, and the inexpensive, mass-produced goods that flooded Yemeni markets from abroad left Jewish small artisans unable to make ends meet. Yemeni Jews had primarily worked as craftspeople, selling their handmade wares to Yemeni Muslims and others, but, as Yemen became more incorporated into the global market, the demand for such locally produced goods dropped sharply.

The other major factor was an increase in anti-Jewish violence in Yemen, and in particular in the British-occupied southern port city of 'Aden. Several Jews were injured, Jewish shops were ransacked, and the Farhi Synagogue was desecrated in a mob attack in 1932.¹⁰⁹ In 1947, an especially significant series of riots broke out against 'Aden's Jewish community. Yemeni Muslim rioters murdered approximately 80 Jews, looting more than 100 Jewish shops and burning Jewish homes and cars.¹¹⁰ Those riots indicated to Yemen's Jews that they were no longer welcome in the land in which they had dwelled for thousands of years.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid* 66-76

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid* 122-128

¹¹⁰ *Ibid* 167

Nevertheless, as this chapter will demonstrate, , Yemeni Jews did not, for the most part, see themselves as primarily seeking emigration *from* Yemen – they understood their migration, instead, in redemptive, messianic terms, looking to Israel as a homeland to which they were returning after millennia of painful *Galut* existence.

Yemeni Jewish Advocacy in Israel and Yemen

Members of the Israeli political establishment were often disinclined to prioritize immigration from Yemen. The new Israeli state was struggling to absorb refugees from anywhere, given the practical limitations of its fledgling economic and social infrastructure, and Holocaust survivors in Europe were regarded as in especially urgent need of aid. Intra-Jewish racism and orientalist ideas of Mizrahi and Sephardi inferiority also likely factored into Israeli leaders' thinking, especially because Mizrahi and Sephardi immigrants were associated with religiosity and conservatism and thus were seen as posing a challenge to the secular leftist labor hegemony. Many Yemeni Jewish activists living in both Israel and Yemen, however, pressured the Israeli administration to make the absorption of Yemeni Jews, most of whom were living in abject poverty and an increasing number of whom were becoming refugees in 'Aden as they left their homes in northern Yemen in the hopes of making *'aliyah* from there, a priority. Zachariah Gluska, Yisrael Yesh'ayahu Shar'abi, and other Yemeni Jewish leaders involved with Zionist institutions articulated their calls for Israeli state action in support of *aliyah* from Yemen in terms of *Kibbutz Galuyot* as a Zionist political objective, demonstrating at once the importance of *Kibbutz Galuyot* to leaders like Ben-Gurion (who was eventually

convinced of the value of the operation) and the degree to which *Kibbutz Galuyot* was the operative ideological framework for discussing Operation *On Eagles' Wings* in Israel.

Zachariah Gluska, who was born in 1895 in the northern Yemeni village of Nadir and who immigrated to Mandate Palestine in 1909, was both an early member of the *Histadrut* (the General Federation of Hebrew Workers) and the leader of the *Knesset's* (Israeli parliament's) first Yemenite Party. In a rousing speech delivered to the Israeli parliament in March of 1949,¹¹¹ he called on the Israeli government to take action to bring Jews from Yemen to Israel. He specifically referenced the idea of *Kibbutz Galuyot* as an argument:

It is not enough to write about, for example, "*Kibbutz Galuyot*." It is necessary to fulfill it immediately and thoroughly, and that we distinguish and see which is the most dangerous place in the *Galut* [Yemen]. . . Regarding *Kibbutz Galuyot*, it is necessary to fulfill promises, and to avoid arbitrary proclamations, which mostly do more harm than good. Yemenite Jews are persecuted more than any other Jewry, and our government should give them priority.

Gluska's way of convincing the members of Israel's political establishment to support his objective was to accuse them of hypocrisy as long as they professed belief in *Kibbutz Galuyot* but took no action toward facilitating the '*aliyah*' of Jews from Yemen.

Yisrael Yesh'ayahu Shar'abi, born in 1908 in S'adeh, also in northern Yemen, served as a member of the *Knesset* as well, as a representative from the Mapai Party

¹¹¹ Zachariah Gluska, *Knesset* Address (speech, Jerusalem, 9 March, 1949), *Knesset* Archive. <https://bit.ly/2pVLaxp>

(which was also Ben-Gurion's party), following his tenure with the Jewish Agency. Although he only became a Member of the *Knesset* in 1951, after the conclusion of Operation *On Eagles' Wings*, he continued to use *Kibbutz Galuyot* as an argument for fuller integration of Jews from Yemen into Israeli society, advocating for greater government allocations to support Yemeni *'olim* and for protection of Yemeni Jews from racism. In an October 1951 speech,¹¹² he praised David Ben-Gurion for promoting *Kibbutz Galuyot* and quoted a speech that Ben-Gurion himself had delivered during a Zionist Congress: "The enormous difficulties are not only in the absorption of *olim*, but also in their integration." Even after the majority of Yemen's Jewish community had arrived in Israel, Yisrael Yesh'ayahu continued to leverage the Zionist ideal of *Kibbutz Galuyot* in order to speak on its behalf. In a sense, the very presence of Yemeni Jews in the Land of Israel was an example and expression of the project of *Kibbutz Galuyot*, to the point that any issue related to them could be articulated with reference to that Zionist principle.

