



From Contemptible Terrorists to National Heroes: The Reburial Ceremonies of Lord Moyne's Assassins and the Shift in Israeli Collective Memory on the Eve of the "Upheaval"

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Abstract

In June 1975, the State of Israel held a series of three state ceremonies as part of the process of transferring the bones of two members of the Lehi underground (the "Stern gang"). Thirty years after they were executed and buried in Cairo, coffins with the bodies of Eliyahu Bet-Zuri and Eliyahu Hakim were transferred from Egypt onto the Israeli army forces in Sinai and were reburied in Jerusalem. On 6 November 1944, in Cairo, the two assassinated Walter Guinness, First Baron Moyne, a cabinet member residing in Egypt and officiating as the British minister of State in the Middle-East. The deed was perceived at the time by most of the Jewish *Yishuv* circles in Mandatory Palestine as an ignominious, insane act of personal terrorism, in contravention to Jewish ethics and universal morality, as well as detrimental to the immediate and long-term Zionist interests. The consensus vis-à-vis the view of the two young Jews' actions as negative and harmful encompassed the vast majority of Jewish circles in the country from left to right. And lo and behold, 30 years later, the Israeli government, led by the Israeli Labor Party, held state ceremonies in a process in whose denouement the assassins would be reburied on Mount Herzl, Israel's official pantheon to heroism. This article seeks to examine the event and its import through a layered perspective based upon the research of collective memory, society, culture, and Israeli politics. The reburial of Bet-Zuri and Hakim summoned an affair from the past that had cast its shadow over the Israeli present of the mid-1970s. The event was fashioned according to the historical consciousness that was shaping during this period, which may be characterized as a crisis stage in Israeli society, in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War (October 1973)—a phase whereby the hegemony of the Labor Movement eroded. I shall argue that the significance of this affair cannot be subsumed in the turnaround that manifested itself in the stance of the Israeli establishment toward the assassination of Lord Moyne and its perpetrators. It may be regarded, moreover, as a landmark for the shift that took place in the concept of heroism in Israeli consciousness. The *modus operandi* of the Yitzhak Rabin government vis-à-vis the affair was dual: on the one hand, it chose to render

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the event state-owned and acknowledge the assassins as legitimate Zionist heroes. On the other hand, the government did not offer a narrative that would clarify or elucidate the act. In fact, it left the arena open to other parties—Lehi veterans, rabbis, and journalists—for commenting on and casting content onto the ceremonies. I shall interpret the silence of the Rabin government as an expression of the weakening of the Labor Movement political center, as well as the erosion of its cultural role, and will argue that its attitude bespeaks an incipient manifestation of the privatization of memory in Israel.

Keywords Israeli collective memory · Israeli politics and society · Israel's 1977 upheaval · Lehi (Stern gang)

In June 1975, the State of Israel held a series of state ceremonies as part of the process of transferring the bones of two members of the Lehi underground (the “Stern Gang”; Heb, or “Fighters for the Freedom of Israel,” a paramilitary and terrorist organization that strove to destabilize and uproot the British rule in Mandatory Palestine). Thirty years after they were executed and buried in Cairo, coffins containing the bodies of Eliyahu Bet-Zuri and Eliyahu Hakim were transferred from Egypt onto the Israeli army forces in Sinai and their remnants were reburied in Jerusalem. On 6 November 1944, in Cairo, the two assassinated Walter Guinness, First Baron Moyne, a cabinet member residing in Egypt and officiating as the British Secretary of State in the Middle-East.

The deed was perceived at the time by most of the *Yishuv* (the Jewish community in Palestine during the Mandate Period) circles in Mandatory Palestine as an ignominious, insane act of personal terrorism, in contravention to Jewish ethics and universal morality, as well as detrimental to the immediate and long-term Zionist interests. The consensual assessment of the two young Jews' actions as opprobrious and harmful encompassed the vast majority of Jewish circles in the *Yishuv* from all political affiliations. Paradoxically, 30 years later, the Israeli government, led by the Israeli Labor Party, held state ceremonies in whose denouement the assassins would be reburied on Mount Herzl, Israel's official pantheon.

This article seeks to examine the event and its import through a layered perspective based upon the research of collective memory, society, culture, and Israeli politics. The reburial of Bet-Zuri and Hakim summoned an affair from the past whose shadow looms large in the Israeli reality of the mid-1970s. The event was fashioned in the guise of the historical consciousness that was taking shape during this period, which may be characterized as a crisis stage in Israeli society, in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War (October 1973)—a phase whereby the hegemony of the Labor Movement eroded.

I shall argue that the significance of this affair cannot be subsumed in the turnaround manifested in the stance of the Israeli establishment toward the assassination of Lord Moyne and its perpetrators; the assassination may be regarded, moreover, as a landmark in the shift which took place in the concept of heroism in Israeli consciousness. The *modus operandi* of the Yitzhak Rabin government *vis-à-vis*

the affair was dual: on the one hand, it chose to render the event state-owned and acknowledge the assassins as legitimate Zionist heroes. On the other hand, the government did not offer a narrative that would clarify or elucidate the act. In fact, it set the stage for other agents—Lehi veterans, rabbis, and journalists—to take over the arena of interpretation and express their conceptual messages in the ceremonial acts. I interpret the silence of the Rabin government as an expression of the weakening of the Labor-movement political center, as well as the erosion of its cultural role, and will argue that the failure to convey a clear-cut and relevant order of the day that would interlace the past with the challenges of the present and the hopes for the future was one of the harbingers of the political “upheaval” that would take place in Israel in May 1977.

The affair at the core of this article is related to fundamental dilemmas in the history of the *Yishuv* and the State of Israel that still prevail and have even intensified nowadays. Radical and messianic groups are growing, spreading and expanding their influence. They draw legitimacy and inspiration, among other, from events and figures who were active in the recent and distant past and the ways whereby these have been integrated into the Israeli collective memory.

What is the criterion for crowning a deed as a Zionist-legitimate action? Is the mere willingness for self-sacrifice and the belief that the deed is committed out of patriotic reasons a sufficient condition for earning recognition and reverence on the part of society? Or should acts of personal terrorism that are antagonistic to Jewish and universal morality, as well as to Israel’s immediate and long-term interests, be condemned and resolutely repudiated, precisely on the basis of the awareness to the danger arising from nationalism? The state transfer of the remains of those who were previously perceived as criminal terrorists constituted a turning point in Israel’s institutional attitude to these queries.

In *The Political Life of Dead Bodies*, Catherine Verdery grapples extensively with the political, cultural, and social aspects of burial and reburial in Eastern-European countries in the post-communist era (Verdery 1999). In her anthropologico-political analysis, she argues that dead bodies are endowed with traits that render them particularly effective political symbols, especially in societies undergoing a process of transformation. Verdery examines dozens of national ceremonies, including reburial events of national leaders, as well as of anonymous citizens buried jointly in mass graves. In the wake of her study, academic scholarship concerning rituals of reburial has expanded, assessing those as effective practices that may bolster the endeavors of the regime to reorganize worlds of meaning and outline contours of communities and belonging (Auchter 2020; Ferrándiz 2019; Renshaw 2017).

The reburial of the remnants of Lord Moyne’s assassins has been but cursorily discussed in academic writing, in the context of the debate on the shifting place—in the Israeli collective memory—of the Etzel and Lehi at large and of the gallows in particular. It has also been assessed as one of the later instantiations of the reburial ritual of Israeli Zionist leaders and fighters forging a national myth that would bolster the foundation of the civil religion developed by the State of Israel, as a budding state.

In the present article, I seek to zoom in on the 1975 ceremonies and on the public reverberation of the event. This affair may be regarded as a prism whereby various

aspects of Israeli political culture and collective memory are reflected upon, on the eve of the watershed moment of the “upheaval”—the Likud’s first rise to power in 1977.¹ Drawing on archival sources, mainly from records of the Israel State Archives and the Israel Defense Forces Archive (IDFA) and Defense Establishment Archives—which have recently become accessible to the public—as well as press clippings, I will present its main stages and analyze the unique pattern that was forged, consisting of multiple state rituals bereft of a cohesive leadership narrative to be presented before the public.

