**Title:** Illegal Immigration Ship Parita, 1939

**Year (Hebrew):** 5699

**Year:** 1939

**Location:** Israel

**Short description**

A photograph from 1939 of the illegal immigration ship Parita landing in Tel Aviv.

**Detailed description**

**​** ​This is a photograph of the illegal immigration ship *Parita* which arrived to the shores of Tel Aviv on August 22, 1939. Illegal immigrants can be seen being taken off the ship in small boats, while the residents of Tel Aviv watch them from the shore. British destroyers can be seen in the background.

The *Parita* was part of an Aliya Bet (illegal immigration) project of the Betar organisation (named Af Al Pi [the Hebrew term for “despite”]) to bring European Jews to Israel despite the British restrictions introduced with the White Paper of 1939. The ship left Europe with 850 passengers on board who were attempting to clandestinely enter Israel. The passengers had an eventful 42-day journey, which ended with ship forcefully docking in Tel Aviv. The *ma’apilim* (illegal immigrants) were taken off the boat by British soldiers with the residents of Tel Aviv looking on. The new arrivals were taken to the Atlit detention camp, where they were interned until they were issued legal immigration certificates ten days later.

This is one example of the struggle of Jewish refugees attempting to immigrate to Israel during the time of the British mandate.

**Would You Like to Know More?**

**The Parita –** The *Parita* was part of an Aliya Bet (illegal immigration) project of the Betar organisation (named Af Al Pi [the Hebrew term for “despite”]) to bring European Jews to Israel despite the British restrictions introduced with the White Paper of 1939. During the British Mandate period only 10,000 Jewish immigrants were permitted entry to Israel per year due to British concern that large-scale immigration would disturb the delicate status quo between the Jewish and Arab populations. Since the passengers on the *Parita* were not included in that number, their entrance to Israel was illegal. The *Parita* left Romania on July 13, 1939 with 850 refugees from Germany, Austria, Poland, and Romania, and approached Tel Aviv on August 22. The journey was supposed to have taken just a week but, instead, it lasted 42 days during which time the passengers had very little food and water. On nearing the shore, the captain and the chief mechanic refused to continue, fearing the British authorities, and were replaced by experience sailors from the Betar movement. When they were about 50 yards from the shore, the bow of the ship was struck by British artillery. The refugees were brought ashore, where thousands of Tel Aviv residents were waiting to welcome and assist them. However, British soldiers were also waiting, and they arrested the immigrants and interned them in the Atlit detention camp. About 10 days later, due to public protest, the refugees were issued legal immigration certificates and released. For many years the skeleton of the Parita lay on the seabed close to Tel Aviv, until it was removed as a public hazard. The *Parita*, its passengers, and crew are commemorated by a plaque near the beach in North Tel Aviv.

**Betar –** This Zionist youth movement was called Betar, the Hebrew acronym of its full name, the Hebrew Youth Alliance in Memory of Joseph Trumpeldor. The movement was founded by Vladimir (Ze’ev) Jabotinsky in Riga, Latvia in 1923 in order to prioritise the importance of immigrating to Israel, speaking Hebrew, establishing a defence organisation, and creating a Jewish state. In 1933 Betar began navy training in Israel but decided to move the training camps to Europe, away from the British Mandate authorities. The main marine academy was founded in Civitavecchia, Italy and was operated under the sponsorship of the Italian government. Most of the Betar branches in Europe were destroyed during the Holocaust, although some members escaped and fought with the partisans and others fought in the Warsaw, Vilna, and Bialystok ghetto uprisings. Menachem Begin, the sixth prime minister of Israel, was a leader in Betar in Poland before World War II.

**Aliyah Bet –** Aliyah Bet refers to the clandestine movement to bring immigrants from Europe to British Mandate Palestine from 1934 until the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. In the years leading up to, during, and after the Holocaust, Jews in Europe sought to escape the Nazis by immigrating to Israel. At the same time, the British Mandate authorities restricted Jewish immigration due to their concern that large-scale immigration to Israel would disturb the delicate status quo between the Jewish and Arab populations. The situation became even more dire when the British issued the White Paper in 1939, restricting immigration to 75,000 over five years”. The British quota denied thousands of fleeing Jews the right to immigrate legally to Israel, thus denying them a much-needed safe haven. The so-called illegal immigrants were called *ma’apilim*, and they were brought to Israel by organisations such as the Jewish Agency, the Haganah and Betar who chartered ships and organised clandestine illegal voyages to Israel. The British intercepted many of the ships and detained the refugees in detention camps in Cyprus and Atlit. In total, more than 70,000 Jews arrived during the Aliyah Bet on 100 ships. Another 50,000 immigrants did not succeed and were detained by the British, to be released only with the establishment of the State of Israel.

**Teaching Suggestions**

**​** **​Israel Studies**teachers can use the photograph when teaching about the Aliyah Bet and the White Paper. It can also be used to discuss the Law of Return and Israel’s policy towards refugees.

**History** teachers can use the photograph when teaching about World War II and refugees.

**Social Studies**teachers can use the photograph to discuss refugees and immigration policies.

**Discussion Points**

**Observation**

* Where was the photograph taken?
* Describe the people in the forefront of the photograph.  
  What are they doing?  
  How are they dressed?
* Describe the people at sea.  
  What are they doing?
* What are the ships than can be seen in the photograph?

**Reading Between the Lines**

* This is a photograph from 1939 of European Jews trying to immigrate to Israel aboard the *Parita*.  
  Why were they fleeing Europe at that time?
* British destroyers can be seen in the background of the photograph.  
  What were they doing?
* The passengers on the *Parita* were considered illegal immigrants.  
  Who was governing Israel at the time?  
  What was their immigration policy, and why?  
  What was the solution of the *yishuv*(Jewish population of pre-state Israel) to the refugee crisis?
* The *Parita* arrived in Israel at the end of August 1939. What is significant about the date?
* Who were the people on board the *Parita*?  
  What was their story?
* Who are the people on the shore, and why do you think they were standing there?
* Why do you think the photographer took this photo?  
  Who do you think the photographer's intended audience was?

**Connections**

* Compare the way Jewish immigrants are received in Israel today to the way the *Parita*refugees were received?  
  What has that changed? Why?
* Can any Jew immigrate to Israel?  
  Why is this?
* This photograph shows the attempt of European Jews to find safe haven in 1939.  
  Did anyone in your family flee Europe before or during World War II?
* There are many refugees in the world today.  
  Where are they from? What are they fleeing?  
  How are they received in the different countries of their arrival?

**Creative Ideas**

* **​**Write a newspaper article to accompany the photograph.
* Write a journal entry for a person on board the *Parita* or waiting on the shore describing their experience.

**Target audience:** Junior High, High School, Informal Education, Higher Education

**NLI Links**

[Visual Memory Photograph Collection](http://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLI/English/digitallibrary/photos/Pages/photo_portal.aspx)

[Photograph of Parita, Hazalmania Collection](http://beta.nli.org.il/he/images/NNL_Zalmania_ROS700011778/NLI_Photo)  
["700 Refugees at Journey's End," The Palestine Post, 23/08/1939, JPress](http://jpress.org.il/Olive/APA/NLI_heb/SharedView.Article.aspx?href=PLS%2F1939%2F08%2F23&id=Ar00101&sk=BB8A063A)