Yesh'ayahu in particular made an effort to trace the idea of *Kibbutz Galuyot* from its origin in messianic theology to its role as a political objective of the Zionist movement and the Israeli state. In June of 1953, for example, he delivered an address to a ceremony celebrating *On Eagles' Wings* and commemorating the famed 17th and 18th Century Yemeni rabbi and poet, Shalom Shabazi.¹¹³ He cited Shabazi's poetry as

¹¹² Yisrael Yeshayahu Shaarabi, *Knesset* Address (speech, Jerusalem, 8 October, 1951), *Knesset* Archive. <https://bit.ly/2GrLwmF>

¹¹³ Yisrael Yeshayahu Shaarabi, Address at the President's House (speech, Jerusalem, 3 June, 1949), Israeli State Archive. 1916/41-9

evidence of a centuries-old Yemeni Jewish disdain for *Galut* and longing for Zion and compared Shabazi's work to that of Yehuda HaLevi, the Medieval Sephardi philosopher and poet whose work is sometimes referenced as a very early example of proto-Zionism. Yesh'ayahu emphasized Shabazi's messianic pining for *Geulah* and boasted that Yemeni Jewish *'olim* had preceded the early Ashkenazi settlers of BILU. The speech overall anchored the mass *'aliyah* from Yemen in a tradition of longing for the Land of Israel that dated back several centuries.

The examples of Zachariah Gluska and Yisrael Yesh'ayahu, both Yemeni Jewish Members of the *Knesset*, demonstrate the importance of *Kibbutz Galuyot* as a Zionist idea in making the case for the inclusion of Yemeni Jews in the Israeli state. Whether their use of Zionist terminology was a product of personal conviction or an adaptation to the Zionist and Israeli political environment, their rhetoric suggests that it was the idea of *Kibbutz Galuyot* that eventually drove the Israeli state to acquiesce (to some degree) to their demands.

It is also important to note the crucial role that Yemeni Jews still living in Yemen at the time of Operation *On Eagles' Wings* played in advocating for the operation as well. Rabbi Shalom Mantzura, for example, was friendly with Imam Ahmed bin Yahya Hamid al-Din, who ruled northern Yemen starting in 1948.¹¹⁴ Mantzura convinced the imam to allow the emigration of Jews from northern Yemen to 'Aden, knowing that they intended to travel from there to Israel, and even to sign exit permits, which Mantzura

¹¹⁴ *Op Cit*: Meir-Glitzenstein 109

himself was charged with writing.¹¹⁵ Selim Banin's 'Aden-based Jewish Emergency Committee extracted from the British imperial protectorate in 'Aden authorization for Jews to travel through the southern port city and even live there temporarily in displaced persons camps on their way to Israel.¹¹⁶ Thus the connections and deft negotiating skills of certain Yemeni Jewish communal leaders in Yemen itself were also indispensable elements of Operation *On Eagles' Wings*.

Zionism and Messianism in Yemeni Jewish Discourse

In the Yemeni Jewish context, as was often the case elsewhere, the line between Zionist politics and messianic theology was not clearly defined. The idea of *Kibbutz Galuyot*, as a concept that emerged from Jewish religious texts and became a key principle of modern Zionism, infused Zionism with religious significance and appealed to the largely religious Yemeni Jewish community in a way that the more labor-oriented and secular socialist elements of Zionist rhetoric usually did not. Messianism thus featured prominently in Yemeni Jewish thinking regarding '*aliyah*.

Many Yemeni Jewish Zionist figures focused on the significance of messianic *Geulah* in the Jewish religion in articulating their case to their fellow Yemeni Jews for migration to Israel. One particularly important Jewish Agency emissary to Yemen, Yosef Zadok, apparently emphasized messianic longing in the underground Zionist propaganda

¹¹⁵ *Ibid* 110

¹¹⁶ *Ibid* 86

he disseminated throughout Yemen in an effort to encourage *aliyah*.¹¹⁷ Tudor Parfitt describes Zadok's efforts as "a mélange of Jewish redemptive theology and secular Zionist ideology."¹¹⁸

Zadok, moreover, was not the first Zionist emissary to fuse political/Zionist and religious/messianic ideology in his calls for *aliyah*. Bat-Zion Eraqi Klorman, in her chapter on "messianic expressions in the waves of migration from Yemen to Palestine" in her book, *The Jews of Yemen in the Nineteenth Century: A Portrait of a Messianic Community*, details the mission of World Zionist Organization representative Shmuel Yavne'eli, which began in 1911. Yavne'eli, an Ashkenazi labor Zionist, initially attempted to entice Yemeni Jews to make '*aliyah* with secular Zionist ideology and material promises, but he found his audiences unreceptive.¹¹⁹ Eventually, he managed to rally more than a thousand '*olim* by adjusting his approach to portray Zionism as a sign of impending messianic redemption.¹²⁰ Just as Yesh'ayahu reinterpreted Yemeni Jewish religious messianism as a form of proto-Zionism to match the hegemonic secular Ashkenazi culture of Israeli politics, Yavne'eli and Zadok reinterpreted secular political Zionism as a form of pseudo-messianism to match the hegemonic traditional religious culture of Yemeni Jewish society. One dispatch to the Jews of Yemen from Yavne'eli's mission read:

¹¹⁷ *Op Cit*: Meir-Glitzenstein 22

¹¹⁸ *Op Cit*: Parfitt 211

¹¹⁹ Bat-Zion Eraqi Klorman, *The Jews of Yemen in the Nineteenth Century: A Portrait of a Messianic Community* (New York: Brill, 1993), 180