I shall attempt to determine the reasons for choosing this *modus operandi*, against the backdrop of the Israeli sociopolitical–cultural reality in the mid-1970s.

Upon unfolding the stages of the affair, I will point out the repercussions of this case study on the apprehension of Israeli collective memory. The episode of the belated state reburial of Lord Moyne’s assassins points to the Israeli collective memory as one of the harbingers of the political “upheaval.”

A Brief Background to the Assassination of Lord Moyne and His Driver and the Repercussions of the Murder

Eliyahu Bet-Zuri and Eliyahu Hakim assassinated Lord Moyne and his driver on 6 November 1944, in Cairo. Bet-Zuri was born in Tel Aviv in 1921 and was associated with a small activist group that upheld Canaanite views.² Hakim was born in Beirut in 1924. He joined the Lehi as a teenager but, acquiescing to his family’s pleas, left the ranks of the organization and volunteered for the British Army. Following his release, he reverted to underground activity. The assassination amounted to the most extreme act of personal terrorism in the annals of Lehi during the Mandate period.

The Lehi proclamations professed that Lord Moyne was the chosen target of the operation because he had been responsible for closing the country’s gates before Jewish refugees at the nadir of the Holocaust, but the choice rather seems to have stemmed from his status as the senior British representative in the Middle East. He was posted in an ostensibly independent Egypt—*de facto*, subordinate to Britain—and it seemed that the chances for the success of a political assassination would be higher in Cairo than in Palestine. Their trial opened on 10 January 1945 and lasted for 8 days.

The perpetrators were treated quite sympathetically by various circles in Egypt, but were finally executed on 23 March 1945, following explicit injunctions issued from London to Cairo regarding the imperative that the affair end in hanging. They were buried in Cairo. Joseph Heller, who composed the most important study on Lehi, regarded the choice of personal terrorism as the operative manifestation of the

¹ On 17 May 1977, the Likud ousted the long-dominant Alignment bloc for the first time. In doing so, Israel’s first non-leftist Prime Minister, Menachem Begin, altered forever the lineaments and dynamics of Israeli democracy. The Likud and its predecessor, Herut, had played a pervasive oppositional role throughout the first three decades of the state.

² A cultural–political trend considered the nation forming in Palestine and Israel heirs to the peoples of the ancient Mediterranean basin, to pagan myths and the Semitic world.

Lehi headquarters' anti-British worldview and as the most effective means to prove its uniqueness as a small organization endowed with an ambition in inverse proportion to its size (Heller 2012).

Several historians who have grappled with the affair share the assessment that, although the assassination received a certain amount of international media coverage, the extent to which it promoted the goals of Zionism is questionable. They actually pointed to the detrimental effect of the assassination vis-à-vis the willingness of the British government to advance a pro-Zionist initiative toward the end of World War II (Wasserstein 1978; Yitzhak 2015; Gilbert 2008; Reinharz and Golani 2020; Wagner 2010). (The British cabinet, whereby Moyne was a member, had engaged, at the time, in deliberations regarding the future of the Land of Israel.)

The assassination of Lord Moyne struck the Jewish community with astonishment. Britain was still caught up with launching the decisive endgame maneuvers against Nazi Germany. The Churchill government sympathized with the Zionist movement, even if it struggled to meet its expectations among the tangle of interests that the British Empire was enmeshed in toward its decline. The leadership of the *Yishuv* and the Zionist movement, together with various circles, organizations, and institutions, as well as the Jewish press in all its shades, did not spare harsh words to condemn the murder (Goldstein 2011). I will focus here on a paradigmatic example: the editorial of *The Observer* (Heb.; *HaTzofe*), the religious Zionist daily, termed the murder “horrific and frightening, degrading and despicable,” Bet-Zuri and Hakim as “terrorist-criminals,” the murder as a “criminal assassination, an act of abomination that arouses disgust,” and the organization that propelled them a “malignant scourge” (*HaTzofe*, 8 November, 1944).

The sweeping consensus vis-à-vis the act of the two young Jews as negative and harmful encompassed, in varying degrees of intensity, the various Jewish circles in the country from all political affiliations, including the right-wing-activist Revisionist Movement and even the Irgun headquarters. Ben-Gurion sensed that the act of personal terrorism had dropped the ground beneath the Zionist claim that the *Yishuv* was an organized body, fit to become an independent state. In an attempt to ensure the authority of the elected Jewish leadership and thwart the pressure on the British army to take drastic action against the *Yishuv* in Mandatory Palestine, the “Season” (“season”) period began, throughout which hundreds of those underground members who refused to impede anti-British terrorism were imprisoned and extradited (Pedahzur and Perliger 2009; Ben-Yehuda 2012).

When the news of Bet-Zuri and Hakim’s hanging in Cairo, in March 1945, reached the *Yishuv*, it was received with consternation, but was pushed to the margins of the news pages. The few reports referred to their proud march to the gallows and the courage they had displayed, but it is debatable how many of its members—beyond the circumscribed circles of the Irgun (“Etzel”) that had assigned them—regarded them as heroes. That was also Israel’s official line concerning assassins during the first two decades after the establishment of the state. The Lehi veterans had dispersed along various political and ideological venues, whereby they continued to cultivate the memory of the two assassins. They were joined by the Herut Movement, which sought to present itself as the umbrella for all the anti-British underground war-horses who operated in the *Yishuv* (Goldstein 2011).

Even in the spring of 1965, on the eve of the twentieth anniversary of their hanging, it is evident that the positive attitude toward Bet-Zuri and Hakim did not transcend these narrow boundaries. Israel Eldad, one of the Lehi commanders, contended that “not only their bodies [...] are far from the homeland for which they gave their blood and lives, but also their light and heroism are remote from here.” Eldad compared between Churchill—whose death several months earlier had been highly commemorated in Israel—and the two Lehi members who were hanged in Cairo under the directives of the British government. “Memorials will not be pronounced tomorrow [...] in synagogues [...] Educators’ debates will not be devoted to them, nor will the state radio station mention the issue.” (*Haboker*, 9 April, 1965).

Who Is a Zionist Hero? The Israeli Labor Movement Version

The Labor Movement developed, over the years, a fairly cohesive conception of Zionist heroism (Shapira 1999; Chazan 2009). This outlook did not stem from politico-partisan considerations. The distinction between the “worthy heroism” espoused by socialist Zionism and the “undeserving heroism” of its rivals was set on an ideological footing. Sacrifice, devotion, and action imbued with patriotic zeal were not perceived by its leaders as the be-all and end-all. Seeking to promote a relatively activist, but also a rather moderate policy, they realized the toxic effect of a heroic myth that did not discriminate between means and ends and did not calibrate vision and realism. The assassination of Lord Moyne was regarded as an act representing a nationalist-messianic romanticism that should not be idolatized.

Israel Galili, one of the commanders of the Haganah—later a Knesset member and a minister—spared no effort, in the late 1940s, to expose the dangerous nature of the Irgun, the Lehi, and their heroes. He made a distinction between acknowledging Bet-Zuri and Hakim’s courage and the nature of their action. An act of personal terrorism against a British minister who had forged connections with the Zionist leadership and that undermined the consensual policy of the *Yishuv* was, in his opinion, “a scourge that must be extirpated.”

The ethos he advanced extolled the unremarkable heroism of the everyday Zionist accomplishment of the labor-movement youth, who had set its sights on the establishment and defense of the Zionist settling project: “What did the pioneering youth say? It said: Go to the Negev! Go to the Galilee! Go and toil! Go to sweat! Go and create new social patterns.”

