**Clothing, fashion and nation building: The case of *Eretz Israel* 1880s – 1948**

**First ideas on a new methodological approach**

**Introduction**

In a photograph taken at the beginning of the 20th century in one of the first Jewish settlements in Palestine in Petakh Tikva, we see a group of people standing in a field looking at the cameraman who captured them. [[1]](#footnote-1) It is striking that everyone in the photograph, men and women, is dressed differently: a woman is lying on the ground in front of the group, one arm propped up to hold her head, she is wearing an elegant white dress with quilling. Some of the men have a Fes, the official headwear for men in the Ottoman Empire, on their head, while at the same time wearing Russian peasant shirts in bright colours. Other men have white scarves as *keffiyehs* on their heads, as common among the Arab Bedouin population. Some of the photographed are holding tools, as if they were complementing their sartorial appearance.

The photographed were part of the large scale migration movement during which between 1882 and 1914 about 70,000 Jewish people from Eastern Europe came to Ottoman ruled Palestine, in their perception ‘the Land of Israel’ - *Eretz Israel*. In this, they were influenced by Zionist ideas, propagating the return of the Jewish People to what they thought of as the Holy Land. The majority of them had worked as artisans and in small trade, often in the textile industry and sweatshops; some of them had experience in agriculture. They had escaped anti-Semitic pogroms in the Russian Empire and were hoping for a brighter economic future.[[2]](#footnote-2) While the immigrants of the so called first Aliyah between 1882 and 1903 established the first agricultural settlements often with the financial support of large capitalist plantation owners, immigrants of the second Aliyah between 1904 and 1914 were influenced by the failed Russian revolution of 1905, hoping to realise a Zionist version of socialism in *Eretz Israel*. In his monograph ‘Prophecy and Politics’, Historian Jonathan Frankel portrayed this migration movement as resulting from the failure of emancipation, now aiming for what Lev Pinsker called in 1882 “self-emancipation”, that was national and socialist in character: ‘the conviction that the Jewish question could not – and would not- be solved by the grant of equal rights from above nor by a return to the status quo ante of traditional Judaism, but had to be won by total change, collective action, political planning, and organization.’[[3]](#footnote-3)

This article presents first ideas on a new methodological approach to explore how Jewish immigrants to *Eretz Israel* from the 1880s until the foundation of the state in 1948 used dress in visual representations to express the search for a new Hebrew culture - between Jewish nationalism and socialist internationalism – and fantasies of belonging in the process of nation building.

Although the photographer of the picture is unknown, given the time period, we can assume that taking the picture required some preparation and a person who knew how to take a photograph. With the Daguerreotype invented as the first photographic technology in 1839, taking photographs was initially marked by long technical preparation for the photographer and the sitters in photo studios. It was only at the beginning of the 20th century that cameras became available to the broader public. The invention of the Brownie Kodak Camera allowed the upper middle class in Europe to take snapshots outdoors.[[4]](#footnote-4) Looking back at the photograph, it is however unlikely that many immigrants had brought such cameras with them. It is thus fait to assume that taking picture was planned in advance and that the photographed knew beforehand that a picture would be taken. Despite our limited knowledge on the picture, it seems as if the photographed gave some thought on what to wear and were posing to present themselves in their sartorial appearance. Yet, in this, they seemed to have different ideas on what the ideal dress for the occasion would look like.

The importance of dress and conflicts arising from differing ideas in the context of nation building were explicitly mentioned by Hemda Yehuda, the second wife of Eliezer Ben Yehuda, the Zionist founding father of the modern Hebrew language, who had immigrated to Eretz Israel in 1881. In 1904, Hemda, who liked to dress up elegantly according to the latest Paris fashion, wrote in a newspaper article: ‚This is the first time during my lifetime that fashion will have been discussed in the Hebrew press. I write these lines with real dear and trepidation (...) who knows whether they might not also ostracize me?’[[5]](#footnote-5)

Ernest Gellner, the influential theorist of nationalism formulated that two men belong to the same nation if they share the same culture, understood as ‘a system of ideas and signs and associations and ways of behaving.’ He further points out that this only happens if they *recognize* each other as belonging to the same nation.[[6]](#footnote-6) Although sartorial appearance seems of obvious importance in this context, neither Gellner nor other scholars interested in nationalism payed much attention to it. While research on nation building has largely ignored the relevance of dress as an expression of concepts of the nation, fashion history has hardly looked at case studies prior to existing national fashion systems enforced by established authorities. The same applies to the case study of Eretz Israel, where research interested in dress focuses mainly on the period after the foundation of the state, when the then dominant left-wing Zionist groups propagated a new national - Zionist - way of dressing that scholars labelled retrospectively as socialist ‘anti-fashion’, emphasising its functional and uniform character as a political statement.[[7]](#footnote-7) Yet, the question how migrant groups with differing clothing habits and ideals negotiated and communicated previous and new ways of dressing *prior* to the foundation of the state has not gained systematic attention. Furthermore, the importance of visual sources in this context has largely been overlooked.

This article addresses these gaps by introducing a new methodological approach that integrates insights from fashion history and photographic history into research on nation building. It argues that such a perspective allows to add a personal dimension to nation building and brings to the fore the influence of heterogeneous migrant groups in the emergence of a national project. Such an approach can not only shed light on negotiations and power struggles on the micro level of a community, but allows to explore the troubling broader question how clothing becomes fashion, or in the case of Israel ‘anti-fashion’. With this, the article challenges the dominant focus in fashion history on established, often national, fashion systems enforced by (state) authorities. It thus encourages research on case studies, in which differing understandings of appropriate, aesthetic and fashionable clothing were existing along side and influencing each other to explore processes of negotiation at the micro level of a community.