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, 182

Love of the Land of Israel, which had been embedded for many years in the hearts of the Children of Israel, burst out with vigor and power. There was a strong awakening in the lands of the dispersion and the Children of Israel remembered the Land of Israel and began to gather [*hitkabetz*] themselves to it.¹²¹

That dispatch exemplified the middle ground between messianic theology and Zionist political ideology – the document used the word “exile” and described an “ingathering” of dispersed Jews, but it envisioned the Jews ingathering *themselves*, rather than being ingathered by divine intervention. The same document also repeatedly mentioned Jews “working the land,” a labor Zionist idea that probably had little resonance with Yemeni Jews, who, contrary to the popularly held belief among Ashkenazi Zionists in the *Yishuv*, were mostly not farmers but small artisans and traders. Over time, it seems, the efforts of Yavne’eli and other Zionist emissaries increasingly focused on *Kibbutz Galuyot* and on the religious dimensions of Zionism.

Kibbutz Galuyot appeared again, for example, in the correspondence between Israeli Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Isaac Herzog and prominent Yemeni rabbis. In 1950, Herzog concluded a message with a blessing for “those who dwell in Zion and Jerusalem, and for you who were able to make ‘*aliyah*’ to the Holy Land at the start of the first redemption and *Kibbutz Galuyot* of Israel.”¹²²

¹²¹ Dispatch of Yemen (First Scroll), Central Zionist Archive. A237 5

¹²² I. Herzog, Letter to Yemeni Rabbis, 15 Jan. 1950, Israeli State Archive. <https://bit.ly/2pRWtHO>

B. J. Yaish, who identified himself as a member of “the Jewish National Movement in ‘Aden,” wrote a July 1927 letter in the Zionist publication *Israel’s Messenger*¹²³ that conflated modern political Zionism with the messianic elements of the Jewish religion and the Yemeni tradition. He argued that the Jewish community in ‘Aden and Yemen was overwhelmingly committed to Zionism, in part because “all Jews who believe in the Bible must of necessity be Zionists unless another Bible is invented.” In his view, “the Jews of ‘Aden belong to the Orthodox section of Jewry and they are therefore all Zionists. There is no such term as non-Zionist known in our ranks.” This statement, it should be noted, is a contentious one – as Aviezer Ravitzky describes in *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, Zionism met with significant backlash among many Ashkenazi Orthodox Jews in Europe, who, in some cases, even went so far as to blame the Zionist endeavor to “force the end” for the Holocaust.¹²⁴ In Ravitzky’s analysis, that severe backlash came in response to the equation of Zionism with messianism and to a general messianic doctrine that demanded passivity until a future, apocalyptic moment of divine intervention.¹²⁵ Yaish’s claim, then, was not the obvious truth that he declared it to be. Rather, it was a bold assertion that tied the religious tradition of the community of ‘Adeni Jews that Yaish claimed to represent to the largely secular Zionist movement that he was addressing.

¹²³ B. J. Yaish, “The Jewish National Movement in Aden” *Israel’s Messenger* 24, no. 4 (8 July 1927), in *Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times* ed. Norman Stillman (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2003), 353-355

¹²⁴ Aviezer Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 63

¹²⁵ *Ibid* 14

Yaish further substantiated his claim that Yemeni Jews were involved Zionists by mentioning the Yemenite organization of which Gluska was a founding member and by listing Yemeni Jewish contributions to Keren ha-Yesod, and then concluded with another crucial statement. “We also look anxiously forward,” he wrote, “to the day when the economic position in Palestine will enable all our coreligionists to live an easy life in the land of their forefathers.” Although he did not use the phrase *Kibbutz Galuyot*, he did suggest that not only Yemeni Jews, but also all other Jews across the world, aspired (or ought to aspire) to settlement in the Land of Israel.

Aside from Zionist leaders, it seems likely that mainstream Yemeni Jews also thought of the *‘aliyah* in messianic terms, and were at least partially compelled to journey to the Land of Israel by religious ideals. The Jewish Agency collected and archived letters¹²⁶ between Jews in Yemen and those already in Israel, which were replete with messianic references. One letter attributed the *‘aliyah* to G-d and expressed hope that the Jews remaining in Yemen would soon be “redeemed” as well. Another referenced “salvation” by the “Israeli government.” Another explicitly referenced the Book of Jeremiah’s declaration that the messianic redemption will “gather you from all the nations and from all the places to which I have banished you” (Jeremiah 29:14).

Haim Tzadok recorded in his book, *Min ha-Meitzar*, a series of notes written by Jews stranded in Yemen and unable to leave their homes, appealing to the Jewish Agency and the Joint Distribution Committee for assistance. Those notes exhibited the

¹²⁶ Letters from Jews in Yemen, Central Zionist Archive. S6 5049

same tendency to understand Zionist-facilitated *'aliyah* in a messianic theological framework. One began with a quote from Psalm 137: "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither," and hope for divine "salvation,"¹²⁷ and another called upon G-d to "ingather G-d's nation and its property that are in exile."¹²⁸ These appeals for practical assistance with *'aliyah* were written much like prayers, at times addressing G-d directly.