In contrast to Zionist-socialist heroism, Galili dubbed Lehi’s “heroism” as trigger-happy and harmful: “Lehi offered the youth a more simplistic perspective. Only on the surface it seems more arduous; in the longer term it is easier. The prospect of becoming a hero, the perspective of a one-time heroism, of adventure, of acts of terrorism, which set you at the center of the world.” Galili’s remarks explicitly alluded to Lord Moyne’s assassins as a blatant example of noncompliance with the Zionist standard of heroism. The pair had acted immorally; had even jeopardized national interests and, in tandem, exhibited ready-made heroism: “There is no doubt that Hakim and Bet-Zuri, in their Cairo act [...] had sought to serve their people, but

what was required of them? No prolonged, unassuming heroism was required, but a heroism that comes with a worldwide advertisement—a great acoustic act.”³

Galili submitted that the gallows’ myth catered to Lehi’s attempt to “conquer the youth.” He considered the assassins’ act as issuing out of blindness and an extremism that severely undermined the *Yishuv* and could have sabotaged the establishment of the State of Israel; hence he dubbed their action as “heroism to harm.”

Over the years, it is possible to trace various manifestations of the Labor Movement’s growing endorsement of several facets in the heroism of underground members, although those opposed the policy of the *Yishuv* leadership and that of the Zionist movement. These have been highlighted more than once in historiography, mainly as an expression of the democratization process that marked the transition in Israeli society from the unflinching David Ben-Gurion days to the conciliatory era that characterized the leadership of Levi Eshkol (Lebel 2013). Indeed, during the latter’s tenure, veterans of the Etzel and Lehi—among them, members of the Bet-Zuri and Hakim families—received the “Decoration of State Warriors” on behalf of their two sons, betokening the initial state of recognition for their heroism (Vaits 2009; Gruweis-Kovalsky 2020; Maariv, 4 November, 1968).

In fact, Ben-Gurion himself also expressed feelings of sympathy, recognition, and appreciation for the utter devotion of Lehi members at large and of Bet-Zuri and Hakim in particular. Alongside these gestures, however, he made a point to vehemently speak out against the attempt to acknowledge them as legitimate Zionist heroes. In a letter to a student who addressed him in 1967, Ben-Gurion emphasized having denounced and still denouncing the path of Bet-Zuri and Hakim: “Murder of human beings—even if for a noble cause—is unacceptable in my eyes.” Even though the “murderers of Lord Moyne marched to the gallows heroically, because they thought that they had done something important for the people of Israel,” he stated, “I think it was the unjustified murder of a man.” An even more vital distinction, according to him, was that between the heroism of self-immolation for the idea and the “worthy” Zionist heroism: “The comparison to Hannah Szenes – is, in my eyes, a sacrilege. Hannah Szenes gave her life to contact Jews during the Nazi occupation. She did not take part in the murder of innocent people.”⁴ Szenes was brought for reburial on Mount Herzl in March 1950, 25 years before Bet-Zuri and Hakim were buried there—those whose attempt to compare their heroism to hers were perceived by Ben-Gurion as anathema.

³ Quoted from the transcript of the trial of Nathan Yellin-Mor and Matityahu Shmuelevich. Jabotinsky Institute archive, H 13-3/48/3, pp. 962–963.

⁴ David Ben-Gurion to Mira Klarsfeld, 23 March 1967, Ben Gurion Archive.

The Goodwill Gesture: The Transfer of Remains—A Station on the Path to the Interim Agreements between Israel and Egypt

Over the years, Lehi circles and their families exhorted that the bodies of Bet-Zuri and Hakim be brought back from Egypt to Israel. Exploratory maneuvers to advance such a move were launched following various rounds of belligerence between the two countries, but these came to fruition only when the Israeli and Egyptian leaderships made strides toward a political agreement. At the end of the June 1967 War, an attempt was made to advance the move through the mediation of the Red Cross, without success.⁵

Following Anwar Sadat's rise to power in September 1970, the appeals resumed through the media and political channels. Some emphasized that Bet-Zuri and Hakim's deed was targeted against British imperialism, which ruled Egypt then, and that the two had made every effort not to injure, during the assassination, Egyptian citizens.⁶

However, the time was not ripe to accomplish the procedure, as Israel and Egypt were rolling down the path to waging another war.

Endeavors intensified when the October War ended (1973), with the hope of bringing up the issue of retrieving Bet-Zuri and Hakim's remnants in the framework of discussions over prisoner exchange, locating the missing and returning the bodies of the fallen in battle. At this stage, family members and politicians joined hands again—the most prominent of which were two Lehi members who first accessed the Knesset in early 1974: Yitzhak Shamir, one of the Lehi commanders who had launched the operation in Cairo and had previously been Bet-Zuri's instructor at the youth movement (Shamir 1994), sided with Geula Cohen, a hawkish-radical journalist.⁷

The Ministry of Defense forwarded the handling of the matter to the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) representatives throughout the Geneva talks, that were sluggishly conducted. Actual progress was achieved only with the breakthrough in the negotiations between the two countries toward an interim agreement.⁸

The Washington administration indefatigably strove to advance a diplomatic agreement between Egypt and Israel that would prevent the Middle East from spiraling into a further war and that would bolster, in tandem, Sadat's tendency to draw closer to the USA. US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger sought to reach an accord over a partial Israeli withdrawal from southwestern Sinai on the basis of an explicit

⁵ Correspondence between Aviva Regulant Bet-Zuri and Menachem Begin, Begin Heritage Center Archive, 26 July 1967, 1 and 7 August 1967; Amnon Ben Yochanan to Aviva Regulant Bet-Zuri, 12 October 1967, Israel State Archives, C-1/6303; Amnon Ben Yochanan to Shlomo Hilel, 29 October 1967, Ben Gurion Archive.

⁶ Nathan Yellin-Mor to Anwar Sadat, 5 September 1971, Yellin Mor Archive, The National Library of Israel.

⁷ Menachem Hakim to Golda Meir, 21 November 1973. Ge'ula Cohen to Yitzhak Rabin, 18 June 1974. Moshe Svora'i to Golda Meir, 27 March 1974. ISA, C-6738/22.

⁸ See correspondence between the offices of the Prime Minister, the Minister of Defense and the Chief of Staff from the end of 1973 onwards: ISA, C-6738/22; ISA, C-6905/27.

Egyptian commitment to a cessation of hostilities (Zaki 2017). The debate concerning the transfer of Bet-Zuri and Hakim's bones was bound up with an attempt to reach an understanding between Egypt and Israel vis-à-vis the exchange of prisoners and bodies of missing persons, as a goodwill gesture that would foster the negotiations over the political agreement.

Indeed, in late February and early March 1975, concurrently with Kissinger's Middle-East "shuttle diplomacy," Red-Cross representatives announced that the Egyptians were willing to approve the transfer of Bet-Zuri and Hakim's bones in exchange for Israel's release of 30 prisoners.⁹ But then the compact was suspended due to a crisis in the negotiations toward the interim agreement. Pauline Hakim, Eliyahu's mother, who was loath to miss the window of opportunity, made an appeal—toward the thirtieth commemoration of their hanging—to allow the families to fulfill their sons' last will and retrieve their bones (*Davar*, 24 March 1975).

In early June, a breakthrough in the negotiations took place. Sadat, who had sought military and financial aid from the USA, pledged, at a summit in Salzburg, Austria, not to wage another war alongside Syria against Israel. It seems that during this meeting he also finally informed Kissinger of his consent to transfer Bet-Zuri and Hakim's remnants as a gesture of goodwill that would encourage Rabin—so he hoped—to become more lenient and look favorably upon signing the interim agreements. Indeed, the Israeli Prime Minister visited Washington, met senior government officials on 11 June and reached the conclusion that the Israeli political and security interests called for the consent to a partial withdrawal from Sinai and a flexing of the rigid Israeli line regarding future security arrangements in situ.