In this, this article calls for the systematic inclusion of public and private photography not explicitly aimed at communicating clothing and fashion ideals and therefore revealing subtle notions of belonging to gain insights into changing and conflicting agencies and ideologies in the emergence of a national project. It draws on approaches from photographic history and visual culture to investigate how the immigrants used dress to express notions of belonging, political visions and fantasies of the envisaged nation in photographs.[[8]](#footnote-8) Based on preliminary archival research in Israel, it will discuss three photographs drawn from photo collections held at the Pinchas Lavon Institute, the Central Zionist Archives and the Yad Ben Zvi institute to outline first ideas of the approach. In this, the analysis focuses on two categories: first on clothing habits and ideals as an expression of political aims and belonging and second, on clothing habits and ideals expressed and communicated in the private sphere. However, it will be shown that these categories only hold for a limited extent for pre-state Israel, as power relations, clothing ideals and the meaning attached to it where in constant transition.

Clothing ideals, and clothing defined as fashion, are relative and subject to change. They can be rooted in different geographical, cultural and social context the wearers originate from and interconnected notions of what would be appropriate to wear; clothing can express feelings of belonging as well as personal and political visions for the future.[[9]](#footnote-9) Given the fact that everybody has to wear something to cover the body, clothing and fashion represent a highly personal and intimate phenomenon. While early works in costume studies used the term costume for historic dress, often seen as something worn outside of the everyday context, more recently fashion historians usually differentiate between dress, clothing and fashion.[[10]](#footnote-10) While dress is used as a neutral term, referring to the visible parts of clothing,[[11]](#footnote-11) clothing is seen as serving a functional purpose, and fashion comprises an aesthetic dimension and is characterized by constant change and the requirement to advertise it as such.[[12]](#footnote-12) In addition, it is usually linked to the existence of a ‘fashion system’ with a textile industry, processes of design, advertisement and consumption.[[13]](#footnote-13) Cultural practices linked to clothing and fashion thus concern the individual and are at the same time embedded in specific social and cultural contexts of a community. Going back to the photograph, neither a medium-or large sized textile industry nor a national fashion system existed at the beginning of the 20th century in *Eretz Israel*. The immigrants had often brought their clothes with them or sewed clothes themselves. [[14]](#footnote-14) And yet, this article will argue, that the immigrants’ choice of dress as represented in the photographs went beyond the functional purpose. Although not defined as ‘fashion’ in the newly settled land, the immigrants were expressing certain, yet differing perceptions of ideal, and even fashionable clothing in the course of nation building. These resulted from clothing habits in their countries of origin, clothing ideals of the changing ruling authorities, the local Arab population and from emerging ideas on the ideal dress for the envisioned nation. Without knowing what the motivations of the photographer and the photographed were, we can assume that the settlers wanted to be perceived as a group and wanted to show what their life in the Jewish settlement in the Middle East looked like. The immigrants sent such photographs in the form of postcards back to their countries of origin to mobilise other Jews to join the Zionist movement or to send regards to their relatives back home. ‘This is us, we are a group, and this is what we look like in the Land of Israel, where we aim to build a home’, tells the picture. This article will argue that in communicating this, dress played a crucial role.

How can such an approach change our understanding of nation building? New scholarship understands nationalism as ‘perspectives *on* the world’ and not ‘perspectives in the world’ to stress the multi-layered agendas and ideas of different actors on the existing or desired nation.[[15]](#footnote-15) As part of this, scholars such as Brubaker and Cooper convincingly replace the vague term ‘identity’ by terms such as ‘identification’, ‘categorization’, ‘self-understanding’ and ‘groupness’[[16]](#footnote-16) to emphasise the agents behind these complex and fluid processes of construction, a suggestion that has been adopted in this article. Echoing this, Alexander Maxwell points out that ‘Understanding nationalist thought requires scholars to confront ambiguity and incoherence. Scholars must not impose artificial consistency to achieve false clarity.’[[17]](#footnote-17) While Maxwell has mainly linguistic notions in mind, this article calls for the inclusion of visual representations, arguing that by looking at these highly personal and intimate cultural practices, we can first gain access to subtle and personal notions of belonging that would otherwise be shattered. With this, it can be shown that if we scratch the surface, we do encounter ambiguity and incoherence and that the notion of a consensus only exists at the surface, hinting to which actors have the authority and means to communicate and impose their ideals as ‘Hebrew’ ‘Zionist’, ‘national’ or ‘socialist’. Second, the suggested approach allows to add a bottom-up perspective as well as the agencies of migrant groups into the process of nation building. Conceptions or ideal dress are fluid to the same extent as linguistic conceptions are and they make references to previous concepts. Looking at the use of dress in photographs, allows us to reveal these references and hierarchies on a deeper level. While Frankel was interested in the Zionist activists’ discourses, party disputes and political considerations between Russian origin, socialist ideology, internationalism in the longing for a national home, the proposed approach seeks to research how these different and changing notions of belonging as well as personal and political aspirations were expressed in representations of dress and labels attached to them.

The ‘Land of Israel’ represents a suitable case study for a number of reasons: the pre-state society was highly heterogeneous, with Jewish immigrants coming from Russia/Soviet Union, Romania, Poland, Hungary, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Germany, encompassing a broad range of geographical and social backgrounds, who settled in a region with an Arab population. The migrants’ motivations ranged from socio-economic reasons, flight from anti-Semitic pogroms and Nazi persecution, to the advancement of political Zionist aims. In this, the transformation of male and female identities was an integral part of the Zionist ideology. These processes took place in a region with changing occupying authorities: Ottoman (until 1918) and British rule (1918-1947) preceded the foundation of the state (1948). As mentioned, a medium- or large sized textile industry did not exist in the region until immigrants from Poland and Czechoslovakia created medium-sized textile industries, that were then often called *Lodzias* in the 1920s with reference to the textile industry in Lodz, but covering also factories set up by other Eastern European immigrants. While it was usually immigrant entrepreneurs who set up the factories, they often hired additional Jewish workers from their countries of origin as they had the required skills and experience.[[18]](#footnote-18) Finally, clothing ideals were defined and communicated in local as well as in transnational contexts. First, this applied to the local and international mobilisation for the Zionist project and. Second, the vastly different immigrant groups made references to their countries of origin and equally integrated influences of European and North American fashion ideals. It is against this background, that the article suggests to explore how socialist Zionist created and communicated clothing ideals as an expression of their political aims and to what extent these conflicted with, were inspired by and influenced the clothing habits and ideals by the local Arab population, the Ottoman and British occupying authorities, and the socio-cultural and political practices of the countries of origin of the migrant groups.