Later memoirs and books written by Yemeni Jews in Israel reflected the same tendency. In the introduction to Rabbi Yosef Qafih's renowned book, *Halikhot Teiman*, Yisrael Yesh'ayahu wrote about *'aliyah* as the end of a *Galut* and the fulfillment of the longing of "generations upon generations." He credited the pioneers who emerged from the Yemeni Jewish community and traveled to Israel for the "redemption" of Yemeni Jewry as a whole.¹²⁹ Qafih himself also wrote about the "liquidation of the exile."¹³⁰ Abraham Tabib, in his *'Aliyat Yehudei Teiman l'Eretz Yisrael v'Hityashvutam bah*, wrote about the mass migration in similar terms to Yesh'ayahu. Generations of Yemeni Jews, living in "*Galut*," had maintained the memory of Jerusalem and the aspiration of someday being "redeemed" and returning to *Eretz Yisrael*.¹³¹ In 1950, following Tabib's death, Speaker of the Knesset Yosef Sprinzak even eulogized him with specific reference

¹²⁷ Haim Tzadok, *Min haMeitzar: Agarot, T'audot, v'Michtavim*, (Jerusalem: Afiqim, 1989), 410

¹²⁸ *Ibid* 419

¹²⁹ Yosef Qafih, *Halikhot Teiman*, (Jerusalem: Kiryat-Sepher, 1978), 9

¹³⁰ *Ibid* 8

¹³¹ Avraham Tabib, *Aliyat Yehudei Teiman l'Eretz Yisrael v'Hityashvutam bah*, (Tel Aviv: Yemenite Union Press, 1943), 4

to his “fulfillment of the vision of *Kibbutz Galuyot*.”¹³² Indeed, Tabib understood the ‘*aliyah* from Yemen in messianic terms, and the other members of the Israeli political establishment in which he enmeshed himself at the end of his life shared his view. Rabbi Shalom Mantzura, in his critical book about the operation, entitled ‘*Aliyat Mervad ha-Kesamim*, wrote that “the Jews of Yemen saw in their ‘*aliyah* to the Land of Israel the beginning of the Redemption, even if it was fraught with great suffering.”¹³³

The figure of Shalom Shabazi anchored this merging of messianic theology and political Zionism in Yemeni Jewish historical memory. MK (Member of the Knesset) Yesh’ayahu referenced Shabazi in his 1953 address, as described above. Rabbi Qafih mentioned that ‘*olim* sang Shabazi songs on the journey.¹³⁴ Haim Tzadok opened his book with Shabazi’s longing for Zion.¹³⁵ Indeed, Shabazi did write extensively about *Kibbutz Galuyot* and Jerusalem. One poem described the “hope of Redemption – the scattered nation will be ingathered.”¹³⁶ Another mentioned the hope for “the settlement of ‘*olim* in the Holy Land that is the inheritance of [our] ancestors” and anticipated the joy of the coming of the messiah.¹³⁷ Several poems in both Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic referenced Jerusalem, the Land of Israel, the pain of exile, and the joy of the impending *Geulah*. During Shabazi’s time, Zionism did not yet exist as a modern

¹³² Yosef Sprinzak, *Knesset Address* (speech, Jerusalem 2 May, 1950), *Knesset Archive*. <https://bit.ly/2pTgo9v>

¹³³ Shalom Mantzura, *Aliyat Mervad ha-Kesamim*, (B’nei Braq: The Institute for the Research of the Sages of Yemen, 2002-3), 8

¹³⁴ *Op Cit*: Qafih 296

¹³⁵ *Op Cit*: Tzadok 7

¹³⁶ Yosef Tobi, *Shalom Shabazi: Selected Poems* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2012), 154

¹³⁷ *Ibid* 156

political movement; Shabazi's longing for Zion was religious and not political, and he certainly could not have predicted a Jewish nation-state in that land. The absorption of Shabazi's work into the Zionist narrative, particularly by Yemeni Jews seeking to establish the longevity and authenticity of Yemeni Jewish Zionism, was therefore one key way in which the line between traditional messianism and political Zionism was blurred.

Although messianism and Zionism coexisted in many other contexts as well, the conflation of those two bodies of thought was especially prominent in Yemen. *Kibbutz Galuyot* had great resonance among Yemeni Jews as a theological concept, and it became a crucial point of connection between Yemeni Jews and the secular Ashkenazi-dominated Zionist Israeli state.

The frequent Zionist usage of the phrase *Kibbutz Galuyot* established a connection between Zionist immigration policy and the messianic religious dream of *Geulah*. That connection was especially relevant to the Yemeni Jewish mass *'aliyah*, as the *'olim* themselves came mostly from traditional, religious backgrounds. The messianic connotation of *Kibbutz Galuyot* became a tool for communication between the new *'olim* and the predominantly Ashkenazi Israeli political establishment. It at once enabled Zionist emissaries to promote *'aliyah* in a way that was appealing to a Yemeni Jewish target audience and helped Yemeni Jewish activists convey the grievances and needs of the Yemeni Jewish community to the Israeli government. This analysis demonstrates both the versatility of the *Kibbutz Galuyot* idea and its importance to

Operation *On Eagles' Wings* overall, on the one hand, and its appeal to the Israeli political establishment and its power as a political instrument, on the other. It also finds that Yemeni Jews themselves very often understood the *'aliyah* and the Zionist *Kibbutz Galuyot* in messianic terms. Although factors such as economic decline and the legal oppression and violence faced by Jews in Yemen were important, they were at the very least augmented by the very real religious yearning that many Yemeni Jews felt for the Land of Israel.

Chapter Four:

Synthesis and Analysis

Esther Meir-Glitzstein's crucial book subverted the myth that Operation *On Eagles' Wings* was an unqualified success. The operation accomplished a great and unprecedented feat, but extreme mismanagement led to gross loss of life and other enormous problems. This chapter will show that the successes and failures of the operation had much to do with relations and communications between Israeli, American, and Yemeni Jews. It will consider how the involvement of the three parties discussed in the previous chapters in *On Eagles' Wings* influenced the nature of the operation and its outcome.