Upon his return to Israel, Rabin succeeded in convincing the hawkish circles in his government to agree—despite the strong resistance of the opposition parties—to the outline of the shaping-up agreement. The political breakthrough gave the signal for the final agreement between the countries regarding the exchange of prisoners and bodies, including those of Bet-Zuri and Hakim.¹⁰

The Egyptians returned the bodies of 39 IDF soldiers who had fallen in the last war, and Israel released, in reciprocity, about thirty prisoners from Sinai and the Gaza Strip. The last clause in the agreement included a permit to transfer the bones of Lord Moyne's assassins, within a week, for reburial in Israel. Defense Minister Shimon Peres was the one to update the families. At this point, the state rituals accompanying the operation had already been determined.¹¹

⁹ See Foreign Ministry correspondence with the Israeli delegation in Geneva—telegrams and talk summaries: 26 and 28 February 1975, 6 and 10 March 1975. ISA, A 370/10; ISA, HZ-5838/4.

¹⁰ Michael Sever to Office of the Chief of Staff, 11 June 1975. Refa'el Vardi to Office of the Minister of Defense, IDF Archives, 92/656/1977.

¹¹ Meir Aizental to the General Staff, 19 and 23 June 1975, IDF Archives 322/385/1979.

The Ceremonies—Manifest, Yet Unformulated Statehood

The transferal of the bones amounted, for the Bet-Zuri and Hakim families, to the closing of a circle after many years of grappling with loss and lack of access to their sons' graves. However, the summer of 1975 events definitely transcended the private sphere. The Israeli government, led by Yitzhak Rabin and his Labor partners, gave patronage to the transferal of the remnants and their reburial by way of holding three state ceremonies.¹² The first took place in Balusa, Sinai—a military ceremony entailing the exchange of bodies and prisoners.

The second commemoration was held at the “Hall of Heroism” in Jerusalem, whereby the main prison of the city had operated during the Mandate period. The coffins of Bet-Zuri and Hakim were placed at the courtyard, and thousands of Israelis—including President Ephraim Katzir and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin—walked past them in token of respect. The third service was the funeral itself. It was held on Mount Herzl, and was attended—among others—by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Yigal Alon, Defense Minister Shimon Peres (both from the Labor Party), and Minister of Religious Services Yitzhak Raphael (from the National Religious Party). A further expression of the state character of the event lies in the directive issued to school principals by Education Minister Aharon Yadlin (from the Labor Party) to devote an “educator’s hour” to the event, based on a booklet composed by the pedagogical secretariat of his office (Maariv, 26 June 1975).

The two were buried near the Greats of the Nation plot—a site that was actually designated as the Israeli pantheon. They were buried next to Avshalom Feinberg, a NILI¹³ member who was reburied on Mount Herzl after the Six-Day War (Bar 2016). This decision should not be taken for granted. The involvement of the government was crucial *vis-à-vis* the political contacts that had led to the agreement on the exchange of bodies and in the very act in Sinai, which took place *de facto* in the area controlled by the IDF and in coordination with the UN. However, at the end of this phase, the torch was passed on to the Lehi veterans, who assumed responsibility for the perpetuation of the process.

A plan of interring the two assassins in a burial plot that had been carefully preserved for them over the years, next to the grave of Avraham Stern (“Yair”), founder of the Irgun, in the Nahalat Yitzhak cemetery, was, indeed, considered at first.¹⁴ This option would have framed the reburial as a partisan rather than a national act. However, as stated, the Israeli government chose otherwise.

The ambiguity inherent in the governmental stance was reflected in the fact that, despite the pronounced state nature of the ceremonies, the Prime Minister and his senior ministers abstained from delivering a speech in any of them and, in fact, did

¹² Meir Aizental to the Head of General Staff, 22 June 1975, IDF Archives 92/656/1977.

¹³ An acronym for a “Jewish espionage network which assisted the United Kingdom in its fight against the Ottoman Empire in Palestine between 1915 and 1917.”

¹⁴ “Aronot Shnei Eliyahu – be-heichal ha-gvura.” Ge’ula Cohen & Yizhak Shamir to Shlomo Goren, 22 June 1975, ISA-Privatecollections-NA-0013 xhe.

not offer their own public interpretation of the event, or formulate any cohesive narrative of its significance.

The Labor leaders under Prime Minister Rabin did not highlight the continuum between past and present; nor did they explain to the Israeli citizens, or to the youth in particular, how they considered the act of assassinating a key British officer in the midst of World War II or frame the event of retrieving and granting state burial to the bones of terrorists within a discussion of the question “Where are we going?”. In this way, Rabin and his ministers eschewed one of the most significant tasks of national leadership.

The government relegated the craft of formulation and interpretation, conveyed in the various ceremonies, to other agents—chiefly to rabbis, Lehi members, and journalists. So, de facto, it chose the path of privatizing state memory. The establishment took care of the very procedure of the rituals, granting its seal of approval, their funding, and legal validity and activated the public bureaucracy (Handelman 2004). But those who were afforded the space and stage to imprint the content, values, and meanings in the public consciousness were other agents.

Journalists, Former Lehi Activists, and Rabbis Cast Content onto Reburial Ceremonies

The Israeli media and, at its core, the nonpartisan press, especially the daily newspapers *Ma'ariv* and *Yedioth Ahronoth*, widespread in Israel in those years, became the key commemoration agents of the event. They devoted to its various stages a comprehensive report that stood out by going beyond the topical informative dimension. Alongside the review of the ceremonies, they featured detailed, in-depth articles focusing on the personality of Bet-Zuri and Hakim, on Lord Moyne's assassination, on the course of the trial and the responses it triggered, and on the conduct of the pair prior to their execution.

Thus, even if the affair did not elicit a lively discussion among diverse groups, parties, and circles in Israel, and though the participation in the funeral itself was quite spontaneous rather than organized, the profusion of newspaper articles rendered the reburial a fairly major “media event” (Dayan and Katz 1992). The journalists framed it within a national and political context, reflecting, through their magnifying lens, a matrix of sociocultural values. An analysis of the various articles at the time reveals that they were written by memory agents who delivered a sympathetic coverage and adopted a mythical terminology, lending the occasion the hallowed status of national reverence.

In Israel of the 1970s, the role played by renowned journalists, who grew out of the Revisionist Movement—among them, *Ma'ariv* editor Shalom Rosenfeld and *Yedioth Ahronoth* editor Herzl Rosenblum—was prominent (Weitz 2002). The latter stated in his editorial that “The people welcomes its heroes” and determined that “the deeds of the two were sanctified by the Minister of History” (*Yedi'ot Ahronot*, 26 June 1975). Alongside, writers who were themselves veterans of the underground or close to the “warrior family,” such as Eliyahu Amikam, Aviezer Golan, Yossi

Ahimeir, and Yaakov Ha'elyon, played an active and significant role in fashioning the narrative of Bet-Zuri and Hakim.

The central role played by individuals raised in the ranks of the Right in the Israeli nonpartisan press still awaits research, but it seems that they hit the mark by tapping into public sentiment and, concomitantly, contributed to its fashioning. They referred to the assassins as sons returning to their home, and adopted the nickname “*Shnei Eliyahu*” (Heb.; “the two Eliyhaus”) dubbed by the Lehi. Beyond the prosaic fact that it was the shared first name of the two assassins, this appellation bore a mythological foundation, symbolizing a marvelous duplication, expressing friendship and brotherhood of warriors, and, perhaps, even hinted at the loss of selfhood entailed in the process of becoming sons of the entire nation.

The articles described in flowery language how, on account of their heroism and martyrdom, they were granted “eternal life in their youth.” They emphasized that now, 30 years later, “the people has repaid a sacred debt to the warriors” and that the public now accepts them “with love, respect and gratitude” (*Yedi’ot Ahronot*, 26 June 1975; *Haaretz*, 27 June 1975; *Yedi’ot Ahronot*, 25 June 1975; *Yedi’ot Ahronot*, 27 June 1975; *Yedi’ot Ahronot*, 27 June 1975; *Maariv*, 26 June 1975).