***Nation building and fashion history***

Despite the fact that the cultural turn has fruitfully informed research on nationalism an nation building by emphasising the importance of cultural practices in developing ideas on the nation, studies that apply these approaches to research on clothing are rare. An exception is Alexander Maxwell who investigates, with a focus on Europe and France, how patriots expressed their nationalist ideas in dress, designed as anti-fashion to reform prevailing ideals.[[19]](#footnote-19) Yet, mainly drawing on written primary sources, visual representations are hardly integrated into the analysis, hence excluding historical actors who did not communicate their conceptions in writing.

The impulses in research on nationalism have equally informed studies on the region of *Eretz Israel* and Zionism, as a form of Jewish nationalism.[[20]](#footnote-20) In this, new scholarship highlights how the complex, often ambivalent dynamics and power struggles within the pre-state society were often expressed via cultural means, for example, through language, food and body culture.[[21]](#footnote-21) Yet, the role of clothing, fashion and aesthetic perceptions, has received little consideration in this context.

Looking at research into historical dress, early costume studies were primarily preoccupied with investigating materials, cuts and modes of dressing across different historical periods. Since the 1980s, the subsequent new fashion history acknowledges the cultural, social and political significance of clothing at the intersection of the individual and the community, but much remains to be done.[[22]](#footnote-22) On one hand, only a small number of studies look at multi-national and heterogeneous regions and empires, mainly researching dress as an expression of class, gender, occupation, generation or aesthetics, while ideas of national belonging are not the main interest.[[23]](#footnote-23) On the other hand, studies with an interest in dress and nationalism are mainly concerned with developed fashion industries in existing nation states.[[24]](#footnote-24) In both cases, the vast majority investigates female fashion, with only limited consideration of male fashion. [[25]](#footnote-25) This pattern also applies to the case study of *Eretz Israel*. Importantly, scholars working on the region, differentiate between urban fashion and rural Zionist ‘anti fashion’ – as the conscious opposition to urban ideals – for the period after the foundation of the state.[[26]](#footnote-26) However, investigations on how these conflicting ideals and definitions came into being in the pre-state period have not been undertaken systematically.

Only a small number of studies on the pre-state period provide crucial information on design, fabrics[[27]](#footnote-27), in the tradition of costume studies, and the infrastructural context of the emerging textile industry,[[28]](#footnote-28) yet these studies fail to consider broader cultural, social and political implications. Informed by a nostalgic view, they tend to interpret the pre-state years as part of a larger national narrative, as expressed for instance in the title of Ayala Raz’s article ‘What we were wearing in the early days of this country’. One exception that provides methodological inspiration is Nancy Stockdale’s chapter on the choice of dress as an expression of hierarchies, oriental fantasies and power relations in her book on encounters between British, Arab and Jewish women in pre-state Palestine.[[29]](#footnote-29) The transnational perspective has only recently started to impact studies of clothing and fashion. With their interest in power relations in a colonial context, global transport and production as well as an interest in ‘Jewish fashion’ items in the light of migration, these studies inform my project.[[30]](#footnote-30) Existing transnational studies focus on other regions and on the enforcement of clothing ideals through ruling elites or actors in trade and production. This article argues for adding a bottom-up perspective by including the role of ordinary immigrants in defining and communicating clothing ideals. Importantly, fashion historians highlight the cultural dimension of fashion by stressing the constructed character, changing perceptions and identities expressed through it.[[31]](#footnote-31) Yet, the emergence and changes of such categories and the underlying processes beyond existing nation states has not yet been examined systematically in a historical perspective.

Scholarship acknowledges the importance of visual representations as crucial means in communicating clothing and fashion ideals. However, research on nation building has not systematically researched public and private photography to examine clothing habits and ideals in the emergence of nation states, while fashion history with its focus on institutionalised fashion industries has mainly focussed on professional fashion photography.[[32]](#footnote-32) The proposed methodological approach addresses these gaps. Building upon the existing research, it goes beyond it by first focusing on the pre-state period; second investigating the agencies of migrant groups; third looking at male as well as female clothing; and examining transnational references; and fifth using political and private photography as primary source material.

***Political clothing in the pre-state period: Dressing up the new Jew in a transnational space***

In 1881, Avraham Soskin was born in in the village Orsha of the Mohila District in the Russian Empire. As a member of the party *Poalei Zion*, he was active in the socialist Zionist youth movement and started working as a photographer in 1901.He immigrated to Eretz Israel in 1905 during the time of the second Aliyah and set up his first photo studio in Neve Shalom.[[33]](#footnote-33) In a studio photograph taken by Soskin around 1913, we see five men standing in front of a nature scenery, wearing various dresses ranging from white Eastern European shirts, combined with boots and hats as worn by Cossacks in Eastern Europe, while others are wearing Bedouin dresses and scarves, contemplated by rifles, that serve in a way as accessories, looking proudly into the camera.[[34]](#footnote-34) The men were members of the Hashomer movement, a Jewish self-defence organisation established in Eretz Israel in 1909 by members of Poalei Zion to defend the early Jewish settlements against thieves.[[35]](#footnote-35) The sitters in the picture were Meir Spector, Yechezkel Chankin, Shaul Karbel, Eisenstein, and Yaakov Feldman.[[36]](#footnote-36) Despite the fact that HaShomer members were known for their preoccupation with dress, photographs taken outside the studio during their work suggest that Hashomer members did not choose such a broad range of dresses when working activities.[[37]](#footnote-37) We can hence assume that the members had dressed up specifically for the photograph to be taken.