On Eagles' Wings: Success or Failure?

One could argue that Operation *On Eagles' Wings* was a remarkable, even historic, success. In an apparent demonstration of international Jewish solidarity, three very different communities cooperated in the unprecedented endeavor of airlifting tens of thousands of voluntary migrants from one country to another. The parties managed negotiations with the Imam of Northern Yemen, with local leaders, and with the British authorities, raised millions of dollars, and brought the majority of Yemeni Jewry to the Land of Israel.

On the other hand, as Meir-Glitzstein points out, much went terribly wrong over the course of the operation, particularly for the Yemeni Jews who were ostensibly

being “redeemed.” In addition to the uncounted people who lost their lives on the perilous journey from tribal parts of northern Yemen to ‘Aden,¹³⁸ some 650-900 people died in the JDC-managed camps, on the border of the ‘Aden British Protectorate, and even at the airport waiting for planes to take them to Israel.¹³⁹ Some 3,000 children arrived in Israel with serious medical conditions.¹⁴⁰ The airplanes were overcrowded, with 60-seat Skymaster planes carrying an average of 134 ‘olim at a time – moreover, they were hot and filthy, which the JDC dismissed as a non-issue because of the Yemeni Jews’ “primitive habits.”¹⁴¹ The transit camp system in ‘Aden was severely overwhelmed, and refugees were not provided with sufficient water or medical care.¹⁴² In fact, the airlift from Yemen was botched in ways that no subsequent mass ‘*aliyah* was, at great human cost.¹⁴³ Naturally, it was the Yemeni Jews themselves who suffered as a result of the operation’s poor management.

The Failure of the JDC and the Jewish Agency to Cooperate

Meir-Glitzstein puts much of the blame for the operation’s mistakes on the JDC, which “had no experience and no suitable manpower to independently manage such an operation.” The Jewish Agency, in fact, volunteered qualified staff who, after having participated in earlier Zionist immigration efforts and in the *kibbutz* movement,

¹³⁸ *Op Cit*: Meir-Glitzstein 2

¹³⁹ *Ibid* 3

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid* 3

¹⁴¹ *Ibid* 137

¹⁴² *Ibid* 138-9

¹⁴³ *Ibid* 7

could have carried out *On Eagles' Wings* more effectively and with fewer fatalities, but the JDC spurned those offers because they deemed Jewish Agency personnel to be too “ideological.”¹⁴⁴

Essentially, that is, hundreds of Yemeni Jews likely lost their lives because the non-Zionist JDC took issue with the promotion of *Kibbutz Galuyot*.

Senior Jewish Agency officer Shreibaum, for his part, voiced strong criticism of the JDC's plan before the operation had even truly begun, noting that the JDC was lacking in both experience and “Zionist spiritual ability.”¹⁴⁵ Although Shreibaum's fears were realized, the Jewish Agency contributed to the mistakes of the operation as well, arguably because they *were* excessively ideological. As described in the previous chapter, Yosef Zadok, and before him Shmuel Yavne'eli, along with other Jewish Agency emissaries, infused their calls for *'aliyah* with messianic significance. The JDC did not have the staff or facilities in 'Aden to care for and effectively transport so many people. Had the Jewish Agency suspended its activities in northern Yemen in order to ensure that the JDC had time to facilitate orderly emigration, some of the suffering and fatalities might have been avoided.

Furthermore, the Israeli political leadership did not make a serious effort to alleviate American Jewish concerns about *Kibbutz Galuyot* or to accommodate American Jewish narratives. David Ben-Gurion and Jacob Blaustein reached their agreement just as Operation *On Eagles' Wings* was coming to a close – the activities that brought

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid* 150

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid* 108

Blaustein in a huff to Israel, therefore, took place during the operation. Even as American Jews were assisting in the *'aliyah* from Yemen, and even as Blaustein himself was promoting it, Ben-Gurion was calling for American Jewish *'aliyah*, which he must have known would have disturbed the very American Jewish leaders on whom the Yemeni Jewish community depended for their emigration. Jewish Agency official Joseph Schechtman's article in *Jewish Affairs* contextualizing Yemeni *'aliyah* within a *Kibbutz Galuyot* framework was published before the operation's conclusion. Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Isaac Herzog and Jewish Agency Immigration Chief Eliahu Dobkin issued their aforementioned controversial statements (documented by the JTA), speaking directly to American Jews to call on them to follow in the footsteps of Yemeni Jews and make *'aliyah*, well before the Yemeni mass *'aliyah* was over. Immediately after the operation, Keren ha-Yesod (UIA) printed their *Ingathering of Exiles* pamphlets, which conveyed directly to American Jews the connection that Israelis saw between the *'aliyah* from Yemen and the potential for *'aliyah* from America – *On Eagles' Wings* had already taken place, but other Jews had yet to be airlifted from Yemen and other *'aliyah* operations, such as Operation Ezra and Nehemia to facilitate a mass *'aliyah* from Iraq, were ongoing.¹⁴⁶ It is no surprise that Israeli media and politics were dominated by Zionist perspectives, but the choice of Israeli officials and institutions to address the American Jewish public, in English and in ways that American Jewish leaders found threatening, during Operation *On Eagles' Wings* likely contributed to the tension between the JDC

¹⁴⁶ Daphne Tsimhoni, "Operation Ezra and Nehemia (Ali Baba)" in *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, Executive Ed. Norman A. Stillman, first published online: 2010

and the Jewish Agency. The operation might have proceeded more smoothly if Israeli leaders had made a good-faith effort to take American Jewish concerns seriously.