Academic research on the collective memory of the 1970s grappled, to a fair extent, with the waning of the Zionist ethos and the rise of a skeptical–critical–subversive dimension vis-à-vis Zionist myths (Zerubavel 2007). This was, indeed, a prominent new dimension in Israeli memory. Nevertheless, an analysis of the narrative shaped by the Israeli press around the retrieval of Bet-Zuri and Hakim’s remnants sheds light on how journalists adopted the Lehi narrative, against the backdrop of an almost negligible minority of voices that met the affair with skepticism.

It is, indeed, difficult to assess the proportion of those readers who were interested in the detailed reports of the historical affair and ceremonies and to estimate their attitudes and feelings. In any case, mainstream Israeli press, read by most Israelis, underscored nationalist purports, in line with the ideology of the Zionist Right.

The Israeli media of the 1970s reflected the trend of Israeli collective memory and, in tandem, contributed to its shaping. National collective memory repeatedly tends to adopt narratives characterized by a simple plot, based upon a dichotomy between good and evil, “us” and “them,” and finds it hard to embrace complexity and contexts. In the plot structure of Israeli popular memory, Great Britain’s status as a bitter enemy and foreign ruler became fixated, overshadowing its crucial role in the establishment of the State of Israel; its decisive role in the war against Nazi Germany has been concealed and suppressed.

Concomitantly, the value of those who had struggled against the British master, displaying determination and devotion, and were executed by its decree, was on the rise (Golani 2009). The controversy over the *Yishuv*’s political authority vis-à-vis the dissenters¹⁵ was forgotten or perceived as irrelevant and the Saison, launched after the assassination of Lord Moyne and intended to ensure the capacity of the

¹⁵ The widespread appellation of underground members who did not consent to abide by the leadership of the elected Zionist institutions during the British Mandate period in Israel.

Jewish political community in a pre-sovereign era, was alluded to primarily as evidence of the regrettable fratricidal war (Goldstein 2015).

Lehi veterans played a major role in the various ceremonies—especially those held at Balusa and Mount Herzl. Yitzhak Shamir and Geula Cohen came to the site whereby the exchange of the bodies took place and mediated the event before the participants and journalists. Shamir delivered an obituary at the funeral (Menachem Begin, the Likud leader attended but did not give a speech). His partner in command of Lehi, Israel Eldad, considered as the radical pointer of the Right since the establishment of the state, went to great lengths to make pungent statements vis-à-vis the state leadership, delivering a speech at the state ceremony, followed by Cohen reading excerpts by Bet-Zuri and Hakim. They and many other veterans of the underground who participated in the ceremonies experienced a sense of retroactive victory, when their group—marginal and ostracized by the Jewish *Yishuv* at the time of the assassination—now stood at the core of state ceremonies.

They sensed that they were fulfilling a “promise of acknowledgement and remembrance” pledged by Lehi to the two assassins, while they had been treated hostilely by the *Yishuv*. The 1944–1945 underground proclamations refused to abide by a future glory, whereby the nation would acknowledge its heroes when “their name would be magnificently displayed among those of all the heroes and the pure-hearted, who gave their lives for the people.” Lehi predicted, then, that “their image will awaken and educate,” when “the whole nation will bring their bones to eternal rest in the homeland when the day of victory comes.”

Indeed, in 1975, Lehi veterans published an ad in the press under the headline “Heroes Return to the Homeland” that presented the event as fraught with “moral-historical significance” and exhorted the citizens of the state, “Step right up and come out in droves to pay homage to the two Eliyahus” (*Haaretz*, 26 June 1975). They were aware of the ways whereby the reburial rites redefined the collective historical consciousness of Israel in a mode that acknowledged the heroism of the members of their organization and included them within the legitimate camp.

The many Israelis who responded to the call partook in state ceremonies riddled with religious and traditional phraseology. The military rabbis and the chief rabbis of Israel delivered eulogies; prayers accompanied the various stations from Sinai to Mount Herzl (Ohana and Feige 2010).¹⁶ In Balusa, the ceremony of receiving the coffins from the Egyptians was led by Chief Military Rabbi Major General Mordechai Piron and his deputy, Brigadier General Gad Navon, while officers of the military rabbinate accompanied the family members.

At the Hall of Heroism, where many civilians came to pay their respect to Lehi members, two soldiers stood beside the coffins and recited verses from the book of Psalms. At the reburial ceremony, Rabbi Piron said a prayer. The Sephardic Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef delivered a eulogy and presented the members of Lehi as emissaries of the people of Israel, expressing the hope that the two would hasten the coming of redemption (Yediot Ahronot, 25 June 1975). Judaism as an ethnic identity

¹⁶ The emphasis on the traditional-religious aspect also stood out at David Ben-Gurion’s funeral, which took place less than 2 years earlier.

strengthened, in those years, at the expense of Israeliness as a civic identity, establishing itself as the most prominent focal point of belonging for many members of Jewish society in Israel.

Religion and tradition played a central role in the affairs at the core of the present discussion, filling the void left by the heads of state vis-à-vis the mediation of the event to Israeli society, even though many Lehi members were secular in their views and Eliyahu Bet-Zuri, an atheist, had refused to confess before the rabbi on the eve of his hanging.

The keynote speaker was the Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi of Israel, Shlomo Goren, who, for many years, had been one of the prominent figures on the seam line between the state and religious-messianic Zionism. Goren dubbed the assassins “two brave warriors, purehearted, heroes and saints” and presented their operation in Cairo as a mission infused with a religious dimension—“mentally, religiously and humanly alike.” The Chief Rabbi compared the Lehi fighters to the zealous Pinchas, grandson of Aharon the High Priest, who murdered one of the leaders of the Jewish tribes out of a religious-ideological motivation during the Exodus from Egypt.

In contradistinction to the religious leadership, which stood unanimously, during 1944–1945, behind the condemnation of the political assassination, Goren emphasized the fervor of their faith and confidence “in the righteousness of their way and the purity of their mission.” He could not eschew the fact that the reburied had violated the commandment “Thou shalt not kill,” and, therefore, chose to emphasize the “extremely difficult mental decisions” that had led them—following moral qualms—to commit the act “not in order to murder but rather to cry out and save a people led to the slaughter.”¹⁷

The main motif the obituary of the Chief Rabbi of Israel had built up to was, thus, the Holocaust as a justification for the assassination. Hence, he joined the directive conveyed by Lehi veterans in their ad, whereby they emphasized that our generation, the “generation of annihilation and resurrection,” had learned that if it did not “fight for the redemption of Israel, its fate will be sealed for extinction” (*Haaretz*, 26 June 1975). The Holocaust, the crematoria, the Americans’ refusal to bomb the extermination camps, the imperviousness of Moyne and Britain, which Rabbi Goren dubbed the “Kingdom of Evil,” had served as a backdrop for the retroactive justification of the action of “the two brave young men [...] these two righteous men” who chose to do the deed, unlike many “who were not gripped with a towering rage and did not shake heaven and earth” (*Ibid*).

The Holocaust motif as a justification for murder intertwined with the exacerbating trend that rendered the Holocaust consciousness, in those years, a central component of Israeli identity. The traditional-religious dimension was underscored in a further way: In the various speeches and reports, the fact that the bodies were returned from Egypt with intact skin and bones was emphasized with excitement, portending that “those martyrs for the sanctification of God’s name [Heb; *Kiddush Hashem*], worms and maggots had no dominion over them” (*Maariv*, 26 June 1975).

¹⁷ Shlomo Goren, “Divrei ha’aracha Be-halvayatam shel olei hagardom Eliyahu Hakim & Eliyahu Beit Zuri, ISA D6.AC.1D 00,071,706.81.

Due to the limited scope of this paper, I will not expand on this aspect, which may be linked to the “living dead” motif, central to Zionist poetics and to a seemingly deep and pronounced—perhaps verging on obsessive—attitude in Israeli culture toward the bodies of the fallen. Bet-Zuri and Hakim were presented not only as those whose souls become immortal by virtue of their heroism—in contradistinction to the perishable body—but as those who, owing to a notch of religious holiness, which imbued their action in retrospect, assumed a unique status of righteous.