In the photograph, a variety of references are expressed through clothing that have to be understood in the transnational context in which the Zionists were operating. Firstly, choosing the *Rubashka* shirts, traditionally worn by the peasants in the Russian Empire, has to be understood as a pragmatic clothing habit, but also as an explicit reference to the countries and traditions of origin and at the same time expressing the Zionist political ideal of being able to cultivate the land in the new homeland. Yet, by contemplating this with accessories, a new meaning was created. In this context, the rifles can be classified as accessories, changing the previous peasant dress from the countries of origin into the dress of the new Jew by highlighting the aspect of Jewish self-defence as a reaction to the traumatic experiences resulting from anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe. In this, the choice of the Cossack dress was an expression of aiming for ideals that the sitters identified with the Cossacks, who had often acted as semi-independent military units in the Russian Empire, with a number of agricultural settlements in which they were granted certain autonomy. In 1913, the year in which HaShomer set up their first colony in Eretz Israel to link their guarding duty with their own labour, Mendel Portugali, one of the founders of the movement wrote in a letter to his wife: 'The ideal of the guard is power; of the worker, brotherhood...(Our) settlement should be modelled on that of the Cossacks.'[[38]](#footnote-38) They hence represented an image of resilience, independence and pride as farmers and frontier people that the Hashomer members referred to in their choice of dress in the photograph.

Cossacks had also taken part in violent acts against the Jewish population in Eastern Europe. By dressing up like the previous antagonists, the Hashomer members might also have expressed indirectly the rejection of the mechanisms of anti-Semitic exclusion and persecution experienced in the Russian Empire. Thus, making reference to Cossack dress from a different historical and cultural context in the new Jewish homeland in the photograph, served the purpose to create and communicate a new image of the Zionist Jew in Eretz Israel. The oriental elements in the dresses chosen by the sitters symbolised the core of the Zionist project to settle in Palestine and to imitate in this the Arab population perceived in having settled the land successfully for thousands of years. In this, the way of dressing was informed by a romanticised version of the Arab man and hence a reflection of the Western and in a way colonial view on the Orient.[[39]](#footnote-39)

The creation of a new male identity lay at the core of the Zionist ideology.[[40]](#footnote-40) The new image of the male Jew was designed as the contrary to the anti-Semitic image created and propagated in the European countries of origin throughout previous decades and century, characterized by attributes such as being weak, ill, womanly, spreading diseases, unmanly.[[41]](#footnote-41) While scholarship has researched the creation of this new image, the role and representation of clothing has gained little attention in this context. Such an approach allows to put emphasis on the experimental character to show that these new ideals were far from being determined from the beginning and that clothing and its representation in photography played a crucial role in this. In 1913, when the picture was taken, a consensual understanding of what the Zionists’ clothing should look like was not yet created and enforced. A cultural space within which newly created ideals were communicated, perceived and understood did not exist yet. This resulted in a co-existence of differing clothing ideals, and a certain is room for manoeuvre, expressed in different ways of dressing and the political meaning attached to. This can be seen in wide-spread criticism that activists of the socialist Zionist groups such as Hapoel Hatzair, founded in 1905 to promote socialist agricultural settlements, expressed with regards to HaShomer. ‘“The moral state of the organisation (HaShomer)”, wrote Yosef Aharonovich, the editor of the newspaper of Hapoel Hatzair in 1913, “is totally unsatisfactory.”’[[42]](#footnote-42). While one argument was that they were guarding private property, the fact that they were dressing up elegantly in Arab clothes in addition to them speaking Yiddish was also explicitly mentioned.[[43]](#footnote-43) With this, Aharonovich labelled aesthetic notions of dress as incompatible with socialist ideology, an argument that can be identified the mentioned discourses on anti-fashion. Furthermore, we can see here how new ideals of Zionist dress as the appropriate expression of Hebrew culture and related discourses were communicated via the pre-state press.

We thus have to understand these kinds of photograph as resulting from disguising as a performative act, in which the studio represented a space that allowed to experiment with different notions of belonging and identity expressed in clothing.[[44]](#footnote-44) In this, habits from the countries of origin, experiences as well as personal and political aspirations and fantasies regarding the future in the imagined homeland were influential in shaping a new way of dressing. Clothing as a marker of political belonging and aspirations had first played a key role in the French revolution. With a focus on the 20th century, fashion historians have examined further case studies of ‘political clothing’, often as part of social engineering processes, but the role of photography in this context has only been considered marginally.[[45]](#footnote-45) For *Eretz Israel*, research has started to examine the role of visual culture and photography after the foundation of the state, briefly touching upon aspects on clothing, but scholars have hardly considered how these ideals emerged in the pre-state period. The representation of dress fulfilled a crucial role in the creation of new individual and group identities, interconnected with political aspirations that were communicated through photographs. References to dressing habits and ideals as well as the communication of the new ideals were transnational in character. In this, they were similar to other modes of political dressing, such as socialist dress that emphasised an idea of internationalism.[[46]](#footnote-46) What was specific about the Zionist movement was that the references and the outreach were transnational, but at the same time part of an ideology aiming for a nation state.

Ariyeh Rafaeli Zenzipper, born in 1900 in the Oblast of Vitebsk in the Russian Empire, became a passionate Zionist in his twenties and travelled around Eastern Europe, collecting thousands of photographs of Zionist groups. He handed over the collection covering the period 1884-1937 to the Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem in *X (to be added)*.[[47]](#footnote-47) In one photograph from the collection, taken in 1924, a group of young Zionist activists is standing in a field.[[48]](#footnote-48) All men are dressed in a similar way, wearing white shirts and their heads covered with scarves worn like Bedouins and using rifles to contemplate their appearance. Given the appearance of the group members, one could assume that the photograph had been taken in Eretz Israel. It is the green scenery that comes as a surprise given the scarcity and dryness of the landscape in the region in the 1920s. Indeed, the photographs had been taken in the Soviet Union, in Tel Hai in Crimea, showing a group of young Khalutzim in a Jewish agricultural settlement that had been set up to prepare the young Zionist activists for their immigration.