In the end, the American Jewish and Israeli leaderships failed to establish a sufficiently strong, cooperative working relationship for the implementation of Operation *On Eagles' Wings*. American Jewish leaders developed narratives that dismissed or softened *Kibbutz Galuyot*, while Israeli leaders continued to promote the operation as part of a totalizing *Kibbutz Galuyot* policy. The two parties worked in loose conjunction, but without a common vision, narrative, or purpose and certainly without mutual trust. The result was an operation that accomplished its most basic goal – transporting most of Yemen's Jewish community to Israel – but that was extremely flawed and even catastrophic for many, many Yemeni Jewish families.

The Success of Israeli and Yemeni Jewish Cooperation

Unlike the American Jewish leadership, Yemeni Jewish leaders were able to articulate a common narrative with Israelis. As discussed in the previous chapter, the thin line between Zionism and messianism allowed Zionist emissaries from Israel and rabbis and other community leaders in Yemen to negotiate a unifying discourse of *Kibbutz Galuyot*. Meanwhile, although Yemeni representation in Israel was certainly inadequate, early *'olim* from Yemen took on important roles in the Jewish Agency and the *Knesset*. Thus relations between the Israeli and Yemeni Jewish communities were less sour than the relations between either of those communities and American Jewish leaders.

Yavne'eli (and others like him) was flexible in his calls for Yemeni Jewish *'aliyah*, deemphasizing the secular and socialist aspects of Zionist thought in favor of messianic symbolism as he came to better understand the needs of Yemeni Jews. The Israeli government selected a name for the operation that reflected the messianic theology popular among Yemeni Jews. Yemeni Jews spoke in Zionist terms in the *Knesset* and offered Rabbi Shalom Shabazi as evidence of the community's long-held Zionist fervor. Thus through a mutual effort on the part of both the Israeli political establishment and the Yemeni Jewish community, a messianic-Zionist narrative emerged that could appeal to both parties. No similar process occurred between Israeli and American Jewish leaders, who, as described above, continued throughout the operation and beyond to reject each other's points of view.

Certainly, this form of ideological negotiation was much easier because the Israeli government, although it was Ashkenazi-dominated, allowed space for Yemeni Jewish voices to be heard in the Israeli discourse. The Yemenite Union, with which Zachariah Gluska, Yisrael Yesh'ayahu, and Avraham Tabib were all affiliated, made itself heard, and Zachariah Gluska served as a Member of the *Knesset* with a specific mandate to represent the Yemenite Party. All three of those figures and others advocated for the Yemeni Jewish community and represented Yemeni Jewish needs, before, during, and after Operation *On Eagles' Wings*, and from both within and outside of the ruling Mapai Party. Whereas Yemeni Jewish voices did not seem to factor into American Jewish thinking or planning in any significant way, the Israeli understanding of Yemeni Jewry

was strongly influenced by the *'olim* already living in the Land of Israel even before the founding of the state.

Moreover, the emissaries who Israel and the Jewish Agency sent to represent Zionism to the Yemeni Jewish community tended to be early *'olim* from Yemen as well. Although Yavne'eli was an Ashkenazi Jew from Ukraine,¹⁴⁷ Yosef Zadok was from Yemen, as was Haim Tzadok, who served as an emissary in Yemen before *On Eagles' Wings* and received *'olim* in Israel during the operation,¹⁴⁸ and the three Jewish Agency representatives on the Hashed Camp staff (Binyamin Ratsabi, Shimon Avizemer, and Ovadia Tuvia).¹⁴⁹

When Yemeni Jewish refugees in 'Aden were able to voice their concerns about the operation and the dire conditions they were forced to endure under JDC supervision, it was through such Israeli Yemeni Jews. When the JDC-appointed Dr. Bejgel complied with JDC orders to scale back displaced person camp expenditures in 1947, Yemeni Jewish camp residents protested in letters to Yemeni Jewish activists in Mandate Palestine, and Bejgel was fired as a consequence.¹⁵⁰ Bejgel's JDC replacement, Dr. Elkanah, was an abusive man, perceived by the displaced persons as harshly anti-Zionist and anti-religious, who was known to starve and beat the Yemeni Jews ostensibly under his care and to speak in openly racist language about the inferiority of Mizrahim. He was fired as well after the Yemeni Jewish Zionist emissary Ovadia Tuvia

¹⁴⁷ Tudor Parfitt, "Yavne'eli (Jawnieli), Samuel" in *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, Executive Ed. Norman A. Stillman, first published online: 2010

¹⁴⁸ *Op Cit: Meir-Glitzenstein* 19

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid* 68

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid* 63

reported him.¹⁵¹ The displaced persons in 'Aden did establish their own leadership structure, but it was the representatives from the Jewish Agency and other Yemeni Jewish Israelis who provided Jews in 'Aden with opportunities to voice their grievances to the JDC.

Yisrael Yesh'ayahu also received special permission from Ben-Gurion to assemble a team of Yemeni Jewish representatives to visit 'Aden and report back to the Israeli government on conditions there.¹⁵² In the wake of the Yesh'ayahu-led investigation, which coincided with a local investigation by Yosef Zadok (of the Jewish Agency) and one representative each from the JDC and the Israeli government, the JDC drastically altered its approach to the operation, firing key staff members and allocating more resources¹⁵³ to ameliorate all manner of problems. Thus it was also Yemeni Jewish Israeli investigators who eventually, although they failed to fully hold the JDC accountable, spurred the American Jewish organizers of the operation to consider the needs of the displaced persons.