This facet would become quintessential in the stories and myths surrounding the assassins over the years and contribute to deepening the bond between the religious Israeli society and their image. Not only were they portrayed as heroes but also as righteous, alongside the recurring mention of the “worms and maggots that had no dominion over them,” sometimes including a tangible description in terms of body preservation. At any rate, the narrative that accompanied the state ceremonies suppressed or pushed to the margins any earnest debate on the queries that stood at the core of the fierce opposition of the *Yishuv* to their action.

Feeble Reservations from the Home Ground and Harsh Criticism from Britain

The Israeli government came through the state ceremonies with almost no significant domestic opposition. A number of disapproving articles were published, but they were marginal vis-à-vis the intense engagement of the press in extolling the event. *Ha'aretz'* editorial objected to the ideological gist implied by the ceremonies—as if Israeli society was allegedly granting retroactive approval to the path of Bet-Zuri and Hakim.

Ha'aretz reminded its readers that “the deed of the two [...] had triggered bitter and incisive disputes” and stated that “whoever took exception to [the assassination] then does not have to change his mind today” (*Haaretz*, 26 June 1975). In the editorials of *Davar* as well, there were those who sought to make a distinction between the right decision to bring their bones to burial and the immoderate rituals, that manifested a loss of an ideological path (*Davar*, 30 June 1975).

However, the criticism did not have a ripple effect in the public discourse and none of the senior government officials saw fit to respond to it. In contrast to the earnest keenness whereby the state reburial was received in Israel, a fierce protest arose in Britain, forcing the Rabin administration to present some kind of narrative for the event.

The British press expressed a widespread protest over the official, stately nature of the ceremonies. Editorial articles, as well as relatives and close associates of Lord Moyne and, especially, key personalities and circles among the British Jewry, issued complaints over the newspapers and in direct missives addressed to the Israeli leadership concerning the way it had rolled out its sponsorship over the transfer of the assassins' bones.

A wave of phone calls and telegrams of protest reached the Israeli embassy in London, and Minister of Foreign Affairs James Callahan instructed the British Ambassador, Sir Bernard Ledwidge, to convey before the Israeli government the

dissatisfaction of the British government vis-à-vis the transfiguring of the 1944 terrorist act into a heroic deed (*Yediot Ahronot*, 27 June 1975; *London Times*, 28 June 1975). The *London Times* formulated the sum and substance issued in following days and weeks.

The paper marked the distinction between a plausible humanitarian gesture performed 30 years after the assassination and the state and official governmental involvement, expressing perplexity concerning the decision of the Israeli Ministry of Education to devote special lessons to the assassination and its perpetrators, as well as post schoolchildren in honor guards during the funeral (*London Times*, 26 June 1975).

In Britain, Hakim and Bet-Zuri were regarded as terrorists to all intents and purposes. Alongside the warnings concerning the damage that the affair could cause to British–Israeli relations and the regret over the detrimental effect upon Israeli friends in government and in public opinion, some of the speakers mentioned the steadfast stance of the *Yishuv* leadership against the act and expressed concern about the change in core values that had come about in the Israeli political leadership.

Heads of other British-Jews organizations, who considered themselves allies of the Israeli Labor Movement, among them fundraising leaders for Israel who also partook in political struggles for its sake, regarded the event as a significant deviation from Israel's high moral standards (*Maariv*, 29 July 1975). They personally addressed Prime Minister Rabin, his deputy and Foreign Minister Yigal Alon, Education Minister Aharon Yadlin, and others, underscoring that political assassins are not heroes and wondered “how the Israeli government could honor terrorists while we are all united in condemning similar Arab attacks.”¹⁸

The decision on the part of the Rabin government to promote ceremonies that could lead to a diplomatic clash with the British government points to the significant role played by domestic policy in decision-making in Israel at large and, in particular, at this period of time, when the hegemony of the Labor Movement was on the wane.

At this juncture, Rabin and senior government officials were required to publicly spell out the Israeli official position vis-à-vis the reburial of the assassins. The Israeli ambassador to London issued a detailed response, quoted by various ministers in response to the protests they received, as well as in press articles. The British perplexity regarding the state respect lavished upon terrorists once unanimously condemned was met in Israel with analogous wonder: “It is regrettable that an act motivated solely by compassion and reconciliation receives such a subversive interpretation.”¹⁹

The main rationale—as presented to the British—behind the broad governmental participation in the bone-transferral ceremonies was “national reconciliation, aimed at healing the wounds and scars of an earlier generation.” The messages stressed that “the representation of the Israeli government at the funeral does not signify a change

¹⁸ Stuart Young (Chairman—JIA Finance Committee) to Yitzhak Rabin, 3 July 1975; Michael Sacher (President—JIA) to Yitzhak Rabin, 26 June 1975, ISA 6738/22.

¹⁹ Yitzhak Rabin to Michael Sacher, 29 June 1975, ISA 6738/22.

in the official Israeli position vis-à-vis the assassination of personalities as a political means” and clarified: “The principles that constituted a source of inspiration for the responsible leadership of the *Yishuv* throughout its struggle for national liberation are as firm and valid today as they were then” (*Davar*, 1 July 1975; *Maariv*, 1 July 1975; *The Times*, 1 July 1975).²⁰ These rebuttals were formulated, as aforementioned, only as a rejoinder to objections issued from London, and were not highlighted in the Israeli home ground.

The Rationale behind the Modus Operandi of the Rabin Administration

Although manifestations of acknowledgement of the gallows martyrs as legitimate Zionist heroes had figured even earlier, the blatant state acknowledgement of Lord Moyne’s assassins by the Rabin government amounted to an unabashed public expression of deviation from the tradition of the Labor Movement and the notion of heroism it upheld. At this point, the first documents from the British archives had already been published, revealing that Moyne was very far from the image that Lehi had sought to portray as the “oppressor of the Jews,” and that he had even held favorable viewpoints vis-à-vis the Zionist enterprise (*Maariv*, 2 January 1972).

The published documents also disclosed that Churchill had assigned to his close friend Moyne an important role in returning to an interrupted course he had hoped would lead toward 1945, to a solution of the division of Palestine and the establishment of a Jewish state (*Maariv*, 3 October 1972). The Labor Party leadership, therefore, would have stood on solid ground had it joined forces with the position of its predecessors in the 1940s, and contend that the assassination of Lord Moyne had been erroneous, useless and even detrimental to Zionist interests. This stance, nevertheless, was hardly vented, and, in fact, the voice of the Israeli leadership was completely absent from the event—an interesting, unconventional and mind-boggling decision.

Searching the relevant archives did not yield records of discussions that would reflect the decision-making process, or an explicit formulation of the motives and considerations of the Rabin administration around the transfer of Bet-Zuri and Hakim’s bones. The attempt to account for the course of action here is made with the awareness that silence, by and large, is not easy to decipher, and that to make silence speak in the absence of sources, is, of course, even harder. It is possible to point it out, aim to explain its meaning and implications, without unequivocally determining its origins. I will venture to offer a number of intertwining explanations in order to contribute to its decoding, as well as shed light, in their wake, on the socio-cultural and political aspects of the mid-1970s Israeli reality.

²⁰ Aharon Yadlin to Evelyn de Rothschild, 29 July 1975, ISA, C-6455/1.

Buttressing the Support for the Interim Agreement

In the immediate politico-national dimension, the reburial event, enabled by the improved dialogue between Israel and Egypt, created a supportive atmosphere for further contacts and compromises on the path to the political agreement reached between the two countries. The Israeli public perceived Egypt as a dangerous and cunning enemy that had launched an attack shortly before, with the intent to annihilate Israel.