In this, the way they had dressed up was inspired by political fantasies and aspiration regarding the imagined future in Eretz Israel. Furthermore, at this point it was equally influenced by the new way of dressing of the settlers in Eretz Israel and the aim for a uniform way of dressing amongst the group members. The dress that the men had chosen for this photograph and that we can identify in similar photographs of the time, suggest that in the 1920s certain ways of dressing were to a certain extent linked to the Zionist movement and understood in an increasingly transnational context.[[49]](#footnote-49) This shows that the creation of Zionist clothing ideals was both national and transnational. As seen previously, clothing habits from the countries of origin of the immigrants influenced new ideals in *Eretz Israel*. These new ideals in combination with political aspirations and fantasies about the desired national home equally impacted on clothing ideals of Zionist youth groups in Eastern Europe. In this, the act of taking the photograph was an occasion for performativity to experiment with different elements and styles that were then presented as an expression of the political aspirations of the Zionist group in the photograph.[[50]](#footnote-50)

Frankel wanted to trace ‘the search (…) for a Jewish solution to the Jewish question – a solution both universal and particular, of the future and yet rooted in popular reality, socialist but also national, scientific and nonetheless messianic.’[[51]](#footnote-51) We can see here that this search was as a process of construction that was equally reflected in choices and representations of dress. By combining elements from different contexts, a new way of dressing was created and linked to the political aims of the activists in the form of visual representations, used to mobilise Jewish people to immigrate to Palestine. This way, items of clothes were charged with political meaning in a new transnational cultural context emerging since the 1920s and 1930s, in which this new way of dressing was anchored and eventually recognised. It was not yet linked to an existing national space, but expressing the longing to settle in what the Zionist activist thought of as their national homeland*.*

***Private family photography – between political visions, oriental fantasies and bourgeois origin***

It was not only political groups who wanted to have their photographs taken by Soskin. In 1920, the photographer portrayed Mordechai and Tsipora Shakhovitz in his studio, at this time located on Jaffa Street in Tel Aviv.[[52]](#footnote-52) Jewish immigrants like this couple went to photo studios in the cities of Jerusalem and Jaffa, later Tel Aviv, to portrait their families to create a sense of belonging and identification. In addition, the pictures were often used as postcard with space provided for a stamp and regards on the back to send regards to family members in the countries of origin.[[53]](#footnote-53) The purpose of these photographs was hence not only domestic, but also transnational. Sending such pictures as postcards was a way of sharing a part of the new life in ‘exotic’ Palestine with the beloved ones back home.

In the photograph of Mr and Mrs Shakhovitz, two pictures of the middle-aged couple are combined. On the right hand sight, we see the couple dressed elegantly in the European fashion of the early 20th century: the woman is wearing an elegant buttoned-up dress, while the man is wearing a black suit, with a white shirt and a black tie, his hair neatly parted, his arm placed around his spouse. They are both looking at the camera; when only considering the picture on the right, the viewer would not know that the photograph was not taken in Europe.[[54]](#footnote-54) Yet, on the left, we see the same couple dressed up in oriental costumes. While the man is wearing a white *keffiyeh* around his head, loosely draped around the back and shoulders, complemented by an *agal*, a black rope, in addition to a thawb and a rifle in his right hand. The woman is wearing a long cotton dress with colourful embroidery. Her head is covered by a black and white *keffiyah*, complemented by a black rope, loosely hanging on her shoulders and holding a clay junk. The picture was taken to be sent as a postcard to beloved ones in in their country of origin, which, according to their name was somewhere in East Central Europe. Numerous other studio photographs taken by Soskin, in which women as well as men are dressed up in a variety of oriental dresses, often in front of exotic sceneries can be identified.[[55]](#footnote-55) However, Tsipora Shakhovitz’ *keffiyah* in from the studio photograph would never have been worn by an Arab woman. The same applies to the other costumes. Interestingly, the sartorial appearance resembles strongly contemporary representations of T.E. Lawrence, later known as Lawrence of Arabia, who had volunteered for the British Army and lead, while stationed in Egypt, an Arab revolt initiated by the British against the Ottoman Empire during World War I. It is fair to assume that the photographer and the photographed likely chose the costumes to reproduce and represent their own fantasies of the Orient, a widespread phenomenon among Europeans during the late 19th and early 20th century.[[56]](#footnote-56) What might have been the intention behind the clothing chosen by the couple Shakhovitz, having immigrated from East Central Europe to Palestine at the beginning of the 20th century? On one hand the choice of middle class European dress represented a connection to the countries and families of origin. They might have aimed to show that they were still living a ‘cultivated’ European life, while at the same time integrating their perception of Palestine as the exotic and other place into the picture by choosing what they or the likely recipients of the photo in Europe perceived as Arab clothing. On one hand, this could represent the idea of metamorphosis following their *Aliyah*, symbolising the acquirement of what they perceived as Arab culture, representing a very colonial view. In this, both the photographer and the photographed were sharing oriental fantasies. Given the large number of similar photographs, we can assume that the photographer Soskin was offering a choice of oriental costumes to the customers, who at the same time wanted to wear these.[[57]](#footnote-57)