In these ways, the involvement of Yemeni Jews in Israeli politics and society was enormously important. Jews from Yemen who had made *'aliyah* in previous years and established themselves in the Israeli government and Israeli state-affiliated institutions (particularly the Jewish Agency) were able to voice Yemeni Jewish concerns to the Israeli political establishment successfully, and through those positions were even able to represent Yemeni Jewish needs to the JDC, which Yemeni Jewish displaced persons had

¹⁵¹ *Ibid* 63-4

¹⁵² *Ibid* 175-6

¹⁵³ *Ibid* 187

very little opportunity to do. In a sense, this dynamic exemplified the nature of relations between the Israeli, American, and Yemeni Jewish communities during Operation *On Eagles' Wings*: despite a strained relationship between Israeli and American Jewish leaders and virtually no unmediated coordination between Yemeni and American Jewish leaders, Yemeni Jews were able to participate and be represented in their own mass *'aliyah* through crucial Yemeni Jewish Israeli activists and leaders.

To be clear, relations between Yemeni Jewish *'olim* and agents of the Israeli state were deeply troubled as well. In recent years especially, archives in Israel have opened for public use, releasing documents that illustrate discrimination and abuse of *'olim* from not only Yemen, but also Morocco and other parts of Southwest Asia and North Africa. Oren Yiftachel describes the process by which discrimination against Yemeni and other Mizrahi Jews was embedded in Israeli society from the moment that they entered the country, pointing out that Israel was constructed around Ashkenazi ideals of “Western” and “modern” statehood¹⁵⁴ and that refugees were immediately settled in “development towns” that were not integrated with the network of settlements that had existed prior to their arrival.¹⁵⁵ Likewise, Ella Shohat writes that Yemeni and other Mizrahi cultures and identities were violently suppressed and erased by the Ashkenazi elites.¹⁵⁶ Bryan Roby writes about the role of the Israeli police in

¹⁵⁴ Oren Yiftachel, “‘Ethnocracy’ and Its Discontents: Minorities, Protests, and the Israeli Polity,” *Critical Inquiry* 26 (2000): p. 742

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid* 744

¹⁵⁶ Ella Shohat, “The Invention of the Mizrahim,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29 (1999): p. 15

repressing Mizrahi efforts at political engagement and activism,¹⁵⁷ and Eliezer Ben-Rafael and Stephen Sharot write about socio-economic stratification among Jews of different backgrounds.¹⁵⁸ In all of these ways, Israeli society relegated not only Yemeni Jews, but also *'olim* from Southwest Asia and North Africa and their descendants in general, to a social, economic, cultural, and political status beneath that of Ashkenazi Jews.

Although Operation *On Eagles' Wings* accomplished its goal on the most basic level, it came at an extremely high price, paid almost entirely by Yemeni Jews. The failings of the operation can largely be attributed to strained relations between the Israeli and American Jewish leadership, and to the lack of access that Yemeni Jews had to American Jewish leaders except through Israeli mediation. Indeed, it was almost exclusively through the Yemeni Jewish community that existed in the Land of Israel before the founding of the state that Yemeni Jews in 'Aden were able to convey their grievances at all.

¹⁵⁷ Bryan Roby, *The Mizrahi Era of Rebellion: Israel's Forgotten Civil Rights Struggle, 1948-1966* (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2015): p. 13

¹⁵⁸ Eliezer Ben Rafael and Stephen Sharot, *Ethnicity, Religion and Class in Israeli Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991): p. 195

Conclusion

This thesis sought to understand the nature of the trilateral relations between the Israeli, American, and Yemeni Jewish communities during Operation *On Eagles' Wings*, through the lens of the idea of *Kibbutz Galuyot*. The operation would have been impossible without the participation of the Israeli state, major American Jewish non-Zionist organizations, and Yemeni Jewish leaders and *'olim*. These three very different communities, despite great difficulties, reconciled the tensions between their ideologies and interests to work together toward a common goal.

Ultimately, this study finds that the idea of *Kibbutz Galuyot*, although it was understood very differently by each party, served as a major ideological vehicle for this operation. It was the primary lens through which Israeli state leaders understood *'aliyah* from Yemen, and it compelled David Ben-Gurion to invite Yemeni Jews to immigrate despite the significant economic and social strain of absorbing so many *'olim* in the first years of statehood. Meanwhile, *Kibbutz Galuyot* provided common ideological ground between Israeli state officials and agents and Yemeni Jewish community leaders and *'olim*. As a term and idea with deep resonance in both messianic theology and Zionist politics, the concept of an “Ingathering of Exiles” facilitated communication between Israeli and Yemeni Jewry and made it possible for Yemeni Jewish activists (often living in Israel) to appeal successfully to the Israeli political establishment and for Israeli agents (often themselves of Yemeni Jewish origin) to appeal successfully to the Yemeni Jewish community as a whole.