Rabin was facing pressure from within and from outside the coalition, exercised by extremist figures and circles opposed to a compromise in the diplomatic arena, in face of the mounting American pressure. Displaying the Egyptian humane gesture and the ability to promote the negotiations to a channel of cooperation, the state ceremonies were likely to increase support for the interim agreement—finally signed on 4 September 1975—or, at least, mitigate the opposition to its implementation.

Impact of the Yom Kippur War

The governmental decision to conduct a state reburial for the assassins of Lord Moyne 30 years after their hanging had a functional value, in the aftermath of the heavy toll exacted by the October 1973 war. The fiasco that led to the war and its consequences—over 2500 Israelis were killed, leaving behind bereaved family members, and thousands wounded—shattered the “consensus” between the state and the fallen.

Bereaved families manifested, in their response to “the fiasco” (Heb., “*Ha-mechdal*”), a critical, skeptical, and angry dimension and considered the political and military leadership responsible for the deaths of their loved ones—a death that could possibly have been prevented (Lebel 2006). The sacred connection between the individual, willing to sacrifice his life for the sake of the nation, and the nation, that confers a symbolic, eternal life through collective memory, seemed to have been undermined (Zerubavel 1994). The state ceremonies of reburial emphasized the State of Israel’s commitment to a “contract” with the fallen youngsters, even after many years, despite their issuing from rival political camps and although they acted in ways unaccepted by the Zionist leadership of the *Yishuv*.

Historical Reconciliation to Smooth Out Political Tensions

The gesture of historic reconciliation served the Alignment (Heb.; *Ma'arakh*)²¹ government as a means for mitigating the exacerbating tensions in Israel. Yitzhak Rabin, Israel’s first Sabra prime minister, took office during a significant crisis, and was required to replace a veteran and strong leadership that was compelled to resign due to the postwar unflinching public pressure. Senior government officials had just

²¹ The “alignment” that was established by merging parties under the umbrella of the Labor Movement was the ruling party in Israel until [the “Upheaval in] 1977.

begun to gain experience in positions at the top of the political pyramid, in a more-than-ever unsettled political milieu.

Although the Alignment received sufficient support for the formation of a government in the postponed elections due to the war, it relied on a limited and shaky majority. For the first time, the Israeli legislative structure had become a two-bloc political system, with the “Likud”²² as a major opposition party constituting a quantitative alternative. The war and the ensuing oil crisis led to economic pressures, manifested in a rising inflation.

Moreover, Gush Emunim’s (Heb., “Bloc of the Faithful”)²³ maneuvers and its daring to contravene the rule of law in Israel—fueled by the decline of the Labor Movement’s hegemony—contributed, in turn, to weakening its governmental legitimacy (Aronoff 2014). The conciliatory approach, manifested in the official-state adoption of heroes from the rival groups, was aimed at increasing social cohesion and counterbalance the cumulative processes of dissolution and division that beset the Israeli society.

Shared Zionist Nostalgia in the Years of Erosion of the Zionist Ethos

The state character lent by the Rabin government to the assassins’ reburial constituted another layer in the integration process of the “dissenters”’ heroism onto the collective Israeli memory, catalyzed in the 1970s. It seems that one of the reasons for this move was the attempt to put the brakes on the forces that were perceived as threatening to disintegrate the Zionist narrative. In the background, the skeptical and disapproving voices vented outspoken criticism, as part of the individuation processes among the second generation of the new Israeli middle-class.

During the War of Attrition, sections from the younger generation began to challenge Zionist martyrology. In the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War, doubts increased regarding the very idealization of the sacrifice that constituted the foundation of Zionist memory (Zerubavel 1997). The adoption of the Etzel and the Lehi heroism was, in this context, part of a move aimed at emphasizing the common Zionist denominator, as a counterweight to the processes of erosion in the Zionist ethos (Melman 2002).²⁴ The story, as presented in ceremonies and newspapers, plucked on the strings of nostalgia that prevailed in Israeli society for the *Yishuv* period and the struggle against the Mandatory authorities.

Yitzhak Rabin himself expressed a whisp of this longing in his autobiographical *Pinkas Sherut* (“Service Notebook”). According to him, even during his time as chief of staff, it annoyed him that “the Israeli boy and youth have no clue about the past-century history of their people,” and that “in the official curriculum more hours

²² The Likud party was established as a group of political parties that united in 1973 under the leadership of Menachem Begin and, 4 years later, would come to power.

²³ Israeli ultranationalist-Messianic Jewish movement. This right-wing activist movement was established in the wake of the 1973 War.

²⁴ For a broader phenomenon of inclusion myths perceived as sectorial in national memory in those years.

are devoted to Madame Pompadour than to all the Israeli warring undergrounds together—the Haganah, the Palmach, Etzel and Lehi [...] I have often felt the negative consequences of such an education, which alienates the Israeli youth from the magnificent chronicle of the miraculous act of revival of the Jewish people [in the past century],” and warns that “this estrangement will take its toll on us, I’m afraid, one day.” (Rabin and Goldstein 1979).

Rabin related to the various militant organizations in the *Yishuv* as all of a piece, thus simplifying the historical gaze and detaching himself from the values and *modus operandi* that had established the legitimacy of his party.

The Prime Minister’s remarks indicate how the attitude toward the civil-military operations of the various circles at the twilight of the Mandate—following the mitigation of the historical controversy—was bound up with a nostalgia for the pre-independence phase, whereby the goal of establishing the state was clear, and the conviction in the righteousness of the way had not yet been undermined (Bar-Yosef 2017).²⁵

In his letter to the families of the assassins, Shimon Peres—who, at this point, positioned himself as more right-winged than Rabin—besides expressing sympathy for their pain, also explicitly acknowledged the heroism of their sons: “Bringing their bones for burial in the independent homeland is the very least that the Israeli people owes to its heroes” (Haaretz, 19 June 1975).

Against this backdrop, the reburial ceremonies of Bet-Zuri and Hakim implied that the time was ripe to draw, out of previously controversial issues, the shared platform on which the heated debates were conducted and emphasize the common Zionist denominator (Vinitzky-Seroussi 2022).²⁶ This token of rapprochement, aimed at deepening the sense of “walking in the path of righteousness,” was targeted, in tandem, both inwards and outwards.

Fashioning the Image of Zionism as a National Liberation Movement

In the background also stood the transformation of the State of Israel, from the summer of 1967, into an occupying power. The texts composed over the reburial ceremonies highlighted the anti-imperialist thrust of Lehi activities, and thus framed Zionism on the same page with other movements for national liberation, and even as their forerunner: “Hakim and Bet-Zuri have set an example for enslaved peoples of how to struggle for the liberation of homeland and people” (*Yediot Ahronot*, 25 June 1975).

This claim strikes as ironic, since it suppresses the Palestinian issue. 1975, the year in which the heroism of Lord Moyne’s assassins was adopted, was a record

²⁵ During those years, a new kind of nostalgia for the British rule emerged among sectors of the Israeli Left, but concomitantly, the nostalgic dimension for the days of struggle against the Mandate authorities was still alive and kicking.

²⁶ On the dilemma faced throughout the commemoration processes regarding the choice of the components and context of the event, versus the potential to arouse the identification of wider audiences.

period in the entrenchment of the PLO's position as the representative of the Palestinians in various international institutions and as a manifestation of the growing criticism leveled at Israel vis-à-vis the West-Bank occupation regime (Farsoun and Aruri 2018).

The reburial ceremonies took place, thus, at a stage when Israeli society was compelled to ask questions concerning the connection between present and past in the colonial context as well, and it resorted to buttressing the collective self-image as just and moral (Bar-Yosef 2017). Framing Bet-Zuri and Hakim's deed as anti-imperialist, glossing over the terrorist nature of their operation, and highlighting the support they had received from the Egyptian public opinion were aimed at underscoring the nature of Zionism as a national liberation movement that had, in the past, waged a justified struggle against a foreign rule, as well as deny the accusations leveled at Israel as an occupying state that suppresses the Palestinian national struggle for liberation from its rule.