As a core topic in fashion history, scholars have researched to what extent the official fashion from above was rejected or adopted by ordinary people in their everyday life. Especially for case studies in which a politically motivated fashion was imposed ‘from above’, have scholars interpreted this sphere as a context in which these clothing ideals were often questioned or rejected by choosing different clothes.[[58]](#footnote-58) For the later national Israeli fashion such a gap has been identified between the official Zionist dress in the rural sphere, that was largely rejected in the urban sphere, inspired by the latest European fashion. Yet, the crucial question in how far these differences emerged in the pre state period still has to be considered; to what extent people dress differently when photographed for private purposes and how far did they adjust their previous habits and preferences to new ideals? In addition, scholars have only researched fashion from above versus the dressing below, of the ordinary people, as two allegedly separate spheres: Yet, it has hardly been examined, how far ordinary people influenced and enforced their clothing ideals in the emergence of a fashion sphere or a common sense of dressing as part of a national project. Private studio photographs allow us to shed light on these questions and to get insights into dressing habits and ideals communicated through private photographs and yet influenced by newly emerging clothing ideals communicated in the public sphere.[[59]](#footnote-59)

When looking at family studio portraits taken by Soskin, elegant European dress persisted in photographs throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Associated with previously known photographic practices in the countries of origin, the habit of dressing up for studio portraits seemed to be of great importance. This was expressed in the fact that people chose elegant clothing even though shoes were sometimes broken and dresses worn to threads, as apparent in a number of studio photographs by Soskin.[[60]](#footnote-60) This might also have to do with the fact that the audience back home was still remaining in a cultural context within which the meaning and connotation of new ways of dressing would not have been understood.

Since the beginning of the British Mandate in 1918, we see increasingly elements of British colonial dress worn in studio photography. In studio family photographs from the 1920s, men chose more and more stockings and sun helmets when being photographed, standing next to their family members who were often dressed in suits and elegant European dresses.[[61]](#footnote-61) Although the choice of dress might partly have resulted from integrating new developments in fashion, it can also be seen as an expression of political loyalty with the British occupying authorities. Following the Balfour declaration from November 1917, the period from 1918 until 1939 – was overall characterised by the British support for the Zionist movement and potentially the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. [[62]](#footnote-62) In addition to the references to British clothing, white *Rubashka* shirts for men and simple linen dresses for women, as the new emerging way of Zionist dressing, can be seen in many photographs. These were contemplating but not replacing previous clothing and expressed the belonging to and support of the Zionist movement. In the studio photographs, we can often see a combination of different ways of dressing in one picture, often within one family.

In contrast, in private photographs of Zionist activists we see a more consistent choice of the uniform and simple clothes that became known as the ideal Zionist dress. In this, dress was used as marker of political belonging to the Zionist movement, not only for photographs in political, but also in the private sphere. The photo album of the family Sokolansky-Sela, originally from Lithuania, represents such an example.[[63]](#footnote-63) Nachma, born Schenkman in 1904, was a member of HaPoel Hatzair when she immigrated to Palestine in 1921, where she met Avraham Sokolonski, both living in a Kibbutz after their arrival. From the beginning onwards, symbols representing their Zionist ideology were integrated into their family photographs taken in photo studios. Initially, this happened by adding political symbols by Hapoel Hatzair to the studio photograph, with a mixture of the middle class dress, and after 1921 on increasingly through clothing, functional simple dresses for women and the *Rubashka* shirts for men. On one hand, the choice of this more uniform and recognisable way of dressing reflected the fact that since the 1920s this way of dressing would be increasingly recognised as the Zionist way of dressing. On the other hand, this was also made possible through the establishment of the *Lodzias*, by immigrants from East Central Europe since the 1920s, that allowed for the production of a more uniform way of dressing, influenced again by Eastern European dressing habits.[[64]](#footnote-64)

**Conclusion**

Looking at photographs of Jewish immigrants to Eretz Israel in the first half of the 20th century, this article has argued that representations of dress played a key role in expressing different feelings of belonging, political visions and fantasies on the imagined nation. In this, different perceptions of ideal, functional and aesthetic dress were existing along side and influencing each other. They resulted from clothing habits from the countries of origin in East Central Europe, loyalties with the changing occupying forces as well as European orientalist fantasies regarding the sartorial appearance of the local Arab population.

At the core lies the question in how far a new way of dressing was created, communicated and charged with political meaning, interconnected with ideas on the nation. All immigrants could only refer back to known and previous clothing habits and fantasies regarding the future. It was first and foremost the socialist Zionist activists of the second Aliyah who in combining these different elements created and ultimately, with the help of transnational networks enforced a new ideal way of dressing. By dressing up accordingly when photographed as groups, this way of dressing was charged with political meaning and communicated in a transnational dimension. While the photographs seen in this article still show a certain room for manoeuvre with regards to different influences, the way of dressing of the socialist Zionist groups such as Poalei Zion, was from the 1930s onwards increasingly inspired by the uniform and functional socialist clothing in the Soviet Union. The fact that way of dressing that became known as the national Zionist way of dressing after 1948 was an expression of the political success of the left-wing Zionist groups in the course of nation building process. The variety in visions and fantasies expressed in representations of dress reflect the hybridity and room for manoeuvre prior to a historical situation in which established authorities can anchor and enforce their clothing ideals. It corresponded with the variety of concepts of the different actors with regards to the Jewish nation. This article has presented first ideas on an approach that seeks to make several contributions to research on nation building and fashion history. In her concise book on the history of modern Israel, Anita Shapira chooses the title Nation Building only for her chapter on the period after the foundation of the state in 1948. This article has stressed that the complex processes underlying processes of nation building started much earlier and shall be researched by looking at the cultural dimension of a community creating new values, symbols and meaning in the invention – or as Benedict Anderson put it, in the imagination - of a new national project. As Maxwell stated, these notions were ambiguous and incoherent. In the case of Eretz Israel, these were characterised by ever-changing external dynamics and circumstances, as well as internal dynamics, determined by the origin and the visions of the people shaping these processes. Dress and its visual representations shall be taken seriously as objects of in the research on nation building to add a personal dimension and agencies of individuals from heterogeneous backgrounds immigrating to a region with differing cultural, political and socio-economic motivations. In this, researching private and political photography enables us to stress the visual dimension in communicating emerging and fluid ideals, especially in a region in which a common language was not anchored amongst the immigrants. Furthermore, by integrating political and private photography, it adds a bottom-up perspective into research in nation building by shedding light on the agencies of otherwise ignored individuals. The approach will ultimately allow us to rethink the relationship between elites and grass-roots movements in nation building. Research into dress in the pre-state period shows how the socialist Zionists of the second Aliyah created, anchored and finally enforced their dress ideals in rejection of dress ideals of the changing elites and ruling authorities it thus sheds new light on the relationship between majorities and minorities, established groups and newcomers expressed in sartorial appearance. Researching of clothing ideals in the pre-state Yishuv, shows the empowerment of the left-wing Zionist groups as the newcomers who were able to enforce and communicate their ideals by drawing on an increasingly transnational network and organisations. Ultimately, we can see how far fantasies on the new nation are informed by the political, social and cultural backgrounds of the nation builders. It is in the representations of dress references to their experiences in their countries of origin, involvement in the socialist movement in the light of the Russian revolution and fantasies deriving from that become obvious. These ideals are created in processes of demarcation. This can be seen in the rejection of the socialist Zionists to dress up in the common middle-class and bourgeois way. From the 1930s onwards, this was also expressed in decreasing references to Arab dress, when the aim for a Jewish state seemed to be increasingly fragile under the British Mandate period and increasing conflicts with the Arab population.