This study also reveals the significance of Jewish solidarity as a motivating force that can bridge ideological divides. Even while American and Israeli Jewish leaders disagreed on some of the most fundamental questions of Israel-diaspora relations, the two communities were able and willing to combine their resources and cooperate for the sake of a struggling third Jewish community. The commitment of the American Jewish Committee and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee to the fulfillment of their shared mission – to aid Jews in distress around the world – overrode these non-Zionist organizations’ disdain for *Kibbutz Galuyot*, so that they sought and found ways to justify their involvement in Operation *On Eagles’ Wings*. At the same time, Israelis overcame the challenges of rapid immigrant absorption, articulating their prioritization of Jewish solidarity and the assistance of their fellow Jews *through* the idea of *Kibbutz Galuyot*. The underlying value of Jewish solidarity both led the Zionists to adopt *Kibbutz Galuyot* as an idea and policy (from Alkalai’s response to anti-Jewish violence in Damascus to the inclusion of *Kibbutz Galuyot* in the Israeli Declaration of Independence, and from welcoming post-Holocaust refugees to facilitating Operation *On Eagles’ Wings*) and compelled non-Zionist American Jewish leaders to tolerate Israeli leaders’ Zionist zeal.

Finally, this study may serve as a case for constructive dialogue between the Israeli and American Jewish communities to reach a consensus on not only short-term policies and operations, but also larger questions of vision and values. As Chapter Four explains, the failure of Israeli and American Jews to come together around a common vision, even though they were able to agree on the importance of Operation *On Eagles’*

Wings itself, had real consequences for the success of their joint operation. Those who suffered those consequences were neither American Jews nor Israeli state leaders, but rather the more vulnerable Yemeni Jewish migrant population. Arguably, the populations at greatest risk of suffering the consequences of fallings out between the American and Israeli Jewish communities today remain certain Mizrahi communities and others on the *peripheria* – the “periphery,” or those communities on both the geographic outskirts of Israeli territory and the economic and social outskirts of Israeli society. It is those communities that are often in the most direct line of fire when rockets land in Israel, and it is also those communities that stand to lose the most from factory closures and other economic issues. Thus this study may be taken as a warning that relations between American and Israeli Jewry must be rooted in deeper principles than immediate common goals, and that the refusal of each community to make compromises and to respect the needs and independence of the other risks failures that stand to harm mainly the most vulnerable populations in Israeli society.

This thesis raises new questions, offers important lessons, and analyzes Operation *On Eagles’ Wings* in a unique way. Hopefully, it will also lead to future analyses of relations between Jewish communities that include Mizrahi voices and agency and will provide new depth for understanding Yemeni Jewish *‘aliyah* to Israel.

Glossary of Hebrew-Language Terms

‘Aliyah (pl. ‘aliyot): Literally “going up,” this is the Hebrew term for the migration of a diaspora Jew, or a diaspora Jewish community, to the Land of Israel.

‘Amidah: A central prayer in traditional Jewish religious services, comprised of several blessings, including one that explicitly calls for *Kibbutz Galuyot*.

Ashkenazi (pl. Ashkenazim): Literally “Germanic,” Jews who for centuries made their homes in Central or Eastern Europe. This group today constitutes the majority of American Jews and a significant minority of Israeli Jews. In the context of early Israel, this term usually describes Jews who migrated from Eastern Europe and their descendants.

Eretz Yisrael: The Land of Israel; this was the term used to describe the territory that is today Israel and Palestine before the emergence of the Zionist movement, and today it can refer either to that same territory or to the land governed by *Medinat Yisrael*, the State of Israel.

Galut (pl. Galuyot): Exile; this term is frequently used in Hebrew to refer to all land and society outside of Israel.

Geulah: Redemption.

Hibbat Zion: Literally “Love of Zion,” this was the name of a loosely unified movement of proto-Zionist groups, largely inspired by Leon Pinsker and other pre-Herzl Jewish nationalist thinkers, that made *‘aliyah* from Europe in the late 19th Century.

Histadrut: The General Federation of Hebrew Workers; this labor Zionist trade union became the most significant single Jewish institution in British Mandate Palestine. It took on the character of a governing institution under the leadership of David Ben-Gurion, and played an enormous role in building the Israeli state.

Keren ha-Yesod: An Israeli state-affiliated organ charged with fundraising in support of the state and Zionist work.

Kibbutz: This word has two meanings: (1) an “ingathering” (infinitive: *‘kabetz*), as in *Kibbutz Galuyot*, and (2) a small socialist Zionist settlement, traditionally agricultural in orientation.

Kibbutz Galuyot: “Ingathering of Exiles;” this originally messianic idea was adapted to become a staple of the modern Zionist movement and of Israeli immigration policy. For a detailed history of the evolution of this term, see Chapter One.

Knesset: The Israeli parliament.

Mizrahi (pl. Mizrahim): Literally “Eastern,” this term can be used to describe either specifically those Jews who have for over a thousand years made their home in territories that are today Arab countries or, more broadly, all non-Ashkenazi Jews.

‘Oleh (pl. ‘olim): A person who is making or has made *‘aliyah*.

Pe’ot: Sidelocks (often curled) traditionally worn by religious Jewish men as a sign of their devotion to G-d.

Peripheria: Literally “periphery,” this term connotes those communities on both the geographic outskirts of Israeli territory and the economic and social outskirts of Israeli society.

Sephardi (pl. Sephardim): Literally “Spanish,” this term can be used to describe either specifically those Jews whose ancestors lived in the Iberian Peninsula or, more broadly, all non-Ashkenazi Jews.

Yishuv: Literally “settlement,” the Jewish community that lived in the Land of Israel preceding the establishment of the State of Israel.

Zion: Jerusalem, or, sometimes, the entire Land of Israel.

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