Concluding Remarks: Israeli Collective Memory as Harbinger of the "Upheaval"

The affair under discussion in this article affords a glimpse into a watershed moment in the reshaping process undergone by the Israeli society in the post-1967 decade and the post-1973 years, and into the mode it chose to reframe the narrative of its past. During those years, radical and messianic groups emerged in Israel, and the leadership of the Labor Movement was required to devise a way of grappling with them. These groups presented themselves as acting in the name of national commitment, and demanded recognition, based on their claim to hyper-patriotism and their willingness to sacrifice themselves for the homeland. They drew inspiration and claimed legitimacy based upon expressions of National Romanticism rooted in the Jewish and Zionist past.

Contending with this complex issue preoccupies Israeli society even more nowadays. The way in which the Israeli collective memory is formulated bears repercussions not only upon the consciousness of the past but also in the apprehension of reality and the vision of the future. The polemics concerning the events of the past—as in the case of the dispute vis-à-vis the modus operandi of the various organizations during the British Mandate period—as well as the polemics concerning the current reality in Israel revolves around the role played by power and heroism in the Zionist ethos and praxis: The Zionist high road acknowledged the need to resort to force in the process of building and establishing the nation, but demanded that it be based upon a pragmatic policy, political and moral logic, and self-restraint. Concomitantly, it had reservations about justifying political violence based on messianic tendencies and fanatical romanticism, and feared lest these might not only exact a moral price, but also drag Israeli society into a disastrous conflict with external powers.

The Zionist ethos comprised, from early stages, an amalgamation of romantic and pragmatic elements. However, the political wisdom, the pragmatic consideration, and the capacity for self-restraint counterbalanced the extreme messianic tendencies

in the mainstream Zionist movement and ensured the successful making of the Zionist nation.

The official recognition of the two Lehi murderers as heroes not only consummated a volte-face in Israel's institutional attitude vis-à-vis the assassination and its perpetrators; it also betokened a landmark in the shifting perception of heroism in Israeli consciousness at large and among the Labor Movement in particular. The latter had exalted patriotic sacrifice within the framework of military activity, but did not regard it as the be-all and end-all. It championed a self-sacrifice that is consummated within a necessary, legitimate, and controlled exercise of power. In tandem, it rejected outright the glorification of those who, contrary to state policy, carry out murderous acts of terrorism entailing political folly and moral taint.

The acknowledgement of Lord Moyne's assassins as legitimate Zionist heroes expressed an obliteration of the distinction between goals and means. The very willingness for self-sacrifice and the belief that the deed was performed out of a Zionist motivation became now a sufficient criterion for their recognition as national heroes.

Yitzhak Rabin and his ministers' choice to set the assassination of Lord Moyne on the pedestal of an educational public event raises the question of whether their silence vis-à-vis the events not only represented the containment and democratization of memory, but also their inability to effectively make use of the past as a supportive resource for the governmental *modus operandi* in the face of present challenges.

Prior to and after the event at the core of this article, the Alignment government was already grappling with Gush Emunim, a new public-politico-messianic movement whose activity violated the rule of law. Its leaders led a series of illegal settlement attempts, aimed at forcing the government to found a settlement at the heart of Samaria and establish the Israeli control over the West Bank.

Rabin himself acted to the best of his ability to restrain Gush Emunim and delineated, concerning its activities, a clear-cut distinction between a determined, confident and pragmatic national policy and an adventurous nationalism swept away by romantic or messianic dimensions. The government drew a clear divide on this matter between past and present.

Its ministers did not harness the ceremonies in order to outline a more complex historical consciousness that would cultivate among the Israelis a basis for controlled observation that excludes current manifestations of adventurous fanaticism.

The reburial ceremonies of Bet-Zuri and Hakim expressed an opposed "memory strategy" to that prevailing in the dominant years of Ben-Gurion and Mapai, whereby the "state rituals" were shaped (Azaryahu 1995). Then, the establishment preponderantly harnessed its power in order to trace the contours of Israeli collective memory in a mode that would consciously and deliberately exclude the fallen affiliated to organizations identified with the Right.

Contrary to Ben-Gurion's approach, the Rabin administration did not regard collective memory as a competitive political arena whereby historical recognition is established around a defined ethos and memory components that endow it with meaning, while concomitantly pushing other narratives to the margins.

This permutation expressed democratization, the creation of a heterogeneous Israeli memory that contained the right-wing myths and, perhaps—to draw on a

concept coined by Michael Rothberg—contributed to the shaping of a “multidirectional memory,” whereby connections between different aspects coexist and the narrative of one movement fosters—rather than exclude—the other (Rothberg 2020).²⁷

The reburial of Lord Moyne’s assassins while relinquishing the deployment of political tools to shape culture and society manifested a depoliticization of collective memory—precisely in years of confusion and permutations. The tendency to hold on to memory, to regard it as a political instrument for cultivating consciousness in the ideological spirit of a particular political movement, had been superseded by nostalgia, by a longing for an imagined past, whereby the fundamental controversies of the Zionist ethos had been blurred. The year 1975 marks a further stage in the obliteration of the Zionist alliance with Great Britain—the most significant stronghold of the *Yishuv* in Palestine—as well as an unparalleled oblivion regarding the damage inflicted by the attempts to jeopardize it through terrorist acts that could sabotage the path to the establishment of a Jewish state.

Herein the prime ministers—the new generation of Labor Movement leaders—created a state resource (ceremonies) and offered it for other circles to imbue with their own values. They chose to abstain from leading, interpret or frame the events within a Labor-movement Zionist ideology. The silence of the Rabin administration as an expression of the enfeeblement of the Labor-movement political center, as well as the erosion of its cultural role. In the politico-electoral field, the Ma’arakh had ceased to be an axis party, around which the entire political system revolved; moreover, in the cultural-conscious field, its role as a central factor in shaping the Israeli ethos was fading.

The affair reveals its failure, as a declining political center, to gear its own governmental hegemony in order to deploy cultural tools, the power of ritual, tradition, and memory, as cultural-ideological resources that would buttress its prevailing policy. The memory agents that would assume center stage were less committed to a party tradition or to complex messages and expressed, freely and simplistically, populist narratives that enabled the broad mobilization of groups and circles among Israeli society.

The event discussed in this article shows the extent to which the last government of the Labor Movement prior to the “upheaval” failed to formulate a relevant central Zionist narrative between the various trends that sizzled in Israel: on the one hand, the skeptical new Left, emphasizing the civic-liberal worldview; on the other, a novel religious Zionism underscoring the Jewish heritage—a growing tendency toward power, particularism, and messianism.

The perplexity, the blurring of stances, was reflected in the performance of the institutions affiliated with the Labor Movement around the event. The difficulty of conveying a clear and relevant value system linking past to present challenges and hopes for the future attested—if not to a certain degree of loss of the way—to the struggle of the leadership with adapting to the changes in Israeli society in

²⁷ Rothberg coined the term “multidirectional memory” to characterize his discussion on the links between Holocaust memory and the struggle against colonialism as two narratives that coexist side by side and even feed each other.

the decade before the upheaval: geopolitical changes in Israel vis-à-vis the occupied areas since the summer of 1967, as well as social and cultural changes.

Furthermore, an analysis of the ideological gospels delivered at the ceremonies and their coverage reveals that elements of the heroic narrative brewed by the Right were adopted and fused into the Israeli ethos: The growing significance of the Holocaust in Israeli consciousness and in the system of justifications employed for the sake of its mobilization, as well as the prominent role played by Jewish religious tradition in the fashioning of the heroic legacy. The acknowledgement of Beit-Zuri and Hakim as legitimate Zionist heroes manifested the blurring of the distinction between ends and means. The very willingness for self-immolation and the belief that the act stemmed from a national incentive became now a sufficient criterion for their recognition as such.

The turnabout in collective memory preceded the political “upheaval” and would become one of its surreptitious harbingers.

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