Furthermore, the suggested approach can inform fashion history in several ways. It stresses the relevance of dress as an expression of national belonging, informed by known clothing habits and ideals from the countries of origin and projecting fantasies into the future for concepts of an envisaged nation state. Drawing on a case study in which multiple perception and concepts of ideals dress were prevailing, it will enable to rethink the construction and anchoring of dress ideals and terms linked to it. We will have to rethink fixed categories such as ‘fashion’ and even ‘anti-fashion’ for a historical situation in which the members of the heterogeneous community did not (yet) agree on common values and perceptions of aesthetics in clothing. We have to ask how the immigrants tried to create a new way of dressing and the meaning they attached to it. In this, we will see multiple references as well as mechanism of rejection that played a role in a way of dressing that was presented as the ideal dress in the new homeland. The discussed case study leads to the rethinking of the relationship between authorities and the ordinary people. While a top-down perspective is crucial in most research on fashion when looking at processes of anchoring ideals - or in the form of rejection by ordinary people – the approach suggested here adds a genuine bottom-up perspective. It shows how various Jewish immigrants influenced, contributed or resisted clothing ideals. In this, it questions the existence of two different spheres – political and private critically - showing that influences and inspiration as expressed in dress where ever-changing and fluid in the pre-state period. Furthermore, the analysis of visual representations beyond official fashion photography can stress the importance of photography in the migrants’ experience and in anchoring the ideals. Ultimately, it allows to emphasise the importance of dress in the construction of male identities prior to an existing fashion sphere.

In the broader perspective, this article is an attempt to open the perspective towards case studies in which differing understandings of appropriate and fashionable clothing were existing along side and influencing each other. In this, the example of Eretz Israel has relevance for further historical case studies where the emergence of a national project and the immigration of various migrant groups form key characteristics. The article aims to encourage comparative research on regions such as the United States, Great Britain and Australia to shed light on changing agencies and dynamics within heterogeneous communities in their negotiating of a common sense of aesthetics as expressed in dress. Ultimately, the outlined approach has a strong and timely social relevance. In times of mass immigration, economic exploitation and mobility in a global dimension, it contributes to an understanding of aesthetic perceptions, dress and beauty ideals as an expression of power relations, cultural hybridity, integration and exclusion. Despite the large-scale migration movements and global media representations, the term fashion and interconnected ideals are defined according to a Western understanding, defined in Europe and North America as an expression of power relations. Research into processes of integration and rejection as expressed in dress by immigrants from non-Western as well as the appropriation of non Western ways of dressing into the mainstream fashion have recently started to gain attention in scholarship. Yet, it is the historical perspective that can help us to understand how these phenomena came into being. The outlined case study can thus promote a perception of migration and diversity as cultural enrichment by underlining the historical role of Europeans as immigrants and the constructed character of national belonging.

1. See Appendix (1) (Signatur: Archives Petakh Tikva, Sign. 002/2514) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Grds. Fn. U.a. Frankel [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Frankel, Prophecy and Politics, p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Gil Pasternak, Brownie Kodak and further references.* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Hemda Ben-Yehuda, Hashkafa, 1904, zitiert nach Raz, Fashion in Eretz-Israel, S. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Gellner, Nations and Nationalism, p. 7, nach Sand, p. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Helman; For the term ‚anti-fashion’ see Anne Hollander (1975) and Alexander Maxwell, Patriots against fashion, Ch. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Perlmutter, David, ‚Visual Historical Methods: Problems, Prospects, Applications’, in *Historical Methods*, 27:4 (1994); Paul, Gerhard, Visual History, Göttingen 2006; Dikovitskaya, Margarita, *Visual Culture. The Study of the Visual after the Cultural Turn*, Cambridge 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Brubaker/Cooper, Beyond Identity (nochmal lesen) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For an overview of the development and the terms used, see Welters/Lillethun, *Fashion History: A Global View*, Chapter: The Lexicon of Fashion, pp. 13-29. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ingrid Brenninkmeyer, *The Sociology of Fashion* (Winterthur: Verlag P.G. Keller, 1962), p.5. (Frances) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Fußnoten [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Fn. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Almoz, Og, ‚Secular Fashion in Israel’, in Marzel, Shoshana/Stiebel, Guy (eds.), *Dress and Ideology: Fashioning Identity from Antiquity to the Present*, London/Oxford 2014, pp. 20-36, at 20-21. (prüfen, ob das noch zur Info past); *Wichtig hier: Raz, What we were wearing.* [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Anderson, Brubaker, Cooper, Maxwell. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Brubaker/Cooper, Beyond identity, pp. 14-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Maxwell, Fashion against Patriots, 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Almoz, Og, ‚Secular Fashion in Israel’, in Marzel, Shoshana/Stiebel, Guy (eds.), *Dress and Ideology: Fashioning Identity from Antiquity to the Present*, London/Oxford 2014, pp. 20-36, at 20-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Maxwell, Patriots against fashion. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. E.g. Shlomo Sand, The Invention of the Jewish people. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Saposnik, Arieh B., *Becoming Hebrew: The Creation of a Jewish National Culture in Ottoman Palestine,* Oxford 2008; Campos, Michelle U., *Ottoman Brothers. Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine*, Stanford 2011; Almog, Oz, *The Sabra. The Creation of the New Jew*, Berkeley 2000; Minta, Anna, *Israel bauen: Architektur, Städtebau und Denkmalpolitik nach der Staatsgründung 1948*, Frankfurt am Main 2004; Halperin, Liora R.: *Babel in Zion: Jews, Nationalism, and Language Diversity in Palestine, 1920-1948*, New Haven 2015; Berkowitz, Michael, *Zionist Culture and West European Jewry Before the First World War*. Chapel Hill 1996; Spiegel, Nina S., *Embodying Hebrew Culture: Aesthetics, Athletics, and Dance in the Jewish Community of Mandate Palestine*, Detroit 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Breward, Christopher, ‚Cultures, Identities, Histories: Fashioning a Cultural Approach to Dress’, *Fashion Theory* 2, No. 4.1 (1998): 301–13; Breward, Christopher, *The Culture of Fashion: A New History of Fashionable Dress*, Manchester 2002; Crane, Diana, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas: Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing*. Chicago/London 2000; Cumming, Valerie: *Understanding Fashion History*, London 2004. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. *Maxwell, Patriot against Fashion* [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. E.g. Guenther, Irene, *Nazi Chic*; Zakharova, *S’habiller à la soviétique*; Stitziel, Fashioning Socialism; Pelka, *Jugendmode*; Bartlett, Djurdja, *FashionEast the Spectre That Haunted Socialism*, Cambridge 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Breward, Christopher, *The Hidden Consumer: Masculinities, Fashion and City Life, 1860-1914*, Manchester 1999; Breward, Christopher, *The Suit: Form, Function and Style*, London 2016; Chenoune, Farid*, A History of Men’s Fashion*, Paris 1996. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Helman, Anat: *A Coat of Many Colors. Dress Culture in the Young State of Israel*, Boston 2011; Helman, Anti-Fashion; “Kibbutz Dress in Dan's 1950s Caricatures” *Communal Societies*, 27 (2007), 1-25; "Clothes and Identity during the First Years of the State of Israel", *Zmanim*, 110 (2010), 66-79; Nurit Bat-Yaar: *Shikaron Haitzuvim. Omanut ha´Ofna be´Israel 1948-2008*, Tel Aviv 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Raz, Ayala: *Halifot Ha’itim. Mea Shanot Ofna be´Eretz Israel*, Tel Aviv 1996; Raz, Ayala: "Fashion in Eretz-Israel: What we were wearing in the early days of this country", in: *Ariel* 107-108 (1998), pp. 160-182. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
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31. Etwas grundlegendes, zB Breward, Fashion History as Cultural History [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. *Name examples: titles Bloomsbury, 20th century research on fashion photography* [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Guy Raz, *Soskin: A Retrospective. Photographs 1905-1945* (Tel Aviv : Tel Ḥai: Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 2003), p. 238-239; here Raz, p. 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. See Appendix 2 [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Fußnote zu Hashomer, zB Anita Shapira [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Guy Raz, 154. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Verweis auf Fotografien, die es im Pinchas Lavon Archiv gibt. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Mendel Portugali, Tsror mikhtavim, Kovets ha-shomer, pp. 14-26; quote after Frankel, p. 440. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. *Reference book Colonial Fashion* [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. *Aussagekräftige Fußnote hierzu hier oder weiter oben bei dem historischen Kontext (u.a. in dem Ethos Buch)* [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. *Fußnote Sander Gilman u.a., later context Maddy Carey, Jewish Masculinity usw.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Aharonovich quoted in Frankel, p. 421. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Frankel p. 421, 440. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. The photo studio as a space of performance (Barthes), in dem Aufsatz zu Indian Portrait photography;Verweis auf Performanz und die Einführung dieser Aspekte in die Modeforschung, neu auch Philipp Dorestal, Clownsartikel und allgemein hierzu; Hier evtl. noch differenzieren zwischen photographs outside and in photo studios; Hinweise Gil [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Günther, usw. auch Alexander Maxwell [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Djurda Bartlett, Fashion East [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Contact the archivist, also add literature Zenzipper. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. See Appendix 3, Photograph Tel Hai, 1924. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. On the emergence of a Zionist visual culture Berkowitz, visual culture and Zionism [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. (*hier jetzt noch etwas zu dem anderen Bild bzw. dem Unterschied zwischen Fotostudio und draußen schreiben; and revise with the help of appropriate geographical and cultural context*) [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Frankel, p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. See Appendix 4. Evtl. Bezug Raz, p. 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. *references here with regards to the photographic practices and photo studios* [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Fotopraktiken and studio photography [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Verweise auf weitere Fotos [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Lou Taylor, Introducing Dress History; Book Oriental Fashion, further literature on photography [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Verweis Photos [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Beispiele Soviet Union, Günther etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. *Hier prominent die Fotoalben und das Israel Album Projekt als Quelle anführen sowie die privaten Studiofotografien von Soskin, also quasi die Sammlungen einführen* [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Pinchas Lavon, Sign. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Pinchas Lavon, Sign. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Shapira, Israel, pp. 70-73. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Ben Zvi Institute, signature and photograph from album to be added. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Ata, catalogue; maybe refer to experience and personal [↑](#footnote-ref-64)